The affective legacy of *Silent Spring* for a public feelings agenda

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1. Introduction

Much of the impact of *Silent Spring* and the shift in environmental perception that it has brought about is credited to its literary style and rhetorical force, its adaptations and amplifications of nuclear and Cold War fears contemporary to publication (for example see Lear, Lutts). This literary style did not emerge, however, with *Silent Spring*, but was evident in Carson's very first work "Undersea" published in 1937 in *Atlantic* magazine. Originally written as a government pamphlet it was rejected as too literary and emotive by her then-employers, the U.S. Bureau of Fisheries (see Brooks). From that moment, Carson began to first loosen and then break "the hold of the old contemplative nature essay as the primary medium for reflections about humanity's relationship with the natural world" (Killingsworth and Palmer 187). Each of Carson's five books and many articles and essays are idiomatic of this break with established forms of science and nature writing. While working on her first book, *Under the Sea Wind*, Carson herself noted:

> I have deliberately used certain expressions which would be objected to in formal scientific writing. I have spoken of fish 'fearing' his enemies, for example, not because I suppose a fish experiences fear in the same way that we do, but because I think *he behaves as though he were frightened.* (Carson quoted in Brooks 34)

So it is no discovery to claim that Carson's work emphasized imaginative techniques that were new at the time to nature writing in combining scientific research with creative prose. Not only does *Silent Spring* mark the moment of emergence of the "modern environmental movement" (Waddell ii) but, as

her most important work, it also broke ground for this new form of environmental writing. As Janet Montefiore has suggested: "Unlike most nature writers she is at her best not on her own observations, fine though these are, but on things that neither she nor any human has seen and that can only be imagined" (48). Killingsworth and Palmer have emphasized this literariness as a major element of Rachel Carson's legacy, and can be seen passed down in "most of the important nonfictional writing about the environment that has appeared since [Rachel Carson's] time" (177). What demands further exploration are the forms and features of this inheritance that *Silent Spring* offers to contemporary environmental writers and their publics. Such an exploration will be the focus of this chapter and explored in three interconnected stages.

First, *Silent Spring* is re-read with an emphasis on how it brought to the public sphere a multitude of personal and theretofore private feelings, coalesced around a politics of environmental protection. Carson wrote *Silent Spring* to puncture "the barrier of public indifference" to environmental degradation (Carson quoted in Brooks 258). Her intention was to achieve this by transforming localised private feelings into a collective public voice, and employ this in "making the case for change" (Gartner 109). In doing so, Carson set to spin the 'affective turn' in the natural and social sciences by which publics now engage with science, technology and the environment via intentionalities of both fact *and* feeling.

In placing public feelings at the centre of environmental narratives in calling for increased pro-environmental behaviours, *Silent Spring* established a template for environmental writers aiming to engender emotional responses as a means of coming to terms with global ecological crises. Going a step further than Killingsworth and Palmer, it is now difficult to imagine environmental writing having political effect *without* such public feelings pivotal to its narrative. The second and third parts of this chapter will then explore two examples, in Bill McKibben's *The End of Nature* and Amy Seidl's *Early Spring*. Both books own a great debt to *Silent Spring* and have had, so far, differing levels of success in challenging awareness and behaviours around climate change and global warming. However, I argue that the more 'successful' book of the two is not McKibben's bestseller, but the lesser known Seidl's. This will be extrapolated below; but first, I will explain why *Silent*

Spring should be re-contextualized within the cultural politics of affect and the emergence of a public feelings criticism.

