

# part i

## prelude

I had taken the scorned artist route in my second half of college. My first few years were spent not-really-studying engineering. All these Excel spreadsheets and hours in the dark learning high level abstract math caused me to feel isolated from the arts that were crying out to be expressed from the lower layers of my subconscious. In my mind, college was meant to be serious, and I felt like I was out of place as an artist. Shit, I didn't even want to call myself an artist when creating art within the Greek life, social scene. I'd even been creating under the pseudonym, McSteezy so that I could anonymously create my art. Granted, I told almost literally every single person I met that I created art under a pseudonym, but that's what it's like trying to be mysterious when you so desperately want to be seen. It seemed like everyone around me was plugging numbers into an excel sheet for the hopes of an eventual salary job and I was doodling all over my notes with characters I made to represent myself. Once I'd found out I could use my art to better understand my own mind, everything else besides art and the natural world left my brain.

I had started to hide my art away from the public eye. "Cool culture" had little room for the tortured artist I had evolved into, so I began creating art in radio silence. In this one instance, I took to the 5th floor of the Southwest Downtown Parking Garage to beautify an electrical box. Every floor of the parking garage was decked out in masterful murals from incredibly talented artists from around Florida. One mural stood out

particularly to me; it was the large ape on the second floor. This gorilla sprawled over the archway that helped to support the floor above it in a thoughtful pose. In my young mind, I assumed that graffiti artists had independently tagged the garage without permission to create their pieces. In hindsight, these had clearly been painted over the course of the construction of the garage, but let's suspend disbelief and imagine a young Mitch felt as if he was contributing to the arts of Gainesville by tagging an open wall on the electrical box. I brought my paints, some brushes, some paper bags to fashion drip cloths out of, and skated to the 5th floor to add my flair to the electrical box. That was a memory at the time of this evening. In my mind, the fluid tangles of black acrylic paint layered over each other and tied together in some abstract symbolism. I hadn't known what I'd been painting at the time, as I never know what I'm painting until later, when I'm done. Tonight, I will find out what's been on my mind in conjunction with my first listening experience of this posthumous album, *Circles*, from my favorite, recently deceased artist, Mac Miller. I'll unpack my own abstractions in my own art with perspectives that are essentially coming to me from beyond the grave.

I'm pacing my room as I feel a sense of giddiness with my present situation. I'm done with all that I need to do for the day, and can finally sit down with this art that I'd so been looking forward to being released. I had been nursing some valuable motifs and concepts I'd picked up from this rapper's last album, but he'd since died, leaving me with a lot of unanswered questions. Once it was announced the companion album to that album would be released posthumously, I began looking forward to this day as a resolution to this dissonance I'd

been left with by a life cut short by drug overdose. I'd been skating in a parking garage downtown a lot lately since I enjoyed caving the gentle slope from the top floor to the bottom with my buddies. We could simply take the stairs from the bottom back to the top and repeat this gentle ride back down to the bottom to our heart's content. The best part is that this garage was adorned with a plethora of murals from all sorts of different artists, so it sat reverently in my mind as a museum I could skate through.

As I'm pacing the floor, thinking about the fun I'd had painting the electrical box on the roof of the building, on a beautiful day with clear blue sky, the idea to synthesize multiple groovy ideas into one epic, artistic outing comes to mind; I can experience the music that I was ecstatic to ponder, while observing talented local artists' work, and end with seeing what my place is in this artistic world by capping off the adventure with my piece on the top floor. It feels like there's a music and arts festival being thrown just for me just a short five mile bike ride from my house.

Now that I had mentally put myself on this track, it was time to set the contextual stage for this album I'll be hearing for the first time tonight. In order to lead up to this posthumous album, I wanted to set the stage with some previous projects by Mac for artistic context. The posthumous album, *Circles*, was to be a companion to his last album, *Swimming* to complete the motif, "Swimming in Circles." I wanted to contextualize this new album by spinning one of the vinyls I had, *G0:0D AM*, which had been released good three years ahead of *Circles*. In the years since its release and the artist's death I'd spent a lot of time unpacking the last album, *Swimming*. In that time, I'd noticed that, in my personal experience with the music, *Swimming* conveyed the

sense of peace while keeping your head above water among choppy currents. Upon sitting with and processing with that album, I had found the ability to keep swimming when I found myself in troubled waters, which was often for a goofy-minded, fundamentally abstract 22-year-old.

Over the first hour and 15 minutes, I sat with GO:0D AM as the record spun and I sat back, attentively listening for motifs that I hoped we'd be expanding on this evening. Something was wrong by the end of the first album. Each song takes me on a small artistic journey that would be microcosms of the whole album.

*What follows is my experience with each song I'd hear over the evening.*

## Doors

At first, I was smiling and giggling with myself as the first song playfully set the scene for a night of catharsis and understanding. The first few songs instilled some giddiness in me as I make a little nest on the wood floor of the “record room” in the house myself and two homies were renting. The song “Doors” opens the album as Mac sets the stage to say “Good morning,” or “G0:0D AM,” to the world. Keep in mind that Malcolm McCormick, the artist known as Mac Miller, had died 468 days prior, but now Mac lays it down for me from beyond the grave with his opening lines to the album. He says, “You know it’s been a minute since I been awake. Didn’t mean to cause you pain, I just needed to escape.”

What a cool experience I was having! Here I was, all alone, a night of thinking with my more abstract mind to commune with my favorite artist from beyond the grave. It’s been a while since he’s been awake. Well, duh! He’s been dead for a little over a year at this point. It hurt when he died, too. The artist whose music I had grown up in parallel with had left us. The sadness I felt when I knew I would not have more of his music to enjoy and relate to was not just mine; it was felt by a vast majority of my peers, or at least I felt as such.

Hearing that it was not an intentional pain that he caused me by his departure was a nice sentiment. I understand the need to escape! There were many times where I felt the creativity in me could only be expressed in the bleakest of solitudes. I am mostly feeling excitement for the opportunity to be in this space to receive the messages of this art, as I’d sectioned myself away from my social scene so I could have a personal experience with the music. I believe there’s something in the art for me that I need to hear.

So here I sit in the record room cross-legged, with my roommates turntable, ready for a transcendent experience with art, imagining this evening to be a solo celebratory music festival. I have my favorite possible listening experience to look forward to with Mac Miller's music the day it's released (posthumously, even) and my favorite setting, my house with my dog, Bear. We were safe, and we were comfortable through the end of the first song. "Doors" closes with a woman's voice seductively saying "Good morning baby."

## **Brand Name**

I woke up with a jolt! The voice that had just welcomed me to this good morning was sharply juxtaposed by the harsh buzz of an alarm clock. I guess there are multiple ways to wake up. I knew this song. Realistically, all of these songs were burnt into my brain over years of pressing play on the same playlists to workout or “turn up.” I knew this song was fun. Just the sound of the intro conveyed the “Oh boooooooyyyyyy here we go,” feeling within me.

I start to slip into an abstract mindset as I meditate with the song, bringing me into the music. Mac helps me to orient myself in this new, artistic, subliminal space we find ourselves in tonight. He tells me, “We in between heaven and hell.” Alright. Cool. Between heaven and hell. I’m on board, I’m stoked to be here. Realistically, I have no idea what’s going on, but I’m open to new experiences.

Most of “Brand Name” was Mac boasting and flexing his wealth and status, as rappers are known to do here and there. Constantly, he refers to style being “nothing but a brand name,” which serves to debase the value of high fashion and luxury. All verses lead to his biggest flex about his style on the song, saying, “this right here is handmade.” It’s worth more because of the intention, time, and care that went into it. One would have to pay a lot of money to attain it, or receive it as a gift from a lovely friend or companion. Any time my friends give me a handmade gift or a hand picked trinket from the woods, it feels like it means more. You’d have my heart if you gave me a rock and told me you found it for me.

Songs like these would tend to stress me out. I’d call songs like this a “banger.” Bangers were fun songs

that were very high energy. I would tend to listen to these songs at bars or parties since they were fun to sing along to and most people knew the chorus. They were fun in those settings, but once I was employing some patient, mindful; introspection, the fun was gone and I was left with “wow, is this really what I think fun is?”

The song fades out with a scattered musical ambience of saxophones and looped vocals giving me the space for a thought. “That parking garage! The one with the murals!” flashes across my mind’s eye. The heavenly woman’s voice comes back in with “La la laaaaaa,”

Mac finishes song #2 with saying a welcoming, “Good morning.”



## **Rush Hour**

Well, now I'm awake, but by the time track 3 opens, my intentions have already shifted. I'm going to finish this album to add the necessary context for this trip, then I'm out of here. It's not like I can take the turntable with me, so might as well. Besides, Mac is really speaking to me here, saying "I give a fuck less and less every day," so I might as well hear what he has to say. Mac Miller was twenty-three years old when he released this album so I think his sentiments are easy for me to relate to at this time in life, since I'm a rambunctious twenty-two (and a half!) year old. I noticed feelings of disillusionment with my life's current path come back to mind. I have felt my connection to my life slipping away for the last little bit. I get Malcom's caring less every day.

I'm feeling the music more than the lyrics at this point. Mac is mostly flexing with his words, but the beat is communicating a boisterous feeling more than anything else. The rapid high hats over the quick and pounding bass line is the musical equivalent of watching a time lapse video of traffic moving. It's telling me that it's time to move. There's places to be and you might as well be there already. "Move, Mitch, Move!" the song says. Like rush hour traffic, I have somewhere I'd like to be but I am stuck in place by the avenue I took to get there. An immobile method of listening to this album was the catalyst for this traffic jam in my head. I wanted to be in the parking garage but the vinyl kept me on 23rd terrace. I stand up to go gather my things, then sit back down.

"I am still. I am peaceful. I can allow this to unfold as it will." I try to persuade my anxious energy into agreement. There's no need to get ahead of myself and I'm aware of this, but the ramping up of my anxiety while sitting in traffic in my head is making it tougher than

usual to stay mindful of this. As I sit in my meditative nest of pillows and blankets, my mind is so occupied with a fluid and ever-evolving stream of thought. When meditating like this, my thought process is so smooth in my mind, that the original nugget that catalyzes a new thought is almost forgotten about by the time I get to the end of the train of thought. It's like if you took off on such a long hike that you forgot what the trailhead looked like and what the trail was even called. I had been allowing my thought stream to flow so fluidly for so long that I forgot the original intention was to sit here with the music. So I'd stand every so often. I'd wistfully move the items I'd need for my bike ride into a loose pile.

My mind is already at the destination. My mind is on the bike. My mind is at the parking garage. I can see myself, eyes wide, as I look up to the walls of this parking garage, lost in wonder. I can see this play out as if I were in a movie. It's Rush Hour, so it makes sense. I'm stuck here, but my mind is longing for the destination. And like traffic, the present setting isn't the best, as nobody likes sitting on a long stretch of road while other frustrated folks are expressing their impatience with honks.

I compare sitting in traffic to the boastful, shallow lyrics that Mac is spitting over the beat. It's party music made to boast, flex, and pop bottles along to. I'm meditating with art! I don't want to hear this shit, Mac. I want to hear some line that strikes a chord in my heart. I want to hear a lyric that makes it into the note on my phone titled "Quotes I Actually Like."

But it doesn't come. The last lyric Mac leaves me with in the mental traffic is, "the world don't give a fuck about your loneliness." I was lonely. I had been lonely for a long time. I had many one-night-stands, and a handful of "situationships," but I hadn't been

comfortable building any sort of extra-platonic relationships in the last two years due to the abuse I'd suffered in my last relationship. The world don't give a fuck about your loneliness. This was news to me. The whole time I had been feeling alone, I was at least finding some solace in the fact that everyone around me appreciated my loneliness. The illusions that I was the "mysterious and brooding, single fellow" or the "bro who could party the most fun" were disappearing like sand in the hands of my mind. I thought I was able to be seen as those tropes because of my loneliness. I thought it helped me to be who I am and I am shocked that the world doesn't commiserate with me in my periods of solitude. I think that I am who I am because of my loneliness.

"The world don't give a fuck about your loneliness."

## **Two Matches (feat. Ab-Soul)**

Two Matches opens with Mac ensuring the audience, myself, know that he's seen some shit. He's been present for some real hard, tough stuff. He's been the soundtrack to some wild stories. People have been playing Mac Miller's music along to some crazy events, some might say. Presently, the voice speaking from the grooves in the disc feels sentient as if this recorded voice were conscious and present when being played. It feels like Mac is with me in the room as I listen. Not the physical person, but the musical motif. It's not feeling at all like reality, where I'm listening to a pre-recorded album for the world in my front room. I smile as I breathe in, loving myself for having trained my brain to dissect music like this so I could take away important perspectives that can help me live a better life. It's feeling like this is happening around me; as if I'm in the room with Mac Miller's disembodied artistic spirit as he tells me what I need to hear. Thinking that this music has been the soundtrack for others as they go through potentially traumatic events was spooky. This musical motif of a person must have been present for some clearly fucked up situations for him to be telling me that he's seen some shit. The voice that I'm listening to has seen others in bad situations. I hope this isn't foreshadowing for what's going to happen this evening.

“Hey, blow out your candles, make a wish. What's a life if you never take a risk? Ain't a place too far, ain't a dream too big.” I smile. This is the voice I wanted to hear, telling me that I can do it. Telling me that I am ready for this experience. It has been a long time coming, so tonight, I just need to take a chance. I've done that before and it usually works out! I can manage this expedition; the future bike ride, the future ascent up the garage, and any future emotions that come with. I'm

thinking of all I might learn from beyond the grave this evening. Mac sings, “Ain’t nothing wrong with a little bit of fun” and I smile.

The end of the song approaches as the two rappers, Mac and Ab-Soul, talk back and forth, discussing the differences of what makes good different from bad and how everyone has a role that they play, some good and some bad. This leads Mac to noting that there aren’t many differences between the highs and the lows, between the good and the evil. Looking back on it, I see the artistry in including this snippet, but I’m not very aware of it in the present. I’m busy looking at that floor. The floor my bare feet stand on.

The floor in the “Record Room” is a lattice of wood rectangles. Three rectangular blocks were placed parallel to each other to make a square. Then the squares are arranged in a chess board of horizontal arrangements to vertical arrangements. It’s like layers of a Jenga wall sat next to one another. If I stand up and look down on it, the depths of the horizontally arranged squares contrast with the levity of the vertically arranged squares. The horizontal squares seem to be set deeper into the floor than the vertical ones. If I get down low and look into the individual rectangles, I can see the dark stain on the hardwood planks. There’s growth patterns in the wood grain that capture my attention. It’s absolutely beautiful as I imagine what conditions led to the wood growing this way. I appreciate the subtleties of this human designed home that still manages to tell a story of nature.

I take a second to drink some water. “Holy shit, that’s good!” I forgot about water, but now, it’s all there is. I can feel it splash behind my sternum after it makes its way down my throat. I can feel it cool my upper chest as it radiates out and down to my upper, and then lower,

belly. I can feel the life as it is replenished in me as the water spiderwebs its way through my body. It is as if my body is thankful for the extra hours I'd bought myself if dying of thirst were to become a concern. I pet Bear on the head. She doesn't know what's going on but she had gotten used to my coming home from the bars and blasting this music by myself. By now, I wouldn't be surprised if she knew the words to these specific songs. I mean, I know everything about these albums. By now, I'd had hundreds of listens to each song. I knew that it was better to listen to complete albums top to bottom to make sure I got the musical context the pieces of art were in, so I had a solid grasp over which songs followed which. In the brief intermissions between songs, the beats and lyrics would taper off and my mind would get to chime in with thoughts again, unhindered by the fear of missing a concept due to an interrupting thought. This is where my anxiety fits in perfectly. As Two Matches fades out, previews for future anxiety take a stab at me. I think about three songs in particular, Perfect Circle / Godspeed, Ascension, and Jump.

With the context of my plans in mind, I get excited by the concept of a Perfect Circle by Mac Miller on the night where I find out what his posthumous idea of Circles is all about. To contextualize what this meant to me, I had come to a new sense of peace with concepts I unpacked from the Swimming album from 2018. I had come to places in the world of mindfulness and spirituality with many of these motifs he introduced back then. 2 years later, I was excited to find out how these motifs would develop, especially with the idea of transcending the veil between life and death to convey said concepts. Besides, the song Perfect Circle/Godspeed had become one of my all time

favorites by Mac. I suppose tonight is the night for the circle to be perfect, if any!

Now, looking ahead to Ascension and Jump is less exciting. Somewhat often in recent years, I had been faced with questions when I looked into the depths of my psyche; abstract questions, existential questions, spiritual questions, questions I didn't want answers to, questions that my answers couldn't solve, you name it. When I'd opened myself up to spirituality and transcendentalism, I'd find that I wanted to follow these mental pathways, these abstract questions to the end of the line.

Unfortunately for me, many times the answers to these questions were, "kill yourself, then." It felt as if my psyche had grown tired of my ego's anxious questions that it would give a very flat "are you gonna kill yourself about it?" to end the stream of what-if's. So many times had I been faced with a "kill yourself," that I had grown numb to the alarm that I should have heard going off. I had been taking the angle of "well, if it's not worth killing yourself over, it's not worth stressing yourself over," which had been proving very worthy. So worthy, that I became desensitized to the sound of the alarm that used to scare me. Now the alarm would ring, flash, and wail while I pat myself on the back for overcoming another existential crisis.

## 100 Grandkids

All of the sudden, a bouncy, punching beat breaks up my train of thought. "Thank God!" I think. My train of thought was getting awfully close to the "kill yourself" spiral that I was used to running from and sliding down. I did not actively want to die at all. In my mind, I was a misunderstood, tortured, artistic genius who was unlucky enough to develop anxiety. I felt like my anxiety was contracted like the flu, and my careless self could never be bothered to wash my hands. I couldn't be too scared since I had become a master of navigating mental struggles. Realistically, I had gotten somewhat good at identifying and processing hardships and learning to grow from them. I'd made progress with mindful concepts, but had been mostly unsuccessful at implementing them. Still, I was swimming in the waters of my mind, doing my best to stay afloat but still making notable progress towards my goal.

