

Aaron Foster-Breilyn, Luke Martin, and Jennie Gottschalk
Second conversation about co-incidence festival
April 16, 2018

JENNIE: Is there anything you especially want to—you can bring stuff up as we talk too—but is there anything you want to cover in particular? We can just sort of see where it goes.

LUKE: I think, well, we'll talk about the season to come, and see. Sarah and Aaron and I had one chat about it so far, so we touched base a little bit. We still have many conversations to go before we hone in on what exactly will happen. But we're getting at some interesting things.

JENNIE: One thing that came to mind, and I think this might be a general issue with any gathering of people in this field, really, is that everybody's going to have their own angle and approach and take on things, and to try to get people to actually meet— It's one thing to get people physically in the same place. It's another thing to get people talking about the same thing, engaging in the same thing if it's not on one person's terms. And how do you build something that's genuinely not centered on one person's idea? And I think what happened in the festival for the most part is that it would shift. The weight would shift. And that happened in the Sound Bridges too where we started doing other people's pieces, which I was very glad for. Which did we do first? Like I came back and suddenly it was Ryoko's piece, or there were different things that were happening otherwise, and it was as if that was a sound bridge, but it was kind of just Ryoko's piece, too. In a way it was a bridge, but it became looser. But it had to loosen to accommodate other people's ideas and other people's work. But how do you get to the point where something is being built, conceived and built by more than one person? And in a way, the whole festival is, but for any piece or for any performed thing to be decentered like that— The place where that started to happen for me the best was when Annelyse brought her piece to Cal's instrument. That was a collaboration. And I think you wanted to be open to that and set it up that way, but it's hard to enact that. And I almost feel like there needs to be, not needs to be, but it takes an extra degree of making a space for that specific thing to happen rather than, this is what I'm doing, that's what you're doing. Okay, let's try this thing on your terms and we'll try this thing on my terms, and we'll try this other thing on their terms. How do you get to the point where there's genuinely a meeting of creative minds and not just a switching of roles? And is that important? Is that possible, and is that something that you would want to have happen? I think that's the thing that, it was that idea of setting up those kinds of bridges, and that's really tough to do. And I feel like it might need more of a starting structure to allow it to happen, but I'm not sure. I don't know. What are your thoughts on that?

LUKE: Aaron, you can go first if you want. I don't know if I'm formulated thoughts yet. Do you have formulated thoughts?

AARON: Well not having formulated thoughts has never stopped me from talking before.

JENNIE: Why let it stop you now?

AARON: Yeah, exactly. I mostly formulate my thoughts through talking, actually. I completely agree with you in that I think a little bit of a stronger structure is necessary for that. I think that one of the things that worked well was when Joachim said, and if someone has a piece idea, let's do it. And something that I was kind of thinking about just as a concept was, what if you had a situation where someone did have absolute control and power, but then it randomly switched? Sometimes you might have absolute control for 15 seconds. Sometimes it's four minutes.

JENNIE: Oh, so the duration randomly switches. It's not so much from who to who but the duration.

AARON: Yeah. It's like you don't know to whom it's going to go to or for how long. And then the relationships that would exist. It would be like an artificial crucible of, if it happened so quickly, like it would kind of go into Meillassoux's idea of the hyperchaos. I know that's a little heady, but it's like if everything was switching so quickly would that kind of blurring occur, or would it be a way of kind of looking at that blurring more accurately than just kind of leaving it open?

JENNIE: I don't know if duration is the way to do it though.

AARON: Yeah, I don't know. It's really just an idea.

JENNIE: Because that would depend on everybody being— I mean, that would be good if everybody was so primed and so ready that they were ready to take control or to change things. But there would still need to be some parameters for that. I don't know. I think in a way—

LUKE: Taking control could be doing nothing, too.

JENNIE: Yeah, that would be Luke's version.

LUKE: No, but if you don't have—

JENNIE: I mean, no, I'm being silly.

LUKE: I mean yes, that probably would, but for instance taking power or control of a situation doesn't necessarily mean doing something active. It could be just like withholding or being neutral, like a powerful neutrality.

AARON: Yeah. Does power imply leadership?

LUKE: No, is my intuition. I think, yeah, I feel like there's some difference between power and leadership, and one doesn't necessarily go with the other.

