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# On Dismantling

A Report from Michigan

JEFFREY INSKO

I used to moonlight as an energy humanist. I didn't know it at the time. In fact, I didn't even know the energy humanities—the study, across humanistic disciplines, of the social, historical, and cultural implications of our modern dependence on fossil fuels—were a thing. I didn't know, that is, until some time in late 2013 when I happened upon an advance notice of Stephanie LeMenager's then-soon-to-be-published book *Living Oil: Petroleum Culture in the American Century*. It felt, at the time, as if that book had been written just for me, a teacher and scholar of nineteenth-century American literature unexpectedly absorbed by “petroleum culture,” a casualty of “tough oil,” practicing a kind of amateur “commodity regionalism”—all terms I'd never encountered before.<sup>1</sup> Only later did I come to appreciate that energy humanities work takes many different forms, not all of them conventionally scholarly, and takes place in many different sites, not all of them academic. My ignorance of that fact explains why for a long time my literary critical scholarship existed in a state of tension, if not conflict, with (what I then didn't realize was) my energy humanist work—the latter of which I just thought of as advocacy or activism, separate from what I considered my day job as a professional academic. The problem I faced was that the advocacy distracted me, for a number of years, from my teaching and my scholarship. Specifically, I had a book to finish—a book on temporality and nineteenth-century American literature that examines, among other things, the eagerness on the part of a number of antebellum writers to hasten the destruction and crumbling of certain social structures, like slavery and white supremacy, in the absence of any sort

of certainty as to where that dismantling might lead. But I wasn't finishing that book. Instead, I was spending most of my time blogging about oil pipelines.

Only over the past decade or so, perhaps for the first time in US history, have pipelines figured prominently in national politics and public consciousness.<sup>2</sup> The debate over approval of the Keystone XL pipeline and the actions taken by the Standing Rock Sioux water protectors and their allies to stop the Dakota Access Pipeline have made pipeline politics—that nexus of questions concerning property rights, local and regional authority, environmental protections (or the lack thereof), safe water, energy policy, tribal sovereignty, the ongoing violence of settler colonialism, and of course climate change—a vigorous site of conversation and contention in the public sphere. But at the national scale, at least, pipeline politics are still a relatively new phenomenon. What's more, controversies over pipelines have centered primarily on *new* energy infrastructure. They've thus generally been forward-looking movements concerned with how we might imagine and structure our energy future—"after oil" as one energy humanities collective describes it.<sup>3</sup> Anticipating imminent environmental disasters, the pipeline-leak mantra has become "It's not if; it's when," as these movements somehow attempt to mitigate or prevent the nightmare scenarios that climate change models have forecast for both the near and long term—scenarios imagined and rendered vividly, for example, in works of climate fiction. Yet this future orientation also duplicates a certain historical blindness about fossil fuel infrastructure, insofar as it fails to remind us of the vast network of *already-existing* pipelines that lie buried underground, where they've remained more or less invisible, hidden from sight and from our social imaginations for most of the past century and a half.

This is simply to observe that while "pipeline politics" may be a distinctly twenty-first century phenomenon—one of the flash points of the Anthropocene—the transport of oil by pipeline in the United States is part of a constellation of transformative energy developments that began in the nineteenth century with the "discovery" of oil in Pennsylvania in 1859.<sup>4</sup> As early as 1865, small-diameter local pipelines were put into use to move oil short distances, typically by gravity, from points of production, like the oil wells rapidly springing up all around northwestern Pennsylvania, to central collections points. These are

