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## In-Mold Electronics with Biosourced and Biodegradable Polymers

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► **To cite this version:**

Caroline Goument, Tony Gerges, Philippe Lombard, Hayet Lakhdar, Murat Arli, et al.. In-Mold Electronics with Biosourced and Biodegradable Polymers. LOPEC Conference for Printed Electronics, Feb 2023, München, Germany. , 2023. hal-04069869

**HAL Id: hal-04069869**

**<https://hal.science/hal-04069869>**

Submitted on 14 Apr 2023

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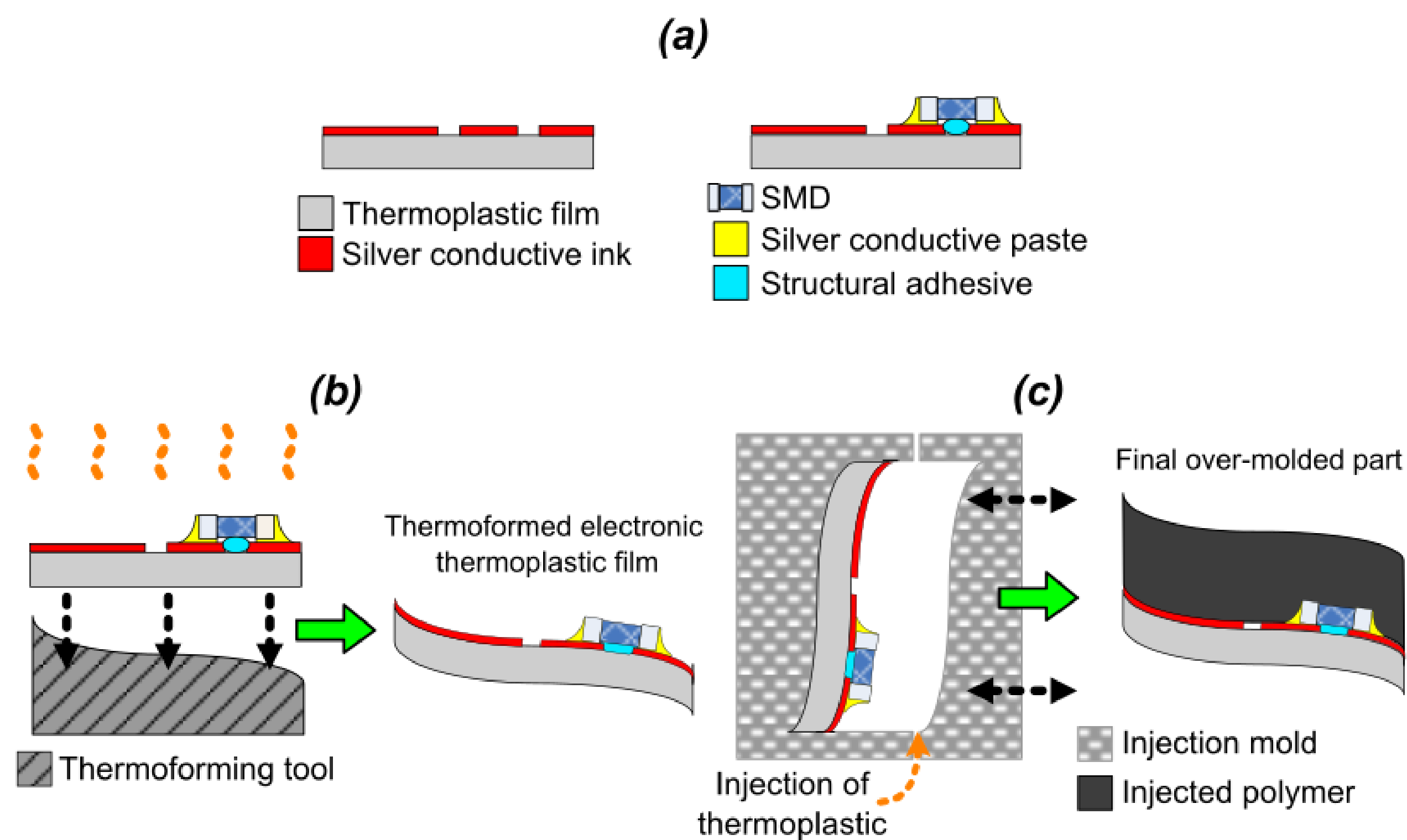
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## In-Mold Electronics : principle and materials

- In-Mold Electronics (IME) is a 3D plastronic technology combining the plastics processing field with electronics.



