

JAMIE BARTLETT

THE DARK SIDE OF SILICON VALLEY

DEFIANCE #013
WITH PETER MCCORMACK



DEF013 - JAMIE BARTLETT INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTION

THE DARK SIDE OF SILICON VALLEY

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Peter McCormack: 00:01:55

Good morning, Jamie.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:01:56

Morning. How are you doing?

Peter McCormack: 00:01:57

Pretty good. It's a strange hearing your voice in person as I've been listening to you for the last two weeks.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:02:04

Likewise, yes. I put the voice on a bit for the radio as well, so it's probably not quite my normal voice now.

Peter McCormack: 00:02:11

It's slightly different, I put mine on but slightly differently. How do you do yours differently?

Jamie Bartlett: 00:02:16

Well, the strange thing at the moment is I grew up in quite a normal part of North Kent,

Medway town. It was quite a Thames Estuary accent, and then I really tried to make it sound better for the radio and the TV. For 10 years, I was trying to sound slightly posher and now I've realised you'd probably better if you don't, the way the media is going, it's better if you've got original accent.

Peter McCormack: 00:02:39

Oh, okay.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:02:40

I'm now thinking I should try and bring the old North Kent accent back in a bit.

Peter McCormack: 00:02:45

If it doesn't have an accent, well, you're screwed then. I've tried to make mine just sound clearer. So one of the things, I studied a lot of different people interview and read a lot about how people construct interviews and try and have clarity in your voice and slow down. You've probably aware of this.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:03:02

Definitely.

Peter McCormack: 00:03:04

And I found my voice got a little bit posher and not very Bedford. Well, Bedford regional accent is just like a townie accent.

Peter McCormack: 00:03:13

We've probably got the same.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:03:14

I can imagine we've got a similar thing. Yeah, exactly what you want point. When you're actually recording the links when you're doing the TV or the radio, obviously the producers sitting over you and they're like, "No, the end of the sentence is running off. You didn't finish the word properly." So they're forcing you to say all more clearly and I get that.

Peter McCormack: 00:03:34

Well, that's also a funny bit when ... so I have an intro and outro to my podcast and this show will go to the engineer and he'll barely edit it. He might take out a pause or a mistake or an arm or an hour here or there, but he does it. But when I record my intro and outro, I've got a script and I just make so many mistakes. It's so unnatural just to sit and record to nothing.

Peter McCormack: 00:03:55

So anyway, great to get you on. A big fan of your work, know obviously about two pieces of your work that I didn't realise they were connected and I obviously watched the two part documentary for the BBC a while back, and quite interestingly, watching it again over the last two days is I've obviously, interviewed Brittany Kaiser-

Jamie Bartlett: 00:04:13

Yeah, I listened.

Peter McCormack: 00:04:13

... and I'm actually wondering where you fit into the timeline of this, correct me on the

timeline if I'm right or wrong, but it feels like you were starting to uncover what was happening before the scandal fully came out in the press.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:04:31

Yeah, that's right. Years start blurring together in my life. The Secrets of Silicon Valley, part one was about AI disruption, the future of employment, that kind of thing. Then part two was all about Cambridge Analytica, Facebook, and Donald Trump. And we started working on that in very early 2017 and so that's how I ended up going to Trump's Digital Headquarters in San Antonio, Texas, interviewing Alexander Nix, the CEO of Cambridge Analytica and it all came out in late 2017. All that right, isn't it?

Peter McCormack: 00:05:07

That is it.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:05:07

I'm losing track of time. That is right. And that was, there were a few little articles about it. Wired did a really interesting thing about Cambridge Analytica just before our show came out. But the big exclusives, the big stories from the Guardian, that was last year, was that last year?

Peter McCormack: 00:05:30

Yeah, that was last year. 2018.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:05:31

Yeah. That was some way after our show had come out. And maybe we'll get to the detail, but there was one bit of the story we didn't cover for various reasons, which was the use of the 87 million scraped data points from Facebook, which wasn't in our show. I knew about it.

Peter McCormack: 00:05:52

But we'll come to it.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:05:54

I was a bit disappointed about how little coverage it actually got when it came out, because I felt like we were onto a huge story here but -

Peter McCormack: 00:06:02

It wasn't your story.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:06:03

It was the BBC's ... I mean it wasn't my personal story, no. But I feel like it didn't somehow quite connect with people. People enjoyed the show but it didn't sort of ... fireworks didn't go off and I tried to get it sold into the US because I thought it was very US centric but not one American TV cable, whatever was interested in showing it.

Peter McCormack: 00:06:28

Well, okay. So there's loads we can get into here. And one of the interesting things I wanted to ask you about it, because obviously it was a two part series, it's funny how you remember things differently. I remembered it not as the secrets of Silicon Valley. In my head, I'd remembered it as the dark side of Silicon Valley and I don't know why that was in my head. I thought that was the title, but it was, and it's only when I went back over that, "Oh yeah, no,

it's the secrets of Silicon Valley." And the other thing I'd forgotten, because it was a while ago, I saw it was in actually, whilst it was a two parter, it's almost two quite separate.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:06:59

Totally separate.

Peter McCormack: 00:07:00

And you connected them at the end, but the thing I wanted to ask you, because we talked before this about filmmaking and I've got an interest in getting into it. One of the people said to me is that you should can't plan too much ahead because the story sometimes finds itself. Is that what happened?

Jamie Bartlett: 00:07:15

Yeah. No one's ever asked me that question before, but that's exactly what happened. So originally Episode 1, it was about Uber in India, AI, driverless trucks, what it would mean for middle class Americans in particular, how the kind of the promise and dream of this disruption was actually causing lots of problems. But it was about AI and stuff like that. It wasn't about elections. And halfway through doing it, we're thinking, "Oh, we need politics in this a little bit. We need a political part of the story." So we'd already done quite a few of the interviews for Episode 1, and then I think it was actually me who said to the team, this thing weighed about Facebook and Trump and I think I'd read the Wired article about it and I was like, "This is something really odd here. It's really interesting. Do you think we could make Episode 2 actually all about politics and Facebook and digital campaigning, because it feels like something's a foot." And we changed direction a little bit because originally it hadn't been the plan. It was going to be two episodes on the AI disruption.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:08:24

And so it was quite a late decision. And then we scrambled around, and you must have this where you don't think someone's going to reply and agree to be interviewed and then they do, and you're like, "Why are you even speaking to me? I don't understand why, what's in it for you?" But this woman called Teresa Hong really held it all together. She was the woman who was the head of digital content for Trump during the 2016 election and who worked very, very closely with Cambridge Analytica, a kind of hopeful emails, see if she'd speak to us, and she replies saying, "Yeah, fine. I mean, I'm in San Antonio, Texas, but if you come here, I'll interview you in the building where we work together with Facebook, Google and Cambridge Analytica, with for the Trump team."

Peter McCormack: 00:09:06

Why though? Do you think some people feel like they're guilty, want to get some of the chest, or they don't know really comprehending what you want to interview them about?

Jamie Bartlett: 00:09:14

I don't think she fully understood what she done because back then the story wasn't very big and after the show went out, she went under the radar. But there's someone gave me some really good advice once about interviewing people and finding the right people to interview. People at the very, very top of an organisation have the PR team, and they're very protected. People at the bottom aren't necessarily knowledgeable enough about what's really going on and while they won't be taken seriously, if you can find a middle manager, they've got that credibility, but they don't have all the PR comms people in the way. And it's

always a good way into a company is to go middle manager, which is what she was, she was head of digital content, but she wasn't the big boss. She wasn't Cushner or Brad Pascal who was running the digital operations and-

Peter McCormack: 00:10:01

It was very revealing what she was telling you.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:10:03

Another thing that was so strange about that is we walk in and we ... when you making a TV show is you're preparing your questions in advance and you're like, "Well, I wonder if she'll cover this or do you think we'll be able to get her to talk about the role of Cambridge Analytica in all this? Or do you think she'll be secretive? How do we get into that?" And we walk in and she likes splurges her gut. She just says everything almost in the first five minutes, and I'm looking over at the producer thinking, "I can't believe she's telling me all this." She like, "Facebook sitting over there and they were helping make sure we could tell, they were amazing. We wouldn't have won the election without Facebook." And all of this stuff, and I'm thinking, "These are dreamlines for a TV person."

