

(Re)Constructing ecology as a home

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

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7 Abstract

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

23 Keywords: queer ecology, multispecies relations, urban ecology, human-wildlife interactions,
24 coyote, *Canis latrans*

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25 Preface

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

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

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

48 Introduction

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

53 - **José Esteban Muñoz**, *The Sense of Brown*

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

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65 exclude social processes from ecology because of the “objectivity” of science. In Western
66 science, ecology is unable to be penetrated by the intimate insertion of worldly processes – such
67 as classism, racism, capitalism, patriarchal dominations of nature, etc. It creates a “social world”
68 and a “natural world” under different, exclusionary roofs. This is in no doubt due to colonialism
69 and white supremacy which “produce allegedly objective, dispassionate, and male science which
70 has traditionally made no room for any subjective, emotionally engaged exploration of the world
71 around us.” (Freyne 2020, 174). Yet, ecology itself, as a word and discipline that studies the
72 relationship between organisms and the environment *demands* we engage with intimacy (Morton
73 2010), necessarily means interrogating the social world and its many (oppressive) processes that
74 leak into the natural world to subjugate human and non-human animals to harsh ecological
75 pressures. When we condemn and dismantle this “objective” ecology, we can examine “the
76 spatially and temporally extensive ways that practices are sedimented into and structure the
77 world” (Murphy 2013, 2), including societal legacies (e.g., colonialism, the plantation, historical
78 redlining) that ultimately shape the social and ecological processes that influence organisms.

79 In this essay, I am leveraging Queer to dismantle and disturb “objective” Western ecology,
80 which is steeped in white cis-heterosexist articulations of nature and a direct result of who has
81 held (and produced) knowledge in these spaces, to (re)construct ecology as a home. Ecology, as
82 a disciple and entity, is about examining the relationship between organisms and their
83 environment. It is when we revisit the roots of ecology, which is a dwelling place and home, that
84 we begin to understand that humans have constructed a rift between themselves and the natural
85 world, disallowing our ability to fully understand the myriad social-ecological pressures
86 organisms are subjected to. Within this reconstructed home, the binary and rigid thinking of the
87 natural world many ecologists cling to begin to dissolve, allowing us to access more of the fluid
88 and dynamic reality organisms exist within. In this space, ecologists are able to gain the power to
89 visualize the intimate connections and entanglements between the not-so separate social and
90 natural worlds.

91 In this essay, I argue that there is currently a rift between ecologists and the natural world which
92 has stifled our understanding of wildlife and prevented the ecological home from emerging. I
93 argue that this rift is due to the societal construction of non-human animals and “conflict” with
94 said non-human animals. This construction, both of the non-human animal and conflict, prohibits
95 us from making and sharing a home with wildlife. I then lean on Queer theory to (re)construct
96 ecology as a home, creating room for intimacy between humans and wildlife and yielding a lens
97 to understand the complex entanglement of the social and natural world with respect to wildlife. I
98 then sit within this reconstructed home to examine the coyote (*Canis latrans*) as it traverses
99 human settlements and the boundaries we place on urban, suburban, and wild as labels for
100 conceptual markers.. Throughout this work, I am leveraging Queerness to envision “an array of
101 subjectivities, intimacies, beings, and spaces located outside of the heteronormative” (Chen
102 2012, 184) and create “an understanding of ecology as naming not the idea of the ‘natural world’
103 as something set apart from humans but a complex system of interdependency (Luciano and
104 Chen 2015, 7). By capitalizing Queer, I am positing Queer as a being that casts shadows of
105 uncertainty around the ways of knowing and feeling, and demands empathy and intimacy to
106 build relationality amongst and beyond the human.

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107 Constructed Conflict

108 Ecological theory has long examined the complexity of human-wildlife interactions. For
109 instance, scholars have spent years examining the myriad social factors – such as perceptions,
110 attitudes, past experiences, gender, socioeconomic status, and beliefs – that determines what a
111 person perceives as conflict (i.e., a negative human-wildlife interaction) (Dickman 2010;
112 Soulsbury and White 2015; Frank 2016). Recently, Harris and colleagues (2023) have
113 highlighted that human-wildlife interactions are not static, i.e., these interactions cannot
114 necessarily be binned into coexistence and conflict as these terms are incredibly flimsy. And
115 although Frank (2016) discussed human-wildlife interactions along a continuum between conflict
116 and coexistence, Harris et al. (2023) extended this by noting coexistence is not necessarily
117 devoid of conflict (i.e., human tolerance of what is deemed a “negative” action from a non-
118 human animal) and that a life cycle of interactions occurs between humans and wildlife that is
119 highly dynamic, such that lasting coexistence may rarely occur.

