

The Feral at Home

*The Rogue Trajectory and
Unexpected Relations
of a “Feral Pig”*

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Abstract: A feral pig in Australia is an introduced pig who lives beyond the constraints of human husbandry or expresses wild physiological traits. These animals are typically characterized as alien, overwhelmingly destructive, and toxic. The only acceptable relation is to kill them. I met Pig-pig during a series of interviews — she was a wild-caught pig living on the property of Scott, a pig hunter. Primarily drawn from conversations with Scott, this paper is an account of Pig-pig that explores a feral pig trajectory that partially existed outside of dominant discourses and practices. Writing about Pig-pig and Scott helps expand our understanding of feral pigs (and hunters) — including who they are and who they can be with. It also requires being attuned to a more-than-human agency that exceeds apprehension and determination, to a degree. First, I analyse how this individual animal eludes common categories and ways of enacting feral pigs. Next, I explore the unexpected and compelling relations she developed and consider how her place in an unauthorized multispecies home enabled her to become Pig-pig. Finally, I ask how Pig-pig was still alive and what it reveals about the limits of Scott's power and the obligations he had towards other claims on Pig-pig, by human and nonhuman alike. The paper concludes with Pig-pig being killed, demonstrating the limits of alternate trajectories of pig becoming in a world geared towards their death.

Keywords: *Feral; pig; Australia; ethics; hunting; more-than-human; multispecies home*

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In 2019, “Scott” was in his late fifties. He was (and still is) a big guy, heavily bearded, with a gravelly voice. There was a softness beneath his hard presentation that I was drawn to when I met him. One late afternoon, we sat in a patch of eucalypts on his half acre property. The leaves offered some protection from the oppressively dry wind and sun during this third and final year of a devastating drought. Scott remained seated in his white ute—an open flatbed utility truck that was the vehicle of choice in rural Australia, especially among pig hunters. I was perched below the driver’s side door, sitting on a broken and dusty red plastic milk crate, engaged in a conversation that meandered over the joys of hunting, the history of pig hunting in the area, and how to cure pork. Suddenly, Scott’s train of thought broke and he enthusiastically directed my attention to something happening behind me. I turned to see Pig-pig, about twenty metres away, strolling through the trees and across the dusty ground, towards a pile of odd materials: discarded groundsheet, barrels, an old cage, a bathtub. Pig-pig had dark, long hair and a lengthy pointed snout, morphological features not common among domestic-raised pigs, but traits akin to the wild boar of Asia and Europe. These are traits that also emerge when domesticated pigs have been living wild for a few generations.¹ Pig-pig looked like a feral pig, part of a free-living population of millions of individuals inhabiting large parts of Eastern and Northern Australia, across diverse ecological niches.² “You should... have a photo of what it’s going to do here” Scott said encouragingly. “It’ll go and get in the bathtub.” I was impressed to watch Pig-pig casually saunter her way among the trees. Impressed not only because it was the first time I was going to see a pig take a bath but mostly because I did not expect an animal who looks like Pig-pig to be here.

Domesticated British breeds of pig were introduced to Australia with European settlers as livestock. Whether by escaping or by being set

1 Tisdell, *Wild Pigs*.

2 The most reliable assessment of feral pig population in Australia was conducted by Jim Hone in 2020, putting the population at 2.5–4 million. However, the actual number is likely higher, particularly in successive years of high rainfall between 2020 and 2023: Hone, “How Many Feral Pigs in Australia”.



Fig. 1

Pig-pig's free-living porcine kin are generally leaner and more muscular. These smartphone photographs are slightly blurry, the reason for which will be made clear later in the article.

Photographs by the author.

free, generations of these pigs began living in colonies beyond the constraints of human husbandry.³ Wild pigs have been visible in the landscape since the late nineteenth century, serving as a pest for farmers and as an economic opportunity for hunters. Yet since the 1980s this population has been branded as “feral” and categorized as an out-of-place, invasive species that are overwhelmingly destructive, toxic,⁴ and so “killable”.⁵ Feral pigs are troublesome animals: there is a wide range of empirical literature demonstrating how they damage species compositions of native ecosystems and negatively impact farming economies.⁶ Scientific research and public discourse are deeply biased towards casting these animals as overwhelmingly negative and possessing no positive value.⁷ The demonization of so-called feral and invasive species is hegemonic and strategic to rallying public support for their culling. The animals’ death is justified as protecting farming economies and vulnerable native ecologies.⁸ In the state of New South Wales (NSW) where I conducted fieldwork, there are strong regulations on how feral pigs are to be engaged: property owners are obliged to destroy them if found on their land and it is illegal to both transport and keep a live feral pig for private or commercial use. Their vast numbers and abject status are also reasons why wild pigs are the most hunted game animal in Australia. The only accepted form of relationship with a free-living pig in the country is to kill them. Yet here was Pig-pig, alive and well, taking baths on the property of a pig hunter and surviving in a nation invested in her death.

Free-living pigs in public and natural scientific discourse are dominantly represented at the level of population and species, thus enabling essentializations and sweeping negative generalizations.

3 Cushing, “‘Cunning, Intractable, Destructive Animals’”.

4 Gentle, Wilson, and Cuskelly, “Feral Pig Management”; Keil, “Unmaking the Feral”.

5 Haraway, *When Species Meet*, especially ch. 3.

6 For an excellent summary of literature see: Hone, *Applied Population and Community Ecology*.

7 Keil, “Unmaking the Feral”.

8 Understanding the feral animal as negative and out-of-place is also a deeply felt part of settler national identity performed through exclusionary biopolitics: Franklin, *Animal Nation*.

