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FILM

Transabelles: Moving Bees at Night

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Transabelles: Moving Bees at Night is a film about transhumance, the active displacement of livestock (including bees) from the highlands (in the summer) to the lowlands (in the winter). The name is a portmanteau of the Catalan words *transhumància* (transhumance) and *abelles* (bees). This short film presents a night in the labour of a beekeeper and his two helpers in the High Pyrenees in Catalonia, Spain. This district lies midway between the plains of Western Catalonia and the High Pyrenees, where the mountain range is at its highest. As such, the district has historically been a region of cross-pollination and multiple ranging activities that count on a diversity of environments and climates. While the movement of sheep and cow might be more visible, bees too are part of the ecological exchange between lowlands and highlands.

The beekeeper brings the bees up the mountain to fight against the rising summer temperatures. The bees face multiple problems as the environment becomes more difficult to inhabit during the summer months. In the High Pyrenees, at the moment of filming in 2018, the region had come out of a three-year drought. Although rains had been good during the year, the summer temperature still menaced the bees' sustenance. The rising temperatures in the low-range Pyrenean region (around six hundred to seven hundred meters above sea level) make the water presence and the general humidity scarcer and scarcer. Humidity impacts the ability of the flora to produce nectar and sustain the bee population while it also makes the dryland maquis more prone to wildfire. These issues make honey production and bee reproduction difficult because bees might not be able to build their winter honey provisions nor produce the surplus for the beekeepers.

Positioning himself in a long beekeeping tradition of relocating bees when water becomes scarce, the beekeeper takes care of the bees and brings them to a colder and more humid environment. Close to the mountain pasture, he brings the bees to grasslands that stand at 1,300 meters above sea level. This drastic change in elevation also helps increase the distance from the original place of the beehives. This shift helps reorient the bees and place them in the mid-range and high-range mountain environment. Bee navigation is predicated on their cognitive map of the region. The cognitive map is made by calculation of position in the triangulation of the sun's position over the horizon, the bee internal clock, and recognisable landmarks they have already seen in previous flights. Bringing them out of the landscape boundaries in their cognitive map, and at a different altitude, will let the bees understand they find themselves in a new environment. The beekeeper must move them at night, while they sleep, so that when they fly out at dawn, they can start drawing a new cognitive map.

Beekeeping is particularly significant in addressing the relationship between migration and rural labour. The district in this film is one of the most depopulated rural Catalan regions. Because the area has been historically less and less populated, fewer economic and ecological activities have encroached on the highland space needed for beekeeping. Farming households have historically maintained beekeeping as a diversifying activity on their farms. However, young people from the cities move to rural milieus—often

following the roots of their family who migrated from the countryside—and find an affordable livelihood in beekeeping. In the absence of population, they weave their labour connections trying out different activities. Among them, beekeeping grants more autonomy because it does not require land: the hives are placed in pastures or marginal lands. They learn from local beekeepers how to take care of bees and their environment.

Moving bees at night becomes quite the experience for the young urban helpers, who know little about the bees and find themselves in literal and metaphorical darkness. In *Moving Bees at Night*, I want to reproduce the alienation of both bee geographic displacement and night labour for humans. By using night footage that hides from vision, rather than just showing, I aim to transfer the estrangement effect to the audience, who learns from the film by listening and glimpsing at the moving endeavour where light, which should help bees and workers alike, is narrowed to the fleeting beekeepers' headlights.

Keywords: bees; transhumance; climate change; moving ecology; Pyrenees

Transabelles: Moving Bees at Night

Watch *Transabelles: Moving Bees at Night*.

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Competing Interests
The filmmaker has no competing interests to declare.

Ethics and Consent
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