



# The Affective Legacy of *Silent Spring*

Alex Lockwood

Centre for Research in Media and Cultural Studies, University of Sunderland, UK

**ABSTRACT** In the fiftieth year since the publication of *Silent Spring*, the importance of Rachel Carson's work can be measured in its *affective* influence on contemporary environmental writing across the humanities. The ground broken by *Silent Spring* in creating new forms of writing has placed affect at the very centre of contemporary narratives that call for 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 risk remaining denuded of agency, and into the public sphere. The work of Lauren Berlant and Kathleen Stewart and their focus on the struggle of everyday citizenship in contemporary life is helpful in illustrating how *Silent Spring* mobilised private feelings, particularly anger aimed at environmental destruction, into political action. This template is then explored in two contemporary environmental writers. First, *The End of Nature* by Bill McKibben is examined for its debt to *Silent Spring* and its use (and overuse) 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 and effective 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. As such, *Silent Spring* is shown to occupy a foundational position in the history of the environmental humanities, and a cultural politics concerned with public feelings.

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## Introduction

Much of the impact of *Silent Spring*, Rachael Carson's 1962 text on the effects of pesticide use, is credited to its literary style and rhetorical force, its adaptations and amplifications of nuclear and Cold War fears contemporary to publication.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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."<sup>3</sup> Each of

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<sup>1</sup> For example, see Linda Lear, *Rachel Carson: Witness for Nature* (London: Penguin, 1997) and Ralph Lutts, "Chemical Fallout: *Silent Spring*, Radioactive Fallout, and the Environmental Movement," in *And No Birds Sing: Rhetorical Analyses of Rachel Carson's Silent Spring*, ed. Craig Waddell (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), 17-41.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Brooks, *The House of Life: Rachel Carson at Work* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989).

<sup>3</sup> M. Jimmie Killingsworth and Jacqueline Palmer, "Silent Spring and Science Fiction: An Essay in the History and Rhetoric of Narrative," in *And No Birds Sing: Rhetorical Analyses of Rachel Carson's Silent Spring*, ed. Craig Waddell (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), 187.

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*.<sup>4</sup>

So it is no discovery to claim that Carson's work emphasised imaginative techniques that were new at the time to nature writing in combining scientific research with creative prose. 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."<sup>5</sup> However, not only does *Silent Spring* mark the moment of emergence of the "modern environmental movement"<sup>6</sup> but, as her most important work, it also helped establish this new form of environmental writing. Killingsworth and Palmer have emphasised this literariness as a major element of Rachel Carson's legacy, which can be seen passed down in "most of the important nonfictional writing about the environment that has appeared since [Rachel Carson's] time."<sup>7</sup> What demands further exploration are the forms and features of this inheritance that *Silent Spring* offers to contemporary environmental writers and their publics, particularly its affective legacy.

Carson wrote *Silent Spring* to puncture "the barrier of public indifference"<sup>8</sup> to environmental degradation. 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."<sup>9</sup> In placing private feelings at the centre of environmental narrative, *Silent Spring* established a template for environmental writers aiming to engender emotional responses as a means of coming to terms with local and global ecological crises. 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. Going a step further than Killingsworth and Palmer, it is now difficult to imagine environmental writing having political effect *without* affect, emotion or feelings being pivotal to its narrative. The second and third parts of this article explore these issues in two texts, Bill McKibben's *The End of Nature* and Amy Seidl's *Early Spring*. McKibben's bestseller and the lesser-known text by Seidl, in different ways and to varying degrees, challenge awareness of and behaviours around climate change and global warming. Both owe a debt to *Silent Spring*. What I look at is the extent to which these texts mobilise affect and private feelings to make possible new public cultures in responding to crisis. This is

<sup>4</sup> Rachel Carson quoted in Brooks, *The House of Life*, 34.

<sup>5</sup> Janet Montefiore, "'The Fact that Possesses my Imagination': Rachel Carson, Science and Writing," *Women: A Cultural Review* 12, no. 1 (2001): 48.

<sup>6</sup> Craig Waddell, "The Reception of *Silent Spring*: An Introduction," in *And No Birds Sing: Rhetorical Analyses of Rachel Carson's Silent Spring*, ed. Craig Waddell (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), ii.

<sup>7</sup> Killingsworth and Palmer, "*Silent Spring* and Science Fiction," 177.

