SPECTRA Interview with Julian Reid

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SPECTRA met with Julian Reid at Virginia Tech on September 12, 2017. During the interview, we talk to Julian about his perspectives on resilience, sovereignty, political theory, academic life, writing, and the arts.

Julian Reid is Professor of International Relations at the University of Lapland in Finland. He has made contributions to cultural, postcolonial, and poststructuralist thought, especially to debates on war, biopolitics and resilience. Some of his recent publications include *Resilient Life: The Art of Living Dangerously* (co-authored with Brad Evans, 2014) and *The Neoliberal Subject: Resilience, Adaptation and Vulnerability* (co-authored with David Chandler, 2016). Among his edited collections is *Deleuze & Fascism* (with Brad Evans, 2013).

Interviewers for SPECTRA are ASPECT students Caroline Alphin, Mario Khreiche, Shelby Ward, and Alexander Stubberfield.

Shelby: So, to start off, maybe we can ask, how do you understand your work as interdisciplinary, and how do you find that productive in the things that you look at?

Julian: That's a good question. I think one of the things I would observe straight away is that it has changed over time. I was a graduate student in the late 90s, and international studies (IS) was this home, which, I think, was struggling. It didn't really recognize itself as being an interdisciplinary space, but pretty much disciplinary or subdisciplinary, in terms of its relationship to political science, and it still remains very hard to not to teach International Relations (IR) or IS, without relating the whole story of political science to the wars. Nevertheless, it has served its function of allowing me to, pretty much from the beginning, approach the world from non-disciplinary perspectives because when I was getting into the academy in the 90s, I was really interested in a range of different things, you know, eclectically arranged subjects and texts and theories. I was very much interested in war, and the theory of war was fascinating to me. I was into Clausewitz, but I was also reading Nietzsche and German philosophy, and it was within that space, where I had my first encounter with Foucault, which was incredibly influential for me, and my thesis, especially. And it remains my main theoretical influence. So, I think that set of encounters, for whatever reason, that interdisciplinarity, because it did involve bringing stuff together from a wide range of different spaces, literally and theoretically, was made possible for me by IS, or at least I was able to make it work that way. And that remains the case, in so far as I really don't care about disciplines, in any sense - don't care. I don't enjoy having to teach disciplinary knowledge though I do it as well as I can. But in terms of the way I work, I just don't care about disciplines. I care about texts, theories, I just don't care about the origins of texts. I can read anything and make use of it. That is my approach. Of course I've been trained to write a particular type of text, employ a particular kind of

praxeology, and I still enjoy doing that. I enjoy the cut and thrust of social and scientific, theoretical, and philosophical debate. But the longer I've been in the academy, the more I have learnt to experiment with ways of writing, and that experimentation is what continues to make it worthwhile for me.

Caroline: Can you provide some specific examples that make this turn apparent?

Julian: I've been writing a book about imagination for the last 3 or 4 years, and when I started the project back in 2014, one of the things I wanted to put in practice, was just to research and write in an open-ended, non-planned, non-guided way. I wanted it to be anarchic in practice, and not to have a plan. I didn't want to have a contract with a publisher, where I was committed to submitting it at a certain time, a certain year, a certain month, or whatever. And I also just didn't want to plan it, didn't want to be schematic about how I was going to approach it. I wanted to read, and I wanted to be able to read in a totally non-guided way, you know, just from day to day. And then just assembling notes, and that is still where I'm at after 3 or 4 years. I'm still with the same project. I have a lot of text, but it's chaotic. I wanted to work in a non-hurried way, and just to follow a path of interest into this concept of imagination, which I find totally fascinating. And just to work without regard to boundary, whatsoever, because when I finished my first book, which was my thesis, I was faced with the trauma of having to make the book accountable to IR. I really wasn't interested in IR, but I had to set the book up, or I didn't have to, but I did set the book up to speak to IR theory, to say "hey, this is important, this story I'm going to tell you about, Foucault, and war, and Deleuze, and these other theorists," I made it accountable to IR, one way or another.

Mario: Has this demand to address IR in a disciplinary way persisted, and if so, how have you dealt with that since?

Julian: Yes, I think the same thing is evident with *The Liberal Way of War* (2009), the second book I wrote, together with Mick Dillon. I think the third and fourth books are a bit different. *Resilient Life* (2014), which I did with Brad Evans, is not an IR text, but it's coming at a phenomenon of the Anthropocene, from all over the place, and I like that very much about that book. I really wanted to continue that path of methodological development and escape from disciplines. Putting interdisciplinarity into practice without it naming it as such, with this current project on imagination. So I've been doing that. I also have a book on indigeneity on the go, with David Chandler, which is also definitely not going to be an IR book. The book *is* interested in problematizing certain forms of disciplinary knowledge, which I think still remains important. Taking on, for example, a very powerful discipline such as anthropology, which is necessary in order to think critically about indigeneity today, given that anthropology has been so powerful in governing the production of knowledge concerning indigenous peoples. So I think, you know, there is also a place for that kind of writing, that kind of knowledge: critical theory, which challenges disciplinary knowledges, where they are powerful, where they are constitutive, which maybe does require a certain taking on of a discipline. Then I've got a third project, which is kind of hard to describe, but is something along the lines of an autoethnography. It's also playing

