

A More Intimate Ecology

1 **Title: A More Intimate Ecology: Reframing the Relationship between the Researcher and**
2 **the Research(ed)**

3 Running Head: A More Intimate Ecology

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9 Abstract

10 Ecology is vast and varied, not just in academic subfields but in how individuals equip
11 themselves with it. In this work, I am trying to access a more intentional and intimate ecology by
12 inserting queer theory to rupture Western scientific training that has created a structured ecology
13 that often prevents researchers from fully engaging with the ecosphere. In this article, I move
14 beyond scientific understandings of human and nonhuman animal relationships to reimagine
15 ecology as a more intimate field. I argue that complete insertion in, rather than removal from,
16 science creates a stronger approach that facilitates a deeper connection with study organisms and
17 non-human beings. I then use this connection to analyze (1) a core concept in ecology, human-
18 wildlife conflict, as a constructed concept and (2) the urban coyote as a Queer ecological being
19 that may be used to understand the experience of a marginalized and oppressed body in
20 academia. This work rethinks what ecology could be to traditional ecologists by demonstrating
21 how an urban ecologist explores human-non-human connections and interactions through the
22 lens of queer theory.

23 **Keywords:** queer theory, intimacy, kinship, queer ecology, interspecies relationships, human-
24 wildlife relations, *Canis latrans*

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25 Preface

26 “Queer thought is, in large part, about casting a picture of arduous modes of relationality that
27 persist in the world despite stratifying demarcations and taxonomies of being, classifications that
28 are bent on the siloing of particularity and on the denigrating of any expansive idea of the
29 common and commonism.”

30 - **José Esteban Muñoz**, *The Sense of Brownness*

31 Vulnerability materializes as a mosaic terrain and the form it takes, that is its shape and texture,
32 is often a consequence of the surrounding environment. Queer theory has unhinged my walls of
33 safety and muddled much of my thought processes, leaving me intellectually naked. This
34 vulnerability has reeled in a storm of anxiousness, stress, pressure, freedom, liberation, and joy.
35 The latter came as I began writing this essay with Queer thought. The former was felt throughout
36 reading Queer texts and eventually materialized as dreams. For weeks, I dreamed of this paper
37 — how I would write it, what I would write, and the emotions it could invoke. Consistently, I
38 dreamed of a house. As I entered the structure, it was boundless. No walls. No corners. All I
39 could see was a never-ending table filled with species, concepts, and people conversing. And so,
40 this paper was birthed. My unconsciousness leaking imagined possibilities through my body into
41 my fingertips so I may produce this tangible work. More often than not, the dreamscape isn't
42 cited as a source of knowledge in empirical work. Dreams aren't material or tangible data and so,
43 within science, they have no power or space. But I want to explicitly lean into what was painted
44 for me here and give it a voice.

45 In this work, I will use Queer/Queerness throughout my arguments. I am not leveraging
46 Queer/Queerness to “merely indicate embodied sexual contact among subjects identified as gay

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47 and lesbian”; instead, I am grounding this work with/in Queerness to envision “an array of
48 subjectivities, intimacies, beings, and spaces located outside of the heteronormative” (Chen
49 2012, 184) and create “an understanding of ecology as naming not the idea of the ‘natural world’
50 as something set apart from humans but a complex system of interdependency (Chen and
51 Luciano 2015, 7) in order to beget a rift in Western ecological thought. In this work, I am using
52 Queer as a template for reimagined intimate ecological thoughts and processes.

53 This work is woven with intimacy. It is an opening of the nebulous space that is my mind and
54 soul. The “arguments” put forth are my intentions and feelings, which aren’t airtight because
55 airtight arguments do not allow for intervention or patching, only extension and uplifting –
56 moving beyond what science may traditionally refer to as an argument. The possible “holes” in
57 my argument allow for the insertion of new thoughts, experiences, and feelings. They allow for
58 additional intimacy with the work to maintain the space for, and create the space that is, the
59 never-ending table that holds space for a kaleidoscope of views. I’m thankful to the many Queer
60 theorists I stand on the shoulder of for this essay and who allowed me, a budding ecologist, to
61 extend their root network into an unknown but familiar soil. The mixture of nutrients and root
62 networks between ecology and Queer theory feels warm. I hope warmth extends off this work.

63 **Introduction**

64 “Yet small bodies and intimate atmospheres often get lost in big atmospheric narratives.”

65 - **Neel Ahuja**, *Intimate Atmospheres: Queer Theory in a Time of Extinctions*

66 For centuries, humans have sought to understand the complex processes of the world around
67 them, from seeking to understand the function of particular organs to investigating why bees

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68 waggle upon arrival to hives. All of these questions have furthered our understanding of what
69 lies beyond the human and provided a foundation to push the envelope and acquire more
70 information about these phenomena. But have these very investigative processes hindered our
71 understanding of the beyond? When we think in simpler terms to understand the functions within
72 the larger ecosphere, we miss many moments that reveal to us intimate and prolific processes.
73 Even beyond these eclipsed moments, this foundation has shaped our foresight to exclude
74 consideration of an “*other*” observed behavior. Something that doesn’t quite fit into the rigidity
75 of human definitions despite nature, like many things, being fluid (and Queer). For example, Dr.
76 Karen Warkentin early in their career observed tadpoles escaping eggs near predation events and
77 proposed a hypothesis that this was a conscious decision being made by a tadpole to escape
78 predation. This proposition was met with intense pushback, as it was “impossible” for a
79 “nonliving” embryo to make decisions as a larva and that hatching simply served as an event for
80 movement between the two dichotomous states. This observation, ruled as a misinterpretation by
81 scientists in norm bodies, went on to become a widely observed and accepted process
82 (Warkentin 2011). This pushes me towards some questions: What is lost when we confine
83 boundless life into tangible phrases and events? If we begin here and work backward, what can
84 be “discovered”? Even more so, if we dismiss what could be considered foundational concepts in
85 science (e.g., taxonomy), what opens up?

