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On Splits, Big and Little: Towards an Intensive Model of Media and Mediation

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Abstract: This essay forwards an intensive model of mediation contrasted with the extensive model implicit in much of media theory, which conceives of communication media as an extension of human faculties. An intensive model, instead, conceives of mediation as a phenomenological process of splitting or folding affective capacities. An extensive model results in a dualistic, essentialist theory of communication media and unresolvable normative debates about the connecting or disconnecting consequences of media. An intensive model avoids these limitations by diagramming various modes of mediation and illustrating how their consequences stem from alterations to intensive properties, thereby helping constitute subjects and media objects alike rather than presuming a media bridge between pre-existing subjects and objects. The essay employs a number of examples to illustrate the extensive model, including telephone conversations, cinema, animation, and social media. The essay concludes with the division of families over QAnon conspiracies to illustrate the analytic gain from an intensive model.

Keywords: mediation; communication media; affect; intensive; extensions



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1. Introduction

There is a sad story here, one about lost connections, frayed feelings, and split families. Yet it begins in a more mundane place—the ubiquity of media. The devices, institutions, and platforms designated with the term “media” are pervasive, and, concomitantly, the study of media has proliferated into numerous disciplines and subfields—media studies, media effects, media design, media ecology, media theory, mass media, new media, and digital media. My university has five different media majors across three colleges, as well as many scholars in other disciplines who study media history, sociology, culture, art, economics, and on. Student confusion reigns, as academic silos fare poorly at communicating the different approaches of the varied studies that carry the media moniker. The ballyhooed “Digital Media Collaborative” initiative, supposed to bring these disparate voices together, quickly transformed into its own silo, mostly a film and animation program, before abandoning the promise of cohesion to become incorporated into the Communication department, now called the School of Communication, Film, and Media Studies.

Media brought us together and split us apart. Such simultaneous connection–division is a recurring theme of media study, driven by the implicit conceptualization of media and mediation. This conceptualization involved a long yet “puzzling obscurity” in its genesis, in part due to the difficulty of conceiving something as both connecting and dividing [1] (p. 321). As Eugene Thacker remarks, “In any given moment of mediation, there is always a minimal separation, a differential, a gap, lacuna, or fissure . . . a blind spot” [2] (p. 84). As such, mediation “is inherently ambiguous; it connects at the same time that it separates, unifies at the same time that it differentiates” [2] (p. 125). No wonder the students’ confusion!

Yet is the students’ confusion more telling? A few scholars point out that media and the process behind the term, mediation, remain remarkably undertheorized. Sarah Kember

and Joanna Zylińska call mediation “the underlying, and under addressed, problem of the media” [3] (p. xviii). John Guillory’s history of the concept of communication media portrays it as “undertheorized” in part because the earlier concept of mediation has been “only tenuously integrated into the study of media” [1] (p. 354). Similarly, Thacker, Alex Galloway, and McKenzie Wark contend that media studies operates with a “limited conception of what media are” because few scholars take the “ultimate step” to “consider the basic conditions of mediation” [4] (p. 7). As a result, they suggest, scholars conceive of media as determinative devices, forgetting “the most basic questions—*what is mediation?*” [4] (p. 9).

This basic question looms. For more than institutional reasons, there remains a need to clarify assumptions about media and mediation. This does not mean further study of the devices and platforms that carry the media name, as this is being done prolifically. What is needed is to think philosophically, which means conceptually, about media and its associated notion of mediation. Do we simply mean the devices, channels, platforms, or intermediaries between senders and receivers? Or is there something else occurring in the action and transformation of media? Are media involved in a process of mediation, and, if so, how does mediation operate?

This essay explores these questions by way of my previous work on animation, cinema, and especially the contemporary media ecology dominated by social media platforms. Specifically, I focus on how the “big split” and “big tension” characterizing the reception and discussion of political news on social media generate smaller divides propelled in part by media—the split of families over political differences. The explication draws upon a conceptualization of media not as a technological object that extends human capabilities but as being involved first and primarily in a process of mediation. This process entails modulating capacities to affect and be affected that are properly intensive, rather than extensive, alterations. In summary, besides extending or connecting, media split, fold, rub, or partition capacities to affect or be affected. *Mediation, thus defined, is the process of putting various affective capacities into relation.* Media thereby constitute subjects and objects alike much more so than bridging between pre-existing entities, as portrayed in most media theory.

Such a view dovetails with Richard Grusin’s notion of “radical mediation”, which comprehends mediation as a “fundamental process of human and nonhuman existence” prior to and not reducible to particular technologies [5] (p. 125). Instead, media objects function to “generate and modulate individual and collective affective moods or structures of feeling” through the ontologically preceding process of mediation [5] (p. 126). Unlike Grusin’s more “radical” and general claims about the centrality of mediation for a process-oriented, empiricist ontology, however, I take his arguments as a starting point to explore the phenomenological processes involved in mediation. Grusin contends that media do not just generate and transmit knowledge; they also generate and transmit affect. My question is how. The answer will vary depending upon the particular assemblage of technology and user; thus, this essay employs a number of examples, yet I argue that mediation involves splitting or folding affective capacities, that is, putting into relation parts of perceptual and embodied experience that were, prior to this new technology or technique, either fused together or unrelated altogether.

This splitting or folding does not amount to the simple claim that media divide as well as connect, despite what may appear at first glance from the example of families splitting over QAnon conspiracies discussed in the final section of the essay. That claim already circulates widely and is, I endeavor to show, a necessary consequence of the current, implicit conceptualization of media as extensions or intermediaries. This conceptualization of media and mediation leaves us, I argue, trapped in dualistic, essentialist theories and unresolvable normative debates about the consequences of media evidenced in both the utopic rhetoric about new media and the media panics that spring up with the emergence of any new medium. Debates over artificial intelligence are the most recent example of this rush to normative judgment, which remain unresolvable because the consequences

inevitably entail “both/and”. AI will assuredly both wreak havoc and yield profit. Which result occurs “more” is academic and a matter of perspective.

Galloway, Thacker, and Wark offer a similar critique of the presumed determinacy of media, and thus their work shares many affinities with my own. However, their basic question “what is mediation” and their initial answers do not go so far as to propose an alternative conceptualization of mediation. Their emphasis on excommunication as the correlative of every form of communication mistakes one mode of mediation for a characteristic of the whole, confusing attributes or qualities (to use Spinoza’s language) with modalities, as I illustrate with regard to QAnon message boards. To correct this confounding of attributes and modes, I argue for a displacement of the extensive view of mediation with an intensive one, which conceives of mediation as the process of splitting or folding affective capacities. This intensive model can help scholars diagram various modes of mediation in their phenomenological richness and sociocultural implication.