with writing; it's fiction. It's a history of writing as a technology of the self. It's a set of lectures, which traces the history of writing from the ancients to the present, and connects self-writing in the ancient context of the Romans and the Greeks to what is going on to today in the context of social media, twitter, and all of the many manifestations of self-writing that are exploding today in the context of these technologies, and then connecting that with diary writing, biography, and writing about oneself. But writing about oneself in a fictive capacity, so it's a set of lectures, and also playing with a lecture format, the written lecture format, the spoken lecture format, because I noticed that one of the defining features of my way of working over the last 10 years has been reading a lot of lectures. Foucault's work is so defined by the translation and by the publications of his lectures, and so I spent a lot of time reading the lectures even though they were written to be spoken, and were ultimately only spoken, and as it happens transcribed. They can be treated as texts and I've enjoyed very much reading them as texts. So, I've got into the space where I'm writing fictive lectures. I've been looking in the methodological debates for ways of describing it, and there are these discussions in ethnography about, not just auto-ethnography, but what's called evocative autoethnography, which is designed to challenge the boundaries between fiction and nonfiction, so you could describe it in that way. But there is also something a bit cheesy about doing that, because ultimately what we are really talking about is simply fiction, things that are not true, but which you present in a mode of address as if they were true, which is the only way in which fiction can be powerful. It has to be able to engage your imagination on a level that enables the reader or the listener to feel as if they're hearing or reading something which is true or might be true.

Mario: I'd like to follow up on the methodological remark you made before we press you on issues of liberalism, resilience, and some other themes in your work. Do you feel the need to justify this kind of imaginative approach, an interdisciplinary or even post-disciplinary approach, to a larger audience, in your case the IR community? Do you feel the need to justify, in any sense, this eclectic approach that you are taking, or have you given up on that?

Julian: I avoid it. I mean, I can imagine situations where it would be necessary, but I think I've designed my life, my academic life to avoid those situations, so I don't go to those big conferences where you might find yourself in that situation. And I also left the U.K. 10 years ago, and went to a place where this kind of eclecticism is quite normal. Where I live and work, in Finland, they let you get on with what you are doing, support you, and appreciate your autonomy, in a way that doesn't exist in the UK. It is a very supportive environment in which to enjoy roaming intellectually, and writing, and then publishing in places which are accommodating and supportive. I have no grand ambitions in terms of growing my work in a way that would enable me to achieve power within particular constituencies. I like to move through literary spaces and into new spaces, and engage with different communities. I enjoy meeting different kinds of audiences and connecting with new readerships. That's what I find exciting about reading, about writing, getting out from the inside, and into new places and new spaces. I'm not interested in that territoriality of writing that is so typical of the academy. It doesn't attract me. So, I avoid those confrontations, or the need to justify. I've organized my life around that avoidance.

Caroline: So, maybe before we move on to resilience and some of the other work that you have done, this notion of imagination permeates throughout your work, and I was wondering if you could elaborate on what this imagination is to you, what or who has influenced you and how you conceptualize imagination? I am asking that in part because I was reminded of Romantic thinkers or Romanticism and the way that, in some sense, imagination is pitted against some of the problems that come out of Enlightenment thinking, including reason and rationality, but their particular take on reason and rationality. Since you were talking about lecturing on the self, I am thinking also of Transcendental thinkers of that time, for whom that was also a popular practice.

Julian: Yeah, really great question and expressive question, too. I think the question of how to conceptualize imagination is precisely what I am interested in, but also importantly how to conceptualize it in a way which is not clichéd, because that's the danger with imagination. That is what I found myself doing towards the end of the Resilience project. At the end of those last two books, I found imagination was playing a positioning role for me as a concept in terms of its abilities to furnish an alternative foundation from the kind of ontology of resilience, which neoliberalism has led us to. So, imagination for me was a concept that pointed towards a different path; one that was able to describe the creative capacities of the human over and against the mere adaptive capacities which resilience as a cult celebrates. That was the function imagination was playing, but then, there is something very twee about that potentially. "Isn't imagination great? It's great to be creative rather than simply adaptive or a survivor…" Then you end up in this humanist position, and I didn't want to go down that route because there are already so many examples of that kind of text. A classic example would be the work of the wonderful Italian political philosopher Franco "Bifo" Berardi.

Caroline: How would you characterize his work?

