**Title:** Queering ecology: (Re)Constructing ecology as a home to better understand the social-ecological pressures of wildlife

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## Abstract

Homes are intimate spaces where many bodies come together in space and time to deeply learn and understand the many processes that have created one another. Ecology, the study of the relationship between organisms and their environment, is based on the study of a home. Yet, ecologists are trained in patriarchal, heteronormative, and otherwise Western articulations and understandings of nature that prevent access to this ecological home. In this article, I argue that through (re)constructing ecology as a home, ecologists can better understand the social and ecological processes that shape an organism. To do this, I dissect conflict with wildlife as a concept that reinforces taxonomical hierarchies and prevents humans from making a home with wildlife. I then leverage queer theory to flatten taxonomical hierarchies and create a landscape that invites the (re)construction of ecology as a home-making discipline. I then sit within the ecological home to examine urban wildlife and the environmental pressures they are subjected to – using the urban coyote as an example. This work leverages Queerness to collapse taxonomical hierarchies and push traditional ecology towards a boundless relationality with wildlife to more holistically understand the various social and ecological pressures that ultimately create their phenotype.



**Keywords:** queer ecology, multi-species kinship, interspecies relationships, human-wildlife interactions, coyote, *Canis latrans*

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## Preface

"Yet small bodies and intimate atmospheres often get lost in big atmospheric narratives."

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

Vulnerability materializes as a mosaic terrain and the form it takes, that is its shape and texture, is often a consequence of the surrounding environment. Queer theory has unhinged the walls of the home I have come to know as modern, Western ecology, muddling much of my thought processes and leaving me intellectually naked. The deconstruction of this home has reeled in a storm of anxiousness, stress, pressure, freedom, liberation, and joy. The latter came as I began writing this essay with Queer thought. The former was felt throughout reading Queer texts and eventually materialized as dreams. Consistently, I dreamed of an ecological home. This home was different than the one I had previously known. As I entered the structure, it was boundless, rather than rigid and fixed. No walls. No corners. All I could see was a never-ending table filled with species and concepts conversing. These species moved between and through each other – recognizing the interdependence and interconnectedness amongst themselves. Ecology, itself, derives from *oikos* (house, dwelling place, habitation) and *-logia* (study of), and thus, as ecologists, we are studying a *dwelling place*. A *home*. A home where intimate interactions reveal to us the many complex processes that eventually produce an organism and their phenotype. However, the methods and language of traditional ecology based in Western science have fractured this home and rendered this intimate space inaccessible for many ecologists. The collapse of the ecological home under white supremacy and patriarchy has stifled our understanding of the countless processes that shape an organism. By leaning into and (re)constructing ecology as a boundless, rather than rigid, home, an intimate atmosphere for a multitude of concepts, bodies, and souls to interact at a never-ending table can be created.

## Introduction

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

- **José Esteban Muñoz**, *The Sense of Browness*

For centuries, humans have sought to understand the complex ecological and evolutionary processes of the world. From investigating why bees waggle upon arrival to hives and the selection processes underpinning the coloration of wildlife, to exploring the myriad environmental pressures that lead to behavioral adaptations in animals. All of these questions have furthered our understanding of what lies beyond the human and the complex entanglement of life with the environment. But have the very investigative processes we have come to know as surefire approaches and methods in ecology hindered our very understanding of what is beyond the human? When we think in binaries (e.g., pest or non-pest, male or female) or simpler terms (e.g., a bold animal) to understand the existence of organisms within our ecosphere, we miss precious moments that reveal to us intimate and prolific processes. Even beyond these eclipsed moments, the current scientific foundation we rest our method on has shaped our foresight to