120 Human-wildlife interactions, generally, can be positive (e.g., ecotourism, local birdwatching),
121 negative (e.g., livestock or pets lost to predation, vehicle mortalities), or neutral (e.g., humans
122 and squirrels co-existing in park). Negative human-wildlife interactions are typically
123 characterized as human-wildlife conflict, in which humans, infrastructure, or interests are
124 negatively affected by wildlife (Soulsbury and White 2015; Bhatia et al. 2019). Negative
125 interactions with wildlife can be considered a major issue (König et al. 2020; Lozano et al. 2020;
126 Treves and Santiago-Avila 2020), with many studies exploring how to minimize negative
127 human-wildlife interactions via management interventions (e.g., Young, Hammill, and Breck
128 2019; Boycott et al. 2021; Estien et al. 2022). Human-wildlife conflict is especially prevalent in
129 urban spaces due to a high concentration of humans and land-use changes (König et al. 2020)
130 and has even lead to evolutionary consequences on wildlife inhabiting these spaces (Schell et al.
131 2021). There is no doubt that interspecies interactions can be complex (Pooley, Bhatia, and
132 Vasava 2021), but I ask: is it *actually* conflict? Conflict, broken down into “together” (con-) and
133 “to strike” (-flict), is defined by Merriam-webster in several ways. Noun: (1) competitive or
134 opposing action of incompatibles: antagonistic state or action (as of divergent ideas, interests, or
135 persons); (2) mental struggle resulting from incompatible or opposing needs, drives, wishes, or
136 external or internal demands; and (3) the opposition of persons or forces that gives rise to the
137 dramatic action in a drama or fiction. Verb: (1): to be different, opposed, or contradictory: to fail
138 to be in agreement or accord; and (2) *archaic*: to contend in warfare. Hence, to say there is
139 human-wildlife conflict is to say we as humans are “different, opposed, or contradictory” to
140 wildlife. It’s to say that wildlife are “antagonistic” and have “incompatible needs, drives, wishes,
141 or demands”. Rhetoric as such can often pre-determine how we perceive or interact with animals
142 that have been seen as “aggressive” and “dangerous” due to myriad “negative” interactions with
143 humans. But are these negative interactions actually conflict and is the use of conflict pre-
144 determining how we perceive wildlife and assess our interactions with them?

145 Peterson et al. (2010) began this conversation by reviewing what has been categorized as
146 “conflict” in the literature. Peterson and colleagues discuss how non-material entities—
147 memories, values, beliefs—are core characteristics of who humans are and influencing our very
148 being, including what we feel is “conflict”. Of the 422 scientific papers reviewed by Peterson et
149 al., only one instance human-wildlife conflict was found, where magpies (*Gymnorhina tibicen*)
150 attacked humans (Warne and Jones 2003). The remaining papers found documented instances of