<sup>8</sup> Carson quoted in Brooks, *The House of Life*, 258.

<sup>9</sup> Carol Gartner, "When Science Writing Becomes Literary Art: The Success of *Silent Spring*," in *And No Birds Sing: Rhetorical Analyses of Rachel Carson's Silent Spring*, ed. Craig Waddell (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), 109.

extrapolated below. First, I set out the emergence of a public feelings criticism in the humanities and social sciences, and argue why it is that *Silent Spring* should be re-contextualised within the cultural politics of affect.

### The emergence of public feelings

In the last two decades, public feelings or public sentiments are terms that have been put into circulation by cultural theorists 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.”<sup>10</sup> These academic/activists focus critical attention on the ways in which affects saturate politics and the political, to expose, for example, their employment in justifying neoliberal aims such as the use of national sentimentality in the ‘war on terror’.<sup>11</sup> These scholars argue that feelings are too often mobilised and circulated in public spheres in ways that support normalising pathologies that degrade and refuse non-dominant reproductions of life (e.g. for women in general, those identifying as queer, or anyone outside of the ‘norm’ of ‘who counts’). As Ann Cvetkovich says, “[o]ur interest in everyday life, in how global politics and history manifest themselves at the level of lived affective experience”<sup>12</sup> is to unpick the relationship between politics, history and ordinary lives, because “private or personal matters are in fact central to political life.”<sup>13</sup> According to Lauren Berlant, public spheres are “always affect worlds.”<sup>14</sup> The critique of many scholars is that when feelings are restricted to private life, they are redacted of political agency. As Jenni Rice explains: “Part of the problem of a public culture built upon private intimacies is that experiences of depression, rage, ambivalence are felt first/primarily as personal, rather than a function of public life [...] If I am depressed, for instance, this is a function of my intimate sphere: unhappiness at home, with the family, with my parents. It is filtered through the intimate zone of therapeutic discourse, rather than first examined as a ‘public problem’.”<sup>15</sup> 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 alleviation or recognition of that ‘pain’ (e.g. through reality TV, or tabloid press attention) is enough to be considered freedom, without changing the structural cause of that pain. For Berlant, the structural cause is “that porous domain of hyperexploitive entrepreneurial atomism that has been variously dubbed globalisation, liberal sovereignty, late capitalism, post-Fordism, or neoliberalism”<sup>16</sup> 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,

<sup>10</sup> Ann Cvetkovich and Ann Pellegrini, “Introduction,” *The Scholar & Feminist Online* 2, no. 1 (2003): 1.

<sup>11</sup> See Lauren Berlant, *The Anatomy of National Fantasy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991) and *The Female Complaint* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008).

<sup>12</sup> Ann Cvetkovich, “Public Feelings,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 106, no. 3 (2007): 459-468 (461).

<sup>13</sup> Cvetkovich, “Public Feelings,” 461.

<sup>14</sup> Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 226.

<sup>15</sup> Jenni Rice, “Notes on Berlant and Stewart,” Accessed 10 September 2012, <http://sweb.uky.edu/~jhri223/?p=151>.

<sup>16</sup> Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 167.

makes no unreasonable claims on resources or control over value, and uses its most creative energy to cultivate intimate spheres while scraping a life together flexibly in response to the market-world's caprice.<sup>17</sup>

As Adi Kuntsman notes, these pioneering critics have been successful in their attempts to bring affect into discussions of social and cultural phenomena with the result that “[t]he theoretical language of emotions, feelings and affect is now broadly used in the field of social and cultural studies [with] the understanding of the social and the political as *passionate and affective*.”<sup>18</sup> The aim of attending to feelings in these public spheres, then, as Ann Cvetkovich and Ann Pellegrini suggest, is to develop a critical program that destabilises the understanding of politics as free from private feelings, to “forge methodologies for the documentation and examination of the structures of affect that constitute cultural experience and serve as the foundation for public cultures.”<sup>19</sup> Importantly, they do so with a will “to make trouble, celebrate minority, and pluralize differences” in the process.<sup>20</sup> Distinct public-feelings projects have sought to address and depathologise negative emotions surrounding the attritional “wearing out of the subject”<sup>21</sup> in politics. In particular, cultural studies (and the broader humanities) has developed new grounds for analysis of contemporary life, for feeling and social resistance (Cvetkovich, 2003); identity politics, feminist and queer pedagogy (Massumi, 2002; Sedgwick, 2003); the cultural politics of particular emotions, such as happiness, envy or depression (Ngai, 2005; Ahmed, 2010; Cvetkovich, 2012); the public and political sphere as intimate or cruel (Berlant, 1997, 2011); and the ordinary affects of everyday experience (Stewart, 2007). However, only rarely so far has the field of environmental studies fully engaged with the language and politics of affect. Notable here is the work of Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands, whose work on melancholia and queer ecologies (2010) draws on AIDS memoirs and queer theory to juxtapose ideas of loss, mourning and melancholia as relevant to the emotions felt at the loss of natures.<sup>22</sup> Sarah Ensor (2012) is another critic drawing on the history of queer theory's engagement with affect in forging new and productive starting points for the environmental humanities and the ways in which the feelings of everyday lives are interwoven with the political.

