

Typewriter Stories

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Integrative Project Written Thesis
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my mother always has a smile. Even when she shouldn't, even when
it hurts, and while i admire her for that, i cant help but feel
silly. like in not being sorry for her, and i dont think i ever can
will.

my mother never stopped loving me. Remember s of what i might
remember her of. who i might remember her of. i am my mother's
pussy :)

My Mother Always takes ten minutes to hang up the phone. Or twenty.

my mother

my mmm

my mother always calls me sweet pea.
.y

my mother always called me silly nicknames too
tmzn theyre embarassing so im not typing them here

bussy bear
drives a bus

my mother always said a persons freedom ends where the freedom of others starts.

my mother never hit me. typing is fun you get into a rhythm and off you go!!

my mother loves me

my mother never buys me tendies even though in super quiet when brian c
gave me lots of food

YOUR NOT MY DAD BRIAN

my mother always is so pretty h is a is a is a
sweet team my mother n saraeisssoooooo my mother l eaz smells good sara is sti

My crotch smells like wonton soup

My mother just ate wonton soup :)
take out the dog like now

my mother always knows things before i do

abdul and robert were here.

My mother always told me not to trust people or strange or myself for
that matter.

my mother never got her hair wet when we went to swim in the pool, always up in a
tight and neat bun, never down and wet. iluvand hh
my mother always told me to stay away from typewriters

i love muzi she is the best (

my mother never gave me a goodbyebye
hhhh

rachel is the best YESSSSS jels

hissrhhs rh S h and Gry were here h lllaolishshab lllaolishshabi

my mother always forces me to eat

m

love you.

mot rlove a s does tuff

pppppussy

this is pretty



my mother never met her soulmate
so she created him in me

A

Introduction

Last year, my Book Arts professor, Barbara Brown, lugged a 30 pound typewriter into our class. Drawn to the tactility, antiquity and mystery surrounding the object, I instantly became attached to it, using it for journaling, making lists and books. As the semester came to close, Barbara noticed my fondness for the typewriter, and decided to let me keep it.

I never imagined that I would be using typewriters to carry out my Senior Thesis project; however in hindsight, it does align with my interests in history, stories, collecting and archives. Over the course of the year, the typewriter transformed from an object of personal use to something that connected me with hundreds of people. By combining the typewriter with a prompt on the personal topic of child-mother relationships, I was able to tap into the distinctive life experiences and upbringings of strangers. My intervention sought to create moments of reflection for my anonymous users, employing their minds and hands to leave their unique impressions.

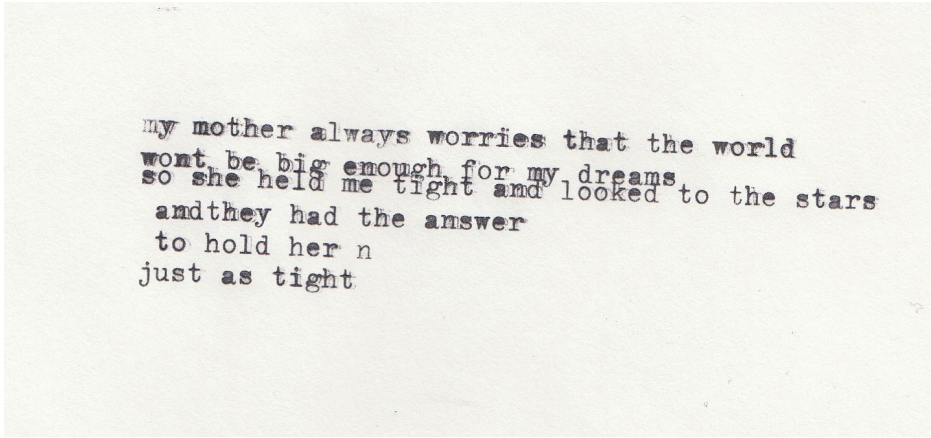
Throughout this paper I will reference the typewriter in both its history and current cultural significance and how I arrived at using it to facilitate *Typewriter Stories*. My research and observations during the process of development will be discussed, as well as my thinking behind creating an interactive installation. I will also discuss themes of participatory and public art.

Problem Statement

Typewriter Stories is an interactive art project that uses a typewriter and a prompt about child-mother relationships to create a space of reflection for the viewer. The anonymous responses serve as glimpses into each individual's unique life experiences and upbringings. Although highly personalized and anecdotal, the collection reminds us of our common anxieties, desires and doubts—our shared joys and struggles.