exclude social processes from ecology because of the "objectivity" of science. In Western science, ecology is unable to be penetrated by the intimate insertion of worldly processes – such as classism, racism, capitalism, patriarchal dominations of nature, etc. It creates a "social world" and a "natural world" under different, exclusionary roofs. This is in no doubt due to colonialism and white supremacy which "produce allegedly objective, dispassionate, and male science which has traditionally made no room for any subjective, emotionally engaged exploration of the world around us." (Freyne 2020, 174). Yet, ecology itself, as a word and discipline that studies the relationship between organisms and the environment *demands* we engage with intimacy (Morton 2010), which necessarily means interrogating the social world and its many (oppressive) processes that leak into the natural world to subjugate human and non-human animals to harsh ecological pressures. When we condemn and dismantle this "objective" ecology, we can examine "the spatially and temporally extensive ways that practices are sedimented into and structure the world" (Murphy 2013, 2), including societal legacies (e.g., colonialism, the plantation, historical redlining) that ultimately shape the social and ecological processes that influence organisms.

In this essay, I am leveraging Queer to dismantle and disturb "objective" Western ecology, which is steeped in white cis-heterosexist articulations of nature and a direct result of who has held (and produced) knowledge in these spaces, to (re)construct ecology as a home. Ecology, as a disciple and entity, is about examining the relationship between organisms and their environment. It is when we revisit the roots of ecology, which is a dwelling place and home, that we begin to understand that humans have constructed a rift between themselves and the natural world, disallowing our ability to fully understand the myriad social-ecological pressures organisms are subjected to. Within this reconstructed home, the binary and rigid thinking of the natural world many ecologists cling to begin to dissolve, allowing us to access more of the fluid and dynamic reality organisms exist within. In this space, ecologists are able visualize the intimate connections and entanglements between the "separate" social and natural world.

In this essay, I argue that there is currently a rift between ecologists and the natural world which has stifled our understanding of wildlife and prevented the ecological home from remaining. I argue that this rift is due to the societal construction of non-human animals and "conflict" with said non-human animals. This construction, both of the non-human animal and conflict, prohibits us from making and sharing a home with wildlife. I then lean on queer theory to (re)construct ecology as a home, creating room for intimacy between humans and wildlife and yielding a lens to understand the complex entanglement of the social and natural world with respect to wildlife. I then sit within this reconstructed home to examine the coyote and the charged landscape it navigates. Throughout this work, I am leveraging Queerness to envision "an array of subjectivities, intimacies, beings, and spaces located outside of the heteronormative" (Chen 2012, 184) and create "an understanding of ecology as naming not the idea of the 'natural world' as something set apart from humans but a complex system of interdependency (Luciano and Chen 2015, 7).

## Constructed Conflict

Ecological theory has long examined the complexity of human-wildlife interactions. For instance, scholars have spent years examining the myriad social factors – such as perceptions, attitudes, past experiences, and beliefs – that determines what a person perceives as conflict (i.e., a negative human-wildlife interaction) (Dickman 2010, Frank 2016, Soulsbury and White 2015).

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Recently, Harris and colleagues (2023) have highlighted that human-wildlife interactions are not static, i.e., these interactions cannot necessarily be binned into coexistence and conflict as these terms are incredibly flimsy. And although Frank (2016) discussed human-wildlife interactions along a continuum between conflict and coexistence, Harris et al. (2023) extended this by noting coexistence is not necessarily devoid of conflict (i.e., human tolerance of what is deemed a "negative" action from a non-human animal) and that a life cycle of interactions occurs between humans and wildlife that is highly dynamic, such that coexistence may rarely occur.