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151 human-wildlife conflict such as property or agricultural damage by wildlife, and human-human
152 conflict pertaining to management decisions about (problematic) wildlife. This review illustrates,
153 and emphasizes, the importance of language use, as the phrase “conflict” is textured and has
154 immense consequences for promoting coexistence between human and nonhuman animals (and
155 the ecosphere as a whole) (Peterson et al. 2010). Extending Peterson’s argument—which hinged
156 on material concepts, that most “conflict” reported is simply miscategorized, and that the phrase
157 human-wildlife conflict is counterproductive to coexistence by dividing human and nature—I
158 argue that broadly, conflict, in the way we have currently come to generally understand it with
159 non-human animals, is not only a construct that bolsters the divide between humans and non-
160 human animals, but, the concept of human-wildlife conflict creates an unbalanced power
161 dynamic that muddles solutions that best integrate human and non-human ecologies so multiple
162 species can thrive. For example, a quick and immediate solution to beavers (*Castor*) – a habitat
163 engineer that has downstream impacts on habitat biodiversity (e.g., Hood and Larson 2014; Law,
164 McLean, and Willby 2016) – causing flooding in forested or peri-urban areas may be to simply
165 remove the individual(s), either by lethal removal or translocation, or install a fence to exclude
166 beavers from certain areas. However, if a species is translocated from an area, depending on the
167 removal distance, that individual could simply return. If the individual does not return or has
168 been lethally removed, the space and resources used by the individual remains opens, allowing
169 another individual to move into the territory. As for fences, research has highlighted that fences
170 have complex effects on the ecology of a landscape (McInturff et al. 2020), and also that fences
171 do not always exclude individuals, regardless of fence maintenance (Wilkinson et al. 2021).
172 Thus, both “solutions” are relatively obsolete, but by centering the human in response to
173 “conflict”, we lose the ability to interrogate strategies for managing landscapes that work best for
174 humans and non-human animals. Notably, for beavers, actions such as deploying “pond
175 leveling” devices can be placed near or in their dams to keep them from flooding a nearby area,
176 creating a cost-effective, ecology-conscious approach that reduces flooding while not relying on
177 extermination of the beaver, or other disruptions to its ecology (Hood, Manaloor, and Dzioba
178 2018; Hood, McIntosh, and Hvenegaard 2021). However, as noted by Hood and colleague
179 (2018), flow devices are not a popular approach to beaver management (employed by 5% of
180 municipalities in Alberta, CA), unlike trapping and shooting (employed by 74% of municipalities
181 in Alberta, CA).

182 Western societies have generally constructed non-human animals as beings with no “rights” or
183 agency. They are seen as beings that respond to external stimuli, whether it be anthropogenic or
184 natural, but do not fully understand the world. For example, urban wildlife can often be
185 perceived as ecological accidents. They are seen as animals that must have been struggling in
186 their natural habitat and have accidentally wandered into urban spaces, where they have now found
187 resources to consume. They are animals that belong in a “natural” habitat. The creation of urban
188 spaces (i.e., cities) as something solely to be human and distant/separate from nature further
189 upholds this notion that wildlife do not belong in these spaces and must be in cities by accident.
190 Rather than seeing cities as trans-species spaces where urban wildlife participates in social life
191 (Hubbard and Brooks 2021), cities are often fictitiously constructed as human spaces where
192 wildlife invade and forcibly make their own home. This militarization of urban wildlife, as
193 animals that invade or colonize spaces, rather than beings that move through borderless lands,
194 further invites the potential for conflict. It is no wonder society finds conflict with wildlife in
195 human-dominated landscapes, especially in cities – a concrete jungle that was built only for
196 human animals in mind. This division and demarcation from nature that humans have built with

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197 cities pushes humans to further construct urban wildlife, specifically wildlife that refuse to exist
198 in cities as humans deem appropriate, as pests, vermin, and nuisance beings. These terms for
199 urban wildlife further construct these animals as beings to be controlled and dominated, and
200 since conflict invites scenarios where there is a winner and loser or a dominator and a
201 submissive, humans find themselves continually constructing conflict with many urban species
202 to reassert their dominance over non-human animals. Conflict with non-human animals is easy to
203 have when cities are seen as incompatible with the animal – a being constructed with no rights or
204 agency – and the animal is seen as something to dominate or control under the Western society.

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

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

225 To fully deteriorate this myth of conflict between human and non-human animals, we must
226 dissolve the human and non-human boundary and surgically remove human exceptionalism such
227 that “boundaries between human and nonhuman melt” (Jones 2002, 93), recognizing that “nature
228 cannot be posited as other than or prior to humans” (Luciano and Chen 2015, 185). It is once we
229 dissolve this boundary between human and non-human beings that we can begin creating a
230 foundation to (re)construct ecology as a home and repair the connections between humans and
231 non-human animals.

