



## Editorial: exploring restorative justice through the canvas of art

Dear All,

In our pursuit of advocating for restorative justice, clarity in communication is our guiding beacon. But what precisely constitutes restorative justice? The nuances embedded within this concept often demand a multifaceted exploration—one that can be enriched through the prism of artistic expression.

In this edition of our Newsletter, we embark on an illuminating voyage through the world of art to unravel the intricacies of restorative justice. Art, with its diverse forms and boundless narratives, serves as a conduit through which the foundational values of restorative practices are conveyed in a deeply resonant manner.

Contained within these pages are contributions that form a rich tapestry of perspectives, each striving to reveal the intricate interplay between art and restorative justice. These pieces conscientiously examine the limitations and potential of artwork as a tool within the landscape of restorative practices.

Art is inherently intimate — a realm where creation and interpretation intertwine to project subjective viewpoints that possess the remarkable power to nurture and inspire. It's within this nuanced space that the dialogue on restorative justice finds a poignant resonance with the world of art.

Our contributors delve into a spectrum of artistic expressions, from sculpture to literature, prison art to specialised techniques such as Ebru, even reaching into the realm of architecture. Each offering serves as a catalyst, encouraging a deeper comprehension of restorative justice.

*Clair Aldington* on 'The making of the awards,' *Robert Shaw* on 'A justice for restorative justice,' *Annie Buckley and Tereza Trejbalová* on 'Where does art fit in American prisons,' *Serena Granzini* on 'The art of being restorative' and *Sabrina Puddu* on 'An exercise in trust' are your guides on this journey. They beckon you to traverse unexplored intellectual terrain, inviting the discovery of fresh perspectives that may have previously eluded you.

### Contents

Editorial	1
Clair Aldington	2
Robert Shaw	6
Annie Buckley and Tereza Trejbalová	9
Serena Granzini	14
Sabrina Puddu	16
Calendar	20

May these diverse artistic forms stir within you a desire to plunge into the depths of restorative justice, fostering the discovery of new vantage points that expand the horizons of our understanding.

Join us on this captivating expedition where the profound beauty of art converges with the transformative essence of restorative justice.

Warm regards,

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## The making of the awards: handmade and relational from Shetland to Sardinia

In 2020 Clair Aldington was commissioned to redesign the award object of the European Restorative Justice Award. She engaged in the work in collaborative way. This is her account of the process. The first version of this text was presented at the European Restorative Justice Award ceremony on 22 June 2022 in Sassari (Sardinia, Italy), when the first piece of the new award objects was presented.

In the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic I was delighted to open my email inbox and find a message from Emanuela Biffi inviting me to discuss a potential design commission for an international restorative justice award with the EFRJ.

Whilst a little daunted, I was excited as this felt like the perfect commission in its merging of two of my passions — design and restorative justice. Occurring during lockdown made the commission even more significant as it was outward looking. As an islander, being asked to design an award that would be presented during an island conference was an additional layer of meaning for me — from Shetland to Sardinia! I will return to this connection later on.



Clair Aldington

The new awards were to celebrate both the twentieth anniversary of the EFRJ, the new EFRJ logo, website and branding, as well as the restorative process itself. These were the reasons why I used the EFRJ logo as my starting point for gathering initial ideas for the design process.

The design process I used to create the awards was a *design thinking* one (the methodology behind how a product or service is designed and produced), which I believe has synergies with the restorative one. There is no one iteration of design thinking but many

would see it as containing three basic components that include: the initial concern or inspiration, the development and exploration of ideas, and the implementation of those ideas, including prototyping and trial. *Participatory design* involves all stakeholders in these three components.

This co-creative involvement is what I aimed to achieve throughout the design process — whether I did or not would be for others to judge but I endeavoured to involve the EFRJ Board members and Executive staff who had been tasked with working alongside me in each stage of the design process. This was from writing the design brief, through designing the initial concepts, to decisions around the construction of the awards, and materials used. A huge thank you to the EFRJ design group who worked with me: Emanuela Biffi, Balint Juhasz, Edit Törzs, Brunilda Pali, Patrizia Patrizi, and Katerina Soulou. The commission was an honour and here is the story behind the making of the awards.

I began by creating a group *Pinterest* board for the award. This contained visual images posted by members of the design group as a way of helping me to understand both the aesthetic as well as any functional expectations for the award.

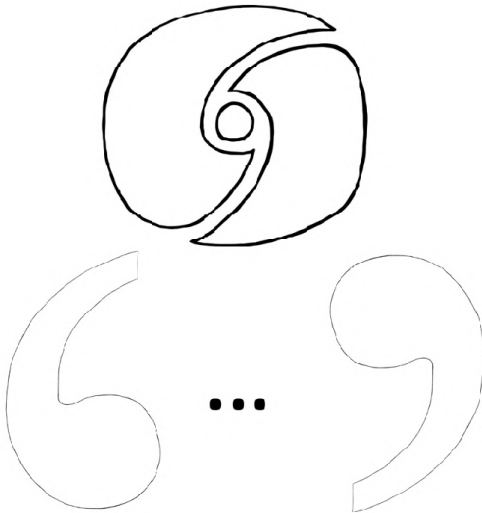
From these visual exchanges we were able to develop a design brief that defined the characteristics of the award. These were that the award should be:

- *Recognisable*, as an award given by the EFRJ only (not simply bought somewhere);
- *Meaningful*, as the award should *reflect restorative justice* (its values, its community, its movement, etc.);
- *Reproducible/replicable but unique*, as the award is given every two years, but it is produced in a *limited edition* and personalised for the winner only;
- *Decorative and maybe multi-functional*, as the award is a “*beautiful treasure*” to show excellence in the restorative justice field and maybe

can be used for other purposes (e.g. *talking piece*);

- *Resistant and long-lasting*, as the award will “travel” (from the EFRJ Secretariat to the conference venue to the home of the award winner), and thus should be *easy to carry and not fragile*.

I used these characteristics to inform my initial design ideas based on the EFRJ logo. I dissected the logo and saw it as being comprised of two speech marks.



The form of the speech mark is also the same as that of a comma — marking a pause in a conversation, a taking of breath, a space for reflection, or a new idea.

As I did so, I reflected on the significance of speech marks — they seem to define the space of a dialogue. The first speech mark is the start of a conversation, then there is the space in between, and the closing of the dialogue with the second. Or visually they could represent the two perspectives in a restorative conversation expectantly facing each other with a space in between for negotiation, understanding and dialogue. The form of the speech mark is also the same as that of a comma — marking a pause in a conversation, a taking of breath, a space for reflection, or a new idea. I also considered the speech mark, although varying slightly in design in different languages, to be a universal form. It seemed an appropriate form for the basis of the award design.