86 Due to the dominance of Western views of science/nature, humanity has been seen as separate
87 from nature for too long. Superior to nature even, despite the inherent interconnectedness of the
88 human and the ecosphere and how intermeshed the two are. This, in turn, has hindered the
89 science accomplished under the larger umbrella of Western science. In *Transgender: An*
90 *expanded view of the ecological self*, Gail Grossman Freyne attributes this to the

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91 infrastructure/foundation of science being intertwined with maleness, which is undoubtedly
92 wrapped in colonialism and white supremacy. “The ideologies of gender and science mutually
93 inform each other and then function in our social arrangements to produce allegedly objective,
94 dispassionate, and male science which has traditionally made no room for any subjective,
95 emotionally engaged exploration of the world around us.” (Freyne 2020, 174). This
96 infrastructure, that is “the spatially and temporally extensive ways that practices are sedimented
97 into and structure the world” (Murphy 2013, 2), which includes colonial legacies, impedes
98 exploration and progression. When we condemn and dismantle this infrastructure, we can begin
99 to open up the interlocked relationship between humans and nature and ultimately see that the
100 “power” of the human crumbles.

101 In this essay, I am leveraging Queer to disturb traditional scientific ecological thought. The
102 scientific thought I aim to disturb is from the scientific training I received in Western and
103 predominately white institutions. This training is steeped in white cis-heterosexist articulations of
104 nature and a direct result of who has held (and produced) knowledge in these spaces. I hope to
105 disrupt this train of thought in order to reimagine ecological processes in my own work. In my
106 own work, I explore how environmental racism and injustice influence wildlife behavior and
107 health. All the “solid” concepts I build my work off are slippery, fluid, and dynamic. These
108 concepts are built then simultaneously unbuilt by the very thing providing structure. And it’s in
109 this space I’m interested in working to build stronger questions for exploring intimate
110 relationships between humans, nonhuman animals, and nature — and what it means for
111 coexistence. What happens when we move these entities to the same table and engage in
112 conversation? What interactions and intimacies are seen that would go unseen otherwise?
113 Throughout the essay, I’ll plunge into the world of intimacy that lies between myself and my

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114 research (subject) as a template for reimagining the traditional ecological approaches that may
115 confine the research subject and consequently stunt the work itself. I aim to move beyond the
116 silo of ecology into neighboring fields to produce stronger and more intimate work. Additionally,
117 I'll meditate on if the urban coyote can be used to further understand my own experience as a
118 Queer Black Latine in the predominately white space that is academia.

119 This essay may be scattered, with ideas that seem unrelated and unconnected at times. However,
120 I'd like to think of this essay as its own ecosystem with each part playing different and perhaps
121 "far off" roles from another. Similar to an ecosystem, these sections are interlocked in relation to
122 each other in order to uphold the larger entity that is this essay.

123 Getting Dirty With Our Research

124 "'Getting dirty' means we become fully human by remembering and embodying our trans-
125 human animalness. This requires a decolonization process, because we must question and shed
126 the conditioned beliefs that say we are more intelligent than, different from, or better than our
127 animal nature and other natural beings (i.e., human exceptionalism)."

128 - **Melissa K. Nelson**, *Getting Dirty: The Eco-eroticism of Women in Indigenous Oral*
129 *Literatures*

130 As ecologists, what if we allowed the border between nonhuman animals and human animals to
131 disappear? If the taxonomic ladder, which places humans at the top and abiotic entities at the
132 bottom, crumbled or flattened, what becomes available? And what if we extended this to nature
133 itself? If this barrier was nonexistent, could we embody our focal species' point of view...
134 actually? If we rupture the concept of individualism and human exceptionalism, as suggested in

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135 *Staying with the Trouble Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Haraway 2016, 30), what can be
136 produced? If we got dirty with our research, which is a “messy visceral, eco-erotic boundary-
137 crossing entanglement of difference that can engender empathy and kinship and a lived
138 environmental ethic” (Nelson 2017, 232), what stories could be told? In this section, I’ll draw
139 from several perspectives in an attempt to connect queer theory to ecological practice for a better
140 understanding of systems and non-human animals. To begin, more about how this boundary
141 between the animal and human functions and what deems a body as “enough”, “worthy”, and/or
142 “superior” must be understood.

143 As a scientist, I have been trained that any argument that has any vagueness, slippage, or room
144 for movement is not an ironclad one. And thus, not one that you can put forward. But what if that
145 very slippage is empowering to the questions and reinforces the validity of the argument? In
146 *Animacies*, Mel Chen opens chapter three by asking: “What happens when an animal appears on
147 human landscapes?” If we open this question up, it’s clear that a human’s response to an animal
148 depends on their positionality and relationality to nature itself. If the individual observing the
149 animal views nature itself as removed from humans, they may have a very diluted, negative view
150 of the animal. It’s seen as “just an animal” rather than something with autonomy, decision-
151 making abilities, and other traits we place on a pedestal that is ultimately synonymous with
152 “human”. But sometimes, “just an animal” warrants fear or weariness. Maybe even respect. On
153 the same coin, we may see endearment or the animal fading to the background based on its
154 biology (e.g., an urban pigeon). What contributes to this transposition of feelings, and how is it
155 maintained? A brief glimpse reveals that any being existing on a landscape where racialized
156 tension continues to stem from colonial roots is incredibly porous, sliding up and down the
157 animacy hierarchy (see Mel Chen’s *Animacies*).