Jamie Bartlett: 00:10:43

But the other thing that's interesting, especially with like freelancers today, so many people work for companies on a freelance basis. They come in as consultants, which is what she did. And then they leave again and they've got to make money. I think Teresa Hong was thinking, "I can boost my profile because I now need another job working for another campaign and this is a good way." I think she was trying to impress us, so she'd impressed the viewers about all these amazing things they did not realising that she's telling us some quite important stuff.

Peter McCormack: 00:11:16

Well that bit, there's a very similar bit in the Great Hack where they talk about the -

Jamie Bartlett: 00:11:20

I'm in that very, very briefly. Right at the beginning.

Peter McCormack: 00:11:22

Are you?

Jamie Bartlett: 00:11:23

Yes, because right at the beginning where professor Carroll is talking about it and he's drawn his little whiteboard about how Cambridge Analytica -

Peter McCormack: 00:11:32

Oh yeah.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:11:33

And then there's a little scene about 30 seconds of me talking to Teresa Hong.

Peter McCormack: 00:11:38

Is that the bit? Because when ... So I'll tell you what happened the second time of watching it, this part. So I watched part one, couple of nights ago, part two as I watched it, I put it on in the car and just listen to it.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:11:52

Oh yeah.

Peter McCormack: 00:11:52

So I can't actually watch it because I'm driving, but it plays it through the speakers. And when I was listening to this bit, I was like, "Oh, this is just right the bit that's in the Great Hack where they talk about the room where the people in the room."

Jamie Bartlett: 00:12:01

That was it.

Peter McCormack: 00:12:02

Ah I didn't realise.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:12:03

They took that footage on YouTube.

Peter McCormack: 00:12:04

Interesting. So I'd love to know your thoughts on the Great Hack because I thought it was useful, but I don't think it was as good as film as I want it to be. I thought there was almost too much on production. And also I thought the story about Brittany was misleading.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:12:20

Yeah.

Peter McCormack: 00:12:20

But there were other things that very revealing. How did you feel about the final output?

Jamie Bartlett: 00:12:23

Yeah, it's a similar thing to me to be honest. I mean it's hard for me to watch it because I did a similar thing to not the same level of critical acclaim or numbers. So there's always tinge of jealousy when you're talking about a more successful, "Oh my film's better than that. How could they ..." But had the same feel, beautifully made. I mean it's very, very hard to make shows that are about digital stories and they're often hackneyed and hamfisted and rubbish-

Peter McCormack: 00:12:51

But it's Hollywood level production.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:12:52

Amazing, yeah. Really well put together. I think that overall, I think the role that is attributed to Cambridge Analytica with its military grade psychographics is wrong. I don't think it's true. I think it's exaggerated. It doesn't mean I think it's not a problem. I think it's a big problem the way that data is now being used in elections is a massive problem. But I don't think that Cambridge Analytical were particularly unique, I don't think they are particularly magical. I don't personally feel like she's an amazing whistleblower. I mean she worked there for a very long time, certainly not up there with Edward Snowden or anyone like that, which is where sometimes or Christopher Wiley placed and he's like, "No, I mean come on." So a good film. I mean I just have a different view on how important Cambridge Analytica is. I think they're really important because they tell us something about where elections are

going and I think we're all missing the point of the story of Cambridge Analytica and we're obsessing over it and we're accusing everything democracy has been stolen and cheated.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:13:54

The real story for me is Cambridge Analytica is the beginning of how elections are going to look all over the world in 20 years time. And we are only just beginning that and we're not thinking about that. We're obsessing over psychographics for example, this idea of personality profile. I don't think it works. I just don't think it works at all. I don't think there's any evidence that it works. I think it will work one day, but then it works now and I don't think it was really important during the election in 2016, I really don't.

Peter McCormack: 00:14:26

Well, my main problem with the documentary is, you've always got to think how do you feel afterwards and all I was thinking about was Brittany Kaiser and then I think if you're doing that, they've made the wrong film because you really should be thinking about the story about what's actually happened. The misuse of data. I mean it was a scandal for me and I've got very different views on Brittany than a lot of people. I actually quite like her after meeting her. I actually thought it was very misleading how involved they played she was. I said to her, I even asked her, I said, "I don't think you're a whistle blower, do you think you are?" And she's just thinks she is, but I don't really think she is. I think she was just someone who was young who got caught up in something that her career was flying. She's suddenly going to expensive dinners.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:15:06

I think she said to you, "I wasn't involved in the Trump thing at all."

Peter McCormack: 00:15:10

She said she was responsible for business development, but she said she wasn't actually in the room running the campaign.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:15:14

Yeah, which is important.

Peter McCormack: 00:15:16

Yeah.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:15:17

There are other people that probably that I'm sure the Great Hack would have wanted to have gotten and couldn't. You make decisions when you're a TV person based on who's available and what they're doing and you try and craft the story around a person and there is, I guess, it's the same with a lot of TV shows. You've got a big story, you know when its own is going to be boring, but it's really important. So you've got to play it through the story of a person. And so they obviously chose Dave Carroll, who's a great guy, really cool guy and Brittany Kaiser, and to tell their story to put the biggest story out. And in that sense, I mean they've really done an amazing job at getting the idea of this and the importance of data and elections out there and so for that I mean I'm very grateful for what they've done.

Peter McCormack: 00:15:58

So we should go back to that question. I said the point I was raising though in that the story finds itself fried and we listened to it again this morning I was like, "God, you were just on

the edge of uncovering this how bad it was." It was almost like there was another 30 minutes of material. Like if you guys could have gone deeper, it's almost like you could have fully exposed the scandal.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:16:21

What is the scandal though? What do you think the great scandal of Facebook and data in 2016 election is?

Peter McCormack: 00:16:29

I think the main scandal is the misuse of data and us not knowing what is being used for.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:16:34

What misuse of data?

Peter McCormack: 00:16:35

Our personal data on Facebook.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:16:37

Yeah, but which bit? Because that's really important because that's the thing, that's like what is the bit about that story that made it blow up in 2018 when it didn't in 2017?

Peter McCormack: 00:16:47

Well, so the most interesting part of the whole documentary for me and the bit that really concerned me and if it's true, is actually what happened in Trinidad.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:16:55

I agree 100%, yes. Well, I thought the same thing.

Peter McCormack: 00:16:57

When I came out of that, beyond Brittany, I was like, "Fuck. The only way they could win an election was to manipulate people not to vote, to create apathy." For me, I started, this is virgin on evil.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:17:12

Voter suppression techniques.

Peter McCormack: 00:17:14

And this isn't right. This is controlling the population and controlling people to do things to get an outcome you want. Now look, you can see that's all electioneering and all electioneer has advertising, etc. But that for me that was really sinister because you didn't know the intentions of what was happening in there. If that is true, that to me is a real scandal.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:17:35

I agree. That was the worst thing for me and the way that Cambridge Analytica genuinely tested their techniques in developing world countries is a story that still hasn't fully been told. Not really, not exactly what they did in Kenya or they didn't India, you get a bit of, even in the Great Hack, a bit of a decent flavour, but I think there's still a lot more to say about that. I mean, could we have gone deeper into that story-

Peter McCormack: 00:17:59

At the time What was your feeling? Did you feel you were onto something?

Jamie Bartlett: 00:18:05

I knew we were onto something, but I mean basically what we'd done is that we had realised obviously that as a general position, the Trump team had used huge amounts of personal data using this Cambridge Analytica team, possibly trying to use these psychographic techniques based on what are the times seemed like pretty unprecedented amount of profiling, but actually not huge amount different from what the other campaigns are doing. And that Facebook and Google were in the room with the Donald Trump team doing very, very sophisticated micro-targeting.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:18:44

So to me that was a big story because I think people needed to understand from the inside, how do elections actually work today and not just from Trump, everyone, which is what I think is so important about that story. The reason it took off in 2018 in the way that it did was not about what happened to Trinidad and Tobago. It was because 87 million data points were scraped by someone who then sold the data to Cambridge Analytica without the permission of those users in 2014 or whenever it was. And then the figure was like, "Oh my God, everyone's data has been stolen from Facebook."

