

Rank atmospheres: The more-than-human scentspace and aesthetic of a pigdogging hunt

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Abstract

Pigdogging is a popular pastime in Australia, a form of recreational hunting whereby people collaborate with dogs to chase and catch wild pigs. This paper analyses the hunt as an interspecies event that unfolds through the sensual and sensory entanglements of human and nonhuman, with a particular focus on the perspectives of the hunters. The concept of 'atmosphere' will be employed to frame an ethnographic analysis of two facets of pigdogging. First, by hunting with a dog, humans augment their capacity to identify the presence of pigs through the canine's extraordinary sense of scent. Through this relationship, the world of scent is revealed as having atmospheric properties: an enveloping phenomenon which is known through the dog, yet also escapes the hunter's perceptual apprehension. Second, this paper will illustrate examples of how atmosphere develops through the sensual relations between human and nonhuman bodies during the hunt. An affectively charged interspecies encounter is composed and participated in by the hunter through this recreational practice, and affords the enactment of subjectivities central to an aesthetics of pigdogging. Hunting atmospheres in this paper emerge at the juncture of human and more-than-human bodies, perspectives and worlds.

KEYWORDS

atmosphere, feral pig, hunting, multispecies, pigdog, sensory anthropology

1 | INTRODUCTION

I was a passenger in Colin's utility truck as we drove across a pastoral property at night (Figure 1). On the back stood two of Colin's friends and two of his hunting dogs. One man operated a mounted spotlight, sweeping across hundreds of cows in a pen. Colin knew wild pigs would be drawn to the pungent smell of cattle feedlots. 'There's a mob, there!' The light centred on a group of nine pigs among the cowherds. Highlighted, the mob bolted. We drove parallel to their escape until they emerged into a field, where Colin predicted the anxious pigs would run towards the safety of the bush. The engine roared as the truck leapt forward.

Failing to cut the pigs off, Colin applied the brakes and called for one of his dogs to be released. The hunting dog leapt from the truck and ran along the spotlight's beam towards the fleeing pigs. Colin jumped out on foot and I followed. The pigs disappeared behind the pitch-black tree line, the dog close behind, and us trailing the pigdog. Our headtorches illuminated only the immediate ground and trees ahead. We eventually lost our speedier, four-legged partner in the bush as she continued to track the pigs by scent. Suddenly, there was the thud of bodies clashing and the squeal of a sow in the distance. Colin raced ahead, orienting towards the sound. When I finally caught up, I found Colin in a deep gully, negotiating the flailing bodies of pigdog and wild pig as the sow desperately tried to free herself from the dog's hold on her ear. The sow shrieked as Colin grabbed her two hind legs. He flipped the pig over, unsheathed his boning knife, and angled the blade in order to stab the animal's heart.

Pigdogging is the recreational hunting of pigs with dogs in Australia, an interspecies collaboration to overcome an agitated, powerful and potentially dangerous game. While anthropologists have explored subsistence pig hunting with dogs in other countries among indigenous peoples (e.g., Simon, 2015), there has been no substantial ethnographic research or engagement with the community, practices and perspectives of recreational pig hunters in Australia (the exception is Meurk, 2011). And, despite recreational hunting being an event through which the bodies, subjectivities and worlds of



FIGURE 1 In the four-wheel drive, searching for wild pigs among the tall grass

humans and nonhumans take shape, it is a relationship largely overlooked by multispecies researchers (Rentería-Valencia, 2015).

This paper is an ethnography of the interspecies interactions that compose the pigdogging hunt from the perspective of the canine and human hunters, and will analyse hunting at the level of the senses. Marvin (2005, p. 16) describes hunting as 'a fully embodied, multi-sensory and multi-sensual practice'. A hunter immerses themselves in the multi-sensual immediacy of their world, attentive to how hunter and hunted affect each other. Through the exercise of tracking animals, the human body attunes to how the more-than-human animal senses, interprets and interacts with their environment (Gieser, 2008). The hunter's perceptual systems are shaped over time through repeated training of attention within the task of hunting (Ingold, 2000), and sensing is always 'emplaced' developing through an unfolding set of ecological relations (Pink, 2011).

Recent ethnographic research on hunting and more-than-human relations has turned to the concept of *atmosphere* to explore how people are immersed in a field of meteorological and also emotional forces that seem to permeate and define the place and practices they inhabit (Böhme, 2017; McCormack, 2018). Hunters dwell within a 'weather-world' (Ingold, 2015), sensitive to shifting temperatures, variations in light, the dynamics of winds and other rhythms of weather, and how these connect with prey and the landscape (Gieser, 2020; Markuksela and Valtonen, 2019, forthcoming). Some hunters also coordinate with nonhumans by tuning into a feeling or 'mood' that emerges and fills the space between them, a palpable force through which both subjects negotiate their relationship (Schroer, 2018). And the ecologies in which human and animal are situated can have their own histories, relational compositions, and multi-sensual presence that invoke tones and feelings distinct to that place (Münster, 2017). These atmospheric forces are elusive, fleetingly sensed, and resist being objectively isolated or reduced to the phenomenological state of a sensing subject (Böhme, 2017; McCormack, 2018). Still, they impress upon the person, are taken up by and shape the body, and are revealed through an 'array of emotions, affects, and sensations' that affect perception, action and relations (Edensor, 2015, p. 83).

