

Organisational Encounters and Reflexive Undergoings: A Speculative Weaving in Three Transpositions

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A woman with dark hair, wearing a white dress, is seated at a white table in a gallery or workshop. She is working on a piece of fabric or paper. The table is covered with various materials, including cardboard boxes, a small basket, and some tools. In the background, there are large windows and a wall with a quote. The overall atmosphere is one of creative exploration and reflection.

Organisational Encounters and Reflexive Undergoings: A Speculative Weaving in Three Transpositions

Debbie Michaels

Transposition III *remake*

Organisational Encounters and Reflexive Undergoings: A Speculative Weaving in Three Transpositions

Deborah Anne Michaels

PRACTICE SUBMISSION – TRANSPOSITION III

in partial fulfilment of the requirements of Sheffield Hallam University
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Culture and Creativity Research Institute, Faculty of Science, Technology and Arts

March 2022

All work attributed to Debbie Michaels unless otherwise stated

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Transposition III – *Remake*


‘Transposition III’ addresses the *remaking* of an emerging ‘body’ of work as I (re)situate and (re)present it in settings that bridge art, healthcare, and academia. Enquiring into the life of the residual ‘body’ and its associated parts outside the studio I involve others in receiving, handling and response *through* FOCUS GROUPS and works such as NOTHING MUCH GOING ON and INTERRUPTING THE FLOW. Extending the ‘body’s’ threads out and across institutional boundaries and challenging traditional relations between researcher and researched I amplify its psychosocial presence as, speaking alongside it, THE VOICE OF ITS MAKING raises questions at the DOUBLE AGENCY intervention and beyond.

Focus Group I

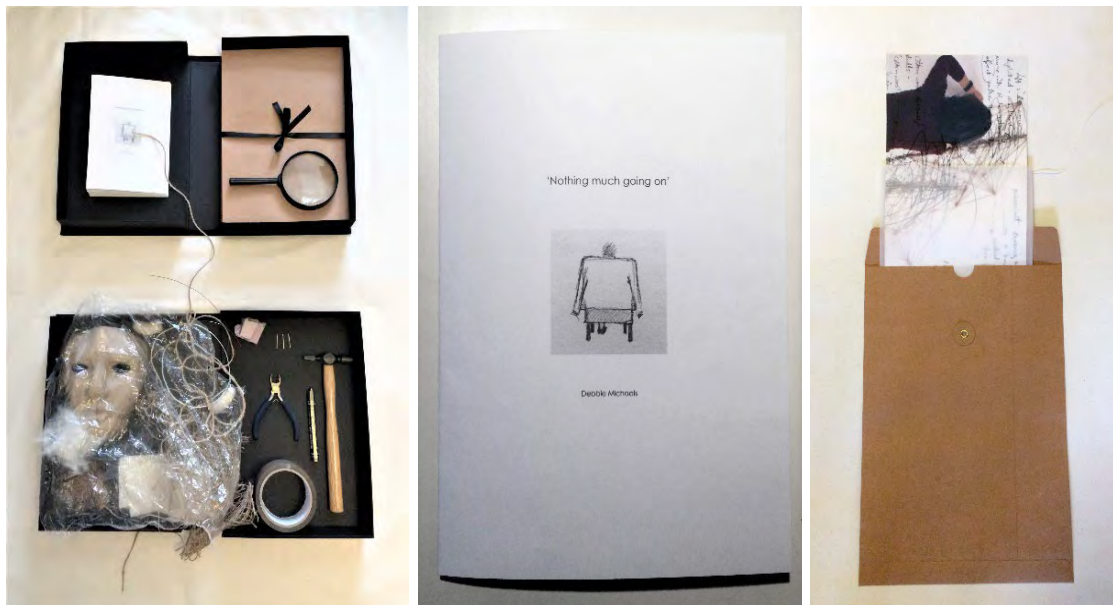
December 2017

Some months after the twelve-week observation, and with University ethics approval, I return to the rehabilitation day centre to undertake a Focus Group with members of the staff team with the aim of sharing aspects of my observation experience in/of the organisation and the material produced and inviting response.

The following pages draw on process notes, other documentation, and audio recordings of the exchanges that took place.

A large magnifying glass is held over a table, focusing on a collection of tools and materials. Inside the lens, a pair of blue-handled pliers, a wooden-handled tool, and some clear plastic packaging are visible. The background shows a white sheet and some cardboard boxes.