- Process in three main steps:
  - Screen printing (ink deposition on a polymer film) + electronic components (SMD) pasting
  - Thermoforming (substrate shaping from 2D to 3D through heating)
  - Overmolding by injection.

- PolyCarbonate (PC), petroleum-based, reference material in IME

### Polymer substrate characterization

- Polymer of interest: PolyLactic acid (PLA 300 μm)
- Biosourced and biodegradable, for the manufacturing of more sustainable IME devices

PLA1, PLA2: pellets Ingeo 2003D and 3251D from NatureWorks LLC  
 PC1, PC2: Makrofol DE 1-1 films and pellets 2405 from Covestro

- Applications in signal electronics and HMI (Human-Machine Interface)

Properties	PLA1	PLA2	PC1	PC2
Tg (°C)	55	59	150	144
Tm (°C)	151	171	/	/
Td (°C)	310	310	454	454
Elongation at break (%)	3.9	/	128.7	/
Impact resistance (kJ/m <sup>2</sup> )	/	1.7 (1J) (notched)	/	8.9 (15J) (notched)
Surface roughness Sa (μm)	0.37	/	0.19	/
Surface energy (mN/m)	38	46	46	47

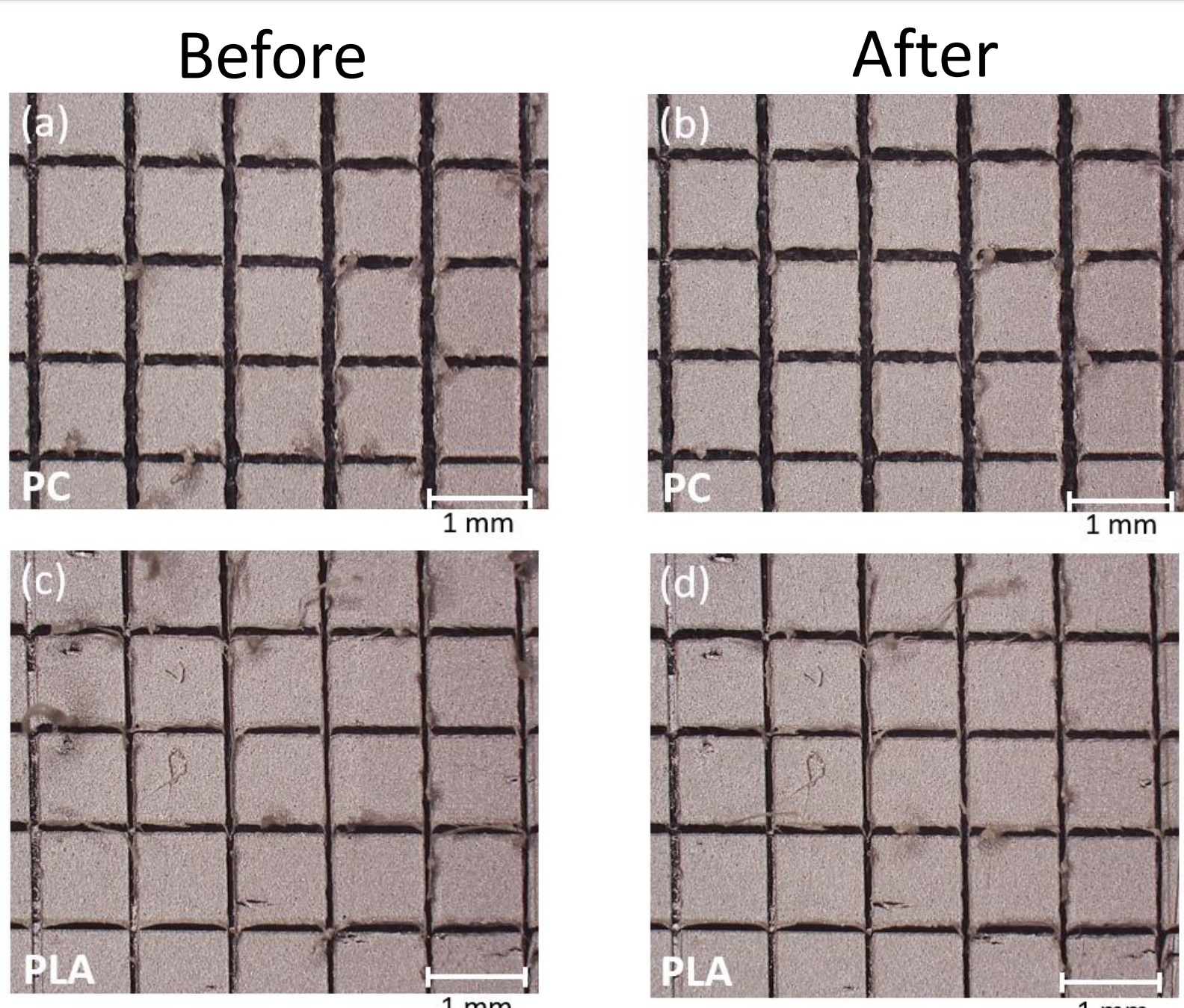
PLA not thermally and mechanically as good as PC:

