

Cultural Geographies

<http://cgj.sagepub.com>

Border-processes and homemaking: encounters with possums in suburban Australian homes

Emma R. Power

Cultural Geographies 2009; 16; 29

DOI: 10.1177/1474474008097979

The online version of this article can be found at:
<http://cgj.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/16/1/29>

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

Additional services and information for *Cultural Geographies* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://cgj.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://cgj.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav>

Border-processes and homemaking: encounters with possums in suburban Australian homes

Emma R. Power

Department of Human Geography, Macquarie University

Ruptures in borders that materially and conceptually separate western homes from nature, nonhumans and the outside have been conceptualized as disrupting and destabilizing home, and provoking a sense of anxiety in homemakers. This paper argues that border ruptures can also contribute to feelings of homeyness at a number of scales. Everyday experiences of border-making and rupture at home are explored through the accounts of 24 residents of suburban Sydney who have lived with uninvited brushtail possums in the wall and ceiling cavities of their homes. Human residents primarily encountered possums through sound and smell-scapes that permeated homes' immediate physical borders. These events at times unsettled home's human residents, but also simultaneously contributed to residents' feelings of belonging within home, the urban environment and the nation. The paper particularly attends to the role of nonhuman agency in processes of border-making and rupture at home, focusing on the activity of brushtail possums as well as the role that less evidently active structures like walls and ceilings play in mediating human–possum interactions.

Keywords: border processes • Brushtail Possums • homemaking • more-than-human agency • nativeness

Introduction

Border practices separating home from 'outside', wildness, nature and dirt are central to the material and conceptual construction of western homes as safe, secure, autonomous, human spaces. Much research theorizes the location and making of these borders, while ruptures, ambiguous and liminal zones are seen as threatening and destabilizing forces that provoke anxiety in homemakers, or an uncanny sense of 'not being at home in one's own home'.¹ This paper focuses on everyday interactions in the house-as-home to show that border challenges can also contribute to feelings of homeyness at a number of scales. This complexity is explored through the accounts of 24 residents of suburban Sydney who have lived with common brushtail possums (*Trichosurus Vulpecula*) in the ceiling and wall cavities of their homes. It broadens understandings of home and its borders in two ways. First, the paper explores the complex and situated nature of boundary-making, with an emphasis on home's immediate wall, ceiling and roof boundaries. Discussing these border zones as spaces of encounter it argues that ambiguity in home's liminal spaces provide opportunities for new relations of belonging and homeyness at a number of scales, from the house-as-home to the nation. Border ruptures in particular are shown to be complex events that do not simply

threaten home, but paradoxically can also produce a simultaneous sense of homeyness (of being in place). Second, the paper foregrounds the role and agency of nonhuman animals in the (un)making of home's borders. Depictions of home as a necessarily human space are unsettled by this view of home as a space cohabited by humans and nonhuman animals. Drawing these discussions together the paper considers how nature is constructed and encountered through border-processes critical to everyday home-making inside the home.

The paper's focus on possums as borderland or liminal creatures provides a novel window on home-making. First, possums draw attention into home's darker, liminal spaces – the ceiling and wall cavities, the night-time and sleep spaces that they inhabit. This is in contrast to the sites that usually frame discussions of home-making, such as the day-times, kitchens, living rooms and dining spaces. Second, habitation of these liminal spaces de-centres the visual senses by foregrounding the role of other senses such as hearing and smell in home-making.

Home-making and border zones

Borders demarcate and distinguish territories and identities. Far from fixed, natural lines between groups and places, they are dynamic processes that have cultural, political, economic and historical dimensions². Border processes create belonging at multiple scales and have significant implications for the identities of individuals, groups and places that they define. However, it is increasingly recognized that borders are not simply sites of division, but also offer opportunities for exchange, encounter and dialogue.³ Although emphasis has traditionally been placed on the ways that people imagine and define borders, borders are more-than human achievements.⁴

Home is produced through border relationships of belonging and exclusion at multiple scales, including the state, neighbourhood and house.⁵ These processes make home as 'an inside in opposition to an existing outside',⁶ where undesired elements are excluded from home, while desired elements are selectively purified and brought inside. At a national scale these exclusionary processes are evident in decisions around quarantine⁷ and the movement of people.⁸ Similar processes define the house-as-home, constructing it as a safe, secure space that is distinct from excluded natures, wildness, nonhumans and the 'outside'.⁹ This view is particularly evident in advertisements for cleaning and pest-related products, which promise to keep home safe from dangerous pests and germs that are shown to originate from outside of home.¹⁰ These processes mirror the conceptualization of urban/suburban spaces as the domain of humans and domesticated species. Much research has theorized the significance of border processes to occupants of home; however, the lived complexity of home's borders has received little attention.

Although the house-as-home is popularly depicted as a space of exclusion in opposition to a dangerous outside world, its border processes are far more complex. They do not exist as clear-cut lines between inside and outside, but are multi-sited and porous. For example, cleaning and pest-control practices are border processes that are located within living spaces and are part of everyday home-making activity.¹¹ Similarly, water and electrical supply networks that facilitate a sense of home's autonomy and separation from nature are temporally and spatially distributed throughout and beyond the home.¹² Further, home does not simply

exclude nature. Rather its appearance as a safe, secure space depends on its material connection to elements of the excluded outside, including nature.¹³ Kaika thus shows that home's borders are characterized by a 'selective porosity' where desired elements of nature are '*selectively* allowed to enter after having undergone significant material and social transformations'.¹⁴ But home is also porous in ways that exceed human design, becoming host, for example, to a diversity of nonhuman 'pests'.¹⁵

Structural borders, including walls, ceilings and roofs, play a key role in facilitating an exclusionary view of the house-as-home as a secure space separated from nature and nonhumans. First, they provide an immediate delineation between home and the outside by protecting occupants from weather extremes, regulating air flow and noise, and limiting pest incursions.¹⁶ Their second key role is in concealing the networks that supply resources like water and energy to the home. The invisibility of these networks fosters a sense of home's familiarity and facilitates occupants' experience of home as a safe, autonomous space by obscuring its material imbrication with nature.¹⁷ However, as Kaika¹⁸ explains, this function also alienates occupants from home because, 'In a deceitful way, remaining unfamiliar with [these] socio-natural networks is a prerequisite for feeling familiar [at home] within one's own home.' These border spaces also accommodate a range of nonhuman pests, yet obscure them from home's occupants.¹⁹ This creates a paradox where home's appearance as a purely 'human' space is secured by the very structures that house unfamiliar and excluded bodies.

As sites of encounter between two conceptually opposed spaces (humans/home and non-humans/nature), home's border zones have been depicted as ambiguous spaces and a source of anxiety for occupants of home.²⁰ Challenges to, and within, these borders are theorized as disrupting occupants' experience of home as a secure space and therefore challenging their feelings of homeliness within home. Germs and pests are frequently depicted as a source of anxiety in home; their unruly, disruptive bodies threatening to contaminate home and its residents by connecting it with spaces conceptually outside home, such as rubbish heaps. Pests also destabilize home by drawing attention to alternate, 'nonhuman', ways of living within home.²¹ Disruptions in home's essential networks, including to water supply and garbage disposal, prompt similar feelings of the uncanny by highlighting home's essential connection to the outside.²² But these rupture events may also have the potential to emancipate occupants by confronting them with their alienation and therefore offering the opportunity for reflection 'on alternative ways of engaging with the world'.²³

Analysis of Australian homes shows that in some cultural contexts a blurring of inside and outside is not necessarily destructive to home. This is evidenced in the growing popularity of 'outdoor rooms' associated with outdoor eating and entertaining, as well as in the trend to informal living areas at the back of the house that are 'physically (e.g. large sliding door) and visually (extensive use of glass)' opened to the outside.²⁴ In this context openness offers new possibilities for living that involve encounters with spaces and bodies outside home. Crouch²⁵ similarly writes of the role of verandas in facilitating a movement between inside and outside in Australian homes. He situates verandas as an architectural expression 'of dialectic interchange between sanctuary and travel, environments and houses – indeed between a still interior intimacy and a constant exterior becoming'.²⁶ These are not spaces of anxiety, but are conceived as facilitating a productive engagement between inside and outside. These structures give material form to borders as sites of encounter and dialogue (see above).

But despite the mobility, interchange and becomings that are associated with these spaces, they are permeated by a sense of design, control and human agency. Here home *is opened* to the outside and liminal spaces appear literally as spaces 'in-between' a secure home and its outside. By contrast, forced openings, ruptures and stories of more-than-human agency do not feature in these accounts.