Alternatively, research on invasive species in animal studies and environmental humanities has inquired into historically shifting and ambivalent attitudes towards such animals, thus complicating contemporary hegemonic positions.⁹ Yet even in these studies, other-than-human organisms are figured at broad scales of time, space, population and kinds, with little focus on an animal's lived particularities in a specific context.¹⁰ Conversely, this paper is not about "feral pigs" or the culture of keeping pet pigs among pig hunters; rather, I give attention to one account of an individual making a place among a peculiar collective of humans and nonhumans. Rendering these idiosyncratic interactions can also help foreground relations and ways-of-being that challenge accepted narratives and expose readers to what is possible.¹¹

Pig-pig was brought to Scott's property as a piglet by his son, Jamie, after a hunt where her mother was killed. Bringing this individual home facilitated a trajectory of "feral pig" becoming that is neither permitted nor desirable within the practices and discourses of invasive species management and biosecurity. In this domestic space, Pig-pig has developed surprising habits and relations of value, surprising because they exist outside of the normative expectations and characterization of her kind. Human-animal and multispecies scholars have been encouraging researchers to tell complex stories about organisms considered abject.¹² Further, there is a need to cultivate a sensitivity to possibilities excluded in certain human-animal practices, so "[adding] to the realities" of the beings studied.¹³ As a researcher of human and wild pig relations in Australia, addressing these exclusions and exploring alternative ideas about who "feral pigs" can be and be with, I am "taking responsibility for how things congeal as they are" in scientific and public discourse.¹⁴ Writing about Pig-pig is not an ethical intervention into her life, but

9 Franklin, *Animal Nation*; Riley, "Cats in Australia"; O'Gorman and van Dooren, "The Promises of Pests".

10 Swart, "But Where's the Bloody Horse?"

11 Govindrajana, *Animal Intimacies*.

12 Tsing et al., *Arts of Living*; Fleischmann, "More-than-human Political Geographies".

13 Lonkila, "Care-full Research Ethics"; see also Hollin et al., "(Dis)entangling Barad".

14 Lonkila, "Care-full Research Ethics", 489.

it contributes to knowledges about the lives of her kind¹⁵ and helps balance dominant and narrow positions regarding their existence in Australia. It is an attempt towards building fairer representation and performing a “small justice”¹⁶ that might mediate people’s perception of these remarkable if problematic beings.

Pig-pig was not a focused subject of my research and my reciprocating encounters with her were fleeting. She was a repeated topic throughout three long conversations I had with Scott and his family about hunting. Sometimes she physically inserted herself into the conversation by scavenging and rootling around where we spoke. A few times she interacted directly with me. Scott was my interlocutor and mediator for the nonhuman in this context, and this paper’s story of Pig-pig is also about understanding what she meant to him. Scott identified as a “pig-dogger”, a member of a large hunting community in Australia¹⁷ often unfairly stereotyped as being irresponsible and composed of people who “presumably do fit the description of ‘redneck, barbaric, and bogan’.”¹⁸ In the human–animal studies literature, there is ongoing debate about how to conceptualize hunters’ relationship to animals: whether as an ambivalent relation that objectifies and also respects animals,¹⁹ or one that is fundamentally an expression of domination and entitlement over the life and death of nonhumans.²⁰ Scott had killed thousands of wild pigs: pig hunting was a lifelong passion and practice in service of his appetites, economic needs, and recreational interests. Admittedly, he was also not very fond of Pig-pig as an individual, as he once exclaimed in an over-exaggerated fashion — “I hate it!” However, Scott’s words cannot be taken at face value, and his position towards and power over Pig-pig was ambiguous. Her place on his

15 Haraway, *When Species Meet*.

16 Ihar, “Multispecies Mediations”.

17 Demographic studies are non-existent, but it is a dominantly male community with possibly 100,00 practitioners across Australia.

18 Adams, “‘Redneck, Barbaric’”, 50; Note: while a term that can be used in a self-deprecatory way, “bogan” can have a derogatory and classist meaning and often used to identify persons who supposedly express aesthetic tastes deemed unrefined or uncultured.

19 Howell, “Hunting and Animal Human History”.

20 Kalof and Fitzgerald, “Reading the Trophy”; Kopnina, “Beyond Multispecies Ethnography”.

property questions assumptions about hunters' singular perspective on the animals they hunt, and resists framing his relationship of power in absolute terms. Sympathetically writing for free-living pigs and pig hunters simultaneously might seem contradictory. However, from ethnographic experience, I find that the hunting community can offer a more nuanced appreciation of the wild pigs they kill compared to other stakeholders. Pig-pig's and Scott's story is not meant as an example of an innocent and harmonious interspecies relation. Rather, it represents a different example of how to live with and kill feral pigs in Australia — one that is arguably more open to these animals compared to dominant discourse and practice.