As Mac begins rapping, I roll the eyes of my mind. "I don't care, Mac" I think as he flexes through some filler lines. I get it, you sell drugs. I get it, you've got money.

He then pivots, "I put the hero in heroin." I pause. He continues rapping but I take a moment to deconstruct. Obviously, it's nutty wordplay since the word hero is literally in the word heroin but now I'm asking why. Mac Miller had become my personal hero over the years. I was able to associate with and really feel his lyrics as I had grown up just a few years younger. It was beautiful to watch the artist who made some of my middle school and high school anthems step into their potential and continue to make impactful art that consistently resonates as the years went on. He really was an artist who did what he was called to do and it worked out. After seeing so many "role models" talk a



big game about plans to break the mold and end up working the office job 9-5, Mac Miller was hero material having followed the creative route in such a way. But what did he mean by “hero in heroine?” I know damn well that heroin is bad news. I’m not the best with setting boundaries, but needles are a very hard boundary for me.

The walls around me feel both expansive and confining. They change back and forth between the two as I pivot back and forth between gut wrenching anxiety and goofy excitement. The anxious feeling felt like a mixture of hunger and the need to puke. All of it manifests physically in me. The hunger sits two inches down from my sternum and two inches back. In just around the same part of my upper stomach, a rising anxiety would threaten to rise up from behind my chest. Imagine the sensation you feel as you vomit, but if it never made it out of your throat. An overarching feeling of a cold sweat would make me feel ill. My anxious thoughts were manifesting physically. The confidence feels like aw warm wash over my head and chest. I am going between a sauna and a cold plunge of feelings.

The seconds start to last a little longer as I dive deep into the sonic experience. My thoughts feel as if they ran out on to slippery ice. As they ran through my mind. they got some momentum as the meditative state that incense, intention, and tranquil solitude kicked in. On this ice, my thoughts had lost the traction and stability they have when I use my left brain to operate, and the momentum they gained on stable ground was carrying them as they glided over the smooth and slick surface of the ice. They were sailing over a smooth surface as they evolved. I feel the thoughts evolving, developing, and flowing away faster and more fluidly than I can observe one long enough to really see what it

is. Because my thoughts were evolving so rapidly and freely, I hadn't noticed as I'd come out of the anxious hole. I was along for the ride now.

It's at this point I stand up from my little nest I made with pillows and blankets on the wood floor. Once I do, I notice that my point of view has shifted. It rose by about 4 feet! Now, the records, the wood planks, and the pillows that had been billboards, trees, and mountain topography up close were shrunk down to being smaller than what they really were. Laughing at myself again, I stand firm but without tension so that I get acclimate to the new altitude. It's a new world up here with a lot to adjust to.

Snapping back to the music, I hear a second voice sampled on the track that I wasn't so familiar with. After Mac was done explaining how he felt like king after his first hundred grand, I hear a woman's voice asking "Oh, you the shit?" and soon after "Oh, you a king?" Looking down on the room around me, I notice that I feel more powerful and significant from this place of height and looking down on my surroundings. I take a deep breath from this point and feel a sense of peace.

## **Time Flies (feat. Lil B)**

While I'm up, the needle of the turntable makes its way to the innermost groove on the record, and a soft, rolling static fills the air. *G0:0D AM* is a 4 LP album, so there's more flipping of records than I'd prefer, but at least the sound quality is the tits. I raise the needle, stop the vinyl from spinning, lift the disk, flip it, and place it back on the slipmat. I restart the turntable and lightly place the needle back down onto the disk.

"Time flies, time flies..." Lil B, the feature on the sixth track of this album begins with a monotone drawl. "As we keep living and as we keep being positive, all we can do is hold onto these memories. Mac Miller, I love you." With the context of Mac Miller's death and the new perspective of him putting the hero in heroin, this line had become tainted. I know that I had been committed to being as positive a person as I possibly could be, in every situation I could as of late, which I was very proud of. I genuinely feel like I have been more positive than ever up until now. I have my struggles, but I'm positive about it. I notice that I have been holding onto memories as well. I think back to when Mac dropped the song *Missed Calls* in 2011, when I was in 7th grade. I remember listening to that song with my girlfriend and feeling like the music was accurately representing the story I was living. It was almost uncanny even back then. I remember spending time in Lancaster Park with my 8th grade girlfriend, and going home to my buddies' house to play the most relatable Mac songs after. As I grew, I began to experiment and learn who I am and who I am becoming. I remember coming into a new plane of self awareness. I remember facing my demons and cleaning the skeletons out of my closet. I remember the first time I accepted my mortality, and the first time I could stand to face the depths of personal pain. I remember my first

mental journey to the dark side of creativity. Most of these memories were in some way tied to Mac's music. I used a lot of his art as a sort of guidance for the processes. It was much easier to understand my thoughts when I had a framework of somebody else's experiences to weave my thoughts through. More than anything, it was nice to feel like I wasn't alone in my pain. All of the pain I feel as a result of the relationships I maintain, and the environment I exist in was validated by this relatability. It was also connective to share a love for this music with others. It was a sort of way to say, "Hey, me too," and, "I'm with you" in a much greater context when sharing a strong relation to a concept that was so complex.

The record continues to play, and I can visualize the rap lines being flung out of the vinyl as it spins. To me, it looks like you spun a black dinner plate covered in paint at 45 revolutions per minute. The metaphoric paint is covering me with motifs of ego, wealth, dominance, and striving. None of these concepts feel like me. I sat alone in this dark room listening to a 23 year old drug addict talk all about his exploits with women, drugs, fame, and fortune. For some reason, I looked up to this person. From how he said it, it was a promising path through life that brought all the spoils to be enjoyed. The social setting I'd found myself in promoted this hedonistic lifestyle that Mac was validating. He raps of all the women he'd been with and 'taken down,' as some might say. I think of the last few women I had been with. I'd had a tear where I ran through a couple very short relationships in rapid succession which I had been proud of. Hearing the way Mac boasted of his exploits, I felt a bit of shame. This was an unpleasant song and I was finding validation from it, which made me feel unpleasant by association. A 22 year old Mitch is learning remorse

for the first time as I noticed that it felt bad to have used people. Recently, I had been salvaging my love from the broken places I had led it to, finding some tenderness and kindness. I felt sweet again as I nurtured a cute crush I'd had on my classmate.

Mac Miller continues to rap in circles as he boasts, and I begin to tune out. Then, he drops another line that strikes me in my spinal cord.

"I got them worried that my mind's fried. I'm going up before I skydive."

"Oh shit" I think. I'm going up before I skydive. I think of my intentions to go explore the parking garage. I hope that's some sort of elaborate and confusing metaphor. My good friend and roommate had recently sat me down and had the tough conversation. He'd said that he was worried about me. He'd said that I had been going a little far with the spiritual and esoteric concepts I'd been entertaining in my mind. To me, that's what I could expect to hear from those who didn't understand what I was getting at. I was on a divine path to self improvement. I got them worried that my mind's fried. I'm going up before I skydive.

## **Weekend (feat. Miguel)**

Time Flies ends, and I hear the first notes of Weekend starts to play. This song had been big in pop culture for a while around 2015 and 2016, when I was graduating high school. It was a song that I'd often hear at pre-game hang outs before going out, house parties, in the bars, you name it. If there was an event with drunk 20-somethings at it, there's a good shot you'd hear this one. It was a popular song about getting through the week and looking forward to partying on the weekend. It resonated with the culture! People loved to play this song, and it was motivically in line with party culture. In the frat, I would find myself just getting through the week of work and looking forward to getting to the weekend where I could blow it out and party Friday to Monday. It was an exhausting way to do life, but it had been working for me, or so I thought.

Again, Mac Miller boasts of how he uses women and how little they mean to him. A dissonance begins to form in me. I loved this man's art and had been idolizing his words for a good number of years, but this was a departure from thinking his words were truth. I began to hear how he was wrong.

I notice that I can feel the wood floor beneath me. The pillows and blankets that I'd made my nest with had shifted to expose the ground beneath me. As it turned out, my nest had been constructed with less structural integrity than I'd thought. Then, my focus returns to the music. He and I both are very aware of the self inflicted nature of the pain in our lives. It is validating, yes, but with the context of his death, this is a scary person to be validated by; self destructive tendencies are cool until you die, I think.

People say not to meet your heroes, but I'd say it might be even worse to find that you're becoming your

hero. I'd become just like the pained artist I'd looked up to for so long. I was just as pained, just as broken, just as alone, and just as lost. With the validation of all my party friends, it felt good to share these feelings. By myself, it felt hollow and misguided. So, while I'd heard this song countless times in party scenarios and smiled as I sang along to it in countless clubs, this time, I was dissecting the song to see the rotten inner workings that I'd built into my life. I felt a strong wave of shame as I looked at my life from this viewpoint. I felt as if I were sitting in communion with all of the women I had used to feel good or look cool. All of us sat in communion, listening to the music as it detailed the thinking that had inspired these emotionally abusive relationships.

Mac wraps up the song with chanting, "We going out tonight." I think of the options I had to go out with my buddies. That would have been so easy! I could have just gone by the frat house, cracked a beer from somebody's fridge, and gone to the bars, got some more drinks, and walked home in a stupor. I likely would be missing a few hours from my memory in the morning, but that's life, I'd tell myself. It would have been so easy! Here I am, concerned that I might be a little too deep in the art, starting to lose myself in the lyrics. I start wringing my hands as the hard ground presses on my tailbone. "I'll be good by the weekend." I'm not good on this Friday.

## **Clubhouse**

By the time Clubhouse begins, I'm strung out. "I got me a bitch I'mma call when I'm tryna fuck." Sounds about right, I think to myself. Women had been a commodity in my life for a while. These rap lines are shot out quickly, and I process them as they hit my brain from my earholes. For example, that last line was spoken, and then the next one just follows immediately after. In that short moment between the lines, I feel a pinch of guilt as to how the line manifests in my life. I think of the shame that I run from due to my emotionally abusive relationships with women, relationships where we use one another for everything other than emotional regulation. But then the onslaught of words trudges on. Before I release the guilt from the one line, the twenty three year old tells me, "you ain't shit to a God, need to get you a job cause when you live in the mall, bills pile up."

"What the fuck?" I think. The way this dude raps, I'm surprised I can take anything away from it. The lyricism is so dense that what it means to me can be lost in the soup of syllables. I don't even like this song. Spending a lot of time lazing around and dissecting music with my pals, I'd found that listening to complete albums in order was the best way to understand the true meaning of a musical piece of art like this. I accidentally looked down on those who didn't know this about music. How could anyone say they appreciated a song without knowing the content in which it was made? But, here I was, listening to a song that made me feel shitty, telling myself that it would all make sense by the end. By the end of this all, it'll make sense to me. It always does, no matter how terrifying it gets and no matter how hopeless it looks.



I notice the space around me feels to have gotten darker. The sun has been down so the light level in the room is unchanged, but it feels darker and more bleak. My insides want to squirm, but there is no movement in this room aside from the record spinning. The energy required to move my body is absent. My eyes fixed on the vinyl, it feels as if I stare into the infinite void of space without any stars.

In a sudden, erratic fashion, my hands jerk up to my head, grasping at my hair for dear life. It was as if my hair were the rope holding me from falling deeper into the emptiness of this void. My breath is short and taught. I don't know what it is that I'm scared of, but I can feel something big and hideous looming on my timeline. It feels as if I've just strapped myself into a rollercoaster ride that I can tell should have been put 'out of order.'

As I'm having my moment, Mac is in the background rapping about his meteoric rise to fame. I had been unaware of his ramblings until he put it, "If there's a list to the top, you can sign me up." I'm starting to get concerned again. I don't want to go to the top of anything anymore. I physically roll my eyes at myself. My psyche is being taken on a ride by the music, and I still have the awareness to be flustered with myself for flip flopping back and forth between confidence and anxiety. Pick one, Mitch. Sit with it and settle in. The timing of my pivoting from one emotion to the other is regular as a metronome, and I'm getting dizzy from jerking back and forth. For a moment, it feels as if the metronome is stopping between the two extremes. I let out a sharp, gasping sob. I'm scared. Even more concerning, I am alone. I can't think of one person that I can call on for help in this situation, so it's back to riding that metronome for me.

Mac Miller is bothering me. I don't know what made me think that this man is some sort of artistic prodigy. All he cares to rap about are shallow concepts in this song and it's making me sick. This dreamy, flow state I am when I sit with art like this does not allow me to exist in any moment aside from the present, making it hard for me to be mindful of why I was so excited to hear what he has to say. This shallow, drug addled, woman user is the person I trusted most by welcoming his artistic impressions to my subconscious. I chose this? I couldn't have.

My head leans left, then right, then back again as I melt into the moment. With the room moving along with me, I watch as the space between nothing breaks open, wider and wider until I can see the connections that hold every molecule in place. The patterns that are flowing through the moment are a static motion. Somehow, the stillness is moving. I notice that everything in the room is perfectly balanced. This is why the walls are standing up and why the roof is not falling down. Thank golly I'd just taken static physics a year prior. I tell myself that I could totally diagram the balancing forces on paper, but I won't. While there's nothing physically moving, I can see the energy flowing through the stillness. It's almost enough to distract me from what I'm listening to.

Mac Miller returns to the forefront of the track, kicking up more ideas of materialism and self-destructive tendencies. I start to perceive a shifting in the room's energy as the darkness I'd been sitting with begins to feel emotionally darker.

I swallow my fear with a gulp that seems so cartoony that I chuckle at myself for sounding like a looney toon. I suppose if you're going to feel dread over your own impending mortality, it's at least good to have a

sense of humor about how you process the feelings. “But seriously,” I think. “This is fucked.” It’s hard to know what to do in a code red artistic emergency when you’re on your own. Chills take me out of the present and into anxieties of the future and my goofball regrets that got me in this mess.

I snap back to the present. This is bad. I’m so fucked. Noticing that I’m just circling around this same thought, I start to see the pattern for what it is. At the center of my mind is this core concept that “I, Mitch Capps, am so mentally fucked with my potential death on the horizon.” I see that I have a long tether attached to this central idea, and I orbit this idea, slowly shortening my rope as the tether winds itself around the idea. I picture myself as a cosmic wakeboarder surfing the space of my mind as I maintain this connection to the idea. If I have this incredibly unique opportunity to see my demise coming while I get to wakeboard in my own head, I might as well enjoy myself, no? It’s not often you see wakeboarders frowning as they get air in a lake, so I’m going to have a big old smile on my face as I hit a frontside 360 off the cosmic lake that I’m visualizing my mind as. The positivity of this idea is attached to a very real and morbid acknowledgment. By deciding, “well, this is going to end anyways, so I might as well enjoy myself,” I was accepting that I was going to die.

Part of me that I wanted to ignore had felt this fact on the horizon of my mental, hoping that I’d misinterpreted the feeling or that a different perspective that would make this feeling a nonissue would make itself known.

Fear would have been a realistic response to this, but I’d spent so much time with fear already that it didn’t feel like it was going to be a good use of my time. I

was going to die tonight, did I want to spend any more of my last little bit stressed?

Clubhouse starts to wrap up with a playful bassline. A voice that isn't Mac's deeply covers the background vocals repeating the phrase, "Can't bring me down." A smile comes across my face and the light and energy in the room playfully brightens. Then Mac comes back in to weave his lines with the background singer's lines. Mac reiterates, "if there's a list to the top, you can sign me up," and I think of the parking garage. The phrases "sign me up" and "can't bring me down" are woven together in such a way that I become excited to see what happens next, no matter how traumatic. It was inevitable at this point. I set this up. I did this. I had become "that kind of kid" that these sorts of things happened to. I accepted my fate and smiled knowing that I was already signed up for the list to the top, whatever I might find up there.

## **In the Bag**

“This the music that make white people mad,” Mac booms as he arrives into the presence of the track. Now I’m having fun. I lift my hands to around my ears and jive around with the music. I’m loving it. “Fuck those stiff, white motherfuckers,” I think, seemingly unaware of my own skin. I separated my whiteness from that of the country club, trust fund whiteness so that I could have some fun. This is just a fun song to me now. I’m not picking the lyrics apart and worrying about their meaning at this point. What’s the use in that? There’s a fun bassline along with a hopping beat, so what would be the point in stressing over the meaning of some lyrics? They’re just words, after all. The feeling and intention is what comes across as important in the long run. So I get my elbows in the mix, too. Bouncing playfully on my cozy little nest, I start to have a good time. I think know what’s coming, but there’s peace in having accepted whatever it is. The fight within me was over and I was left with a dark curiosity. I can start to visualize the trajectory of the evening, but the result of this creative musical exploration remains invisible. I can imagine that I’ll finish up this album while I’m tied to the place since I couldn’t take a record player on the go, then I’d take a little goofy journey once I moved onto the next album. You see, this album, GO:OD AM was just a pregame for the night’s big show. The posthumous album was a companion to the previous album, Swimming, to create the complete piece Swimming in Circles. I was just setting the scene. GO:OD AM was helping me to see how the night was going to go. Taking on these albums chronologically, it would make sense to listen to Swimming while I journey to the parking garage.

So I’d finish this album here, then the Swimming album could accompany a bike ride to the garage, then

I'd listen to Circles for the first time once I'm in the garage with all those beautiful murals I'd wondered so much about. I could already imagine getting to the top of the garage and seeing my painting on the electrical box. In my mind, I knew I was going to make all of the confusion and fear I'd been experiencing make sense. My art has the answer I'm looking for. With this intention set, I kept in mind that there is a lot of time between my expected resolution and now, but it was going to be an interesting journey to get there now that I'd accepted my fate and surrendered to the experience. At least I wasn't crippled by my fear any longer. It sucked that I was going to die, but we all die, don't we?

