

Seeing copiapósols: anthropogenic soils, strategic unknowing, and emergent taxonomies in northern Chile

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ABSTRACT ORIGINAL

In recent decades, anthropogenic soils have become so ubiquitous that for some authors they should be taken as the “golden spike” signaling the start of the Anthropocene. Despite their prominence, leading soil taxonomies have resisted calls to recognize them as a proper kind of soil. Such omission has importantly limited the ways in which soil practitioners can account and deal with the sociopolitical aspects embedded in soil formation. Approaching the issue from a sociomaterial perspective, this paper studies the effects of such omission on the work of soil scientists working in northern Chile. By contrasting their usage of the USDA/NRCS soil typology with the realities found in the field, the work of strategic unknowing that such typologies achieve becomes evident. To challenge such situation, the paper concludes exploring the notion of emergent taxonomies, classifications that are sensitive to local configurations of materials, living beings and power out which soils emerge. © 2021, The Author(s), under exclusive licence to Springer Nature B.V.