called gathering lines. But when most of us think about pipelines today, like the Keystone XL or the Dakota Access Pipeline, we're thinking of transmission lines—the larger-diameter pipelines that move oil over long distances from gathering points to refining or storage facilities or (often) to export destinations. The first transmission lines were laid in the 1870s.<sup>5</sup> Over the next hundred years, thousands and thousands of miles of pipelines were constructed across the United States, creating the world's most extensive pipeline network, which now totals nearly 3 million miles of pipe. This infrastructure, as Christopher Jones has shown, created new energy markets and thereby helped accelerate the shift from an organic to a mineral energy regime, or from what Bob Johnson calls a “somatic economy” to a mechanized “ecology of production.”<sup>6</sup> And those transformations, in turn, helped ensure the continuation of fossil fuel extraction as well as the ongoing violence of settler colonialism (the indigenous scholar Kyle Whyte has described oil pipelines as “the endoskeleton of settler colonialism”).<sup>7</sup> Pipelines also helped obscure many of the other costs of modernity. Their invisibility made it possible, for instance, to disassociate sites of extraction from sites of consumption or use so that people could enjoy the benefits of petroleum without having to witness or contend with the environmental (and social) damages that attend extractive practices. Infrastructural networks dedicated to the flow of oil also, as Timothy Mitchell has argued, significantly altered the conditions that enabled democratized mass political action when coal was the dominant carbon-based energy source.<sup>8</sup> And perhaps most significantly, the transport of oil over long distances and to every corner of the country, invisibly and with ease, enabled petroleum to seep and ooze and penetrate into every part of our lives and our selves, becoming for most of us embodied knowledge and memory, inseparable from life itself. We are all, as LeMenager has so elegantly shown, living oil.

I gloss this history to note that one of the imperatives of the energy humanities has simply been to make fossil fuels and their infrastructures visible in ways that they ordinarily are not. Indeed, it's become a critical commonplace to observe that infrastructures tend only to reveal themselves when they break down or fail, like when a pipeline ruptures and leaks and spills. That truism, in fact, accounts for why I started blogging. In 2010 a sixty-year-old pipeline transporting diluted bitumen from the oil sands region in Alberta, Canada, across the

United States Midwest, into Sarnia, Ontario, ruptured near Marshall, Michigan. Ignoring warning signs indicating problems with the pipeline's operating pressure, control center personnel chose not to shut it down; in fact, at one point, they turned *up* the volume. As a result, diluted bitumen gushed out of the six-foot seam that had opened up in the pipe for a full seventeen hours before a local utility worker finally detected the leak. By the time the pipeline operator finally shut it down, over one million gallons of oil had spilled into Talmadge Creek, a tributary of the Kalamazoo River. Eventually, the oil traveled more than thirty miles down the river, where, once the diluents—a proprietary cocktail of chemicals containing known carcinogens like benzene that reduce the thick bitumen's viscosity enough to allow it to flow through a pipe—evaporated into the air, the remaining solid bituminous material sank to the bottom of the river. No one expected this. And no one knew how to retrieve it; a spill of this sort and of this magnitude had never occurred before in a moving body of fresh water. It took the pipeline company, Enbridge, over seven years and a billion dollars to clean it up, making it the costliest inland oil spill in US history.<sup>9</sup>

That pipeline—known then as Line 6B—traverses the state of Michigan. Approximately one hundred miles east of the spill site, as it snakes its way toward Sarnia, it runs through my backyard. Soon after the spill, Enbridge asked the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA), the federal regulatory body that oversees the operation of liquid and hazardous materials pipelines, for permission to restart the line, claiming that it was still safe for operation. PHMSA eventually granted the request but placed restrictions on the line's operating pressure, limiting the amount and rate of oil Enbridge could transport through it. A year later, as cleanup efforts in the Kalamazoo River continued, Enbridge sought permission from state regulators in Indiana and Michigan to “replace” all 210 miles of Line 6B. I place that term in scare quotes to highlight the fact that Enbridge did not actually remove the old line and construct a new one in its place; instead, they left the old Line 6B where it lay and installed the new one right next to it. The decision to embark on this massive new infrastructure project meant that, on our property, Enbridge would have to destroy a green wall of over one hundred mature trees, as well as a sizeable perennial garden my wife and I had labored to create over the course of several years. All told, the construction project lasted more than

four years. During that time, Enbridge ran roughshod through the state, mistreating landowners, strong-arming local municipalities, and manipulating state regulatory agencies.<sup>10</sup> The *Line 6B Citizens' Blog* became not only an outlet for my own personal rage and frustration but a hub for information, a real-time account, and a running critique of the project and Enbridge's behavior.

