The Coyote in the Cloud

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Coyote Alert

/Coyote alert / Coyote Pack Alert! / Coyote sighting / Coyote Sighting Alert / Coyote spotted 9:34am / Coyote Just Now! / Coyote on 16th street / Coyotes on 14th and Montana / Coyotes! / LARGE COYOTE / Coyote Season / Coyotes at it again / Another day, another coyote. . . /

This is how coyotes move on Nextdoor. At once keyed to specific places and untethered in a ghostly digital space, coyotes circulate in the homely precincts of "the app where you plug into the neighborhoods that matter to you." Nextdoor is a location-based social media application that allows users in specific neighborhoods, defined by the app, to communicate directly with one another. Relations of territory, ownership and domestic belonging are built into the platform; "neighborhoods" are determined by an algorithm, and determine who can speak where and thus who should feel propriety over what spaces.

Nextdoor has become famous for enabling rich white communities to practice constant racial surveillance of their streets.[1] This atmosphere of racist paranoia has led critics to describe Nextdoor's "neighborhoods" as "digital gated communities" and "the app version of the midcentury suburb."[2] The company has tried to discourage such posts, to little avail.[3] Nextdoor users carry the territorial thinking and volunteer surveillance practiced on the app into their relations in physical space, creating an ongoing carceral and surveillance infrastructure.[4]

In Los Angeles, Nextdoor is also a tool for residents to police coyotes. They do this not by directly interacting with the animals in question, but by summoning up what we call *cloud coyotes*. Los Angeles is coyote

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[1] Lambright, "Digital Redlining: The Nextdoor App and the Neighborhood of Make-Believe," *Cultural Critique* 103, no. nil (2019): 84, https://doi.org/10.5749/culturalcritique.103.2019.0084; Will Payne, "Welcome to the Polygon: Contested Digital Neighborhoods and Spatialized Segregation on Nextdoor," *Computational Culture*, no. 6 (2017), http://computationalculture.net/welcome-to-the-polygon-contested-digital-neighborhoods-and-spatialized-segregation-on-nextdoor; Rahim Kurwa, "Building the Digitally Gated Community: The Case of Nextdoor," *Surveillance & Society* 17, no. 1/2 (2019): 111–17, https://doi.org/10.24908/ss.v17i1/2.12927.

[2] Sam Levin, "Racial Profiling via Nextdoor.Com," *Eastbay Express*, October 7, 2016, https://eastbayexpress.com/racial-profiling-via-nextdoorcom-2-1/.

[3] Christian Hetzner, "Social Media's Growth-at-All-Costs Mentality Is Damaging Communities, Says Ceo of Nextdoor," *Fortune*, October 13, 2019, https://fortune.com/2021/10/13/social-media-growth-issues-nextdoor-sarah-friar/.

[4] Lauren Bridges, "Infrastructural Obfuscation: Unpacking the Carceral Logics of the Ring Surveillant Assemblage," *Information, Communication & Society* 24, no. 6 (2021): 830–49, https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118x.2021.1909097; Stefano Bloch, "Aversive Racism and Community-Instigated Policing: The Spatial Politics of Nextdoor," *Environment and Planning c: Politics and Space* nil, no. nil (2021): 239965442110197, https://doi.org/10.1177/23996544211019754; Ruha Benjamin, *Captivating Technology : Race, Carceral Technoscience, and Liberatory Imagination in Everyday Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019).

territory, and anyone who lives in the city can, if attentive and patient, catch a glimpse of one trotting down the street or furtively darting into darkness. But thanks to platforms like nextdoor, it is also now *cloud coyote* territory, where a vividly animated cloud coyote posted by one user can convince hundreds of commiserating neighbors that they too have seen a real coyote, even if they have not. Nonetheless, cloud coyotes are *also* real, and even a casual acquaintance with Nextdoor will demonstrate how often heated debates about coyotes erupt on the platform.

Summoning cloud coyotes has material consequences for real coyotes in the increasingly contentious coyote debates unfolding in LA and other cities like it. Cloud coyotes don't stay on Nextdoor. They trot from camera phone to neighborhood council to city government to other social media platforms, and furbound coyotes can die as a result. Groups with names like #evictcoyotes and "Coyotes out of Downey" bluntly connect the politics of racism and homelessness to nonhuman co-inhabitants. Residents demand action from governments, and threaten to take matters into their own hands. In response, city governments develop "coyote management plans" that encourage humans to change their ways: from managing waste and potential coyote habitat, to "hazing", to creating coyote sighting reporting systems, to programs for the outright trapping and killing of the local coyote population.[5]

Meanwhile, science provides fuel for both sides of the fire, as it reveals more about what urban coyotes do, where they live, and what they eat.[6] Ongoing research reveals population dynamics, home ranges and movements, and the "boldness" or habituation of coyotes in cities.[7] Overall, the song dog navigating cities is a curious, resourceful, somewhat mysterious creature.

Cloud coyotes, by contrast, are mobile, predatory, numerous, and terrifying. They threaten the sanctity of homes and yards, they eat pets with impunity, they even attack children. Though the image they enact is clearly a fantasy, it is nonetheless a fantasy with real consequences. Cloud coyotes are a threat to the way of life of people in Los Angeles, and in that way, they are diagnostic of that way of life: *a 21st century urban settler colonial ecology.*

Los Angeles and Nextdoor, as territories, share a common history as places with a legacy of settler colonialism. Settler colonialism is an ongoing project of securing control in multiple ways (physical, legal, administrative) over territory occupied by non-indigenous residents.[8] Whatever else Los Angeles is—and it is many things—an ongoing practice of settlement is a key component of the way that residents speak and act in this place, online and off, in public and private spheres. Crucially, this project is also *ecological* and we follow Kyle Powys Whyte in viewing settler colonialism not only as a structure of power or a legacy of US history, but a remaking of ecological relations that produces what he calls a "vicious sedimentation".[9]

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[5] Eric G. Strauss, Michele Romolini, and Melinda Weaver, "City of Long Beach Coyote Management Project," Report (Center for Urban Resilience Reports, 2020), https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/cures_reports/4.

[6] Rachel N. Larson et al., "Effects of Urbanization on Resource Use and Individual Specialization in Coyotes (Canis Latrans) in Southern California," *Plos One* 15, no. 2 (2020): e0228881, https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0228881; Rachel N. Larson et al., "Food Habits of Coyotes, Gray Foxes, and Bobcats in a Coastal Southern California Urban Landscape," *Western North American Naturalist* 75, no. 3 (2015): 339–47, http://www.jstor.org/stable/24644675; Scott Sugden et al., "An Altered Microbiome in Urban Coyotes Mediates Relationships between Anthropogenic Diet and Poor Health," *Scientific Reports* 10, no. 1 (2020): 22207, https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-020-78891-1; D. M Bucklin et al., "Are Tnr Practices Contributing to Human-Coyote Conflicts in Southern California?," *Proceedings of the Vertebrate Pest Conference* 29 (2020), Retrieved from https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6873n1fw.

[7] Christopher B. Mowry, Lawrence A. Wilson, and Bridgett M. vonHoldt, "Interface of Human/Wildlife Interactions: An Example of a Bold Coyote (Canis Latrans) in Atlanta, Ga, Usa," *Diversity* 13, no. 8 (2021): 372, https://doi.org/10.3390/d13080372; Stewart W. Breck et al., "The Intrepid Urban Coyote: A Comparison of Bold and Exploratory Behavior in Coyotes from Urban and Rural Environments," *Scientific Reports* 9, no. 1 (2019): 2104, https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-019-38543-5.

[8] Patrick Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology : the Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event* (London New York: Cassell, 1999).