Julian: Berardi writes about the crisis of imagination today in the context of neoliberalism, such as "why is it that we cannot imagine an alternative to capitalism?" With this kind of problematic, which is a real one, the danger is that imagination becomes seen as just a neglected human faculty, and that if we just think a little harder, a little more creatively, if we group think more, or we just play with images, use a bit more art, a bit more literature, to imagine the possibility of an alternative world, then we'll get there and we'll find our way out of neoliberalism. I want to avoid investing in that conceptualization of the imagination, while finding a way to do that is not necessarily easy because when we look at the history of the theory of imagination, what we tend to see is a very basic division, which you describe very well in your question, between, on the one hand, the rationalists, the rationalism, which has dominated Western philosophy from Plato onwards, and the Romantics, who hate reason and love imagination. I am interested in trying to get over that bifurcation and do something different that also involves looking at imagination as a kind of dark capacity, while also trying to reevaluate reason, as something other than simply the opposite of imagination.

Shelby: What kind of thought, or specific thinkers do you turn to in this context?

Julian: I've ended up going back to Foucault, which is ironic, because I have also been trying to move on from Foucault. I wrote this first book, which is very Foucauldian, called *Biopolitics of the War on Terror* (2006), then *The Liberal Way of War* (2009) which is also very Foucauldian, and after that I've been trying to move on. The last two books *Resilient Life* and *The Neoliberal Subject* aren't so Foucauldian. There is a bit of Foucault in both of them, but basically I've been trying to move on to different places. I thought that with writing about imagination I was going to do something completely different, but funnily I have been going back to Foucault, and discovering that there is so much in his work on imagination. It is there in every one of his works. His first essay, written in the early 1950s, and which has been out of print for decades, is even called "Dream, Imagination, and Existence." He wrote it as a graduate student. It's in an introduction that he wrote for a book by a Swiss psychologist called Binswanger, and it's the most incredible text, about 30 or 40 pages long. He goes way beyond writing an introduction for another scholar's work, and writes this incredible theorization of imagination, precisely as transcendental power of the human, but he also does it in a way that involves thinking about imagination, the power of imagination in very dark ways. For Foucault, imagination is essentially an iconoclastic power. Imagination is not this creative capacity for the production of new and alternative imaginations, it's violent and it's destructive. His basic argument is that imagination abhors images. It's about destroying images. So, there is something going on there which I think doesn't exist within the dominant theory of imagination as alternative to Western reason. Maybe it's there in the romantics, I have to discover that. It's certainly there in Foucault. And I'm interested in exploring that vein of thinking that he produces as a way of developing this project.

Mario: It strikes me as if that line of thinking would be conducive to tracing the aspects in writers that are usually undertheorized. So, there is a Marx who talks more about human nature who often gets overlooked, and there is a McLuhan who is much more interested in the ambiguities of technologies than its determinations. You talk about Foucault in a way that shows a different side of Foucault. Is there something especially productive in thinking about these theorists through a lens of imagination? Are there other theorists where you're thinking about seeing what their work might have been about, how much their work can maybe contribute to your project?

Julian: Great question. We know about Deleuze, for example, as a philosopher of the cinematic image, but we know much less about him as a philosopher of the image as such. There is a lot on the image in Deleuze, and it is more obvious than it is for Foucault. Of course, Deleuze was also a philosopher. What is interesting about Foucault is that he is not thought so much of as a philosopher. And people often deride him as a kind of historian. Yet there is this transcendental conception of the imagination, which is not just there in that early essay, but runs throughout his work. Also, it was through this project that I got very interested in Lacan's psychoanalysis. I love reading his stuff. There is a whole theory of the image in Lacan, which I don't think has ever been really dragged out philosophically, or taken seriously in philosophical terms and in correspondence with other philosophical thinkers. Lacanians tend to be very psychoanalytic and

it's a very particular kind of problematique. I think it is interesting to take Lacan seriously as a philosopher and develop a theory of the image from that and from the imagination as such. There is so much going on in that text as well as in Foucault, Deleuze, and Lacan. I mean, there is Arendt, who we know was a theorist of the imagination. And there is a lot on cinema, as well. There is also a little Plato and Aristotle. I am interested in bringing things into context, in a non-guided chaotic way. Well I have been, I say that, but now this Foucault thing is really becoming compelling, and I am starting to think that maybe I should just set it up as a Foucault book. As a new way of reading Foucault. And then using other literature in support of that.

Shelby: We were talking about the poetic and the poetic subject beforehand. It is not ever really defined in what you write, but it is used, and perhaps it is the use of it that is productive. If there was a definitive definition, then it loses its productivity.

Julian: I think that is a nice way of saying it. It is also a reality that in any project you'll have some concepts that are more developed than others. So, there is a place where you start out, and there is a place where you end up, and necessarily that place where you end up is less developed. You know there is always an end. In the final chapter, there's a point where you have to think about the beyond. So, you establish the limits that you've reached in your thinking, in your writing, and then that reaching of the limit brings you into contact with another space which you haven't been to yet, but you know exists, and your work is pointing the way over there, somewhere, the beyond. Brad was really important actually in terms of developing the concept of the poetic subject. I credit him with more agency for that concept. There is a point where you develop concepts, and they play roles for you in a given text. But, they themselves are less developed than others. So I think the poetic subject is a bit like that in *Resilient Life*, and imagination is a bit like that, in both that text, and the *Neoliberal Subject* (2016). But overall, I prefer to avoid the poetic.

