Transcript

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Mark Burry

Good morning, everybody. We'll begin. So welcome to the Speakeasy on how smart data is shaping our identities. And first thing I'll do is acknowledge that we're having our Speakeasy on the lands of the Wurndjeri language group of the Kulin Nation, and I wish to acknowledge them as traditional owners. And I would like to pay my respects to elders past, present, and emerging, and the aboriginal elders of other communities who may be here today.

Now, the idea of the Speakeasy is to take us through our four programs, and to consider at least our four programs for the Institute. We going to have four sessions. Each of the programs has been asked to bring a provocation that would, perhaps, steer a major project next year. And we're going to begin with Jenny and the future spaces for living.

The main driver for this is the Institute, which is a virtual Institute positioning itself as a collective of thinkers in the urban space from across the entire university. That means that we actually represent 65 discipline areas from hard core engineering through to the softer social sciences. They're all part of our Institute.

And next May, we hope to inaugurate what we think might be the world's first digital pinup space. And this is an impression of it here. A digital pinup space is an environment where everybody can put their work up at once. So instead of what we're doing now, the sequence of images on a PowerPoint, everybody who's got something to say and can visualize it in some way, which is basically data, can put it up on the screen and have a conversation across the work.

This is very important because we need a new type of dialogue with the people who we make decisions for. So everybody who's going to be on the front today is an expert in an area, and you're all experts possibly in the same area or another area. But at it's a Speakeasy, so we want to get a conversation going. It's to prototype how we might hold conversations in a space like this where experts can have an opportunity to explain to those of who are affected by the decisions that they make what is expertise in their domain? What does it look like? How does it operate?

And hopefully, get more credibility for what they have to say. And at the same time, those people who are being affected by the decisions get an opportunity to say what they need, what their view is. And so that it's actually participating around a problem area or a challenge rather than simply engaging with it.

So without further ado, I will invite Jeni who is leading the first session. But I haven't actually even introduced our principal guest which is Nicholas Gruen from Lateral Economics. Described by an eminent politician as the foremost public intellectual, which I think it's a very nice label to have. And Nicholas is CEO of Lateral Economics, and he is on our advisory board and has been from the beginning. And he makes a wonderful contribution. I think the Lateral Economics is one thing, but just

lateral-- as a lateral thinker is what we love about having you engage with us, and always count on Nicholas to find another way of looking at the same thing that we thought we'd got pretty well nailed.

So that's how we're going to proceed today. Thank you. Jeni.

Jeni Paay

OK, good morning, everyone. Welcome to the M Pavilion, and welcome to this lovely Melbourne weather. We still have seats down the front as usual. Oh hi, Andy. So anybody wants to come and sit down, please do.

So my group is talking about increasing participation in the city in terms of why bother talking if we don't think anyone is listening. So it's the old thing of if the tree falls in a forest and nobody hears it, did the tree really fall? So if you have things to say and you want to say them and nobody seems to be listening or you're not sure how to make people listen, then we need to talk about what the ways we have as citizens to feed back information about the Smart City.

So citizen participation is at the center of what our Smart City Research Institute is about. And we define a Smart City as one that utilizes the information and communication technology to provide innovative and efficient services for positive citizen experience. So on the panel today, I have Simone who is a co-design expert. I have Chris, who is a data visualization expert. So we're going to talk today about how do we combine something that's qualitative, like co-design where people come and they talk and they give their opinions and we get their opinions through different activities.

And Chris's job, which is taking big data or all the kind of data that's being collected quantitatively, so measures of when we ride our bikes, where our cars drive, all that kind of stuff. How do we visualize that in a way that people can actually comment on it sensibly, or they know what's happening? So Chris's job is to help us understand all of that data in a way that's much more human than a bunch of numbers.

So what we're going to do today is play with those ideas about how we can use co-design and data visualization to help citizens participate in the future city development. OK, I'm going to hand over to whoever's in charge.

