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## **The art of inclusion: phenomenology, placemaking and the role of the arts**

### **Abstract**

This paper extends emerging research on the role of the arts in placemaking by introducing readers to the theories of Hannah Arendt. Specifically, it outlines the value of an Arendtian phenomenological framework for conceiving why, how and in what ways ‘inclusion’ could and should operate in placemaking. The paper first presents an outline of Arendt’s phenomenological approach. An exploratory case study of arts activities in a rural Irish town is then employed to illustrate the explanatory potential of this approach. The paper closes by reflecting on how an Arendtian approach suggests important lessons for placemaking research and practice.

### **Introduction**

Across space and time, places are made and remade in a multitude of ways by a multiplicity of agents. Sometimes this happens as a result of government intervention, at other times through bottom-up initiatives. Taken together, academics commonly refer to this expansive church of activities as ‘placemaking’ (Aravot, 2002; Arefi, 2014; Friedmann, 2010; Hou, 2010; Musterd and Kovács, 2013; Palermo and Ponzini, 2014). In a broad sense, placemaking is thereby the term commonly used by those in the related fields of architecture, planning and urban design to describe the processes of creating spaces that are desirable for people to live, work and visit (Marshall, 2009). It is an endeavour normally conceived as bringing together designers and users in creating contextually sensitive interventions that respond to local economic, environmental and socio-cultural attributes (Thomas, 2016). Academic research has sought to examine the many facets of this multidimensional activity, with informative studies exploring such topics as the importance of urban greening (Cilliers et al., 2015), heritage conservation (Parkinson et al., 2017) and architecture (Schneekloth and Shibley, 2000), among an array of other issues to the making of places.

More recently, attention has focused on the role of the arts in placemaking activities (Bain and Landau, 2019; Carmona, 2017; Courage, 2017; Filep, 2019; Gkartzios and Crawshaw; McHenry, 2011; Olsen, 2019). Much of this work has sought to explore how the arts can mediate the relationships of people to place by posing questions that prompt processes of change. In a growing volume of this research, the writings of prominent art theorists have been used to help tease apart the role and potential of the arts in this process. For example, the work of the curator and critic Nicolas Bourriaud (2002) has been employed to frame an understanding of how art can provide a medium through which to rethink place identity. Bourriaud uses the term ‘relational art’ to describe an understanding of art ‘that takes its theoretical horizon as the sphere of human interactions and its social context rather than the assertion of an autonomous and private symbolic space’ (Courage, 2017: 35). For him, artistic

practices thereby exist as a ‘bundle of relations in the world’ (Bourriaud, 2002: 14) that ought to enhance human encounters both with the arts and with each other. Similarly, thinkers in this space such as Courage (2017) have mined the work of Kester (2011, 2013) to advance a relational approach to the productive potential of artistic encounters, which is more focused on revealing the various levels of dialogical interactions between the perceiver, the artist, the artwork, and others with whom s/he shares the experience.

While such thinking on the role of the arts in placemaking has greatly advanced our understanding of relationality and imagination in creating and consolidating the social and material processes that profile and give depth to place, they remain largely grounded in theories concerned with the ontology and reception of arts activities. Therefore, this paper takes a different tack. Specifically, it introduces placemaking researchers to the phenomenological thinking of Hannah Arendt as an alternative avenue for exploring the role of the arts in placemaking from a relational perspective. In doing so, it seeks to demonstrate the importance of her theoretical insights for identifying and unpacking the position of ‘inclusivity’ in conceptualising how, why and with whom placemaking could and should play out as a practice of transformation. As such, the paper seeks to complement and extend emerging research in this field by showing how Arendt’s particular approach to phenomenological thinking provides a potentially valuable tool for understanding the normative impetus for artistic initiatives connected with placemaking.

Hence, the next section outlines and discusses Arendt’s phenomenological approach. Following this, her thinking is employed to examine data from an exploratory study of arts activities in a small Irish town as a means to demonstrate its elucidating potential. The data used is sourced from an array of podcasts, newspaper reports, websites and project documents detailing the aims and formats of the numerous arts initiatives and organisations in the town, as well as 11 in-depth interviews with a mix of arts practitioners, curators, organisation administrators and municipal authority officials variously associated with the unusually high level of artistic activities operative in the town. This material was collated and analysed using NVivo software by the paper’s author via a hybrid inductive-deductive coding approach. The paper closes with a discussion on the relevance of Arendt’s approach to helping us better understand the role of the arts in placemaking.

### **The Phenomenology of Hannah Arendt**

As a focus of inquiry, phenomenology emerged at the turn of the twentieth century in response to the long-held delineation of ‘subject’ and ‘object’ as discrete concepts within philosophy. Phenomenologists claim that such a separation is a philosophical construction that distorts a more attentive understanding of how humans experience the world. Hence, they seek to counter both the lingering resonance of metaphysics and the more recent dominance of empiricism in philosophy (Moran, 2002). For phenomenologists, ‘phenomena’ are what appears in the context of their appearing. It is contended that such phenomena cannot adequately be explained by reduction to simplified descriptions of collected sense data. Rather, phenomenologists, particularly those of the hermeneutic tradition<sup>i</sup> hold that

'phenomena are always immediately but implicitly meaningful, constituted by implicit understanding based on our familiarity with the world and our know-how' (Borren, 2013: 233). This means that for the phenomenologist, the perceiver is not experientially isolated from that which is perceived, be it people, things or events. Instead, these are understood to exist in relation to the perceiver. As such, the immediacy of perception and subsequent interpretation is contoured by our embeddedness in a world that already has meaning for us. While this resonates with recent thinking on the relationality of situated art (Bourriaud, 2002; Courage, 2017; Gell, 1998; Kester, 2011; Meskimmon, 2010), Arendt's particular phenomenological approach sought to rethink our experience of the world as one moulded by our capacity for uniqueness in the context of our relationships with others.