This article is then an attempt to “explore the role of feelings in public life”<sup>23</sup> in relation to texts that urge an uptake in pro-environmental behaviours, and to argue for how such texts offer openings onto “alternative possibilities, for emotional as for public life.”<sup>24</sup> It is concerned

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<sup>17</sup> Berlant, “The Subject of True Feeling: Pain, Privacy and Politics,” in *Cultural Studies and Political Theory*, ed. Jodi Dean (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2000), 43.

<sup>18</sup> Adi Kuntsman, “Introduction: Affective Fabrics of Digital Cultures,” in *Digital Cultures and the Politics of Emotion: Feelings, Affect and Technological Change*, ed. Athina Karatzogianni and Adi Kuntsman (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 1-20 (4).

<sup>19</sup> Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 11.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas Dumm, “Wild Things,” in *Cultural Studies and Political Theory*, ed. Jodi Dean (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2000), 267.

<sup>21</sup> Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 28.

<sup>22</sup> Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands, “Melancholy Natures, Queer Ecologies,” in *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire*, ed. Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 351-358 (333).

<sup>23</sup> Cvetkovich, “Public Feelings,” 459.

<sup>24</sup> Cvetkovich and Pellegrini, “Introduction,” 14.

with exploring the ways in which *Silent Spring* brought out ordinary affects from the domains of family and community and revealed how such feelings are not separate from but integral to what the anthropologist Kathleen Stewart calls that “something huge and impersonal [that] runs through things.”<sup>25</sup> It is important to be precise in exploring this relationship between ordinary, often private emotions and either their mobilisation into a public sphere, or the affects that already exist as public feelings, not least to avoid “reasserting them as opposites”<sup>26</sup> the ‘private’ and ‘public’ binarism which too easily allows the hegemonic dominance of ‘public’ (often male) emotions over private and feminine experiences. As Staiger, Cvetkovich and Reynolds state: “the opposition of the public and private [as] a discursive division serves to minimize some people’s forms of knowledge and consequently their social and political contributions.”<sup>27</sup> I use the term public feelings to refer to those feelings recognised and circulated in the public sphere through politics, media, the workplace and other systems. Public feelings can contribute to and maintain normative values within a culture; but they are also affects that can be circulated by those same or other, alternative systems and spaces to challenge that culture. Public feelings, then, are “neither inherently subversive nor inherently conservative. Rather [...] we must ask into the instant and consider ‘who is utilizing it, how it is deployed, and where its effects are concentrated’.”<sup>28</sup>

The main focus of this article is on the processes by which individual writers attend to private feelings and mobilise these in the public sphere to counter the ‘end of nature’. A focus on such texts is useful as they can have a force or meaning in world-building that helps to develop “adequate descriptions of such multivalent everyday experiences, and acknowledg[e] their often ambivalent relationship to already established representational conventions.”<sup>29</sup> I argue that people’s affective responses to the natural world are “buried in habits of life, interpretative practices, and forms of sociality”<sup>30</sup> and it is in exploring those everyday affects that *Silent Spring’s* legacy can be located for the ways in which private feelings can be channelled by today’s environmental writers into a strong, public, political force.

### ***Silent Spring* and the production of public feelings**

As Christof Mauch puts it: “Perhaps no other book from the United States has caused as strong a stir as Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*.”<sup>31</sup> First published as excerpts in the *New Yorker* magazine, its 1962 publication brought into view “the world as a complex organic system—a comprehensive and dynamic view that one could call ecoscopic, in which everything is connected to everything else.”<sup>32</sup> It was published at the height of the Cold War and the threat of nuclear fallout, and Carson “was able draw on the anxiety and skepticism of the American

<sup>25</sup> Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007), 87.

