Pitching *The Drift*

We're looking for essays that are driven by sharp, surprising argumentative interventions in ongoing conversations. These may include: socially engaged cultural criticism; class-sensitive analysis; pieces that point out what's being avoided or talked around in politics, media, arts, or even academia; upbeat cynicism; un-self-serious screeds; generous takedowns; entries from the margins.

Ask yourself…

- What's your argument? Your pitch should contain a thesis statement — a clear distillation of what your essay will aim to persuade readers.
    - E.g. *I'm interested in particular in trying to retrospectively define the aesthetics of Ted. My argument is this: Ted Talks offered a formulaic synthesis of two aesthetic categories—the interesting and the inspiring. They had an idea (interesting) and a story (inspiring). Neuroscience is interesting. A story about a man overcoming a stroke is inspiring. Put them together, you have a Ted Talk. If I were giving a Ted Talk now, I'd come up with a name for this aesthetic category. I'd call it "Inspiresting."*
- How is that different from what everyone else has been arguing? What are you adding that's new, original, and surprising to any current or past conversations about this topic? What context are others missing that you can fill in, and what are they getting wrong that you can correct for us? Situate your essay in the broader critical landscape.
    - E.g. *I'd like to write an essay for The Drift interrogating an article of faith on the left—that a solution to climate change is incompatible with capitalism…I think the best strategic solution given the constrained timeline for action and the significant barriers to climate legislation is to exert as much pressure as possible to speed up the private transition that is already happening. In other words, the best route to a significant near-term emissions reduction is to piggyback on the power of the market. The basic idea is to show how much the world has changed over the past five to six years and think about what a strategic reevaluation would look like for the left.*
    - E.g. *Here is a whole new vocabulary for talking about emotions, for making aesthetic judgments. While others have tackled parts of it—see Kyle Chayka on vibes and TikTok, Robin James on vibes and finance capital, Jia Tolentino on "cursed energy," Paul Roquet on "ambience videos," Marta Figlerowicz on memes and identification—this vocabulary has yet to be addressed as a whole. I'd love to write you an essay that tries to understand this congeries of new (post?) aesthetic categories as the system that it in fact is.*
- Why now? *The Drift* is not in the business of breaking news, and we want to make sure our pieces are evergreen enough that they will hold interest into the future, but we still care about timeliness. We are open to revisiting the past, but there should be a compelling reason to do so now other than personal interest. What's the occasion for your essay? Bear in mind that we have a long lead time; we generally commission pieces ~5-6 months before publication.

- What is the scope of your essay? There is no prescribed word count for essays in *The Drift,* but most tend to fall in the 3-5k word range. Give us a sense of why your argument requires this kind of space; at the same time, if you're weighing in on a broad subject, help us understand how you'll narrow your focus.

Bear in mind…

- We do not allow the use of generative A.I. (even A.I. functions on sites like Grammarly) at any point in the pitching or writing process.
- Many pitches pose big, open-ended, provocative questions. These are great, but make sure to give us some sense of how you'll answer them!
- Some of the best *Drift* pieces take a historical approach, excavating the surprising backstory behind some feature of contemporary discourse. These essays still require an argumentative framework: what lessons can we draw by tracing an overlooked line from the past to the present?
- If your essay is pegged to a forthcoming book/film/TV show, etc., note that we very, very rarely publish straight reviews of a single work. Tell us how you'll use a particular work as the occasion for a broader essay. (This will most likely mean including more books/films/etc.!) The best candidates are books 4-6 months away from publication.
- We very rarely publish essays grounded in personal narrative. If you use the first person (feel free!), your argument shouldn't hinge on it, nor should it be the primary motivating force behind the piece.
- If your essay tackles an academic or technical subject, tell us why it should still be of interest to mainstream readers — and how you'll make it accessible to them.

As always, the best way to get a sense of whether a piece is a good fit for *The Drift* is to read *The Drift*. Past issues contain great examples of:

- Criticism that uses multiple books to make a broader argument about the literary landscape
- A history lesson that sheds new light on a contemporary controversy
- A bold argument pointing out an under-examined or under-theorized phenomenon
- The background and meaning of a suddenly ubiquitous concept, term, or discourse
- A sharp read on a divisive political figure