The multi-media, interactive installation that I have built provides both the external and the internal spaces where *Typewriter Stories* operates. The external space allows for the continuation of the participatory action, while the internal space allows individuals to view the poems and video footage I have collected.

Figure 1
One of my favorite responses I collected, outside of *RoosRoast* on Liberty Street, Ann Arbor, Michigan.



A Brief History of the Typewriter

The invention of the typewriter marked a revolution in society, playing a fundamental role of our cultural, commercial, social and industrial world. In a way that handwriting never could, the invention of the typewriter created a clean, universal format, that allowed for immediate presentation and dissemination of thought. This new technology was especially pivotal in paving a path for women into the workforce. Many working class women that were suffering from working conditions in factories were elated to become typists. Office work was a step up in the class structure, offering a cleaner, higher-paying job. At that time, typing generally paid as much or more than teaching, the main professional job accessible to women.¹



Figure 2
"Women at Work - the Typewriter Revolution." www.thetranscriptionpeople.com

¹ Gershon, Livia. "How Typewriters Changed Everything." Jstor, Jstor Daily, 10 Sept. 2017, daily.jstor.org/how-typewriters-changed-everything/.

Typewriter Cultural Resurgence

It is amusing to think of a time when typewriters were considered sophisticated, cutting-edge technology that were vital to commercial and artistic lives of people. Today, these objects are associated with antiquity. Decor at a trendy coffee shop. A dead technology. However, despite our ability to disseminate our thoughts like never before thanks to our iPhones, Macbooks and PCs, the typewriter proves to still hold importance.

Like vinyl, the resurgence of typewriters in the US is very real. On the streets of New Orleans, you can find poets selling personalized, typewritten poems on the spot. Bars across the country have been hosting “type-ins” or events where typewriter enthusiasts can meet up and try out these vintage machines. In 2017, mega-celebrities and typewriter-lovers Tom Hanks and John Mayer created the documentary *California Typewriter*.¹

What is it about typewriters that garner such interest today? Perhaps it is because they symbolize the move into the modern era, reminding us of the mechanization of our lives. Typewriters are undoubtedly a symbol of progress that led us directly to the path of the PC. They are also objects met with great nostalgia.

This ‘typewriter trend’ can also be interpreted as a result of ‘digital burnout’ or the idea that our lives are being infiltrated by technology. Inventions no longer seem to serve one singular need. Yet, the typewriter completes one function only and it does it well. With no wifi, it resists the data stream and is a means to disconnect from our hectic, complicated lives and focus our attention. Poet and novelist Robert Graves, said that a typewriter ‘of which you have grown fond seems to reciprocate your feelings, and even encourage the flow of thought. Though a lifeless assemblage of parts, it eventually comes alive.’²

To me, the typewriter is a symbol of self-expression and coherency. Typewriters give something back when the user strikes a key, which to many is quite a physical experience. These are some of the reasons why I was compelled to create *Typewriter Stories* in the first place. *How would they respond to my intervention?*

1 Tullett, Barrie. *Typewriter Art a Modern Anthology*. Laurence King, 2014.

2 Ibid.,

Typewriters and The Public

I was not the first person to wonder this. A bookshop called *Literati* in Ann Arbor, Michigan has a permanent typewriter set up in their basement that has gathered profound messages from their customers overtime. This seemingly simple act developed into a successful book by the shop called *Notes from a Public Typewriter*. Michael Gustafson, co-owner of *Literati*, talks about the “digital fatigue” that society is facing today and how typewriters are tools to check out of social media.³

The Typewriter Project is another example of a project that presents the public with a typewriter in order create an archive to be shared. The installation is a mobile, wooden booth that holds a typewriter with a long scroll of paper. On the project’s website there is a visual transcription of a scroll collected at the 2018 New York City Poetry Festival.



Figure 3
The Poetry Society of New York;
The Typewriter Project

Participatory Art

While developing *Typewriter Stories*, I was looking closely at artists and other creative projects that employ public participation. These projects added to my understanding of what it meant to be going out in the world to collect material for making—as they all had a strong foundation of looking, observing, and collecting.