This argument proceeds by first detailing the extensive view of mediation present in the history of Western philosophy and media studies. I then provide numerous examples of how different communication media enable the intensive folding or splitting that shapes their modes. Finally, we arrive at the sad part, turning to the examples of split families to illustrate how this intensive view of mediation better understands the affective modulations taking place than do the normative judgments of QAnon media. Such judgments can only conceive of family members as brainwashed, in ways reminiscent of the “hypodermic needle” model in which media effect by injection, that is, by extension through a channel (the needle). Rather than being brainwashed, family members practice a modulation of the intensities of the contemporary “big tension” into a conspiratorial mode which may, tragically in this case, split families apart.

2. (Connective) Mediation and (Extensive) Media in Western Thought

The extensive model of media(tion) and some of its forebears shall be outlined in this section. This model conceives of media as human prostheses that extend across distances to connect parties that pre-exist their interaction. This model relies on a dualistic and essentialist view of the parties involved in mediation, makes connection–disconnection the primary problematic, and results in hopes and anxieties reflected in perpetual normative debates about the consequences of communication media. Yet before this conceptualization emerged, mediation was a key concept in Western philosophy, whose heritage is reflected in this extensive model. In *Keywords*, Raymond Williams traces the first usage of the term “mediation” to the 14th century, noting that mediation is a complex word made more complicated by being “a key term in several systems of modern thought” [6] (p. 204). The term emerged through two primary usages, one the idea of mediation as an “interceding between adversaries, with a strong sense of reconciling them”, and the other as “a means of transmission” [6] (p. 204). Such usages persist in media theory, as further elucidated below. Eventually, according to Williams, both senses became common and practically fused as mediation was elaborated in Western philosophy.

In idealist philosophy as represented by Hegel’s dialectic, mediation plays the key role of intermediary between God and man, spirit and world, and subject and object. A thesis and its antithesis become mediated into a synthesis that represents a higher understanding of totality. Or, in the struggle between master and slave, the truth of oneself as self-consciousness only emerges as mediated through the recognition of the other. Transformed by Marx, Marxist dialectics envision mediation as primarily between classes and, eventually, between the base and superstructure. Here, Williams notes, mediation becomes “used in an unfavorable sense”, as “devious” or “misleading” [6] (p. 206). Unlike Hegel, mediation is not conceived as the key to consciousness but as the essential move of ideology “where certain social agencies are seen as deliberately interposed between reality and social consciousness, to prevent an understanding of reality” [6] (p. 206). In *Marxism and Literature*, Williams expresses doubts about either conceptualization of mediation

because of the basic dualism in which the related parties are seen as separate from and prior to the process of mediation, echoing the critique advanced here [7] (pp. 99–100).

John Guillroy traces a similar history for the concept of communication media, drawing on Williams to develop the conclusion that the concept did not emerge until the 19th century despite being “wanted” for several centuries prior because it “exerted a distinctive pressure” on early efforts to theorize communication [1] (p. 321). As new technologies proliferated in the 19th century, they made older art forms such as painting and poetry, previously conceived under the paradigm of mimesis, newly visible as media, beckoning the development of the concept. Guillroy traces early usages to such philosophical lodestones as Francis Bacon and John Locke, who primarily use the term media to mean a means of expression, transmission, or transferal. Importantly, transferring ideas across time and space made the problem of distance fundamental to communication. “Every communication”, Guillroy writes about Locke, becomes a “telecommunication; conversely, long distance communication can stand as a figure for the inherent difficulty of communication” [1] (p. 334). As media become understood in a communication frame, then:

[T]he enabling condition of mediation is the interposition of *distance* (spatial, temporal, or even notional) between the terminal poles of the communication. . . . Distanciation creates the possibility of media, which become both means and ends in themselves—not the default substitute for an absent object. [1] (p. 357)

Here we can begin to see why I label this view *extensive*, as media extend across distances to bridge between participants. I also employ the term extensive in its scientific sense as a property such as length or volume that changes depending upon the amount of matter in the sample, in contrast with intensive properties such as temperature, density, and hardness that do not change. Such an extensive conceptualization exists across a number of frameworks common to different versions of media studies, including three discussed here: Marshall McLuhan’s media ecological approach, the Shannon–Weaver model of communication from cybernetic theory, and media phenomenology, often tracing its heritage to Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

McLuhan’s conceptualization seems the most obviously connected to an extensive view, as his famous work *Understanding Media* is subtitled *The Extensions of Man* <sic>. McLuhan even clarifies his aphorism “the medium is the message” by reference to media as extensions. The aphorism, he remarks, “is merely to say that the personal and social consequences of any medium—that is, of any extension of ourselves—result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by any new technology” [8] (p. 23). In *Understanding Media*, McLuhan develops his earlier work on print as an extension of the eye to conceptualize cinema as another extension of the literate eye, of the phonograph as an extension of voice, and of television as an extension of the sense of touch. In *The Medium is the Massage*, McLuhan further characterizes the wheel as an extension of feet, clothing as an extension of skin, and electric circuitry as an extension of central nervous systems [9].

Manuel Lazarrato critiques this model of media because the relationship between humans and devices is “not primarily instrumental but affective” [10] (p. 83). This model, “centered on the tool, which makes the machine an extension and projection of the living being”, is “utterly insufficient” because the consequences of media are “never the simple result of the actions or choices” of users [10] (pp. 81, 83). Driving a car does not simply extend feet for transportation but constitutes a new assemblage that “mobilizes different processes of conscientization” [10] (p. 89). Lazarrato quotes Felix Guattari’s portrayal of driving as a “‘state of wakeful dreaming’ . . . which allows several systems of consciousness to function in parallel, some of which are like running lights, while others shift to the foreground” [10] (p. 89). Lazarrato echoes the scholars quoted in the introduction, bemoaning that the theorization of mediation has disappeared in favor of a “tool-inspired model” envisioning media as a “prosthesis or an organ” and consequently reducing them to an “incorporation” or an “exteriorization” [10] (p. 91).