I definitely had thought I was going to live longer than this, but this makes sense to me. I exhale in a pitiful chuckle and the left corner of my mouth tightens in a bummed sort of half frown. I flashed back to my early days listening to Mac's early projects, like K.I.D.S. (Kickin' Incredibly Dope Shit) and Best Day Ever. These albums represented a time in my life that felt idyllic. In those albums, Mac writes about being a playful, dumb kid, which I certainly related to through my own adolescence. That music brings me back to walking home after middle school and playing manhunt or what have you in the area's neighborhoods. I'd grown to love these albums via my closest friend. He and I were inseparable, which made the trauma of the sexual abuse at his hands much more layered in my mind. I started to see the web of connections that led me to this exact moment and situation. It had started all the way back when I was just a kid.

Transcendentalism through art can help a person to take a step back and view their life through a different lens. This can be very helpful at times to uncover thought processes that can be released if it is

discovered they have you stuck. In my case, I was seeing my life through that different lens now with this music. I was taking the step back from the normal way of thinking and processing. If we think of life as painting a picture, it is like I was so zoomed in, fixated on painting the current moment on the wall in the small scale with fine detail and never taking a step back. However, now I had taken a big step back and could see the whole story I'd been writing on the wall. It wasn't necessarily pretty, seeing the sad story I'd been writing, but it at least was making sense. I mourned my future. Until tonight, I'd imagined big things for myself. I imagined a long road with a bunch of new characters and story arcs. I'd arrived at a point in that road where it was cold and dark and I was alone. I wondered if I'd already seen the last friend I was ever going to see. I felt a little pang of sadness for all the friends that were going to miss me. I didn't want to dwell on it. I saw how long I'd been on this road and that there was no turning around at this point. I had to keep moving forward, to keep it in motion.

So I dance as Mac playfully describes his wishes for more fame, bitches, money, and status. I sit here with my legs criss-cross-apple-sauce and bounce up and down on the pillows. It all makes sense and I'm at peace with it. "This is how these things go." I think. "It's better to slip out unexpectedly while nobody knows you're leaving this world anyways. Everyone would just cause a commotion and make this goodbye much harder. They won't understand anyways, so this Irish goodbye from the planet is better for everyone." I thought back to seeing the big picture I'd been writing on the wall. I thought of some old friends that I'd intentionally met up with recently when I didn't know this was coming.

One of these friends was my best friend's ex-girlfriend. I'd made a point to meet up with her recently to apologize for some reason. At the time, I had no idea what called me to do so, but I felt it was important that I apologize for being shitty to her and doing my all to drive a wedge between them back in high school. I just called her up, made a date, and told her that it was all my bad and that I'm sorry. Was it really something that needed to be rectified? Probably not. I was riddled with all of these goofball regrets that I just chalked it up to the game. At the time, I didn't know why I was doing any of this. I also reached out to the old friend that abused me and confronted him. I'd never done this before, but I told him how much it had impacted me in the years since. I wasn't sure what gave me the courage to do either of these things, but it was becoming clear. When I met up with Riley's ex over coffee or with my abuser over a pitcher, I had been tying up loose ends, making my peace before I left. I was shocked to notice this as well. It's funny to me to see how much we can be setting into motion without having any idea. The house of cards I'd been unknowingly making was massive and precarious, yet very thoroughly set up.



## **Break the Law**

“Get high, breaking laws. Get high, breaking laws,” Break the Law opens up. I immediately place myself in the central role in the narrative. I mean, a bar later, Mac raps of waking up with the taste of pussy still in his mouth and deja-vu catapults me back to yesterday morning. Usually, I may have felt proud for being the main character, but I currently felt strung out and wispy, as if “butter spread over too much bread,” as Bilbo Baggins said. The frat guy lifestyle and the rockstar lifestyle are oddly parallel in this context.

I anxiously roll around in the nest of pillows and blankets I’d made for myself. I felt like a baby bird. I felt like a cartoon baby bird, the kind that is mostly a sphere for a body with a small bird head with a tiny cone as the beak. I rock and roll around on my glutes like a wobbly Bozo the Clown. I wasn’t even alive when Bozo the Clown was a thing, but I picture myself taking musical blows to the head and continually getting back up by the counterbalance that is resilience. Whatever fatalist lyric Mac had for me or whatever existential anxiety I wanted to fixate on had a natural foil ready for it in my noggin. Like Bozo, I would naturally pop right back up following each blow. For a second, I swear that I hear the chorus of Tubthumping by Chumbawumba hinting in the booms and baps of Break the Law. I get knocked down, but I get up again. You ain’t ever gonna keep me down.

I could have been upset because Mac Miller is still on some bullshit about how he’s some top dog making millions and breaking laws, but why bother? He’s just expressing himself the same as I do. I understand that you have to get all that nonsense out so you can speak on true beauty. In my experience, I’d found that expression would deepen in its profundity when you did

not deny the negative. I can appreciate this perspective now.

## **Perfect Circle**

Angels sing to open this track. I can hear from beyond a veil that I usually am imperceptive of. It's not a sense of chills that I am getting. I feel as if my bones became hollow and my blood became denser. Thoughts begin to pass through my mind as clouds through the sky. I had subscribed to this visual as a mindfulness practice, but I generally liked to think of white and fluffy cumulus clouds. These dark clouds rumble with thunder and flash internally with heat lightning.

"Oh fuck, oh fuck, oh fuck," flashes down from a cloud as lightning. "I forgot this song was next." claps as thunder seconds after.

The angelic voices are met with a western sounding guitar that would play in a movie scene with a tumbleweed. The reverb applied to the guitar's twang deepened the haunting nature. Slow percussion comes in to herald more vocalizations. Perfect Circle's intro sounds like the soundtrack to the after-after parties I'd been to throughout my earlier, strung out, party(er) days. These scenes would be riddled with kids still strung out from the night before, smudged mirrors on coffee tables, and a pulsing, throbbing feeling from a self-inflicted cigarette burn now that the alcoholic numbness was wearing off. If it were a scene in a movie, there'd be a subtle but sickly, greenish-yellow lens over the camera.

And suddenly I was present there, in that scene. I could hear my feet squelch and tear from the liquor soaked pavers as I looked out over a scene of vices I'd used to self destruct the night before.

"Fuck you." an feminine voice says to me. An unnamed female voice would chime in and out of the album to offer often confusing or insightful musings. I was taking her voice to be a more omniscient character in the narrative of this album's story.

“That trifling bitch.” I think to myself. Of course we’d get to this emotional place in the album and she’d pull some shit like this with me. But, it is what it is. What am I going to do? Try and fight her on this? Pass. What you resist persists and I don’t want homegirl taking shots at me all night.

Mac steps into frame with a boisterous declaration of, “I came for whoever is in charge. I suggest you go and get yourself a weapon and a guard.” Alright dude, I get it. Hands up. It’s over for me. Sure, whatever. I feel that I am in charge when it comes to my mental state.

All of these players in my mind were getting difficult to track. Now my mind is full with me, my regrets, Mac Miller, each featured rapper on the album, Miguel, Chief Keef, Ab-Soul and the female voice that was establishing itself as the metaphoric representation of art, I’m calling her Lindey. I don’t care if you’re aware that you’re going to die tonight, it’s never not funny to sit at a roundtable in your mind with Chief Keef. However, everyone wants some nonsense to do with me and I just can’t deal with all of that. Mac and Lindey want me dead it seems, which is never the best feeling. I chuckle picturing myself as a cartoon mouse running from a cartoon Mac Miller and Lindey chasing me with an oversize mallet. It’s a Tom and Jerry situation, and these clowns can’t kill me. Mac says, “The devil with me and he tell me to shoot,” implying that he’s trusting the devil on his shoulder and is ready to commit murder. Sure buddy, like I’ve never thought I was going to die before and got myself out of it. We’ll see who dies here. I had proven myself an acrobat when navigating near-lethal situations. Those around me got some cheap laughs when I’d be going on and on about how, “You just simply can not kill Mitch.”

I picture the electrical box I'd tagged on the roof of the parking garage. I wonder what all those abstract lines and wiggles would mean to me with the context of this album poured on top. I start to imagine how I might save the day for myself and get out of this mess. I hope that the version of me that'd painted that box had potentially left some artistic breadcrumbs that might provide some relieving context when I get to it. This beat flows like gauze in the breeze that's draped over a mummified scarecrow in a dormant cornfield. Lindey is in the background with "murder, murder, murder," and I'm a little too tired of this goofy hyperbolic scare show at this point.

Mac then asks, "Can you draw a perfect circle?" I look down at my hands and know that I can not. I'm not sure if I even believe in a perfect circle outside of mathematics. I am so excited for what the posthumous album, *Circles* will reveal to me. I wonder what answers Mac has from beyond the grave for questions he'd presented when he was alive. But, I had to stay present. There are so many songs between then and now.

"You got options, what do you do?" He then lazily drones, "I wash these pills down with liquor and fall. Leave it to me I do enough for us all. Got what you need if you like breaking the law." At this point, I'm staring directly at the writing on the wall. This is the star I was essentially hitching my spiritual wagon to. It's clear as day to me how I got in this position. The woman's voice repeats her phrase over and over in varying degrees of emphasis. Mac and Lindey harmonize to express their desire to sin, need for shelter, and paradoxical nature. She laughs and I feel a hint of fear. The harmony had taken on a ritualistic tone in my mind like it were occultists preparing a sacrifice. Lindey keeps repeating "fuck you" over and over and over until a

haunting poem stops her berating and she giggles. I was thankful when the sound of a phone call being sent to voicemail overtook the soundwaves of the track. Mac had sampled a phone call with his brother to segue the song 'Perfect Circle' into the song 'Godspeed.'

## **Godspeed**

Mac Miller's brother begins his message with a burst of positive, sonic energy. Whatever negatives were piling up from the first half of this Perfect Circle/Godspeed slashed, two-part song were immediately banished with brotherly love. It's a simple voicemail a brother would leave another, and I feel love for my brother. From my perspective, this is now a message that my brother is leaving me. I hadn't thought that I wouldn't see him again. Instead of feeling gutted by this, I am so thankful that he found a way to reach me tonight before this happens. I needed to hear a message from my older brother. Keeping in mind that, to me, this voicemail is conveying the message that my older brother wanted to give me before I died, I was so happy to hear that he wished I could be there with him. That would be so Bryan. He'd want to see me and I love him for that, but he'd wish that I were with him, not that he were with me. He says that he loves me in that casual way that he would. I hadn't thought of him yet. It makes sense in my spiritual mind that he'd know the situation. Of course he'd have a message for me before I'm gone. He says, "I hope you have a good night, slash weekend, slash I hope I talk to you soon." I know in my core that this means he'll meet me on the other side when it's his turn. I know it won't feel like long. "Alright, Godspeed," he wishes me. He knows what I have to do. There's no need to stop what's coming. He knows that I'm on a path and that there's only pain in resistance. I'm grateful for his acceptance and wisdom.

The verse takes an optimistic shift as Mac begins to express disdain for his vices and setting his intentions to better himself. There was a time when this same verse had helped me break deep rooted cycles. I relate to the bars talking about how I am free to make

my mistakes without identifying with them as well as the bars talking about dreams of being a great artist and the need to seize opportunities or else the world will find someone better. I know that I am bound for something incredible. I hope that I'll have the courage to take the chances I need to step into my potential. Then follow more bars that I know are powerful, but my mind was dreaming of bravery the whole time. Am I brave enough? How will I know the moment?

As the song begins to fade, Mac Miller describes a place that sounds like Heaven. He says there are no worries and everyone is fine. It sounds like everything is exactly as it is in this place and it's simply good. With the idea of this place established he guides me through our shared process of waking up. "Shit, I'm finally awake, good morning."

I am thankful that Mac made the artistic choice he did here to add a snippet of a mundane conversation between himself and a friend. Adding this essentially created dead air for me to process what had just happened. When I set out to unpack this music, I knew that there would be moments of catharsis by nature of the art, but this was something deeper than I could have thought. It makes sense to me that I was having such a spiritual experience with such a momentous happening on the horizon, but I find myself stupefied regardless. I am just classic Mitch, same as I've ever been, but now I'm walking the hero's journey all the fucking sudden. I am present. I am honored. I am safe. Somehow.



## **When in Rome**

A spiraling opening beat creates a double helix in my brain. Instantly carried away with the rhythm, 'When in Rome' ramps up the energy. I know this one. Coming after the emotional ride I'd just gotten off with Perfect Circle/Godspeed, 'When in Rome' is a celebration. Another song I'd listen to at the gym or a hype party, 'When in Rome' reminds me that I can move this meat sack that I'm living in. I had forgotten that I saw out of eyes that were in a head that were attached to a body with appendages. I started wiggling around and regaining confidence, remembering that I had maybe five more hours on this wonderful planet so I'd prefer they be a glorious few hours. Mac agrees with this sentiment in saying "trippin' now, everything straight," to which I smoothly but vigorously nod along, as I'd been bugging out in my own noggin as well with newfound comfort. Everything is straight now! By accepting my fate, I removed the painful resistance that was causing my experience to sour. *Amor fati*, as Neitzche would put it. To love my fate in this instance brought me great contentment. This has been a beautiful life that I've lived. Every single second of it has been valued. I remember that I, in the spirit sense, came to this planet to have an experience.

I am suddenly two years old. I am stumbling towards my mommy and I and so happy to see her. Her arms are wide open and I can't wait to show her that I'm the best walking boy. I'm good at this! My confidence far exceeded my capabilities and I took a tumble, a theme I'd need to get used to. This felt like something that might become a motif in my life over time, but I'm three years old and can't imagine how this might manifest when I'm twenty-two. Mom catches me right before the ground! I'm so thankful I can always count on my

mother. We laugh together about this close call. I could have bonked my sweet head!

The chorus of this song is the phrase, “when in rome,” on repeat. It’s a banger for sure, but I’m noticing the meaningfulness with which I’ve been directing this human experience. I mean, I had this one shot, and I’ve done it so well. I have made the most authentic relationships with my absolute favorite people on this Earth that I’ve come in contact with. I’ve spent my time with nature, with creativity, and with connection.

Might as well. When in Rome, after all. This feeling stayed with me for the rest of the song and I took the time to bask in it. I deserved this. I never shy away from hardship to take the easy route. As I’m feeling this sense of pride over the depth with which I’ve experienced life thus far, I notice Mac is also taking this time to flex. “Ohhhhhhhhhhhhh...” I think, “this is pride over a life well lived.”

## ROS

The good feelings continue into the next song. This is a love song with feelings of searching and longing. I feel this one too. I spent so much time romanticizing and longing for the divine feminine energy in this life. It's a beautiful thing, to know that you're a mess and still believe in true love. I feel like I'm standing in the rain waiting outside her door with flowers in my hand. She won't open the door because of the mistakes I've made. Normally, I'd try a bigger romantic gesture, but I see that it's getting late in this rainstorm, she's not coming outside, and it's time for me to go. Lightning strikes and there is only one and a half or two seconds until the thunder. The strikes are getting closer.

This song is a microcosm of an experience I'd had painting the divine feminine energy on a stolen hotel bed sheet with oil paint. It's reminding me of the feminine beauty I was fortunate enough to spend time with while I was here. I'd spent some time with some very wonderful women over the years, inside and out. The sappy sound of the music rings me back to my girlfriend's room back in eighth grade. Her parents weren't there and I was able to go over since I was "at my friend's house." I was originally, but I'd be lying if it wasn't a strategic friend to kick it with since he lived in my girlfriend's neighborhood. We had just gotten to whatever base making-out was, and it was an unbeatable passtime. See, we were all horny as hell but had no avenues to do anything about it. I didn't even know what an orgasm was just yet. Nonetheless, this song feels like a crush. This is an innocent feeling that I'm very glad I get the opportunity to revisit before my passing. I'm still hearing the rap lines, but my stomach is busy dropping and churning over and over in my stomach as I feel like it's my first kiss all over again. I don't even bother to spend time feeling bad over

the ways my love had strayed from this innocence as I  
grew older. I'm just happy to feel this in me right now.

### **Cut the Check (feat. Chief Keef)**

The third disc of the record comes to a close. I'm three discs through this hectic album and the fourth and final disc is next. I look to the vinyl sleeve and see the tracklist for LP 4. I see Cut the Check, Ascension, Jump, and Festival. I know these songs well. It's a wonderful close to an album, and before I dive into the last act of the album that's dragged me through hell and back already, I take a moment to acknowledge the last three songs in their order. Ascension, Jump, and the Festival. So in one song, I can expect to ascend to a great height, then there will be a jump followed by some sort of festival. I notice that I'm not in any place presently to make an ascension or a jump, so this isn't a current issue. I just find it somewhat plain.

Hard juxtapositions are one of Mac Miller's specialties. Cut the Check with Chief Keef starts exactly how a song with Chief Keef might expect to start, with self-deprecating profanity. Mac is tearing himself apart, me too with the level to which I'm placing myself in the "I" that Mac Miller is using. It's kind of a hilarious track that I'm listening to. I hear Mac Miller and Chief Keef going back and forth trading stupid sounding verses. Whenever Chief Keef opens his mouth, I expect to hear a booming "these bitches love Sosa," so I'm giggling in the back of my mind the whole time he's rapping.

## **Ascension**

I hear the beat creep into the ether to open Ascension. Over time with this song, I've conditioned myself to have an emotional reaction as soon as the verse opens. Mac dreamily converses with himself aloud for the recording booth as he describes his current mindset. He's expressing his excitement that this isn't going to be a sad song, despite the melancholy beat. Thank God, I'm done with sad. A narrative voice places us in space and time, announcing that we are in between heaven and hell. Heard that, I'm there. He says, "Oh it's not sad, baby!"