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158 We can dig into this by examining the domestic dog, for example, who can become very
159 (in)human. Domestic dogs are porous in their image and, because of their positionality to
160 humans, reap the benefits and consequences of the arbitrary and troubled hierarchy humans have
161 constructed. On the one hand, some dogs are demonized and ostracized with anthropocentric
162 personalities such as “aggressive” sticking to them because of their proximity to Black and
163 Brown communities and thus, seen as “below” other dogs (similar to how Black and Brown
164 individuals and other marginalized groups (Disabled folks, Trans folks, etc.) have been seen as
165 “subspecies” to humans/humanness) while other dogs hold higher statute as classy, safer dogs
166 because of their prevalence in white communities, and can often become familial and above
167 other humans. For example, dogs with names deemed white are adopted quicker than those with
168 names perceived as Black (Quadlin and Montgomery 2022). Chen moves on and notes that the
169 language we use around nonhuman animals situates and isolates them lower on this conceptual
170 animal hierarchy — hence the phrase “treated me like a dog”. So, how does this fluidity in
171 feelings ultimately create the identity of what an “animal” is and what characteristics and rights
172 are immediately attached to it? This immediately opens up the question — where are rights for a
173 particular body originating from?

174 To explore this more, I’ll briefly dive into *Extractivism* where Gómez-Barris prys open the world
175 of the “submerged”, revealing a complex and interactive space teeming with perspectives. By
176 moving beyond a “worldview” (i.e., Western worldview), which is synonymous with and
177 entrenched in colonialism that breaks down the human and nonhuman into resources rich for the
178 taking and uses vertical seeing to normalize violence and removal, we can interact with the world
179 in a new fashion. Going into what Gómez-Barris deems the “fish-eye” allows us to connect
180 deeper to the environment and be enveloped by what extractivism (i.e., the colonial gaze)

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181 dismisses and moves beyond. An interaction that goes beyond examining land and people as
182 something that is to be commodified and transformed endlessly until it holds no monetary value
183 to industries. If we stitch in thoughts from *As Black as Resistance*, we can go beyond this by
184 enforcing that extractivism is “a state, not an event” (Samudzi and Anderson 2018, 27).
185 Extractivism *continually* views land (and bodies) as commodities and feeds on neo-settler
186 colonialism and capitalism to further extend settler politics and view the world as an ever-
187 renewing resource that must give and give and give. A framework and ideology that maintains
188 and uplifts “white supremacy’s capital interests, signified by anti-Indigenous and anti-Black
189 exclusions” (Samudzi and Anderson 2018, 5). Moving into and employing this submerged
190 perspective allows a new relationship with nature to be created. Or, rather, a relationship with
191 nature to be restored. In this submerged perspective, “protecting nature means protecting
192 ourselves” (Samudzi and Anderson 2018, 33). Moreover, getting into this submerged zone
193 allows us to feel the emotions and pain the land may be feeling and thus, reframe these actions as
194 violent. When I enter this zone, I see and feel, for example, the pain of the coyote who is
195 constantly criminalized and misconstrued (more in *The Queer Concrete Canid* section).

196 With an understanding of the porous nature of animals, via the example of domestic dogs and
197 how marginalized peoples have often occupied the “nonhuman” level in the hierarchy, and the
198 system in which value is assigned, via extractivism which weaves in both colonialism and
199 capitalism to construct a vertical lens of value, we can begin rearranging this imaginary
200 landscape. What would it look like to rearrange/destroy a hierarchy that is rooted in oppression
201 and acts as a barrier for human-nonhuman connections? Instead of a vertical hierarchy that
202 assigns values to bodies, with entities such as insects on the bottom and human at the top, what if
203 we flatten it? Upon flattening, what space is carved out? When we flatten this ladder, we get a

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204 track that allows us to maneuver interactions between entities a bit differently. Instead of levels,
205 we get doors that create two-pronged intimacy, allowing us to (1) enter a space and engage with
206 the life behind the door and (2) create respectable boundaries between two or more entities. In
207 this new space, the differences between two entities is important to note and celebrate. In this
208 space, I am not suggesting absorbing the heterospecific into the conspecific as I think to do so
209 would erase the myriad of uniqueness. Here, I agree and uplift Freye’s argument when they
210 suggest reframing the human existence as being “deeply embedded in the ecosphere” and while
211 doing this, recognizing the “distinctness and independence of every earth other”. By upholding
212 differences, we can “love, befriend, and care for another” by “respect[ing] the independent
213 aspect of their being (Freyne 2006, 77)” (Freyne 2020, 178). By having doors instead of levels,
214 we can not only enter the space for intimate interactions but also create distance and boundaries
215 which can also produce fruitful knowledge. This door between entities can create protection and
216 insulation from violence – which may cultivate intimacy in a very different way. An intimacy
217 that centers respecting boundaries between species.

