

Interpretation and Reflection of My Life

Introduction

The writing within “*Interpretation and Reflection of My Life*” was sparked by the experience of – and is a continuation of – an art exhibit, **My Life**.¹ (LifExhibit.org)

My Life is a continuous performance piece on radical openness, with the first event on August 11th, 2018. **My Life**, the current culmination of my existence as an “art exhibit.” The pieces in the exhibit, composed of mixed media and memories, include every physical object that I own. Participants can have something² from **My Life** (love letters, trash, plants, paintings, clothes, etc. ... Anything and everything)³ as an exchange. To gain admission to **My Life**, potential participants must tell me why they would like to be in **My Life**.

My Life prompts reflection toward the notion of individual and communal identity blurring the boundaries between art and life, self and others, artist and participant, creator and creation, you and I. These concepts, are reflected within the writing throughout the “*Interpretation and Reflection of My Life*,” subverting the distinctions between artist, writer, editor, reviewer,⁴ and reader⁵ as a continuum of “you” and “I”.⁴ **My Life** captures and presents

¹ I am writing to let you know that I am not the primary contributor to **My Life**.

² Every thing is small. No thing is important without contextual meaning behind it. We give meaning to things based on our experiences, all of which are inherently²⁹

³ I begin to illustrate the exhibition contents more clearly toward the midway mark within “*Interpretation and Reflection of My Life*,” in a footnote³⁰ where it becomes explicitly apparent that **My Life** is an exhibition of objects related to an identity.

⁴ I cannot evaluate this work – properly, and just because of its novelty and its experimentation as there will be a range of reaction – from shit to excellent.

⁵ As ideation of text becomes print, “I” die as author and am born as “you” the reader. ☯, ♡

☯ It has been suggested, that I may want to let you know that I intend to bring you in as co-artist/author.

♡ “...la naissance du lecteur doit se payer de la mort de l'Auteur.” – Roland Barthes

I think the question you pose is interesting b/c it forced a typically private judgement/ thought out into the open / it makes those who are close to you (1)

verbalize what is taken for granted / assumed (2)

the notion that a human life is a culmination of combinations, distillations, and changes which may occur throughout [time](#) as influenced by living and nonliving thingS and concepts. The continuation of **My Life** as represented within this textual format, attempts to project and convey the complex notions of aggregated-communal experience symbolically through the ergodic arrangement of the text as a complementary support of its contents.

What is the Motivation for My Life?

My Life is intended to develop openness, empathy, and vulnerability. To receive openness, empathy, and vulnerability a person must first express these thingS. **My Life** started off as joke; ^{And ends with a punchline.} an exercise of narcissism^{6,7} in a most pure form. I would host an art exhibit where I would be the “art.” I would charge admissions for people to rummage through **My Life** and for the right price you could take something with you.

I would be moving soon,⁸ and I needed to get rid of a lot of stuff, but I didn’t want to move anything outside for a conventional garage sale. I’m a bit eccentric too, so just looking

⁶ ...how to evaluate it. For me, it seems like an attempt to deconstruct what appears to be an obvious hyper-narcissistic work of art, something like a ‘hoarder’ trying to cure themselves, or searching a way to do so; someone like Marlane Dietrich who could no let go of anything that came into her life or, and had to make up stories as to why something had to be kept or had been lost to stave off any fear that the worth of her life is in doubt – a constant justification and disavowal of ‘her life’.

⁷ **My Life** feels somewhat narcissistic for the first four pages until the top of page five when you begin to include literature that relates to the topic and brings in the viewer/editor/participator/relational entity as part of the main text highlighting the author/viewer important mutual conversation. Up until this point, I am inherently involved in the footnotes[Ⓢ] throughout as questioner. You still might not be clear about what **My Life** *actually* is and offer no specifics to give any idea of the contents.

Ⓢ The included footnotes are a lovely feature as they dovetail with the main text. You might want to explain the footnoting as a form that reflects the paper’s relational theme, a conscious choice to bring a dialogue in that is connected to the objectives of the reading. I was reminded of *Troubling the Angels* by Patti Lather.

