Trend alert: accelerationism

Maygane Janin: Did you know...

Adam Hadley: ...that in March this year a US man allegedly planned to bomb a hospital caring for covid-19 patients in the US, and that in May a french man was arrested planning to target places of worship once the lockdown had been lifted in France. Both had been engaging in far-right violent extremist content, and had their motivations accelerated by the health crisis.

Maygane Janin: The term boogaloo originating in the 1984 film breaking two electric boogaloo and turning into an internet meme has become a synonym for an upcoming civil war in the US.

Adam Hadley: The Christchurch shooter dedicated an entire section of his manifesto to accelerationism as a tactic for victory.

Maygane Janin: This is Tech against terrorism and I'm Maygane Janin

Adam Hadley: And I'm Adam Hadley, in this episode we take a deep dive into far-right violent extremism's call for violence to accelerate the collapse of society as we know it. Otherwise known as accelerationism. To fully comprehend what this means and why it matters in today's counter-terrorism discussion. We'll take a look back at the origin of this doctrine before turning to its increasing popularity amongst far-right violent extremists and terrorists, especially online.

Maygane Janin: Whilst there are similarities between the Christ Church shooter and the man behind the recent plot in the US and France. Beside all of them having the motivations in far-right violent extremism, they're all reading accelerationist mantea whilst preparing their attacks, related to their plans to act are motivated, or rather accelerated, by the covid-19 crisis.

Adam Hadley: Anyone with half a brain and enough time can find the information to realise that accelerationism is the last resort of the white man of the modern age; so says a discord user, summarising in a few words the importance of accelerationism has taken within the far-right extremist

and terrorist space in recent years. According to these people, our modern societies are corrupted to the core, and on the brink of collapse because of so called degenerate values of multiculturalism, liberalism, feminism and diversity. In other words, a lot of the things that we hold dear in democratic society. For them, they're keen on accelerating the collapse of society, and for these people this is the only manner that they believe they can bring true change and ideally a new world order founded on white supremacist and neo-nazi values.

Maygane Janin: Accelerationist belief has become increasingly popular amongst far-right violent extremists in recent years and only seem to be gaining prominence. On its increased visibility in the online space accelerationism has been a key ideological factor in a number of attacks in 2019. Moreover, 2020 appears to have been the year many accelerationists have been waiting for. The covid-19 crisis ends during lockdown, the social unrest in the US following the death of George Floyd all have proven to be fertile ground for accelerationist exploits.

Adam Hadley: To help us understand what accelerationism is, why it has become a flagship doctrine of far-right violent extremism, and how it is reflected online we are joined by Professor Matthew Feldman and Ashton Kingdon. Matthew is a director of the central analysis of the radical right carr and also an expert on facist ideology, neo-nazism and so called lone acts of terrorism. His research is also focussed on siege culture, a key tenet of neo-nazi accelerationism as we will see during this podcast. Ashton is a PHD student at the University of Southampton and a fellow at Carr. Her research focuses on how far-right extremists use technology, and the internet in particular, for recruitment and radicalisation. Her latest articles, the 'Gift of the Gab' and 'I predict a riot' analyse how violent extremists have been exploiting the covid-19 crisis and the death of George Floyd.

Maygane Janin: On today's episode we are also welcoming a third guest, so stay with us until the end to hear Ben Makuch discuss accelerationism from his perspective as a Journalist.

Adam Hadley: Matthew, Ashton, it's a great pleasure to have you here today on the Tech Against Terrorism podcast, welcome to the show.

Maygane Janin: First off, let's go back to the origin of the term and what it implies, I believe that accelerationism is originally an epilogical doctrine, in the sense of advocating for the accelerated collapse of a social order to replace it by a new one without specifying what one could believe by this new order. Matthew, Ashton could you tell us a bit more about the key tenets of accelerationism, its history, and its appropriation by far-right bound extremists.

Matthew Feldman: Sure, I actually think accelerationism can be bundled into three overlapping but pretty distinct things. The first is the doctrine that we want to, it's a political doctrine that if we can support something that overthrows, basically my enemies, enemy is my friend, but basically overthrows the correct system that oppresses us, we will support it. The classic example going back in history would be, for example, the revolutionary defences of both Lennon and the Bolsheviks a hundred years ago. Accelerationism in general context is a very broad concept that essentially means rooting for the people who are fighting your enemies to win. In its more narrow context, a generation ago or so a philosopher

based in Britain named Nick Land coined the term accelerationism as part of a wider, kind of technological revolt against modernity it was called the Dark Enlightenment and he published a number of works that were sort of, philosophical in the 1990s. Now that was the more apolitical accelerationism that you're talking about, and I think that's really where we owe the term as it didn't really exist as a term before Nick Land came along and started talking about this idea of sort of pushing fragile systems over the edge so that they collapse. More specifically, and not directly linked to Nick Land is a form of nazi accelerationism that probably is better called siege culture and that emerged in the last five or seven years by a number of neo-nazi activists, particularly prominently online and dotted around the world but particularly prominently in the UK and the US, now that we have come to call accelerationism but is really nothing more than a sort of exacerbation making it extreme, a doctrine that is already in the heart of nazism which is a revolution to overcome liberal democracy. The certain erm type or way in which this accelerationism has presented is very much in-keeping with James Mason's ideas in Siege, and I think that when people are talking about extreme right accelerationism, what they really mean is siege culture which has sort of emerged on the scene in the last, you know, over the last decade.