We agreed that I would produce three initial concepts that I would then present to the design group. The concept in the middle image was selected.

I then produced three iterations of this concept as below and the middle design was the one selected by the design group as the final design idea. This design has the form of a speech mark cut out from the edge of the award. A smaller speech mark is engraved onto the award with the new EFRJ strapline etched between them — ‘connecting people to restore just relations’.



In the next stage I refined the design as above to enable it to be constructed and created templates for cutting the components. The final design contained both wood (the award) and metal (the stand) as differing materials but with a relationship between them — the two materials are brought together when the award sits on its stand but separated when the award is removed from the stand.

Thus, each element of the award and its stand was designed to be symbolic. I will now examine these elements:

1. The size of the award is based on a small plate (21.8cm) I use everyday at home. This size enables the award to be intimate, personal and familiar, easily and safely held.
2. The space carved out by the speech mark on the edge of the award signifies that it is impossible to be fully repaired or restored in the aftermath of harm or crime. When we have been people harmed through crime there is always a gap in our lives, a loss, and something that has been irrevocably taken away from us — we are not the same afterwards as we were before. This is why I sometimes question the word ‘restorative’ in restorative justice. A repair *can* be beautiful, however, whilst acknowledging the harm caused — as with the restorative process.
3. The wood chosen for the award is from the yew tree which traditionally symbolises protection from harm. Yew is a tough wood yet elastic in its properties. I deliberately selected wood that

contained ‘imperfections.’ These were filled with purple resin that physically ‘repaired’ the wood and are visible on the front and back of the awards. Time and care was taken to decide on the colour of the resin with exchanges of ideas between me and the design group.

4. The award is multi-functional and designed to be removed from its stand to enable it to also be used as a talking piece in a restorative circle.
5. The award is deliberately designed to be displayed in its stand at an angle to indicate the imbalance of power created by the act of a crime being committed. Restorative justice can redress that imbalance through, for example, giving the person harmed a voice.

Finally, as may be seen from figure 1, there were four awards created — one to be presented every second year during the EFRJ conference over the next decade. The four awards were formed from one piece of wood as may be seen from the grain running through them all when viewed together. But, importantly, each is still unique.

All of the people involved in the design and fabrication of the award live in the Shetland Islands in the very north of Scotland or have family connections here. The making of the award, therefore, was relational and rooted in one place. Their fabrication involved four different people in addition to myself. I am deeply grateful to Cecil, Dawn, Keith and Paul of Ocean Kinetics who worked collaboratively with me to produce them, in particular, to

- Cecil Tait (and his sheepdog!) for creating the wooden part of the award and stand,
- Keith Gorman for laser engraving the speech mark and lettering,
- Dawn Siegel for engraving the metal stand with the EFRJ logo and name of the award, and
- Ocean Kinetics for producing the metal component of the award stands.

Thus, interwoven with the awards is a notion of island-ness, and the specific relationality that island-ness brings. I knew of and now know better each of the makers and companies above through working closely with them on aspects of the award. I still hear about them, see them or bump into them as part of our daily island lives.

As a way for the mainlander to fully understand this ‘density of acquaintanceship’ (Freudenburg 1986, p. 27; Vannini and Taggart 2012, p. 230) invite us to imagine island living through the actions and embodiment of everyday life. For example, ‘Imagine waving at cars driving the opposite direction, regardless of whether you know the driver.’ They thus describe island-ness as being defined by the practices of islanders (‘how do you do your island?’) instead of as a ‘representational entity’ and an abstraction. This changes island-ness ‘from a representation inside our heads to a set of tasks’ (Vannini and Taggart, 2012, p. 235). This is why it was so significant for me for the awards to come round full circle and not only be designed and made in an island setting but also to be presented in an island setting — during the 17th international conference of the EFRJ in Sassari, Sardinia. Massive congratulations to Siri Kemeny for being the first recipient.

... a design and making process is a dialogue that is never static but always changing as new information comes to light and new things are discovered and learned along the way. Much like the restorative process.

As with islands, a design and making process is a dialogue that is never static but always changing as new information comes to light and new things are discovered and learned along the way. Much like the restorative process.

As a reflection, in this world of throw away goods, and mass produced objects and furniture, I hope in a small way the creation of the awards challenges how we perceive and understand designed objects. In the past, we would probably all have known the story and person/people behind each item of furniture or each object in our homes. The maker of them would have been someone we knew or someone who lived nearby. Thus, there was a relationality between ourselves, our objects, and our communities. Consequently, I would also suggest a greater valuing of the designed object because of its embodied relationality. It would also have been more durable. Think about the heirloom pieces of furniture we may have received or the objects we treasure or miss if we lose our homes. For instance ‘consumers have a special appreciation for the human factor in production; handmade products are perceived to be made with love by the crafts person and even to contain love...’ (Fuchs et al., 2015, p. 110). There is an understanding, therefore, that the handmade = an object characterised by love.



Figure 1: The four awards

In the foreword to their book of collected essays, editors Moran and O'Brien (2014) describe what they call 'love objects' as those objects that can become conduits 'for negotiating, materialising, and understanding relationships'. They state their aim in the book is not to 'describe the objects' but rather to unravel the times when love is 'central as an emotion'. As Moran and O'Brien (2014) state in their foreword 'objects become the foci of the authors' attempts to grapple with the complexities of love as it is played out through the objects' identities, both as possessions and as props in the performative enactments of social rituals.'

In an essay in the same book, Chapman (2014) describes love objects as being primarily ecological and sustainable, and as sharing the following criteria with 'emotionally durable design' — of being about:

- narrative (users share, and develop a personal history with the product);
- consciousness (products are autonomous);
- attachment (strong emotional connection to the product);
- fiction (the product inspires interaction and connections beyond the physical relationship); and
- surface (the product ages gracefully).

In these ways, Chapman (2014) views love objects as emotionally durable design, and as a counter to

our throw away society.

I hope that, in time, and as they are handled and used as talking pieces in restorative work, the awards will become just such 'love objects' and in so being challenge our throw away society. I hope also that in a tiny way the awards and the making of them cause us to reflect on our relationship with the designed object. In particular, the significance and beauty of a designed object, handmade in a particular place and time but having an ongoing relationship with us into the future — perhaps even outliving us for the next restorative generations. In so doing, being not only 'love objects' but also becoming examples of 'emotionally durable design.'