Although Arendt rarely characterised herself as a phenomenologist and is only occasionally included in anthologies on the topic, her writings evidence a phenomenologist's attention to the relationality of experience, particularly in the context of the public realm (Bowring, 2011). Normally identified as a political theorist<sup>ii</sup>, Arendt was a student of the political conditions of the ancient Greek polis. However, she was not a nostalgic idealist who sought a return to the past. Rather, she strived to explore how the experience of politics in classical antiquity 'might yield a new critical perspective on the distinctively modern phenomenon of society' (Swift, 2008: 44). The originality of her phenomenological approach to politics has drawn misunderstanding and criticism from both sides of the political divide, such that the Left held her in suspicion as a conservative while the Right considered her too left-wing (Arendt, 1979). Much of this wariness relates to her criticism of 'essentialism' that she levelled against both the Left and Right in equal measure. In her view, the Left sought to derive the essence of humanity from the premise of an innate human 'sameness' informed by Marxist thinking, while the Right implicitly or explicitly reduced all humans to the utility maximising construction of *homo economicus*. For Arendt, such attempts to pinpoint the essence of human nature results in efforts to deductively construct a society around a particular concept of the person that is the key feature of a totalising potential that suppresses openness to difference, debate and reflection. In this sense, she was acutely conscious of how the creation of categories of people based upon reductive presumptions of human innateness can dehumanise them (Arendt, 1951, 1964). She sought to redress this tendency in modern society through a phenomenological reading of politics wherein people are conceived as interpreters of their experiences that are informed by the particular situations in which they find themselves. Such interpretations are understood as mediated through the lens of the broader personal, environmental and socio-cultural contexts in which they are embedded. From this standpoint, Arendt emphasised the difference between 'what' a person is, as defined by their physical attributes and category allocation – poor, white, female, able-bodied etc – and 'who' a person is, as expressed by their unique life-story and consequent perspectives. She saw in modern society a tendency to obscure such uniqueness and thereby stifle informed critical debate<sup>iii</sup>. Arendt attributed this to how 'loneliness' emerges in a way that erodes reflection through isolating people from each other. However, loneliness for Arendt is not the same as that used in common parlance. Rather, she offers a

novel interpretation of what loneliness entails in modern society, as well as how it comes about and what consequences it generates. This understanding centres on her phenomenological conception of 'the world'.

### *Worldlessness & Loneliness*

A core theme running through Arendt's oeuvre is that modern society has eroded opportunities for informed critique, careful debate and the mutually considerate interactions that emerge from relationships that recognise, support and value difference. For her, the 'world' is an experience constituted by bonds that create a sense of something shared concurrent to facilitating respect for the uniqueness of different viewpoints. As she asserts,

*To live together in the world means essentially that a world of things is between those who have it in common, as a table is located between those who sit around it; the world, like every in-between, relates and separates men at the same time.*

(Arendt, 1958: 52)

Hence, Arendt conceived the 'world' as the commonality of the shared space between people that enables them to recognise, acknowledge and appreciate each other as similar but unique. A concern of Arendt was that this world was being eroded through a process of alienation. A key phenomenological innovation of Arendt was to reason that this alienation was not a Marxian alienation from oneself (Marx, 2007), but rather an alienation from a relational experience of the world. Such alienation thereby creates a sense of 'worldlessness' or 'the withering away of everything between us' (Arendt, 2005: 201). This withering results in the loss of an appreciation for uniqueness and a conformism that categorises people as 'what' they are (poor, disabled etc) rather than recognises 'who' they are as person with a distinctive perspective born of a unique biography (d'Entrèves, 2002). Arendt believed that such worldlessness is insidious and results in the experience of 'loneliness'. This loneliness arises from an inability to have recognised the value of one's uniqueness consequent on how a pervasive wordlessness in society catalogues people into groups that operates 'by destroying all space between men and pressing men against each other' (Arendt, 1951: 478), so that identities and interests are presumed rather than asked. In the context of Arendt's political phenomenology, loneliness thereby refers to 'a lack of difference from others and being too close to them, rather than to a mere absence of others or being too distant from them' (Borren, 2010: 61). Arendt's experience of Nazism taught her that the danger of worldlessness is that people seek to escape the painful experience of loneliness by conforming to and employing identity categories that propagate alienation and victimise people through creating positions of privilege and marginalisation (Kohn, 1996). However, as noted by Swift (2008: 15), '[T]his loss of the world neither began nor ended with the downfall of Hitler. In a different way, Arendt also thought that post-war consumer society furthered the destruction of this common world.' This is consequent on how value and attention are allocated to production and consumption at the expense of critical reflection and debate<sup>iv</sup>. Although generally hesitant of Marxist theory, she agreed with the contention that capitalism as a process of wealth accumulation ultimately commodifies all aspects of human life such

that generating and fulfilling superficial desires replaces relationships bound by mutual recognition in reflective debate<sup>v</sup>. Arendt was similarly weary of how the means-ends attitude that is properly situated in the realm of fabrication risks reshaping society in a way that intensifies the experience of loneliness<sup>vi</sup>. This ensues from how such an attitude breeds a politics of instrumentality wherein value is determined solely by usefulness (Villa, 1996: 23). Indeed, Arendt was concerned about how human relations are increasingly wrought by perceptions on the usefulness of others as a means for achieving one's objectives (ends), rather than out of respect for their uniqueness. She worried that such an attitude exacerbated worldlessness by reifying people 'into fixed conceptual and instrumental categories, subsuming humanity into the limitless instrumentalization of everything that exists' (Yar, 2000: 24). This diminishes the space for different perspectives, such that non-conforming voices are silenced with a consequential loss of the mutual recognition and respect necessary for experiencing the 'world'. Having diagnosed the problem, her solution proposed a phenomenologically attuned reinvestment of 'worldliness' into human affairs by enhancing the place of the 'political' as a principle contoured by a commitment to 'plurality'.