[9] Kyle Whyte, "Settler Colonialism, Ecology, and Environmental Injustice," *Environment and Society* 9, no. 1 (2018): 125–44, https://doi.org/10.3167/ares.2018.090109.

This paper describes how cloud coyotes structure settler relations in contemporary Los Angeles. They do this by performing a threat and justifying a response that includes various attempts at extermination, containment, and assimilation, all of which—even supposedly humane alternatives—further sediment forms of settler colonialism in urban Los Angeles. Based on fieldwork in Los Angeles, and an archive of over 400 conversations collected from Nextdoor (2015-2019) we diagnose this process, show how it works and argue that decolonization–of both Los Angeles and its cloudy territories like Nextdoor, is needed to escape from perpetuating its violence. This paper is a collaboration among three scholars—from literary studies, environmental studies, and anthropology—which aims to combine expertise in coyote ecology, literary analysis, and ethnographic inquiry in the services of theorizing the cloud coyote in a settler colonial place.

We begin by showing the most common patterns of cloud coyote debates on Nextdoor, to explain what a cloud coyote is and can do. We then turn to theories of settler colonial relations with wildlife in the US, the distinctive features of settler colonialism as a mode of governing, and to the history of its approaches to wildlife. Cloud coyotes contribute to this ongoing structure because they participate in a fantasy of "generalized domestication": they create a renewable threat that justifies action, but one that is impossible to overcome.[10] We show how cloud coyotes animate fear and anxiety around ownership and family, specifically with respect to pets and pet keeping in the yards and streets of LA. This fantasy structure is available to residents but it is also available to politicians, and we further demonstrate here how it can be taken up to justify and renew policies of extermination that are thinly veiled expressions of hatred of human as well as coyote others.

There are many political alternatives on offer for dealing with coyotes, and we explore them in the final sections. We show how humane alternatives, as hopeful as they are, repeat the themes of containment and assimilation at the heart of the structure of settler colonialism. We therefore turn at the end of the paper to the question of actually existing attempts at (ecological) decolonization, inside and beyond cities.

Endless Debate

If you click on a Nextdoor coyote post, you can be pretty sure what you're going to get: a debate. Cloud coyotes and their human non-companions perform in patterned, predictable ways in Nextdoor's precisely delimited "neighborhoods." Users animate cloud coyotes, who then faithfully enact an imagined coyoteness: they sneak into yards, they snatch pets off of leashes, they hover on the edge of visibility. And they The basic structure of cloud coyote animation starts when a human does indeed encounter a real coyote: on a street, or in a yard, or sometimes on a surveillance camera. In some grim cases, they encounter only an index of the coyote in the form of a missing or dead cat or dog. But by summoning up this experience in the space of Nextdoor, they and their neighbors then amplify the experience, fill in details, extrapolate, and enable their human handlers to perform a set of scripted responses. Read enough of these arguments, and you start to see the patterns.

Someone announces that they've seen a coyote in the street; in their yard; stalking a pet; guarding a kill.

> just saw a large coyote in somones front yard… i think he is stalking our small pets. [11]

Someone says, well, scare it off, haze it, keep your pet on a leash, put away your trash.

> keep trash, pet food and bird feeders locked up at night, haze or scare coyotes when you hear

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[10]Ghassan Hage, *Is Racism an Environmental Threat* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2017).

[11]Unless otherwise noted, all quotations come from a database of archived conversations available on Nextdoor. They are anonymized here in keeping with the requirements of the Human Subjects protocol that governs this research (IRB #17-000297 and IRB #22-000060).

them, keep animals inside and on a leash and supervised when outside, carry a stick or mace when walking your dog, report coyote sightings, etc.

Someone says, trap it and move it to the mountains.

> While I do not want to exterminate coyotes I believe the city should play a more active role in moving the coyotes back up to the mountains where they belong. AWAY from homes.

Someone says, we should kill them all.

> It is up to humans, who have taken out their natural predators (wolves and mountain lions) to cull the herd. What do you think Animal "Control" does every single day of the week? You know that's a euphemism, right? Why is it okay to kill cats and dogs and not coyotes?

Someone points out that killing them won't work, it's a well-documented fact that when coyotes are targeted for culling or relocation, their numbers in that area actually tend to increase. (Because they do).[12]

> Check out recent studies on breeding/population replacement - the studies indicate that even if you kill the alpha male and female… the so called betas step up their breeding… the overall population increases due to additional coyotes moving into the pack from outside in the absence of those alphas being gone.

Someone says, that's easy for you to say. *You* haven't seen the life go out of your furkid's eyes right in front of you.

> have you lost a pet to one of these Feral Doggies? Have you witnessed your pet being carried away after her spine has been snapped? As she uttered her last bone chilling warrior screech? Followed by her final grunt as she relinquished her power to the jaws that carried her away?

Someone says, they're really just dogs. So someone says:

> They are wild animals. Definitely not untamed domesticated dogs.

Eventually someone says, look, we shouldn't be talking about *removing* coyotes at all: we're the invaders in their habitat. Our development is driving them out of their wild habitats and into our backyards. They're beautiful—someone might say—and when they kill a pet, that's only natural. They were here first; we need to learn to coexist; to scare them off, haze them, keep our pets on leashes, and put away our trash. So someone says:

> Coyotes don't understand the word coexist—that's ridiculous!

Every now and then you'll get someone who tries to step back and observes how weird it is that people post about coyotes on Nextdoor:

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[12]Frederick F. Knowlton, Eric M. Gese, and Michael M. Jaeger, "Coyote Depredation Control: An Interface between Biology and Management," *Journal of Range Management* 52, no. 5 (1999): 398, https://doi.org/10.2307/4003765.

Maybe you guys should start a post that's against coyote sighting posts and type all your grievances there amongst each other.

Over time, the comments start to organize themselves into some basic categories: coexist, kick out, or kill. Even the apparent exceptions—posts telling coyote stories, sharing coyote data, imagining LA through coyote eyes—tend toward one of these three options. Residents debate because they want to know how to govern not only the coyotes, but themselves, their pets, and other people. In many US cities (and in other places with a legacy of settler colonialism) residents often want to take action even as they ask the question "who is responsible?" Nextdoor provides a convenient place to go for all kinds of answers to the question "what should we do?"

Perfect dispensers for the wolf urine I purchased. I place 10 of the dispensers around the perimeter of approximately an acre and no coyotes on camera since. I would recommend using a syringe or eyedropper to fill, though. Very hard to fill from a bottle and not get it on you

What is a cloud coyote?

Cloud coyotes are not coyotes, but both are real. Cloud coyotes are performances; they are not representations but a kind of animated participation, both coyote and not coyote at the same time. A real coyote kicks off a Nextdoor conversation, perhaps by being sighted, but it is a cloud coyote that becomes the actor. Cloud coyotes are not restricted to Nextdoor, but this particular platform—widely used in Los Angeles—is especially tuned to them.

While representing animals with digital tools can encourage certain kinds of relations, like care or commodification, invoking a cloud coyote on social media activates a set of relations that are structured by the platform and its role in the governmental, ecological, and historical relations of a place.[13] For Nextdoor, the defining affect is *ownership*: Nextdoor's neighborhoods are an intimate site for imagining urban space as owned by particular humans and in need of constant, vigilant settlement by them. Cloud coyotes prop up this imaginary precisely by threatening it, but it is a threat that turns out to be *impossible* to overcome, because cloud coyotes (unlike real coyotes) are unstoppable.