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Throughout the making of the award she was also undertaking a PhD in design and restorative justice from which she graduated in November 2022

Other than Figure 1, images © Clair Aldington.

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## A justice for restorative justice

William Shakespeare (1564–1616) was an actor, poet and playwright who lived at the time when England was beginning to become a trading nation and a growing middle class could support a wide range of new institutions including a permanent theatre. His 39 plays are usually grouped into comedies, tragedies and histories and he drew many of his plots from ancient Rome and mediaeval Italy but then adapted them to his own dramatic purpose.

Two examples have a particular relevance to ideas of justice, *The Merchant of Venice*, written in the late 1590s, and *Measure for measure*, first staged in 1604; both contrast the justice of 'procedural correctness' with the justice of 'consequences,' a contrast also found in Hindu literature (Sen, 2009).<sup>1</sup> However, both plays present problems for modern audiences, *The Merchant of Venice* because of its apparent anti-semitism and *Measure for measure* because the timings of events do not add up. So the ideas of justice which both share are rarely explored.

While Shakespeare knew nothing of restorative justice, many aspects of *Measure for measure* will be familiar to restorative justice practitioners.

While Shakespeare knew nothing of restorative justice, many aspects of *Measure for measure* will be familiar to restorative justice practitioners. The heart of the play is the soliloquies and conversations of the main characters and, as with all Shakespeare's plays, there are many characters but, for the purpose of exploring ideas of justice, six are central to this exploration:

- the Duke
- Angelo, a man with high moral values
- Marianna, his former girlfriend
- Claudio, a young gentleman who has just got his fiancée, Juliet, pregnant

- Isabella, Claudio's sister, who is about to take her vows as a nun
- Lucio, a 'man about the town,' who sometimes comments on the action and is sometimes the key to taking the drama forward.

## The plot

The Duke says that he is going abroad and appoints Angelo as his deputy. But in fact he does not go abroad; he disguises himself as a wandering friar to find out what people really think of him in his absence.

Angelo decides that the Duke has been too lax in enforcing the law and proceeds to tighten things up, including the law which says that anyone who has sex outside marriage will face the death penalty.

Claudio is arrested and asks Isabella to go to Angelo and plead for his life. Isabella does so and Angelo offers to spare Claudio if Isabella will sleep with him. When Isabella threatens to expose him, he asks her who is going to believe her given his reputation for high moral standards.

Isabella returns to tell Claudio that she has failed and he implores her to sacrifice her virginity for his life. The wandering friar overhears of this and arranges for Marianna, Angelo's former girlfriend whom Angelo had previously cast aside, to take Isabella's place at the dark rendezvous which Angelo had proposed.

Everything goes to plan except that, after his night of pleasure with Marianna, Angelo reneges on his

promise to Isabella and orders Claudio's execution.

The Duke returns and Isabella publicly confronts Angelo in front of the Duke but, as expected, Angelo is able to dismiss her allegations and the Duke appears to take his side. Isabella says that the wandering friar will support her allegations and Isabella is held pending the arrival of the wandering friar. Meanwhile, Marianna arrives to confront Angelo and her allegations are similarly dismissed by Angelo as all part of a conspiracy.

The Duke contrives to leave the proceedings and return disguised as the wandering friar to be interrogated until Lucio takes it on himself to pull off the Duke's disguise.

Angelo now has no answer and asks for immediate execution. The Duke proceeds down the route of 'procedural correctness,' ordering Angelo to marry Marianna so that she will inherit his property from him after his execution.

Marianna pleads for his life and asks Isabella to join her in this plea, in spite of the fact that Angelo has ordered her brother's execution, which Isabella does.

The Duke then reveals that he had been able, as the wandering friar, to get another prisoner already on death row executed in place of Claudio and he pardons both Claudio and Angelo.

Finally, the Duke confronts Lucio who had slandered the Duke to the wandering friar and orders him to marry the woman whom he had got pregnant and abandoned.

## The behaviours visible even today

The failure of the three men, Angelo, Claudio and Lucio, to accept any responsibility for their actions and to expect the women to suffer as a result will be familiar to many restorative justice practitioners. Little has changed in the past four hundred years. Similarly, the arrogance of Angelo in believing that, as a man in a respected position, he will be able to get away with things, will be familiar to many people.

Many people today see restorative justice as a 'soft' option but Shakespeare shows Angelo choosing execution as a way of avoiding having to explain his behaviour to Marianna and rebuild a relationship.

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ecution as a way of avoiding having to explain his behaviour to Marianna and rebuild a relationship.

From the point of view of Marianna and Isabella, they have now found

- a safe space to speak of their experience
- validation and vindication

but, if Angelo is to be executed, they will lose the opportunity to receive:

- answers to their questions
- genuine truth-telling
- empowerment
- restitution or reparation and
- hope of a better future (Marshall, 2005).

The route of 'procedural correctness' does not bring justice to any of the women in this play, only a justice of 'consequences' ...

The route of 'procedural correctness' does not bring justice to any of the women in this play, only a justice of 'consequences' where those who have behaved badly take responsibility for the behaviour and its consequences and seek to ameliorate those consequences.

## Perspectives applicable in wider issues

The law which Angelo sought to implement was presumably intended to prevent children being conceived out of marriage, something which the established church and the authorities, along with the puritan separatists who were increasing in number in England in Shakespeare's time, would all have supported. In the end Shakespeare satisfies them because all the men are forced into accepting their responsibilities towards the women. But he demonstrates through the drama that only a justice of 'consequences' can achieve this.

A similar situation has arisen over the past two decades in many western countries which have increased the penalties for sexual abuse. In the 20th century the guilty plea rate in sexual abuse cases in England was the highest rate for all types of offence and so few victims had to appear in court to present their evidence. Since the imposition of tougher sanctions, the number of those accused willing to plead

guilty has dropped significantly and many more victims are having to appear in court than previously as the accused take the chance of being acquitted if the victim cannot produce a sufficiently convincing case. The justice of 'procedural correctness' is failing sexual abuse victims. We therefore need a completely different approach to sexual abuse cases (Hulls, 2015).

## What happened to the idea of the justice of 'consequences'?

The fact that Shakespeare twice fashioned plays around comparing ideas of 'procedural correctness' with ideas of 'consequences' suggests that these were ideas familiar to his audiences and that there may well have been debates about their relative merits at the time.