I lay out a folded white sheet on the table that sits in the centre of the occupied office on which I present a selection of tools and materials in an archive box. In another are several copies of an experimental writing, *Nothing Much Going On*. Alongside are twelve archival envelopes sealed with strings and washers that contain layered photographic images captured from video material. A magnifying glass is offered to focus the attention more closely.



2 × A4 archival boxes,

12 × string/washer envelopes, archival tissue pockets tied around with black ribbon

2 × magnifying glasses,

hammer, nails, pliers, packing tape, aluminium and copper wire, hessian scrim, plaster bandage, polystyrene packing material, wire wool, cardboard mask, polythene, graphite stick, string

21 × colour photographs,

5 × Copies of 'Nothing Much Going On', pamphlet, 21×14.8

Presented on folded white cotton bed sheet.

Nothing Much Going On

2017

This experimental writing responds to my first impressions as I experience the organisation and myself *in* it. Based on an edited transcript of words spoken during the first fifteen minutes in the studio after the first observation I present it as a reading at the beginning of the Focus Group inviting responses from staff.

An audio extract from *Nothing Much Going On*, and can be heard at <https://www.debbiemichaels.co.uk/nothing-much>

passed
out of something
unexpected
I wasn't expecting it
sadness
welling up
isolation
aloneness
moving in and out
to sit
to not have to do
immerse myself
somebody talk to me
no don't
no conversation
a different frame
looking in
not hearing
just taking in
sensing

passed
out of something
unexpected
I wasn't expecting it

sadness
welling up
isolation
aloneness
moving in and out
to sit
to not have to do
immerse myself
somebody talk to me
no don't
no conversation
a different frame
looking in
not hearing
just taking in
sensing

isolated
outside
I am outside
coming in
from outside
no identity
no role
where am I
isolation
sadness
in front of me
back was to me
clock behind me
my watch
I need a clock
in front of me

*I wasn't expecting to be looking in this
direction*
I was expecting to be facing the other way

at the camera for 15 minutes, because I just needed to talk to the camera. Anyway, this piece
se has come from that first experience. I've called it nothing much going on.
... 'Nothing Much Going On'

en it up to any thoughts or responses.

08

that cap... from a therapy point of view that sounds like the patients we w
se things that you mentioned... the isolation... the separation... the disjoin
g with people with neurological conditions... these are all things... des
le here... these are all things they come with us to work... that is a str
was like you were recalling an assessment... an initial assessment f
like you were picking up on that what was happening.
... it might not do.
... the isolation and loneliness
... quite a lot
... not

...it might not do.
...happening.
...assessment for treatment...for me it
...despite what we try to
...is a starting point for us isn't

...the isolation and loneliness as well.
...on patients quite a lot...a lot of my patients have aphasia so
...talk to me...nobody talk to me' – that is something that a
...wish someone would talk to them but they don't want to
...and language? Sorry I feel I should have gone around
...are new to here and you are visiting like our patients
...they may have all those thoughts as well and kind
...g at the environment and what that would m
...gs like that...I suppose that ki

I invite staff to handle the materials, open the envelopes and remove the archival tissue slip-covers, inside which are one or more photographs – evidence of something having taken place.



Behind a mask

Can we open as many envelopes as we want?

I find that quite disturbing really...and I just wondered what made you...what it was?

Left side more
dilated - was hard to
move into R hemispheres
affect rather than again

Cotton wool discs -
skulls -
'Cotton wool'
brain

...evokes some quite strong emotions

...you said it was an intense experience

I don't like the feel of polystyrene

Why have you got a hammer?

...is that there like a brillo pad...wire wool?

I suppose you like go into another mode...

...like acting

...it is a heavy bag that we've got here...

...put your face on

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...like humour and...

...or what ways can we do to manage it, for our own sake?

we balance it for patients...

...it's like how do we sustain it internally?...it's just making me think

Interrupting the Flow

August 2018

Interrupting the Flow responds to the work of moving and handling the residual 'body' of work as I transfer it out of the studio and resituate it in the place from where I had observed for one hour a week over twelve weeks at a regular time and in a regular place.

The title refers to an interruption to the flow of usual processes and routines; whether through an interruption to blood flow as with a stroke, my observational presence in the organisation, or an interruption that opens a space to see something differently.

The following pages draw on process documentation, audio recordings, and reflections to trace the moving, handling, and transferring of the object-body-thing and its affects from one place to another.