"Yeah, I saw a mountain in the horizon, you know, across the horizon. When I got there, it turned out it was just a pile of rocks." This metaphorical mountain I'd been climbing was not as treacherous as it looked from a distance. My progress to the height I'd made it to was a culmination of a huge number of tiny steps, tiny rocks piled up to make a massive mountain to climb in what has been a beautiful journey. Mac even lets us know that this song won't be nearly as depressing as the former. Cool! I definitely carry the feeling that I was previously more depressed than I am now, so that's a good thing that this song won't be that way. Mac raps about his origins from house parties, burning Nag Champas in Heaven, and his inability to trust facts, all of which I assume he's saying about me too. Again, he describes the experience I'm having by talking about looking to his parents in moments where he is fearing impending death. I'm looking my mortality dead in the face, and I'm no longer surprised by these synchronicities as I appreciate the time I spent with my mother in my mind, if it were just for a moment.

I close my eyes and dive back into the expanse inside. As Mac poses questions, I drift deeper into a

conscious unconscious that feels between life and death to me, but is between heaven and hell in his words. He asks himself what is between heaven and hell and then answers his own question; a brand new me. The space my consciousness is occupying continues to expand into infinity. I was present with the edges of this infinite expansion same as I was present in the center. Mac then directly explains advice he would give to young kids, which was to, "make sure you handle your business." He then explains how a criminal leaves no witnesses and it dawns on me how this man is going to kill me without being present in a roundabout way.

He ends the song with more questions directly about death and a last line calling for the time to "ride out."

## Jump

An exciting but spacey beat backs the first lines to the song Jump and Mac wastes no time before cutting into the listener on this track. I'd normally be hyping this artistry up, but unfortunately, I am the listener being cut into. He begins by asking who he's speaking with over the phone and then sets the scene by telling me that we're going to begin our descent to hell since he didn't get an immediate response to his questioning. I don't really have much of a choice at this point as to where this experience is taking me, but I am feeling exasperated with the constant motion from heaven, to hell, to the space between the two. I take a moment to consider this exasperation. Noticing that I'm exasperated at the nature of a wave, I decide to leave this frustration behind. I notice that the waves I usually ride are a little less intense in terms of magnitude. This musical wave I was currently riding had me reaching peaks as high as heaven and troughs as low as hell. High highs and low lows are still exciting to me at this point in life.

It's a fun first verse, but I'm interested in that chorus. What's this song going to reveal to me about a jump? I sort of hope it might connect me with an idea that gets me out of being the one who jumps off a building, but I try not to let that hope bring me back into that place of painful resistance. Just before the chorus, Mac eases me by saying there's no need to cry and that it'll be alright. I knew that to be the case by now, but it's validating to hear. Mac asks me what has happened to the world and then suggests the only way to change it is to burn it to the ground. I think of my world and all the mental struggles I'd navigated and how much pain I was still holding onto. I know the world needs to change, I just thought I could have taken a more patient and peaceful avenue for changing it. He does not give time



to process these ideas before a barrage of bars about bitches, Escalades, and getting paid.

The song zaps me with a spurt of hope when I'm told that I won't die tonight and that I'll live free until the morning. At this point, I don't really want to get my hopes up. I feel manic with the way this album is jarringly ricocheting from peak to trough and this is the first album of the night.

"Take a breath, feel this moment," says the rapper. I appreciate that so much. Dude, I've got a finite number of clock ticks left on this groovy, green planet, and I really value being called to breathe and feel the moment. I take him up on this call to action. I take a deep breath. My lungs felt better than usual. Generally, they were a little tight from the smoking, but I'll quit soon. In the same verse, Mac tells about how he is setting prisoners free from their cages with these lines he's spitting.

The song ends with my artistic idol asking if I think he can fly if he jumps off the edge. I wonder what happens if he can't?

## **The Festival (feat. Little Dragon)**

All of the sudden the same beat that Jump ends with is the sounds of a meadow with fairies making fun by the creekside. It's pretty! A smooth transition brought me here without feeling any seam between songs. I appreciate the smooth transition, because now I feel as if I've arrived. I feel that now the energetic peak of the album has passed in the last song, I am where I worked so damn hard to get to over the last sixteen songs. God damn, Mac, you never make this easy, do you? Repetitive listening habits tell me this song is the Festival. It makes sense that I'd be at a festival. To me, festivals had become the place to go for celebration of all the trials that had been overcome in the real world. They were an event that marked the end of a long period riddled with tribulations. I felt good in this meadow. I could stay forever right here.

The lines between my ego and the one of the person I'm listening to are quite blurred. When Mac says "I," occasionally, that's me. For now, Mac, who is myself, converses with God and raps a scene that expands my frame of mind. The meadow and creek is now part of a bigger environment with swings hanging from old willow trees and smooth, black beetles crawling atop cool, grey boulders covered with lichens. There are petit songbirds swooping around excitedly, bringing a sense of joy to the festival at play. I lay down by the tree to rest. It feels right. Mac and I are both going to the festival. The song and I are joined thematically. It is time to leave.

I notice that Lindey is speaking through the featured artist, Little Dragon on this one. She keeps asking me if I want to go to the festival. She says that she'll lift me up when I drown. I hope I don't drown in the Swimming album that comes next. She's asking me if I

want to go to the festival. Let's go then.

## part ii

### **memento mori**

I lift the needle off of the still spinning disc and flip the lever to stop the vinyl from making its revolutions. I stand up and stretch my arms way back as if I knew what yoga was. I got a few degrees in a backbend and called it there. It felt empowering once again to have my eye's up at about five and a half feet off the ground. That's like forty something inches higher up than it was for a while. Without a thought or a determinate stimulus, I departed from the record room and stepped into the living room. The wood floors in here are darker and arranged linearly.

My heart erupts with love. There, on the couch was my beautiful baby dog, Bear. She's curled up the massive sectional my roommate had filled a third of the living room with. I am so overcome with love that I don't even care that this is the last night I spend with her. She's the most beautiful angel baby dog I've ever seen as she's curled up in her little ball, pressed up in the corner of the couch by the backrest and the oversized armrest. I cry right there, standing up and everything. It's all joy in my eyes. This dog and I crossed paths so serendipitously that I felt so fortunate to have had the time that I've had with her that I can't be worried about the future. I feel like that's probably how she feels too. She looks back at me over her shoulder with a knowing sort of look. Wise beyond her years, this mutt is communicating with eyes. Eyes like deep saucers, she gazes into me with nothing but love and I am happy. I am so happy right now as I stand in the threshold, looking at my dog, getting ready to go die.

*Memento mori.* Remember that you must die," I think to myself. I always knew I was going to die at some point. I had tried to keep that in mind since I had caught wind of the phrase, yet like most others, had imagined the event of my death to be a far off and abstract concept. I am more aware of my breath than I normally am. I wonder how many are left? Four thousand, six hundred and thirty one. That's probably a little off, but I'm not counting. My roommates are still gone, as I knew they would be. "Damn." I say out loud, still locked eyes with Bear. It would have been great to see them again. I settle for the present moment and sit down on the couch with Bear. I know that I don't have long to stay here, but I'm going to drink in these moments of scruffing her coarse hair and rubbing her doubly-lobed head; such a sweet girl.

I walk back into my room and I go straight for my bedside table. A square, wooden table I'd pulled off the side of the road supports a plastic mini set of drawers meant for a dorm. I'd painted the plastic to make it unique since I couldn't make it better any other way. In the bottom of three wide drawers, I find my wired headphones wrapped up around themselves. Some people have started moving to wireless headphones recently, but I can't afford those, and the wire helps me keep track of these. I plugged the headphones into my phone and grabbed a jacket. For Florida, it was chilly. It's down in the mid-fifties this evening, asking me to not only put on a jacket I'd picked up thrifting on a roadtrip to the woods around Asheville, NC, but a pair of joggers as well. I drink a few more glasses of water and feel the hydration coarse through my body once again. Will this be the last time I feel this?

Absolute stillness. Science questions if there is a true, absolute zero in terms of degrees celcius. Is there a

temperature where there is no atomic motion? I certainly don't know, but in this moment, facing this end is something so baseline instinctive and constant since the womb, which debases me. I was devoid of energy.

"Thoughts, Mitch," I blink two or three times. "Remember you can think thoughts." This is good news. I'm back in motion. Visiting the stillness of zero energy was an interesting excursion, but I wonder what would happen if I stayed there too long. It felt related but entirely dissimilar from the feeling I'd had when I entered the art festival in my mind. Now that energy had been reintroduced to my person, it was time to make some movements. The gears in my mind were able to start churning again. Once these clanky gears got the rust off, I quickly remember the plan I'd had in place. I remember that musically, Swimming is up next, which can naturally ease into Circles being companion albums. If anything, it was nice that GO:OD AM was done because it was more of a precursor to the main event, which was to be Swimming in Circle, the mysterious, open-ended project I'd set out on this path to unpack. I open the creaky, wooden door to our cozy abode. The Gainesville air was still wet this January evening as every other, although brisk. I stand on the front porch in front of the red door. I turn to my left and walk to the side of the house by the large plastic trash cans. The red fixie bike I'd gotten dirt cheap at a thrift store was propped up against the wall. I didn't need to lock it. Nobody wanted this old bike, but I couldn't understand why since it did so well for me. Regardless, no need to stress about not having to stress about it. I walk the bike into the driveway with it on my right side. The yellow-sepia light shines through the leaves of Camphor trees and smilax vines, casting foliar shadows on myself, my bike, and the coarse grit of the concrete driveway.

I reach into my loose pockets of my black, cotton joggers and begin to unwrap my headphones from around my iPhone. With the iPhone 5 in my hand, the headphones in my ears, and my legs straddling the thin framed bike, I search for Swimming on Spotify. I see the plain album artwork that I knew so well, with the comfortable black, white, and pink color scheme. I never knew exactly what Mac was sitting in when posing for the album art. Sometimes, I thought he was sitting in a box, sometimes in front of the door of a plane. He's sitting in a sort of black rectangle. Today, he is clearly sitting in a coffin. Under the Spanish moss and buzz of Florida street lights, I select the first song off the album and start pedaling.

## **Come Back to Earth**

The soft opening of Swimming soothes me as I feel the cool wind on my face biking lazily down the street. Mac references his regrets, and it reminds me of the artwork I'd recently completed, titled goofball regrets. I smile thinking of the faces I'd put into that big doodle. It made me smile! Mac is looking for a way out of his own head on this track. When describing his struggles, he mentions how he had been drowning, but was now swimming. I, still imagining I am the place of the voice saying all of this, remember how I used to struggle and feel as if I were drowning, but have now gotten through that to the point I am metaphorically swimming through life. A hard road that scared the life out of me, but if I learned anything from my tricky and winding path, it was that it's better to be a great story worth telling than it was to avoid all the bumps in the road. I believe the wrong turns and blunders I'd made gave my story character. I constantly prove to myself that I can do hard things, and whenever I consider the road that brought me here, I have to look back and tip my hat to it to feel gratitude that it hasn't killed me and I can still live to tell the tales.

Just noticing the production value change is enough to emphasize that I'm in new artistic territory here. Three years and one album had passed between the last project to the one I'd just begun, and it was evident. Even the bass on the beat sounds more mature, more bodied but also more refined.

He calls the both of us out with his next line saying, "All the things I do to spend a little time in hell," suggesting that we're going out of our way to put ourselves in painful situations. If I think about the mindset I worked to operate under, it was a hellish lifestyle. It was an impulsive and hedonistic mindset that kept me stuck in pain and regret. But, I'd still sign myself



up for the next event and do whatever necessary to make sure I did not have to tone it down.

The production on this track is refined beyond anything Mac Miller has released before. The string instruments behind the ghostly, reverberated vocals are masterfully composed, creating a heavenly scene that I enter in my mind with my eyes on the road. The sounds coming from my headphones are perfect for this bike ride I'm on right now. Beginning my bike ride in my quaint neighborhood paired well with the subdued intro to the album. A plucking bassline bounces along with the poetry as Mac describes the forlorn feelings he's been living among. As I feel the breeze blowing past my cheeks, I feel a sense of peace creeping in since the ethereal nature of the music balances me out, understanding I've been spending time with both the yin and the yang. I see the frivolousness of my fears at the emotional troughs of the last album and my confidence at the peaks of it. I recall that, at my lowest, I had optimism that I'd get back to a peaceful place, and when I was up high, I carried that mindfulness that I'd make my way back down to the trough at some point. To me, that embodied the yin yang situation I felt upstairs.

## **Hurt Feelings**

I've heard this album countless times in the year and a half since it's release, so I know it well, but it's all bringing up some new perspectives for me on the synthesizers on this second track spin me around like a frog on a lily pad that got caught in a slow whirlpool. I'm lazily rotating on my pad, occasionally licking my eye to this beat until Mac starts talking about our hurt feelings.

The road wheels on my bike took a while for me to get comfortable after I'd first handed over my fifty dollars cash for this old bike. Now that I'd put the miles in with it, I was no-handing this skinny little bad boy under the yellow, Florida moon. I'm swerving back and forth across the road as I get my bearings on my bike, and Mac seems to have brought some tendencies from his last album with him into this new period. He's flexing again, but I have more empathy for it now that I know it comes from genuine pride that I empathize with at times. I don't think I need to villainize anyone.

Mac says he's driving with his eyes closed and is consequently missing all the road signs. The idea that I'd been writing on the wall without seeing the whole picture comes back to mind. It seems like we both may have been writing out and then manifesting our own fate without being mindful of any warning signs that may have redirected us away from danger that could be run into when mixing obsessive musical investigation with transcendentalism.

## **What's the Use**

I really am throwing it all away right now, huh? I mean, from an objective standpoint, here I was, a promising young adult, still a kid in my mind, and I'm sacrificing my future. I always had a feeling that I'd be one to die young, but it is still odd when you can't think past a few hours in the future. I mean, thoughts stray into the future with even the best mindfulness practice, so it's a natural part of being a human. "What do I need to make sure I get at the store this evening? Are there any relationships I need to rectify before I show up to this party? I wonder what the repercussions of these actions may be? Did I fuck this all up? You know, those sorts of future thoughts.

Not me, not anymore. I existed in a much smaller timeline. No matter what stimuli crossed the screen of my mind, thoughts simply did not exist beyond tonight. I could have chosen to feel fear. It would have been a very reasonable response to this foreign way of thinking. This was a new sort of finiteness to thoughts I'd never experienced. Think of thoughts like offset line segments that have a beginning and an end. There are places where the timeline spent with these thoughts overlap since maybe I would think about two or three things for a moment. All the thoughts had their own independent starting point and ending point. For the first time in my life, the endpoints of all my thoughts were one. All the thoughts, regardless of when they started, stopped at the end of the night.

I'm not scared and it's not sad. As the funky bassline laid down by Thundercat playfully bubbles, bounces, and pops, I find myself asking a similar question as the song; What's the use? Thankfully, Swimming has been taking much nicer care of me than the last album and I consider what it means to mature. In

the three years from GO:OD AM to Swimming, more matured sonically than just Mac's vocals. The production, inviting on top tier producer, John Brion, has become far more refined. The motifs on which Mac raps have refined from hectic, rich asshole to more meditative, accepting, artist. Taking a moment to notice the rounded-out nature of the motifs brings me a sense of comfort. If I were speeding down the highway in the passenger seat with Mac berating me with big, bad bars while he drives in the last album, we've transitioned settings to a cozy speakeasy where he calmly and playfully introduces mindfulness topics to a mellow conversation across drinks. He is drinking an old fashioned and I am drinking a white Russian and we both smoke light blue American Spirits. He even mentions that he gets, "a little sentimental when [he's] off the juice (liquor)."

There is an acknowledgment as to where we've come to in space. Where in the last album, he markedly differentiated his position at great heights from mine being lower, I now feel as if we are both equals as artists. Mac Miller and I, both fitting into the "I" the song speaks with, are way up above the rest, looking down. I don't look to revel in any false sense of superiority, but I did really take a risk to be here. I notice our solitude in this house. I consider the alibis my friends had that were more important to them than settling this long term artistic question; what is on the other side of death? Without giving them any flack, this was the only opportunity to rawly tune into a message from a storied artist that was literally being sent over from the other side of the veil, and I was so thankful I was here to learn. I wish people could understand why I had to do this. The fear of missing a transcendent message from the ethereal realm was too much to quell, and I am at peace

knowing that I have tuned in to hear. I mean, it's looking like I'll be dead by the end of this, but that feels like a later problem.

As I bike in a loop around the small pond in the middle of my quaint neighborhood, Mac tells me that we're colder than the breeze but the breeze doesn't have the same fluidity that we do. He references himself as being the pilot driving this plane and informs me that we will not be landing. The song ends with Mac letting us both know that we're on the way and getting closer.

### **Perfecto**

When the next song begins, it is immediately evident that Mac is talking about life. My life, his life, your life, all life. He mentions that it's not perfect but that it doesn't bother him because it's worth it. This feels kind of plain to me, but he's not wrong by any means. I am biking south out of my neighborhood and take the first left out of my neighborhood. It seems that I have been very lost in the music. For the first three songs, I've been circling my neighborhood, riding with no hands while finding my balance. For a moment, I feel like a kid again. I flashback to learning to ride with no hands on the asphalt roads in my neighborhood. I can imagine having older Mac projects, Blue Slide Park or Best Day Ever, playing from my iPod Touch as I fell again and again, committed to finding my balance.