Peter McCormack: 00:19:21

And there was the dramatic pictures of the offices being ... I remember who went into the office, but -

Jamie Bartlett: 00:19:26

The ICO going into Cambridge Analytica office.

Peter McCormack: 00:19:28

And taking their computers. It's like, "Okay, this is bad."

Jamie Bartlett: 00:19:31

Yeah. Another reality is, I think you mentioned it in your interview with Brittany Kaiser and a lot of companies before 2016 ... basically the way that Facebook worked with its app developers was to say, "Okay, you can only collect, you can't crawl our platform. You can only take data from users if you've got their expressed permission and don't use your clever scrapers to go around friends of friends... That's unlucky, isn't it?"

Peter McCormack: 00:19:56

Yeah.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:19:56

That's someone just doing some gardening. The good news is this, everyone has a tiny garden in this road, so it can't last for more than about two minutes...

Jamie Bartlett: 00:20:07

So a lot of app developers were doing that because Facebook said to people on their terms and conditions, and I'm sorry it's getting a bit technical, but-

Peter McCormack: 00:20:16

No, it's good.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:20:16

... said to their turn on the terms and conditions. You're not allowed to scrape other people's data without permission, but they didn't restrict it so you could do it. Loads of companies were like, well, if you're not actually going to stop it, we can technically do it, then let's just get all the data in. So Cambridge Analytica was one of lots and lots of companies are doing this and I don't think that the data they collected was necessarily hugely important in terms of what they were doing. To me, what they were doing better than anyone else was the legal data they'd acquired buying it from data brokers, which is a massive industry that's still mostly unregulated and no one understands, your magazine subscriptions, your mortgage repayment, what car do you drive, all the, all the publicly available data about your voting records that the parties hold and stuff like that.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:21:08

And putting that altogether to create an incredibly detailed profile on 250 million Americans and then just throwing millions of dollars at Facebook, especially to do the most targeted adverts in particular key swing states better than Clinton had done, better than Obama had done. But to me, what was interesting with that story is that was all legal. That was legal stuff. They were just using the platforms in the way they should. And I wanted people to realise that legally our elections are changing and they're no longer the model of how democracy should work, an election should work. It's being screwed up by all this. Our rules don't fit this anymore. That to me was what was interesting. The 87 million acquired accounts, and we knew about that. We couldn't stand it up because we couldn't get anyone from the company to say, "Yes, we've got 87 million Facebook." But people are very interested in that side of the story because that felt like data misuse, which made the story explode. Whereas I was interested in the legal acquisition of this data and what it meant for how our elections work, which I think is more important because we might be able to get rid of some of this illegal stuff and we're still left with a massive problem, which is that none of our rules work anymore.

Peter McCormack: 00:22:22

Okay. So Jamie and really interesting thing for me is I used to work in digital advertising and I worked from pretty much the start of the internet when we were building websites, and then banner ads came and then social media and email marketing came. And my main agency had in London was part of a bigger traditional agency who did TV, radio, print advertising. And what was very interesting is you could see the way advertising was changing. It was going from an ad that would go to a group of people on the underground or in a magazine or whatever. It would be one ad, a broad ad that ... All right. You might target it slightly because of the magazine you're in or the paper you're in. But generally speaking, they were broad ads. And then we suddenly had this thing called social media where we could customise the ads and you could see where it was going. In no way did we think it was sinister. It was just a sad that the advertising was going to this-

Jamie Bartlett: 00:23:18

Hyper-personalised.

Peter McCormack: 00:23:18

Yeah, and I lost interest in it. So when I look at politics, politics has always been a fine line between what is advertising, what is propaganda. It's always a message where there's was a message on a bus or a billboard. The elections now going to social media. What I'm trying to separate is what is sinister and misuse or what is fair game?

Jamie Bartlett: 00:23:40

Yes, good question. Well, I got my view on that, which is the ... So I think the rules that should govern how you receive election based material should be different from just when you're being sold jeans and T-shirts and stuff. I don't have a problem with hyper-personalised adverts. I mean, there may be a problem in 100 years time, questions to do with free will and who's going to really ... is a machine going to know you better than you know yourself. How do we understand what free will means in that while we start questioning our own judgment, because advertisers know us extremely well and stuff. And I can very well imagine that there's going to be a lot of gray areas where an automated advertising system works out that you're a manic depressive and you probably barely know it yourself and it knows exactly when your turn, when you'll have a down cycle and it will sell you things in that down cycle and it might all be done by a machine as well.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:24:30

So a human won't even be involved in that process and you could consider that to be extremely abusive and unethical, but no one will be held accountable for it because no one person can be accused of being in charge of this system. And that's what I think is going to be the problem in 20 years time. But more immediately, elections are supposed to be places where everyone knows what everyone else sees. We thrash out the issues of the day collectively. This is the idealised election is never quite like this, but everyone thrashes out the subjects of the day. We have a common basis of information, which we then argue over and that's where our opinions and stuff come in. Where elections are heading using this perfectly customisable, targeted and increasingly highly personalised and maybe some quite sinister ways is that it throws all that out of the window and elections become about how can we find a niche group of people with very particular interests and almost irrelevant to what our political position is. How can we push their emotional buttons.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:25:32

And the reason why I find the Cambridge Analytica story, the wrong one that we're being told is that all I think is what's an election going to be like in 20 years time. So that fridge over there that I've got and that coffee machine that we've just been using, there are going to be data collectors, aren't they in 20 years time? And we're going to have in 20 years time, 40 years worth of mine and your data is going to have been collected about us, including our diet, our caffeine intake, my smart home heater and it will be able to work out more and more. Not just things about me but time-specific things that we'll be able to tell that I'm in a bad mood at that particular moment and it will know that when I'm in a bad mood I'm more open to candidates who are tough on law and order and me and you we're like, I will get a different advert to my neighbour and my neighbour get different advert to his wife.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:26:22

Every single one of us in 15 years time we'll be receiving adverts that are tailored purely to us based on 30 or 40 years worth of data adverts or we don't really understand how they're

made. They're probably going to be made by machines. How on earth do we run an election like that? We don't want no idea. And that's what Cambridge Analytica is the start of something, is not the culmination of something. It's just the start of a new approach to how we understand elections and that's what worries me because I think we're totally clueless about it.

Peter McCormack: 00:26:54

But one of the things that I do think about, which I know a lot of people looked into is that in 20 years will we have the delivery mechanisms. So Facebook engagement is dropping. I just know, I mean for myself personally, I barely use it anymore. It was a novelty when it first came out. Oh look, we can put photos up and we weren't at Saturday night and we can laugh and joke about it and we can like stuff. And then for one reason or another I just don't really use it anymore.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:27:17

It doesn't matter whether is Facebook, I imagine the adverts will be coming out of my fridge or they'll be coming out of my TV and, but it will still be based on huge amounts of data that has been collected by data brokers. Not just for Facebook posts, but all the other things you're spewing online all the time.

Peter McCormack: 00:27:32

See, I'm wondering if it will, and the reason I'm wondering if it will is because TV is moving, apart from live sports, TV is actually moving away from the advertiser model. It's a subscription model. Netflix, Disney, Apple TV, they're all moving away from advertising. Banner ads just don't work online. Will Facebook engagement drop, it is dropping now. Will people be using that in 20 years? What I'm wondering is, without the delivery mechanism, do you have a problem? You say you can have fruit ad from your fridge, but really, I don't think I would have those, I'll switch the fucking thing off. So I'm wondering if this is unique to Facebook and this might die with Facebook, don't it?

