

Narrative Shifts

The Role of Our Archives

Session 2 Resource Packet

SEVENTH WAVE

Session 2: The Role of Our Archives

Overview:

Every writer walks with, into, through, and/or away from a dizzying array of archives: emotional, historical, familial, and otherwise. Here, we look at our deep storages — the experiences, behaviors, and patterns we inherit — while also interrogating accessibility: who gets to have an archive, and what happens when an archive is erased or taken from us? This session is meant to be foundational, a look deep into the wells we create from and a reorientation toward the centers of our gravities.

Before Session:

Before our session, we're asking you to sift through or sit with an archive — but don't get lost in one. Archives can have a gravitational weight to them, and part of the writer's work is to emerge from the archives — past or present, solo or shared — with a new thread for the future. You could sit with a traditional archive — a box of letters, objects, or journals — or something more modern (say, a Notes App or series of voice memos or emails that contain things you've yet to categorize or document), but it could also be relational. At Seventh Wave, we look at the archive as its own narrative, which begs the question: Who's the narrator of our archives?

Recommended prompt AND/OR reading: Sift, sit, and settle into an archive — physical, virtual, or conceptual — until you find something that tugs at you or speaks to your writing in a way that it previously did not. Something that, only now that you are going through your archive, can you see how it was there all along, what role it can play, or where it fits into the context of you or your work right now. How would or could you weave it into a piece? (See Google folder for PDF). And/or, read and simmer on this conversation with Saba Keramati on the topic of archives from our summer 2024 session. (See Google folder for PDF).

During Session:

Below are the activities we have planned for our second session:

- **The archive as a prompt.** While we look at archives as a record of our past, we also look at it as a tool for current and present creation. In the first part of our session, we'll ground ourselves in the archive of our work, and emerge with new and renewed thoughts through a series of prompts.
- **A vertical interrogation of others.** Working from Bhanu Kapil's *The Vertical Interrogation of Strangers*, we'll be looking at deep surfacings: the indelible connections between those who came before us and those whom we are imprinting ourselves upon.
- **Breaking down the bigness.** Based on a question Alexander Chee asked a room of 315 people during a class he taught called "The Thief of Lives," we'll examine the shape of change and preverbal experiences through a generative writing session and intimate conversations.

After Session:

These are continuing resources created in collaboration with Emilie Menzel, a poet and librarian who builds creative libraries for individuals, nonprofits, and organizations (pictures are not in order, but just a sample of the authors listed).



1. How to access and share our histories in our writing:

- [**Immaterial archives : an African diaspora poetics of loss**, Jenny Sharpe \(book\)](#). In this innovative study, Jenny Sharpe moves beyond the idea of art and literature as an alternate archive to the historical records of slavery and its aftermath. *Immaterial Archives* explores instead the intangible phenomena of affects, spirits, and dreams that Caribbean artists and writers introduce into existing archives. Through the works of Frantz Zéphirin, Edouard Duval-Carrié, M. NourbeSe Philip, Erna Brodber, and Kamau Brathwaite, *Immaterial Archives* examines silences as black female spaces, Afro-Creole sacred worlds as diasporic cartographies, and the imaginative conjoining of spirits with industrial technologies as disruptions of enlightened modernity.
- [**"Two Acclaimed Writers on the Art of Revising Your Life," Kiese Laymon interviewed by Tressie McMillan Cottom, Ezra Klein Show \(podcast\)**](#). Sociologist and brilliant thinker Tressie McMillan Cottom interviews writer Kiese Laymon upon the publication of his book *Heavy: An American Memoir*. The conversation focuses on Laymon's approaches to revision, authenticity of a manuscript archive, and how, in combining the two, revision is "a moral, even a spiritual, act — a crucial part of becoming a loving and responsible human being." Further, the writers discuss how Laymon "navigates a publishing world that often puts pressure on minority-group artists to suppress their full identities to appeal to white audiences, the way his writing pushes the boundaries of conventional genre and canon."

2. Resources to Return To:

- [**Thresholds**, Jordan Kisner, Lit Hub \(podcast\)](#). Interviews with contemporary authors about how threshold, at-the door-of-a-new-world, "life-wasn't-the-same-after-that" moments have impacted their writing.
- [**Archive of *The Sketchbook Project*, The Brooklyn Art Library \(project\)**](#). A 17 years long project of collecting and sharing artist sketchbooks, facilitated by The Brooklyn Art Library. Artists requested a blank 5x7" sketchbook, filled it, and mailed it back to the library for preservation and to share with the public. Sadly, the project has recently ended following a devastating fire, but the

collection is in the process of being rehoused, and you can still view the 35,000 sketchbook archive on Instagram.

3. Examples of Accessing Your Archives in Your Writing:

- [*The Vertical Interrogation of Strangers*](#), **Bhanu Kapil (book)**. Bhanu Kapil's full-length collection of prose poems is arranged using a series of twelve repeated questions, such as: "How will you begin?"; "Describe a morning you woke without fear"; and, hauntingly, "Who was responsible for the suffering of your mother?" The manuscript is set in diverse places — Punjab, Central America, England, Arizona — where the meditations on the "interrogations" considered by the narrator are described in surprising, sensual language that is segmented and seeking.
- [*My Autobiography of Carson McCullers: A Memoir*](#), **Jenn Shapland (book)**. Shapland writes of the yearning and projection and desire that lives between the queer Carson McCullers archive she found, the queer Carson McCullers archive she knows is there but unwritten, and the queer Carson McCullers archive she wishes exists.

4. Resources by the Seventh Wave: The below pieces published by the Seventh Wave are pieces that incorporated elements of archive — personal, communal, cultural, or otherwise — in their creation.

- [*"Reading in Carceral Text,"*](#) **Paul S. Ukrainets**. Paul S. Ukrainets' hybrid poetry/translation piece, "Reading in Carceral Tense," examines the roots of common Russian words by translating words from the GULAG slang dictionary and interspersing the translations with reflections of their own relationship to the Soviet and carceral state.
- [*"Moses' Ear,"*](#) **Shelby Handler**. Shelby Handler's poignant essay, "Moses' Ear," recounts the passing of their father and digs into the root language that ties them to their father and to their ancestors countless generations back: that of the "sound of sense."

- **“[Muchijoon](#),” Lilian Mehrel.** In captivating prose and imagery, Lilian Mehrel’s “Muchijoon” summons the spirit of her Persian grandmother, imagining her life and the bittersweet realities of growing up in an embattled Iran. She interweaves her grandmother and her mother’s stories to reveal a tapestry of narratives about endurance and strength.
- **“[A Short History of Hysteria](#),” Christina Shideler.** Christina Shideler examines the legacy of misogyny that gave rise to the diagnosis of hysteria in her incisive nonfiction piece, “A Short History of Hysteria.”
- **“[Confessions to My Ancestors](#),” Jen Soong.** Jen Soong’s essay, “Confessions to My Ancestors,” delves into questions of intergenerational trauma and attempts to trace back the roots of her family wounds. Through the use of visual and figurative collage, she hones in on the question: How do we get to know our ancestors when the bridges of language and shared history are missing?
- **“[After \(or, Nine Beholdings\)](#),” Yasmin Boakye.** Yasmin Boakye digs into her personal archives and childhood memory to find the kernels of truth that have informed her worldview and understanding of her place within the world as a Black woman today in her lyrical essay, “After (or, Nine Beholdings).”

If you have any questions about the resources provided, just let us know.

*Writing is not the only
form of writing.*

