

Circulating elephants: unpacking the geographies of a cosmopolitan animal

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Cosmopolitanism has emerged as an important concept in geography and the social sciences. The rise of mobility, circulation and transnational networks has been paralleled by academic scholarship on un-parochial others: diasporas, travellers and itinerant social groups. However, the role of nonhumans as participants in and subjects of cosmopolitanism has received scant attention. This paper seeks to develop a 'more-than-human' cosmopolitanism that accounts for the presence of nonhuman animals and entities in stories of circulation and contact. Through a multi-sited ethnography of elephant conservation in India and the UK, the paper illustrates how animals become participants in forging connections across difference. Through their circulation, elephants become cosmopolitan, present in diverse cultures and serving banal global consumption. The paper then illustrates how cosmopolitan elephants may be coercive, giving rise to political frictions and new inequalities when mobilised by powerful, transnational environmental actors. It concludes by discussing the methodological and conceptual implications of a more-than-human cosmopolitanism.

Key words Asian elephant; conservation; cosmopolitan; cultural geography; India; more-than-human geography

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Revised manuscript received 9 August 2013

Elephants are contagious — Paul Éluard (Peret *et al.* 2004, 173)

Introduction

In a provocative response to Ulrich Beck's cosmopolitan approach to handling otherness in times of global interdependency, Bruno Latour argued that framing the cosmos in an exclusively human club was restrictive because it limited the number of bodies at the negotiating table and failed to embrace 'the vast number of nonhuman entities making humans act' (Latour 2004, 454). Since this iteration, there has been a substantial body of work in geography that brings nonhumans to the table. Scholars have examined how a retinue of organisms, things, materials and forces influence 'social' outcomes and co-produce hybrid geographies (Braun and Whatmore 2010; Hinchliffe *et al.* 2005; Lorimer 2006). They interrogate the ways in which knowledge, skill and expertise cut across human–nonhuman divides (Bear and Eden 2011; Lorimer 2008), and have called for a relational ethics and politics that is open to nonhuman difference and the recalcitrance of life (Bennett 2010; Haraway 2007). What is less explicitly addressed is the notion of cosmopolitanism, how it might be a 'more-than-human' endeavour, critical to global interdependency.

There are a number of cosmopolitanisms on record, ranging from being a moral philosophy to a methodological approach in the social sciences.¹ Undercutting

these disputes, Beck stresses the need to distinguish cosmopolitanism as a credo from cosmopolitanism as a process of trans-territorial transformation of the social (Beck 2004). Beck provides four examples: the rise of an interconnected global public arena resulting from side effects of modernisation, a 'postnational politics' driven by such novel configurations, a globalisation of inequality as a consequence of entangled national and transnational processes, and finally a 'banal cosmopolitanism' based around cultures of consuming global products and images. These concerns have appealed to geographical sensibility. Scholars have examined how socio-cultural conditions of cosmopolitanism transform the ways in which the world is inhabited (Jeffrey and McFarlane 2008; Szerszynski and Urry 2006), and have addressed the ethico-political concerns that arise when engaging with radical alterity outside Eurocentric universalising values and human normativity (Jazeel 2011). However, barring nascent work on the spread of less desired global mobiles (Braun 2007; Clark 2002), this scholarship largely operates through a humanist lens. The state, corporate interest or political parties remain the prominent actors (Edwards 2008; McFarlane 2008; Strang 2008), humans largely constitute who or what is the other (Jazeel 2011). All that is nonhuman melts into thin air.

In this paper, I examine the role of nonhumans as participants in, and subjects of, cosmopolitanism.

While embracing Beck's enterprise of examining global interconnection, consumption and the constitution of new inequalities, bringing nonhumans into this project links to Isabelle Stengers' concept of cosmopolitics (Latour 2004; Stengers 2011). In contrast to Beck, Stengers intends her use of cosmopolitics to resist politics from meaning give-and-take in an exclusive human club. She opposes restricting the set of entities that are granted entry into the cosmos. Consequently, what it means to belong or to pertain is opened up to relations between heterogeneous ways of being. Here, human practices are crafted 'in the presence of' others (Stengers 2005a), the things, technologies or organisms to whom people submit, are allured by and without whom they would be unable to achieve pathways or goals (Stengers 2005b). In purview of this posthumanist argument, this paper focuses on three interrelated questions that offer up potential for developing a 'more-than-human' cosmopolitanism. First, do nonhuman entities and animals play a role in forging global connections across difference? If so, are animals themselves reconfigured as cosmopolitan, present the world-over and not just 'out there' in the beastly places traditionally assigned to them (Hinchliffe *et al.* 2005; Jalais 2008)? Cosmopolitanisms are themselves inherently political, moulding modes of contemporary environmental governance connected across differential fields of power. This leads to the third question: what practices and politics of representing nature are such animals used to promote? Whom do they benefit and what do they edit out?

To address these questions, I turn to practices of elephant conservation in India and the UK. The Asian elephant provides a specific but compelling opportunity for a 'more-than-human' analysis of cosmopolitanism.² Elephants, as Whatmore and Thorne in their groundbreaking work on wildlife and mobility observe, are creatures so long caught up in social networks of trade and transport, ceremony and entertainment, that traces of their presence 'litter the histories and geographies of civilizations and everyday lives' (2000, 187). Their popularity in both Asia and the West allow elephants to be mobilised in the form of flagship species to conserve wildlife habitat and generate public support for conservation (Barua *et al.* 2010). The creature is a conduit for connectivity: spatially by enabling landscape linkages via elephant corridors, and socially by knitting together diverse and far-flung epistemic communities to enrol financial resources and political potential for those who speak in its name (Lorimer 2010a). At the same time, geographies of elephant conservation are riven with asymmetry, especially when elephants are deployed by powerful actors to control landscapes and govern resources from afar (Lewis 2004). As the Paul Éluard maxim above provocatively suggests, elephants are contagious. They affect diverse bodies and draw

them together to constitute new connections. These connections may be productive or coercive, not dissimilar to how cosmopolitanisms operate in human contexts (Beck 2004).

Methodologically, this research draws from a multi-sited ethnography of elephant conservation in India and the UK that traces how elephants circulate and forge connections across difference (Marcus 1995). The journey is through three spatially and temporally disparate events, connected by their shared history and conservation purpose. It starts by reanimating the travels of an elephant and her English companion Mark Shand through India in the early 1990s to open up postcolonial histories of human–elephant encounters and the cosmopolitical sensibilities to which they give rise. This was through a close reading of a travelogue about the journey, supplemented by interviews with Shand and an examination of visual material of their travels. The second concerns a public art and conservation event in London organised by a UK-based elephant conservation charity set up by Shand following his India journey. The event deployed aesthetic representations of elephants to raise funds for elephant corridors and to generate public support and patronage for conservation. Its objective was to understand how elephants draw diverse actors into assemblages of conservation. Research involved participant observation through volunteering, interviews with sponsors, artists, NGO partners and charity staff, as well as joining a group of the London public who had come together to follow the event.³ The third constituent of this multi-sited ethnography was to follow Western configurations of the elephant back to India.⁴ It sought to trace the trajectories through which elephants circulate and the connections they forge. Here, elephants 'return' in the form of 'transportable packages' (Fujimura 1992), combining conservation theory, monetary capital and GIS-based cartographies to secure wildlife corridors. Travelling the routes prised open by this flow, the paper interrogates how elephants are entangled in, and constitute, cosmopolitan differences of interest, fields of responsibility and modes of knowledge (Szerszynski and Urry 2002).