- Low Tg (60°C) → necessary to adapt and optimize the process and the choice of application to this limitation.
- Minimal elongation at break (less than 5%) and impact resistance (just 2 kJ/m<sup>2</sup>) rather unfavorable to IME as such.

Surface roughness minimal and surface energy around 40-45 mN/m: the polymer wettability can influence the adhesion of conductive ink and electronic components in screen printing. → advantageous properties similar to PC.

## Characterization toward an electrical circuit

### Adhesion of ME603 conductive ink



- Standardized cross-cut test (ISO 2409, scotch test).

- Great adhesion on PLA1 and PC1 substrates  
 Classification 0 = Edges of the cuts smooth and no squares of the lattice detached.

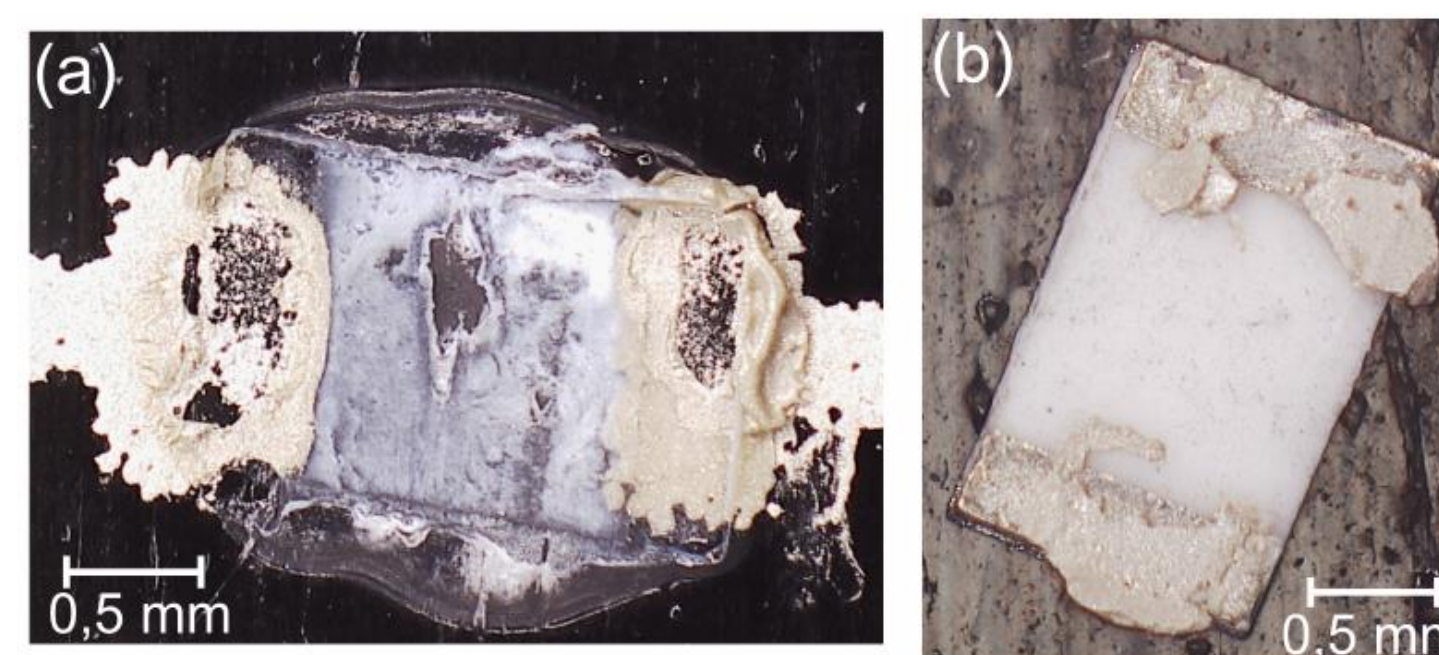
Drying ME603 and ME902 on PLA1 : 55°C – 2h30