The lived complexity of everyday homemaking within, around and through home's borders is a notable absence in discussions of home. Similarly, home's immediate physical border spaces, including the walls, ceilings and roofs, are largely invisible within discussions of home-making. Where these spaces have appeared it is the visible, solid, painted walls inside the home that are emphasized,²⁷ rather than the comparatively disorderly, hidden internal cavities that house pests, insulation and networks of wiring and pipes. Where Kaika²⁸ highlights these spaces in relation to essential networks, she theorizes their role rather than attending to how they are encountered in the course of everyday home-making activity. Discussions of home-making have also rarely attended to the place of nonhuman agency in the (un)making of home, and particularly to the role of uninvited nonhumans. Kaika,²⁹ for example, emphasizes the role of crises and malfunctions in the disruption of home, but does not attend to the particular property or agency of the materials and bodies that constitute and circulate these networks, or to their role in challenging or rupturing home's appearance of autonomy.³⁰ Power³¹ points to depictions of animal agency in homemaker magazines, but does not attend to how these organisms are encountered by homemakers. Some important exceptions focusing on companion animals show that nonhumans can play a key role in shaping the ways that home is lived by human residents.³²

Human-centred studies of border processes in the house-as-home are challenged by recognition of the active role that nonhumans play in their relations with people and in place-making,³³ and by research showing that nonhumans actively shape and contest borders in other contexts. For example the travels and activities of animals have been shown to shape the location of national scale quarantine borders in Australia.³⁴ Similarly, in the United States native animals, including cougars, contest the construction of suburban fringe environments as the domain of humans and domesticated pets as they travel through, relax and hunt in these locations.³⁵ Analysis of cougar agency shows that these animals are active in this reconstruction, altering their own activities and behaviours to maximize the opportunities provided by suburban environments. This is similar to experiences in New Zealand where 'alien' brush-tail possums have enthusiastically adapted to the opportunities of rural and urban living since their introduction as part of the fur-trade in the 1800s.³⁶ In each of these studies animal presences unsettle and disturb peoples' feelings of safety and security at multiple scales. These studies support an analysis of home-making that is attentive to the active role that nonhumans play in the (re)construction of borders around the house-as-home.

This paper attends to these absences and opportunities through the accounts of 24 residents of suburban Sydney who have cohabited with possums. Possum agency is engaged through a focus on everyday practices and interactions in home³⁷ Possums are rarely invited into homes, but forcibly enter through gaps and ruptures that they find or make. They frequently inhabit the wall and ceiling cavities of homes and so provide a unique opportunity to foreground the role of border spaces in homemaking.

Introducing possums

Common Brushtail Possums (*Trichosurus Vulpecula*, see Figure 1) inhabit much of suburban Australia. When living in bushland areas they predominately eat plant foods, including leaves and flowers. Eucalypt leaves are particularly important in their diet. They are tree-dwelling animals and make their dens in hollow trees. In temperate bushland locations they predominately breed in autumn, with a secondary peak in spring. The adaptable nature of these lively, medium sized nocturnal marsupials makes suburban environments lucrative habitat, bringing people and possums into increasingly frequent and intimate contact.³⁸

Common Brushtail Possums living in urban and urban-bushland locations frequently make their dens in the ceiling and wall spaces of homes, as well as inhabiting and consuming the gardens that surround them. One study of urban possums in Tasmania found that 87 per cent of their visits to dens were associated with buildings (mostly older houses), while 45 percent of den visits were to roof cavities specifically.³⁹ A recent Sydney study similarly found that as many as 69 per cent of people whose properties were visited by possums reported hearing possum activity in roof cavities, while 58 per cent reported possums *inhabiting* these spaces. The most common complaints about possums denning within the ceiling and wall spaces of homes centre on the amount of noise generated by their movements and loud vocalizations. Damage to the ceiling cavity, including to electrical wiring, and urine stains and



FIGURE 1 Common Brushtail Possum (*Trichosurus Vulpecula*). (Image courtesy of Tracey Russell.)

odours in the ceiling are also frequently reported.⁴⁰ Common Brushtail Possums are protected as native animals in New South Wales (*National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*). Current policy emphasizes 'living with possums' and requires that when trapped (e.g. in roofs) they are not relocated more than 150 metres beyond the catch site.⁴¹ When removed possums frequently reinhabit roofs, even when 'precautions against reoccupation' are taken.⁴²

However while possum populations are thriving in urban and urban-bushland areas, their numbers are declining in non-urban bushland locations, and they are believed to have disappeared from more than half their range over the last 150 years.⁴³ Despite (or perhaps because of) the benefits that possums gain from urban living, residents of these areas express mixed feelings towards these creatures. For example many continue to imagine that non-urban bush areas are the safest, most appropriate locations for native animals like possums. Some people, particularly those who have lived with possums in the ceiling cavities of their home, encounter possums as pests,⁴⁴ while others aim to attract them into their own backyards.⁴⁵ These conflicting views are also strongly evident in newspaper opinion pieces and online blogs.⁴⁶ One columnist, expressing a caustic dislike of possums, suggested that the division between supporters and opponents of possums was so extensive, and the numbers of supporters so 'surprisingly' numerous and vocal that 'Few people are prepared to speak openly about possums, although many will abuse them in private.'⁴⁷ This paper finds that these conflicting attitudes are not clearly in opposition as both positions are often expressed within the same individuals.

These changing geographies and conflicting perceptions make possums' borderland creatures who are at once imagined to belong, and not belong in urban Sydney. As Donna Haraway⁴⁸ explored with coyote, and Lesley Instone⁴⁹ observed with dingo, possums' activities, interactions and travels signpost and disrupt a number of binaries and call into question where lines of belonging are drawn. Possums highlight the contingent nature of belonging and being 'native' in a settler nation like Australia.⁵⁰ Although legally protected as native animals, possum populations are diminishing in the territories traditionally imagined as their homelands, while they flourish in urban spaces. They are also simultaneously depicted both as pests that do not belong in the urban environment, and as symbols of biodiversity and a healthy, balanced urban environment. These conflicts highlight tensions between settler discourses of home-making that exclude indigenous nonhumans and contemporary environmental discourses that privilege native plants and animals, the latter defined as bodies that were present in the nation prior to European settlement in 1788.⁵¹ Indigenous humans are subject to similarly ambiguous discourses of belonging and exclusion that see them romantically constructed as 'noble savages', or their existence and agency denied through doctrines of 'terra nullius'.⁵²

Possums negotiate a further dualism related to these constructions, being viewed alternately as victims of Australia's colonial history and contemporary urban development – and as dangerous, pestilent opportunists that colonize urban environments and home spaces. Everyday human–possum interactions also negotiate a binary between views of possums as wild animals to be respected and left alone, and a sense that possums are familiars to be fed, protected and petted. These boundaries and divisions are drawn into the home by possums. In a settler nation like Australia the experience of being-at-home within the house-as-home, with its associated ideals of safety, security and the exclusion of wild natures, is thus drawn

into tension by national discourses that afford belonging and homeyness through association with these same wild natures.

Tensions surrounding possums in Australia resonate with international experiences of urban settlement and invasion. The North American experience with cougars and wolves (see above) highlights similar tensions where native animals are constructed alternately as threats to human safety that do not belong in the suburban fringe, and as symbols of nature and wildness that deserve protection and respect.⁵³ These dualisms are differently explored in New Zealand through encounters with brushtail possums as 'alien invaders' that introduce sickness and destroy native animals and ecosystems.⁵⁴ In each of these examples home border processes that seek to create home as a safe, secure space (whether at the scale of the house, or nation) are disturbed by the presence of 'out-of-place' animals. Within the house-as-home this produces a complex and unsettling interplay between wild/domestic, native/non-native and nature/home dualisms.

In the Australian context of this paper possums' habitation of liminal wall and ceiling spaces in the house-as-home provides a unique opportunity for examining the role of borders in homemaking, and particularly the ways that people make home with, and despite, border transgressions and ruptures. Through possums' activities and travels home's border spaces begin to penetrate into the house and the everyday activity of homemakers in a variety of ways. They shape home-making practices and, as the remainder of this paper explores, contribute feelings of both homeyness and unhomeyness at a number of scales, including the house, urban environment and nation.

Methodologies

The paper draws on interviews undertaken in 2006 with 24 people who had lived with a possum in the ceiling or wall cavity of their home. Participants responded to an advertisement placed in two local newspapers in Sydney's northern suburbs (see Figure 2). Titled 'Ever had a possum in your roof?', the advertisements asked for 'people to take part in a study about how people and animals interact in the home'. All respondents who had lived with a possum that independently entered the home were interviewed. People who had only lived with possums that they had purposely brought into the home to rehabilitate were excluded. Sydney's northern suburbs were prioritized as they are known to have high possum densities.⁵⁵ They are also well established, with older housing stock than is found in other parts of Sydney. Older houses are often associated with possum den sites because they are more likely to have age related gaps and holes that make the home accessible to possums.⁵⁶ Twenty-three of the houses were brick veneer, and one was constructed from fibro. Only two did not have hollow roof cavities; however, these participants had experienced possum habitation of a roof cavity in a prior home, and experienced extensive possum activity over the metal roof in their current home. Interviews took place during spring as possum activity in Sydney is perceived to be greatest in this season.⁵⁷ This was important to the research because it meant that participants were more likely to have current experience of possum co-habitation.

