

I've Started Standing in Hallways

May Heili

Dr. Lindsay Daigle

HONORS 200: The Shaping of the Modern Mind:

The Third 'W': Ideas of Place & Space

Fall 2022

Abstract: This project is a combination of creative artwork and academic writing. This is the reflection/paired essay portion of my work on passing. It is written as a retrospective narrative of my research and ideation process for my artist's book, titled "I've Started Standing in Hallways". The book itself is documented in photo and video format in the other PDF file I have sent; it is my intention that the book is read thoroughly before this reflection. This text sets my experiences as a nonbinary individual in critical conversation with trans voices that have come before me. Every trans and nonbinary story that is put into the world provides context for the social unrest that trans inequality causes.

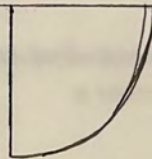
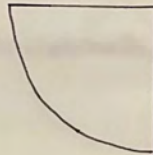
I've started standing in hallways

May Heili

video documentation: https://youtu.be/XNH29m_SzMw

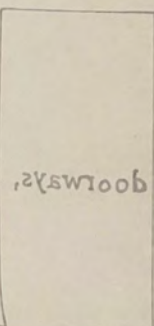
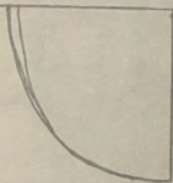
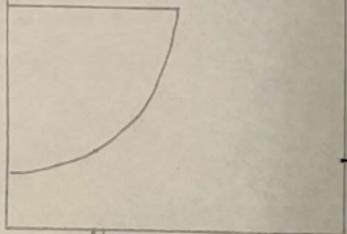
I've started standing in hallways.

In vestibules,



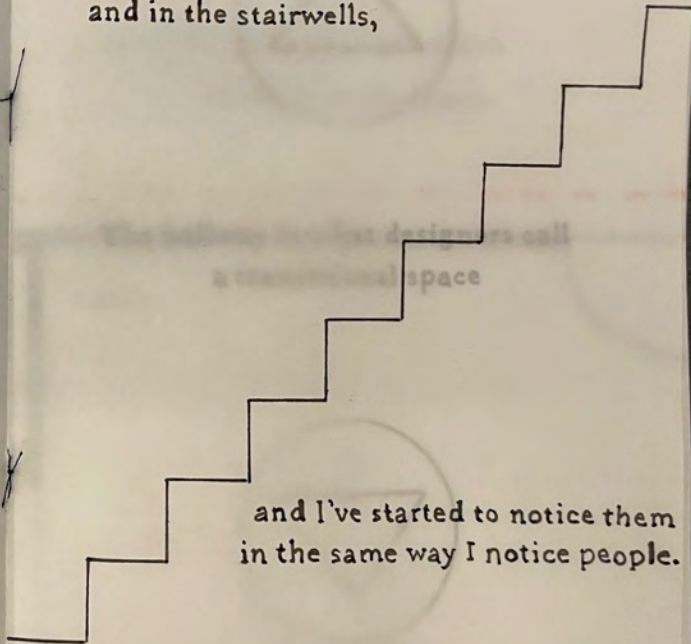
In doorways,

In vestibules,



In doorways,

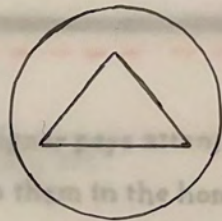
and in the stairwells,



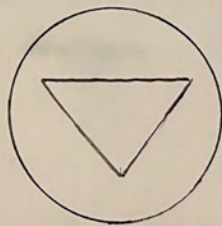
and I've started to notice them
in the same way I notice people.

and in the stairwells,

and I've started to notice them
in the same way I notice people.



The hallway is what designers call
a transitional space





The hallway is what designers call
a transitional space



A good designer pays attention
to them in the home.

bedroom

A good designer pays attention
to them in the home.

bedroom

In public, they are
part of
a
series
of
mundane
tasks.

tasks.
mundane
of
series
a
part of
In public, they are

Passage-granters.





Passage-granters.



Passage-granters.

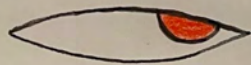


Passage-Starters.

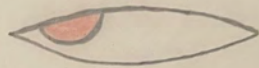


They're barely seen

In public,
they are not the type of space
for attention.



In public,
they are not the type of space
for attention.



They're barely seen
because they are not made to be seen

but
only
passed through.