Travelling with elephants

Travel, circulation and contact with itinerant others are markers of cosmopolitanism. They forge novel connections, foster sensitivity to difference and open up new fields of responsibility. But what if these others we come into contact with are not always human? What kind of awareness does this raise in the travelling subject? What dispositions toward other places and cultures does it shape? These are some of the questions that arise when reanimating the travels of the conservationist Mark Shand on his elephant through India in the early 1990s. Shand, an upper-class Englishman,



Figure 1 Shand's journey through from Konark to Sonepur in eastern India, 1990s

Source: Redrawn from *Travels on My Elephant* (Shand 1992)

completes an 800-mile journey from Konark to Sonepur with his elephant Tara (Figure 1), accompanied by her *mahout* Bhim, Tara's 'grass-cutter' Gokul, and Shand's friend Aditya Patankar (Shand 1992). This journey through east India, narrated in Shand's (1992) best-selling travelogue *Travels on my elephant*, is a tale of postcolonial and more-than-human encounters. It is about the rise of a cosmopolitical sensibility, crafted through intimacy, contact and learning. Porous, it cuts across human–nonhuman divides.

Shand's inspiration to travel through India on elephant-back came about while sifting through books in the India Office Library in London:

Every old book I found literally had an elephant on each page. ... Then there was an old woodcut showing this crazy English traveller Thomas Coryate on an elephant. It just caught my imagination.

This 17th-century engraving depicts a disproportionately large person sitting on top of a fierce-looking

elephant, wearing a plumed hat, boots, spurs and a sword. A roll of papers, perhaps his travel notes, is in his right hand. The effect borders on the absurd: it seems as though Coryate, intending to ride a horse, was assigned an elephant (Figure 2). The contrast between the fierceness of the elephant and the civilised attire of the Englishman represents an 'awkward zone of engagement', zones where people of different histories and cultural origins meet and establish relations (Pratt 2008; Tsing 2005). Coryate's is one of many past encounters with elephants that have been integral to shaping Orientalist views of India (Aune 2005). It is this romantic ideal that becomes an intensity for Shand, inspiring him to take up a similar endeavour: 'I was now obsessed ... I was determined to have my picture expressed in my next book sitting upon an elephant' (Shand 1992, 1).

Upon arrival, Shand finds India a difficult country to negotiate. India is peopled with lives starkly different from his own, where a shared and fraught history with Britain prevails. Shand is separated from the Indian world by an 'affective wall', one that has historically closed off the English sahib's body through a complex bricolage of sexual, social and culinary prohibitions (Collingham 2001; Lorimer and Whatmore 2009). He senses this barrier in his initial musings: 'India shows what she wants to show, as if her secrets are guarded by a wall of infinite height' (Shand 1992, 4). Despite attempts to enter and engage with its culture, India remains closed, sealed off: 'You try to climb the wall – you fall; you fetch a ladder – it is too short' (1992, 4). Performing open modes of engagement demands emotional boundary-crossings that do not occur immediately: 'But if you are patient a brick will loosen and then another. Once through, India embraces you, but that was something that I had yet to learn' (1992, 4).

Shand travels to Orissa, a state in east India, with the hope of buying an elephant to commence his journey. Several attempts to procure an elephant end in failure. Finally, he tracks down a group of itinerant elephants travelling with Hindu saints begging for alms in the outskirts of a provincial town. This is Shand's first encounter with Tara, a moment of intense affect and enchanting proximity that later becomes a life-changing event:

Then I saw her. My mouth went dry. I felt giddy, breathless. In this moment the ancient wall crumbled and I walked through. With one hind leg crossed over the other, she was leaning nonchalantly against a tree, the charms of her perfectly rounded posterior in full view, like a prostitute on a street corner. I knew then I had to have her. Suddenly, nothing else mattered ... (1992, 13–14)

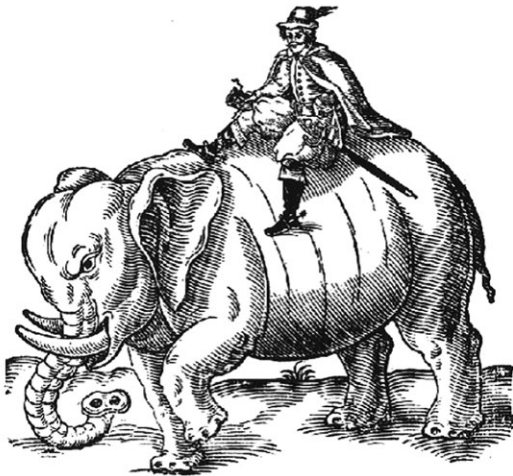
Written in sexualised prose and shadowed by notions of domination, this is indeed an uneven encounter, across past colonial and human–animal divides. Yet, it

Thomas Coryate,

TRAVAILER

For the English wits, and the good of this Kingdom:

To all his inferiour Countrey-men, Greeting: Especially to the Sirenis-call Gentlemen, that meet the first Friday of euerie Moneth, at the Mermaide in Breadstreet. From the Court of the great Mogul, resident at the Towne of Agra, in the Easterne India.



Printed by W. Iaggard and Henry Fetherston.
1616.

Figure 2 The image of Thomas Coryate that inspired Shand's travels

Source: Thomas Coryate Traueller for the English Wits. London (1616)

marks a simultaneous moment of connection. The affective wall that seals Shand from immersing himself in India's culture crumbles. The intensity of this attachment to an elephant, and its later opening up of a common world, is deeply humbling. He recounts in one of our interviews how in the past he fitted an 'upper-class wasteful stereotype': 'Before Tara, I had no direction at all ...'. The animal makes him look beyond this narcissism: 'She healed me. It took an extraordinary animal to change me'.

Thereafter, the journey becomes a more open mode of engagement for Shand. He crosses social and cultural barriers to become the disciple of Bhim, Tara's *mahout*, in order to learn how to ride an elephant. Shand is initiated into the subcultures of elephant handlers, their social life and ways of relating to their animals. The expertise and skill he is exposed to are haptic, crossing porous bodies, performed by both humans and elephants. Besides riding Tara, a range of other corporeal activities, such as feeding, cleaning and washing, contribute to Shand's bonding with the

creature. He experiences pleasure in the meaning offered up by these bodily encounters: 'bathing with, or washing an elephant is something close to experiencing paradise' (1992, 37). However, Shand is not entirely at ease during the journey, as the sight of an Englishman riding an elephant through the Indian rural landscape attracts considerable attention:

I had not yet become adjusted to the huge crowds I knew our entourage would attract. I realized I had no right to complain. I was traveling in their country, probably camping on their land. An elephant with a foreigner was understandably fair game, but I was still too much of a tourist to tolerate such human curiosity. (1992, 36)

It is in Tara, his nonhuman companion, that Shand finds assurance to confront what he experiences: 'There was something reassuring about an elephant close by. It was like being guarded by a huge jovial nanny' (1992, 39).