Shelby: For people familiar with your work, what can they expect from your past work in terms of biopolitics, resilience, and neoliberalism?

Julian: I was exhausted by resilience at the end of this two-book project: *Resilient Life* and *The Neoliberal Subject*. *The Neoliberal Subject* was actually completed around the same time as *Resilient Life*, but its production took a lot longer for complicated reasons. There is even an article which Brad and I did together called "Exhausted by Resilience." I was saying at the time, I am done with resilience, I am not going to write about it anymore, I want to do something else, to leave it behind. But then a couple of years ago, I got a research grant for a project on indigeneity. I live in the north of Finland, in the region of Lapland, which encompasses the whole of the north of Finland, but also across the border into Sweden, Russia, and Northern Norway, and this is the homeland of the Sámi, the people who it is said, lived in Lapland before that space was settled by the colonial states of Finland, Sweden, Norway, and Russia too. There is a whole politics to the conflict of the Sámi and the variety of indigenous peoples of the Arctic region, not just of Lapland, which is of great interest to me. I now have the funding to pursue this over a period of years. As I have been looking at the politics of indigeneity, I've been forced to

confront the reality of the way in which this concept of resilience is now colonizing discourses around indigeneity. For me, it is an urgent political problem, especially where I live in the Arctic, in Lapland. I see a total absence of critical thinking about or recognition even of how this concept is problematic when it is applied to indigenous people. I am mobilized by the urgency of the political problem to continue the work I've been doing on resilience in the context of debates about indigenous peoples. So, I've regained my interest in resilience through being interested in the politics of indigeneity, and how it is affecting life in the Arctic, and in Lapland where I live. For me, this project on indigeneity is a deeply political one. I am committed to it politically, and I am excited by it.

Mario: Can you explain this political commitment in a way that relates the discipline of anthropology to your critiques of resilience and indigeneity? And, how do you make sense of the feedback that your work has received over the last years? Does it inspire your current work?

Julian: I am finding myself in a situation where I really want to problematize anthropological knowledge. What I see is a discipline that is still deeply mired in colonial reason. When you read anthropologists today, nearly every time they will start by defining themselves as being against colonialism, and they see their knowledge and their work as being designed to, as they put it "decolonize the university"; it sounds very heroic. But then, if I look at some of the discourses they are using, this discourse of resilience especially, I see a kind of naivety in terms of understanding how what they are doing connects with governing rationalities, essentially neoliberal rationalities concerned with governing, not just the indigenous, but people everywhere, and with producing this new form of a resilient subject that is so integral to neoliberalism as a project. I also want to respond to some of the critique of the critique of resilience, as I've followed with interest the debate on resilience that developed after the publication of my books *Resilient Life* and *The Neoliberal Subject*, both of which are very critical books. They're critical rejections of the concept of resilience, and they more or less condemn the concept. What we've seen in response to that is a literature that has said, "hey, you can't just condemn resilience, it's a multiplicity, it's not a univocal concept, it has to be looked at in different contexts." This is the message I read of the critique of critique, criticizing my own work, and it is a critique I take very seriously and recognize the power of and the influence of and the truth of. So, I want to respond to that critique in this new project, and try to develop an understanding of the complexity of resilience as a discourse and look at the different spaces in which it is articulated. The different points of articulation for resilience, which are indeed vastly different and antagonistic and complex but also complexly interrelated. Where I'll start from in the talk I am giving later today here at Virginia Tech is the protests against Trump, which developed in December of last year, following his election leading up to his inauguration on January 20th in different American cities, but especially in Washington, D.C., where when you look at the pictures of those protests, what you see are a range of different kinds of banners and posters, but one of the most iconic of which was a poster created by the Amplifier Foundation and designed by a Chicano artist from California, an image of a native elder in the Dakota pipeline protest with the words "We the Resilient." In other words, it is the way in which this concept of resilience, this notion of indigenous resilience, became definitive of subjectifications

of the indigenous in the context of resistance to Trump just over the last 8 to 9 months. I'll start with that image of indigenous resilience, a mode of articulation very hostile and resistant to neoliberalism and liberal fascism. I think about the connection between that mode of articulation of indigenous resilience to the way in which colonial states, like those states involved in the Arctic Council and the colonial governance of indigenous peoples in the Arctic, say "indigenous people are so resilient and we're here to help the indigenous to be more resilient as well as learn from the indigenous how other people can become resilient like the indigenous." I am interested in opening the question of how this concept works as discourse and maybe even an ideology of neoliberalism. So, responding to the critique of critique, the critiques of authors like Ben Andersen, the geographer, and also Peter Rogers, who say "you can't condemn resilience, there is good and bad resilience." So, I want to think about the different ways in which resilience is articulated, but also problematize some of the connections between them.

