Megan report (What's on the page)
word count: 1243

Dead Ends — Analytical; Internal

Things that I'm going to stop doing:

1. Typing up my morning pages
2. Calorie counting
3. Poem-a-week goal

Aspirations and Reflections — Romantic; External

What do I want to create?

What do I think about what I've created?

The cleric transformation course has been squirrely, or a new adjective I'm intrigued by: "plural." I recently read/skimmed a book about Experiential Learning, and there were tidbits about literary moments regarding essays from T. S. Eliot and Virginia Woolf that circled religion/identity/poetry/plurality, and I appreciated that sense of dream-world logic—where, without full sentences, I can feel a magnetism towards that.

Have I created an inventory of what I've created in the last three weeks? Kind of, but I could do a more formal one. I thought I was going to do a performance art event with a vending opportunity, so I geared up for that. [a] Then I was sick. Before that, I was preparing for a feedback session opportunity, and I wrote Red Lady Dark Ride. [a] Is there a way to do inline footnotes? Because I have more to reflect on with "Jolly Market"—it felt good to get a sense of festivity with the upcoming season.

A liturgical calendar/color palette.

A great research question is: How to concretize the liturgical calendar? I had an acquaintance talk about how the charge changes its color palette for each thinging—I forget what that is, but I like the idea of ways to help the time passing feel more cadential (?)

A big reflection is on the new promise "Dream Curriculum," or having flexible and resonant deadlines. If I had all the time and money in the world, I would hire tutors with psychomagical skills who would hypnotize me, give me sigil practice, help me understand my strengths and weaknesses, and help me gear up for a job in a society that makes me feel like I've leveraged my aesthetic potential. A Lynda Barry-type character who is like a Black Mountain College professor.

I like what Octavia Butler did in terms of celebrating and manifesting. I had a moment where I thought about an exhibit where I saw Octavia Butler's journals, and they were very much of the conviction of someone who is a rising star, self-aware, driven, etc.

I can see how researching her would help me understand a positive mindset.

Mindsets and Achievements — Internal; Romantic

Maybe I would flip reflections and achievements. What I have created vs. what do I think about it is in two different categories.

Well, next time we might have a different approach to chunking the prep list.

An achievement: I created a new format for fiction and nonfiction submissions to Megan that honors the typesetting I'm going for while keeping the submissions 8.5 x 11.

An achievement: I started a new package with Ariel that relates to ADHD. Ariel Wilson is a local Nutritional Therapy Practitioner. Her offering is specifically ADHD cooking classes. I have a lot to think about in terms of educational theory regarding experiential learning, but the body-double method is pretty solid and cannot be overrated in terms of its effectiveness.

An achievement: Trying a new technique called preplist, where I can map out/generate a list of components that go into the document and knock it out. Also, chunking the prep list into four parts for ease of use. (Attach prep list.)

Mindset

I've been intrigued by the comparison that Ariel has given me regarding ADHD. There's a feeling of what a diagnosis could feel like. I'm appreciating the idea of the mirror and not-mirror. Every encounter, there's an opportunity for integration. What worked and what didn't work.

I don't think Ariel operates with disclosed learning objectives (per session). Perhaps the other way would feel too restrictive.

Slow and together. The idea that therapy is slow and I cannot metabolize the information if it comes at me faster. Perhaps it's like at work: less micromanaging means more self-directed skill-building, which makes for a student to be able to transfer skills. There is a better way to put the thesis of getting the student to own their journey.

Updates, Objectives, Timeline — Analytical/External

I think the term paper has always been a bit more on the nonfiction side—not true—but I like the idea that this next one will be grounded in some kind of structure that relates cause and effect. Ex.: The liturgical calendar is normalizing habits through time and easing the pace of deadlines and making it more of a timed walk through a garden.

I had a flash of recognition. It's more of a suggest. The idea that when I was a kid, I would overeat at buffets and then I felt guilty. I figured out a method. Round 1: Try high-worth, good stuff—sushi, oysters, noodles, char siu, etc. This was at King's Wok in Bremerton, WA. Maybe something I was grateful for at the time: my family ate out at restaurants a lot. I remember the feeling of the car ride back from a great meal, such peace. Maybe, too, for a brief moment, I was considered the "Golden Child" by my stepfather, which I can admit felt nice.

A long review to go over a strategy, which is Round 1 — must-haves; Round 2 — best of the best; and Round 3 — a modest portion of dessert.

All this being a reflection on how the term paper has been a process of refining my strategy because, like the buffet experience, I see an opportunity to not feel bloated after the term paper is "consummated." Weird metaphors to describe the act of a culmination project for each term.

Objectives

Create a document that:

- Defines a problem
- Introduces itself
- Gives background context
- Summarizes activities for discovery

- Summarizes conclusions
- Reflects with details (supporting evidence)
- Uses a format from an academic reader
- Is 3,000 to 6,000 words
- Involves T. S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf, and Octavia Butler as sources of sacredness in the literary

Objective, Phase 2:

Create a series of training dives to work up to 3,000 words.

500\
1,000\
2,000\
3,000\
4,000\
5,000

Prompt: If you were a diving trainer and someone said, "I want to go to this chamber in a certain cave," how would I structure their training so that they wouldn't be a statistic?

The timeline is that I have 3–9 weeks. This project cannot be done in the timeframe because I cannot get the books required and then draft something.

What I can do in 3 weeks is:

Liturgical Calendar System Explainer\
Color palettes\
Weekly subdivision\
Planner product\
Intention\
Dates\
System

21 days, spending 1–2 hours a day:

1. Write mid-month report.
2. Reread mid-month report and develop prep list.
3. Work through prep list strategy.
4. Deep dive into topic 1.
5. Deep dive into topic 2.
6. Deep dive into topic 3.
7. Deep dive into topic 4.
8. Deep dive into topic 5.
9. Deep dive into topic 6.
10. Deep dive into topic 7.
11. Deep dive into topic 8.
12. Assemble parts.
13. Iteration 1 — rough draft — 1 redline.
14. Address redline.
15. Let sit — work on something else.
16. Iteration 2 — redline.
17. Address redline.

18. Let sit — work on something else.
19. End of final edits: finalize — look for grammar and typos.
20. Typeset.
21. Last pass over — submit term paper.

Composition Notes: “The Five-Card Tasting Flight”

1. Initial Concept

- Develop an immersive prose piece rather than a conventional poem.
- Establish a grounded scene featuring a waitress presenting an original dish.
- The waitress is an adept participating in *Our Daily Bread*, a residency combining food-making, artistic practice, and vision-quest-like activities.
- Her presentation is an act of integration: she shares something learned through experience by translating it into food.

2. Narrative and Character Decisions

- **Setting:** An intimate neighborhood café.
- **Character:** A warm, conversational waitress who is knowledgeable but not overly authoritative.
- **Narrative structure:** A slow revelation. Begin with an ordinary restaurant interaction and gradually introduce conceptual material.
- **Point of view:** Interweave the waitress's presentation with the internal observations of a workshop participant.
- **Tone:** Quietly profound, accessible, sensory, and understated.

3. Central Metaphor: The Book Buffet

The original notes explored several interconnected ideas:

- Books as relationships or intellectual friendships.
- A collection of 100–149 books as a manageable social universe.
- The approximate 150-person social-network threshold (Dunbar's number) as a playful framework for thinking about cognitive capacity.
- A five-card hand representing the limits of active attention.
- Curiosities developing into research questions.
- The distinction between acquiring materials and actually using them.

Culinary translation:

- Books become tasting portions.
- The book collection becomes a buffet or deck of cards.
- Five active books become five dishes on a tasting board.
- Reading becomes getting to know, tasting, digesting, and returning.
- Research becomes the discovery of relationships between ingredients.

4. Sensory and Formal Choices

- Use a tasting flight rather than a conventional entrée to represent multiple intellectual interests.
- Give the food concrete textures, temperatures, flavors, and ingredients.
- Use dialogue to introduce the conceptual framework without turning the waitress into a lecturer.
- Allow the scene to move between physical experience and intellectual reflection.

5. Source Material and Interpretive Choices

Several phrases and ideas from the original notes were translated rather than reproduced literally:

Original note	Treatment in composition
"I am a scroller."	Infinite buffet and abundance of information
"Radioactive sludge"	Intellectual overexposure
"A reed bent by the river of my time"	Cultural influence and historical context, left implicit
Art supplies: acquiring vs. using	Directly retained as a central analogy
Sacredness and emotional material	Submerged beneath the practical, playful framework
1,000 citations vs. 150	Reframed as a question of meaningful intellectual relationships

6. Intended Reader Experience

The piece should initially feel like an ordinary café encounter. As the waitress explains the dish, the reader gradually recognizes that the presentation is also an invitation to practice active reading.

The reader is encouraged to:

- Notice details.
- Make associations.
- Follow curiosity.
- Hold several ideas in mind simultaneously.
- Discover a question through sustained attention.

7. Revision Opportunities

- Strengthen the relationship between the waitress's residency experience and the dish.
- Develop the five-card mechanic into a more recognizable game.
- Clarify the distinction between the 100–149-book collection and the five-book active hand.
- Consider whether the ending should offer a more participatory action.

Compositional principle: Make the intellectual experience tangible through hospitality, food, and attention rather than explaining the underlying ideas directly.

The Five-Card Tasting Flight

Word count: 772

The waitress comes over with a little notebook tucked into the pocket of her apron. She's been working on something new, she tells us, and wonders if we'd be willing to try it. It's a tasting flight, though not the kind with wine. She calls it the Book Buffet.

She sets down a long wooden board with five small porcelain dishes arranged across it. The first contains a thin slice of toasted sourdough, a smear of something green and peppery, and a few flakes of salt. The second is a little mound

of roasted root vegetables, still warm, with a glossy vinegar reduction. The third is a tiny bowl of something fermented. She explains that each portion represents a book she's been getting to know.

Not reading, exactly. Getting to know.

She says she's been thinking about how many books a person can maintain a relationship with. There's a number, apparently, somewhere around 150, beyond which the social world starts to become difficult to manage. She doesn't remember all the particulars, but she's been experimenting with the idea. If books were friends, how many could you actually know? Not simply recognize by their covers or remember having purchased, but know well enough to call upon when you need them?

She gestures toward the board. Five at a time, she says. That's your hand. You can have a much larger collection, of course. You can keep adding cards to your deck. But you can only hold five at once.

I look at the little dishes. The green smear has an unexpectedly sharp finish, something between parsley and mustard. She explains that it's made from an herb she found in a book about edible plants, which led her to another book about botanical classification, which led her to a question about how we decide what counts as useful knowledge. She laughs. Sometimes the ingredients get away from you.

The cards, she says, are the books. You can add them to your deck as your curiosities develop. Maybe you begin with a question about plants, but after a while you're more interested in classification, or naming, or the history of collecting. Eventually, if you pay attention, the cards begin to arrange themselves into something like a research question.

She pauses to let us taste the second dish.

The vegetables are sweet and earthy, with a little bitterness at the end. I think about the books I've bought and haven't read, the ones stacked beside my bed, the ones I keep meaning to return to. It's a familiar kind of abundance. Like art supplies. Getting them and using them are two different hobbies.

The waitress seems to understand this distinction. She says the buffet is designed to make choosing more interesting than accumulating. There are always more dishes coming out of the kitchen, more books being delivered, more possibilities to sample. But a person has to eat. A person has to digest.

She mentions that she used to think she needed a thousand citations to make a convincing argument. Then she started wondering whether 150 might already be too many. And if 150 is the outer edge of a social world, perhaps the question isn't how many books can be gathered, but how many can be invited into a meaningful conversation.

I turn back to the five dishes. They seem less like portions now and more like introductions. Each one asks for a different kind of attention. The fermented one is particularly strange: sour, almost floral, with a lingering warmth. I want to know what went into it. I want to ask where the ingredients came from, how long they were left to sit, what made her decide they belonged together.

The waitress smiles. That's how it starts, she says.

She has a little deck of cards in her apron. She offers to let us draw one before we leave. There's no score, no winner, no particular order in which the books have to be encountered. The game is simply to notice what you're curious about, choose a few things to keep close, and see what happens when you spend enough time with them.

I realize I've been listening differently than I usually read. I've been looking for the connections between things, noticing what I want to ask, holding an image in my mind long enough for it to become a question. The waitress collects the empty dishes. She says she'll be working on another tasting flight next week.

I look at the little wooden board, now nearly clean. Five places, all empty again. The buffet, she reminds us, is still open.