Twenty-three participants were women. One man participated independently, and two took part in interviews that their partners organized. It is unclear why the majority of participants

were women. However, it is interesting to note that most undertook paid employment either in or outside of home, and were the primary carers within the home. Male participants were all retired. Research shows that although women have a ‘higher ... “belief in the intrinsic value of possums”’ than men,⁵⁸ regard for possums is not ‘sufficient to combat ill-feeling toward possums that [inhabit] roof cavities.’⁵⁹ Reflecting the suburbs from which they were drawn the participants were predominately middle class. They also had a settler heritage and,

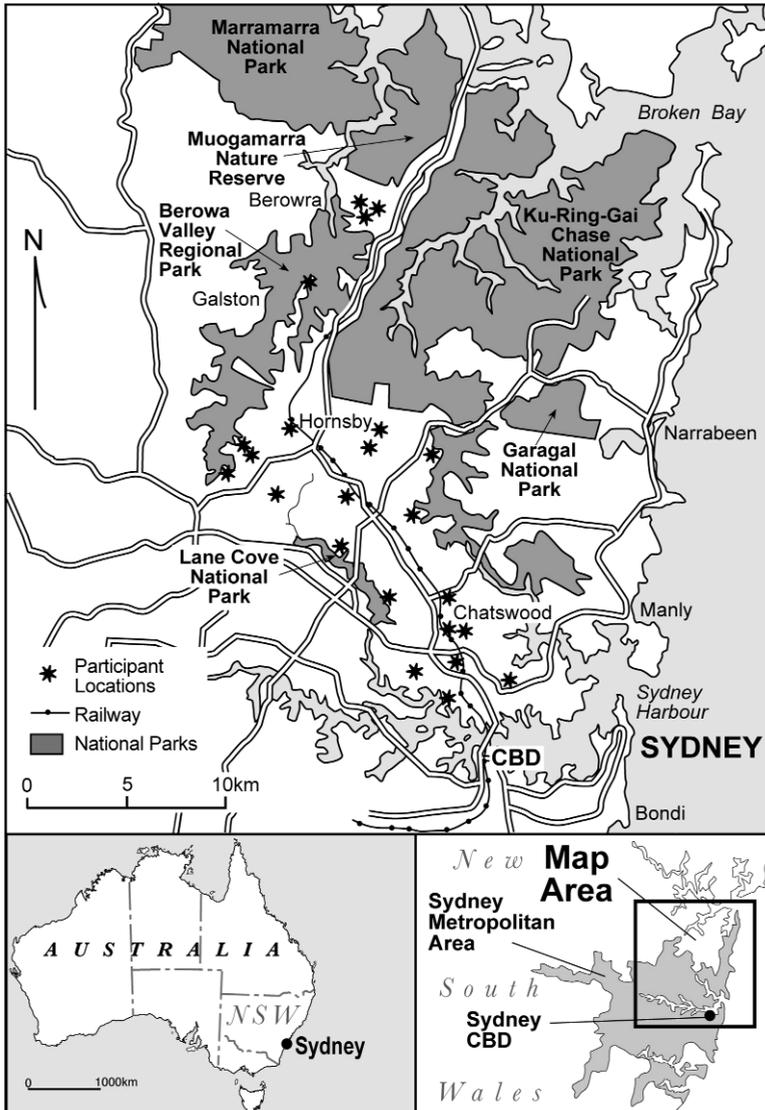


FIGURE 2 Map of Sydney indicating research locations. (Image prepared by Judy Davis.)

with the exception of one participant who had emigrated from New Zealand, had grown up in Australia. Although in New Zealand brushtail possums are eradicated as pests, this participant had embraced a view of brushtail possums as desirable, native animals and was active in a wildlife group that rehabilitated them.

Interviews took place in participant's homes and were approximately one hour in length. Interviews were semi-structured and focused on participants' experiences cohabiting with possums. Topics of interest included how participants identified that a possum was living in their home, their experience of living alongside a possum, the positive and negative impacts that possums have on the home and home-making, participants' degree of familiarity with possums, and their attitudes towards the presence of possums in their local area. Interviews also discussed the presence of common black rats in the home as, anecdotally, the sounds that these animals make when moving in the roof are often mistaken for possum sounds. Participants also reflected on the different values and stigmas associated with possums and rats. Following the interviews participants were requested to write a short recount of their experiences cohabiting with possums and post it to the researcher; 41 per cent completed this activity.

Interviews were transcribed and then coded according to whether participants perceived that possums belonged firstly in the urban environment, and secondly within the home. Following a grounded method of coding, these themes were selected because they were central to the ways that participants framed their encounters with possums. Attention was then given to people's experiences of interacting with possums at home, and their efforts to encourage, negotiate, manage or limit possum presences. This emphasis on home practices threaded through the interviews and coding process and allowed possum agency to emerge through participants' discussions of their embodied encounters with possums. This method has successfully been used elsewhere in research concerned with plant and canine agency.⁶⁰

Making home with possums

Participants' interactions with possums took place within the home and garden that surrounded it. Their perceptions of whether possums belonged, or did not belong in these spaces reflected their interactions with possums and drew on narratives of home, colonization, urbanization and nativeness. They were also mediated by home's wall and ceiling cavities, which both restricted and facilitated interaction between people and the possums dwelling within them. Participants' beliefs about possum-belonging shaped their experience of home, and their sense of belonging within home and the urban environment. This pointed to two divergent, yet simultaneous themes which shape the remainder of this paper. In the first, possums contributed to participants' feelings of unhomeyness in the urban and home environment. In the second, possums contributed a simultaneous sense of homeyness in the house-as-home and nation. This created a paradox where possums contributed to residents' feelings of unhomeyness within the house-as-home, while simultaneously providing opportunities for new relations of belonging and homeyness at other scales. Only two participants, Lisa⁶¹ and Judy, never experienced possums as homey. Common black rats also frequented these spaces, but their association with dirt and disease meant that they were nearly always

encountered as a disruptive and contaminating force in home. These encounters extend understandings about home's border processes,⁶² attending to how homemakers experience border challenges, and showing that these events do not simply threaten feelings of homeyness. A final section draws these experiences together to reflect on the role of possum agency and home's liminal wall and ceiling cavities in residents' experiences of home and home-making.

Unhomey

Urban unhomey

Participant's encounters with possums were framed by discussions about whether possums belonged, or did not belong in the urban and urban-bushland environments that participants lived in. Participants' beliefs about whether possums belonged in these environments shaped their own sense of homeyness in these spaces and in the house-as-home. Although urban environments have traditionally been framed as human-only spaces, participants expressed a more complex conception of possum-belonging that drew on narratives of nativeness, invasion, colonialism and contemporary urban development. These relations had implications for participants own sense of being at home within the house-as-home, urban space and at a national scale.

Participants' narratives constructed possums as borderland, or liminal creatures that both belonged and did not belong in the urban environment. Only one participant, Lisa, felt that possums never belonged in urban space. This dual, and apparently conflicting idea, reflected the complexity of constructing belonging in a postcolonial context. Possums were described as not belonging in urban environments, including urban areas that bordered bushland, because they were native animals. In this view bush environments were perceived as a more appropriate home. They were believed to be safer for possums and provide more of their food and accommodation needs. By contrast, urban spaces were described as unsafe because of their habitation by people, cars and domestic animals,⁶³ and a belief that these spaces provided less of possums' food needs.⁶⁴ A further concern was that co-habitation of these spaces made it more likely that possums would enter into people's homes (as discussed in the following section). However, all participants (except Lisa) also simultaneously expressed a belief that possums *did* belong in urban spaces because they were native animals and therefore had a basic right to residence. They also emphasized the difficulties of restricting possums to bush-only environments, particularly in urban-bushland locations. As Jill observed 'Well he can't read a notice can he [laughs], "do not enter"'. The physical appeal of possums also played a significant role in securing participants' affections.⁶⁵ These divergent views drew on understandings of possums as native animals and led participants to reflect on their own presence in urban-Australia.

Possums were unanimously perceived as native animals. Reflecting dominant constructions of nativeness, their habitation of participants' home suburbs, and Sydney more generally, was understood as pre-dating European settlement.⁶⁶ These discussions constructed humans' as invaders through a sometimes naive reference to Australia's colonial history, as captured in Susan's statement that 'this is their home, possums were here before people were', and Janie's assertion that 'you have to accept that they were here first'. This theme was most marked when

participants discussed the presence of rats within and around the house-as-home. Although possums were sometimes undesirable, rats were unanimously disliked. Participants explained that this was because possums are native, whereas rats are introduced. As Stephanie explained, rats 'are rodents, they're scavengers ... and particularly the ones that came on the boats' (that brought European settlers to Australia). Lesley and Diane explained that because rats are non-native they disrupt the integrity of the local environment by spreading disease and pushing out 'native animals'. Rats were associated with people, whereas possums were viewed as natural and therefore cleaner and more rightfully present within Sydney (the significance of rats in the home and their association with dirt is discussed in a later section: 'Homeyness'). The *National Parks and Wildlife Act (1974)* supports this view of possums by protecting possums' right to dwell in urban locations because of their 'native' status.

Humans were also established as urban-invaders through reference to contemporary patterns of urban development which were seen to be destroying possum habitat. Lana explained:

we've moved into their territory, we're cutting down all their trees, even in urban areas where we should be *growing* more we're taking more out, more and more are being removed for car parks and different developments.

These discussions pointed to two periods of invasion – the initial establishment of urban areas within 'pristine' bushland locations, and contemporary developments within existing suburbs, including railway upgrades and medium-density housing developments. These latter activities were seen to threaten areas of the 'non-natural/built' environment (i.e. aspects of the environment associated with people and urbanization), including trees like camphor laurels (that are classified as non-native, noxious weeds in the study area) and spaces like railway sidings and sports fields, that possums had previously been able to exploit for food and accommodation. Observations of possums in participants' local areas suggested that these developments were having a detrimental effect on possum health and population numbers. Ten participants detailed their efforts to support what they felt were diminishing possum populations (though from their own descriptions some of these activities appeared to be having a negative impact on possum health, for example through over-feeding).

