

Larissa Hjorth, **Mourning on Mobile Media: Everyday Affective Witnessing**, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2025, 200 pp., \$45.00 (paperback).

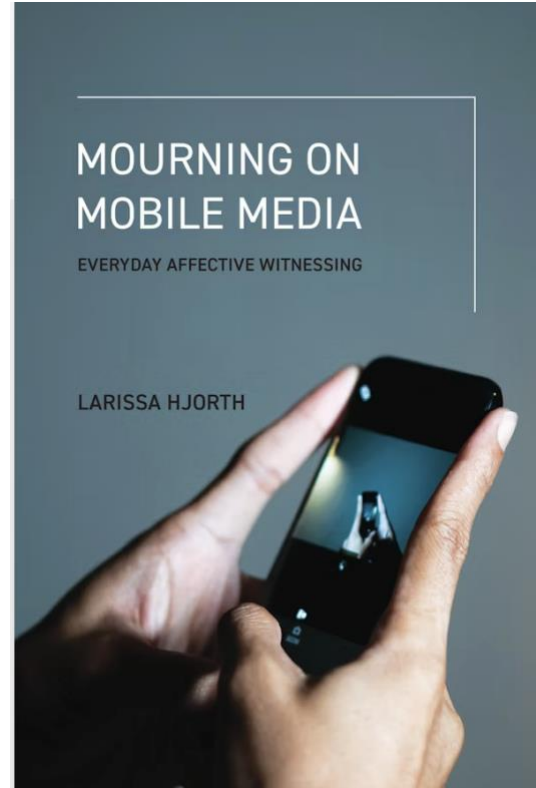
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In ***Mourning on Mobile Media: Everyday Affective Witnessing***, Larissa Hjorth argues that we

can not only recalibrate how we relate to others through mobile media but also re-envision rituals of mourning by publicly relating to others. We can accomplish this through a complex process that Hjorth coins digital kinship and kinning, which I discuss in more detail below. As a digital ethnographer who has written extensively about mobile intimacy, gaming, intergenerational connection, and loss, Hjorth is well positioned to reflect on this topic. In the end, she presents a surprisingly positive view of how people can “choreograph” their own social connections to others through mobile media. Her previous scholarship on the 2011 Fukushima disaster in Japan, Australian floods and wildfires, and the COVID-19 pandemic provides the foundation for this book, which examines how disasters are experienced, witnessed, and shared through mobile media. Hjorth is a distinguished professor and socially engaged artist at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology in Melbourne, Australia. She continues to build on her previous work with the Australian Research Council Future Fellowship, which funded her work on mobile media mourning rituals, affective witnessing, and creative ethnographic interventions here.



At the heart of Hjorth’s book is one central claim: Mobile media mourning rituals reflect our social, cultural, and emotional lives (p. 5). In numerous examples, vignettes, and micronarratives, she illustrates how mobile media mourning and affective witnessing intersect. Hjorth draws on Judith Butler’s concept of grievability to demonstrate how cultural norms around the “right to grief” (p. 10) inform sensemaking and produce affective witnessing. Hjorth connects her research to a vast corpus of literature (e.g., cultural, feminist, technology, communication, media, death, and dying scholarship). She aims to orient the reader to the scope of the book: to examine grief and related emotions as a cultural practice through case studies illustrating mobile media mourning. Hjorth examines mobile media witnessing through relationalities (e.g., how people observe and respond to online grief posts), digital and sociocultural practices (e.g., how people write online about their grief, hashtags, rituals of parasocial connection). Here, the author presents the notion that the visibility afforded by mobile media amplifies traumatic events and lived experiences, suggesting that mobile media extends beyond traditional methods of knowing. Hjorth argues that mobile

media is more than a channel modality; rather, it becomes a “conceptual lens for understanding the world” (p. 17).

Hjorth then discusses how mobile media creates digital kinships (chapter 2 onward). She unpacks the tensions between biological and social kinship, decentering familial-only grieving. Instead, she centers mobile mourning on nonlineal (e.g., people we meet online) and nonhuman (e.g., pets) relationalities. And so, the author eloquently challenges the traditional understandings of kin when we cope with loss by illuminating the importance of nonhuman/lineal kinships that emerge through mobile mourning in and through our everyday lives. For instance, she provides examples of social media pages for pet owners that both document and witness everyday pet rituals (e.g., Salty the dog), as well as pet and eco-grief eulogies and elegies. Hjorth defines *kinning* as the process of connecting with others online through commonly shared experiences. This chapter ends with a discussion of methodological choices because Hjorth boldly rejects traditional forms of ethnography rooted in colonial and human-centric epistemologies and proudly adopts an unorthodox method to begin shifting toward a more radical type of ethnography or “type of sensemaking storytelling” (p. 28). She pairs her ethnographic methodology with creative practice, such as workshops and socially engaged art (e.g., postcards, photos, drawings, and creative writing prompts), adding to the nuances of mobile media mourning and relationalities by emphasizing nonhuman kin and loss (e.g., pets, employment).