2. *Silent Spring* and the emergence of public feelings

Public feelings or public sentiments are terms that have been put into circulation by writers such as Ann Cvetkovich and Lauren Berlant "to challenge the idea that feelings, emotions, or affects properly and only belong to the domain of private life and to the intimacies of family, love, and friendship" (Cvetkovich and Pellegrini 1). When restricted to private life, such feelings, emotions or affects are redacted of political agency. For public feelings scholars, a critical programme is one that erupts to destabilize the understanding of this current form of politics as free from private feelings, with a will "to make trouble, celebrate minority, and pluralize differences" (Dumm 267) in the process. For Lauren Berlant, feelings—and particularly painful feelings—have become central in the making of political worlds: but generally, so far, in the service of traditional hierarchies. Berlant's argument is that pain is legitimated as a 'true' feeling by those hierarchies, and in the process this legitimation disempowers opposition within minorities, to the point that the simple removal or alleviation or recognition of that 'pain' (e.g. through reality TV, tabloid press attention) is enough to be considered freedom or survival, without changing the structural causes of that pain. The structural cause of such pain is a triumphant capitalism, which:

> exhorts citizens to understand that the "bottom line" of national life is neither democracy nor freedom but survival, which can only be achieved by a citizenry that eats its anger, makes no unreasonable claims on resources or control over value, and uses its most creative energy to cultivate intimate spheres while scrapping a life together flexibly in response to the market-world's caprice. (43)

In particular, a central site of contention for public feelings criticism is given to everyday and ordinary events. It is in those places of people's struggle for survival, their small victories and defeats, where, argues Kathleen Stewart, "politics has to be tracked through the twisted machinations of everyday experience and meanings buried in habits of life, interpretative practices, and forms of sociality"

(245). As Berlant continues: “The everyday of citizenship is a ground that must be fought for […] because it so often represents the imaginable limit of political responsibility in the face of pain’s claims” (61).

It is arguable that the politicization of American citizenship and its everyday feelings toward the environment began with *Silent Spring*. Carson’s chief concern was that *Silent Spring* would have a lasting effect on government policy (Brooks 304). In this it succeeded: but I would also argue that it achieved this success through registering the painful feelings of private citizens and, rather than having them “eat their anger,” organising those emotions to effect real political change.

As Randy Harris identifies, Carson’s strategy in writing *Silent Spring* was to “represent and re-present […] homeowners, farmers, and other concerned nonspecialists who belong to nature societies, write letters to the paper, phone local agencies, and generally give vent to the bewilderment and outrage of people suffering the collateral damage inflicted by the Bad Guys” (Harris 130). This is Carson’s “Citizen chorus” (140), and they are hurting. The Good Guys are scientists, conservationists and pro-environmental, usually local, activists. The Bad Guys are corporate pharmaceutical and chemical America, their lobbyists and supporting politicians in Washington: a triumphant nexus of capitalism. Harris’s analysis focuses on the rhetorical and linguistic devices that Carson uses to make distinct (and re-present) her subjects, such as paraphrase and quotation; while “Carson individualizes the Good Guys […] in sharp contrast, the Bad Guys are almost always nameless, anonymous, without titles or accomplishments” (137). But importantly, as Harris identifies, “the Citizenry is Carson’s largest constituency” (139) and she gives their emotions the greatest voice. Carson knows that, if political change is to be effected, then the “everyday, purchasing, voting, song-bird-appreciating Citizen can not only be brought in to believe but might be moved to action” (141) and Carson sets about the mobilization of the constituencies’ feelings:

> The first Citizens (a “New England woman” and a “conservationist”) show up as clear representatives of a ground-swelling outrage. The very first in the book, writing “angrily” to a newspaper, speaks as part of a “steadily growing chorus of outraged protest about the disfigurement of once beautiful roadsides by chemical sprays”. (Harris 139)

Local sportsmen in Illinois quickly add their angry voices with eyewitness accounts of dead and dying birds while at the sportsmen's club (Carson 92). During a news report that carries pictures of low-flying planes spraying DDT, "after receiving nearly 800 calls in a single hour, the police begged radio and television stations and newspapers to 'tell watchers what they were seeing and advise them it was safe'" (Carson 90). Carson gathers together and deploys multiple examples of her Citizenry's emotions of loss, anger, indignation and frustrated agency, as they seek forms of political action during and through their everyday activities, and are as often rebuffed by representatives of political and capitalist institutions—the police, the TV, the newspapers—in those same everyday locations.