Move and Handle

Method? The one I set out at the beginning of last year
Simulation; I'm simulating someone who wants to write
I'm not methodological; if I were to present
suppose there'd have to be a whole...


23/7/18

Thinking

When I originally think about packing you up, I imagine separating your body parts quite easily, as if, dispassionately, I can just dismember you, pack you away in various boxes and then reassemble you. Yet, when I approach you again and look at how intimately and intricately your threads are woven, bound — entwined together, and mine with yours — to even attempt to separate or dismantle you into your constituent parts feels damaging to your integrity. As soon as I engage with you again — touch your body — you come back to life through what you touch and evoke in mine.

So, I tentatively begin by packing some of the loose materials, artefacts, and bits and pieces associated with, but not attached to, your main body.

We think about something to support it's 'spine' during transportation. I make a 'cane' from a 2"x2" length of wood, wooden stumps + cardboard.



all this stuff here...

it's a bit...I don't know...a bit like specimens...

as soon as I start interacting with it something feels different...

Discarding the bubble-wrap which now has no place in proceedings, I wrap your upright body in the polythene sheet that has enveloped us both at times, securing it with string, and then repeating the process with the white sheet, noting the feeling of 'binding up a body'.



...feel like I'm binding up a body

I've got this sort of contraption...like a cradle...

...a way of supporting it while I transport it

Mindful of your 'heaviness', I carefully pick you up in my arms and lay you gently in the cradle that has been made to support you, tying string around to secure you in place, as if a body in a shroud being laid out for ritual burial.



...it's heavy

It is then a question of packing up the remains on the table and rolling up the paper backdrop which hangs on the wall. This bears the traces of my gestures in footprints and incidental marks, the vertical echo of a shape – a first impression – and the pencil outline of my hands which appear to reach up – towards something?

However, in my attempt to move the paper I become entangled with it as, no longer held up and somewhat unwieldy, it collapses on me before being (re)organised into the more comfortable and familiar shape of a roll that sits alongside and supports the body as it rests.