232 If we as a ecologists rupture the concept of individualism and human exceptionalism, as
233 suggested in *Staying with the Trouble Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Haraway 2016, 30), what
234 can be produced? To rupture and appropriately dismantle human exceptionalism, ecologists must
235 flatten the imagined and constructed hierarchical taxonomic ladder, which places humans at the
236 top and “lesser” beings towards the bottom. Moving in this direction necessarily means we, as
237 ecologist, must get dirty with wildlife: “Getting dirty means we become fully human by
238 remembering and embodying our trans-human animalness. This requires a decolonization
239 process, because we must question and shed the conditioned beliefs that say we are more

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240 intelligent than, different from, or better than our animal nature and other natural beings (i.e.,
241 human exceptionalism).” (Nelson 2017, 255).

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

255 We can dig into this by examining the domestic dog, for example, who can become very
256 (in)human. Domestic dogs are porous in their image and, because of their positionality to
257 humans, can reap the benefits and consequences of the arbitrary and troubled hierarchy humans
258 have constructed. On the one hand, some dogs are demonized and ostracized with
259 anthropocentric personalities such as “aggressive” sticking to them because of their proximity to
260 Black and Brown communities and thus, seen as “below” other dogs (similar to how Black and
261 Brown individuals and other marginalized groups (Disabled folks, Trans folks, etc.) have been
262 seen as “subspecies” to humans/humanness) while other dogs hold higher statute as classy, safer
263 dogs because of their prevalence in white communities, and can often become familial and above
264 other non-human animals and even other humans (Weaver 2021). Chen notes that the language
265 we use around nonhuman animals situates and isolates them lower on this conceptual taxonomic
266 hierarchy—hence the phrase “treated me like a dog”. This fixed taxonomical hierarchy stems
267 from the colonial gaze – which suppresses and hides entities deemed invaluable in a submerged
268 world.

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

281 With an understanding of the porous nature of animals and the perspective that ignores a vibrant
282 network of intimate connections, we can begin rearranging this constructed landscape. What

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283 would it look like to rearrange a hierarchy that is rooted in oppression and acts as a barrier for
284 human-nonhuman connections? Instead of a vertical, capitalistic hierarchy that assigns values to
285 bodies, with entities such as insects on the bottom and human at the top, what if we flatten it?
286 When we flatten this ladder, instead of levels, we get create doors with two-pronged intimacy
287 into a home. First, this two-pronged intimacy allows us to enter spaces that were considered
288 “disparate” before and fully engage with the life behind the door. Behind this door, hierarchical
289 barriers are dissolved – allowing us to see that wildlife are not detached from the human world
290 but incredibly entangled with our systems. We are able to better engage with our research
291 subjects and understand who they are and what their experience is on their respective landscape,
292 no matter the ecosystem. Although ecological theory already recognizes the complex interactions
293 between humans and ecosystems (Collins et al. 2000; Ramalho and Hobbs 2012; Des Roches et
294 al. 2021; Schell et al. 2020), in this flattened space, we can better identify the environmental
295 processes that entangle and latch onto our research subjects. For instance, a standard ecological
296 approach recognizes that urban wildlife have various behavioral responses to both social and
297 ecological pressures. Here, social and environmental factors such as urban heat, societal wealth,
298 pollution, transportation infrastructure, and human population density can impact community-
299 level processes (e.g., biodiversity; Leong, Dunn, and Trautwin 2018; Chamberlain et al. 2019)
300 and feedback onto individuals (Saaristo et al. 2018; Des Roches et al. 2021), shaping an
301 organism’s behavior and physiology (Ouyang et al. 2018). Yet, these approaches still fail to
302 consider or recognize how systems of oppression and extraction construct different niches for
303 urban wildlife, both social and ecological. Although current ecological thought considers the
304 ecological portion, examining what parts of cities are ecological hospitable for wildlife (i.e., has
305 the resources to sustain a population) or where wildlife currently occur in cities, ecological
306 theory has yet to critically examine why portions of cities are more socially acceptable than
307 others for certain wildlife (e.g., where are perceptions and attitudes of this organism tolerable).
308 Using these doors will reveal to ecologists that urban wildlife can slip into the racial and
309 capitalistic hierarchies of humans, ultimately shaping the existence of wildlife in urban
310 landscapes. For instance, urban wildlife interfering with capital interests and aesthetics can
311 become pests and are deemed “disposable”, similar to marginalized human bodies (e.g.,
312 homeless populations). Simultaneously, wildlife associated with particular human groups
313 become entangled in ethno-racial as well as economic conflict and hierarchies, leading to
314 unfavorable or violent views towards particular animals.

