

Est.
1841

YORK
ST JOHN
UNIVERSITY

O'Brien, Dai ORCID:

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4529-7568> (2020) Negotiating Academic Environments: Using Lefebvre to Conceptualize Deaf Spaces and Disabling/Enabling Environments. *Journal of Cultural Geography*, 37 (1). pp. 26-45.

Downloaded from: <http://ray.yorks.ac.uk/id/eprint/4101/>

The version presented here may differ from the published version or version of record. If you intend to cite from the work you are advised to consult the publisher's version:

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/08873631.2019.1677293>

Research at York St John (RaY) is an institutional repository. It supports the principles of open access by making the research outputs of the University available in digital form. Copyright of the items stored in RaY reside with the authors and/or other copyright owners. Users may access full text items free of charge, and may download a copy for private study or non-commercial research. For further reuse terms, see licence terms governing individual outputs. [Institutional Repository Policy Statement](#)

RaY

Research at the University of York St John

For more information please contact RaY at ray@yorks.ac.uk

- 1 Negotiating Academic Environments: Using Lefebvre to Conceptualize Deaf Spaces and
- 2 Disabling/Enabling Environments.
- 3 Dr Dai O'Brien
- 4 York St John University
- 5 Lord Mayor's Walk
- 6 York
- 7 YO31 7EX
- 8 d.obrien@yorks.j.ac.uk
- 9 @drdaijestive
- 10 ORCID – <http://orcid-org/0000-0003-4529-7568>

11 **Abstract.**

12 How do deaf academics navigate the physical environments of their workplaces? Original
13 interviews with five deaf academics working in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the
14 UK were conducted using walking interviews to explore the ways in which they experienced
15 the physical environment of their HEI and how they produced their own deaf spaces within
16 their workplace. Results show that deaf academics face distinct barriers to their involvement
17 in and access to their HEIs, and analysis using a Lefebvrian approach shows that deaf
18 academics have their own ways of subverting the spatial expectations of the HEI to create
19 their own pockets of lived, deaf space.

20 **Keywords.**

21 Deaf, Lefebvre, Walking Interviews, Environmental access, DeafSpace

22 **Introduction.**

23 While there has been some work exploring the experiences of signing deaf¹ academics in the
24 UK in recent years (see O'Brien, forthcoming, Jones and Pullen, 1992, Trowler and Turner
25 2002, O'Brien and Emery 2014, De Meulder 2017) much of this research has focused on the
26 social experiences of deaf academics or is focused on the social or professional barriers that
27 they face working in Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs). Very little has been written
28 about deaf academics' physical experience of their HEI and the way in which this may affect
29 their feelings of belonging or access to their home HEI. Similar lack of attention has been
30 paid to academics with other disabilities, although there are recent publications by Inckle
31 (2018) and Brown and Leigh (2018) which offer some insight into the barriers faced by

¹¹ I use 'signing deaf' to refer to those deaf people who have a (or more than one) sign language as their first or preferred language(s). Traditionally Deaf Studies has used a d/D distinction to label people who consider themselves culturally Deaf over audiologically deaf. However, this binary has been problematised in recent years (see Kusters, De Meulder and O'Brien 2017 for example).

32 academic staff who are not deaf but do have physical disabilities. In this project, I conducted
33 in-depth walk-through interviews with five current deaf academics in the UK to look at their
34 physical, embodied experience of the built environment in their respective HEIs. In this
35 paper, I explore the implications of my findings through the lens of Lefebvre's spatial triad of
36 perceived, conceived and lived space, and discuss how my findings can be used to make
37 HEIs more accessible and welcoming for deaf academics, suggestions which may suggest
38 novel ways of thinking about environmental access.

39 **Literature Review.**

40 There is relatively little research currently published which looks at the ways in which
41 academic staff experience the built environment of their home HEI. Temple, in his most
42 recent review of the relevant literature claims only five papers have appeared in higher
43 education research literature in the period 2012-2016 (Temple 2018, 138).

44 Temple (2009, 213) talks about the physical form of the university being such that it can
45 encourage community formation and thus social capital creation. However, Temple was
46 arguing from the point of view of someone who has relatively unproblematic access to the
47 social and physical spaces of academe. This is not the case for many scholars who are
48 disabled by the form and structure of the HE system in the UK (and elsewhere) who
49 encounter barriers of various kinds to their full participation in the system (see Pring 2018
50 and Sang 2017, for example). These barriers can render the physical form of the HEI in some
51 ways inaccessible, in other ways inconvenient, and in some ways inconsequential for disabled
52 people's involvement in the academic community.

53 This article could be seen as a return to the more traditional environmental access geography,
54 but from a perspective that was not covered in the past. Deaf people's experiences were
55 largely ignored in previous literature of this type, because disability was mostly framed

56 through the lens of impaired mobility (see, for example, Kitchin, 1998, Imrie and Kumar
57 1998, Imrie, 2000). Where deaf people's experience was considered, it was largely limited to
58 normative issues such as the presence/absence of induction loops for spoken communication
59 (Imrie 1996). This ignores deaf people's sensory-spatial experience of the environment and
60 how these experiences can impose non-physical barriers to inclusion in the physical
61 environment. Recent work, such as that of Bauman's DeafSpace, Sirvage's (2012)
62 exploration of the proxemics of walking signers, Harold's (2013) Lefebvrian exploration of
63 deaf people's experience of audist urban life and others have coalesced into a field which
64 explores how sensory, physical and spatial experiences combine to give deaf people a unique
65 experience of their environment (see the special issue of the Journal of Cultural Geography
66 Vol 34, Issue 2, 2017 for more on Deaf Geographies)².

67 Bearing in mind Lefebvre's claim that social space is a social product, we must consider what
68 sort of spaces are produced, how and by whom. Of course, minority academics very rarely
69 have control over the physical environment in which they work, although one exception is
70 that of Gallaudet University in Washington D.C, where the majority of students and staff are
71 deaf and use American Sign Language. The Sorenson Building in Gallaudet University is one
72 example of how deaf people have been able to play a key role in the design of the physical
73 environment. This building was specifically designed following the DeafSpace principles
74 developed by Hansel Bauman, which are based on principles of sensory reach, mobility,
75 proximity, light and colour, and acoustics as experienced by deaf people³. DeafSpace
76 principles aim to explore how pre-existing environmental affordances can be exploited or
77 utilised in unexpected ways to improve accessibility for deaf people. One such example
78 would be the use of vibration, mirrors and transparency (for example, windows in doors) to

² See also the Deaf Geographies Sandbox resources page - <https://deafgeographies.com/resources/>

³ See <https://www.gallaudet.edu/campus-design-and-planning/deafspace> for more information on these principles.