They're barely seen
because they are not made to be seen



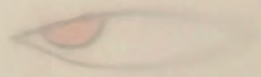
When you stop and look
at what's not supposed
to be seen,
but
only
passed through.

you begin to
see through the cracks
of reality

into the development of landscape

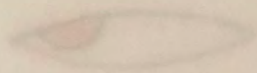
They're barely seen
because they are not made to be seen

but



only
passed through.

They're barely seen
because they are not made to be seen
but
only



When you stop and look
at what's not supposed
to be seen,

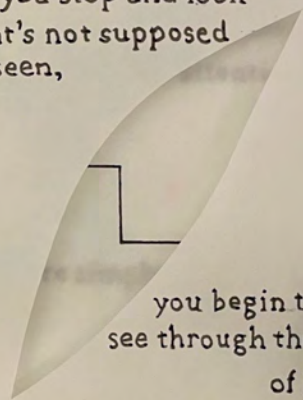
passed through.

you begin to
see through the cracks
of history

into the development of landscape

only
passed through.

When you stop and look
at what's not supposed
to be seen,



you begin to
see through the cracks
of history

into the development of landscape

into the development of landscape

of history
see through the cracks
you begin to

seed throw

When you stop and look
at what's not supposed
to be seen,

I feel reverence for the stairwell.

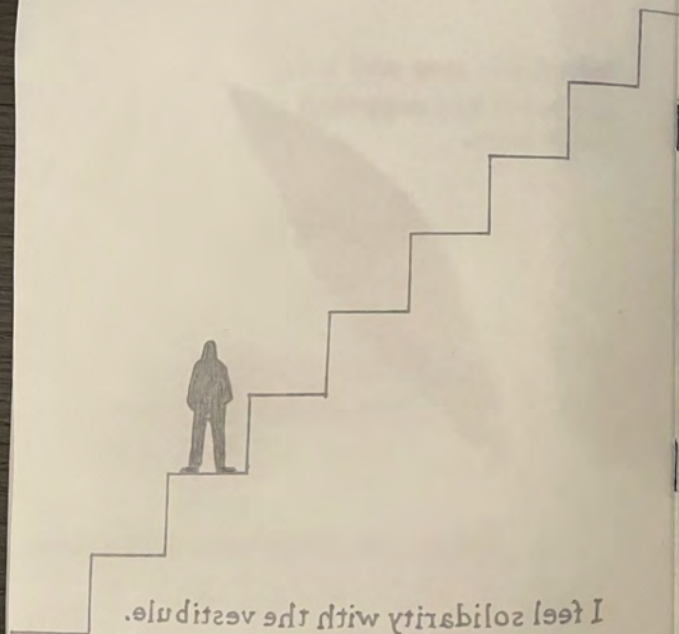
No need to change them
or great care attention to them

They're simply



I feel solidarity with the vestibule.

I feel reverence for the stairwell.



I feel solidarity with the vestibule.

No need to change them
or grant more attention to them

They're simply

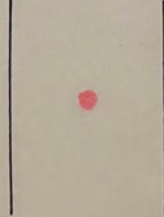
between.

No need to change them
or grant more attention to them

They're simply

between

As I pass through and so



the better way to do it



As I pass through and as I pass to others,

the hallway and me are the same.

This project presented me with a lot of challenges, but I primarily struggled with ambiguity. I knew from the beginning what kind of artist's book I wanted to create— I knew its minimalistic style, its use of transparent pages and ink— but deciding on how to say what was in my head through imagery alone was not possible. The last-minute decision to build my imagery around a lyric essay, which devolved into a short poem for lack of time, was a valuable one.

The book I created revolves around the trans/gender-nonconforming experience. My main inquiry is about passing— how its meanings in the physical space we inhabit (passing through) and in the sociocultural exchange of daily interactions (passing as) shape us and our spaces. We pass *through* a room, a lecture hall, a doorway, and we pass *as* our gender, age, status, etc. The final book literally emphasized spaces, and more figuratively acknowledged gender. When we only have to pass *through* a space, its purpose is limited by the time we spend with it, and its true nature becomes subject to our ignorance. The speaker of the internal poem relates to the in-betweenness of transitional spaces.

This term “transitional space” came up in my research early on, but before that, I had referred to these as “places of passing.” Wordplay, admittedly, lent itself to some of the ideation process. Finding two meanings of “passing,” then discovering in the strings that connect those two meanings the words “transitional” and “transgender” perhaps superstitiously confirmed some of my personal experiences with the outside world. It was at this point that I delved into accounts from other trans- and genderqueer people.