315 Second, while this two-pronged intimacy allows us for us to see new perspectives by more
316 intimately engaging with our research subjects and seeing how they function in their ecosystem,
317 this two-pronged intimacy allows for us to erects respectable boundaries between two or more
318 entities. These respectable boundaries allows for us to note and celebrate the differences between
319 the researcher and the research(ed). By recognizing and upholding these differences, we can
320 “love, befriend, and care for another” by “respect[ing] the independent aspect of their being
321 (Freyne 2006, 77)” (Freyne 2020, 178). These differences, whether biological or social, can
322 ultimately be what links the researcher and research subject against a structure that
323 simultaneously subjects them to violence. And in this simultaneous multi-species struggle
324 against neocolonialism and extractive capitalism, both researcher and research subject briefly
325 overlap, spatially and temporally, in an intimate fashion to become one. By being overlaid, both
326 (or more) bodies occupying the space are fluid, and the interactions become more intimate,
327 allowing a subject to become fully known. It’s behind this door that we prevent pushing apart
328 and devaluing bodies and begin to realize that we, as ecologists, do not hold all the knowledge.

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329 Here, our research subject becomes our research partner revealing what it wants to share about
330 the vast adaptations they are equipped with in response to vast social and ecological pressures.

331 Traditional ecological approaches are built on Western understandings of nature, which do not
332 recognize wildlife as beings with agency and inevitably reproduce troubled and oppressive
333 hierarchies. Upon identifying this, we can begin to recognize that these approaches are “an
334 imagined system, not an actual, self-regulating one” (Chen 2012, 89) and do not allow for an
335 expansive view of wildlife. Through Queering our approach to ecology, we are able to get dirty
336 and become entangled with wildlife, producing “empathy and kinship” (Nelson 2017, 232).
337 Getting dirty with wildlife allows us to have intimate interactions with non-human animals and
338 access understandings of how these animals navigate their environments. It’s through approach
339 that we are able to flatten taxonomical hierarchies, weave new, personal connections with nature,
340 and access ecological knowledge that would otherwise be missed due to the static observations
341 of nature traditional ecology asks for.

342 When we begin to work in this flattened landscape, human exceptionalism and bounded
343 individualism fall to the side and a new intimate landscape teeming with complex emotions and
344 relationality is freed. In this landscape, organisms and processes are observed and felt differently.
345 For example, even a prominent ecological concept like co-evolution, an idea primarily discussed
346 in the context of predator-prey/host-parasite interactions, can be transformed into an intimate
347 interaction that occurs between abiotic and biotic beings: “As plant sex spawned new generations
348 of plants, it also made new fire. As plant life mobilised, evolved and radiated, so fire migrated,
349 proliferated and diversified. As plants made the living world more hospitable to flame, so too did
350 wildfire select for species or communities that tolerated, even depended upon, flame.” (Clark and
351 Yusoff 2018, 12). Similarly, photosynthesis transforms from a process of acquiring and
352 processing energy into “celestial fertility” that burns “like a cool green fire” (Clark and Yusoff
353 2018, 11), and spiders move beyond animals that create webs to capture prey and sustain
354 themselves; instead, they make “attachments and detachments; they make cuts and knots; they
355 make a difference; they weave paths and consequences but not determinisms; they are both open
356 knotted in some ways and not others.” (Haraway 2016, 31). On this flattened landscape, we can
357 begin to reconstruct and erect the ecological home, where interactions between human and non-
358 human beings can be seen, felt, and sensed differently. It is then within the ecological home, that
359 we are able to sit at the table with organisms and fully see them. We are able to hold our research
360 organisms to feel their richness and texture. We are able to slowly move around the edges and
361 note characteristics we overlooked before. It’s through this intimate process within the ecological
362 home that ecologists can begin to better understand the myriad social and ecological pressures
363 that impact them.