...I should have rolled up the paper before I laid it down

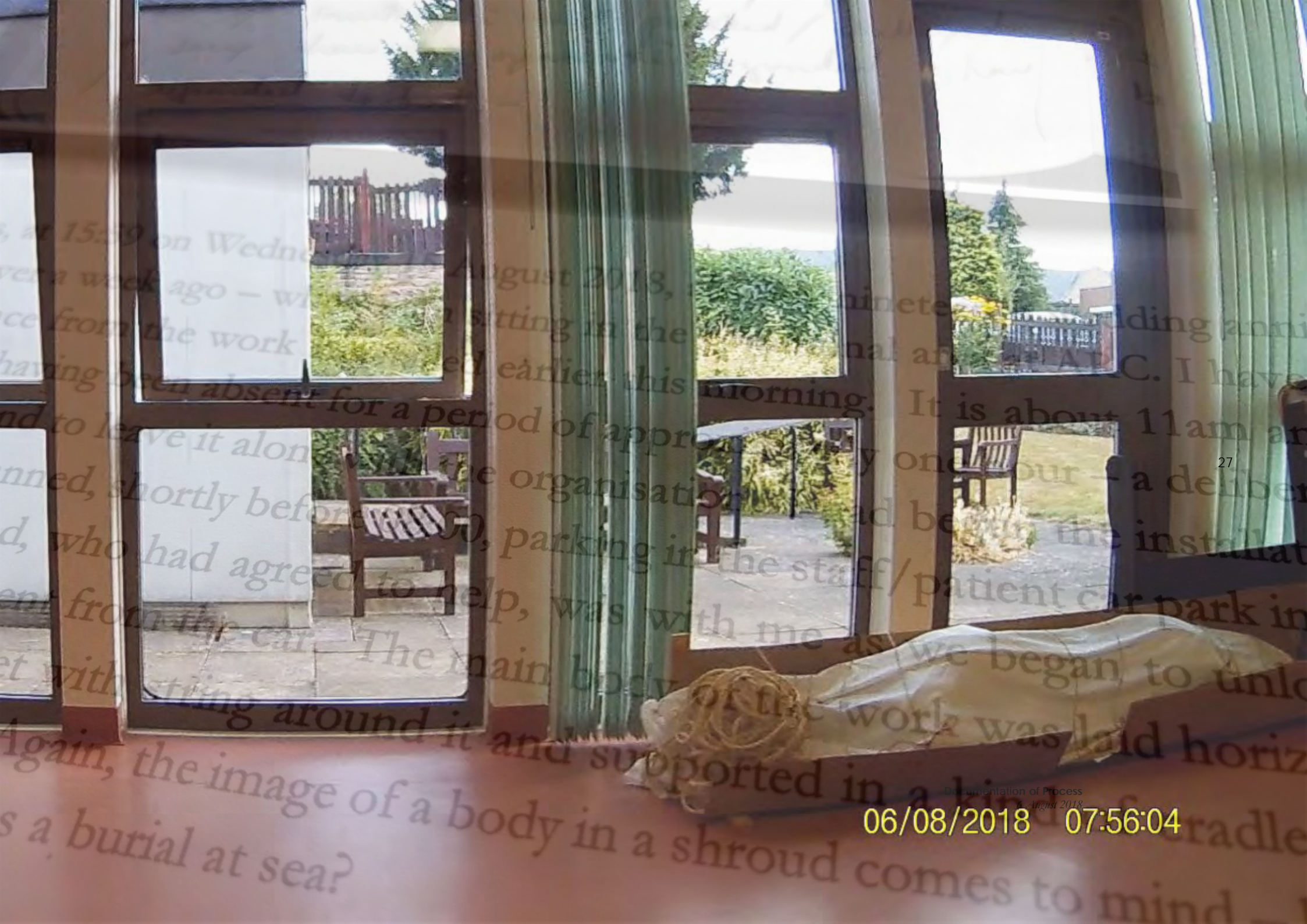


The remains of something...

Resituate

It is too risky to attempt to carry you on my own – I might drop and damage you – so my husband helps and together we take your body out of the studio to the car – gathering glances from passers-by and acknowledging the powerful evocation of carrying a dead body in a shroud for burial – a ritual of sorts – a mourning perhaps?

Carrying your 'body' past the windows and into the rehabilitation centre through a side door, we place you on the floor before unpacking and resituating you in the place from where I observed.





INTERRUPTING THE FLOW, 6 August 2017

Unpacking the 'body'



'Interrupting the Flow'

An Art Installation by Debbie Michaels

PhD Researcher, Sheffield Hallam University

Monday 6th August 2018

Gather responses

Bringing aspects of my experience and understanding into the organisation in the form of a residual 'body' of work, I invite staff, patients, and relatives, to respond to its presence, anonymously on cards provided or through dialogue with me.

You can feed back by:

- Writing, making a mark or drawing on the back of this card and putting it in the box on the table. (You do not need to put your name on it.)
- Speaking with me about the artwork. (I may ask for your consent to audio-record our conversation. This is entirely voluntary and I will be happy to speak with you without recording if you would prefer. All identifying features will be anonymised for the purposes of the research.)

Makes no sense

The piece feels rather isolated and cold
the mask feels as though feelings of
not expressing how really feels
the bare feels as though there are elements
of social isolation.

I feel as though there is need to
tidy up areas and lack warmth and
colour to the piece.

Reaching out to someone that is
difficult to grasp.

Very phallic
messy birth
jangle
nameless
uncomfortable

looks like a scrambled brain
after a stroke

I'm out on a limb outside
looking in. ~~everything~~ is
jumbled up not sure why
I am scared but why
I don't know.

Physio asked pt. what I don't know.
do you make of it?

"Absolutely nothing!"

lonely
messed up.
fragile

A load of materials!
Found on a beach or
old garden shed?
Art?
Money well spend or could
have been used for
art therapy - pts?
Throws up questions!

Please tick ✓:

patient ☐

relative ☐

staff ☒

other ☐

I can see myself lying on a beach

Looking at it from this angle it reminds me of being on a beach and – with the – and these could be shells and over there is a rock or sand and this is what comes out of sea sometimes – it's seaweed on a long piece of log that's got thrown in from years ago –

I don't know

I would say the mask doesn't belong there.

Reminds me of a palm tree

Some part of a ship wreck

Unless it was something untoward? Makes you feel uncomfortable – something not nice on the beach I look at it as a tree

I'd look at that bottle and think somebody has had a good time

Water coming in on that side, but I'm not sure about that mask...I don't know what that – I can't think about That's all really – I just feel as if you could just sit and hear waves coming in – and I'm not there, and I wish I were

Message in a bottle?