Yet Amartya Sen (2009), an Indian philosopher and Nobel Prize Laureate in Economic Science, argues that the English tradition from Hobbes and Locke in the 17th century — not long after Shakespeare died — to Rawls in the 20th has focused on arriving at ideas of justice through reasoning rather than emotion — hence the focus on 'procedural correctness.' But he does not argue for the substitution of one set of ideas for another but for an integration of those ideas. For example, restorative justice practitioners have developed a number of ideas around the 'procedural correctness' of preparing for a restorative event, managing that event and ensuring positive outcomes from the event. But ultimately both restorative justice practitioners and those involved will judge the success of restorative justice on the consequences which flow from it rather than on its 'procedural correctness,' unless they perceive the procedure itself to have been harmful.

Did the ideas disappear or were they below the surface all the time? Carol Gilligan (1982), psychologist and gender researcher, showed that, while boys sought *logical* solutions to decisions, girls sought solutions which *did not hurt*. Then again another psychologist, Nona P. Lyons (1988) showed that men overwhelmingly saw justice as *objective* and based on *reciprocity* whereas women overwhelmingly saw justice as a *response* based on *relationships*. Drawing from his extensive work on cross-cultural leadership issues, Michael H. Hoppe (1998) found that cultures which valued work more than family valued

- job centredness,
- performance centredness and

- results orientation

in organisational life whereas cultures which valued family more than work valued

- employee centredness,
- relationship centredness and
- people orientation

in organisational life.

In other words, abstract impersonal and responsive personal ideas seem to be present and expressed in various ways in modern cultures. So it seems reasonable to assume that they have been present in various ways in the west throughout the last 400 years in spite of the dominance of the abstract impersonal ideas of justice as 'procedural correctness' in western thought.

We do not know whether there was an ongoing debate on these ideas in Shakespeare's time or whether the lack of serious debate prompted Shakespeare to air the issues on the stage. But in the end *Measure for measure* is a satisfying play because it takes us deep into human emotions in some of the most difficult situations which we can encounter and Shakespeare plots a tortuous route out of the situation which allows him to make further points in the debate before coming to a resolution which brings justice for the women and an acceptance of responsibility on the part of the men. Clearly, whatever the situation in his day, Shakespeare thought that it was important to use his art to make the argument for a justice of 'consequences.'

Today the arguments for a justice of 'consequences' are just as strong as they were in Shakespeare's day and such a justice would enable restorative justice to find its true place in today's societies.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> See also 'Restorative Shakespeare' (Shaw, 2020)

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## Where does art fit in American prisons?

Painting takes my mind off being in prison. It makes me feel beautiful.

— PAC participant

### The System

In comparison to the correctional landscape in most of Europe, American prisons have generally acquired the reputation of spaces where the emphasis is on punitiveness rather than rehabilitation. This is not to convey that rehabilitative efforts do not exist in America; however, America's relationship with rehabilitation has been complicated. The tough-on-crime policies of the 1970s — and decision makers who promoted them to appease voters and alleviate the public's fear of crime — led to an enormous number of people continuously being sentenced to serve time in prison, often for decades and sometimes with multiple life sentences. Complicating the situation further, people sentenced to prison have disproportionately come from communities of colour and economically disadvantaged communities.

Since the majority of people who are currently behind bars will be eventually released, the utmost importance of offering programming that would address the searing rates of recidivism cannot be overstated.

Historically, Black men's likelihood to be incarcerated far surpasses the odds for men of other racial and ethnic backgrounds (Gramlich, 2020). Black men

are five times more likely to go to prison than white men specifically (Nellis, 2021). Mass incarceration and systemic racism quickly became staples of the US criminal justice system's vocabulary. As of 2023, almost 2 million people are incarcerated in America, making it one of the nations with the highest incarceration rates (Sawyer and Wagner, 2023). Since the majority of people who are currently behind bars will be eventually released, the utmost importance of offering programming that would address the searing rates of recidivism cannot be overstated. The need for meaningful rehabilitation is pressing.

Nevertheless, in 1974, Robert Martinson, an American sociologist focusing on criminology, famously concluded that rehabilitative programming in prisons did not work. Martinson's work was well received by correctional decision makers and substantially contributed to doubling down on punitiveness. Despite the shortcomings of the methods of studies that Martinson reviewed, and his own perspectives on what he found, rehabilitation remains questioned to this day. Fortunately, the study of correctional programming has tremendously progressed since the 1970s, and we now know what type of programming works and what does not. Evidence-based programmes are at the forefront in the field.

As of 2023, [Crime Solutions](#) under the National Institute of Justice reports that 170 programmes in

the area of corrections and re-entry across the US are effective in achieving their intended outcomes as evidenced by data. While evidence-based correctional practices are the pinnacle of addressing individuals' criminogenic needs (Andrews and Bonta, 2010), the benefits of arts-based programming are relatively unexplored even though they tap directly into at least one criminogenic need — leisure time — and further can be connected to the [Good Lives Model](#) (Ward, 2002). To briefly elaborate, the Good Lives Model posits that rehabilitation also includes focus on fulfilling one's innate need to lead a meaningful life.

Most of the people in prison carry a history of trauma, and their likelihood of experiencing more while they are incarcerated is searing.

Most of the people in prison carry a history of trauma, and their likelihood of experiencing more while they are incarcerated is searing (Widra, 2020; Sawyer and Wagner, 2023). This is also true in California where the correctional landscape is additionally highly affected by the aforementioned harsh sentencing policies (e.g. three-strikes law) and long sentences, high recidivism rate, and strict racial divides that exist in the prisons to this day. To many who are incarcerated in the state, it is unthinkable to share space and heal alongside individuals from different racial backgrounds. The nuances that complicate lives, rehabilitation and re-entry of incarcerated individuals in California are countless. Noting these nuances, the state is increasingly attempting to become more responsive to the needs of system-impacted people. For example, a recently passed Assembly Bill 1104 is to ensure that rehabilitation becomes one of the pillars of California corrections. Rehabilitative programming has been extensively available in the state's prisons even prior to AB 1104. One example is arts-based programming provided by [Prison Arts Collective \(PAC\)](#). Since 2013, Prison Arts Collective has been dedicated to expanding the transformative power of the arts to communities impacted by incarceration. The project and collaborative teaching teams are organised around the belief in art as a human right.

Art is essential in human development and allows the artist to use their personal experience as the energy for the artist. Art will continue to be an integral part

of rehabilitation 'cause it causes the person to search within in order to create their own personal artwork.