The blog also helped produce new forms of sociality by providing a (virtual) gathering place for people living along the pipeline as well as for other interested citizens, making for a kind of bioregionalism organized not by environmental, geographical, or climatological features but by infrastructures—the pipeline that, quite literally, linked our properties together and the internet that facilitated our assembly. Ironically, such linkages and assemblies might never have taken place were it not for the pipeline project. Before Enbridge's land agents started knocking on our doors, I'd never met most of my neighbors, certainly not those living miles away. Indeed, one of the perversities of private property is that it actively discourages us from thinking about our relationships to our neighbors in terms of contiguity and interconnection. It took what many of us viewed as a *violation* of those rights—Enbridge cutting a two-hundred-mile-long, sixty-foot-wide swath through the state—to bind us together into a kind of collectivity, both physically and imaginatively. On weekends during the construction phase, I would occasionally walk parts of the right-of-way with my dog, Sam, as if rambling across the public footpaths of England, unimpeded by the fences, hedgerows, invisible property lines, and suspicious glares that would ordinarily have kept me off my neighbors' land.

Yet however much the pipeline's path may have rendered visible the artificiality of property lines, the destruction it left in its wake also became a vivid sign of our helplessness. The *Line 6B Citizens' Blog* thus helped produce a counterforce, summoning (in its very title) a pipeline citizenry to resist the exertion of the pipeline company's state-sanctioned power. Similar efforts to harness the internet and social media to mobilize resistance in response to pipeline infrastructure projects have played out across the country. Digital activism—in the form of real-time video streams of police action, the circulation of images on social media, and Twitter hashtags—formed a crucial element of the Standing Rock protests, for instance, helping to foster and encourage unexpected solidarities across social and geographical boundaries. In

my case, I found that the immediacy afforded by blogging provided an important outlet for affective expressions of urgency and also an efficient means of generating and sharing information that worked against the frustrating delays, deferrals, and evasions, the unreturned phone calls, the corporate foot dragging, and the sluggish pace of court proceedings and regulatory processes that otherwise characterized the construction project. Equally important, the blog helped produce networks of affiliation with other pipeline activists contending with Enbridge expansion projects elsewhere. I forged a productive friendship with Emily Ferguson, for example, then a college student who had recently started her own blog, a remarkable online mapping project she called *Line 9 Communities* in response to a pipeline project in Canada. I also connected and shared information and experiences with citizen groups and activists in Minnesota embroiled in a fight with Enbridge to protect the sensitive headwaters of the Mississippi River through which Enbridge has proposed to build yet another pipeline.

As these examples illustrate, the networks created by the digital infrastructures that make blogging possible in some ways mirror the intricate pipeline networks operated by large corporations like Enbridge, networks that traverse vast distances, cross national borders, and branch out in multiple directions. At the same time, blogging and other social media produce and transport forms of energy—narrative, activist, social—that resist the destructive and exploitative logic and materialities of extraction and consumption. Nor do those energies circulate in fixed and determinate directions—from the upstream sector of extraction to the downstream sector of refining, to use the industry’s metaphor. Instead, mediatic forms like blogging help facilitate coalitions and modes of citizenship that are often temporary, provisional, shifting, and unexpected, like the Cowboy and Indian Alliance created by Keystone XL activists in Nebraska that brings together ranchers and indigenous groups with a shared interest in protecting water and preserving property rights and tribal sovereignty—associations that are neither unidirectional nor constrained by national borders, the flows of capital, or other entrenched historical formations.