The Ritual of Coming Up Empty

Word count: 1412

At a certain depth, the composition of the air you breathe becomes a technical problem. Ordinary compressed air is no longer suitable. Nitrogen can produce narcosis, impairing coordination and judgment; oxygen, under pressure, can become toxic. Technical divers use carefully calculated gas mixtures, switching between them at planned depths. The dive is organized around a sequence of thresholds: descend, switch, check, communicate, proceed. On the ascent, the sequence reverses. Decompression requires the diver to stop at designated depths for calculated periods, allowing dissolved gases to leave the body without forming dangerous bubbles.

There is a ritual to this. A diver does not simply decide to go deeper. There are procedures for becoming the kind of person who can go deeper and return.

A checklist is a kind of prayer with consequences. A sequence of practiced actions makes an unfamiliar environment legible. Equipment is checked, signals are agreed upon, gas supplies are calculated, and the timing of the dive is shared among the people who will support it. The terminology matters. At depth, when a person is startled or confused, there should be a common language already in place. The plan is rehearsed so that the body can recognize what to do before the mind has time to invent something else.

In January 2005, Australian technical diver Dave Shaw descended into Bushman's Hole, a flooded cave in South Africa, to retrieve the body of Deon Dreyer. Dreyer had disappeared in the cave ten years earlier, at twenty years old. Shaw had found him during a record-setting dive the previous October, at approximately 270 meters. He surfaced with the discovery and told Dreyer's parents that he would try to bring their son back.

The recovery operation was meticulously planned. It involved a team of divers stationed at different depths, backup gas cylinders, communication procedures, and a specially designed body bag. Shaw had practiced putting a body into the bag in a shallower dive, with his friend Don Shirley playing the part of the corpse. The actual task would be allotted approximately five minutes at the bottom. The entire dive would take around twelve hours, most of it spent decompressing on the ascent.

The body Shaw had found was not quite what the team expected. Dreyer's head and hands, exposed to the water, had become skeletonized, but the rest of him had mummified. His mask was still in place. His body had a strange solidity and, when Shaw began working with it, it floated.

The plan had accounted for a body that might fall apart. It had not adequately accounted for a body that would move.

Shaw struggled to get Dreyer into the bag. The body rolled and floated in front of him. His breathing became labored. A line that had been attached to the body became entangled with his torch and eventually with Shaw himself. In the footage from his helmet camera, his hands move around the body and the line. He tries to free himself. At one point he takes out his shears, but he does not successfully cut his way clear. His light becomes entangled. His movements become less purposeful. The dive exceeds its planned bottom time.

Shaw and Dreyer were eventually recovered together. Their bodies, connected by the lines and equipment, had risen from the cave floor to a shallower depth. Shaw had died attempting to bring Dreyer to the surface.

It is tempting to make this story into a warning about determination. But the details resist such a tidy interpretation. Shaw was not unprepared. He had rehearsed the task, designed equipment for it, consulted specialists, and assembled an extensive support team. He understood the danger. He had even told the other divers that if they encountered trouble, they should look after themselves rather than attempt to rescue him. The plan contained an instruction for failure. It did not necessarily contain a way to recognize that the mission itself had become the problem.

Perhaps this is where ritual becomes most interesting: not as a means of making the impossible possible, but as a way of establishing the conditions under which a person can recognize the impossible.

There is a difference between practicing a task and practicing its interruption. We rehearse the successful sequence: the switch, the signal, the handoff, the return. But what if the ritual also required the participant to rehearse being unable to finish? To imagine arriving at the bottom and discovering that the body will not fit into the bag. To imagine the equipment snagging, the timeline collapsing, the task becoming too large for the available hands.

What if the ritualist had to spit everything out?

A deliberately undignified ceremony might begin with the admission that the mouth is too full. The participant takes on more than they can chew, struggles, spits it out, and stands there with nothing accomplished. The humiliation is prewritten. It is part of the procedure, anticipated before anyone enters the room. There is no grand reveal, no unexpected exposure of inadequacy. The ritual has already made a place for coming up empty.

This sounds less like a ceremony of achievement than a ceremony of permission. Its purpose is to make retreat available before retreat becomes necessary. It might even be a way of protecting a person from the terrible pressure of having promised something—to a family, a team, a friend, a dead stranger—and then discovering that the promise exceeds the body carrying it.

The cave is not moved by promises. It does not know what a person intended, what they rehearsed, or what they owe someone waiting at the surface. It is an environment to be read, not persuaded. The diver has to attend to the conditions as they are, rather than the conditions the plan anticipated. Expertise may look like confidence from the outside, but perhaps its deeper form is the ability to notice when confidence has become irrelevant.

I keep returning to the possibility of a different ending. Not a successful recovery, necessarily. Not a different set of equipment or a better body bag. A moment in which someone recognizes that the task has become too large and turns toward the surface. The body remains below. The promise remains unfinished. There is no explanation that makes the outcome dignified.

And still, the diver comes back.

I wonder what kind of ritual could make that return possible. What would have to be practiced, repeated, and believed so that a person could come up without the body and not mistake the unfinished task for a failure of character? Perhaps the ceremony would have to begin before the dive, with the participant already on the floor, already spitting out what they cannot swallow. Perhaps the most difficult instruction would be to leave something behind.

There is a version of the story in which someone comes home without what they went down to retrieve. I find myself trying to imagine what would have made that possible.

Research notes and sources

The following sources informed the historical details. The prose does not quote them directly.

Tim Zimmermann, “Raising the Dead,” Outside, August 1, 2005. The most detailed narrative reconstruction of the recovery plan, technical preparation, body bag, practice dive, unexpected condition of Dreyer’s body, and Shaw’s final dive. Read the article.

ABC Australia, “To Boldly Go | David Shaw,” May 16, 2005. A documentary transcript with testimony from Shaw’s family, dive partner Don Shirley, filmmaker Gordon Hiles, and others, including their descriptions of the helmet-camera footage. Read/watch the ABC feature.

News24, “Video details ‘dive of death,’” January 13, 2005. Contemporary reporting on the camera footage, the entangled torch and lines, and the failed recovery attempt. Read the report.

ABC Australia, “Australian diver’s body recovered in South Africa,” January 13, 2005. Contemporary confirmation that Shaw and Dreyer were recovered together, connected and buoyant at approximately 35 meters. Read the report.

A factual nuance worth preserving: The story is not simply that Shaw forgot his safety procedures. The operation was extensively planned, and he had explicitly told his support divers to prioritize their own safety. The more unsettling question is how a carefully planned task can exceed its assumptions once the physical reality changes. Also, the shears are visible in the footage; the ABC documentary's account says he was unable to make the necessary cuts. I have avoided claiming he never attempted to use them.

The ending is intentionally unresolved. The father is present as an imagined alternative, not identified or explained.

The Warm Light of the Wallace Line

Word count 1191

There is a line in the ocean called the Wallace Line. It marks a biogeographical boundary between the animals of Asia and those of Australasia. On one side, one set of creatures; on the other, another. The line is not a wall, exactly, but a threshold. It makes visible the strange distribution of life: how things arrive, adapt, diverge, and become native to places they did not originate.

The way I learned about it, the creatures of an archipelago all came from somewhere else. They arrived by accident, by migration, by whatever improbable means life has of getting around. Eventually, their descendants belonged there. Their origins did not disqualify them from becoming part of the place. The ecosystem was made of arrivals.

I liked this idea. I still do.

I grew up in Hawai‘i, where the world seemed to have room for many kinds of origins. My childhood education included stories, lore, traditions, and ways of understanding the world that sat alongside mathematics and science. I remember an atmosphere in which the natural world could be practical and mysterious at the same time. The land was not merely scenery. It was full of presences, histories, and possibilities. There were gods and fairies, missionaries and hula, leis and dancing, all of it somehow sharing the same room.

I left when I was eleven.

There is a particular kind of loss in leaving a place before you understand what it has given you. You can remember the atmosphere but not necessarily the instructions for making it. You carry fragments: a vocabulary, a sensibility, a few doors into a world that you no longer know how to enter. Later, you might try to reconstruct the experience through research, through family stories, through the memories of people who stayed. You become an archivist of your own inheritance.

I have also become interested in the ways that identity is treated as a problem of origin. Where are you from? It sounds like a simple question, but it can become a demand for a coherent explanation. A person is expected to identify the correct starting point, the proper ancestry, the place that accounts for their appearance and behavior. Being multiracial can make this demand especially conspicuous. You are asked to explain a composition that other people have already decided is unusual.

Perhaps this is one reason fantasy has always offered me a kind of relief. In a fantasy world, everyone is unbelievable. There are different species, lineages, magical systems, gods, monsters, and improbable histories. Nobody has to pretend that the world is made up of one coherent people with one coherent origin. The premise is already strange. You can move between kinds of magic without having to explain why you are allowed to be there.

I think about the difference between science and magic through an image John O'Donohue offers: science as neon light, magic as warm, romantic light. Neon makes things clear. It illuminates edges, surfaces, distinctions. It is excellent for inspection. Warm light lets the room remain a little mysterious. It gives things atmosphere. It makes a home.

I don't want to turn this into an argument against science. I like science. Evolution is astonishing. Migration is astonishing. The Wallace Line is astonishing. But I wonder what happens when neon becomes the only acceptable lighting. When everything must be made explicit, categorized, measured, and explained before it can be taken seriously. What happens to the kinds of knowledge that depend on relationship, imagination, ritual, or the willingness to let something remain partly unknown?

The spore is scattered far away.

It lands on a continent. The ecosystem is larger, more continuous, and more homogeneous than the archipelago it came from. Difference exists, of course, but it is not necessarily normalized. The continent has its own ways of organizing life, and those ways can be rigid. There are established categories, dominant systems, and expectations about what counts as ordinary. Magic is not woven into everyday life in quite the same way. The spore cannot simply resume its old existence.

At first, it might look for an island. It might imagine that somewhere there must be a community of organisms with similar sensibilities: a place where plural spiritual frameworks, strange aesthetics, ritual, and play are part of the ordinary texture of life. Perhaps it looks toward psychedelic culture, experimental art communities, role-playing games, and other subcultures that make room for worldbuilding and imaginative possibility. These are not the same as the place it came from. They are not replacements. But they offer a kind of resonance.

Still, the spore does not find its island.

It mutates.

This is not a failure to return home. It is a new form of life, one that could not have existed in the original ecosystem. The spore carries something with it, but not an intact miniature island. It carries capacities: the ability to imagine multiple worlds, to move between systems of meaning, to find the everyday enchanted, to resist the assumption that reality has already been completely explained.

I think this is where Édouard Glissant's thinking about Relation becomes useful to me. Identity does not have to be a root that reaches backward toward one exclusive origin. It can be a rhizome, extending through encounters and relationships, changing as it grows. His idea of a right to opacity also appeals to me: the possibility of not having to become completely legible to someone else. Not every person, culture, or experience needs to be translated into a tidy explanation before it can be respected.

The archipelago offers one image of this kind of life. It is not a collection of identical islands, nor a single landmass pretending that its internal differences are insignificant. It is a system of distinct places connected by water, currents, arrivals, and departures. The gaps matter. The distances matter. The relationships are real without requiring sameness.

I don't want to make the island into paradise or the continent into a villain. Islands have their own histories of exclusion and hierarchy. Continents contain their own archipelagos, even when dominant systems fail to recognize them. But I am interested in the rigidity of continental thinking: the tendency to assume that belonging requires continuity, that a person must be traceable to a stable origin, that difference is an exception to be managed rather than a condition of life.

The spore doesn't have to become an ambassador for its lost ecosystem. It doesn't have to preserve everything, explain everything, or make its inheritance useful. It is allowed to enjoy what it carries. It can play. It can make strange things. It can sit in the warm light and let the world remain larger than the available explanations.

Perhaps home is not the place where the spore first germinated. Perhaps home is the sensibility it carries: the expectation that the world is plural, that arrivals can belong, that there are more ways of knowing than the dominant system has room to name.

The spore becomes something new. It does not recover what it lost. It does not need to.

And the world, illuminated differently, becomes expansive again.

The Right to Relax

Word count 1114

When I was eleven, my half-sister reminded me that I used to be a thumbsucker. I didn't tell her that I still was. There are certain things you learn to keep to yourself, even when they're technically childhood things, even when everyone knows that children do them. I had a private relationship with my thumb, and apparently it was time to retire it.