Ashton Kingdon: Yeah I completely agree with, erm ,what Matthew is saying, particularly in terms of what I've seen on the platforms that I've been on. Mainly in relation to siege culture, cropping up over the past sort of five or ten years after the creation of Ironmarch and its escalated from then, but I don't necessarily believe that the people that are using this imagery understand, erm, the key origins of it… that's one thing I will say.

Maygane Janin: Well that's really interesting background into accelerationism and how it came to be appropriated by the extreme far-right. Matthew you mentioned siege culture and James Mason, he also wrote a lot about leaderless resistance if I'm not wrong, could you develop on how leaderless resistance links back to accelerationism.

Matthew Feldman: Yes, so I think again when we're talking about extreme right accelerationism we're really talking about James Mason's ideas, which is wrong because in a radical right accelerationism it's more than that but it's become prominent particularly because of, erm, neo-nazi groups like Atomwaffen Division and national action, and others. I think the core of this, that all scholars as far as I can tell have wrong maybe with one or two honourable exceptions and sadly I'm not amongst them, is that the idea of leaderless resistance was really popularised by a man named Louis Beam in the early 1990's he wrote a text by that name which was taken up by a number of, er, this concept of kind of lone wolf or leaderless resistance was taken up by a number of, erm, neo-nazi's in the US, Alex Curtis and Tom Metzger in the 1990's and then it sort of came home to roost most horrifically in 1999, with David Copeland and that's when it sort of arrived as a practice. But I think the thing that we've all gotten wrong was that a decade before Louis Beam was writing leaderless resistance James Mason was used in the phrase 'lone wolf,' he also used the phrase 'lone eagles' and 'one man armies' in his Siege pamphlets that were originally published between, about the Summer of 1980 and the Summer of 1986. Given the way text travelled in the United States at that time it's all but impossible for me to conceive that Louis Beam and a number of other people who had, people that, developed the ideas didn't originally get it from James Masons' writings, erm, in siege in the early 1980's. He's really the sort of founding father of neo-nazi lone wolf terrorism.

Maygane Janin: So you both mention Atomwaffen Division and Ironmarch, the online neo-nazi prone of the times. I find it quite interesting that Atomwaffen Division which sort of became the flagship of accelerationism and siege culture was kind of born out of an online forum, because of that can you develop on these images and the importance of accelerationism know this within the far-right extremist online sphere.

Ashton Kingdon: I spent a lot of time on a platform called Fascist Forge which was like, what emerged after Ironmarch was taken offline, and also a, like, counter platform platform to that sort of linked called Siege Culture it's now called Universal Order but its got the same URL, and it's very much this accelerationism is a key narrative within their propaganda. So, what you see now in the midst of the coronavirus and the George Floyd pandemic is this propaganda being repackaged to coincide with particular events, but it actually stems from the forums Ironmarch and Siege Culture. Now, to be part of these forums you have to read James Mason's Siege which links back to what Matthew was saying, like a lot of these people that follow this ideology now weren't actually reading this when it came out, and don't necessarily understand where all the ideas are coming from, erm, there's a lot of an obsessed with Charles Manson for example, and what he was saying about helter skelter which isn't actually correct to what he was saying in the propaganda. So, I think it's really interesting to see how these forums not only sort of bare new forums when they come down, but also the way that the same narratives travel and are misconstrued depending on particular events.

Maygane Janin: To continue on this particular event, and the repackaging that we have seen in 2020. Your most recent article Ashton talking about this exploitation of the covid-19 crisis and George Floyd death and all the social unrest that followed in the US. Could you develop a bit more on that, and how they're using that for their own interests and to recruit new members.

Ashton Kingdon: Yeah, so I spend, because I'm in the middle of my PHD at the moment I spend a hell of a lot of time on different forums, and to me the platforms aren't the important thing about my research, it's the narrative. So, there's a few key accelerationist sub-cultures, like loosely linked sub-cultures that have emerged. Obviously you've got like Matt was saying, this Neo-nazi, Ironmarch James Mason siege culture, then you've got eco-facism, you've got the anti-government extremism as well in there, so you've got these kind of different narratives emerging and they're coming up on every single platform. So for example, if you look on Russian platforms like 'VK' you've got eco-facist propaganda coming up, so back in the day you'd have facism it was sort of conform or else, then when you had National Socialism race became the most important part of that, and then with eco-fascism the environment becomes the most important part. So essentially they're using the coronavirus pandemic to kind of insinuate that this is the thing that will kick start this new movement, and replace whoever is in government, so they'll accelerate the collapse of capitalism, and then who will be in charge will recommend that the environment comes before all. So that's an interesting narrative that's emerged. But if you go onto the dark web, I was on there last week doing something for some other research I was doing, and even if you go on the Daily Stormer, like, the first thing that comes up is we're preparing for an apocalypse, you know, we're in the middle of a race war preparing for that and when you come onto the sort of Nchan, 8chan forums they're swapping this like race war that was, became such a big issue

and narrative with the George Floyd protest but they're turning it around from it's black versus whites to actually, against Jewish people so if you go onto the dark web the narrative has changed and it's oh, we need to accelerate capitalism, capitalism's evil, who's in control of capitalism and then those really old deep-rooted prejudices against Jewish people come out as well. So, it's really interesting to see how they are all co-elessing together on completely different platforms.

Maygane Janin: That's really interesting, especially the difference in discourse used I believe. To continue onto the kind of platform we use, so you mention quite a few platforms that you've used lately but do you also see accelerationist propaganda popping up on more mainstream platforms, mainstream social media such as Twitter, Facebook, or YouTube or even Instagram these days.