While his assimilation into cultures of the other is incomplete, the journey itself is a cosmopolitical event, for it generates an awareness of how social life in rural India is affected and co-constituted by nonhuman beings. It is an awareness that arises *with*: Tara 'teaches' Shand to 'slow down to the pace of India', to take notice of the impacts wild elephants have on people's lives in rural Orissa. While the notion of India's slow pace is a replication of a modernist cultural stereotype, prevalent in both the West and within India (Chakrabarty 1991), slowing down is also integral to the development of Shand's cosmopolitical sensibility. As Stengers (2005a) takes pains to show, slowing down resists consensual ways through which situations are presented or how action is mobilised. Shand notices the *machans* villagers put up on trees, he witnesses the travails of farmers sitting up at night to guard their fields and deter rampaging elephants from demolishing crops. Local people approach him for help: 'It is the tusker, sir. It has decimated our crops. It has already killed eleven people.' Shand finds this surprising, but soon becomes cognisant of how grave the situation is in light of the limited interventions in place: 'The government will do nothing. The tusker has only killed eleven people, sir. It must kill twenty-four before they are even considering taking actions' (Shand 1992, 56). Such exposures, coupled with a frustration of being unable to help the affected rural poor, effects a realisation that is different from Shand's initial romantic musings. He writes about the 'growing imbalance' between 'rural man and the natural life of the elephant', both of whom are 'blameless victims of greed for timber' (Shand 1992, 56–57).

The journey culminates in the development of a conservation sensibility, a desire to redress the troubled fate of the Asian elephant and the plight of the rural poor affected by human–elephant conflict.

Sadly this situation is worsening. The Indian elephant is simply running out of living space ... It is fervently to be hoped that desperate measures like culling will not be introduced, and it is up to man to redress the balance. The tiger, which until recently was almost extinct, is beginning to make a dramatic recovery thanks to the resources and expertise made available to 'Project Tiger'. The elephant must now be given the same attention. (Shand 1992, 57)

Upon returning to England, Shand becomes closely involved with elephant conservation. He brings together a group of individuals with a similar passion for elephants in the UK to found a charity – the Elephant Family. The emotions of being affected by an elephant, as well as places and people encountered during the journey, are so intense that what started off as a topic for a travelogue becomes a life-long obsession. Shand goes on to write a second book on elephants, containing close accounts of the travails of the rural poor and the crises facing elephants in landscapes riven with conflict (Shand 1996). He recounts how human and elephant lives are lost, how adequate mechanisms to redress the issue are wanting. These stories are grave, and he later tells me: 'I had researched the journey. I had not researched the emotion'.

The encounter is transformative not just for Shand, but for Tara as well. While there are dangers of over-interpreting the creature's lifeworld from textual sources, a number of inferences about the elephant's changing corporeality and ethology can be drawn. Initially called 'Toofan Champa' by previous owners, she is renamed Tara, meaning 'star' in Hindi. The name evokes a new relationship, established upon care, respect and pride. Tara's health and body, 'in poor condition due to mishandling and starvation', gradually turns to that of 'a lovely riding elephant'. This corporeal transformation is reflected in the photographs of Tara in Shand's book. Ethological changes also occur as a consequence of this encounter. Through prodding and reprimands, Tara's 'habits of a beggar elephant', developed while living with the itinerant saints, 'were dying' (Shand 1992, 109). She was 'acquiring a new pride', what Bhim likened to royalty: 'She Raja-sahib haathi now. She behave like one' (Shand 1992, 35). Tara's journey and biography provides glimpses into how the lives of such itinerant creatures may in some sense be cosmopolitan, of assimilating into cultures of the other. Shand notes from the marks of crupper ropes and spars on her back that Tara was probably a wild-caught animal used in erstwhile elephant capture operations in northeast India. She had exchanged many hands prior to being auctioned at Sonepur, one of India's biggest elephant markets, where her previous owners purchased her. Shand contrasts these different identities: 'Looking at her now, as she stuffed her face with paddy, I wondered

if she could catch a bus, let alone a wild elephant' (1992, 48). In each of these contact zones, the creature adapts to and mirrors cultures of human others. Such cosmopolitanism may not be a conscious endeavour or desire on elephants' part, but is uneven and operates through the constraints of captivity. Yet, elephants are capable of imitating human actions (Poole *et al.* 2005), and even classifying and differentiating between ethnic groups (Bates *et al.* 2007). Their ability to connect across difference makes relinquishing agency to humans alone a moot point.

However, there is a power dynamic involved in how Tara's identity is effected and mobilised. Bhim's quip that she is 'Raja-sahib haathi' or a prince/sahib's elephant is reflective of Shand's own elite position and links to British royalty.⁵ Tara's becoming 'a princess' is in part a result of her belonging to Shand and the tabloid appeal this offers up. Her enrolment into wider elite networks is further constituted through being the mascot of the Elephant Family – 'Our real founder' as the charity's brochures state. Tara becomes a celebrity animal deployed to represent the Asian elephant's predicament and to promote conservation awareness among UK publics. The story of her entanglement with Shand circulates through numerous media articles and images. It is in this creation of a celebrity animal, brought about through high-society assemblages, that Tara appeals to the banal cosmopolitanisms of global consumption. At the end of their journey, Shand finds her a home in an exclusive ecotourism lodge in central India. A stable 'on the scale of St Paul's Cathedral' is designed for the 'whims of our spoilt client' (Shand 1996, 10). Tara's work-free lifestyle becomes very different from those of other elephants labouring under captivity. Shand himself reflects upon the predicament of the latter as they are auctioned in India's elephant markets:

What will happen to them? Some will go to temples, some will work in game parks ... be bought by rich individuals as symbols of status ... One or two very lucky ones could even end up like Tara. (1996, 139)

In summary, this tale of travelling-with an elephant illustrates the roles animals play in forging cosmopolitanism, understood as connections across global difference. The specificities of the case provide new insights into the 'contact zones' where peoples with different cultural and geographical origins and histories meet and establish ongoing relations (Pratt 2008). Such zones are not solely about human contact, but may be scaped through encounters with many other lively bodies whose presence gets overwritten in scholarship about cultural circulation and exchange. Reanimating Shand's journey allows us to reflect how animals can affect humans and foster new attachments to people, places and things. Such attachments operate through a

range of haptic, optic and affective registers. In Shand's case, his close ties to Tara, the new encounters with India's rural landscape witnessed with her, develops into a desire to conserve Asian elephants and the landscapes they inhabit. For Tara, this encounter across difference marks a change, leading to new becomings. Nevertheless, such cosmopolitanisms are partial and ambiguous. Shand's journey, made possible through his elite position, proceeds through fraught histories over an unequal socio-economic terrain. Attachments are formed but an element of the exotic retained. There is cognisance of people's travails, but assimilation is incomplete. To further explore how more-than-human cosmopolitanisms proceed, I will turn to how elephants 'travel' to other contexts where they are deployed to draw different actors into assemblages of conservation.