⁸ The fact that you moved out from **My Life** shortly thereafter is also significant. This movement represents a transition. We collect objects and inhabit spaces and interact with others throughout life, but despite the way we place such importance on these thingS, they are fleeting and temporary.

through **My Life** might at the very least be interesting. I wanted to meet you; my fellow oddity. I

wanted to know you, get closer to you, and let you have something to remember **My Life**. ^{-Why is this important?}

From its inception, I was certain that **My Life** was something worthless.^{9,10} To justify this toxic perception, I continuously sought feedback from friends, associates, strangers, and foes; Giving feedback itself takes openness, as a closed mind can quickly crush a fledgling idea searching for someone who would justify my festering thoughts and tell me that **My Life** was worthless or stupid so that I could cancel it.¹¹ I was hoping to receive negative feedback about **My Life** so that I could cancel it,¹² but I never received any. Because of that I was forced to continue with **My Life**.

While I did not receive any feedback that was outright negative toward the idea of **My Life**, I did receive an abundance of suggestions and ideas for how I should present **My Life**. A large amount of the feedback I received felt like When you invite someone into your life they feel the need to control / redirect according to their ego projections of those persons' desires for **My Life**. This feedback focused on them. Some of projected self from others was very interesting but ultimately it was more distracting, away from the goals of **My Life** than helpful. The feedback I received that helped me mold and guide **My Life** without distraction was feedback that queried my intentions, instead of projecting their desires. What's the point? Before I was asked this, I did

⁹ If this was the case why is it written about as if it was important? Obviously there is felt worth here so to say there is not is ingenuine. **HAHA**

¹⁰ This is an interesting contrast with how you call **My Life** "an exercise in narcissism."^a How do you reconcile these two seemingly conflicting perspectives about **My Life**?^b

^a The discussion early on about **My Life** as narcissistic seemed important to address and reading the rest of the piece I felt that it shifted more and more away from **My Life** toward a more interactive notion. I am wondering if you could make this more thematically clear up front somehow. Perhaps **My Life** is too limited.

^b Clinical theories of narcissism postulate the paradoxical coexistence of explicit self-perceptions of grandiosity and covert fragility and worthlessness. (Hovarth, S.; and Morf, C.C. 2009)

¹¹ The references to the question of self-doubt are found throughout this work... a constant forwarding of justification and disavowal throughout.

¹² ...reading this work is faced with a **struggle**... ?

not know nor consider this answer. What is the point of **My Life**? What did I want to achieve with **My Life**? What were the goals for **My Life**? You were the first person to ask me “What’s the point of **My Life**? What are you trying to do? What’s the message?”

You helped me find the answers to these questions with these points:

Radical openness, empathy, and vulnerability

These are the things I want to have, and these are the things I want to give.

I do not consider myself an artist, scientist, scholar, writer, musician, athlete, or anything.¹³

I am not my job, hobbies, things, gender, sex, nor race.¹⁴

I am a human-person.¹⁵

I am myself.¹⁶

I’ve never done anything that only I could do.

You are and you aren’t
all these things

My Life is not special, but I’ll share it with you, and that’s special.¹⁷

¹³ Is this ‘identity’?

¹⁴ Is this ‘identity’?

¹⁵ Is this ‘identity’?

¹⁶ Is this ‘identity’?

¹⁷ I was thinking about how the simple act of calling something “art” makes it seem more special than other things that are not considered art and how this relates to how you described the act of sharing with others as a special act. Perhaps, this is what characterizes this as “art”—this “specialness.” It is hard to define what “special” means, though. It could mean different things to different people (like all things and all art).⁴

k a k a

human connection adds meaning

But before you categorized My Life as worthless + asked + asked until you were told My Life has meaning

What were the Expectations for the Opening of My Life?

“What if no one comes? Would that crush you? Would that be a huge blow to your self-esteem?” These were questions posed to me by others. Before they said that, these weren’t thoughts invading my mind, but I had to consider them. If I didn’t give these questions consideration, I might suffer for it upon their realization. Initially, I thought that **My Life** was a maybe thinking it was worthless blocked you from worthless and stupid idea. While no one justified these toxic perceptions of mine about the realizing that it may become a thing worthiness¹⁸ of **My Life**, I had no way of knowing if **My Life** would be something that you would want to go out of your way to experience even if you told me that you had intentions to do so.