Ashton Kingdon: Yeah I mean you do see it everywhere, and this is the link between who's disseminating the propaganda and what their core narratives are. So for example the way that I have a conceptual framework of the way that I use imagery is, I look at the universal meaning within memes and images so what will everyone whose looking at that agree upon, so the universal message and then the inherent crystallisations within specific memes that will have specific meanings based on what platform they're shared on and at particular moments in time. So you can see accelerationist propaganda on mainstream platforms mainly relating to anti-government extremism that I've seen, and this kind of kick-starting of a race war is a lot more palatable when you look at platforms like Instagram, it's not going to be like the sorts of things that you would see on the dark web, like there is just a completely different, like, narrative going on there. But yeah, the main accelerationist propaganda that I've seen on like mainstream platforms is to do with anti-government extremism, again like I said, you can coincide like Charles Manson propaganda with the release of the second season of Mindhunter, like you know, people get into it they become familiar with who he is, what his messages were, and they're more likely to then engage with them sorts of narratives which as I've said before are actually incorrect the way they're being disseminated now. But I haven't seen, like, really intense like neo-nazi propaganda on like surface platforms and as I said in the article that I did for GNET when they got rid of Fascist Forge you could see them migrating over to sort of more right wing populist forums like Gab which I found really interesting because I'd never seen that sort of content on Gab until they shut down Fascist Forge.

Adam Hadley: So it seems that manifestos are especially important where the violent far-right's concerned, for example the Christchurch shooter just like the El Paso and the Halle attackers, and of course Alexander Breivik years before, had all posted manifestos online before committing their attacks. Tell us more about this phenomenon of online manifestos and how they're linked to accelerationism, if they can be

Matthew Feldman: Well I would say they're not directly linked to accelerationism in only so far as they, again that's a term that no one used five years ago. Nick Land came up with it twenty years ago and it refers to a concept that arguably Trotskyism is the closest, you know, kind of analog to it. If what we're talking about is revolutionary right or in this case neo-nazi attempts to overthrow a system of government, of course there have been examples and indeed there have been lone wolves so called examples going right back to David Copeland which is again some twenty years ago. Erm, I've also participated in cases as an expert witness amongst, er, several cases over the last decade where again,

people are writing various forms of manifestos one was called the 'Waffen SS UK Members Handbook,' and like the Breivik manifesto, erm, was written for an audience that didn't exist or that was in the process of being created like the Knights Templar, this had one, one member this particular tractarian or ideologue whose releasing or compiling manifestos to scare or to convert the population at large, and that phenomenon is actually more familiar than what we'd seen just with the horrors of Breivik of course in the last couple of years, there have been an a rash of these including Patrick Crusius in the United States, also John D. Earnest left a manifesto and of course Brenton Tarrant left a seventy-four page document called 'The Great Replacement,' modelled on the sort of Great Replacement Theory of Renaud Camus that just before he killed fifty-one people in Christchurch. There was also a multi hundred I think nearly four hundred page manifesto by someone who reminds us when we start thinking, oh these guys are young white men, so that's what our profile needs to be. A man named James Von Brunn wrote a four hundred page manifesto, deeply anti-semitic and then shot up a Holocaust Museum in the late 90's he was, I believe ninety-three years old. So I think it's important to remember that this tactic of sort of kind of, initiating yourself as a lone soldier and going out and attacking innocent people who you regard as basically, that you're at war with that lone wolf tactic which again was popularised but first put forward by James Mason was popularised in the 1990's by Louis Beam and a number of other american based neo-nazis, er, started to become prevalent in the late 1990's and then spread internationally thereafter, that sort of playbook that sort of guide, in itself is transnational that is generation long or two generation long for the radical right so those are not new things. Similarly, the idea of exploitation after a terrorist attack is a very very familiar tactic and the idea that the radical right, the neo-nazis are using that, shouldn't surprise us. Again I think one of the things that's really important to note here is that some of us who have been working in this area for a long time will have seen a number of these manifestos that have been written you know for years and years and years, so they didn't just really start with Breivik or with Terrin those two by contrast were sort of keying into a longer standing trend that I think are are visible this century and even into the last century.

Maygane Janin: So I guess moving on my next question will be on the increased media attention that has been given to accelerationism lately. So we see more and more newspapers especially in the US, talking about that and about it as a threat to our societies. However, as I just said it's mostly in the US that they talk about it, it might give the impression that accelerationism is only a US phenomenon is that right or a mistaken assumption that everything is alright elsewhere.

Matthew Feldman: I just answered briefly that guns are the American phenomenon here, that's whats different about the United States, and of course ready access to guns can lead to acts of accelerationist terrorism, like we saw with Patrick Crusius or John D. Earnest attempted attacks. Erm, so I think that's one thing that's very different once we're talking about other, er, types of elements and again theres a broad range as we've seen, erm, very appallingly in the last few years, different types of terrorist attack and that's before we get into cyber-terrorism or other forms of state based terrorism. Individual sub-state actors have used everything from, erm, caster beans and vehicles to much more sophisticated chemical agents and bombs to try and reek havoc on a society that they feel they're at war with, and in that sense I think the one difference that we've seen and one of the reasons that things tend to be body counts tend to be higher in America is just ready access to guns, which in some cases has become a sort of go-to weapon, think of Robert Bowers you know shooting up a Synagogue only a couple of years ago,

those things are possible in other countries but they happen with such less frequency that we can actually say that these mass shooting's whether they are school shootings, spree shootings the product of mental illness or indeed terrorist shootings, you know, happen more in America than the rest of the world put together.