The rebuffs could not hold back the anger. *Silent Spring* led to "a wave of anxiety" (Glotfelty 167) that moved swiftly across America and into Europe. But this public wave was the outer ripple of the multitude of inner feelings encircling and inscribing their voices. Everyday observations lead to distress: of the "Milwaukee woman" writing of "the pitiful, heartbreaking experience" of finding beautiful birds dying in her backyard (90); of the "Wisconsin naturalist" writing: "It is tragic and I can't bear it" (107). As Harris argues: "By giving so many Citizens a voice in *Silent Spring*, Carson is also giving voice to her readers, engaging them in the book and in the argument" (Harris 141). But while Harris believes Carson's "responsibility for the words, the beliefs and the truth of *Silent Spring* is the wellspring of its power" (152) I would argue it is rather Carson's skill in marshalling the affects of the everyday—the emotions invested in writing letters, playing sports, waiting in the kitchen at the back window while the pie is cooking for the first phoebe to arrive, watching DDT-spraying on the evening's news—and of shifting its collective force into a public sphere, that is the wellspring of the book's power. *Silent Spring* is a spring of public feelings that explicitly challenges the limits placed on emotions as proper only to the domain of private life. The everyday actions of Carson's Citizenry are pregnant with feeling; Carson's organisation, following Kathleen Stewart, makes visible how "[t]he visits and phone calls of every day are filled with stories that cull seemingly ordinary moments into a sensibility attuned to extraordinary threats and possibilities" (250). This "wave of anxiety" was so overwhelming it led, famously, to President John F. Kennedy's Advisory Committee Into the Use of Pesticides, the outcome of which brought about the banning of DDT and, in 1970, the inauguration of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. *Silent Spring* brought from under the surface of

national public life private and localised feeling about the death of songbirds and the destruction of nature in ways that, for example, the Audubon Society could and did not. In doing so, it has established a template for campaigning science and environmental writing that approaches public feeling and political agency as actively enmeshed. That template is the focus of the rest of the chapter.

3. A template of affect for literary environmental journalism

Carson's own feelings, as with most writers, were central to both the subject matter and causes she wrote about. Her first three books, her sea trilogy, "would bring into focus the emotional ties she had felt with the sea since childhood" (Brooks 109) and she was unafraid of her emotional response to nature. As Paul Brooks, her editor at Houghton Mifflin and later her friend and biographer, recalls, "she felt a spiritual as well as physical closeness to the individual creatures about whom she wrote: a sense of identification that is an essential element in her literary style" (8). In the writing of *Silent Spring* one of the voices of private anger and despair that she made public was, of course, her own. There can be no doubt from its language, the book's impact, or from the documentary evidence and letters that weave their history around *Silent Spring* that Carson wrote with strong feelings against the issue of pesticide use and the wider ecological alarms of environmental damage (see Freeman). Carson did not as a rule talk about her own work, but in a speech to the Women's National Book Association in February 1963, she emphasized the urgency she felt in writing this book:

> The time had come […] when it must be written. We have already gone very far in our abuse of this planet. Some awareness of this problem has been in the air, but the ideas had to be crystallized, the facts had to be brought together in one place. If I had not written the book I am sure these ideas would have found another outlet. But knowing the facts as I did, I could not rest until I had brought them to public attention. (quoted in Brooks 228)

And to public attention she brought them. Many of the attacks on the publication of *Silent Spring* focused on its emotional and affective appeals to her Citizenry. An editorial in *Time* magazine accused Carson of using "emotion-fanning" language (Brooks 297). However, the attacks on Carson can hardly be called temperate (see Brooks 296-298). As Priscilla Coit Murphy and Paul Brooks have

both documented, the reception of *Silent Spring* was bitterly contested by some politicians and the chemical industry; in particular, attempts were made to reduce Rachel Carson to the status of an overemotional woman with no bearing on political debate. Yet the factual accuracy of the text stood up to scrutiny, and threats of lawsuits. What Carson did in writing *Silent Spring* (and which demands more space than I can give it here) was to enact a public feelings project that turned on its head the generally accepted ideas of, as Berlant describes it:

> […]what normative feminine aspirations are: a world where women are responsible for sustaining conditions of intimacy and of sexual desire; where they are made radiant by having more symbolic than social value (derived from their expertise in realms of intimate feeling and sexuality); where their anger is considered evidence of their triviality or greed and lack of self-knowledge. (Berlant 60).