Yet infrastructures are also, as LeMenager points out elsewhere, “the interface of multiple scales,” scales that are both spatial and temporal.<sup>11</sup> Thinking of them in this way means accounting, too, for missed opportunities. Just how far, for instance, did my neighbors—did I—imagine

the extent of our community along the line? The tagline for my blog described it as a resource for “landowners,” a term that might suggest affiliation with, say, Nebraska ranchers similarly subject to the might of a transnational pipeline company and its governmental abettors but that fails to acknowledge crucial economic disparities and distinctions. Or to take another example, how many of us along the line considered the residents of Detroit living near the Marathon Oil refinery as part of the “Line 6B landowners” community? After all, much of the oil transported through Line 6B winds up there, where it is refined into usable fuel. A by-product of the refining process is called petroleum coke, an ashy product that can be burned like coal and used in other processes, like making asphalt. In 2013, Marathon began to store great heaping black mountains of the material on the banks of the Detroit River, where the winds blew the fine powder onto the balconies and into the windows of nearby residents. What is the loss of a few trees compared to the slow violence inflicted on the poor residents living in what is one of the most polluted zip codes in the nation?<sup>12</sup>

Temporal scales, too, pose imaginative and political challenges. Attacks on eminent domain laws, for example, have become a strategy of resistance for antipipeline infrastructure activists and have gained traction because they appeal to property-rights adherents across political persuasions. Yet that form of resistance can easily look like complicity in the context of the violent historical dispossession of indigenous peoples and continuing assaults on tribal sovereignty, which of course precedes the comparatively benign practice of legal condemnation, by hundreds of years.<sup>13</sup> For most of us along Line 6B, the “replacement” project was merely an event, not a structure (to invoke Patrick Wolfe’s well-known formulation). For example, many people along the line, in some cases those most energized to organize and resist, simply (and understandably) wearied after a time; they wanted to get back to their ordinary lives, to consign the upheaval and trauma of the spill and construction to the past. And Enbridge, of course, was only too eager to promote and facilitate this temporal affect with signs of renewal—properties restored and grass growing again in the right-of-way, the Kalamazoo River restored and “cleaner than ever,” a spiffy new park near the spill site. Yet such narratives of resilience work to obscure, say, the decades of air pollution and water contamination produced by the petrochemical industry in Sarnia’s infamous Chemical



Valley, where Line 6B terminates, which have increased the levels of chemical compounds and negatively affected the health of the area's First Nations.

I, too, have felt the tug to just move on, to look forward, to get back to normal. But that impulse, that desire, is itself a sign of our ultradeep relationship to oil, an example of just how hard it is, as LeMenager puts it, to decouple “human corporeal memory from the infrastructures that have sustained it.”<sup>14</sup> Besides, I just can't stop thinking about the two pipelines in my backyard—thinking, that is, about new and abandoned infrastructures. Unsurprisingly, the new Line 6B formed the primary locus of controversy during the “replacement” project. Enbridge shrewdly capitalized on the trauma of the spill and fears of more to come in order to gain approval for the construction project, which allowed them to install a pipeline of larger diameter and capacity, a pipeline therefore exponentially more profitable than the old one. The company's public relations machinery assured everyone that the new pipeline would be state-of-the-art and hence safer, that it would help meet America's energy needs, that it would provide desperately needed jobs—the familiar narrative about infrastructure as a mode of technological advancement and driver of progress and economic growth. Meanwhile, property owners, environmentalists, and climate change activists expressed what are by now a set of familiar concerns, demonstrating once again Imre Szeman's observation that pipelines have become “sites for the articulation of environmental fears, critiques, and hopes.”<sup>15</sup>

And while I certainly share all those concerns, I nevertheless find myself far more preoccupied with the old Line 6B, the disused and abandoned pipe lying right next to that shiny new one in my backyard. The decommissioned pipe raises what I think are more urgent, and more interesting, questions for the future: How do we think about infrastructures that no longer perform their function? What might it mean to let certain infrastructures go, to let them deteriorate and decay? How might we imagine futures built out of the ruins of infrastructures rather than on the promise of newer or better ones? These are questions that theorists of infrastructure typically address only within frameworks of progress and technological advancement, such as in the study of “residual media”—those mediatic objects and forms that have been superseded, discarded, or rendered obsolete by new advancements but that nevertheless remain, lingering anachronistically, disused or re-

purposed.<sup>16</sup> But the decommissioning of the old Line 6B doesn't exactly fit this model; given favorable conditions, Enbridge would have continued to operate it indefinitely. For months during the construction process, we sought guarantees that Enbridge would never recommission or repurpose the old line, guarantees Enbridge would never provide.