### Adhesion of SMDs

- ME902 conductive paste + ethyl cyanoacrylate
- Shear testing of SMD on ME603 traces

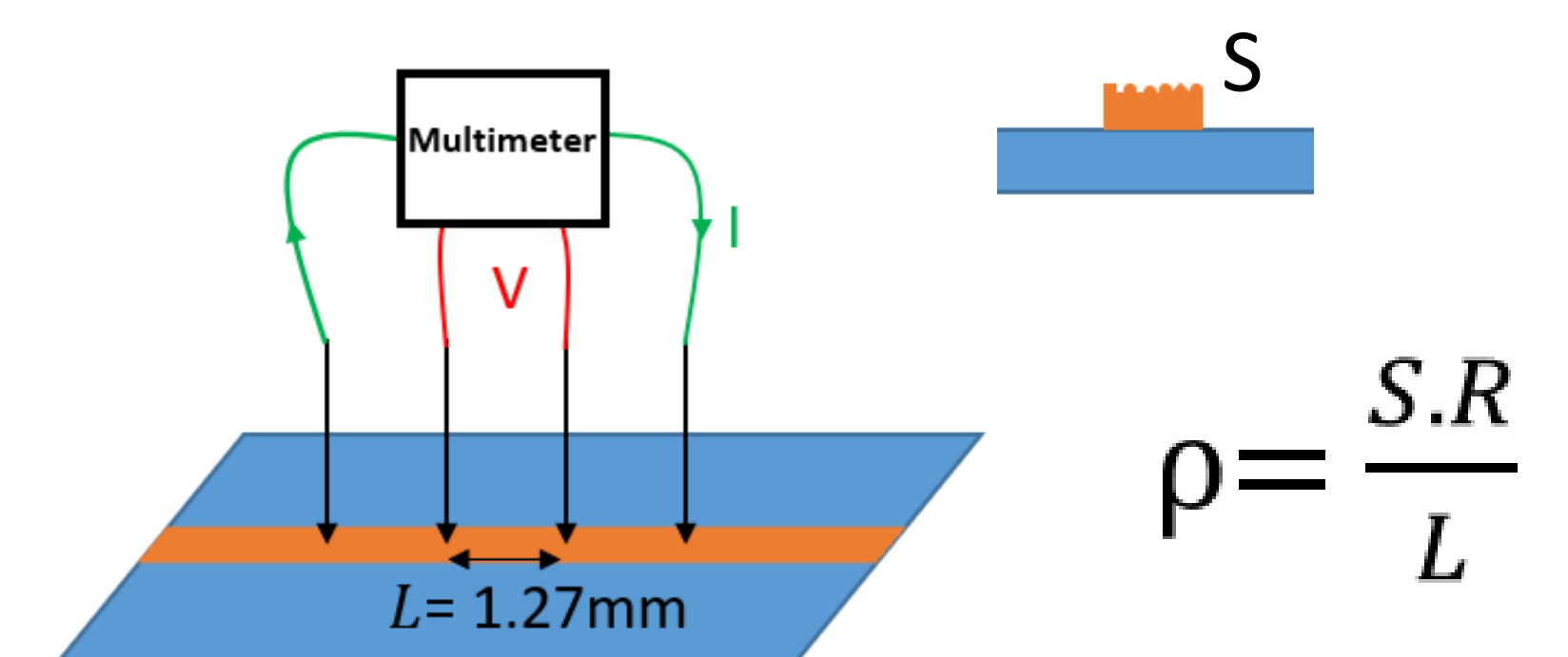
	Drying conditions	Shear stress (N/mm <sup>2</sup> )
ME902 on PC1 (ref)	120°C – 20 min	7.68
ME902 on PC1	55°C – 2h30	2.76
ME902 on PLA1	55°C – 2h30	1.80
ME902 + cyano on PC1	55°C – 2h30	8.67
ME902 + cyano on PLA1	55°C – 2h30	9.10