Views of possums as both belonging and not-belonging in the urban environment initially appeared to be divergent. However, they were held together by a view of Australia as a 'natural' bush environment that has been transformed by (settler) human activity, and a related view of possums as native animals with a natural right to reside in these locations. These discussions did not progress as far as interrogating the role of indigenous Australians, or suggesting that settler Australians did not belong in Australia or in the urban environment (indeed possums sometimes paradoxically also contributed to participants' feelings of belonging, as discussed in a later section: 'Homeyness'). However, they did point to a sense that something else, something nonhuman, also belonged, or perhaps more rightfully belonged in this environment. Lana's comments about humans cutting down all *their* trees encapsulate this sentiment, as does Marlene's explanation that humans must learn to co-exist with possums because, 'well we have chosen to live here and this is technically their environment'.

Although eschewing discussion of (human) indigenous Australians, this view resonates with Gelder and Jacobs discussion of the postcolonial uncanny where, in a settler nation like Australia, 'what is "ours" is also potentially, or even always already, "theirs"'.⁶⁷ This sense of

possum-belonging introduced tension into participants' everyday home-making as a desire to remove possums from home conflicted with this belief in possums' right to dwell in urban and urban-bushland environments. It also contributed to participants' sense of being at home in the urban environment and nation, as later sections explore. These themes highlight a complex and multi-scalar view of home, where feelings of homeyness in the house and urban environment were shaped by discourses of national home-making through association with native animals. Later sections show that notions of 'nature' were similarly unsettled by native/non-native dualisms.

Assault on the senses: unhomey in the house-as-home

Eighteen different [brushtail possum] vocalizations have been described including grunting, growling, hissing, screeching, clicking and teeth-chattering calls, many of which would not be out of place on a horror movie sound-track.⁶⁸

Most participants described the ideal home as a space that was not suitable for and should exclude wild animals. They typically found the presence of possums inside the wall and ceiling cavities of home unsettling. Some were concerned about the damage that possums might cause to the structures of the home and their impact on everyday home-making activity. Others experienced feelings of unhomeyness as possum sounds and smells permeated the house.

Twenty-three (of 24) participants explained that the house-as-home, including the bordering wall and ceiling cavities, was not suited to possum habitation. Four participants explained that it was not a safe place for wild animals as they were likely to become trapped and die inside the home. Nineteen were concerned that possums would damage and disrupt home, both through structural damage to the roof and disruption to sleep through noise generated while they exited and entered the house. Twelve participants felt that 'wild' animals simply did not belong in home. Sally did not mind when they inhabited the roof while she was extending her house and the roof was open:

That was ok, that didn't bother me. You know you might be sleeping up in the bedroom and hear thump, thump, thump but that's fine, it's just like having birds outside tweeting really, it's part of nature, and if you've got an extension open then you have to expect that that's ... but once the house is closed it's like this is *my* living space, don't invade it, that was my attitude.

Katie observed: 'I feel a bit uncomfortable about things in the roof that I don't really want in the roof. [...] they're invading my space and I've got to get rid of them.' Lisa similarly explained: 'you're not supposed to share your domestic situation with animals, they're supposed to have their own space. That's not to say that when we had dogs they didn't sleep in the bedroom, but that's *my* invitation, not theirs, well sort of.' Rats were unanimously viewed as a contaminating influence that should be excluded from home. This view of home reflects the dominant construction of western homes as safe, secure spaces that exclude the 'outside', nature and wildness.

Although possums were physically hidden within wall and ceiling cavities their sounds and smells gradually permeated the house. Smells, in particular, became insidious over time, gradually penetrating the home and overwhelming its human residents. While renovating part of

her home Stephanie moved into a bedroom at the back of the house and became gradually aware of an unpleasant odour like ‘men’s toilets’. Urine stains in the ceiling of Susan’s home did not concern her, but brought her into conflict with her elderly mother who considered moving house to get away from them. Possum waste was of concern to participants even when it could not be smelt or seen, as they were left to imagine its volume and potential impact in the ceiling.

Three participants (Sally, Bronwyn and Letitia) also experienced possums dying in their homes. The rotting carcasses were overwhelmingly smelly, and extremely difficult to find as they were hidden within ceiling and wall cavities. Participants were forced to navigate their way through the rotting smell-scape both in their search for the source of the smell, and as they moved through their homes during their daily activities. Box 1 recounts Sally’s experience and shows that these smells often overpowered daily routines. Like Sally, Bronwyn and Letitia also described an extended search for the rotting smell. Until found these stench assumed an almost haunting quality, lingering in hallways, doorways and bedrooms, and drastically altering participants’ experience of home. Although the possums were clearly dead, there was a sense that participants had been somehow outwitted by a possum who had managed to discover inaccessible sections of the house.

Night-time sounds were differently disconcerting. Participants described jumping awake at dawn to crashing and scraping sounds, and a feeling that someone was in the house. At home by herself one evening Samantha thought the house had been burgled. The ‘thunderous loud noises’ made Andy think someone was in the lounge room and prompted her and her husband to get out of bed and check the house. Lisa also described being woken at night:

every now and again they’d make some fairly spine chilling [‘hisssssing’] noises and you’d wake up and think ‘oh my god!’ Before you realise it’s possums your heart is just pounding because you *know* there’s a home invasion going on downstairs.

Caroline similarly woke to hear: ‘A sound like a big ceramic pot being dragged across the bathroom and you wake up and go [gasp]! I couldn’t work out *what* the sound was.’ She sent

BOX 1 Sally’s story: The possum after-life.

[There was] this hideous, we knew it was something dead and with the heat of summer, it was just this *smell* that took over and it was starting to *really* annoy me because my husband’s a handyman, like he built this extension onto the house and he knew where things could be, but he checked everywhere, absolutely everywhere and couldn’t see where this possum could be. [...] he ended up having to pull half the place apart trying to find this dead thing and then oh, the maggots, oh it was just disgusting. But then in the meantime of him trying to find out where it was and having this smell in the house was driving me *nuts*. I had to close these doors here, I had to pull the mattress down here because I’m not going up, I can’t sleep in my bedroom! I was really stressed, I had to, I got cranky with everybody [...], I had to escape to Westfield [a major shopping complex] [laughs], light candles, smelly candles.

her husband to have a look around the house. He searched the bathroom, but found nothing. Pursuing the sound to the fireplace he noticed a lever slowly moving, apparently on its own. Within days they realized that a possum had taken up residence in the chimney. As this experience suggests, these sounds often had the qualities of a haunting, a feeling which was exacerbated by possums' habitation of hidden spaces and night-time hours. When possums could be seen their cute appearance seemed to outweigh fear, but at night when it was their hisses and screams that predominated, a sense of fear and uncertainty typically pervaded. Judy and Donna experienced high levels of sleep disruption as a result of possum noises in their homes and felt that their family relations and daily routines, including their ability to work, were affected. Possums were of most concern when their presence extended into the wall cavities and their sounds moved from overhead to 'surround sound'.

Despite the evident discomfort surrounding possum presences in home's ceiling and wall cavities possums typically remained living in these spaces for extended periods, ranging between an average two months and two years. This period reflects a range of practical, economic and ethical issues that made possum removal a complex concern, and is important in understanding the impact of possums in home firstly because it meant that their negative impacts were experienced for a longer time, and secondly because extended cohabitation sometimes led to familiarity and acceptance, as the following section explores. Anna's account of her efforts to initially manage and limit the disruption caused by the possum, and finally to remove the possum, is typical of participants' experience (see Box 2).

BOX 2 Anna's story.

He'd come in that corner of the house over there and you could hear him sort of sliding in the roof and making movements and then in the middle of the night he'd start, he didn't do it all the time but he'd start scratching and gnawing at the rafters. We had to come out with a broom, we didn't know what to do with him, so we'd come out with a broom and banged up on the ceiling, up like that [Anna demonstrated the activity] 'boom, boom, boom' and sometimes he'd stop but it was getting to the point where he wouldn't stop when we did that [...]. So that was very disturbing because you'd have to get up more than once a night to attend to the loud sounds you know [...]. But then we realised we had to do something a bit more permanent and so we started to try and find ways we could keep the possum out of the roof and first of all my husband put chicken wire up over the entry point where he was coming into the house, but he was very clever that possum because he was very strong and he'd lift up the chicken wire and he'd come back in and we did that more than once and he'd still come back in, and he was just very good at doing it. Then we sought some information and we wondered what else we could do and we tried naphthalene flakes because we'd heard that was good but it wasn't, we used [a] repellent, that was no good it didn't work. My husband made a possum box which he put up in the tree and there [...] and we put fruit in them but the thing is he went to the fruit one night and then abandoned the box.