[Figure: #evictcoyotes in the Torrance City Council . Photo by Axel Koester]

Cloud coyotes don't stay put in Nextdoor. They designate bipedal settlers as their negative representatives in city politics. Nowhere is this clearer than when those who have lost companion animals, or who have imagined losing companion animals, show up in the real spaces of city councils, wildlife hot-lines, or the streets of their city. People in these spaces often engage in displays of grief and anger over their loss; sometimes these displays look more like therapy than political activism or participation. Grieving for pets lacks both traditions of its own and the legitimacy accorded human death, and thus the political and the personal are performed through cloud coyote talk.[14]

Residents transform that grief into political demands to strengthen practices of settlement and control; as if "closure" must lead ineluctably to "enclosure." Cloud coyotes also serve to crowd out fleshy coyotes from these participatory spaces, in another form of negative representation: through Nextdoor, they become

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[13]Erica von Essen et al., "Wildlife in the Digital Anthropocene: Examining Human-Animal Relations through Surveillance Technologies," *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space* nil, no. nil (2021): 251484862110617, https://doi.org/10.1177/25148486211061704.

[14]David Redmalm, "Pet Grief: When Is Non-Human Life Grievable?," *The Sociological Review* 63, no. 1 (2015): 19–35, https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-954x.12226.

political actors via a process that precisely does not allow real coyotes to participate. Real coyotes—silent and unrepresented—are not animated by settlers, but cloud coyotes are.

There is a temptation to see cloud coyotes—especially for those with real expertise about real, embodied coyotes—as vectors for inaccurate or bad faith information about the behaviors of their fleshy analogues. The focus can quickly shift from the cloud coyote to the misrecognizing human in need of correction, critique, or control.[15] The solution, it would seem, is to provide more accurate information, to counter these beliefs and anxieties with the truth of coyote behavior.

But the zero-one biome of the cloud coyote is not related to the fleshy beast as virtual is to real. Summoning a cloud coyote on Nextdoor is not a way of making claims, true or false, about coyote behavior. Instead, it is a way of activating and reinforcing affects that, in turn, structure inhabitants' relations with land. Cloud coyotes are not misrepresentations; they are performative or imagistic, in Eduardo Kohn's sense. They are, following Kohn's extended, more-than-human account of semiotics, signs in a network that reverberates in lively ways. If they represent anything, it is not a coyote but a human-coyote relation, which in turn draws on and resonates with other human-human relations of various sorts. There is evident pleasure when Nextdoor users animate a cloud coyote, imagining its unstoppable power to stalk and kill, or to hide and survive. Cloud coyotes have "worldly effects" not reducible to their referential relationship to the material human-coyote encounters that set them in motion.[16]

Nextdoor in particular, in its very design facilitates the settler logic by which cloud coyotes operate. It activates a particular conception of free speech structured around territorial sovereignty by settlers. To act and speak on Nextdoor one must have a door—literally. It is impossible to join the platform without providing proof of a fixed address in the "neighborhoods" which determine the shape and relations of who can speak and where. These arbitrary boundaries are built on ideas of settler sovereignty over an intimate *domus* (the homestead with its yard); it cannot accommodate the mobility endemic to cities (living in one neighborhood, working in another, shopping/hunting in a third, etc.) As such, they are doubly designed to police certain kinds of people: migrants, homeless people, criminalized people, and in our case, non-human animals. Their movements shaped by these affordances, cloud coyotes are settler coyotes: animated by imagery and desires for private property and dominion, racial exclusion, and the need for an ever-renewing threat that justifies the protection of these institutions.

#evictcoyotes

Coyote debates refuse to be only about coyotes. Listen long enough, and you'll hear echoes of other violent speech acts characteristic of the 21st century American city. The language of coyote eradication, in particular, moves in striking parallel with anti-homeless, anti-migrant, and anti-Black rhetorics. In Los Angeles, anti-coyote activists often explicitly invoke images of both legal and racial exclusion, including eviction specifically, as in names like "#evictcoyotes" or "Coyotes Out of Downey" (modeled on a previous group that called itself "Gangs Out of Downey"). The language of "kill, kick out, or coexist" moves in parallel with practices of eradication, containment, and assimilation for human and non-human alike.

The language of eviction is particularly salient, especially in a city with a growing population of un-housed

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[15] Carly C Sponarski, Craig Miller, and Jerry J Vaske, "Perceived Risks and Coyote Management in an Urban Setting," *Journal of Urban Ecology* 4, no. 1 (2018): nil, https://doi.org/10.1093/jue/juy025; Michael D. Drake et al., "How Urban Identity, Affect, and Knowledge Predict Perceptions About Coyotes and Their Management," *Anthrozoös* 33, no. 1 (2020): 5–19, https://doi.org/10.1080/08927936.2020.1694302; M. Oleyar Claude, "How Misinformation Fosters Urban Human-Coyote Conflicts," *Proceedings of the Vertebrate Pest Conference* 24, no. nil (2010): nil, https://doi.org/10.5070/v424110685.

[16] Eduardo Kohn, *How forests think : toward an anthropology beyond the human* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 34.

people and a long history of race and class-based exclusion from housing. Ananya Roy, for instance, has recently theorized eviction as "racial banishment",[17] a legal mechanism for policing a racialized category of personhood that depends on the right to claim property. That a comparable logic of banishment operates on Black people, unhoused people, and coyotes suggests that the spatial questions around which coyotes debates are organized—Are coyotes "moving into" the city? Do they belong here? Can we kick them out to where they do "belong?"—are part of a broader project of defining and defending an exclusionary conception of the human.

In cases of the eviction politics of racial banishment, institutions of state and city power (banks, courts, police, or housing authorities) identify particular peoples as in need of assimilation or as a threat to be controlled or evicted. Seen from this perspective, *coyote* politics would seem to be an issue of similar state and city power: in the US context, this includes the National Park Service, the United States Department of Agriculture, state Departments of Fish and Wildlife, or local Animal Services departments, the agencies responsible for the lives, death, and movement of wild animals.

While these government agencies are important, in the case of cloud coyotes residents play a much more central role, one best understood through the frame of settler colonialism. Settler colonialism describes a historically specific ongoing project of removing indigenous people from the land and replacing them with settlers endowed with new legal and juridical forms of exclusionary ownership.[18] It is, in Wolfe's formulation, better understood as a structure, not an event. As such "its history does not stop" with the end of explicit frontier violence. Instead, its logic "transmutes into different modalities, discourses, and institutional formations as it undergirds the historical development... of settler society".[19]

Under settler colonialism, the choices and decisions about how to govern a place are delegated to individual settlers, backed by, but not directly executed by, the settler state.[20] The forms of this delegated power are violent, bureaucratic, economic, and, vitally, ecological: to settle is to transform the landscape in vital ways that sustain settlers and displace relations/arrangements already in place. Settling includes bringing in forms of property, enclosure, and fencing as much as it does new ways of cultivating land, raising livestock, planting things settlers like to eat, and all the forms of management necessary to maintain these new ecological relations.

The Potawatomi philosopher Kyle Whyte describes the settler colonial project as a "vicious sedimentation" of one ecology over another:

> by seeking to establish their own homelands, settler populations are working to create their own ecologies out of the ecologies of Indigenous peoples, which often requires that settlers bring in additional materials and living beings (e.g. plants, animals) from abroad.[21]

Coyotes are—and were—part of that ecology, and their status, their behavior, even their evolution is therefore, both part and legacy of the ongoing settler colonial project.[22] The consequences are not only eco-

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[17] Ananya Roy, "Dis/Possessive Collectivism: Property and Personhood at City's End," *Geoforum* 80, no. nil (2017): A1–A11, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2016.12.012.

[18] Whyte, "Settler Colonialism, Ecology, and Environmental Injustice"; Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology : the Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event.*

[19] Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology : the Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event*, 402.