Vibrant sculptures and conservation publics

It is the middle of a warm English summer. I am in London's Hyde Park, a green space amid the capital of the erstwhile British Empire, where a herd of 11 elephants are stranded. Solitary animals lurk in the streets, in front of the Marble Arch, in Harrods and in Piccadilly Square, all iconic landmarks of the metropolis. These are not living elephants, but decorated six-

foot fibreglass replicas. They form a part of the 2010 London Elephant Parade – a three-month long conservation and public art event organised by the Elephant Family to raise the profile of Asian elephants among the city's public. Each sculpture clings on to a piece of artificial turf, representing shrinking forest patches. They are metaphors of fragmentation, akin to polar bears on melting ice that signal impending threats of climate change. One message of this event is prominent: Asian elephants are endangered due to habitat loss and we must act upon this by securing corridors – linkages that connect fragmented elephant habitat in different parts of South and Southeast Asia.

The London Elephant Parade is a compelling illustration of how animals are reconfigured as cosmopolitan through their entanglement in transnational networks and selective representation in the West.⁶ Here, cosmopolitanism refers to elephants' global presence through their transformation into commodities for banal consumption. Over 250 elephants were placed all over the city (Figure 3), many designed by famous artists and celebrities such as Marc Quinn, Tommy Hilfiger and Lulu Guinness. The elephants are anthropomorphised, with accentuated eyes and soft facial features. Some embody iconic images of London. For instance, 'Bobby' is depicted with the uniform of a London policeman, while 'Taxi Elephant' is in the form

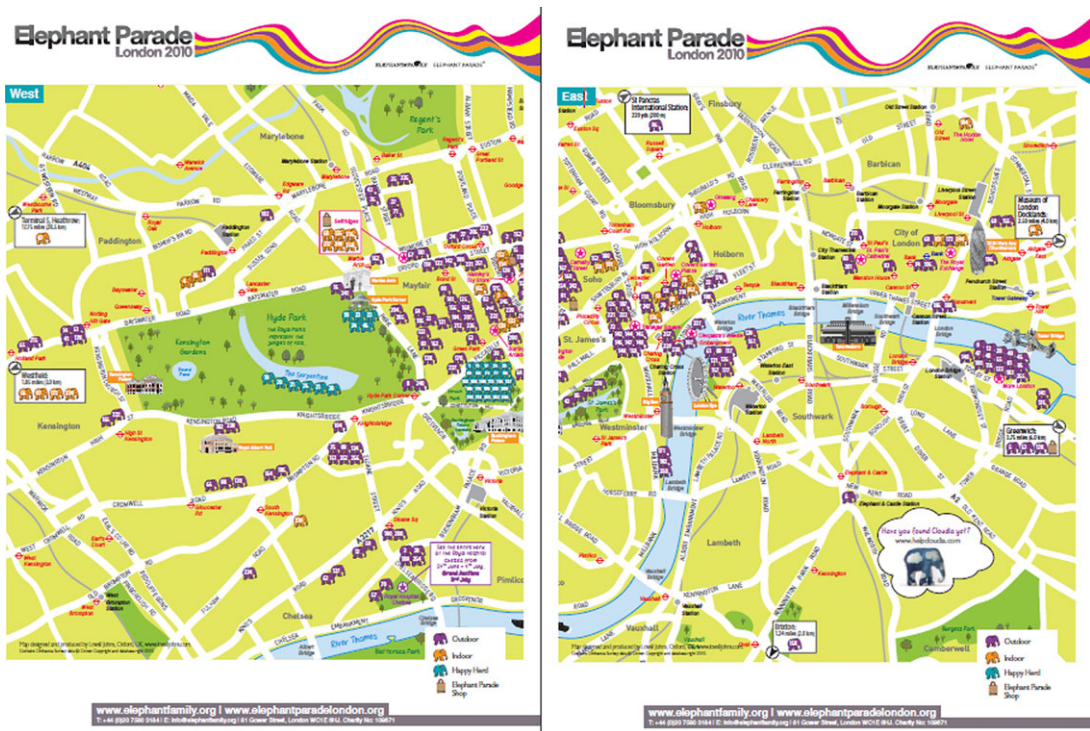


Figure 3 Map of the sculptures placed around London during the Elephant Parade, 2010

of a black cab, blending a mode of London travel with notions of transport the creature has been long entwined with. Similarly, there is 'Tara' – a grey elephant with Mark Shand's intense text of their first encounter draped over the body. Such representations, resonating with the aesthetic inclinations of an urban public, are a mode through which elephants circulate outside of their home ranges in Asia. As stylised works of art, they easily cross into domains of Western cultural consumption. This stylisation is akin to the cosmopolitanisation of music described by Beck (2004), where elements from many different cultures are continually being compared, fitted together and remixed.

Yet, these cosmopolitan commodities retain characteristics of elephants that allow publics to associate with live counterparts in Asia. The ways in which people interact with these vibrant sculptures makes it evident. I observe children climb on to their backs, nestle between their feet and slide down their trunks. The mother of one of the children tells me:

[They are] an interactive work of art ... You can't touch these things in a museum, but here you can ... and this is so important for people to connect with the elephant.

The sculptures prompt haptic responses not dissimilar to what elephants might afford in captivity. Prehensive, tactile encounters fashion a love for the creature and connect by prompting apprehensions about their endangerment and extinction. In other words, these sculptures work as 'travelling landscape-objects': portable representations of elephants and their habitat embedded in material supports that allow for the creatures to move through space and time (della Dora 2009). Their material affordances enable people to 'get in touch' with an animal that is otherwise far-removed from the life-spaces of the urban metropolis.

These sculptures draw diverse actors into assemblages of conservation, reflecting the constitutive agency elephants may have when mobilised in material form. An example of how such material elephants may convene publics was that of a sculpture named 'Gerald', designed by the artist Jonathan Yeo (Figure 4). An elephant with swirling autumn leaves covering its body, Gerald was on public display in Selfridges, a high-end departmental store. It later turned out that the leaves depicted on its body contained a collage of explicit pornography, a style that gained Yeo attention when he deployed it in a controversial portrait of George W Bush (Anon 2007). Following a number of customer complaints, the Elephant Family was asked to remove Gerald, as it was offensive to Selfridges' clientele. Housed temporarily in the charity's office, Gerald's absence began to gain traction among members of the London public who were trying to build photograph collections of every elephant in the parade. A person



Figure 4 Gerald being moved to the Elephant Family office (London, 2010)

working in the city started a campaign page called 'Free Gerald' on the social networking site Facebook, stating the removal was 'a punishment' for Gerald and demanding that he be made available for public viewing: 'It's not his fault. He's a work of art. Give us Gerald back! Free Gerald!' The page soon became very popular and members of the London public began to post comments about the sculpture. Gerald was anthropomorphised and personhood attributed to it: 'Poor old Gerald! Free him for ... when they are gathered at Royal Hospital Chelsea, the other 257 [elephants] may mock and tease him for his lack of public appearances!' Messages evoked notions of belonging, displacement and home, resonating with the plight of its living counterparts in Asia: 'I don't mind if they want to stick Gerald outside my house if they are struggling to re-home him! Let him be free and roam as nature intended!' An aleatory outcome rather than a public relations stunt, the Elephant Family received close to 300 emails and phone calls asking where Gerald was (Moore-Bridger 2010). When a viewing was arranged in the charity office, more than 200 people arrived to photograph the elephant. Later placed in a Soho nightclub, Gerald attracted 200 visitors an hour (Anon 2011).