Is **My Life** a worthwhile experiment regardless of whether you choose to experience it?

Is **My Life** still worthwhile if I’m the only one who experiences it?

I decided that **My Life** would still be valuable and worthwhile even if I were the only one to experience it.¹⁹ I decided that not knowing if you would want to share and experience **My Life** was a part of radical openness and that the potential scenario where I am the only person to experience **My Life** was also a part of vulnerability. For me to share these qualities of openness and vulnerability to achieve empathetic connection, I must first express them.

YES!

¹⁸ Is your worthiness imposed on you by its evaluation by others, or self-endowed?²¹

¹⁹ This would be the only conclusion I could come to and still follow through with **My Life**. If I had decided otherwise, it would not have²⁹

Invitations²⁰ to My Life

I received an invitation²¹ to **My Life** .²² Normally, I ignore requests from people , but I was intrigued and decided to do further inquiry. I found more information for the exhibit and sent a message to learn more. You replied with an exceptional message explaining the project. I let you know that I was interested in the ideas around connectedness, empathy, and vulnerability, but also non-traditional works of art and artists who create outside of the confines of the “artworld.”

Although I am usually very shy and unlikely to bring people into **My Life** too closely, I made an exception because you were so willing to make yourself vulnerable through this exhibit and I respected that. I felt that I could reciprocate this openness . I believe that through such opportunities for openness, we can address issues of discrimination like , , and . When I received this

²⁰ ***Come Closer; closer***
Stand in two lines facing each other, making sure someone is in front of you.
Come closer.
Closer, closer.
Until it gets uncomfortable.
Try to look at the other in the eye, or find a way in which you feel both, safe²³, but challenged to be present.
Claim your space
Disclaim where you stand.
From that position, work together to define how do you stand together.

This is our body. Our body in a gesture of somatic disposition of perception and openness to the space and others, while in “Errantes en la ciudad”, (2016). Moving in public, together.

²¹ Since **My Life** is available to the public, is there ANY significance in an “invitation,” as all people are impractically invited? I think this may shift importance/ “specialness” toward accepting than sending invitation. Accepting invitation to **My Life** is acknowledgement/ validation by the participant that **My Life** is “art.” Is **My Life** “art” without acknowledgement as “art”?²⁴

²² palimpsest: “a manuscript or piece of writing material on which the original writing has been effaced to make room for later writing but of which traces remain; something reused or altered but still bearing visible traces of its earlier form.” (Google Dictionary)

invitation to “radical openness” through **My Life**, I was seeking, but not finding openness.

~~As the day of the exhibit drew near,~~ I fluctuated between feeling excited and wary about the whole project. I was enthused to meet someone ~~who was just as interested in some of the same ideas that I had~~ was interested in: upending traditional notions of art and artist and opening up spaces for vulnerable connections ~~with something akin to art as a catalyst.~~ I was also skeptical about whether it was safe^{23,24} for me ~~the voice here is confusing~~. And yet, I had a sense that this was something truly unique, that was pushing the boundaries²⁵ ~~of what is art and who an artist is.~~ I felt that if I did not go, I would regret missing this.

When you responded to the invitation I sent you to **My Life**, I was ~~flushed with powerful emotions and~~ brought to tears. You told me that **My Life** was something special, powerful, meaningful, and that you wanted to be a part of it (even if not physically). I had never truly known this ~~nor had I received~~ positive feedback in such a manner. All of the responses I received were emotionally intense, ~~taxing, and made it more difficult in sending out further invitations.~~ I did not expect this, but it was welcome.²⁶

²³ What kind of (un)safe?

²³ Human sex cells typically have ²³(XXIII, ٢٣, ٢٣, ٢٣, etc...) chromosomes.