A somewhat more generative framework for thinking about the abandoned pipeline is suggested by the media and technology theorist Steven Jackson's notion of "broken world thinking."<sup>17</sup> Broken world thinking acknowledges the "limits and fragility of the worlds we inhabit" and therefore takes "breakdown, dissolution, and change, rather than innovation, development, or design,"<sup>18</sup> as its key problems. For Jackson, this sort of thinking gives rise to what he describes as an ethics of maintenance and repair, which, as he puts it, "highlights actors, sites, and moments that have been absented or silenced by stories of design and origination"<sup>19</sup>—like the welders and heavy equipment operators I'd chat with in my backyard, nearly all of whom, to a man (and they were nearly all men), disliked Enbridge almost as much as I did. Yet while there's much I find appealing about broken world thinking, when it comes to the future of some infrastructures, emphasizing maintenance and repair might not be radical enough. It's not just because Enbridge called the replacement of Line 6B a "maintenance and rehabilitation" project as a clever way to avoid the environmental assessments and regulatory procedures that would have been required for a new infrastructure project. Nor is it because, according to regulations, Enbridge is required to maintain the decommissioned pipe, which was to be filled with inert gas and monitored. After all, the latter is certainly a reasonable course of action to help prevent, say, groundwater contamination. Still, I'd prefer to see the damn thing removed altogether.<sup>20</sup> Part of me, in fact, would rather it just rot in place.

That is to say that when it comes to certain infrastructures—like the infrastructures of the extractive economy—we might be better off letting them go to ruin. What the planet needs as soon as possible are not well-maintained pipelines but *no* pipelines. Activists, of course, have understood this for some time and, accordingly, have engaged in grassroots efforts all over the country to try to stop new infrastructure projects. In Michigan, during the Line 6B construction project, activists from the group MiCATS (the Michigan Coalition Against Tar Sands) chained themselves to construction equipment to disrupt construction

work. In another action, the activist Chris Wahmhoff skateboarded deep into a stretch of new pipeline where he remained for twenty-four hours before voluntarily yielding to authorities. Recently in Minnesota, direct-action activists broke into pumping stations and physically shut down actively operating pipelines. In all of these instances, activists have cited the urgency of global warming as justification for their actions. And in the Minnesota case, lawyers for the arrested activists have made the climate crisis the basis for a necessity defense—a strategy that has recently gained legal traction. Even some economists have begun to recognize the potential economic and political benefits of pursuing legal versions of this same principle and to advocate for “restrictive supply-side policy instruments” that would limit the supply of fossil fuels at their starting points, rather than simply attempting to mitigate their effects on the back end with policies like emissions restrictions and carbon taxes.<sup>21</sup>

Choking off supply is one thing. But what if we were to commit ourselves to an even more thoroughgoing undoing? What if the fight didn't end at preventing new fossil fuel infrastructure but extended to the disassembly of the infrastructure that already exists? What if we didn't think of (some) failing infrastructures as a problem to solve but as a welcome demise? How might we generate a politics and ethics of dismantling? How might new media forms help facilitate that dismantling? These questions derive as much from my work as a scholar of nineteenth-century U.S. literature as they do from my lingering irritation with the existence of twin pipelines in my backyard and a wish for their disappearance. Like other literary scholars, much of my work involves trying to make sense of formal structures that are under pressure, attempting to wrest meaning from modes of conveyance (like poetry and narrative) that are often erratic, that seep and crack. More specifically, in my long-delayed book project, I'd been examining writers and texts that were themselves devoted to the productive potential of various forms of unmaking—of history, of narrative, and above all of the unconscionable system of slavery. I was drawn not to those who sought slow, cautious, administrative solutions to that most pressing of ethical-political problems but to those who increasingly believed that the only hope for creating a truly renovated—and just—society was the destruction, undoing, and dismantling of the society that was currently in place. What that new society, that renovated world, might look like

was anybody's guess. Fear in the face of that uncertainty resulted only in torpor, prudence, inaction.