First, it was extremely difficult to discover and seal possums' point of access to the house as they often used spaces that were invisible or inaccessible to humans. Repairs to these spaces were also complicated and demanded consideration of the strength and ingenuity of possums.⁶⁹ Possums were frequently observed removing barriers and even lifting roof tiles. These challenges, coupled with laws stating that possums may only be relocated 50 metres from where they are caught, meant that roofs were frequently reinhabited following removal. Only two participants in this research did not experience re-habitation after removal.⁷⁰ Second, the high costs associated with removal and roof repair (participants were quoted between Australian \$300 and \$500 per removal, with repairs an additional cost) meant many participants felt forced to leave possums in the ceiling. Finally, participants frequently experienced guilt about their desire to remove possums from the ceiling and wall cavities of their homes. These feelings reflected a belief that possums, as native animals, had a right to reside in urban Sydney.⁷¹ These concerns and difficulties resulted in possums remaining within the ceiling and wall cavities of participants' homes for extended periods of time, and meant that feelings of unhomeyness associated with possum sounds and smells persisted. These experiences begin to unsettle the dominant construction of the house-as-home as a space that excludes nature, an idea which is explored in the following section.

Homeyness

Possum presences in the home did not always unsettle participants; instead they were sometimes simultaneously experienced as familiar and comforting. The classification of possums as native animals was central to this identification. Although this view invoked a sense of humans as invaders (see previous), it paradoxically also contributed a sense of belonging and connection to the nation. When possums were perceived as the original inhabitants of the land, participants were more likely to accept their presence in the home. While this familiarity did not override the unsettling nature of possum sounds and smells, it did allow possums to also be experienced as a comforting presence in home. This acceptance challenged popular notions of home as a space suitable only for humans and 'domesticated' species, as possum presences within the home began to signify homeyness and belonging. These discussions highlight a paradox where possums contributed to feelings of homeyness and unhomeyness at a number of scales. These apparently conflicting experiences and attitudes occurred within the same individuals.

Seventeen participants at times experienced possums as contributing to their sense of homeyness in the home (though this did not always mean that they preferred to cohabit with possums). Lana's experiences living with consecutive generations of brushtail possums capture the sense of belonging afforded by co-habitation with possums. Lana was concerned about the safety aspects of having possums living in the ceiling cavity of her home. She was worried that they may singe their feet and tails on down-lights that were inserted in the ceiling, and was concerned that they would become tangled in the electrical wiring and start a fire. The noise of them 'frolicking' and their 'baby-like' crying sounds could be heard inside the home. These sounds disrupted Lana's sleep and she described them as annoying. However, Lana and her family had lived with possums for five years and had become extremely familiar

with them. Lana described her husband's pride when showing the possums to visitors, and was pleased that (she believed) they felt safe with both her and her husband. Discussing a possum they had named 'Possie-pie', she explained that the possum had:

not a *lack* of fear, but a respect for both my husband and I. Still as wild as anything but we can walk up and pick her up and move her and put her somewhere else if she's sitting on the car or whatever without fear of attack or anything like that. So after a while she just became part of the family.

Notions of wildness and nativeness were particularly important to Lana and framed her interactions with the possums. This was typical amongst participants, who described their efforts to ensure that they did not domesticate possums by making them overly familiar or reliant on human contact. Lana explained that maintaining wildness secured the possum's safety when away from home.

However, Lana, her husband and their home were included within the term 'wild', their familiarity with the possum being viewed as healthy and beneficial for both person and possum. They were able to touch the possum, pick it up and even take it to the vet when required, but:

If anybody else approached it, it would do the normal hissing and fluffing itself up and it would definitely bite and scratch and carry on which was good to know because it meant that in the wild, out and about and doing their own thing, they weren't tempted by other handouts and things like that. And that was a funny thing, the old folks behind us used to try and feed them and they weren't interested, they'd always come *home*, or they'd take the food and bring it *home* and have it in the garage.

For Lana this association with an apparently 'wild' animal consolidated her sense of family and being at home. Although she spoke of concern at the destruction and disruptions caused by the possum, she also emphasized the comfort she felt at knowing that there was something else alive in the house when she was the only person at home during the day. Andy and her husband also emphasized the wildness of possums, yet experienced them as comforting familiars. Although initially startled by their sudden, disruptive noises at night (see previous section), once woken the sounds were experienced as a normal and welcoming aspect of home: 'like sometimes [...] we're in bed and we'll go "oh the possums are home", you know like "the kids are home"'.

A sense of possums as wild, native animals was essential to this view. Participants discussed their concerns about maintaining this wildness through (or despite) their interactions with possums. Lana's decision not to regularly feed the possums reflected her belief that it was important 'to treat her as a wild animal, she's not a pet'. Marlene similarly emphasized the importance of encouraging possums to be self-sufficient and explained that her interactions with possums negotiated a 'fine-line'. She expressed a concern that despite not 'intentionally feed[ing] them', she may have crossed the line by 'talking [to the possum] in a nice tone', leaving cat food out, which the possum had been observed eating, and not 'shooing' the possum away. Like Lana she also discussed the importance of respect between humans and wild animals. Lesley and Janie on the other hand asserted the importance of 'support feeding' possums, believing that it was critical to compensate for the perceived diminishing food supplies in urban areas. These women explained that the wildness of possums was not compromised by feeding, but instead that the continued presence of possums in urban locations was contingent on the willingness of residents to provide this food.

Participants viewed possums as examples of healthy nature and wildness in the home because of their (legal and popular) construction as native animals, and their association with bushland. They were viewed this way even when they were known to inhabit urban spaces. By contrast, the unanimous association of rats with humans, the 'city' and waste (especially sewers, drains, gutters and garbage) saw rats constructed as unhealthy and disease carrying. They were particularly associated with 'germs' and the 'plague'. Only Anthea preferred rats over possums because of a concern that possums were more destructive. Participants were concerned about possum waste in and around the home (see previous section), but did not view these products as contaminants. The smells and stains associated with possum urine, for example, were viewed as disruptive and potentially destructive, but urine was not viewed as unhealthy. Similarly, their faeces were viewed as messy and annoying, but, owing to the plant-based diet of possums, were described as clean and disease-free. The construction of possums as 'clean' animals was central to participants' ability to encounter them as a comforting, familiar and healthy influence in the home.⁷² It also underpinned the differential treatment of possums and rats. Although participants occasionally expressed frustration with 'living with possums' policies, they largely adhered to them. Rats on the other hand were described as pests and participants explained that they should be eliminated using poisons and traps.

The 17 participants' who encountered possums as a homey influence gradually developed a view of home as a space connected to nature, including native bushland. This sense of connection developed through their growing awareness of the activities of possums that dwelt within and around their home. As they described the regular patterns of movement that possums made over and through the roof space, they depicted their homes as essential nodes (in their role as possum dens) and pathways within possum's urban highways. This sense of connection to 'nature' outside the home contributed a sense of homeyness within home, proving the health of the home environment and suggesting that it was a wild sanctuary away from the degraded city. Participants also began to speak to environmental ethos of connectedness, where they emphasized the importance of home-based environmental action. Here the house was constructed as both homey and wild. Possums, perceived as wild, native animals, extended the home into nature and brought nature into the home to make the house more homey. These experiences conflict with views of home as a human-space and illustrate some ways that wildness and homeyness can come together within the house-as-home. They extend discussion of designed, integrated living spaces that blur inside and outside,⁷³ because here blurring was a product of uninvited ruptures in home. It went beyond human design to instead reflect the particular impact of possum-agency on home and homemaking.

For 22 participants, an association with possums in the home additionally contributed a sense of belonging in the urban environment. For these people home's connection to the urban environment (as observed through possum travels) suggested that home-making activity had broader environmental consequences. For example, eight participants explained that their willingness to allow possums to den in their homes was integral to the ability of possums to persist in urban and urban-bushland environments. These discussions were framed by a discourse of environmental balance that asserted the importance of 'nature' in cities. The presence of possums in urban areas was cited as evidence that current development practices had not irrevocably destroyed native nonhuman life in cities. It therefore signified

the health of the urban environment. Although not overtly willing to cohabit with possums the remaining 14 participants observed the benefits that possums gained from living in urban environments, as well as the benefits of possum presences to human urbanites, and pointed to the role of suburban homes in supporting this presence. Two participants also situated their willingness to cohabit with possums as an opportunity to correct their personal history of environmentally destructive behaviour.

An association with possums as native animals provided these participants with a sense of belonging to the nation. Two people did not experience this: Lisa did not view possums as native animals, and Judy found her experience with possums in her home so distressing that she could not conceive of them belonging anywhere except 'bush'. The vast majority of participants, however, explained that possums were native animals because their habitation of the Australian continent preceded European settlement in Australia (as discussed in 'urban unhomely'). This is how native species are popularly defined in Australia.⁷⁴ Though this sense of essential belonging at times pointed to human invasion at an urban scale, it simultaneously created a space through which participants could own or imagine a sense of Australian identity and belonging within Australia. This was discussed in terms of stewardship and care for the native/natural environment, and to explain the different ethic that applied to rats as non-native species. Anna also expressed this when she asserted the centrality of bushland and native animals, including possums, to Australian culture and values. This type of association with possums was not a passive relation, but one forged through interaction and relation, even when this was sometimes uncomfortable or unsettling. Although belonging was framed as pre-1788, participants were not calling for a return to this landscape.⁷⁵ Instead they sought balance, forged through human–nonhuman co-habitation, as a way into a new, environmentally grounded future. These themes illustrate a complex construction of nature that renegotiates the typical overlay of nature/culture and wild/domestic binaries onto home, which sees nature and wildness excluded from the house-as-home. Instead, the additional layering of native/non-native binaries muddled and unsettled home, as nature and wildness came to also signify the health and homeliness of the house-as-home. The following section reviews these processes and shows how the physical structures of home facilitated this broadening of home values.