At thirteen, very close to my birthday, I made an announcement to myself: I am done with the thumbsucking thing. I turned a new leaf. I don't remember whether there was a ceremony. I imagine there should have been. A small graduation, perhaps. A certificate of completion. An official acknowledgment that I had successfully transitioned from one form of self-soothing to another, presumably more socially acceptable one.

I've been thinking about thumbsucking again because I've been thinking about being a stoner.

There's something funny about the way I remember my former stoner life. When I talk about it, I notice that I use a different map, a different vocabulary, a different atmosphere. I feel a certain ease. I remember the feeling of being high and slipping into a past-me suit. It doesn't quite fit anymore, but I recognize the fabric. And there's something peculiar about that: when I was high, I felt unmasked. I felt normal.

Perhaps this is one of the stranger things about self-soothing. Sometimes the thing that helps us feel most like ourselves is also the thing we eventually feel compelled to outgrow, hide, or explain.

I wonder whether being a stoner was a little like being a worshipper. Not necessarily because I was particularly spiritual, but because there was a ritual to it. There was anticipation, preparation, a first moment of the day when the world seemed to settle into place. I know the feeling of having my first drink of the day. I remember the feeling of having my first bong rip of the day. Maybe this is something people feel when they have their first prayer of the day.

I don't mean to collapse these experiences into one another. They have different meanings, different consequences, different cultural histories. But I am interested in the shared human impulse to create conditions in which we can inhabit ourselves more comfortably.

What if self-soothing is not necessarily a failure of self-sufficiency? What if it is one of the ways we learn to live?

I keep returning to the idea of a culture that understands the importance of expanding its window of tolerance while also providing something like air conditioning for the body. We talk a lot about resilience, about increasing our capacity to withstand discomfort, about becoming more flexible and more capable of managing difficult experiences. But what about the conditions themselves? What about the right to cool down? What about the possibility that a person doesn't always need to become more tolerant of an uncomfortable environment? Sometimes the environment could simply be made more comfortable.

Different cultures have different relationships to comfort, ritual, substances, and the body. The things one community regards as sacred, another might regard as indulgent. Something that feels like medicine to one person might look like

a vice to someone else. I find myself wondering how much of our understanding of appropriate self-soothing is actually an understanding of the practice itself, and how much is a judgment about the person doing it.

There are people in my life — and, if I'm being honest, people in my own head — saying: That's bad. You're a druggie. I don't like you when you're like this.

It's a strange thing to discover that you can internalize the disapproval of an imaginary audience. I have tried to quit. There was a day when I decided smoking weed was expensive, and I stopped. That's a perfectly reasonable explanation. It is also a surprisingly unceremonious ending to something that had once occupied a meaningful place in my life.

I wonder how much of my decision-making was about the practicalities and how much was about respectability. Was I finished with the practice, or was I finished with the identity? Was I moving on, or was I trying to distance myself from a version of myself that I had learned to regard as embarrassing?

Maybe I should watch Thumbsucker again. I remember being interested in the feeling of being out, of discovering another thumbsucker. There's a particular intimacy in finding someone who shares a supposedly embarrassing experience. You don't have to explain the mechanics of it. You don't have to defend the pleasure. There's a little recognition: Oh, you too.

I wonder whether this is part of what made stonerism feel like a community. Not simply the substance, but the recognition. A shared vocabulary, a shared map of the world, a way of understanding a particular kind of ease. And perhaps there's something tender about that, even if the practice itself isn't something I want to return to.

Recently, I talked with my coach Ellie about wanting to do a psychedelic writing adventure. I noticed that I was interested in the preparation, the diving, the lists. I had a nice feeling talking about my former stoner life. I wasn't necessarily expressing a desire to resume it. I was enjoying the memory of having belonged to something, of having had a relationship with a particular kind of relief.

Maybe I can appreciate that without needing to reenlist.

I keep thinking about the child who decided at thirteen that she was done with thumbsucking. I wonder what she thought she was accomplishing. Was she embarrassed? Was she proud? Did she imagine that growing up meant no longer needing certain kinds of comfort? Did she understand that the thumb had been doing something useful?

I wish I could have told her that there was nothing particularly shameful about wanting to feel settled. That the desire to soothe yourself isn't a character flaw. That sometimes you find a way to relax, and sometimes you find a different way, and neither experience needs to become a permanent identity.

I don't know whether you need a diagnosis or permission to explain why certain practices feel so meaningful. I don't know whether the language of sacrament, medication, and vice can ever adequately describe the variety of ways people make peace with being alive.

But I am interested in the question.

If prayer can be a daily practice, if medication can be a legitimate form of assistance, if rituals can help us feel at home in our bodies, then what exactly are we asking when we question someone else's way of finding relief?

And who gets to decide which forms of assisted peace count as peace?

How to Worship Latha: A Handbook for Secular Devotion

Word count 1583

An investigation into religious paraphernalia, self-authority, and the possibility that ritual can teach us to believe.

What if secular people have something to learn from worshippers? Not necessarily theology, doctrine, or even belief in a higher power, but the practical technologies of devotion: the objects, calendars, repetitions, gestures, and contemplative exercises that help organize a person's relationship with meaning. I've been circling around this question through an artistic project called How to Worship Latha, which might eventually become a handbook for investigating the possibility.

My curiosity has a personal dimension. My grandparents were Catholic and Christian; my parents inherited different relationships with religion, including my mother's combination of Christian and more unconventional spiritual interests and my father's Christianity. My generation, by contrast, identifies more readily with atheism. This distance from organized religion has left me with an interesting freedom. Ritual can feel foreign, almost like encountering an unfamiliar cultural technology. I don't have a firmly established religious identity to defend, so I can approach devotional practices as materials for experimentation.

Recently, while participating in a devised theatre game called Daggerheart, a tabletop roleplaying game inspired by Dungeons & Dragons, I selected the Seraphim class after the Druid class had already been taken. This seemingly incidental character choice returned me to a whirlpool of religious themes. I became interested in the relationship between inhabiting a role and developing a belief. Could writing about belief, or performing a character who believes, affect my own capacity to believe? Perhaps belief is not exclusively a prerequisite for ritual. Perhaps ritual is one of the ways we learn to believe.

One word that helped me articulate this interest was apotheosis. I encountered it in an inspirational thesaurus and was struck by its implications of elevation, glorification, and transformation into an ideal or divine form. I'm particularly interested in apotheosis as a process of self-actualization through devotion. What happens when I worship an aspirational figure as a way of becoming more like her?

Latha is that figure. She is an aspirational self, and How to Worship Latha is an investigation into the possibility of developing qualities I admire through a devotional relationship with her. Rather than treating worship as an exclusively theological activity, I want to explore it as a practice of self-authority. In a conversation with Ellie, I considered whether part of my attraction to religion might come from wanting a stronger sense of personal authority. What would it mean to establish a source of direction and legitimacy within myself, rather than waiting for external institutions or other people to provide it?

The rosary offers an intriguing place to begin. A rosary is a connection to prayer, but it is also a counting object. It provides a physical structure for repetition and attention. Prayer beads appear across different regions and religious traditions, suggesting a recurring human interest in material objects that help organize contemplative practice. I'm interested in the rosary not only as a sacred object but as a productivity technology. It offers a sequence, a tactile interface, and a reason to return to an activity. These are qualities that secular productivity systems also attempt to cultivate, although they don't always provide the same sense of significance.

I imagine developing a devotional kit alongside a liturgical calendar. The kit would include a headpiece, face makeup, ceremonial collar, rosary, ritual materials, pen and paper, cards, sacraments, prayer guide, tablecloth, and cups for water. These are not merely costume accessories. They are paraphernalia my character desperately needs. Their presence makes the ritual tangible and establishes a threshold between ordinary activity and intentional practice.

The calendar would provide a corresponding temporal structure. Religious traditions organize time through recurring observances, seasons, and commemorations. A secular person might adapt this approach to creative work, personal development, or other ongoing commitments. Instead of relying exclusively on motivation, one could establish meaningful occasions for reflection, preparation, repetition, and celebration.

This brings me to an earlier interest in financial coaching. I regularly apply for and receive a microgrant through CCI's Quick Grant program. In the past, I hired Megan to coach me through activities intended to improve the financial success of my artistic practices. When that premise eventually went out the window, I found myself reconsidering what the underlying activities were actually offering. There was something valuable in having a framework, a recurring commitment, and someone helping me establish a relationship with my intentions. Could some of those benefits exist independently of financial outcomes?

I like the premise of worshippers having productivity tools that secular people can adapt for their own workflows. Religious practice can offer more than inspiration: it can offer infrastructure. A devotional handbook could investigate how to establish a ritual, how to select meaningful objects, how to construct a calendar, and how to create opportunities for contemplative attention. It might even include interviews with practicing Catholics to understand the practical and experiential dimensions of their devotional tools.

I don't want to assume that religious practice and productivity are interchangeable. The distinction matters. Worship involves an energetic connection, an orientation toward something considered worthy of reverence, and potentially a surrender that conventional productivity culture rarely accommodates. But perhaps this is precisely what makes it interesting. Productivity systems often ask what we can accomplish. Devotional systems might ask what deserves our attention in the first place.

My proposed handbook is therefore both an artistic project and a personal experiment. Exhibit A is the rosary. Exhibit B is the liturgical calendar. Exhibit C is scripture. Each offers a different way of organizing attention, time, and meaning. Through Latha, I can experiment with these materials without needing to resolve every theological question beforehand.

Perhaps the most interesting possibility is that devotion can be practiced before it is fully understood. I can assemble the kit, mark the calendar, learn the gestures, and see what changes. The question isn't whether I can convince myself of a particular doctrine. It's whether adopting the technologies of worship might help me develop a more authoritative relationship with my own aspirations.

What if secular people reclaimed the contemplative and organizational intelligence of religious traditions? What if we treated the cultivation of belief as an artistic practice? I don't yet know what I believe about Latha. That's partly why I want to build the handbook.

Composition Notes

Composition Notes: How to Worship Latha

1. Original research and source material

The essay originated from my notes exploring:

The rosary as a devotional and counting object.

The possibility of developing a personal faith practice.

How to Worship Latha, an emerging artistic campaign and handbook concept.

The relationship between religious paraphernalia, ritual, and productivity.

My family's multigenerational relationship with Christianity and religion.

The concept of apotheosis, encountered through an inspirational thesaurus.

My experience playing a Seraphim character in the tabletop roleplaying game Daggerheart.

Previous financial coaching and CCI Quick Grant experiences.

2. Conceptual development through eight questions

I used an eight-question multiple-choice interview to clarify the essay's direction.

Question

My selection

Contribution

1. Central thesis

C

Self-authority as the central motivation.

2. Personal origin

D

Experimenting with performing belief as a form of agency.

3. Rosary

E

Understanding devotional objects as productivity technologies.

4. Latha

B

Latha as an aspirational self.

5. Religious inheritance

D

Freedom to borrow and adapt religious practices.

6. Apotheosis

B

Self-actualization through devotion.

7. Practical experiment

C

A ritual kit combined with a liturgical calendar.

8. Intended conclusion

B

Investigating what secular people can learn from religious organizational and contemplative practices.

3. Major creative decisions

Established self-authority as the essay's central argument.

Connected theatrical roleplaying to the possibility of developing belief through performance.

Reframed the rosary as both a sacred object and a practical technology for repetition and attention.

Positioned Latha as an aspirational figure rather than simply a fictional character.

Introduced apotheosis as a framework for personal transformation.

Developed the handbook as the tangible outcome of the inquiry.

Organized the proposed handbook around three exhibits: the rosary, the liturgical calendar, and scripture.

4. Further research opportunities

Interview a practicing Catholic about rosary use and devotional routines.

Research the history and cross-cultural use of prayer beads without assuming all traditions serve identical purposes.

Investigate the relationship between ritual, habit formation, attention, and motivation.

Research the liturgical calendar and its organizational principles.

Clarify the definition and historical use of apotheosis.

Examine how secular productivity systems might benefit from contemplative rather than purely outcome-oriented practices.

5. Working hypothesis

Belief may not always precede practice. Practice may also cultivate belief.

The handbook will investigate whether adapting devotional tools and structures can help secular practitioners develop self-authority, intentionality, and a more meaningful relationship with their aspirations.

6. AI collaboration disclosure

AI was used as an interview and synthesis tool. I supplied the original notes, selected the conceptual directions through eight multiple-choice questions, and provided the central ideas and project framework. AI assisted with organizing, connecting, and drafting the material into an essay. The resulting essay is a working composition for further review and revision.