Ashton Kingdon: Yeah just to add to that because I completely agree, one of the key things that I've noticed as I said in sort of unpicking different narratives and how they all link together within different groups of different ideologies, everyone wants a race war right, if you're looking at these neo-nazi sort of narratives, their propaganda that's coming out they want a race war now you've seen it emerge in America with the George floyd, erm, issues of race issues of a race war again where they're mixing issues of narratives. A lot of what contemporary neo-nazi's believe in stems from siege and a lot of what is in siege is in 'The Turner Diaries,' and the thing that if anyone's read that kicks it all off is The Cohen Act so going away, taking their guns taking their weapons away from them, so I think it's really important to realise that actually a lot of these narratives intersect and sort of influence and propel each other and this sort of issue with the guns is coming into countries where as Matthew is saying we don't have easy access to guns. But the sentiment is the same, like accelerationist's are everywhere they're on every platform, mainstream, dark web, like slightly more sinister platforms on the surface web like Gab the right-wing platforms they're everywhere it's not just based in America. But I think the easy access of weapons and the culture of weapons does also fuel the likelihood of an attack occurring.

Adam Hadley: All of our work at Tech Against Terrorism is focussed on supporting smaller tech platforms in tackling the terrorist use of the internet whilst respecting human rights. So we're really interested in learning from guests, about hearing about what they think the tech sector should be doing to improve matters. What recommendations would you give to tech platforms, especially the smallest ones to counter the spread of accelerationism online?

Matthew Feldman: So I think and I've spoken with executives, I've spoken with practitioners, I should say IT executives and so I think that as far as I can tell there's two problems here. One is that these tend to be much more focussed on and home to accelerationism on smaller platforms like there's no doubt about that, that this stuff does exist on the larger platforms but that, you know, they're eager and anxious to get off of it, you know get off of those platforms. Whereas, some of the smaller platforms like Steam, or Discord, or Gab, Ashton earlier mentioned VK you know are willing to host these. I think the difference is of course, that the big four, ,your Facebook's, Twitter, Google's and YouTube, you know that's more than nine tenths of the internet, and so I think that the problems are different. One of them is about small platforms hosting really extreme material that can radicalise or even lead people to political violence, and then the other one is about materialist, not as extreme, but is seen by, you know, twenty times more people, ten or twenty times more people on the main sites and some of those can of course lead to, lead people to the more extreme materials, it doesn't simply just work as a sort of ladder of extremism or as a sort of slide, erm, but one can lead to another, the algorithms on YouTube can in times lead people to then go and look at Bitchue or some of the more Gab for more extreme content. So those problems do exist but I think that it seems to be mistaken to suggest, to lump, and I'm not suggesting you do this Maygane, but to lump big platforms and small platforms together because they seem to be like apples and oranges in terms of facing this problem.

Ashton Kingdon: Yeah one thing that is really important to me is my research doesn't look at any of the large platforms it's all about, sort of about the hidden away niche more sinister platforms. I did a conference in, erm, October I was presenting my research from Fascist Forge as I spent about eight months on that. And the one thing that I really wanted to get across to people because, the argument was that so many people focus on the big tech platforms and how we can prevent extremism on there how can we prevent radicalisations, how can we use artificial intelligence to help combat extremism. You've got these web 1.0 old school forums where the most disgusting radical people are, that don't have as much attention placed on them and when I was really looking at each member of Fascist Forge and who they were, they were paramedics one of them was a primary school teacher they were like the ordinary people hidden amongst society that you would never suspect. And that was the thing that really frightened me, and thought we really need to be looking at people out of stereotypes of whose a right wing extremist and see that these sorts of more sinister ideologies are more widespread, and it's not necessarily about employing technologies to help combat them, but rather, and this is what I do, really understand the core narratives of the propaganda that's potentially radicalising people, to try and reeducate people and combat it that way, rather than just deploying A.I and machine learning and taking down propaganda that might not be as potentially dangerous as some of the platforms that are more hidden. So I think that's really important in combating it, like understanding the different narratives.

Adam Hadley: And Ashton if I may ask a question, how do you feel this is going to change over the next few years, are we winning this battle in combating the extreme far right use of the internet, what's the direction of travel in this regard do you think?

Ashton Kingdon: A lot of my research also focuses on artificial intelligence, and not only the way that it's used by extremists but the way it can be used to prevent them. And I don't think that platforms are transparent enough about their technology, so for example one of the things I argue is just because you tell someone you're using deep learning or you're using machine learning doesn't mean that they know. Or, just because someone tells you doesn't mean you understand what they're saying, right, so I think this is a key thing I think a lot of people do not understand the technology that is suggesting content to them, like, regardless of people saying we employ deep learning people don't understand it, I think that is a key problem. There is a problem with people becoming more susceptible to the extreme narratives, I don't know if any of you have come across this recently but, so many of my friends who were usually rational people are going down the like QAnon rabbit hole of you know conspiracy theories because of things that they've seen on the big tech platforms. So I think that combatting that is a thing. I think we need to focus on the smaller platforms with the older technologies right, this goes right back to like when you were looking at Al-Qaeda and the way they were communicating was just logging into an email and not actually sending it but so that the other person could log into the same email and read it, and it's just like some of the old school technologies are winning here in terms of being able to radicalise more people. So yeah, I don't think we're winning any wars at the moment... I know that's quite depressing but yeah I think it is still a really big problem.