<sup>26</sup> Cvetkovich and Pellegrini, “Introduction,” 2.

<sup>27</sup> Janet Staiger, Ann Cvetkovich and Ann Reynolds, “Introduction,” in *Political Emotions*, ed. Janet Staiger, Ann Cvetkovich and Ann Reynolds (New York and London: Routledge, 2010), 1.

<sup>28</sup> Cvetkovich and Pellegrini, “Introduction,” 1, quoting Diana Fuss.

<sup>29</sup> Ann Reynolds, “Introduction,” in *Political Emotions*, ed. Janet Staiger, Ann Cvetkovich and Ann Reynolds (New York and London: Routledge, 2010), 13.

<sup>30</sup> Kathleen Stewart, “Real American Dreams (Can Be Nightmares),” in *Cultural Studies and Political Theory*, ed. Jodi Dean (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2000), 245.

<sup>31</sup> Christof Mauch, “Commentary,” in *The Future of Nature: Documents of Global Change* ed. Libby Robin, Sverker Sörlin and Paul Warde (Newhaven, CT: Yale University Press, in press).

<sup>32</sup> Mauch, “Commentary.”

public to direct her readers to her own concept of human vulnerability and risk.<sup>33</sup> Carson's chief concern was that *Silent Spring* would have a lasting effect on government policy.<sup>34</sup> In this it succeeded 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 puts it, Carson's strategy in writing *Silent Spring* was to "represent and re-present [...] homeowners, farmers, and other concerned non-specialists 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."<sup>35</sup> This is Carson's "Citizen chorus,"<sup>36</sup> 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."<sup>37</sup> But importantly, as Harris identifies, "the Citizenry is Carson's largest constituency"<sup>38</sup> 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"<sup>39</sup> and Carson sets about the mobilisation 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."<sup>40</sup>

Local sportsmen in Illinois quickly add their angry voices with eyewitness accounts of dead and dying birds while at the sportsmen's club.<sup>41</sup> During a news report that carried 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'."<sup>42</sup> 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.

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<sup>33</sup> Mauch, "Commentary."

<sup>34</sup> Brooks, *The House of Life*, 304.

<sup>35</sup> Randy Harris, "Other-Words in *Silent Spring*," in *And No Birds Sing: Rhetorical Analyses of Rachel Carson's Silent Spring*, ed. Craig Waddell (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), 130.

<sup>36</sup> Harris, "Other-Words in *Silent Spring*," 140.

<sup>37</sup> Harris, "Other-Words in *Silent Spring*," 137.

<sup>38</sup> Harris, "Other-Words in *Silent Spring*," 139.

<sup>39</sup> Harris, "Other-Words in *Silent Spring*," 141.

<sup>40</sup> Harris, "Other-Words in *Silent Spring*," 140.

<sup>41</sup> Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (London: Penguin, 2000 [1962]), 92.

<sup>42</sup> Carson, *Silent Spring*, 90.

The rebuffs could not hold back the anger. *Silent Spring* led to “a wave of anxiety”<sup>43</sup> 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 citizen voices. Everyday observations lead to distress: of the “Milwaukee woman” writing of “the pitiful, heartbreaking experience” of finding beautiful birds dying in her backyard;<sup>44</sup> of the “Wisconsin naturalist” writing: “It is tragic and I can’t bear it.”<sup>45</sup> 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.”<sup>46</sup> Carson’s skill is in marshalling the affects of the everyday—the emotions invested in writing letters, waiting in the kitchen at the back window while the pie is cooking for the first phoebe to arrive, watching the evening’s news—and shifting its collective force into a public sphere, challenging the limits placed on emotions as proper only to the domain of private life. Carson’s organisation 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.”<sup>47</sup> 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. From under the surface of national life *Silent Spring* released 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 the making public of private feeling, and political agency, as actively enmeshed.