In Sophie Calle’s piece *The Bronx*, she approaches strangers in The Bronx and asks them to bring her to a special place to them. She records the happening and photographs her subject, highlighting the importance of process in the work. This intimate transaction catapults Calle into stranger’s lives, allowing for an expression of human commonality through shared experiences.³ *It made think: Where does the private sphere end and the public one begin?*

Similarly, in *Following Piece*, Vito Acconci chose a stranger at random on the streets of New York City and followed them until they entered a personal place. Acconci enters the stranger’s time and space, and even begins to mimic their movements as he learns to navigate in their world. *Are works like these attempting to empathize with others by looking from new perspectives and being exposed to different paths?*

3 Gustafson, Michael. Interview on *NPR’s All Things Considered*. 2016.

4 Sommer, Carol. “Sophie Calle Artist Overview and Analysis, artstory.com.”



Performance as commitment: performance as 'forming a part of' something, 'forming a part of' someone: not communication so much as a lodgment of resources.

FOLLOWING PIECE

('Street Works IV,' Architectural League, New York; October 3-25, 1969)

Project:

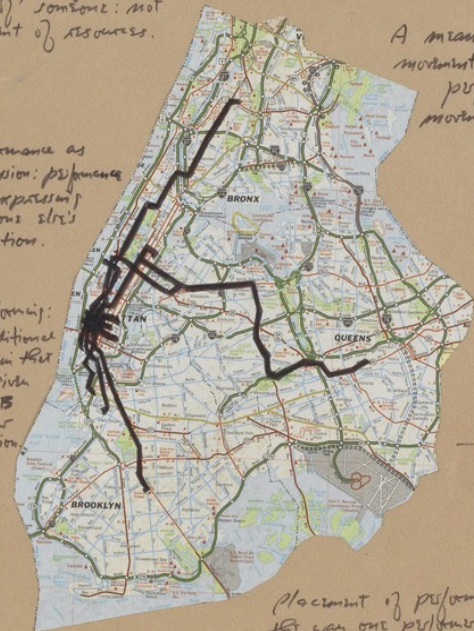
- Each day, a person is chosen at random, in the street, any location.
- I follow him wherever he goes, no matter how long or how far he travels. (I stop following only when he enters a private place - his home, his office.)

Realizations:

- Shortest time: October 3 - five minutes.
- Longest time: October 10 - five hours, twenty-nine minutes.
- (On two days, October 12 and October 16, the project was not carried out.)

Performance as expression: performance as expressing someone else's direction.

Performing as conformity: performance as conditional and/or - A's claim that he will pursue a given course of action if B engages in another given course of action.

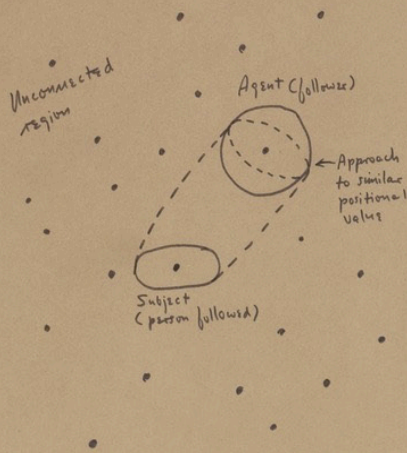


A means movement
movement
perfu
movement

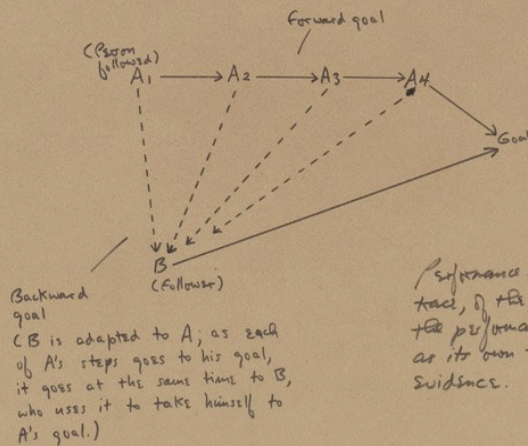
Body as pointer: virtual space: insatiation of a (actual) situation as a particular case with the system of other possible situations.

Placement of performer
the way one performer
drives from another

①



②



Performance as trail: trail, trace, of the performance during the performance: performance as its own trail, its own evidence.

Sample episode (October 31)

- Time: 3:44 PM
- Place: 8th Street and Avenue of the Americas
- Subject: Girl in orange coat - she was north side of the street.
- 3:57 PM - she entered First Bk
- 4:18 PM - left First Bk
- 4:29 PM - entered Experiment I
- 4:52 PM - left Experiment I
- 4:56 PM - entered 7th St
- 5:10 PM - left 7th St
- 5:26 PM - entered Michell's
- 5:59 PM - left Michell's and
- 6:12 PM - went down into uptown and 8th St.
- 6:15 PM - boarded train, w
- 6:39 PM - got off at 77th
- 7:01 PM - turned south on the street.
- 7:06 PM - entered building,



of motivated movement:
determined by another person's
movement as 'being performed':
not as 'being moved.'