Jamie Bartlett: 00:28:12

Interesting. I don't think so because I think that the power of personalised content and I think it will perform better and better because even if it's a subscription model on your TV, it's going to presumably still be more personalised to you rather than to everyone on your street even if it's not then paid for by ads. So there'll still be mechanisms of more and more personalised content. And I think that it's that trend that worries me the most. More and more personalised content, whatever thing is coming through, whatever the mechanism is. And I can't really predict it because I'd never would've thought smartphones would have been so important 20 years ago either.

Peter McCormack: 00:28:49

Have you seen this alternative model for privacy? I always try to say the word-

Jamie Bartlett: 00:28:54

Obfuscation.

Peter McCormack: 00:28:55

... obfuscation, yeah. So there's for example, I think there's a widget you can get for your Google browser just constantly doing weird searches.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:29:02

Would you see this is the thing, this is why I wrote this book. So after that I did the TV show, wrote a book about all of this stuff. And there were things I was suggesting that people did to help safeguard their privacy and do something against the mass collection of data. And one of them is that, hey, you could have a plugin to do it for you or you could just start randomly liking different things to try to confuse the data models. And I think all of those things are important jobs as citizens, like as democratic citizens. You've got to dare. Because I suppose the way ... I don't know exactly if it's the fridge will be the delivery mechanism or the TV or I can't imagine these things are going to, and the smart phones are going to really disappear. They're too useful. All of this stuff is too useful. None of it is a criticism about the tech in a way because the reason it's damaging. It's so amazing. Like I love it...

Peter McCormack: 00:29:50

You say that, I've bought a new phone. I've got my iPhone here but I was like a Kickstarter or go find me, the light phone. Have you seen it?

Jamie Bartlett: 00:29:57

I haven't.

Peter McCormack: 00:29:58

I mean it's stupid because I've spent \$350 on it. So this phone, all it does is text, call, alarm, book a taxi, listen to music. There's no apps, there's no comms apart from text and thing. And I'm want that because I want to get away. It's like your documentary, it was 117 times in a day, five hours out. I want to get away from it.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:30:19

Me too. And I agree, but what I'm saying is that for a lot of people it's very, very useful, very convenient. There's this thing that researchers talk about called the, I think it's something like the privacy gap or something, everyone says it's really important to me. I really care about my data. I'm really concerned. But they just carry on doing what they've always been doing, which is getting free stuff in exchange for giving their information away. And it's hard to see how to turn that back entirely.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:30:51

See what I think might happen in the next 20 years or so is there'll be a new inequality emerging because data is so valuable that it's clear to me that all the household products that are increasingly going to become smart are going to become cheaper than the ones that are going to be non-smart because the companies will want your data. So they'll give you reductions on having a smart fridge. And if you want an expensive smart fridge that's non-smart, it's going to have to be 10 years old and all the middle classes will buy it. Because they'll say, Oh, I don't want my child isn't going to be monitored by my fridge and I'm going to get an old, but it's going to be much more expensive and poor people just won't be able to afford the privacy premium that will come with buying 350 pound old phone essentially, that doesn't do all this stuff.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:31:39

So you could have this weird new inequality forming between poor people who are much more targeted by everything. More data about them and more predatory algorithms that

understand them even better. And then richer people who pay to not have all of that stuff happening, they'll throw up another problem. Let's recently, Simon Carroll said he's given up his smartphone and he feels great. It feels amazing about it. But he's completely ridiculous because all he's done is he's replaced the apps with people.

Peter McCormack: 00:32:08

Yeah, people.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:32:10

I don't need Uber because my drivers waiting outside and I don't need Deliveroo because my chef will just make it for me. And while I can't afford to do all that stuff. So I can see that as the beginnings of a weird new dividing society. But I guess what I'm saying is you might be right about the delivery mechanisms. We may be moved to a subscription model on more stuff that will be ... I'd hope that's true. I'm not sure that's true. But what I'm saying is the risk of Cambridge Analytica to me is about what happens in 10 years time and 15 years time and even this election compared to just obsessing over 2016 where it's not really clear how well some of their techniques actually worked. Because it's one of the things I think is happening is everyone's accusing everyone else of cheating all the time because people have a sense that the rules aren't working.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:32:58

I guarantee in this election, I don't know if this is going to come up before the election or not, but one of the things that will keep happening is people will be digging up adverts on Facebook or Twitter or Instagram, whether the ads are appearing and saying, "Look, this is a lie. You're lying, these adverts are lies and you've targeted these people." And then the journalists will blow it out of all proportion because they love those stories at the moment. And all it will do is just decrease confidence in the fact that a results legitimate.

Peter McCormack: 00:33:26

What happened the other day with a good morning interview, didn't know, I can't remember who it was.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:33:30

It was James Cleverly. Was it the one where he-

Peter McCormack: 00:33:34

They recut the ads of the interview to say he wouldn't give a straight answer on-

Jamie Bartlett: 00:33:38

Oh, its Keir Starmer.

Peter McCormack: 00:33:39

Yeah.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:33:40

Yeah, it was Keir Starmer say, what's your labor's position on Brexit or something like that. And it was a long pause.

Peter McCormack: 00:33:45

And they recut it and I mean-

Jamie Bartlett: 00:33:48

Was that bad really what they did?

Peter McCormack: 00:33:50

No. I mean just a note.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:33:51

I mean, it was just for effect, wasn't it?

Peter McCormack: 00:33:53

But it was misleading. It was misleading because I saw that and I was like, Oh, I came to a judgment just based on that one clips seen on Twitter. Then I was listening to Radio 5 on the way, and I had the interview, and they were actually saying that it's been recut in a really misleading way. So I had to go back and watch the whole thing and say, actually that was misleading and this is it. This is like this constant battle of propaganda, misinformation being thrown at us. Actually, I've become really apathetic to the whole thing basically.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:34:19

But you see, I think that is what is going on here. The way I see is we had an old way that elections were run, and we knew the rules and maybe we weren't happy with it and it wasn't perfect, but we respected the results because we understood how the game was played. And suddenly all this new technology turns up, the old rules haven't changed and so everyone's getting apathetic actually like, I don't trust anything. It's apathetic or angry.

Peter McCormack: 00:34:41

It's all a load of rubbish.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:34:41

Apathetic or angry, but both are bad for different reasons, aren't they?

Peter McCormack: 00:34:45

Yeah.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:34:45

And I think apathy might become, or maybe you're right, it's going to be both because some people are like, I don't trust anything. I don't trust anyone. All content is potentially fake-able because it's very easy to manipulate videos now. So I don't trust anything I ever see, or angry, I'm furious about these lies, these cheaters and so on. And then politics is reduced to nothing more than emotion because facts are irrelevant and everything's emotional. And that's what I think is happening with politics today. I see the emotion in politics as a direct result of digital technology. I mean, politics always been emotional, but it's been supercharged by all these things that are going on and a sort of feel-

Peter McCormack: 00:35:28

On 24-hour news media has changed it a lot as well, and news media, especially out in the US becoming very political itself. The rise of Fox news and then Fox news versus MSNBC where if you hear something say with regards to the Trump impeachment, you can read it on Fox news and MSNBC and you read two different versions of the event because they're both driving an agenda to support their advertisers and that itself is becoming like-

Jamie Bartlett: 00:35:55

You see two versions, right?

Peter McCormack: 00:35:57

Yeah.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:35:57

That's true. But we're moving into an era where we're going to ... there's hundreds of versions and I think one of the reasons, I mean my analysis of all of this is it's based on old writers like Marshall McLuhan who wrote about the global village and the electronic revolution in the '60s and how that was going to change politics and it would make politics more emotional is what he said because TV is an emotional medium, whereas reading is a thoughtful medium. And he's probably exaggerating that a little bit. But I see that that's how I think the biggest problem of all is information overload, which is there's too much. There's too much information, we can't deal with it.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:36:35

And we're getting more and more and more of it. It's going to inevitably come more and more personalised because otherwise you'll just get lost, surrounded by constant. I mean you must feel it when you go online and you walk away feeling less informed than when you signed on.