Writer-activists like the abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison and Frederick Douglass harnessed their era's own new media forms, like newspapers and other printed publications, and built their own multipronged, ever-shifting activist networks—conventions, local and regional antislavery societies, political parties—devoted to the undoing of historically entrenched social practices and the institutions that cultivated and sustained them. Perhaps even more importantly, they cultivated a disposition toward history and social transformation that was experimental, spontaneous, and informed by the urgencies demanded by justice and not the hesitations that result from caution or prudence. When Douglass gazed out “upon the boundless sea of the future,”<sup>22</sup> for example, he couldn't foresee what that future would look like. Nevertheless, he devoted himself to the hastening of his present world's destruction. For Douglass, dismantling was a form of world building.

Have we reached such a point with climate change? Argument, debate, misinformation, cautious policies, compromises, and incremental measures all too often function simply as modes of deferral—call it climate gradualism. At most, our current approaches aim to slowly wean us from fossil fuel dependence while we wait for a suitable, sustainable replacement (e.g., wind, solar, algae), one that won't cause any major upheavals to existing social and economic structures and institutions. Yet even if such careful solutions could somehow prevent us from exceeding the carbon budget (thereby preventing a global temperature rise of more than two degrees Celsius) established by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, those solutions are unlikely to do anything to address the ongoing violence, inequalities, and myriad environmental injustices wrought by fossil fuel modernity. Isn't a wholesale dismantling more ethically appealing?

Of course, the obvious rejoinder to the suggestion that we set about the complete dismantling of the infrastructure of the extractive economy, which echoes the view of antislavery moderates in the nineteenth century, is that it is a hopelessly impractical idea, a threat, as the trite saying goes, “to our modern way of life.” We remain, to borrow Karen Pinkus's phrase, “governed by a tyranny of the practical.”<sup>23</sup> I'd like to conclude, however, with one final development from Michigan that might suggest otherwise. Unsurprisingly, the Marshall spill brought

additional scrutiny to Enbridge's activities in the state. And as it turns out, Line 6B is part of a network of pipelines that Enbridge operates in the Great Lakes region, what they call the Lakehead System. One of the assets in that system is a pipeline known as Line 5, which originates in Superior, Wisconsin; runs across Michigan's Upper Peninsula; crosses the Straits of Mackinac into the Lower Peninsula; and terminates, like Line 6B, in Sarnia, Ontario. At the crossing between the Upper and Lower Peninsulas, Line 5 splits into two separate pipes, which run underwater at a depth of as much as 270 feet before once again reaching land. The pipeline was constructed in 1953, which means it is now older than Line 6B was when it ruptured. Of course, the very existence of Line 5 is a tale of modern technological ingenuity and audacity. When it was built, it was touted as the world's longest crude pipeline, promising cheap gasoline to Michigan drivers, in-state jobs, and tax revenue for public schools. One newspaper report even described it as a "priority project in the defense of the continent."<sup>24</sup> Construction during the summer of 1953 became a statewide spectacle covered breathlessly in newspapers. The *Detroit Free Press*, for instance, viewed it as part of an almost-mythical historical transformation. "Paul Bunyan dropped his log chain and sulked in defeat when the pipeline builders moved into Michigan," the paper wrote.<sup>25</sup> In the midst of the nation's post-World War II economic expansion, driven in part by an infrastructure boom, running twin pipelines beneath the world's largest source of freshwater likely didn't seem unreasonable. But neither did smoking on airplanes, driving cars without seatbelts, or producing house paint laced with lead. Now we ought to view such efforts as utter folly.