A note on the next stage

I think the handbook is potentially the more interesting long-term artifact. The essay establishes the hypothesis; the handbook could become the actual research instrument.

One particularly productive next step would be to develop a prototype with three sections:

Objects: What does a practitioner need?

Time: How does a practitioner organize devotion?

Practices: What does a practitioner actually do?

That would let How to Worship Latha function as both an artistic work and an experiment in secular devotional design.

Adjust the Opacity: Toward a Handbook for Plural Creative Practice

Word count 1645

I have been trying to find my voice. More precisely, I have been trying to discover what happens when I stop assuming that I have only one. Identity, like artistic practice, might be better understood as an ecosystem than a finished portrait. I am interested in plurality: the coexistence of contradictory impulses, competing interests, different registers of sincerity, and ways of knowing that don't always translate neatly into one another. Perhaps the lyrical essay is a particularly hospitable form for this kind of investigation. It can accommodate research and autobiography, humor and reverence, intellectual rigor and associative leaps. It can make a home for things that might otherwise be asked to choose sides.

My recent studies have involved a curious weaving of mental health, creativity, executive function, play, humor, and clerical practice. I have been looking for connections among these subjects, but I am increasingly interested in the weaving itself as a creative methodology. Rather than deciding in advance what my artistic identity should look like, I want to conduct a series of experiments and observe what emerges. The experiments are not simply exercises in self-expression. They are ways of discovering my values, aesthetic preferences, intellectual commitments, and perhaps even the conditions under which I do my best thinking.

One aesthetic tension I keep returning to is the fluctuation between irony and sincerity associated with metamodernism. I am drawn to the sacred and the ridiculous, sometimes simultaneously. Humor can make room for reverence without requiring solemnity. It can puncture an inflated idea while preserving the possibility that the idea matters. I have wondered whether some of my experiences of attention, executive function, and creative energy might be understood through this oscillation. I suspect I have AuDHD, although I don't want to make a diagnosis the organizing principle of my artistic identity. What interests me is the creative possibility of moving between modes of engagement: earnestness and skepticism, play and commitment, intellectual investigation and intuitive discovery.

A phrase I would like to give all authors is "adjust the opacity." I first imagined this as an instruction about how much of something should be visible. In visual art and cinema, opacity can be a technical quality, but it can also become an ethical decision. What do we reveal? What do we leave partially obscured? Who gets to look, and who is expected to become legible? These questions connect my interest in finding a voice with feminist cinematic ethics and Édouard Glissant's poetics of relation.

Glissant's thinking about relation and opacity offers an alternative to the expectation that another person must become completely knowable before we can encounter them. Feminist cinematic ethics similarly invites a reconsideration of the camera's relationship to its subjects. Rather than treating the camera as an instrument of imperial voyeuristic capture, we might understand it as a relational medium rooted in care and reciprocity. The ethical challenge is to frame difference without reducing it to a consumable commodity. Film becomes an encounter between subjects rather than a tool of mastery.

I wonder whether these principles might also inform lyrical essay writing. A writer is constantly making decisions about representation: how much autobiography to disclose, how to characterize another person, when to explain an experience, and when to allow it to remain mysterious. The essayist's authority is not necessarily derived from making everything transparent. Perhaps a more ethical and interesting form of authorship emerges when the writer recognizes that not everything belongs to them to explain.

This is one reason I want to experiment with form. Plurality might be expressed through multiple voices, fragments, juxtaposition, changes in register, and unexpected connections. An essay could move from a theoretical argument about cinematic ethics to a personal reflection about a workshop, then to a ridiculous clerical ritual, without having to apologize for its associative intelligence. The connections would need to be meaningful, but they wouldn't necessarily need to be linear. I am interested in writing that allows its subjects to remain distinct while discovering their relationships.

I already have some supporting evidence from my artistic practice. A review from a Fringe writer offers one perspective on how my work has been received. My experiences with online workshops offer another: a record of how structured creative encounters can generate unexpected discoveries. Kismet activities provide a third body of material, demonstrating how collaborative artistic experimentation can bring together people, disciplines, and ideas. These are not merely anecdotes to decorate an essay. They are potential case studies in the development of a creative methodology.

One particularly satisfying writing experience came from preparing a grant proposal for a workshop called Alternative Effort. I enjoyed applying myself to specific questions and discovering that the constraints of the application could actually stimulate my thinking. Feedback from my financial counselor and encouragement that the proposal was competitive made the experience feel even more rewarding. I appreciated the particularity of the task. Instead of confronting the enormous, amorphous question of what I wanted to create, I had a series of concrete questions to answer. Writing became an adventure because the problem had boundaries, stakes, and possibilities.

A question from a writing coach has stayed with me: How would I make writing an adventure? It made me consider whether some of the resistance I experience around writing comes from conditioning that might not even belong to me. Perhaps I have inherited assumptions about productivity, professionalism, discipline, or what constitutes legitimate intellectual work. Perhaps I have confused the ability to perform someone else's preferred process with the ability to develop my own. What would happen if I treated writing as an opportunity for discovery rather than a demonstration of competence?

This brings me to an emerging possibility: a creative handbook that combines research, writing experiments, play, humor, ritual, and reflection. I am interested in investigating whether these practices could eventually inform a professional direction involving psychedelic arts therapy. I don't yet have a settled model or a conclusion about what certification or practice might entail. For now, I want to investigate the possibility through a more modest and immediate project: documenting experiments, collecting evidence, developing exercises, and noticing which approaches produce meaningful experiences.

The handbook would be both a practical resource and a record of inquiry. It might include prompts for shifting narrative perspective, exercises in adjusting opacity, collaborative experiments, playful constraints, and reflective questions about the relationship between sincerity and irony. It could invite participants to investigate their own creative conditions without requiring them to adopt a predetermined artistic identity. Research citations would function as companions and provocations rather than academic ornaments.

I am also interested in distinguishing the gems from the fillers. Not every experiment needs to become a permanent practice. Some will be illuminating precisely because they fail. The handbook should make room for documentation, revision, and the occasional ridiculous dead end. Five curiosities successfully woven with ten supporting citations might be a game worth playing, but the real prize would be discovering which connections have enough vitality to sustain further investigation.

I don't want to write myself into a singular identity. I want to develop a practice capable of accommodating the many ways I think, feel, work, and imagine. Perhaps finding my voice means becoming more comfortable with its plurality. Perhaps style is not a fixed signature but a set of values expressed through repeated choices. And perhaps the most useful instruction I can offer another writer is not to become more transparent, more consistent, or more easily understood.

Adjust the opacity. Let the sacred be ridiculous. Let the research become an adventure. Allow the islands to remain islands, while discovering what passes between them.

Composition notes: documenting my contributions

Original intellectual and creative contributions

Established the central concept of weaving as a methodology for discovering voice, style, and values through lyrical essay experiments.

Introduced plurality of identity as the essay's philosophical center.

Identified the fluctuation between irony and sincerity, particularly the relationship between the sacred and the ridiculous.

Supplied the phrase "adjust the opacity" as a guiding artistic and ethical principle.

Connected feminist cinematic ethics with Édouard Glissant's poetics of relation.

Identified mental health, creativity, executive function, play, humor, and clerical practice as research interests.

Supplied the Alternative Effort grant-writing experience as an example of writing becoming an adventure through structured questions and feedback.

Identified the Fringe review, online workshops, and Kismet activities as supporting case studies.

Proposed a creative handbook combining research, writing prompts, play, humor, ritual, and reflective exercises.

Introduced the possibility of investigating psychedelic arts therapy as a future professional direction.

Eight-question customization process

Question

Your contribution

1. Central discovery

E — Methodology of weaving

2. What is weaving?

Finding voice, style, and values through experiments

3. Theoretical framework

Expressing plurality in identity

4. Formal expression

Plurality as an underlying concern

5. Tonal identity

A — The sacred and the ridiculous

6. Desired outcome

B + D — Plural identity and transformative experiences

7. Supporting evidence

C — Case studies

8. Next step

D — A creative handbook

Editorial and synthesis contributions

Organized the original notes into a central argument.

Developed transitions connecting personal inquiry, theoretical frameworks, artistic evidence, and future possibilities.

Expanded the cinematic ethics discussion into a consideration of authorship and representation in lyrical essays.

Connected the grant-writing experience to the idea of structured creative adventure.

Proposed the handbook as a concrete outcome without presenting an exploratory professional interest as an established qualification or practice.

Research note: This draft incorporates the theoretical ideas you supplied but does not yet contain ten verified scholarly citations. Those should be researched and integrated in a subsequent revision rather than invented.

My editorial recommendation: preserve this as the gems essay. It has a coherent argument and a strong closing refrain. The next essay could investigate the fillers: the experiments, assumptions, and inherited writing habits that don't belong in the handbook.

Megan report (ai assist)
word count: 571

Megan Report — Mid-Month

Updates, Objectives, Timeline

1. Dead Ends — Analytical / Internal

Things I'm going to stop doing:

- Typing up my morning pages.
- Calorie counting.
- Maintaining a poem-a-week goal.

These practices have begun to feel less useful than the energy they consume. I want to redirect that energy toward work that develops my aesthetic potential and supports a more sustainable creative practice.

2. Achievements — Tactical / External

- **Red Lady Dark Ride:** Prepared for a feedback-session opportunity.
- **Jolly Market:** Developed work for an anticipated performance-art and vending opportunity. I want to reflect further on the festivity I felt in preparing for the upcoming season.
- **Submission format:** Created a new format for fiction and nonfiction submissions that accommodates my intended typesetting while retaining an 8.5 × 11-inch page size.
- **ADHD cooking project:** Began a new package with Ariel Wilson, a local Nutritional Therapy Practitioner. I'm intrigued by the compassion she's brought to ADHD and by the feeling of possibility that a diagnosis can open up.
- **Preplist:** Started using a technique for mapping the components of a document before drafting it.

3. Reflections — Romantic / Internal

The cleric transformation course has been squirrely—or, as a new adjective I'm intrigued by might have it, *plural*.

I'm thinking about how learning can be structured without becoming overmanaged. The body-double method is remarkably effective, and I'm interested in experiential learning as a way to help students own their journeys. Perhaps less micromanaging allows more self-directed skill-building and better transfer of skills. Therapy has also reminded me that learning takes time: I cannot metabolize information if it arrives faster than I can process it.

A recurring image is the buffet. As a child, I sometimes overate at King's Wok in Bremerton and felt guilty afterward. Now I imagine a three-round strategy: first, the high-worth essentials; second, the best of the best; third, a modest portion of dessert. I remember the peace of the car ride home after a great meal. Could a term paper offer that same feeling of satisfaction rather than bloating?

I'm beginning to see that the paper has been a process of refining my strategy. I had a flash of recognition: the goal is not simply to consume more material, but to develop a method for choosing, integrating, and finishing.

4. Objectives — Strategic / External

Primary project: *Liturgical Calendar System Explainer*

Research question: How can I concretize the liturgical calendar through time, color, and literary practice?

I want to explore how a calendar might normalize habits, soften the pressure of deadlines, and make time feel more like a timed walk through a garden. T. S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf, and Octavia Butler are potential sources for thinking about sacredness in literature. Butler's journals, in particular, conveyed the conviction of someone self-aware, driven, and ready to become a rising star.

The project should define a problem, provide background, present supporting evidence, summarize discovery activities and conclusions, and use a format drawn from an academic reader.

5. Next Steps — Tactical / External

Over the next three to nine weeks, I want to develop a flexible series of training dives, progressing through 500, 1,000, 2,000, and eventually 3,000 words. I'll use a preplist, draft in iterations, redline, let the work sit, and make a final pass for grammar and typos.

The larger intention is to build a *Dream Curriculum*: flexible, resonant deadlines and a structure that helps me develop capacity without overwhelming myself.

The Writing Situation v1

Word count: 2161

Rosary

I am a scroller. I use social media, and it uses me. I am guilty of the crime of being a reed bent by the river of my time.

I will justify this by saying I discover quilting suwards in this process, and I engage them in my pieces. So maybe glamorizing it like I'm Marie Curie. I am exposing myself to this radioactive sludge to further my project.

I will keep writing, knowing I can edit this down to the finer parts, and the less interesting parts first lubricate the thoughts. Two essays: one will be the gems and one with the fillers.

The rosary is a devotional tool. I like the premise of worshippers having productivity tools that secular people can adapt for their workflow.