Shelby: Do you find postcolonial theory helpful in what you are doing here, or do you find some of that same naivety that you are talking about in terms of anthropology? Is it helpful for what you are doing?

Julian: I think it should be. Postcolonialism, postcolonial theory, literature, it should be one of those spaces for the potential production of this kind of knowledge, of counter-knowledge. But what I tend to find when I read work, which is nominally postcolonial, are similar problems that I encounter when I read anthropology. There is a certain tendency towards thinking certain ways about discourses, which are problematic, and they are often not recognized for their problematic nature. So, I am committed to improving postcolonial theory, to filling it as a space, and working with people in that space who are thinking along the same lines. One of my favorite collaborators is an Indian political philosopher and theorist named Ranabir Samaddar. He is my image of a what a postcolonial theorist should be like. He is very circumspect about the way postcolonial theory has functioned as a discourse: as an ideology of western imperialism, essentially. And he is committed to remaining in India. He hasn't made the migration, which many of the well known Indian political philosophers and post-colonial theorists have already made out of South Asia. So yeah, I am committed to postcolonialism, but I am also deeply skeptical of it as a body of knowledge and theory.

Alex: Would you also be looking at travel writing and how it constructs narratives of indigeneity and resilience?

Julien: Great idea. Is there a particular text you have in mind?

Alex: Well, I am thinking about in the United States, Anthony Bourdain has become so popular. And he is stuck on CNN now, but there are many times where he goes to different indigenous communities. One example was on his old show, *No Reservations*, where he is in Namibia with the bushmen, and he was talking about them and has a meal with them. His particular way of approaching culture and politics is through food. But his popularity and his now mainstream

appearance suggests that travel writing, at least to me, is making a comeback as a grand narrative for understanding the world put in terms that are outside of the academy.

Julian: Yeah, it's true. Anthropology is a kind of travel writing, isn't it? That is what they do. The way they present themselves is very interesting. It is like looking at someone's holiday snaps. If you go to the university website pages of any number of different anthropologists, they'll have a picture embedded of themselves hanging out with an indigenous crew. Another, she is not quite a travel writer, but she is also a wonderful writer, Rebecca Solnit, a Californian. She is very popular in Britain. I don't know if she is as popular here as she is in Europe. In Britain, she writes for the *Guardian* a lot. She is a brilliant writer. One of her best books is called *A Field Guide to Getting Lost* (2005). Well, in that book she talks about one of the indigenous peoples in California, the Wintu, in ways that are similarly exoticizing. She uses them to problematize the West and Western traditions. So, there is a certain move that would seem to be decolonial, but then there is another move that puts them on a different kind of equally orientalizing pedestal.

Caroline: As I was reading through some of your work, I was thinking about whether you see a tension between this resilient subject and the responsibilized self or the possessive individual? Or if that responsibilized self is just another iteration of the resilient subject? Because there seems to be two understandings of liberalism working simultaneously together. One that has this underlying problem of resilience and the other one that has the able-bodied, agentic individual that is supposed to compete in the market and understand space in marketized terms. So, are they existing together, is there tension here, or is one just an iteration of the other?

Julian: So, I am working on this at the moment. I want to write a book on indigenous politics with my friend David Chandler and the book is provisionally titled "Becoming Indigenous." This is a much more schematic and classic academic project where you have a plan. And part of the plan is to write a chapter on debates around possession and dispossession in the context of the indigenous subject and notions of indigenous subjectivity. There is a move, which says that liberalism is grounded in the cult of possession. If we go back to the 17th century and look at what John Locke was saying about Native Americans, we'll see that the whole foundation of liberalism rests on this assumption that indigenous peoples don't do possession, that they don't know how to do possession, that they don't know how to create property. We do, and also possession is necessary for the development of the land and it is a hallmark of the human. You are not human unless you understand the fundamental humanity of property, and of possessiveness, the capacity for possession, the power of possession. Our understanding of the way in which liberalism emerges, and indeed the whole colonization of the indigenous, has to be understood on account of its presumption that possession is good and necessary, and that there is something wrong with a people that doesn't know how to make property. Of course, today what we see is a shift in the opposite direction. We recognize that liberalism was wrong to think that way, that it has made the world a worse place, a terrible place. It has done terrible violence on account of this conceit and way of thinking about possession, and we want to learn from the indigenous how to do dispossession. You know, how to live dispossessed lives with land and