— PAC participant

## Art as liberation

A group of about twelve men in blue uniforms, the words 'CDCR Prisoner' emblazoned on the backs of their shirts in yellow block letters, sit in a circle at the back of a large, bare prison gym at the conclusion of a yoga class. Around the spare cement floor, two additional gatherings of men are engaged in creative arts with teachers from the local university. A similar setting takes place across fourteen prisons in California where PAC offers collaborative and multidisciplinary arts programming. Since starting with one university-based team of faculty and students at one prison in 2013, we have brought arts programming to more than 7,000 people incarcerated in California state prisons with the support of state and federal grant funding. But on this day, in this gym, the men engaged in class with an enthusiastic team of teaching artists focused on making art and building a creative community.



M. Nguyen, *My Choice of Weapon*

Each PAC class follows a four-part model including:

1. the cultivation of a safe space for creative expression,
2. teaching and discussing a work of art history or visual culture to expand perspectives,
3. creative practice in many media (drawing, painting, creative writing, guitar, collage, and more), often in response to requests from participants, and
4. reflection on the process.

The four elements of a PAC class are designed to create an experience that allows for creativity and expression while also making space for dialogue, interaction, and insight. Art history is introduced to let participants know that they are part of a larger story and to inspire new ideas. Reflection and dialogue facilitate community building and the rare (in prison) opportunity to express feelings and listen thoughtfully to a point of view that might be vastly different from one's own experience.

... art and other rehabilitative classes are spaces where residents can interact with folks they would not talk to on the yard for fear of retaliation by those that uphold the strict if unwritten codes of order.

This process takes place in one of the most restrictive spaces imaginable, both from the outside (bars, locks, cells, tightly controlled movement), and from the inside (most American prisons operate along strict racial divides imposed by the residents themselves). It provides a level of freedom and imagination not present in the regular prison environment. In addition, art and other rehabilitative classes are spaces where residents can interact with folks they would not talk to on the yard for fear of retaliation by those that uphold the strict if unwritten codes of order. Thus, the art spaces in PAC classes, and in the many rehabilitative programmes throughout California, are active spaces of integration — of thought, ideas, experiences, people — and resistance to the steady control of one's ideas and movement and friends. Art, in this sense, is liberation. It is art at its most elemental and vital.

I am interested in the ways art can be used as a tool for healing and liberation.

I am interested in the ways artists can leverage their resources and privilege to create access points for other members in their communities.

— PAC intern

Back in the prison gym, a professor that had recently curated an exhibition of the men's work outside the walls was visiting for the day. A participant en route from yoga warm up to painting class approached her and asked to speak briefly. 'You know the book you gave us?' he began, referencing a publication the team had created alongside the exhibition.

'Yes, I remember. Did you get your copy?' She asked.

'Yes!' He began, then halted, enthusiastic but also shy, in the manner often seen in people experiencing the deeply institutionalised life of American prisons. She waited, nodding encouragingly, knowing he had something more to share and allowing space.

'I sent it to my family,' he said with cautious pride and an irrepressible smile, 'My daughter, you know what she told her friends? She told them that her dad is an artist.'



*Student with family.*

*Photo by Peter Merts, January 2023*

The professor broke out in a grin. 'That is beautiful,' she said softly, 'Thank you for sharing.' And the man walked a few paces to the PAC class led by a graduate student.

## Restoring through arts

I think this class is a wonderful opportunity to learn and bring out something positive out of us. This class has helped me with my rehabilitation in

many ways. For example, meditation, relaxation, how to learn the different types of art, how to use and blend paint. But, overall, is how to bring out my hidden talent I didn't know I had.

— PAC participant

Art can be so many things to so many people. But here, in the most restrictive of spaces possible, the impact of art shines in high relief. Art offers liberation in a space where freedom is denied. Art offers a means to express the feelings that are too tangled or tough for words. The art class provides a place to relax in an environment where most live under 24/7 stressors. All of these are vital not only for a meaningful life (see Ward (2002) for a discussion on why that is important in the context of the Good Lives Model), but for wellness and, arguably, for survival.

It is the significance of connection that brings us to the concept of restorative justice.

The particular set up of PAC classes intentionally builds on the transformative power of art to allow participants to also gain opportunities for dialogue and community building, self awareness and identity building, and a vital expanding of perspective. For people that often lack any opportunity to connect with others outside of this limited space, or the chance to see or experience a walk on the beach, a picnic with family, even, in many cases, a view through a window, the impact of a creative community in which to connect with others is profound. It is the significance of connection that brings us to the concept of restorative justice.

Restorative justice centres on the needs of the person who was victimised, arguing that the traditional approach to justice overly focuses on punishment rather than on repairing the harm that has been done (Zehr, 1990). The emphasis is also put on the community and the person who committed the crime. Although the work that PAC engages in does not directly contribute to the wellbeing of those who were victimised, positioning arts-based programming as a tool for restorative justice is not far-fetched. Incarcerated people coming together to create art and sharing it (through gifting, donating, displaying) with one another, with their community, with their loved ones can undoubtedly be a way to start mending relationships. But this conceptualisation is up for debate, even among the people that PAC serves.

Art for me is much more than putting brush to canvas, it was about connecting with others and developing a sense of belonging. It was about learning to express myself emotionally, artistically and vocally, as well as listen to others in a more meaningful way.

— PAC participant

At the furthest edge of California, deep in the heart of a remote landscape, behind numerous locked gates and steel walls, a professor and a group of students in prison blues sit together in a crowded classroom. On the walls, oversized post-it notes feature comments from their conversation in brightly coloured and varied handwriting, as everyone takes turns jotting notes. The topic of the day is how art does or does not further restorative justice.



*Professor Annie Buckley and participant  
Photo by Peter Merts, June 2017*

The students are enrolled in a training class unique to PAC. It was designed for people with experience in the arts who want to share it and for correctional institutions that are far from cities where they might get more frequent volunteers. The Arts Facilitator Training is a 60 hour course followed by 10–15 weeks of apprenticeship. At the conclusion of this, the peer facilitators lead classes and cultivate creative communities with the prisons with mentorship and supplies from PAC. While learning to teach, participants study art history, classroom management, lesson planning, and practice standing up in front of others to speak and facilitate dialogue with a group of peers. This training has resulted in over 400 people graduating and 29 currently teaching classes in state prisons across California. Of those who took this programme and have been released, several work in re-entry spaces, including PAC. Over the years, PAC has hired approximately ten alumni from this programme in different capacities including as interns, teaching artists and coordinators.