[20] Lorenzo Veracini, "'settler Colonialism': Career of a Concept," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 41, no. 2 (2013): 313–33, https://doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2013.768099; Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology : the Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event.*

[21] Whyte, "Settler Colonialism, Ecology, and Environmental Injustice."

[22] J.M. Bacon, "Settler Colonialism as Eco-Social Structure and the Production of Colonial Ecological Violence," *Environmental Sociology* 5, no. 1 (2018): 59–69, https://doi.org/10.1080/23251042.2018.1474725; Christopher J. Schell et al., "The Evolutionary Consequences of Human–Wildlife Conflict in Cities," *Evolutionary Applications* 14, no. 1 (2021): 178–97, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/eva.13131.

logical: alongside the deaths of real coyotes, vicious sedimentation "damages settlers' inclinations for consensual decision-making with Indigenous peoples"—which makes recognizing colonization and imagining decolonization of these relations extremely difficult.[23]

While urban ecologists and biologists talk of coyote "habitat", often discussing the ways coyotes adapt and move between "natural" or "rural" environments and urban or built environments, such naturalizing language misunderstands the way that ecological remaking is part and parcel of the historical and biological transformations wrought by settler colonialism. More than just a "natural" or "unnatural" habitat, urban or rural, coyotes inhabit a landscape held in place by ongoing practices of settlement which not only displace the coyote but also specific kinds of people—native inhabitants, un-housed people, illegal migrants, and others—for specific political purposes. The very taxonomy of "native" and "invasive" species are inextricably bound up with settler states.[24]

Cloud coyotes are new entrants into this project. They are part of this structure through which settler forms of governance are enacted by residents, with the help of social media platforms and the forms of organizing and response they enable. The ecological governance intrinsic to the settler project might not require centralized state action if residents desire for a safe domestic space, clear property boundaries, and a sense of ownership could take its place. Where that fails, and where residents demand action, the state is expected to step in, even if particular state agents—like wildlife biologists, or police officers—neither want to nor see the wisdom in it. In one sense, urban coyotes unsettle this project by refusing to comply with settler's attempts to transform the ecology; but it is cloud coyotes who really pose the threat—they are the coyotes who overflow, persist, will not stay put, and which in turn creates the desire to strengthen and police the boundaries and relations in question.

The cloud coyote thrives because there is a ready-made fantasy of viability and threat that underwrites the ongoing practices of settler colonialism, one that Ghassan Hage describes as "generalized domestication".[25] Generalized domestication is a structure of desire, an affective correlative of concrete processes of domination and extraction: "a mode of inhabiting the world through dominating it for the purpose of making it yield value ()." It is the fantasy that the world can be made "homely" and one's existence "viable" through escalating acts of "aggression and domination."

Crucial to the project of settlement is that settler subjects *desire* to remake land for their own use. It is the inexhaustible threat of the cloud coyote which drives this desire out of the virtual biome and into the yards, neighborhoods, council hearings, and landscapes of the city. The fact that domestication is about the intimate sphere is related to the work of settlers as agents of the state in re-making ecology: the *domus* (the house and its yards or fields) is the site of ecological (as well as political and family) practices of domination. A real coyote might come and go in this space, creating a periodic upheaval. Cloud coyotes, however, *never go away*. They cannot be contained, nor can they be assimilated. As such, the demand for extermination can constantly renew itself. In the next section we demonstrate some of the ways that cloud coyotes exemplify the desire at the heart of generalized domestication, and sustain ongoing practices of settler colonialism.

Pets are the new livestock

For much of the 20th Century, settlers, with the help of the United States government, waged war against the coyote and other North American predators like wolves, bears and mountain lions. Total extirpation

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[23]Whyte, "Settler Colonialism, Ecology, and Environmental Injustice," 139.

[24]Jessica R. Cattelino, "Loving the Native: Invasive Species and the Cultural Politics of Flourishing.," in *The Routledge Companion to the Environmental Humanities*, ed. Ursula K. Heise, Jon Christensen, and Michelle Niemann (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 145–53.

[25]Hage, *Is Racism an Environmental Threat.*

was the aim. States paid bounties to private citizens who could prove their kills, the cost of which at one point made up two-thirds of the total Montana state budget. It was common practice for federal employees throughout the West to "pre-bait" the ground with fat cubes and meat and then to shoot a horse in a selected spot, lace its carcass with poisonous strychnine tablets, and wait.[26] One of the US government's prominent predator hunters reported the possibility of killing up to 350 coyotes in less than ten days by these methods. Exceedingly efficient killing of large carnivores and other pesky vermin animals is one of the most striking signatures of settler colonialism in the US.[27]

Though wolves were essentially eliminated from the lower forty-eight states by mid-century, the coyote escaped extinction. To this day coyotes are expanding across the continent. Historically ranging in the plains and deserts of the North American West and Southwest, today the coyote can be found as far north as the boreal forests of Alaska and as far south as the Costa Rican jungle.[28]

They are also increasingly found in major American cities. The same behavioral plasticity that equipped them to survive a federally mandated extermination has allowed the coyote to flourish in the most unlikely of human-disturbed landscapes, including some of the densest concrete and asphalt urban centers in the world, like Los Angeles or Chicago. Coyotes' ability to flourish in these conditions raises the question of how extreme their adaptation to urban space has been. It is now a serious research question: how different is the urban coyote from its rural or wilderness ancestors?[29]

One thing has clearly changed: whereas in the rural American West of the past, protecting ranchers' livestock provided the main impetus for killing coyotes, today it is private urban and suburban homeowners and their beloved cats and dogs who are on the front lines of settler colonialism. The non-companion coyote threatens the companion animal, even as it has found a companionable place in the city where co-existence increasingly finds support right next to demands for extermination.[30]

This transition—from livestock to pets—is not simply a material replacement of one valuable creature for another; it comes with new fantasies, desires, and anxieties as well. Whereas earlier settlers may have mourned the violent attack on a valuable animal, and demanded the extermination of a predator, pets activate different values and anxieties. These values appear in a striking and surprisingly common word-image that circulates in Nextdoor coyote posts:

> As I was walking with my mother I noticed a deceased cat or body parts of a black & white cat [on a street corner]. Most likely done by the coyotes in the area. Not my cat. In case someone was missing their beloved cat.

> We see far fewer squirrels in my neighborhood and have found cat parts in our yard. Twice. Fact. Ask the boy [on a nearby street] what he thought about hearing a cat being killed then went outside to check and saw it.

> Hyperbole to you, until you have lost pets, or find pet body parts on your lawn.

Such images mark the passage of the cloud coyote. The pet's dismembered body, oftentimes a cat, laid on the front lawn, as if on display. The horrific simplicity of this picture—the flat, homogenous background of

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[26] Dan Flores, *Coyote America : a Natural and Supernatural History* (New York: Basic Books, a member of the Perseus Books Group, 2016).

[27] Even though eradication is no longer a goal, the US Department of Agriculture's Wildlife Services still killed 512,710 coyotes between 2006 and 2011, see Flores, *Coyote America : a Natural and Supernatural History*, 173.

[28] James W. Hody and Roland Kays, "Mapping the Expansion of Coyotes (Canis Latrans) across North and Central America," *Zookeys* 759, no. nil (2018): 81–97, https://doi.org/10.3897/zookeys.759.15149.

[29] Breck et al., "The Intrepid Urban Coyote: A Comparison of Bold and Exploratory Behavior in Coyotes from Urban and Rural Environments"; Anthony Adducci et al., "Urban Coyotes Are Genetically Distinct from Coyotes in Natural Habitats," *Journal of Urban Ecology* 6, no. 1 (2020): nil, https://doi.org/10.1093/jue/juaa010.