Silent Spring refused such symbolic devaluation and instead insisted on its expertise and the political value of its record of everyday feelings, and in particular its anger. Certainly further explorations can be made here of Carson's importance for women's political expression and aspiration in these forms.

And yet these affective textures of *Silent Spring* cannot, of course, be declared the single or most important factor in the book's achievements. As Craig Waddell has emphasized, its success can be sought only by searching for "diverse contributing factors that collectively overdetermine such a response" (Waddell 12) although its power drawn from themes aligned with the zeitgeist of the 1960s, such as Cold War fears, has clearly waned. What I believe *can* be argued is that *Silent Spring* not only offered its readers at the time "a template for future action […] even models for writing, for Carson's readers to emulate in the pursuit of legislation governing responsible pesticide use" (Harris 141); but that its "models for writing" that emphasize affective patterns of public appeal have been employed today as the exemplary templates for environmental writing. There are two templates, in fact, that I wish to look at here. The first is the use of the author's own feelings and emotions of the subject matter they write about and how these are turned public; and the second is the engagement with the private and everyday emotions of affected citizens. By studying these strategies of writing in the works of McKibben and Seidl, I hope to show that not only are contemporary environmental and

science writers indebted to Rachel Carson, but that it is the combination of these two templates or techniques that I believe *Silent Spring* so paradigmatically got right in its fight against pesticide use.

Bill McKibben's *The End of Nature* was first published in 1989. If environmental historians are unanimous in claiming that the modern environmental movement began with *Silent Spring*, it is similarly recognised that *The End of Nature* was the first book written for a general audience about climate change. Published 27 years later, the book almost maniacally adheres to Carson's affective template. At many points McKibben directly references the debt both he (and nature) owe to *Silent Spring*. Discussing the ban on DDT, McKibben says "one could, and can, always imagine that somewhere a place existed free of its taint. (And largely as a result of Rachel Carson's book there are more and more such places)" (58). And later, at the sight of returned bald eagles to the Adirondacks, McKibben says: "This grand sight I owe to Rachel Carson; had she not written when she did about the dangers of DDT, it might well have been too late before anyone cared about what was happening. She pointed out the problem; she offered a solution; the world shifted course" (148).

The debt McKibben owes to Carson is also evident in the book's literary and rhetorical style. Descriptions of the natural environment are written with one ear attuned to the rhythms of poetry: "But I prefer trees to shrubs. You can keep your sumae bush—give me yellow birch, tamarack, blue spruce, the swamp maple first to change its color in the fall, rock maple, hemlock" (34). Its argument is made through metaphor—mankind's insidious permeation into the natural world is characterized as the noise of a chain saw (reversing the absences of *Silent Spring*): "Now that we have changed the most basic forces around us, the noise of that chain saw will always be in the woods" (47). Such metaphors are nearly always used in the mobilization of the reader's emotions by affiliation with the writer's affective responses: "The sound of the chain saw doesn't blot out all of the noises of the forest or drive the animals away, but it does drive away the feeling that you are in another, separate, timeless, wild sphere" (47). The book's structure also follows that of *Silent Spring*. Both begin by drawing on characterizations and differences between 'natural' time and human time. For McKibben: "Nature, we believe, takes forever. It moves with infinite slowness through the many periods of its history" (3). And for Carson: "For time is the essential ingredient; but in the modern world there is no time" (Carson 24). McKibben's final chapter "A Path of More Resistance" echoes Carson's final

chapter “The Other Road” (drawing, of course, on Robert Frost’s famous poem) and the metaphor of the path to be chosen winds through both texts, from first page to the last.