Lazarrato does not mention McLuhan specifically, perhaps because McLuhan's media ecological conceptualization is more complex than the slogan-focused, brief summary outlined above. McLuhan does depict media as extensions, yet his work emphasizes how media's primary consequences result not from the extension but from alterations to the sociocultural environment, including the sensory ratios dominant at a particular time and place. Nevertheless, much of the reception of McLuhan (mis)understood his work to be emblematic of the extensive model of media—focused on tools, as human extensions, which have a determinative sociocultural force. Such a model was not original to McLuhan and carries on, both inside and outside of his direct intellectual legacy, as Lazarrato maintains.

Lazarrato's contention also parallels Grusin, Thacker, Galloway, and Wark's critiques that serve as the launching point for this essay. For Thacker, the extensive model stems primarily from another source, the 1948 Shannon–Weaver model of communication [2]. Billed as a “mathematical theory”, Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver diagram communication as consisting of a sender who transmits a message along a channel to a receiver in an atmosphere of noise. A telephone conversation serves as the paradigmatic case for this model, yet the diagram “has become part of the standard way in which we view media today. . . applicable across a wide spectrum of everyday examples, from most personal of computers to the most social of networks” [2] (p. 88). In this model, the channel “is a medium, and as such it both connects and separates two points that are physically or geographically remote from each other” [2] (p. 87). This conceptualization presumes a distinction between sender and receiver and thereby understands the goal of mediation to be a seamless and transparent connection through the reduction of noise.

The Shannon–Weaver model “puts into formal language what we take for granted—that a medium is some device X that connects two separate points A and B” [2] (p. 88). As this model becomes common, the extensive concerns accompanying it become foregrounded—questions about the amount of matter, about how much connection occurs. In other words, this conceptualization maps “out a problem central to the mediation concept itself—how to connect without also separating, insofar as connection implies a separation” [2] (p. 98). In the model, media industries find a potent rhetorical appeal, the promise of connectivity. We can “reach out and touch someone” because the whole world is “available at our fingertips”, advertising slogans that exemplify what Thacker calls a “promissory rhetoric of new media” found in the proclamations of proponents [2] (p. 89). Media critics, in contrast, stress the disconnection caused by media, as in the idea of mediation as ideological in Marxist thought.

A quick book search readily illustrates that such normative debates continue to rage, revolving around the question of connection–disconnection. Do media create a “collective thinking” making us *Smarter Than You Think* [11] or do they distract and divide, leaving us in a strange state of being *Alone, Together* [12]? Such debates remain irresolvable because media both connect and separate. Rather than understanding the process of mediation, thinkers rely upon a reductive and deterministic frame of judgment. As Galloway, Thacker, and Wark remark, “For media studies generally, media are, in short, determinative devices, and they are thus evaluated normatively as either good influencers or bad influencers” [4] (p. 7). I call these debates irresolvable because the focus becomes on what media do, in extension, allowing for a continual employment of dueling examples as to how media connect or disconnect. Such a view does not consider how mediation operates via communication media intrinsically and intensively, and thus is left pointing “out there” for evidence of media's consequentiality.

One final forebear of the extensive view deserves attention, the phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty and his well-known example of a blind man and walking stick, which seems to quintessentially represent a model of media as extensions. Merleau-Ponty introduces the example in his elaboration of the body. For Merleau-Ponty, the body is not another object but a “background” against which other things can be seen or acted upon [13] (pp. 112, 115). Individuals are in “undivided possession” of their body, “quite simply” we are our bodies and our bodies are “the potentiality of a certain world” [13]

(pp. 112, 122). We do not have to look to find the spot bitten by a mosquito, or get out of the car to measure a parking space, because the body is not in space and time but inhabits it, sensing time and space through it. Merleau-Ponty therefore concludes that the body is “our general medium for having a world” [13] (p. 169).

Merleau-Ponty contends that motility best demonstrates how the body serves as general medium and then introduces the walking stick example. Although a walking stick seems far removed from today’s digital media, and although he is not concerned with articulating media theory, Merleau-Ponty also makes recourse to examples of communication media alongside the blind man. Similar to Guattari, as driving becomes a habit, we become able to feel the size of the car without the need to measure [13] (p. 165). Likewise, an organ player does not analyze the instrument to create a mental memory or representation of the location of keys and pedals. Instead, they incorporate within themselves “the relevant directions and dimensions”, settling into “the organ as one settles into a house”, the keys becoming “given to him <sic> as nothing more than possibilities of achieving certain emotional or musical values” [13] (p. 168). Similarly, “If . . . I want to reach the telephone, the movement of my hand towards it, the straightening of the upper part of the body . . . are enveloped in each other. I desire a certain result and the relevant tasks are spontaneously distributed amongst the appropriate segments” [13] (p. 172).

The same incorporative process occurs with the stick, which ceases “to be an object for him, and is no longer perceived for itself; its point has become an area of sensitivity, extending the scope and active radius of touch, and providing a parallel to sight” [13] (p. 165). Through the stick’s extended reach, positions of things become “immediately given” [13] (p. 165). The pressures of stick-on-hand “mediate a second order object, the external thing”, the stick becoming “an instrument with which he perceives. It is a bodily auxiliary, an extension of the bodily synthesis” [13] (p. 176). So conceived, media become a dual process of incorporation and extension, of connection and separation. In short, “To get used to a hat, or a car or a stick is to be transplanted into them, or conversely, to incorporate them into the bulk of our own body” so that one can extend the new assemblage into the world [13] (p. 166).

One could joke about male theorists envisioning media as extended organs, who are perhaps not unexpectedly attracted to this, dare we say, penile model of media. It is no surprise, then, that the alternative model offered here draws significant influence from affect theory, which has been greatly advanced by feminist scholars including Eve Sedgwick, Kathy Stewart, Jane Bennett, Sara Ahmed, Ann Cvetkovich, Lisa Blackman, Patricia Clough, Melissa Gregg, and Catherine Malabou, to name a few. The alternative turns on this issue of incorporation, asking how this incorporation alters how one may affect and be affected. Extension may be one alteration to affective capacities, yet *there are others*, a phrase which might also stand for a feminist critique of androcentrism. Conceiving media as tools or devices reduces the process of mediation to the tele- alone. Media are conceived as prosthetic extensions across distance, creating a central problematic concerning their connecting and disconnecting consequences. This problematic leaves commentators mired in normative debates that point externally for evidence of the determinative force of media. This implication is regrettable because it leaves an incomplete understanding of the varied dynamics of mediation, even if the extensive model may apply in some cases. In other words, mediation may involve extension, yet in what other ways may mediation also affect?