Border-practices, ruptures and home-making

Participants' experiences of cohabiting with possums show that home's liminal wall and ceiling cavities are porous and liable to rupture. They were ruptured by possums who lifted roof tiles and dug their way through light-weight building materials. They were also compromised over time as the house aged and decayed giving rise to gaps in previously sealed surfaces. These processes opened home's border spaces, particularly its wall and ceiling cavities, to the outside. Walls and ceilings were also internally porous. Stains and smells from possum urine seeped through the ceilings of some homes, while the footfalls of scurrying possum and loud vocalizations were common in all. The stench of decaying bodies also permeated some homes. These sounds and smells disrupted home's border processes, drawing home's external wall and ceiling spaces inside the home and into the everyday home-making activity of its human residents. However, home's internal borders were also solid. Possums largely

remained out of sight and were restricted to the ceiling and wall cavities (except in Lisa's home where possum urine disintegrated sections of the ceiling). The unplanned porosity of these borders challenged the separation of home from nonhumans, nature and the outside. This section highlights the role of nonhumans in the (un)making of home, and residents' experiences of boundary rupture at home. The role of wall and ceiling cavities in mediating these relations is also discussed.

Nonhumans in home

Even though some participants were willing to cohabit with possums, possums were not initially or overtly invited or encouraged into any of the homes visited in this research. Instead the presence of possums in participants' homes reflected a combination of the agency and activity of these lively mammals and the materiality of home's physical structures. Possums were acknowledged as both exploiting and enlarging existing gaps in houses, and as constructing their own access points. Their presence in the home belied home's construction as a space distinct from nonhumans because they not only lived in the home, but were believed to benefit from their occupation of these spaces. Previous studies of possums,⁷⁶ and participants' accounts in this research, go as far as suggesting that possums in many cases *prefer* to den in the ceiling and walls of houses even when more apparently 'natural' options are available, such as tree hollows. The forceful, uninvited presence of these animals challenges home's 'selective porosity'⁷⁷ by opening home in ways that exceed human design.⁷⁸

As possums entered and dwelled within ceilings and walls they were described as bringing 'nature' and 'wildness' into home. As previous literature has suggested, these ruptures sometimes unsettled participants' experience of home as a secure, safe space.⁷⁹ In particular their sounds and smells were described as destructive to home, disruptive to sleep and were sometimes frightening. As the following section argues, possums' habitation of hidden ceiling and wall spaces amplified this affect by making them difficult to discover, silence or remove. However, possums were also simultaneously experienced as comforting and healthy, and contributed to participants' feelings of being-at-home in the house-as-home, urban space and at a national scale. These paradoxical feelings of homeyness and unhomeyness developed through close encounters with individual possums through the course of everyday home-making. The sporadic nature of possum sounds helped participants to tolerate their presence. The charismatic nature of possums is likely to have further supported their acceptance, and was cited by some participants as a reason not to hurt or kill possums even when they were perceived as disruptive. The economic, practical and ethical complexities of possum removal meant that possums typically remained in situ for extended periods, which fostered participants growing familiarity and tolerance of possum presences.

Participants' experience of possum activity as contributing to their feelings of homeyness is at odds with dominant conceptions of home as a space that is safe and secure *because* it appears distinct from nature, wildness and the outside. Possum sounds, for instance, easily slipped from unsettling and frightening to comforting and familiar, as Andy explained when she described being woken and searching for burglars, before relaxing and observing with her husband that 'the kids are home'. This paradoxical sense of homeyness was underpinned by recognition of possums as native animals with a right to dwell in Australia. This binary of

native/non-native was drawn into the home by possums and contributed to the re-negotiation of nature–culture borders within home. Possum sounds and smells continued to unsettle 23 participants, but this sense of native-belonging destabilized distinctions between home and nature/wildness/nonhumans so that possums could also be conceived as belonging in the house-as-home (17 participants). Their native status and essential association with bushland (despite their habitation of urban environments and participants' homes) underpinned their association with 'healthy nature' and allowed home to be encountered as a hybrid space that was not fully human or possum, domesticated or wild, culture or nature.

Walls and ceilings as borders in home

Home's wall and ceiling spaces act as a barrier, and point of contact between spaces inside and outside of home. Participants' encounters with possums show that they are liable to external ruptures, as well as being internally porous. This porosity shapes and mediates human–possum interactions inside home, both restricting and facilitating interaction between possums, who dwell inside the ceiling and wall cavities, and humans who inhabit the house proper.

Internal borders, particularly home's ceiling and wall cavities, housed possum bodies but restricted their access to the house proper and kept them hidden from human residents of home. This allowed possums to be encountered as homey, familiar and comforting because it limited their potential impact on home and helped to maintain the illusion of home as a human space. By contrast the ability of rats to circumvent these boundaries and access the house proper disturbed participants. Similarly on the rare occasions that possums accessed home's internal spaces through open windows or doors they also provoked feelings of fear and were quickly removed. However, when visually obscured from home and encountered only through their sounds and smells, their impact on home was unsettling, but more readily accommodated. These internal borders also prevented participants' from observing the impacts of possums' activities in the ceiling and wall cavities. This meant that participants' were frequently forced to imagine the activities that were occurring in these spaces. At times this was unsettling (see below), but it also allowed participants to disregard or downplay their impact. For example, the invisibility of possum urine and faeces supported participants' assertions that these waste products were 'healthy' by obscuring visual evidence of mess and decay. By contrast, when this waste was observed outside the home, or when it seeped into the home, it was predominantly encountered as disruptive and dirty.

However, while the ability of these internal spaces to restrict the movement of possum bodies between home and its wall/ceiling cavities was central to the feelings of homeyness that surrounded possum presences, their simultaneous leakiness to possum sounds and smells unsettled home's human residents. These sounds and smells pervaded home's internal spaces and disrupted participants' everyday home-making activity. Because possums were hidden from view within these spaces their sounds and smells were disembodied. This invisibility lent possums an almost haunting quality in the home. Possums' nocturnal habits compounded this effect, momentarily disturbing and disorienting people when they were asleep and perceived themselves most vulnerable. Invisibility also made possum sounds and smells more difficult to identify and manage. Sounds were disconcerting because their origin was unclear.

For example, sounds in the ceiling were often initially heard as human home invaders in other rooms. Similarly the smells of decaying possum carcasses were particularly problematic because they were encountered as a general wide-spread smell, while their specific location was obscured. This made them extremely difficult to discover and remove.

The design and material structures of home are significant in human–possum interactions. The houses visited for this research varied in age, but reflected dominant building styles in Australia. They were all constructed with hollow ceiling and wall cavities that provided ample space for possum habitation. The internal facings of these homes were predominantly plasterboard. This comparatively light-weight material proved able to transfer sound into the home. It was also vulnerable to damp and allowed possum urine to seep into the home. It is likely that this style of house-construction is particularly vulnerable to possum habitation. By contrast a home constructed with solid walls and no ceiling cavity may be less vulnerable. One of Katie's previous homes was built like this. Although she experienced possum noises on the roof of the home and found that they disrupted her sleep, she did not experience other effects of cohabitation such as urine stains and smells.

Conclusions

The paradoxical feelings of homeyness and unhomeyness that surrounded possum presences highlight the complexity of border practices and ruptures as they are lived through everyday home-making. Possums were not actively sought as cohabitants of home. Indeed the majority of participants conceived of home as a human space that was not suitable for nature or wild animals. However, close encounters between people and possums in home, coupled with the complexity of possum removal, ruptured and unsettled these boundaries and saw participants embracing a more hybrid view of home as a space connected to, and inclusive of, wildness, nature and the outside. The layering of native/non-native binaries onto the house connected home-making practices with discourses of national-belonging and environmentalism and supported this alternate view of home.

Human participants rarely came face-to-face with possums; instead they predominately encountered them through sound and smell-scapes that permeated home's borders. Dead possums thickened the air, making it hard to breathe and home unpleasant. Bumps, squeals and scratches from possums inhabiting ceilings, and crashes from within home as participants tried to deter possums, similarly resonated throughout home producing spikes of sound that disrupted sleep. These sensory encounters contributed new texture to home's internal spaces and shaped the ways that humans encountered and navigated home in the course of everyday home-making. Though invisible these sounds and smells altered participants' sense of home in profound ways and might be compared to more visually evident structures, such as walls, in their impact on home and family life. Further, the non-visual nature of these encounters underpinned their unsettling impact within home. These encounters point to the key significance of multi-sensory relations in home-making and in shaping human encounters with the many nonhumans that dwell within their living spaces. In a move that would further destabilize views of home as a human space, attention to the sensory dimension of human–nonhuman cohabitation might profitably extend beyond evidently 'living' nonhumans

to foreground the contributions that other nonhumans make within home (e.g. the chill of walking on slate floors, or the insulating properties lent by cork tiles).⁸⁰

The lived experiences of participants in this research broaden understandings of home's border processes, showing that ruptures in these spaces do not necessarily contribute to feelings of unhomeyness. Instead, ruptures, challenges and openings in home provided opportunities for new relations of belonging at a number of scales. Close interactions with the bodily activities and agency of possums who travelled through and dwelled within home were central to this renegotiation of belonging and homeyness. Similarly the structures of home, though static in comparison to possums, played an active role as they mediated contact between humans and possums in home. These findings underscore the centrality of nonhumans in home and call for further research into the ways that experiences of home and home-making are shaped by the necessarily more-than-human character of home.