These obvious debts to *Silent Spring* would be enough to secure its legacy for the ways in which it influences a significant contemporary writer as he tackles today’s ecological crises. But the critical inheritance evident in McKibben’s widely merited work is its adoption of the affective template used to bring private feelings to the surface for direction in the aims of political action. *The End of Nature* is an affective narrative, a book written to turn private feelings public (as McKibben’s latest project, www.350.org, also attempts). These are foremost McKibben’s own feelings of sadness. Using rhetorical techniques employed at emotional junctures, such as asking questions of feeling in response to ecological crises, and then (as Carson did for her implied reader (Harris 143)) answering those questions, McKibben stirs up a centrifugal storm of sadness around his observations and conclusions. For example, McKibben asks: “How should I cope with the sadness of watching nature end in our lifetimes, and with the guilt of knowing that each of us is in some measure responsible? The answer to the second part is easier: at the very least, we have to put up a good fight” (xix). The guilt can be addressed, but the sadness is more difficult to answer. And this, as I suggest below, is where the book departs from Carson’s template and weakens its political agency.

There are at least two levels of affect at work in *The End of Nature*. These differences are articulated in the two sadnesses that McKibben talks about as he says: “Certain human sadnesses might diminish; other human sadnesses would swell” (207). The first leads to the second, but their distinction indicates that *The End of Nature* is not only, as McKibben says, a record of environmental destruction, but it is also the death of an idea (61). The second overlapping but different sadness is the *emotional response to the emotional response*: what McKibben identifies as a separate “sadness that drove me to write this book in the first place” (xix). With the death of the idea of nature, what remains is a narrative of affect: a book with a central question *about sadness*: “How will we feel the end of nature?” (74). The outcome is “at the very least […] to put up a good fight” (xix). But as Jane Bennett and William Chaloupka suggest, *The End of Nature* is rife with “the holist longing evident in McKibben’s grief for the nature we have killed” (xi) and the fight is as good as lost. There is no clearing of the dull sadness. *The End of Nature* is a lament for the death of both nature *and* the

feelings that can be engendered *only* by nature. McKibben tries to hold on to these feelings, as he does to the nature that brings them about, but in the end is left with imagining nature's after-affects:

> For now, let's concentrate on what it feels like to live on a planet where nature is no longer nature. What is the sadness about? In the first place, merely the knowledge that we screwed up […] Our sadness is almost an aesthetic response – appropriate because we have marred a great, mad, profligate work of art, taken a hammer to the most perfectly proportioned of sculptures. (92-3)

In the sense that McKibben is marshalling feeling to the aid of the environment, *The End of Nature* can be considered a *Carsonian* book. But the template is misused or overused: overwhelmed by its "ugly feelings" (Ngai 3). Political agency is suspended. Following the argument Berlant puts forward, the recognition of a 'true' feeling of pain (here, sadness) is used in a way that the alleviation of that pain (through, perhaps, writing a book?) is enough to consider its work done: that is, freedom or survival is achieved. On a number of occasions McKibben says he will continue to drive his car, burn his wood.

For Berlant, such "politicized feeling is a kind of thinking that too often assumes the obviousness of the thought it has, which stymies the production of the thought it might become" (48). McKibben assumes these feelings for everyone ("our sadness") but, critically, his book lacks the ordinary, everyday affects of a Citizen chorus. We have his experiences, Good Guys and Bad Guys, but very few others. As such, McKibben fails to proliferate that which Berlant demands we develop and debate in challenging the politicization of feeling; namely "new vocabularies of pleasure, recognition and equity" (62). Instead he settles on an inconsolable, aesthetic sadness and then, overwhelmed by the end of nature ("We live in a different world; therefore life feels different" (146)), turns from feeling toward reason. "As birds have flight, our special gift is reason […] should we so choose, we could exercise our reason to do what no other animal can do: we could limit ourselves voluntarily" (234). McKibben is quick to suggest that man's interventions in natural spaces "gets in your mind. You're forced to think, not feel—to think of human society and of people" (McKibben 49). And yet ecological restraint, he seems to say, can only be found in the processes of thought that

he both implicitly and explicitly blames for the ecological crisis. He abandons *Silent Spring's* affective template—that private feelings can be mobilized for public and political impact—and turns to thought, characterised as reason, to bring about change. While being an incredibly successful book in sales and reach, *The End of Nature* falls short of the mobilization of public feelings for political action that *Silent Spring* achieved. Its over-reliance on the author's negative affect (sadness) stymies wider positive resolution (hope) set against the sheer scale of climate change.