- Fracture surface = in ME902 paste layer
- Adhesion decrease with drying temperature decrease



### Resistivity of ME603 ink

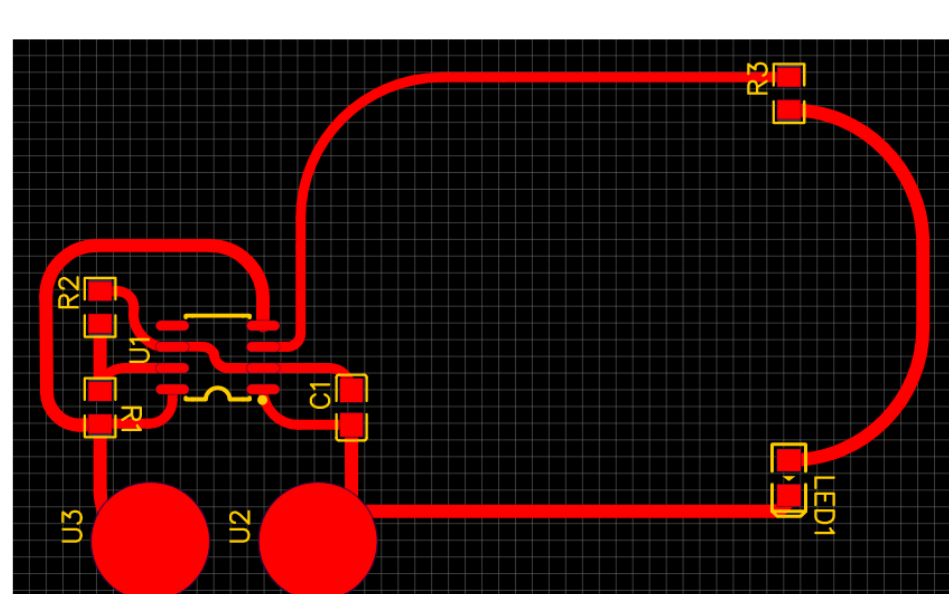
- Resistance measurements with four-point probes method and cross-sectional area S with confocal profilometer



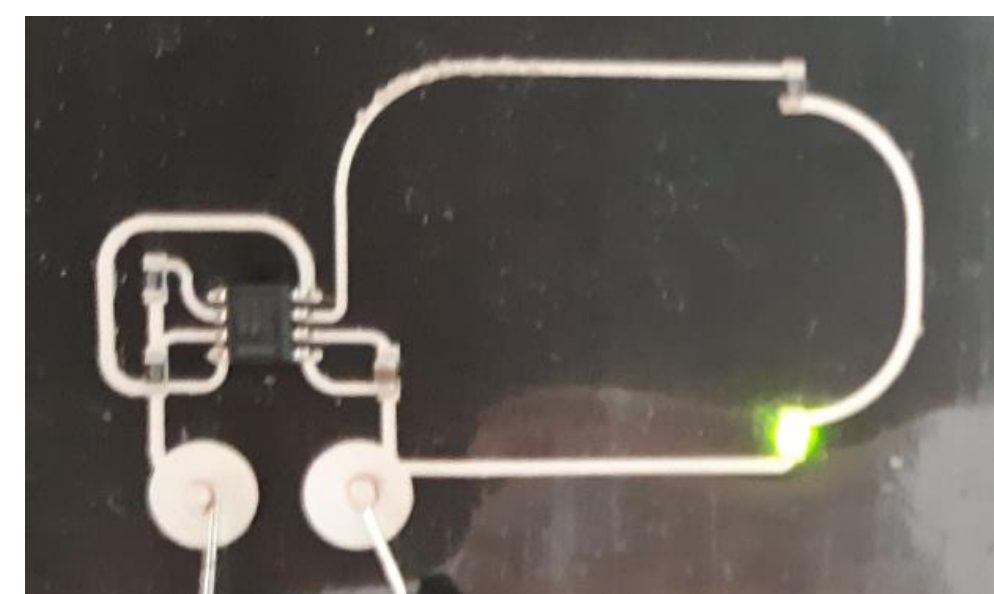
	ME603 on PC1 (120°C – 20 min)	ME603 on PLA1 (55°C – 2h30)
Resistivity (μΩ.cm)	31 – 54	290 – 300