Initially, the professor asks if anyone knows what restorative justice means. A few hands go up but most stay down. She calls on someone who shares what he learned about restorative justice in another rehabilitative group. Others slowly build on the answer and they come to a working definition, noting that the process of restorative justice emphasises community health over individual blame and, crucially, engages the victims of crimes in restorative dialogue. Some participants have taken part in groups that actively engage this dialogic process, but many have not and, for a majority, the concept of restorative is new.

As a next step, the group discusses how art does or does not forward restorative justice. Several participants enthusiastically note the ways that art does forward restorative justice, as a means of liberation, reflection and growing understanding for the artists and as a way to share something positive with the world. The students are actively engaged in stating the many benefits that art has on their rehabilitation when someone raises his hand tentatively. The professor calls on him and he begins, 'We are in here making things,' continuing with emphasis, 'but it is not doing anything for the victims of crime! So I don't think it is restorative justice.'

What stands out is how firmly and passionately the men defended art as a part of restorative justice.

Several hands quickly go up, eager to refute this point. Some note that they send art outside and it is sold to support charity. One explains that he sends his art home and his mother gives it away, bringing positivity to the community and shifting perceptions of those that commit crimes. The discussion continues but the man that refuted art's engagements as restorative justice stands firm in his perspective. The fact that he can solidly defend a perspective at odds with the group is testament to the climate the professor and students have co-created that allows for respect, listening and accepting altering viewpoints. Interestingly, these are the elements that characterise, if not embody, restorative justice practices more broadly. What stands out is how firmly and passionately the men defended art as a part of restorative justice. It was as if they not only believed it was, but really needed it to be, integral to this healing process.

For those still in touch with family and friends, [art] is a way to share something they have made.

For those engaged in PAC and other arts programmes inside correctional institutions, art can be a vital bridge to their own freedom, transformation, selfhood, and community as well as to the outside world. For those still in touch with family and friends, it is a way to share something they have made. And for those who do not have connections to family any longer, art can open an avenue to connection to community.

The idea of 'giving back' is often touted as a vital part of healing for those who are incarcerated and art offers a powerful opportunity. Those inside give art to family and friends to bring happiness and joy, to show another side of them, to demonstrate their positivity and light in a dark space. And many also give art to community groups and nonprofits, including PAC, which are then given to donors or sold to raise funds for art materials, for community needs, for victims' groups, and more.

For those locked into conditions with few to no outlets, with histories often steeped in trauma, the opportunity to engage with others in the creative community is a lifeline and a bridge.

Art might not be the main purveyor of traditional restorative justice dialogue, putting victims and perpetrators in conversation, but facilitating the creativity and imagination of the arts within correctional settings can further the goals of restorative justice, including identity building, expressing feelings, listening to alternate points of view, and connecting with others inside and out. For those locked into conditions with few to no outlets, with histories often steeped in trauma, the opportunity to engage with others in the creative community is a lifeline and a bridge.

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## The art of being restorative: Ebru

What is art? This question is one of the most difficult to answer but since I started being a restorative practitioner I understood there is another one quite similar: what is restorative justice? I will not try to solve these two big enigmas but I will put them in connection, showing that art is always a good idea to put people together and face their internal and external conflicts.

### 1 Art like a tool for relationships

One of the most difficult things in relationships is communication. We daily live with the problem of explaining who we are, how we feel and what we need. We feel misunderstood and frustrated for not being satisfied with our needs.

Verbalisation is sometimes even impossible and finding different ways to express ourselves can reduce the incident of conflict or make their resolution easier.

The Turkish art of mosaic painting — Ebru — can help in doing this.

### 2 Why Ebru: story and technique

This ancient painting technique born in Turkistan during the 13th century was named ‘the cloud-like paint’ but also ‘water surface’ by Persians.

This word was used to refer to the appearance of the paint changing like a cloud.

Nowadays a similar word ‘abri’ is used in Persian for cloudy weather.

Ebru was used to decorate important books so it initially had a secondary function but in time it be-

came an independent figurative art that represents Turkish traditional symbols.

It’s basically painting on water with colours and materials of totally natural origin.

We are used to thinking about solid materials on which we can gently paint using brushes but in Ebru’s case we will use the most insatiable element on which we will paint breaking and screeching in a more or less delicate way.

The artistic process can be done by a single person or by a group; in that case the element of collaboration becomes a must and a plus to reach the artistic result.

After a long process of preparation of the liquid base and the painting phase, a paper is put on the water surface and catches all the colours like a sponge showing the result.

### 3 The elements

Like in daily life to obtain a change from ourselves or from a person we need to go through a process that is not always supported by stable conditions and needs more intense actions to evolve.



Figure 2: *Ebru: Turkish mosaic painting*

Ebru shows how human artistic action is actually comparable to human social interaction.

Ebru shows how human artistic action is actually comparable to human social interaction.

If we look at the word Ebru, we can easily find the strong connection of this art with the ‘art’ of restoring relationships:

- Equality
- Balance
- Responsibility/Repair/Respect
- Unpredictable/ Uniqueness/Unity

All these elements are needed to build a positive human relationship and also to create an Ebru painting.

We will need faithfully to prepare the water surface. For the first time water will not just take the shape of its container but instead will become itself the container of the art.

Like water the human interaction will not just adapt itself to the situation but will create the best conditions to create a positive and satisfying relationship.

To prepare any restorative meeting or procedure we need to put down some common approved rules that will permit us to satisfy the value of *Respect*. For this we will add an oil that will keep the colours separated but able to interact with each other on the water surface creating a *Balance*.

Here comes the moment to interact!

Every participant will be able to express himself/herself *Equally* choosing their way to communicate and give to the others a part of their soul.

Like this painters choose their colours, a burnishing tool to touch the water and spread the colours.

Every person's exchangeability will produce a consequence like every touch in the water will extend the paint influencing the other's artistic gesture.

Every person's exchangeability will produce a consequence like every touch in the water will extend the paint influencing the other's artistic gesture.

Taking their own *Responsibility* for what they did/said will help them to be an active part in building who they want to be and how they want to be with people. Same thing in Ebru! I need to know that a little touch will be fundamental in the final result of our paint.

A word that in the beginning looks like a mistaken one, later can be changed, explained and put in a context that enhances its meaning.

Like this a scratch in the water that seems to ruin the ideal paint can be *Repaired*, what appears divided on the surface is actually *United* in the artistic intention.

The result in both, human relationship and Ebru paint, is totally *Unpredictable*: everyone can have an expectation about that but the process will define

what will happen. Trying to behave, speak and relate to people restoratively, of course we can expect to build better and better relationships, but no one has the certainty of how the other people will be affected by us.

