

# Suitcase Stories

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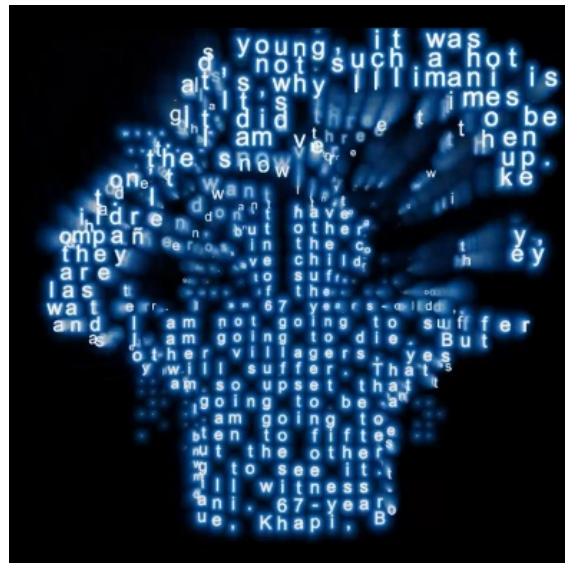


Figure 1: Images of *Suitcase Stories* - a participant is shown interacting with a first-hand account of climate change by Marcos Choque [8].

## CCS Concepts

• **Applied computing** → Arts and humanities; Media arts; • **Human-centered computing** → Human computer interaction (HCI); Interaction techniques; Gestural input.

## Keywords

interactive typography, climate change, art, installation

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The Suitcase Stories installation facilitates embodied interaction with typographic representations of firsthand accounts of climate change. The work aspires to create a powerful and visceral connection between the participant and individuals affected directly by environmental changes, thus developing greater awareness and propensity towards positive action. Participants interact with powerful and often emotive narratives through upper body movement and gesture, discovering and playing with words and phrases. The entire artwork is integrated within a vintage suitcase, adding aesthetic and thematic dimensions to the user experience. Through this installation, the author sets out to test whether interactive typography, controlled through body tracking, can offer a unique platform for disadvantaged voices to be heard in a powerful and immersive way.

## 1 Introduction

This artwork paper is structured in the following way. The installation and functionality of Suitcase Stories are described in order to provide a foundational understanding of the artwork and how it conforms to the ‘exhibition-in-suitcases’ protocol set out in the conference Arts and Performance track. An artistic statement details the intent behind the work, how it relates to the conference theme of sustainability and how it draws thematically upon the suitcase idiom. A research statement locates the work within a trajectory of contemporary art and design practice, followed by a conclusion offering final insights and a next steps section outlining potential future actions.

## 2 Installation and Functionality

Suitcase Stories comprises of a vintage suitcase with a small computer hidden in the base, an LCD monitor secured to the inside of the lid and a depth camera attached to the top of the lid (see Figure 1). The lid is secured in an open position for the duration of the installation and the whole suitcase is mounted on a table or surface of a similar height so that it can be accessed from the front. An individual interacts with Suitcase Stories by approaching

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the suitcase from a distance of 1-2 metres, in which case the participant’s upper body shape is captured by the depth camera and used to position words and letters that make up an individual story. The participant manipulates the appearance of the story through body movement and gesture. From time to time, a static scene is displayed, attributing the preceding individual testimony, followed by the next interactive narrative. Static and interactive scenes are coloured alike so that narrative content and authorship are clearly linked.

## 3 Artistic Statement

It is notable that many of the UN’s 17 Sustainable Development Goals [12] relate directly to human experience rather than to simply policy or infrastructure development, although evidently these aspects are interrelated. Suitcase Stories seeks to highlight and explore the lived experience of sustainability concerns through contemplative and playful interaction with first-hand accounts from those directly affected by climate change. Individual stories, quoted from publicly available research, such as published by Oxfam International [8] and the Climate Change and Migration Coalition [10] are presented as ‘word sculptures’ that respond to bodily movement. By providing a natural user interface with such compelling personal perspectives, often featuring displacement and loss, Suitcase Stories invites participants to connect directly, both physically and emotionally, with lived experience. In the context of climate change, where personal stories play a vital role in humanising data and statistics, as discussed by Keefe [4], this approach allows for a more intimate and meaningful exploration of narratives, potentially developing both awareness and propensity for action. Additionally, by integrating the artwork within an evidently well-used suitcase, itself a potentially evocative object linked to notions including transience and displacement as put forward by Mendelsohn [6], further dimensions of tangibility and authenticity are added to the user experience.