79 increase the sensory access deaf people have to their environment in the absence of auditory-
80 based cues.

81 Lefebvre's triad of perceived, conceived and lived space now has enough traction in
82 mainstream academia that a cursory definition of the three concepts can be outlined here.

83 Perceived space, or spatial practice, refers to the everyday, taken for granted, or 'common
84 sense' experience of social space (Simonsen 2005). Conceived space, or representations of
85 space, refers to the 'codes, signs and knowledge' used by the dominant order of any society
86 (Ibid 2005). This space refers to the space of planners, of architects, of developers (not
87 referring to the design and building of a particular structure but rather that of 'a spatial
88 texture' (Lefebvre 1991, 42), which designs and moderates spaces through the official or
89 legitimate discourse of space). Finally, there is lived space, or spaces of representation. This
90 is the space in which new meanings, 'alternative imaginations' and 'conflicting rhythms of
91 everyday life' emerge and are embraced, allowing us to realise ourselves as 'total persons'
92 (Simonsen 2005). Lived spaces are those 'invested with symbolism and meaning, the space
93 of *connaissance* (less formal or more local forms of knowledge), space as it is lived, social
94 space' (Elden 2001, 815). These three concepts of space do not exist in isolation, but are
95 always in an unresolved dialectic tension.

96 Gulliver (2017, 2009) has utilised these concepts in his exploration of deaf spaces, including
97 one particularly relevant paper in which he explored the lived space, or *vécu*, of a 'deaf'
98 classroom in the now-defunct Centre for Deaf Studies in the University of Bristol. This paper
99 aims to build on Gulliver's work, and also work done by Sirvage (2012) in looking at the
100 proxemics of deaf people, the importance of the environment and how the material
101 experience of the environment affects interpretations of and access to the built environment,
102 and the production of space. I focus on this aspect of the deaf experience to bring attention
103 back to the corporeal deaf body, to focus on the physical body as well as the social, cultural

104 and linguistic concerns of deaf people. Social space is not only ‘a thought concept and a
105 feeling – an “experience”’, but also a ‘concrete materiality’ (Schmid 2008, 41). Hence,
106 attention to the concrete materiality of the environment of deaf academics is essential in
107 understanding their production of and experience of space.

108 **Method**

109 *Walking Interviews.*

110 There has been more engagement with phenomenological experiences of walking through
111 environments in the field of geography, such as Wylie’s accounts of engaging with
112 landscapes such as the South West Coastal path or Glastonbury Tor (Wylie 2002, 2005).
113 Such accounts foreground the individual sensory experience and immediate perceptions of
114 the landscape. However, my focus is less on this and more on the interview mediated analysis
115 of the environment, understanding the problems deaf academics faced in making sense of and
116 accessing their surroundings. These sense-makings could be considered to be some kind of
117 co-production because as a signing deaf person myself, I brought a shared bodily and sensory
118 experience to these interviews/interactions. This social proximity between myself and the
119 participants meant that this project could be seen as being ‘a double socioanalysis, one that
120 catches and puts the analyst to the test as much as the person being questioned’ (Bourdieu
121 1999, 611), but it allowed us to critically know our lived reality, through ‘the task of re-
122 creating that knowledge’ (Friere 1996, 51). This can be contrasted to Gulliver’s (2017) paper,
123 which was written from a hearing perspective ‘looking in’ to deaf spaces.

124 For this exploration of the spaces of deaf academia, participatory walking interviews were
125 used. Previous research suggests that walking interviews are more successful than sedentary
126 interviews in producing ‘data about the way in which people relate specifically to place’
127 (Evan and Jones 2011, 856). They also have the advantage over sedentary interviews, which -

128 *'...can miss out on those themes that do not lend themselves to narrative*
129 *accounting, such as pre-reflective knowledge and practices of the body, or*
130 *the most trivial details of day-to-day environmental experience.'*
131 *(Kusenbach 2003, 462).*

132 Evans and Jones (2011) upon a review of the literature suggest that walking with interview
133 participants offers a more intimate connection with the environment and a deeper
134 understanding of how people create spaces through their interaction with their environments
135 (850). This engagement can also be encouraged in walking interviews through using the
136 environment itself as a prompt for discussion (Jones et al 2008, 3).

137 The interviews I conducted were not what Kusenbach (2003) would define as 'natural' go-
138 alongs, in that I did not follow my participants on outings which they would go on anyway
139 (p. 463). It would be impractical to do so in the case of working academics, where
140 interference in their everyday tasks could impact on their teaching (where their students may
141 suffer), their research (where the ethics of having an observer present would affect their
142 work), or administrative tasks (in which sensitive, confidential information may be handled).
143 However, I did not impose a route on the participants before the interview began. Indeed, it
144 was impossible for me to impose a route on the participants, as I was not familiar with their
145 use of the environment before they guided me through their HEI. Following Evans and Jones'
146 (2011, 850) typology of walking interviews, the method I ended up using was a participatory
147 walking interview, in which the route taken through the environment (within the artificial
148 constraints of the interview situation) was determined by the participant.

149 A small video-camera was used to record the walking interviews, all of which were
150 conducted in British Sign Language (BSL). Of course, interviewing signing deaf people
151 means that interviews must be visually recorded anyway. Video recording also allows for

152 ‘flexibility as participants guide you to what they think is important, setting your agenda
153 spontaneously as you move, creating de Certeau’s space of tactic where experience, cultural
154 memory and everyday life can be the events most worth recording’ (Garrett 2010, 531).

155 Video recordings of the walking interviews were thus not just recordings of what was said in
156 the interview, but also and simultaneously field notes of the encounter.

157 It has been claimed that video recording on the move can be very disorientating and limits
158 what one can capture. However, with some practice I was able to hold the camera close to my
159 chest which allowed me to maintain eye contact with the participant, and use my free hand to
160 question or prompt them about their environment. I was also able to intuitively frame the shot
161 to capture them when they were signing, to capture features when they referred to a specific
162 location or object, or to pan around to capture the environment or lay-out of a particular area.