#### *Worldliness, Plurality & Freedom*

For Arendt, 'plurality is specifically *the condition* – not only the *conditio sine qua non*, but the *conditio per quam* – of all political life' (Arendt, 1958: 7; emphasis in original). Thus, she conceived the political as that which emerges from the interaction of a plurality of unique selves. She believed that such interactions create a 'web of human relationships' (Arendt, 1958: 233) that generate an experience of worldliness where one exists in a recognised and respected bond of difference with others<sup>vii</sup>. Unlike the experience of wordlessness, 'worldliness' operates under conditions where the person lives 'as a distinct and unique being among equals' (Arendt, 1958: 178), such that difference and equality mutually presuppose one another. Therefore, 'plurality, taken in a strictly phenomenological sense, is a plurality of the "who", understood as a plurality of perspectives' (Loidolt, 2015). At first blush this may suggest that Arendt was proposing a theory of human rights. However, Arendt's life-long phenomenological analyses of political history gave her a suspicion of human rights discourses and led her to the un-modern conclusion that people are not naturally equal. She contended that appeals to the universally innate equality of humans confuses 'sameness' with 'equality', such that the biologically given similarities between human beings becomes the anchor point for human rights discourses in a way that subsumes the unique 'who-ness' of the person beneath the 'what-ness' of their categorical attributes simultaneous to profiling these attributes<sup>viii</sup>. Accordingly, human rights can create a platform for experience, but it is possible that this is one of loneliness. Arendt therefore argued that equality is not an inalienable human attribute, but only emerges as people find and are given space to express their uniqueness vis-à-vis each other. Hence, equality is a normative rather than a descriptive concept that must be pursued instead of presumed. She maintained that this was best achieved through focusing on the 'political'.

In contrast to many political thinkers, Arendt's phenomenological approach led her to interpret the 'political' as the experience of worldliness resultant from advancing one's perspective, rather than the institutions necessary to enable this type of activity (Mahrdt, 2012). Although the two are undoubtedly connected, her interest is in the openness of horizontal relations between a plurality of people in the public realm. This is because in her view, institutional politics continued under the Nazis, although with a non-political principle at its core (Arendt, 1964). Hence, she held that emphasising the construction of political institutions is not necessarily sufficient to ensure worldliness. Instead, prominence should be given to the principle of the political as it is this which creates a shared world of 'we' that comprises the 'paradoxical plurality of unique beings' (Arendt, 1958: 176). For Arendt, an authentic form of 'we' does not dissolve the uniqueness of 'me'. Rather, 'the highest possible form of a We-community is that which is dedicated to this task of articulating individuality in togetherness (which Arendt calls "the political"), or, at least, which is aware of its vital importance for a human community' (Loidolt, 2015: 52). However, a further paradox of this 'me-we' relationship of worldliness is that it necessitates the experience of both solitude and being together. Arendt held that people need temporary solitude and a shared experience of being together as otherwise 'solitude turns into the pathological condition of isolation, when people become distinct without being together' and 'being-together turns into fusion...when people are together without being distinct' (Borren, 2010: 86). Consequently, the ability to temporally withdraw from the public realm is as much an aspect of worldliness as the capacity to have one's uniqueness recognised and respected within it.

Furthermore, the circumstances that facilitate actualised plurality are fragile, contingent and temporary as the 'web of human relationships' is produced through the intangible interactions and intersubjective meanings that circulate between unique individuals (Topolski, 2015). As such, the paradoxical plurality of unique beings constituting an Arendtian community relies on continuous political activity to create spaces for mutual recognition and respect. Arendt calls this activity 'action'. As noted by Moran (2002: 318), 'action is neither empty talking nor theoretical reflection, for Arendt, rather it is the opening up of public space, the making possible of a specifically human world...Action founds world.' Action therefore can be described as a moment of origination that reveals the uniqueness of the self within a plurality of others. For Arendt, action is the actualisation of freedom, as it 'promises the possibility of transcending the limitations of our embodied selves and the mechanical thinking of instrumentality' (Voice, 2014: 47). Thus, she asserts that,

*The answer to the question of the meaning of politics is so simple and so conclusive that one might think all other answers are utterly besides the point. The answer is: The meaning of politics is freedom. (Arendt, 2005: 108)*

In keeping with her phenomenological approach, 'Freedom is conceived not as an inner disposition but as a character of human existence in the world' (Arendt, 1981: 135). It supplies 'the capacity of beginning something anew'<sup>ix</sup> (Arendt, 1958: 9). Arendt believed that the principle of the political that profiles freedom requires critical reflection in the experimental creation of new ideas and ways of relating (Marder, 2013; Walsh, 2011). This is

because she believed that critique without experimentation results in cynicism, while experimentation without critique tends to utopianism (Borren, 2010). For her, imagination is the key to moderating the potential excesses of critique and experimentation in a manner that facilitates new ways of informed understanding, and thereby advancing freedom. This is consequent on how imagination mediates our experience by distancing us from some phenomena and approximating us to others. In this way it resolves the 'sock of the new' that can inhibit critical reflection on new ideas and ways of relating. As she explains,

*Imagination alone enables us to see things in their proper perspective, to be strong enough to put that which is too close at a certain distance so that we can see and understand it without bias and prejudice, to be generous enough to bridge abysses of remoteness until we can see and understand everything that is too far away from us as though it were our own affair. This distancing of some things and bridging the abysses to others is part of the dialogue of understanding, for whose purposes direct experience establishes too close a contact and mere knowledge erects artificial barriers. (Arendt, 1994: 323)*

As the home of imagination and a common vehicle for societal critique, the arts have the potential to supply a place of attentive political experimentation wherein the experience of freedom can be actualised through advancing plurality in culturing a community characterised by individuality in togetherness. The next section demonstrates the usefulness of an Arendtian approach for understanding how this sense of 'freedom' is being realised in practice through participatory arts activities in the small town of Callan.

