UNIVERSITY OF DUNDEE
EXPLORING THE DIGITAL CITY
TAPE 5 1-2

MALE: To exist as a community.

LORENS: But we are always buying in to them and trying to get out of them.

MALE: Well yes and Nick's pointed about being ambivalent in the sense that we know the advantages of Tesco's having our Clubcard details because it means that half the store is stocked with the stuff that we want to buy. But we also resent the fact that they know what we buy every week and what is in our cupboard and all those sorts of things. But it is bigger than that too in the sense that I imagine that going back to Roman Empire there were those people that saw all the benefits that the great empire of Rome gave in terms of road systems and town planning principles. The great law system of the Roman Empire. But they also wanted to run away into the countryside and be themselves at the same time. We all do. We want to be part of the city but we like to go out into the countryside, be somewhere where we are not part of a paradigm that has been set by somebody else.

MALE: We will take our GPS with us and our mobile phones in case we get lost in the Highlands.

MALE: We all have a romantic desire to be without all those things as well. We would love to be able to throw away our mobile phones and our credit cards and not use the internet because we all know that these things are and on the other side of those coins if you forgive the expression are that we lose some of our freedom.

FEMALE: I don't know how true that is of the common generation. I mean certainly for me I am probably on the cusp and I kind of have a little bit that wants to do that and another bit that goes nah I would never want to do all that stuff. And I look at my kids and wonder how much that is going to mean anything to them. I mean my generation you didn't- going to the country was nice but then you couldn't get the Sunday papers. You know so for them the internet might be the same thing.

MALE: I think that ambivalence if part of our human psyche isn't it? And I suspect that some thing goes back thousands of years. It is not something that we are talking about as if it is something that belongs to now. But I suspect it's something that is, you know we even living in a Celtic village, we have got the round houses and we have got the paling that surrounds where we live. But sometimes you want to go off into the woods wouldn't you and be apart from it. So that sort of.

FEMALE: I don't know the wolves would have got you then. You might have stayed in the village.

FEMALE: Also I am a bit suspicious of these kinds of arguments that suggest that these kinds of technologies are taking away our freedom. There is just as much, one could construct an argument just exactly on the other side and say that these technologies are giving people a lot of freedom that they didn't have before. And the argument that sort of suggests that a lack of freedom is associated with technology is itself harking back to this kind of romantic Rousseauesque sort of idea of freedom as associated with the state of nature and all this kind of thing which, you know surely nobody believes. So the way in which we think about freedom is kind of bound up with a certain …

MALE: No, I am not talking about it in those terms. I don't think that is the right response. Charlotte had an interesting point about the [inaudible] thing downstairs which was the place where you could be outside of the gaze. I think that is a very interesting point. That is not necessarily – whether you tie it up with issues about how you define freedom and then, I mean I think I have read somewhere about freedom is actually the lack of restriction. Freedom is actually a negative. It's when you haven't got the restrictions of things. But that idea of escaping from the gaze or escaping from the frame, you escape- that is one of the words that seems to been in here all the time is this screen and the frame. But we also, I mean I thought it was very interesting when the camera was going around, the different responses that people had to the camera being put in the frame. Some people started just talking to the camera as if the rest of us weren't here. Somehow the camera took on a primary importance. I mean he hasn't said anything. Is he a real person?

FEMALE: What I am sensing is sort of that freedom doesn't need to be- why think of freedom as necessarily escaping the frame. I mean the point that was made over here is an interesting one. For instance the use of CCTV in all sorts of urban environments in fact makes people feel more free, especially women to go about their business because of the sense that there is greater safety in being watched and being framed. And in the whole society being framed. And so it can, it is just to kind of break down the necessarily kind of link between sort of this idea of being digitised. And somehow losing something of humanity or losing freedom. Somebody said some point that all this technology makes us lose our humanity. Well I am not convinced about that. I mean I would like to see more. I worry that there is a kind of romanticism that goes on about this kind of thing.

MALE: No I agree. I think there is a point to make that it is ultimately who is in control of this technology. What are the sort of ideological framework in which it is used. And the point that Nick was making earlier which kind of relates to something that Naomi Klein says in her book *No Logo* which is we see this huge explosion of and taking over of like [inaudible] image of Time Square, taking over the public domain by corporate sort of institutions that now so

dominates whichever space we go into, somehow we are positioned as a consumer if nothing else. So in that sense you know it is acting upon us. It has got a determining effect. You know there is always two sides to it.

