

Of Bees and Migrants

Place a beehive on my grave
And let the honey soak through.
Sue Monk Kidd,
The Secret Life of Bees, 2002

In oppressive July heat we move along rough and tumble Pipeline Road in the mountains east of Ajo, Arizona, delivering water to remote migrant aid stations in the Arizona-Sonora borderlands. In the Desplado, the spectral is everywhere and nowhere. Bodies are ‘passings’ in an incomprehensible vastness. The landscape is doubly haunted, by unfathomably deep time and by death. Using GPS and thermal cameras, we search for sites along washes reported to be locations where human remains have been discovered. “This is the language of waves and radiation, or how the dead speak to the living” (DeLillo 1985).



There is material evidence of migrant crossers along Pipeline Road: plastic gallon water jugs, homemade moccasins (to reduce tracking by the Border Patrol), blankets and bedding, backpacks, hats, clothing, bordados (hand embroidered cloths used to wrap possessions), personal care products, medicines, and palliatives associated with a long journey on foot. There is a spectral perplexity and profundity surrounding the objects—absence in presence, presence in absence—that eludes capture. We come upon a site strewn with more than a score of abandoned rotting beehives and objects discarded by passing migrants. We wander about the materialities, as if they might somehow reveal mysteries of what transpired here, whispering stories about the bees and migrants who passed through, and what became of them. Have we fallen prey to the phenomenological illusion that “causality must be happening ‘behind’ objects which are mere surface appearances” (Morton 2013)? The abandoned rotting beehives and objects themselves are vibrant and forceful, radiating sensations sensible and insensible, vibrating with the inexhaustible Sonoran desert landscape.

DeLillo, Don. 1985. *White Noise*. New York: Viking Penguin.

Morton, Timothy. 2013. *Realist Magic: Objects, Ontology, Causality*. Ann Arbor, MI: Open Humanities Press.

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