

Nonhuman labor and the making of resources making soils a resource through microbial labor

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ABSTRACT ORIGINAL

With soils increasingly seen as living ecosystems, the understanding of the relationship between soils and agricultural labor is changing. A shift from working the soil to working with the soil is hoped to deliver a true ecological modernization of capitalist agriculture, making the production of ever-growing yields and the maintenance of healthy ecosystems co-constitutive. Drawing on ethnographic data from English farming, this article argues that the current trends are in fact a continuation of the logic of capitalist soil improvement in which soils are made into economic resources. By proposing a new conceptualization of labor as a material process of transformation oriented toward the generation of capital value, the author establishes a dialogue between hitherto separate literatures on the making of economic resources and on nonhuman labor. This approach transforms the debates on the relationship between nature and capital by productively collapsing the distinction between labor and resources. The author argues that acknowledging the material co-constitution of (any form of) labor and resource making allows us to better analyze the processes through which natures are rolled into capital. Today's enrollment of soil biota as labor thus opens up the whole biosphere to the logic of improvement, and to the operations of capital. © 2020 Anna Krzywoszynska.