[30] Arlene Plevin, "How Wild Do We Want It? 'Wiley' Coyote versus Fluffy," *Society & Animals* 22, no. 1 (2014): 80–101, https://doi.org/10.1163/15685306-12341320.

the grass, simultaneously a surface and a screen onto which to project a fantasy, and a pet once recognizable as whole, now in parts—gives this image its wide-ranging currency and emotional impact. As if operating by the logic of nightmare, and carrying the supposed facticity of the picture—even though it is almost never an actual photograph, which would be too much—this image courses through the imaginary of the Nextdoor community, eliciting nervousness and sympathy in equal measure.

There is no doubt that the main emotional and affective vector of settler politics around coyotes is the family pet, the companion animal.[31] "Furbabies" and "furkids", inducted into the space of the family, collapse the distinction between human and pet, standing as the perfect victim for imagined attacks and thus demanding the extermination or banishment of the coyote. As with the necessary vigilance of the rancher or farmer, this relation encourages a kind of "nervous" reading of the landscape, an affective quality long noted as characterizing the settler colonial atmosphere,[32] shifted here from the rural frontier to the urban domains of house, yard and neighborhood.

The threat that the cloud coyote poses to the furbaby is a complex one, not simply a question of safe streets, but a complex intertwining of fear, grief, and a dangerous ethical orientation towards pets which demands from them an unconditional love that compensates for damaged relations with other humans by treating pets as children, furbabies. Donna Haraway, who otherwise defends a rich relating with companion animals, argues: "these beliefs are not only based on mistakes, if not lies, but also they are in themselves abusive—to dogs and to humans (33)" and later warns that, "to regard a dog as a furry child, even metaphorically, demeans dogs and children—and sets up children to be bitten and dogs to be killed.[33]

The confusion of pet and child puts both in danger. Actual, physical danger, as Haraway makes clear, and constant, imagined danger too. Selective animal kinship locks family, ownership, and animals in discursive relation, family as threatened, predator as threat, assertions of ownership as both an attempt to protect some animals and an attempt to exclude others.

As with the early twentieth century response to the coyote threat, it is the settlers themselves who constitute the first line of defense against this ever renewed threat. Some of the approaches remain the same, at a smaller scale and with different definitions of value. The settler rancher's loss of livestock to a coyote could be valued in terms of the loss of income, or even more directly, food on the table. For the suburban pet-owner, the backyard must be revalued—and re-enclosed—in order to meet the threat anew.

Post after post mentions back-yards and the painful idea of being unable to extract value from it just the way individuals desire–including individual dogs and cats, who are increasingly recruited into settler relations as *owners* via a kind of insistent pet primogeniture:

> Dogs and cats should be able to be in their own fenced backyard to go to the bathroom and play… Wild coyotes roaming for food do not belong in the city.

> It is obvious that you've never had a loving dog or cat, a member of your family attacked in their own home, a place where one should be able to feel safe and secure from predators and yet it's happening every day. Coyotes are jumping into people's backyards and attacking poor pets!

> Domestic pets should not have to be locked during the day so wild coyotes have free use of our streets.

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[31]Marc Shell, "The Family Pet," *Representations* 15, no. nil (1986): 121–53, https://doi.org/10.2307/2928394; Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto : Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003).

[32]Denis Byrne, "Nervous Landscapes: Race and Space in Australia," in *Making Settler Colonial Space*, Making Settler Colonial Space (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2010), 103–28, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230277946_8; Tiffany King, *The Black Shoals : Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies* (Durham North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2019).

[33]Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto : Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*, 37.

However, following the structure of the impossible desire, the fence is both necessary and inadequate at the same time:

> I have had a coyote in my backyard twice now. It went through an open gate the first time, but the second time, it jumped a six foot fence

> Three coyotes jump six foot wall and enter backyard. What is important, they show no fear of multiple motion sensor lights or the home owner yelling at them. They also went up to the upper level patio as well.

Coyote rollers (a device designed to prevent coyotes from jumping fences) are frequently mentioned, as are motion-sensor lights, sprinklers or alarms. The fortress mentality of gated LA, described by Mike Davis and Eric Avila pushes in two directions in these posts: on the one hand it fantasizes about a city without coyotes (or certain human others), but it also emphasizes the seemingly unstoppable capacity of the coyote to penetrate the fortress-yard, to renew the necessity of fortifying the legal and material structures of settlement.[34]

Settler control of the city is not confined to the backyard. Ownership is not just a question of property boundaries, but of propriety more generally. Take, for instance, the leash. The power of the leash is to produce a kind of roving human-animal, family-property assemblage that privatizes public space as it navigates through the city. Normally, the leash, like the fence, is a technology of protection. Heated debates on Nextdoor center around whether an animal that a coyote killed was on a leash or not, often framing the pet owner as the responsible party.

But as with the fence, the power of the leash also brings a vulnerability that Nextdoor coyote watchers frequently lament:

> I have seen them on [a nearby street] now and then and a pet was attacked a few years ago at [a nearby intersection] while on a leash.

> As far as leaving your pet alone or not it makes no difference, coyotes will snatch your dog right off its leash as you are walking them down the street because the coyotes are not afraid of us or anything since we do not pose a threat to them so pets on a leash is a easy opportunity for a easy meal.

The leash is a frequent point of contention on Nextdoor, a site for the moralization of pet ownership: maybe you weren't paying enough attention to your pet. One self-proclaimed "coyote co-existence coach" says she recommends dispensing with extension leashes because, at the outer limits of the leash, sometimes fifteen or twenty feet from the owner, too much anxious attention is required to ensure the pets' safety.

Unless, of course, the anxiety is the point. What is at stake for most Nextdoor discussants is not the actual behavior of real coyotes, but the constant animation of cloud coyotes. This is the structure of social media discussion: one user experiences is grief over a lost pet, or tells of a scary experience of encountering a coyote and all-too-quickly re-attaching, and dozens or hundreds more add amplify and animate the cloud coyote, they add fear and concern, they debate what to do, the make idle demands and they propose real interventions (Altrudi and Kelty 2022).

Real coyotes are subjects of diverse forms of human governance, whose effects are not well understood. But cloud coyotes are *ungovernable* and therefore a constantly renewable threat. The ungovernable cloud

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[34]Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight : Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Mike Davis, *Ecology of Fear : Los Angeles and the Imagination of Disaster* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998).

coyote who leaps six-foot fences and snatches dogs from leashes is capable of a constant incursion into would-be-homely space. [35] As Hage explains, no single event can create an "ungovernable" entity. Classifying something as ungovernable is

> paradoxical in that it indicates on one hand an inability of governmental forces to relate to it and yet also implies a historically acquired familiarity: it denotes a relation paradoxically marked by a certain intimate lack of relationality, a relating to something through a recognition of the permanent inability to relate to it.[36]

Real urban coyotes have very few relations with humans, and even fewer humans cultivate sustained relations with urban coyotes. Anybody who uses Nextdoor, however, will have relations with cloud coyotes, and the attention-grabbing behavior of *these* coyotes is pretty much guaranteed to be a nuisance, even as the behavior of real neighborhood coyotes remains mostly a mystery. Cloud coyotes, then, are saturated with the paradox that Hage locates in the ungovernable: "a relating to something through the recognition of the permanent inability to relate to it."

The cloud coyote is a vicious, unstoppable predator with no remorse and an insatiable appetite, a kind of serial killer that targets furbabies and possibly even human children, dismembers them and arrays their body parts on the lawn as evidence of its evil. The yard and the leash extend modes of settler space-making up to the point where they are threatened, and must be asserted again and again. Pet owners therefore insist repeatedly on the right for their furbabies to poop unattended in their yards or to have *free rein* from the leash; they insist on the infinite but incomplete extensibility of human-pet-property relations. In the settler imagination, city space must be made safe for such relations.