I avoid identifying Pig-pig as a “feral” animal. First, feral invokes the divisive binary order of domestic/wild and so constructs free-living pigs in Australia as aberrations; yet an appreciation of Pig-pig requires respecting the talent of pigs to move fluidly between domestic and wild states.²¹ Second, the normative use of the terms feral and “invasive” in Australia can characterize a pig's presence as wholly negative and destructive. This forecloses the other relational potentials of these animals as will be explored in this paper.²² And third, branding an animal as feral is often held to reinforce the human claim on nonhuman animal bodies and lives:²³ ferals are posed as risky, out-of-place, “human-created mistakes”²⁴ who must be rectified through killing. However, such a characterization does not fully align with my analysis of Scott's interaction with Pig-pig, where within the imbalanced power dynamic of the multispecies home they both inhabit, there are some limits on his ability to lay claim to and dictate her life and death. In addition, Scott's property is also a set of relations where Pig-pig was *not* necessarily out-of-place.

Conscious of how Pig-pig exists in ways that escape how feral pigs are typically apprehended, this paper is attuned to Pig-pig as a non-human agency that partially exceeds determination — a being who

21 Govindrajan, *Animal Intimacies*; Arregui, “Reversible Pigs”; Keil, “Unmaking the Feral”.

22 Ogden, “Beaver Diaspora”.

23 Rowan and Timmins, “Politics of Naming”; Hill et al., “Uncivilized Behaviours”.

24 Lu, “World's Feral Pigs”.

is always *more-than-human*. More-than-human, in this case, invokes a flipside notion of ferality where feral animals are not objects of anthropocentrism, but rather reveal its limits. A feral pig, for instance, thwarts or eludes imposed categories and orders, is frustratingly beyond control,²⁵ and exposes the presumed power to manage a free-living population as deeply limited.²⁶ It is this notion of ferality that has informed the concept's revaluation by multispecies, feminist, and environmental humanities scholars in recent years. Ferality can be positioned as: transgressive and liberating for the subject;²⁷ possessing a liminal quality, living both within and without categorical orders;²⁸ or an effect afforded by anthropogenic world-making, yet working in unexpected ways beyond humanity's sphere of control.²⁹ Through these ideas, ferality can refer to the ways and degrees in which life eludes concept and comprehension and undoes those intentions, plans and efforts which seek to grasp or shape the world in a certain way.³⁰ While I do not claim to represent Pig-pig's "voice," her more-than-human agency and difference are present in this paper in the feral ways in which she is revealed as partially indeterminable. Especially, in how through her relations she disrupts cultural expectations and concepts, compels others, and creates unintended obligations on Scott. To begin, I will look at how Pig-pig confounded my own ideas on how to make sense of a feral-looking pig.

Not Feral Game

In Australia, accounts of free-living pigs are primarily produced by either the recreational hunting community, or by farming and associated government agencies. As a researcher, I mostly encountered wild pigs through ethnographic research on pig-dogging, the kind of hunting practised by Scott. This popular mode of hunting

25 Wilson, Wilson, and Robin "Ought Ecology of Ferals".

26 Pigs are too elusive and too rooted in place—targeted suppression is the compromise in Australia, instead of total eradication: Commonwealth of Australia, "Threat Abatement Plan".

27 Montford and Taylor, "Guest Editorial: Feral Theory".

28 Rutherford, "Anthropocene's Animal?"

29 Tsing et al., *Feral Atlas*.

30 Halberstam, *Wild Things*.

choreographs a highly provocative encounter where pigs are located, chased, and caught by canines. Such an interaction enforces a limited degree of freedom for the pig—in other words, pigs can only fight or take flight. Killing the pig involves the hunter physically grappling with them in an intimate and risky encounter and then stabbing the pig in the heart, resulting in a quick death. Through the hunt, pigs are largely experienced as cunning and elusive creatures, skilled at avoiding and escaping the hunters. If caught, they are found to be aggressively defensive and dangerous. Both reactions are desired and central to the experience of the hunt.³¹

By NSW law, a feral pig in Australia is any pig who is free-living or one that expresses “wild” physical traits.³² Scientific and public discourse about free-living pigs often revolves around them being diseased, destructive to livelihoods, and ecologically invasive.³³ Through my fieldwork with farmers and government pest control officers, I have observed multiple examples of extensive feeding on crops, and listened to the frustrations of state biosecurity officers attempting to control pig populations. Furthermore, this species is a generalist omnivore able to adapt to many environments, and in the agricultural landscapes of NSW pigs will maintain a high reproductive capacity, with large litter sizes more than once a year in good seasons.³⁴ These qualities feed into a popular characterization of feral pigs as wildly proliferating pests who mindlessly eat anything. In extreme cases, particularly when mapping pigs through population numbers, pigs can be portrayed as bare life and a disease to remove from the national body.³⁵

Free-living pigs are *enacted* in certain ways. Enactment is a performative logic, where who an animal is and what they can do is a reality

31 Keil, “Rank Atmospheres”.

32 Riley, “Brighton v. Will”.

33 Hone, *Applied Population and Community Ecology*.

34 Analysis of their presence in scientific articles and media is often abstracted to maps and population levels, and representative numbers are exaggerated either referencing their total possible population (with unreliably large margins of error) or breeding potential. Such figures invoke an overwhelming potential. They are killed at a distance and *en masse*, through poison and helicopters in the hundreds and thousands.