Human-wildlife interactions, generally, can be positive (e.g., tourism, local birdwatching), negative (e.g., livestock or pets lost to predation, vehicle mortalities), or neutral. Negative human-wildlife interactions are typically characterized as human-wildlife conflict, in which humans, infrastructure, or interests are negatively affected by wildlife (Soulsbury and White 2015). Negative interactions with wildlife can be considered a major issue, with many studies exploring how to minimize and understand negative human-wildlife interactions (e.g., Estien et al. 2022; Treves and Santiago-Avila 2020). Human-wildlife conflict is especially prevalent in urban spaces and has even had evolutionary consequences on wildlife inhabiting these spaces (Schell et al. 2021). There is no doubt that these interspecies interactions can be complex, but I ask: is it *actually* conflict? Conflict, broken down into "together" (con-) and "to strike" (-flict), is defined by Merriam-webster in several ways. Noun: (1) competitive or opposing action of incompatibles: antagonistic state or action (as of divergent ideas, interests, or persons); (2) mental struggle resulting from incompatible or opposing needs, drives, wishes, or external or internal demands; and (3) the opposition of persons or forces that gives rise to the dramatic action in a drama or fiction. Verb: (1): to be different, opposed, or contradictory: to fail to be in agreement or accord; and (2) *archaic*: to contend in warfare. Hence, to say there is human-wildlife conflict is to say we as humans are "different, opposed, or contradictory" to wildlife. It's to say that wildlife are "antagonistic" and have "incompatible needs, drives, wishes, or demands". Rhetoric as such can often pre-determine how we perceive or interact with animals that have been seen as "aggressive" and "dangerous" due to myriad "negative" interactions with humans. But are these negative interactions actually conflict and is the use of conflict pre-determining how we perceive wildlife and assess our interactions with them?

Peterson et al. (2010) began this conversation by reviewing what has been categorized as "conflict" in the literature. Peterson and colleagues discuss how non-material entities — memories, values, beliefs — are core characteristics of who humans are and influencing our very being, including what we feel is "conflict". Of all scientific papers reviewed, authors only found one instance of human-wildlife conflict, with other instances of conflict including negative interactions such as property or agricultural damage. This study illustrates, and emphasizes, the importance of language use, as the phrase "conflict" is textured and has immense consequences for promoting coexistence between human and nonhuman animals (and the ecosphere as a whole) (Peterson et al. 2010). Extending Peterson's argument — which hinged on material concepts, that most "conflict" reported is simply miscategorized, and that the phrase human-wildlife conflict is counterproductive to coexistence — I argue that broadly, conflict, in the way we have currently come to generally understand it with non-human animals, is a construct that bolsters the divide between humans and non-human animals and creates an unbalanced power dynamic.

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Western societies have generally constructed non-human animals as beings with no "rights" or agency. They are seen as beings that respond to external stimuli, whether it be anthropogenic or natural, but do not fully understand the world. For example, urban wildlife can often be perceived as ecological accidents. They are seen as animals that must have been struggling in their natural habitat and have accidently wandered into urban spaces, where they have now found resources to consume. They are animals that belong in a "natural" habitat. The creation of urban spaces (i.e., cities) as something solely to be human and distant/separate from nature further upholds this notion that wildlife do not belong in these spaces and must be in cities by accident. Rather than seeing cities as trans-species spaces where urban wildlife participates in social life (Hubbard and Brooks 2021), cities are often fictitiously constructed as human spaces where wildlife invade and forcibly make their own home. This militarization of urban wildlife, as animals that invade or colonize spaces, rather than beings that move through borderless lands, further invites the potential for conflict. It is no wonder society finds conflict with wildlife in human-dominated landscapes, especially in cities – a concrete jungle that was built only for human animals in mind. This division and demarcation from nature that humans have built with cities pushes humans to further construct urban wildlife, specifically wildlife that refuse to exist in cities as humans deem appropriate, as pests, vermin, and nuisance beings. These terms for urban wildlife further construct these animals as beings to be controlled and dominated, and since conflict invites scenarios where there is a winner and loser or a dominator and a submissive, humans find themselves continually constructing conflict with many urban species to reassert their dominance over non-human animals. Conflict with non-human animals is easy to have when cities are seen as incompatible with the animal – a being constructed with no rights or agency – and the animal is seen as something to dominate or control under the Western society.

