Negotiating Academic Environments: Using Lefebvre to Conceptualize Deaf Spaces and Disabling/Enabling Environments.

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Abstract.

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

Keywords.

Deaf, Lefebvre, Walking Interviews, Environmental access, DeafSpace

Introduction.

While there has been some work exploring the experiences of signing deaf[1] academics in the UK in recent years (see O'Brien, forthcoming, Jones and Pullen, 1992, Trowler and Turner 2002, O'Brien and Emery 2014, De Meulder 2017) much of this research has focused on the social experiences of deaf academics or is focused on the social or professional barriers that they face working in Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs). Very little has been written about deaf academics' physical experience of their HEI and the way in which this may affect their feelings of belonging or access to their home HEI. Similar lack of attention has been paid to academics with other disabilities, although there are recent publications by Inckle (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).

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

Literature Review.

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

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

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

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

Bearing in mind Lefebvre's claim that social space is a social product, we must consider what sort of spaces are produced, how and by whom. Of course, minority academics very rarely have control over the physical environment in which they work, although one exception is that of Gallaudet University in Washington D.C, where the majority of students and staff are deaf and use American Sign Language. The Sorenson Building in Gallaudet University is one example of how deaf people have been able to play a key role in the design of the physical environment. This building was specifically designed following the DeafSpace principles developed by Hansel Bauman, which are based on principles of sensory reach, mobility, proximity, light and colour, and acoustics as experienced by deaf people[3]. DeafSpace principles aim to explore how pre-existing environmental affordances can be exploited or utilised in unexpected ways to improve accessibility for deaf people. One such example 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.

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

Lefebvre's triad of perceived, conceived and lived space now has enough traction in mainstream academia that a cursory definition of the three concepts can be outlined here. Perceived space, or spatial practice, refers to the everyday, taken for granted, or 'common sense' experience of social space (Simonsen 2005). Conceived space, or representations of space, refers to the 'codes, signs and knowledge' used by the dominant order of any society (Ibid 2005). This space refers to the space of planners, of architects, of developers (not referring to the design and building of a particular structure but rather that of 'a spatial texture' (Lefebvre 1991, 42), which designs and moderates spaces through the official or legitimate discourse of space). Finally, there is lived space, or spaces of representation. This is the space in which new meanings, 'alternative imaginations' and 'conflicting rhythms of everyday life' emerge and are embraced, allowing us to realise ourselves as 'total persons' (Simonsen 2005). Lived spaces are those 'invested with symbolism and meaning, the space of *connaissance* (less formal or more local forms of knowledge), space as it is lived, social space' (Elden 2001, 815). These three concepts of space do not exist in isolation, but are always in an unresolved dialectic tension.

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

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

Method

Walking Interviews.

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

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

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

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

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

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

‘flexibility as participants guide you to what they think is important, setting your agenda spontaneously as you move, creating de Certeau’s space of tactic where experience, cultural memory and everyday life can be the events most worth recording’ (Garrett 2010, 531). Video recordings of the walking interviews were thus not just recordings of what was said in the interview, but also and simultaneously field notes of the encounter.

It has been claimed that video recording on the move can be very disorientating and limits what one can capture. However, with some practice I was able to hold the camera close to my chest which allowed me to maintain eye contact with the participant, and use my free hand to question or prompt them about their environment. I was also able to intuitively frame the shot to capture them when they were signing, to capture features when they referred to a specific location or object, or to pan around to capture the environment or lay-out of a particular area. The first part of the interview was always held in the participants’ office, usually a private space in which they could get used to the camera and settle into my line of questioning. All were very comfortable on camera, as most were very experienced filming and being filmed thanks to use of video communications such as Skype or Facetime, filming vlogs, or otherwise recording themselves or being recorded using BSL for professional or personal communications.

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

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

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

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

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

Anonymity.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Findings

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

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

Accessibility of the HEI (perceived space)

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

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

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

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

INSERT FIGURE 1 NEAR HERE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

There were often no adaptations in their teaching space –

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

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

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

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

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

Problems of university planning (conceived space).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Making spaces 'deaf' (lived space).

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

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

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

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

I don't like having my back to the door. Here I'm side on, so I can see. I'd rather be facing the door, but I don't really have a choice.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Conclusion.

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

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574 **Biographical note.**

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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.

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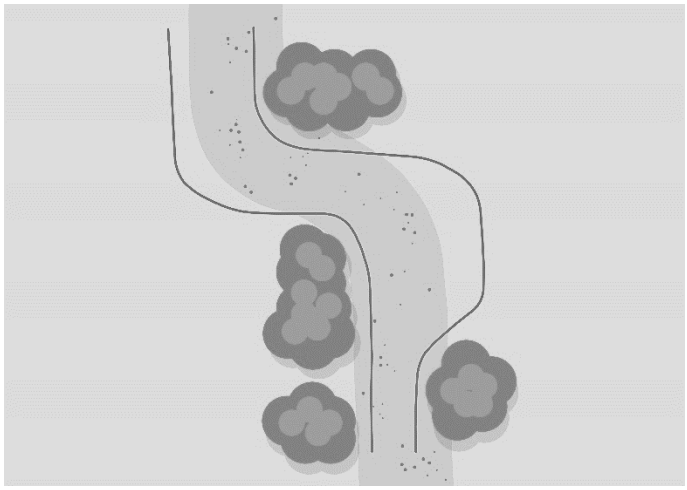
685 

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