Adam Hadley: And what would you say had changed over the past five years for example, because clearly the internet has been around for quite a long time now Facebook is not a start-up.

Ashton Kingdon: Yeah so I actually like, like, the main thing that I talk about in my research in terms of technology is socio technical approach, so what's happening in society, what is going on at this moment in time, obviously if you're talking about the last five years the things I talk about are you know, the Syrian Civil War, the increased 2015 migration crisis, the 2008 financial collapse- where are these economic migrants and refugees coming in from Africa they're hitting the nations as close as say Spain, already on the borders that are already economically weak, combine that with an extreme rise in nationalism now we're facing a severe economic recession you're going to have a lot of unemployed people, a lot of disenfranchised people and I think that if you are angry and annoyed with the State, with society you don't fit it, you've got things missing from your roles, you're more likely to be attracted to these narratives. So I think that actually it's mainly to do with a combination of both, half tech half what's going on in society, if everything was lovely and fluffy in the world would these people really be using this technology to talk to other extreme people, probably not.

Matthew Feldman: I do think that if we're talking about these trends, and, everything Ashton says is spot on, but I do think that if we're talking about the last five or ten years the elephant in the room really is social media, you know, it existed of course for the first decade of the twentieth century but it didn't really find its feet, I guess you could say for a lack of a better pun, until really the last decade and, um, you know I'm probably not the best person to consult about this but there's something like, you know, it's something like the crack of the internet it really is the sort of micro blogging and the sort of the quick hit of just looking, you know, online and, you know, it seems to take away, a, maybe a layer potentially of responsibility from people self censoring or doing normally the things that you wouldn't just say to someone's face, erm, and I do wonder how much and I don't know if the question is even answerable at this point, um, whether or not research has been done on it, but how much, in a sense, social media may be seeming to coarsen our discussion online in this case. And I'm no saint you know, I'm not sitting here saying that every engagement I have on social media is you know, always perfected professionally I have aired as well, but I can't wonder if the rise of social media has to do with something fuelling what are ultimately simplistic, conspiratorial, you know, one sentence solutions to a complex world and complex problems.

Adam Hadley: Could you not also argue that social media, the internet, is an example of flattening communication between people. So could happen through social media could be various other things, er, and therefore it's reducing kind of friction to communications and therefore opening society up to many of these concerns that would otherwise have been held at bay because of the difficulty, er, for communities and individuals to communicate with one another?

Matthew Feldman: I mean yes, I'm not going, this is a terrible analogy Adam but just to draw maybe in conclusion. You know there are those kind of people who say you know guns don't kill people people kill people, right, you know like in a sense that's obviously true, a gun is just an object but you have a lot of these objects around the likelihood of people getting angry and then resorting to using guns goes up right, it's a pretty clear kind of thing. I don't doubt that what we're seeing is also a product of things that

are beyond social media there's no doubt that of course, the flattening of conversation those things might be going on quite apart from social media, but I can't help but feel like it's the gun in this situation that makes it all too easy, I mean just to give an example of anybody who's ever been on twitter you know two hundred and eighty characters can be very difficult to develop any nuance in an argument. It's just the way in which that is set up, even Facebook which would allow you the ability to write something longer, Instagram, you know, write a longer post. These aren't the kinds of fora where it's, you know, jostled amongst dozens of other things competing for your attention, um, this isn't like reading and writing a letter fifty years ago.

Ashton Kingdon: I don't believe or subscribe to the technologically deterministic view that technology as itself radicalises people, like you were saying there's the argument guns don't kill people people kill people, it acts as an accelerator. Certainly what I've found is that, on Fascist Forge, and I'll use this as an example because I spent the most time on that one platform, these people have thought these views for a long time, longer than five years ago when Ironmarch was around, they've had them for a long time. But what I think that social media has done, like, in combination with like the election of Trump, Brexit, has made people feel more comfortable to express more extreme views because there\s more extremism on big, like, tech social media platforms. So feel, they probably feel more comfortable now to come out and express their really intense neo-nazi views, because it's more acceptable now, um, and that is again, the exposure of social media to people. Like Matthew was saying, do you think these people would be exposed to QAnon like ten years ago, fifteen years ago, probably not...

Matthew Feldman: I think that's true, although I do have one caveat you know this, for example we're seeing a lot of racism, instances of racism captured on video and it goes to the question again not precisely what Ashton was saying, but you know is there more racism in the world, again I do think there's something to be said for maybe there's less but it's being captured more because we have the ability to, you know, film it and disseminate it so I think there are various push and pull factors it'd be nice to think that we're seeing more racism but there's actually less around if you see what I mean- it gets captured more, people are shocked by it, they get out their phones and they record it, um, and in all of that again social media can play a quite virtuous role and that's a, you know, important and excellent role. As well I tend to agree though with Ashton that social media perhaps plays to some of the least honourable aspects of human nature let's put it that way.

Adam Hadley: Thank you very much that was Matthew Feldman and Ashton Kingdon on accelerationism and far right violent extremism. Before we conclude this podcast we wanted to learn a bit more about the increased media attention thats been given to accelerationism and its only manifestation.