218 When we recognize this rearrangement as *sui generis*, that is something that highlights
219 differences and uniqueness, we prevent pushing apart and devaluing bodies which allows for an
220 ephemeral overlap with our focal subject. And by being overlaid, we can begin to understand our
221 focal subject more deeply, especially for its differences. In this model, both (or more) bodies
222 occupying the space are fluid, and the interactions become more intimate, allowing a subject to
223 become fully known. Through this process, we can begin to realize that we, as the researcher, do
224 not hold all the knowledge. Instead, our focal subject becomes our research partner revealing
225 what it wants to share.

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226 In theory, the more we remove ourselves, the more "objective" we become and the "stronger"
227 our science is. However, I argue the exact opposite. Complete embeddedness, not removal,
228 allows for this. Embedding ourselves allows for us to view pollution and acts against nature as
229 acts against kin (including ourselves and our own ecosystem within the body). Moreover, the
230 removal of borders and the realization of our porous body with the environment and
231 heterospecific animals allows for more intimate interactions with our research, and through this,
232 knowledge with power is produced. Through Queering this fundamental aspect of study design,
233 we also begin to recognize that the system we hinge much of our work on is "an imagined
234 system, not an actual, self-regulating one" (Chen 2020, 89) with respect to hierarchies and
235 interactions. Although we can observe these movements and interactions over time to predict and
236 even describe these interactions — these interactions and bodies are likely more *fluid* and
237 *dynamic* than we think they are. There is something to be seen in this space between our static
238 observations of nature and how dynamic it actually is. How do we access this *in-between* space?
239 Leveraging a flattened landscape allows for the creation of boundaries and/or the weaving of
240 new, personal connections with nature, both giving us a very intimate glance at nature that may be
241 missed otherwise.

242 Intimate Destabilization

243 "What happens when human exceptionalism and bounded individualism, those old saws of
244 Western philosophy and political economics, become unthinkable in the best sciences, whether
245 natural or social? Seriously unthinkable: not available to think with."

246 - **Donna J. Haraway**, *Staying with the Trouble Making Kin in the Chthulucene*

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247 Donna Haraway opens Chapter 2 of her book *Staying with the Trouble Making Kin in the*
248 *Chthulucene* by asking a truly disturbing question to scientists – what if we not only decentered
249 humans from the natural or social processes we’ve come to understand, but completely removed
250 the implied notion that most scientists operate in that is “human exceptionalism? She moves on
251 to ask another destabilizing question: “What happens when the best biologies of the twenty-first
252 century cannot do their job with bounded individuals plus contexts, when organisms plus
253 environments, or genes plus whatever they need, no longer sustain the overflowing richness of
254 biological knowledges, if they ever did?” (Haraway 2016, 30). As an ecologist, I am deeply
255 interested in moving between these statements in an attempt to tether this very theoretical
256 thought into a field that bolsters itself in “facts” and “fixedness”.

257 To move through this, I must first situate in the sense of human entitlement to land stemming
258 from Western ideology (e.g., Manifest Destiny). For centuries, settlers and their descendants
259 have woven this sense of working against, and taking from, the environment into the everyday of
260 life of Westerners, specifically individuals in the ongoing empire of the US. There’s no
261 overlooking that much of this comes from attempting to erase and bury Indigenous culture and
262 existence which grounds itself in stewarding, caring *for*, and working *with* the land. There is a
263 certain emotion and relationship invoked and birthed with a connection as such. Abiotic and
264 biotic factors are on the same playing field and given the same attention rather than the large
265 scientific skew of excitement towards biotic beings. In this space, the concept of “human” and
266 “person” is deconstructed such that typical traits assigned to humans by the Western world (i.e.,
267 intelligence, autonomy, memory, feelings) and the boundary between the abiotic and biotic
268 world (and within the biotic world) blurs (Tallbear 2011) – allowing for more *intimate*
269 *interactions*.

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270 When we shatter the Western lens, closer readings and understandings of abiotic and biotic
271 beings can be interpreted. For example, even a prominent concept like co-evolution, an idea I
272 have primarily learned about in the context of predator-prey/host-parasite interactions, can be
273 transformed into an intimate interaction that occurs within and across abiotic and biotic beings.
274 “As plant sex spawned new generations of plants, it also made new fire. As plant life mobilised,
275 evolved and radiated, so fire migrated, proliferated and diversified. As plants made the living
276 world more hospitable to flame, so too did wildfire select for species or communities that
277 tolerated, even depended upon, flame.” (Clark and Yusoff 2018, 12). What do closer, more
278 intimate readings of these interactions open up for ecologists?

279 A new world is unlocked if we remove human exceptionalism and insert an intimate relationship
280 with the ecosphere. Interactions are seen, felt, and sensed differently. Photosynthesis transforms
281 from a process of acquiring and processing energy into “celestial fertility” that burns “like a cool
282 green fire” (Clark and Yusoff 2018, 11). Spiders don’t just create webs to capture prey and
283 sustain themselves, they make “attachments and detachments; they make cuts and knots; they
284 make a difference; they weave paths and consequences but not determinisms; they are both open
285 knotted in some ways and not others.” (Haraway 2016, 31). Coyotes which are often a research
286 subject becomes a research *partner*, co-creating research questions. They become knowledge
287 keepers and elders; they maintain order and structure in their systems; they emit and attract
288 respect from their peers. Coyotes are given a voice, moving beyond the silence to represent
289 themselves and become more than their human imposed and transposed definition. What does
290 this feeling disintegrate and un-level? I’ll move through this question in the next section for an
291 area of human-wildlife interactions that often invoke textured and heavy conversations –
292 conflict.