3. An Intensive Model of Mediation

It is the emergence and proliferation of new media—what some call widespread “mediatization” due to digital technology—that beckons the intensive model of mediation. McLuhan predicts as much, arguing that new media makes visible the previously undetectable or overlooked grounds of older media [8] (p. 63). As noted above, for instance, it was the proliferation of early modern technology that led to the emergence of the concept of media itself, as Guillroy illustrates. Media like trains and phones and photographs fit, more or less perfectly, into a model of mediation as extension. Yet today, digital media

do so much more than extend existing human capabilities like movement or hearing or sight, as the example of artificial intelligence amply demonstrates. AI does not merely extend human intelligence but “thinks” in ways inaccessible to the human mind, leading philosophers to contemplate anew the very definitions of intelligence and consciousness. In short, digital media have such proliferated capacities to affect and be affected that extension alone cannot encapsulate the process of mediation, even if extension remains one potential outcome or aspect. Digital media thus call forth an intensive view of mediation by making the modulation and generation of affect an apparent element of mediated experience.

To state the definition at the beginning, an intensive model envisions mediation as a process of relating affective capacities, often by splitting or folding those capacities. In contrasting this model with an extensive one, I do not mean to set up a new binary between intensive and extensive but instead to properly diagram the order of operations, from a phenomenological perspective. Experientially, mediation begins by relating affective capacities, and that process then enables extension, connection, disconnection, and other effects that are the focus of the extensive model. Like Merleau-Ponty and phenomenology generally, an intensive model thus begins in the middle, in the midst of embodied experience, with the process of mediation. Mediation processes relate affective capacities, causing them to split or fold in ways that did not pre-exist the mediation itself.

Mediation thereby helps constitute subjects and objects, rather than presuming that mediation simply bridges between pre-existing senders and receivers. In this way, the intensive model differs from traditional phenomenology, which often maintains and presumes pre-existing subjects and objects. In line with a Deleuzian ontology, instead, the intensive model is based on a process-oriented ontology, which envisions processes as prior to and foundational for the emergence of subjects and objects alike. The intensive model avoids the dualism inherent in a position that views subjects and objects as pre-constituted and the concomitant commitment, in the extensive model of mediation, to normative debates about whether media primarily connect or disconnect. Mediation does not, at least on an *a priori* level, connect or disconnect but “generate and modulate” (to use Grusin’s words) affects and feelings, constituting new, previously unimaginable or inaccessible experiences. The result may be connection or disconnection or some admixture of those effects, but the process of mediation begins as a modulation of affect, and the effects come later.

Given the emphasis on affect, a few words on the concept are necessary before proceeding to examples. The “affective turn” in scholarship began largely from a sense, expressed directly by Eve Sedgwick and Adam Frank, that postmodern theory’s emphasis on discourse gave short shrift to the body [14] (p. 513). Affect emerged as the term of choice to designate bodily issues such as feelings, sensations, emotions, forces, and energies. Different theorists envision affect and hence each of these terms in varying and sometimes contrasting ways. For instance, Brian Massumi interprets Deleuze to posit a difference in kind between affects, which he calls pre-subjective intensities or forces, and emotions, which are said to be the personal and subjective registration and interpretation of affect [15] (p. 28). Others like Sara Ahmed prefer the term emotion, believing the distinction between affect and emotion to be overwrought [16] (pp. 4–6). In a survey of the subfield of affect studies, Donovan Schaefer depicts two primary streams, one represented by Deleuze and Massumi who define affect as “something like unstructured protosensation”, and the other by Ahmed and Sedgwick who define affect as the “emotional textures structuring our embodied experience” [17] (p. 1).

The intensive model offered here draws more from the Deleuzian stream, although I am not as sold on or concerned by the strict distinction between emotion and affect. What both streams share is more important, in my estimation, which is an emphasis on the importance of bodies, feelings, and sensations for power, society, and culture. Schaeffer describes this overarching link as a concern for the “role of nonlinguistic and non- or para-cognitive forces”, which asks “*what bodies do* . . . and especially how they are impelled by forces other than language and reason” [17] (p. 1). Even though Ahmed prefers the term emotion, for instance, her emphasis on the significance of orientation for phenomenological

experience informs and resonates with the intensive model offered here [18]. In Ahmed's explication, a desk is not a desk is not a desk. What the object entails for different subjects depends greatly on our orientation towards it. Is a desk for writing or cleaning, for instance? And even though Elizabeth Grosz's work consistently offers a nuanced theory of the body, she insists, following Deleuze, that the body can only be understood by considering its incorporeal, processual aspects (like orientation) [19].

Thus, the intensive model draws from a number of affect scholars, even many not directly cited here. Yet the Deleuzian version of affect most underwrites the model because that theoretical stream stresses the import of processes like mediation and because the conceptualization of affect is broader than terms like emotions and feelings which, at least in their connotations, imply a sensing subject. As scholars like Daniel Stern illustrate, there are affects such as the sensation of a surge or a fall that neither the term emotion nor senses fully capture [20]. A fall can be exhilarating or horrifying; a surge might be of sights or smells. Laura Marks' notion of the haptic eye illustrates, for instance, that vision can often be received in a way much closer to touch than sight [21]. In this way, I take affect to mean broadly any way that a body might affect or be affected, including emotions, senses, and feelings, but also more incorporeal or metacommunicative things like orientation, directionality, frequency, and rhythm. In the intensive model, mediation means the putting into relation of any of these broad and varied capacities to affect and be affected. Mediation may entail embodied feelings and sensations, yet it also may involve more incorporeal aspects of experience, such as one's orientation or one's cognition of presence.

This abstract summary beckons elucidation through example, so let us return to those in the previous section—walking stick, organ, and telephone. For Merleau-Ponty, the stick extends the blind person's touch, enabling them to "see" at a distance. Yet something more fundamental occurs in this process of mediation than extension. Sensing-through-stick involves splitting the body in ways best described as intensive. The stick-arm-hand assemblage entails a significant alteration in how pressure and sensitivity are experienced compared to touching something with the hand alone. A stick is less sensitive to scrapes and bruises, and so can smack around with less regard. A stick also feels pressure in a cruder manner, giving a rough estimate of something's presence, size, and hardness. In contrast, imagine a blind person running their hands over someone's face. Here, the sensitivity of hands, the ability to more precisely move while varying pressure to sense details with fingertips, gives a much different impression than does knocking around with sticks. With the stick, the sensation of pressure and location becomes split from the organ of touch, the skin, with advantages and disadvantages for the blind person. Extension is one advantage, as is the lack of susceptibility to wounds. Yet in this split, precision and detail are lost along with this lost sensitivity.