Perhaps it is understandable. Although Rachel Carson was aware of the threats of global warming (see Brooks), she was not facing its consequences. In the face of its unique threats, how would Rachel Carson have responded? I believe something of an answer to that question can be found in the work of Amy Seidl, to whom I now turn.

4. An emotional age in a world out of kilter

Amy Seidl is an environmental scientist living in Vermont. On the blurb of her book *Early Spring*, published in 2009, she is "an ecologist and mother" to which the book's subheading makes specific reference: "An Ecologist and Her Children Wake to a Warming World". Her book owes debts to both Rachel Carson and *Silent Spring*; and to Bill McKibben, who has contributed the foreword. Writing two decades after the publication of *The End of Nature*, McKibben begins by distilling his own book's essence in familiar affective tones. It was, he says, "an attempt to sense what the world would feel like once its rhythms, as old as human civilization, began to alter" (ix). McKibben makes no apology for emphasizing these affecting and feeling qualities in his own work and linking them to Seidl's. He writes: "[…] the human heart is the most sensitive instrument, and that is why Amy Seidl's marvellous book is so important" (ix).

No doubt Seidl, a first time author, is thankful for the attention that a foreword from McKibben has brought the book. But the greater debt is to Rachel Carson. The title of *Early Spring* is an obvious reverberation, and each chapter of *Early Spring* begins with a quotation from *Silent Spring* or another of Carson's texts, an epigraphic frame that fastens the book firmly to the tradition of imaginative science writing that Carson began. The final chapter "Epilogue" begins with an extract from Carson's speech given at the National Book Awards in 1963, an award she won for *Silent Spring:*

> The aim of science is to discover and illuminate truth. And that, I take it, is the aim of literature, whether biography or history or fiction. It seems to me, then, that there can be no separate literature of science. (quoted in Seidl 155)

Seidl is a convert. The chapter begins and the book ends with a brief tale of the sickness of her daughter Celia ("Her heart is racing like a hummingbird's" (155)) before pausing to make the point, as if needed: "Health is a metaphor we can all relate to" (155). She then continues the epilogue with a discussion of the ecological health of the planet. Her daughters, Celia and Helen, are constant companions both physically and metaphorically. They are with Seidl on forest walks, visiting the store, staring through the lens of a microscope. They are the two most important members of Seidl's audience: "I reach into the minds and sensibilities of my children, where the world is as yet unencumbered by this crisis. I use their gaze, one that comes from an open-eyed perspective and an uncorrupted sense of wonder, a gaze that asks, 'All this for me?'" (xviii). Each wonder gazed upon is some everyday event that resonates with the miasma of chance and crisis and weighs on the mother's shoulders. The beginning of the chapter "Forests" is worth quoting at length:

> One night at the end of winter, from inside the house, I hear a pack of coyotes howling near John's Brook a hundred yards away. A waxing moon is just visible above the garden's treed boundary when I step into the evening's darkness with Celia. We are not dressed for being outside, having only kicked off our slippers and stepped quickly into our boots, the front door closing heavily behind us. Celia holds my hand as we walk to the forest-garden edge and peer into the deep woods. The coyotes howl again, and their ululations reverberate up from the brook. Celia tightens her grip; her response is equal parts fascination and fear. She's pulled to hear the wild sound coming out of the woods again. It comes toward her, vibrating out of the ravine into her small body, down the hair on her neck, and later than night into her dreams as she sleeps beneath a slightly opened window, her ear cocked to the brook. (47-8)