Acknowledgments

My thanks go to Sandra Suchet-Pearson and Robyn Dowling for their conversations and advice throughout the preparation of this paper. Thankyou also to Judy Davis from the Department of Human Geography, Macquarie University, for preparing the map in Figure 2. I am particularly grateful to the participants in this research for the time spent sharing their experiences and stories of possums. I also thank the anonymous reviewers whose challenging insights have improved my paper.

Biographical note

Emma R. Power is a PhD candidate at Macquarie University in Sydney. Her research, titled 'Making home: an engagement with more-than-human agency', investigates the ways that people co-habit with non-human pets and pests in the home. She can be contacted at: Department of Geography, Macquarie University, North Ryde, NSW 2109, Australia; E-mail: epower@els.mq.edu.au

Notes

- ¹ A. Vidler, *The architectural uncanny: essays in the modern unhomey*, (Cambridge, MA, The MIT Press, 1992), p. 4 in M. Kaika, 'Interrogating the geographies of the familiar: domesticating nature and constructing the autonomy of the modern home', *International journal of urban and regional research* 28 (2004), pp. 265–86; and see for example B. Berner, 'The meaning of cleaning: the creation of harmony and hygiene in the home', *History and technology* 14 (1998), pp. 313–52; G. Ger and B. Yencioğlu, 'Clean and dirty: playing with boundaries of consumer's safe havens', *Advances in consumer research* 31 (2004), pp. 462–7; L. Martens and S. Scott, "'The unbearable lightness of cleaning": representations of domestic practice and products in *good housekeeping* magazine (UK): 1951–2001', *Consumption, markets and culture* 8 (2005), pp. 379–401; L. Martens and S. Scott, *Domestic kitchen practices: routines, risks and reflexivity – full report of research activities and results* (Swindon, ESRC, 2004); L. Martens and S. Scott, 'Under the kitchen surface: domestic products and conflicting constructions of home', *Home cultures* 3 (2006), pp. 39–62.
- ² D. Newman, 'The lines that continue to separate us: borders in our "borderless" world', *Progress in human geography* 30 (2006), pp. 143–61; D. Newman and A. Paasi, 'Fences and neighbours in the post-modern world: boundary narratives in political geography', *Progress in human geography* 22 (1998),

- pp. 186–207; A. Paasi, 'Boundaries in a globalizing world', in K. Anderson, M. Domosh, S. Pile and N. Thrift (eds), *Handbook of cultural geography*, (London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi, Sage, 2003), pp. 462–72.
- ³ R. Howitt, 'Frontiers, borders, edges: liminal challenges to the hegemony of exclusion', *Australian geographical studies* 39 (2001), pp. 233–45; L. Palmer, 'Bushwalking in Kakadu: a study of cultural borderlands', *Social and cultural geography* 5 (2004), pp. 109–27; K. Staudt, 'Transcending nations: cross-border organizing', *International feminist journal of politics* 4 (2002), pp. 197–215.
- ⁴ Kaika, 'Geographies of the familiar'; S. Muller, E.R. Power, S. Suchet-Pearson, S. Wright and K. Lloyd, "'Quarantine matters!": quotidian relationships around quarantine in Australia's northern borderlands', *Environment and planning a* (in press); E.R. Power, 'Pests and home-making: depictions of pests in home-maker magazines', *Home cultures* 4 (2007), pp. 213–36.
- ⁵ A. Blunt and R. Dowling, *Home* (London, Routledge, 2006).
- ⁶ Kaika, 'Geographies of the familiar', p. 272.
- ⁷ Muller, 'Quarantine matters!'
- ⁸ H. Bauder, 'Equality, justice and the problem of international borders: the case of Canadian immigration regulation', *ACME* 2 (2003), pp. 167–82; S. Pickering, 'Border terror: policing, forced migration and terrorism', *Global change, peace and security* 16 (2004), pp. 211–26; Staudt, 'Transcending nations'.
- ⁹ Kaika, 'Geographies of the familiar'.
- ¹⁰ Martens and Scott, 'Under the kitchen surface'; Power, 'Pests and home-making'.
- ¹¹ Berner, 'The meaning of cleaning'; Martens and Scott, 'Under the kitchen surface'; Martens and Scott, 'The unbearable lightness of cleaning'; S. Pink, *Home truths: gender, domestic objects and everyday life* (Oxford and New York, Berg, 2004); Power, 'Pests and home-making'.
- ¹² S. Hinchliffe, 'Locating risk: energy use, the "ideal" home and the non-ideal world', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 22 (1997), pp. 197–209; Kaika, 'Geographies of the familiar'; E. Shove, *Comfort, cleanliness and convenience: the social organization of normality* (Oxford and New York, Berg, 2003).
- ¹³ Hinchliffe, 'Locating risk'; Kaika, 'Geographies of the familiar'.
- ¹⁴ Kaika, 'Geographies of the familiar', p. 274.
- ¹⁵ Power, 'Pests and home-making'.
- ¹⁶ G. Holland, 'The comfortable house: responding to the Australian environment', in P. Troy, ed., *A history of European housing in Australia* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 197–217.
- ¹⁷ Kaika, 'Geographies of the familiar'.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 275.
- ¹⁹ Power, 'Pests and home-making'.
- ²⁰ D. Sibley, *Geographies of exclusion* (London and New York, Routledge, 1995).
- ²¹ Martens and Scott, 'Under the kitchen surface', p. 47; Power, 'Pests and home-making'.
- ²² Kaika, 'Geographies of the familiar'.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, p. 283.
- ²⁴ L. Head and P. Muir, 'Suburban life and the boundaries of nature: resilience and rupture in Australian backyards', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 31 (2006), pp. 505–24; and see A. Blunt and R. Dowling, *Home* (London, Routledge, 2006), p. 106.
- ²⁵ D. Crouch, 'Writing of Australian dwelling: animal houses and anxious ground', *Journal of Australian studies* 80 (2004), pp. 43–52.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 43.
- ²⁷ For example R. Dowling, 'Accommodating open-plan: children, clutter and containment in suburban houses in Sydney, Australia', *Environment and planning a* (in press); G. Rose, 'Family photographs and domestic spacings: a case study', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 1 (2003), pp. 5–18; D.J.B. Young, 'The material value of color: the estate agent's tale', *Home cultures* 1 (2004), pp. 5–22.
- ²⁸ Kaika, 'Geographies of the familiar'.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ See B. Braun, 'Environmental issues: writing a more-than-human geography', *Progress in human geography* 29 (2005), pp. 635–50.

³¹ Power, 'Pests and home-making'.

³² R. Fox, 'Animal behaviours, post-human lives: everyday negotiations of the animal-human divide in pet-keeping', *Social and cultural geography* 7 (2006), pp. 525–37; A. Franklin, "'Be[a]ware of the dog": a post-humanist approach to housing', *Housing, theory and society* 23 (2006), pp. 137–56; E.R. Power, 'Furry families: making a human-dog family through home', *Social and cultural geography* 9 (2008), pp. 535–55.

³³ R. Hitchings, 'People, plants and performance: on actor network theory and the material pleasures of the private garden', *Social and cultural geography* 4 (2003), pp. 99–112; C. Philo and C. Wilbert, 'Animal spaces, beastly places: an introduction', in C. Philo and C. Wilbert, eds, *Animal spaces, beastly places: new geographies of human-animal relations* (London, New York, Routledge, 2000), pp. 1–34; E.R. Power, 'Human-nature relations in suburban gardens', *Australian geographer* 36 (2005), pp. 39–53; E.R. Power, 'Pests and home-making'; Power, 'Furry families'; J.A. Smith, 'Beyond dominance and affection: living with rabbits in post-humanist households', *Society and animals* 11 (2003), pp. 181–97.

³⁴ Muller, 'Quarantine matters!'.

³⁵ A. Gullo, U. Lassiter and J. Wolch, 'The cougar's tale', in J. Emel and J. Wolch, eds, *Animal geographies: place, politics and identity in the nature-culture borderlands* (London, New York, Verso, 1998), pp. 139–61; M. Davis, *Ecology of fear: Los Angeles and the imagination of disaster* (New York, Metropolitan Books, 1998); see also J. Emel, 'Are you man enough, big and bad enough? Wolf eradication in the US', in J. Emel and J. Wolch, eds, *Animal geographies: place, politics and identity in the nature-culture borderlands* (London, New York, Verso, 1998), pp. 91–116 about wolves.

³⁶ P. Gruffudd, 'On the prowl with the possum posse: nature and nation in Aotearoa/New Zealand', presented to Association of American Geographers Annual Meeting, San Francisco, April 2007; K. Milton, *Possum magic, possum menace: wildlife control and the demonization of cuteness*, presented to Animals and Society II: Considering Animals, Hobart, Tasmania, July 2007.

³⁷ For discussion of everyday practices and performativity see Hitchings, 'People, plants and performance'; R. Hitchings, 'At home with someone nonhuman', *Home cultures* 1 (2004), pp. 169–86; H. Lorimer, 'Cultural geography: the busyness of being "more-than-representational"', *Progress in human geography* 29 (2005), pp. 83–94; S. Whatmore, 'Materialist returns: practising cultural geography in and for a more-than-human world', *Cultural geographies* 13 (2006), pp. 600–9.