35 Hudson, “The Political Animal”; Collins, “Feral Pigs”.

done in relation to a particular set of discursive and material practices.³⁶ The “feral pig” and the “hunted pig,” for example, are not solely semiotic constructions—they are realities also informed by the ways the nonhuman agent interacts with pest control and hunting techniques.³⁷ Importantly, the pig’s identities and capacities are not pre-given and can only be understood as effects emerging within the human relations in which they are embroiled. Consequently, enactments are non-exhaustive of a species’ potential.³⁸

This also means that the performance of a certain reality will inevitably exclude possible alternatives.³⁹ Animals have a “slippery” existence and inhabit worlds outside of the material-semiotic practices through which people attempt to apprehend them.⁴⁰ In Australia there are potentially other articulations of porcine existence that are not revealed through the dominant practices of culling and hunting. For example, invasive species discourse often enacts pigs as a population number and as purely destructive and so excludes consideration and analysis of their potential relations of value to humans or ecosystems, as well as failing to sympathize with their subjective, individual lives.⁴¹ And hunting is an interaction that does not create opportunities for other modes of relation beyond a predator-prey dynamic. Neither form of engagement is particularly receptive to unexpected relational possibilities and events—“the space of what is not yet and may or may not ever be” or what Donna Haraway has referred to as *the open*.⁴² Nonhumans in interspecies entanglements will always be more-than human’s ability to apprehend them materially and conceptually.

While attending to what is excluded in realities is often framed as an ethical responsibility of the researcher,⁴³ sometimes realities and

36 Law and Lien, “Slippery”.

37 See also Geiger and Hovorka, “Animal Performativity”.

38 Law and Lien, “Slippery”.

39 Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*.

40 Law and Lien, “Slippery”.

41 Celermajer and Wallach, “Illegible Animal”.

42 Haraway, *When Species Meet*, ch. 8.

43 Lonkila, “Care-full Research Ethics”; Hollin et al., “(Dis)entangling Barad”.

questions are pressed upon the researcher outside of their control. When I saw Pig-pig crossing the property to take a bath I was bewildered. Not only was she alive, but she was unchallenged and neither anxious nor aggressive in my presence. Being so habituated to encountering pigs as a destructive animal or elusive hunted game, I was unsure how to engage a feral-looking pig who freely and comfortably inhabited domestic space near people. Over the course of my research, even after meeting several more feral-looking pigs living as pets with hunters, I am still compelled to ask about the individuals. They seemingly embody an out-of-placeness, both in their “unhomeliness” in context of the national body,⁴⁴ and in how they make their home with people who regularly hunt their kind (although this sense of being out-of-place would likely have been less impressive prior to the 1980s, when keeping and moving wild-caught pigs was still legal in the state).⁴⁵

Encouraged by Scott, and eager to get a photo of this unusual and unique habit of Pig-pig taking a bath, I pulled out my budget smartphone from my pocket. The camera’s limited range demanded I get in close to take a shot. Having noticed me, instead of proceeding into the water, she directed her attention and began walking in my direction. “She’s not going to do it!” I announced, laughing. As Pig-pig approached I greeted her cordially, as if she were a dog, “Hello there! Hello!” However, I quickly learned that I was ignorant of her intentions towards me, notably as Scott began to shout from his ute and with increasing urgency: “Pig-pig, wake up to yourself! Pig-pig!! PISS OFF!!!” He was waving his cane wildly out the 4WD window. I laughed nervously, foolishly, taking faltering steps backward (hence the blurry photos), desperately trying to mask my anxiety as it dawned on me that she was not coming up to say hello. Scott’s brother later informed me that Pig-pig had a habit of biting people. I created enough distance between Pig-pig and myself, and she halted her march forward. She eyed me cautiously, uttering low porcine grunts while I returned to the red crate somewhat embarrassed and defeated. Five minutes later, when

44 Gressier, “Going Feral”.

45 Further, this unhomeliness would have been even less pronounced in Northern Territory where a blind eye is turned to catching and keeping free-living pigs as livestock.

I went to my car to fetch a drink, Pig-pig again approached me with similar intent, sizing me up, following and watching me from a few metres away. I had the presence of mind in that instant to address her directly this time, “I see you! Don’t even think about it!” Pig-pig left me alone after that and did not uncomfortably bother me for the rest of the afternoon and evening as I spoke with Scott and his family. She paced back and forth under the eucalyptus trees while keeping in our proximity, perhaps seeking out scraps of food. At one point, she entered a tense standoff with a hunting dog a passing friend brought over, who supposedly just wanted a “little nibble on her ear,” as the dog’s owner said jokingly.

Human–animal studies researchers deliberate over the possibility of misrepresenting animals. Such problems can be quickly corrected when meeting an animal in the flesh. Pig-pig had the opportunity to express her own power by being able to assert herself physically and disrupt my representative account.⁴⁶ That is, Pig-pig’s agency was not made known through a positively apprehended presence—such as her precise meaning as expressed through her feelings or intentions—but manifested in the ways my own ideas and expectations were destabilized. As I bumbled my way out of her reach, I was subject to her rather than the other way round.⁴⁷ Critical analysis of human–animal relations through enactment or the related concept of agential cuts often emphasize how it is anthropocentric practice and agency that primarily determines what is included and what is excluded.⁴⁸ Yet in this case, it was Pig-pig that worked against my expectations and demanded that I engage her differently. In fact, it was only during our second encounter, when I both recognized her distrustful and disgruntled response to my presence, that she seemed satisfied of the appropriate respect I offered and left me alone. Her (potentially) violent response in our first encounter was appropriate to my own violent misrecognition of her irreducible individual self.⁴⁹

46 See Buller, “Animal Geographies I”.

47 On being subject to the other-than-human, see Plumwood, “Being Prey”.

48 Hollin et al., “(Dis) entangling Barad”; Lonkila, “Care-full Research Ethics”.

49 See Derrida, *Animal*, 9.

Pig-pig was reminding me that she was more than I supposed. She adopted a position in relation to me that I was initially unable to interpret. In fact, scrambling to make sense of Pig-pig, I mistook her for something akin to a house dog, and assumed her quiet interest was one of curiosity if not friendliness. Even now, upon reflection, her intention to bite me remains an ambiguous gesture — pigs will use their mouths to explore, feel, and test the world, not simply to defend or attack.⁵⁰ My limited ability to respond to and communicate with her properly was connected to both a misplaced familiarity and the lack of ready-to-hand conceptual resources through which to interpret her actions and her place on the property.⁵¹ Her presence disrupted the set of categories I haphazardly assigned to her.