JENNIE: I think there's always going to be some implicit structure. There's a place where things are happening. There's a sort of understood duration of how long people are going to be around, for the most part. There are certain things that are more accepted or of more interest to the people that are there, and what choices are people making within that, and are they defaulting to something or are they taking advantage of a greater degree of openness that's present? And the irony to me is that it seems like there's structure necessary to enforce the openness, or else it defaults to a more closed situation. Otherwise it becomes sort of a colloquium.

AARON: I would agree. I really, really like your use of the word default. I'm going to steal that from you, because we often talk about how this is, we think of this as an experimental piece, and an easy metaphor is free jazz, specifically how easy it is for people just to literally default. And when you've seen the same group do "free jazz" a few times, if they're not very good, you've heard them, and you know what's going to happen. They know what's going to happen. And it is defaults. And I think that much like truly being free in those kind of moments and really good, "free music" takes a lot of work. Like, it's really hard to do, to not default. And so the way to get around that is to impose limitations, and to say, I'm not going to default. You know, you are structuring.

JENNIE: That's what Cage does.

AARON: Absolutely. And he does it, I would say, fairly naïvely, but that's what happens when you're figuring the stuff out, right?

JENNIE: Or you're the first one doing a lot.

AARON: Absolutely. But so those are fairly intense structures that, pardon the pun, but they need to be constructed. It's either a lot of work building the structure so that you can be "free" within it. Or you need to work really, really hard within a loose framework to have that same freedom.

LUKE: I'm not too sure if it is as split as that. I wonder if this— It reminded me of something else that I was talking about earlier with you too, Jennie, which you know how shaky I am with understanding this at the moment. This is that Fred Moten outside of the outside idea, which I think is related to refusal (of both), or a refusal of refusal. You reminded me of it because you keep talking about a structure that you build that you work within, which is like the architect building a house to create an inside, and that inside implies an outside. And it relates in some way. The architect is trying to get to not just the outside, but the outside of the outside, and Moten says that that involves diving back into the inside. But perhaps a different inside, something imperceptible and/or dangerous to the very idea of inside/outside. Yeah, a refusal of refusal. And I know this sounds very abstract. That's because I don't have the best handle of it yet. Yet!

AARON: Bachelard would say that would be either the attic of imagination or the cellar of the unknown, right?

LUKE: Yeah, I think something like that. It's that *Undercommons* book. I think I sent a picture to you of some passage from it the other day. The question of structure is a big one, and we've discussed with Sarah this idea of setting up roles. That's in the very beginning stages so it might change, but having very firm positions for people to occupy during the day. Then they rotate, and they could rotate indeterminately. That would be pretty interesting, I think. Or they could just rotate on a regular schedule. So one of the roles that we talked about that I thought was interesting was of referees. Like basically, bullshit callers, in a more forceful way to put it.

AARON: As Sarah would put it [laughter].

LUKE: As Sarah would put it, yeah. So to keep a conversation productively digging into a concept, and to kind of make people own what they're saying. So it runs a fine line of being harmful, on one hand, if a person is really trying to figure something out and they need to stumble to do it, then that's that what they need to do (I do this a lot). But in many cases, people have some either, in the worst-worst case scenario an ulterior kind of motive for saying something, either to gain some 'respect' by faking something from an authority or whatever, or in the best-worst case scenario, they're just functioning on default with the logic of that. Like they're not even meaning to. It's just, they're in such practice in whatever community or graduate school program or however they exist that they do that. We surely all have these moments. In any case, this kind of empty response to a question that just tries to show how smart you are, or just tries to, I don't know, show-off with answers that don't actually have depth behind them. And for the referees to just say, excuse me... I don't know what they'd say... stop?

JENNIE: We call BS.

LUKE: Yeah, or something maybe in a gentler manner...

AARON: I think we should just have a referee who gets to yell 'default' and someone else gets to go [laughter].

LUKE: But the point behind that is— We talked about this in our last Skype meeting with Sarah, is that there's, maybe in the last two festivals, there has lacked an *urgency* to what we're doing. Not in terms of, like we're genuinely earnest about what we were doing. Everybody was. There lacks a kind of, like we-don't-have-time-for-that-shit type of undercurrent. We really want to get at something, because there are real consequences, hopefully, for what we're doing.