Paradoxically however, many residents of Los Angeles also appear to be reluctant or recalcitrant or even *bad* settlers: they decry the problem of an *absent state* that would take care of the problem for them. They demand action, though from whom is never clear (sometimes Animal Services, sometimes the police, sometimes just "the city"). This paradox is built in because settler colonialism and the myth of individual resourcefulness requires *small* government that stays out of the lives of individuals. Such a paradox, in Trumpian America, is ripe for exploitation.

Make our Lawns Great Again

In a polarized media landscape, charged images—like dead cat parts on a lawn—are powerful tools for organizing. So if, in the wake of your loss of a beloved pet, you turned to Facebook, you'd find a political landscape waiting for you to choose sides: You could join pro-coyote groups like "Coyote Clan" and "Protect Our Coyotes" or, because you are angry and afraid, you could join anti-Coyote groups "Coyote Hunting" and "Evict Coyotes." Whereas Nextdoor coyote posts are about disagreement and to some extent, about information-sharing, Facebook groups bring like-minded people together for a purpose:

> This group is for people wanting to bring down the coyote population to much safer levels. We 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 group is meant for individuals that want to see the coyote population culled. If arguments arise from opposing views, you may be removed from the group. The group is meant for like-minded people wanting to find solutions to the coyote issue. We do NOT support Co-Existence, period. (from "Evict Coyotes Torrance.")

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[35]It is worth noting that some actual coyote governance experts and employees of agencies responsible for wildlife, are not immune to participating in cloud coyote animation, because all too often it can serve their own mission of drawing attention to a problem they are charged with solving.

[36]Hage, *Is Racism an Environmental Threat*, 75–76.

In another group, from another city:

> This group is for people wanting to bring down the coyote population to much safer levels. … No coyote huggers are allowed. You can have respect for them. But going around causing problems or saying they were here first wont be tolerated. It will get you kicked out and blocked. (From "Evict Coyotes West Covina, Walnut and surrounding cities")

and another, from yet another city:

> This group is for people wanting to bring down the coyote population to much safer levels. … #EvictCoyotes #WearRed (from "Evict Coyotes Downey California.")

The striking similarity of these descriptions might convince you that there is some kind of grassroots movement taking shape. And to some extent that's right—clearly, these groups speak to, and likely amplify, a shared fear of coyotes. Their goal is to convince local governments to adopt "trap-and-kill" programs to reduce coyote populations. Supporters have turned out at city council meetings, wearing red "#evictcoyotes" shirts and demanding action. They convinced one city to adopt a program to cull coyotes for 5 months out of the year.[37]

But these groups can also be traced entirely to a single person: Torrance City Councilman Aurelio Mattucci. In 2016, Mattucci sensed "the pain in people's hearts" and made a Facebook page called "A Coyote Killed My Pet in Torrance" despite having never seen a coyote himself. Afterwards, Mattucci says, he saw coyotes everywhere. The Facebook page became a popular community gathering space for "coyote criers"—people who feel intensely that the presence of coyotes in their neighborhoods is a problem. Mattucci used the momentum to run for Torrance City Council on a strong anti-coyote platform.

In our interview with Mattucci [9/19/2019], conducted at his real estate company's office, he admitted the likelihood of a coyote attacking a human was slim to none and that there are small adjustments people can make to keep their pets safe.[38] But this is not his public message:

> As cute as these animals are, we must remember that they are ruthless and vicious killers and would have no issue attacking a young child right in front of an adult. (Facebook group post …).

And for Mattucci, the question of what is at stake is also clear:

> Enough is Enough.
> We want our backyards back. ("Evict Coyotes" Facebook group, August 10 2020.)

Although Mattucci used coyotes to build support, they are just one part of his platform. He's fighting, in his words, for "A Cleaner and Safer Torrance." As a politician his platform is pure American conservativism. He calls Black Lives Matter a "terrorist organization." He calls homelessness "a Cancer" and says it's "spreading," language decorated unconvincingly with a rhetoric of concern: "as for the homeless,

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[37]Nick Green, "Torrance City Council, at Behest of Residents, to Begin Trapping Coyotes," *The Daily Breeze*, September 11, 2019, https://www.dailybreeze.com/2019/09/11/torrance-city-council-at-behest-of-residents-to-begin-trapping-coyotes/.

[38]There were 367 attacks between 1970 and 2015; of which 3 were fatal. By contrast, an estimated 4.5 million people are bitten by dogs every year. Rex O. Baker and Robert M. Timm, "Coyote Attacks on Humans, 1970-2015: Implications for Reducing the Risks," *Human–Wildlife Interactions* 11, no. 2 (2017), https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.26077/jy37-s271. https://www.avma.org/resources-tools/pet-owners/dog-bite-prevention

may they be given viable options, because we care and our streets shall no longer be their permanent residence." "Cleaning up" Torrance is a cipher for strong police who keep the borders impermeable, and homeless people, immigrants, Black Americans, and also, coyotes, out of the American yard.

Mattucci exploits settler desire: he invokes the cloud coyotes as a threat to ownership and control over the city. So although settlers are deputized to remake the land, and to assert ownership over it, this work also comes with fear and anxiety. Coyotes *do not belong* in these non-wild places, and the possibility that they might enter them engenders fear and surprise. Mattucci recognizes this threat and offers, as an agent of the state, to take care of it. He offers to step in, as a kind of delegated apex predator:

> Hey, I'm not going to argue whether they're here first or not. Well, now humans are here. Okay. And we deserve and want a safe place to live and coyotes aren't making it safe.

Mattucci recognizes the implicit demand of residents to do something about the coyote problem, and offers to be a kind of backstop to their settlement. The cloud coyote is absolutely central to this offer, because it must appear to be impossible to even consider some form of co-existence with coyotes in the city. One Nextdoor poster makes this clear:

> How do you propose we 'coexist' with wild, dangerous predators? Lock up our family pets & young children 24/7? We're not talking about an animal that only comes out at night anymore; that stays out of our backyards so that we can use our backyards for our own enjoyment safely with our children and pets; and an animal young children can safely pass on the street during the 'day.' Coyotes are out to kill, hunting for food day and night. Coyotes don't understand the word coexist – that's ridiculous!

The potential capitulation to the impossibility of living with coyotes – the "ridiculous" proposition, here made all the more palpable by the incessant activity of the cloud coyote—underwrites the capacity of the state to engage in killing on behalf of the settlers. Torrance's city council has exploited this fact not simply by acknowledging the fear, but by killing real coyotes.[39]

Mattucci's success in Torrance requires demonstrating that the state can do something; and though everyone involved—including biologists, wildlife experts, representatives of state and federal agencies, and even private trappers—agree that killing coyotes will achieve little to nothing, real coyotes were nonetheless killed to prove that the cloud coyote threat is legitimate, and that the state will back up the activities of settlers.

A kinder, gentler settler colonialism

Extermination fantasies, like those seen in the City of Torrance, exemplify Hage's notion of ungovernability: cloud coyotes draw down violence on real coyotes. But the LA political landscape does offer alternatives. Many agencies and coyote groups have turned to coyote management strategies premised on "coexisting" with coyotes.

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[39]Nick Green, "Torrance to Assess Costs and Benefits of Year-Round Coyote Trapping," *Daily Breeze*, May 5, 2021, https://www.dailybreeze.com/2021/05/05/torrance-to-assess-costs-and-benefits-of-year-round-coyote-trapping/; Michael Hixon, "Rancho Palos Verdes Approves Hiring of Professional Coyote Trapper," *The Beach Reporter*, September 9, 2021, https://www.dailybreeze.com/2021/09/09/rancho-palos-verdes-approves-hiring-of-professional-coyote-trapper/; Green, "Torrance City Council, at Behest of Residents, to Begin Trapping Coyotes."