This paper aims to describe and analyse pigdogging through its embodied, sensual relations and atmospheric dimensions, offering insights into how this interspecies relationship is practiced, and contribute to the growing literature on recreational hunting. In an ethnography of hunting falcons, Schroer (2018) argues that the role of more-than-human subjectivity has been overlooked in the literature on atmospheres. This paper will also demonstrate how more-than-human perspectives, particularly that of the canine, can shape the development of atmosphere while hunting.

I will begin with a brief introduction to pigdogging in Australia, followed by an analysis of how wild pigs are characterised as 'rank'. Smell offers a cultural insight into male pigs as the object of pigdogging, and serves as an introduction to the anticipatory atmosphere of the hunt that the boar scent invokes. Next, I will analyse how a hunter's senses are augmented through a relationship with a pigdog. The canine's ability to track pigs through scent gives the hunter the capacity to be affected by elements perceptually inaccessible to the human body (Lorimer et al., 2017). Thinking about scent as an atmosphere can help articulate the ways in which hunters experience a dynamic material dimension that envelopes and connects hunter and hunted. Atmosphere is a sensed thing that always exceeds attempts to apprehend it (McCormack, 2018). Similarly, the hunter's awareness of scent—what I refer to as *scentspace*—is a presence and absence, a more-than-human dimension disclosed to the hunter through an unsettling and uncanny feeling.

To experience the unfolding of an event is to be swept up in the development of atmosphere, a force that appears and disappears as bodies mutually affect the other (Anderson, 2009; Edensor, 2015). The final section of this paper will look at how human, dog and pig move through and against each other, and how this entanglement generates and provokes a force of excitation, anticipation and tension that

grips willing and unwilling participants. Both the interspecies interaction and developing atmosphere is 'orchestrated (Bille, et al., 2015) in order produce an aesthetic experience of pigdogging, that is, a 'sensorial and felt-bodily perception' of a particular space-time (Grifferio, 2019, p. 1). It is through this atmosphere that pigdogging subjectivities are enacted.

Methodologically speaking, to research recreational hunting as well as atmosphere it is essential to be exposed to the sensual immediacy and more-than-human agency of the event. Ethnographic data in this paper draw on seven hunts and a competition I joined over a period of four months in late 2019, as well as interviews and online research which form part of an ongoing ethnographic project on hunting and feral pig relations in north New South Wales (NSW), Australia. Four of those hunts were with Ned,¹ an older, experienced hunter of 40 years and public representative of pigdogging. In northern NSW, pigdogging mostly occurs on private agricultural and pastoral properties, which can include a variety of environmental conditions, including flat agricultural fields, muddy riverbanks or forested hills. Pigdogs are deployed to hold the wild pig in place so the hunter can kill the pig by either shooting them or piercing their heart with a long blade. Possibly the most common approach in Australia, and the one I became familiar with, was hunting on farming property, from a four-wheel drive (4WD) or sometimes on foot, with dogs and a knife. The goal of this paper is to think through the form of pigdogging with which I am familiar; this paper is not intended to be a singular representation of the varied pigdogging cultures and practices across Australia (Figure 2).

2 | A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO PIGDOGGING IN AUSTRALIA

Pigs were introduced to Australia as domestic livestock by British colonists but soon ran wild. Allowed to sprout tusks and grow long, dark hair, an estimated 10–24 million free-roaming pigs now flourish in agricultural landscapes and 'native' wilderness. Pigdogging is done primarily for the overlapping



FIGURE 2 Classic pigdogger's truck. Four-wheel drive ute, spotlight on roof, dog cages on back. The pig carcasses have been dressed to be weighed for a hunting competition



purposes of recreational hunting and invasive species culling.² Caught pigs are always killed: most bodies are left behind as carrion, some boars are weighed and photographed as trophies, and a few are harvested as meat for hunting dogs or exported to a small, international market. In general, wild pig meat is not eaten in Australia by the public or the hunters.³ Many recreational hunters do not come from a landholding class, manage a property or work as farmhands, and so must negotiate access to hunting country. Dogs are purposefully bred for the challenge of catching and physically holding wild pigs. The favoured breeds are a mix between 'molosser' types (e.g., bull terrier, bulldog, bull mastiff), and hairier, longer-legged wolf-, grey- or staghounds.

Pigdogging is likely the most popular form of pig hunting in Australia (Orr et al., 2019). Young, white males from rural backgrounds are the dominant demographic of this expanding community, yet men living in urban/suburban areas are an emerging set of practitioners. Pigdogging is also popular among Indigenous men in northern Australia. And women, despite being in the minority, also enjoy pigdogging. In 2019, a women's hunting Facebook group, 'Boars and Babes Australia', held a popular photo competition called 'Girls that can do both' (embody classic feminine traits and perform male-associated tasks). While the primary focus of this paper is analysing the interaction of human and nonhuman bodies, senses and environments, this interspecies practice also offers insight into Australian rural and gender identities. Proper analysis of gender is outside the scope of this paper; however, I will draw attention to its intersecting influence in the final section.