163 The first part of the interview was always held in the participants’ office, usually a private
164 space in which they could get used to the camera and settle into my line of questioning. All
165 were very comfortable on camera, as most were very experienced filming and being filmed
166 thanks to use of video communications such as Skype or Facetime, filming vlogs, or
167 otherwise recording themselves or being recorded using BSL for professional or personal
168 communications.

169 Video-recording the interviews also allowed me to bypass several weaknesses of traditional
170 ethnographic recording methods during go-alongs pointed out by Kusenbach (2003, 465).
171 She noted that audio-recordings neglect any environmental factors which are not audible,
172 such as lighting, room layout and other spatial factors. These are all essential factors when
173 exploring the physical environment of the participants and their responses to that
174 environment. Of course, audio-recording of interviews conducted in a visual-spatial language
175 such as BSL would be of limited use anyway. There have been various methods attempted to
176 resolve the issue of recording environmental conditions, including combining audio recording

177 with GPS trackers and mapping onto GIS (Evans and Jones 2011) which may give rich
178 locational data, but the environmental data is less rich. Other researchers (Clark and Emmel
179 2010) have given participants disposable cameras to take photographs of the route walked.
180 While this captured visual data of the route itself, these were only snapshots of the route, and
181 only of the elements which the participants felt were important. There would be no guarantee
182 using this method that they would capture the ‘trivial details of day-to-day experience’
183 mentioned by Kusenbach above.

184 Initial questions in the participants’ offices were aimed at establishing a baseline of
185 information about them, their role, their academic experience and qualifications. I also asked
186 about their identity, which I allowed them to define how they liked. The aim of this question
187 was to elicit responses which would tell me whether they saw themselves as academics and
188 whether being deaf played an important role in how they saw themselves in the world.
189 Subsequent questions were linked to their office, whether they had any power to change the
190 layout, whether there were any adaptations they (or their HEI) had made to make it more
191 accessible for them.

192 The aim of recording the ways in which the deaf academics navigated the space of their
193 institution was to see what areas of the institution they frequented, which areas they avoided,
194 which areas they were comfortable in and which they were not. I wanted to see whether there
195 were ways of creating lived spaces from the perceived and conceived spaces of the
196 university, and to ask them how they managed to produce these spaces of creativity and
197 freedom in the face of the power of the university as an institution.

198 I subsequently translated and transcribed from BSL to English. Analysis was conducted on
199 both the transcripts I produced, and the video recording itself, to retain the environmental,
200 physical and sensory sources of the elicited interview data.

201 *Anonymity.*

202 Damianakis and Woodford (2012) outline the issues of protecting research participants’
203 anonymity in what they termed ‘small connected communities’, defined as those in which
204 ‘participants know each other not only through geographically close, tight knit communities,
205 but also through ‘connections that transcend shared geography, such as professional or
206 personal networks’ (p.709). This is certainly the case for deaf academics in the UK, with the
207 number of academics being so low that despite being geographically dispersed, most are very
208 familiar with each other either through personal contact in shared networks, or by reputation
209 through working in similar fields. In terms of physical location also, mentioning even the
210 rough geographical location of the HEI in which a participant worked had potential to
211 identify them (for a similar problem with other research see Saunders, Kitzinger and
212 Kitzinger 2015). Equally, mentioning the geographical areas in which the participants worked
213 would eliminate others from the game of ‘guess who’, making it easier to identify
214 participants through a process of elimination.

215 Using mobile interviews as a research method made it even more difficult to guarantee
216 participants’ confidentiality because we were visibly conspicuous walking around their
217 campus together with a camera (Finlay and Bowman 2017). The nature of the fieldwork, ‘of
218 being seen, as presenting oneself as a researcher in certain places’ (Nespor 2000, 548) could
219 make it easy for observers to later make connections between my presence in the HEI campus
220 and later publications.

221 Some have argued that anonymising place is a tactic for making claims of generalizability of
222 findings (Nespor 2000, 552). Others have argued that anonymising places and participants
223 reduces the context of the interaction to just so much background information (Clark 2006),
224 which diminishes the depth and richness of the data gathered. While I do not dispute that this
225 is a risk, I do not make any sort of claims for generalizability from this study. It is an

226 exploratory study of a small number of deaf people's experience of working in HEIs, and
227 their reactions to this experience. An in depth study of the HEI itself as a workplace would
228 need the informed consent of a huge number of people, not just participants directly involved
229 in the project, but also colleagues, managers, students, and people who have either direct or
230 indirect association with the HEI in question. It would not be fair to these people, let alone
231 the participants in this research project, to not make every effort to keep their contributions
232 anonymous. While this runs the risk of losing the unique context of each contribution that is a
233 risk that must be taken.

234 I have thus removed any and all identifying information from the quotes used in this paper. I
235 have used gender neutral pronouns throughout to refer to each participant and have not
236 attributed any of the quotes. This is to prevent a composite picture from being built up of
237 each participant, which would risk identifying them.

238 In the preamble before the interview began, and while going through the consent form with
239 the participants, I made it clear to them that I could not guarantee that they would not be
240 identified through their involvement in the research. They were aware of the small size and
241 nature of the deaf academic community in the UK, being members of said community
242 themselves, but were happy to accept the risk once I had outlined the steps I intended to take
243 to minimise it.

244 I informed the participants that if they felt uncomfortable during the data collection, they
245 could refuse to answer any questions, or withdraw from the interview completely at any time.
246 Any data collected before the point of withdrawal would be reviewed together and we would
247 negotiate what could or could not be used.

248 Upon data analysis and selecting quotes from the raw data to use to illustrate themes
249 identified, the selected quotes, with some context on how I intended to use them, were shared

250 with each participant for them to see if they felt they would be identifiable from the selected
251 quote. Any changes they requested were made, so long as they did not alter the meaning of
252 the quote itself. Such changes might include removal of any information they felt was too
253 personal (for example, specific work circumstances, a specific turn of phrase), or requests not
254 to use certain quotes because of the risk they posed if they were identified (for example,
255 direct criticisms of colleagues or institutions).