Elastic system - adjunctive
system - participative system -
complemental system.

(Survey of
twenty-three days' following:
locations and directions)

is according to
can be produced or
movement as deviation.

...ics, northeast corner.
walked east on 8th Street,
...ams, shoe store (21 W. 8th St.)
... and continued east.
... clothing store (9 W. 8th St.)
... and walked west.
...est (Bookstore) (17 W. 8th St.)
... Bookstore and walked east.
...et store (5 W. 8th St.)
... continued east.
... RT subway station (4th Ave.
... side.
... thron local.
... Street, walked east on 7th St.
... York Avenue, east side of
... 432 York Avenue.



Sample episode (October 8)

Time: 12:04 PM
Place: 14th Street and Second Avenue,
southeast corner.
Subject: Man in a black sweater - he walked
west on 14th Street, south side of
the street.
12:10 PM - just west of Broadway,
on 14th Street,
I lost sight of him.

Vito Acconci

Figure 4
Vito Acconci. *Following Piece*. 1969.

These works by Calle and Acconci led me to examine and think critically about my role as a facilitator in my creative work. Lowe proposes that participatory art describes an engagement between artist and participant “in a process that the artist facilitates.”⁴ Artists like Calle and Acconci utilize groups of people as material for a creative process that they define. In this way both Calle and Acconci actively collaborate with their subjects to facilitate a creative inquiry, even if in Acconci’s case the participants are unaware. I learned that participation can be both active and passive. *What can I learn from people that choose to not follow my given prompt or decide to not type at all?*

Studying Calle and Acconci also illuminated the idea that can make art from direct engagement with non-art audiences. Lowe further describes this kind of creative process as a “co-production of meaning” through “shared journeys in which artist and participants learn from one another, and recognize the different types of skills and knowledge that each brings”.⁵ I began to think of this process as something of a symbiotic relationship, an opportunity to develop a shared sense of ownership of the material that is created from the work. Although Calle and Acconci’s tactics require their physical bodies, differing from my project, this kind of thinking led me to better understand the process behind participatory art.

5 Lowe, Toby. A Quality Framework for Helix Arts’ Participatory Practice, helixarts.com

6 Ibid.,.



Figure 5
Sophie Calle. *The Bronx*. 1980.

I have also been looking at the work of Candy Chang, a University of Michigan alumni, most notably known for her installation “Before I Die”. After Chang lost a friend, she yearned for connection as she was depressed and avoiding the discussion of death. To start a conversation, she covered the walls of an abandoned house in New Orleans with chalkboard paint and stenciled it with the prompt “Before I die I want to _____.”⁶

This seemingly simple act had proved to have a large impact on the community because by the next day the walls were filled. Her project was called “one of the most creative community projects ever” by *The Atlantic*, triggering a response so great that over 4,000 Before I Die walls have been put up in 70 countries around the world. Chang’s piece represents a productive intervention in public space where people can share their inner lives in public, allowing neighbors to gains perspective about neighbors in new and enlightening ways. It reminded Chang that she is not alone as she tries to make sense of her life.

7 Chang, Candy, candychang.com, 2011.



Figure 6
Candy Chang. *Before I Die*. 2011.

Methodology

During the first semester in IP, I initially sought to create a project that showcased marginalized stories of women in Ann Arbor's history. I conducted a dozen interviews with business owners, professors, architects, historians, etc., that lived and worked in Ann Arbor and began making collage and photo based works in response (pictured below).

Perhaps because I am not originally from Ann Arbor, I felt disconnected to what I was making. Instead, I found myself gravitating towards a different project I was developing at the same time in a studio course called *Narrative Forms*. This is would eventually morph into *Typewriter Stories*.



Figure 7
Digital Collage



Figure 8
Diorama

The class was driven by free-writing exercises. One day my Professor Holly Hughes, presented the class with the prompt: Start your exercise using either the phrases 'My mother always...' or 'My mother never...'. As went around the room, I found my peer's responses profound despite the short amount of time given to write. They latched onto it; spilling out prose that were succinct, eloquent, witty, heart-felt yet also riddled with anxieties, doubts and pain. I knew there was more to be explored with this prompt.

It was at this point that I became captivated with children's relationship to their mother; I was interested in how their internal sentiments could be gathered and presented back to the public. So, I staged a typewriter and the prompt in the middle of the *University of Michigan's* central campus.