Gerald provides a compelling example of the constitutive force of things in social and political life (Bingham 2006), of how a vast number of nonhuman entities link the cosmos and the polis (Latour 2004). These material elephants, while anthropomorphic and presenting selectively edited facets of their living counterparts, convene public constituencies in support of elephant conservation. The 'Free Gerald' campaign led to the formation of a fan club called 'Gerald's Groupies', members of which met on a regular basis, coordinating trips around London to spot elephants. As Paul, one of the group members put it, the desire to find elephants did not stem from prior love for nature or conservation. Rather it was from the curiosity these sculptures aroused:

I wanted to find them all ... It is a sort of 'collector's mentality' ... Like going on safari, but the shooting is obviously with a camera, not an elephant gun.

Members of the group displayed their digital trophies via online albums, and shared information about locations of elephants in the city. Elephant spotting in London was often described as finding elephants 'in the wild'. Yet, the elephants were also contagious, in the sense that they bound publics, the charity and elephants in new ways. They generated concerns about conservation of counterparts in the wild. Members of the group raised money for the event and contributed to the Elephant Family's cause. Two years on, the group continues to meet and have attended elephant parades in other European cities. Their main aim is to 'maintain personal contact, promote the plight of the Asian elephant and enjoy outdoor photography' (Anon 2011).

The transnational connections woven together by elephants are not just restricted to the charity and elephant-spotting public. The event was co-hosted with the company Elephant Parade, which had organised similar events in Holland and Belgium prior to London (Figure 5).⁷ At the interface of 'art, business and conservation', connection was the key logic at play here. The first set of connections was between artists, corporations and conservation charities. A student artist told me that he was motivated to do something for a charity with a mission to save Asian elephants. His elephant, named 'Claire de Lune', was inspired by a desire to connect people: 'I used the moon as a metaphor – it is something everybody in the world sees

in the same way. It is a good metaphor for connecting people'. Furthermore,

Elephants are far removed from British culture. ... You would think the ordinary person cares very little or hardly knows much about the elephant. In that sense this event has created a space for the Asian elephant and has given it a profile.

For corporate firms, sponsoring individual sculptures provided good marketing value and publicity in London, besides opportunities to network amid British high-society with whom the Elephant Family, through Mark Shand, had strong links. More significantly, the popular appeal and apparently apolitical stature of the elephant was an incentive to be involved. A corporate sponsor told me

We are the only architectural firm involved in the parade. Elephants are a good way to cheer people up, and it is a non-political symbol that works across sectors ... Everyone has different agendas – corporate houses, the Elephant Family ... The elephant connects these agendas.

The second way in which connection was metaphorically deployed was through elephant corridors: patches of forest that link fragmented elephant habitat. For the Elephant Family and other elephant conservation NGOs involved in the parade (e.g. WTI and IFAW), the main objective was to generate funds for securing corridors on the ground. Each sculpture was auctioned, the proceeds shared between the Elephant Parade company and Elephant Family or partner conservation NGO. The social capital of the charity was instrumental for attracting the right celebrities whose presence

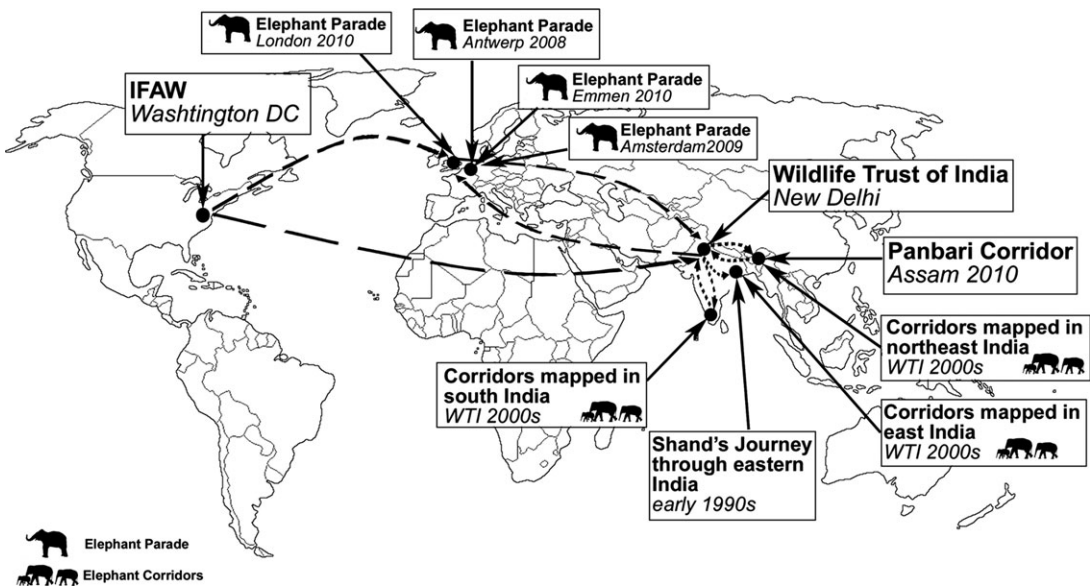


Figure 5 Sites, events and actors relevant to this ethnography and circulation of the cosmopolitan elephant

interested potential buyers. One event was even visited by Shand's brother-in-law and sister, Prince Charles and the Duchess of Cornwall. The live auction, preceded by a gala dinner, was attended by the likes of Princess Beatrice and the actor Goldie Hawn. Elephant corridors were the key theme in the auction, posited as conduits of connectivity that are the only realistic hope for the future survival of this endangered creature. Besides being high-quality art and representing an important cause, the act of buying was viewed as a measure of peer esteem. A lady who bought two sculptures told me:

I came here wanting to buy a particular elephant, one that both my dad and I liked. But the atmosphere here is so fantastic. I saw another elephant and I bought it as well. I felt I just had to...

The event was extremely successful from the charity's perspective: over £4 million was raised for securing elephant corridors in Asia.

In summary, this event shows how elephants are reconfigured by different actors and commoditised to serve the banal globalisms that unfold and de-sever the world. As synecdochic bodies, material representations of elephants operate as dynamic vehicles for the creature's circulation. Both elephants and their landscapes are set in motion. Like 'circulating references', these representations are a valuable means for the translation of conservation issues from the field to the metropolis (Latour 1999). They make distant non-presence present. The creative traffic generated through the transnational networks elephants are entangled in, unsettles site-bound, parochial localisations of animals. Elephants are no longer confined to the 'out there' of national parks or forest reserves, but enrolled into heterogeneous networked assemblages that congeal in and through multiple spaces and fluid ecologies (Whatmore and Thorne 2000). Within these assemblages, elephants have a binding effect, linking things as diverse as art and publics, corporate agendas and habitat fragments. The affects and forces of these material bodies are contagious. They evoke global ecological responsibilities and concerns for creatures far removed from the worlds of city publics.