256 Finally, with the agreement of all participants, a draft copy of the paper itself was shared with
257 each participant so that they could see all of the quotes used in the context of the paper at
258 large. They were asked to read the paper and see if they could identify any of their fellow
259 participants. If they could, I requested that they tell me what they felt identified the
260 participant. I neither confirmed nor denied their suspicions, but reviewed the quotes used to
261 see if I could further anonymise them.

262 This followed the principle of ‘open and egalitarian discussion and negotiation between the
263 researchers and the researched’ to minimise the risk of identification (LeCompte 1993, 11). I
264 treated participants as equals and able to make their own decisions about what was
265 appropriate to share or not appropriate to share in this paper. Of course, all participants, as
266 academics themselves, understood the process of informed consent and the possible risks of
267 identification. Whether this process would necessarily work well with participants less
268 familiar with the academic world and academic practices is open to debate.

269 **Findings**

270 I have split this section into three parts. Each part will reflect on one of Lefebvre’s
271 interconnected aspects of space. Again, it is emphasised (and will become clear on reading
272 this section) that these three aspects cannot be separated from one another but are in complex
273 dynamic interaction. It is for ease of analysis and illustration of broad principles that I have

274 organised this section in such a way. It will become clear to the reader that some examples
275 used in each section could equally well be placed in other sections if analysed from a
276 different perspective. Unfortunately there is not the space to draw out the complexities here,
277 but I invite readers to ponder on these overlaps and intertwinings themselves.

278 *Accessibility of the HEI (perceived space)*

279 There was a general view amongst research participants that perceived space in which they
280 worked was one which was largely unresponsive and unfriendly to deaf people. Very little
281 was done to make the university premises accessible to deaf academics. It is clear from much
282 of the video I shot when moving down corridors in several different HEIs that in the majority
283 of them, there is not enough space for deaf people to walk side by side and converse at the
284 same time. Having sufficient space in which to sign is essential for communication in signed
285 languages (Fekete 2010, 69), not just to give the signer freedom to articulate themselves
286 freely, but also to give the watcher sufficient width of visual field to see the whole of the
287 signers signing space. Several participants commented on this during the interviews, for
288 example –

289 *It's really narrow here, too narrow to have a conversation. You'd have to*
290 *talk in the lobby or somewhere else. The corridors down there are all the*
291 *same.*

292 This was also evident in our communication behaviour while walking. In some cases, such as
293 walking outside in traffic-free, pedestrianized areas, we were able to walk and talk at the
294 same time. However, in many other cases, we could only converse when we stopped in an
295 area with sufficient space to see and sign. There were also numerous occasions in the videos
296 where I had to intervene to prevent participants from walking into obstacles in their path, and
297 they had to do the same for me. On other occasions, when walking on narrow paths through

298 grassy areas (see figure 1), one or both of us moved off the path to maintain appropriate
299 communicative distance (Sirvage, 2012). On some occasions, these movements and
300 communicative behaviours were only clear to me after the interview was completed, and I
301 watched the video of the interview back. Most of them were instinctive or automatic in the
302 moment, and it was only by placing oneself at a remove by re-watching the interaction, and
303 noting our movements through space that such observations were made.

304 INSERT FIGURE 1 NEAR HERE

305 Despite the inaccessibility of the perceived space of the university for most of the
306 participants, they did not seem to dwell on this. A significant finding was that half of the
307 participants had to actively fight for adaptations to be made to their offices to preserve their
308 own safety. Several had to argue, sometimes over a period of years, for appropriate fire
309 alarms with flashing lights to be installed. Some of them had fire alert systems connected to
310 their mobile phones or to a pager system which did not function appropriately. Some of them
311 did not have accessible doorbells, so that they would either not know when someone was at
312 the door of their office or would have to work with their doors open –

313 *There are no flashing light doorbells here, no. But there's been talk... there*
314 *are still quite basic things, even after years and years, that they need to*
315 *adapt.*

316 In hearing academics' perceived space of the HEI, none of these adaptations would be
317 required or even considered, but they were essential for the interview participants to feel
318 integrated into the HEI workplace. While this led to some frustration on the part of the
319 participants, it was at some level taken for granted that the hearing space of the HEI would be
320 inaccessible, alien or inhospitable to them. There was a sense of resignation to the way their

321 requirements seemed to be ignored or thought to be of low importance, which came through
322 in some flashes of dark humour during the interviews -

323 *There's nothing, right. It's true, I could burn to death here! (laughs)*

324 Other dangers the academics faced were related to fast moving traffic on roads near their
325 campus. They had to remain vigilant while moving around, as they would not hear a vehicle
326 approaching behind them. This came up in one interview when both the participant and I
327 were warily crossing a road near the campus where our visual reach was curtailed. It was
328 interesting that this lack of access to the HEI on such a basic level was almost taken for
329 granted. When asking about negative atmospheres or feelings about their HEI, these issues of
330 lack of access were seen as a prevailing background audism (see Bauman 2004 for more on
331 audism) or disabling of deaf academics due to hearing privilege. In this sense, the HEI is no
332 different from the rest of everyday experience of deaf people, and so was almost not worth
333 mentioning.

334 Even when these adaptations were put in place in the academics' offices, they also had to
335 teach people how to use them –

336 *In the past, a hearing person has come straight into the office while I was*
337 *looking away making a coffee. I turned around and they just appeared right*
338 *in front of me! That was a real shock. I've had to educate people about how*
339 *to flash the lights on and off to let me know they are there.*

340 There were often no adaptations in their teaching space –

341 *How would I know if the fire alarm goes off in here? There's no regard for*
342 *health and safety. If the students haven't arrived yet and I'm on my own in*
343 *here, how would I know?*

344 All of these concerns seemed to build a background sense of insecurity in many of the
345 interviews I conducted. There was a sense that the deaf academics could never really ‘switch
346 off’ and concentrate entirely on their work because there were always barriers or safety
347 concerns of some sort to negotiate.