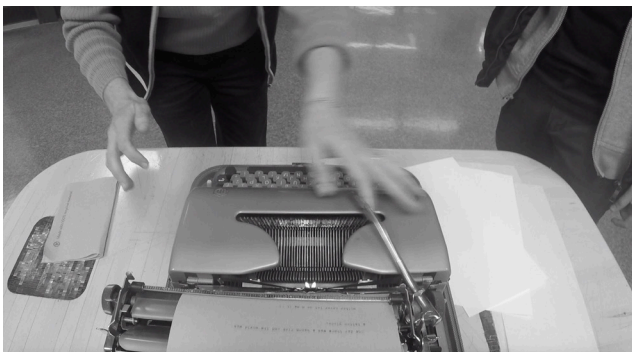
Figure 9
Typewriter in the Diag



Figure 10
Typewriter in Downtown Ann Arbor

The intervention felt performative immediately as I watched the typewriter from afar, interested in the way that people interacted with it. The public immediately took to my project as I was gathering profound messages each day. They were glimpses into stranger's lives; vivid and detailed prose that painted pictures in my head. It became apparent that I was receiving a range of emotionally charged responses. They spoke of pain, resentment, anxiety, abandonment, but also comfort, celebration, nostalgia and happiness. I especially enjoy the presence of the typer's hand on the paper, the imprints had nuances, typos and smudges that gave each response character and differentiation.

I continued to put the typewriter out and became increasingly interested in capturing the way people interacted with it. I went as far as setting up a GoPro camera on the hood of the typewriter, so an element of surveillance began to emerge.

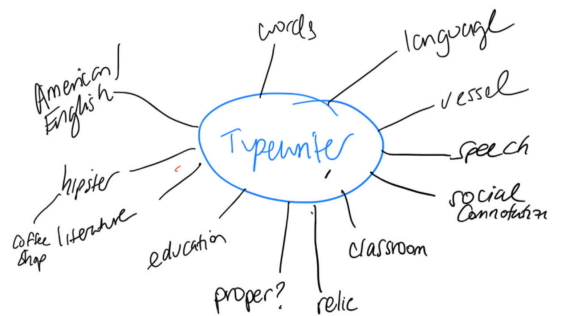


Figures 11 and 12
GoPro Footage

In critique, I was pushed to think of why I was using the typewriter. Through research, it slowly began to occur to me that this was less about the typewriter and more about mothers. I was so focused on the process of this experiment that I began to lose sight of what the prompt meant. *Why was I so interested in learning about child-mother relationships?*

In an attempt to further explore the meaning in the poems, I tried to synthesize them. I began collaging, making word maps, analyzing the words to uncover certain similarities, etc. I wasn't satisfied with the outcome. So, I continued collecting. I set typewriters up at a late night event at the *University of Michigan Museum of Art (UMMA)*, had a one-month installation of three typewriters at the *Detroit Public Library*, and continued collecting around Ann Arbor.

The typewriter is a vessel for words, letters, sounds, voices, stories & memories to be heard. Click clack. It's made of metal. It's hard. Seniors love them. There is a fascination there. They are ways of staying telling. No one is like your mother. Some people really hate their mothers. Others are best friends.



Pope is a rockstar

Typing out your favorite song

Time passing

What if it were a scroll?

Figure 13
Word Map

I realized that it wasn't my place to alter the poems in anyway. Instead, I needed to find a way to showcase the process of carrying out this project and the material I was receiving from the public. So, I began to develop an interactive installation for the gallery space, a way to activate the poems and video footage and allowed the project to continue in the gallery (see on opposite page).