Peter McCormack: 00:36:53

I also, I wake up in the morning, I've got numerous alerts from every single app and then I go online. I've got to deal with emails and such. But as I said, I don't know if the Simon Carroll thing actually will reflect a change in society. Screen time appearing and being put on your phone by Apple is actually a reflection of people. There's a demand for people to know what they're spending the time. This is the demand for me to know what my children are spending their time on. When we go out for dinner now as a family, we all leave our phones at home. That's new. But we went out to dinner and we're all on our phone. I was like, this is ridiculous. We leave our phones at home. It's getting to the point now whereby it's going to be when we come home at the end of the day the phones are going in a cupboard.

Peter McCormack: 00:37:34

I said to you, I bought this new phone because I want to get away. I want to detach from it. But I think there's a few other things. I also think I'm quite interested in this obfuscation technique for protecting data because I tried to switch off everything, Google. It actually became shit. I remember I was in San Francisco and I was trying to find a restaurant and I had to switch on location because he didn't know where I was. But I liked the obfuscation. I think Apple or some companies like Apple making privacy central to what they do, really important.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:38:02

It is.

Peter McCormack: 00:38:03

So I think technology could also solve this if it reflects, if people are actually saying that I've got a problem with this. Someone like Apple, they actually have an incentive to solve this for you.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:38:14

Yes. No, I agree 100%. I mean it's not impossible that we can turn these things around. Like the book I wrote about this was saying with technology can solve some of these problems, if we decide and we demand and we change our behaviour. I think the risk is every year that goes on, it's a bit like climate change. It gets slightly hard to do because the technology becomes more and more central to our lives. Like you say, it becomes harder to go to a restaurant. It becomes harder to do your job without being logged in all the time. And convenience is such a powerful driver of human behaviour, the least difficult option that the more and more integrated it becomes.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:38:56

So when my whole smart house is all connected up, it's just a lot harder for me to be able to then switch off or take these measures to make sure I'm not logged on all the time. And it's going to be the same as something like driverless cars. If driverless cars turn up like every passing year will get harder and harder to not have one because all the systems around it will be built around the assumption that people are moving to driverless cars. So the road signs will start disappearing and all of that stuff because who needs a road sign when you're a driverless car and then it's harder for a normal car to be used on the road.

Peter McCormack: 00:39:28

Well, it'll become illegal to drive.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:39:29

Well, because it becomes dangerous. Presumably it will become illegal at some point because I mean a single network would be a much safer way of doing it. But, and so the same is true of all of it. And this is why it feels a bit like climate. I don't know your views on climate change.

Peter McCormack: 00:39:43

Well you get interesting views in the world of Bitcoin because I believe it's happening. I believe it's human calls, but a lot of Bitcoin is fighting to say this is propaganda and it's being misused-

Jamie Bartlett: 00:39:53

Centralised systems.

Peter McCormack: 00:39:54

Yeah, it's has been used to drive an agenda to support incentives for green technologies. Climate has been changing. I fundamentally believe climate change changing is because of humans. I fundamentally believe that.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:40:06

But even if you didn't, I mean the idea that every passing year it gets harder to unplug and harder to change your behaviour because the convenience of it gets better and better and better and more useful. But the idea now frankly imagine trying to live your life fully unconnected now. So going back to old maps, physical maps, it will be hard to buy a physical map, because no one sells them anyway. So the point is that I agree with you that we can turn all this around, but I think it's a bit of a race against time before it just gets harder and harder to do it.

Peter McCormack: 00:40:34

It's like that point, remember you're similar age to me. So when you were like 15, 16 remember when you said to go meet one of your mates, you had to be on time.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:40:43

Yeah, of course.

Peter McCormack: 00:40:44

Because if you weren't on time, they would know where the fuck you were. Whereas we just, I can text you, I'm 20 minutes late and everyone's can become about bit cash-in about arrival on time actually really pisses me off.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:40:54

You see, I think this is a cultural shift though, and I think this is really important and it's more important than Cambridge Analytica, all of this stuff to me. And it's good that Cambridge Analytica story has put the question of data into the heart of politics. So people are thinking about it and I hope they're now thinking this is more than just data's being manipulated. It's like what norms are we creating about behaviour now? What do we expect of politics? More important than Cambridge Analytica to me is the fact that everyone's attention span is decreasing quite sharply because they're checking things all the time. How can you be a good citizen if you cannot read something for more than half an hour without having to check your bloody phone?

Peter McCormack: 00:41:31

Yeah.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:41:32

And how can you be an inform citizen who thinks carefully about who to vote for, what causes to give to. And that to me is driving political polarisation more than sinister Cambridge Analytica using your data to manipulate you with military grade psychographics, but they don't even know what military grade psychographics even means.

Peter McCormack: 00:41:54

And what is there on the politics though as well into that. Just to throw it in, is politics about serving the people or is it about someone's career and about achieving power and therefore do ... because I go back to the Trump thing and they bombarded with ads. Are these the things they believe in that they want to make a better world for their voters for the electro or is it just about winning now?

Jamie Bartlett: 00:42:19

I mean you're outside my range of expertise now.

Peter McCormack: 00:42:21

It just feels about winning now and that's why I think everyone's fighting and arguing because it's now it's just about winning and we're right, you're wrong. Let's fight.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:42:28

Well, yeah. It feels like that. I mean, it feels like politics has become a much more like a sport and sports become much more political as well. But become a lot more like a sport where you take a side and it's your side to the death and your opponents are evil and they're

wrong and they're dangerous and everything's existential because the other side is, and that to me again is partly, not entirely, it's partly a product of our information environment. So maybe that makes me a techno determinist. I'm not saying that this is brand new. Humans have always been motivated by these things. I just think it's been turbocharged and monetised an industrial scale by the way our inflammation infrastructure has been set up unintentionally.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:43:12

I'm not blaming people for it. It's just I think you can see in the style of politics we have I think a direct reflection of the way our technology's been designed and, but it is about the expectations. You mentioned about going to see your mates and you had to be on time and you say, "Oh, let's meet down the Pentagon centre, which is where I lived. We'll meet down the Pentagon centre." It would be like you do Grange on Friday to me on Saturday morning. But I think those things create an expectation of behaviour. What do you expect to have things and people and systems and I always give the example of boots and getting your photos developed so you'll remember the hassle, the rigmarole, the price, the inadequacy.

Peter McCormack: 00:43:56

Always I remember the excitement though. The thrill of it. Actually getting your photos.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:44:00

Nearly always disappointed though, because if you've got one good photo, you'd be buzzing.

Peter McCormack: 00:44:05

because you can retake over and over. But the excitement of getting it and it was like a thing you go through photos of the first meeting.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:44:13

And they're just meaningless now because they're filtered, they're endless, they're free to send, they're free to take. They're free to redo. So everyone curates their own existence perfectly and then presents it. And so to me, like the world of politics is still stuck in the model of boots really. I mean because you didn't get what you wanted and it wasn't right. And I think when you got your photos developed that way and politics worked that way, you understood it.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:44:44

I know this is going to sound like a weird analogy, but what I didn't quite get what I voted for, but I didn't get all the photos I wanted at boots either. So it makes sense that this is how the world works. It's compromise, it's slow, it's imperfect. As a consumer now it's like everything is as I want when I want redone reedited, refill, said personalised to me with total control, and politics is still going to boots.

Peter McCormack: 00:45:07

And I think that's the expectation.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:45:09

Yeah, the expectation is changing, which I think drives the anger.

Peter McCormack: 00:45:12

I want the government to serve me as the individual for this one thing that I have. And if you don't -

Jamie Bartlett: 00:45:16

You're evil and you're stupid and you're wrong, and how could you and I don't trust you anymore. And that's I think where our behavioral norms driven by technology, you're going to start really impacting on politics because politics no longer reflects how we live our lives as a consumer. Does that make sense?

Peter McCormack: 00:45:32

No, it does.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:45:33

And I see that as much bigger than Cambridge Analytica.