### **The Arts & Actualising 'Freedom' in Callan**

Callan is a rural Irish town with a population 2,475. It is situated approximately 145 kilometres south of Dublin and 20 kilometres south west of the popular tourist town of Kilkenny. In the past, Callan was a vibrant service centre for the surrounding agricultural hinterland. However, today Callan is experiencing the challenges faced by many rural towns of its size in an increasingly urbanised Irish context. Prominent among these is the fallout from greater commuting to larger urban centres for work, leisure, retail and service functions. This has resulted in a low level of property reuse and clusters of vacant buildings. It is against this backdrop that a growing community of artists in the town have sought to help transform perceptions of Callan through placemaking initiatives focused on actualising an Arendtian conception of 'freedom'.

#### *Unearthing the Roots of 'Loneliness'*

For those associated with the arts in Callan, there is a perceived bias in how places are considered in the activities of planning, regeneration and placemaking. As conveyed by one interviewee and echoed by many others:

*A lot of the field in the built environment has been heavily focused on objects and things, physicalities and financial instruments and those elements [that] are very tangible and quantifiable. And I feel the people, as in 'human being', unpredictable as we are, have been left behind. (Interviewee C1)*

This presents a considerable problem in the context of the broader values such agents see circulating within society, most specifically in how they perceive the uniqueness of the person being eroded through a pervasive categorisation of people that prescribes 'what' they are as opposed to 'who' they are. As noted by an interviewee with considerable attachment to the town,

*I feel like societally there is some sort of putting people in boxes, you know as to what kind of person you are. And what that means for what you can be involved in or interested in. (Interviewee A6)*

A shared belief held by interviewees was that this reduction of the 'who-ness' of people to the 'what-ness' of categories is consequent on the widespread silencing of complexity. As summarised by one interviewee,

*It's that reduction of knowledge, that reduction of information, that condensation of something down to a simple sound bite so that there's no room for ambiguity, there's no room for subtlety, there's no room for the grey between: like sort of black and white and that's it. That's kind of terrifying, because it seems to be, whether intentionally or not, through social media and through social life on the internet to be coming to that. So how can you challenge that? And I suppose one of the ways of doing it [is] through people coming together. (Interviewee A2)*

As identified by this interviewee and held by all other interviewees, bringing people together is believed to be the means by which to address what in Arendtian terms is the 'loneliness' ensuing from the suppression of plurality. Hence, to address the loss of human 'who-ness' from society, the creation of opportunities for engagement with others in ways that recognises and respects difference is considered crucial in confronting the spread of loneliness. For those interviewed, this implies acknowledging that 'we all have a relationship with each other...it's finding the mechanism of embracing those relationships rather than seeing those as obstacles' (Interviewee C1) that is key to countering societal loneliness. The Callan arts community hold that participatory artistic events, particularly those that are very visible, are a fruitful mechanism for embracing such relationships as,

*You need to have these strange and unusual things happening because otherwise we all just become too much set in our little laneways and we don't think beyond that and look at things from different perspectives. (Interviewee A6)*

To understand how promoting an appreciation of different perspectives has been advanced in Callan through such 'strange and unusual things', it is first necessary to grasp the influence of the evolutionary path that arts activities have taken in the town.

*Sowing the Seeds of 'Freedom'*

The majority of those interviewed feel strongly that the inclusive approach to arts activities in Callan has been heavily profiled by the ethos of the Camphill Community. Indeed, it is concluded by most that the embeddedness of this ethos is what 'makes Callan so much more interesting than just another homogenous arts community' (Interviewee A8). The Camphill Movement was established by Dr Karl Koenig, a Viennese Jew who fled to Scotland during the Nazi occupation of continental Europe. Shocked by the poor treatment of children with disabilities that he encountered in Britain, Koenig worked with other exiles and British citizens to establish a school for children in need of special care on the Camphill Estate near Aberdeen in 1940. This school sought to provide an environment responsive to the exceptionality of such children rather than forcing them to learn by the narrow teaching methods of the day or placing them within the category of 'uneducationalble' if failing to respond to these. In particular, he spurned the contemporary medical model of disability which he viewed as incompatible with a holistic understanding of each child as a unique human with special needs. Instead, he espoused a culture of mutual care wherein a community of equals would live together in difference by sustaining each other (Jackson, 2011). Resonant with Arendt's thinking on the 'political' dimension of 'worldliness', such communities are intentional creations rather than the product of local organic evolution. Consequently, they can last only so long as their members remain committed to the ideals of co-equality, care and a respect for difference that is the bedrock of each community. An openness to creativity and use of the arts as a medium for community building, learning and expression has always been present in the Camphill philosophy (Koenig, 2018). To a large extent this is traceable to the close relationship between the early Camphill Movement and the pedagogical thinking of Rudolf Steiner, which focuses on creating a holistic educational experience that balances artistic, intellectual and practical content (Childs, 1992). A Camphill Community and associated Steiner School was established in 1979 about 7 kilometres south of Callan in the rural area of Ballytobin. However, the interaction of this community with Callan remained relatively limited until the Kilkenny Collective for Arts Talent (KCAT) opened an Art and Study Centre in the town in 1999<sup>x</sup>.