While cosmopolitan configurations of elephants make motion easier, they also limit where we go. Aesthetic and stylised renderings of elephants accentuate the 'cute and cuddly' aspects of these creatures, akin to the number of anthropomorphised elephant luminaries such as Elmer, Dumbo and Babar prevalent in the West (Lorimer 2010b). Similarly, companionate aspects of Shand's encounter with Tara are amplified (Shand 1992), while his writings and later film *The dark side of elephants* on elephant aggression and travails of the poor (Shand 1996) are subdued. There is a fund-raising and business logic to concealment, for the dark

side of elephants does not travel well. As one of my key informants in the Elephant Family put it,

The last time we focused on the dark side of elephants and screened Mark's film before a fund-raising event, it was a complete failure. These are things about elephants that people here don't want to know.

This editing out of concerns that are grave or antagonistic is necessary for turning elephants into commodities for consumption, and it is through such consumption that elephants become part of global cosmopolitanisms (Beck 2004). Further, such renderings fashion among the public a particular 'Western' vision of what constitutes an Asian elephant, why or how the creature should be conserved. Cosmopolitan elephants may indeed be deceitful if they leave out important actors and other ways of engaging with elephants, not to mention the risks of trivialising the lives of these creatures themselves. In the following section, I trace some of the unpredictable and dynamic effects that arise when cosmopolitan elephants return in the form of 'transportable packages' to secure conservation corridors on the ground in India.

Cosmopolitan returns: friction

It is a sunny morning in November 2010, and I am with a group of 50-odd farmers in a paddy field outside Kaziranga National Park in Assam, northeast India. A public meeting is underway. The paddy is ripe, ready for harvesting, but the mood of the gathering is tense. Midway through the meeting, the farmers rise and start shouting slogans: 'Inqhilab Zindabad!⁸ Land-grabbing will not be allowed! Stop the NGO from touting land! Inqhilab Zindabad!' Theirs is a protest against having to sell their paddy fields to the government in order to pave the way for an elephant corridor. During the past year, a succession of government notices has arrived in the village, asking the farmers to hand over their land at a pre-determined price. The farmers have been adamant: 'We will not give up our land'. A series of negotiations over land transfer have ensued, involving landholders, civil authorities, the forest department and a wildlife conservation NGO. The elephant is central to these negotiations, mobilised in different ways by each actor. The government and NGO try to convince the villagers that channelling the movement of elephants through the designated corridor will lead to a reduction in crop-raiding and help secure a long-term future for the animal. The farmers are less certain of this linear logic, emphasising the unruliness of elephant behaviour. One of them responds: 'Are your elephants so polite that they will use no other path besides the corridor?'

This ripe paddy field, this place in-between two protected areas, is the site to which the cosmopolitan

elephant returns in the form of monetary capital and GIS-based cartographies delineating elephant landscapes (Figure 5). This corridor project is an initiative of the Wildlife Trust of India (WTI), the Indian partner NGO of the Elephant Family, and funded by the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), one of the conservation organisations associated with the London Elephant Parade. Corridors are a genuine conservation concern, whose importance the director of WTI highlights in an interview:

In a land with a billion people, if I want to leave something for my son, what will I leave? The first thing you think of leaving the next generation is land. So if you want to leave something for wildlife in this country, it has to be land. And what is the land that we should prioritize? Simply that bit which connects two protected areas.

Elephants fuel these cartographic aspirations: 'For the elephant [corridors are] even more important as it's a nomad, a big nomad.' Corridors are both real and constructed: the elephant's landscape requirements, its ability to introduce a sense of groundedness into GIS visualisations, make fragmented landscapes legible and *connectable* (Jepson *et al.* 2011). Furthermore, its ability to attract funding and support from Western donors and publics make it an ideal 'flagship species' to mobilise conservation aspirations: 'Very soon we found we could use elephants as a powerful tool to conserve chunks of land in India'. Under a programme entitled Wild Lands, the trust undertook a nation-wide exercise of mapping elephant corridors, standardising their names and categorising each corridor according to its 'ecological priority' and feasibility of acquisition. This classificatory work was published in the form of a manual by the WTI (Menon *et al.* 2005). The Panbari corridor, as this site in Kaziranga is called, is listed as 'high' in terms of ecological priority and conservation feasibility.

While landscape-scale movement is important for elephants, these discourses and cartographic practices project corridors as pure spaces of ecological connectivity from which traces of the social are expunged. Corridors are seldom the conservation panacea they are projected to be, not just in ecological terms (Simberloff and Cox 1987), but also because of the troubled histories of control of land and resources their implementation sometimes gets entwined in (Goldman 2009). The creation of Kaziranga National Park in the early part of the 20th century had met with considerable resistance from the neighbouring peasantry, who were ultimately dispossessed of their rights to collect resources or graze cattle in the reserve (Saikia 2009). Tensions between the local community and park authorities have ensued at various times, often when proposals or moves to expand the reserve are mooted. These fraught histories are evoked when people claim ownership over the land of the proposed elephant

corridor: my informants frequently remarked that their ancestors had once lived inside what is now the national park. As a move to gain legitimacy of ownership of the corridor land, the farmers repeatedly tried to establish the fact that their community had been cultivating the land proposed as a corridor over many generations. This idea of belonging was voiced in an official response to one of the government notices the farmers had received: 'We have been living here since British times'. Further, local narratives described the corridor as a paddy field, a place in which they dwelt and cultivated. This was at odds with the NGO discourse, which emphasised the corridor's importance in connecting two critical elephant habitats.

Elephants' movements were through many parts of the landscape, not just the strip designated as a corridor. This led to heated debate. Several protests and demonstrations ensued over the winter of 2010, where contending interpretations of what constituted an elephant corridor were voiced. One of my key informants, a landholder in Panbari, pointed out to a WTI representative that there were several corridors in the landscape, not just the one the trust and forest department were fixated on securing:

Why aren't you doing anything about other corridors in the vicinity? There are so many hotels and resorts coming up in paddy land surrounding the national park. One of them has even erected a high concrete wall, completely barricading elephant movement. Instead of trying to grab people's land at Panbari, why aren't you trying to stop these other corridors from becoming defunct?

The representative, with a copy of the manual on the science and classification of elephant corridors in India in hand, attempted to defend his position: 'You can't call those movement tracks corridors. Just because there is elephant movement does not mean it is a corridor'. For the representative, a corridor was defined through the science of meta-population ecology. Its meaning was standardised in the manual in his hand: 'a corridor is a linear landscape element where the immigration rate to the target patch is increased over what it would be if the linear patch was not present' (Menon *et al.* 2005, 26). Such standardisation is integral for building bridges and channels of circulation across epistemic communities (Tsing 2005), but its validity rests on an epistemological high-ground that relegates contending interpretations to the margins (Haraway 1991). Further, the process of translation must occur if corridors are to move smoothly from one social world to another (Goldman 2009). In this context, incomplete translations and contentious interpretations led to heated political frictions.