Exhibit A: the rosary. Exhibit B: the liturgical calendar. Exhibit C: scripture. Maybe interview a Catholic for more. D: Gideon hand.

Well, a rosary is a connection to prayer; it's a counting object. I would love to get one. I'm very intrigued by the metamodernism of this project, where it's a sincere and cheeky attempt to find meaning in tradition and be open and curious to the potential, which some might accuse of appropriation.

What I like about the rosary—prayer beads show up globally across regions, so it's more of an evolutionary state/stage. It's paraphernalia which my character desperately needs.

Headpiece, face makeup, ceremonial collar, rosary, ritual kit, pen and paper, cards, sacraments, prayer guide, tablecloth, cups for water.

A paper called *How to Worship Latha*. Get a rosary, and there's a prayer guide.

Energetic connection and contemplative prayer.

Wallace Line

I'll get a book on this, but right now, I can appreciate what I know. I'm intrigued by developing a metaphor about a place where everyone is "from" somewhere else.

I've been interested in unpacking the rhetoric of belonging to the land and the messiness of giving someone their land back.

As a multigenerational here-there person, it's like couples' privilege—staying in one spot privilege, the idea that to claim ownership, you have to just be there. Hold down the fort, be better stewards.

I suppose I like the phrase "let them." What happens when you accept that "anchored people" have a different way of life and have created predatory systems to project what they believe is rightfully theirs?

I was interested in archipelagic thinking à la Édouard Glissant, and I suppose I want to push this pluralism/poetry/paradox into a nomad-archipelago Deleuzian schizophrenia.

I have been interested in claiming something in the process of finding my voice, and I suppose here I'd like to involve feminist cinematic ethics as the follow-up to archipelagic thinking, if there was a way to—

I asked Gemini about this intersection, and I will provide that text here.

By uniting feminist cinematic ethics with Édouard Glissant's poetics of relation, the camera shifts from an instrument of imperial voyeuristic capture into a relational medium rooted in care and reciprocity. Rather than demanding total visual transparency or objectifying the subject on screen, this synthesis honors Glissant's right to opacity by leaving space for marginalized identity and lived experience to exist beyond the totalizing gaze of the viewer.

Ultimately, cinematic ethics becomes a commitment to framing difference without reducing it to a consumable commodity, establishing film as an encounter between subjects rather than a tool of mastery.

Questions and Concerns

I put this in here because I believe that questions and concerns map to reading, writing, and treatment. I've been interested in doing more focused writing. One of my favorite writing sessions recently was for a grant about a workshop proposal, "Alternative Effort," and I appreciated the feeling of really applying myself and answering specific, particular grant questions and getting feedback from my financial counselor and encouragement about being competitive.

My supporting evidence: a review from a Fringe writer, a description of my experience with online workshops, and a list of Kismet activities.

I had an idea just now about how to brainstorm this with Ellie—just a massive brain dump about questions and concerns.

As a designer, I like the idea of a juicy problem statement where brainstorming can be very specific and have more insights as a result.

Purpose Diving Metaphor

I talked with my life coach, and we uncovered a sense of purpose.

I was talking about the weaving I was doing with my studies (keywords: mental health, creativity, executive function, play, humor, cleric), and I had a moment when we talked about immersive writing. Writing adventure partner. We talked about diving and prep lists, and I had a nice feeling when I was talking about my former stoner life. And now I'm piecing together the feeling of unmasking as a stoner—when you're high—when I'm high, I'm at ease, I feel *normal.* And too, when I talk about stoners, it's a similar map but a different vibe than when I talk about others.

Maybe I need to watch the movie *Thumbsucker* again—the feeling of enjoying being "out," the feeling when a thumbsucker meets another thumbsucker... the beauty of "we have this thing in common"—and how I've tried to quit. I remember when I was eleven, my half-sister reminded me that I used to be a thumbsucker, and I didn't tell her at the time that I was. I was 13, and one day, very close to my birthday, I told myself, "I am done with the thumbsucking thing," and I turned a new leaf.

Now I don't feel the need to go over my drug history.

A thing I will remind all authors to do is **"adjust the opacity."**

There was a day when I told myself smoking weed is expensive, and I stopped. Maybe it's like meat for some vegetarians, and that it makes them sick when they do it. And I can appreciate that feeling of when I get high on weed,

it feels like I'm slipping into a past-me suit, and it doesn't quite fit. I'm noticing all the ways it doesn't fit, and I'm not present in the situation that I'm in.

I talked to my coach Ellie about how I would love to do a psychedelic writing adventure. She asked me how I would make writing an adventure, and it really clicked for me: this idea that I'm feeling a conditioning that might be someone else's. People in my life (me in my head) saying, "That's bad, you're a druggie, I don't like you when you're like this..."

There's something there, an emotional skeleton. I've been watching a lot of cave-diving incident videos, and there's an interesting one about recovery.

Well, the story is a guy goes diving, finds a body, decides to plan a special dive to get him, ends up getting tangled. When they go to recover him, he's tied himself and the corpse to a rope for easy access.

Well, I don't think I'm going to die, but I appreciate that Ellie identified that my fear of novelty is something that I interpret as "no, don't do that."

So perhaps, writing about the potential of becoming a certified psychedelic arts therapy practitioner.

I saw a book that would be an interesting reference.

Subject: scaredness.

I like the idea of writing with a thicker pen for headers, but it will have to be more contrasting than the above.

I was talking to Ellie about my cleric transformation project. In January, I had a grant issue. I apply and receive money for a microgrant every year. CCI's Quick Grant for financial coaching.

I'm tangenting into my to-do list for getting funding for a project next year—tie a line and come back.

I have hired Megan in the past to coach me through activities to improve the odds of financial success for my artistic practices, and when that premise went out the window, I had a beautiful—

Bespoke Solutions for Whimsical Problems

Idea. At the time, I was working on developing a campaign. I was engaged in a sort of devised theatre called *Daggerheart* (a D&D spin-off), and I had chosen the Seraphim class after Druid was taken, and it brought me back into a whirlpool of religious themes. Only this time, there was a level of aesthetic distance and collaborators.

The world of religion in fantasy roleplay is perhaps like being hapa in Hawaii. I have a unique background being multiracial (statistic here related to United States diversity). I did a project on Hawaii's racism issues because my half-sister is white, and she did not have the same experience. Hapa in Hawaii—there's a vast swath of differences in brown, but the chasm between brown and white is enormous in Hawaii, and they have a name for this outsider: haole.

"Where are you from?" is a question that I detest because it reminds me of a time when I was— I was born here. I was eleven when I left. That is enough time to make your home your identity.

What is home? Where do you feel at home?

The topic sentence is how to be different and yet the kind of different that is normalized by the surrounding society.

We live in a Christian-majority (statistics) country? [Insert statistic here.] My grandparents—Catholic and Christian, my parents, mum woo-woo and Christian dad, and then my generation, atheists.

I suppose I'm trying to pull out the feeling of being a magic user in a world where there's all kinds of magic and trying to relate that to racial difference and the feeling of having an immigration story.

I talked to Ellie about the comfort of a fantasy world—perhaps a place to feel less self-conscious, like all the creatures are a little unbelievable, so there's some handwaving.

The truth is I've been circling around this theory: belief affects ability—maybe roleplaying about belief, writing about my belief—affects my ability to believe.

Can I choose to develop my faith muscle, and what does that look like?

I recently turned to the word *apotheosis* in a positive emotional thesaurus (adjectives that start with A, that are inspirational website), and I think it's pretty amazing. Definition of apotheosis here.

When I was talking to Ellie, the idea that one of the reasons that I'm drawn to religion is related to self-authority.

I want to unpack why I feel like being a stoner was like being a worshipper and the feeling of unmasking.

The right to relax. I don't know if you need a diagnosis or permission, but the way I feel when I have my first drink of the day and what I used to feel when I had my first bong rip of the day, maybe that's what people feel when they have their first prayer of the day.

I suppose sacrament/medication/vice are draining into a question about "stonerism," or how to feel less than or othered by the idea of "assisted peace."

A lot of cultures supported— is there a story here? A culture that has a balance between expanding their window of tolerance and the "air conditioning" of the body.

I think this is where ritual comes into play—and I had a flash of cave diving—you switch out tanks at lower depths to avoid too much nitrogen in the blood? [Insert science on oxygen mixes for depths.] And so, it's more technical ritual: what needs to happen to go deeper?

So yeah, that feeling of ritual being this foreign outsider thing? Traditions of depth lost by immigration.

I used to live in a country that said love all the time, that celebrated leis and dancing, that loved nature and magic, all the lore about gods and fairies perpetuated, and the missionary influences integrated. I think being Irish is the same way.

Perhaps that's why PRG maybe calls to me—psychedelic culture, the baseline is paradise, and not even earned, but just as a starting point.

So perhaps it's the everydayness that ties up into exoticism. When you're from past the Wallace Line and you come over to essentially a big block of continental sameness—the grief and worse, the exile.

Intake Book Buffet

After all that emotional stuff about sacredness, how to bring myself back to the book buffet concept.

I think it's pretty simple at this point—have a buffet of books that I'm interested in having. It's like art supplies: getting them vs. using them are two different hobbies. The card game of "I have 15 slots," and they are sometimes occupied by slow books.

There is a simple game here—maybe it's like Fluxus. There are cards with the books on them; you can add to your deck. You want 1,000 cards (citations), and 150 is too much. You can only have five in your hand, and the game's deck is delivery on curiosities you have, and the curiosities get woven into a research question. Five curiosities successfully woven with 10 citations with supporting evidence wins the game.

What are 100–149 books I can get to know better?

Composition Notes: “The Five-Card Tasting Flight”

1. Initial Concept

- Develop an immersive prose piece rather than a conventional poem.
- Establish a grounded scene featuring a waitress presenting an original dish.
- The waitress is an adept participating in *Our Daily Bread*, a residency combining food-making, artistic practice, and vision-quest-like activities.
- Her presentation is an act of integration: she shares something learned through experience by translating it into food.

2. Narrative and Character Decisions

- **Setting:** An intimate neighborhood café.
- **Character:** A warm, conversational waitress who is knowledgeable but not overly authoritative.
- **Narrative structure:** A slow revelation. Begin with an ordinary restaurant interaction and gradually introduce conceptual material.
- **Point of view:** Interweave the waitress's presentation with the internal observations of a workshop participant.
- **Tone:** Quietly profound, accessible, sensory, and understated.

3. Central Metaphor: The Book Buffet

The original notes explored several interconnected ideas:

- Books as relationships or intellectual friendships.
- A collection of 100–149 books as a manageable social universe.
- The approximate 150-person social-network threshold (Dunbar's number) as a playful framework for thinking about cognitive capacity.
- A five-card hand representing the limits of active attention.
- Curiosities developing into research questions.
- The distinction between acquiring materials and actually using them.

Culinary translation:

- Books become tasting portions.
- The book collection becomes a buffet or deck of cards.
- Five active books become five dishes on a tasting board.
- Reading becomes getting to know, tasting, digesting, and returning.
- Research becomes the discovery of relationships between ingredients.

4. Sensory and Formal Choices

- Use a tasting flight rather than a conventional entrée to represent multiple intellectual interests.
- Give the food concrete textures, temperatures, flavors, and ingredients.
- Use dialogue to introduce the conceptual framework without turning the waitress into a lecturer.
- Allow the scene to move between physical experience and intellectual reflection.

5. Source Material and Interpretive Choices

Several phrases and ideas from the original notes were translated rather than reproduced literally:

Original note	Treatment in composition
"I am a scroller."	Infinite buffet and abundance of information
"Radioactive sludge"	Intellectual overexposure
"A reed bent by the river of my time"	Cultural influence and historical context, left implicit
Art supplies: acquiring vs. using	Directly retained as a central analogy
Sacredness and emotional material	Submerged beneath the practical, playful framework
1,000 citations vs. 150	Reframed as a question of meaningful intellectual relationships

6. Intended Reader Experience

The piece should initially feel like an ordinary café encounter. As the waitress explains the dish, the reader gradually recognizes that the presentation is also an invitation to practice active reading.

The reader is encouraged to:

- Notice details.
- Make associations.
- Follow curiosity.
- Hold several ideas in mind simultaneously.
- Discover a question through sustained attention.