³⁸ P.L. Bird, 'A review of the ecology of the common brushtail possum *Trichosurus Vulpecula* in south-eastern Australia', in J.B. Paton, P.J.B. Alexander, P.L.F. Dal Piva, R.W.K. Inns, D.K. and R.F. Storr, eds, *Seminar proceedings: the common brushtail possum in South Australia* (Adelaide, Fauna Management Coordinating Committee, 1997), pp. 4–10; N.J. Hill, K.A. Carbery and E.M. Deane, 'Human – possum conflict in urban Sydney, Australia: public perceptions and implications for species management', *Human dimensions of wildlife* 12 (2007), pp. 101–13; A. Matthews, D. Lunney, K. Waples and J. Hardy, 'Brushtail possums: "champion of the suburbs" or "our tormentors"?', in D. Lunney and S. Burgin, eds, *Urban wildlife: more than meets the eye* (Mosman, Royal Zoological Society of New South Wales, 2004), pp. 159–68.

³⁹ M. Statham and H.L. Statham, 'Movements and habits of brushtail possums (*Trichosurus vulpecula* Kerr) in an urban area', *Wildlife research* 24 (1997), pp. 715–26.

⁴⁰ Matthews, Lunney, Waples and Hardy, 'Brushtail possums'; B.M. Hill, 'The ecology and management of the common brushtail possum in metropolitan Adelaide', J.B. Paton, P.J.B. Alexander, P.L.F. Dal Piva, R.W.K. Inns, D.K. and R.F. Storr, eds, *Seminar proceedings: the common brushtail possum in South Australia* (Adelaide, Fauna Management Coordinating Committee, 1997), pp. 11–14; Hill, Carbery and Deane, 'Human – possum conflict in urban Sydney'.

⁴¹ DEC, *Policy on the management of possums causing disturbance to residential or commercial property* (Hurstville, Department of Environment and Conservation, 2004).

- 42 Hill, Carbery and Deane, 'Human – possum conflict in urban Sydney', p. 104.
- 43 Hill, Carbery and Deane, 'Human – possum conflict in urban Sydney', p. 104.; A. Kerle, *Possums: the brushtails, ringtails and greater glider* (Sydney, UNSW Press, 2001); A. Kerle, 'A cautionary tale: decline of the common brushtail possum *Trichosurus vulpecula* and common ringtail possum *Pseudocheirus peregrinus* in the woodlands of the western slopes and plains of New South Wales', in R.L. Goldingay and S.M. Jackson, eds, *The biology of Australian possums and gliders* (Chipping Norton, Surrey Beatty and Sons, 2004), pp. 71–84; Matthews, Lunney, Waples and Hardy, 'Brushtail possums'.
- 44 Hill, Carbery and Deane, 'Human – possum conflict in urban Sydney'.
- 45 NPWS, *Urban wildlife renewal: growing conservation in urban communities* (National Parks and Wildlife Service, NSW, 2002).
- 46 M. Duffy, Opinion: 'Hello, possums! Scourge of our roof spaces is across the Tasman, too', *The Sydney Morning Herald* (22 Sept. 2007), p. 35; SMH (2006) 'Possum magic', *The Sydney Morning Herald* Blogs, <http://blogs.smh.com.au/entertainment/archives/essential/006582.html>, Accessed: April 2007; S. Zeederberg, Heckler: 'Look possum, we need to talk', *The Sydney Morning Herald* (27 April 2004), p. 16.
- 47 Duffy, 'Hello, possums!', p. 35.
- 48 D. Haraway, *Simians, cyborgs and women: the reinvention of nature* (London, Free Association Books, 1991).
- 49 L. Instone, 'The coyote's at the Door: revisioning human-environment relations in the Australian context', *Ecumene* 5 (1998), pp. 452–67.
- 50 In Australia nativeness and belonging is popularly ascribed to bodies that were present within the nation prior to European settlement in 1788. Contiguously it is denied to those who have subsequently arrived, drawing the status of 'alien' plants, animals and even humans into question. A further dimension of locality ascribes nativeness according to presence in a particular geographical location, as well as on temporal lines, see L. Head and P. Muir, 'Nativeness, invasiveness and nation in Australian plants', *Geographical review* 94 (2004), pp. 199–217; Head and Muir, 'Suburban life and the boundaries of nature'; D. Trigger and J. Mulcock, 'Native vs exotic: cultural discourses about flora, fauna and belonging in Australia', in *Sustainable development and planning II*, (Boston, WIT Press, 2005), pp. 1301–10; D. Trigger and J. Mulcock, 'Forests as spiritually significant places: nature, culture and "belonging" in Australia', *The Australian journal of anthropology* 16 (2005), pp. 306–20; C.R. Warren, 'Perspectives on the "alien" versus "native" species debate: a critique of concepts, language and practice', *Progress in human geography* 31 (2007), pp. 427–44.
- 51 L. Head and P. Muir, 'Nativeness, invasiveness and nation in Australian plants', *Geographical review* 94 (2004), pp. 199–217; L. Head and P. Muir, 'Suburban life and the boundaries of nature: resilience and rupture in Australian backyards', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 31 (2006), pp. 505–24; D. Trigger and J. Mulcock, 'Native vs exotic: cultural discourses about flora, fauna and belonging in Australia', in *Sustainable development and planning II* (Boston, WIT Press, 2005), pp. 1301–10; D. Trigger and J. Mulcock, 'Forests as spiritually significant places: nature, culture and "belonging" in Australia', *The Australian journal of anthropology* 16 (2005), pp. 306–20; C.R. Warren, 'Perspectives on the "alien" versus "native" species debate: a critique of concepts, language and practice', *Progress in human geography* 31 (2007), pp. 427–44.
- 52 K. Anderson, *Race and the crisis of humanism* (London and New York, Routledge, 2006); M. Langton, *Burning questions: emerging environmental issues for indigenous peoples in northern Australia* (Darwin, Centre for Indigenous Natural and Cultural Resource Management, Northern Territory University, 1998).
- 53 Davis, 'Ecology of fear'; Emel, 'Wolf eradication in the US'; Gullo, 'The cougar's tale'.
- 54 Gruffudd, 'On the prowl with the possum posse'; Milton, 'Possum magic, possum menace'.
- 55 Hill, Carbery and Deane, 'Human – possum conflict in urban Sydney'; Matthews, Lunney, Waples and Hardy, 'Brushtail possums'.
- 56 Statham and Statham, 'Movements and habits of brushtail possums'.
- 57 Hill, Carbery and Deane, 'Human – possum conflict in urban Sydney'.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

⁶⁰ Hitchings, 'People, plants and performance; Power, 'Human-nature relations in suburban gardens'; Power, 'Furry-families'.

⁶¹ All participant names are pseudonyms.

⁶² For example, Kaika, 'Geographies of the familiar; Martens, L. and Scott, S, 'Under the kitchen surface'; Power, 'Pests and home-making'.

⁶³ Statham and Statham, 'Movements and habits of brushtail possums' also emphasizes car-related dangers; and see also Matthews, Lunney, Waples and Hardy, 'Brushtail possums'.

⁶⁴ Bird, 'Ecology of the common brushtail possum', contests this view, arguing that in some locations urban gardens ensure increased food availability.

⁶⁵ For more discussion see Milton, 'Possum magic, possum menace'.

⁶⁶ See Head and Muir, 'Nativeness, invasiveness and nation in Australian plants'; Head and Muir, 'Suburban life and the boundaries of nature'; Trigger and Mulcock, 'Forests as spiritually significant places'; Trigger and Mulcock, 'Native vs exotic'.

⁶⁷ K. Gelder and J. M. Jacobs, *Uncanny Australia: sacredness and identity in a postcolonial nation* (Carlton, Melbourne University Press, 1998), p. 23.

⁶⁸ Bird, 'Ecology of the common brushtail possum', p. 8.

⁶⁹ See also Kerle, *Possums*.

⁷⁰ See also Hill, Carbery and Deane, 'Human – possum conflict in urban Sydney'; Matthews, Lunney, Waples and Hardy, 'Brushtail possums'.

⁷¹ Head and Muir, 'Suburban life and the boundaries of nature' observe that gardeners who do not like native plants express similar feelings of guilt.

⁷² In New Zealand brushtail possums are constructed as diseased and a threat to human health, see Milton, 'Possum magic, possum menace'.

⁷³ For example, Head and Muir, 'Nativeness, invasiveness and nation in Australian plants'; Crouch, 'Writing of Australian dwelling'.

⁷⁴ See especially Head and Muir, 'Suburban life and the boundaries of nature'; Trigger and Mulcock, 'Forests as spiritually significant places'; Trigger and Mulcock, 'Native vs exotic'; Cerwonka, *Native to the nation*.

⁷⁵ This is sometimes the case for native gardeners, see Cerwonka, *Native to the nation*.

⁷⁶ Statham and Statham, 'Movements and habits of brushtail possums'; Kerle, *Possums*.

⁷⁷ Kaika, 'Geographies of the familiar'.

⁷⁸ See also Power, 'Pests and home-making'.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Hetherington, K. (2003) 'Spatial textures: place, touch, and praesentia', *Environment and planning a* 35:1933–44 similarly considers how place is made and interpreted through touch.