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293 **Constructed Conflict**

294 “An organic imperialist, the human colonizes ecologies, time, and thought itself — an entire
295 lifeworld.”

296 - **Neel Ahuja**, *Intimate Atmospheres: Queer Theory in a Time of Extinctions*

297 A fraction of my research focuses on understanding wildlife behavior, particularly in human-
298 dominated landscapes. Within behavioral ecology, it’s well understood that humans can
299 influence how animals use space and time (Gaynor et al. 2018) as well as shape the personalities
300 of animals (Schell et al. 2019), all influencing urban evolution (Caspi et al. 2022). I’m keen on
301 unearthing how behaviors continue to be shaped by human activities and how this puts two
302 animals (the non-human and human) in “conflict” with one another. However, what is “conflict”
303 in this case? *Who* is this conflict for? And is it *really* conflict? Are we stretching the landscape so
304 thin and forcing the hand of wildlife? Is the use of conflict in some cases pre-determining how
305 we perceive and assess interactions? In this section, I’ll discuss the concept of “human-wildlife
306 conflict” and how a shift in this reframing may change our understanding of these interactions,
307 building on extractivism from the previous section.

308 Conflict, broken down into “together” (con-) and “to strike” (-flict), is defined by Merriam-
309 webster in several ways. Noun: (1) competitive or opposing action of incompatibles: antagonistic
310 state or action (as of divergent ideas, interests, or persons); (2) mental struggle resulting from
311 incompatible or opposing needs, drives, wishes, or external or internal demands; and (3) the
312 opposition of persons or forces that gives rise to the dramatic action in a drama or fiction. Verb:
313 (1): to be different, opposed, or contradictory: to fail to be in agreement or accord; and (2)
314 *archaic*: to contend in warfare. So, to say there is human-wildlife conflict is to say an animal is

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315 “different, opposed, or contradictory” to humans. It’s to say that they are “antagonistic” and have
316 “incompatible needs, drives, wishes, or demands”. I ask the question then — is the phrase
317 “human-wildlife conflict” not texturized? Does the use of conflict not generate attitudes and
318 values that are counterproductive for creating a more holistic ecology? Does it not obscure who
319 the animal truly is? Does it not eventually materialize as militaristic actions against the very
320 ecosphere we are embedded in and map aggression onto non-human animals?

321 Human-wildlife interactions, generally, can be positive (e.g., tourism, local birdwatching),
322 negative (e.g., livestock or pets lost to predation, vehicle mortalities), or neutral. Negative
323 human-wildlife interactions are typically characterized as human-wildlife conflict, in which
324 humans, infrastructure, or interests are negatively affected by wildlife (Soulsbury and White
325 2015). Negative interactions with wildlife can be considered a major issue, with many studies
326 exploring how to minimize and understand negative human-wildlife interactions (e.g., Estien et
327 al. 2022; Treves and Santiago-Avila 2020; Wilkinson 2020). Human-wildlife conflict is
328 especially prevalent in urban spaces and has even had evolutionary consequences on wildlife
329 inhabiting these spaces (Schell et al 2021). There is no doubt that these inter-species interactions
330 can be complex, but I pose the question to readers: is it *actually* conflict? Peterson et al. (2010)
331 began this conversation by zeroing in on rhetoric and the influence of materialization. They
332 discuss how non-material entities — memories, values, beliefs — are core characteristics of who
333 humans are, influencing our actions. Of all papers reviewed, authors only found one instance of
334 actual human-wildlife conflict, with other interactions including interactions such as property or
335 agricultural damage. This study illustrates, and emphasizes, the importance of language use, as
336 the phrase “conflict” is immense with consequences for promoting coexistence between human
337 and nonhuman animals (and the ecosphere as a whole). Extending Peterson’s argument — which

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338 hinged on material concepts and that most “conflict” reported is simply miscategorized — I
339 argue that conflict, in the way we have currently come to understand, define, and quantify it with
340 non-human animals, is simply a construct that further drives the divide between humans and
341 nature and creates an unbalanced power dynamic. This “conflict” can often be one-sided or
342 human-human conflict (Peterson et al. 2010).

343 Conflict in the context of human-wildlife conversations, if we take a large step back, is a
344 definition we constructed to escape responsibility for the expansion and mistreatment of
345 surrounding lands. If I focus on my research partner, the coyote who is often regarded as a model
346 species for human-wildlife (and especially for human-carnivore) conflict, are we really at odds
347 with this animal? Is the coyote *antagonistic* towards us? To make this definition and map it onto
348 an organism is to map hate onto these animals. Using conflict in modern times is
349 counterproductive to (re)building an intimate relationship with the land. In the case of human-
350 wildlife conflict, there must be discourse around the micropolitics of “directed conflict” from
351 wildlife, where human exceptionalism and entitlement are discussed and cemented at the core of
352 the conversation. With this, we can understand why non-human animals that go against this
353 entitlement to land are immediately viewed as “conflicting with” or “aggressive towards”
354 humanity. We see that a human’s, specifically a Western human’s, understanding and utilization
355 of the land is what determines and produces conflict. Conflict is in the eye of the beholder. To
356 fully deteriorate this myth of conflict between human and non-human animals, we must dissolve
357 the human and non-human boundary and surgically remove human exceptionalism such that
358 “there is no natural law to oppose human deviance, since nature cannot be posited as an other
359 than or prior to humans” (Luciano and Chen 2015, 185). Moreover, transposing the world
360 “conflict” into non-human and human interactions inherently blocks any creation of intimacy

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361 with non-human beings by maintaining ideas of a “better” being and that “incompatibility” could
362 occur between a human and non-human being.