Appropriately, then, and given Enbridge's track record in the state, a growing number of citizens, tribes, environmental groups, and other organizations have embarked on a campaign to convince state officials to force the permanent decommissioning of Line 5—a campaign that even eight years ago seemed unimaginable. Yet the movement has gained such momentum that it caused the state's previous Republican governor to convene a pipeline-safety task force, prompted the state's two US senators to call for an investigation into the safety of the pipeline, and in 2018 played a major role in electing a new governor and attorney general, both of whom made the decommissioning of Line 5 a centerpiece of their election campaigns. Since that time, the attorney general has declared as unconstitutional a law authorizing the con-

struction of Line 5's replacement and has filed a lawsuit that seeks to invalidate Enbridge's original 1953 easement under the public trust doctrine, arguing that Line 5 represents "a continuing threat of grave harm to critical public rights in the Great Lakes."<sup>26</sup> And in an even more decisive action, in November 2020, Governor Gretchen Whitmer notified Enbridge that the state was revoking and terminating the 1953 easement based on a long history of violations of its due-care clause. The notice gives Enbridge six months to shut the pipeline down permanently.

Although the shutdown and removal of Line 5 might well remain unlikely, given the legal appeals, the state's politics, the power and influence of the energy industry, and the sheer depth of our dependence on carbon-based energy, it has now at least become thinkable. What would the dismantling of Line 5 mean? Enbridge and its supporters warn of rising gasoline prices, a nation in thrall to foreign sources of energy, grandmothers freezing in Upper Peninsula winters, and convoys of exploding tanker trucks rumbling across the Mackinac Bridge. And when it comes to climate change, the fact is that shutting down Line 5 would hardly make a dent in the North American energy economy. But it might well have great power as both a symbolic gesture and a first step toward a future that begins not with growth and expansion but with deliberate dismantling—the precondition for rebuilding. Wouldn't it be fitting if Michigan, home to Detroit, arguably the US city most closely associated with both the promises and failures of carbon-fueled modernity, also initiated its undoing?

**Jeffrey Insko** is a professor of English at Oakland University in Rochester, Michigan. He is the author of *History, Abolition, and the Ever-Present Now in Antebellum American Writing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019). He is currently completing a manuscript titled "Untimely Infrastructures: The Marshall, Michigan, Oil Spill in the Human Epoch."

#### NOTES

1. See Stephanie LeMenager, *Living Oil: Petroleum Culture in the American Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014). For a helpful overview of recent work in the energy humanities, see Jamie L. Jones, "Beyond Oil: The Emergence of the Energy Humanities," *Resilience* 6, nos. 2–3 (2019): 155–63.

2. Pipeline politics have also only recently become a topic of interest for academic humanists. However, last year the journal *South Atlantic Quarterly* devoted a special section to

it. See “Against the Day,” ed. Imre Szeman, *South Atlantic Quarterly* 116, no. 2 (April 2017): 402–39.

3. See, for example, Imre Szeman and the Petrocultures Research Group, *After Oil* (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2016).

4. Of course, indigenous peoples had known about oil seeping from the ground for centuries. For a history of the origins of oil production in the United States, see Brian Black, *Petrolia: The Landscape of America’s First Oil Boom* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).

5. On the beginnings of pipeline infrastructure in the United States, see Christopher F. Jones, *Routes of Power: Energy and Modern America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).

6. See Jones, *Routes of Power*, 14–21; Bob Johnson, *Carbon Nation: Fossil Fuels in the Making of American Culture* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2014), 14–17.

7. Kyle Whyte, plenary address, Association for the Study of Literature and the Environmental Conference, Detroit, MI, June 24, 2017.

8. See Timothy Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil* (New York: Verso, 2011).

9. For a detailed account of the Marshall spill, see Elizabeth McGowan, Lisa Song, and David Hasemyer, “The Dilbit Disaster: Inside the Biggest Oil Spill You’ve Never Heard Of” Inside Climate News, accessed November 1, 2018, <https://insideclimatenews.org/content/dilbit-disaster-inside-biggest-oil-spill-youve-never-heard>. Inside Climate News won the 2014 Pulitzer Prize for investigative reporting for this series of reports. For the causes of the spill, see the 2012 accident report produced by the National Transportation Safety Board following its investigation: *Enbridge Incorporated Hazardous Liquid Pipeline Rupture and Release, Marshall, Michigan, July 25, 2010*, accident report NTSB/PAR-12/01, PB2012-916501 (Washington, DC: National Transportation Safety Board, 2012), <https://www.nts.gov/investigations/AccidentReports/Reports/PAR1201.pdf>. In 2013 the US Congress charged the Department of Transportation to study the spill properties of diluted bitumen in comparison to conventional crude. As a result, in 2016, the National Academy of Sciences published its report *Spills of Diluted Bitumen from Pipelines: A Comparative Study of Environmental Fate, Effects, and Response* (Washington, DC: National Academies Press), <https://doi.org/10.17226/21834>.