Sensitivity and pressure are intensive qualities, those qualities which are the same for any part regardless of the amount. Pressure, for instance, is the amount of force exerted per area. So, an atom of carbon exerts the same amount of force regardless of the number of atoms. Likewise, sensitivity can be compared to hardness, which is a well-known intensive property, as some materials are more malleable, scratchable, and dentable than others. Iron is harder than the more sensitive gold, regardless of the amount of iron or gold. The split of the blind person with the walking stick entails intensive changes to perception in terms of sensitivity and pressure alike, altering capacities to affect (they can touch things harder and at distance) and be affected (with less precision).

Another split occurs with the blind person, as their right and left hand perform different functions, one balancing and the other reaching. This split recalls the organ player who also must learn to do different things with different limbs. The extensive conceptualization of media largely misses this split embodiment. Sure, instruments allow musicians to project sound into space, yet that is only a consequence of the musician's prior phenomenological experience, which entails learning to split limbs yet have them work in harmony. I have known prospective drummers who never got to the stage in which pedals and sticks became immediately given, as Merleau-Ponty depicts. If one can never

get left hand and right hand, left foot and right foot to split, certain musical values become inaccessible rather than given.

Merleau-Ponty also reaches for a phone, and that gesture recalls the Shannon–Weaver model. Does a call primarily involve extending the sender’s voice across a channel, or are there intensive alterations as well? For a phone conversation, the voice must first be split from the presence of the body, with the sound waves being transmitted and amplified along the wires. Before the phonograph and then telephone, such splitting of body and voice was impossible—to hear someone’s voice meant their body was nearby. This splitting of voice and body affected people dramatically, leading to speculations about the spirit and death in movements like spiritualism, as documented by John Durham Peters [22]. People were struck by the separation of voice and body, becoming excited (maybe we can speak to the dead) and unsettled (maybe these voices are manipulated or manipulating). As Peters remarks about this split, prior to the phonograph, sound was an event [22] (pp. 165–66). Afterwards, sound no longer necessarily disappeared into the air because it became possible to inscribe time.

Peters focuses on the phonograph, and the telephone performs a similar split but with an important difference—the liveness of voice. Whereas a phonograph recording must have occurred in the past and might play a deceased person, a telephone conversation generally demands living people. Separated in distance and split from their bodies, the telephone led to an intensive alteration to perceptions of time expressed in the notion of liveness. We can now speak to someone in different time zones, even on a different calendar day across the ocean, *live*, in “real time”. Before the phone, asking someone what the weather is like right now, where they are, was nonsensical. Now, it is commonplace. Feelings and moods alter dramatically with this splitting, as evidenced by the plethora of songs about phone calls and relationships. Long-distance relationships become easier, and, for all sorts of relationships, anticipations, expectations, and anxieties emerge over telephonic behavior (“Should I call?”, “Why didn’t they call?”, etc.).

The splitting of voice from body affects all parties’ experience, as splitting voice from body also means splitting hearing from vision. We may therefore need to ask, “Who is calling”, to confirm identity, and we lose much of the nonverbal communication that scholars contend constitute the bulk of face-to-face content. On the phone, the split of vision and hearing often means the eyes go curiously dormant; we may stare at a wall or off into space while the ears train focus. This alteration to inputs and outputs, to what is focused on and what is filtered out, is another way of understanding mediation in an intensive model. Mediation involves the filtering and partitioning of inputs and outputs, directing attention and response.

This telephonic alteration to inputs and outputs creates obstacles to communication that well exceed those considered by the engineers Shannon and Weaver. On the telephone, noise is not the only obstacle, and clarity not the only demand. Mistakes of understanding occur due to the lack of nonverbal cues. The lack of bodily presence also means the lack of a comforting or threatening gesture, for better or worse. Prank calls, mistaken identities, catfishing, fraud, and telemarketer manipulation emerge as obstacles. A plethora of emotional consequences occur as well, with the “love” of smartphones the best illustration. Today, people regularly report they love or cannot live without their phones, carrying them everywhere, even sleeping beside them and turning to them as soon as they wake. Whether and how the phone conveys messages and from whom plays a significant role in emotional ups and downs, with mental health experts now detailing some consequences of such smartphone habits. In the face of these affective and cultural consequences, the idea that the primary thing the telephone does is extend one’s voice seems limited at best. Shannon and Weaver miss a whole world of experience in the narrowness of their model.

The purpose here is not to detail the splitting or folding of every communication medium, yet a few more examples can aid the analysis of divided families in the final section. In *Special Affects*, I diagram the split of the motion picture camera, which entails separating the sensation of movement from the sensation of presence [23]. Prior to the

motion picture, any perceived movement was accompanied by the presence of the thing moving. Afterwards, people could perceive movement while knowing that the things moving were not present. The apocryphal “train effect”, where it was reported that some early spectators dove out of the way when a speeding train barreled towards the screen, attests to the public recognition of this fundamental filmic split. Discussions of the train effect were largely used to joke about spectators who did not “get” the split between presence and movement. If you think the train is actually present, you better dodge (what a rube!). If not, you can enjoy thrilling, scary sights without flinching.

The affective consequences of film far exceed those from a mere extension of vision. With the separation of presence and movement, “astonishing” feats of movement could be witnessed that were unavailable prior. Viewers could peer into the lives of people going about their days in other countries or places, even if they could not afford to travel there. As documented in *Special Affects*, early motion picture viewers regularly depicted this movement as astonishing, and thus the first films that attracted large audiences were called “actualities”, one-shot recordings of things in motion like people riding bikes or operating an assembly line. Actualities astonished people due to the perception of lifelike movement that they knew occurred in another place and time. In short, the split of the motion picture was the first cinematic attraction.