Chris Fluke

Well, good morning, everyone. Oh that's loud, isn't it? I'll step back. I just want to make a couple of opening comments about data visualization, the good stuff and the bad stuff and the potential. This is John Snow. And some of you might know the story of John Snow and the Game of Throne fans, not that John Snow. This is a more serious and important John Snow.

He was the father of something called epidemiology. He was also one of the fathers of antiseptics and washing your hands, and all these other things to prevent disease because he was very concerned about cholera. And in 1854, there was a major cholera epidemic in London. And this is the sort of information that John Snow had available to him. He was really trying to understand what was causing cholera to spread through communities. Some people thought it was vapours, and the smell was all that took to get cholera around.

John Snow said, no, there's something else going on. I think it's about cleanliness and it might be a waterborne disease. So here's a table of data. This is as-- my background actually is in astronomy. And so looking at numbers is part of what we do. We gather numbers, but it doesn't tell you the whole story. Because what you can see is that around September, the numbers get bigger. But what's that actually telling us about cholera?

And so John Snow did something that no one had really done until that point with data in quite the same way, he visualized it. He took a map of London, and he marked down the houses where deaths from cholera had been reported. So each of these little horizontal lines in here represents a death from cholera. And so if we zoom in quite some way you can see there's a big clustering of people near the centre there near a location in Broad street.

And he worked out that what was going on from this visualization is that there was a well that was contaminated in Broad Street. And using that data, he had to then advocate to the counsel, take the handle off the pump so that people stop using the water. And the counsel didn't listen to him straight away, but eventually they said, OK, John, we'll take the handle off. They took the handle off, and the deaths from cholera decreased.

So by visualizing the data, we've got an example of where a citizen is actually influencing policy in order to get a better outcome for people. But the problem with visualizing is that, as humans, from an early age we're trained to see things in data. And one of my favourite words is nephelococcygia. If you take away nothing else from this morning, nephelococcygia is seeing patterns in clouds. There's a lot of them out there.

But when I look at this, what I see is I see my dog jumping through the air. And you might see that, too. Because well, you don't know my dog looks like. But your visual system is trying to make sense of information, and it can jump to a conclusion that's wrong.

And there are other crazy things that our brains do that allow us to see things that are there. To see information emerge from noise, and sometimes you can do it and sometimes you can't. And so if I show you this picture and I ask you the question, put your hand up if you saw the Dalmatian, OK? So some of you could not see the Dalmatian. So I'm going to do something to you that will change you forever.

I'm going to show you the Dalmatian. And once I have shown you, and if you're then able to see it, you will never unsee the Dalmatian, OK? So here it is. There's the head of the Dalmatian, there's its legs, there's back legs, there's the body. It's like it's drinking from some water at the ground.

So anyone who couldn't see the Dalmatian before, can any of you now see the Dalmatian? Great. So you will never unsee that Dalmatian. And so now, actually, I've closed your mind to other interpretations of that data, OK? And that's where I wanted to leave my little introduction.

Simone Taffe

Thanks. So what we're going to do today to get started is do a co-design, a participatory activity with you all. It's going to be pretty short, but we want you guys to do it all. We're going to get you sorted. But to start, we're going to model a co-design activity. So just to show you, even in your offices or businesses or you might like to do something like this.

So I've got two bags here. One has provocations and one has random items. It's all very random what you find in your house or your recycling bin you can play with. So I'm going to ask Nicholas, if you could pick out a question. And if you could pass that to everyone, and everyone take one of those out of the bag. Everyone on the-- yes. Yes start with that direction. Just choose one. Yes, thank you.

What have you got? Yeah, it really probably should be a see through bag, but you just have to make do. You've got one. You've got one. OK, so Nicholas if you could read the question out. And then, we're all going to look at the question from the perspective of what we have in our hand. This is a trigger, like a design trigger, and it helps us to force a perspective.

Nicholas Gruen

OK, so the question is are we pre-interpreting data before displaying it? Which is exactly what I was thinking when Chris was talking.

Simone Taffe

Do you want to start with your prompt with your item? Like a trigger--

Nicholas Gruen

Well—

Simone Taffe

We'll come back to you. You can sum up. So Chris.