The pig's status as invasive and a pest makes it 'killable' (Haraway, 2008). Wild pigs are a legally accessible game animal and a species not subject to the same welfare standards as native or domestic animals. Feral animals are killed through a variety of controversial methods, including poisoning and aerial shooting in government culling programs, or recreational hunting. Pigdogging methods are intimate and violent: the dog bites into the pig's ear to hold it, and the pig is then stabbed in the heart with a long knife in a manner that is both swift and gory. For the unfamiliar, it can appear disturbingly brutal. Pigdogging is thus the subject of both ethical criticism and sensationalism. Hunters are consistently targeted by animal rights groups⁴ and their practices critiqued over animal welfare concerns (Orr et al., 2019). Pigdogs are depicted as dangerous and blood-thirsty, and pigdoggers are stereotypically framed as criminally oriented, 'redneck, barbaric, cashed-up bogans' (Adams, 2013). Pigdogging is incommensurate with the norms of many, particularly urban-dwelling Australians (Trigger et al., 2012). However, similar to other ethnographies on hunters (see Gressier, 2014; Meurk, 2011) my research with pigdoggers has found a heterogenous set of identities that does not conform to stereotypes, people whose nuanced positions on animals are worth consideration, and friendly dogs. This paper's analysis focuses on the hunter's perspective, and largely on the interactions between human and dog leading up to catching a pig. Consequently, it neglects a deeper and sympathetic exploration of the wild porcine subjectivity and lifeworld. In fact, we will only meet the pig's perspective in the final section, and in the brief moment in a hunt when it is located, caught and killed.

3 | THE SMELL OF A MALE PIG HUNT

I was seated in the passenger seat of Ned's ute (utility truck), a muddy Holden Rodeo. Four of Ned's dogs, wearing Kevlar amour chest plates to protect against sharp boar tusks, were seated on the rear flatbed tray. We had been driving for several hours since dawn along the dirt roads of an expansive, hilly pastoral property, and had caught a sow and a boar. Through an agreement with the property owner, Ned had access to thousands of hectares of grassy paddocks interspersed with forest patches and gullies home to wild pigs. We were approaching a hill, which was covered in blackberry bushes (Figure 3). Wild pigs have a mutually beneficial relationship with this invasive species. The bush



FIGURE 3 A hill full of blackberry bushes and ‘reeks of pigs’

affords a place of refuge and pigs spread the weed via blackberry seeds that attach themselves to their hairy hides. ‘*Reeks of pigs, doesn't it?*,’ Ned remarked.

Pigs within a Western European perspective have been derided and are associated with filth, disease and an offensive smell (Essig, 2015). Hunters accept that some wild pigs do ‘reek’, especially the males, who emit an aversive scent through their sweat, saliva and urine. This odour is most evident when the hunter grapples with the animal during the kill or repositions the dead body for a trophy photo. Smell, like touch, is a sensory experience connected with intimacy and proximity (Classen et al., 1994; Böhme, 2019). The pungent scent can emanate like a provocative field around the pig, causing momentary or reflexive retreat. It can linger in the nostrils and has a persistent and polluting quality, in some cases so bad that it can take hunters days to wash the stink off their hands. Aversive smells are powerful: they mediate distance both physically and symbolically and define the moral identities of those to whom the smell is attached (Low, 2018). This includes the wild pig in Australia, for whom experiences of disgust and pollution have strong associations with the animal's ferality and status as an overwhelmingly prolific, destructive and out-of-place animal (Atchison, 2019; Gressier, 2016).

However, the relationship between hunters and the smell of male pigs is ambiguous and cannot be narrowed to disgust. One hunter, for example, described the smell of boar on his dog's chest plates as one of his favourite odours. While pigdoggers will kill both male and female pigs, boars are the desired trophy. Pig hunters across history and cultures claim that the aggressive male pig offers a more thrilling challenge (Yamamoto, 2017). Among pigdoggers, the term ‘rank’ can describe the offensive smell of male pigs. Yet the meaning of the word extends beyond olfactory sensation and is associated with a set of qualities that constitute a ‘good boar’. As Ned explained to me, describing a boar as ‘old and rank’ can insinuate a ‘hard fighting, rough looking, long haired and dangerous’ pig, whose age is an indicator of cunning and intelligence. Interestingly, the use of rank to describe long hair and rough-looking traits references the word's other meaning, which is overgrown vegetation. Again, these messy, ungovernable and hazardous qualities can be associated with the notion of the feral and uncontrolled. These are qualities used to justify the animal's eradication but are also valued for the excitement and challenge they offer the pigdogger.



When Ned said that the landscape ‘reeks of pigs’ he did not mean literally; neither of us could smell a pig from that distance, let alone see or hear them—these animals are masters at hiding. What Ned meant is that the hill seemed like the kind of place that would be dense with pig activity. Ned’s use of an olfactory metaphor to express this sense is worth noting. First, like the common phrase ‘something smells fishy’, smell expresses the intuitive feeling of pig presence without Ned being able to precisely define how he knows. The blackberry bushes were a visual cue, but his sense of pigs extended beyond this index, an undefined sensation of ‘something-more’ (Grifferio, 2019). Second, smell is evocative of a thing’s immediate presence as revealed through the surrounding air (Böhme, 2019), an enveloping sensation which strongly affects the individual, evoking feelings, embodied dispositions and relational possibilities in connection to a particular place (Stenslund, 2018). When Ned perceives a landscape that ‘reeks of pigs’, he refers to an atmosphere that is charged with the anticipation of a good boar, a challenging hunt, and a test of his skill and courage. Yet, for Ned to locate pigs through smell is to represent his perception of this place through a sensory register not actually available to him. Interestingly, this mode of sensing pigs is familiar to and possible for his canine hunting partners. Ned’s four dogs are acutely attuned to porcine scent and can reveal the hidden presence of pigs. An olfactory metaphor invokes a more-than-human way through which the world is perceived (Figure 4).