In urban spaces specifically, human-wildlife conflict typically stem from wildlife "misbehaving" and interfering with capital, property, and aesthetics. In these cases, the use of conflict often invites militaristic actions against the animal that is the deemed the perpetrator rather than the oppressive system that underpins the negative interaction with wildlife. Conflict, here, reinforces the taxonomical hierarchy and pushes wildlife into a social category that (dis)allows them existence on human-dominated landscapes and access to resources. For example, New York City has declared a war against rats. Although the conflict with rats can be argued as just, due to potential human exposure to zoonotic diseases, what conflict here overlooks is a capitalistic system that continues to values capital over people. Rather than interrogate the oppressive and violent system that as created poor housing conditions and other environmental conditions that has created favorable habitats for rats, leading to dense rat populations and human exposure to zoonotic disease, the city is spending millions of dollars on the extermination of rats. Thus, conflict, as a structure and process, often ignores the societal processes that degrade environments and push (marginalized and minoritized) humans to have negative interactions with wildlife. I argue that on a large-scale, the use of conflict prevents an interrogation of a system that asks to have negative interactions with wildlife due to notions of, for example, aesthetics, property, and capital. Simultaneously, the usage of human-wildlife conflict inadvertently maps conscious antagonism onto wildlife, constructing a villainous and dark figure that eclipses who the animal is and invites violence towards wildlife.

To fully deteriorate this myth of conflict between human and non-human animals, we must dissolve the human and non-human boundary and surgically remove human exceptionalism such that "there is no natural law to oppose human deviance, since nature cannot be posited as an

other than or prior to humans" (Luciano and Chen 2015, 185). It is once we dissolve this boundary between human and non-human beings that we can begin creating a foundation to (re)construct ecology as a home and repair the connections between humans and non-human animals.

## Getting Dirty with Wildlife to (Re)Construct the Ecological Home

If we as a ecologists rupture the concept of individualism and human exceptionalism, as suggested in *Staying with the Trouble Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Haraway 2016, 30), what can be produced? To rupture and appropriately dismantle human exceptionalism, ecologists must flatten the imagined and constructed hierarchical taxonomic ladder, which places humans at the top and "lesser" beings towards the bottom. Moving in this direction necessarily means we, as ecologist, must get dirty with wildlife: "Getting dirty means we become fully human by remembering and embodying our trans-human animalness. This requires a decolonization process, because we must question and shed the conditioned beliefs that say we are more intelligent than, different from, or better than our animal nature and other natural beings (i.e., human exceptionalism)." (Nelson 2017, 255).

Instead of being viewed as an individual with autonomy, decision-making abilities, and other traits we place on a pedestal and have been socialized to understand as synonymous with "human", wildlife are reduced to "just an animal". It's this constructed and infantilized "animal" that warrants different societal perceptions and understandings of it when it appears on a human landscape depending on the positionality of the human observing it. For instance, if the human observing the animal views nature as an entity that should be removed from humans, then any move that animal makes may become "conflict". On the other end, a human may see endearment, resentment, or lack of excitement for an animal simply based on its biology and positionality within human society (e.g., a pigeon or rat compared to a falcon or puma). What contributes to the transposition and maintenance of these dynamic feelings towards the non-human animal? A brief glimpse reveals that any being existing on a landscape where racialized tension continues to stem from colonial roots is incredibly porous, sliding up and down the animacy hierarchy (see Mel Chen's *Animacies*).

We can dig into this by examining the domestic dog, for example, who can become very (in)human. Domestic dogs are porous in their image and, because of their positionality to humans, can reap the benefits and consequences of the arbitrary and troubled hierarchy humans have constructed. On the one hand, some dogs are demonized and ostracized with anthropocentric personalities such as "aggressive" sticking to them because of their proximity to Black and Brown communities and thus, seen as "below" other dogs (similar to how Black and Brown individuals and other marginalized groups (Disabled folks, Trans folks, etc.) have been seen as "subspecies" to humans/humanness) while other dogs hold higher statute as classy, safer dogs because of their prevalence in white communities, and can often become familial and above other non-human animals and even other humans. Chen notes that the language we use around nonhuman animals situates and isolates them lower on this conceptual taxonomic hierarchy — hence the phrase "treated me like a dog". This fixed taxonomical hierarchy stems from the colonial gaze – which suppresses and hides entities deemed invaluable in a submerged world.