Whereas McKibben has only Good Guys and Bad Guys, Seidl's narrative returns to the triangulation of constituents found in *Silent Spring* by emphasizing the feelings of her Vermont Citizenry and, with great emphasis, her daughters. Each chapter begins with her daughters in some act of exploration and emotion, records of what Kathleen Stewart has called "ordinary affects […] public feelings that begin

and end in broad circulation, but they're also the stuff that seemingly intimate lives are made of" (Stewart 2). The broad circulation is the threat of a warming world, their intimate lives are emotions shared by a daughter and her mother at the garden's boundary, "equal parts fascination and fear".

In the preface Seidl explains how she wants "to emphasize the changes I see in my landscape close to home—in my garden, in local woods and ponds. It is in this everyday context that I notice the world entering flux" (xii). Seidl is recording the events of a community unknowingly written into the rapidly growing library on global warming, not only by Seidl but by an environment with whom their ecological relationships are being changed by this warming. The everyday, the ordinary, and the changes in those patterns and habits are directly descended from the patterns of storytelling narrative corralled into service in *Silent Spring*. Where Carson had "Milwaukee woman" and "Wisconsin naturalist" Seidl has the teary-eyed George Hart as he sells his sugar bush to Paul and Jen, young entrepreneurs "optimistic that the maple sugar industry will last through their lifetimes despite the age of warming" (57). Seidl talks of near-daily conversations about the weather, which "take place at Beaudry's Store […] and entering is much like standing in a reception line at a wedding: *Hello* and *How are you?* are exchanged with customers in line or the shopkeeper behind the counter" (9).

These are her Citizenry, and their private feelings expressed in everyday situations are folded into an urgent telling of ecological catastrophe erupting around them. Seidl emphasises that it is the *intimacy* of their feelings for nature that is the wellspring of their (and her book's) power: "These record keepers are motivated by their enjoyment of the natural world and also by the feeling that they are a part of the annual cycle they document […] these environmental diarists maintain a close connection with their home environment, and their diaries provide a history of this intimacy" (xiv).

Early Spring is a less well known book, but with its subtler uses of affect and her appeals to the feelings of other citizens— specifically, her daughters—I suggest Seidl's book is a more productive text for fully thinking through *Silent Spring's* legacy and lasting impact for ways in which public feelings have been set against the mechanisms of ecological vandalism. It is closer to *Silent Spring* in its tacking along the lines of the ordinary, everyday affects of family and community and how these are not separate from but integral to that "something huge and impersonal [that] runs through things" (Stewart 87) that is capitalism or climate change or the coyote howling in the garden-forest and a

child's dreams. I think what both Carson and Seidl offer, which McKibben does not (quite), is the understanding that:

> There's a promise of losing oneself in the flow of things. But the promise jumps in a quick relay to the sobering threats of big business, global warming, the big-box corporate landscape, the master-planned community, the daily structural violence of inequalities of all kinds, the lost potentials, the lives not lived, the hopes still quietly harbored or suddenly whipped into a frenzy. Either that, or the promise of losing yourself in the flow becomes a dull, empty drifting that you can't quite get yourself out of. (Stewart 89)

Seidl's book lifts up the everyday feelings of her Citizenry from the "dull, empty drifting" of "the big-box corporate landscape" and gives them the loudest voices. Like Carson but unlike McKibben, Seidl's own sadness and fear for the ecological changes being wrought does not overwhelm the book. Rather, using a specifically *Carsonian* concept, Seidl asks of "my readers to *endure* the discomfort of wrestling with the largest question" (xviii, my emphasis). ("The Obligation to Endure" is *Silent Spring's* second chapter). That question is not McKibben's fatalistic "how will we feel the end of nature?' but rather an enduring "what does global warming mean for life on Earth?" (xviii).