- Higher resistivity on PLA1 than on PC1 (55°C vs. 120°C) → Loss in conductivity on PLA1  
 ➤ Good enough to operate a simple electronic circuit

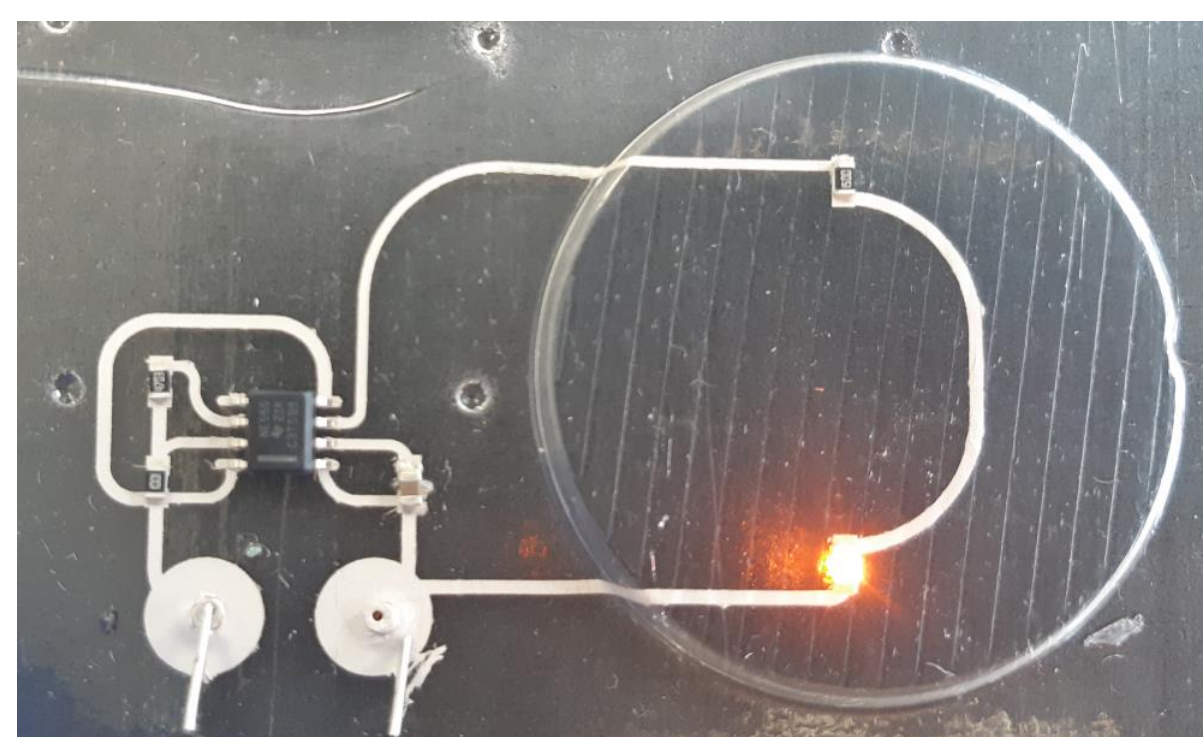
## Proof of concept



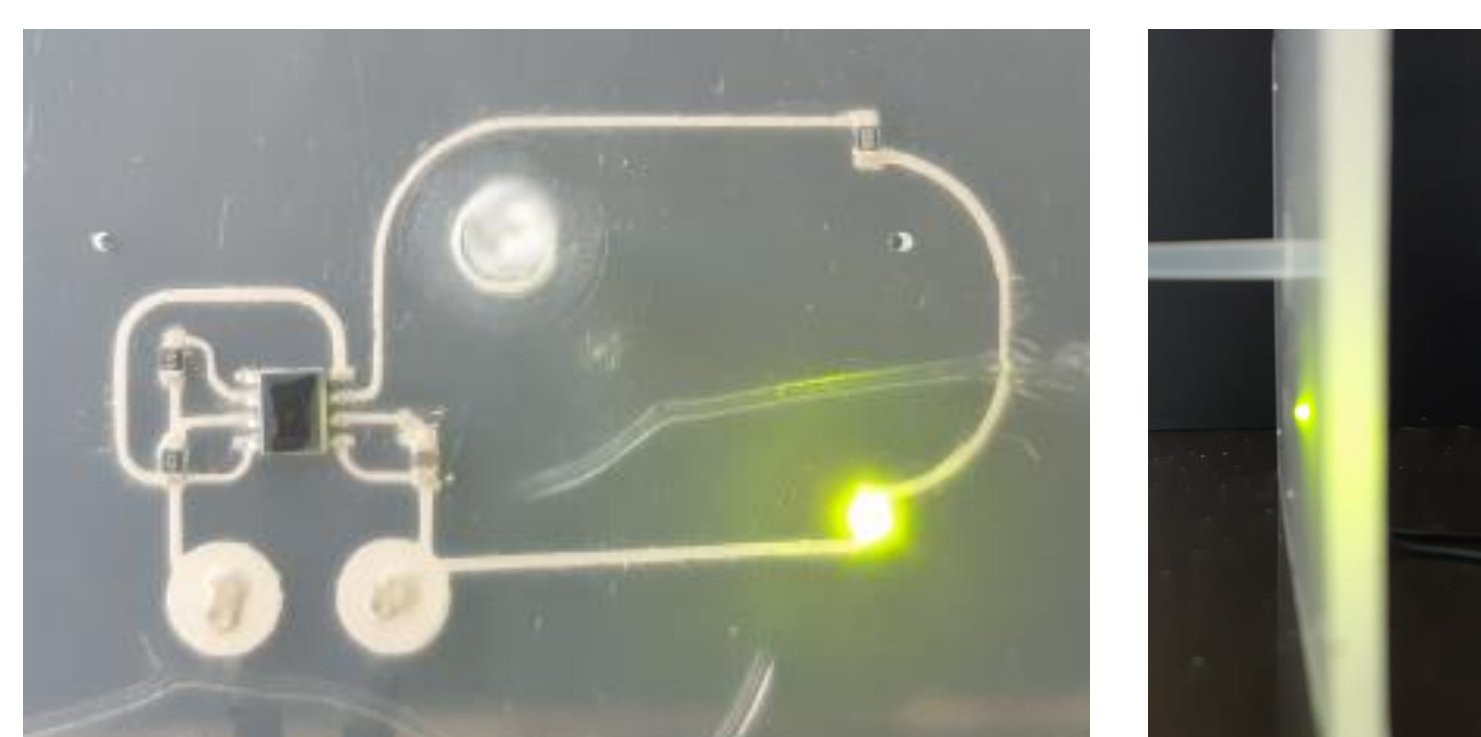
NE555 IC timer  
 3 resistors  
 1 capacitor  
 1 LED



After screen printing + SMD pasting



After thermoforming



After overmolding by injection

## Conclusion

- The feasibility of IME on PLA was demonstrated:
  - ✓ The electronic circuit is well encapsulated
  - ✓ The performances of the conductive ink is sufficient for our applications (signal electronics) and the ink and SMD adhesion is excellent
  - ✓ The mechanical properties of the proof of concept in PLA remain interesting
  - ✓ The ink conductivity can be improved → photonic curing

- C. Goument *et al.* In-Mold Electronics on Poly(Lactic Acid): towards a more sustainable mass production of plastronic devices. *Int J Adv Manuf Technol* (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00170-023-10878-4>

## Acknowledgements

This work has been financially supported by the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes Region, BioAntenna project (Antenne pour IoT sur polymère biodégradable pour le stockage et la récupération d'énergie) of the Pack Ambition Recherche 2020 (Convention no. 20 009551 01–22464) that we gratefully acknowledge.