The memory of a younger, more innocent Mitch listening to a younger, more innocent Mac in a safe space as my neighborhood growing up juxtaposes the present moment. We have both come a long way since then. You could say we've risen to new heights if you like the wave we're riding, or you could say we're falling down a bad path if you reject the spiritual and artistic pursuits that brought us here. Either way, the path here was far from perfect. I think about the time that's ensued

since my time in Southern Oaks, my childhood neighborhood. My mind typically would go right for the mistakes I'd made in that time, or the massive wins. After all, those events are what I'd felt recorded the merit of life. The monumental milestones that define you. I realize a new immediate response to this hindsight I was feeling. Now, upon looking back, I immediately noticed a balance. I see that this road dragged me through the mud at times, but every time it did, it was dragging me to new heights. So no, it has not been perfect. It's been far from it, but with each revolution of the bike pedals, it brings me closer to that new height that I was being dragged to. I notice how there is a lack of friction causing resistance this time. I say that I was normally dragged since I'd resisted most redirections life gave me, so I made it difficult for life to change my situation. Picture a toddler going limp and making their parents literally drag or carry them to bed. Historically, that was how I made life bring me new opportunities.

“Perfect.” says Mac.

## Self Care

This time, the fluidity with which I was moving through time and space was like cursive. The smooth rotation of the bike pedals and wheels translated into a buttery rolling of the bike wheels that carried me down the choppy sidewalk. The sidewalk was broken up by roads that went down cul-de-sacs and other small neighborhoods. I'd ride down a small decline onto the red brick crosswalks that would bring me to the sidewalk across the road. My handlebars wanted to turn to the left at the beginning of the first brick crosswalk I navigated so I threw my right hand out to tap the handlebar back into its forward position. I feel like I'm doing wonderfully. I can't seem to miss any shots I take right now.

Since accepting my death, *memento mori*, the smoothness with which I am existing in the world and operating my body is impeccable. I just know that whatever it is going to happen is going to happen exactly how it needs to. With that in mind, fear starts to be left behind. As I leave the house with the scary record behind, I notice having left fear of failure there as well. 'Self Care' is the song playing in my ears right now. Mac is mentioning his ability to fly home and suggests he can be found at home since he isn't hiding. He then plainly says that hes, "climbing over that wall," and that the, "heights be too tall." I've accepted my fate, but it still feels a little morbid with the objectivity with the way he puts it. I was stunned by the subtle warning with which he suggested this path might end poorly, but I was now stunned by the way he candidly presumes that I'm going to get up on the wall of the building and then jump off the edge.

Every part of the present moment is smooth. Synchronicities between the music and events are moving me closer to my destination while I enjoy my

seat atop my bike. The cool air feels like it holds me with a bubble of softer air. The street lights peek through the foliage and bare twigs between the sidewalk and the tall, metal pole. As I bike, the light glitters as it shifts from one hole in the canopy to another. It's beautiful! I'm coming up to a split in the road. If I go right, it'll take me through campus, past some of my lecture halls. If I go left, I can go by the stadium and the midtown bars. I remember what day it is. Since it's Friday, I know how packed midtown will be.

So I lean right and my bike follows me across the street by the law school. This was clearly the right move as campus was pretty dead at 9:00PM on a Friday. I had the streets and the sidewalks to carve up on my own, and I was thankful that I'd avoided a traffic laden sidewalk ride broken up by groups of drunk college students getting into rideshares off University ave that I'd need to dodge. I like the repetition of "self care" as the chorus for this song. Self care was a new concept for me.

As I'm considering my avenues for self care, a beat switch pivots the song. Mac's voice sets the scene as I glide through this asphalt parking lot. Lines about feeling beautiful in oblivion and having all the time in the world ring in my ears and resonate with my life. I'm thankful for what feels like a poetic summarization of my mindset. The whole song is reframed by the pivot in the beat. Beautifully, we two artists have a moment where we exist outside of life's timeline. For a moment, we both exist in what he describes as oblivion. I can appreciate that descriptor since it is a space where time is not moving, but I still am. I know that I exist here in my mind. Somewhere else, in a different plane, I know normal life is still going. I know the boys are having a blast, I know my ex is likely with that one dude, and I know my best



friends are probably spending a comfy night with their loved ones. While I acknowledge that timeline is real and very much still going, we in oblivion are able to take a much needed respite.

I dismount my bike and prop it up against a brick wall near the baseball field. With all the time in the world, I sit down on the ground next to it and lean my back against the brick wall. I let out a deep exhale as I enjoy this time outside of time. For a moment, it isn't happening. None of this is happening; not my cathartic connection with this music, not the potential suicide, not the election, not my bad grade on the exam I got back, none of it. Sitting in limbo, I press my back against the bricks and feel their edges. I feel like I'm back in elementary school, waiting for my mom to pick me up from the pick-up loop. It was all brick walls then too. For a moment, I feel content in this limbo as I feel the misplaced hope that mom will pick me up to go home soon. Soon the red Grand Cherokee would pull around the corner and it'd be time to go back home. I'm not sitting here waiting for that, but I don't move to leave. I can live here forever, I think.

Then I did for a little while. For a moment, I did exist for an eternity with my back pressed to the brick. Nowhere needs me. Nobody needs me. I am.

As soon as eternity was over, I stood up, ready to progress. Mac validates this feeling by agreeing that, "it's a beautiful feeling in oblivion."

## **Wings**

The high hats of my favorite song come in, bringing feelings of relief with them. All I'd been through so far this evening feels like it was being lifted from my shoulders by this lofty intro. It has me feeling a stop and start, however smoother with less tension when compared to the traffic jam I got caught in back on 'Rush Hour' from the last album. This felt like the beat would pop into progressing the song forward. Then, the beat would stop and stay where it was, have a thought, then only begin moving once again when the thought was fully formed. I liked this beat's style. It is reminiscent of the Heffalumps and Woozles from Winnie the Pooh I'd been so fond of as a wee lad. Something about the synth conveyed that essence into pink and blue bubbles that filled my mind.

Early in this track, I can appreciate the rapper's newfound maturity and peacefulness. I was taking a lot of notes from the way this man explored his psyche, so it is confidence inducing to hear of growth catalyzed by the path. As I listen and cycle my bike in wistful swerves down the road, I am at peace. In step with the musician, I appreciate the newfound freedom having left emotions that I felt to be negative behind. Now that neither of us is carrying the feeling of being broken or ugly, I find that my bike ride has gotten smoother. Bumps in the sidewalk I was still hitting resulted in fewer and less uncomfortable reverberations in my tailbone than they were when I'd begun this ride.

I'd been spending an exorbitant amount of time considering my place in the world. "Who was I? Who am I supposed to be? Who am I now? What is my role? What's this all about? Am I good?" I realize that I am free of these questions. There's no need to worry.

I am approaching a nice downhill. It's a long, smooth hill just campus-side of the football stadium. I think it is nothing more than a huge flex by the university to get donor money, but the streets at UF were always smooth as hell, making it great for any sort of manually operated, wheeled activities I might be partaking in. Even the brick pavers were like butter under longboard wheels. Regardless, I appreciated this smooth ride as my thin, street tires glided over the asphalt.

Mac Miller then spits one of the most poignant verses I have ever heard. He begins touching on his desire to ride around with the wind in his face and my eyes unleash. I hadn't cried yet, this evening. I love crying! Every word he said sounded nostalgic for a time before the world had sunk its teeth into me. It made me feel for a young mitch who had never known abuse, who had never known sustances, who wasn't fully aware of reality. That Mitch only knew love and passion and it was beautiful. The words, "so familiar, never been realer, never felt so damn good where I'm at," are felt, as they were lived, as they were spoken, and as they were heard.

Cold tears are flowing as the wind pushes them back towards my sideburns rather than my cheeks. They burn a little bit but I don't wipe them away. I take a deep breath and savor the ride now that I am getting to the bottom of the downhill. The night sky is a dim bluish-grey, with a few heavy clouds with distinct margins to their form. I'm safely in the bike lane (there's nobody on this road anyways) so I take a moment at the base of the hill to gaze at the sky while I approach the incline. I notice how the clouds roll and grow, continually evolving before my eyes.

After this nice skyward moment, a couple more rap lines help me to get up the incline and back onto

even ground, and I'm now in a brick paver courtyard of a smaller library. The bricks are smooth and I weave between bollards with no thought of using my handlebars. I love myself very much in this moment. I love that I learned to do the "no hands" thing, and I love that I know where to go on campus for the smoothest bike ride. In my mind, skating and no-hands-biking is really cool and dope. I notice that I'm having a blast right now doing what I think is cool, and it's all for me. I am so thankful that I've gotten to know myself like this. I've spent so much time on my own, asking myself questions as to how I work, learning goofy nonsense for no reason other than because it excites me. I can trust myself too! With the way this evening is going in mind, I still find beauty in the fact that I saw a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to explore an art I was deeply passionate about and committed myself to it.

Mac reminds me of the idea. "Growin' up (one, two, three), jump," he says. He and I both notice that there's nobody here with us to walk us through this difficult moment. I don't feel let down by anyone because of where I am now. I am alone, yes, but this is the path I took. "That's why I keep to myself, get what I need, then I'll be out." I'm taking this as a direct metaphor for life at this point. We feel a purpose for being here, and feel that we'll be good to go on our way and die once we've gotten what it is to get. For the next couple lines, Mac is picking me apart in an artistic and playful, yet cutting way. He's showcasing his musical mastery as he plays with my psyche, putting feelings I didn't know how to express into eloquent stanzas.

He finishes up with a few more lines, dreamily stating, "these are my wings," accompanied by a degenerative synth sound that pops like ping pong balls off the paddle. I've got no idea what he's referring to.

## **Ladders**

The intro to Ladders has me pedaling my bike in sync with the rhythm, causing me to accelerate a tad. Mac is expressing a need to find a way to get to our destination, regardless of how many miles it might take us. It was just over two miles from my house to the garage, so I was pretty sure it wouldn't be too many miles. He talks about being on the figurative "top" over some guitar licks with some smooth reverb, making this whole endeavor a little easier to continue on. In some part of my mind, I am still very nervous knowing that there is pain in my future. I know this is one of those situations where if I just tied myself to the ground so I'd have to stay in one place until tomorrow, this would all be a crazy memory. Not only did I not feel like tying myself to the ground, but I was intentionally solo so that nobody could tie me to the ground. This garage really had been calling to me for a while. The heavily muraled building was the main parking garage for downtown Gainesville and had a great bar, Loosey's, that I was getting into with the dudes. I'd been frequenting downtown as of late and noticed some paintings begging me to be seen. I was an artist, but had no structure to my art education or practice, so to me, this was the closest I'd come to seeing art in a gallery outside of field trips. There's this fuckin' monkey in there too! This monkey has been watching over me as I longboarded down the parking garage just to take the stairs back up and ride back down. My closest friends and I would do this for hours on end, and it felt authentic and beautiful being the sidewalk knuckleheads we were as kids among the arts.

I'm thinking of the expectations I had for this experience and Mac is talking about how it'll all come falling down. Then just a while later, we're building a

ladder up to the sky together. Is it just me or is this wave really wavy? There's ups, there's downs, there's in the middles, there's nowheres. Ladders is about progressing. It is welcome progress, since I do have somewhere to get to. Earlier, Mac referenced not knowing when the right time to take a risk would be, but here, he is saying that he wouldn't wait forever and to, "just shoot your shot." Noted.

## **Small Worlds**

The vocalizations to open Small Worlds begin as lazy and fluid. I emulate these feelings with my bike, swerving loosely over smooth, empty streets. The Spanish moss above me joins the clouds in adding a second veil between myself and the clouds. This is a very realistic song that I'm experiencing. Mac is describing how the world feels small until one day it doesn't. I mean, it's not that deep, but I'm still feeling it deep as I weave the thread of my life's experience into the framework of this music. I can appreciate this one. My world had expanded in magnitudes I never imagined in the recent years where I'd begun exploring meditative, tantric, and transcendent methodologies. I know that I likely sound like a heady goofball talking in quirky circles most days, but I truly had expanded the capacity I had for empathy, connection, love, and expression as I expended the walls of my mind. After some time with Pink Floyd's 'The Wall,' I'd even learned to tear down the wall so now I just had a cosmic expanse in my mind to explore. Mac speaks what I'm thinking saying, "I'm building up a waaaaall, 'til it break."

This world I'd found myself was indeed small. I was around people constantly, but I did seem to keep a tight circle considering the vast crowds I would find myself in. The friends of mine in this very small world were friends who were also deep in this rabbit hole with me, we dove deep into self discovery. We would share wildly profound experiences with one another and share art we'd used to have these experiences. We'd use art, mostly music and paint, to do what we can to understand certain aspects of life or to share perspectives. While we were part of a much larger institution, my little circle was so tight together that we could reference "tearing down the wall," and everyone in the room understands that

we're talking in the metaphor established by the one album we'd all tracked a formative experience to. Part of me hoped that by the end of this night, my friends could look back at the posthumous album and understand what will happen tonight. Hopefully, we all will.



## Conversation Pt.1

I ride my bike past some kids who seem to be walking to midtown from their dorms. From one look at them I can tell what type of kid they are. I'm so good at making wild assumptions and then being 100% right by not considering other possibilities. These kids were all freshmen who had clearly just pregame'd with a shared twenty-four pack of piss beer and were going to try and pay their way into the bar by lining the bouncer's pockets with a crisp \$20 from their Christmas money.

"I'm feeling good and they hate it. Shit, I don't recognize these faces," Mac summarizes the event as I ride by these kids, undoubtedly surprising them since they didn't know swamp goblins on bikes attend their university. I feel a goofy smirk cross my face as I feel their eyes on me riding by.

My ego steps out again and I am now Mac Miller saying, "All you do is sit around the house, you getting faded," thinking of all the friends I'd intentionally skirted by biking this way. I am sorry for the friends that I won't see again, but then I find myself agreeing with the music again saying, "that ain't entertaining, you missing every single shot that you ain't taking." There was a time when I loved the lifestyle I was leaving behind but I have it set in my soul that I will not miss the next opportunity to take a gamble on myself.

For a while, the song is the background for a conversation I have with myself, a conversation about intentions.

"Do you know what's coming?" I asked innocently.

"How could I?" I respond.

"How will you know when is the right time to take a chance on yourself?" asks the planning part of my mind.

“I think I’ll just know.”

“What if it’s scarier than you could imagine?” I try to debase myself with the question.

“Look, Mitch. You’ve been presented with plenty of chances to take a shot, to take a risk. How many times can you let it pass by and be left wondering? Would you be happy with a life lived full of what if’s?” The question caught myself off guard. I knew the answer to this question. I did not want to think of where it might take me, so I just told this bold part of my mind, “lead the way,” and the song fades out with esoteric clarinets.

## **Dunno**

Mac and I are basking in the light of our relationship with art, represented in the feminine. He's expressing it as a sexual relationship where they have a mutual understanding that they value one another's company even though they get in each other's hair by causing inconvenience. There's a beauty to this relationship. They both drive one another crazy, but there's so much love there that working through the trials is natural. Talking about cuteness and freedom, I feel love and appreciation for her, for art. We'd shared some beautiful moments together. In this moment of beauty, I remember when she and I had found where the river rose from the ground. All of the beauty in nature we'd seen together could never be recorded but is everpresent. Canvases and paints cluttered my brain as I remembered the process of connecting my emotional expression to artistic creation. Together, we'd abused the hell out of each other but we'd made some beautiful creations in the process. Lyrically, it sounds as if we are describing 2 waves that balance each other out with contradicting peaks and troughs rather than causing destructive interference. The relationship is balanced since the peak of one wave is at the same point as the valley of one another, if I imagine this visually.

I speak through Mac's voice telling Art that I was busy when she called to tell me to come home. The reason I'm not with her in whatever realm she inhabits is simply because I'm taking too long. I'm just taking my sweet time to get there. Since Mac's voice is essentially mine, when I hear, "until there is no longer, lets get lost inside the clouds," I realize that I don't know what's about to happen. For a while it seemed like I was for sure about to jump off a building, especially with that Ascention, Jump, the Festival trilogy to end the first

album, but now I'm not sure what to think. Mac's voice transcribes my thoughts as we close the song singing, "I think we're gonna be alright, alright, okay. Thank God," and I feel an ascension happening inspired by the string instruments in the background.

## **Jet Fuel**

Jet Fuel is the next song and it starts with an odd voice saying words that I never bothered to look up. In my mind, I'm listening to a big tiki torch wielding bad guy from a Nickelodeon show badly appropriating Hawaiian culture. But it's a kinda fun sound; a bop, even. I recognize this song to be 'Jet Fuel.'

I didn't even notice getting here, but I am swimming, just not in the water. If an opportunity, a quest, a life, an adventure is an ocean, the idea is that you have to jump in to swim, to live your life. I was so afraid of this bike ride a while ago, but now I'm feeling understanding and empowerment at having made progress into something that I had been so paralyzed by.

This song is reminiscent of the life I had left behind. A droning sort of numbness conveys a degree of detachment from my feelings that I was intentionally leaving behind. The song keeps reiterating that we're never going to run out of jet fuel for this plane we're apparently riding in. While this is a silly line in a poem, it is known that it's sarcastic. What goes up, simply has to come down, no matter how much fuel we have. I put my arms out at my side as I pedal and become a Boeing for a second, feeling the breeze flap the loose sleeves of my colorful, wool jacket. I'm still leaning left with my arms out, taking this descent slow as we circle around the landing strip. It's at this point I notice that I've been biking in circles for a while. I was so focused on balancing with my arms out and being a jet plane that I was looping the courtyard with my arms extended for the majority of the song.

Just as I noticed my circles, the song makes a lofty switch, causing me to break my loop and resume progressing on my path. The sounds I am living in are transcendent. For the last minute and fifteen seconds of

the song, otherworldly words tell me that my maker,  
God, the universe, whatever I'm calling her right now, is  
waiting for me. Now is only now, and it is time to head  
back to the ground.