²⁴ The space of **My Life** felt both safe and unsafe²³ in different moments and for different bodies. As I walked through **My Life**, you could sense that I was afraid, my body responded by fidgeting, sweating, and even crying. And yet, once I more fully entered **My Life**, I began to relax my body, I laughed, and I felt a connection that allowed me to tell you about **My Life**.

²⁵ We think about the productive tensions that emerge out of the spaces opened for vulnerable connections. We have had the opportunity of finding people with whom have allowed us to explore together with the tensions, difficulty and potentiality of shared vulnerability. Being off, together, and “Errantes”: erring-wandering to reclaim existence.

²⁶ This work becomes more of a phenomenological reflection with its over-bearing focus of a stream of consciousness that doesn't allow any escape – even the space did not have me hesitate. Maybe that is the affect that is sought for?

Interconnectedness of Humans and Non-Humans through **My Life**

My Life is the culmination of thoughts and experiences as they have been combined, modified, and distilled into an interactive experience where you and others can participate and join. When you enter **My Life** as participant, you have the unavoidable opportunity contribute creatively either with or without intent using both conscious or subconscious mind. The participants of **My Life** contribute to the project through the same means that I do: through combination (adding their own experiences and thoughts), distillation/isolation (removal of pieces), and modification (altering my/ your own perspective on **My Life**).’

If I was born into your life and experienced the same things you did, leading up to now, I would be the same as you are. You cannot experience living as me though, and I cannot experience living as you. I can share myself with you though, and if you want, you can share yourself with me.²⁷ If we have shared experience, maybe we can glimpse into understanding each other. You were willing to participate in an exchange of openness, empathy, and vulnerability with others through **My Life**.

Because of your willingness to share yourself through **My Life**,
you have shifted how I exist in the world with other beings.

²⁷ I can see how this exhibit moves one to seek a dialogue between self and what others perceive who we are. Even the very term "my" can be a conundrum as it denotes something that is yours, or, belongs to you. All these definitions or perceptions of "my" are relatable only in relation to this three-dimensional universe, but what happens when there is more to **My Life** than that? Everything we are and everything we feel is more complicated and surpasses what a simple, "my" can denote.

My Life is necessarily participatory because the life of an individual is inextricably tied to interactions with human and non-human others—“mixed media and memories”.²⁸ The way we construct identities is akin to the way we construct art: through an interaction with materials both human and non-human. In **My Life**, you and I can potentially see aspects of ourselves revealed through engagement—through interaction with the human and non-human others involved.

Jane Bennett (2010) argues that a conceptualization of “vital materiality” (p. 112).²⁹ Such a view can enable humans to better conceptualize “the complex entanglements of humans and nonhumans” (p. 112) and to see the non-human entities that surround us as just as vibrant and vital as humans. To illustrate this point, Bennett (2010) provides a list:

I am a material configuration, the pigeons in the park are material compositions, the viruses, parasites, and heavy metals in my flesh and in pigeon flesh are materialities, as are neurochemicals, hurricane winds, E. coli,³⁰ and the dust on the floor. (p. 112)

²⁸ People, a dog, love letters, a book about self-esteem, a painting found on the ground outside, photographs of friends, memories, sheets on a bed, a yoga mat, painted mirrors, feelings, an upright bass, a smudge stick, a toothbrush, another toothbrush, googly eyes on everything transparent slides and photography film, plants, haunted dolls, pictures of loved ones, handfuls of twine, sewing needles, incense, a bicycle, pottery, socks, a bean bag chair full of old clothes, a T-rex made of wire (also with googly eyes), a piece of spine as a poem, various succulents, a table cloth stapled to the ceiling with glow in the dark stars silly puttied around (also on the ceiling), dog food and dog snacks, a full porrón wine pitcher, a large (8' x 4') rasterbated poster of Jeff Goldblum with his fingers pressed to his lips to quiet your mind, a large wooden mallet, a couple machetes, a record player with a few Tom Waits records placed on top, 300 tea light candles, simple syrup, mint simple syrup, three uncooked potatoes, a water pick dental hygiene apparatus, several picture frames hanging in the windows without pictures in their frames, a medicine ball, a pile of bullet journals, etc...^{ε, ♯}

^ε The footnotes^⓪ are the most interesting stylistic aspect of the piece, as they do not function like traditional footnotes. I suggest being more consistent and perhaps even more radical with these. In other words, why not push the aesthetic potentiality of the footnote even further? Have an entire page of footnotes? This would be a further way of "cluttering" the self with things and stuff that *seem* extraneous.