Carson’s own feelings, as with most writers, were central to the causes about which she wrote. Her first three books, her sea trilogy, “would bring into focus the emotional ties she had felt with the sea since childhood”<sup>48</sup> and she was unafraid of her emotional response to nature. As Paul Brooks, her editor at Houghton Mifflin and later her 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.”<sup>49</sup> And 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.<sup>50</sup> 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 emphasised the urgency she felt in writing this book:

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<sup>43</sup> Cheryll Glotfelty, “Cold War, *Silent Spring*: The Trope of War in Modern Environmentalism,” in *And No Birds Sing: Rhetorical Analyses of Rachel Carson’s Silent Spring*, ed. Craig Waddell (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), 167.

<sup>44</sup> Carson, *Silent Spring*, 90.

<sup>45</sup> Carson, *Silent Spring*, 107.

<sup>46</sup> Harris, “Other-Words in *Silent Spring*,” 141.

<sup>47</sup> Kathleen Stewart, “Real American Dreams (Can Be Nightmares),” 250.

<sup>48</sup> Brooks, *The House of Life*, 109.

<sup>49</sup> Brooks, *The House of Life*, 8.

<sup>50</sup> For example, see Dorothy Freeman, *Always, Rachel: the Letters of Rachel Carson and Dorothy Freeman 1952-1964: The Story of a Remarkable Friendship* (Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1995).

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.<sup>51</sup>

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.<sup>52</sup> However, the attacks on Carson can hardly be called temperate.<sup>53</sup> As Priscilla Coit Murphy has 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.<sup>54</sup> Yet the factual accuracy of the text stood up to scrutiny, and threats of lawsuits. What Carson did in writing *Silent Spring* 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.<sup>55</sup>

Indeed, Rachel Carson wrote from a position of (and was attacked because of her ‘belonging’ to) interlinked non-dominant categories of ‘woman’, ‘spinster’, and ‘lesbian’.<sup>56</sup> But *Silent Spring* refused such symbolic devaluation and instead insisted on its author’s 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 emphasised, its success can be sought only by searching for “diverse contributing factors that collectively overdetermine such a response”<sup>57</sup> 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

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<sup>51</sup> Carson quoted in Brooks, *The House of Life*, 228.

<sup>52</sup> Brooks, *The House of Life*, 297.

<sup>53</sup> Brooks, *The House of Life*, 296-298.

<sup>54</sup> Priscilla Coit Murphy, *What a Book Can Do: The Publication and Reception of Silent Spring* (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005).

<sup>55</sup> Berlant, “The Subject of True Feeling,” 60.

<sup>56</sup> Sarah Ensor, “Spinster Ecology: Rachel Carson, Sarah Orne Jewett, and Nonreproductive Futurity,” *American Literature* 84, no. 2 (2012): 409-435.

<sup>57</sup> Waddell, “The Reception of *Silent Spring*,” 12.



governing responsible pesticide use";<sup>58</sup> but that its "models for writing" that emphasise 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 examine here. The first is the use of the author's own feelings and emotions concerning 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, and how they are drawn together into a public sphere to "create new and *counter-cultural* forms."<sup>59</sup> By studying these strategies of writing in the works of Bill McKibben and Amy 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 *Silent Spring* so paradigmatically instituted in its fight against pesticide use.

### A template of affect

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. It came at a time of heightened and yet still, perhaps, hopeful concern towards the global environment. The U.N. Montreal Protocol tackling ozone depletion had been written (although not yet ratified), and the Earth Summit in Rio was still three years away. At points it 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)."<sup>60</sup> 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."<sup>61</sup>

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 sumac bush—give me yellow birch, tamarack, blue spruce, the swamp maple first to change its color in the fall, rock maple, hemlock."<sup>62</sup> Its argument is made through metaphor—mankind's insidious permeation into the natural world is characterised as the noise of a chain saw (reversing the absences of *Silent Spring*).<sup>63</sup> Such metaphors are nearly always used in the mobilisation of the reader's emotions by affiliation with the generalised 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."<sup>64</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Harris, "Other-Words in *Silent Spring*," 141.

<sup>59</sup> Cvetkovich and Pellegrini, "Introduction," 2.

<sup>60</sup> Bill McKibben, *The End of Nature* (London: Bloomsbury, 2003 [1989]), 58.

<sup>61</sup> McKibben, *The End of Nature*, 148.

<sup>62</sup> McKibben, *The End of Nature*, 34.

<sup>63</sup> McKibben, *The End of Nature*, 47.

<sup>64</sup> McKibben, *The End of Nature*, 47.