A Home to Become Pig-pig

Scott and his brother grew up around free-living pigs. He spent at least forty years of his life hunting pigs for recreation, to sell to wild game processing companies, and to consume (wild pork formed a main part of his diet). Scott learned pigging from his father, who used to trap, keep, and then sell the live pigs at stockyards — a practice made illegal in the 1980s. Their grandparents were itinerant shearers and farmhands, who in their spare time caught wild pigs with their dogs for some “poor man’s pork”.⁵² Scott inherits a history of entanglements with free-living pigs now banned by biosecurity legislation or discouraged by food and health authorities — consuming wild pig is rare, as it is popularly considered diseased or disgusting.⁵³ While Scott was incapacitated at the time of our meetings and unable to hunt, Jamie hunted and brought home pigs to eat. Unlike many recreational pig hunters in NSW, Scott professed the value of not killing wastefully.⁵⁴ Additionally, he did not speak disparagingly of pigs as “villains” as often done in pest or invasive species discourse.⁵⁵ Scott

50 Studnitz, Pederson, and Jensen, “Why Do Pigs Root?”

51 See also Willerslev, “Spirits”, on the temporary breakdown of expectations.

52 Garvey, *Dinkum Little Aussies*.

53 Australians, including most hunters, rarely eat feral pigs. See Gentle et al., “Feral Pig Management”; Gressier, “Going Feral”.

54 The bodies of most recreationally hunted pigs are left as carrion.

55 Chua and Schreer, “Introduction”.

and his brother often admiringly expressed that pigs are courageous and smart. To co-opt the famous quote by John Berger about farmers and livestock, hunters can hold pigs both in high regard and love to hunt them: “[w]hat is significant, and is so difficult for the urban stranger to understand, is that the two statements are connected by an *and* not by a *but*.”⁵⁶ Outside the practice of hunting, hunters can hold themselves open to different ways of being with pigs beyond the chase. For Scott, it was not unusual to have a wild-caught pig as a pet: he and his broader family have kept multiple pigs of this kind at their places over the years. Hunters might bring home these animals to train the hunting dog, or as future food for the dinner table, or as pets for the family — although such relational categories can be uncertain and fluid, as pets might eventually become a meal, or training objects become much-loved pets. Hunting interlocutors familiar with keeping wild caught pigs will claim they make great domestic companions, just as smart and lively as dogs.

Pig-pig was neither the feral animal of government discourse, nor the elusive and aggressive game of hunter (nor a dog!). Scott’s concept of and position towards her was ambiguous. One evening, I accompanied Scott’s brother on an unsuccessful pig hunt. It was early December, and there was some question about whether a pig might be caught in time for Christmas. Talking about the upcoming holiday, Scott claimed that if there was no luck catching one, then he would serve up Pig-pig if he had to. Expressed with the masculine bravado characteristic of male Australian pig hunters, and clarifying his practical position towards Pig-pig, Scott asserted, “I don’t give a fuck, and I will kill and eat that pig.” However, he immediately retracted this statement, adding that he would not do so because he did not want to upset his son. Apparently, Jamie was quite fond of Pig-pig. “He can do anything with that [pig],” Scott testified, offering evidence of how close their relationship is: “Pig loves him. If he laid down [on the ground], the pig will lay down [with him].” Despite Scott’s lack of regard for Pig-pig, he also recognized her to be a valued pet, a relation demonstrated through the resonant affection

56 Berger, “Why Look at Animals?”, 7.

between the animal and his son.

As much as Scott asserted that Pig-pig was nothing more than an irritation and a potential meal, she certainly was an individual that afforded him an entertaining topic of conversation with strangers like myself. At one point, Scott invited me to observe where Pig-pig slept. Within the patch of eucalypts on his property was a chicken coop. One half of it was enclosed by corrugated iron and wood slats, the other half was constructed from fencing wire. Under the shaded portion was Pig-pig lying on her side, her large, black, hairy frame surrounded by four or five chickens sleeping beside, under, and on top of her. As she drew deep breaths in the heat, I pressed my face into the wire for a closer look. Pig-pig offered no sign of acknowledgement apart from a single—and possibly irritated—grunt. Scott proclaimed proudly how Pig-pig was better than any guard dog. And that any fox or stranger who dared to enter the property to steal one of the chickens, would be in for the “surprise of their life.” When I asked why Pig-pig slept with the chickens, Scott replied: “Oh, she’s been adopted as family, I suppose.”