## 2009

My instincts bred by obsessive listening tell me that this song is '2009' just with the crescendo I'm hearing. The song, '2009,' has a way of bringing me back home. I'm in my childhood home in Southern Oaks all over again. This musical score is not one of rapper. This is a masterful selection from a musician that has devoted his life to the craft and curated a musical trip out of pure creativity. As the orchestra plays, the world seems to spin around me. Surprisingly, I am not disoriented. I am planted firmly in my body on this bike, on this planet. I notice a feeling of purpose. I feel driven to get to my destination to see this journey to the end, and I find myself taking moments to appreciate the context of life that has brought me here. It is the year 2009 presently. I ride my bike with no handlebars down the street when I hear, "Eric."

The voice of Redd Foreman from That 70's Show says the name in that stern voice that Redd, Eric Forman's dad, always used. I hear it as my dad calling my name. I love my dad to death and know that he loves me, but that stern, chastising voice still reminds me of being a kid at home with him. I kind of laugh because I know he'd be so pissed if he knew what I was doing right now. He'd bust a gasket. Riding my bike with no handlebars, how carless! "You'll get yourself hurt, Mitchell." He'd get on my ass for being careless and then say, "See?" when I bit it. Realistically, he was always right about those things, and did bust my ass countless times riding my bike with no handlebars. Enough times that someone with less hard of a head (possibly a softer head?) would have graphically plotted the copays for doctor visits against the attempts it took to learn to ride like that and determine riding a bike with no hands to be a poor fiscal endeavor.

The thing is, look how good I am at riding my bike with no handlebars now! All those times I busted my ass had some value at least, even if that value is just the ability to love myself a little more because of a cool moment I had by myself biking hands-free, between bollards, having a goof.

It is a sunny day in 2009 in Orlando, Florida as I bike down this dark street towards downtown Gainesville. I am perceptive of the darkness, of the cold, and of my surroundings, but it feels exactly like biking down my street as a kid when I was just twelve years old. Through the music, I express my contentment with this feeling, with this life, "all I do is shine take a breath and ease my mind." I am the music now, I'm expressing feeling of contentment with her, with the feminine, and with art. She tells me that angels are meant to fly and I don't feel the need to ask any further questions. I've spent enough time bargaining with fear.

Then, it is no longer the year 2009. I am back in the present before I even knew to get stuck in nostalgia. I am thankful as I notice how spending too much time there could have derailed my whole journey. Through the music, I feel a wave of confidence in my actions and intentions. We're talking about everything being exactly as it is, in perfect harmony, perfect poetry. I know that friends will understand what happens tonight. I know that this will be hard on everyone, but everyone is strong.

"Sometimes I wish I took a simpler route instead of having demons that's as big as my house," It's true. That would have been nice. I am reminded of the scars on my body I'd collected. "It is what it is," I reckon. I just wish this is something I could have communicated to my friends and family before I leave. I know that my life could have been a lot simpler had I played it a little safer. I feel a deep appreciation for everyone who has put up



with my bullshit since I made the choice to live an interesting life. I remember a time when I was pondering what the central “goal” was in living this life. I can’t say for sure what you’re supposed to do, but all I knew was it was essential that I be a good story, a story worth telling. I know that as I operate under that idea and use my head to live with my heart, it’ll be an interesting life at the very least. I have to acknowledge the pain this has brought myself at many times, but as I’m biking to the garage, I feel no regrets, none whatsoever. Yes, I felt pain. Yes, I made mistakes. I’ve made a plethora of them! It’s true that I could have made this life easier on myself, but no part of me regrets the path I’ve walked.

“All I do is shine, take a breath and ease my mind,” I hear as I was already mid breath, balanced with no hands, having left campus behind after passing the ATO frat house a quarter mile ago. Every line is bringing me peace. I feel like I’m on the righteous path. I laugh at myself for being on my silly, little hero’s journey.

## **So It Goes**

'So It Goes' begins with a dog barking. I think of Bear at home and wish I'd never been so hard on her when I was upset. I loved my dog, but I could hear my occasional harshness in Mac's voice yelling to the dog to be quiet.

I know that this is the last song on the album. I'm so close to the big reveal. I don't see any need to get ahead of myself though. Mac prepares me to take the shot that I've wondered when would come by saying, "You can have the word in the palm of your hand, you still might drop it." I understand now. None of what's led up to now has been a coincidence. All of the independent story arcs that were loosely related to this music, to past traumas, to romantic relationships are now culminating. I feel like I've been put on this path by a higher power. Call her God, the universe, my higher self, whoever, working with the art to bring about a monumental occasion in my life and I see that I've been on a collision course with whatever I'll find in this parking garage from way before I'd set out tonight. This was my shot with the world in the palm of my hand, whatever's happening.

As the bars progress through explanations of exhaustion with greedy folks, successes in an artistic career, and diversity of expressive avenues, the beat bounces like Plinko balls bouncing off keys of a xylophone. It creates an ambience like the Jeopardy theme music, which accurately captures my mindset. I'm getting close now. I can't quite see the garage yet, but I know that it's close. The Jeopardy theme captures the feeling I'm experiencing of considering the options. I know that there's a point of no return and I feel myself approaching that point.

Mac keeps repeating, “so it goes,” which motivically sounds to me a lot like, *it is what it is*. I notice something about the way he says it. With the inflection put on, “so it goes,” it sounds eerily like, “circles.’ I’m floored upon hearing this. When Mac died, I did not know that this new project was in the works. For me, right now, these are bread crumbs a living Mac Miller dropped so that we could track his art to the other side. I don’t want to die by any means, but you’d be dead wrong if you think I’m not going to hear what’s on the other side of this. He invites everyone to gather around and listen to the tale since he’s finally back in town. The, “so it goes, so it goes, so it goes,” that he’s singing is doubling with meaning in my mind, meaning “circles, circles, circles.”

I turn left and the parking garage comes into view for the first time. As I bike up to the base of the five story building, we both sing “la-da da-da, la-da-da, circles,” in unison. It doesn’t look that tall from here.

## part iii

### memento mori

I take a slow inhale as I size up the parking garage. I look up, and it doesn't look too big. Then I look down at its base and my stomach knots. "It's not like that," I tell myself. I look back up, and the building doesn't look nearly as big once its base disappears from view. I've spent a lot of time in parking garages. I grew up skating in parking garages in downtown Orlando. Even better than the ones in Gainesville, the ones in Orlando had elevators so you could spend more time carving and bombing the hills than you would spend walking. The lights of the garage are on and I can see one car exiting on the first floor. I'm not very concerned about anyone seeing me.

I'm in no rush. I'm not in limbo, not in oblivion, not heaven, not hell; I am right here. I am just outside the Southwest Parking Garage in downtown Gainesville. I am very much in my body, very much in the driver's seat of my mind and body. If anything, I feel more lucid than I have in a long time. I feel a depth in clarity that grounds me. It's a slow night downtown. I see a couple small groups going into and out of some of the more mature bars in town. One of them had been the music store that Tom Petty used to buy his instruments from. This place definitely has class and character. Each of these groups feels like they're trying to be the same mold. It's like three to four dudes with two to three ladies. Two to three of the guys are peacocking, putting on a show for the girls who are likely just trying to have a night out. Oh, guys. Poor girls.

I take a second to finagle with my headphones. The thing about running through these albums from the

top to the bottom is that it really straps you in and lets you have it. I've been riding this musical wave as it's turned into a tsunami. Now, at the base of the parking garage, I feel as if I am surfing at the peak of a wave, and for a moment, the wave pauses just as it's about to crash. As I stand on my surfboard frozen in the face of a wave as it's ready to crash. I turn in a circle and admire the wave. It consists of pure energy. It's music, it's art, it's pain and it's pleasure, it's happiness and sadness, and it's more than anything, it's real. My jaw is slack as I notice the massive amount of context that is packed into this wave that I've been riding. As I surfed this wave, I'd been so focused on staying balanced and riding the wave safely that I hadn't noticed how dangerous the wave had gotten just by growing in sheer size. It's so large it has potential to drown even the most experienced surfers.

*Memento mori* flashes across my mind.

Remember that you must die. I take a deep breath and let out a heavy exhale. Practicing longer exhales than your inhales can cause your parasympathetic nervous system to kick in, regulating your nervous system. The quick exhale tells me that it's time to get moving and I return to finicking with my headphones. I can't even remember why I was re-raveling them in the first place. I shake my head at myself and undo the work that I had begun. I put the buds in my ears and take a look at the tracklist. I felt good looking at thirteen new Mac Miller songs. There was a sadness when he'd passed that I'd never get to hear a new song from this artist.

This was a fourteen song album but only thirteen were new to me since 'Good News' was the single dropped in advance of the album to promote it. It's been my favorite song since it came out. The black and white album cover looks morose. I don't feel like pondering it

here is going to help me prepare for what's about to happen so I press play on the first song.

## **Circles**

“This is what it looks like, right before you fall,” says Mac Miller.

“Fuck, man, no way.” I say out loud at the bottom of the parking garage.

So it’s going to be like this. The writing on the wall was now screaming itself at me and I couldn’t look away or plug my ears anymore. I take a long exhale and prop my bike up against the wall on the outside of the rightmost wall of the entrance. I won’t be needing this anymore.

I realize that this evening of maniacal artistry has actually been quite kind to me so far. Even though it has me at the base of a building I know that I’m about to fall off of, it’s at least presented this to me in digestible bits. I was unwell at the idea of falling earlier, but I was able to push the worry off at the time. If the music had revealed this position I’m currently in to that earlier Mitch, I would have pulled the figurative fire alarm in my life. I would have done anything to avoid this moment back then. However, now that I am in this moment, it’s like what Mac said back in ‘Ascension,’ “Oh, it’s not sad, baby!”

I’m not scared and I’m not sad. I look back before I step into the garage and I see that every loose end has been tied down. It is all making sense now that I’m getting so close. I had been wondering why I’d been making peace with people from my past. Now that I feel myself approaching the edge, I was glad I didn’t need to imagine the panic I’d be feeling if I hadn’t cleared whatever air. It isn’t that I’d be crushed if my buddy’s ex from middle school were upset with me, but I certainly didn’t need any extra weight at this point.

The melody is plucking soft notes in an easy tempo. It makes each step towards my inevitable death

that much easier. It's a repeating progression that bounces, sounding like playground balls bouncing on a giant synth pad in low gravity. I take another breath in, let it sit for a second, and let it out slower. I feel a cycling moving in my core, a sort of balancing act; it's a rising and falling, and an ebb and flow.

After the lines between Mac's ego and mine had melded in the way that his "I" is my "I," the part of the voice that represented Mac Miller no longer represented anyone when the voice said "I don't have a name, I don't have a name, no." This let me know that I am conversing with an omnipresent, natural, unnamed, energetic, and transdimensional being. Good news! These words definitely came out of Mac Miller's mouth when he was alive, but currently was coming from a transcendent force. I just know that this voice that is singing me on towards my death, who is not connected to a person living or dead, who I invested myself into art specifically to commune with, is telling the Truth. I feel a sense of reverence, presence, and profundity. I am honored to be here. I feel like I want to cry. I am not sad, I do not feel fear, nor loss, nor pain. I just want to cry. It's perfect.

"Who am I to blame, who am I to blame though?" What an odd question for God to ask.

"I mean, dude..." I start to think. I obviously would love to not take the blame for my being here. It would be lovely. This conversation with myself, with God, is beautiful, acknowledging the wherewithal and consciousness with which I, we set up this beautifully arranged deck of cards. It is a beautiful sort of stubbornness to accept certain parts of you just are. I feel this beauty as the voice that represents myself, the divine refers to drawing circles for the first time. I think of how I can not draw a perfect circle. I'm an artist who likes to doodle, so I draw circles for fun since they make



great eyes if you put a dot in the middle. The fact that I can't draw a perfect circle does not discourage me from drawing circles. I appreciate the act of drawing the circle. It's like the inability to change, I will not be discouraged from trying to make a change if I can't be perfect.

As I am turning a familiar corner, the breath is taken from me; I am floored. The voice in my ears is still connected to no living being, not myself, nor Mac, nobody. Once I see the painted ape taking up the entire, yellow wall in the corner of the first floor, he becomes the speaker from my perspective. This ape, constructed by the artist with an array of simple, geometric shapes to create an impressionist gorilla, peers into me with pensive eyes.

Very quickly, this gorilla personifies the voice of nature due to my perception of an apes closeness with Mother Earth. I felt this gorilla to be wise upon first glance. Then his voice comes in to say, "trust me, I've tried," conveying a forlorn attitude to me. This broke me, feeling as if the wise ape were perceiving me to be a lost cause. Although he was taller than me, he did not look down on me. He looked at the young environmentalist with hope in his pupil-dominant eyes and passed on a sense of pained acceptance. To me, with his eyes, this gorilla, reminiscent of Daniel Quinn's *Ishmael*, says, "we did our best, Mitch, but it was not enough. I think of the habitat loss and fragmentation happening to this dude's home.

I am just one person. There are so many people out there that my mind recoils at the thought of billions of folks. I am just one of them.

"Went through a wall, sitting, watching this wor;d go down its decline," the song says as we enjoy this space between us. This ape and I normally cannot commune, but in this artistic context, I can pass along

my caring sentiments to this ape to let him know that there is still love in humanity. While I have this opportunity to talk abstractly with our closest relatives in the animal kingdom, I make sure he knows one thing.

"Please know that there is still love in humans," I say with my eyes, now filling with tears. "I am so sorry for what many of us do to you and your family." We exchange more empathy as the music confirms we are both safe in each other's presence. In the wild, we wouldn't be able to sit and commune like this but because we're art right now, we can safely exchange sentiments without fear.

Then, the music mediates our conversation, first conveying my side to the chimp and then vice versa, by saying, "You're feeling sorry, I'm feeling fine." I am happy my condolences are heard by this liaison for the animal world, and it's uplifting to hear that he's fine. I can't possibly know how, but I know that it will be ok. Then the abstract gorilla co-ops Mac's voice to advise me to avoid adding more stress to my plate and to take it a day at a time.

Just after this, the gorilla tells me that it's getting pretty late. I know that he knows my night is coming to an end, and he knows there's no need for me to dilly dally. He says, "It's gettin' pretty late. And I find it goes like the hand that keep counting the time, drawing circles," closing the first song of the album.

## **Complicated**

Just as I was starting to think the last album of my life might be a bummer, some bright synth punches through the clouds that started to roll in my mind. Mac even refers to these figurative clouds in the first line, saying that it is cloudy outside but that is preferable. I am watching my feet as I stroll around the corner and away from my primate pal.

As I walk with myself, there is nobody else in my reality for the lyrics to be said by. There was nobody for the lyrics to be said to either. The music is heard, experienced, and understood, saying, "Some people say they want to live forever. That's way too long. I'll just get through the day without any complications." I sway my hips a little with each step, and then I do some slow, exaggerated, high steps as if I'm wearing massive cowboy boots rather than tattered high top Vans.

The moment asks, "does it gotta be so complicated?" My high steps are goofy as hell. It doesn't need to be hard anymore. I'm here. I've arrived. All I have to do is do my best to avoid complications from here on out. I assessed it from the outside before I came in and nobody is in this garage between me and my painting on the roof. I'll aim for that and feel it out as I go. As the chorus asks why it needs to be so complicated all the time, I'm grooving my way down the middle of the lane, aimlessly making my ascension until a piece of art calls me otherwise.

"All I wanna do is look but I can't see," I hear, then, "baby." I'm giggling to myself as I essentially walk down a gallery aimlessly and independently, not really looking at any of the art. I just know that I'll know which pieces have something to say to me right now. Imagine having only an hour at a job fair. You're going to want to talk to the right people and avoid wasting precious time

with the rest, regardless of the validity of the rest of the companies there. This is how it feels for me right now, knowing that I could potentially get sucked into a long conversation with most pieces of art right now. Like Mr. Monkey said, it's getting pretty late, so I don't have time to waste being enveloped by a piece with nothing applicable to communicate.

## **Blue World**

A new, nondescript, male voice comes in and informs me that the world is blue without me. This is a nice thing to be told, I notice, but it comes with a twinge of sadness and guilt. It will be a blue world without me, I reckon. I think of a picture a wonderful friend took of me in a forestry class. The picture is of me in my “hiking Vans,” a yellow Grateful Dead hat, and a grey hoodie that I found on the ground as I swing my leg over a tree as I start to climb it. I appreciate that picture because it shows me the good in me. It shows me the innocent, goofy, loving dumpster fire that I am, different from the egotistical, alcoholic, degenerate I’ll try to convince myself that I am on anxious occasions. I am, once again, gutted for a moment. It hits me what others will lose for the first time.

The same voice then says, “it’s a blue world alone,” which identifies the speaker of these lines. This is the world once I’m gone that is telling me this. A dancey beat smacks in just after the “world-without-Mitch” says that to me, which only gives me a second to feel touched that the world is going to miss me. I feel a gut wrenching anxiety and guilt for a brief second thinking of the folks who love me. I harden my heart with a sense of, “they’ll understand by the end of this,” and I quickly move on.

Mac’s voice comes back in, now speaking my internal voice, talking about how it’s the crazy world that made him crazy and that he, and I by proxy, are going to turn this metaphorical ship around because we’re not stressing anymore.

Over the next few bars, lines jump out at me to emphasize the beauty of the artistic poise put into this piece. I hear lines that say, “had the homies with me, all the sudden they split,” which refers to my inevitable

decision to take a solo trip because all the boys are busy. They didn't do it out of spite, I notice. They were unintentionally making the space for me to have this experience that only I could have on my own. Imagine if I'd had a homie with me and said, "Hey dude, I'm gonna go check out this building that I really hope I don't jump off," I'm not getting invited to the next kickback. Then, it'd be a whole thing too where I have to calm my friend down so they don't think I'm going to off myself because of music, and nobody wants that.