4 | A MORE-THAN-HUMAN GUIDE THROUGH SCENTSPACE

There are two basic perceptual strategies by which hunters locate pigs. The first relies on vision. A sighthound privileges their eyes when hunting. These pigdogs are particularly deployed at night, having learnt to locate pigs along spotlight beams. Humans will also exercise their sight. While driving across a paddock or walking through hills, the hunter is continuously scanning the landscape. Hunters



FIGURE 4 Clyde wearing a protective chest plate. Some boar tusks are very sharp and can injure or kill pigdogs

display practised skill at discerning silhouettes in low light, and distinguishing animals by their shape and gait, even at the periphery of vision.

The second strategy depends on the canine's extraordinary capacity to sense scent. Pigdoggers will deploy two kinds of dogs: 'luggers' and 'bailers'. Luggers will chase and grab a pig by the ear and struggle to hold it in place; bailers will chase and prevent the pig from moving by placing pressure on it through barking. Either pigdog can be a 'finder': an individual that expresses an exaggerated 'will' or 'drive' to track pigs by smell. Pigdoggers claim that chasing animals is deeply fulfilling for the dog. While hunters mostly train pigdogs by running them with older, experienced pigdogs, an essential intervention in the pigdog's development is 'stock-proofing'. While hunting, a handler will correct the dog verbally or physically whenever they express the drive to chase another animal apart from a pig (this includes wildlife, but especially domestic livestock). Like the human hunter's vision, a stock-proofed dog's perception of the environment has been skilfully tuned (Ingold, 2000). Their sense of smell has been shaped according the demands of the task (the dog should not track a goat!) but also political and ecological context (hunters rely on access to private property to hunt, and disturbing livestock will damage right of access). For a pigdog, porcine scent has become the most exciting element in their environment.

In the ute's side-vision mirror I can see Clyde, his nose raised and attending to the air as we move through it. Ned has learnt to pay close attention to Clyde's behaviour, since he has the best nose of the dogs. Suddenly, Clyde begins whimpering and getting restless. 'There's a lot more agitation for Clyde going this way,' Ned observes. Whether it was the trace of pig carried on a gust of wind, or on dirt exploding upwards from underneath the ute's tyres, through Clyde we learned that we had entered a place that reeks of pigs. 'Finding off the ute', the dog will leap off the vehicle and scan the area with intent, following something in the air or on the ground that neither Ned nor I can perceive with our non-canine senses (Figure 5).

Lorimer et al. (2017) argue that animals are receptors of atmospheric elements. Chemical, electromagnetic, acoustic, meteorological and other material aspects imperceptible in an environment perceived by naked human senses, can be sensed by nonhumans. More-than-human perceptual systems have the capacity to be affected by these elements, and so gesture towards their invisible presence.



FIGURE 5 Bailing dogs, finding off the ute and investigating a place that reeks of pigs



Despite the different embodied and sensory capacities of human and nonhuman animals, knowledge of what constitutes the 'animal's atmosphere' can be gained through a 'perspectival approach'. This approach includes a combination of scientific and technological methods, but also an embodied, empathic and emplaced exploration of the animal's lifeworld (Lorimer et al., 2017). Homologous physiological traits coupled with the embodied process of attuning to how a nonhuman animal moves through and interacts with the world, are grounds for speaking about more-than-human subjectivity and the environments they perceive (Despret, 2013; Fuentes, 2006; Shroer, 2019).

Theories of scent, following the dog's conduct, technological mediators and the experience of hunting together in shared environments are ways by which hunters understand how dogs track pigs and the nature of scent. Hunters speak of 'hot' and 'cold' scent. Temporal differences associated with the age of scent are read through their dog, achieved through a close visual familiarity with the pointedness of a dog's movements and poise, the tactile sensation of a taut leash, or the aural force of a bark. Scent is not smelt but followed and felt through the dog's intensity. Many hunters use GPS tracking collars to follow their pigdogs. The dog's movement is translated into a blue thread atop a digital topographical map. This re-presentation of pigdogs also enables an interpretation of how they move in relation to porcine traces in their environment. A wavy S-shaped line reveals how the dog tracks scent hanging in the air, while zig-zagging movement indicates ground-scenting. The GPS system is technology that coordinates human and dog in new ways, a compound relation that creates possibilities for better perceiving and becoming entwined in other worlds (Haraway, 2008).

The hunter cannot perceive scent directly but knows and can sense how it travels. He learns to feel the air. A gentle, steady breeze felt against the skin and stems of grass seen bending slightly, together with theories about air movement, help hunters to assess what the dog is responding to. Ned expressed how he was thinking about the dynamics of eddy winds across hilly terrain, where pigs might be located in relation to these movements, or how changing temperatures at dusk and dawn will cause scent to rise and fall. Yet, because even these atmospheric movements can be barely perceptible—hunters 'can't see [or feel] all the eddies' but sometimes can only get the vague sense of 'when the air is just different'—it requires the hunter to experiment blindly. A good pigdogger will try to reposition their dog and open up scenting opportunities. It is difficult to determine if the dog's relationship with wind bares similarity to a human's, in the same way that falconers, for example, can get a partial sense of the wind's feeling against the falcon's body (Schroer, 2018). How chemicals travelling on air currents impress upon the dog may not take the same shape as breeze felt against skin. Nonetheless, sensing and coordinating with the movement of air does allow the hunter to intersect and align their perceptual systems and decisions with the dog's navigation of scent's movement and distribution (Figure 6).