Another magic element is the *Uniqueness* of what we will build/ paint. Gifting the others with who we really are will permit us not to lose the aim of authenticity. Every artistic gesture will just be us!

As I tried to explain, the similarities in those two processes are multiple and fascinating.

## Conclusion

Sometimes for knowing people deeply and getting connected with them, using words is not enough.

Art, specifically Ebru, can be a valid and enjoyable way of communication.

It could be amazing to see in those colourful clouds reflecting who we are, who we want to be; reaching a deep connection with participants through a collaborative process in which near me i always find the help and different perspectives of other human beings.

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## 'An exercise in trust': restorative justice in architectural pedagogy

In 2019, myself, Paolo Emilio Pisano and Francesco Zuddas launched the first edition of a visiting school on the island of Asinara, Italy, for the Architectural Association School of Architecture. Asinara hosted for a century a carceral settlement and in the late 1990s was transformed into a National Park. Since then, much work has been done for the environmental enhancement and conservation of the island, but the disentanglement of its long carceral history is still underway due to the complexity and overlapping of the many narratives attached to the island — just to mention a few, the island served in the past as an agricultural penal colony, a quarantine station, a political prisoners camp in the WWI, a high-security prison for members of mafia organisations and of political terrorist groups. For those of you who are familiar with the beautiful book *Il Libro dell'Incontro (The Book of the Encounter)* (Bertagna et al., 2015), Asinara's prison facilities hold in detention some of the protagonists of the experience narrated in that book.

As we were about to bring a group of architecture students to the island who had probably heard little of prisons — if not in the way in which most do through mainstream media — many questions remained open.

The plan was to ask them to 'walk the island' for two days with a camera, in search of their relationship with the island's (prison) landscape and sparse buildings and artefacts. Then we would ask them to



imagine the incipit for a possible project starting by reproducing a fragment of what they had encountered and photographed. These fragments would materialise with a sandcasting model. For those not familiar with sandcasting, this is a technique that uses sand as a mould on which plaster is then poured to create an object. In our case, the result was going to be a model that reproduced at a smaller scale an existing artefact but with a looser architectural definition — like a ruin with softer edges — questioning those qualities of precision and clarity that are instead sought by modern prison design.

But how were we going to speak to these students about prisons and incarceration?

This was going to be a very quick process — ten days in total. We were certain that the workflow — based on photography and sandcasting — was going to work. But how were we going to speak to these students about prisons and incarceration? How were we to prevent them getting trapped in the easy-to-consume narratives — aka ‘The story of the most sensational escape from Asinara’ — that (island) penal tourism often deploys to perpetuate and legitimise a traditional understanding of justice grounded on ideals of retribution, punishment, and reform? Options included a survey seminar covering the history of prison architecture, or a Foucaultian account dissecting the *panopticon* — always so popular in architecture schools.

We understood that none of these options was appropriate to us and that we should seek someone who not only could give a survey of the key facts of traditional modern justice and prisons but also convey to our architecture students an imaginative ‘push.’ We wanted to open the field of imagination beyond architectural discourses on how to design newer, more humane, more beautiful, reformed prisons for the current ever-growing prison population or on how to retrofit a former prison (now heritage) in ways that legitimise the traditional prison system that we are accustomed to. So it was that, in this didactic attempt to shake up a group of architects-to-be on an uninhabited former prison island, we brought to Asinara a member of the European Forum for Restorative Justice, Brunilda Pali. She would talk about a paradigm of which none of us knew.

A few years earlier I had been with Brunilda to visit a Sardinian artist called Maria Lai in a village not distant from where my family is originally from. I had a great admiration for the work of this artist, so

imbued with beauty, poetry, and strength. But Bruna started to look deeper into one of her most famous performances from the 1980s — *Legarsi alla Montagna* (*Binding to the Mountain*) — and interpreted it as an attempt of art to pursue some principles close to those of restorative justice. I don’t feel that I quite understood what she meant then. Since Asinara, my interest in restorative justice began.

## Responses from students

I am an architect in prison studies and, at the time of Asinara, I had been looking at prisons for several years. While I was — slowly — consolidating my position as a researcher towards the topic of prison architecture and broader carceral spaces, I struggled to translate this into my teaching. I teach design studio, the core course in any Faculty of Architecture, where students spend one or more days a week in class with their peers and their tutors to discuss and draft their architectural projects, with drawings and model making. The aim is to produce a project, for which we tutors write a brief. Over time I became increasingly uncomfortable asking students — our future generation of architects — to work in the context of my research. I was looking for ways to propose briefs that tackled topics of incarceration and addressed justice from outside prison and prison design.

While I had already navigated this controversy in the past when teaching Master’s students at Leeds Beckett University in 2017–18, the first brief for a design studio tying together a reflection on incarceration, restorative justice and (non-prison) design was delivered to a class of fourth-year students at KU Leuven Faculty of Architecture, Belgium, in 2021. For two consecutive years, my colleague Jesse Honsa and I proposed a brief challenging students to explore if and how it is possible to mobilise restorative justice principles in architecture in the realm of housing and community infrastructure.

What might result from such a process of acknowledgement and reparation is a completely new relationship, or environment or artefact that keeps a trace of the conflictual situation that generated it.

The brief and an overview of the students’ projects are in this [faculty blog](#). These projects reflected on what a restorative approach to togetherness can be — in an introductory seminar with Brunilda such approach was summarised as an approach that asks people to take relationships seriously, recognising

that they are one part of a web of people, institutions, and the environment; to be aware of the impact of their actions on others and the world around them; and, in case of wrongdoing, to take responsibility for the harm they have caused, acknowledge, and try to repair it. What might result from such a process of acknowledgement and reparation is a completely new relationship, or environment or artefact that keeps a trace of the conflictual situation that generated it.

Shortly, the project was located in the Belgian countryside. Each student was asked to identify a site and a specific conflict that they wanted to address and repair (intergenerational injustice, environmental damages, exploitation of labour, migrants and dispossession etc.) to then design a residential farm that is inhabited by an ‘imperfect intentional community’ — formed of a very heterogeneous group of thirteen ‘extraordinary’ people including also those who are sometimes marginalised if not criminalised and that find it hard to secure permanent homes and subsistence.