Writing of her interlocutors in Uttarakhand, India, and how they use genealogical terms to explain their relationship with nonhuman others, Radhika Govindrajan states that “kin making is a multispecies affair.”⁵⁷ If Pig-pig had run with her sounder, she would have lived in a matriarchal pig society of interrelated family groups of females and their offspring, ranging, foraging, procreating, parenting, loving, fleeing, and fighting together. Yet, through hunting, she was unmade⁵⁸—violently disentangled by Jamie from the rich biological, social and ecological worlds she had been born into. Now, instead, she lived intimately with a brood of hens.⁵⁹ Yet this so-called “feral pig”, much maligned for being a habitat destroying animal who mindlessly feeds on all manner of things—from roots to bird eggs, live lambs to carcasses—had convivially joined with these feathered

57 Govindrajan, *Animal Intimacies*, 6.

58 Baynes-Rock, *Crocodile Undone*.

59 I also wonder about her position on the pecking order, and whether she plays a role in incubating eggs.

others: feeding together on insects and worms beneath the eucalypts in the afternoon, intimately sharing sleeping arrangements, and developing protective ties.⁶⁰

Living on Scott's property also required Pig-pig to negotiate with the hunting dogs who sometimes also roamed freely about the place. Despite their reputation as violent animals, I generally find "pig-dogs" to be calm individuals, a trait appreciated by those who keep them around young families. These canines are selected for their intense drive and enthusiasm to chase target animals, and their expertise at holding wild pigs with barks or their teeth. Yet Pig-pig and the pig-dogs, were surprisingly nonplussed in each other's company. They were so relaxed, Scott assured me, that sometimes Pig-pig would wander over to where the dogs liked to lay near the house and share their spot on the cool, shaded concrete. While I accept the chickens saw Pig-pig like family, it is hard to say how the dogs saw her. Listening to hunters who keep wild-caught pigs at home, one described the relationship as a mediated tolerance, where the dog respects the human's command not to harass the pigs. Another supposed that his dogs were smart enough to know the contextual difference between a pig to be hunted and a pig to share a home with. One individual I met was brought back as a piglet for the hunting puppies to practice on (the piglet likely to die at some point); but, within a few days, both puppy and piglet unexpectedly befriended each other: "Porky" was now two years old, and a cherished subject doted on by her human family. In Pig-pig's case, her relationship with dogs seemed more one of caution and tolerance, as demonstrated when the dogs occasionally became grumpy with her getting too intimate and warned her off with a growl.

If Scott expressed little regard for Pig-pig beyond being an object (and he always referred to her as an "it"), his stories about her inevitably drew admiring attention to her talent at soliciting kinship, friendship, and begrudging acceptance from others. Pig-pig was not merely

60 In a private communication, Laura Kuen, an anthropologist conducting multispecies ethnography on smallholders in the Carpathian Mountains of Ukraine, informed me how a pig kept by an interlocutor regularly killed the chickens also kept on the property. Pig and chicken kinning is not a given!

what Jamie Lorimer calls “corporeally charismatic”,⁶¹ a material and affective encounter framed at the interspecies level; rather at an interpersonal level she was related to as a curiously compelling individual, a nonhuman person with a vibrant and strong personality as expressed through her idiosyncratic arrangements with others. While interspecies charisma is often framed through human relations with nonhumans, it seemed to me that her charm also worked on other nonhumans in this shared space, such as chickens who accommodated for her sleeping in their pen. And, while Scott might not have admitted it, he also was taken with and amused by her.

Scott is aware that keeping a feral-looking pig on his property was illegal. He expressed some disregard for the Local Land Services, the authorities who police such matters and who would shoot Pig-pig if they learned of her presence. Defying NSW law, Scott’s property held open a space for Pig-pig to be engaged and enacted in ways beyond being an invasive species, a pest, or hunted game. Further, the way in which Scott’s small property was managed helped facilitate these unexpected interspecies relations. It was unorganized: there were no demarcating or enclosing fences or cages, and no clear distinctions between animal and human spaces apart from the house. The domestic space was a “contact zone”⁶² for creating new relational possibilities and interpretations, as well as forms of place-making.⁶³ Nora Schuurman refers to such spaces as the co-production of a *multispecies homescape*—“an inseparable part” of who the animal is and “how they and their lives can be understood”.⁶⁴ These homescapes are material arrangements and imaginaries where identities and capacities are co-constituted through the multifaceted set of interspecies perspectives and relations connected to this space.⁶⁵

61 Lorimer, *Wildlife in the Anthropocene*; Boyd, “Painting with Horses”.

62 Haraway, *When Species Meet*, passim.

63 See also Russell, “Domestication of Anthropology”.

64 Schuurman, “Multispecies Homescales,” 660.

65 It is worth noting that I am unsure how Scott might have spelt the name “Pig-pig,” but I choose to write the name with a hyphen. Hyphens are common ways by which linguistic reduplications generally are represented in English. The hyphen is also important to understanding Pig-pig. As anthropologist Garry Marvin explained in a private communication: etymologically, the ancient Greek term ὑφέν (huphén) means “together” and

On Scott's property, Pig-pig lived apart from the world of "feral pigs," becoming part of this eclectic, domestic multispecies collective. A place proximally and dynamically organized by varying bodies, histories, and affects, with relationships defined through notions of tolerance, family, ambivalence, and friendship.