Shortly, the novelty of this split wears off, and makers adapted by editing together shots to craft narrative movies. Directors combined the capacities of the theater for fictionalization with the capacities of cinema to capture and edit movement to create “fantastical” worlds and feats. Filmmakers use cuts and stop-motion tricks for special effects featuring movements that never occur (someone jumping off a moving train) or that could never occur (someone suddenly disappearing). Based on reports from the time, I call this affect “the fantastic”, defined as the affective experience of seeing something that exists only in the imagination. The fantastic is innervated by “seeing what cannot be seen, which can also be described as the affection resulting from the split between human eye and camera eye” [23] (p. 37). Early film commentators remarked upon this fantastic feeling, describing cinema as creating dream worlds and fantasies by using the camera’s “eye” to create images that seemed to exist, prior to cinema, only in myth and science fiction. Fantasy became matter of fact; dreams became real; time and space became subject to the shaping of imaginations. A giant industry with widespread cultural influence emerged in the wake of this fantastical spark. Fashion, consumerism, gender, race, nation, and many other aspects of culture became dramatically changed.

This fantastical spark closely relates to the “wondrous” affect felt by viewers of Disney’s first full-length animated movies, yet animation entails a different splitting than live action. As articulated in *Special Affects*, Disney animation’s split is between perception and cognition. Before the first full-length feature *Snow White*, few if any felt that the early Mickey or Felix were living beings, since it was readily apparent that they were two-dimensional drawings moving across two-dimensional spaces. Audiences could laugh at their pranks and the marvelous tricks of vision, yet few worried about or cried over the characters. Indeed, before release, the press called *Snow White* “Disney’s Folly” because of the belief that no one could feel the same emotional depth for a cartoon they might from an actor in a live-action film. Yet by the end of the first showing, audiences were in tears when *Snow White* slips into a coma, only to cheer in joyous relief when the prince saves her.

Through techniques of depth perception, color, framing, and sound, people sensed *Snow White* as alive, thinking, and existing, and responded accordingly *despite* knowing she was composed of drawings that never existed. This “wondrous” affection does not stem from the split between the camera’s eye that records movement and the human eye that receives it. There is no recording of movement in animation, and hence no “realism” of imagery that generated so much of the spark for live-action cinema. Unlike live action, the actors never moved and never lived; characters are an amalgamation of millions of hand-drawn frames. Yet the characters are sensed as alive. The spark of Disney, why the films were frequently called “wonderful”, stems from this split between cognition and

sensation. Viewers know the characters are not alive, but is it not wonderful to let that knowledge rub against the sensations of life we perceive anyway? It tickled audiences to feel the rubbing of brain and body, knowledge and sensation. What would an extensive model of media even say is extended to explain Disney's success? Disney animation does not extend human capacities so much as it fuses sound, drawing, color, and photographs into a life-like whole, tickling audiences by splitting knowledge from sensation.

Permit one final example to drive home why this splitting involves intensive, rather than extensive, alterations. This example comes from *Surfing the Anthropocene* and focuses on the intensive alterations to the reception of news due to social media platforms [24]. The title *Surfing the Anthropocene* tries to capture the essence of the "big split", between the epochal scale of the news in terms of both volume and reach (as connoted by Anthropocene) and the speed and rhythm of reception (as connoted by surfing). Surfing social media, there is a split between the world-reaching news that regularly pops onto feeds and the celerity and disjointed ways that news is received. As we surf feeds, jumping quickly from story to story, we hear so much news from across the globe, producing a clash or split in the temporality and spatiality of news reception.

The big split results in affective outcomes I call the "big tension" to signal their intensive properties. Many feel overwhelmed, overloaded, burned out, stressed, and tense because problems seem so big and the time to deal with them so short and already so taxed. Scholars discuss this issue in terms of an information flood or overload, yet overload is only one possible mode of response to the big tension. As affect theorist Lauren Berlant remarks, "[F]looding does not always feel like flooding, just as the affective structure of any relation can manifest a range of emotions" [25] (p. 81). People respond to the flood and speed of news today with many different modes tied to many different affects. Some silo in like-minded enclaves, others filter the news to only certain subjects or block news altogether. Some troll; others embark on activism. I call this tension "big" because it is so large that it is nearly impossible to avoid, thus a plethora of modes emerge as means to grapple with this overriding tension generated by the friction between the scale and speed of news reception.

As a result, news and its discussion on social media become marked by intensive changes. As detailed in the chapters, the public screen becomes saturated, dense, heated, and translucent, producing a range of emotional responses marked by their intensity—a big tension, indeed. With the invention of the telegraph, Henry David Thoreau pointed to one aspect of the big split generating this big tension. Thoreau thought news from far-flung places might interrupt his focus on more meaningful tasks, just as complaints about distraction today feature in many discussions of social media. As Thoreau scoffed in *Walden*:

We are in great haste to construct a magnetic telegraph from Maine to Texas; but Maine and Texas, it may be, have nothing important to communicate. . . . We are eager to tunnel under the Atlantic and bring the old world some weeks nearer to the new; but perchance the first news that will leak through into the broad flapping American ear will be that Princess Adelaide has the whooping cough. [26] (p. 39)

Today, people surf headlines and skim articles, getting about as much information as a telegraph transmission (a technology which, scholars show, has a significant connection to the evolution of the news media). Additionally, Thoreau's comments point to one element of the big split—the coming into awareness of events from all over. Yet Thoreau's criticism centers on triviality, whereas today the trivial circulates in great volume and speed alongside the most world-impacting events. It is not just the scale and scope of problems that characterizes the big split but, uniquely with social media, the speed and rhythm with which they enter awareness. Thoreau would hear news from the telegraph perhaps once a week in a newspaper, which was organized and edited according to someone's idea of importance. Thoreau would also have to seek out this news, going to town to purchase a paper. On social media, the news finds us, often whether we want it to or not. On social

media, there is no one organizing the news according to import or any standard other than an algorithm's determination that it might interest you, with social media companies resolutely agnostic to content and thus reticent to get involved in much moderation.

The concept of "context collapse" does not fully capture this second, temporal side of the big split. Contexts collapse—audiences are easily unaware of when or where events occurred—but also stories appear and disappear on personalized feeds at different times without anyone overseeing the process. Algorithms are black boxed, and those behind them often do not understand how their creations end up making selections. Furthermore, the structure of social media ensures that stories are constantly populating AND constantly slipping to the unseen bottoms of the feed. Users respond to this temporal structure with speeds and rhythms of their own, generally skimming for something of interest while rarely spending long on any story or discussion. Although dated vernacular now, "surfing" adequately metaphorizes this common rhythm and speed of news reception. Surfing is thus the other side of the big split, designating the intensive changes to acceleration, speed, and rhythm affected by the mediation of social media. The Anthropocene crashes onto our feeds in great volumes and from far-rung places, and we witness its landing in a rapid, disjointed, and sporadic manner. This is the big split, and the big tension it produces evokes different modes of response from different users. One such mode is conspiratorial, and the emotional wreckage that mode produces illustrates the conceptual gain from the intensive model of mediation outlined here.