Hjorth incorporates examples of grief that reach beyond human and suggests grief is about death and loss (chapter 3). Her research on the COVID-19 pandemic underscores that nondeath losses opened a parasocial window for the world to witness and experience trauma. The author spotlights how mobile phones became a portal to social connection, affective witnessing, and a companion to aid in sensemaking during unprecedented times. She connects mobile affective witnessing to the home, arguing that the pandemic recalibrated how people use mobile devices, considering the unstable dynamics of place and space. Ultimately, Hjorth encourages readers to consider how home and mobile devices constitute each other.

Radically, Hjorth introduces literacy to suggest mobile mourning enhances not only individual abilities to cope but also cultural acceptance around stigmatized topics, such as death, dying, and grieving. Hjorth sketches mourning literacy as a cultural practice, highlighting the complexities of grief literacy across cultures and contexts. By engaging the literacy framework, she highlights that conversations about death and grief ought to be normalized. She builds upon death literacy literature to pivot the discussion to parasocial grief, or when one, for example, mourns a celebrity (p. 66). Here, the author returns to Butler’s concept of grievability and underlines the significance of the circulation of images, posts, testaments, and witnessing, bringing forth the different modes of affective witnessing that blur the boundaries between mourner and witness (chapter 4). Above all, it becomes clear that Hjorth seeks to challenge traditional grief norms, advocating for social change and broader acceptance of publicly sharing experiences of death, loss, and trauma.

Hjorth extends her argument that grieving is a collective cultural process when she discusses the social and cultural practices of pet loss. Drawing on examples from the Netherlands, Poland, China, Japan, Mexico, the USA, and Turkey, she examines anthropomorphizing practices that extend beyond human bonds. For example, rethinking modes of kinship to consider multispecies relationalities, as illustrated by

the Australian bushfires of 2020 and the Fukushima disaster of 2011 (chapters 6 and 7). By adapting Butler's grievability, Hjorth encourages reflection on the values of pets in our lives and demonstrates how mourning pets online functions as both a therapeutic and sociocultural practice of grief. Pet eulogies and elegies are discussed as transformative practices that are part of destigmatizing nonhuman-human kinships, which she conceptualizes as more-than-human kinships. Using the example of pet mourning, she argues that mourning online is a shared experience. In doing so, Hjorth stretches the boundaries and orthodox tropes of mourning by posing this question to readers: "How can witnessing the end of life in our more than human kin teach us about the value of kinship?" (p. 98). For Hjorth, social media provides a safe space for parasocial forms of comfort, enabling griever and mourners to connect despite having no personal relationships with other media posters. Grieving is no longer a private affair only to be shared by family members; it needs to become a collective cultural practice. Affective witnessing and sociality become important sociocultural practices. The author urges us to reconsider what is shared and witnessed online, a process that can help cultivate grief literacy.

Chapter 7 builds on Butler and Cunsolo's work to facilitate recognition of eco-grief and climate mourning by unpacking how the genres "play *out*, *in* and *through* mobile media" (p. 128; emphasis in the original). Hjorth proposes we must create new vocabularies to conceptualize, understand, and normalize more-than-human relationalities, thereby transforming conventional ways of knowing. In doing so, she makes a significant contribution to scholarship on digital, media, death, and environmental studies. She briefly pivots to queer ways of knowing and Indigenous rituals to support her conjectures. The book continues to build upon death, grief literacy, and afterlife scholarship to further query people's everyday experiences of digital legacy to engage future thinking of digital capital (e.g., Facebook, X) or "proprietary social media platforms" (p. 144). All along, the author effectively weaves a critique of neoliberal and capitalist forces into her argument to reframe digital media (e.g., Facebook accounts) as properties of large corporations, even after someone has passed away. Hjorth contends that politics, loss, and hauntings must be understood through media mourning futures, in which social media operates as part of a capitalist apparatus that monetizes death and extends the economic value of legacy. She circles back to affective witnessing, connecting mobile media mourning, and the need for tools to create and curate safe spaces of reflection to acknowledge the transformative role of deaths and afterlives between human and more-than-human relations is imperative.

Larissa Hjorth's book makes a significant interdisciplinary contribution to mourning literature. While the author briefly acknowledges the role of power, the discussion would have benefited from a more sustained engagement with how power operates through intersecting identities, affective witnessing, and lived experiences. Although the author mentions queer studies, its relevance to the broader analysis is not fully articulated, leaving me wanting more. Furthermore, a more comprehensive discussion of the author's positionality at the outset of the book would have strengthened the work by acknowledging how the researcher's identities, experiences, sociocultural and geopolitical location shape the research process and the interpretation of findings.

In closing, *Mourning on Mobile Media: Everyday Affective Witnessing*, offers a transformative reconceptualization of the intersections among digital media, mourning, and nonhuman/more-than-human loss. By framing mobile devices not merely as utilitarian tools but as companions and portals to affective

witnessing, Larissa Hjorth powerfully redefines mourning in the contemporary moment. Because she seamlessly bridges digital media and communication studies with ethnography, cultural studies, and critical feminist frameworks, the author demonstrates the value of interdisciplinary approaches to understanding grief. This compelling work will be of particular interest to advanced undergraduates, graduate students, and scholars interested in media, ageing, communication, affective theory, and qualitative research methods, and more.