The book's structure also follows that of *Silent Spring*. Both begin by drawing on characterisations 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."<sup>65</sup> And for Carson: "For time is the essential ingredient; but in the modern world there is no time."<sup>66</sup> McKibben's final chapter "A Path of More Resistance" echoes Carson's final chapter "The Other Road" (drawing on Robert Frost's poem) and the metaphor of the path to be chosen winds through both texts, from the 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. 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)<sup>67</sup> 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."<sup>68</sup> The guilt can be addressed, but the sadness is more difficult to answer. And this, I suggest, 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."<sup>69</sup> 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.<sup>70</sup> 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."<sup>71</sup> 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?"<sup>72</sup> The outcome is "at the very least [...] to put up a good fight."<sup>73</sup> 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"<sup>74</sup> 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

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<sup>65</sup> McKibben, *The End of Nature*, 3.

<sup>66</sup> Carson, *Silent Spring*, 24.

<sup>67</sup> Harris, "Other-Words in *Silent Spring*," 143.

<sup>68</sup> McKibben, *The End of Nature*, xix.

<sup>69</sup> McKibben, *The End of Nature*, 207.

<sup>70</sup> McKibben, *The End of Nature*, 61.

<sup>71</sup> McKibben, *The End of Nature*, xix.

<sup>72</sup> McKibben, *The End of Nature*, 74.

<sup>73</sup> McKibben, *The End of Nature*, xix.

<sup>74</sup> Jane Bennett and William Chaloupka, "Introduction," in *In the Nature of Things: Language, Politics and the Environment*, ed. Jane Bennett and William Chaloupka (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), xi.

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.<sup>75</sup>

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.”<sup>76</sup> 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. Political agency is suspended. On a number of occasions McKibben says he will continue to drive his car, burn his wood.

McKibben's work is not without its detractors. The reputation that *The End of Nature* earned McKibben identified him as an easy target for unkind criticism.<sup>77</sup> But his work, in particular *The Age of Information* has also generated some more considered and constructive criticism for McKibben's failure to engage with the human-created world he laments and attacks. As John Parham notes, there is a tendency in McKibben's polemic towards “woeful analysis” of the social and cultural world; in *The Age of Information* this was “because [McKibben] feels no need to submit his prejudices to established media research and appears unaware (or disinterested) in debates in media studies.”<sup>78</sup> Parham suggests such “wholly inadequate analysis feeds his cultural pessimism”<sup>79</sup>; and McKibben's ex-colleague David Gessner has recently suggested that “maybe what is needed isn't a raging prophet of doom.”<sup>80</sup> But as Julia Martin noted in defence of McKibben, his arguments and in particular his emotional engagement with the nature he grieves for as lost “can serve to renew an understanding of our inextricable connections with living systems, an understanding which modern industrial societies have tended to obscure more effectively than their predecessors.”<sup>81</sup>

The work of Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands can perhaps clarify what McKibben's sadness makes possible in envisioning new relations to the natural world. Mortimer-Sandilands uses arguments formed in queer theory to suggest that:

at the heart of the modern age is indeed a core of grief—but that that ‘core’ is more accurately conceived of as a condition of *melancholia*, a state of suspended mourning in which the object of loss is very real but psychically ‘ungrievable’ with the confines of a

<sup>75</sup> McKibben, *The End of Nature*, 92-93.

<sup>76</sup> Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2005), 3.

<sup>77</sup> Andrew Ross, *The Chicago Gangster Theory of Life: Nature's Debt to Society* (London: Verso, 1995).

<sup>78</sup> John Parham, “Academic Values: Why Environmentalists Loathe the Media,” *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 13, no. 1 (2006): 113-133 (118).

<sup>79</sup> Parham, “Academic Values,” 118.

<sup>80</sup> David Gessner, *My Green Manifesto: Down the Charles River in Pursuit of a New Environmentalism* (Minneapolis: Milkweed, 2011), 9.