Chris Fluke

I'll make a start. So I have the strainer here, which I think is a perfect analogy for that question. Because when we are presented with a great deal of data, we do have to do some straining. We have to make some decisions about what we might use versus what we might leave behind. Not all data is good data. So we're either bringing a judgement beforehand about a quality issue, or we're saying, well, I won't do any straining at all. I'll just take everything, regardless of quality, and see what happens.

So I think if we're not-- there needs to be a little bit of straining that happens. But I think if your holes in your strainer are too big and you let too much stuff through, that perhaps then you might not be making the right decisions from that data. So that's my interpretation.

Nicholas Gruen

You've also got to design your strainer. So your strainer is straining for size. And you might not want to strain for size. And the one comment I wanted to make on your presentation, which was very interesting, was that you said that he was the first guy to do a data visualization. But the first picture you showed was also a data visualization, that was just the table. That's a data visualization too.

So we're always classifying. We can't perceive until we classify. And therein lies the rub because we might-- in classifying it one way, we're not classifying it in another.

Simone Taffe

So I suppose I've got this rock or this stone, and I could think we're way down with data where there's just way too much and we don't know what to do with it. So it's like a rock or noose around our head. We're way down. Or I'll leave it at that.

Mark Burry

Well, so I got a turtle. And it's suppose because it's early in the morning I was able to process it very quickly, and realize it's a turtle. But then I noticed that it's actually covered in code data. And the interesting thing is I can't read this data. I don't have the skills. Even though it's early in the morning and I'm literally at my sharpest, I'm not able to interpret this yet.

So my message would be just because the data's sitting in front of you and it's visualized doesn't mean to say you'd get it. But like the case of cholera. OK, so they worked out that it was coming from the well, but you never explained what was in the well that made the water cholerific, if that's the word.

Nicholas Gruen

Well, I've got a rope. So I'm a little troubled as to what I'm supposed to make of this rope. I just look at what these other people have done. And Simone talked about being weighed down by a rock, and you can certainly be tangled up in a rope. So that's about the best I can do.

You can be tangled up in the red tape of data and all that sort of stuff.

Simone Taffe

Perfect.

Nicholas Gruen

Another question. Yeah.

Simone Taffe

Do we want to swap our items, and then we'll just--

Nicholas Gruen

I want the turtle. That's the most interesting thing--

Mark Burry

We all want the turtle, Nicholas. You have the turtle.

Nicholas Gruen

I do.

And the question is, may I have the envelope please? How do you feel about consenting to the terms and conditions of data about you? Well, I'll go first with my turtle. I'm not sure that I'm interpreting the object and the question-- the relation between those two things correctly. But what that immediately brings to mind is the absolute hopelessness and helplessness of not the privacy issues, but the cognitive issues of being shown 10 pages of consent, which of course, I mean-- hands up anyone who read a consent form in the last month.

And yet, entire legislative apparatus-- of course, someone will be able to come up with the four letters. I can't do this. But in the EU, they've just come up with a huge new data regime introduced over the last six months. You couldn't help noticing being taken through more farcical consent processes.

And everything is built on that utter fiction that we should be taken through a consent. Incredible. That's what my turtle said, by the way.

Chris Fluke

So I've got the clothes peg here. And I certainly don't read the terms and conditions. I don't have the time or the mental interest in wading through some of these statements. But when I go to a website and I make a decision myself to click yes I consent, that's a little bit different to when I come into an

environment where I might be monitored and my behaviour might be followed. And that's important information for informing how we might improve the design of cities.

But I'd kind of like to be able to put a peg on myself, and a little label that says, don't track me today. I don't wish to be followed. But that's a really interesting-- how do we do that in practice? How do I actually ensure that I am giving my consent to be monitored, or how do I make sure there are times when I am happy to contribute that information?

If I want to use this great space here, and it's of value to M Pavilion to know how many people are here, great. Track me. I'm very willing to do that. But if there are other things that I'm doing that I perhaps don't want to be monitored doing, not necessarily for nefarious reasons, how do we sort of peg that information on ourselves as citizens in this space?