Maygane Janin: To better comprehend this rise in reporting on accelerationism, and why it matters, we are also welcoming Ben Makuch in today's episode. Ben is national secretary reporter with Vice news he has been investigating and writing about far right violent extremists, especially neo-nazis for the past years. He has written a number of articles on Atomwaffen Division, a US based neo-nazi group which has been playing a key role in bringing accelerationism back in fashion within violent extremists.

Adam Hadley: Ben, welcome to the show.

Ben Makuch: Thanks so much for having me.

Adam Hadley: So, accelerationism has gathered quite a lot of media attention lately as a Journalist yourself, especially one so versed in the extreme far right, why do you think that accelerationism has experienced this increased attention?

Ben Makuch: Well I think right now obviously, a lot of the time people wonder what the far right is going to do and I think one thing you have to remember is that they're part of our society as much as you and I are. So, when they're experiencing something that's as cataclysmic as the pandemic which has caused several governments to have sort of adverse reactions to something that's really generational and shakes the very foundations of our society, they see it always in the terms of, how do we take advantage of things. Because this isn't new among neo-nazi terror organisations going as far back as something like The Order in the eighties, or even the Aryan Republican Army in the nineties, and now we have groups like Atomwaffen Division and The Base and through my own reporting I've seen them, I've seen them, discussing things online together as early as last Summer discussing whether or not they should take advantage of some of the unrest around the tensions between Iran and the US government. So this has always been something they look at as a possibility, and right now when you look at something like the pandemic and the economic strife that's been caused by it, also the increased attention for law enforcement around fears that this could turn into something more, more difficult just on a day to day basis on the streets of say somewhere like New York City or other places in the United States specifically, they see it as a complete opportunity to sort of advance their goals and to hasten the collapse of society through acts of death by a thousand cuts, sort of this idea of, of attacking society in a way that will help it fall apart and I think when you look at something like the pandemic if you're them this is a great opportunity.

Adam Hadley: So if i understand you right, you're saying, you know, this is about real life trends in society and it's important to focus on the offline component of that. So, to what extent would you say that extreme far right actors are keen to promote what they're doing and to some extent, to get publicity from it and, you know, how would you describe that symbiosis?

Ben Makuch: I would describe it almost as identically to the way in which each a Jihadist terrorist organisation has operated in the past. I mean these are groups that look at it the same way, media attention and publicising what they do is an important component of being a terrorist organisation period. So if you look at something like The Base, I mean one of their founding was to use Twitter accounts to spread propaganda and to also spread their contact information, you know, they would tweet something as sort of insidious as how to stab someone and kill them properly, how to slash someone and kill them properly, and then would also provide their, you know, if you want to join the group here's our word press account here's our pro-talent mail email address. So, when it comes to that sort of thing I mean, their tech is always a very important, a very important tool, I mean before if you looked at something like Al-Qaeda, Al-Qaeda used advertisements in magazines to get people to join the mujahideen in Afghanistan to fight the Soviets, and I think if you look at the evolution of that Isis clearly in 2014 used social media very prolifically, and then not long after you have these neo-nazi

accelerationist groups that looked at social media and the ways in which they publicised their, their, their acts of terror but also their training, their numbers, they become more attractive to a potential recruit. So right now I think if you're looking at something like telegram there's been an awful lot of chatter at least initially around how to take advantage of the pandemic, and you had individuals saying go and shoot your guns across the roofs of buildings in urban centres to cause fear and pandemonium. So I think when it comes to the far right actors they're using social media in much the same way you would have seen any terrorist organisation use it in the past except in this case it's, you know, it's the various applications that they're still allowed on and can still find recruits from.

Adam Hadley: That's really interesting, so you know a lot of the work we do at Tech Against Terrorism of course we're monitoring, we're researching, we're trying to understand, um, how terrorists and violent extremists are using the internet, social media etcetera, and all those sorts of sites. But something that always strikes us as interesting is that a lot of the activity that we come across is kind of like at the operational level, it is sort of in group communications, sometimes some attempts to kind of reach out and to recruit others. However, in many cases, often this content has only really become viral once mainstream media has, has sort of surfaced it. So my question is, as a responsible journalist how do you deal with striking the right balance here, because it's perhaps not impossible to imagine a scenario in which the mainstream may not be aware of a particular ideology or group, until it starts being publicised. So, so what responsibility do you think mainstream media has to strike the right balance in this, because it seems to me that that's very difficult?

Ben Makuch: I mean it's an extremely difficult question that I think is something I've been dealing with since my reporting started on terrorism in 2013-4, when I was looking at something like Isis. I mean it's very important that you're not amplifying what they're doing, but at the same time you have to start warning the public if something, if something very serious or a group that has emerged that's not just sort of some trollish group that's just a nazi brigade of guys who mean nothing, but if these individuals have a violent past, a history of being looked up by law enforcement agencies or the intelligence community, at that point you have to understand that this is something much more than trolls on twitter getting together and saying awful things about people of colour, or jewish people, this has now become something more organised something you need to keep an eye on. So for me I always weigh that balance myself of whether or not that group itself is dangerous and I think that that's something to bear in mind. But the other thing two, is do you take exactly what they're saying and reprint it do you take them saying you know we for example belief in the path of the fear into an article, no but do I look at how big their numbers are, where they see themselves, how do you situate a group like this within the context of of, danger and threat to to, public safety and national security and this is something that's really fundamental to reporting on this and it's difficult because, you know, the terrorists like I said there's a history of them using media to, to, to show their to show who they are and what their group is. And I think I'll give you an example, I spoke to an individual in Isis in 2014, and they told me that they were planning attacks in Canada and the rest of the conversation was, was you know, the typical terrorist bluster that I think we all come to know if you research this daily, and I was sort of stuck in this position where that hadn't been said yet by Isis that they were planning attacks in Canada and this individual was a bonafide operator within the Islamic State and I didn't want to amplify what they were saying but I also needed to warn the public, so I was left with having to publish an article on this and