^⓪ The footnotes were fascinating, at the same time disturbing the flow, which made **My Life** (at times) **unbearable**. Again – perhaps that's what was sought for. **haha**

[♯] I am not sure that you are using the footnotes in the best way possible as some of the footnotes should be potentially be main text. For example, the listed objects are ~~important~~ and should appear sooner and perhaps as the main text.

²⁹ Incomplete thought

Through this descriptive list, Bennett entreats us to recognize the equal materiality of all things. This equality of things, in Bennett's (2010) view, is "not a uniform or flat topography" (p. 117), but, rather, an entangled assemblage of erratically interconnected things. **My Life** highlights such entanglement between humans and non-humans in the context of a particular person's life. Indeed, the "things" of **My Life** have what Bennett (2010) calls "thing-power" (p. 2) and act as catalysts for engagement between and among humans and other things through acts such as telling stories, negotiating the value of things, giving things away, buying and selling things, and the boldly simple act of the existence of the things themselves.

The meaning of such things can exist beyond the significance of the things in relations to the humans that own and utilize them. Much like in way that "art" is often interpreted differently by different viewers and sometimes in ways that is distinct from the intentions of the "artist," the meaning of the things in **My Life** is can be different for different people.³¹ Visitors to **My Life** who engaged with and obtained things from the exhibit still have tangible traces of the experience of the exhibit and have, in the process of obtaining things, have also become further entangled with the artist of **My Life** to varying degrees. Yet, it is also likely that the meanings of these things procured from **My Life** have changed now that they are decontextualized and placed into new homes, now linked with the stories of other humans.³²

³⁰ humans are aggregations of living things not a single living thing (Blaser M.J. 2014). Your microbiome aka the bacterial that live on and inside you are not human, but they are you in that they can influence/modify your moods/emotions/neurology (Forsythe, P. 2010) which are in turn a part of your identity (Klein, B.S. and Nichols, S. 2012). You could imagine that you could potentially exchange some of this bacteria with another person via handshake. A hurricane can carry this too and it's a neat way of thinking about communication/exchange (DeLeon-Rodriguez, N. *et al.* 2013)

³¹ This is like the notion that the 'you' that exists from your perspective does not exist for any other person that each other person perceives 'you' differently, and that each person who knows you, knows a different you.

³² I wonder if I now simply see them for the memories and ideas that they provoke in me rather than for the significance they hold for you. This makes me think of how viewers of art often interpret the work differently from the intentions of the artist.

Radical Openness, Empathy, and Vulnerability

~~Radical Openness~~ = *Open-heartedness*

~~Empathy~~ (*being-otherness*)

~~Vulnerability~~ (*infinito-otro; the-infinite-other; sharing obliquity*)

My Life offers an invitation to engage in embodied participation in the life of another human being—as it and other works of art can function as catalysts for the breaking down of the status quo.

My Life is not special,³³ but I'll share it with you, and that's special.

Special can be defined as “distinguished or different from what is ordinary or usual” (Dictionary, n.d.). **My Life** was a break from the “usual” way of presenting one’s life. One’s individual life³⁴ it itself might not seem special or might not seem to be art. Yet, sharing one’s life in this way became an *offering* of connectedness that disrupted the “usual” that opened up space for interconnectedness to happen and for other humans who interacted with the project to also see this potentiality for connection, openness, and empathy. As the work breaks down separations between person and artist and *thing*s and art, it also breaks down separations between humans who choose to actively engage in the work, highlighting their intersubjectivity. Indeed, such breakdowns are productive, such ruptures and subversions of boundaries between art and life, artist and human being as well as among human beings to more fully know one another and

³³ This is lingering self-doubt.