Despite the name, Coyotes Out of Downey is one representative of this newer and more humane approach. The organization, an outgrowth of an earnest community-facing City Hall, educates residents about what to do to avoid getting into conflicts with coyotes in the first place: secure trash at night, encourage residents to keep their pets on a leash; keep cats inside. Coyotes Out of Downey turns municipal attention toward coyotes not in the form of violent interventions, but by funneling residents' anxieties into a version of community policing, a Wildlife Watch analogue of Neighborhood Watch.[40]

The ambition of these more human approaches is much broader than protecting cats from the occasional predatory coyote. These plans reorganize urban ecologies, beginning with human-coyote relations, in order to produce coyotes whose use of space no longer overlaps with that of homely human property. Making such coyotes requires not just behavioral interventions on coyotes, but careful management of human behavior, too; because the two are intertwined. As the representative of Coyotes out of Downey put it:

> They're actually really fearful of humans… they're very observant animals. And so when they see humans and all they're doing is taking a photo or videotaping it… all you've taught to that coyote is, 'Oh, that person isn't scary at all. They just took a photo.' And so I think little by little, their inherent fear of us is changing because they're not constantly getting hazed or scared. And so they're like, 'Oh, it's not so bad here. And there's food out here. So why not?'

Coyotes Out of Downey is, roughly speaking, on the side of coyote coexistence, but a more distant kind of coexistence, one premised on the possibility that, if people could discipline themselves, coyotes would no longer be a problem. By working with residents to change their behavior and undo the problematic coyote association of humans with food, this kind of "coyote" management hopes to retrain coyotes to keep their distance from equally well-trained humans. It's coyote management in a biopolitical mode: through self-discipline and self-governance, humans can in turn discipline and govern coyotes.

Coyotes Out of Downey is part of a larger shift. Coyote managers increasingly recognize extermination policy as a failure; the City of Los Angeles stopped killing coyotes in 2004.. Coyote expert Eric Strauss (LMU) puts it bluntly: " Lethal management of wildlife as a first recourse is part of an outdated paradigm".[41]

Instead, municipalities across LA County have started creating "Coyote Management Plans" —or more often, simply cutting and pasting these plans from one city government website to another. In place of killing, these plans offer a range of practices in line with the mutual disciplining advocated by Coyotes Out of Downey. Increasingly, therefore, it is human behavior that is the focus of wildlife managers' work: cleaning up trash, reshaping urban habitat to be less coyote friendly, and above all, *hazing* as a central, though unproven, practice. The idea is that residents should actively threaten or scare coyotes, using a variety of techniques like yelling, waving or throwing things, in ways that do not harm coyotes but, somehow, convince them not to return.

None of these non-lethal plans and techniques, however, address the central question of where the coyote should be. Once hazed, where exactly should newly-distant and afraid coyotes go? Out of the city entirely? To different neighborhoods? Or should they remain nearby, but out of sight? Coyote Management Plans don't say. If the idea is to discipline coyotes away from human habitat, then the implication is that there is a non-human outside to the city where coyotes can 'return' to 'natural,' non-urban ways of life.

Such approaches still work according to the same logics of containment and assimilation, enforced by the settler desire for generalized domestication and backed by the threat of eradication. Containment means keeping coyotes out: create reserves, build fences and walls, innovate "coyote rollers" or wolf urine spray

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[40]Wildlife Watch, which actually exists in California, is run by the California Department of Fish and Wildife: https://wildlife.ca.gov/Wildlife-Watch

[41]https://curesblog.lmu.edu/coyotes-we-cant-kill-our-way-to-conservation/

bottles; create roving, space-owning human-animal pairs that haze coyotes; encourage coyotes to hunt elsewhere by securing food, cleaning up clutter etc. Assimilation means knowing coyotes better: studying and learning about their movements and behaviors, collaring and tracking them in order to learn more, creating coyote-sighting apps to know when and where they pose a threat, hazing them. Assimilation, like surveillance, works on a logic of strategic intervention: rather than indiscriminate killing, killing happens, so the argument goes, only when absolutely necessary because one can more precisely predict the risk.

Invasion is a structure, not an event. Coyote Management Plans, hazing, and non-lethal management of coyotes thus emerge not as alternatives to settler colonial domination but as disciplines within it. This is a kinder, gentler settlement—one that demands changes, perhaps quite small, in both individual and collective behavior. But the settlers are not leaving.

The decolonial coyote

> I don't know or care if they were here first; we're here now and any threat to us and ours should be met with as much force as it takes to eliminate it. This is how humans have survived and prospered for tens of thousands of years I see no reason to stop now. We are the Big Dog, we should act like it.

> They adapt quickly, breed quicker and have no predator enemies… except man. We need to stop abdicating our position at the top of the food chain. They need to be shot.

These are the words of Nextdoor posters who would exterminate the coyotes, justified by a quasi-biological species imaginary that sees humans as apex predators. The "we" here is not Americans or settlers or white people, but "we, the species" who have ascended based on the law of might makes right.
However, coyote co-existers make use of a very similar "we":

> They have a natural predator and something that has been "invading" their own homeland!!!
> It's called "human beings"!!!

> Humans are the most invasive species on this planet. We make kudzu look like microgreens.

Here, too, *we* humans are a "natural predator" consuming the planet under the sway of biological law. And so the irony is that both sides end up saying the same thing: killing other creatures is just what humans do. Predators predate; humans destroy, whether you hate it, or kind of like it.

> I guess it could be said us humans are the apex. I kind of like it.

The symmetry of Nextdoor's apex "we" illustrates how grand species narratives serve to assuage settler anxieties. If the destruction of lives, land and relations is not colonial, but human, then *we* cannot be held responsible. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang show how the idea that "We are all colonized" serves as a "settler move to innocence," a way of relieving "settler of feelings of guilt or responsibility without giving up land or power or privilege"[42] The idea that we are all *colonizers* can do the same emotional work. Mattucci offers his followers precisely this move to innocence:

> I don't subscribe to the idea that they were here first so we need to somehow play by their rules. We humans need a safe environment of our own and technically, no matter where we go, we are somewhere where something else was there before us.

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[42]Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," *Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 10.

Technically, says Mattucci, "we humans" are all settlers—thus absolving actual settlers of their complicity in actually existing settlement. A necessary step toward breaking out of the settler imagination that suffuses the coyotes in the cloud is to recognize it as such.

Nonlethal management techniques like the mutual training of humans and coyotes to keep their distance, and proposals to relocate predators to "wild" spaces conceived as theirs, recapitulate settler desires. At their best, these approaches might move beyond domestication by pushing toward *inclusion* as a horizon for coyote belonging, or toward a conception of coyotes as sharing in an expanded, multispecies "right to the city".

However, inclusion is not decolonization. Politics of inclusion are, according to indigenous political thinkers Jodi Byrd and Glen Coulthard, politics of assimilation—it is always inclusion on the terms of the rights-based models of the settler state, often framed in spatial terms (reservations, property owning, even "rights to the city") that criminalize mobility or refusal to settle.[43]

As Tuck and Yang insist, "decolonization is not a metaphor." They warn against (and the three white settler-descended authors of this paper take seriously) the risk of "Dressing up in the language of decolonization" as "a form of enclosure, dangerous in how it domesticates decolonization".[44] We learn from them and other scholars of sovereignty that decolonizing only means one thing: to return sovereignty over land to the Indigenous people from whom it was stolen.