FEMALE: I think it is more to do with, I think the thing about the romantic version of freedom is more to do with a very western sense of the individual and it is very important for us to be very individualistic and very sort of depending only on ourselves. All this kind of surveillance technology and the reason that the identity card is kind of aggravating me a bit is to do with a sense of not quite being sure what community I am buying into. You know I don't actually as you were saying, I don't have a problem particularly with this sense that I am part of a community and my role is as a social being, not as an individual. And I am quite happy to buy in to forms of surveillance and forms of control and forms of sort of technological intervention that I feel comfortable that I kind of understand the limits of and the community that I am buying in to. And when I feel nervous is when all of a sudden out of the blue when I go to replace my bus pass which was previously part of a local authority community and that somehow felt safe. And now I am part of a Scotland wide community on this mysterious database and all these other things are involved. That starts to aggravate me and that starts to make me feel concerned.

MALE: So what if your details now go on to some super computer that is buried in the middle of the Nevada Desert or something like that that's sort of stored …

FEMALE: Well I am already on the big one in Salt Lake city that has defined me as a Mormon.

MALE: No, I am asking whether you, are you concerned about that?

FEMALE: Yes I am. That is exactly what I am saying. It is to do with the sort of get the sense of I could understand it at local authority level because that feels like a community I am comfortable with. I buy in to my local authority. You know I take part in local politics and I send my kids to the local school and all the rest of it and I pay my taxes. And when it gets to a nation state level I am starting to get anxious and if it gets anything bigger than that.

MALE: But can you put your finger on why you become anxious when it gets to the nation or the international level?

FEMALE: It is probably something quite primal to do with that, you know the number, what was it? 126 people of the optimum village size or something. It is probably something that goes back to that. When it's, I mean I live in Edinburgh so when it is at the city of Edinburgh level it feels like I know that space and I can understand that space. The nation of Scotland as a space I don't, as a space that kind of houses a community I don't really understand.

MALE: Doesn't it also include something to do with the fact that you suspect that somebody might be able to do something sinister with that information?

FEMALE: Yes that is it. It is to do with if it's happening in Edinburgh, well you know I feel like I have an immediate comeback because I can find the buggers out, you know quite quickly. Or I can go and batter on my local councillors door and say hey, which I have actually done. And he didn't know about it either which was really interesting.

MALE: Is that more to do with comfort zones and it goes back to what I was talking about, these digital comfort zones in the sense that we like to be compartmentalised and have some pigeon holes where we can slot things in to. It's when it becomes outside our control that it becomes a bit more anxious inducing. I mean I think it is quite simple. I think we are just in some sort of perverse digital version of Richard Dawkins natural, selfish gene you know natural selection process but within a digit domain where we are being, you know we have got the good and the bad. We have got the large institutions that hold this data or control this data and we have to accept the good with the bad in that sense but it becomes a process of natural selection in the sense that it is the ones with the most money or the most investment or the most invested interest that actually control that natural selection in that sense. I think there is an interesting sort of route in which this is all sort of going. And I think it is the same within the physical environment. We are dealing with entities which sort of have the sort of natural route of selection process which govern how things develop, how cities develop, how buildings develop. And we are dealing at a macro scale, at a micro scale as well. And it is a question of how all those layers actually stack one on top of the other. And how we data mine all that information. And deal with that information which is what we are sort of trying to deal with. And maybe that information overload which is causing some anxieties I think.

FEMALE: I think just to add to that, I think for me surveillance is one aspect but also the kind of new inequalities being created by these types of data capture. So I just always think of the airport and you know the way that biometrics is now able to kind of sort passengers on aeroplanes in to sort of business elite people that are allowed onto the plane first and you know the kind of asylum seekers or sort of illegitimate migrants who are kind of hauled up in rooms and kind of questioned for hours on end. And for I think it is a really interesting question about how data is increasingly able to sort different categories of people on the basis of things like wealth and you know ability to consume products and all that kind of thing. So it is not just something, I think it is also separation and inequality as well that is a kind of facet of new sources of data.