The song makes a pivot, with Mac reiterating "don't trip" three times as the beat slows down. To me, this acts as an insistent, "don't worry." I'm doing my best. Mac's voice, coming from deep within myself, says "if you could see me now," as I hold my hands out and wiggle my fingers in a fluid flutter that I pass off as dancing. "Love me and hold me down," my ego still holds onto the idea that we won't get hurt tonight, that we'll still end up on the couch with a cold beer and the boys by the end of this.

"Hey, one of these days we'll all be fine. Don't be afraid. Don't fall in line."

## **Good News**

Playful plucks start off a song that I am surprised that I recognize. Prior to the release of this album, the single, Good News was released by Mac Miller's team to tease the album drop. It had immediately become my most streamed song, and I was stoked to hear it now. The plucking notes led to the confession that I spent the whole day in my head and that it was time to do some spring cleaning. I reminisce on my earlier panic I'd felt when I first started noticing spooky trends in this musical exploration while the song asks the questions; why can't it be easy, and why does everyone need me to stay on this planet? I take it a step further, wanting to ask more mental questions, but I slip on the step. I am so synchronized with the music that every line feels to be written with each step I take. This album had never been heard in my experience, so I'm having fun imagining that this is for me. Now that everything else had dropped out of my personal experience of life, I was thankful I'd avoided hearing anything off this album besides this single prior to tonight. In my tangled, silly, creative noggin, this message from the other side of life, the other side of consciousness could be tuned into and lived in real time.

Referencing my life, the song puts it for me, "get everything that I need then I'm gone," and I am reminded of a line from Swimming, "get what I need, then I'll be out." Both pieces from before and after death have a line that mentions departing from this life once everything had been accomplished. I thought back to entering the parking garage and remember that I have no business back there. I will keep it in motion, circling, spiraling up this parking garage until the path is made clear for me, as now I have no expectations for what I may find.

The song takes me through accepting the present as it is. I appreciate this idea as the song points out my uniqueness. I appreciate that as well. In this moment, I appreciate everything that brought me here. Everything that had its hand in bringing me here had my hand in it, making me feel immense gratitude for myself. It is very nice to feel guided to deep spiritual and artistic meaning and connection by a person I can trust, especially in this case since that person is me.

As the song reminds me, “when it ain’t that bad it could always be worse,” I turn a corner and see what looks to be a wall of peas. Somebody painted a bunch of peas that look like heads on the wall! These are good peas in my mind, but they don’t look to be good peas for the eating sense, since they are all pressed up against one another, they are wack colors for peas to be, and they all have faces. Stoic, Easter Island looking peas, these characters look like they would have been the exact Plinko balls that bounced on the beat in the end of Swimming. They all have faces that I could imagine looking mildly spooked with a high pitched “ope!” as they bounce off every peg they make bouncing down the sonic Plinko board. It’s a cute visual, so I stay with the peas for a while as the song peacefully weaves between themes of acceptance and resignation.

The song takes an introspective turn as Mac’s voice begins explaining how others are interested in my goings on, but that they only want the good news. They could take or leave the parts of me that are down or depressed. If this isn’t the truth, I feel it to be, at least. Employing Mac’s voice to dictate my thoughts, I am noticing that, “there’s a whole lot more for me waiting on the other side.”

The song winds down as I notice that it ain’t so bad. I take a deep breath as my favorite song ends.



## **I Can See**

The pensive end to Good News left me expecting the wave to flow into more audio tranquility, but the next song, I Can See, bubbles like slipping up and down a spiral staircase. The first lines describe how close I am to the end, saying “I’m so close I can taste it.” I am really close to the end, aren’t I? Mac’s voice talks about looking for balance and the need for somebody to coregulate their emotions before they go crazy. I assume these lyrics to be about me, and it makes sense as I notice that I am currently kind of crazy.

“If life is but a dream then so are we,” I hear, bringing me to a perspective where I feel as if I am floating through a dream. As I peacefully walk through this building that is just lousy with cars, I feel as if I am in a dream, but physically in a dream; metaphorically, it feels as if the parking garage is the physical head and that the art inside, including myself, is the living dream. I knew that this life was a dream before this evening, but the voice in my head confirming it is fun. It feels good to exist in this dream space. I feel happy for the entity that is having this dream, as it is a very good dream. The song repeats the phrase, “show me something,” as I look back to the walls for deeper meaning. I burst out laughing at the mural right in front of me.

I’d been walking in somewhat of a daze with my head tilted down at the ground, so I couldn’t see much besides two of the best feet I’d ever known. After asking for a message from the divine, present moment, the answer was given when I looked up. Hilariously, the mural in front of me is all black; it’s all black with plain text that simply states, “BE RESPONSIVE” up top, and “NOT REACTIVE” down low. The swirling staircase of a beat continues to wind and spiral and grow in the background as I download the message. I look into my

brain to check on the vocabulary files. I take out the manilla folder that is labeled “things to do after an event.” I flip through the pages until I find the one that says “REACT.” I gently remove this page from the folder, grab my pencil, erase the word, and replace it with a much gentler, “RESPOND.”

The vocals come back in and I feel at ease until I’m reminded of my fears when I hear the words, “I’m hitting the ground, I’m hitting the ground, I fell from the top.” Eyes still transfixed on the plain text, I take a moment. I notice that a Mitch from earlier this evening would be shitting himself over this and might want to try to fix it. Old Mitch would have done whatever he could do to deny this from manifesting; anything from texting a friend, grabbing a beer, or taking a walk. Not that any of these would have been inherently bad or wrong, I just noticed these mindless reactions never help me. Reactions tend to be quick bandaid solutions that would make me feel as if I am doing something, at least. However, to be responsive is to be mindful.

I stand in front of what is likely the least visually stimulating mural in this garage and am having a breakthrough. I am twenty-two years old and I am learning about mindfulness for the first time from a mural in a parking garage. Our education system sure prioritizes the right things!

The song continues, confirming that I never expected to be in this position, falling off a building, since that seems to be what’ll go down this evening. Apparently, this somewhat like a “God’s plan” according to the song. As I notice the fears I’d lived in earlier about some abstract time down the line where I might be falling, I appreciate the fact that I am currently here, hearing the news as I am. I couldn’t have possibly gotten this far had I held onto those fears and brought them

with me, so even though I see all these paintings on the wall that are taking the place of the writing on the wall, I am at peace. I feel so powerful, centered, and new. I literally flex my bicep for myself as I notice this and thank myself for my bravery; nice.

## **Everybody**

I am back in the moment as the next song opens with a somber piano chord followed by the declaration that “Everybody’s gonna live and everybody’s gonna die.” I acknowledge this and allow a slight smirk. Of course everybody is going to die. This validates what’s about to happen to me. I always knew I was going to die, so this fact makes my current situation a little easier. Thinking about it, I am probably one of the few to be able to see their death coming, so when the song says, “everybody just want to have a good, good time,” I think of the uniqueness of my situation. I notice that I can have some fun with this slow death.

While the song plays its melancholy sounding, keyboard riff, I’m looking for an opportunity to start bouncing. The chance is granted as soon as the intro is over. A light hearted drum beat kicks in and my feet start feeling fun. Now, with each step, I am wiggling the raised foot in the air a few times before I put it back down. Then some fingers start to dance as my hands swing lazily by my sides. This is a rap album that came out, but this is not a rap song. Sung as if it were performed on a red rocking chair on a front porch painted white, the sound brings me a sense of hominess even when I am so far from home in my mind. The front porch is reminiscent of the American South, and it feels cozy for a moment even considering I’ve got a few more songs until I die.

The song continues reminding me of the figurative agreement I signed before my energy came to be a human being on Earth. I initialed MC and dated the contract with July 24, 1997 having acknowledged the clauses saying, “you will live,” and, “you will die.”

The song pivots into an anecdote about a blind man with very little. This man is down bad, but he’s still playing the blues with expertise, becoming yet another

representation of myself. I am an artist with no formal training, oftentimes feeling beat up, disheveled, or generally out of sorts. While I don't have the harmonica and guitar that this old blind man has, I too can play some beautiful blues, mine were just more of a lifestyle and expressed visually.

Sensing that we are approaching the close of this song, a timely beat change confirms my suspicion. The voice that used to belong to Mac reminisces on the beautiful sunsets he'd seen with his love. I think of my love, and feel the sun starting to set on me one more time. "Everybody's gonna die. Everybody's gonna try to have a good good time. I think you know the reason why."

While I can't put it into words in this moment, I know the reason why.

## **Woods**

Outside of this evening and outside of this parking garage, I'd been spending a lot of time in the woods. Sure, I am "in the woods" on this endeavor, but being that I'm studying forestry in school, I was thankful to be learning so much about the forests I loved spending my time in. In that regard, I'm in the woods in the reality sense and a metaphorical sense, so when the snares that define the intro to the song, Woods, come in, I'm brought into the woods in a musical sense as well. The dream sense comes back into mind as I drift over the pavement. I notice that I'm feeling like a death row inmate making his walk to the gallows. I find this hilarious, but do not let this hilarity burst out in a cackle, perhaps because I am feeling a somber, respectful mood from this song.

There is color all around me in the murals. There is color in my mind in the music. I am draped in color as well, as my jacket is a patchwork of bright hues. All of this color is juxtaposed by the drab concrete and metal utility pipes. I can't imagine what these painted red pipes would be carrying through a parking garage, so I don't.

Mac Miller's voice can be heard questioning if I/he/we love enough and expressing a desire for my/his/our love to stay around. If love is leaving, can I/he/we come along with? I notice that I would follow love anywhere. Love could lead me places I wouldn't even go with a gun and I'll be smiling the whole time. Lines about the time spent in a daze, heartbreak, and loss bring me to the hook of the song, where it is revealed that my soul is quite close to being broken as I spend a forever in just one day. As I experience this album, I notice that this journey has brought me through an eternity in just one, silly Friday. At this moment I look at my jacket to see the fibers woven together to make this sweater. I notice that

this jacket was alive before me, that this music will exist, documenting this experience far beyond my time.

As the song walks me through the woods, I feel as if I walk through the woods in my mind, noticing vines, dense foliage, and a feeling that there might be a puma out there that I can't see. The puma wouldn't let me see it unless it wanted to, so I don't quite have the wherewithal to do anything about this puma since I can't see them. So, I shrug it off. I feel respect for this puma I made up. I look to turn another corner as the lyric, "we can only go up," reverberates in my mind.

## **Hand Me Downs**

“I’m thinking maybe I should thank you,” I hear as the energy flows into what is clearly a new song. To me, this feels to be the universe giving me a nod for putting myself in a position to receive these messages from it. The song is very quickly flowing through poetry I feel exemplifies my best work. I feel these lyrics in the moment as if I had written them, and it feels good to hear a message of self preservation and love coming from what feels to be my voice.

The song vocalizes the need to depart from a position where things don’t feel right, helping me to appreciate myself a little more. I notice that I will do the work to take myself out of a situation that doesn’t feed my soul, even if the situation is comfortable. I am doing it currently. I notice the discomfort I have felt all night and I appreciate it. The feeling is an icky one, but I have needed it to exemplify my strength and resolve. I realize these uncomfortable feelings catalyze changes to better my position and my person. The song tells me that my design is beautiful, helping me to appreciate this process that I repeat to continually better myself.

It is a cycle! The first part is getting comfortable. From there, I’ll generally allow the comfort to turn into stagnation, which is where discomfort creeps in. I’ll exist there for a while as the discomfort unconsciously builds. When I notice that I am in the thralls of toxicity that stems from my uncomfortable comfort, that is when I am inspired to change. In this sense, positive change comes from pain. I accept this fact with a quick and heavy sigh to exhale.

I take a buttery breath in and let it go quickly. I’m in no rush, but it just feels so good with the air moving through me that I want more of it. Then, the song



slows me down as the voice in my ears says, “down, down, down,” in a loop, slowing me down.

“Just being honest, my conscience ain’t doing bad,” I hear in my ears to validate how I’d been feeling. It does feel as if I am doing quite well in this moment. I’ve done all this hard, hard work to get here, and I’ve accepted my death which was maybe the hardest part of all. Now that I’ve accepted this, my conscience feels light and free. The line continues into, “because I try to minus the problems that I attract,” and I smile. Breathing just feels so good right now.

“I move carelessly, that’s why I’m always tripping,” I hear in my ears to confirm how I’d been feeling. I would always spill milk all over the table at family dinners as a kid. I don’t know what it was about those tall, thin, glass cups that seemed to be top heavy with the way they wanted to topple over. I would reach across the table and then milk is all over the place, causing everyone to pick up their plates as the milk spilled into everyone’s lap. I would not be one to cry over spilled milk, but I did feel shame at being careless once again. Mindfulness as a concept wouldn’t be introduced to me for another fourteen years at this point, so I would just feel sad that I was cursed to be making careless decisions for the rest of my life. It is probably this same carelessness that has me bugging out so often in my mind, causing me distress. By the associative property, my carelessness is directly related to my distress.

“Get away when it ain’t really safe and it don’t feel right,” I hear in my ears to confirm the feeling I’d been suspicious of. I had been wanting to eject myself from my position in life as of late, feeling stuck in an environment that idealizes unhealthy coping strategies, abusive relationships with people and substances, and a general absence of self preservation. This line clearly

confirmed and validated this feeling in my head. I had allowed this feeling that something is wrong to squeeze me right out of my role in life into this space where I was actively redefining who I show up as in society.

“But what’s new? You get used to the bullshit, the screws they go missing,” I hear in my ears as I am reminded that this is just another iteration of that same cycle I’m so used to. I am repeating this cycle once again. I have been somewhat desensitized to the ramping up of the intensity with which I wrap myself in the toxic comfort before I notice that I need a change. The mental screws that were holding me together do start to back out, causing the wheels to fall off, leaving me feeling disassembled in this current situation. I had been squeezed out of the comfortability I’d become addicted to and know a change for the better is inevitable, but I am currently in pieces within my noggin. I’m not in pieces in the sense that I have fallen apart, but more so been taken apart by the art in preparation of being reassembled into a new form that is more suited to my ideal environment.

## **That's On Me**

Following being disassembled by the last song, the present song immediately acknowledges my own fault in my current position, repeating “that’s on me, that’s on me,” and the occasional, “I know,” or “It’s all my fault.” I know that I am the one who put me in this precarious position. Even if I really wanted to, there is no way I can blame anyone else for the way this is going. I self-isolated in the art, I decided to take this musical journey on my own, and I set off for this garage. It seems I had been very intentional as to getting here such that I only had myself to credit, blame, celebrate, or fault for getting here. The voice in the music wistfully retraces over this same sentiment, sort of lullabying me into comfort with an objectively tough situation.

The song acknowledges that time is moving slowly for me now. These last moments are lasting a while. I’ve known that it has been metaphorically getting late and that the sun is figuratively setting on my life for a while now, but I notice that these minutes in the garage with the art have been lasting a little longer than normal as they are jam-packed with profundity. I’m so deeply involved in this art, that the seconds are so meaningful I don’t notice them passing.

Mac Miller’s returns to the scene in my head, referencing how he said “good morning” this morning. I take this as a direct allusion to the first album that I listened to on this wild ride of an evening, GO:OD AM, since that’s what the album directly translated to. Consistent with my thinking, his voice now says that tonight, he will be saying “goodnight.” In this moment where Mac Miller is reconnected with his voice, I hear this as him accepting his own death, which makes sense to me since this line would have been recorded right before his death. It also refers to my impending death,

as I process this goodnight as being told to me before I go as well.

His ego had been detached from his voice for a while in my mind, so it was fondly familiar when he returns to the scene, saying that he and I will “take the stairs that gets us into there.” I know that wherever ‘there’ is would be somewhere on the other side that I want to be. I am content as the song fades out of mind with the phrase “that’s on me” reverberating through my mind.

## **Hands**

A distorted, childlike voice enters the scene, making sounds that a 1920's cartoon character might make when lifting a heavy crate with a heave, or perhaps when lifting heavy dumbbells in a hilariously tight spandex unitard. The sounds are playful. I feel positive as the voices accompany these sounds by simply confirming my thoughts with repeated "yeah's."

I'm brought back to dancing with my fingers by the groove, so when the song asks me, "Why don't you wake up from your bad dreams?" and "Why don't you take a little time for yourself." As I take these questions to be suggestions to ease my mind, I am informed that there is actually very little reason to be so upset, and I like this angle. The music tells me that carrying the weight of my mental burdens will break my legs, to which I smirk. I am very thankful that I've put a lot of my heavy mindsets down a long time ago, since I'm not in the mood to have broken legs.

A few more lines about the collective apathy towards offering free favors for folks fill my ears as I think about breaking my "glass knees," as it was put for me. I stay with this thought until I hear the music explain that, "I'm way too busy tripping 'bout some shit that still ain't even happen yet," encapsulating my earlier anxieties and presenting them in a way I see the act of worry for what it is. I appreciate the candid nature with which my worries were displayed so that I could easily shed them in the future. I notice that, while this is helpful to be aware of going forward, my future isn't that long. Nonetheless, I appreciate myself for making this progress in my noggin at all, happy that I can be more mindful of anxiety from now on. At least I wouldn't slip down the same mental pathways again before the end. I can't guarantee that I won't be anxious again before the

end, but I can at least know that I won't be anxious in the same way I was earlier ever again. Even with my life on a very short and finite timeline, a mental win is still a mental win.

The song reiterates the initial questioning, emphasizing the need to awake from my nightmarish day-to-day and be patient with myself, for myself and ends with the affirming series of "yeah's" that were so confidence inspiring to begin with. My fingers wiggle along with the song's fading away. The 1920's body builders finish up with their hefts and heaves.