KCAT developed out of a 1996 EU Horizon funded project that sought to provide an opportunity for a Camphill Community resident and six others to work alongside a professional artist in advancing their practices. The KCAT Centre opened in rudimentary premises in 1999. A purpose-built centre was subsequently opened on the same site in 2005. The new centre is complete with studios, multipurpose rooms and office accommodation. Irrespective of its growth and the development of new facilities, the orientation of KCAT remains towards 'supporting a small group of artists with special needs; alongside courses for a wide range of students, with and without special needs' (KCAT, 2009: 12). As recollected by one of the key drivers behind the KCAT project,

*During that process we realised we don't want to create a disability arts centre, but we need a place for people to learn, to be reflective, to engage with each other. So...we devised the KCAT centre. And it is not a disability centre, it's a centre that*

*is radically inclusive, it's an arts centre of radical inclusion and that's still the same.*

(Interviewee A7)

Hence, from its very genesis, KCAT fostered an ethos infused with the inclusivity characterising the philosophy of the Camphill Movement. Paralleling the establishment of KCAT was an initiative by some members of the Ballytobin Camphill Community to create a rehabilitation therapy centre in the town's derelict workhouse building<sup>xi</sup>. It was at this juncture (in 2001) that these members moved into the town, and in doing so founded a Camphill Community in Callan. While the rehabilitation centre never materialised, the workhouse project evolved into an arts space, now called the Workhouse Union, where the spirit of the Camphill Movement is strongly reflected in the broadly inclusive approach undertaken to arts activities and research (Workhouse Union, 2019). Such early initiatives by those aligned with the Camphill Movement has contoured an approach to the arts in Callan, which is focused as much on community building and placemaking as on artistic content. Indeed, as concluded by one interviewee deeply embedded in the town's artistic community,

*In the last 20 years Callan has become this model of inclusive arts practice, or it certainly is becoming that. It's becoming renowned I think on the national stage, in terms of the level of artistic work that happens here and the level of community engagements and the level of inclusion that happens here, mostly because of KCAT and because of Camphill and that kind of thing that's sort of permeated through the social infrastructure I suppose, over the last couple of decades. (Interviewee A2)*

This 'permeating' has resulted in a broadly outward orientation to arts activities in the town, such that the conventional emphasis is frequently reversed through a focus on seeking inspiration in plurality rather than authenticity in solitude. In this sense, the Callan arts community has endeavoured to kindle 'worldliness' through forms of 'action' that nurture the 'freedom' to be oneself.

### *Cultivating 'Worldliness'*

Much of the artistic work that has taken place in Callan in recent years has been participatory and public in design in order 'to get people to reflect back on themselves as to "what's this all about" or "what are we doing", "what are our lifestyle choices", you know, "where are we going with our built environment?" (Interviewee B1). This often entails working with large numbers of people, many with little experience of the arts. In echoing the ethos of the Camphill Movement, this involves reaching out to people who are often silenced through their explicit or implicit positioning within categories that identify them as 'different', and thereby potentially seen through a lens of 'what-ness' rather than 'who-ness'. As noted by one interviewee deeply involved in public theatre productions in the town,

*I'm just really interested in the idea of voices from the margins, and then when you listen to the voices from the margins and what they have to say, and the way they say things, I suppose that kind of fits with the whole idea of inclusion, because it's*

*just different ways of thinking, because we really are at a place where we need to hear different peoples' different ways of thinking.* (Interviewee A2)

The artistic activities centred on Callan's Bridge Street illustrate how such inclusivity is reflected in arts activities in ways that cultivate 'worldliness' and supplies a reflective dimension to local forms of placemaking.

As described by an interviewee very familiar with the area, Bridge Street is 'a street like many other streets in Ireland that was built for people, not built for cars, and suffered with the onset of the car, the dominance of the car, and a lot of the home-grown family industries left after the last generation retired or died' (Interviewee A3). Although once the commercial heart of the town and subsequently a congested thoroughway resultant from being part of the main route between Dublin and Cork, the opening of a town bypass road in 1997 sent the street into a spiral of decline. By the early years of the twentieth-first century many of the buildings on the street were in a dilapidated condition that gave the space a rundown appearance. However, the street's position at the centre of the town and its continuing use as a main crossing point of the King's River drew the attention of the area's arts community. Indeed, throughout 2014, the Workhouse Union had been working with a London based architectural company called Studio Weave on a programme exploring how to better connect people with their built environments. A core element of this involved working with school children to help them think spatially with respect to their locality and to map their views regarding different parts of it. During this process it transpired that the children shared broadly negative opinions of Bridge Street, which they viewed as unsafe from a pedestrian perspective. Hence, when Bridge Street was temporarily closed to traffic in 2014 as part of the town's annual Abhainn Rí<sup>xii</sup> festival, these children were encouraged to participate in the practice of re-imagining possible uses of the street and highlighting its potential as an important space for civic engagement.

Concurrently, Equinox Theatre Company which had been established in 2008 by KCAT as an inclusive theatre company, was conducting a story gathering programme in a pop-up café in a temporarily restored, but still very dilapidated, former pharmacy building on the street. This initiative had been prompted by difficulties that a number of disabled artists resident in KCAT were experiencing in negotiating the street consequent on its poorly maintained and bollard-lined footpath. The initiative sought to mine memories of the street to deepen understanding of its history as a place of significance within the locality and to help kindle interest in it. As conveyed by a person associated with this initiative,

*We opened a shop; renovated a space, painted it, made it look different. A space that had been very unsightly before that...and Equinox offered tea and cake in exchange for stories about the street and anecdotes...And nobody was obliged to tell a story. You could just have a free cup of tea. And just a warm atmosphere and great fun vibe.* (Interviewee A5)