7. Revision Opportunities

- Strengthen the relationship between the waitress's residency experience and the dish.
- Develop the five-card mechanic into a more recognizable game.
- Clarify the distinction between the 100–149-book collection and the five-book active hand.
- Consider whether the ending should offer a more participatory action.

Compositional principle: Make the intellectual experience tangible through hospitality, food, and attention rather than explaining the underlying ideas directly.

The Five-Card Tasting Flight

Word count: 772

The waitress comes over with a little notebook tucked into the pocket of her apron. She's been working on something new, she tells us, and wonders if we'd be willing to try it. It's a tasting flight, though not the kind with wine. She calls it the Book Buffet.

She sets down a long wooden board with five small porcelain dishes arranged across it. The first contains a thin slice of toasted sourdough, a smear of something green and peppery, and a few flakes of salt. The second is a little mound

of roasted root vegetables, still warm, with a glossy vinegar reduction. The third is a tiny bowl of something fermented. She explains that each portion represents a book she's been getting to know.

Not reading, exactly. Getting to know.

She says she's been thinking about how many books a person can maintain a relationship with. There's a number, apparently, somewhere around 150, beyond which the social world starts to become difficult to manage. She doesn't remember all the particulars, but she's been experimenting with the idea. If books were friends, how many could you actually know? Not simply recognize by their covers or remember having purchased, but know well enough to call upon when you need them?

She gestures toward the board. Five at a time, she says. That's your hand. You can have a much larger collection, of course. You can keep adding cards to your deck. But you can only hold five at once.

I look at the little dishes. The green smear has an unexpectedly sharp finish, something between parsley and mustard. She explains that it's made from an herb she found in a book about edible plants, which led her to another book about botanical classification, which led her to a question about how we decide what counts as useful knowledge. She laughs. Sometimes the ingredients get away from you.

The cards, she says, are the books. You can add them to your deck as your curiosities develop. Maybe you begin with a question about plants, but after a while you're more interested in classification, or naming, or the history of collecting. Eventually, if you pay attention, the cards begin to arrange themselves into something like a research question.

She pauses to let us taste the second dish.

The vegetables are sweet and earthy, with a little bitterness at the end. I think about the books I've bought and haven't read, the ones stacked beside my bed, the ones I keep meaning to return to. It's a familiar kind of abundance. Like art supplies. Getting them and using them are two different hobbies.

The waitress seems to understand this distinction. She says the buffet is designed to make choosing more interesting than accumulating. There are always more dishes coming out of the kitchen, more books being delivered, more possibilities to sample. But a person has to eat. A person has to digest.

She mentions that she used to think she needed a thousand citations to make a convincing argument. Then she started wondering whether 150 might already be too many. And if 150 is the outer edge of a social world, perhaps the question isn't how many books can be gathered, but how many can be invited into a meaningful conversation.

I turn back to the five dishes. They seem less like portions now and more like introductions. Each one asks for a different kind of attention. The fermented one is particularly strange: sour, almost floral, with a lingering warmth. I want to know what went into it. I want to ask where the ingredients came from, how long they were left to sit, what made her decide they belonged together.

The waitress smiles. That's how it starts, she says.

She has a little deck of cards in her apron. She offers to let us draw one before we leave. There's no score, no winner, no particular order in which the books have to be encountered. The game is simply to notice what you're curious about, choose a few things to keep close, and see what happens when you spend enough time with them.

I realize I've been listening differently than I usually read. I've been looking for the connections between things, noticing what I want to ask, holding an image in my mind long enough for it to become a question. The waitress collects the empty dishes. She says she'll be working on another tasting flight next week.

I look at the little wooden board, now nearly clean. Five places, all empty again. The buffet, she reminds us, is still open.

The Ritual of Coming Up Empty

Word count: 1412

At a certain depth, the composition of the air you breathe becomes a technical problem. Ordinary compressed air is no longer suitable. Nitrogen can produce narcosis, impairing coordination and judgment; oxygen, under pressure, can become toxic. Technical divers use carefully calculated gas mixtures, switching between them at planned depths. The dive is organized around a sequence of thresholds: descend, switch, check, communicate, proceed. On the ascent, the sequence reverses. Decompression requires the diver to stop at designated depths for calculated periods, allowing dissolved gases to leave the body without forming dangerous bubbles.

There is a ritual to this. A diver does not simply decide to go deeper. There are procedures for becoming the kind of person who can go deeper and return.

A checklist is a kind of prayer with consequences. A sequence of practiced actions makes an unfamiliar environment legible. Equipment is checked, signals are agreed upon, gas supplies are calculated, and the timing of the dive is shared among the people who will support it. The terminology matters. At depth, when a person is startled or confused, there should be a common language already in place. The plan is rehearsed so that the body can recognize what to do before the mind has time to invent something else.

In January 2005, Australian technical diver Dave Shaw descended into Bushman's Hole, a flooded cave in South Africa, to retrieve the body of Deon Dreyer. Dreyer had disappeared in the cave ten years earlier, at twenty years old. Shaw had found him during a record-setting dive the previous October, at approximately 270 meters. He surfaced with the discovery and told Dreyer's parents that he would try to bring their son back.

The recovery operation was meticulously planned. It involved a team of divers stationed at different depths, backup gas cylinders, communication procedures, and a specially designed body bag. Shaw had practiced putting a body into the bag in a shallower dive, with his friend Don Shirley playing the part of the corpse. The actual task would be allotted approximately five minutes at the bottom. The entire dive would take around twelve hours, most of it spent decompressing on the ascent.

The body Shaw had found was not quite what the team expected. Dreyer's head and hands, exposed to the water, had become skeletonized, but the rest of him had mummified. His mask was still in place. His body had a strange solidity and, when Shaw began working with it, it floated.

The plan had accounted for a body that might fall apart. It had not adequately accounted for a body that would move.

Shaw struggled to get Dreyer into the bag. The body rolled and floated in front of him. His breathing became labored. A line that had been attached to the body became entangled with his torch and eventually with Shaw himself. In the footage from his helmet camera, his hands move around the body and the line. He tries to free himself. At one point he takes out his shears, but he does not successfully cut his way clear. His light becomes entangled. His movements become less purposeful. The dive exceeds its planned bottom time.

Shaw and Dreyer were eventually recovered together. Their bodies, connected by the lines and equipment, had risen from the cave floor to a shallower depth. Shaw had died attempting to bring Dreyer to the surface.

It is tempting to make this story into a warning about determination. But the details resist such a tidy interpretation. Shaw was not unprepared. He had rehearsed the task, designed equipment for it, consulted specialists, and assembled an extensive support team. He understood the danger. He had even told the other divers that if they encountered trouble, they should look after themselves rather than attempt to rescue him. The plan contained an instruction for failure. It did not necessarily contain a way to recognize that the mission itself had become the problem.

Perhaps this is where ritual becomes most interesting: not as a means of making the impossible possible, but as a way of establishing the conditions under which a person can recognize the impossible.

There is a difference between practicing a task and practicing its interruption. We rehearse the successful sequence: the switch, the signal, the handoff, the return. But what if the ritual also required the participant to rehearse being unable to finish? To imagine arriving at the bottom and discovering that the body will not fit into the bag. To imagine the equipment snagging, the timeline collapsing, the task becoming too large for the available hands.

What if the ritualist had to spit everything out?

A deliberately undignified ceremony might begin with the admission that the mouth is too full. The participant takes on more than they can chew, struggles, spits it out, and stands there with nothing accomplished. The humiliation is prewritten. It is part of the procedure, anticipated before anyone enters the room. There is no grand reveal, no unexpected exposure of inadequacy. The ritual has already made a place for coming up empty.

This sounds less like a ceremony of achievement than a ceremony of permission. Its purpose is to make retreat available before retreat becomes necessary. It might even be a way of protecting a person from the terrible pressure of having promised something—to a family, a team, a friend, a dead stranger—and then discovering that the promise exceeds the body carrying it.

The cave is not moved by promises. It does not know what a person intended, what they rehearsed, or what they owe someone waiting at the surface. It is an environment to be read, not persuaded. The diver has to attend to the conditions as they are, rather than the conditions the plan anticipated. Expertise may look like confidence from the outside, but perhaps its deeper form is the ability to notice when confidence has become irrelevant.

I keep returning to the possibility of a different ending. Not a successful recovery, necessarily. Not a different set of equipment or a better body bag. A moment in which someone recognizes that the task has become too large and turns toward the surface. The body remains below. The promise remains unfinished. There is no explanation that makes the outcome dignified.

And still, the diver comes back.

I wonder what kind of ritual could make that return possible. What would have to be practiced, repeated, and believed so that a person could come up without the body and not mistake the unfinished task for a failure of character? Perhaps the ceremony would have to begin before the dive, with the participant already on the floor, already spitting out what they cannot swallow. Perhaps the most difficult instruction would be to leave something behind.

There is a version of the story in which someone comes home without what they went down to retrieve. I find myself trying to imagine what would have made that possible.

Research notes and sources

The following sources informed the historical details. The prose does not quote them directly.

1. Tim Zimmermann, “Raising the Dead,” Outside, August 1, 2005. The most detailed narrative reconstruction of the recovery plan, technical preparation, body bag, practice dive, unexpected condition of Dreyer’s body, and Shaw’s final dive. Read the article.
2. ABC Australia, “To Boldly Go | David Shaw,” May 16, 2005. A documentary transcript with testimony from Shaw’s family, dive partner Don Shirley, filmmaker Gordon Hiles, and others, including their descriptions of the helmet-camera footage. Read/watch the ABC feature.
3. News24, “Video details ‘dive of death,’” January 13, 2005. Contemporary reporting on the camera footage, the entangled torch and lines, and the failed recovery attempt. Read the report.

4. ABC Australia, “Australian diver’s body recovered in South Africa,” January 13, 2005. Contemporary confirmation that Shaw and Dreyer were recovered together, connected and buoyant at approximately 35 meters. Read the report.

A factual nuance worth preserving: The story is not simply that Shaw forgot his safety procedures. The operation was extensively planned, and he had explicitly told his support divers to prioritize their own safety. The more unsettling question is how a carefully planned task can exceed its assumptions once the physical reality changes. Also, the shears are visible in the footage; the ABC documentary's account says he was unable to make the necessary cuts. I have avoided claiming he never attempted to use them.

The ending is intentionally unresolved. The father is present as an imagined alternative, not identified or explained.

The Warm Light of the Wallace Line

Word count 1191

There is a line in the ocean called the Wallace Line. It marks a biogeographical boundary between the animals of Asia and those of Australasia. On one side, one set of creatures; on the other, another. The line is not a wall, exactly, but a threshold. It makes visible the strange distribution of life: how things arrive, adapt, diverge, and become native to places they did not originate.

The way I learned about it, the creatures of an archipelago all came from somewhere else. They arrived by accident, by migration, by whatever improbable means life has of getting around. Eventually, their descendants belonged there. Their origins did not disqualify them from becoming part of the place. The ecosystem was made of arrivals.

I liked this idea. I still do.

I grew up in Hawai‘i, where the world seemed to have room for many kinds of origins. My childhood education included stories, lore, traditions, and ways of understanding the world that sat alongside mathematics and science. I remember an atmosphere in which the natural world could be practical and mysterious at the same time. The land was not merely scenery. It was full of presences, histories, and possibilities. There were gods and fairies, missionaries and hula, leis and dancing, all of it somehow sharing the same room.

I left when I was eleven.

There is a particular kind of loss in leaving a place before you understand what it has given you. You can remember the atmosphere but not necessarily the instructions for making it. You carry fragments: a vocabulary, a sensibility, a few doors into a world that you no longer know how to enter. Later, you might try to reconstruct the experience through research, through family stories, through the memories of people who stayed. You become an archivist of your own inheritance.

I have also become interested in the ways that identity is treated as a problem of origin. Where are you from? It sounds like a simple question, but it can become a demand for a coherent explanation. A person is expected to identify the correct starting point, the proper ancestry, the place that accounts for their appearance and behavior. Being multiracial can make this demand especially conspicuous. You are asked to explain a composition that other people have already decided is unusual.

Perhaps this is one reason fantasy has always offered me a kind of relief. In a fantasy world, everyone is unbelievable. There are different species, lineages, magical systems, gods, monsters, and improbable histories. Nobody has to pretend that the world is made up of one coherent people with one coherent origin. The premise is already strange. You can move between kinds of magic without having to explain why you are allowed to be there.