Nicholas Gruen

Can I develop that a bit? Because I want to challenge you and say that I've never heard a more neoliberal framing in my life. So what I mean by that is that you've just cast yourself as the individual, and your way to liberate yourself from these problems is to exercise an individual choice. And haven't we already had an illustration in what we were saying about consents that that's unlikely to work very well, I think.

And also, when I think of, say, surveillance cameras. One of the things that a surveillance camera is trying to do is it's trying to replicate the-- seen in terms of it's benign-- if we are to think-- I mean, these are often put there with benign intent, OK? And they are trying to create a space which is safe, basically.

And then, we start talking about opting out of this safe space. Well, it seems to me there is a kind of a mixture of metaphor. And what we have to sort out is what in this situation, what in this story makes sense to be spoken about as an individual thing. And what does it make sense to speak about as a collective thing.

And neoliberalism, with which I have a complex relationship. I'm not using it as a boo word necessarily. But neoliberalism regards these things as pretty-- is often offering itself as if these things are pretty unproblematic and maximizing individual choice is pretty unproblematically a good thing. And I think that's-- it's incoherent as far as consent forms on data is concerned because we all ignore it and we all know we ignore it and we all go through the farce all the time.

And when we talk to our parliamentary representatives, we find ourselves talking about our individual rights and we end up back where we started and we're rather unsatisfied with the whole thing. But we ought to be at least pretty unsatisfied with ourselves.

We're all participating in a dysfunctional dialogue. Now, what the answers are I'm not too sure. But anyway, there's some interesting questions. I think they're interesting anyway.

Simone Taffe

That's wonderful. Thank you. Yeah, I've got a piece of sandpaper. So I would think clicking yes to the terms and conditions, yeah you just do it. But then, the consequences are irritating, and they irritate me like a piece of sandpaper. They bug me and they rub me up the wrong way. Because then I find out that my-- because I've bought a ticket to the cinema, they're looking at every single other thing I've bought and making a persona of me and targeting me. And then I feel like going back to cash. So all this data that they get from one little thing you buy doesn't-- it's irritating.

Mark Burry

Well, I've got a piece of rope that's 47 centimetres long. And that's the point because it's actually a finite length, but it's actually from a potentially infinite element. So when I sign the consent, it encourages me to think that I'm in that 47 centimetres. That that's the whole story. I personally have never read one. I've dabbled, as you do. I wonder what this is really saying.

I have different degrees of irritation. I like the ones that are full frontal, and just say, do you consent or not at the top. And then, there's a squillion pages you may or may not-- just like it knows you're not going to read it. And I get very irritated by the ones-- I think Apple make you literally troll through a lot of it to get to the bottom. So therefore, you've been sort of implicated. Well, you must have read it because you got to the bottom of it.

What I find really interesting is how this stuff is evolving so fast. So one of my favourite thought experiments was to think about when they brought out RF ID tagging, I thought, OK, so the wrong kind of government or possibly the right kind of government, depends on your disposition, could insist that everybody has a tag. And so that nobody would ever be able to say that they weren't somewhere if they were. And you think, well, what are the positives? Well, it would be very difficult for criminals to have a perfect alibi.

On the other hand, crimes of passion are not going to be--

Nicholas Gruen

You're in favour of them, are you?

Mark Burry

Well, I'm not so close to them. But I haven't studied them particularly. But they happen.

Well, I think that if a crime of passion is unlikely to be stopped by-- whoops, you've got the hatchet out, whatever it is. But maybe I shouldn't because of the tag. Anyway, the point is this is a pointless observation because in the meantime, it's nothing to do with these tags because they've got this facial recognition that's going to happen. And I'm curious to know that when the government says, we're not going to use it for-- they'll probably qualify it. They're not going to use it for something. It's the 47 centimetres. But they'll be using it for something else.

And one of the most scary things is-- I think, I'm pretty-- who thinks that cashless society is great? Because I did. I thought it's fantastic. You just go on the phone-- my watch now. But the chilling fact is that everything I spend my money on is going to be known. So yeah, my personal habits, which I choose not to hide. But if I did, they would be certainly found. Insurance companies could really make hay with this data.