364 The Queer Concrete Canid

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

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

392 Coyotes have emerged as an exciting potential case of ecosystem sentinels – species that provide
393 information about an ecosystem (Zacharias and Roff 2001) – sentinels in cities. The coyote is
394 set to expand its range across the Americas (Hody and Kays 2018), and their intimacy with
395 (toxic) landscapes will be greater than we will understand. With this range expansion, the images
396 of the coyote will continually collide and be rebuilt to articulate *who* the coyote is both
397 materially and cosmically in modernity, "generating friction and leakage" between these
398 identities (Luciano and Chen 2015, 186). As these conversations of *who* the coyote is continually
399 surface, the coyote is often seen as a *danger*, *out-of-place*, and *not belonging*. For example, in
400 Denver, Colorado, themes of anger, accusation, violence, and crime in response to the coyote are
401 incredibly prevalent (Draheim et al. 2021). Similarly in Los Angeles, California, people have
402 organized a group entitled "Evict Coyotes" who "are not here to discuss both sides. The only
403 side we discuss is how to get our government to do their job and start Evicting Coyotes". This
404 rhetoric around *who* and *what* belongs *where* and use of phrases, such as "they don't belong
405 here" and "we don't want to coexist with them, we want them gone", mirror feelings directed
406 towards marginalized humans who are viewed as an "other".

407 Despite these negative attitudes, coyotes, like many other urban animals, have increased their
408 tolerance of people and human-dominated spaces (e.g., Breck et al. 2019), all while facing
409 detrimental threats such as the rupturing of our climate and environmental violence (e.g., toxic
410 pollution and contamination). The phenotypic plasticity coyotes exhibit is something to marvel
411 over—almost like no matter how far humans bend them, they never break. And yet, this
412 phenotypic bending (i.e., plasticity) done by humans via the construction of a concrete jungle
413 and other large-scale landscape alterations is viewed as negative (e.g., Manzollillo et al. 2019)
414 rather than beautiful. Why is that? Mel Chen asks in *Animacies* "What happens when an animal
415 appears on human landscapes?" and for the urban coyote, dramatic and intense slippage occurs
416 as it is rapidly thrown between the many constructed coyotes that exist in, for example,

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417 NextDoor forums, Twitter threads, dinner table conversations, or local parks. The constructed
418 coyote – an “aggressor” and “villain”– directly alters how the material coyote interacts with the
419 urban landscape with actions such as hazing aiming to reinstate human dominion and control
420 over the urban coyote (Niesner, Kelty, and Robins 2024). The constructed coyote has incredibly
421 tangible and sometimes violent consequences for the urban coyote, who is simply resourceful,
422 plastic, and resilient. This constructed coyote offers the human a “logical reason” to invest in
423 warfare and violence against the urban coyote rather than build a home with the urban coyote
424 (Niesner, Kelty, and Robins 2024). Yet, the coyote does not subscribe to this false image of self,
425 despite the human begging for the coyote to buy into this constructed image to validate the
426 coyote’s ultimate death and removal. The urban coyote moves around the constructed coyote and
427 does not seek to be validated from the world or have a desire to be of this world. The urban
428 coyote recognizes that it does not exist beyond the margins of society and the cities we have
429 come to know, so much so that its existence seems to beget the interrogation and destruction of
430 the constructed heteropatriarchal, white supremacist world that has pushed the urban coyote into
431 these very margins. Within these margins is where the urban coyote absorbs xenophobic and
432 racist rhetoric via the entanglement with society’s constructed *other* who are similarly crushed
433 and caricatured by myriad systems of oppression. It is here the urban coyote becomes Queer and
434 embodies abolition, freedom, and revolution. It is in this space that we can begin to understand
435 that antagonisms towards the coyote are not random, but a direct result of colonialism,
436 heteropatriarchy, and white supremacy.