## 4 Research Statement

This project explores the use of the human body as an interface for interacting with typography, drawing upon a variety of interactive installations and digital works that challenge traditional notions of text, space, and user agency. Through this approach, the body becomes not just a passive reader but an active participant, manipulating and reshaping typography in real-time.

Artist Camille Utterback’s Text Rain [13] is a seminal work that exemplifies the fusion of the body and typography within an interactive space. In Text Rain, participants use their physical presence to interact with falling letters that respond to their movements in real time. The letters, when caught by participants, form lines of a poem, transforming the audience from passive spectators into co-creators of meaning. The dynamic interaction between movement and text demonstrates how the body can influence the structure and interpretation of type, reimagining typography as an immersive, kinetic experience.

Artist collective Semitra’s Movable Type project [11] uses multiple turntables as a means to manipulate type, creating a direct and tactile form of interaction. By physically rotating the turntables, participants alter the shape, speed, and arrangement of typographic

elements. This interaction highlights how hardware interfaces and physical connection can be used to control and manipulate text, creating a playful and tactile engagement with typography.

Multi-disciplinary studio Nota Bene Visual's *In Order to Control* [7] explores the concept of control over information through typography, in a context where the body plays a significant role in navigating this relationship. Participants walk through a floor-projected passage of text exploring ethics, justice and morality which is disrupted by their presence and re-projected to an adjacent wall, silhouetted in human form. The artwork illustrates how interactive typography can engage with broader societal issues, highlighting the importance of embodiment in fostering human connection with these themes.

In *Data Shadow* [3], artist Mark Farid explores the relationship between data, identity, and surveillance using the body as an interface to engage with complex information. This installation uses personal data hacked from a consenting participant's smartphone, to generate dynamic visualisations that include multiple textual elements. The resulting experience showcases how the body can be used to influence and frame the representation of deeply personal typographic content.

*Unlimited Space* [9] is a large scale, multi-participant interactive typographic installation by the design agency Rakuten. Using 3D motion capture, participants 'silhouette' multiple keywords drawn from search trends on Rakuten's services, effectively creating human-shaped word clouds. The project illustrates how the body can manipulate and explore typography within a vast digital space, where movement and physicality connect the real world to the world of the internet.

Tong Li is an artist and typeface designer who creates interactive environments where typography is not confined to a two-dimensional space but is instead influenced by user movement, light, and spatial arrangement, as discussed in an interview with Al-Tiba9 Contemporary Art [1]. The WebVR element of her work *Between Hype and Hyperreality* [5], for example, locates the reader within a deconstructed book that is transformed into 'an embodiment of the Metaverse' [1]. Li's approach blurs the lines between graphic design, programming and spatial art with embodiment located at the very centre of typographic experience.

The works of Utterback, Semitra, Nota Bene Visual, Farid, Rakuten, and Li, illustrate a trend in contemporary art and design that sees typography as more than just a visual medium. By using the body as an interface and/or a focal point, these works demonstrate that typography can become an immersive, dynamic, and often highly interactive experience. Through movement and spatial interaction, the body becomes a key factor in shaping typographic design, unlocking new possibilities for creative expression in the digital age.

## 5 Conclusion

A critical component of climate justice is amplifying the voices of those most affected by environmental changes, particularly marginalised communities who are often underrepresented in global discourse, as discussed by Crawford et al. [2]. Interactive typography, controlled through body tracking, can offer a platform

for these voices to be heard in a powerful, immersive way. By transforming users from passive readers into active participants, Suitcase Stories seeks to create an embodied, empathetic connection to the narratives of those affected by environmental changes.

## 6 Next Steps

The immediate next steps for this project are to continue developing and user testing the core interactions while also progressing the aesthetics that accompany each narrative. A larger exhibition format that allows full body interaction will also be created to test the work on a greater scale, albeit not necessarily confined to a suitcase.

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