So I think this is a very interesting time for us because I don't think the genie can go back in the bottle. We can have as much legislation as we like, but we're going to be very public people.

Nicholas Gruen

No, I'm not very good at wrapping things up. I mean, I agree. And genies don't go back in bottles. And this stuff is coming at us very fast. And like you mark on-- I'm just very sceptical that this stuff about well, we'll legislate what purposes something can be used for. That's not even a very coherent way of putting things. There will be immediate boundary questions. So that's one of the things we're heading towards is a surveillance society. The Chinese government seems to be very keen on that and moving towards it very fast. And we're moving towards it more surreptitiously with corporations and

governments. Not our sort of single eye, but yes, it's certainly got some things about it that don't seem too good to me.

Mark Burry

However, this is a condition of the city. Because if you think about village life, that was always-- it's not like, as a human condition, we're not used to being surveilled. So it's not like it has to be disastrous. It's just that we've gotten used to being anonymous in the city and that's going to be taken away from us.

Nicholas Gruen

Well, one of the things, and I'll probably say this more in other sessions, but one of the ways-- so the where I head for these things is to reinvent culture. So if these things are going to be there, I want things like citizen juries to make the decisions about these borderline cases and what's OK and what's not OK. Not somebody at the top of a hierarchy of sovereignty, which is a hierarchy of preferment.

So that's how we make our decisions now. So if you ask the question, is a piece of university research ethical, then that will go to an ethics committee. And that ethics committee will be full of professionals, and those professionals will interpret an apex document which comes from the NH and NRC. Someone can tell me what those letters stand for, but I know some of them.

And I don't trust any of that. Because all of those professionals will be thinking about their jobs. They'll be all kinds of things about it. And I feel much more comfortable as the barons in 1215 did with King John running amok in England when they signed Magna Carta with the idea of a jury. An idea of my peers-- if a overwhelming majority of my peers think something's wrong, I'll go with that. And otherwise, leave me alone.

Jeni Paay

OK, that's a perfect segue way into our next activity. So everybody stand up because we're getting a bit cold now. Wiggle around. Get a bit warm. OK, so my next-- who's got the clicker?

Simone Taffe

So we we've just modelled using triggers, using designerly thinking to bounce off an idea. Now, we're going to ask you three questions, and we're going to use designerly methods with us as people rather than things this time. So a different activity to answer this question. And if you wouldn't mind, we would like to-- this one's on a continuum. So the binary. So well, we just have hands up for this one. What are we doing? No, corners. Yeah. So should people be involved in data decision making? Everyone so leading from your citizen jury like this is a very crude basic method but we've only got five minutes to see the idea through. Everyone who says yes, go to Jenny's camp. And everyone who says no, go to Chris's camp. And we'll get an idea of the volume of the data here.

Nicholas Gruen

And anyone who thinks that the question isn't specific enough and don't know should join me.

Simone Taffe

Exactly.

Questioning the question, you go to Nick. He questions the question.

We need a photo of this? Has someone got a camera?

There's "No" over there.

So what do you think, Nick? Citizen jury. I think we're winning here, although you've got quite a lot of in between, and not very many for no. So if we were Brexit. Great. OK, next question. Clicker.

This time, we're going to go in a line all the way from the coffee machine all the way down to that end. And when should this happen in the process? If you want to be involved in the decision making, should it be at the very beginning, like before the questions even formed, or do you want to be asked-- tested-- focus group testing. And all the things that people do along the way. When should do you want to be asked along the continuum? Depends on the question. You're with Nick again.

And we've done this deliberately. Are the questions confusing? What do you think? Can you answer it? Where along the line?

Nicholas Gruen

What do we want? We're not sure. When do we want it? Sometimes.

Simone Taffe

Exactly.

Chris Fluke

Jeni, I wonder if anyone's feeling a bit of multiple personality and wondering if they need to split themselves off, and not just be in one spot? Has anyone got that feeling?