These political frictions were not just spun between the interests and epistemologies of the state, conservation NGOs and local inhabitants. Elephants and their

ecologies were implicitly enrolled into the political fabric. One informant in Panbari drew attention to an electric fence that the forest department and WTI had erected along the national park boundary to minimise animal incursions into people's fields. While an important effort to reduce crop-raiding, he pointed to a gap left in the corridor area to facilitate elephant movement. For the farmer, this was a deliberate ploy to funnel animals into their fields:

This is a policy of the NGO and forest department. They want to make sure that the elephants only move through here, so that crop depredation increases in our fields and we inevitably have to sell our land for the corridor project.

The farmers were well aware of the *political effect* thwarting elephant movement through the corridor might have. The same informant told me how the villagers had taken steps to forestall such movement:

If we chase away the elephants regularly, there will be a time when they will stop using this corridor. If usage of this track by elephants stops, the forest department and NGO won't bother us anymore.

Indeed, the political resistance to corridor implementation comes together in the presence of elephants. Politics thus becomes a more-than-human endeavour, enacted in conjunction with elephants, where their movements and trajectories matter. Not only the notion of who is brought to the negotiating table is changed, the very process of political negotiation is altered, as it no longer means give or take in an exclusively human club.

In conclusion, this journey illustrates what happens when cosmopolitan elephants return to the ground. The creature, whose landscape-scale habitat requirements are conservation-enabling, helps different actors build channels for conservation ideas to travel. The contingent linkages it creates as a transportable package allow environmental governance to operate from afar. Yet, these are not always smooth outcomes. Cosmopolitan elephants and the modes of conservation they are made to represent generate frictions between rural farmers and transnational conservation assemblages (Tsing 2005). This in part arises due to a sanitised portrayal of the elephant to fit purposes of fund-raising through banal consumption in the West. Concerns of local actors, their modes of relating to elephants or the creatures' unruly behaviour are muted. Cosmopolitan connections across difference are thus ephemerally held together. These transnational entanglements entail asymmetric power relations and in some instances give rise to new forms of inequality (Beck 2004).

Discussion

In this paper, I have sought to examine the role of nonhumans as participants and subjects of cosmopolitanism. The notion of cosmopolitanism mobilised here

pertains to Beck's proposition of a global public arena, transnational processes and banal consumption as constitutive features of a cosmopolitan condition (Beck 2004). Although geographers have looked at the implications such cosmopolitanism has for developing an understanding of geopolitical arrangements (Edwards 2008), economic and political life (Jeffrey 2008; Strang 2008), or its failure to address radical alterity (Jazeel 2011), the bodily presence of nonhumans and their diverse agencies are evacuated from their analyses. In contrast, the symmetrical analysis attempted here opens up this geographical sensibility to a more diverse array of materials, things and animals that make humans act. While being a multi-sited ethnography of a specific project, the case study presented here interfaces with a number of historical, material and political dimensions of more-than-human cosmopolitanisms. It reflects some of the cultural tendencies of contemporary conservation and unpacks how they operate in an interconnected world. Implications of this work for geography and the wider social sciences are manifold.

First, it has bearings on how we account for histories of environmental conservation in (post)colonial contexts (Guha 2006). Much of this work has a diametric tendency of viewing conservation as a mode of 'cultural imperialism' where Western ideals are imposed onto local South Asian communities (Guha 1989),⁹ or as the hegemony of Indian elites over subaltern citizens (Rangarajan 1996). This paper, while acknowledging forms of imposition at work, suggests that histories and practices of conservation are less polar and far more ambiguous. For instance, Shand's journey with Tara, the transnational networks that get assembled and the conservation outcomes that emerge are products of multiple locales and divergent cultural affinities toward people, animals or places. Yes, Shand's encounter is fraught with a romantic ideal, and is an asymmetric meeting between the privileged and the disenfranchised. However, Shand is also opened up to a common world populated by both human and nonhuman others. The resources that he mobilises following this intense, affective encounter are to act for the plight of elephants in the Anthropocene, to create new networks and convene publics in many far-flung places. Some of his writings and films profess loyalty to the marginalised, but at other times human–elephant relationships are depoliticised to serve strategic goals. The apparently apolitical nature of the elephant that appeals to corporate investors in the Elephant Parade is not purely coincidental. Rather, it becomes apolitical only when contested aspects of human–elephant cohabitation are downplayed. There is thus a tension between Shand's cosmopolitan sensibility and the cosmopolitics in which he is involved. Further, the transnational linkages elucidated here show that there are many

more actors, concerns and apprehensions involved, not all of which can be considered 'Western' or operating from without. This transnational nature of Indian conservation is best elucidated in the scholarship of the historian Michael Lewis (2004). Where this paper departs from Lewis' account is the role of nonhuman actants, which participate in this rhizomatic history and politics, and are integral to how assemblages constituted by Indian and Western NGOs, networks of wealth and capital, concerns of global publics engrossed in banal consumption come together.

Second, appreciating cosmopolitanism as a more-than-human endeavour has bearings on how we configure animals and account for the spaces they inhabit. For instance, it begs the question as to what makes an animal cosmopolitan, and what such creatures might look like in the Anthropocene? Annu Jalais, in her work on cosmopolitan animals, suggests that some creatures such as the tiger are cosmopolitan because by their very presence the world over, they personify the universalism of a Western particular, that of wildlife and its need to be protected (Jalais 2008). Such presence is in the form of images or replicas consumed through spectacular and banal global cosmopolitanisms, not dissimilar to those elucidated by Beck (2004). This paper builds upon Jalais' predominantly discursive analysis to argue that cosmopolitan representations are co-constituted by the affordances of elephants. As the above ethnography suggests, elephants enter other cultures in multiple forms: live animals, circulating images or as vibrant sculptures. The becoming-cosmopolitan of the elephant is enacted through the agency of these ontologically diverse bodies, not solely that of living beings. The registers of sentimentality and affection these multiple bodies evoke are important (Lorimer 2010b). Indeed, commoditised representations fitted for banal global consumption are not mute. The agency of such a cohort is contagious (Deleuze and Guattari 1987), in the sense that they draw and bind different actors and give rise to novel cultural configurations. The cosmopolitanisms that arise are not about global belonging in a Kantian sense, but a partial and asymmetric endeavour where unevenness is at play.

Engaging with the material lives and spaces of elephants suggests how encounters across difference affect the ethologies of these creatures themselves. Tara's journey, from an animal used for elephant capture to an itinerant begging elephant and finally the companion of an English aristocrat, is reflective of how the behaviour and dispositions of an animal can undergo change as it is enmeshed in different cultures. As a celebrity animal housed in an ecotourism lodge, her material and sentient life is very different from other elephants labouring in captivity (Locke 2011), or the travails of wild counterparts as they negotiate landscapes riven with conflict (Jadhav and Barua 2012).