with each other. This is the argument of Judith Butler in her also excellent, very readable book called *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political* (2013). So, there is a move from possession to dispossession that is occurring in an attempt to think about the indigenous subject as an alternative to the liberal subject. And there is the notion that if we can produce this new kind of dispossessed subject we will therefore be able to defeat liberalism because liberalism is so grounded in possession. Well, I think it is more complicated than that, and an argument I am interested in exploring is that liberalism is pursuing dispossession itself as a new foundation for rethinking its own conditions of possibility. Maybe the liberal subject itself is precisely the subject of dispossession, which some theorists believe is the alternative to liberalism. If we understand liberalism in more complicated terms than the terms we are presented with, if we get beyond or just forget about Locke in the 17th century, and look at how liberalism is functioning today here in the 21st century, maybe we get a more complicated picture of the situation. Are there other vernacular ways of thinking about possession itself as a practice and as a foundation of selfhood, which can be seen as not simply negative in the ways we recognize the negativity of the Lockean subject?

Shelby: Are you, in some sense, suggesting that deconstructing the notion of possession might be more useful than simply navigating the dualism of possession and dispossession?

Julian: One of the things I have been doing in my work and research is going back to a text I love very much, which is pertinent to this project. It's a wonderful book from the 1960s, a cult classic, it's Carlos Castaneda's *Journey to Ixtlan*. It was a very controversial book because it also takes us into the space of fiction vs. nonfiction. Castaneda does this PhD study, this anthropology, this conversation he has with a Yaqui Indian shaman, and then writes it up. It turns out the whole thing is fiction. It was totally made up, but it is a classic. It is probably the greatest work that anthropology has produced. There is no text by an anthropologist that is so good. And, I would say no text so beautiful, or brilliant, or compelling. I love this book, *Journey to Ixtlan*, and the story he tells. And for me the beauty of this encounter that Castaneda has with Don Juan, the subject of his investigation, is embedded in the way in which he goes to visit Don Juan, originally to get information from him about what he knows about plants. He is interested in Don Juan's knowledge about the flora and the fauna of the land, which is classic in terms of what anthropologists are interested in extracting from indigenous people today. It's all about how can we learn from them to relate to the land in ways that can help us extract more. So Castaneda goes there to talk to him about plants. As it happens, Don Juan isn't interested in talking about plants. He may have this knowledge, but he is not going to tell Castaneda. Instead, Don Juan wants to talk to Castaneda about the self. He wants to talk to Castaneda about his self, by which he means Castaneda's self, as well as the self as such, and the book for me is a remarkable discussion of selfhood in terms which are utterly compatible with the whole Western tradition of thinking about the self. It's the human self, it's the human, which Don Juan, this indigenous subject of Castaneda's study, is really interested in. He is not interested in talking about plants, flora, and fauna, or ecology. He is interested in talking about the self, the human self, and strategy and power, and empowerment, and also hunting, and cunning and manipulation, and relations between human beings, what goes on there in that space of human being, and also about

possession. Don Juan is self-possessed, a self-possessed subject; he possesses himself; he also possesses his own world. For me, Castaneda's Don Juan offers us a totally different kind of indigenous subject: a self-possessed and deeply possessive kind of subject. He basically possesses Castaneda, takes him and possesses him, and manipulates him at will. That is the beauty of the book, the story it tells, of the strategy of Don Juan: how he works Castaneda, this Western subject, over. Don Juan really turns Castaneda into his vessel, even though it may be said that it is actually Castaneda working this more or less fictive/nonfictive character to his own ends. There are these very informative documentaries telling the story of Castaneda: this guy who writes this work of anthropology, which turns out to be fiction. He develops this whole cult of personality around him. He ends up living in Los Angeles, running this cult with these believers who worship him because he is producing all of this faux hippy knowledge. It's a fascinating story.

Mario: How do you think your critique maps onto the reemergence of materialism or "New Materialism" that has a similar approach to whether things have an agentic quality, that considers whether they have some sort of vitality, in a kind of neorealist sense. Is maybe the New Materialism limited in a similar way as Castaneda's character in this story?

Julian: Yeah, I think you are absolutely right, if I understand what you mean by new materialism. You're talking about authors like Jane Bennett and books like *Vibrant Matter* (2010). I really enjoy reading that kind of work. I read *Vibrant Matter*, and I've seen how it has taken an effect on the academy and on the arts. You go to performances and nine out of ten times it is someone showing you how this or that dead object is animate like human beings. It's a cliché; it's a governing cliché. I am interested in trying to problematize that cliché and not simply repeat it, or become part of that school. I think what interests me as a critical theorist is always this connection between critique and power. If you want to be a good critical theorist, it is very easy to produce critical knowledge, which functions strategically for power. This is also I think what drove Foucault, to show audiences how critique functions for power and to debunk the Marxism of the late 60s and 70s France, especially, but also to problematize some of the new knowledges that were emerging at that time. I think that is what attracts me to critique: the capacity to critique the critique and then after that to critique the critique of the critique. Just to dig and dig and dig. To be cynical. I enjoy cynicism, as a modus operandi, but, yeah, you are right in terms of that, if New Materialism is the right term to describe Jane Bennett and the discourse on "living matter".