Within this space, not all inhabitants are recognized or given voice equally, and power is unevenly distributed. Although Scott was the owner of the property, as well as a key observer and interpreter of the homescape's dynamics, that did not necessarily mean he was at the centre of this place. Domestic properties by categorical definition are contrasted to wild spaces as closely governed by humans, where people play a significant role in cultivating and managing social and ecological relations.⁶⁶ Yet in multispecies homes, the world-shaping power of animals cannot be overlooked: they express agencies that are closely entwined with and constrained by, but not wholly dictated by people.⁶⁷ Pig-pig's relations with chickens and dogs were negotiated and co-created between themselves. And, as per Scott's description, Pig-pig had done significant work weaving together this world — an achievement complemented by the generosity of chickens and dogs. For example, Pig-pig dared to lie alongside a kind of being who in another situation might be her potential attacker and, in turn, the dogs were open to novel possibilities with an animal they regularly chased. There are meaningful more-than-human worlds that overlap but do not fully coincide with Scott, and that partially fell outside of his power both in their development and in the ethical demands they would make of him.⁶⁸

The Ties that Kept Her Alive

Despite being fostered into a multispecies home on Scott's property, Pig-pig was always at a high risk of being killed. Scott certainly made

so the hyphen reminds us that being is always compound. Pig-pig's identity was constituted by the human and nonhuman beings with whom she made her life and home. In many ways she was also a human-pig, a chicken-pig, and maybe even a dog-pig.

66 Cassidy, "Domestication Reconsidered".

67 Haraway et al. "Anthropologists Are Talking".

68 See Latimer, "Being Alongside".

this clear. This risk became most apparent to me after finally watching Pig-pig take a bath—a small part of her daily routine and a necessity, given her species' lack of sweat glands. Scott and I sat quietly amused as this porcine lady approached the tub, stood on two hind legs using the rim to support herself, then hoisted herself into the water with barely a splash. Pig-pig sat there for a while with all but her oversized head submerged in the tepid water, bathing in silent contentment under the eucalypts, momentarily absent to the searing heat. Reading my notes after returning from the field, I juxtaposed this moment against the conversation I had with Scott several days before taking this photo. We were also looking at the bathtub, and he was explaining how he used this tub to scald the bodies of hunted pigs before butchering them. He went into detail about the exact temperature to boil the water and amount of bicarbonate soda to add. After being submerged for some time, the coarse feral pig hair could be easily scraped from the body. Given Scott's proclivity for hunting and taste for wild pigs I suspect many dead pigs had passed through that bathtub over the years. As Scott bragged, on the two out of three occasions we spoke, "I've eaten more pigs than most blokes have killed." Sitting in that bathtub, where other dead pigs had been processed, Pig-pig led a precarious existence that oscillated between the relational possibilities that could result in either her life or death.

How was Pig-pig still alive? Thinking about it now, I still find it surprising and unlikely that she was alive, given who Scott was and the trajectories of most of her kind that come into contact with humans in Australia. At the time of my visit, we were also in the middle of one of the worst droughts in living memory. Pigs are very resilient beings, but even their population numbers and condition in the area were noticeably dropping. One farmer in northwest NSW confessed to me that "even if I was still hunting, I wouldn't be hunting them now. . . pigs, roos [kangaroos]. . . we're all struggling." The ecological relations that sustained human and nonhuman lives were stretching thinner and thinner, and, for some, inspiring a sense of solidarity with an animal typically seen as a pest. Scott, however, did not seem to possess such a sympathetic sense of fellowship for Pig-pig's wild kin. Chasing and killing these animals has been an important and vital part of his livelihood, diet, and



Fig. 2

Pig-pig having her daily bath.

Photograph by the author.

sense of self for decades. And as Scott claimed, he has no qualms about eating Pig-pig, just like any other pig he hunts.

However, Pig-pig was not like most other pigs Scott encountered. His claim over Pig-pig and his capacity to decide whether she lives or dies were overstated. Scott was obliged to preserve the companionship she developed with Jamie and would not kill her at the risk of upsetting his son. Scott appreciated Pig-pig's adoption into a family of hens and how, like a guard dog, she now served to protect the brood — a role he both respected and saw as beneficial. Even Pig-pig's personality — expressed through her unexpected and idiosyncratic relations with pig-dogs, chickens, Jamie, and bathtubs — “captured” Scott through a charismatic agency which seemingly compelled him to talk about Pig-pig despite not “[giving] a fuck” about her. Charisma is a vulnerability to being affected by others in ways that cannot be consciously controlled.⁶⁹ Pig-pig's worth was beyond his ability to decide alone. Becoming part of this multispecies home, she developed value for others to which he felt beholden.

Scott's position stands in contrast to how governing authorities in Australia regard pigs identified as feral. As Danielle Celermajer and Arian Wallach argue, invasive species programs seek to strip these nonhumans of any utilitarian, aesthetic, or identity-based value and deny the possibility of any legitimate, economic, or meaningfully positive relationships that might potentially support their existence in the country.⁷⁰ By denying their value and by judging their presence as wholly negative, biosecurity discourse aims to invalidate all ecological and social relations and so starve pigs of those vital connections that makes life fundamentally possible.⁷¹ Scott, in relation to Pig-pig and others on his property, does not reproduce such a monological position towards pigs, a position that is unappreciative of the perspectives of others and reduces the world and its inhabitants to serve a singular purpose.⁷² While Scott did not seem to contem-

69 Keil, *Presence of Elephants*.

70 Celermajer and Wallach, “Illegible Animal”.

71 Keil, “Unmaking the Feral”.

72 Rose, *Reports from a Wild Country*.

plate what Pig-pig might think or want, he did account for and was in dialogue with other desires about, claims on, and interpretations of her as part of the multispecies home. These other relations that constituted Pig-pig bound her to the world, pulled her in other directions beyond Scott's intentions and appetites. Who Pig-pig was for Scott was also about who she could be for others—this made it possible for her to be alive at my time of meeting her.