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In *Extractivism*, Gómez-Barris prys open the submerge world and reveals a complex and interactive space teeming with perspectives. By entering this submerged world and moving beyond the Western scientific perspective, we can interact with the world in a new fashion. Going into what Gómez-Barris deems the "fish-eye" allows us to connect deeper to the environment and be enveloped by what extractivism (i.e., the colonial gaze) dismisses and moves beyond (Gómez-Barris 2017, 94-100). Moving into and employing this submerged perspective allows us to get dirty with wildlife and reconstruct ecology as a home where intimate interactions are seen and heard. In this submerged perspective, "protecting nature means protecting ourselves" (Anderson and Samudzi 2018, 33). It's in this intimate space where we are able to feel the emotions and pain of wildlife when they are subjected to violent acts, such as polluted landscapes. Getting dirty allows us to attend to the unseen, or even dismissed, interactions between wildlife and the landscape they operate on and are engulfed in.

With an understanding of the porous nature of animals and the perspective that ignores a vibrant network of intimate connections, we can begin rearranging this constructed landscape. What would it look like to rearrange a hierarchy that is rooted in oppression and acts as a barrier for human-nonhuman connections? Instead of a vertical, capitalistic hierarchy that assigns values to bodies, with entities such as insects on the bottom and human at the top, what if we flatten it? When we flatten this ladder, instead of levels, we get create doors with two-pronged intimacy into a home. First, this two-pronged intimacy allows us to enter spaces that were considered "disparate" before and fully engage with the life behind the door. Behind this door, hierarchical barriers are dissolved – allowing us to see that wildlife are not detached from the human world but incredibly entangled with our systems. We are able to better engage with our research subjects and understand who they are and what their experience is on their respective landscape, no matter the ecosystem. Although ecological theory already recognizes the complex interactions between humans and ecosystems (Collins et al. 2000; Collins et al. 2011; Des Roches et al. 2021; Ramalho and Hobbs 2012; Schell et al. 2020), in this flattened space, we can better identify the environmental processes that entangle and latch onto our research subjects. For instance, a standard ecological approach recognizes that urban wildlife have various behavioral responses to both social and ecological pressures. Here, social and environmental factors such as urban heat, societal wealth, pollution, transportation infrastructure, and human population density can impact community-level processes (e.g., biodiversity; Leong et al 2018) and feedback onto individuals (Des Roches et al. 2021; Saaristo et al. 2018), shaping an organism's behavior and physiology (Ouyang et al. 2018).Yet, these approaches still fail to consider or recognize how systems of oppression and extraction construct different niches for urban wildlife, both social and ecological. Although current ecological thought considers the ecological portion, examining what parts of cities are ecological hospitable for wildlife (i.e., has the resources to sustain a population) or where wildlife currently occur in cities, ecological theory has yet to critically examine why portions of cities are more socially acceptable than others for certain wildlife (e.g., where are perceptions and attitudes of this organism tolerable). Using these doors will reveal to ecologists that urban wildlife can slip into the racial and capitalistic hierarchies of humans, ultimately shaping the existence of wildlife in urban landscapes. For instance, urban wildlife interfering with capital interests and aesthetics can become pests and are deemed "disposable", similar to marginalized human bodies (e.g., homeless populations). Simultaneously, wildlife associated with particular human groups become entangled in racial-ethno conflict and hierarchies, leading to unfavorable or violent views towards particular animals.

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Second, while this two-pronged intimacy allows us for us to see new perspectives by more intimately engaging with our research subjects and seeing how they function in their ecosystem, this two-pronged intimacy allows for us to erects respectable boundaries between two or more entities. These respectable boundaries allows for us to note and celebrate the differences between the researcher and the research(ed). By recognizing and upholding these differences, we can "love, befriend, and care for another" by "respect[ing] the independent aspect of their being (Freyne 2006, 77)" (Freyne 2020, 178). These differences, whether its biological or social, can ultimately be what links the researcher and research subject against a structure that simultaneously subjects them to violence. And in this simultaneous multi-species struggle against neocolonialism and extractive capitalism, both researcher and research subject briefly overlap, spatially and temporally, in an intimate fashion to become one. By being overlaid, both (or more) bodies occupying the space are fluid, and the interactions become more intimate, allowing a subject to become fully known. It's behind this door that we prevent pushing apart and devaluing bodies and begin to realize that we, as ecologists, do not hold all the knowledge. Here, our research subject becomes our research partner revealing what it wants to share about the vast adaptations they are equipped with in response to vast social and ecological pressures.