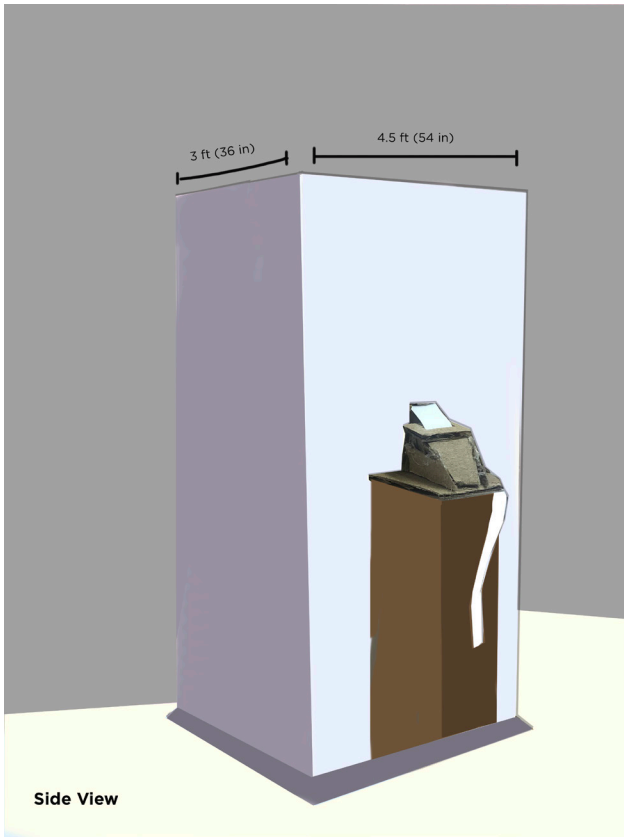
Figure 14
Detroit Public Library



Figure 15
Detroit Public Library



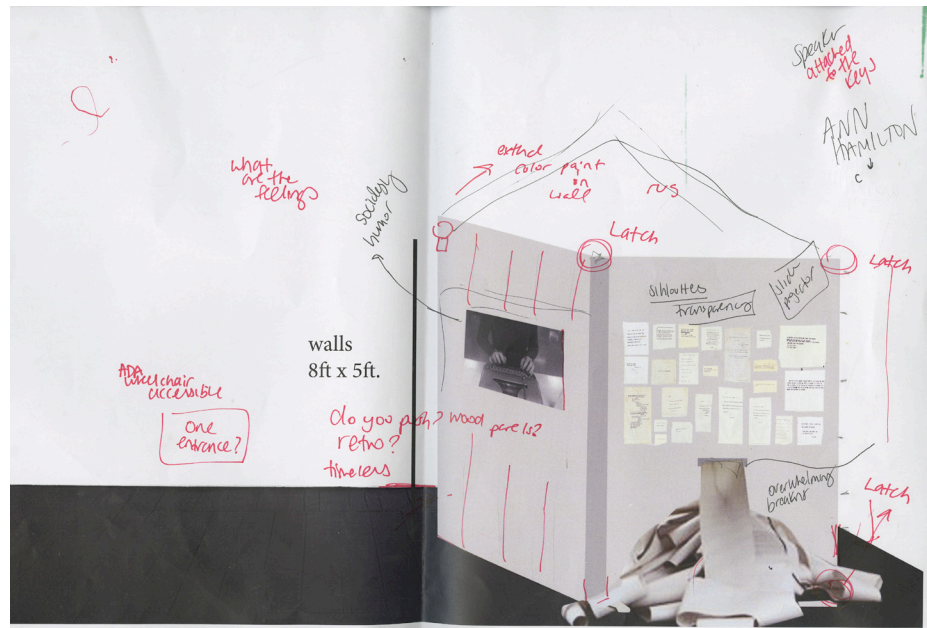
Figure 16
UMMA



Figures 17 and 18
Mock Ups for the Installation

I set to work on the installation with a tremendous amount of help from my former Shop teacher, Rich Lindsay. We built the structure out of Lumin and plywood. I color-matched the paint to match my typewriter. We built a mechanism that would feed the paper scroll directly from the typewriter straight through the wall onto the other side, spilling onto the floor. This would be an important element to the installation because it signifies the moment that the private becomes public. The inner self migrating outward. A singular response joining an entire collection.

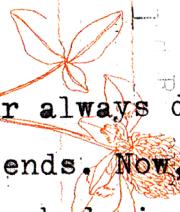
I also made three handmade books that housed many responses and photographs I had taken. Lastly, I created a short video that briefly explained the project and showed footage I had gathered. I also spliced in clips from vintage typewriter advertisements to pay homage historical nature of my project— I was constantly getting typewriters repaired, people told me about their relationships with typewriters throughout their life, etc.



My mother never met me.
gave me away before she could.
but ive met her before.
In my dreams.

A

my mother always made more mone
my mother always did drugs when
she did them because she wanted
its kind of funny what moms wil
to be better moms
even if that thing doesnt make
weird how we make up these idea
what moms have to be
so they think they have to be m
i love her
i am glad she is a good mom now
but often i am still angry



My mother always dreamt of a train
with no ends. Now, with all my
dreams packed, i am sitting
quietly on this train. With her
on one end, i am heading another...

my mother always taught me
the power of words

how they can heal us
or destroy us

s.a.w.

y than my father
i was a kid
to be a better mom
l do

them a better mom at all
s about

more than they do

my mother never had a sober day they were always
filled with empty bottles and emptier hearts. -s.p.