<sup>81</sup> Julia Martin, “New, with Added Ecology? Hippos, Forests and Environmental Literacy,” *Interdisciplinary Studies on Literature and Environment* 2, no. 1 (1994): 1-12 (6).

society that cannot acknowledge nonhuman beings, natural environments, and ecological processes as appropriate objects for genuine grief.<sup>82</sup>

Perhaps then why *The End of Nature* has had such a lasting legacy as an important book in environmental thought (and action) is because McKibben's sadness, or what Mortimer-Sandilands calls "nature-nostalgia"<sup>83</sup> is "a form of melancholy [...] not only a denial of the loss of a beloved object but also a potentially politicized way of preserving that object in the midst of a culture that fails to recognise its significance."<sup>84</sup> That is, for Mortimer-Sandilands, following Judith Butler's reappraisal of Freud's work, melancholia can be seen "not so much a 'failed' mourning as a psychic and potentially political response"<sup>85</sup> to environmental destruction under late capitalism. The refusal to 'let go' of the lost object and simply replace it with another one, to move on in the processes of consumer capitalism, suggests melancholia is "a non-normalizing relationship to the past and the world"<sup>86</sup> that represents "a holding-on to loss in defiance of bourgeois (and capitalist) imperatives to forget, move on, transfer attention to a new relationship/commodity."<sup>87</sup> This is certainly true for McKibben himself, who is still campaigning through his organisation 350.org<sup>88</sup> and who continues to write on the subject with affective vigour. It may also explain why McKibben channels sadness and not anger at the destruction of nature.

*The End of Nature*, then, opens up a space for shared mourning in which the loss of nature becomes "grieveable" rather than remaining an ungrieveable loss in "the face of a culture that barely allows, let alone recognises"<sup>89</sup> such attachments (queer, ecological); and at the same time begins a process of politicising those feelings in countering environmental destruction. But then McKibben seems to reject this politicisation of emotion as a means of mobilising against environmental crisis. In settling for an inconsolable, aesthetic sadness McKibben becomes overwhelmed by the end of nature ("We live in a different world; therefore life feels different")<sup>90</sup> and turns 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."<sup>91</sup> McKibben is quick to suggest that human intervention in natural spaces "gets in your mind. You're forced to think, not feel—to think of human society and of people"<sup>92</sup>; and yet 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. I suggest McKibben does this because he assumes these feelings for everyone ("our sadness") but, critically, fails to engage 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

<sup>82</sup> Mortimer-Sandilands, "Melancholy Natures," 333.

<sup>83</sup> Mortimer-Sandilands, "Melancholy Natures," 333.

<sup>84</sup> Mortimer-Sandilands, "Melancholy Natures," 333.

<sup>85</sup> Mortimer-Sandilands, "Melancholy Natures," 339.

<sup>86</sup> Mortimer-Sandilands, "Melancholy Natures," 341.

<sup>87</sup> Mortimer-Sandilands, "Melancholy Natures," 354.

<sup>88</sup> 350 is the figure of particles of carbon dioxide per million that is considered a safe, or at least acceptable, level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere for human survival. <http://www.350.org>.

<sup>89</sup> Mortimer-Sandilands, "Melancholy Natures," 339.

<sup>90</sup> McKibben, *The End of Nature*, 146.

<sup>91</sup> McKibben, *The End of Nature*, 234.

<sup>92</sup> McKibben, *The End of Nature*, 49.

proliferate that which Berlant demands we develop and debate in challenging the politicisation of feeling: namely “new vocabularies of pleasure, recognition and equity.”<sup>93</sup> McKibben abandons *Silent Spring’s* affective template 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 a trust in the mobilisation of private feelings for political action in the public sphere that *Silent Spring* achieved. Its over-reliance on the author’s negative affect (sadness) obstructs wider positive resolutions set against the sheer scale of climate change. As Berlant suggests, McKibben’s 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.”<sup>94</sup> Perhaps it is understandable. Although Rachel Carson was aware of the threats of global warming,<sup>95</sup> she was not facing its consequences. In the face of its unique threats, how would 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.

### **An emotional age in a world out of kilter**

Amy Seidl is an environmental scientist living in Vermont. According to the blurb of her book *Early Spring*, published in 2009, she is described as “an ecologist and mother” to which the book’s subheading makes specific reference: “An Ecologist and Her Children Wake to a Warming World.”<sup>96</sup> 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.”<sup>97</sup> McKibben makes no apology for emphasising these affecting qualities in his own work and linking them to Seidl’s. He writes that “the human heart is the most sensitive instrument, and that is why Amy Seidl’s marvellous book is so important.”<sup>98</sup>

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. 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*.<sup>99</sup> 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”)<sup>100</sup> before pausing to make the point, as if needed: “Health is a metaphor we can all relate to.”<sup>101</sup> She then continues the epilogue

<sup>93</sup> Berlant, “The Subject of True Feeling,” 62.

