



Arts +
Opinions

CALL FOR PAPERS

Theme: Decay
Esse arts + opinions no. 115
Deadline: April 1, 2025

Submissions for the thematic section (1,500 to 2,000 words maximum) must be sent in DOCX or RTF format to redaction@esse.ca by April 1, 2025. Please include a short biographical notice (35 words) as well as your e-mail and mailing address.

Persons wishing to first submit a note of intent (250-500 words) are invited to do so before January 10, 2025. No notes of intent will be read after this date, but it is still possible to submit a final text by the issue deadline (April 1, 2025).

DECAY

Damp viscera ooze across the pages of Jenny Hval's 2018 novel *Paradise Rot*. Her profoundly weird world of putrefying food, decaying flesh, and fungus reminds us that everything is temporary. Bodies age, food spoils. Over time, everything falls apart. According to the second law of thermodynamics, all closed systems move irreversibly toward increasing states of decomposition. It's not just physical structures that decay, but cultural, economic, and political systems also.

In the *Powers of Horror: An Essay of Abjection* (1980), the French theorist Julia Kristeva describes decay as a privileged site of "mingling," an ambiguous space where life is contaminated by death. Rogue taxidermists have engaged this site by developing new ethical practices of caring for dead animals. Resisting the entropy inherent in all living things, artists have explored the cryogenic storage of human embryos, semen, and eggs, and museologists struggle to preserve media archives from the digital decay that threatens to erase cultural memory. Other artists have collaborated with decay, staging its material forces in ephemeral installations and process-based art. Drawing attention to the domestic labour of compositing, ecofeminists remind us that putrefaction processes are powerfully generative. "Decomposers" such as moulds, fungi, mushrooms, and other micro-organisms break down not only organic waste but the synthetic debris of consumerism, facilitating toxin remediation in a creative transformation of death.

Entangling the “human” with “humus,” Donna Haraway’s “hot compost piles” conjure multispecies worlds and alternate visions of what it means to be alive.

From deserted factories and infrastructures, from rotting media and flesh, emerge new possibilities of life in capitalist ruins. In his recent work on “unworlding” and the “aesthetics of collapse” (2024), the American critic Jack Halberstam encourages us to find queer beauty in the urban decay of predatory capitalism; the anthropologist Anna Tsing (2015) turns a mushroom into a modern parable of post-industrial survival and environmental renewal. In a similar vein, the Berlin-based theorist Hito Steyerl advocates for “poor images” (2009) degraded by generation loss. Digital decay, she argues, releases audiovisual production from capitalist circulation. As images deteriorate across copies and data transcodes—as they are compressed, copied, remixed, and ripped free from film archives and cultural patrimonies—they release a revolutionary potential.

For this issue, *Esse arts + opinions* solicits texts about decomposition and decay in contemporary art and theory. We invite papers that consider decomposition as a porous boundary between life and death. Can decomposition be an aspirational aesthetic phenomenon? How have artists engaged and resisted decay? How are queer feminist ecologies of death rethinking decomposition and waste? Can embracing decay counter the elegiac tone of extinction discourses? Does the movement toward decomposition incite acts of care for finite and vulnerable bodies and communities in the face of their inevitable undoing? We are seeking reflections on the critical and creative potentials that emerge from decay. We invite submissions that affirm rot and ruins, abandoned spaces, regenerative practices of composting, radical mycology and mycorrhizae mutual aid, and the queer beauty of decay, as well as critical accounts of “ruin porn” and the biopolitics of the decay.

EDITORIAL POLICY

Esse arts + opinions, published by Les éditions Esse, is a bilingual magazine focusing on contemporary art and multidisciplinary practices. The magazine favors critical analyses and essays on current practices, with texts that address art in relation to its context. Each issue features a thematic section accompanied by a portfolio of works, as well as non-thematic critical articles, columns and reviews of exhibitions, events and publications. The esse.ca platform, in addition to reproducing all of this print content, also publishes original digital articles on current artistic events, research residencies, round table recordings, as well as an archive of past issues of *Esse*.

Texts published in *Esse* are submitted to an editorial board, which reserves the right to accept or reject them. Selection criteria are based on the quality of the analysis and writing, the relevance of the text to the theme, and the relevance and current interest of the chosen selection of works and artists.

A 6-week deadline is required for the selection of texts or notes. The decision to reject a text is final. In view of the number of submissions received, the board cannot commit to commenting on unsuccessful submissions.

Authors are invited to submit texts on January 10, April 1 and September 1 of each year. Papers can be submitted to one of the following 3 sections:

FEATURES: essays of 1,500 to 2,000 words. The theme is made available online 4 to 6 months before the deadline: <https://esse.ca/en/call-for-papers/>. Persons wishing to first submit a note of intent (250-500 words) for the feature are invited to do so on a set date, i.e. January 10 (for the April 1 deadline), June 1 (for the September 1 deadline) and October 1 (for the January 10 deadline). No notes of intent will be read after this date. Authors who have not submitted a note of intent may nevertheless submit a completed text by the issue deadline.

OFF-FEATURES: essays or in-depth articles of 1,250 to 1,500 words (including notes) dealing with an issue, theme or practice not related to the theme of an issue. Given the limited space allotted to off-feature articles, final texts are requested for this section (notes of intent will not be considered).

REVIEWS: coverage of exhibitions, events or publications (500 words, no footnotes, or 950-1100 words, one or two footnotes maximum). Given the short format, final texts are required for this section (notes of intent will not be considered).

Please consult the writing protocols here: <https://esse.ca/en/call-for-papers/>

1. Unless otherwise agreed with Les éditions Esse, the author agrees to submit an original and unpublished text.

2. Unless otherwise agreed, the board will not accept submissions that are a potential source of conflict of interest between the author and the subject covered (for example, submissions by artists about their own practice, submissions by curators of exhibitions or events, or submissions by an artist's gallery).
3. Authors of accepted submissions agree to format the text according to *Esse* typographic standards, as per a document sent with the publication agreement.
4. With due respect for the author's vision and style, the editorial board reserves the right to request corrections of semantic or other nature: quality of language, general structure of the text, clarity, shortcomings, relevance of headings and subheadings, standards of composition.
5. Texts accepted with conditions will be discussed between the author and the editorial board. If modifications are requested, the author will be given fifteen (15) days to make them.
6. All expenses for typographical correction of the author's text will be assumed by Les éditions Esse, with the exception of author's corrections, if any, which will be assumed by the author.