MALE: It would be interesting to know what everyone thinks has changed though because everything that we are all talking about now, especially data collection, that data has been there since the day you were born and it was there when your grandmother was born and their grandparents. It's just I think

the way it is collated now just doesn't bother me in the least. And I am sitting around thinking shit should this be really bothering me now that all this data is around. But I actually don't think it does because it has always existed and always will. I mean your card that you talk about, maybe your anxiety is to do with the fact that it is all in one place. Someone knows what your tax details are. Also someone will know how old you are someone will also know what journey you take but when you put it all in to one object then maybe that's when it becomes threatening to you.

FEMALE: I don't think it was that because there are lots of [inaudible] I am sure Tesco's knows exactly how old I am and what my shoe size is and how many kids I have and all the rest of it. But no it was more to do with this sudden arrival of a new authority and a new storage place that I have no knowledge of or control over at the moment. I don't you know I wasn't involved in the decision to launch this scheme and therefore I have no kind of way of contributing to the debate about whether or not it is appropriate. And I have no route to monitor the use of it.

MALE: Did you ever have any control over it?

FEMALE: As a citizen you have the role in the sense that you can vote the government in and out, you can take part in haranguing your local MP or whatever. If I had known that this was being proposed in Scotland I would have been interested in this and I would have followed the debate and considered it and I probably would have been far less shocked by the whole thing than I was when I suddenly chipped up and discovered that this was happening. And I think it is to do with just that level of your sense, illusory or not, of control over the community that is controlling that process of data collection.

LORENS: I wanted to say something in that sort of information equality that you mentioned. But I wanted to talk about it in a different way I think in relation to this. Because every person in this room has information. We are all kind of like databases okay. And we all probably even have information about each other in this room, okay. I sort of know a little bit about, you know I know some things about you and you know some things about me, da, da, da. And maybe not very much and some people more and some people less. And it's probably not hugely threatening because you know that I only know kind of 10% of the stuff about you. And 10% about you. In other words I am never in a position where I know all about you. And as soon as you get in that situation I think you get some kind of inequality. You know 10% about me but I know everything about you is an inherently unstable and threatening kind of position. It is not that, I mean it may be that there is some total of what everybody in this room knows about you and okay but that has not happened until one person can collect it. And it's the inequality comes in when it's all to one point.

MALE: But it's also this point, I mean there have been times when there have been governments that have used personal information about people to the detriment of their lives.

LORENS: Well yes.

MALE: I mean if Tesco decided that you were never going to get because of the basis of the information that they have got on their computer that they were not going to give jobs to certain sorts of people then what can be more sinister than that sort of data collection? You know, something silly like if people buy more than three packets of Weetabix a week they are not going to get a job with Tesco's. They have got that information. I mean states have done that sort of thing in Romania, in the United States with J Edgar Hoover. That is what is worrying about all this data collection. It is profoundly worrying.

MALE: The opposite is also true that data can be used in a much more positive way. I mean we collect much more precise data about say ethnicity to introduce policies of positive affirmation for example. So basically I think here that we should remember that the state is Janus faced, you know it has got two faces. I don't think it is all on one …

MALE: I mean having been brought up in the 1950s and 1960s, that is what concerns me about the identity card. You know because there used to be sacrosanct personal liberty and that there were problems with it because people would get away with doing things that maybe they shouldn't have. But now we are on the other side of the coin where there is so much data being collected and so much you know, the sort of things that are brought in to play when they are looking for these people who have robbed all this money. There was a chap on one of the programmes last night, he said well good luck to them because you know he was an east end lad you had been a criminal himself. And I actually empathised with this chap saying well good luck to them because the police are out to get them. You know there is something about the trickster, about breaking free of other peoples paradigms that I find fundamentally attractive.

MALE: Yes I was just going to come to that as well. The idea of the trickster keeps coming back because coming back to the Tesco thing I can't help but, I don't shop in Tesco's but now I want to go and have a Tesco's Club Card and go and buy lots of cigarettes to convince them I am a smoker when I am not. So there is room for playing with all of these kind of information trails if you like that people have. And this is the kind of trickster, the [inaudible 17.15] type thing, you can disappear and re-appear in different places and different data maps if you like. So you can play around with those kind of identities. At least at that level because you are in control of it a little bit more than perhaps the kind of identity card thing.