363 In human-wildlife “conflict” cases, particularly in cities, we forget that we created the conditions
364 to select for particular organismal adaptations (Schell et al 2021), which may create more
365 “conflict”. Today, in addition to “wild” spaces, coyotes can be found in cities. In these spaces,
366 coyotes can be viewed as a nuisance; they are “antagonistic”, “problematic”, and derogatorily
367 “complex”. However, again, how much of this lies with(in) the coyote? The “conflict” produced
368 by the coyote I see as a resistance; a type of resistance that should be further examined as
369 perhaps a strategy of resistance to the many forms of oppression that go unseen. Yet, through all
370 of this — the defamation and subsequent violence that has come with human expansion —
371 coyotes persisted, much like marginalized bodies on the landscape. Instead of marveling at the
372 coyote’s adaptations, movements, and interactions, coyotes are often demonized in the eyes of
373 humans. Why does that feel like a punch to the gut? I’ll move through this feeling in the next
374 section as I meditate on the coyote as a reflection of myself.

375 The Queer Concrete Canid

376 “Coyote came around to a group of camps. The men were sitting around. They knew that Coyote
377 was always telling lies.

378 They called to him. They said, “Codi, you are the biggest liar we ever saw.”

379 “How do you know I lie?”

380 “Oh, you always make trouble in the tribe, and then you lie about it. Why don't you teach us your
381 power to lie so we can lie successfully too?”

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382 “What I learned is from my enemy. And I paid a big price for it.”

383 - *Coyote Shows How He Can Lie* (Apache Legend)

384 Much of my current research lies in understanding how cities and humans influence animal
385 behavior and health, specifically in mammals. For this work, I’m particularly interested in
386 coyotes, and I believe this work and, even more so, my research partners (coyotes), are special.
387 Coyotes are beings that persist in spaces they aren't wanted in, often demonized even though
388 they are beautiful and meek. Despite all of that, they take up space, persevere, and continually
389 surprise us with what they are capable of. In this section, I’ll discuss the Queer potential of the
390 resilient coyote, the inextricable link between myself and the coyote, and how this elevates my
391 understanding of how my identities situate in academia.

392 Nature is Queer, and I, as a Queer man, have felt predestined to be intimately connected with it.
393 Nature crept itself into me from a young age, wrapping itself around me in my grandmother's
394 garden as gently as a hug while I delicately placed seeds into the ground. And with it, sending
395 my love so it could grow as big as me. If I could give it all of me and some of my heart, it would
396 give something in return. Gardening ruptured any idea that intimacy only existed between two
397 human animals. In my grandmother’s garden, I had been intimate and entangled with nature.
398 Both nature's Queerness and mine mixed thoroughly, creating a heterogeneous mixture where
399 every so often, both of us would revert to our suspended states while remaining united and often
400 remixed. This has continued to evolve as I realize my positionality as a Black body whose
401 existence is conditional within an ongoing settler project. This connection is further understood
402 as extractivism views and understands both nature and Blackness as entities to be commodified:
403 “Those of us who are treated as natural commodities, particularly Black people (and more

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404 particularly the wombs of cisgender Black women), must recognize our inextricable link to the
405 environment.” (Sumudzi and Anderson 2018, 33).

406 Nature is strange. It’s mysterious, alluding, and promiscuous. It exudes vitality and refuses to fit
407 in the arbitrary boxes we affix to it. In this way, nature is a model of resistance against Western
408 ideology and whiteness more broadly. Nature sees the world differently than us, Queerer even.
409 The coyote is one of many appendages of nature and by extension, is Queer. Here, I leverage
410 Neel Ahuja’s definition of Queer/Queering: “Queering in this sense emerges by tracing an
411 affective materiality that interrupts anthropocentric body logics and space-time continuums
412 rather than a sovereign stance of negation in relation to Law...” (Ahuja 2015, 372). By simply
413 existing and persisting, the coyote dismembers all anthropocentric logic on wildlife survival and
414 how wildlife should (and can) exist in cities. The coyote exists in tandem with asphalt and soil.
415 Between the rough, gritty, chilled, and overbearing grey and the plush, firm, wet, and boundless
416 brown. All of it is home to the coyote. In this way, I would say that the coyote is incredibly
417 intimate with concrete, more than humans may ever be. The coyote, similar to the Black identity
418 (see Samudzi and Anderson 2018, 21), is inextricably linked with the land. It paces and traverses
419 streets as it has traversed time and moved through different embodiments. On one end, the
420 coyote moves through many Indigenous stories as a parental figure, savior, or creator, to name a
421 few (Baldy 2015). On the other end, the coyote erupts in the Anthropocene as an embattled and
422 resilient carnivore that polarizes the Americas. Observing the coyote as this still, yet transient,
423 deviant body bursting with potential and possibilities instills an unmatched wave of peace and
424 power. It’s an overwhelming feeling that drowns you and provides air simultaneously. *It’s eerie.*

425 Coyotes have emerged as an exciting case of ecosystem sentinels in cities. The coyote is set to
426 expand its range across the Americas (Hody and Kays 2018), and their intimacy with land will

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427 be greater than we will understand. With this, the images of the coyote will continually collide
428 and be rebuilt to articulate *who* the coyote is both materially and cosmically in modernity,
429 “generating friction and leakage” between these identities (Chen and Luciano 2015, 186). As
430 these conversations continually surface, the coyote is often seen as a *danger, out-of-place, and*
431 *not belonging*. For example, in Denver, Colorado, themes of anger, accusation, violence, and
432 crime in response to the coyote are incredibly prevalent (Draheim et al. 2021) and in Los Angeles,
433 California, people have organized a group entitled “Evict Coyotes” who’s mission is “discuss
434 how get our government to do their job and evict coyotes”. This rhetoric around *who* and *what*
435 belongs *where* and use of phrases, such as “they don’t belong here” and “we don’t want to
436 coexist with them, we want them gone”, mirror feelings directed towards humans who are
437 viewed as an “other”.