Hunters conceptualise the canine's world of scent as being in flux. Scent is in continuous states of decay. Chemical traces of our bodies bleed into this field of scent and constitute it, and along with porcine bodies are distributed and moving through surroundings in ways humans cannot visually grasp. While closely connected to meteorological forces, scent is neither a thing of earth nor of sky. It is a dynamic, elemental dimension that envelopes our bodies and has an atmospheric presence (McCormack, 2018). And like atmosphere, hunter immersion in scent can be revealed fleetingly through the dog. By guiding the hunter, canines enable people to be affected by this dimension. However, humans remain ultimately 'scent-blind' (Hearne, 2007, p. 80). Speaking to Peter one evening, we attempted to make sense of what dogs know:

... dogs have different knowledge [to humans] ... Like how the hell do you tell if that's a fresh pig scent, or that's an old one, or which direction ... it's phenomenal ... how many other smells are they running through ... old pig smells, new pigs, big pigs, little pigs, roos, leaf, pollen ... things we don't even trigger ... how many things are they thinking about?



FIGURE 6 Watching the dogs on the GPS tracker

Peter speaks of a rich, multilayered and lively multispecies world of scent that the dog inhabits, and represents a being who makes complex decisions and distinctions through this sense. As Hearne (2007, p. 79) states: ‘for dogs, scenting is believing’. Yet what the dog believes can be very different from a person: ‘We are on the same field but playing a different ball game’, as Peter later put it. While humans, to a degree, can follow what ‘triggers’ nonhumans, the limits of the animal’s powers—what their bodies can do and thus what environments they can inhabit—is ultimately elusive (Keil, 2017).

Through their dogs, hunters inhabit a scentspace. Scentspace, like atmosphere, is ‘quasi-objective’, a quality that lends it a haunting presence (Böhme, 2017). As McCormack (2018, p. 50) notes, to sense the atmospheric is to ‘not only feel immersed in something, it is also to feel the absence of that which is held back’. For Hearne (2007), the dog handler believes in the scent, because he believes in the dog. Yet, when speaking about the common existence of scent—for example, guiding a dog’s attention to an empty space and instructing the dog to ‘find it’—can inspire an ‘uncanny’ or ‘queer’ feeling in the dog handler. Feelings of the uncanny arise when faced with the unsettling presence of something that seems obviously evident yet also escapes comprehension (Keil, 2017). Similar experiences are expressed by pigdoggers: Peter, in the example above, spoke in awe about what the dog can know and how they can make sense of their environment. Darryl, an experienced pigdog breeder and hunter, recalled a time his dog was able to perform a seemingly incomprehensible feat of tracking, what he considered ‘supernatural’. Like the perception of atmosphere, awareness of scentspace can sometimes have a fleeting spectral quality; scent is promised to exist but never truly materialises in human space (McCormack, 2018).

The spectral quality arises when confronted with behaviours that escape ready explanation and perceptual apprehension. This presence of the other-worldly atmosphere is not limited to the relationship with dogs, or indeed scent. Pigs, like dogs, have exceptional smelling capacities, and hunters offer tentative explanations of how these intelligent animals exploit scent to outwit the dog in surprising ways.⁵ However, there are also seemingly inexplicable or unknown sensory channels through which the pig comes to possess certain kinds of knowledge. For instance, the local boar who only ever appears in front of the hunter when they are without dogs or a gun, or will boldly stroll in front of the property manager’s 4WD but never the hunter’s vehicle. ‘Wild animals can read [hunting] intent,’ Ned notes, although he cannot explain how a pig can sense this intent. In the face of the unknown, hunters might experiment, for example, ‘driving like a cocky [farmer/property manager]’ or switching between

unleaded and diesel vehicles in the hope it might confuse the pigs. However, it is unclear through what sensory register pigs might be responding to these differences: smell, sound or otherwise.

By being in 'a contest and a competition between two sets of senses and sensing' (Marvin, 2005, p. 18), I suggest that hunters in general are occasionally faced with the queer notion that they participate in a more-than-human dimension. Whether through imperceptible 'scent-threads' that connect animals across a landscape (Ingold, 2015) or other elemental atmospheres perceived on unknown sensory registers, hunters become conscious of the ambivalent notion that they are participating in a world which they cannot know, or gauge with certainty the ways they are connected to animals (see Atchison, 2019 on the 'spookiness' of carp; also Marvin, 2003).

5 | COMPOSING PIGDOGGING AESTHETICS

Much of the time searching for pigs is uneventful, a relaxed yet mindful drive across empty paddocks. Once a pig is detected, the hunt happens suddenly, a burst of activity that might only last several minutes. Ethnographer Carla Meurk recalls the exhilaration of participating in a hunt with dogs, describing in hyper-sensual detail the barking of bailers, the rapid movement of frightened wild pigs, and the sound of cane snapping in fields at night (Trigger et al., 2012). Such an experience is different, for example, from that of deer hunters in New Zealand who value the 'sublime' atmosphere when hunting by themselves in a 'natural' environment (Reis, 2009). Unsurprisingly, the tone and energy of hunting atmospheres will vary depending on time of day, weather, ecology, the capacities of the hunted animal, the tools and mode of killing, and the encultured perceptual systems and skilled practices through which the human (and canine) relates to these aspects.

Marvin (2003) depicts fox hunting as an aesthetic performance. Practitioners take pleasure in certain visual, aural and tactile aspects, an appreciation of the multi-sensual, multispecies composition of the recreational practice. 'Aesthetic' can refer to artistic appreciation, and the term's original meaning: aesthetic as an encultured, corporeal, deeply felt and sensed perception of a particular space-time (Böhme, 2017). 'Like a song, the aesthetics of the hunter's landscapes is composed of repeated refrains' notes Ogden (2011, p. 44), referring to themes, motifs and events that define being a commercial hunter in the early 20th-century Everglades. 'Bloodshed and boredom', 'alligator flesh' and 'the smell of mangrove' are refrains that invoke experiences and relations that constitute the lives of these men: 'an aesthetic of bodies, both animals and humans, immersed in water, mud, and smoke' (Ogden, 2011, p. 44). While not explicitly mentioned by Ogden, these aesthetics are also evocative of an atmosphere that permeates these sensual and sensory entanglements.