Simone Taffe

Maybe we could have a bit of a moving data then? Like you go here, then you go there, and you go there. Move around. OK, so I think that shows a picture of-- which is interesting. The questions are confusing, or you don't know where to be, or you want to be in two places at once. So that's visualizing that.

And our third question. How would you like to have your say? And this time we got four corners. So each of us are going to go in corners of this lovely square architectural shape. So do you want to-- do you like to lobby your local politician? Use a facility like the IHUB? Send an SMS like more of the quick tweet or text or SMS using a citizen app that was designed, or go to a town hall discussion?

Chris Fluke

It's worth-- perhaps you can also help to interpret this for us as well. That if you don't want to just sit in one camp, but you feel like you belong in the other camps, then go and stand near a boundary or an intersection of the quadrant. You don't need to go straight into one camp as your only decision.

Jeni Paay

I have blankets, almost.

Simone Taffe

I've got nobody. No one wants to lobby a politician anymore.

That's gone. There you go. That's interesting. Isn't it.

Who's got the most? And what have you got, the IHUB? Maybe people don't know about it. So if it's unfamiliar, it's not popular. And Chris, use an app. The modern--

Chris Fluke

It's my personality they're attracted to I think rather than that. It's interesting though from an app as being just-- I just quickly do it, and then it's done. Nicholas, you worry that that's a quick solution?

Nicholas Gruen

Well, it depends. I mean, all of these things. They're not really mutually exclusive, any of these things. So it's a bit tricky. Some things should be done as quickly as possible. Other things, not so much.

Simone Taffe

Do we want to hear from somebody in this crowd, since it's the most popular, why you chose this? Anyone?

Audience Member 1

This is a shortcut for some sort of technological interaction with whoever makes the decisions. So sending off your vote or your opinion, your preferences.

Simone Taffe

Yeah, cool. And I can see a few young people here too, so maybe the youth are more favourable to the apps.

Audience Member 2

Look, I don't feel like any of these options are really what I would go for. I'll be honest. I feel like the effort is useful in the sense that it allows for discussion, and allows for you to have some other perspectives potentially, if you can see it like a discussion board.

So that's what I'm drawn to, but it's slightly more accessible perhaps than a town hall discussion where you have to be there at a certain time and day and place. But I think the limitations are that it's probably anonymous. So sometimes people comment in ways that they wouldn't in person. Yeah, and it can be really quite open to a lot of bias or editing. So I think there's some limitations there.

I guess I want a platform where there is actually an informed discussion, but that is more accessible and inclusive.

Audience Member 3

Mostly of the engagement I've done, if you don't start off with an artefact it goes nowhere. So town halls usually just explode. So with the IHUB, you're getting that nice mix of experts, but they're also open to being shot down and then the cross disciplinary discussion is usually pretty good as well. So I would start with the artefact and then advance the discussion that way.

Jeni Paay

Do you have something to say?

Because you're standing neutrally.

Audience Member 4

Well, I think the thing is that, like every discussion, you have to have an entry point. So depending on what the discussion is, I'm going to want to know more about it. That's why I'm here. I'm not here-- I don't have a badge. So I don't come as anyone, luckily. I used to work in government, I've run my own business, all those sort of things. But in this particular sphere, if this is truly democracy, I can stand here and listen without a preform view.

And I think that, to me, when we start to go to an either or, the colour and light and shape disappears. And more particularly, it doesn't take account of my entry point, which might be precluded because I'm not able or I can't read that language or whatever. So I just think that the binary nature this is far too simplistic. And the work I've done has always been about actually respecting humanity as extremely complex.

Jeni Paay

Thank you.

OK, so thank you very much for participating in our citizen participation session. So any opinions that you have may be a good start. If anything has come out of this talk, or any of the things that we've said, if that's got you going on something you would like to comment on, then we've given you the Twitter handle here for the Lord Mayor. So please tweet her, even if just to say the M Pavilion is a fantastic venue, and we need to have more of it and more of these kind of discussions happening here, or something like that.

So please send your opinions, and thank you very much for having us. And we now change over to the next group.

[APPLAUSE]