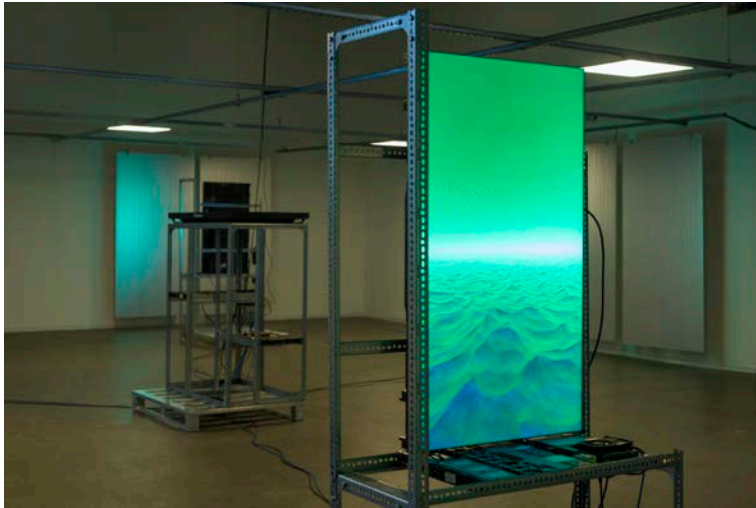


Kelly Murphy, Aidan, *'Interview with Yuri Pattison - Part Two'*, **this is tomorrow**, 27 February 2021

**this is tomorrow**  
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The Douglas Hyde Gallery, Trinity College, Dublin 2, Ireland

## Interview with Yuri Pattison – Part Two



Title : Yuri Pattison the engine (installation view), The Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin, 2020-2021

Website : <http://www.douglashydegallery.com/yuri-pattison>

Credit : Courtesy of the Artist; The Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin; mother's tankstation, Dublin and London. Photo credit: Louis Haugh

### Interview with Yuri Pattison – Part Two

The Douglas Hyde Gallery

17 December 2020 - 6 March 2021

Interview by Aidan Kelly Murphy

December 2020 saw the opening of 'the engine', Yuri Pattison's new exhibition in Dublin's Douglas Hyde Gallery. This was six months later than originally planned due to the closure of cultural institutions in Ireland during the pandemic.

Having spoken earlier in the summer, when Pattison presented a cross-section of the proposed work via an online screening, we reconvened in late December from our respective lockdowns in Dublin and London to continue our discussion. Pattison's 'the engine' features a new body of work highlighting the vast systems that create and shape the realities of modern existence. The show's title makes a nod to 'The Engine' from 'Gulliver's Travels' (1726) by Jonathan Swift, and the story of Lemuel Gulliver's encounter with a poverty-stricken society obsessed with technology, which does not seem to be advancing or improving the lives of its citizens.

The elongated timeframe and continuing impact of the pandemic has resulted in two distinct conversations, which will be published as two distinct texts. Below is a transcript from the second of these phone interviews from 23 December 2020.

**Aidan Kelly Murphy: How was the process of installing remotely?**

Yuri Pattison: A disassociating experience. I luckily visited the gallery for a second time in March ahead of the then scheduled opening in May, not knowing that I wouldn't be there for the eventual install. For a new body of work like this, realised with the space in mind, I would normally be there and take on many aspects

of the install myself. Doing it remotely and delegating was somewhat new for me. Fortunately, I had already anticipated remote install for pieces in the show which were intended to tour, the rest was filled in over many calls and with much patience from the team at Douglas Hyde.

**It's been several months since we first discussed this work and the potential for change that 2020 might promise. Looking back, do you think capitalism's ability to generate new realities in order to survive has been highlighted even more?**

It's still hard to say. In terms of timelines, I think we're yet to really see the worst of things as it takes a while for economic effects to take hold and shift things on a state level. We see indicators that countries, like the US, are nearing a tipping point. Even if there is a way through this, we will still have mass unemployment and huge shifts in industries which are only being felt now. The possibilities for true change are yet to be felt.

In 2020, we saw the full force of those who invest in and accumulate capital striving to protect it; this was visible in the way economic bailout packages in the US and UK were constructed, and their focus on stopping companies going under rather than adopting a universal basic income. They focused on getting back to work, being productive, and generating value. There was a huge effort into protecting that reality, protecting the status quo, and as such we're yet to see the real impact.

**We've seen the endurance and resilience these capitalist systems possess. 'the engine' points to these systems as being vast and pervasive, and not the simple binary choice of this system vs. that system.**

The extraordinary nature of these systems, and why they're so successful at total distraction, is that the people in power win either way - disaster capitalism funds win because situations, like the pandemic, are so catastrophic. There are people involved at very high levels of government in the UK that have huge amounts of capital in these funds and stand to benefit from the decisions they make. In the same way we see CEOs that are remunerated even when companies are tanking; there is a trickle-up effect where you have so much control that you reap the benefits no matter what the outcome is. More and more people are aware of this, but whether that will empower more people going forward is a totally different thing.