Creative Work

I used my research, observations, and data that I've collected to create an interactive installation. The installation is comprised of three main components: video, handmade books, and an active typewriter/scroll. There is a large emphasis on interior vs. exterior space in the design of the installation. I wanted there to be a reveal on each side of the structure which would add to the viewer's visual interest and lead them to investigate each aspect of the installation. For example, as you approach the structure from the front, the typewriter is in view, but the scroll that is feeding through the wall is not.

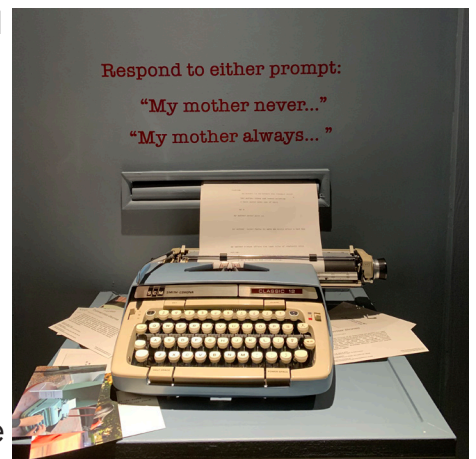


Figure 24
Installation
Side View

This proved to be successful during the opening night and beyond, as I witnessed groups of people crowding around the installation. I was excited to see so many people typing and adding a lengthy amount of responses to the scroll, as well as examining the handmade books that I made. The books did not seem to stay on the shelves during opening night; I am very pleased in how they came out, especially my choice to include photographs which I feel added to the viewer's understanding in how I worked. The video was successful in being an initial draw to my piece as I saw people watching intently and sometimes laughing at participant's trouble with using typewriter. I was most surprised to see people crouch down to examine the scroll on the ground and read the responses. This was an interactive element I did not anticipate; I more so thought of the scroll as a "sculptural element" that would further display the volume of responses.

My research on participatory art guided me in making a project that worked to enable the public to reflect on their lives, allowing for an expression of human commonality through a shared experience. Through *Typewriter Stories*, I interacted with hundreds of people—whether that be face to face interaction or through the typewriter itself. Although I will never meet the anonymous participants, I still carried and studied their responses, gained insights into their lives, and finally gave them another life within the installation.

My installation was approachable and easy to understand to a wide variety of audiences. I was told that it wasn't even necessary to read my statement to "get" the piece. The human quality of it came to the forefront; the public continued to type and reflect but also made sure to look.



Figure 25
Installation Side View



Figure 26
Front View // Video



Figure 27
Individual Viewing the Scroll

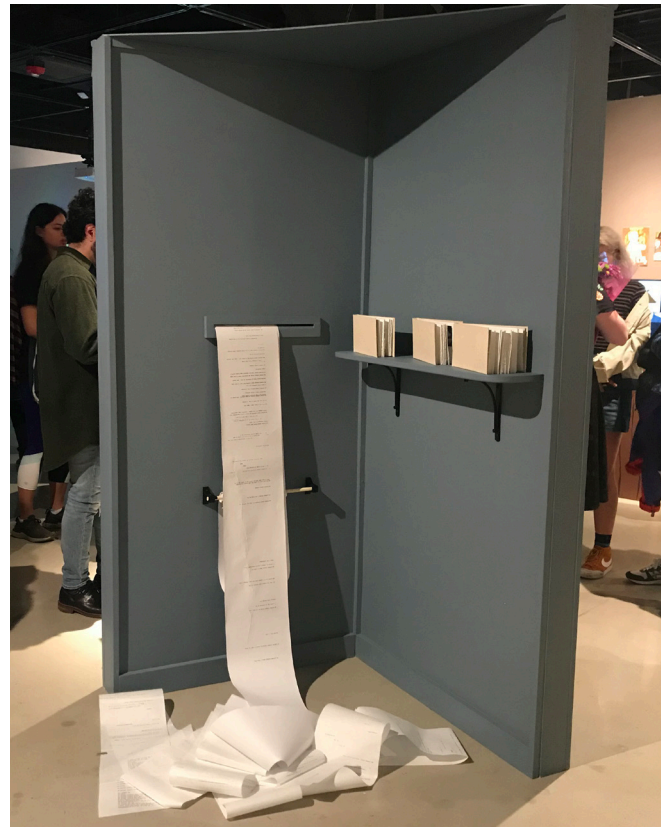


Figure 28
Interior View // Scroll

Conclusion

I had such an wonderful experience developing this project. It gave me the freedom to experiment in new places and meet dozens of people while doing so. I took the Integrative Project as an opportunity to cast a wide net and talk to as many people as possible for feedback and guidance, and my network grew exponentially because of it.