348 Regardless of the basic concerns for safety, there were other elements of the everyday built
349 environment that acted as barriers for deaf people in a way which they would not for hearing
350 people. One such example was from an interview in which we were walking along a corridor
351 with floorboards which tangibly moved under our feet –

352 *Feel the floor! I feel uncomfortable, I feel it affects everyone, they want to*
353 *concentrate, they want peace and quiet and someone’s creaking up and*
354 *down outside their office... I get paranoid that the noise is annoying*
355 *people.*

356 It is interesting to note that neither of us could actually hear whether the floorboards were
357 creaking noisily or not. We were translating the tactile sensation of movement under our feet
358 into an assumption that there were loud and disruptive creaking noises being produced. This
359 participant reported that they preferred taking the long way around a building just to avoid
360 this corridor out of fear that they were disturbing their colleagues. This was an attempt to
361 adhere to the perceived space of academic offices as spaces of concentration and intellectual
362 work. It is also interesting to contrast this with the positive DeafSpace interpretation of
363 vibrations or moving floorboards being deliberately used to alert deaf people to what is going
364 on in the immediate environment. It could be considered here that there is a conflict of deaf
365 and hearing values inherent in a single environmental affordance in the opposition of moving
366 floorboards for attention-getting and creaking floorboards as a distracting nuisance, a conflict
367 between deaf and hearing perceived and conceived spaces.

368 *Problems of university planning (conceived space).*

369 The conceived space of the university is such that there are certain plans put in place for the
370 way such space is to be used. Layouts of rooms are often pre-determined and users are
371 expected to adhere to the planned layout, even when they are not ideal or even suited to
372 purpose (see, for example, Dale and Burrell, 2015). This disparity between design and
373 function has already been noted above in discussions about the presence or absence of visible
374 fire alarms or doorbells in participants' offices and workspaces. There were other issues
375 which came to light during the interviews which are discussed below.

376 The rules and expectations in conceived space are not just associated with physical space, but
377 also with the behaviours and social interactions within that space. There are ways in which
378 people are expected to behave, in which they are expected to interact, and a knowledge of
379 these rules, implicit or explicit, can govern the extent to which they feel comfortable and able
380 to access the conceived space of the HEI. A key theme of the conceived space of the academy
381 is that of collegiality. Several papers have been written about the importance of the
382 experience of physical space in building collegiality in HEIs, and the resulting social capital
383 (Temple 2009) that this creates or encourages. However, there were many barriers to this
384 collegiality built into the conceived space of the university which prevented deaf academics
385 from accessing social interactions with colleagues or benefiting from the social capital the
386 university supposedly creates. Again, some of these were barriers which would not exist for
387 hearing people.

388 Something that might be considered a relatively neutral, or even beneficial feature of the
389 workplace design from the point of view of hearing academics was the lack of windows in
390 the doors of most of the offices in which the deaf academics worked. The lack of windows
391 was in keeping with the prevailing design choices of those workplaces. For many hearing
392 people, this might be considered a benefit, it prevents people from seeing in and thus confers

393 privacy, it prevents visual distractions and enables concentration, but they can still hear
394 knocks on the door or hear people passing in the corridor outside. However, for deaf
395 academics, the lack of windows created an impermeable barrier to the world outside the
396 confines of their office.

397 *One thing I've been asking for, for a while, is a door with a window in it. I*
398 *want a window for access reasons, but it seems I won't get one. I've tried*
399 *the health and safety route, but no... it's just, money... I feel a lack of*
400 *contact with the outside world.*

401 *I'd prefer to have a window in my office door so that I could see out and*
402 *know what's going on. It's interesting that they have glass in the doors in*
403 *this building but not in my office building.*

404 *I'd still like a window though... I could put my coat over it or something!*
405 *I'd like to have the option.*

406 Participants were aware that a window in their office door could be a mixed blessing. While
407 it would offer them access to the outside world, and also allow deaf visitors to see whether
408 they were in their office or not, there was also the risk of visual distraction from corridors
409 outside. But the point was that they should have a choice. The only other option for them to
410 maintain visual contact with the world outside their office was by leaving the door
411 completely open, which was the worst of both worlds. The lack of windows in doors created
412 a barrier to collegiality because it resulted in participants not knowing whether there was
413 anyone present in other offices –

414 *This is my boss' office. Again, it's the window issue. It's not only that I*
415 *need one on my door because I'm deaf, but this door as well. I can't see if*
416 *they are in, if they are in a meeting... How do I approach this? Am I*

417 *interrupting? I feel really detached from them. The windows are a bit like*
418 *the interpreters... They're not for deaf people only, but for everyone!*

419 This is another example of where the conceived space of the university and the perceived
420 space of the deaf academic collide. The university expects that academics behave in a
421 collegiate manner, by engaging with each other in discussion and intercourse and indeed this
422 behaviour has been proven to be beneficial to those working in HEIs in terms of improving
423 job satisfaction on both individual and institutional levels (Victorino *et al.* 2018). However,
424 the physical design of many of the office spaces on different campuses prevented that from
425 happening. Cutting off visual access to other rooms and offices effectively created
426 impermeable barriers for these deaf academics.

427 Lack of access to the conceived space of the university building sometimes manifested itself
428 in a lack of knowledge about what facilities were available to academics and a lack of
429 awareness of the rules or norms associated with different facilities or spaces –

430 *I don't know [if they have a staff room any more], I think most people will*
431 *use the dining room, or outside, or their office. I think.*

432 This lack of access left deaf academics feeling unsure of their position in the HEI, and
433 possibly left them isolated. But lack of access to conceived space was not just limited to
434 permanent features of their HEI, but also to planned alterations and changes made to their
435 workspace –

436 *A while ago they were ripping up carpets outside my room, and doing some*
437 *kind of painting and decorating. I don't understand what they were doing,*
438 *they never tell me anything here. So that day I left my office and the air was*
439 *absolutely full of dust from pulling up the carpets, absolutely choked. They*

440 *never let me know what was going on. I've given up really. They never let*
441 *deaf people know what's going on here.*

442 This lack of communication and lack of access to the conceived space of the university had
443 potential to alienate these academics. On the whole, those who were had more access to the
444 university grapevine through communication with colleagues either face-to-face or through
445 BSL/English Interpreters seemed more knowledgeable about what was going on in the
446 university and what was expected of them, although even they showed some blind spots in
447 their knowledge about, for example, whether or not students were allowed into staff common
448 areas.

449 ***Making spaces 'deaf' (lived space).***

450 All of the participants in this research were able to create their own lived space through
451 various creative ways of interacting with the spaces around them. While our interviews did
452 not cover teaching experiences in the same detail explored by Gulliver (2017), each small act
453 of creativity or subversion of the 'rules' or customs of the HEI created a little pocket of lived
454 deaf space, some temporary, others more permanent.

