

Narrative Shifts

On Permission

Session 3 Resource Packet

SEVENTH WAVE

Session 3: On Permission

Overview:

How do we know when we're ready to write about a particular experience? For all kinds of reasons, the idea or act of "permission" can play a key role in our writing and our approach to it. Perhaps it is a tangible kind of permission you seek — with or within the self, knowing what is yours to tell, even if it involves others. Or perhaps the permission you're seeking is murkier than that, especially if you're dealing with narratives rooted in trauma, addiction, or abuse. In this session, we will dive into the world of dreams, obsessions, and subtext in an effort to surface with a sense of permission to put shape to the stories we know we need to tell.

Before Session:

In an interview we did with Melissa Febos in 2016, we talked about wounds, stories as sense making, and the power of critical distance. "When you don't have a story to make sense of something," she told us, "you traipse around it." She said a lot of things ever since that we continue to think about. For example, in *Body Work*, she writes, "There's no pain in my life that has not been given value by the alchemy of creative attention." In speaking to this notion in her book *Girlhood*, [Melissa told Yvonne Conza in LARB](#) that "[f]iguring out ways to represent silence is a really big part of my craft," which is what one part of this session is about: *the permission to break silence(s)*.

Recommended readings: We have two recommended readings for Session 3: a) this one time talk with Katie Lee Ellison on permission (see Google folder for PDF) and b) this comic zine on permission by comic artist Issy Manley ([a second version here](#), plus [instructions on how to print and fold](#)). Both Katie and Issy joined Session 3 for our Summer 2024 intake and these were the "stones of wisdom" they shared. If you're looking for more, read [Katie's](#) and [Issy's](#) pieces in Seventh Wave or any of the other resources here.

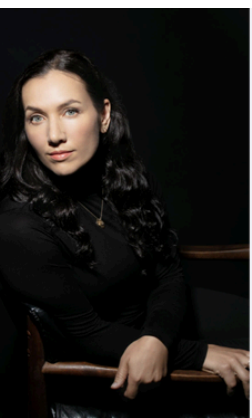
During Session:

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

- **The spoken, unspoken, and unspeakable.** Continuing to lean on Melissa Febos as a mentor, we're bringing in a narrative framework of hers that has been instrumental to the way we understand and document what permission means to us on and off the page.
- **The Fact of a Body.** Regardless of what form you write in, research can play a big role, even if it doesn't directly surface on the page. Invoking Jenny Offill's *Dept. of Speculation*, in this second activity, we're presenting research as a prompt — and a way — to navigate the murkiness of permission, obligation, and the collective stories we tell.

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 Offer Yourself Permission to Write about Obsessions:

- [Body Work: The Radical Power of Personal Narrative, Melissa Febos \(Book\)](#). In this bold and exhilarating mix of memoir and master class, Melissa Febos tackles the emotional, psychological, and physical work of writing intimately while offering an utterly fresh examination of the storyteller's life and the questions that run through it. How might we go about capturing on the page the relationships that have formed us? How do we write about our bodies, their desires and traumas? What does it mean for an author's way of writing, or living, to be dismissed as "navel-gazing" — or else hailed as "so brave, so raw"? And to whom, in the end, do our most intimate stories belong?
- [The Art of Daring: Risk, Restlessness, Imagination, Carl Phillips \(Book\)](#). "In six insightful essays, Carl Phillips meditates on the craft of poetry, its capacity for making a space for possibility and inquiry. What does it mean to give shapelessness a form? How can a poem at once explore the natural world and the inner world? *The Art of Daring* is a lyrical, persuasive argument for the many ways that writing and living are acts of risk."

2. Resources to Return To:

- [Commonplace, Rachel Zucker \(Podcast\)](#). "A series of intimate and captivating interviews by Rachel Zucker with poets and artists about quotidian objects, experiences or obsessions, Commonplace conversations explore the recipes, advice, lists, anecdotes, quotes, politics, phobias, spiritual practices, and other non-literary forms of knowledge that are vital to an artist's life and work."
- [Art Genome Project, Artsy \(Website\)](#). In a manner of speaking, organization and categorizing is a means by which obsessions and fixations can be made socially permissible. Return and return, then, repeatedly to those images and artworks which evoke that itchy emotion, that texture or pattern you can't get out of your head. "The Art Genome Project is the classification system and technological framework that powers Artsy," and "it maps the characteristics that connect artists, artworks, architecture, and design objects across history."

3. Examples of Giving Yourself Permission:

- [**ECODEVIANCE: \(Soma\)tics for the Future Wilderness**](#), **CAConrad (Book)**. Both a how-to-manual and an expression of delight, this collection of somatic, inventively formed poems (both in visual form and in how-they-came-to-be forming) is a prime example of allowing yourself explorative, wild, bodily permission in both your writing process and writing product.
- [**Kink**](#), eds. **R.O. Kwon and Garth Greenwell (Book)**. "A dynamic anthology of literary fiction that opens an imaginative door into the world of desire. The stories within explore bondage, power-play, and submissive-dominant relationships; we are taken to private estates, therapists' offices, underground sex clubs, and even a sex theater in early-20th century Paris. While there are whips and chains, sure, the true power of these stories lies in their beautiful, moving dispatches from across the sexual spectrum of interest and desires."

4. Resources by The Seventh Wave:

- [**"What Happened,"**](#) **Lauren Friel**. Using exquisite, haunting prose, Lauren Friel recounts her experience with intimate partner violence in her essay, "What Happened"; in it, she delves into the messiness of trying to leave an abusive partner while also simultaneously searching for a way to return to herself.
- [**"Related to Rhythm: Three Poems,"**](#) **Natachi Mez**. Natachi Mez explores the ever-shifting roles of joy, grief, power, and agency and how they play a part in our larger human experience in her stunning trio of poems — "Power Play," "A Drum, in 3 Sounds," and "Describing Warmth." In her work, she looks at the ways we can claim joy as our birthright; how Black folks have been resilient in the face of erasure; and how we are never really alone in our celebration of life and living.
- [**"The Value of Fat,"**](#) **Holly Elizabeth Rice**. In her essay, "The Value of Fat," Holly Elizabeth Rice writes unflinchingly about her experience growing up fat, and the process of unlearning society's fatphobic tendencies while also learning to let go of past hurts.

- **[“May the Stars Guide You Safely Home”](#) and other poems, Jenny Molberg.** In her suite of four poems, Jenny Molberg examines the inherent sexism that is ingrained in our legal system, especially as it pertains to gender-based violence and the ways that we talk about concepts like victimhood, abuse, and sexual violence.
- **[“The Way We Are Buried,”](#) Lisa Chen.** In her tender essay, “The Way We Are Buried,” Lisa Chen unpacks the complexities of navigating the healthcare system as a child of immigrants, and examines how language and cultural barriers foisted heavy burdens upon her as her mother’s primary translator.
- **[“Smoke Screens,”](#) Bobuq Sayed.** Bobuq Sayed’s thought-provoking piece, “Smoke Screens,” poses a complex question about smoking’s bad rap amid the countless other “bad” things that face marginalized communities — racism, homophobia, Islamophobia, xenophobia, etc. — drawing upon their own personal relationship to smoking and the “little suicide” that helps folks at very least have agency in their march toward an inevitable death.
- **[“How Things Are Done,”](#) Issy Manley.** Comic artist Issy Manley offers a behind-the-scenes glimpse into the service industry and shows how the government’s lack of regulations around COVID-19 exposed its inherent inequities, especially surrounding the question of who gets to be safe.

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

*The journey of putting
it together is yours.*