JENNIE: There have been confrontational moments, but I think that's not what you mean.

LUKE: No. Yeah, it's more redirecting and trying to have a collective push towards something that we all realize is consequential. And that can get lost, sometimes, in this experimental art world.

AARON: Yeah.

JENNIE: Yeah, because I think sometimes if it's sort of competing ideals or different ideas about what a word means or how it applies, that's less interesting than what are we actually trying to get at? And are we still getting there or are we off track?

LUKE: Sometimes it does involve a deep dig into a word. Like Sarah was there for that first day and she was pushing back on the definition of bridge or something. She was trying to get people to define it more and saying, well no, it's not this. It's not that. I actually want to figure out what it means. That can be productive, I think. But then it kind of tailspins off at times. And it's not people's fault. It's just, it takes work, like Aaron was saying.

JENNIE: Right. But I think it also takes having a genuine shared project. I think what tends to happen is that something is one person's project. That's the default. The sound bridges appeared to be Joachim's thing, and other people are interested in them of course, but other people are like, I'm not sure what this is about. I'm just showing up. Maybe not, but it's like—

AARON: Well, not exactly. They were still fairly open. That's why we made the applicants talk about the bridges and these concepts in the application. So they knew what is was focused on from the get-go and, theoretically, would be invested in the concepts.

JENNIE: So maybe that was me, and I hadn't applied and I was just there.

LUKE: Yes, that's a good point!

AARON: I also didn't apply [laughter].

JENNIE: No, but I felt like there wasn't an engagement with that idea that was inclusive of—

AARON: I very much agree.

LUKE: I would counter slightly that, while yes people may not have had as intense of a relationship with the Sound Bridges ideas as Joachim (at first), that is simply because he is so experienced with them and has clearly thought quite deeply about it. Much like I hope to be when composing a piece, in fact. But yeah, it was geared toward the attendees who applied, for sure; but not exclusive of others at all. Actually, I've had interesting moments since the Festival where the idea of a 'sound bridge' has cropped up, they begin to appear, to multiply through my own perception. Often in unusual ways!

JENNIE: I wonder, if there were a way of having genuinely shared ownership of something, and not just in a spontaneous way but in a considered way. I don't know. That would be interesting!

AARON: Yeah. It's funny, because there's something that I think about a lot, and I think I've definitely heard Michael [Pisaro] talk about it a few times, is the Deleuzian idea of lines of flight, where

you have these radical exit-ways, like ant colonies have these, right, where it's an emergent pathway that can exist so that something can radically just like pop up somewhere else. And Deleuze talks about nomadic communities in the desert do this, where there will like be a [desert storm] or something, and then they just show up somewhere else, and that's not even on their usual trails. It's just, there exist pathways of escape and exit. And I wonder if— I'm not a Deleuzian scholar so I can't quite be sure — but I wonder what the opposite would be, like radical lines of entryway, radical application of ownership and self-empowerment. Like how do you radically get someone who's never heard of a sound bridge on day five of the festival, when we've already developed kind of the means of talking about it...

LUKE: So this becomes like a black hole? Maybe that's too negative.

JENNIE: Well that sucks everything in.

AARON: Oh, I see what you're saying. But how do you get someone from anywhere to choose to radically, like to come back in? Not back in, because that implies a return, which I don't mean.

LUKE: I don't know if you can get someone to do that.

JENNIE: I think it needs to be co-created. It's not a question of convincing somebody, because nobody who is genuinely interested in this stuff is going to be easily convinced of anything. I think that's fair to say.

AARON: Oh, that's true.

JENNIE: But I could imagine— Like how many people will be in the next festival, do you think? How many active participants, including—

LUKE: Eleven, plus you if you're there, twelve.

JENNIE: Would that include you two and Sarah?

LUKE: Yup. So six guest artists, Michael, Joachim, and us.

JENNIE: Okay. So what if— [logistics conversation] I'm just interested in this idea of what kind of structure would it take? Not that I'm trying to influence things. I'm just curious about, I don't know, it's a question. Like what kind of structure does it take for genuine conceptual collaboration to happen? And has that happened in previous festivals, and is it a goal?

AARON: That's a really good question.

JENNIE: Which one?

LUKE: The goal question. Well, that's what I thought. What did you think?