10. For reporting on Enbridge’s aggressive tactics, see the *Line 6B Citizens’ Blog* online at <http://grangehallpress.com/Enbridgeblog/>.

11. Stephanie LeMenager, “Infrastructure, Now and Always,” in “Energy Humanities,” ed. Jeff Diamanti and Brent Ryan Bellamy, *Reviews in Cultural Theory* 6, no. 3 (2016): 28.

12. See, for instance, Ian Austen, “From Canadian Oil, a Black Pile Rises in Detroit,” *New York Times*, May 18, 2013; and Erica J. Shell, “Petcoke: How an Outdated and Inconsistent Regulatory Framework Defeats Environmental Justice in Detroit,” *Journal of Law in Society* 17, no. 2 (2016): 3–26.

13. See Kyle Powys Whyte, “Is It Colonial Déjà Vu? Indigenous Peoples and Climate Injustice,” in *Humanities for the Environment: Integrating Knowledge, Forging New Constellations of Practice*, ed. Joni Adamson and Michael Davis (New York: Routledge, 2016): 88–105.

14. Stephanie LeMenager, “Infrastructure, Now and Always,” 104.

15. Szeman, "Introduction: Pipeline Politics," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 116, no. 2 (2017): 406.
16. See Charles R. Acland, ed., *Residual Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).
17. See Steven J. Jackson, "Rethinking Repair," in *Media Technologies: Essays on Communication, Materiality, and Science*, ed. Tarleton Gillespie, Pablo J. Boczkowski, and Kirsten A. Foot (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014): 221–40.
18. Jackson, "Rethinking Repair," 222.
19. Jackson, "Rethinking Repair," 239.
20. Enbridge is currently seeking approval to "replace" a pipeline in Minnesota called Line 3. A group of landowners there have organized a campaign to have the old Line 3 removed, an effort that has met with moderate success; see the group's blog *Pipeline Cleanup MN*, at <http://www.pipelinecleanupmn.org>.
21. See Fergus Green and Richard Denniss, "Cutting with Both Arms of the Scissors: The Economic and Political Case for Restrictive Supply-Side Climate Policies," *Climatic Change* 150 (2018): 73–87, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10584-018-2162-x>.
22. Frederick Douglass, "The Dred Scott Decision," in *Selected Speeches and Writings*, ed. Philip S. Foner (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1999), 345.
23. See Karen Pinkus, *Fuel: A Speculative Dictionary* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 4.
24. "Condemnation Fight May Delay Pipeline," *Detroit Free Press*, October 5, 1953.
25. Harold Tyler, "Pipeline Is Making History," *Detroit Free Press*, August 30, 1953.
26. Attorney General of the State of Michigan v. Enbridge Energy Limited Partnership, No. 19-000474-CE (30th Cir. Jun. 27, 2019). In 2018 the Michigan legislature passed a bill authorizing construction of a concrete tunnel beneath the lake bed of the Straits of Mackinac that would house a new Line 5 pipeline. In March 2019 newly elected attorney general Dana Nessel declared that law unconstitutional. In response, Enbridge filed a suit. In October 2019 a court of claims judge ruled in Enbridge's favor. Nessel appealed, but in June 2020 a court of appeals upheld the lower court's decision. The case appears headed for the Michigan Supreme Court. Nessel's suit to decommission the line by voiding Enbridge's easement was a separate action filed in June 2019. A circuit court heard oral arguments in the case in May 2020, but as of this writing, an opinion from the court is still pending.