LORENS: I mean I think this comment gets back to one that Hameed made about the difference between the consumer and the producer because as soon as you are able to take data and mess with it like what you just about Tesco's. I think it is quite good. You would have ten friends and you would decide that each one of you would only buy one thing and that you would share and so you would be on their database as the person that only smokes cigarettes and eats them and everything and then somebody else the one that you know, only does Cheerios would really mess them up. And what that is coming back to, I mean in addition to being funny it is this thing about can you, can other people intervene in the use of information as well. And that is sort of what the hacker, that is why we like hackers because they are doing that. And if we can just take that idea of the producer, consumer and then obviously what you don't want to be is just the consumer where basically all the information is gathered about you. But you have no way of then messing with it. If we can just take that idea of produce, consumer for a minute and look out those windows again and look at the urban development going outside there, I mean I would like to sort of bring this back to the city and for goodness sakes we have got, you know we have a situation where some development has gone on out there. And I think we probably all agree it is god awful. And I would like to try and put why it might be god awful into this term of producer, consumer. I am not sure I am going to be able to do it. But it would go something like this. I mean in addition to it being development which kind of breaks radically with the city fabric and takes the most glorious space of Dundee and turns it into a really mundane office park or something. There is something else about it which cuts us off from it which is maybe even more divisive than the fact that there is six lanes of road between us and it. And I think it might be because when we look out that window there is a sense in which when we say, oh god it has all been privatised, this thing which we thought was a public resource, this beautiful riverscape, has not been privatised. One way of understanding what we mean by that is that it is not a space that I see that I could be a producer in or I could be a trickster in. in other words it has been taken, it is a space that only allows me to be a consumer or a kind of victim of data collection or whatever we want to call it. It's just you know, I mean you go to the high street and it is all shops. You can say I am a consumer here but actually there is a lot of other things going on there that are possible. You know it is not just the skateboarders that go to the, there is the church, I don't know what it is called that they play skateboarding on that church. But there is a lot of other uses going on down there which is what you know and when people, when tourists come home and they say oh that was a very interesting city and they have lots of tourists there, it is primarily because they see a lot of producers. They don't see consumers, they see producers. They see people engaging with their culture in different ways. Whether it is the people skateboarding or it's like this summer in Rome with kind of street theatre going on or it's you know artists painting. Whatever, I am not even thinking of any good examples. And this relates to Paul's work which is about trying to create in public spaces or i.e. outdoor urban spaces venues where people can come and play. Okay play with you know in this case it is

playing with digital media but you know that is really just I think because that is kind of the popular thing now. Twenty years ago it would have been like to get people involved in some other kind of outdoor kind of fun stuff which would be about not just in this kind of bovine way enjoying a street skate but actually doing something in it which can be then understood as part of the culture of the city. And what we look out that window and see is not just oh God there is six lanes of road, I will never get across it. But it is also I don't see how in that space I will ever be a contributor the culture of this city. It is just like unless it is you know, all that means is I just quite simple use this street to walk down to get into my building where I have a job in the typing pool or the call centre, whatever it is. It is how that space doesn't look participatory.

MALE; This is the classic non placed dilemma which a group of us have been sort of studying. And it is amazing how often in our discussion with sociologists and geographers and others, when we go on this course that you are going on now which is a lament basically, ain't it awful and got what do we do about it. It's a fact of life. It is there and it's everywhere. Do let's deal with it. And people do, folks do. This is of course chaotic, less designed sort of area and airports have also been identified as non-placed and car parks and so and yet things happen in those places. People make something of it. That is part of what it is to be human. How can we as designers, how can we assist those processes? That is kind of to me a more productive line of enquiry.

LORENS: I mean that is the challenge of that space. I am not saying that it has to be abandoned. I mean yes because it is of course I put it in the form of a lament but that is because I don't do anything but lament. No seriously. And any statement I make will be in that form. But my point is, I mean probably Paul looks at that space and sees that is precisely where I want to go next. I have already done all the work I can do in the abandoned spaces of St. Louis now where they are building an abandoned space out here. That is perfect fertile territory for me okay. And it doesn't necessarily have to be with digital media. He does it that way. It could be with, you know we could set up a speakers corner down there. We could do that probably.