AARON: Oh, I really liked the, this is why we work well. I really like the, has it happened before?

LUKE: Has what happened before?

AARON: Has this idea of true, radical collaborative ownership. Has that occurred?

LUKE: In the festival?

AARON: Well not just. I mean in general, maybe. I don't know.

LUKE: I'm sure it's occurred.

JENNIE: Somewhere in the universe. But yeah, in the festival.

AARON: Yeah, but I would be really interested to— That's not something that I've thought very much about, quite honestly.

LUKE: Are we talking about ownership of...? Ownership of a piece?

JENNIE: I'm not even sure if it's about ownership.

AARON: Yeah, I'm not happy with my own use of the word ownership. Investment?

LUKE: Sure.

AARON: Like being truly invested in it? That's not the right word. It'll bug me, but I'll think of it at like 2 AM tonight.

LUKE: Would it be too crazy to say— I know this is going to sound just not fitting, but the means of production of the festival, like shared ownership of that? It's very complicated as to how that would work, but I wonder if we're pointing in that direction in how we want it to be this thing where if somebody else decides they want it to go in one direction, they in a way kind of produce it in that direction. You know what I mean? Like there can be these different structures that form following terms of power between people in the festival, and in terms of time and space and activity. And in that sense, it's more of a shared composition or creation of a thing. Still, I don't know if that gets to the actual production of the thing, which we 'own'. I don't know. I mean, if we really did it, then we'd share all the shitty work that we do to make this happen with everybody else, and I don't think anybody else would want to. Well, maybe not! I'm sure some people would actually be really interested now that I think about it. And hell, who am I to say they wouldn't be! This gets to the other idea that we had a while ago, which is a thing that we haven't done which we should do. I don't know if we told you, Jennie. We were thinking of trying to make a score for the festival that basically outlines how it could be constructed in another place by another person, and so on.

JENNIE: Or for an instance of this festival, too. That's what I think might be— There's been explanatory stuff. I'll let you talk.

LUKE: Yeah, then it's like the score becomes the means to produce co-incidence. The very basic means, because we're not talking economics (yet). That becomes shared. We could go as far as just making it publicly available on the website. This is what we had originally thought. Basically every year, we ask another person or two, whoever we think might be interested in this kind of thing, hey, do you want to do your own, like an instance of co-incidence wherever you are located, or in Boston or Germany whatever? Then any time of year, it's hands off. It's totally up to them at that point. I still really like this idea.

JENNIE: It would have to be maybe a little more flexible so it could happen within a day, rather than many more days, just for practicality, possibly.

AARON: I don't know.

JENNIE: I don't know if it'll be replicated as much if it required twelve people and eleven days.

LUKE: Yeah, I think a lot of this stuff would be opened.

AARON: We'd really have to think about it.

LUKE: Yeah. We'd have to make a score!

JENNIE: I think the idea of making a score for an instance of the festival is really interesting, because that would give the kind of structure. It would have a lot of openness built in. But for example— And I'm just brainstorming, and ignore everything I'm saying if you like. But you could have people decide on creative units, like decision-making units of one, two, three, or four people. It wouldn't be the whole group. That's just not going to happen. And it might not be more than three, but if one person was like, I want to do a thing. I have this thing in mind, and I have a strong idea, and nobody else is going to tap into it, then they could do that. It wouldn't be like enforced collaboration. But otherwise, some people would have to find each other and arrive at something together through active conversation, and not through one dominating the other. But just even that kind of a structure. That's an example, I guess. But that kind of a structure where some collaboration is taking place could be interesting, so long as it wasn't then one person just leads it and makes all the decisions. But yeah, it's a configuration.

AARON: Yeah. But I think maybe in a way, we're looping back a little bit, because configuration is another kind of structure. It's something that has to be, not necessarily, not as strong of a word as imposed, but it needs to be there. It needs to be set, right? Whether from within or from outside doesn't really matter. And I think that, the more we're talking about it, it becomes clear to me that it's more necessary, because I think one of the things that makes collaboration, at least with Luke, and I can

speaking for myself, our relationship, we've spent so much time talking and discussing ideas and disagreeing and trying to figure out why the hell the other one has that stupid opinion.

LUKE: Yeah, speak for yourself.