understand what's going on, and then notify authorities to say this is what's happened, this individual's told me this, that they're an Isis operator what is your comment on the story? You know, two weeks later there was a major attack on Parliament Hill where an Isis sympathiser went and shot up the war memorial that tragically killed a soldier, and then also went into our halls of power in Canada and attempted to enter the House of Commons to kill members of Parliament, and other individuals. And he was he was eventually apprehended but all's to say is that, when I was publishing that story to me it was important that I understood that the public knew that Canada was also part of this coalition of targets that Osis saw as aggressive states, and I think, you know, when you look at something like that you have to be able to and I think the far right is very similar, if their bonafide operator is doing thing that that are potentially violent and dangerous towards society it's important to warn the public and I think that that's something that reporters in this feet are keenly aware of.

Adam Hadley: And indeed, it's a vital role that you play and it's very important that, that, you're able to do so. What evolution have you noticed over the past few years in terms of far right violent extremism both in society and online?

Ben Makuch: Well, in society I would say I think one of the scarier things I think for me is that, you know, I studied the history of this very closely in, you know, the idea of a group of angry neo-nazi white supremisitcs getting together and forming a terrorist cell and attempting to carry oug violence or terrorism on behalf of this cause, and this world view is actually not new, you know, this is something that goes back at least in this form of cellular paramilitary style units of individuals meeting in person and creating these bonds and these sort of, this perspective to carry out violence this is something that happened as early as the eighties with Bob Matthews and The Order after publishing something called The Turner Diaries in the seventies, which you know which is a famous, an infamous novel that has inspired so much white supremacist terrorism.Then you fast forward to the 90s and you have the Aryan Republican Army, and then you have people like Timothy McVeigh who carried out what was the worst act of domestic terrorism in the United before 9/11 at the Oklahoma city bombing, and you understand that this is something thats happened before this is such a cellularised neo-nazi groups but if you look at now in 2020 and you even, over the last five years the amount of group that have popped up and organised under these principles, to varying degrees of seriousness some being extremely serious, some being less serious, I mean it's honestly it's astonishing to see the amount of groups that have come up and I think that's something that is very telling of the society were in that suddenly I think these sort of extremely nasty forms of, I mean not that white supremacism isn't nasty, it's extremely nasty, but neo-nazism and accelerationism and sort of this genocidal idea of white nationalism is particularly malicious and is particularly prone to being used for terrorism, that is that is really erupted in the last little while and that's something that I think people need to really understand

Adam Hadley: That's really good to understand more about, and I appreciate this is a vast oversimplification but to what extent would you say that the rise of the extreme far right is because there are, there are simply more people that are aggrieved and hold these extremely abhorrent views, or is this more about their ability to organise or a combination of the two?

Ben Makuch: I think you know, I actually would say I think their ability to organise and use the internet just like everything else in society we're able to coherently unite across any geographical location, and I would say even more importantly, you could unite over the geographic distances of a country, right look at something like the United States, the internet's very important for an organisation, it's a big country but it's big enough that you can't see someone most people, you know, if you're in New york and the other person is in LA it's a big distance right? But it's, you're able to unite and to organise using the internet and I think that's something that society needs to deal with, but, but I think one of the bigger things is that right now we have an agreement particularly with young angry men who are millennials and now we're also seeing Gen-Z, as well where a lot of these people have been raised into a society that they think they're not prepared for, they think they've been let down but also you mix into that something like economic downturn and a pandemic and it really is a.. a.. a.. dangerous cocktail of, of, both societal aggrievement but also actual social decay, I mean this is, we all know that there's a lot going on in our society right now it wasn't what it used to be, and I think again the point I made earlier these far right individuals are also part of our society because they're experiencing the same things, and they're reinterpreting it with their world view and I think right now we're at a particularly bad moment. So I think if you look back in the eighties around the time of Bob Matthews and The Order there weren't as many per capita groups as there are now, andIi think that's something to keep in mind, is that this is a moment where there are a lot more groups even with the population that we have, and how its grown.

Adam Hadley: And thinking, thinking about the specifics of the ideology that you're seeing what proportion of this relates to accelerations in particular?

Ben Makuch: I would say if you look at accelerationism and sort of this hardcore version of neo-nazism it is a smaller percentage of the far-right militants, it's not, I wouldn't say it's all of them because it's something like the boogaloo movement which pulls in different political ideologies and political perspectives but also looks at the militia movement which is much more far right, they're not accelerationists but accelerationists they exist in their thousands online and on telegram and I think that they probably exist in the thousands in real life aswell, and that percentage is high enough and they, you know, they have their they have their ideologies they've got their books, they've got you know I would say much like you looked at something like Isis and Al-Qaeda and they've got a whole ideology of, of individuals they refer to, to create their world view the accelerationists neo-nazis have that aswell and that's, I think that's something that codifies the way they think, and codifies their organisational structures.

Adam Hadley: So, Ben you mentioned boogaloo and boogaloo have obviously got a lot of media attention, um, recently, just how dangerous are they, are they, are they is it a violent group do they belong in the same group as the accelerationists, I mean how how can we make sense of this?