FEMALE: But I think to go back to your thing about non-places, isn't the danger when you start to think about non-places in that sense of how do we design to support non-places that by designing them you are already kind of configuring them on behalf of somebody else. The great thing about non-places, I mean I grew up in a town full of non-places and the non-places where we went to get drunk or have sex or you know, we appropriated those very happily. And kids appropriate non-places all the time and ostracise groups appropriate non-places all the time. You know do we really want to start designing them.

MALE: So the non-places where they appear to be public, they actually are controlled. Places like shopping malls, the classic example is a shopping mall.

Try and mount a demonstration. You will get chucked out because it is not public space….

FEMALE: They are designing our sort of middle class interest in the use of space for exercising demonstration but I mean, you know if you are 16 and living in the middle of nowhere with your parents on your back the whole time then the shopping mall is where you go and hang out with your mates and you appropriate that very happily. Yes you get chased out by the …

MALE: Within their parameters.

FEMALE: Well absolutely of course but that is the whole point, that is the beauty of what makes people so fantastic is that they can take something very unlikely like a supermarket. A mall or a non-space or a dark corner and turn it into something completely different. And again I sort of, yes I do kind of have this anxiety that if we are incredibly bleak about non-places or surveillance we kind of ignore the fact that human beings are incredibly creative at subverting whatever the state or the powers of whatever try to do to us. And if we always want to try and somehow provide something to this non-space out here, I mean I am sure the kids and the junkies of Dundee will soon find a use for that space. And the ladies of the evening and all the rest of it and great. You know do we want to lose that?

MALE: Yes I think apart from the ways in which we can appropriate these sort of non-places. I am not sure they are non-places anyway, aren't they a product of particular sensibilities. Surely one of the classic examples of non-place was inter-war suburbia. But inter-war suburbia was much aspired to. Even at the time by particular groups but has been projected subsequently as a sort of classic example of some endless boring suburbia, etc. etc. So I mean airports have this normally included but that is not to say necessarily that people passing through an airport see it in that light and indeed consider that it is serving it's instrumental function very well. It is getting them in to Malaga, etc, it's part of the process. So I can see where non-places comes from but I think it is a result of sort of critical sensibility that belongs to certain class groups.

MALE: I guess it is mainly sort of anthropologists who have dreamed it up who are aware of a traditional setting where symbolism is rife and very rich and full of meaning and layers and all the rest of it. Now they realise that the rest of the world generally, or most of the world isn't like that. So how do we deal with it? Well that must be non-placed. It is the inverse or opposite of place. But then I think the theorists of non-place typically don't see it as something, it is not just a pejorative term where you reject these places. It's a question of how do we deal with them? What are the theories we are going to construct around them?

FEMALE: Yes there is an ontology around places but you were talking about airports, but I mean I pass through Waverley everyday and that is non-placed to an anthropologist as well but to me it is a very different non-place than an

airport. An airport is much more, just intersects with your interest. An airport is much more surveyed than a railway station is. So there is an awful lot more opportunity for a railway station to be subverted and appropriated than there is an airport. You have to have a ticket to get in.

MALE: I would say that the places that are given to us by architects of this angst that are all sort of sat round this table are usually the non-places. The places that are actually places are places that we create ourselves. Like if you look at the allotments on the hill, to me they are the most peaceful places in Dundee because there is no design, there is no draft. There is no 'is this all right?' there is no discussion. Everyone is sort of left to their freedom to do what they want to do and that kind of creates their own place. If something is given to you, it has no meaning to you but if you create it yourself then it becomes a place and we're on about parameters, I think it is hard to create a public place into a place for yourself because the parameters are often too restricted. It's like we all went to Dundee hills with balloons to let them out for our architecture projects and we were ordered out of the mall for having balloons. They said there was too many balloons. So like the parameters are often daft and like saying well where is your laws, where is your policy against balloons?

FEMALE: Seventy three balloons.