4. QAnon Casualties: A Conspiratorial Mode of Response to the Big Tension

Now comes the sad part. "QAnon Casualties" is a Reddit board featuring posts from people attesting to losing family over belief in the QAnon conspiracy.¹ QAnon began on the infamous message board 4chan, whose strict anonymity policies attracted the most vile and extreme posts. A person who self-identified as Q, based on a US security designation for the highest clearance, began posting cryptic messages alluding to a conspiracy of politicians and celebrities involved in a worldwide child sex ring. The details are not important, yet somehow this outlandish and absurd theory from an anonymous source spread widely, garnering thousands of believers to the point that some call it a cult.

The Reddit posts bemoan the loss of loved ones and often beg for advice, sometimes in heart-breaking ways. People frequently claim they have reached a breaking point after trying to get their loved ones to drop the issue. Posters note how they have completely "lost" their family members, how the believers seem to care more about the conspiracy than their families, and how conversations regularly turn angry and threatening. They express grief that parents or grandparents or siblings no longer see them as a person or care for their feelings. Posters report exhaustion, frustration, and sadness, frequently offering a vernacular media theory as to why this occurred—their family member was brainwashed.

The idea of brainwashing began in the Cold War after some soldiers defected to communism and rumors about military experiments involving chemical substances emerged [27]. Brainwashing became a frequent subject of pop culture and was apparently taken seriously by the CIA, which engaged in unethical experiments attempting mind control. Rather than fictional portrayals or military paranoia, posters on the message board seem to believe that brainwashing is possible and has occurred. Two primary approaches to deal with brainwashing circulate on the boards: "no-contact" and the "grey rock". No-contact comes from advice about marriage separations and entails not contacting a loved one in hopes that absence will make them realize they miss them. Grey-rocking involves maintaining contact but refusing any emotional or discursive response when QAnon comes up. People should remain neutral and unmoved, like a grey rock, based on the idea that it is emotional reaction the other person seeks. This advice is so common on the board that whenever someone mentions the phrase, a bot automatically posts a link with information on grey-rocking.

This vernacular brainwashing theory relies on an extensive model of media, and the modes of no-contact and grey-rocking prescribe excommunication as solution. In the prototypical brainwashing scenario, drugs are injected into the target to enable mind control.

In the media version, content is injected into audiences, who become unrecognizable and begin to “parrot” (a term used frequently on Reddit) QAnon conspiracies. Infected with these beliefs, people no longer see family members the same way, and their anger becomes easily triggered when questioned. This should remind media scholars of the early, oft-critiqued “hypodermic needle” model in which content is injected into an audience that immediately and passively receives it. Media content extends from the needle to receiver; media extend the capacity for persuasion across distances, to the susceptible “masses”. None of the media theorists representing the extensive model above subscribe to the hypodermic needle conceptualization, and despite it being well known, no media theorist possibly ever fully endorsed this account of media influence. Nevertheless, the hypodermic needle model circulates on Reddit boards, rarely being questioned, and posters point to their family as evidence that mediation means disconnection. Digital conspiracies split families apart, and the question becomes how to restore connection.

In the attempt to restore connection, grey-rocking and no-contact constitute modes of what Galloway, Thacker, and Wark call excommunication, “*a message that proclaims: ‘there will be no more messages’*” [4] (p. 15). They call excommunication a fantasy of an absolute end of communication because excommunication is not “an aberration” but the “correlative” of every communication as its prior condition [4] (pp. 10, 15). In other words, the prospect of not communicating lurks behind every attempt to communicate, which is technically correct but does not elucidate much about the experience of excommunicative modes like grey-rocking and no-contact. On Reddit, the issue is not existential angst but the loss of specific loved ones, and excommunication does not condition their attempts at communication but becomes a strategy of reconnection.

How does an intensive model of mediation understand the split of families and these modes of excommunication in ways different from the extensive model? Galloway diagrams three “modes of mediation”—mediation as “extension, transit, representation” as thematized by the Greek god Hermes, mediation as “communion, immediacy, and immanence” represented by Iris, and mediation as “multiplicity” that “extinguishes any sort of middle whatsoever” represented by the Furies [28] (pp. 28–29). The QAnon conspiracy falls under the Hermetic classification. Hermes is the messenger god, being their representative who transmits their messages. Yet the themes of Hermes’ story include trickery, moral ambiguity, duplicity, and promiscuity. As a messenger, Hermes is not exactly direct and clear, engaging instead in frequent translation and misdirection. Thus, *hermeneutics* emerged as the preferred method. “In hermeneutic mediation there is never simply a direct relationship to truth. . . [T]exts are not self-evident, they do not reveal truth in a clear and direct way” [28] (pp. 36–37). Thus, hermeneutics entails exegesis, critique, and symptomatics, that is, interpreters must explain and criticize texts, looking for the deeper meaning as a symptom of something else. The explicit message is “in some sense a decoy” that requires the knowing hermeneut to decipher [28] (p. 39).

Conspiracy theories in general, and QAnon in particular, constitute a paranoid and totalizing mode of hermeneutics *par excellence*. Explicit messages in the news represent something deeper and more sinister, something “they” want us to believe. Q offers cryptic messages full of misdirection and even trickery, much like Hermes, that must be deciphered, with part of the attraction being the debates on forums about the “real” meaning of their prophetic informer. Much like the hermeneutics of ideological critique, the world becomes divided into enlightened knowers and deluded masses who fall for the explicit message. QAnon explains the news through the lens of this giant conspiracy, making Marxist critique look quite empirically supportable and not very reductionistic or totalizing by comparison. QAnon allows believers to process all the world’s events through this all-encompassing frame: it is all a cover for the sex-trafficking ring. Never mind that this “depth” analysis is not very deep; the gesture is thoroughly hermeneutic.