Traditional ecological approaches are built on Western understandings of nature, which do not recognize wildlife as beings with agency and inevitably reproduce troubled and oppressive hierarchies. Upon identifying this, we can begin to recognize that these approaches are "an imagined system, not an actual, self-regulating one" (Chen 2020, 89) and do not allow for an expansive view of wildlife. Through Queering our approach to ecology, we are able to get dirty and become entangled with wildlife, producing "empathy and kinship" (Nelson 2017, 232). Getting dirty with wildlife allows us to have intimate interactions with non-human animals and access understandings of how these animals navigate their environments. It's through approach that we are able to flatten taxonomical hierarchies, weave new, personal connections with nature, and access ecological knowledge that would otherwise be missed due to the static observations of nature traditional ecology asks for.

When we begin to work in this flattened landscape, human exceptionalism and bounded individualism fall to the side and a new intimate landscape teeming with complex emotions and relationality is freed. In this landscape, organisms and processes are observed and felt differently. For example, even a prominent ecological concept like co-evolution, an idea primarily discussed in the context of predator-prey/host-parasite interactions, can be transformed into an intimate interaction that occurs between abiotic and biotic beings: "As plant sex spawned new generations of plants, it also made new fire. As plant life mobilised, evolved and radiated, so fire migrated, proliferated and diversified. As plants made the living world more hospitable to flame, so too did wildfire select for species or communities that tolerated, even depended upon, flame." (Yusoff and Clark 2018, 12). Similarly, photosynthesis transforms from a process of acquiring and processing energy into "celestial fertility" that burns "like a cool green fire" (Yusoff and Clark 2018, 11), and spiders move beyond animals that create webs to capture prey and sustain themselves; instead, they make "attachments and detachments; they make cuts and knots; they make a difference; they weave paths and consequences but not determinisms; they are both open knotted in some ways and not others." (Haraway 2016, 31). On this flattened landscape, we can begin to reconstruct and erect the ecological home, where interactions between human and non-human beings can be seen, felt, and sensed differently. It is then within the ecological home, that we are able to sit at the table with organisms and fully see them. We are able to hold our research

organisms to feel their richness and texture. We are able to slowly move around the edges and note characteristics we overlooked before. It's through this intimate process within the ecological home that ecologists can begin to better understand the myriad social and ecological pressures that impact them.

## The Queer Concrete Canid

Coyotes are beings that persist in spaces they aren't wanted in and are often demonized even though they are beautiful and meek. Coyotes are often viewed as "antagonistic", "problematic", and derogatorily "complex". Yet, through all adversity — the defamation and subsequent (environmental) violence that has come with human expansion — coyotes persist in urban spaces, much like marginalized humans. In this section, I'll sit within the ecological home to examine the urban coyote as a Queer ecological being navigating a charged landscape and the associated social-ecological pressures.

The coyote is one of many appendages of Nature. The coyote in particular, similar to Nature at large, exudes vitality and refuses to fit in the arbitrary boxes we affix to it. In this way, coyotes are a model of resistance against the rigidness of Western society and ideologies. The coyote sees the world differently than us and moves through space and time as a Queer ecological being. Here, I leverage Neel Ahuja's definition of Queer/Queering, as the coyote "emerges by tracing an affective materiality that interrupts anthropocentric body logics and space-time continuums rather than a sovereign stance of negation in relation to Law…" (Ahuja 2015, 372). By simply existing and persisting, the coyote dismembers all anthropocentric logic on wildlife survival and how wildlife should (and can) exist in cities. The coyote intimately exists in tandem with asphalt and soil. Between the rough, gritty, chilled, and overbearing grey and the plush, firm, wet, and boundless brown. All of it is home to the coyote. In this way, I would say that the coyote is incredibly intimate with concrete, more than humans may ever be. The coyote, similar to the Black identity (see Anderson and Samudzi 2018, 21), is inextricably linked with the land. It paces and traverses streets as it has traversed time and moved through different embodiments. On one end, the coyote moves through many Indigenous stories as a parental figure, savior, or creator, to name a few (Baldy 2015). On the other end, the coyote erupts in the Anthropocene as an embattled and resilient carnivore that polarizes the Americas. Observing the coyote as this still, yet transient, deviant body bursting with potential and possibilities instills an unmatched wave of peace and power. It's an overwhelming feeling that drowns you and provides air simultaneously.