455 One way in which the participants staked out areas of deaf space in their HEIs was by
456 changing, as far as they were able, some aspect of their offices to suit their sensory
457 orientation. This included the addition of flashing light alerters for fire alarms and doorbells.
458 These not only performed a functional role, but also acted to mark the office space as 'deaf'
459 in some way. In all the offices I visited, some modification to layout had been made to ensure
460 that the academic maximised their sensory reach. For some, this was moving the desk so that
461 it faced the door so that they could see when someone wanted to come in, for others, it was
462 removing partitions between desks or the use of a strategically placed mirror –

463 *I have the desk here so that I don't have my back to the door.*

464 *The only thing I've changed is moving the desk around, so it faces the door.*

465 *I don't like having my back to the door. Here I'm side on, so I can see. I'd*

466 *rather be facing the door, but I don't really have a choice.*

467 These relatively minor adjustments to the layout of the office to maximise the visual reach of
468 the deaf academic changed the nature of the space from the default 'hearing' to an
469 indisputably deaf orientation. This could be read as imposing a deaf conceived space on their
470 environment.

471 There were other, maybe more obvious ways of demarcating office spaces as 'deaf' within
472 HEIs. These included the display of posters, flags, white gloves and other symbols of deaf
473 culture and sign language rights activism around the office space. These are all important
474 symbolic elements, with their roots in individual or cultural history (Lefebvre 1991, 41),
475 making them powerful symbols of deaf space. Creating a specific area in an office for filming
476 signed videos showed the use of space for something markedly 'deaf'. An interesting contrast
477 again between hearing and deaf values can be seen in the choice of background to videos.
478 Hearing academics often chose to film with books in the background to show their academic
479 capital. For sign language users, this backdrop would be unacceptably visually 'noisy'. A
480 much plainer background of an unadorned wall is preferred, hence the need for a specific
481 filming space. Similarly, ensuring there was enough room with appropriate visual reach to
482 have comfortable signed conversations, again free of visual noise or physical limitations on
483 the spatial nature of the language was another way of marking out a deaf space.

484 None of these were particularly big, obvious changes, but added together they further subtly
485 changed the nature of the space the deaf academics inhabited to something that was different
486 to, if not in opposition to, the nature of the space of the wider HEI.

487 Some of the academics continued this practice outside their own offices and made themselves
488 as visible as possible around the campus. Some of them discussed this in terms of building a
489 ‘brand’ for themselves and their teaching around campus, others approached this in terms of
490 raising awareness of deaf people and sign languages, but all of them seemed to see this
491 behaviour as a way of creating a deaf space on campus.

492 *I’m happy to be seen signing in public, I want to be visible, for people to*
493 *think ‘oh, sign language is something you have here!’ ... It’s important we*
494 *show what we do... It’s a ‘planting a flag’ thing. We’re always concerned*
495 *about our visibility.*

496 While visibility was a very important concern for these academics, its converse, privacy, was
497 also something that arose throughout the interviews interviews. There were, broadly, two
498 approaches, both of which challenged traditional, hearing views of how to achieve privacy.
499 Some academics felt that the risk of being overseen by someone who could sign was so great
500 on their campus that they would only discuss private things in an office with a closed door,
501 with blinds on the windows drawn. This may seem extreme, but bearing in mind the visual
502 modality of sign language, drawing the blinds on windows or other ways of preventing
503 yourself from being seen is a perfectly valid and maybe the only way of ensuring privacy,
504 comparable to the lowering of voices when using speech. Others used the fact that they were
505 able to talk in a different language and modality to their advantage, and held effectively
506 private conversations in clear sight of other people secure in the knowledge that even if they
507 were being watched, the likelihood was that no-one could understand them. However, these
508 academics accepted there was a risk that someone who understood BSL might be present, in
509 which case they would move the conversation to their office or other more demonstrably
510 ‘private’ location.

511 The layout of teaching rooms was another chance for deaf academics to exercise their
512 creativity in modifying room layouts to better suit deaf needs. Most were able to show me
513 examples of rooms in which they taught, and explain ways in which they modified the layout
514 to match deaf cultural and communication norms. These norms were to ensure that all
515 students and the teacher could see each other clearly, so rooms with less than perfect layouts
516 were modified by moving tables and chairs around to ensure that everyone could sit in a
517 circle and see one another. Mutual visibility in teaching space is often cited as good
518 pedagogic practice, but this was never the driving force behind these modifications, they
519 always came from the point of view that with a deaf lecturer, the teaching space should
520 follow deaf cultural and communication rules.

521 A final way in which some participants created their own deaf space was by resisting the
522 expectations of the academy to be involved in multiple roles within their departments or
523 schools. Others, rather than working to fulfil these expectations, did not actively engage with
524 them. Instead they focused on quietly getting on with their own work in the way that they felt
525 most benefitted their research participants or their students –

526 *I'm not bothered about the REF and the pressure associated with it, I kind*
527 *of pay lip service to it, but I ignore it most of the time and get on with my*
528 *own work. I'm not interested in climbing ladders in work. I don't want to*
529 *be a head of school, I just want to continue my own work.*

530 *I feel less like I fit into that [academic] world. A lot of this, for me, is that*
531 *as an academic you can't avoid self-promotion. I'm not very good, I've*
532 *never been very good at that.*

533 *I focus on my own work, not anything else. I could be involved in other*
534 *things, but I want to focus on my own role in my own job... and my own*
535 *students.*

536 However, there was still a feeling that more needed to be done to make the HEIs more
537 accessible for deaf people. One participant, towards the end of the walking interview, when
538 asked about their overall feelings about the HEI campus in which they worked replied –

539 *I'd pull the fucking thing down and rebuild to make it more deaf-friendly,*
540 *more open. The people are all really nice... but I'd pull it all down and*
541 *rebuild it in a more deaf-friendly, Gallaudet-style, 100% I would.*

542 **Conclusion.**

543 Of course, such a treatment of Lefebvre's space that tries to separate the different strands as
544 above is artificial. The three concepts of space interact and compete in a never resolved
545 triadic dialectic. Deaf academics navigate hearing spaces and also create their own deaf
546 space, their own creative lived spaces every day. These lived spaces do not need to be
547 something as big as a research centre, or a module which permanently changes the way in
548 which subjects are taught or classrooms managed. Even the smallest things like having an
549 office door with a window in it, or a strategically placed mirror on a desk which does not face
550 the door to extend visual reach, are expressions of the imaginative 'change and appropriation
551 of space' (Lefebvre 1991, 39), acts of subversion or resistance to the abstract space of the
552 university. In a way, this could be compared to the 1001 victories that Ladd (2003, 315)
553 writes about in relation to deaf schools and deaf lives in general, where tiny victories must be
554 celebrated, because major ones are so few and far between.