Hence, the 2014 Abhainn Rí festival provided an 'experimental time and space' (Interviewee A8) to foster interest and commitment to re-imagining Bridge Street as a more pedestrian friendly and lively space. Resulting from this experience, a collaboration of local theatre

companies was successful in a funding proposal to stage an immersive 'promenade theatre' show as part of the following year's Abhainn Rí festival (2015) in which the audience would 'inhabit the space of the play along with the actors' as it progressively moves through a series of different spaces' (Nield, 2008: 531). From its inception it was intended that this would be an inclusive production involving a large community cast of town residents and drawing on their experiences of the street, such that the pop-up café initiative 'literally gave us the material to write the stories to write the play...It was a vehicle to gather the stories and to meet people' (Interviewee A5). The outdoor production was titled 'Bridge Street Will Be'<sup>xiii</sup> to echo the name given the pop-café and was themed around re-imagining the future of the street in the context of its history and through the challenges presented by a fictional proposal to demolish the street's historic buildings. Preparations for the theatre event involved considerable work on the street that drew the attention of the local community, many of whom had not previously participated in the arts activities underway in Callan. As recalled by one of those deeply involved in the production,

*We closed the street every month for a day for several hours to traffic so that people would be walking down the street. And this was to do a number of functions: stop to look at the street, have a space to play in. Children started appearing with bicycles and skateboards and all that kind of stuff. And then also, to allow us to do the paint job that we did...and we just did a massive amount of cleaning, scrubbing, power washing, just of the street, you know. And the conversations that were had then by people walking down the street were amazing: 'Why are you cleaning that window?' 'Because it's dirty'. 'But it's not your window'. 'Ok, but it's dirty'. And this is like, we want you to stop and have the chats with me. And it was just extraordinary. As soon as people saw that what you were doing wasn't about you, it was about the town and about everybody in the town, then people started coming in, helping, arriving with overalls, 'What can we do?' - 'Right: let's go and paint the street'. So, that was really the first time we went, oh, ok; this is kind of the next level. 'Do you want to be in the show?' (Interviewee A5)*

In this way, the activities of the arts community in very publicly seeking to improve the appearance of the street ignited interest in the activities underway and prompted members of the broader public to become involved. Indeed, a person central to the play's production recalls how the growing level of interest in the production meant that he had to repeatedly return to the commissioned writer to script new parts for people who sought to participate (Interviewee A2). In this fashion, a broad cross-section of the community became involved in the 'strange and unusual things happening' (Interviewee A6) in the centre of the town. The production helped forge an Arendtian experience of 'worldliness' by creating an inclusive space for people to meet and exchange ideas in an open forum that respected difference and re-imagined perspectives on a shared space in a collective endeavour of placemaking. In essence, it stimulated a civic experience in a space previously viewed as degraded and a challenge to communal engagement. As recollected by one interviewee involved in the production,

*Civic life as we live in the city, towns and villages, it is kind of eroded...we've kind of lost that through modernisation, there's nothing really that binds us. All the civic spaces now, the non-public spaces, it's like shopping malls; we go to the cinema. They're entertainment, and there's retail and commerce. But those are not really civic, we don't go there because we are bonding and growing together. I guess the point of the Bridge Street Project really was 'let's make this street back into something that had a specific life'. (Interviewee C1)*

Of note here is that the production helped rekindle a sense of civic experience not through physical interventions per se, but through the 'worldliness' produced via open engagement with each other and in working with, in and on the particularities of place. By stimulating and involving participation in acting, music and the decorative arts, along with ancillary activities associated with a large project (logistics, security, materials provision etc), the theatre production provided a medium for people to re-envisage the possibility of place via the lens of their own stories and affective investment. In doing so, the production helped change how people identified with the place and with each other. As noted by one interviewee involved in the production,

*With the Bridge Street Project, people's stories were brought to life. People could identify different things within the characters that we made on Bridge Street. It showed people themselves, it showed people their town, it showed me my town. And it has made me proud of Callan, it has made many people proud of Callan and their place in it and the legacy of it, the future of it. (Interviewee A3)*

Nevertheless, these arts activities on Bridge Street were limited in time, rendering them ephemeral. Therefore, understanding how these initiatives continue to help transform Bridge Street and promote the experience of inclusion in Callan involves attending to the most notable legacy left on the street from the production, namely 'Fennelly's of Callan Cultural Coffeehouse' (hereafter Fennelly's).

### *Propagating Plurality*

Throughout preparation works for the theatre production, the yard of a disused pub<sup>xiv</sup> called Fennelly's on Bridge Street became home to daily workshops that produced props for the play. However, as the preparations advanced this location took on additional roles. As recollected by a person at the core of this process,

*Fennelly's became a kind of a keystone place for meeting at the beginning of the day in the run up to the Bridge Street Project for about 6 weeks...So, I started putting out a little donations bucket and making some seriously strong coffee, some nice fruit and toast, and it just changed the whole thing...After the Bridge Street Project, I continued doing all of these different kinds of happenings. I did a series of breakfast residencies then with artists...I mean we weren't open as a business: I would open the doors literally and invite people to come in for coffee and some breakfast with suggested donations and the artist would engage with*

*the public in whatever way was pertinent to his or her practice at the time.* (Etaoin Holahan, owner/manager of Fennelly's)

Hence, throughout the preparations for the play and subsequent to these, Fennelly's developed from a workshop to a meeting point and progressively into an arts venue that outlived the ephemerality of the theatre production. This process of embedding arts activities as a more permanent feature of the street was consolidated by the Courtyard Screen project in 2016. This involved a collaboration between the Workhouse Union, Studio Weave and the owner of Fennelly's in organising a series of public workshops in the courtyard of Fennelly's, where woodworking and sewing skills were taught. Such work ultimately resulted in the building of a retractable awning structure within the courtyard. This initiative helped strengthen, enhance and expand the growing 'web of human relationships' facilitated by arts activities in the town through negotiating the street's constricted configuration to create a space of civic engagement for film screenings, workshops, communal dining, as well as providing a venue for music and theatre events.