As a process of mediating the news, the intensive model teaches to expect that the mode involves “generating and modulating” affective moods and feelings, to employ Grusin’s words. So what affects does this conspiratorial mode modulate? The answer is

the big tension. Faced with a flood of tragic news (there is child sex trafficking all over the globe!) and with limited time and rapid rhythms with which to process it, QAnon offers a quick and easy way to make sense of it all. The conspiracy theory helps combat feelings attending the big tension, such as being overwhelmed, confused, stressed, and pressed for time. Furthermore, the community of believers helps address isolation and loneliness, which scholars show is behind many parasocial relationships. Believers have even adopted the slogan “Where We Go One, We Go All” that reflects these affections toward the community. The conspiracy also supplies believers with a sense of superiority, who are not the deluded masses but the enlightened few. Participating in this mode also may generate the enjoyment of solving a riddle or puzzle, as members frequently decipher what are called Q’s “drops” or “breadcrumbs”.

From this perspective focused on the affective attractions of the conspiratorial mode, the story gets sad, indeed. These are lonely, confused, stressed, and outraged people seeking something to make sense of it all. They get enjoyment from using their brains to construct an amazingly complex if mind-numbingly reductionistic and totalizing explanation of the bad news that repeatedly pops up on their feeds. The extensive view of QAnoners as brainwashed, in contrast, re-victimizes the victims. Similar to the conspiracy itself, brainwashing is a too-easy explanation, one that allows the media to be blamed while denying that family members might be engaged in critical thinking, might be actively involved in constructing these beliefs, and might gain anything from their participation other than anger, sadness, and disconnection. Posters on QAnon Casualties cannot understand these affective attractions and thus are left exasperated, sad, and begging for help. Their extensive model of mediation leaves them in, ironically, a similar hermeneutic mode as QAnon, pointing externally to their family members as symptoms that prove that media disconnect. Their “depth” hermeneutics is similarly shallow, envisioning media as determining minds through simple brainwashing. Their criticism of QAnon ends not with an analysis of the mediation of news today but with dismissal and a call for excommunication, which, history shows, tends towards hate and violence.

Other scholars, most notably Mark Andrejevic, also connect the recent surge of conspiracy theory to the digital media ecology, particularly the information “glut” [29]. Glut encourages simple explanations to connect all the disparate dots. People look for patterns in response to a deluge of information and think they see them even if patterns do not exist. The glut is one part of the big tension, yet the conspiratorial mode also addresses its temporal dimensions. Conspiracy offers not just a totalizing but also a quick way to make sense of the whole. Everything can readily be run through the frame of the conspiracy. All events are either proof or what “they” want you to believe. Rather than the time it takes to study, reflect, and deliberate on events—time that social media platforms make us feel like we do not have due to the never-ending feed—the conspiratorial mode helps one process rapidly while surfing from post-to-post. The same can be said for the hermeneutics of the family members on Reddit, who forego a deeper and more time-consuming analysis of why loved ones might be attracted to QAnon for a hypodermic explanation that is quicker and easier. It ends with a similar totalizing, one-size-fits-all solution: excommunication.

This example of one conspiratorial mode of response to the big tension hopefully illustrates the analytic gain of an intensive view of mediation over that of the extensive model implicit in media scholarship and explicit on QAnon Casualties. Mediation involves splitting or folding human capacities, enabling new modulations of inputs and outputs to generate different affective outcomes. Rather than pointing to societal events as evidence of whether media connect or disconnect, the intensive model begins with the splitting and folding, showing how it enables different experiences that may entail connections, disconnections, and other alterations to affecting and being affected. The QAnon example illustrates that hermeneutics is not, as Galloway argues, a mode of communication but an *attribute* of numerous modes, including a conspiracy theory and ideology critique. Likewise, excommunication constitutes a mode of mediation involving tactics like no-contact and grey-rocking more than an a priori condition of all communication.

This distinction between modes and attributes comes from Baruch Spinoza's [30] ontology and Gilles Deleuze's [31] interpretation of it, which classifies existence into substance, attributes, and modes. This distinction may seem like a minor quibble with some of the few media scholars who have begun to make the theorization of mediation explicit. Galloway, Thacker, Wark, and Grusin's work maps much of the field of inquiry for such a task. The task entails, however, diagramming mediation in its varied specificity, including how different modes split or fold subjects. The task also means detailing how mediation thereby alters intensive attributes, whose affective and hence sociocultural consequence remain significant. It matters, in short, whether the hermeneutic mode is conspiratorial or an ideological critique. Marxists and QAnon adherents affect the world and seek to change it in dramatically different ways, after all. Thus, the pursuit of the intensive study of mediation should not replicate the reductionistic analysis of media found in the extensive view. There exists a potential infinity of modes, not three or four, that differently modulate attributes like the depth reading of hermeneutics. To riff on Spinoza, no one yet knows all the ways bodies might split or fold. The task of an intensive analysis of mediation, then, has much work remaining.

5. Conclusions

The big split unfolds into all sorts of little splits like the QAnon families. Some respond with conspiratorial modes, others with nihilistic ones, others by trolling, or tuning-out, or siloing, or venting, or marching. I experienced the impact of the big tension myself quite dramatically, as my wife and I separated in part because my mood had become so affected by the tragedies of the Anthropocene. I found myself in an anxious mode of paralysis, finding little joy in life and basically waiting for the end. I am doing much better now, thank you. I just mention it to note that this effect of the big tension occurred despite my own years of research on the subject. The big tension is not something that can simply be avoided by excommunication or cured by conscious awareness, not without work anyway. This conclusion drives home Grusin's point that media do not primarily operate epistemologically but more as affective generators and modulators. All the information available to me, someone who *had* taken the time to study the news today and was aware of the big split, did not help me address the big tension's affective consequences, at least not enough.

Some commentators have written recently about the mental health consequences of "doomscrolling", and they recommend meditating more and scrolling less. Hopefully you hear in this prescription the echoes of an extensive view and its focus on the amount of matter. Yet I did not engage in doomscrolling, despite experiencing many of the same mental health effects. I did not look for doom; doom found me as I scrolled. This directionality of the news (coming to rather than going to) is an attribute of news mediation today. Given the difficulty of avoiding social media, the consequences will not be addressed by sheer force of individual will. The extensive concerns of more and less are only a small part of the matter. The saturation, temperature, acceleration, rhythm, and density of the news environment affect us dramatically, too, sometimes indirectly through the moods of others and sometimes directly, on our feeds, without us trying, knowing, or wishing. The big split results in countless little splits like my own and QAnon casualties. Addressing the affective consequences of the big tension means diagramming the modes people adopt in response. Perhaps in that analysis, new manners of mediation might be discovered that can help prevent the big split from tearing us all apart.

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- ¹ See <https://www.reddit.com/r/QAnonCasualties/> (accessed on 9 July 2024).

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