³⁴ This blurs the line between your life and **My Life**. Also, the event itself is a break from the usual, and thereby special. For me, you sharing your life is then not special because it is usual and normative. Unless the quality of your sharing with me being so usual is unusual, and thereby makes it special.

have empathy for one another across differences. Such work is not simple and anxiety and oppression around differences cannot be neatly and readily resolved. Yet, creating spaces for such encounter can be productive for facilitating this difficult work.

Because this exhibit provoked a sense of connection and **vulnerability** between participants and artist, this is a potentially risky endeavor.³⁵ Gloria Anzaldúa has called for “risking the personal” (Keating, 2000, p. 1) and “listening with raw openness” (Keating, 2007, p. 22) as avenues towards inner as well as social transformation. Because of the risks involved in sharing **vulnerable** aspects of oneself, even when spaces for such “radical openness” as **My Life** become available, people will still make choices as to what parts of themselves they are willing and able to disclose. Despite the opportunity to be receptive to the “radical openness” that **My Life** offers, it takes time to break down the walls that we create to keep ourselves from being exposed, which protect us from ridicule.³⁶ There are societal expectations that keep us from sharing this with others. And, even when we do find a way to share some of this with others, are we ever truly seen and known? It is hard for us to even fully see and know ourselves and yet we try to share parts of ourselves with others in this effort towards connection, towards being seen and known. Yet, even when there are opportunities for such connection, there are limitations to what can be accomplished in sharing through language alone.

Phenomenology is a useful tool in the consideration of how the body reveals much of what words obscure and that embodied encounters with others wherein sociocultural positionalities come to the forefront are educative (Author, 2018). Phenomenological flashpoints—moments wherein there is a breakdown in the façade of the everyday that reveals

³⁵ “You get eaten by a tiger just one time, and *things* change dramatically for you.” – Johnny Truant

³⁶ As you deal with most people of good nature, setting boundaries will improve not only your life, but theirs as well. (Katherine, A. 2012)

what underlies below the surface can be opportunities for progress in the breaking down of barriers around differences among humans and non-humans. Amelia Kraehe and Tyson Lewis (2018) state that “through phenomenologically attuned descriptions of flashpoints, we can craft language capable of articulating forms of sociocultural understanding that are tacit, prelinguistic, prethematic, and prereflective” (Kraehe & Lewis, 2018, p. 4). Such moments often feel risky and unsafe,²³ particularly because they are experienced through the body—rupturing a sense of safety as well as the status quo. And yet, they are instructive: “flashpoints are specific instances in which the flesh educates. Flashpoints help us understand how the flesh complicates dichotomies between self and Other” (Kraehe & Lewis, 2018, p. 9).

How might such spaces, however risky they might seem at first, be avenues for greater empathy between human beings of different positionalities and experiences? What other opportunities can we build for people to engage in such encounters with one another? How are such encounters pedagogical? Within critical education theory and practice, there are ongoing efforts towards the development of critical consciousness (Anzaldúa, 2002; Freire, 1970/2000; hooks, 1994). William Pinar’s (2012) characterizes education as “complicated conversation” whereby he states: “the teacher is ... an artist and complicated conversation is his or her medium” (p. 54). Such engagement in “complicated conversation” with others can be risky and for many, there are tangible dangers in the sharing of oneself with others in particular spaces. What are deemed “safe spaces” for some, are “unsafe²³ spaces” for others. Yet, as **My Life** illustrates, because of the willingness to engage in such risk, there can also be opportunities for empathy and connectedness that would have otherwise been impossible.

My Life as Art

What is **My Life** and how is it *art*? Alles wat nou bestaan, is 'n kombinasie, distillasie of isolasie, of wysiging van dinge wat voorheen voornemens of andersins bestaan het.^{37, 38}

This is the case for both physical and non-physical thingS, and when applied with intention this is the essence of ideation, creation, and art. Therefore, everything with intention is (or can be considered) art, regardless of whether driven by conscious or sub-conscious thoughts, feelings, or actions. You are your greatest creation and you could never create anything more spectacular.