I think about the difference between science and magic through an image John O'Donohue offers: science as neon light, magic as warm, romantic light. Neon makes things clear. It illuminates edges, surfaces, distinctions. It is excellent for inspection. Warm light lets the room remain a little mysterious. It gives things atmosphere. It makes a home.

I don't want to turn this into an argument against science. I like science. Evolution is astonishing. Migration is astonishing. The Wallace Line is astonishing. But I wonder what happens when neon becomes the only acceptable lighting. When everything must be made explicit, categorized, measured, and explained before it can be taken seriously. What happens to the kinds of knowledge that depend on relationship, imagination, ritual, or the willingness to let something remain partly unknown?

The spore is scattered far away.

It lands on a continent. The ecosystem is larger, more continuous, and more homogeneous than the archipelago it came from. Difference exists, of course, but it is not necessarily normalized. The continent has its own ways of organizing life, and those ways can be rigid. There are established categories, dominant systems, and expectations about what counts as ordinary. Magic is not woven into everyday life in quite the same way. The spore cannot simply resume its old existence.

At first, it might look for an island. It might imagine that somewhere there must be a community of organisms with similar sensibilities: a place where plural spiritual frameworks, strange aesthetics, ritual, and play are part of the ordinary texture of life. Perhaps it looks toward psychedelic culture, experimental art communities, role-playing games, and other subcultures that make room for worldbuilding and imaginative possibility. These are not the same as the place it came from. They are not replacements. But they offer a kind of resonance.

Still, the spore does not find its island.

It mutates.

This is not a failure to return home. It is a new form of life, one that could not have existed in the original ecosystem. The spore carries something with it, but not an intact miniature island. It carries capacities: the ability to imagine multiple worlds, to move between systems of meaning, to find the everyday enchanted, to resist the assumption that reality has already been completely explained.

I think this is where Édouard Glissant's thinking about Relation becomes useful to me. Identity does not have to be a root that reaches backward toward one exclusive origin. It can be a rhizome, extending through encounters and relationships, changing as it grows. His idea of a right to opacity also appeals to me: the possibility of not having to become completely legible to someone else. Not every person, culture, or experience needs to be translated into a tidy explanation before it can be respected.

The archipelago offers one image of this kind of life. It is not a collection of identical islands, nor a single landmass pretending that its internal differences are insignificant. It is a system of distinct places connected by water, currents, arrivals, and departures. The gaps matter. The distances matter. The relationships are real without requiring sameness.

I don't want to make the island into paradise or the continent into a villain. Islands have their own histories of exclusion and hierarchy. Continents contain their own archipelagos, even when dominant systems fail to recognize them. But I am interested in the rigidity of continental thinking: the tendency to assume that belonging requires continuity, that a person must be traceable to a stable origin, that difference is an exception to be managed rather than a condition of life.

The spore doesn't have to become an ambassador for its lost ecosystem. It doesn't have to preserve everything, explain everything, or make its inheritance useful. It is allowed to enjoy what it carries. It can play. It can make strange things. It can sit in the warm light and let the world remain larger than the available explanations.

Perhaps home is not the place where the spore first germinated. Perhaps home is the sensibility it carries: the expectation that the world is plural, that arrivals can belong, that there are more ways of knowing than the dominant system has room to name.

The spore becomes something new. It does not recover what it lost. It does not need to.

And the world, illuminated differently, becomes expansive again.

The Right to Relax

Word count 1114

When I was eleven, my half-sister reminded me that I used to be a thumbsucker. I didn't tell her that I still was. There are certain things you learn to keep to yourself, even when they're technically childhood things, even when everyone knows that children do them. I had a private relationship with my thumb, and apparently it was time to retire it.

At thirteen, very close to my birthday, I made an announcement to myself: I am done with the thumbsucking thing. I turned a new leaf. I don't remember whether there was a ceremony. I imagine there should have been. A small graduation, perhaps. A certificate of completion. An official acknowledgment that I had successfully transitioned from one form of self-soothing to another, presumably more socially acceptable one.

I've been thinking about thumbsucking again because I've been thinking about being a stoner.

There's something funny about the way I remember my former stoner life. When I talk about it, I notice that I use a different map, a different vocabulary, a different atmosphere. I feel a certain ease. I remember the feeling of being high and slipping into a past-me suit. It doesn't quite fit anymore, but I recognize the fabric. And there's something peculiar about that: when I was high, I felt unmasked. I felt normal.

Perhaps this is one of the stranger things about self-soothing. Sometimes the thing that helps us feel most like ourselves is also the thing we eventually feel compelled to outgrow, hide, or explain.

I wonder whether being a stoner was a little like being a worshipper. Not necessarily because I was particularly spiritual, but because there was a ritual to it. There was anticipation, preparation, a first moment of the day when the world seemed to settle into place. I know the feeling of having my first drink of the day. I remember the feeling of having my first bong rip of the day. Maybe this is something people feel when they have their first prayer of the day.

I don't mean to collapse these experiences into one another. They have different meanings, different consequences, different cultural histories. But I am interested in the shared human impulse to create conditions in which we can inhabit ourselves more comfortably.

What if self-soothing is not necessarily a failure of self-sufficiency? What if it is one of the ways we learn to live?

I keep returning to the idea of a culture that understands the importance of expanding its window of tolerance while also providing something like air conditioning for the body. We talk a lot about resilience, about increasing our capacity to withstand discomfort, about becoming more flexible and more capable of managing difficult experiences. But what about the conditions themselves? What about the right to cool down? What about the possibility that a person doesn't always need to become more tolerant of an uncomfortable environment? Sometimes the environment could simply be made more comfortable.

Different cultures have different relationships to comfort, ritual, substances, and the body. The things one community regards as sacred, another might regard as indulgent. Something that feels like medicine to one person might look like a vice to someone else. I find myself wondering how much of our understanding of appropriate self-soothing is actually an understanding of the practice itself, and how much is a judgment about the person doing it.

There are people in my life — and, if I'm being honest, people in my own head — saying: That's bad. You're a druggie. I don't like you when you're like this.

It's a strange thing to discover that you can internalize the disapproval of an imaginary audience. I have tried to quit. There was a day when I decided smoking weed was expensive, and I stopped. That's a perfectly reasonable

explanation. It is also a surprisingly unceremonious ending to something that had once occupied a meaningful place in my life.

I wonder how much of my decision-making was about the practicalities and how much was about respectability. Was I finished with the practice, or was I finished with the identity? Was I moving on, or was I trying to distance myself from a version of myself that I had learned to regard as embarrassing?

Maybe I should watch *Thumbsucker* again. I remember being interested in the feeling of being out, of discovering another thumbsucker. There's a particular intimacy in finding someone who shares a supposedly embarrassing experience. You don't have to explain the mechanics of it. You don't have to defend the pleasure. There's a little recognition: Oh, you too.

I wonder whether this is part of what made stonerism feel like a community. Not simply the substance, but the recognition. A shared vocabulary, a shared map of the world, a way of understanding a particular kind of ease. And perhaps there's something tender about that, even if the practice itself isn't something I want to return to.

Recently, I talked with my coach Ellie about wanting to do a psychedelic writing adventure. I noticed that I was interested in the preparation, the diving, the lists. I had a nice feeling talking about my former stoner life. I wasn't necessarily expressing a desire to resume it. I was enjoying the memory of having belonged to something, of having had a relationship with a particular kind of relief.

Maybe I can appreciate that without needing to reenlist.

I keep thinking about the child who decided at thirteen that she was done with thumbsucking. I wonder what she thought she was accomplishing. Was she embarrassed? Was she proud? Did she imagine that growing up meant no longer needing certain kinds of comfort? Did she understand that the thumb had been doing something useful?

I wish I could have told her that there was nothing particularly shameful about wanting to feel settled. That the desire to soothe yourself isn't a character flaw. That sometimes you find a way to relax, and sometimes you find a different way, and neither experience needs to become a permanent identity.

I don't know whether you need a diagnosis or permission to explain why certain practices feel so meaningful. I don't know whether the language of sacrament, medication, and vice can ever adequately describe the variety of ways people make peace with being alive.

But I am interested in the question.

If prayer can be a daily practice, if medication can be a legitimate form of assistance, if rituals can help us feel at home in our bodies, then what exactly are we asking when we question someone else's way of finding relief?

And who gets to decide which forms of assisted peace count as peace?

How to Worship Latha: A Handbook for Secular Devotion

Word count 1583

An investigation into religious paraphernalia, self-authority, and the possibility that ritual can teach us to believe.

What if secular people have something to learn from worshippers? Not necessarily theology, doctrine, or even belief in a higher power, but the practical technologies of devotion: the objects, calendars, repetitions, gestures, and contemplative exercises that help organize a person's relationship with meaning. I've been circling around this question through an artistic project called How to Worship Latha, which might eventually become a handbook for investigating the possibility.

My curiosity has a personal dimension. My grandparents were Catholic and Christian; my parents inherited different relationships with religion, including my mother's combination of Christian and more unconventional spiritual interests and my father's Christianity. My generation, by contrast, identifies more readily with atheism. This distance from organized religion has left me with an interesting freedom. Ritual can feel foreign, almost like encountering an unfamiliar cultural technology. I don't have a firmly established religious identity to defend, so I can approach devotional practices as materials for experimentation.

Recently, while participating in a devised theatre game called Daggerheart, a tabletop roleplaying game inspired by Dungeons & Dragons, I selected the Seraphim class after the Druid class had already been taken. This seemingly incidental character choice returned me to a whirlpool of religious themes. I became interested in the relationship between inhabiting a role and developing a belief. Could writing about belief, or performing a character who believes, affect my own capacity to believe? Perhaps belief is not exclusively a prerequisite for ritual. Perhaps ritual is one of the ways we learn to believe.

One word that helped me articulate this interest was apotheosis. I encountered it in an inspirational thesaurus and was struck by its implications of elevation, glorification, and transformation into an ideal or divine form. I'm particularly interested in apotheosis as a process of self-actualization through devotion. What happens when I worship an aspirational figure as a way of becoming more like her?

Latha is that figure. She is an aspirational self, and How to Worship Latha is an investigation into the possibility of developing qualities I admire through a devotional relationship with her. Rather than treating worship as an exclusively theological activity, I want to explore it as a practice of self-authority. In a conversation with Ellie, I considered whether part of my attraction to religion might come from wanting a stronger sense of personal authority. What would it mean to establish a source of direction and legitimacy within myself, rather than waiting for external institutions or other people to provide it?

The rosary offers an intriguing place to begin. A rosary is a connection to prayer, but it is also a counting object. It provides a physical structure for repetition and attention. Prayer beads appear across different regions and religious traditions, suggesting a recurring human interest in material objects that help organize contemplative practice. I'm interested in the rosary not only as a sacred object but as a productivity technology. It offers a sequence, a tactile interface, and a reason to return to an activity. These are qualities that secular productivity systems also attempt to cultivate, although they don't always provide the same sense of significance.

I imagine developing a devotional kit alongside a liturgical calendar. The kit would include a headpiece, face makeup, ceremonial collar, rosary, ritual materials, pen and paper, cards, sacraments, prayer guide, tablecloth, and cups for

water. These are not merely costume accessories. They are paraphernalia my character desperately needs. Their presence makes the ritual tangible and establishes a threshold between ordinary activity and intentional practice.

The calendar would provide a corresponding temporal structure. Religious traditions organize time through recurring observances, seasons, and commemorations. A secular person might adapt this approach to creative work, personal development, or other ongoing commitments. Instead of relying exclusively on motivation, one could establish meaningful occasions for reflection, preparation, repetition, and celebration.

This brings me to an earlier interest in financial coaching. I regularly apply for and receive a microgrant through CCI's Quick Grant program. In the past, I hired Megan to coach me through activities intended to improve the financial success of my artistic practices. When that premise eventually went out the window, I found myself reconsidering what the underlying activities were actually offering. There was something valuable in having a framework, a recurring commitment, and someone helping me establish a relationship with my intentions. Could some of those benefits exist independently of financial outcomes?

I like the premise of worshippers having productivity tools that secular people can adapt for their own workflows. Religious practice can offer more than inspiration: it can offer infrastructure. A devotional handbook could investigate how to establish a ritual, how to select meaningful objects, how to construct a calendar, and how to create opportunities for contemplative attention. It might even include interviews with practicing Catholics to understand the practical and experiential dimensions of their devotional tools.

I don't want to assume that religious practice and productivity are interchangeable. The distinction matters. Worship involves an energetic connection, an orientation toward something considered worthy of reverence, and potentially a surrender that conventional productivity culture rarely accommodates. But perhaps this is precisely what makes it interesting. Productivity systems often ask what we can accomplish. Devotional systems might ask what deserves our attention in the first place.