Peter McCormack: 00:45:37

Well then we go full circle back to the original starting point of the documentary, which is actually, it's about Silicon Valley itself and technology and what the role of the technology it plays. Because this is all technology. This isn't just Cambridge Analytica, this isn't just Facebook. Facebook wouldn't be what it is without our mobile phones, right?

Jamie Bartlett: 00:45:53

Yeah.

Peter McCormack: 00:45:54

So there's all these different technologies that have come into play and there was a lots of other parts by the way, that documentary I found really, really interesting and I'm going to segue here a bit because I don't want to miss out on an observation I had. And I think this is why I thought it was the dark side of Silicon Valley.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:46:13

I think that was by the way, maybe a subtitle was the darker side of Silicon Valley.

Peter McCormack: 00:46:16

Ah, was it?

Jamie Bartlett: 00:46:16

Yeah, I think that might be where you got it.

Peter McCormack: 00:46:19

That to me it was a title and I think this is why. There was a bit where they talked about the most invested company in Silicon Valley was Uber. 15 billion or something or whatever, and they went out to, it was a Calcutta?

Jamie Bartlett: 00:46:35

Hyderabad Where I was in India.

Peter McCormack: 00:46:38

And they went out there with all the promises. What I realised is that they can create companies in these locations, which are first seem great, take over and dominate the

market, but they can do that and run it over a loss. Because they've got so much money invested in them that the important thing is growth. Once they need to hit profit and then they can squeeze the people who are already tied in. I think that's why I felt it was the dark side is because there's so much money now coming in from venture capital is that you can destroy businesses because you can afford to run at a loss.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:47:08

To subsidise.

Peter McCormack: 00:47:08

Yeah.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:47:09

Yeah, exactly. Or to cross-subsidise certain things. So if you are a company that owns lots of different things, you can run it at a massive loss just to destroy the local market and then squeeze when you're in monopolistic or near monopolistic position or duopolistic or whatever. I hope I don't get sued for it. I believed Starbucks was accused of cluster bombing companies, they would put several companies around local coffee shops.

Peter McCormack: 00:47:38

They triangulate them.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:47:39

Yeah. And so they destroy them and then they had the market to themselves. This is a weird version of that. I suppose.

Peter McCormack: 00:47:45

So lots of that happened. The Subway did the same. And so what they would do is, they would open three in a town. They would triangulate. So and once they've got to the point where the local businesses have closed down, they would closed one. I've literally watched this just happen in Bedford.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:48:03

Right.

Peter McCormack: 00:48:03

We had three subways open, two of them were on our high street, either ends of the high street, one is just closed down now. And I've watched it happen and it's kind of sinister and, but I also get into this weird world.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:48:15

So easy though with the app based companies like Uber, it's so easy to start up somewhere. You don't need all the physicists to the same extent. You don't need all the physical buildings, you can turn up somewhere and because of the network effects you have this sudden exponential growth, more drivers means more data means better data, which means more drivers, which means more data and feeds itself and goes very, very quickly. Uber turns up and then six months later they've an entire market, they all almost own. I mean the good thing I think at the moment though is that the regulator, even since I made that, I think the regulators in these places are getting more and more worried about it and it definitely clamping down more.

Peter McCormack: 00:48:58

Well this is I get stuck.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:49:01

Because you're quite libertarian on that.

Peter McCormack: 00:49:04

So I quite like a lot of what libertarians talk about.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:49:07

I am.

Peter McCormack: 00:49:08

But I also can't fully, especially the fall anarchist libertarians, I can't fully picture their world. I just can't see it. I can't see a world where there's no regulation. Everyone can have any weapon they want and the free market will sort itself out and we'll live in a more respectful low Biden society. I feel like no, we're going to go a bit more wild West. And there's such an imbalance with money that I just struggled with it because I think without some form of regulation you do have people that take advantage and that does lead to the loss of lies. I've just interviewed Pete Patterson from the Guardian about what's going on with the Qatar World Cup. There's a show that's being released today. There were no regulations about the treatment of migrant workers. Pretty much through most of the gulf and the death rates are ridiculously high. I mean something like up to 4000 people might die in the construction of the 2022 World Cup. I mean that's completely unacceptable for me. So 2022 World Cup.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:50:07

You see, if you're thinking about sort of classic liberalism and people like that term has become really a bit debased. Everyone likes to call themselves a classic liberal now and it's nice cover for all sorts of ideas. I could probably consider that's the closest thing to me. I've always felt like the purpose of government is to create roughly an even playing field, so an actual free market can operate. Because if you allow a free market operate and it creates massive monopoly, it's not really a free market anymore because you don't have any competition. So what's the point in that? Where's the free market in a free market that leads within six months to a monopoly and rent seeking behaviour.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:50:48

If you care about free markets, you shouldn't always be anti-regulation, should always be thinking can we build a regulation that allows for genuine new competition, newcomers. Because I also think free markets are the best way of encouraging growth and personal freedom and all of those things. The problem of course is that the minute you get the regulation in, regulation starts serving itself, bureaucracy stuff forming. They get bigger and bigger. They start engaging in rent seeking behaviour as well. And so you end up with this tussle and that's where I end up being wary of what happens when you do put in the regulation to help a free market. Because it always, and I just see you just have this pendulum effect in society where it's sort of-

Peter McCormack: 00:51:28

Left and right, left and right.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:51:29

Yeah, you over do it a bit and then you swing back a little bit and it's totally imperfect.

Peter McCormack: 00:51:34

Trump and Brexit is a reflection of going to left and ...

Jamie Bartlett: 00:51:39

Well, and they feed off each other, don't they as well?

Peter McCormack: 00:51:41

Yeah.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:51:41

They feed off each other.

Peter McCormack: 00:51:42

So what conclusions did you come to with the two part of ... because I think it's very easy to look at Silicon Valley is sometimes it's very, very evil but also there have been some amazing innovations that have come out of it and some of it is life improving. There's certain things to do with your phone that will support your health and improve your health. It's not all bad, but where did you kind of finish.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:52:08

I agree. I'm also, even myself getting a little bit, I've stopped doing it. Stop writing the complaint about big tech and I can't read another book that's slagging off big tech, just boring and it feels like it's all been settled. The only place I wanted to get to was a slight rebalancing of the scales. So people were a bit more annoyed about what's been going on. They're a bit more worried about it. Regulators are a bit more interested in what's happening and the nudges a little bit back in their favour. That was it. I didn't think, "Oh you tear these companies down, break up Facebook, do this and that."

Jamie Bartlett: 00:52:42

I was just thinking a realistic goal with this and the book I wrote about it was, well if you can get a few more people being worried about it and making a few moves about enhancing their privacy, downloading a Tor browser, increasing all of the privacy settings they have, the GDPR rules about data protection. Maybe actually trying to use some of that. Because I think this GDPR, which is the data protection stuff that's come out this summer, but potentially really interesting things that could encourage more competition. Like you've got data portability, you can ask companies to give you data back and then give it to other companies. And I can imagine a world in which people ask other companies to get their data back for them and then sell it for them. Take a cut of the profit. And that could help other companies to start up to compete with the big boys because if we believe in free markets, we want more competition with these big companies. Because what I worry about in the long run is monopolies that are far bigger than the ones we have at the moment. Because if you think about artificial intelligence as a general purpose technology that can be used in almost any industry, and the more data you get and the more compute power you get and the more people you get, the better you'll be at that. What is stopping Google dominating almost every industry imaginable. If everything's going to become data enabled and AI driven, you can have a monopoly that's way bigger than anything we see now. And that's what worries me. Where are we heading on the current trajectory and it's not towards

an amazing free market. To me it was about raising a little bit of awareness, a few more things that where people would be a bit more cautious, interested, understanding that data and privacy is part of being a citizen.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:54:23

To me it's as important that you focus on what's happening with your data as you would, whether you'd vote. I don't vote in an election because I think it's going to make a difference in this constituency. I'll vote because I feel like it's a duty and we should have a higher turnout. So the bastards know we're watching them. It's the same with data. I feel data is also a duty as a citizen to think about, consider where is it, who's got it, what do I do with it? Can I get it back? So that was all it was to nudge the scales a tiny bit.