I just associate with wherever you are on a beach
It's good...it's good...everything's got a meaning hasn't it, but I'm thrown with that mask.

I don't know – nothing comes to mind with that mask, but everything else it does – yes

The mask? I don't know. At first I thought it was – as professionals I suppose we put on masks, you know – a professional To me it something not nice...Something that shouldn't be there front, but the black behind it makes me think maybe not – that's not the situation.

Again makes me feel I don't know – a disguise mask rather than – I don't know

Makes you want to move it away?

At first when I saw it I thought it looks a bit like – you know – what's been washed up by the sea – a bit of flotsam and jetsam – that sort of thing. But that mask there. I feel it's like somebody that's had a stroke that's on the outside looking in – thinking everything is scrambled –

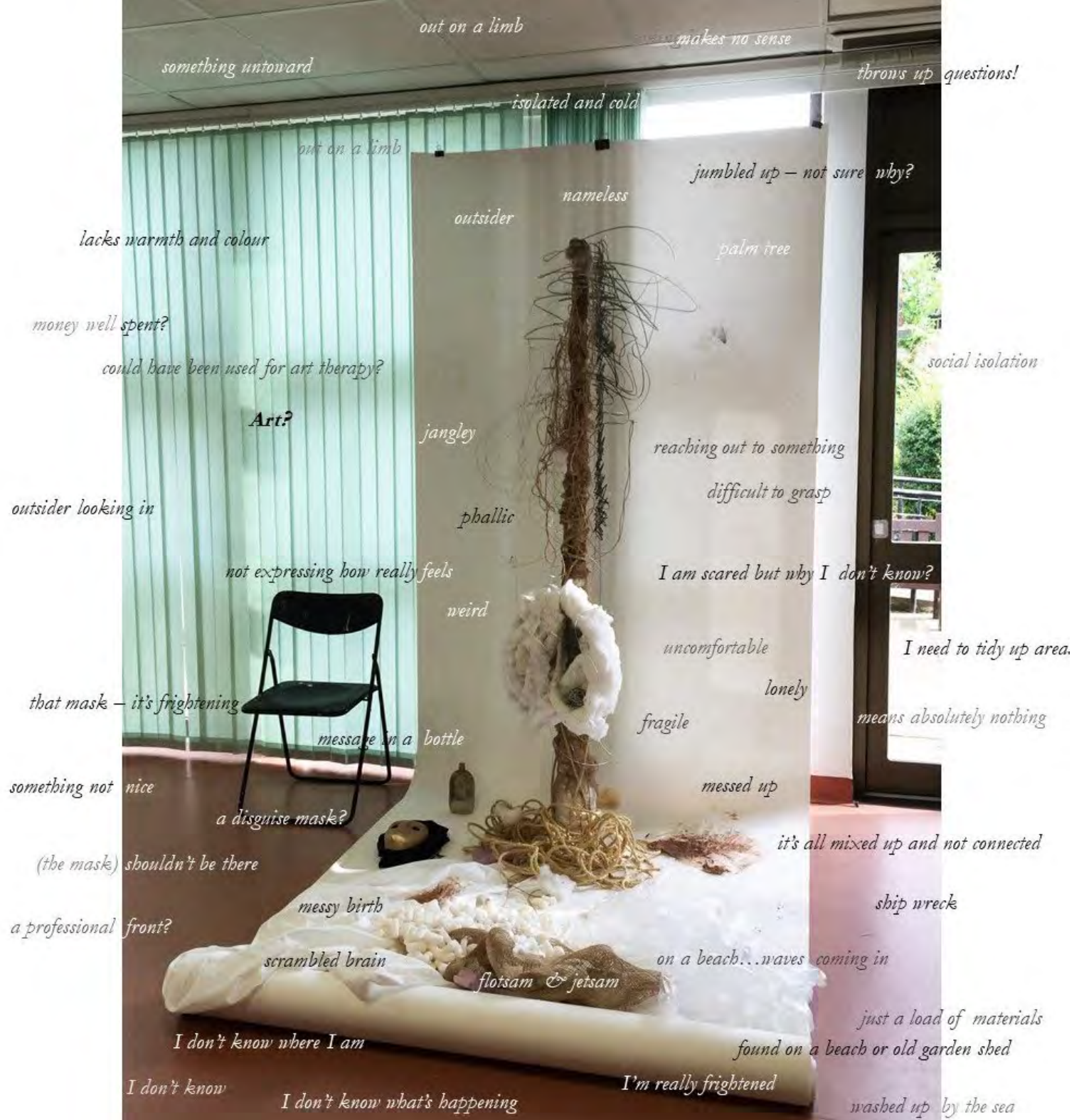
Yes...cause it's not nice at all. Why it should be there...why it's there?

