

Mediated Death by Johanna Sumiala, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2022, 180 pp., £17.99 (pbk). ISBN: 978-1-5095-4454-7

Sumiala's book explores 'the dilemma of mortality in our present-day media-saturated society, and the complex ways in which death is integrated and/or disintegrated in our contemporary social lives' (p.164). The use of examples throughout makes the book both thought-provoking and highly current. Examples include case studies of deaths that have received public attention in the UK, Finland and globally as well as 'ordinary' deaths, specific examples of digital mourning on different social networking sites and broader events including the Coronavirus pandemic, Charlie Hebdo attacks and the Black Lives Matter movement. *Mediated Death* utilises approaches from media and communication studies, anthropology, and sociology.

The first chapter offers an introduction to the concept of mediated death and the book's arguments, which are threefold. First, that an expansion in mourning rituals can be witnessed across a range of media resulting in the vernacularization and pluralization of publicly visible mourning. Second, that mediated mourning rituals are highly ambivalent and contingent, leading to contestations about victimhood and death taboos. Third, that ritual activities in mediated spaces are more likely to be about a commitment to keeping the dead alive (in memory and media) than they are to enabling the dead to 'rest in peace'.

Chapter two offers a brief history of mediated death using plenty of examples and featuring an interesting section on death in hybrid media. Chapter three focuses on death as an event, arguing that 'death, when considered unusual, has the power to break up the everyday flow of news and become an event' (p.43). This chapter includes thoughtful reflection both on deaths deemed 'events' and deaths which, by failing to garner attention and visibility, suffer erasure and fail to accrue value as 'events'. Chapter four is entitled Rethinking Mourning Rituals and includes case studies of specific social media platforms including Instagram, Twitter, YouTube and Facebook. Chapter five, Ritual Contestations,

considers the politics of victimhood through examples including Trayvon Martin, Ahmed Merabet and Margaret Thatcher as well as the complex and emotive politics of livestreamed murders and suicides.

Chapter six, a highlight of the book for me, considers 'ritual order' (p. 136) or, as the chapter title describes, how 'Rituals Connect and Separate'. Sumiala considers how some deaths are deemed more 'grievable' than others. Among other examples, the author uses the harrowing case of the Finnish child Vilja Eerika who died as a consequence of child abuse to demonstrate how some deaths are considered 'inappropriate' and 'repulsive' in hybrid media contexts with focus concentrating not on the victim but instead on 'hate, anger, and rage' toward the perpetrator, positioned as an 'evil other' as a way to 'push' the death away (p.150). The final chapter is entitled The Quest for Post-Mortality. This chapter includes valuable reflection on the ways in which death and mourning rituals are adapted and developed to adhere to the commodified and commercialised communicational structures of platform social media.

Mediated Death will appeal to *Mortality* readers interested in death and media, mourning rituals, and contemporary mediated death events, given it covers the topics of Covid-19, the global Black Lives Matter movement, the Christchurch shootings, Manchester Arena bombing and many other high profile 21st century death events, as well as the deaths of ordinary people. It is accessibly priced with a paperback coming in at under £20, which is always a pleasure to acknowledge in the current publishing climate. Its original insights and breadth of engagement with literature from various disciplines will make it an excellent resource for death studies researchers at all levels.

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