Peter McCormack: 00:54:53

The AI thing is actually very interesting. I think it'd be a good area to close out because it's almost like you say thinking 20 years ahead. There are very different views on how this will pan out. There is the very scary Terminator 2 outlook, which we know from our childhood amazing film. But I was about to say, can they turn on us? Can the robots turn on us? There is a feasible scenario.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:55:20

Can I just say, I will see. I think far more, more likely than that, it's just mass confusion. No one knows how anything works. Everyone's pissed off because machines are making decisions based on systems we don't understand. We can't hold them accountable because we don't ... everyone says someone else's to blame. That to me is more likely a scenario than Terminator 2.

Peter McCormack: 00:55:43

Well we've got bigger problems beforehand potentially, which is the vast loss of middle class and working class jobs. Like, how serious is that? So for example, you went in the self-driving lorry, which must've been a very strange experience.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:55:58

I loved it. So interesting.

Peter McCormack: 00:55:59

So my brother was out important and recently he works in a management and traffic planning and he went out to, there's a whole study on self driving cars and vehicles, which you talked about autonomous vehicles. The thing about the autonomous lorries, a lot of people there are subsidies. Oh, it's great because it gets rid of the driver. They miss the extra step is that it can drive 24-hours a day. It's not just that you save the salary, it's more productive. And there's going to be essentially safer. So there's going to be no logical reason to regulate against it apart from to save and jobs. But you could suddenly lose all those jobs you suddenly do as taxi drivers. I dread to think pilots without having ... again on a plane without a pilot. But you've also got customer service jobs, will the economy adapt? Will everyone just find new jobs? Will we go to more service based economy where internet ... that I don't know right now.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:56:48

That's it. That's the question though. That's the transition question. Rather than thinking a jobless society where we're all unemployed, it's more about big changes come in. Are we

going to be able to adapt to it quickly enough? That's to me. I mean, and I would speak to these self-driving truckers and the people who are building the technology and I'd say, what's a 50 year old man who's driven a truck all his life going to do, he's from South Dakota and didn't go to college. And they would always say things like, "Oh well, he should retrain as a machine learning engineer," and like, it's not going to happen, is it?

Peter McCormack: 00:57:18

Come on, get a grip.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:57:19

So what's that person going to do and what that person's going to do, in my opinion, is they're going to sabotage the machines because they will not just sit by and watch their profession and their livelihood just disappear. What they will be doing is they'll be out on the streets with ... they'll work out how the machine learning algorithms work on these trucks and they'll know that they look at the road signs, and the street signs and the road markings and they'll get spray paint and they'll mess around with the road signs. So lorry goes straight over around about without stopping because they've changed the road markings that will crash, that will kill somebody and then regulations will slow it all down again because they'll feel like that's their only option. So I think more likely in the short term is a wave of Luddism as people try to smash these things up.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:58:10

And that's what happens when people feel like the economy's changing very quickly and they don't have any options left to them because there aren't the other jobs, there aren't the other opportunities. And people say, "Oh, but we had this with the industrial revolution and the Luddites and stuff." And it's like, yeah, we did, but they weren't allowed to vote. The police could just smash them and forget about them because they didn't have any economic or political power really. So how's it going to work when everyone's allowed to vote? I mean, This is the thing about the way technology is talk about the future. It's slightly forget how irrational and emotional people actually are and how we deal with rapid change. We don't like it. We can't deal with it and we don't think, "Oh that's okay. My grandchild will be safer because the lorries will be safer when we've ..." I'd be like, Fuck that. I'm not just going to stand by and let these Silicon Valley people turn up and destroy my industry."

Peter McCormack: 00:59:05

And filter all the money into fewer-

Jamie Bartlett: 00:59:07

Fewer and fewer people who own the software.

Peter McCormack: 00:59:09

Yeah. Who can build bunkers in New Zealand in case things go wrong.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:59:13

It's just people aren't going to accept it, which is, I suppose that's what worries me in the short term. And there's long term questions about sentient machines and all of those things. But the short term it's going to I think as a wave of anger about systems we don't understand and disruptive technology ruining our lives. What's the human reaction to that? It's violence and anger.

Peter McCormack: 00:59:35

Yeah. Because that's the bits, it's the transition.

Jamie Bartlett: 00:59:37

How exactly?

Peter McCormack: 00:59:38

And you've got people like Andrew Yang talking about giving people \$1000 a month, which was a-

Jamie Bartlett: 00:59:44

Would you take that?

Peter McCormack: 00:59:45

Did you hear him on Rogan?

Jamie Bartlett: 00:59:47

I didn't know

Peter McCormack: 00:59:48

What he said was he said-

Jamie Bartlett: 00:59:50

The universal basic income

Peter McCormack: 00:59:51

... universal basic income. I'm going to give everyone \$1000 a month. And Joe Rogan said, well what about the lorry driver who's earning \$72000 a year, which is a good wage for a relatively unskilled worker. And he said, well his starting point, he's got \$12,000, and in my head I'm going, "Joe, ask him about the \$60,000 gap." We've got two children. So you see the sabotaged-

Jamie Bartlett: 01:00:12

Those were questions of dignity. Do you want to just be given money by the governor?

Peter McCormack: 01:00:16

No, nobody wants to be given money. Socialism is a very, very stranger.

Jamie Bartlett: 01:00:21

It's a question of dignity as well to me. And I had this argue, well it was an interview with Sam Altman, the Y Combinator guy in the TV show, the Silicon Valley show.

Peter McCormack: 01:00:30

He's kind of odd that interview.

Jamie Bartlett: 01:00:32

Very odd. To me, I felt ... and he was same argument like no, because they'll get a universal basic income when all the jobs have gone and they'll use it to do more productive things. And I'm thinking, "Well, yeah, I mean I obviously don't want people to do crap jobs and I'd love them to do jobs they really enjoy in a meaningful and maybe they spend more time doing other things in society. We weren't born to work. But the reality is it requires you

being relying on handouts from other people. Sam Altman won't be happy receiving his money from the government. He'll still want to be rich and powerful and important and doing things and working 15 hour days. I mean, it's amazing that people that talk about moving to a four day week where we work three hours, they all work 18 hour days and would never change because they get meaning in that.

Peter McCormack: 01:01:19

Well I know all the people who seem to be very interested in universal basic income. And I'm running the test. I can't remember the venture capital firm that's also running it. Is it Peter Thiel or somebody?

Jamie Bartlett: 01:01:30

It might be Y Combinator.

Peter McCormack: 01:01:32

They're all the people doing these tests are rich people.

Jamie Bartlett: 01:01:35

Yeah.

Peter McCormack: 01:01:35

They're all millionaires or billionaires trying to implement a version of socialism that, or Neo-communism, which they think is the answer to the problems they've created, which I find a little bit distasteful.

Jamie Bartlett: 01:01:48

But again, maybe one day it can work. Maybe there's a way of, in this weird future is possible. And it sort of relies on some assumptions about dramatic cost of production. So the reason that the \$12,000 in the future is enough is because everything's more or less free because 3D printers are printing everything. So, I mean, there's some assumptions built into all of that, but I still think it does underplay the transition and human reaction to rapid change like that.

Peter McCormack: 01:02:16

I think the transition will be slightly different. So I think lorry drivers are great at demonstrating. They've got the vehicles to close down systems and roads and cities.

Jamie Bartlett: 01:02:27

They did it in the UK once that fuel ... like-

Peter McCormack: 01:02:30

It was my interest

Jamie Bartlett: 01:02:30

... 20 years ago.

Peter McCormack: 01:02:31

Yeah, they did it. They closed down the motor, we have to do to get for them side by side on the M1, slow them down. But the lorry drivers in France, they closed the fuel depots. I actually just think it will be mass demonstrations and I think what will happen then it will be

like, "Okay, so each self-driving lorry will have to have a driver in there for safety to monitor it. And it'll just happen in like slower stages. And there'll be phased out. But do you know what? It's the transition I worry about, we seem to be heading into a lot of anarchy globally. We've had demonstrations in France or we've just had Lebanon and Chile and there's like a rise up now people are thinking of just saying, "Look, we've had a fucking nut for this."