AARON: I am. As the owner of said stupid opinions, I am. But that's because we've built this relationship for years, so the structure doesn't, we don't need someone to say, you need to listen up and collaborate. But then in something like—

JENNIE: Well you decided to collaborate. You made that active decision.

AARON: Yeah, whereas in co-incidence, in a lot of ways, we're picking who gets put into the pot. That's a lot of structure. We're throwing all the ingredients in there, in a way. And maybe in a way, it's doing everyone who we're accepting or whatever, maybe we're doing them a little bit of a disservice for not giving them more structure. I don't know if I agree with what I just said.

LUKE: For not giving them more structure?

AARON: For not giving them more—

JENNIE: Seeing that through further.

AARON: That then they can take down at any point.

JENNIE: Is it kind of like you've put together the list of ingredients but you haven't written the recipe?

AARON: Yeah, and then we need to figure out how to make a cake.

LUKE: That was my favorite thing to do as a kid, though. I'd go and I'd ransack the kitchen and put a bunch of stuff in a pot and stir it all up and then put it in the oven at 400 degrees for half an hour, see what would happen. I didn't know what was supposed to go with what. I knew eggs were important, so I'd throw those in. And then cinnamon, I liked cinnamon, and vanilla. I put a lot of vanilla and cinnamon. It turned out horrible every time.

JENNIE: Reliably horrible.

LUKE: Yeah, but it was so much fun.

JENNIE: That's great. But for example, I could imagine— This is probably tacky, but just take it as, we would never do that in a million years. You set people up in pairs, or groups of three, and this would be fairly early on, like find the coincidence among your ideas. What's the point of gravitation that you all are drawn to? What's that point of connection? I don't know if that's even possible.

LUKE: Maybe this is not exactly related, but it made me think of something. Let me see if I can retrace my leaps... Well okay, I'll just jump to the end of it because I can't. One thing that we may have been missing that can help with all this structuring stuff is the 'silence' of the festival. I mean this analogously. In other words, how are— We've been very concerned with how the participants and us and everybody are interacting with one another in terms of coinciding ingredients or sounds, if you want to think, like intentional sounds. But we have maybe, would it be too strong to say, forgotten about how they engage with the world and the events that happen to [it], like the contingent events that occur during that week in the 'outside' world.

JENNIE: I think that happened in the square.

LUKE: Kind of, yeah. It opened it up more to it, but I'm thinking even— Because that was more like, we're going to do a thing. We're going to impose a thing on that square, as opposed to—

JENNIE: I think it was mutual.

LUKE: We did go out and listen for times, so, yes. But even things like what's happening in Boston that week, and how do we engage or not engage with that thing? I wonder if that's something to consider, this like silence of the festival, the unintentional events that occur?

JENNIE: Is that silence or is it just listening, and openness and contingency?

LUKE: I think it's silence. I look at it as silence. Or like I'm looking at it as, in our decisions and our social interactions, and between ourselves, are seen as more like intentional sounds. And then other social events with other people not included in that group itself are seen as unintentional sounds. Maybe the analogy is a little reductive.

AARON: Maybe more inside, outside?

LUKE: Yeah, it could be like that. But I think it has to do with unintentionality and intentionality, an intentional gathering in a space, as opposed to the unintentional occurrences of day to day life in whatever place people are in, or even the unintentional things related to their lives that are brought in, like if somebody has, like Ryoko talking to her children, and how does that, how are we paying attention to that?

JENNIE: Without invading that space, yeah.

LUKE: I mean, how do things like that structure our relations (and sound-making!)? Not that we have to listen-in or whatever!

JENNIE: Sort of the stuff in between.

LUKE: Yeah. It gets very hazy and confusing, and I think maybe we've thought about it more than we think we've thought about.

JENNIE: It's kind of the negative space, and bringing the negative space of the breaks, or those spaces between the planned events, bringing those more into the foreground.

LUKE: Yeah, I think we may find some life there.

AARON: Yeah.

LUKE: There's always life there.

JENNIE: I could imagine something with even field recording, like bringing something back from the time between planned events, or planned time together, bringing that in. I don't know. I think there could be ways of doing it.

AARON: Everybody field record your own lunch and your conversation, and then the afternoon is just a listening to everyone's lunches.