437 There is tension between cities and coyotes, such that when a coyote emerges in a city, it is a
438 polarizing force that disrupts, ruptures, and shatters all quotidian entities and infrastructure. The
439 coyote’s existence has continued to evolve and become conditional within an ongoing settler
440 project, similar to myself as Black Queer person. This can be further understood as extractivism
441 views and understands both nature (and Blackness) as entities to be controlled and commodified
442 (Anderson and Sumudzi 2018, 33). With this lens, it becomes clear that to be an urban coyote is
443 to be “anti-human” in the same way that to exist as a Black person in the US is to be “anti-state”
444 (Anderson and Sumudzi 2018, 112). The simple existence of the coyote is in direct opposition of
445 urban spaces and human assumptions of where nature “deserves” to be. The very construction of
446 cities is often made to center (socially dominant) humans and their needs – leading to a dense,
447 built landscape created from a love-affair of oppressive systems. For the coyote, capitalism,
448 classism, anti-Black racism, and more materialize to create inequitable and unjust cities that evict
449 slow violence on marginalized communities (Wright 2021). In this toxic urban landscape that
450 was not built for the coyote, it persists as a form of resistance to the many forms of oppression
451 that are consciously overlooked in urban landscapes. The urban coyote experience is not one of
452 thriving, but survival, tenacity, and grit. The coyote’s plasticity bends its destiny to encompass
453 life and a concrete future that prevents the constructed coyote from engulfing the urban coyote
454 until only its ghost is left.

455 The world we’ve come to know is not neutral nor natural phenomenon but constructed through
456 many systems of oppression that affect humans and non-humans alike (Schell et al. 2020;
457 Hubbard and Brooks 2021; Cannon et al 2023; Estien et al. 2024). The urban coyote, along with
458 other wildlife, is swept up in this constructed world where it subjected to harsh social and
459 ecological processes stemming from injustices and oppressive systems (e.g., imperialism,
460 capitalism). Yet, traditional ecology prevents ecologists from engaging with this part of the
461 world when investigating the environmental pressures, both social and ecological, that influence

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462 wildlife. With the reconstructed ecological home, and the lens it produces, we can begin to
463 recognize that the large-scale oppression directed towards marginalized and minoritized humans
464 – including racialized rhetoric, violent actions, environmental degradation, and unjust laws –
465 encompass the urban coyote, ultimately shaping its phenotype and crystalizing it as a Queer
466 being.

467 **Conclusion: Ecology as a Home**

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

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

471 Science as a modern approach has a long history of entanglement with white supremacy,
472 dismissing other forms of knowledge, being, and understanding. Such that when we reduce non-
473 human organisms to solely scientific terms, we are reducing and stripping non-human organisms
474 of their being and preventing a full understanding of said organism. We are inevitably
475 reinforcing a taxonomical hierarchy and colonial human/non-human power schemes, losing the
476 ability to create boundless, intimate relations with our research subjects. What if intimacy and
477 love, such as respect, trust, commitment, and recognition (hooks 2000, 5), was shown to wildlife
478 as a researcher? For instance, what would it mean for ecologists to *commit* to wildlife and
479 *recognize* wildlife as beings with agency? Committing to and recognizing the agency of wildlife
480 would lead to erecting and reinforcing the ecological home, consequently pushing ecologist to
481 shift their disciplinary lens and methodological approaches. The movement into the ecological
482 home allows ecologists to better recognize, for example, the myriad oppressive structures that
483 shape the urban coyote (Cannon et al 2023). More applicably, it is through the trans-species
484 intimacy within the ecological home that we can begin to think how to plan cities and manage
485 urban landscapes that support all life, especially those that have been marginalized.

486 Currently, ecology has found itself in an unintimate landscape that encounters itself as a hurdle.
487 In this piece, I have argued that by Queering ecology, ecologists are able to shift the field such
488 that the core aspects to ecology – understanding the relationship between organisms and their
489 environment – can be better interrogated. Specifically, I have argued that through
490 (re)constructing ecology as a home, we can best identify the vast social-ecological pressures,
491 including systemic racism, charged rhetoric, and constructed perceptions, that shape wildlife
492 ecology. My hope is that by grounding ecology as a dwelling place and working within a home,
493 an intimate atmosphere for a multitude of concepts, bodies, and souls to interact at a never-
494 ending table can be created. This intimate ecological atmosphere calls for the abolition of
495 taxonomic hierarchies because intimacy, and by extension respect, care, and coexistence, cannot
496 exist with dominion. Through ecological homemaking, we can begin to understand the
497 positionality of wildlife in our constructed world, how this varies across organisms based on
498 their social and ecological niches, and how the ecological pressure wildlife are subjected to is a
499 direct consequence of this violent, constructed world.

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