It's weird

I don't know where I am – I don't know what's happening – I'm really frightened. That's how I think of it. Just like, they are there – looking in – on the outside looking in – and it's actually them – but they don't know why it's them. It's all mixed up and not connected.

It's just how it feels to me. It's frightening. But I think that mask – it's frightening. At first I thought, oh it looks like flotsam and jetsam, but then – when I've looked at it.

I don't know what it feels like to have a stroke obviously.



Focus Group II

October 2018

Life has become messy & complicated
disjointed post stroke

With University ethics approval, I return again to the rehabilitation day centre to undertake a second Focus Group offering an opportunity for staff to share their responses to the object-body-thing and its presence in the organisation.

In order to facilitate this I share my experience of, and response to, moving and handling it.

Quite stark, drab colour,
complex, quite negative emotions
? Reflection of self or ? New patient
feel due to their condition?
Helpful to hear some of your
perceptions + complexities of what
contributes to organisational
culture.

for me it's a pile of materials – it's a bit like somebody's tidied up the shed and threw them from one place and that's how they landed – bits on top of each other there didn't seem to be any structure

I don't understand it – I can understand how the patients didn't understand it either

Interrupting the Flow...what did you...what made you come up with that?

on some level it felt as if I was interrupting your normal process and routine and introducing something unfamiliar, and difficult to make sense of

we're a good art gallery

You've probably already said it already, but could you restate your research question again

if anything goes wrong...we know what to do

'Reflexive art practice as an investigative tool to explore organisational culture.'

That's quite multiple...from your original research title it seems to have morphed into

like a spider's web

It has been quite helpful listening to how you got to – because we can't necessarily engage with that or understand all that's meant, but it's interesting hearing about your process – makes more sense of it

35

Is it a finished article or will it continue to change?

and you're responding to that body of work in a conscious way and a lot of people don't respond consciously to their own bodies

I thought it was quite interesting – other people observing your work – like how patients approach something they don't understand will be displayed in so many different ways depending on personality and cognition and things

I can't explain why but the face makes me feel uncomfortable – that's as far as it goes.

I can't explain why it does, but it just

it was quite interesting watching our staff group respond to something they didn't understand because we don't like it – if we don't understand something the immediate reaction is to have a reaction isn't it

It's quite disconnected isn't it – emotionally

makes me feel uncomfortable

I can't tell you why – makes me feel a bit – just uncomfortable really

deathly

FOCUS GROUP II

Participant responses

Double Agency

Design4Health, 4 – 6 September 2018, Sheffield Hallam University

Places
are limited;
sign up at
Reception



The 'Double Agency' intervention was initiated and designed by artist-researchers Sarah (Smizz) Smith, and Julie Walters. Hosted by the Design4Health conference 2018 it comprised a series of one-on-one material & dialogical 'encounters' with four 'double agents', including myself – all health practitioners and artist/designer/researchers working with creative methods to look critically at aspects of the healthcare system.¹

The event also saw the launch of the Critical Arts in Health Network (CAHN) and the 'Double Agency' Publication edited by Sarah Smith and Julie Walters.² This features those directly involved in the intervention, but also invites others to engage in a critical dialogue about, and around, the use of art and design practice in healthcare.

The publication can be downloaded at
<https://www.debbiemichaels.co.uk/publications.php>

Welcome to the *double agency intervention* booking system.

This booking system is designed to:
Help you critically reflect on the sometimes
baffling process of accessing health care and
Generate an actual booking for the double agent encounters taking
place at the Design Health Conference..... or will it?

Registering online via a system which both mirrored and critiqued GP
booking systems, conference delegates are invited to enter into a critical
and material encounter with each Double Agent Practitioner for ten
minutes, at a specific time and in a pre-defined sequence over a total period
of forty minutes.³

Maps direct delegates up stairs to a waiting area, where they are offered
information about the encounters and asked to sign consent forms for
each. At the appointed time delegates are collected by the double agent and
taken to their first encounter. A maximum of two people can attend.