Nevertheless, at this juncture Fennelly's still remained a space for temporary performances and social gatherings. Set against this backdrop, the owner of the property was conscious of the limitations of a seemingly partial presence on the street. As she recalls,

*But then I said, I'm only ever going to get a certain demographic of people and only ever going to get people who are a little bit adventurous. So, I thought, right I need to, we need to get people over the threshold, we need to get people in and once we get the people in then we can talk to them all about the different things that we're up to...I wanted to be part of the rejuvenation of the street, I wanted to open a place properly and really there is a certain language that people understand: they understand opening hours, they understand business, they understand shop, they don't understand residency, art project, that kind of thing, that's fleeting...We bridged the gap or joined the two fronts of art and business and opened as a cultural coffee house...So, we got this solid business, we have got people coming over the threshold with 5 euros in their pocket because they want tea and a scone and then we can tell them all about the cool stuff that we're doing.* (Etaoin Holahan, owner/manager of Fennelly's)

Having formally opened its doors as a cultural coffeehouse in 2017, Fennelly's has emerged as a permanent legacy of the arts activities on Bridge Street, which maintains an energetic presence for the arts on the street in a manner that helps spur its ongoing transformation. However, a viewpoint shared by all interviewees is that what is most pertinent to the continued rejuvenation of Bridge Street and Callan more broadly, is how Fennelly's serves as a welcoming meeting place for people of different interests and backgrounds that enhances the increasingly inclusive character of the town. As noted by one interviewee and echoed by several others, Fennelly's is a,

*...kind of space that's welcome and open, both to artists, but also to everybody else as well. I mean it is amazing, if you ever go to a gig in Fennelly's there'll be an extraordinary mix of people that night. Say if there's a band or something playing*

*there, there's this mad mix of very local, kind of the local Farmer's sons who would usually be in the pub. There's people from Camphill with intellectual disabilities. There's older people. There's the arty-farty brigade. People coming up from Kilkenny. So, there's this mad mix of people coming together in a social space.* (Interviewee A2)

For many of those interviewed this welcoming of difference further evidences how the arts in Callan serves as a vehicle for promoting the ethos of inclusivity advocated by the Camphill Movement. Indeed, as concluded by one interviewee,

*It's just a very creative scene and that's something really positive, I think. And it has no organisational or any other direct link to KCAT or Camphill or anything like that but it's part of this different culture.* (Interviewee A7)

In this sense, the fragility that characterises the Arendtian perspective on 'worldliness' has been protected in Callan through creating a permanent space wherein creative ideas are propagated in an environment welcoming of plurality. Here, people are free to,

*'...shine their fucking light, and to be able to talk to peers about it, and to be in a nurturing environment where they can create...to be able to lead their own lives with their own power and autonomy, and effect change within their community for positive.* (Interviewee A3)

Hence, the arts have emerged as a medium of inclusive placemaking in Callan that has, at least partially, helped re-envisage the perception of the town through striving to reverse a societal drift towards 'loneliness' and provide opportunities for the experience of 'worldliness'. This is consequent on efforts placed on creating openings for 'recognising each other as people rather than another group' (Interviewee A1), which as noted by one interviewee is a 'fairly deep rooted philosophical attitudinal thing that you can't really undo – you can't un-see it once you've started thinking about it' (Interviewee A5).

## Conclusions

Arendt's experience of totalitarianism during World War Two taught her to reject thinking that reduces people to categories of 'what-ness'. Hence, she spurned both communitarian and individualist responses to resolving questions on how best to conceive and enhance a positive experience of the public realm (Borren, 2010). For her, the greatest threat to this experience was the insidious growth of conformism that sought solace in worldviews which silence plurality by creating groups of people 'as though they were members of one family, each multiplying and prolonging the perspective of his neighbor' (Arendt, 1958: 58). As a redress, she highlighted the importance of plurality. By reconceiving the concept of 'loneliness' and unearthing its roots within society, she demonstrated how a positive experience of publicness demands a respect for difference that allows the uniqueness of each person to be recognised and valued. In sum, Arendt believed that it is only through resisting the tendency for homogenising people that a multiplicity of views can be given space to emerge in a manner that facilitates 'worldliness'. However, such phenomenological concepts

are not abstractions. Rather, they are descriptions attentive to how we relate in a world of others, and as such, how we can adjust such relations to alter our experience of this world.

Informed by the work of Arendt, this paper has shown how the particular orientation of the arts community in Callan has facilitated an experience of 'worldliness' by intentionally creating opportunities for welcoming the expression of peoples' distinctive 'who-ness'. Whilst this experience begins with the intangibility of human relations, it is through the co-presence of people openly engaging in space that fosters the transformation of an area's perception and physical appearance. As such, working on 'worldliness' in ways that reconstitute perceptions of identity can provide a method for placemaking. Indeed, what the case of the Camphill-infused artistic activities in Callan demonstrates is that creating a positive experience of place necessitates a phenomenology of inclusion wherein a deep respect for a diversity of perspectives forges a placemaking process of Arendtian world-making. Through this, a movement of space identity occurs from absence (loss of that which was) and exclusionary dominance (spaces for cars not people) towards ownership, positive affect and imaginative projection that transforms stigmatised spaces to places of civic engagement which are both physically attractive and socially rewarding to spend time in. In this sense, an Arendtian reading of arts activities in Callan reveals how the trajectory of an educational philosophy orientated towards inclusion can infuse placemaking activities in ways that profile the particularities of how the social and the physical are interwoven such that the uniqueness of place is inseparable from the uniqueness of the diversity of stories that are invested in its emergence. As illustrated in the case of the Bridge Street Project, such stories work dialogically between people and space in contouring the uniqueness of place. This is achieved by facilitating communal connection via spatial reconnection in a manner that stimulates enthusiasm and engagement in the imaginative creation of places that resonate with the past but look to the future. Through this, the conventionally conceived horizontal and vertical axes of communal and hierarchical governance regimes are reconfigured via the temporality of artistic activities. Here, a consistent progression from ephemeral initiatives through periodic gatherings and onto permanent projects evermore embeds an ethos of plural togetherness that leaves a lasting social and physical legacy as a vertical dimension operating through time to increasingly horizontalise difference into equality. By tracing the ongoing development of arts-related events in Callan, this paper draws attention to the value of temporally contextualising initiatives within the broader trajectory of evolving activities that profile the contingency of place as something made through developing social relations in space. As such, it shows how artistic initiatives can become nimbly interlaced with the broader social and economic processes in which they find themselves situated in ways that give volume to voices potentially muted by dominant discourses (Kwon, 2004).