555 The focus on the material reality of the university buildings through the use of walking
556 interviews is a novel contribution to the literature on deaf academics' experiences of working
557 in HEIs and adds depth to the body of work examining these experiences. Several of the
558 issues which arose in these interviews were of a nature which affected only deaf people, and
559 would not necessarily bother hearing people, such as the need for windows in office doors, or
560 moving furniture around to extend visual reach. However, such seemingly small features
561 were of sufficient importance to the deaf academics that it left some openly questioning how
562 much they were valued by their institution. This could well lead to a deterioration in the
563 quality of work that the deaf academics put in. Siebert *et al.* (2018 344) showed that the
564 deterioration of the quality of the space made available to people in the workplace, and the
565 reduced sense of collegiality and social production of knowledge and knowledge sharing that
566 this brings can have detrimental impacts on the work of professionals. By showing more
567 sensitivity to the unique spatial needs and experiences of their deaf staff, HEIs could enhance
568 the inclusion and involvement of these members of their staff in the everyday life of the HEI,
569 and maximise the contribution that these academics can make to the academic community in
570 which they work.

571 **Funding details.**

572 This research was funded by the Society for Research into Higher Education through their
573 Annual Prize for Newer Researchers 2017.

574 **Biographical note.**

575 Dai O'Brien is a Senior Lecturer in BSL and Deaf Studies in York St John University, in the
576 UK. He is deaf and uses BSL as his preferred language. His current research interests focus
577 on deaf space and how the physical and sensory experience of being deaf influence the
578 production of deaf spaces. His most recent research project, 'The Spaces and Places of Deaf

579 Academia' was funded by the Society for Research into Higher Education through their
580 Newer Researchers Prize. Dai is one of the founders of the Bridging the Gap conference
581 series in the UK which aims to build and strengthen connections between deaf academics and
582 deaf communities. When not working, he enjoys running and yoga.

583 **References.**

584 Bauman, H.-D. L. (2004) Audism: exploring the metaphysics of oppression. *Journal of Deaf*
585 *Studies and Deaf Education*, 9 (2), 239-246.

586 Bourdieu, P. (1999) *The Weight of the world: social suffering in contemporary society*.
587 Cambridge: Polity Press.

588 Brown, N. and Leigh, J. (2018) Ableism in academia: where are the disabled and ill
589 academics? *Disability & Society*, 33 (6), 985-989, DOI:10.1080/09687599.2018.1455627

590 Clark, A. and Emmel, N. (2010) *Using walking interviews*. Realities Toolkit #13ESRC
591 National Centre for Research Methods.

592 Clark, A. (2006) *Anonymising research data*. NCRM Working Paper Series 7/06.

593 Dale, K. and Burrell, G. (2015) Leadership and space in 3D: distance, dissent and
594 disembodiment in the case of a new academic building. In A. Ropo, P. Salovaara, E. Sauer
595 and D. De Paoli, eds. *Leadership in spaces and places*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar
596 Publishing, 217-241

597 Damianakis, T. and Woodford, M.R. (2012) Qualitative research with small connected
598 communities: generating new knowledge while upholding research ethics. *Qualitative Health*
599 *Research*, 22 (5), 708-718. DOI: 10.1177/049732311431444

600 De Meulder, M. (2017) The emergence of a deaf academic professional class during the
601 British deaf resurgence. In A. Kusters, M. De Meulder and D. O'Brien, eds. *Innovations in*
602 *Deaf Studies: the role of deaf scholars*. New York: Oxford University Press. Pp. 101-128.

603 Elden, S. (2001) Politics, philosophy, geography: Henri Lefebvre in recent Anglo-American
604 scholarship. *Antipode*, 33 (5), 809-825.

605 Evans, J. and Jones, P. (2011) The walking interview: methodology, mobility and place.
606 *Applied Geography*, 31, 849-858. DOI: 10.1016/j.apgeog.2010.09.005

607 Fekete, E., 2010. Signs in space: American Sign Language as spatial language and cultural
608 worldview. Thesis. Kent State University.

609 Finlay, J.M and Bowman, J.A. (2017) Geographies on the move: a practical and theoretical
610 approach to the mobile interview. *The Professional Geographer*, 69 (2), 263-274 DOI:
611 10.1080/00330124.2016.1229623

612 Freire, P. (1996) *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. London: Penguin.

613 Garrett, B.L. (2010) Videographic geographies: using digital video for geographical research.
614 *Progress in Human Geography*, 35 (4), 521-541. DOI: 10.1177/0309132510388337

615 Gulliver, M. (2017) Seeking Lefebvre's vécu in a "Deaf space" classroom. In N. Ares, E.
616 Buendía and R. Helfenbein, eds. *Deterritorializing/reterritorializing: critical geography of*
617 *educational reform*, 99-108. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

618 Gulliver, M. (2009) DEAF space, a history: The production of DEAF spaces Emergent,
619 Autonomous, Located and Disabled in 18th and 19th century France. Unpublished PhD
620 Thesis – University of Bristol: UK.

621 Harold, G. (2013) Reconsidering sound and the city: asserting the right to the Deaf-friendly
622 city. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 31 846 – 862 DOI:10.1068/d3310

623 Imrie, R. (2000) Disability and discourses of mobility and movement. *Environment and*
624 *Planning A: Economy and Space* 32 1641-1656, DOI: 10.1068/a331.