Next

STAIRS



Welcome to the **Heart of the Campus**,
home to the Helena Kennedy Centre, and the
Departments of Law and Criminology, and
Psychology, Sociology and Politics.

With the help of another, she carries the shrouded body in a crude wooden container up the stairs through a crowded institution where people sit and study at tables set around the floors below and above to a small room...



*'When the whole
world is silent,
even one voice
becomes
powerful...'*

Malala Yousafzai

...of interplay with the material in which the intervention of the unconscious with its ambiguities to deal with the sub

between encounters a speculative weaving

Debbie Michaels

...feature of the problematic situation and, from their gradual discovery,
designs an intervention...

Debbie Michaels, 'Between Encounters: A Speculative Weaving', in *Double Agency*, ed. by Sarah Smizz and Julie Walters,
Sheffield: Independent Publishing Network, 2018

on of unconscious promptings
This writing is an

Delegates who have booked an 'encounter' visit each Double Agent in a predetermined sequence for ten minutes.

Arriving at my door, each is invited to step over the 'object-body-thing' which occupies the room and to sit in one of the two chairs opposite me. Neither of us knows what kind of encounter we will have, or what will happen within the constraints of the allotted space and time. Also present, though not visible, is 'the voice of its making' – an intermingling of more or less distinct and identifiable vocal sounds with other noises and accompanied by a rhythmic beat that marks the passing of every five seconds.

Free to sit quietly or to move around and touch the 'body' the encounter offers delegates an opportunity to enter into a conversation with the work – to look, listen, wonder, speculate, suspend judgement – to become involved, question what is going on, and weave their own threads in response. Recorded with consent, snippets of such conversational weavings are included on the following pages.

The Voice of its Making

2018

Soundpiece, 60 minutes duration

The Voice of Its Making was made for the Double Agency conference intervention. It comprises an audio-recording of the twelve hours in the studio making the ‘object-body-thing’ layered and compressed into one hour – a soundtrack of its own construction in which my voice as maker is also heard.

However, divorced from the original site of making, *remade*, and offering a different sensory experience, the soundtrack disrupts and reframes the material ‘body’ of work, amplifying it’s presence in the process.

An extract from *The Voice of its Making* can be heard at
<https://www.debbiemichaels.co.uk/voice-of-its-making.php>



I didn't expect this

I'd put on the mask and stand in the corner

that disturbs me – that noise

*it's like something bad has happened - like somebody's been tied up and left in a certain way – suffering – in distress
trying to escape a situation*

it doesn't feel secure – doesn't feel safe
something has happened here and I don't know why
an accident – crime?

chaotic

lots of tubes in the body.

some brown stuff over here – excrement maybe?

what's that behind the mask?

and hairs

unease

the mask – identity – as if someone is trapped in the body – trying to get free
secret identity?

expressionless and anonymous

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dismembered – faceless
just a mask with that blank stare

a set of symptoms

trapped behind the mask

strange

bits and pieces of who you are
unpacked, opened up, strewn everywhere

like a construction site

left dragging it all behind
all this entanglement and the mask
sinister

in opposition to the body

the noises are distracting

it's like your ears are trying to tune into what's being said – to make sense of something
as if someone is in distress
diagnosis

a cow – some kind of animal?

*that shadow looks like it's trying to mirror – a reflection of what's in front – but upside down
as if it's been turned on its head.*

...but the hands disturb – ghostly – reaching out from below – reaching up to
grab something and take it back down.

a shadow behind

without the sound it might be easy to relax?

where did that noise come from?

hard to connect the sounds to one another – to what's inhabiting the room

...and that sound fits with the ghostly hands on the wall

*disconcerting these hands ...as if they're grasping at something – in a tussle
and the noises as well – like someone is suffering*

a call to do something?

someone needs my help and I'm not sure where
they are
or what's wrong



DOUBLE AGENCY, 2018

Installation views before and after interventions by participants



I want to tidy up the mess

the remaking is ongoing...

Notes:

1. The four 'double agents' were Sarah (Smizz) Smith, Julie Walters, Debbie Michaels, and Laçin Aksoy.
2. The Critical Arts in Health Network (CAHN) was created to provide space, time and resources to enable platforms for sustained critical attention to the mechanisms of Arts in Health practice (as opposed to its health outcomes).
3. The 'Double Agency' booking system was designed by Sarah (Smizz) Smith and Julie Walters, and programmed by Neil Mayne.