Recreational hunters might not consider hunting as performative (Marvin, 2003); however, pigdoggers do nurture, choreograph and establish the conditions for an embodied aesthetics that are constitutive of a good hunt. Hunting can be framed as an act of composing worlds, weaving an event together through skilled, relational practices, coordinating and participating in the interaction of 'human and nonhuman agencies in a given environment' (Descola, 2014, p. 274). These acts of worlding afford possibilities. For recreational pigdoggers, the multispecies event enables not only the practical outcome of catching a pig, but also the opportunity to participate in and become immersed in atmosphere. Participants can both co-produce and be swept along by the permeating moods and forces that constitute a space-time (Edensor, 2015). In the case of pigdogging, these forces also envelope and are shaped by pigdog and wild pig.

The following text in this final section describes in ethnographic detail several aesthetic moments common to a pigdogging event, moments I label as—'place that reeks of pigs', 'the chase' and 'the hit up and sticking the pig'. These are examples of how an atmosphere emerges through the mutually affecting entanglement of human and nonhuman beings. By affect, I refer to the capacity of a body

to shape and be shaped, and an agency co-constituted through relations, where a change in one body necessitates a change in the other (Despret, 2013). Following certain scholars of affect and atmosphere (Anderson, 2009; Michels, 2015; Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, 2016), I am interested in articulating not only the sensual and emotional intensities affected on each body as they interact, but focusing our attention on the shared space between bodies. Or, more precisely put, the space between previous and emerging, co-constitutive affective states. This affectively charged space and moment of potential through which relationships unfold, I propose, can be grasped through experiences of *anticipation* or *tension*. Ethnographic depictions by Schroer (2018) and Gatt (2018) of a palpable energy that emerges and is felt between mutually attuned subjects, articulate such an affecting force. Negotiating and developing a relationship with others (or a dynamic environment) requires being sensitive to an acutely felt expectancy of the (sometimes unpredictable) affects one will have on the other. These feelings can have an enveloping atmospheric presence, and it is “within and through” these affective forces that people engage each other and the environment (Schroer, 2018, p. 84). In the following aesthetic moments, I will explore how tension and anticipation defines the atmosphere of pigdogging. This atmosphere is a necessary condition for enacting the violent encounter that defines the hunt, as well subjectivities characteristic to pigdogging.

5.1 | Place that reeks of pigs

‘It’s great to hear them whine from the back of the truck and see them getting excited and sniffing hard at the air ... The finders I have “yip” as they get close onto fresh scent’ (Hogenelst, 1998, p. 64). The environment at this moment is charged with anticipation of a rank boar. The hunter is poised, ready for the explosive instance when the pig is revealed; he will slow the vehicle to a cautious and steady tread, hypersensitised to porcine signs in the surrounding. Every tall mass of grass now potentially hides a mob of pigs waiting to burst forth; at any moment, the dog might bolt, having caught a gust of hot scent.

The hunter is prepared from previous hunts, but the expectant feeling that pervades this place, a feeling through which the environment is revealed, is not simply an internal state. The presence of pig in the grass and in the air is felt through the intensity of the dog’s bark, the tautness of the leash or the finder’s pointed movements forward. Hunters assert that the central joy and unique experience of pigdogging is hunting alongside their dogs. One hunter claims he likes running with a dog who is ‘filled with anticipation’. Killing the pig can be ‘more of a by-product ... I like watching my dog hunt ... watching my dogs get real keen’. Hunters are moved by the dog’s intense and overwhelming drive to find and catch the pig. Even as an observing ethnographer, it is difficult to not be swept up by the dog’s charismatic performance as they leap off the ute to chase a pig and jump over five-foot obstacles in expectation of the encounter.

During these moments, the unbridled enthusiasm of a dog can be infectious. Ned notes that there is an ‘energy ... [or] whatever is coming out of them [the dog]’ that is hard to define. For Ned, dog and human (or other pigdogs) are connected and sense each other through this energy which fills the space around and between them. In her ethnography of falconers, Schroer (2018) refers to a similar sensation of ‘mood ... a spatially tangible and palpable force’. However, unlike the excited relation of dogs to the promise of pigs, these birds are anxious around the unfamiliar human. Falconers must be attuned to the birds’ subjective relation to the environment and assuredly feel their way through this affectively charged space. Alternatively for pigdoggers and their hunting partners, as Ned points out to me, the expectant energy that manifests with a pigdog is not a force that young hunters try to resolve, instead they enjoy thriving on that energy. Pigdoggers also report that their excited scanning of the environment reciprocally stimulates the dog’s interest. Ned, who is an older hunter, prefers to

self-regulate calmness and modulate the mood that encompasses and connects himself and his pigdog team. An overexcited pigdog (and hunter), he asserts, will not think and make mistakes.

Atmosphere builds through the mutual attunement between dog and human as they track scent (Despret, 2013; Lorimer et al., 2017). In a place that reeks of pigs, hunter and pigdog are participating in what Schroer (2018) calls an 'atmospheric milieu', an affective field swirling with porcine scent, wind and mood. Partnering with a pigdog augments the hunter's capacity to be affected by scent and generates an energy which is taken up through the bodies of canine and human. The expectant mood that permeates this affectively charged space serves as a shared affordance which shapes how both hunters perceive their environment and excites and propels them through the hunt. For some hunters, this enjoyable resonance between themselves and their pigdog and the shared challenges they face in hunting are a primal experience, and interpreted as a masculinised expression of the co-evolutionary human–canine bond, one that goes 'back to when we were nomadic hunters' (Figure 7).