<sup>94</sup> Berlant, “The Subject of True Feeling,” 48.

<sup>95</sup> See Brooks, *The House of Life*.

<sup>96</sup> Amy Seidl, *Early Spring: An Ecologist and Her Children Wake to a Warming World* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 2009).

<sup>97</sup> McKibben quoted in Seidl, *Early Spring*, xi.

<sup>98</sup> McKibben quoted in Seidl, *Early Spring*, xi.

<sup>99</sup> Carson quoted in Seidl, *Early Spring*, 155.

<sup>100</sup> Seidl, *Early Spring*, 155.

<sup>101</sup> Seidl, *Early Spring*, 155.

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?'"<sup>102</sup> 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 that night into her dreams as she sleeps beneath a slightly opened window, her ear cocked to the brook.<sup>103</sup>

Whereas McKibben has only Good Guys and Bad Guys, Seidl's narrative returns to the triangulation of constituents found in *Silent Spring* by emphasising 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."<sup>104</sup> 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."<sup>105</sup> 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."<sup>106</sup> Seidl talks of near-daily conversations about the weather, which "take place at Beaudry's Store [...]"

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<sup>102</sup> Seidl, *Early Spring*, xviii.

<sup>103</sup> Seidl, *Early Spring*, 47-48.

<sup>104</sup> Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*, 2.

<sup>105</sup> Seidl, *Early Spring*, xii.

<sup>106</sup> Seidl, *Early Spring*, 57.

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."<sup>107</sup> 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."<sup>108</sup>

*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 makes possible fully thinking through *Silent Spring's* lasting impact for ways in which private feelings have been mobilised and set against the mechanisms of ecological vandalism caused by capitalism. What both Carson and Seidl offer, which McKibben does not (quite), is the chance to think through the idea 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.<sup>109</sup>

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"<sup>110</sup> ("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?"<sup>111</sup>

There are "hopes still quietly harbored"<sup>112</sup> 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?"<sup>113</sup> Seidl is asking her readers 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"<sup>114</sup> a political act. What McKibben says of Seidl, however, is immeasurably 'true': "She is one of the very first to grapple with what it

<sup>107</sup> Seidl, *Early Spring*, 9.

<sup>108</sup> Seidl, *Early Spring*, xiv.

<sup>109</sup> Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*, 89.

<sup>110</sup> Seidl, *Early Spring*, xviii (my emphasis).

<sup>111</sup> Seidl, *Early Spring*, xviii.

<sup>112</sup> Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*, 89.

<sup>113</sup> Seidl, *Early Spring*, xviii.

<sup>114</sup> Seidl, *Early Spring*, 159.

means—what it feels like—to come of emotional age in a world spinning out of kilter.”<sup>115</sup> In that, she is Rachel Carson’s daughter.

### Conclusion

Rachel Carson’s work has been rightly identified as “a landmark not only in environmental history but in book history as well”<sup>116</sup> for the ways in which she “helped to make *ecology*, which was an unfamiliar word in those days, one of the greatest causes of our time.”<sup>117</sup> 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 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* shattered the safe ideals of masculine scientific corporatist America. 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, Carson opened up the everyday of struggle as “a ground on which unpredicted change can be lived and mapped.”<sup>118</sup> 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.”<sup>119</sup> *Silent Spring* offers an important challenge to normative associations of emotions and private intimacies, and occupies a foundational position in the history of cultural politics concerned with private and public feelings.

**Alex Lockwood** is Senior Lecturer in Journalism and member of the Centre for Research in Media and Cultural Studies at the University of Sunderland, UK. His research looks at the relationship between environmental thought, affect and the production of writing. Email: [alex.lockwood@sunderland.ac.uk](mailto:alex.lockwood@sunderland.ac.uk)

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<sup>115</sup> McKibben quoted in Seidl, *Early Spring*, x.

<sup>116</sup> Murphy, *What a Book Can Do*, 190.

<sup>117</sup> Brooks quoted in Waddell, “The Reception of *Silent Spring*,” 16.

<sup>118</sup> Berlant, “The Subject of True Feeling,” 62.

<sup>119</sup> Berlant, “The Subject of True Feeling,” 62.



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