You are spectacular^{39, 40, 41}

The simple act of calling something “art” makes it *seem* more “special” than other things that are not considered art, somehow elevated from that which is a non-art thing. Acknowledging that the sharing of a life with others as a “special” act is a moment of identifying **My Life** as “art.” Nonetheless, **My Life** brings up questions about how it connects with the longstanding artworld questions of: “what is art?” and “who is an artist?” Because you, “the artist,” may not identify as

³⁷ Afrikaans - *Everything that exists now is a combination, distillation or isolation, or modification of things that previously existed intentionally or otherwise.*

³⁸ On further reflection, even language can limit the potential for connection.[§] When you choose a medium for connecting and being open, you filter out those who cannot connect to that medium.

§ I agree that language alone is not enough for creating spaces for empathy and connection.

Phenomenology[°] does take account of that which is prelinguistic and this is partly why I referenced phenomenology.

° However, the concept of phenomenology is very academically-oriented and in a way, the ‘academic-ness’ can make **My Life** less open.¹⁰

10 !!!

³⁹ Yes, you! All of you who are reading this are spectacular! (All the other people are great too)

⁴⁰ 樸-*Pu*- a Chinese word meaning, unworked wood;⁴³ inherent quality; simple. A Taoist/Daoist metaphor for the natural state of humanity. Like Pooh, as in Winnie-the-Pooh (Hoff, B. 1982).

⁴¹ “All you have to do is to take a big chunk of marble and a hammer and chisel, make up your mind what you are about to create and chip off all the marble you don’t want.”^² — Paris Gaulois

² You need some sort of strong adhesive glue -

if you’re trying to put all the marble back,

Maybe honey would do⁴¹

an “artist” who makes “art,” **My Life** upsets the traditional concepts of art and artist (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2008; Soussloff, 1997). Art critic and curator Lucy Lippard (1973) defined “conceptual art” as “work in which the idea is paramount and the material form is secondary, lightweight, ephemeral, cheap, unpretentious and/or ‘dematerialized’” (p. vii). This is an artwork that is created through relationality, a social interaction, socially engaged art, participatory art—a participatory self-portrait. It is both relational and conceptual, material and dematerialized. It is a living representation of self as co-constituted by others—both human and non-human. At the same time, **My Life** subverts these categorizations of what art is and who an artist is.⁴² There is, in this work, no separation between art and life, no distinction between artist and self. With this complete dissolution of the boundaries between art and life, the work approaches the fulfillment of Jorge Lucero’s (2017) call to: “for art’s sake, stop making art” (p. 200).

Relational aesthetics is conceptualized as “art taking as its theoretical horizon the realm of human interactions and its social context” (Bourriaud, 2002/1998, p. 14). This concept of relationality is embedded within socially engaged art, social practice, social sculpture, relational art, and participatory art and shares art historical lineages with the ready-mades of Marcel Duchamp, the social sculpture of Joseph Beuys, the happenings of Allen Kaprow, and the performances of Marina Abramović. Although you did not intentionally draw upon this knowledge of the history of art in preparing for **My Life**, there are some parallels between **My**

⁴² Sometimes, all you need to do is to keep existing to upend norms.[¶]

[¶] See centenarians: Persons who live to or beyond 100 years of age.

Life and the work of the artists working in this tradition. As Allen Kaprow (1993) states: “The playground for experimental art is ordinary life” (p. 248).

Within such socially engaged art, there is no concern as to whether or not the work is “beautiful” in the sense of being “aesthetically-pleasing” in a visual way—it could be considered beautiful in social sense—even as all participants might have a different conception of beauty. It evokes and invokes **vulnerability** in that both artist and co-participant (the artist is also a co-participant) are **vulnerable** in the space. Just as in social interactions in “real life,” both participants come to the space with varying degrees of receptivity to such **vulnerability** and different levels of empathy and compassion.

One might also feel fear or discomfort in being in such **vulnerable** spaces.

