

A pipeline is a hole

Darin Barney
McGill University

Lines and Nodes: Media, Infrastructure and Aesthetics
Media, Culture & Communication, NYU. September 2014



"KM 125" – photograph by Thaddeus Holownia, *Anatomy of a Pipeline*, 1999-2000

A pipe, according to the OED, is a hollow cylinder or tube through which something may pass. A pipe *conveys* and is, therefore, a transportation technology, which is to say: a pipe is a medium. Like our bodies, the ground is full of them.

As for lines, where even to begin?

The geometers will say a line is a point that moves in a fixed direction, and also in the reverse direction, infinitely. As if that weren't enough, in *Lines: A Brief History* (Routledge 2007), Tim Ingold reminds us that while lines are often *straightening*, they are only contingently, not necessarily, straight. Lines not only are, they also do. There are many kinds of line, and any given line does many things. Also, lines are marks on a surface, though (pipe)lines are typically buried, leaving just traces.

So, compounding pipe and line is already asking for trouble. And if you look at it another way, the way Canadian photographer Thaddeus Holownia asks you to in "KM 125," his image of a not-yet-buried pipeline in New Brunswick, it gets even more complicated. A pipeline, it seems, is also a hole.

And what is a hole? It is hard to be certain, but I think it might be where the truth of the pipeline lies. "A truth occurs," Alain Badiou tells us, "as a hole in the sense-making of knowledge." If knowledge is what simply repeats—the *flow through the pipeline*—then the truth is in the hole: the void, where nothing is happening yet, the end cannot be seen, and something else is possible.