438 Coyotes, like many other animals, have increased their tolerance of people and human-
439 dominated spaces (Schell et al. 2019; Breck et al. 2019), all while facing detrimental threats such
440 as the rupturing of our climate and environmental violence (e.g., toxic pollution and
441 contamination). The phenotypic plasticity coyotes exhibit is something to marvel over — almost
442 like no matter how far humans bend them, they never break. And yet, this phenotypic bending
443 done by humans, via the construction of a concrete jungle and other large-scale landscape
444 alterations, can viewed as negative (e.g., Manzolilo et al. 2019) rather than beautiful. These
445 attitudes toward the coyote, to me, crystalize them as an image of resistance. Its existence alone
446 in urban and nonurban spaces alike is so powerful it disrupts, ruptures, and shatters all quotidian
447 entities and infrastructure. The coyote itself creates an “open ended inquiry that interrogates both
448 its theoretical and its experiential conditions of possibility” (Gómez-Barris 2017, 9). So, to
449 revisit Mel Chen’s question, what happens when a coyote enters a human-dominated landscape?

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450 Both embodiment and slippage emerge as it passes through human-driven caricatures of nature,
451 and perhaps that's why the human visualization/caricature of coyotes feels familiar and uneasy.

452 The societal identities mapped on coyotes alter how it interacts with the surrounding landscape.
453 In the same way, who I am fundamentally, shapes how I interact with language, materials,
454 human and nonhuman animals, and the greater ecosphere — sometimes unknowingly and
455 unwillingly. Mel Chen asks, “What happens when an animal appears on human landscapes?”,
456 and I now ask, what happens when a non-white, specifically a Queer, Black, and Latin body,
457 appears in on a landscape dominated by white perspectives, narrations, and definitions? What
458 reactions take place in this atmosphere? Does it parallel the coyote entering the urban landscape?
459 My experiences within academia, especially in a field dominated by cisgender heterosexual
460 white men can be classified as *other*. Whether it is my Blackness, my Queerness, or other
461 identities — there as has always been a tension between my identities and academia. And rather
462 than feeling like a fish out of water, I feel like a coyote in the city. That is, when I step into an
463 academic building, I am a polarizing force that disrupts, ruptures, and shatters all quotidian
464 entities and infrastructure. That although none of this was built for me, I must traverse this toxic
465 landscape that evokes slow violence from above into non-norm bodies such that they slowly
466 deteriorate until they only remain as a ghost.

467 Parallel to the coyote navigating a hostile charged, toxic landscape, I am actively surviving a
468 similar landscape that is academia (see Roberts-Gregory 2022). I'm often surprised I made it to
469 be a PhD student in a top ecology program. I mean that in two ways: (1) physically alive and (2)
470 physically taking up space. When I entered the educational landscape in elementary school, my
471 survivability was immediately questioned. It was assumed I needed to be put in a slower-paced
472 learning program because of combination of mother's accent and my name. Throughout my

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473 schooling, I was often the only (or one of the few). The only Black person. The only non-white
474 Hispanic. The only low-income person. I was an always an *other*. Yet somehow, I am both alive
475 and progressing in an institution (both academia and the greater empire state that is the US) not
476 built with me in my mind. Just like the coyote, I often observe my conspecific(s) being killed at
477 the hands of an institution for being “too bold”, “too aggressive”, or simply “too Black/Brown”. I
478 often think I am my ancestors’ wildest dreams. That accessing, navigating, and persisting in
479 these white landscapes so foreign and exclusive would be a measure of true success. That it
480 would allow for stronger fitness (in an ecological sense). But, I think my ancestors’ wildest
481 dream was for me to simply exist with no opposition. I wonder if ancestral coyotes wildest
482 fantasy was simply the ability to exist without being viewed as “different, opposed, or
483 contradictory” to the biome. I wonder if coyote’s too thought their descendants would navigate a
484 landscape so foreign to their historical homes and if urban coyotes too, reflect on their lineage.
485 The more I sit with this, the more I realize that to be a coyote in today’s world, especially in
486 cities like Los Angeles, is somewhat synonymous to being “anti-human” in the same way that to
487 exist as a Black person in the US is to be “anti-state” (Samudzi and Anderson 2018, 112).

488 Just like a coyote, I exist between a love-affair of oppressive systems. For the coyote, capitalism,
489 classism, racism, (and more) – all materialize to create inequitable and unjust cities. For me,
490 these materialize to create academia, an inequitable and unjust institution built off of Indigenous
491 land and imported Black labor. How am I surviving in this type of climate? How does a coyote
492 survive in a heavily urbanized area?? Is my resilience in these spaces (similar to the resilience of
493 the coyote) continuing to enable the unjust characteristics of academia? Will I realize the damage
494 academia has done when it’s too late? Does my existence in this space not point towards success
495 or resilience, but rather a limited plasticity and ability to learn how to operate on already finite

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496 resources? Is the experience of a marginalized body in academia not one of thriving but of
497 survival, tenacity, and persistence? Does that realization itself solidify my connection to the
498 urban coyote?

