

Potential Removal

“Carbon removal”, “enhanced carbon sequestration” or “carbon capture and storage” (CCS) is both the imaginary and technoscience of a range of processes that speculate on eliminating CO₂ from the atmosphere *forever*. Carbon removal deploys a violent mix of creative accounting, questionable geo-engineering practices, scientific experimentation and advanced advertising techniques. It is a technofix with many indeterminacies: from the implications for local communities and ecosystems to its validity, value, and technical feasibility.

According to the most recent models published by the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change), Net Zero can only be achieved when counting on CCS. Governmental and industrial agents therefore project the image of carbon removal as a reluctant plan B for plan A, the actual cutting of emissions and financing systemic change. Instead, nation states, oil companies and Big Tech invest billions in scaling up carbon removal startups, not in the least because the financial elite has made it into a profitable investment which according to their own predictions could (and should) eventually be bigger than the current oil market itself.

The images in this booklet were gleaned from countless scientific and commercial publications that visualize “mineral carbonization”. They render imaginable the inframaterial process of injecting carbonated fluids into the voids of porous basalt and confidently depict how chemical interactions between silicate rock and fizzy water will trigger “enhanced mineralization”, trapping carbon deep underground through “fast calcification”. This collection of emptied diagrams illustrates the ongoing recombinatory experiments with the potential of porosity, and its risky reliance on the stabilizing force of minerals to hold carbon until the end of times.

The promise of enhanced carbon sequestration produces a glittering mirage of opportunity, especially seductive for those who wrecked the earth to begin with. Carbon removal once again invents the underground as a resource for extraction, but this time through injection. Even if appearing benign and full of good intentions, this reversal does not do anything to repair historical violences. Instead, carbon removal makes the underground into a site of double erasure: while sinking the abolition of fossil fuel economies into the ground, it turns its inaccessible vertical presence into a potential volume to be filled.

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