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Mulhall, Henry (2024) Cultural constellations. [Show/Exhibition]

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Henry Mulhall

**CULTURAL
CONSTELLATIONS**

PELTZ
GALLERY

19 January - 13 March 2024

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Union Street was the centre of Plymouth nightlife and the home of many pubs and nightclubs. By 2006, most of the clubs were gone, and the street was left in almost total economic collapse. Stonehouse, which sits to the North of Union Street, is also socioeconomically deprived. The area accordingly acquired a negative image. Henry Mulhall's research focuses on 2010-2020, a decade within which the area has seen significant change. Key transformations include the foundation in 2012, of KARST, a contemporary gallery and artist's studios which opened just off Union Street and in 2014, Nudge, a community benefit society, which started engaging with many locations on Union Street (including former cinema-come-nightclubs, pubs and empty shops) by putting them to community use.

Participatory Diagrams: These artefacts were developed to research with others during the first COVID lockdown. Mulhall used a website called Graph Commons to visualise all the connections he could find using publicly available information on artists, arts organisations, community groups and funders that have a connection to Union Street. He then posted the diagrams to some of the people depicted on the graphs and asked them to edit, add, change, or mess up the diagram in whatever way they saw fit. The diagrams visually display a range of perspectives on the cultural ecosystem of Union Street and illustrate how participants responded to the research method itself.

Keyword booklets and wall posters: For these items, Mulhall extracted seven words from the diagramming process, either from the diagram interventions themselves or from conversations with participants about the diagram method. He then used the most frequently used words to filter through a section of arts policy documents ranging from 2010 to 2020, including Arts Council England strategies as well as Plymouth specific documents. By clustering together quotes that used the same keywords, Mulhall made a filter to disrupt how he read the language found in the chosen policy documents. The booklet also served as a facilitation tool for the subsequent focus groups. He worked with local Plymouth artist, printmaker and journalist Alan Qualtrough to hand print the booklets and posters using antique, reclaimed letterpress machines. For more information on Alan's work visit: www.alanqualtrough.com

Permissive Space (30 minutes): Film editing has been an important aspect of Mulhall's approach to facilitation, research, and analysis. *Permissive Space* documents conversations around what art and culture mean on Union Street, as well as a conversation about how to approach such a complex subject. Mulhall formed a group of five people who had been referenced most through the diagram process. They were then invited to meet for two focus groups and discuss various aspects of art, culture and community relating to Union Street and Plymouth generally. Both meetings were filmed, and *Permissive Space* is comprised of edited documentation from the two sessions. In the second, the group watched footage from the first, allowing the participants to start a process of analysis on the subjects discussed and to consider their own performances in the first meeting. Importantly, Mulhall's research approach was also under scrutiny.

Contextualising films

The exhibition also includes two contextualising films. The first is an archival news film circa. 1990 from the **Southwest Film and Television Archive (SWFTA)** collection held by The Box, Plymouth's city museum. In the video, we follow cameraman John Walmsley spending the night with the police on Union Street. Although shot a few years before Mulhall started going to clubs, it expresses the hedonistic and often tense atmosphere associated with the erstwhile Union Street nightlife. Mulhall came across the film through extended conversations with Adam Milford and Tony Davey, two curators based at The Box. Milford and Davey worked on *Plymouth After Dark*, a project that collected objects and captured people's memories to tell the rich and diverse story of Plymouth's nightlife. For more information on *Plymouth After Dark* visit:
www.theboxplymouth.com/past-projects/plymouth-after-dark

The second contextualising film is **BLVD** (2019), which comes from Plymouth-based filmmakers and community organisers Allister Gall and Dan Paolantonio known collectively as Imperfect Cinema. The pair began by organising open-access DIY film nights in 2010. *BLVD* stems from their ongoing Union Street based project *Home of Movies*. *BLVD* acts as a document of their time spent with people in an area experiencing high levels of urban development that does not represent the desires and needs of current and former residents. For more information on their work visit:
www.imperfectcinema.com

Henry Mulhall: 'Thanks to everyone who took part in my research but particularly Rachel Dobbs, Hannah Harris, Donna Howard, Gabi Marcellus-Temple and Hannah Slogget for their participation and support. I would also like to thank Lewis Rhodes, Clare Taylor, Mah Rana, Plymouth Athenaeum, Sophie Hope, Louise Owen, Bartek Dziadosz and The Derek Jarman Lab for their help in making Permissive Space. Thank you to Alan Qualtrough, Imperfect Cinema, Tony Davey, Nicolas de Oliveira, Nicola Oxley and Adam Milford and the Southwest Film and Television Archive for contributing work to this exhibition.'

Events & Exhibitions Producer Adam Castle

With thanks Birkbeck staff including: Arts Space Steering Committee; Customer Service Coordinators at Gordon Square; Estates and Facilities; College Secretariat; IT Services.

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