

Creative Practices of Care: The Subjectivity, Agency, and Affective Labor of Preparing Seeds for Long-term Banking

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ABSTRACT ORIGINAL

Laying aside the question of whether saving seeds in freezers is the most promising long-term solution to prevent the loss of plant biodiversity and secure our access to food in a troubled future climate, this article draws attention to the conditions of possibility that scaffold the seed bank world. Oft relegated to “tech” work that is unworthy of observation, this article focuses on the labor practices of seed curators as they prepare the seeds for their ultimate storage at the largest seed bank of wild plants—the Millennium Seed Bank Partnership in West Sussex, England. Contributing to the growing scholarship on care in technoscientific practice, I investigate how scientists summon their bodies, imaginations, and feelings to clean, screen, and count seeds, all the while producing knowledge that renders the seeds legible in the bank. By following the seeds through the experimental care practices espoused by scientists involved from the moment seeds arrive at the bank until they are ready for storage, I study how seemingly mundane tasks radically influence how “life” is being prepared for the future. [seed banking, gene banking, Millennium Seed Bank Partnership, care practice, laboratory studies, affective labor]. © 2019 by the American Anthropological Association.