**The influence of the military on society is present in the exhibition, with references to multiple inventions, such as GPS and the internet, which began life as projects under the American military research agency, DARPA. Was your choice of the uRad monitor a way to promote a more holistic vision of military-style technology?**

The uRad monitor is a project influenced by the effects of Chernobyl and the idea of liberating information to give people access to power. That's the thing happening now with the leaks of information around COVID; the public knows information at the same time as the government and those in power are increasingly uncomfortable about this. I was interested in the uRad monitor project because it was something that could be picked up by both hobbyists and scientists, and its data is accessible regardless of if you've bought into the hardware. For me, it represents an interesting and empowering example of citizen-led tech.

**The uRad is an example of sharing information and removing the prevalence of information asymmetry, which can disrupt meaningful discussions. Was this an aspect you wished to highlight?**

The uRad creates data that directly affects aesthetic decisions within the work, whilst also being connected to and sharing data within the wider uRad network. This gives the work a dual purpose - it comments on the fact that we have this incredible potential and access to information, whilst creating its own reality and commentary on what does and does not exist. 'the engine' looks at a much longer history, tracing back in time to instances and situations that have impacted the reality we experience now, like time standardisation, and comparing the parallels that exist between them in order to highlight them not as separate events, but as a continuous timeline.

**'the engine' pokes quite hard at the standardisations that exist in modern life which often have their roots in empires. Is this a criticism of standardisation or a criticism of the lack of discussion around how and why standardisation occurs?**

More the latter. In the show I'm thinking about what shapes the reality we exist in and why, and also who controls that reality. In the last few months, people have begun to question the perception of time and how and what they spend it on. What seems like really simple decisions, like aligning time zones, have practical and logistical implications, and can be hugely motivated by geopolitical motives.

'the engine' as a title alludes to something that is inhuman, that exists outside of nature - such as pegging time to an arbitrary point in south London - and can have unnatural effects on the human body. These systems are hugely problematic. They push people to work across time zones, outside of their natural time. This is something that is only going to get worse with the pandemic because people are spending huge amounts of time at home staring into virtual spaces, working hours dictated by labour demands. Workers' rights, such as the short-time movement, have been constantly eroded and there have been no adequate replacements that acknowledge the current conditions.

**Projects like the atomic clock are about overriding how we normally process time through sunsets and sunrises - creating a system that is perfectly set-up to move beyond the natural world.**

We constantly shift in and out of different realities. My interest in the atomic clock surrounds its nature as being too perfect; it could be argued that it goes beyond the level of accuracy that is needed because the movement of the globe within the solar system is not perfect. Once we become aware of issues like this we have to make decisions about what is more accurate; should we fix nature to match this artificial structure? It raises questions about how we consider these constructs.

**Walking around the gallery feels like being inside a giant sculpture or a giant supercomputer, bringing to mind Alan Turing and early supercomputers. Does this presentation serve as a metaphor for the modern world?**

Much of this has to do with sound. I envisioned that the gallery space should resonate with the silent frequencies that control our modern world, like the sound waves coming directly from the chip-scale atomic clock - a piece of infrastructure used within satellites, the GPS network, military drones, data centres etc. The other audible aspects are the web servers running the generative video elements in the exhibition. They are similarly pieces of critical modern infrastructure: the connected tissue of all the mechanisms that keep our world functioning so it appears as one massive system, one massive machine. I wanted to situate the audience within that.

**After my visit, I began to think about engines that have run the world, like the steam engine during the Industrial Revolution. You touch on colonialism in the exhibition's accompanying text, noting how contemporary life is mimicking it. How pertinent do you feel it is that we embrace the past in order to inform our future?**

Within any exhibition, I look to connect different ideas with different degrees of information that open connections to wider political structures. I'm interested in 'The Engine' in 'Gulliver's Travels' because it is a narrative engine, a machine for the automatic artificial generation of ideas. Engines from the first Industrial Revolution focused on the production and movement of tangible goods. Our current Industrial Revolution is all about the creation, processing and movement of data, which sees more speculative concepts like the creation of entirely new realities. I want to investigate the implications of that while pointing back to something written 300 years ago and finding the parallels with today as a form of journey for the audience.

One of the hopes was to interrogate this as we don't know what the implications will be of blurring the boundaries between real life and these new realities. 'The Engine' points towards broader timelines. Zooming out we need to understand the wider implications and the fact that a lot of these decisions are being interrogated on very tight timelines. Previously battles were fought over issues like securing the 8-hour work day and we see that has begun to entirely collapse recently. Our battles now are in relation to these new realities and who shapes them, who is in charge. My hope for the show was to open up narratives and give the viewer distance to consider their own presence in these realities.