The Conclusion to the Feral at Home

While I have not referred to her as feral, there is also a sense in which an aspect of Pig-pig was always feral and more-than-human. Pig-pig is unauthorized, evades expectations and easy conceptualization, and cannot be completely governed, even within skewed power relations. Scott's property was a transgressive space that allowed her to develop relations and unexpected ways of being-with that do not align with hegemonic perspectives on free-living pigs and fall outside the biopolitical orders that organize the country. The domestic relations Pig-pig formed on Scott's property were affective arrangements that emerged beyond Scott's ability to fully dictate and mediate. This includes how her charisma partially captured Scott despite his intentions. Finally, as per the first section, Pig-pig's presence was beyond my expectations and conceptual resources at the time of our meeting. The feral in Pig-pig can come to stand for an agency that was inapprehensible and unpredictable,⁷³ and highlights the ways in which life always exceeds determination. Nonhuman being will always partially exist beyond our bodily and conceptual apparatus and become through other relations beyond our own perspectives and intentions.⁷⁴ Ferality, then, constitutes an aspect of all our relations and can occur not just "in the wild" but domestic domains too.⁷⁵ Ferality suggests that Pig-pig will always be more-than a "feral animal" in Australia.

Pig-pig complicates my understanding of free-living pigs and hunters. Scott's account and my limited interactions with her have

73 Ramírez and Ravetz, "Feral Futures".

74 Latimer, "Being Alongside".

75 Halberstam, *Wild Things*.

helped me understand that pigs are animals whose potentialities are not limited to rigid categorization or a limited range of affects. This multispecies home facilitated other ways of speaking about and relating to free-living pigs beyond their enactment as invasive species to be eradicated, or even game to be hunted and eaten. Pig-pig's connections with humans and nonhumans on Scott's property articulate not only her uniqueness but also the relational knots that helped keep her alive during that time. To write about hunters and feral-looking pigs in a more nuanced and, potentially, positive manner is not to overlook the objectifying expressions of human dominance over animals by hunters and the destructive effect of a troubling, introduced species in Australia. Rather, this essay attempts to write from a depolarized position,⁷⁶ and push back against absolute or all-encompassing perspectives on these subjects by rendering them more fairly and keeping their potentialities uncertain.

I'd like to end this paper with another story about Pig-pig. After I initially drafted this paper in 2022, I was able to return to Scott's town following an extended hiatus. The drought that peaked in 2019 had transformed into three back-to-back years of rain. Much of the area was flooding and free-living pigs were thriving. I learned this speaking with Scott's brother, with whom I had the opportunity to share a quiet, brief beer at his home one afternoon. Scott was not around town, so I asked after him. I then asked after Pig-pig.

Scott and Jamie were open to Pig-pig wandering in and beyond the property boundaries, feeding elsewhere and returning home later — something like the free-ranging pannage pigs of nineteenth-century settler Australia.⁷⁷ Overtime, she began visiting one neighbour who reciprocated her attention by giving her food. She then began to repeatedly return, pestering for more. For a vaguely offered reason that remains unclear to me, Pig-pig had become a nuisance. Perhaps Pig-pig's gregarious yet blunt personality did not translate well beyond Scott's property. Wild or domesticated, pigs are well known for their intractability, and at 70kg (which they easily

76 Palmer et al., "Holding Discomfort".

77 Cushing, "'Cunning, Intractable, Destructive Animals.'"

grow into in their first year) they can be felt as powerful and potentially dangerous to owners. Pig-pig had become such a pest to the neighbours that one day, Scott received a phone call complaining that he needed to solve the problem. So, Scott instructed his son to take the rifle up to the property to shoot the pig and bring her back. The neighbours protested but Scott apparently saw no other way of handling the issue. While Scott and Jamie took responsibility for Pig-pig, they were unwilling to pen the animal which came along with additional domestic responsibilities of keeping, caring for, and feeding her.⁷⁸ Keeping a feral-looking pig was also illegal, so any persistent troubling might have exposed Scott to unwanted attention from authorities. Competing obligations to his neighbours led to Scott demanding that Pig-pig be killed, over and above any value she had for Jamie, the chickens, or for her own life. The relational space open to alternate life trajectories for Pig-pig—to becoming more-than a killable “problem animal”—was always tenuous and imperfect. And, as it turned out, it had definite limits. When I met Pig-pig, it seemed as if her fate was undecided; yet it is also unsurprising that she was ultimately killed, given that Pig-pig lived within a country and set of relations so heavily geared towards the control and death of her kind.

Scott’s brother expressed his own annoyance, arguing that the neighbours invited this eventual outcome by feeding her and that killing Pig-pig was not something Scott or Jamie wanted to do. “Anyway,” Scott’s brother continued, “we did her right.” It turns out, they scalded Pig-pig in the bath she used to bathe in and then ate her. Again, appropriating John Berger, a hunter is “fond of his pig and is glad to salt away its pork.”⁷⁹ I believe in this instance, saying that “we did her right” was also to imply that they treated her respectfully. While Scott and his family enjoyed eating wild pork generally, Pig-pig was not just any pig. In this case, consuming Pig-pig was affectively appropriate: an act that was a necessary display of good manners towards their feral-looking companion.

78 Such a decisive solution is also not uncommon in rural Australia to practically deal with a working animal or livestock who has developed bad habits or committed a transgression.

79 Berger, “Why Look at Animals?”, 7.

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