I believe that self-directed projects like this, if done properly, expose one's deepest interests and natural tendencies. Upon reflecting on the path I took to create *Typewriter Stories*, it reveals that I am someone who is driven by history, curiosity, and stories. It is something that is embedded in me; it is how I navigate the world and learn. Further, it validates my next step post-graduation, which is an internship that I will begin soon in New York City. The internship is at a heritage-brand jewelry company called *Verdura*. I will be working as an archival intern, working within *Verdura*'s massive archive of over 10,000 conceptual drawings that are still being used to create contemporary pieces.

Additionally, I do plan on continuing *Typewriter Stories* while living in New York and potentially approaching art spaces/galleries to show the work.

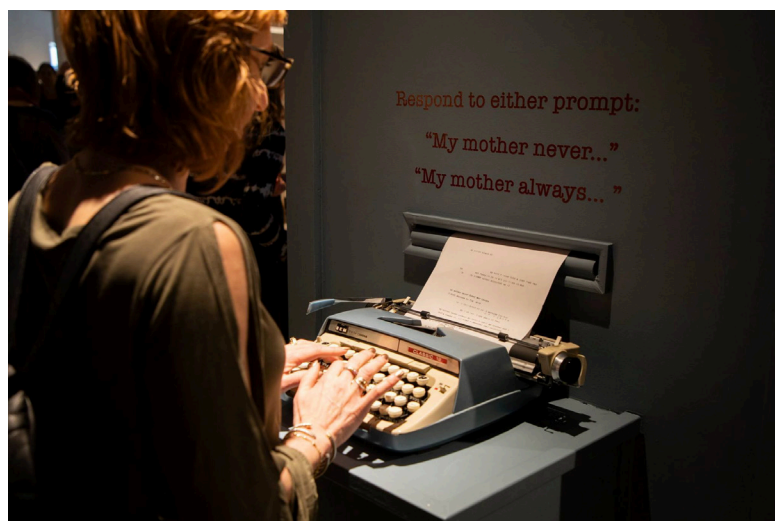


Figure 29
My Mom, Linda, Typing

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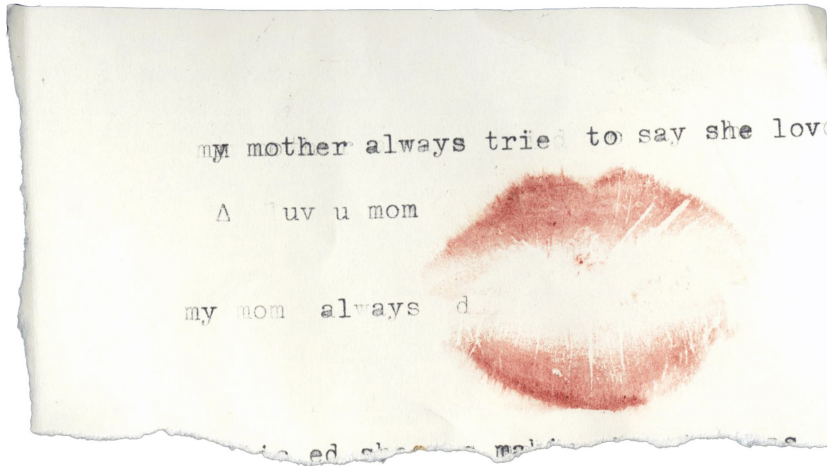
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Content compiled and written by Carol Sommer, Edited and revised, with Synopsis and Key Ideas added by Kimberly Nichols, <https://www.theartstory.org/artist-calle-sophie-artworks.htm>. First published on 16 Dec 2018.

Tullett, Barrie. *Typewriter Art a Modern Anthology*. (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2014), 66.



Figure 30
Individual Viewing the Books



Many thanks to my dear friend Rich Lindsay of the *University of Michigan Theater & Drama Department*, John Mulcare of *M&M Typewriter Service Inc.*, Holly Hughes (& her brilliant prompt), Mayela Rodriguez, Joe Trumpey, *The Detroit Public Library* and of course my family.

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hissrhsh rh Sh and Gry were here h alleolihshab illaolishshabi

my mother always forces me to eat

vhf

i

love you.

dear,
not love a s do s tuff