MALE: I think often a place is just somewhere you can be free and there is no policy and no sort of government background saying 'you must do that.' And to be honest back to your MP comment. I kind of trust the hard drive in Nevada more than I trust my local MP. Because I think they would listen more. I mean i don't really care about having an ID card. I think it is a great thing. I publish my information on the internet. I publish my name, my phone number. Anyone can put me in Google and give me a call. It really doesn't bother me to be honest. This idea of being interconnected. I mean I was kind of given a computer at five and embraced the internet. I think it is great. I think the world should be like less divided in these small narrow minded communities. It's 'oh I am in my Scottish Highland, I don't want anything to do with anybody else.' I think we should embrace other cultures and we can possibly learn a hell of a lot from them.

MALE: That is an important point actually because the sort of net generation which is what you want, I can't speak about myself because I am not really part of that. But I that think that notion that we have got this net generation which embraces digital cultures from the outset. And there is no problem about that. It doesn't really exist as a problematic issue. It is part of the natural development. It is part of this natural, unnatural selection I was talking about and it's ongoing issue.

FEMALE: And to [inaudible 30.56] the internet as a concept is part of that generation.

LORENS: A military man too actually.

FEMALE: Well they all were from the services.

FEMALE: There is also this thing of camouflage. If you are in a society, like I worked in Japan for a long time. It is a very confined society. It is a very controlled society. And people like that comfort. But the way that they gain their freedom is not by exploding, it's they implode and they create lots and lots of subcultures. And they don't go home but they will go to lots and lots of infinitesimally small places within the city that are represented by digital signs, by flags that wave. By all sorts of gizmo's that we will get to in the next ten or twenty years. But what they do is by that they create their own sort of anonymity in the public space. And you talk about information. They might have information that they create or aware about themselves. It's just, nobody could ever with the hugest computer in Nevada in the whole world underneath the desert, you know you still could never ever know all those things to know about. So we never- we leave trails but you know no-one can capture everything about you. And it's if your sort of personal privacy and personal space, at least you are sort of protecting yourself against complete control. But you talk about collecting information. I mean in the future, well they have sort of health trails on people now. And that will affect, does affect insurance policies. So if you belong to a family that have a certain hereditary condition that ultimately will result in a premature death, that limits your ability to be insured or it puts your premium high, it may affect your ability to have the same kind of level of mortgages as your mate on the same side. I mean there are all sorts of ways that that can affect you. I mean, jobs, maybe it affects your ability to get a job. You won't get on the university staff if you have got certain illnesses or propensities to certain illness.

FEMALE: Which is one of the reasons that card brings up because previously I can manipulate my disabled status. I quite like being disabled when it gets me a free bus pass. I don't want to be disabled when I am approaching an insurer. And as soon as you start to pool that into some big centralised resource it gets a hell of a lot harder for me to play the system and protect my [all laughing] and now I am freaked.

MALE: But a more charitable way of looking at your identification of yourself there is that you are a multi faceted individual. And you reinterpret and reinterpret yourself in loads of ways and we do of each other. We never know everything about each other. There is kind of no such thing. But at best we have interpretations of one another and that is varied and rich. The trouble with these databases presumably is that they don't contain rich multi variant interpretations that are contingent. They contain data and that data tends to be fixed. And I think that's become, this thing has just distracted, I will become the paranoia kid. It is the fact that what should cause disquiet is the fact that it is data not us that is in those systems and the data might be our age, birth date,

where we live. Some designation of what happens to be our disability or otherwise. And that is potentially scary because it is kind of fixed.

MALE: It doesn't have a sense of humour.

MALE: And it doesn't have a sense of irony.

LORENS: You know our program was intended to end at four and I mean we don't have to stop now but we are kind of considerably over and we were thinking that maybe people are getting tired and want the option of leaving.

MALE: Could you give some advice on trains to get back to Edinburgh. Are they every hour?

FEMALE: They are on the half hour every hour.

MALE: And it is …

FEMALE: The half five is a nightmare, wait for the half six.

MALE: So we are having a drink.

MALE: That was the next suggestion. Any people who want to …

FEMALE: -well I am going back to Edinburgh.

MALE: Are you driving or catching the train?

FEMALE: No, no. Unfortunately.

MALE: Also parking advice!

MALE: Maybe people want to go down to the bar for a drink with some of us. I mean there may be also …

END OF SESSION

36 minutes