5.2 | The chase

The aesthetic of the chase is the moment at which wild pigs are identified in the distance, or have spotted the hunter and begun to flee. It is a central part of many 4WD pigdogging hunts and in some contexts a seasonal activity, when the mobs are in the open at night, feeding on the harvest remains. The chase relies less on scent and surprise, and more on vision and speed, an enjoyable and exciting tension where the hunter tries to close the distance between himself and the pigs before they escape. Hunters will frequently capture the chase on hunting videos: a shaky headcam, spotlight bouncing over uneven, night-time terrain, and sometimes a rock-n-roll soundtrack to express and capture the frenetic pace.

An ethnographic audio-recording of a hunt catches the moment of surprise as a mob of pigs suddenly bursts out from the tall grass. There is the crunching sound of shifting gears synchronised with Ned's exclamation of 'there they are!' followed by the building rumble of the engine. The chassis of the truck rattles wildly as we speed over uneven ground. I recall the sensation of the bouncing vehicle,



FIGURE 7 Sows from a herd of pigs fleeing from the hunting dogs



the sound of dry grass snapping against the bull bar, the dog cage clanging. The pigdogs on the back, responding to the shift in pace, are getting excited. I can hear canine claws shuffling on the tray behind me, and the whines and barks of dogs increase in frequency as Ned accelerates. The intensity growing between human and canine is an affect not closed to sensing mammalian bodies. This field also incorporates the ute: the vibrating haptic and audible sensations produced from the vehicle's movement feeds into our neurophysiological arousal, and in turn the engine vibrates harder as Ned's foot on the accelerator becomes heavier. The porcine mob's pace increases and they split up. Ned's swear words become more pronounced. In his frustration, Ned forgets to keep calm. The dogs are overagitated. A trainee dog has defecated on the ute in his excitement. It stinks.

Human, canine, machine and terrain are frictionally enmeshed through this embodied, sensual and unfolding activity. Like the 'contagious affect' Kirksey (2015) observed between human and wild macaque interactions, these bodies resonate with intensifying affect. This motivating force of excitation that grips the participants emerges from their reciprocating relations and cannot be attributed to one particular thing—human, dog, vehicle, long grass or uneven terrain. Yet, for the most part, these sounds, smells and bodily feelings are not the focus of attention; instead, Ned is concentrating on the trajectory of the pigs, the location of the dog in relation to himself, the lay of the environment and calculating the best approach as the event unfolds. The arousing hum that is characteristic of this aesthetic is a semiconscious, multi-sensual and all-encompassing presence, joining with other forces such as variations in light and meteorological patterns. It is within this atmosphere that the hunter dwells during the chase and through which he orients his perception of the environment and trajectory towards the prey (Gieser, 2020).

5.3 | The hit-up and sticking the pig

Hunting pigs with dogs is what Marvin (2005) refers to as hunting through 'irruption'—a method he compares to hunting through 'immersion'. Through immersion, a deer hunter, for example, aspires to be inconspicuous and get close to the target. Constructions of this practice refer to becoming at 'one with the natural world' and 'open to the animal' (Marvin, 2005). Hunting through immersion is akin to calmly negotiating the tension between unfamiliar animals, as described through 'mood' (Schroer, 2018). Alternatively, pigdoggers and pigdog are not concerned with sensitively managing this tension or limiting anxiety in the pig. Instead, through irruption, the pigdogger's presence induces what stockpersons call 'pressure' in the target animal, impinging upon on a 'bubble' or force-field that exists between and around hunter and hunted (see Keil, 2015). The excited movement and intention of hunters are sensed and known within this space through a corresponding affective intensity in the pig, an affect realised as emotions of anxiety and fear.⁶

The spatially felt tension through which hunter and hunted perceive the other is an affectively charged force, one that excites and attracts the hunter and repels the wild pig. Gripped by anticipation and anxiety within this provocative atmosphere, the pig will respond reactively. The environment the pig senses is reduced to affordances for immediate escape—a state typically characterised as 'fight or flight'. In fear, a mob of pigs might flee and will drive the aesthetic of the chase. Cornered by bailers or held by the lugger, the boar might defensively respond with violence and become rank. Irruption enacts the wild pig as the subject of a good hunt. It is within and through this relational atmosphere that the pigdogging aesthetic of the 'hit-up' and the sticking of the pig can occur.

What pigdoggers refer to as the hit-up is when the lugger collides into the pig with a violent thump, exploding dust and a tangle of flailing bodies. The wild pig will desperately and powerfully heave in an attempt to throw off the dog who keeps a stubborn hold on its ear. The struggle between these animals is constructed in reference to character traits associated with Australian forms of masculinity,

ones that draw on depictions of manhood popularised in wartime heroism and Australian sports (Adair et al., 1997; Bryant and Garnham, 2015; Burgess et al., 2003). A boar is respected for being cunning, tough and dangerous; a pigdog for its self-sacrifice, skill and 'hardness' (will, stoicism and resilience). Their explosive interaction is valued for the display of strength, ability and spirit. This embodied, sensual spectacle and battle is repetitively represented among the pigdogging community as a marker of identity. Countless videos of the hit-up are uploaded online, a competition between men celebrating the prowess of their dogs. Pigdogging businesses have logos of snarling, muscular, big-tusked boars, or images of pigdogs and wild pigs in the moments before they clash (Figure 8).