Metaphors, however, much like cloud coyotes, are never mere. Cloud coyotes illustrate how metaphors and images can serve colonial, and therefore hopefully decolonial, ends. To imagine decolonial practice in and around the urban lives of coyotes requires careful thinking about both what we do, and how we represent or animate coyotes. To return sovereignty here is not only a question of land and territory, but of ceding the domains of knowledge about coyotes to other ways of knowing and relating to them.

Federal, state and city wildlife management constitute one such site of sovereign relations. To undo it would require these agencies, and their various networks— wildlife experts, the animal services employees, the agricultural and vector control agencies, and the university departments of ecology, biology, evolutionary theory—to recognize the reality of ongoing settlement, and to begin to change it.

Serious decolonizing experiments can and do exist. One model is that reported upon by Neale, Carter, Neslon and Bourke in "Walking Together".[45] Here the experiment concerns returning sovereignty over (the knowledge and the practice of) fire management and cultural burning to the Dja Dja Warrung in Victoria, Australia. Legitimate, official, and quotidian, this experiment concerns the day to day acceptance of Dja Dja Warrung relations to forest, fire, and cultural burning as a central part of provincial fire management. It is hard work: everyday decolonization includes everything from managing media portrayals to creating a welcoming bureaucratic environment (e.g. including aboriginal flags or objects inside the office alongside or instead of settler signs and symbols).

There are examples in California, too. A well attested case is that of the Karuk and Yurok tribes in Northern California, who are increasingly involved in both fisheries and fire management, and who are finding new ways to work alongside settlers in the forests and rivers of Northern California.[46] The political will to

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[43]Jodi Byrd, *The Transit of Empire : Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011); Glen Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks : Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

[44]Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," 3.

[45]Timothy Neale et al., "Walking Together: A Decolonising Experiment in Bushfire Management on Dja Dja Wurrung Country," *Cultural Geographies* 26, no. 3 (2019): 341–59, https://doi.org/10.1177/1474474018821419.

[46]Frank K. Lake and Amy Cardinal Christianson, "Indigenous Fire Stewardship," in *Encyclopedia of Wildfires and Wildland-Urban Interface (Wui) Fires*, Encyclopedia of Wildfires and Wildland-Urban Interface (Wui) Fires (Springer International Publishing, 2019), 1–9, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-51727-8_225-1; Frank K. Lake et al., "Returning Fire to the Land: Celebrating Traditional Knowledge and Fire," *Journal of Forestry* 115, no. 5 (2017): 343–53, https://doi.org/10.5849/jof.2016-043r2.

protect and amplify such efforts is sparse, but available. Such experiments find tribal members thinking creatively and differently about how they might make new relations with science and science-based ways of knowing ecologies, rather than assenting to a colonial distinction between scientific and traditional forms or modes of knowing.

Both of the above examples involve non-urban ecologies however—forest management, water management, and other non-urban collaborations are hopeful but only partial ways of imagining what urban wildlife relations might look like in the future. Cities, as Libby Porter and Oren Yiftachel point out, are often imagined as places of near-total Indigenous absence, and urbanization can function as a particularly viciously sedimented form of settlement.[47] But Indigenous people live in cities as anywhere else, and Indigenous tribes advocate for authority over urban land and policy everywhere. Moreover, Porter and Yiftachel suggest that the city, because of its "inherent openness" and contingency, might constitute not the endpoint but the "'Achilles' Heel'" of the settler-colonial project," where the "incompleteness" of settler world-building is most visible.[48]

Additionally, the question of reforming social media itself is unavoidable here. The explosive proliferation of cloud coyotes is not simply a question of generalized domestication as it has always taken place, but also of the insertion of new modes of animating affects, manipulating humans, and enabling forms of power that serve the continued projects of settlement.

Conclusion

We have explored how the cloud coyote—a creature birthed and animated on social media platforms like Nextdoor—reveals the ongoing structure of settler colonialism and the fantasies of generalized domestication that underwrite ongoing practices of containment and assimilation in US cities. Such cloud coyotes are not confined to Nextdoor, but the platform does give them a particularly (un)welcoming habitat in which to thrive. In previous eras, remarkably similar stories of ungovernable coyotes as threats to the Los Angeles way of life circulated regularly in the pages of the *Los Angeles Times* and other newspapers and television programs.

The ability of cloud coyotes to renew themselves is not just a question of representation or ideology or narrative. It is an expression of a logic of governance in settler societies, whereby threats to the settler ability to remake landscapes according to ideals of domestic dominance, ownership, and control constantly renew themselves in order to justify the need to respond to them. And where settlers fail to do so themselves, savvy political operators are all too happy to step in and exploit the fantasy.

But this logic is both incomplete and fractured. Real urban coyotes might not always be as visible as cloud coyotes, but wherever they go, they dwell at the always-incomplete edge of settlement. Through practices of attention and imagination, coyotes might guide settlers briefly outside the assumptions of ownership that otherwise structure their relationship to land.

The Gabrieleno-Tongva thinker Cindi Moar Alvitre finds in coyote movement and what it creates something she calls "coyote space," an alternative mapping of the city: "coyote space is about making visible what others cannot, or choose not to see. Arbitrary political boundaries become meaningless." Whereas the cloud coyote crosses such boundaries to inspire fear at the revelation of settlement's porous boundaries, for Alvitre, coyote movement across these same boundaries inspires joy at the knowledge of a resistant outside to the settler city. Alvitre suggests that the practice of moving with or like coyotes can reveal the

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[47]Libby Porter and Oren Yiftachel, "Urbanizing Settler-Colonial Studies: Introduction to the Special Issue," *Settler Colonial Studies* 9, no. 2 (2017): 177–86, https://doi.org/10.1080/2201473x.2017.1409394; Whyte, "Settler Colonialism, Ecology, and Environmental Injustice."

[48]Porter and Yiftachel, "Urbanizing Settler-Colonial Studies: Introduction to the Special Issue," 180.

city as a place of Indigenous survivance. We don't claim that settler city dwellers can see the city in the same way; but we do advocate for other experiments in seeing and doing otherwise alongside coyotes.[49]

Here are some examples we have encountered in Los Angeles of heterodox human-coyote relations, some of which likely run afoul of official management best practices: Unhoused people feeding coyotes as they pick recyclable material out of neighborhood trash cans. Groundskeepers at a local cemetery sustaining life giving relations with coyotes who participate in mourning rituals over many coyote-generations. A parks manager who sometimes looks for what they call "not coyotes" so as to protect their whereabouts from private coyote trappers. Private coyote trappers who release the coyotes they trap even though they are legally required to kill them. A concerned resident who commits daily to following close—but not too close—behind a pack of coyotes living in an urban park, to prevent parkgoers from harassing or feeding them.

Perhaps cities could more consciously nurture the "urban ecological commons" that emerges when animals like coyotes make use of infrastructural spaces to move around,[50] by reimagining the city's inhuman spaces as pro-coyote. Perhaps there is an analogous way of relating across temporalities: giving time over to coyotes, as some cities are starting to give nights back to migrating birds by turning off lights to avoid collisions. Perhaps a kind of trickster-relating could make space through a practice of mutual wariness without violence or the hope of mastery. Again, such experiments would not constitute decolonizing acts except to the extent that they return sovereignty over land and relations to Indigenous people. But if they prepare settlers to think of urban space as something other than *theirs*, they could be a meaningful step.

Notes

References

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[49]Cindi Alvitre, "Coyote Tours," *Latitudes: An Angelino Atlas*, 2015.

[50]Chase A. Niesner et al., "Wildlife Affordances of Urban Infrastructure: A Framework to Understand Human-Wildlife Space Use," *Frontiers in Conservation Science* 2, no. nil (2021): nil, https://doi.org/10.3389/fcosc.2021.774137.