JENNIE: Something. I don't know. But there is a lot—

LUKE: I don't like that idea Aaron [laughter].

JENNIE: No, not that, but there's stuff that happens in pairs or in smaller groups that wouldn't happen in the whole group. And if there's a way of activating that. I don't know. I feel like it might go a little deeper. There's the question of sort of the single, the individual, and then the various pairs and relationships between pairs of people, and then the collective, where it's a different life that's happening on all of those planes. And what someone is going through on an individual basis versus what gets communicated group-wide versus things that happen or conversation in the car on a break or whatever, those are different planes of activity and relationship. And there's something there, I think, that's part of it, too. But I don't know how that gets tapped in a deliberate way without making people feel like it's performative. But maybe just asking them to bring something to bear on the day from that, asking people to select something. I don't know. If it's deliberate and a chosen thing, that's less of a, now you're on display. The whole week is so active, and wanting to build in breaks, I think is really important and it's really good. But those breaks have life. It's not like people stop being interesting and creative when they're not in the space.

LUKE: I wonder if it relates to your opposite lines of flight idea, because I like that idea. I would have to think about it more. That's a hard one.

JENNIE: It's coincidence and divergence.

AARON: Di-vergence. Sorry.

LUKE: Yeah, so have you thought about this idea more, or did that just pop into your head?

AARON: No, I've been listening.

LUKE: No, before you brought it up as an idea.

AARON: Oh, no.

LUKE: Yeah, it's a good one. Opposite, cause lines of flight occurs when something's being so enclosed that it forces out— The potential for escape actually becomes greatest at the point at which it's becoming most enclosed. That's how I understand it.

AARON: Yeah. Lines of flight comes from *A Thousand Plateaus*. It designates an infinitesimal possibility of escape, the elusive moment when change happens as it was bound to when a threshold between two paradigms is crossed.

LUKE: Nice. So then I wonder if the opposite is very much like that. Like it also happens at that same kind of critical point. But instead of going away to some other place, it sucks inward. And I'm imagining it imploding.

AARON: Or maybe it's the opposite. Maybe instead of, maybe a line of flight comes from pressure, and it's the escape. Maybe a line of—

LUKE: Intake or something.

AARON: Inwards, in-words (I hate me) come from the loose, from openness. From the bland.

LUKE: From the bland. That sounds great to me already. So we kept it very loose last time. Still, with some minor structure. I don't know if that intake— Does there need to be some sort of pressure to create an intake, or is it like this empty vessel idea, where you really just empty it out? You loosen it up so much that there is just open, like what Joachim was talking about. I think this is how he ideally imagined the sound bridges, as empty vessels.

AARON: I kind of feel like the opposite happened.

LUKE: Right. So then maybe there needs to be some pressure, some sucking pressure, like a vacuum.

JENNIE: We just have to suck.

LUKE: Well, we can do that! Yeah, so maybe there needs to be some— an internal energy that's a gravitational energy, that draws things toward it. It's going back to the black hole. And then it becomes this kind of investment and like creating revolutions as in like turns, not like the colloquial version of it, but like turning the inside of it and creating torque and energy and speed, and all of those things that increase, that can accumulate. This is the urgency! I don't know. It also, unfortunately, reminds me of capitalism, sucking in, sucking in, sucking in, and increased snowballing, in a way...

JENNIE: But if it's not sucking into one thing but several things, that's different. It's not just the one mode of being, but here are various things that happened.

AARON: And ideally, I think, it would change as it gathered more things, as opposed to capitalism, which just is same.

JENNIE: And it absorbs the things and eats them.

AARON: Yeah, it is the great sameness. It is the lowest common denominator, right? Who said that? Don't remember. It's what's-his-head.

LUKE: Oh, Adorno. And, yeah, you're right.

AARON: Adorno. As Adorno would say.

JENNIE: I don't know. I think there's something in all this.

LUKE: When we talk to Sarah, we'll get a better idea of what she's thinking. But I am getting the sense that it's going to head toward a much more structured, or some combination of the horizontal and the vertical, in terms of power. But more structured and more responsible, in a way, for things. I don't know if that's the right word.

AARON: With urgency I think comes a little bit of that. If you're truly like, hey, look, we are here for eight, nine, ten, whatever days. We gotta go. We gotta talk. We gotta make art. We gotta think.