Recollections of a good boar hunt among pigdoggers evoke the critical and confronting context of the encounter. These stories may begin with the urgency to reach and kill the pig before their canine partner is injured. The terrain might be challenging, running through rough country or crawling inside a dense, thorny blackberry bush. The hopeful expectation of a big boar is counterpoised with the unsettling anticipation of the boar's violent intention towards the hunter. Human, dog and pig are all pressured: acting, perceiving, making decisions in relation to each other and towards their respective desired outcomes. Within and through affectively charged space, the hunter will strategise their approach to avoid being struck. Fearful and agitated, the wild pig will try to flee or lash out at the hunter. The hunter trusts the dog will tighten its hold on the pig as he approaches. Sows in this moment will unleash a sustained, piercing and overwhelming scream that fills the air. 'Sticking the pig' with a knife into the heart is quick, but demands an intimate, risky mode of killing. The hunter must grapple with and lean into a wildly thrashing body, against coarse mud-encrusted bristles, sharp tusks and an aversive smell. The friction and tension between bodies dissipates soon after the knife is removed, with hot gushes of blood and the unfortunate pig's dead weight.

The recreational hunt is an event that choreographs human, dog and pig in a way that creates the conditions for a certain kind of multispecies encounter and atmosphere, but also the opportunity for some pigdoggers to enact their gender and status. As one hunter put it, pigdogging for young men can be about getting 'charged up on testosterone ... getting their tough stickers'. Grappling with dangerous pigs, injuries and contact with carcasses and blood are sensual, embodied ways through which pigdoggers construct and



FIGURE 8 Ned and a trainee dog, satisfied after overcoming this boar



affirm their 'toughness' (Massey et al., 2011). Thrilling and risky behaviour can be seen as an expression of physical and psychological talents believed naturally attributable to men rather than women (Walker, 1998). Failure to support one's dog and confront the unique challenges of pigdogging can be derided both through questioning a person's courage and character, or feminising the target (despite the fact that some 'girls can do both'). While constructions of pigdogging subjectivities refer to gender dynamics familiar to settler Australians, hunting pigs has a long association with masculinity in Europe. Historically, the male heroes of myth and legend proved themselves worthy by killing a wild boar (Yamamoto, 2017).

6 | CONCLUSION

Analysing the atmospheric aspects of pigdogging opens new approaches to exploring hunting as a multi-sensory and multi-sensual practice. This paper draws attention to the hunter's immersion in and coordination with meteorological forces, but also the hunter's awareness of the sensory worlds and 'animal atmospheres' of the nonhumans they hunt and hunt with (Lorimer et al., 2017). The notion of an affective force that permeates and defines interactions offers novel ways to characterise and describe the sensual experience of different kinds of hunting. Further, framing hunting as an aesthetic performance (Marvin, 2003) opens the question for how hunters might compose the emplaced, embodied conditions for hunting atmospheres to emerge and to participate in those atmospheres for recreation.

In this article both an atmospheric awareness of scentspace and the affective force that characterises pigdogging emerges at the juncture of human and nonhuman subjective experiences and sensation. Attuning to a nonhumans' perception of an environment can foreground the presence of meteorological forces often backgrounded in everyday consciousness, but also point towards those elements that are beyond the limits of human senses, a more-than-human sensory dimension. Animals can be vital partners in speculating about atmospheric things (McCormack, 2018). Analysing mutually affecting interspecies relations can follow how atmospheres emerge through the interaction of human and nonhuman subjects (Schroer, 2018). This article's analysis of the hunting event describes an ensemble of bodies and perspectives in conflict and in alignment, and articulates the atmosphere of tension and anticipation that is produced by and grips those involved. The multispecies entanglement and aesthetic of pigdogging offers insights into how recreational hunting atmospheres can be co-constituted by more-than-human agency, whether the drive and excitement of the pigdog, or the desperate responses of the wild pig.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ While Ned is his real name, all other names have been changed for privacy reasons. All location names are purposefully removed.
- ² Preliminary research suggest that pigs were regularly hunted with the assistance of farm dogs on rural properties since the mid- to late 1800s, and were conducted by working classes for recreation, food and pest control, or pigs were captured live and sold at local markets.
- ³ From the 1950s onwards, wild pigs were increasingly branded as 'feral' and diseased by scientists, the pork industry and government alike, making harvesting pigs for local consumption illegal as well as unappetising.
- ⁴ Emma Hurst, Animal Justice Party NSW. Facebook post: The brutal 'sport' of pig-dogging must end. 27 September 2019. <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=436756823620965&extid=TzISbzqHrSviEGrq> [Accessed 26 August 2020].
- ⁵ A pig might try to disguise its smell by jumping into water, or depositing pungent 'bombs' of semen and urine in multiple places in thick scrub as a decoy.

⁶ It is worth noting that irruption seems also to impress on nonhuman animals in the vicinity. Property managers do not look kindly on hunts that occur near livestock, as it is likely the cattle will get 'spooked' and stressed, disrupting the routine and relaxed conditions farmers nurture for improved productivity in their livestock. Kangaroos, fallow deer, feral goats and various species of birds that live wild on these large pastoral blocks will also observe intently from a distance and might take flight. The excitation, agitation and anxiety that erupts between and captures pig, pigdog and hunter, also spills over into the world, and sweeps up other beings present in the environment.

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