625 Imrie, R. and Kumar, M. (1998) Focusing on disability and access in the built environment.
626 *Disability and Society* 13:3 357-374 DOI 10.1080/09687599826687

627 Imrie, R. (1996) *Disability and the City: International Perspectives*. Liverpool: Paul
628 Chapman Publishing.

629 Inckle, K. (2018) Unreasonable adjustments: the additional unpaid labour of academics with
630 disabilities. *Disability & Society*, 33 (8), 1372-1376, DOI:10.1080/09687599.2018.1480263

631 Jones, L., & Pullen, G. (1992). Cultural differences: Deaf and hearing researchers working
632 together. *Disability, Handicap & Society*, 7, 189-196.

633 Jones, P., Bunce, G., Evans, J., Gibbs, H. and Hein, J.R. (2008) Exploring space and place
634 with walking interviews. *Journal of Research Practice* 4 (2).

635 Kitchin, R. (1998) ‘Out of place’, ‘knowing one’s place’: space, power and the exclusion of
636 disabled people. *Disability and Society* 13 (3) 343-356, DOI: 10.1080/09687599826678.

637 Kusenback, M. (2003) Street phenomenology: the go-along as ethnographic research tool.
638 *Ethnography*, 4 (3), 455-485.

639 Kusters, A., De Meulder, M. and O’Brien, D., eds. (2017) *Innovations in Deaf Studies: the*
640 *role of deaf scholars*. New York: Oxford University Press.

641 Ladd, P. (2003) *Understanding deaf culture: in search of deafhood*. Clevedon: Multilingual
642 Matters.

643 LeCompte, M.D. (1993) A framework for hearing silence: what does telling stories mean
644 when we are supposed to be doing science? In D. McLaughlin. And W.G. Tierney, eds.
645 *Naming silenced lives: personal narratives and processes of educational change*, 2-9.
646 London: Routledge.

647 Lefebvre, H. (1991) *The production of space*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

648 Nespor, J. (2000) Anonymity and place in qualitative inquiry. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 6 (4), 546-
649 569.

650 O'Brien, D. and Emery, S. (2014) The role of the intellectual in minority group studies:
651 reflections on Deaf Studies in social and political contexts. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 20 (1), 27-36
652 DOI: 10.1177/1077800413508533

653 Pring, J. (2018) [https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/union-backs-claims-of-widespread-](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/union-backs-claims-of-widespread-discrimination-by-hostile-university/)
654 [discrimination-by-hostile-university/](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/union-backs-claims-of-widespread-discrimination-by-hostile-university/)

655 Sang, K. (2017) [https://migrantacademics.files.wordpress.com/2017/05/disability-sang-may-](https://migrantacademics.files.wordpress.com/2017/05/disability-sang-may-2017.pdf)
656 [2017.pdf](https://migrantacademics.files.wordpress.com/2017/05/disability-sang-may-2017.pdf)

657 Saunders, B., Kitzinger, J and Kitzinger, C. (2015) Anonymising interview data: challenges
658 and compromise in practice. *Qualitative Research*, 15 (5), 616-632. DOI:
659 10.1177/146794114550439

660 Schmid, C. (2008) Henri Lefebvre's theory of the production of space: towards a three-
661 dimensional dialectic. In K. Goonewardena, S. Kipler, R. Milgram and C. Schmid, eds.
662 *Space, difference and everyday life: reading Henri Lefebvre* 27-45. London: Routledge.

663 Siebert, S., Bushfield, S., Martin, G., and Howison, B. (2018) Eroding ‘respectability’:
664 deprofessionalization through organizational spaces. *Work, Employment and Society*, 32 (2),
665 330-347. DOI: 10.1177/0950017017726948

666 Simonsen, K. (2005) Bodies, sensations, space and time: the contribution from Henri
667 Lefebvre. *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography*, 87 (1), 1-14. DOI:
668 10.1111/j.0435-3684.2005.00174.x

669 Sirvage, R. (2012) Navigational Proxemics of Walking Signers: A Paradigm Shift in
670 Methodology. *Deaf Studies Digital Journal*, Issue 3.

671 Temple, P. (2018) Space, place and institutional effectiveness in higher education. *Policy*
672 *Reviews in Higher Education*, 2 (2), 133-150.
673 <https://doi.org/10.1080/23322969.2018.1442243>

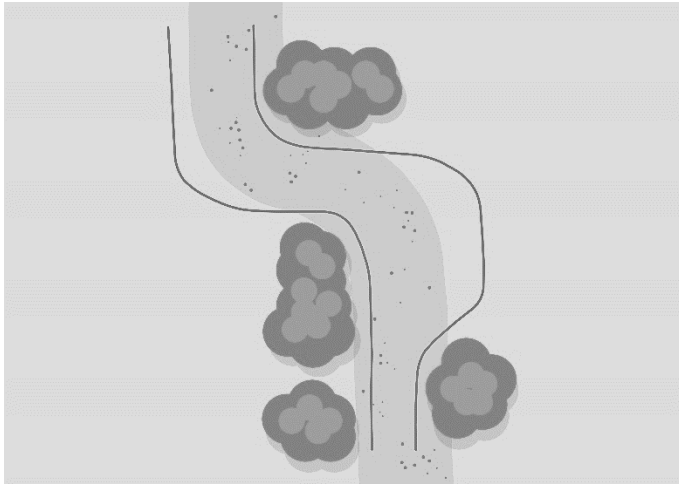
674 Temple, P. (2009) From space to place: university performance and its built environment.
675 *Higher Education Policy*, 22, 209-223. DOI: 10.1057/hep.2008.30

676 Trowler, P. R., & Turner, G. H. (2002). Exploring the hermeneutic foundation of university
677 life: Deaf academics in a hybrid “community of practice.” *Higher Education*, 43, 227-256.

678 Victorino, C., Nylund-Gibson, K. and Conley, S. (2018) Prosocial behaviour in the
679 professoriate: a multi-level analysis of pretenured faculty collegiality and job satisfaction.
680 *International Journal of Educational Management*, 32 (5), 783-798 DOI: 10.1108/IJEM-09-
681 2017-0258.

682 Wylie, J. (2002) An essay on ascending Glastonbury Tor. *Geoforum* 33 441–454.

683 Wylie, J. (2005) A single day’s walking: narrating self and landscape on the South West
684 Coast Path. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers New Series*, 30 (2) 234-247.



685

686 Figure one. To show how interviewer and interviewee's walking routes veer off the path onto
687 grass to maintain appropriate signing distance.

688