Alex: I mean, there are different shades. You've got Jane Bennett, William Connolly, and then you have Manuel De Landa, and others.

Caroline: Bruno Latour is influential on some of those writers, and a lot of them draw from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari as well in the way they talk about the body without organs.

Julian: Sure, Connolly and De Landa as well. And you are right, there is a certain reading of Deleuze which is powerful in this literature. Deleuze is a philosopher who I engage with a lot

and love and respect very much. I think there are a lot of bad readings of Deleuze, too. Very one-sided or limited engagements with his work. You know, he is also a very dark thinker.

Mario: "Postscript on the Societies of Control" (1992) comes to mind, for example, a very short text, and much less optimistic than some previous works.

Julian: But also in terms of Deleuze's thinking about sovereignty and transcendence vs. immanence. He is usually read as someone who says life is on the side of immanence and anything transcendental is opposed to life and has to be destroyed by the movement of immanence. I don't think it is as simple as that at all. For him there is an ontology of a necessary antagonism between the transcendental and the immanent, and the constitution of the sovereign moment, and the articulation of the human as precisely that. I think for him these are necessary foundations of life and being. You can't simply create a world in which the sovereign moment is done away with in the way that Hardt and Negri argue in their classic work *Empire* (2000). They then try to reevaluate that notion in their book *Multitude* (2004). I think there is another Deleuze. There is a darker Deleuze who is more celebrative of the sovereign moment actually, of the human, over and against the mere life or immanence of life, which I think is much more interesting, or at least needs to be excavated more fully. Bergson, in that respect, is very important, which is another reason why everyone should read Deleuze's book *Bergsonism* (1990), because it's brilliant. I mean, he really does something else altogether with Bergson. He breaks with Bergson. He reads Bergson like he reads everyone else. He reads Bergson to produce another philosophy: It's not Bergson's Bergson that you get when you read Deleuze and Bergson. He makes Bergson work for him to theorize the sovereign. It's an articulation of the sovereign moment over and against Bergson's vitalism, which others are much more dependent on. Especially, when you get to the last chapter of *Bergsonism*, which is brilliant.

Mario: I forgot where I read it, maybe in Eugene Thacker or Alexander Galloway, who point out the fact that Deleuze wrote a lot of books about other scholars, monographs on Nietzsche, Spinoza, Bacon, Foucault, and Bergson, and always with a specific goal in mind.

Julian: He was a real philosopher, but his strategy was always the same. He would always read someone brilliantly, but to produce another image of that thinker. He was a very violent reader of other people's works. He would always produce something else, which was not really in the text, but he would do it so brilliantly that it's compelling and convincing. He reads other philosophers with a deliberate violence. He wrote and philosophized in order to dominate others. That was his method to produce his own image out of them. He was as far from queer theory as you could get. It was not about trying to read and empathize with the object, align with the object of critique. It was about a very violent destruction of a body of text. That is also why he loved Francis Bacon, who showed a similar kind of violence, figurative violence in his work.

Caroline: Perhaps, you could talk about how you understand sovereignty, and how you see discourses of resilience functioning within this conception that you have of sovereignty.

Julian: I think like everybody else I am wary of the concept and the reality of sovereignty. We associate sovereignty with violence, with killing, with illegitimate power, with things that we would like to imagine the absence of in a different world. But the more we confront its force, its power, its reality, and the more we confront the difficulties of doing away with it and the failures of those projects trying to do away with it, the more I think we have to find another way of reconciling with it. I am interested in not just another weak reconciliation but trying to think through the project of how we can, not just accept its reality, but work it in a different way to produce a different kind of politics. I think that is why Deleuze is so attractive because I think that is precisely what he is doing in his work. He is continually trying to imagine the processes and modes of production through which another sovereign people will one day emerge and destroy the old order and constitute the world anew through the deployment of sovereign power. I am interested in how sovereignty can be vernacularized to produce another world. The more I have thought about it, the more I have addressed its perseverance not just as a problem but as a reality, and power, the more I have been led to think, you better have it, because you are not going to make anything else without it. So that is how I think about it now.

Shelby: Does reconciling with sovereignty also have to do with anthropogenic politics and approaching those inconceivable catastrophes that we are currently witnessing? It's not totally fleshed out, but I am wondering what can we gain from reconciling sovereignty, what kind of benefit is there with reconciling the sovereign. Is addressing anthropocentric politics part of that?

Caroline: I understand what you mean by anthropogenic politics, human-centeredness, but is there even a problem with being human-centered, or being human-centered in a particular way? Because resilience and even something like New Materialism poses a problem for being human-centered, but critiques a particular type of human-centeredness, and perhaps, you are pushing us to get past that type of human-centeredness to offer an alternative human or humanness.