There are "hopes still quietly harbored" (Stewart 89) when Seidl asks her readers this question, and the next: "To look at the landscapes where we live and ask: how are they signalling what the future holds; how do they contain indicators of the oncoming flux?" (xviii). Seidl is asking her readings to face "the flow of things" and record there the everyday, ordinary events as an affective bulwark as means of *enduring*. In this way, Seidl achieves what McKibben does not in making what "feels good to be doing the right thing" (Seidl 159) a political act. What McKibben says of Seidl, however, is immeasurably 'true': "She is one of the very first to grapple with what it means—what it feels like—to come of emotional age in a world spinning out of kilter" (x). In that, she is Rachel Carson's daughter.

5. Conclusion

Rachel Carson's work has been rightly identified as "a landmark not only in environmental history but in book history as well" (Murphy 190) for the ways in which "[h]er book helped to make *ecology*, which was an unfamiliar word in those days, one of the greatest causes of our time" (Brooks quoted in Waddell xvii). Her legacy can be traced not just in the examples I have used here, but in the environmental journalism of Mark Lynas and Elizabeth Kolbert, in the literary fiction of Cormac McCarthy, J G Ballard and A S Byatt, and the poetry of Sylvia Plath, among many notable others. We can now add to this that *Silent Spring* has done much—perhaps more than any other book of environmental literature—to, as Cvetkovich and Pellegrini put it, challenge the idea that feelings, emotions, or affects properly and only belong to the domain of private life. With *Silent Spring*, Carson undermined and stepped outside of each of the normative values ascribed to her and to women in the field of science writing. In particular, the impacts of *Silent Spring*, attacked and denigrated as she was for its publication, shattered the safe ideals of masculine scientific corporatist America. *Silent Spring* was, and remains, evidence of its author drawing power not from expertise in the "realms of intimate feeling and sexuality" but from the sphere of *public feeling* and *politics*.

In particular, Carson showed that the capitalist atomisation of the natural world was (and is) avoidable, and that the anger felt about that destruction could (and can) be channelled into political action, away from the flow of dull, empty drifting that goes nowhere. Instead, following Berlant, Carson opened up the everyday of struggle as "a ground on which unpredicted change can be lived and mapped" (62). There is a caveat though: as Berlant forewarns us "the new maps will not reveal a world without struggle, or a world that looks like the opposite of a painful one" (62). *Silent Spring* remains—is perhaps only now being recognised as—an important challenge to normative associations of emotions and private intimacies, and occupies a foundational position in the history of cultural politics concerned with public feelings.

Abstract

The importance of Rachel Carson's legacy can be measured in its *affective* influence on contemporary environmental literary journalism and science writing. The ground broken by *Silent Spring* in creating

new forms of writing has placed emotions, feelings and affect at the very centre of contemporary narratives that call for increased pro-environmental beliefs and behaviours. A critical public feelings framework is used to explore these issues and trace their passage from the private and intimate, where they are denuded of agency, and into the public sphere. The work of Lauren Berlant and Kathleen Stewart and, in particular, their focus on the struggle of everyday citizenship in contemporary America is helpful in illustrating the ways *Silent Spring* turned its rhetorical and literary force to mobilize public feelings, particularly anger aimed at environmental destruction, into political action. This 'template' is then explored in the work of two contemporary campaigning environmental and science writers. First, *The End of Nature* by Bill McKibben is examined for its debt to *Silent Spring* and its use (and ultimate overuse) of the emotion of sadness in its attempt to bring climate change to the public's attention. Second, *Early Spring* by Amy Seidl is shown to be a more *affective* descendant of *Silent Spring* in its adherence to Carson's narrative procedures, by bringing attention back to the unpredictable and intimate power of ordinary, everyday affects and their political agency. As such, *Silent Spring* is shown to occupy a foundational position in the history of cultural politics concerned with public feelings.

Key Names and Concepts

Lauren Berlant, Paul Brooks, Rachel Carson, Ann Cvetkovich, Bill McKibben, Amy Seidl, public feelings, ordinary affects, ecology, science literature, *Silent Spring*, *The End of Nature*, *Early Spring*.

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