Coyotes have emerged as an exciting potential case of ecosystem sentinels in cities. The coyote is set to expand its range across the Americas (Hody and Kays 2018), and their intimacy with (toxic) landscapes will be greater than we will understand. With this range expansion, the images of the coyote will continually collide and be rebuilt to articulate *who* the coyote is both materially and cosmically in modernity, "generating friction and leakage" between these identities (Luciano and Chen 2015, 186). As these conversations of who the coyote is continually surface, the coyote is often seen as a *danger*, *out-of-place*, and *not belonging*. For example, in Denver, Colorado, themes of anger, accusation, violence, and crime in response to the coyote are incredibly prevalent (Draheim et al. 2021). Similarly in Los Angles, California, people have organized a group entitled "Evict Coyotes" who "are not here to discuss both sides. The only side we discuss is how to get our government to do their job and start Evicting Coyotes". This

rhetoric around *who* and *what* belongs *where* and use of phrases, such as "they don't belong here" and "we don't want to coexist with them, we want them gone", mirror feelings directed towards marginalized humans who are viewed as an "other".

Despite these negative attitudes, coyotes, like many other urban animals, have increased their tolerance of people and human-dominated spaces (e.g., Breck et al. 2019), all while facing detrimental threats such as the rupturing of our climate and environmental violence (e.g., toxic pollution and contamination). The phenotypic plasticity coyotes exhibit is something to marvel over — almost like no matter how far humans bend them, they never break. And yet, this phenotypic bending (i.e., plasticity) done by humans via the construction of a concrete jungle and other large-scale landscape alterations is viewed as negative (e.g., Manzolilo et al. 2019) rather than beautiful. Why is that? Mel Chen asks in *Animacies* "What happens when an animal appears on human landscapes?" and for the urban coyote, dramatic and intense slippage occurs as it is rapidly thrown between the many constructed coyotes that exist in, for example, NextDoor forums, Twitter threads, dinner table conversations, or local parks. The constructed coyote – an "aggressor" and "villain"– directly alters how the material coyote interacts with the urban landscape with actions such as hazing aiming to reinstate human dominion and control over the urban coyote. The constructed coyote has incredibly tangible and sometimes violent consequences for the urban coyote, who is simply resourceful, plastic, and resilient. This constructed coyote offers the human a "logical reason" to invest in warfare and violence against the urban coyote than build a home with the urban coyote. Yet, the coyote does not subscribe to this false image of self, despite the human begging for the coyote to buy into this constructed image to validate the coyote's ultimate death and removal. The urban coyote moves around the constructed coyote and does not seek to be validated from the world or have a desire to be of this world. The urban coyote recognizes that it does not exist beyond the margins of society and the cities we have come to know, so much so that its existence seems to beget the interrogation and destruction of the constructed heteropatriarchal, white supremacist world that has pushed the urban coyote into these very margins. Within these margins is where the urban coyote absorbs xenophobic and racist rhetoric via the entanglement with society's constructed *other* who are similarly crushed and caricatured by myriad systems of oppression. It is here the urban coyote becomes Queer and embodies abolition, freedom, and revolution. It is in this space that we can begin to understand that antagonisms towards the coyote are not random, but a direct result of colonialism, heteropatriarchy, and white supremacy.

