



Arts +
Opinions

CALL FOR PAPERS

Theme: Plastics
Esse arts + opinions no. 113
Deadline: September 1, 2024

Send your text in US letter format (1,500 and 2,000 words, doc, docx, or rtf) to redaction@esse.ca before September 1, 2024. Please include a short biography (45 words), an abstract of the text, and postal and email addresses.

Applicants who wish to first submit a statement of intent (250–500 words) are invited to do so before June 1. An acknowledgment of receipt will be sent within 7 days of the respective deadlines. If you have not been notified, please contact us to ensure your text has been received.

We also welcome submissions (reviews, essays, analyses of contemporary art issues) not related to a particular theme. (See the editorial policy below.)

PLASTICS

Though plastics were invented in the nineteenth century, they became a major part of life only after the Second World War. The possibilities of this new material exploded into every market and consumers couldn't get enough. We began conceiving of entire homes built of plastic; in fact, the House of the Future designed by architects Alison and Peter Smithson was presented at the *Daily Mail Ideal Home Exhibition* in 1956. The speed and voracity with which plastic took hold of our imaginations begs the question, was our goal to merge humanity with this durable yet malleable invention? Today, plastics actually run through our bodies: researchers recently found microplastic particles in human blood. We consume plastics: we buy and use them, but we also eat and drink them. The proliferation of plastics in terrestrial and marine environments is transforming the ecology of the planet and altering the biochemistry of living organisms—we are literally becoming plastic.

The word "plastic" is related to the mutable concept of *plasticity*, a term whose sense has been transformed over the last decade as it has travelled from feminist science studies and new materialisms to queer and trans studies. Derived from the Greek *plassein*, meaning both "to give" and "to receive" form, plasticity describes the malleable condition of living systems. Feminist/queer theorists have praised its intrinsic promise: the destabilization of fixed or essential forms across the registers of gender/sex and

neurobiology. From gender-affirming plastic surgeries to mutability of gender, plasticity, and even plastics, are affirmatively queer.

Although plastic's malleability points to a shifting flux of processes and forms, the industrial production of plastics has become a permanent geological marker of the Anthropocene. Geologists are using plastic polymer particles, mass-produced on a greater scale than other materials due to their intrinsic strength and usefulness, to help locate the start of a new geological epoch—the plastic age, or the “plasticocene.” The carbon-bond chains that make plastics so incredibly enduring—one of their main appeals as an invention—have revealed their fatal flaw. We are living with more plastic waste than the planet can sustain, while we continue production at such speed that we simply can't recycle and reuse it quickly enough. The editorial of our 2008 issue, “Waste,” expressed concerns around this crisis. It explains how the artists and writers of that issue viewed waste as “a meaningful object, with an important cultural and historical background, which has the potential to make us think and the capacity to be transformed into an artwork.” Artists have been working with and thinking about repurposing materials since the first human societies. Although their efforts are inspiring and, at times, lead to new forays in artistic creation, it is hard to not feel defeatist. Consumers bear the brunt of responsibility, while corporations evade governmental oversight and regulation.

The possibilities of plastics are infinite. Perhaps this is why they were proclaimed the material of the future when the Smithsons built their consumer spectacle of a house. But that house was a simulation, and it reminds us that the word “plastic” also quickly became synonymous with the superficial and the fake. For many, plastic represents the unattainable ideal: eternal beauty, living forever, a smooth and shiny “bimbo” existence. Contemporary artist Cindy Sherman's latest foray into the world of Instagram face filters in her selfie series is but one example of this preoccupation. It goes without saying that the possibilities that plastic surgery has afforded people is incredible. Safe access to sex-affirming surgeries is critical, and body modifications should be easily accessible. Examples of body artists such as Orlan and the musician and performance artist Genesis P-Orridge and their partner Lady Jaye Breyer P-Orridge come to mind here.

For this issue, *Esse arts + opinions* invites authors to consider the expansive subject of plastics and submit texts that consider it as a material, a philosophy, or even an approach to life and art practice. How are artists rethinking their practices around plastics? How have they intervened in a plasticized world? Can we find enchantment in waste? What can plastics teach us, or what have we learned from them so far? Are we so entwined with plastic that we can't envision life without it? Or could our very plasticity help us imagine a way through the contemporary crisis?

EDITORIAL POLICY

Published by Les éditions Esse, *Esse arts + opinions* is a bilingual magazine focused mainly on contemporary art and multidisciplinary practices. Specializing in essays on issues in art today, the magazine publishes critical analyses that address art in relation to its context. Each issue contains a thematic section, portfolios of artworks, articles critiquing the international culture scene, and reviews of exhibitions, events, and publications. The esse.ca platform also offers articles on contemporary art and an archive of previous issues of *Esse*.

Submissions are accepted three times a year: January 10, April 1 and September 1. The texts can be submitted for one of the following 3 sections:

Feature: essays between 1,500 and 2,000 words. The guideline regarding the theme is available online 4 to 6 months prior to the deadline: <http://esse.ca/en/callforpapers>

Articles: essays, articles or interviews between 1,250 and 2,000 words.

Reviews: reviews of exhibitions, events or publications (maximum 500 words, without footnotes, or 1,000 words, with one or two footnotes maximum). Please note that for the reviews section, complete texts are requested. It is recommended, however, that you express your interest beforehand by writing to redaction@esse.ca. You can find guidelines for reviews here: <https://esse.ca/en/publishing-guidelines>.

1. With the exception of the express consent of Les éditions Esse, the writer agrees to submit a previously unpublished, original text.
2. All articles are reviewed by the Editorial Board, which reserves the right to accept or refuse a submitted article. Selection criteria are based on the quality of the analyze and writing, the relevance of the text in the issue (with regard to the theme), and the relevance of the chosen artworks and artists. Selection of articles may take up to 6 weeks after submission by the writer. The Board's decision is final. A refused text will not be re-evaluated.
3. With the exception of the express consent of the Board, the Board does not consider articles that may represent a potential conflict of interest between the writer and the content of the article (i.e., a text written by the curator of an exhibition).
4. The writers whose pieces are selected commit to format their text according to the typographic standards of *Esse*, following the guidelines sent to them with the publishing contract.
5. With the respect to the vision and style of the writer, the Board reserves the right to ask for corrections and modifications to be made to ensure overall clarity, and coherence of an article.
6. Conditionally accepted articles will be up for discussion between the writer and the Board. If changes are requested by the Board, the writer will have 15 (fifteen) days to carry these out.
7. All costs of typographical correction of the author's text shall be borne by Les éditions Esse except the author's corrections, if applicable, which shall be borne by the author.