Julian: Exactly, I am trying to get us past that simple critique of the human, the way in which human beings have been made to feel about ourselves. Being human, there is no longer any kudos to it. It is a source of shame and I want to get us past that source of shame, to revalorize the human, and to take pride in being human. There is another paper that I have, and I am going to talk about this one in New York, after this next week, where I read the wonderful film by the Hungarian director, Béla Tarr, called the *The Turin Horse* (2011). Have you seen this one? I really recommend it. It's a great movie. It's a film about a horse. It's also a posthuman film. It's about when Nietzsche went mad; he went mad in the city of Turin in Italy. He came out of his apartment and embraced this horse. This horse was being whipped by its owner. He comes out of the apartment and embraces the horse and cries. He goes insane on that day. That was the first evidence that Nietzsche was insane.

Alex: He goes home, strips down, thinks about shooting the Kaiser, and calls himself Jesus and the devil, loses his mind.

Julian: Right. So, this is a film, not about Nietzsche, but about the horse, the Turin horse. The film starts out with the owner driving the horse back from Turin into the countryside to the house where he lives with his daughter. It's a really miserable film. It's shot almost entirely from within the interior space of this house and this poor father and daughter couple who live on potatoes, and who have no life, no existence, no future, who would like to leave and escape, but have nowhere to go to, but still try to leave and go to another place, but they come back and the mission fails. The landscape is sort of apocalyptic and it's clear that the world is effectively ending in this film and they have nowhere to go. Their existing shelter is going to fail them. It's a popular film in political theory and philosophy, including I have been told, Latour's Gifford Lectures published as *Facing Gaia* (2017). Latour, apparently, when he was giving those lectures talked about how fantastic *The Turin Horse* is, and how everybody has to see it because it shows us the present conditions of the human. We are finished and we've got nowhere to go to, and there is just no future, it's just all over, humanity is done. Humanity is also to blame for where we are, there is nothing left, and there is this wonderful film that depicts that. What I do is to read the film and show that that is completely wrong. There are two key scenes in the movie. One is when a neighbor comes to the door asking for brandy and delivers this really intense monologue denouncing the sociopolitical conditions of the city, Turin, to which they are attached agriculturally and economically. But it's the second and most important scene of the movie, which is totally ignored in Latour's analysis, as well as in a whole range of different philosophical, and cinematic, and political readings of this film. It's an absolutely brilliant scene where a band of gypsies approach the house and the daughter is sitting at the window; she is looking out. It's a bit like watching *Rear Window* (1954) but from a peasant perspective. There is a lot of looking out the window. She is looking out of the window on the landscape and these gypsies are approaching and the father asks, "what is going on? Who is coming?" and she says, "oh there are some gypsies coming." And the father says, "no, no, no, you have to get rid of them, they are going to rob our water." And the gypsies come. So, she goes out to meet them, and they want the water, so they go to take the water, and the father comes out and says, "go away, go away, stop robbing our water" and they say, "you worm, you are pathetic, here take some money." And then they address the daughter, and they say, "hey, come with us, we will take you, there is another world, there is another existence, life is still possible, it's not as bad as you think, come with us, we'll show you." She doesn't go, fails, they go back inside to their ending world, and the gypsies ride off into the sunset. But the whole point about the movie for me, is that there is this intervention from the outside. And this demonstration of the fact that it is possible to live another life, "the water is ours, the earth is ours," as the gypsies literally say to the girl and the father. You can take possession, there is still possession to be had, and that is the message of the film. And that is a message you won't get if you read Latour. It's incredible that someone could watch that film and that scene just passes like it didn't happen, and likewise, if you look at the literature as I have done on the film, that scene is almost totally absent. People read the film as though it is a totally negative depiction of the condition of the Anthropocene. Some will say, "oh, it's a film about a horse, it's not a film about human beings." It's about a horse, and what horses can teach us. And it's true, the horse is a central figure of the film. The horse hates the father. It is in alliance with the daughter. The horse empathizes with the daughter and the daughter empathizes with the horse. And really, they both loath the stupid father figure

who you know doesn't have any way out. He is kind of a poor and pathetic figure, and who the gypsies themselves also denounce. It's a really compelling movie, but not because of the reasons Latour and others believe it to be compelling. It's not just another example of the cinema of the Anthropocene in the sense of instructing the viewer about the realities of a world that is ending and an end which it cannot escape. It is quite the opposite. What it depicts is the blindness of the human to the reality of the outside, its openness, and its potential. The father, especially, is a character study in not just blindness but stupidity. A stupidity which functions as a regime of control preventing the daughter from ever realizing her life chances. And a stupidity that explains and justifies the poetic gesture of refusal of the horse of Turin; the very horse, we must remember that Nietzsche embraced, not simply out of sympathy, but in solidarity with its subjection to such a regime. If you are searching for the poetic subject today, and if you are looking for an example of a poetic subject, a subject with the necessary imagination, the necessary diffidence to power, then perhaps watch *The Turin Horse*.