Hence, an Arendtian reading of placemaking moves beyond calls for 'dialogue' (Till, 2014) towards a deeper reflection on the importance of world-making as a stimulant and consequence of creating and/or transforming the public realm into a commons that provides a shared space for the recognition and respect of multiple perspectives. This reading requires greater attention to the priority allocated in the ways we ask questions about attempts to

create and improve place, such that reasoning the mechanisms for 'how' placemaking should be done is inseparable from a focus on 'who' does it and 'why'. In this sense, an Arendtian interpretation of the arts activities in Callan suggest that placemaking should first be conceived as a normative social endeavour before physical and financial interventions are contemplated. Accordingly, from an Arendtian reading, placemaking should be thought of as an ethical enterprise concerned with mitigating the fragility of the 'world' by creating and consolidating a strong civic sensibility via attention to the art of inclusion.

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<sup>i</sup> There are various 'traditions' within phenomenology. These are broadly centred around trajectories set by the concerns of key philosophers in the field. Such concerns include issues of relational perception and understanding in the broad areas of: 'epistemology' (Husserl); 'ontology' (Heidegger); 'existentialism' (Sartre); 'ethics' (Levinas); 'hermeneutics' (Gadamer); and 'embodiment' (Merleau-Ponty). Indeed, as noted by Moran (2002:18), phenomenology is 'a fractured movement, and its inspiration often appears to run like an underground stream enriching the ground rather than as an explicit and self-confident movement in its own right'.

<sup>ii</sup> Arendt rejected the label of 'political philosopher', which she believed to be associated with metaphysical abstractions that paid scant attention to the role of experience (Young-Bruehl E. (2008) *Why Arendt Matters*, New Haven, Connecticut, U.S.A.: Yale University Press.).

<sup>iii</sup> Although she distinguishes between them, Arendt did not believe that ‘what’ we are (e.g. physically disabled male) is completely separable from ‘who’ we are (i.e. our uniqueness). She was fully aware of how the interplay between social context and ‘what’ we are influences ‘who’ we are. Arendt’s project was to resist a growing tendency to reduce the depth of the latter by way of the former.

<sup>iv</sup> Arendt termed such productive-consumptive activities as ‘labour’. She argued that, “The endlessness of the labouring process is guaranteed by the ever-recurrent needs of consumption; the endlessness of production can be assured only if its products lose their use character and become more and more objects of consumption, or if, to put it another way, the rate of use is so tremendously accelerated that the objective difference between use and consumption, between the relative durability of use objects and the swift coming and going of consumer goods dwindles to insignificance” (Arendt, 1958: 125).

<sup>v</sup> There is a sense here to which Arendt’s political phenomenology provides a theoretical antecedent to the critical theory of Axel Honneth on ‘recognition’ and Jurgen Habermas on ‘communicative action’, both of whom have acknowledged that her thinking informed their own.

<sup>vi</sup> Arendt is here referring to the intentional actualisation of something in the world that had previously existed in the mind(s) of the designer(s). She refers to this as ‘work’, which as argued by Seyla Benhabib is a phenomenological description of a type of experience rather than an empirical generalisation about what people actually do (Benhabib S. (2003) *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*, Lanham, Maryland, U.S.A.: Rowman & Littlefield.).

<sup>vii</sup> Arendt exhibits what Dana Villa terms ‘creative appropriations’ of Martin Heidegger’s phenomenological ontology, such that ‘Heidegger’s conception of *Dasein* as primordially both being-in-the-world and a being-with-others helped her to place worldliness and human plurality at the heart of human freedom rather than at the extreme margins’ (Villa D. (1999) *Politics, Philosophy, Terror: Essays on the Thought of Hannah Arendt*: Princeton University Press.: 76). However, as noted by Kattago, ‘while Heidegger tends to be solipsistic and orientated towards the self, Arendt is more interested in the relations of the self to others’ (Kattago S. (2013) *Why the World Matters: Hannah Arendt’s Philosophy of New Beginnings. The European Legacy* 18: 170-184.: 172).

<sup>viii</sup> This is reflective of Arendt’s broader suspicion of any form of philosophical essentialism, be it metaphysical (e.g. human rights) or empiricist (e.g. behavioural approaches in economics).

<sup>ix</sup> Arendt sometimes draws on the metaphor of birth to refer to this experience as ‘natality’, such that action is conceived as a the ‘actualization of the human condition of natality’ (Arendt, 1958: 178).

<sup>x</sup> The Ballytobin Camphill Community had purchased land in Callan in 1992 for the construction of a housing project to cater for Camphill residents who would have grown up in the Ballytobin Community. However, the need to respond to the specific and pressing artistic needs of a Ballytobin Camphill Community resident meant that work on establishing KCAT took precedence.

<sup>xi</sup> Workhouses were institutions that operated in Ireland from the early 1840s to the early 1920s. Should people not be able to support themselves they could come into the workhouse. Here they would undertake manual labour in exchange for basic food and accommodation.

<sup>xii</sup> This is Irish (Gaelic) for which an English translation reads ‘King’s River’.

<sup>xiii</sup> Most commonly referred to by interviewees as the ‘Bridge Street Project’.

<sup>xiv</sup> The premises also served - sometimes simultaneously - as a funeral home and grocery store.