499 Academia operates under capital and thus, often demands and craves more than individuals are
500 capable of giving. I want to lean into Samudzi and Anderson’s understanding of the capital
501 consumption of natural resources to draw similarities on how Black bodies are treated within the
502 academy. “The planet cannot sustain itself to a violent system relentlessly demanding more and
503 more consumption” (Samudzi and Anderson 2018, 32). This statement is further extended via
504 Claudia von Welhold: “Capital is insatiable. It needs more than nature has; it needs infinitely
505 more.” (Samudzi and Anderson 2018, 32). Even under “scarce” conditions, even within limits,
506 every breath is demanded. And so, I ask, does academia not do the same? Is academia not
507 *insatiable*, especially for Black scholars? Does it not steal all time, effort, sanity, and breath from
508 these individuals — all while continually propping up an institution built for the Black scholar’s
509 very demise? To get through this hostile obstacle course that was built against me in every way
510 (see Berhe et al 2021) and whose foundation lies deep in the Earth’s core rooted in whiteness, I
511 must bend. *I must be plastic*. However, where does my, and the coyote’s, plasticity end? Are
512 there limitations to the coyote as an image of resistance and resilience? Where does that stop,
513 and by extension, where do I stop? What are our limits, and is that limit death itself? How much
514 more bending can we do and still produce fruits that are ultimately underappreciated and
515 appropriated? Will the walls of academia and the layout of cities, all constructed for whiteness,
516 be the end of the coyote and me?

517 **(In)Conclusion: Ecology as a Home**

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518 “We should not wait for the magic words we want to hear to come out of someone else’s mouth
519 when we can designate, dictate, and deliver change ourselves.”

520 - **Zoe Samudzi and William C. Anderson**, *As Black as Resistance*

521 Humans cannot exist without the many processes the Earth regulates and oversees. However, the
522 Earth can exist (and has existed) without us. When we take this step back, we can enter a role
523 that releases the information from us and puts it back into the hands of the Earth. When we allow
524 the Earth to reveal their processes to us, what relationship is formed and how does it change
525 methodological approaches? And slightly related, when is information beyond the human, i.e.,
526 not for us to understand? As scientists, can satisfaction be found in not fully understanding a
527 phenomenon, and does that feeling itself lead to new questions?

528 When we use these frames of thought to deconstruct what science and scientists are (e.g., siloed
529 disciplines, detached from the public), what do we become? When we come to sit at this newly
530 formed foundation and open up a conversation between our research subject and the research we
531 set out to conduct – what is unlocked? When ideas are deconstructed and simultaneously, what
532 new voices rise? For me, my focal subject transforms into a research partner I am in constant
533 conversation with. After the coyote becomes an interlocutor, I am able to learn alongside and *with*
534 the coyote. I view myself, not as a “discoverer” but as a stage the coyote uses to amplify more of
535 itself to the world. Rather than entering spaces and extracting knowledge, I am there to observe
536 and *listen* to the coyotes. Through listening to and learning with the coyote, I can further my
537 understanding how my own identities situate in this world and remove anthropocentrism from
538 my scientific approach. I begin to see the human not as removed from the world and at the top of

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539 this animacy hierarchy, but as a being who has entered the home of another where bread is
540 broken and knowledge is exchanged.

541 If equipping yourself with queer theory has the possibility of unlocking new methods and
542 questions, why are empirical scientists not doing it? For example, after plunging into queer
543 theory, I am left with questions such as: How does radical ideology find scapegoats in wildlife?
544 How do “pest” species absorb rhetoric that often mirrors racist, xenophobic, and/or anti-
545 homeless rhetoric? How are Black ecologies and the disregard/domination of nature by the
546 United States of America linked? Does feeling kinship with your focal species change the
547 questions you explore? What does transforming a focal species into more than a non-human
548 animal unlock with respect to co-creating environments for humans and non-human animals?

549 We as scientists know what it means to be on the brink of change and often challenge established
550 theories. Why do we not challenge the foundation of ecology (and biology more broadly) and its
551 governing theories? Why do we rest on this foundation rather than attempt to fracture it? As
552 scientists, we should *want* to redefine the field constantly. We desperately need a resistance in
553 the core of ecology to unlock liberation within ecological thought. We need more Queering of
554 traditional ecology. We need a deeper, more intimate, ecology – one that uses ecology as a term
555 that always includes the human (Deloughry 2019, 33) and ruptures human exceptionalism.

556 This essay is the materialization of my dreams of/hope for an intimate ecology that will be fully
557 embraced by every ecologist. That this work will open up the conversation and create the
558 concept of ecology as a home. Ecology, itself, derives from *oikos* (house, dwelling place,
559 habitation) and *-logia* (study of), and thus, as an ecologist, I am studying a *dwelling place*. My
560 hope is that in grounding ecology as a dwelling place, as a home, as a place where your head is

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561 rested at the end of the day, an intimate atmosphere for a multitude of concepts, bodies, and souls
562 to interact at a never-ending table can be created. What happens in that intimate atmosphere?
563 What is waiting, eagerly I may say, to step out of the box we have manufactured into its dynamic
564 self? Rather than conclusiveness, I offer another beginning for, or a continuation of, ecological
565 intimacies and possibilities.

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