My proposed handbook is therefore both an artistic project and a personal experiment. Exhibit A is the rosary. Exhibit B is the liturgical calendar. Exhibit C is scripture. Each offers a different way of organizing attention, time, and meaning. Through Latha, I can experiment with these materials without needing to resolve every theological question beforehand.

Perhaps the most interesting possibility is that devotion can be practiced before it is fully understood. I can assemble the kit, mark the calendar, learn the gestures, and see what changes. The question isn't whether I can convince myself of a particular doctrine. It's whether adopting the technologies of worship might help me develop a more authoritative relationship with my own aspirations.

What if secular people reclaimed the contemplative and organizational intelligence of religious traditions? What if we treated the cultivation of belief as an artistic practice? I don't yet know what I believe about Latha. That's partly why I want to build the handbook.

Composition Notes

Composition Notes: How to Worship Latha

1. Original research and source material

The essay originated from my notes exploring:

- The rosary as a devotional and counting object.
- The possibility of developing a personal faith practice.

- *How to Worship Latha*, an emerging artistic campaign and handbook concept.
- The relationship between religious paraphernalia, ritual, and productivity.
- My family's multigenerational relationship with Christianity and religion.
- The concept of apotheosis, encountered through an inspirational thesaurus.
- My experience playing a Seraphim character in the tabletop roleplaying game *Daggerheart*.
- Previous financial coaching and CCI Quick Grant experiences.

2. Conceptual development through eight questions

I used an eight-question multiple-choice interview to clarify the essay's direction.

Question	My selection	Contribution
1. Central thesis	C	Self-authority as the central motivation.
2. Personal origin	D	Experimenting with performing belief as a form of agency.
3. Rosary	E	Understanding devotional objects as productivity technologies.
4. Latha	B	Latha as an aspirational self.
5. Religious inheritance	D	Freedom to borrow and adapt religious practices.
6. Apotheosis	B	Self-actualization through devotion.
7. Practical experiment	C	A ritual kit combined with a liturgical calendar.
8. Intended conclusion	B	Investigating what secular people can learn from religious organizational and contemplative practices.

3. Major creative decisions

- Established self-authority as the essay's central argument.
- Connected theatrical roleplaying to the possibility of developing belief through performance.
- Reframed the rosary as both a sacred object and a practical technology for repetition and attention.
- Positioned Latha as an aspirational figure rather than simply a fictional character.
- Introduced apotheosis as a framework for personal transformation.
- Developed the handbook as the tangible outcome of the inquiry.
- Organized the proposed handbook around three exhibits: the rosary, the liturgical calendar, and scripture.

4. Further research opportunities

- Interview a practicing Catholic about rosary use and devotional routines.
- Research the history and cross-cultural use of prayer beads without assuming all traditions serve identical purposes.
- Investigate the relationship between ritual, habit formation, attention, and motivation.
- Research the liturgical calendar and its organizational principles.
- Clarify the definition and historical use of apotheosis.

- Examine how secular productivity systems might benefit from contemplative rather than purely outcome-oriented practices.

5. Working hypothesis

Belief may not always precede practice. Practice may also cultivate belief.

The handbook will investigate whether adapting devotional tools and structures can help secular practitioners develop self-authority, intentionality, and a more meaningful relationship with their aspirations.

6. AI collaboration disclosure

AI was used as an interview and synthesis tool. I supplied the original notes, selected the conceptual directions through eight multiple-choice questions, and provided the central ideas and project framework. AI assisted with organizing, connecting, and drafting the material into an essay. The resulting essay is a working composition for further review and revision.

A note on the next stage

I think the handbook is potentially the more interesting long-term artifact. The essay establishes the hypothesis; the handbook could become the actual research instrument.

One particularly productive next step would be to develop a prototype with three sections:

1. Objects: What does a practitioner need?
2. Time: How does a practitioner organize devotion?
3. Practices: What does a practitioner actually do?

That would let How to Worship Latha function as both an artistic work and an experiment in secular devotional design.

Adjust the Opacity: Toward a Handbook for Plural Creative Practice

Word count 1645

I have been trying to find my voice. More precisely, I have been trying to discover what happens when I stop assuming that I have only one. Identity, like artistic practice, might be better understood as an ecosystem than a finished portrait. I am interested in plurality: the coexistence of contradictory impulses, competing interests, different registers of sincerity, and ways of knowing that don't always translate neatly into one another. Perhaps the lyrical essay is a particularly hospitable form for this kind of investigation. It can accommodate research and autobiography, humor and reverence, intellectual rigor and associative leaps. It can make a home for things that might otherwise be asked to choose sides.

My recent studies have involved a curious weaving of mental health, creativity, executive function, play, humor, and clerical practice. I have been looking for connections among these subjects, but I am increasingly interested in the weaving itself as a creative methodology. Rather than deciding in advance what my artistic identity should look like, I want to conduct a series of experiments and observe what emerges. The experiments are not simply exercises in self-expression. They are ways of discovering my values, aesthetic preferences, intellectual commitments, and perhaps even the conditions under which I do my best thinking.

One aesthetic tension I keep returning to is the fluctuation between irony and sincerity associated with metamodernism. I am drawn to the sacred and the ridiculous, sometimes simultaneously. Humor can make room for reverence without requiring solemnity. It can puncture an inflated idea while preserving the possibility that the idea matters. I have wondered whether some of my experiences of attention, executive function, and creative energy might be understood through this oscillation. I suspect I have AuDHD, although I don't want to make a diagnosis the organizing principle of my artistic identity. What interests me is the creative possibility of moving between modes of engagement: earnestness and skepticism, play and commitment, intellectual investigation and intuitive discovery.

A phrase I would like to give all authors is "adjust the opacity." I first imagined this as an instruction about how much of something should be visible. In visual art and cinema, opacity can be a technical quality, but it can also become an ethical decision. What do we reveal? What do we leave partially obscured? Who gets to look, and who is expected to become legible? These questions connect my interest in finding a voice with feminist cinematic ethics and Édouard Glissant's poetics of relation.

Glissant's thinking about relation and opacity offers an alternative to the expectation that another person must become completely knowable before we can encounter them. Feminist cinematic ethics similarly invites a reconsideration of the camera's relationship to its subjects. Rather than treating the camera as an instrument of imperial voyeuristic capture, we might understand it as a relational medium rooted in care and reciprocity. The ethical challenge is to frame difference without reducing it to a consumable commodity. Film becomes an encounter between subjects rather than a tool of mastery.

I wonder whether these principles might also inform lyrical essay writing. A writer is constantly making decisions about representation: how much autobiography to disclose, how to characterize another person, when to explain an experience, and when to allow it to remain mysterious. The essayist's authority is not necessarily derived from making everything transparent. Perhaps a more ethical and interesting form of authorship emerges when the writer recognizes that not everything belongs to them to explain.

This is one reason I want to experiment with form. Plurality might be expressed through multiple voices, fragments, juxtaposition, changes in register, and unexpected connections. An essay could move from a theoretical argument about cinematic ethics to a personal reflection about a workshop, then to a ridiculous clerical ritual, without having to apologize for its associative intelligence. The connections would need to be meaningful, but they wouldn't necessarily need to be linear. I am interested in writing that allows its subjects to remain distinct while discovering their relationships.

I already have some supporting evidence from my artistic practice. A review from a Fringe writer offers one perspective on how my work has been received. My experiences with online workshops offer another: a record of how structured creative encounters can generate unexpected discoveries. Kismet activities provide a third body of material, demonstrating how collaborative artistic experimentation can bring together people, disciplines, and ideas. These are not merely anecdotes to decorate an essay. They are potential case studies in the development of a creative methodology.

One particularly satisfying writing experience came from preparing a grant proposal for a workshop called *Alternative Effort*. I enjoyed applying myself to specific questions and discovering that the constraints of the application could actually stimulate my thinking. Feedback from my financial counselor and encouragement that the proposal was competitive made the experience feel even more rewarding. I appreciated the particularity of the task. Instead of confronting the enormous, amorphous question of what I wanted to create, I had a series of concrete questions to answer. Writing became an adventure because the problem had boundaries, stakes, and possibilities.

A question from a writing coach has stayed with me: How would I make writing an adventure? It made me consider whether some of the resistance I experience around writing comes from conditioning that might not even belong to me. Perhaps I have inherited assumptions about productivity, professionalism, discipline, or what constitutes legitimate intellectual work. Perhaps I have confused the ability to perform someone else's preferred process with the ability to develop my own. What would happen if I treated writing as an opportunity for discovery rather than a demonstration of competence?

This brings me to an emerging possibility: a creative handbook that combines research, writing experiments, play, humor, ritual, and reflection. I am interested in investigating whether these practices could eventually inform a professional direction involving psychedelic arts therapy. I don't yet have a settled model or a conclusion about what certification or practice might entail. For now, I want to investigate the possibility through a more modest and immediate project: documenting experiments, collecting evidence, developing exercises, and noticing which approaches produce meaningful experiences.

The handbook would be both a practical resource and a record of inquiry. It might include prompts for shifting narrative perspective, exercises in adjusting opacity, collaborative experiments, playful constraints, and reflective questions about the relationship between sincerity and irony. It could invite participants to investigate their own creative conditions without requiring them to adopt a predetermined artistic identity. Research citations would function as companions and provocations rather than academic ornaments.

I am also interested in distinguishing the gems from the fillers. Not every experiment needs to become a permanent practice. Some will be illuminating precisely because they fail. The handbook should make room for documentation, revision, and the occasional ridiculous dead end. Five curiosities successfully woven with ten supporting citations might be a game worth playing, but the real prize would be discovering which connections have enough vitality to sustain further investigation.

I don't want to write myself into a singular identity. I want to develop a practice capable of accommodating the many ways I think, feel, work, and imagine. Perhaps finding my voice means becoming more comfortable with its plurality. Perhaps style is not a fixed signature but a set of values expressed through repeated choices. And perhaps the most useful instruction I can offer another writer is not to become more transparent, more consistent, or more easily understood.

Adjust the opacity. Let the sacred be ridiculous. Let the research become an adventure. Allow the islands to remain islands, while discovering what passes between them.

Composition notes: documenting my contributions

Original intellectual and creative contributions

- Established the central concept of weaving as a methodology for discovering voice, style, and values through lyrical essay experiments.
- Introduced plurality of identity as the essay's philosophical center.
- Identified the fluctuation between irony and sincerity, particularly the relationship between the sacred and the ridiculous.
- Supplied the phrase "adjust the opacity" as a guiding artistic and ethical principle.
- Connected feminist cinematic ethics with Édouard Glissant's poetics of relation.
- Identified mental health, creativity, executive function, play, humor, and clerical practice as research interests.
- Supplied the *Alternative Effort* grant-writing experience as an example of writing becoming an adventure through structured questions and feedback.
- Identified the Fringe review, online workshops, and Kismet activities as supporting case studies.
- Proposed a creative handbook combining research, writing prompts, play, humor, ritual, and reflective exercises.
- Introduced the possibility of investigating psychedelic arts therapy as a future professional direction.

Eight-question customization process

Question	Your contribution
1. Central discovery	E — Methodology of weaving
2. What is weaving?	Finding voice, style, and values through experiments
3. Theoretical framework	Expressing plurality in identity
4. Formal expression	Plurality as an underlying concern
5. Tonal identity	A — The sacred and the ridiculous
6. Desired outcome	B + D — Plural identity and transformative experiences

7. Supporting evidence	C — Case studies
8. Next step	D — A creative handbook

Editorial and synthesis contributions

- Organized the original notes into a central argument.
- Developed transitions connecting personal inquiry, theoretical frameworks, artistic evidence, and future possibilities.
- Expanded the cinematic ethics discussion into a consideration of authorship and representation in lyrical essays.
- Connected the grant-writing experience to the idea of structured creative adventure.
- Proposed the handbook as a concrete outcome without presenting an exploratory professional interest as an established qualification or practice.

Research note: This draft incorporates the theoretical ideas you supplied but does not yet contain ten verified scholarly citations. Those should be researched and integrated in a subsequent revision rather than invented.

My editorial recommendation: preserve this as the *gems* essay. It has a coherent argument and a strong closing refrain. The next essay could investigate the fillers: the experiments, assumptions, and inherited writing habits that don't belong in the handbook.