As Whatmore argues in the case of an African elephant housed in Paignton Zoo, the creature's history makes a difference: it may belong to a particular species, but its life at the zoo bears only distant relations to its counterparts in the African bush (Whatmore 2002). With increasing global flows and connections, it is highly plausible that elephants in many parts of the world are being reconfigured as cosmopolitan. Animals in centres where tourists from across the world come to learn to ride elephants, some of which are even trained to showcase activities such as pulling timber, playing instruments or painting (Anon 2013), are a case in point. Commodification of interactions is intrinsic to such cultures of consumption, but it is the specific qualities of elephants themselves that shape the ways encounters are packaged and sold. The danger of pinning the survival of these creatures in 'their ability to pay their way', however, remains inherent (Duffy 2012, 17). Furthermore, one might even speculate whether animals of the future might become consumers of cosmopolitanisms themselves, as in the case of pet dogs in the USA (Haraway 2007).

Tracking the mobility of elephants as they shuttle back and forth across cultural contexts opens up new ways through which we might understand the spaces of animals. Main currents within South Asian environmental history, and more specifically Jalais' account of cosmopolitan animals, tend to contrast spaces of the cosmopolitan as a diametric opposition to the local (Jalais 2008). In this paper we witness how the geographies of cosmopolitan animals, or the landscapes of conservation, are not polar, but dynamic and dispersed. Their spaces are better understood as networked (Bingham and Thrift 2000), issuing forth as these creatures circulate through a *complicated* (folded) world. This folding of space and time is what makes human–elephant exchanges in the UK an intimate part of the rural ecologies of Assam in India. As the ethnographic material presented here suggests, transnational flows are at times about cooperation, and at other times lead to frictions and inequalities (Beck 2004; Tsing 2005). Who gets enrolled into networks of elephant conservation, and who is edited out is about power, but a power of translation, emerging from the diverse ways in which humans and nonhumans get associated with one another (Latour 1986). This perspective enables new insights into how we might engage with the politics of conservation in times of interdependency, in a world that unfolds through circulation and mediation.

Third, the posthumanist multi-sited ethnography deployed here has implications both in the context of the materials generated, and in terms of its contributions to the methodological repertoire of more-than-human geography (Davies and Dwyer 2007; Lorimer 2010b). This ethnography could come across as a

worrying claim to be a holistic representation of cosmopolitan animals and their spaces. However notions of connection across difference are in part due to the trajectories traced by the travelling ethnographer. It is through rhizomatic becomings-with a plethora of human and nonhuman bodies that notions of cosmopolitan connections across difference are co-constituted. Further, the ambiguities and discrepancies of such transnational modes of conservation were mirrored by my own varying identity in different contexts: a 'conservationist' associated with the Elephant Family in London, among New Delhi NGOs a former acquaintance, in Assam a 'local' inhabitant of a village next to the corridor site. Each of these positions was fluid and unstable, shifting and changing as I became itinerant-with elephants. Equally, the different engagements with elephants, as an anthropomorphised creature in London, as maps and GIS projections in New Delhi and as an unruly, marginalised beast in Assam, co-produces this analysis of cosmopolitan animals. What this work does is to follow more than just the human in multi-sited ethnography (Marcus 1995). There is a tendency within the latter tradition to follow objects and how they circulate. However, this paper emphasises how things and living beings have agency and are eventful. They participate in the construction of the 'fluid ecologies of performative networks' in which they are enmeshed (Whatmore and Thorne 1998, 451). The paper remains open to the fact that other modes of analysis of cosmopolitan elephants are possible and could be different if other trajectories or events were followed.

Finally, this paper shares some of the insights on contagion and circulation offered up by the nascent work on cosmopolitanisms in more-than-human geography (Braun 2007; Clark 2002). However, its focus on human-animal relations in the broader context of relations between India and the West is very distinct from the latter scholarship on circulation of undesirable mobiles. Further, unlike this paper, their work does not delve into the lived spaces of animals themselves or account for notions of belonging through which more-than-human cosmopolitanisms proceed. Global environmental governance may proceed through differential and uneven ideas about belonging and difference, as much as it does through imperatives to control biological risks or thwart species invasions. Fluid spaces of cosmopolitanism emerge from the multitude of ways in which circulating elephants convene publics and make humans act. The cosmos and polis are indeed linked by a vast number of entities. Global interdependency is more than a human tale.

Acknowledgements

This research was supported by the University of Oxford Clarendon Fund, Felix and Wingate scholar-

ships. Many thanks to Gavin Bridge, Madeleine Hatfield and the five anonymous reviewers for their constructive comments. I am grateful to Paul Jepson and Sarah Whatmore for their help and advice. Fieldwork in London would not have been possible without the hospitality of Sushrut Jadhav and Mallika Sekhar. The Elephant Family, Wildlife Trust of India and people in Assam shared diverse views and insights; shortcomings in the paper are entirely mine.

Notes

- 1 The number of ways cosmopolitanism is used can be bewildering: a political project, as moral philosophy, a way of being, condition or postcolonial disposition, and a methodological stance. This diversity may be further specified as 'rooted', 'situated', 'actually existing', 'discrepant' and so forth (see Jazeel 2011). A dissection of these terms is beyond the scope or project of this paper.
- 2 Contrary to the work of Clark (2002) and Braun (2007), whose focus is on the spread of invasives and viruses that unsettle and go against the grain of environmental cosmopolitanism, this paper emphasises how nonhumans foster sentience and belonging through connections across difference.
- 3 My involvement was shaped by pre-existing relations I had with Elephant Family, the charity running the event. I had met members of the charity several times in India and my doctoral supervisor knew them closely. This enabled access to private events closed to the public, but also had bearings on how the ethnography was shaped. Some of these concerns will be addressed in the discussion.
- 4 This involved studying a corridor project in Assam, northeast India. The project was not implemented by Elephant Family, but by two partners of the London event: the Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) and the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW). The local community it interfaced with was close to my family home. Access and participant observation were enabled by the pre-existing links I had with local informants. Its implications for analysing cosmopolitanism through multi-sited ethnography will be taken up later.
- 5 Shand's sister is the Duchess of Cornwall, second wife of Charles, Prince of Wales.
- 6 Starting with the Cow Parade in 1999, there have been numerous animal parades across the world. They feature creatures from dragons to donkeys, but not all are about conserving the focal species per se.
- 7 Prior to the London event, the company had organised parades in Rotterdam, Antwerp and Amsterdam. Since 2010, other parades have happened in Bergen, Copenhagen, Milan and Singapore. Only the London event was in support of Elephant Family; the post-2010 parades support The Asian Elephant Foundation. There is a complex set of actors involved, but this analysis is restricted to the London event.
- 8 This Urdu phrase, meaning 'Long live revolution', was commonly used by revolutionaries during British rule over India. The term has popular currency in contemporary social movements within the country.

9 This polarisation between the West and the rest has also been a feature of subaltern studies of history that have influenced postcolonial environmental history in India (see Simeon 2001).

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