Ben Makuch: There are in fact dangerous people with guns going out to, to, to protests and they're they're wearing a certain type of shirt, they're wearing certain types of patches, they're organising to some extent, and I think also you know any time you get this amount of people together with guns in the public, I mean we've seen recently there's been militias who have gotten together and someone let off a stray, and I think those types of things are dangerous and you know I think generally when you get

a bunch of people together who are particular anti-government and they at least look like they have the propensity to be militant there's a chance for things to go poorly, um, and I think that itself is dangerous. Boogaloo whether or not it's organising under, under a real codified principles of taking down the state in a violent manner, I haven't seen that yet and I also think like I said it's pooling from a lot of different political ideologies, it's not just the far-right, I would say predominantly far-right I think that that's very clear. But you know, you're also seeing some group like Red Neck Revolts type individuals who are part of it, and I think they are they're a threat I don't want to downplay them and I think there was even three individuals who attacked a security guard in I believe California, and they were they ascribed to, to the boogaloo movement so it certainly is possible and I think especially when you have that widespread of a movement that you know, could have some violent individuals within it. But if you're looking at it from a counter terrosim perspective, I think you know it's best to look at the groups and the accelerationists because I think they're the ones who are truly trying to plan something. You know, if you look at the very recent history of FBI crackdowns you know stunning FBI crackdowns in January and February of The Base and Atomwaffen Division, you understand that, you know, there were and there have been groups in America that have been planning real serious terroristic violence and you know they're not wearing boogaloo patches, and those groups don't subscribe to the boogaloo.

Adam Hadley: Makes sense. So, where would you draw the line, because of the challenges that many of the tech platforms we work with have is figuring what groups cross that line of acceptability. What would you say those should be, and how should that be grounded in. in democratic values for example?

Ben Makuch: The great thing about being a reporter is that I have the luxury of not having to prescribe what, what should be done, I get to report on what's happening and figure out what things are of interest to the public and I would say something like boogaloo the ways in which its been spread online, I mean it certainly I think the evidence will show, I have a colleague here at Vice who's done some excellent reporting on the boogaloo... and she's you know, she's very clearly shown that on places like Facebook and elsewhere, you know, I would say some of these you know more open platforms the boogaloo movement has taken in a lot of, a lot of people saying some violent things and I think that if that's happening tech companies and governments need to be aware of that, because you look at something like again the rise of Isis and some and even the rise of the outright I mean a lot of the rise of the outright I originally reported on on white nationalists or white supremacists they wouldn't call themselves this street groups called the Soldiers of Odin in 2017, and they were organising on Facebook and that's how they started, so it would've been very easy for Facebook to go on and see this, you know, some of the hate speech that was going on and stem it but it didn't it grew and I think if you look at something like boogaloo movement it's clearly pooling in a very similar perspective of people who are saying some pretty terrible things and talking about doing some really terrible things, so I think that's something to keep an eye on.

Adam Hadley: And where do you think this is going, especially at the moment in the US in North America in general it seems to be quite a febrile environment politically, how would you see the extreme far right playing into this as we see the US presidential elections coming up?

Ben Makuch: I think you know, I'm certainly not alone in thinking this and I know in places like the FBI are openly worried about this is what the far-right will do with the election and I think, I think that that's something to really keep an eye on. You know for me, I've kept such a close eye on groups like the Atomwaffen Division and The Base of that and these are fairly they can be quite intelligent in the way that they view politics and their moment and how they can take advantage of it, and I think you know i don't want to fearmonger, I don't know exactly what groups like that would do. But I'll tell you that the social unrest here in America today is this, is unprecedented, and the division that's been going on over the last four years or so has been fuelling this divided, and right now if we get into a situation where President Trump tries to dispute the legitimacy of the election and these are sort of the moments that accelerationists dream of, and I think that that's something that if I were in a law enforcement agency or in an intelligence community member I would be keeping an eye on that, er, very keenly certainly as a reporter on this I'm going to be looking at this very closely and my reporting is surrounding that entire, that entire philosophy of what will happen in the next three to four months, and are we anticipating the right things.

Maygane Janin: You mention the FBI crackdown on Atomwaffen Division, and you also recently wrote an article about the newly announced national socialist order which has been formed by former member Atomwaffen Division, could you develop a bit on that and on what does it mean for accelerationists?

Ben Makuch: So, I think that the more significant thing, I mean the numbers and the size of national socialist order, so, right now I'm monitoring them. It's certainly something to keep for a group to keep an eye on. ButIi think in terms of this moment, what that particular source told me that I found more interesting and it was a piece of information I wanted to get out to the public was that they were less concerned about using the pandemic and the cultural moment that we're in for violence, and they're much more interested in using the strife for recruitment and that says a lot about an organisation that previously was linked to Atomwaffen Division, a violent neo-nazi accelerationist organisation. If they're saying that they're seeing this social decay and they're saying they don't want to take advantage of it, but they're saying we do want to recruit from it, means that they're seeing the potential for those types of political ideologies to expand and I think that's something that's a striking thing for me because it means that, and to be honest with you I don't think they're wrong I think that these these types of terrible moments in human history have attracted people to extremist ideologies. And I think that that is something that the law enforcement agencies and the intelligence community need, need, to, to truly they need to truly listen to that, and find ways to thwart that from happening because i think that that's a real problem.

Maygane Janin: Thank you very much Ben, that's all for today's discussion on accelerationism but we will be back soon with another episode, in the meantime find us on twitter @techvsterrorism.