I take a buttery breath in and let it go quickly. I'm in no rush, but it just feels so good with the air moving through me that I want more of it. Then, the song slows me down as the voice in my ears says, "down, down, down," in a loop, slowing me down.

## Surf

Slowly, this song opens up with an intimate sort of comfort. The voice in the song asks me where I'm going and if it can come with. In my mind, without words, I invite the voice to come with me. I'm not sure where it is that I am going right now, but I know that I could use the company of music wherever it is that I'll end up.

The music tells me that this whole world is open, acting as a playground for us. Myself and music have been playing on the monkeybars of life together, sliding down slides, playing 4-square and hide-and-go-seek. Sometimes, we'll fall and scrape our knees, finding ourselves crying and running to mom for a band-aid and a kiss to make it better, but that's a part of it. In fact, I appreciate that as being one of the most important parts of recreating on this playground of life. I love that I can be a kid on the playground, fall doing it and get hurt, run to mom, get some love, then get back out there to play knowing that the raspberry on my elbow is going to heal with time.

As I rise in this garage, making circles with my pathway, the song continues to speak to my soul, validating my feelings, but simultaneously connecting me with everyone else's experience. Hearing these words that feel so self-referential from a voice that is not mine shares a theme I had felt so alone in. Removing this sense of alienation made my personal experience become a shared experience, and I bask in a moment of beautiful community with humankind.

I am reminded of the beautiful process of growing a flower from seed. The patience required to sit with a seed, being patient with it and tending to it for it to grow into beauty in time is a motif I keep in mind as I approach the wall. I look to the wall, and I smile at the small flower painted near the margins of a much larger

painting. I smile and I hear, “there’s water in the flowers, let’s grow,” helping to move me right along, with a smile as I find a double meaning in “let’s grow,” hearing, “let’s go.”

At this point, I must have walked in more than a couple circles, making my way through this museum of murals. As I had hoped, I’d had this entire museum to myself. I feel very fortunate to be able to have this intimate experience. Zooming out, I look at this expand on this feeling to a much larger perspective. I notice the intimacy with which I’ve spent my time on this big ‘ol rock. The smooth bassline in the background leads me to feeling warm and comforted. I feel held by this music, rocked like a baby. It is a magnificent feeling as if the arms of a lover were also a hammock between two palm trees on a tiny island in the sunset. In making my circles, I’d also risen up a few floors, it seems. I can see from my place standing on the garage floor that I had risen higher although I could not see the ground from here. I could tell that I’d risen because I could see the crowns of the trees below. I love southern live oaks.



## **Once A Day**

As I think of the circles I'd been walking as I spiral upward in the parking garage, the next song begins by bringing me through my daily routine by framing my day simply, "once a day I rise, once a day I fall asleep with you." I start seeing my days as circles. I start in my bed, go about my silly little daily business, walk all around the place, and end up right where I started at home, "right at the start of the line, drawing circles." It is beautiful.

As time passes and makes its own circles on a clock, I notice that all of us people travel in circles of different shapes, making our own patterns and playing our own unique roles. I close my eyes and stand before a mural. I open them back up, and my eyes lock onto the lines of the mural, enjoying the brushstrokes more than anything as I'm not even processing what the strokes coalesce to make.

The song expresses a desire for another door to open soon, which I feel to be expressing my feeling as I look towards the future looking for some new direction, suddenly excited because I will get to see my painting on the electrical box soon. Part of me was still hoping it will elucidate a pathway that will not be painful for myself, or anyone really. I hope the Mitch that was up on the roof in broad daylight painting on an electrical box some weeks ago had dropped some bread crumbs to the present Mitch who was still really hoping to avoid any pain somehow. The song lyrically advises against keeping it all in your head. I take "it" to refer to the pain, angst, silliness, or quirkiness that sat within my skull at any given time. I'd learned that creative expression was my best way to remove the pains that blocked my path forward, so I am excited to analyze this mural when I get to it. There's still no rush since I have concrete above

me still, but the excitement mounts. When I was up here painting my piece, I hadn't given much thought to what it is that I was creating with my brush strokes. I had gotten up to the roof and let loose on this box, allowing the paint to show me where it wanted to go. I'd follow it wherever it wanted to take me, and felt now to be the perfect evening to dive into my mind a little further.

I can't know what this painting might reveal to me, what it might contextualize in my life to make things make a little more sense. I move away from the painting that I never actually saw in its entirety. I just saw it as its individual parts, as a bunch of uniquely beautiful components. I saw the forest for the trees and felt better for it somehow. I wasn't meant to see this piece for the sum of its parts but I still took what I needed away from it. I got what I need, and now I'm out; good practice.

## Right

The ether calls to me through the lyrics of the next song, saying, "Yeah, it's been a while without your face." I realize it has been a long time since I've been to this space. I haven't been to the space outside of life on Earth in a long time. Right now, I can not remember what that space is like, I just know it's there waiting for me to come back. The song softly rolls through more lines that call me home to it. I feel empathy with this intangible space, as I notice that these feelings resonate with me, that I too have been missing it. Life on Earth has not been the easiest, and that fact is acknowledged in this moment.

My feet are the tight snares on the background of this track. I notice this and stop for a moment, look at my feet as they synchronize; nice. The progression of the song keeps me moving and I notice there is the ceiling opening. I had gotten so used to existing between two layers of concrete, a floor and a ceiling, that reintroducing the sky to my frame of vision was astounding. When I had a roof above me, I could only see maybe ten feet above me, and that view was nothing more than concrete slabs and those red pipes that carried some mysterious substance through them. Now, I could see forever at once! The sky just goes on and on for a very long while, it seems.

I hear this "ethereal realm," as I call it speaking from out there, but through my headphones, saying "when it's right, then it's right." I feel that I understand what it is saying, so I continue on, feeling that the moment I'd been waiting for would be presented soon. A wave of excitement crashes over me, noticing that I'd soon get to see my own mural! Now that I'm here, under the sky, the electrical box I'd painted my abstract mural on would soon present itself and I'd be

able to sit with my own abstractions and get to unpack them. A large part of me expected to gain some insight from this, so as I approach the concrete cube, I feel my heart as it is torn up through my esophagus, collapsing both lungs in the process, or so it feels.

The city of Gainesville had applied a liberal coat of white paint over the entire electrical box, erasing any evidence that I'd ever been there. I feel a cavity on my chest that I stand four feet from the box, looking over this white washed cube that I'd put myself into. I feel like I need to sit down, so I do. I sit down criss-cross-applesauce in front of this box like a child in front of a retro TV set. I guess you had to have permission to paint a mural in this parking garage, but seeing this shows me that nothing I'd done left any sort of mark. I take it in an environmental context first. None of the trash I'd fished out of Hogtowne Creek mattered, none of the garbage I'd resorted into recycling mattered. Then, I take it in a community context. The beauty I'd been trying to put into the world had not left any mark. Perhaps I had been going about love the wrong way.

I'm just one tiny dude out in this world. The effort I'd put into this world to beautify it clearly did not matter to the world, as it had been represented by the art I'd contributed to this parking garage. If this parking garage is the world and my art was my contribution to moving the world forward, none of what I'd done mattered to anyone. It wasn't wanted here. I notice that there was an active effort to remove the art I'd contributed to this building, and that fucking sucks for a moment. Ouch, world. I'd really felt like I'd been contributing some great things to this world, and just for shits and giggles too! I'd painted this electrical box with near-professional quality for free, and it was cool!

I look away from the box toward the stars, hoping for guidance. From beyond the depths of space, the music tells me, "I ain't gonna break your heart, promise it's always safe," and I smile with a renewed sense of meaning. I won't let the city government make me feel as if I hadn't left a beautiful mark on this world. It's a shame that they used resources to de-beautify their building, but again, "it is what it is."

## **Floating**

I'm looking away from the ground or the electrical box, up at the stars when the next song begins, informing me of the place way up there that I, we, all want to get to. It feels like the sort of heaven beyond the stars that I'm hearing word of, and I want to be there so badly. I want to be there so badly, and this song is doing nothing but encouraging this feeling. I am feeling like I want to get away.

I do want to get away, and I do want to be there. I notice that I am up higher than I was before. I didn't notice the disturbance that you'd expect to notice when you climb up onto a three and a half foot wall, but it must have gone unnoticed during some of the disgustingly funky and complicated bass guitar riffs midway through the song.

I look down. I see up. I see the same eternity in the ground that I saw in the stars. I notice this with a chilling understanding of what I didn't get previously. I'm at the top, looking down, and I see that it's not the terror I'd imagined when I'd been pacing my room in a fit Just a few hours earlier. As I look down, I see the crown of a tree.

I hear the line, "gravity ain't holding me down," and understand what it means to me, which is unsurprisingly, not the literal sense. I know with all my power that if I take this step forward, I will fall. I know that I will fall and that it will be the most pain I have ever felt in my life. I know that my life will never be the same. I feel a wave of remorse for all those who this will hurt who are not me.

I snap back into a more rational-Mitch mindset, thinking "what the fuck are you thinking, dude?" I can seriously be about to be that guy who gets way too into music and jumps off a building. There's just no way I can

be that trope. So then I start thinking of alternatives, and they come easy. I can turn back around, get off this ledge, go back to the crib, crack a beer and tell the guys all about how crazy this was.

“Dude! I almost jumped off this building because I thought the music was telling me that’s the way things are destined to happen. How crazy is that? Yeah, I know, I’m always doing crazy shit like that.” Then, I have five or seven more after the first one or two and I can do my best to forget this ever happened. I’m starting to like this idea; lather, rinse, repeat. I can do that forever.

***amor fati***

Then I look out over the horizon. It's so wide. The upper hemisphere of my vision is a deep but soft greyish-greenish-black that constitutes the sky and the lower hemisphere is a cold, rock-colored concrete painted a sickly yellow by the warm streetlights. There exists a thin layer of lush foliage that separates the two. I can be anyone out there. More importantly, I can be who I am called to be. I know that I am strong. I don't want anyone to hurt, but I know my community is strong as well. I can become who I need to be if I take this next step into the horizon. I know it's going to be the most painful step I've ever taken, but I know turning back would hurt worse over time. I know this step will end my current life and I will have to begin anew. I know that I'll be just fine. I take a very even, complete breath, and extend my right foot, stepping into the horizon.

I drop, like I knew I would. The first few feet are just that dropping feeling that I'd always hated at Universal Studios. Then, I am next to the fifth floor, and I think, "Damn. I fucked up."

Crunch! I fly through a tree as she catches me, redirecting my fall such that my legs hit first. My legs are shards, my teeth exploded, and my head is in pieces, but I am onto the ether. I barely have time to process how badly it hurt, for my body to snap like it did when I hit the ground, but I'd already kept moving. The godly voice I'd felt called to by outer space was now a spiritual energy all around me, within me. It was encouraging me onward, to keep breathing, that everything was ok. I keep on going, instinctively knowing that this is the right thing to do. I know that I have been here before. Because I'd been here before, it was a comfortable space. This is the space I'd come to Earth from. I was simply returning home, like I'd intended.



I keep on going, egged on by an esoteric attraction that seemed to be building in magnitude as I built in speed, getting closer to the building energy. I had just become attuned to the energy that was calling me, but as soon as I was aware of it, all parts of the experience intensified at an exponential rate; the sound, the colors, the light, and the beauty with which they are all experienced. This energy is the same that had been calling to me through art, that I'd sensed and felt when looking into the depths of space, and in the places in my mind where spirituality lives.

I am soaring through space. It is not dissimilar from the outer space I learned about in school, the one we see when we look into a clear sky. I see suns, shooting stars, ringed planets, spiral galaxies and the like in my periphery as I jettison towards this central energy. As I'm getting closer, I start to sense feelings coming from my target. This energy I was rocketing towards was all love. I could feel the love radiating out from it, as excitement builds in me, hoping to crash into it like the joyous falling star that I am.

I am here. I am present. I am finally here. It's been a long time since I've been here. I am so happy to be here, surrounded by friends and family that showed up here before me. It's been a long time, but it doesn't matter, because I am here. Next to me are my best friends that I choose. They're my best buddies and I knew I'd see them here. I'll always find them to smoke joints in any energetic plane we exist in, so it makes perfect sense that I'd see them here, in what I know some people call heaven. For me, it's just Here. It is all just a capital Right, capital Now, if you dig. So the homies are all stoked that I'm here and they're all moshing around, building hype that I just showed up to the party.

The party! It was a party, since my favorite artist was playing live. I couldn't tell who it was, and maybe that's because I know they will always be changing, but this was my favorite song. I was front row, at my favorite song, live in concert, with all my best friends passing around some smoke, safely watched over by my ancestors. All is so well.

I turn back to face my ancestors. I appreciate their guidance with my soul. I know that I am only here, only was there because of them. A profound love and adoration is felt in both directions. Many who I have never met before are here. Introductions are brief, respectful, and deeply loving. I am but a twig in a massive, old, sturdy, oak tree that traces back almost as far as the future goes forward, and it's love on every branch, in every leaf, and it comprises the whole trunk. Mom's mom, who I'd never met on that rock I'd popped in here from, is with me. We connect for a moment, just her and I, and a deep love is felt. I had always felt it, but now I connect this love with the source.

Then all of a sudden, I remember that I have business that I have to attend to. I have shenanigans I need to get into, silly, sweet love to spread around, back there, back on Earth.

There isn't a second thought, nor a decision, and I am blazing backwards, flying backwards faster than I came to this place. The galaxies and planets and stars I'd seen on my way in are blurs on the way back out, and it's a euphoric ride. Imagine flooring the gas in reverse down a street without looking and knowing that you'll get exactly where you want to go safely. It feels a little like that if you were on molly, which I imagine would be next-level-nuts.

I'm thinking, "Yay!" the whole way and then I pop back into that good 'ol meat sack, with it feeling like it's

in a bit of a different shape. I lift my head up slowly, and it fucking hurts. Everything hurts so fucking badly. I am lifting my head to see two bright circles, signaling safety. These headlights signaled the arrival of help, so I was free to go into my coma, which I did. A sweet blackness envelops me, heralding a temporary respite from pain, and the beginning of what would be an extensive, grueling, and inspiring healing process.

## **looking back on it**

It is May 1st, 2022

and I am graduating from my university with a degree in forestry. What a groovy ride it's been! I finally got here after all this time; all those semesters I'd spent taking half of what a normal course load would be, all that time I'd spent figuring out how and what I did to myself, all the time in the woods and creek, I'm here. I'm graduating today and I'm going to drive to Asheville tomorrow to see if I can figure something out. I've wanted to live there for a while and now seems like a good time to see if something makes sense. My family is with me, taking graduation pictures on the very building that I'd stepped off of over two years ago per my request. I feel immense joy being here with them having conquered this pain. I am so very sorry to have put them through what I did, but being on this end of things, I regret nothing.

That's a bit of a stretch. I'm so very sorry I put mom through that. She didn't know what I knew, that I'd be okay, and that wasn't fair to her.

It's silly popping a champagne bottle on the top of this building. I have a long road ahead of me still, but there I know I can do anything. As I stand atop this building on two legs, I know that I am capable of anything.

I feel immense love and appreciation for so many that have helped me to get here. The love and support that I felt in the recovery process was unexpected by wholly felt and appreciated. Friends had made my art into prints, t-shirts, and other swag to help fund the recovery process and folks came out of the woodworks to come to my side and support. None of this happened alone. My family is with me, somehow able to celebrate me after all I put them through. It's not lost on

me how difficult I make their lives most of the time. I don't really know what to do about it since I have no idea how to be any other way, so I give them all big hugs and try to communicate how much I love them with words. I'll never get close, but I'll keep on trying.

We're looking over the same horizon I looked across that fateful night. I hadn't remembered where it was that I'd hit the ground since I had pretty significant memory loss from bonking my head so hard. My dad points at a tree and says that it's the one that broke my fall. This was news to me! I'd used dendrology, the study of tree identification, to help get my memory back for a while and then to kickstart my career as an outdoor goofball. I take the second fastest route to the bottom, the stairs, to get down to the tree. I start looking at my tree savior to try and make an accurate identification. It took no time. Sure, the ovate leaf shape with doubly-serrate margins could have helped if I were blind to the twigs, but the corky appendages that grow like wings on the twigs of this tree make it easy. This is an *Ulmus alata* specimen, a winged elm. I chuckle because I can't fly, but a tears come to my mind as I notice these trees are my wings. Just like mom would catch me right before I fell when learning to walk, Mother Earth reached out to catch me when I was learning to fly. (I never thought I could fly, but it's poetry)

It is January 16th, 2025

and I am writing this right now. Five years have now passed since I fell off that building. Holy fucking shit that hurt. That healing process was exhausting and all consuming for many years. I look at the past five years with loving acceptance. I am living in West Asheville, two miles from my studio space in the River Arts District. I moved here with the intention of being an artist with the extra prints to sell that I had. Jack made all those prints for me when I was busy with the coma, and we had extras. That experience showed me that folks wanted my art, which I'd never expected before.

Right now, I appreciate it all. I appreciate the pain, the perseverance, setbacks, the triumphs, and more than anything, the love. I know that I could have made this so much easier. I recall the option to turn back on the roof of that building and know that would have been valid and far easier. Nobody would have been worse off for me choosing that over this *incredibly* tough road that I've walked, nobody besides myself. I currently sit here, tip-tap-typing away in my room with Bear, the best lady dog that's ever been. The one who has been to hell and back with me, and I am so proud of myself. I can visualize the road I could be on had I chosen the easy route. I'm sure I could have done well with that path, but this one is mine. This one is the one where I get to be exactly who I am, and I've proven to myself that I can do whatever work is required to continue my perpetually beautifying metamorphosis.

I trust my capability to handle difficulty. Part of me hoped that I'd get the easy road after the fall, but it just made me more elastic in terms of my ability to rebound following a disturbance. It has not gotten any easier, but I've gotten good at handling it.

Period.