Conclusions

My Life upends the binary of artist and viewer in the sense that most visual art is experienced—by passively looking. However, even with relative passivity, choosing not to interact with the artist by asking them questions - prompting stories related to the objects - you encounter and modify the space simply by existing within it. It also disrupts the binary of artist and participant that is present in most participatory or socially engaged art where an artist creates an “art space” for intervention and participants engage in this designated “art space”. While you, “the artist,” have participated in the development of the space and the collection of objects that comprise **My Life**, you are a central participant in the art simply by living in it. While, the work is fully realized through the interaction of co-participants, you also noted that if no one came to view **My Life**, you would be okay with that, too. The idea was that you were opening up this space of **My Life** and whether or not others chose to engage would not necessarily deter you from doing so.

Indeed, this work shares many of the qualities of works of conceptual art, relational aesthetics, participatory art, and socially-engaged art. And yet, it is distinct in that it is not separate from life.

My Life is completely the same as **Your Life**.

References

- Anzaldúa, G. E. (2002). Now let us shift...the path of conocimiento...inner work, public acts. In G. E. Anzaldúa & A. Keating (Eds.), *This bridge we call home: Radical visions for transformation* (pp. 540–591). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Author. (2018).
- Bennett, J. (2010). *Vibrant matter: A political ecology of things*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Blaser, M. J. (2014) The microbiome revolution. *The Journal of Clinical Investigation*. 124(10), 4162-4165.
- Bourriaud, N. (2002). *Relational aesthetics*. (S. Pleasance & F. Woods, Trans.). Paris, France: Les presses du réel. (Original work published 1998)
- DeLeon-Rodriguez, N., Lathem, T. L., Rodriguez-R, L. M., Barazesh, J. M., Anderson, B. E., Beyersdorf, A. J., Ziemba, L. D., Bergin, M., Nenes, A., & Konstantinidis, K. T. (2013) Microbiome of the upper troposphere: Species composition and prevalence, effects of tropical storms, and atmospheric implications. *PNAS*, 110(7), 2575-2580.
- Forsythe, P., Sudo, N., Dinan, T., Taylor, V. H., & Bienenstock J. (2010). Mood and gut feelings. *Brain, Behavior, and Immunity*. 24(1) 9-16.
- Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York, NY: Continuum. (Original work published 1970)
- Gaztambide-Fernández, R. A. (2008). The artist in society: Understandings, expectations, and curriculum implications. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 38(3), 233-265.
- hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. Routledge: New York, NY.
- Hoff, B. (1982) *The Tao of Pooh*. New York, NY: Penguin Books
- Hovarth, S.; and Morf, C.C. (2009) Narcissistic defensiveness: Hypervigilance and avoidance of worthlessness. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*. 45(6) 1252-1258.
- Katherine, A. (2012). *Where to draw the line: How to set healthy boundaries every day*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.
- Keating, A. (2000). Risking the personal: An introduction. In A. Keating (Ed.), *Interviews/entrevistas: Gloria E. Anzaldúa* (pp. 1–16). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Keating, A. (2007). *Teaching transformation: Transcultural classroom dialogues*. New York, NY: Palgrave.
- Klein, S.B., and Nichols, S. (2012) Memory and the sense of personal identity. *MIND*. 121(483) 677-702.
- Kraehe, A. M., & Lewis, T. E. (2018). Introduction: Flashpoints—The breakthrough of sociocultural difference. In S. Travis, A. M. Kraehe, E. J. Hood, & T. E. Lewis (Eds.). *Pedagogies in the flesh: Case studies on the embodiment of sociocultural differences in education* (pp. 1-14). New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Lippard, L. R. (1973). *Six years: The dematerialization of the art object from 1966-1972*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Lucero, J. (2017). For art's sake stop making art. In Cahnmann-Taylor, M. & Siegesmund, R. (Eds.). *Arts-based research in education: Foundations for practice* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Kaprow, A. (1993). Just doing. In *Essays on the blurring of art and life* (pp. 247-251). Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Palimpsest [Def. 1]. n.d. In *Google Dictionary*. Retrieved October 15, 2018 from <https://www.google.com/search?q=palimpsest>
- Soussloff, C. (1997). *The absolute artist: The historiography of a concept*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Special [Def. 5]. n.d. In *Dictionary*. Retrieved October 15, 2018 from <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/special>