There is tension between cities and coyotes, such that when a coyote emerges in a city, it is a polarizing force that disrupts, ruptures, and shatters all quotidian entities and infrastructure. The coyote's existence has continued to evolve and become conditional within an ongoing settler project, similar to myself as Black Queer person. This can be further understood as extractivism views and understands both nature (and Blackness) as entities to be controlled and commodified (Anderson and Sumudzi 2018, 33). With this lens, it becomes clear that to be an urban coyote is to be "anti-human" in the same way that to exist as a Black person in the US is to be "anti-state" (Anderson and Sumudzi 2018, 112). The simple existence of the coyote is in direct opposition of urban spaces and human assumptions of where nature "deserves" to be. The very construction of cities is often made to center (socially dominant) humans and their needs – leading to a dense, built landscape created from a love-affair of oppressive systems. For the coyote, capitalism, classism, anti-Black racism, and more materialize to create inequitable and unjust cities that evict slow violence on marginalized communities (Wright 2021). In this toxic urban landscape that

was not built for the coyote, it persists as a form of resistance to the many forms of oppression that are consciously overlooked in urban landscapes. The urban coyote experience is not one of thriving, but survival, tenacity, and grit. The coyote's plasticity bends its destiny to encompass life and a concrete future that prevents the constructed coyote from engulfing the urban coyote until only its ghost is left.

The world we've come to know is not neutral nor natural phenomenon but constructed through many systems of oppression that affect humans and non-humans alike (Schell et al 2020; Cannon et al 2023; Hubbard and Brooks 2021). The urban coyote, along with other wildlife, is swept up in this constructed world where it subjected to harsh social and ecological processes stemming from injustices and oppressive systems (e.g., imperialism, capitalism). Yet, traditional ecology prevents ecologists from engaging with this part of the world when investigating the environmental pressures, both social and ecological, that influence wildlife. With the reconstructed ecological home, and the lens it produces, we can begin to recognize that the large-scale oppression directed towards marginalized and minoritized humans – including racialized rhetoric, violent actions, environmental degradation, and unjust laws – encompass the urban coyote, ultimately shaping its phenotype and crystalizing it as a Queer being.

## Conclusion: Ecology as a Home

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

- **Zoe Samudzi and William C. Anderson**, *As Black as Resistanc*e

Science as a modern approach has a long history of entanglement with white supremacy, dismissing other forms of knowledge, being, and understanding. Such that when we reduce non-human organisms to solely scientific terms, we are reducing and stripping non-human organisms of their being and preventing a full understanding of said organism. We are inevitably reinforcing a taxonomical hierarchy and colonial human/non-human power schemes, losing the ability to create boundless, intimate relations with our research subjects. What if intimacy and love, such as respect, trust, commitment, and recognition (hooks 2000, 5), was shown to wildlife as a researcher? For instance, what would it mean for ecologists to *commit* to wildlife and *recognize* wildlife as beings with agency? Committing to and recognizing the agency of wildlife would lead to erecting and reinforcing the ecological home, consequently pushing ecologist to shift their disciplinary lens and methodological approaches. The movement into the ecological home allows ecologists to better recognize, for example, the myriad oppressive structures that shape the urban coyote (Cannon et al 2023).

Currently, ecology has found itself in an unintimate landscape that encounters itself as a hurdle. In this piece, I have argued that by queering ecology, ecologists are able to shift the field such that the core aspects to ecology – understanding the relationship between organisms and their environment – can be better interrogated. Specifically, I have argued that through (re)constructing ecology as a home, we can best identify the vast social-ecological pressures, including systemic racism, charged rhetoric, and constructed perceptions, that shape wildlife ecology. My hope is that by grounding ecology as a dwelling place and working within a home, an intimate atmosphere for a multitude of concepts, bodies, and souls to interact at a never-

ending table can be created. This intimate ecological atmosphere calls for the abolition of taxonomic hierarchies because intimacy, and by extension respect, care, and coexistence, cannot exist with dominion. Through ecological homemaking, we can begin to understand the positionality of wildlife in our constructed world, how this varies across organisms based on their social and ecological niches, and how the ecological pressure wildlife are subjected to is a direct consequence of this violent, constructed world.

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