Jamie Bartlett: 01:03:13

But don't see, there's lots of reasons for this, but I see one of the underlying ones a bit like you have an enormous change in the way that information is produced and how the economy works and it's living alongside an old world, which is all based on all these different principles and ideas about control and centralism, and the two things just seem out of sync with each other in lots of different ways. And it's a bit the same. You have an old sort of medieval society and then you drop the printing press in the middle of it and it's like, the whole thing blows up and we feels like that's what it is. I mean that's what's happening. It's very hard to piece it together precisely. But roughly speaking, I think that was what's happening.

Peter McCormack: 01:03:54

There's a really great book called Engines That Move Markets and it talks about this, that the virtual light bulb and electricity and railroads and how these different key inventions change that. I think the latest version had the internet in there. My assumption is there's going to be another re-print version that one will have maybe Bitcoin in another one maybe we'll have AI in them. We'll see how it all plays out.

Jamie Bartlett: 01:04:14

Because I studied history. History was always my subject. And people when I'm talking about this stuff and they say, "Oh, but the printing press, it was good in it. In the end it was good. And then just revolution. Yeah, it's good, right?" And I'm like, "Yeah, but look at what happened in the 50 or 100 years afterwards. Mayhem, complete mayhem." Like yes, good in the long run of course. But you've got to get there first. And so that's sort of minor. So anytime anyone says, I love it when they do say, "Oh, hello. Yeah, excuse me. Yeah, one word for you printing press." And I'm like, "Yes, that proves my point. Not your point. I know what you think. You'll say. You think you're saying it all worked out for the best. Well you didn't live through the Spanish inquisition, did ya? Well, this is all Southern transformation, how society's worked." Anyway, that's why I'm loaded on predictions as well because once you factor in human rationality into all of this, you realise things can go in all different directions.

Peter McCormack: 01:05:14

Do you think you're going to go back into the subject at all, do you think this is a story done for you now or are you moving on to other things or do you think you're going to go back into at all?

Jamie Bartlett: 01:05:21

I think I'm now more interested, so I'm sick to the back teeth of stories moaning about big tech. Like I said, I can't read another book which says essentially the same thing. 20 of them been published now in the last couple of years. I'm not sure what else there is to add. I'm now more interested in sort of thinking about the next 10 or 20 years time. What things are we heading towards? Because to take it back to Cambridge Analytica, what was the first election you ... if we're about the same, you say 1997 Tony Blair things can only get better.

Peter McCormack: 01:05:53

So my first election-

Jamie Bartlett: 01:05:55

Would have been, it must have been.

Peter McCormack: 01:05:57

Yes, that was because I was at university.

Jamie Bartlett: 01:05:58

Yeah

Peter McCormack: 01:05:59

I didn't know what to vote. My weird thing was in that election, I actually voted conservatives and the reason I've voted conservative is because-

Jamie Bartlett: 01:06:06

One of the very few 19 year olds was leading conservative '97 I reckon.

Peter McCormack: 01:06:09

Very simple rule I had on this. That's who my dad voted for. And my dad was financing me to go to university and I was like, "Dad, I don't know who to vote for, but whatever's best for you is best for me." And he said, "I'm voting conservative." And he explained why and I did. Funny enough, my brother voted labor and there was a mega argument.

Jamie Bartlett: 01:06:28

But there was a mood in '97 that it was obviously, the mood had changed in the country and it was obviously -

Peter McCormack: 01:06:33

Things are going to get better. That was our make America great again.

Jamie Bartlett: 01:06:39

I mean it was, and the thing about that election, which my first election as well, so 20 years later, we're now talking about the Donald Trump election in '96, sorry, in 2016 so roughly 20 years on. And think about if someone would've said to you in 97 well, in less than 20 years time, Facebook, you'd be like, what? Yeah, Facebook will be key to the election because it would be collecting data about you and on your phone, which will actually now be a handheld device that you're going to-

Peter McCormack: 01:07:12

Sounds like a film.

Jamie Bartlett: 01:07:13

It sound ridiculous. And a company called Cambridge Analytical will have profiled you and we serving up, it would have sounded ludicrous. No one would've believed you.

Peter McCormack: 01:07:21

Yeah.

Jamie Bartlett: 01:07:24

But 20 years isn't a long time in the history of nations or I mean, it's a very short period. So I'm thinking I'm now more interested in thinking what will we be like in 20 years from now? That person's first election in 2019 when they're our age, what might it be like, and what sort of things do we think about now to help shape how that looks? So I'm thinking more about the sort of medium term reachable future, not going to Mars and like super AI is pushing the nuclear button. I just think that's a really long way off. But what are the likely changes that we might see within our sort of ... we'll still be well alive, I say hopefully because a few problems with people.

Peter McCormack: 01:08:08

Maybe still miserable old men

Jamie Bartlett: 01:08:10

"back in my day."

Peter McCormack: 01:08:12

"We didn't have mobile phones. We arrived on time." Interesting.

Jamie Bartlett: 01:08:19

So it's more like that. So that's the kind of, what is Cambridge Analytical are like in 20 years time, I find that more interesting than just rerunning what we already know.

Peter McCormack: 01:08:26

I think you and I possibly see that differently because I see the demise of Facebook. Facebook to me is just a telecoms company now. It will be all about phone communications, virtual reality. I don't see the platform itself as something that survives. I know a lot of people are moving away from it and it's losing its network effect actually. There's a lot of people dropping off.

Jamie Bartlett: 01:08:49

It's not just that though. It's not just that, it's what's it going to be like for you living in a smart connected home?

Peter McCormack: 01:08:56

Yeah.

Jamie Bartlett: 01:08:56

What things might that create for you? Your coffee machine is going to be hacked into.

Peter McCormack: 01:09:02

But I think Facebook and what happened now, what might be peak manipulation. I think we're more aware, we're better at protecting ourselves. I think we're going to be less manipulated because we're spending less time on things like Facebook. I personally think this election and what happened was peak manipulation. We can learn from them. People are more self-aware. That's my personal view and I think we drift away from it. I think the next time it gets really bad is when we have chips in our head, which would get hacked. That's probably the next time it goes really bad. But I see a different.

Jamie Bartlett: 01:09:30

That's the next show when we're back in 20 years to about 30 years.

Peter McCormack: 01:09:34

Oh listen, this was great. I'm going to tell everyone to watch it.

Jamie Bartlett: 01:09:37

You can't.

Peter McCormack: 01:09:38

You can't. Yeah, is there no way of ever getting out there? Because think we should see it.

Jamie Bartlett: 01:09:40

I try, every three months I go back to the BBC and say, can you please put this back on iPlayer because it's still totally relevant.

Peter McCormack: 01:09:48

Yeah.

Jamie Bartlett: 01:09:49

But I don't know.

Peter McCormack: 01:09:49

Why don't they just have a YouTube channel? They should just have the YouTube channel.

Jamie Bartlett: 01:09:52

I'll try.

Peter McCormack: 01:09:52

I mean, the assumption is-

Jamie Bartlett: 01:09:55

But the book I wrote, does cover a lot of the same grounds.

Peter McCormack: 01:09:57

Okay. Well, I recommend the book and the thing is about the BBC. I assume the iPlayer thing is a data thing. So they just take stuff off because they don't want to keep paying for the data.

Jamie Bartlett: 01:10:04

I think so.

Peter McCormack: 01:10:04

But I really, they should just have a bloody YouTube channel so somebody else does because I think it should be out there. It's a shame people won't get to see. If it does, you let me know and I'll let people know to watch it. I'll recommend the book because I think it's really interesting and look, thanks for doing it. It was great.

Jamie Bartlett: 01:10:18

Pleasure. Thanks for having me.

Peter McCormack: 01:10:21

All right man.

