

PETs

The current crisis of plastics is familiar to most Cape residents. The intimate and systematic exchange between coastal geography, oceanic life, and late capitalist consumption is also a familiar set of relationships. The damaging effects of plastic on the environment is not a difficult argument to make—especially single-use plastics—nor to be acknowledged. However, the radical forms of behavioral change necessary if our oceans are to survive may be more difficult to hear.

Before coming to Cape Cod, I thought I was aware of these conditions and arguments. As a religious plastic recycler—plastic film as well as the numbered hard plastics—I thought I was an agent of change, but my first ever walk along the beach in Wellfleet changed my understanding of the scale and scope of the problem. In a thirty-minute walk, I collected more beach plastics (of an incredible variety of size and nature) than I'd ever seen washed ashore on any beach in my lifetime of beaches. I wasn't even able to collect all the plastic I encountered—but I carried as much as I could. I bagged them up—3 large garbage bags filled with lobster line, plastic cups, bottles, straws, buoys amongst the catch— and drove them

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back to Brooklyn, 21st-century seaside souvenirs. In the months since, I have felt their presence in the bedroom closet. They have impelled me to learn more about the specifics of their far-reaching geographic and infinite existence. I now know more than I want to know about polymers and the environmental effects of their degradation. I also know that it will be impossible to eradicate all plastics from the planet.

Object-oriented ontologists have for years invested effort in shifting a human-centered approach to the world at large to an object-centered approach, where there is no hierarchy: humans are no more or no less important than any other thing. Every thing is a thing. And every thing has relationships and desires.

When these ideas meet current queer theory—one that posits that we learn to love and care for nonfamilial others—and are applied to plastics in the environment, a proposition: can we adopt and care for the orphaned plastics that currently roam the planet via tide and current? Can we learn to love and care for them as we do our dogs and cats and birds and plants and children? Can we pledge to keep them from garbage and ocean, harm and hatred, and give them protection worthy of 1000-year lifespans?