Before I introduce their experiences, an aside: I feel that I took a risk deciding to make a memoir-style piece of art in an academic setting. The inquiry is there. My interest in it and exploration of other genderqueer and trans people's experiences are what led to the creation of this project. I feel hesitant to present it in this academic setting, however, because the idea is still so fresh to me. If I had to speak on it with no preparation, I am not sure if I would do these fragile topics justice. In order to even begin my book and create something true to my experience, I had to embrace that fear and ambiguity and make them a part of my creative process. My book, my art, and my story join in on the conversation containing stories of other genderqueer people shaped by space, and anyone else who feels in between.

I was first concerned with avoiding tropes, stereotypes, and overused imagery when I was not yet sure if I would include written words in my main text. I have found that there are specific stereotypes surrounding transness that it is suffering, it is medical, that it is a young, attractive teenager looking in the mirror and frowning. In TV and media, trans people are depicted as scary folktales, selfish, as predators, or people that should always die first (Kehrli). I knew it would not be difficult to avoid such an outright harmful depiction of transness in my book, but the circumstances, the social spaces that led to these stereotypes existing were important to acknowledge. Imagery and storytelling have been weaponized against trans people in the past. I needed to do the exact opposite of that.

I then looked to Youtuber Natalie Wynn, known online as Contrapoints, in her socratic dialogue style video "Transtrenders". It contains dialogue between several characters, including one nonbinary individual and one transgender woman who clutches onto transmedicalism in order to justify the community to the greater world. Transmedicalism is the ideology that in order to be trans, one must be "diagnosed" with gender dysphoria, then undergo hormone

therapy and multiple gender affirming surgeries in order to “pass” to the greater population as their preferred gender (22:23). This is harmful because it paints transness as a path of suffering. It literally ascribes transness as an illness. It serves the enemies of trans people just enough to make them friendlier to a select few that “pass”. At this point, transmedical passing is a financial hurdle. It is a harmful standard to hold to people who cannot afford to transition, are not allowed to transition, or do not desire to medically transition.

This brings us again to Nico Dacumos, who presented a portion of “Becoming The Man I Was” at the Men’s Story Project in 2010, plus some additional spoken words. Dacumos struggles with the idea of transitioning. He says, “Will I still be beautiful after the surgeries and the hormones? What will I forget? What will I lose forever? Am I really ready to take these next steps, or is there honor in becoming truly happy and comfortable as the female-bodied man that stands before you today?” (9:34). Dacumos opposes the gender binary and transmedicalism. Dacumos guided me toward the in-between. I connected greatly to his works because my trans experience (as of yet) is not medical. My experience as nonbinary and genderfluid is, entirely, “between”.

Every single text I referenced for my work includes multiple mentionings of passing. In the aptly named documentary “*Passing*,” trans man Lucah said “you don’t transition in a vacuum. How you’re read by the outside world has a profound effect on the treatment that you get,” (4:40). This is the nature of passing that I wanted to touch on in my work. I wanted to acknowledge that the outside world, the space that we live in, work in, and pass through defines how we are treated. Not to mention, the people in that space will impose judgements on how much effort is going into passing. This is the constriction of the gender binary. To be publicly accepted as a trans woman, one must invoke classical femininity in order to please the others

around them, and vice versa.

My intent, sharing my perspective, was to challenge the binary and the prejudice with my ambiguity. Being one with the transitional spaces has granted me a little bit of invisibility. The pressure of the binary is off; I do not have to pass as a man or a woman. There is not a gendered purpose to the room that I am, to the space that I occupy. I can comfortably stand in the in-between, and the judgements and misconceptions are just a little easier to live with that way.

Works Cited.

"Nico Dacumos "Becoming the Man I Was" Men's Story Project , UCSF." *YouTube*, uploaded by Men's Story Project, 6 Dec. 2010, www.youtube.com/watch?v=JdIq_NjuUBQ.

Passing. Directed by Lucah Rosenberg-Lee and J. Mitchel Reed. Produced by Emily Jenkins, 2015. Alexander Street, Part of Clarivate, courtesy of University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Libraries,
https://search-alexanderstreet-com.ezproxy.lib.uwm.edu/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cvideo_work%7C5243007

"Transtrenders." *Youtube*, uploaded by ContraPoints, 1 Jul. 2019,
www.youtube.com/watch?v=EdvM_pRfuFM&t=1391s.

Kehrli, Keffy. "Tropes As Erasers: A Transgender Perspective." *Apex Magazine*, 13 Dec. 2016.
<https://apex-magazine.com/nonfiction/tropes-as-erasers-a-transgender-perspective/>.