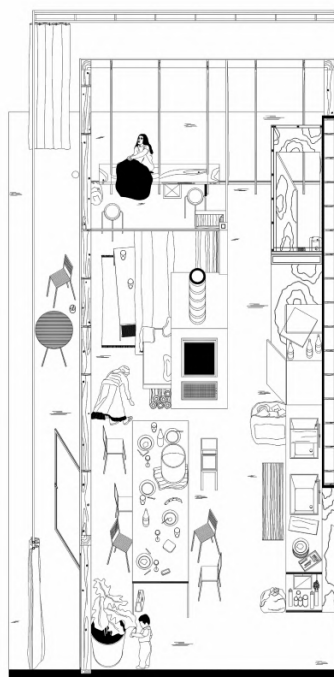


Figure 3: *Mael Duclovel, Building with Conflicts, 2021*

Some of the titles of the students’ projects are already evocative of some reflections about architecture and restorative justice. Astrid de Maziere and Julia Cuppens’ ‘*An Exercise in Trust*’, Febe Clinckemaillie’s ‘*Farm Beyond Harm*’, Marta Wisniewska’s ‘*Growing Monument*’, Maren Schroeder’s ‘*Creatur*:

*Re-Wild + Disperse*’, Giulia Mazzucco and Mélanie Juliette Lembregts’ ‘*All I did was turn 18. A food forest for growth*’, Lars Hemmeryckx and Luca De Voz’s ‘*Vacant Front Gardens for the Settlement of a Multigenerational Community*’, Defne Saysel and Juliette Moncarey’s ‘*My Thoughts Run Wild. A Farm for the Unwanted*’, Monika Dauksaite’s ‘*Gardens for Everyday Rituals*’, Tessa Delaey and Victor Stans’ ‘*Released in your 50s*’, or Mael Duclovel’s ‘*Building with Conflicts*’.



Figure 4: *Marta Wisniewska, Growing Monument, 2021*

Mael, for instance, asked: ‘What if restorative justice was not only relegated to specific organised moments in ad-hoc designed spaces (peacemaking rooms and restorative justice centres) but its principles were to invest the whole life of a community, both its overarching philosophy and its daily practices?’ His project for a residential farm eventually materialised as a space for the sometimes-exhausting process of community building — based on continuous negotiation among its members, both humans and non-humans, and between them and the built space. He designed a co-housing where the inhabitants live in rooms organised according to a matrix where doors are shared and negotiable, and the collective living space — the kitchen but also the bathroom — is subject to negotiable rules of use. In Mael’s and other students’ projects, the architect is not seen as a demiurge aiming to create a perfect



harmony between the inhabitants. Instead, the architect has the role of creating and raising possible spatial situations which will lead to negotiations, oppositions, funny moments, and changes in housing management and how the space can be inhabited.

This was also the case in Marta's project: she imagined a community of human and non-human beings (pigeons) as the builders of a collective growing monument for an enhanced social life made of conflict and celebrations.

The most recent attempt was a design studio brief 'Restorative Practices' that I wrote together with Elena Palacios Carral for second and third year students in architecture at the Central Saint Martins (University of the Arts London). The brief asked students to propose projects for a social infrastructure for vulnerable women — who often in their lives have been both victims and perpetrators. It took on board and tried to respond to a project set up by *Beauty out of Ashes*, an organisation of women largely with experience of imprisonment, women's sector service provision, and researchers. The organisation works to create a building for women's services to be collectively conceived, built and run by women in the area around the former Holloway Prison, in north London.

The moment you attach labels to architecture or space you risk empowering them and denying their ambiguity and complexity.

We purposely avoided titling the studio 'Restorative architecture' or 'Restorative space.' The moment you attach labels to architecture or space you risk empowering them and denying their ambiguity and complexity. We instead put forward a tentative definition of restorative practice — which we drafted in this way:

A 'practice' implies actions together with ideas and habitual exercise. A 'restorative practice' is one that focuses on repairing harm or wrongdoing caused to or by a community, groups of humans and other-than-humans, the environment, or a building. Carried on collectively as a form of verbal or non-verbal communication, it seeks negotiation that values conflict as social fuel.

The students' responses, in this case, were all sort of community buildings where principles of restorative

justice were interpreted more or less loosely. Students worked with drawings and modelmaking and produced some beautiful architectural models where the possible narratives of their users and inhabitants could unfold. We don't have a comprehensive link to this experience but some students have uploaded their individual projects — for example, Una Manapat's '*Cracked Vessels and Open Stitches*' or Malik Saad's '*There is No Place Like Home*.'

Shekanah Irish's project, *Sharing Like a Portico*, imagined a building that hosts, alongside counselling and mediation rooms, also spaces for mutual sharing of skills that can empower the women in their everyday life. Figure 5 is a fragment of Shekanah's model: the observer is in an internal garden overlooking a portico and one of the rooms — while the room is being given a fresh (green) paint by the users, who are involved in maintenance of the building and have agency on it.



Figure 5: Shekanah Irish, *Sharing Like a Portico*, 2023

There was, in these brief and many students' projects, an awareness that space can support convivial relationships among people that are complex, and sometimes conflictual, rather than idealised harmonies. This goes against an architecture that tries to smooth and prevent conflictual relationships and the risks associated with it — i.e. prevention design, secure by design — that is the underlying principle of prison design.

## Sassari 2022

As a researcher, I have looked at how the discourse on architecture and restorative justice is unfolding in practice through the work of those (few) architects who are committing to restorative justice. This was

the content of my presentation at the EFRJ conference in Sassari in 2022 (prepared together with Jesse Honsa). My presentation concluded with a question on the benefits and relevance of including architecture in restorative theory, practices, and training. To unpack this question, it would require another longer conversation and, probably, a deeper involvement from my side in restorative justice practices in the future — which I hope will happen.

I still haven't responded to my own question on the relevance for restorative justice to include architecture. But I do see the relevance to introduce the students that I meet and teach in architecture schools to the radical possibilities — radical in their being ordinary — that restorative justice entails. Those very students will be out soon practising architecture and will be confronted with dilemmas that are directly or indirectly linked to incarceration and justice. This is the underlying context of the reflection presented here, on the meeting of architecture and restorative justice in the teaching activities that me and my colleagues have attempted in the past years. I like to see these experiences as 'An exercise in trust' — to borrow Astrid and Julia's project title. Not always successful in finding definite resolutions and answers. But success is not the measure of teaching. And neither, from what I have understood so far, of restorative justice.

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## Calendar

**Travel Guide on Restorative Cities** 12 January 2024 5–6:30 CET) *Launch Event* (online) Further details from the [EFRJ](#).

**Winter Academy** 5–9 February 2024 Leuven, Belgium

- *A practical introduction to trauma informed work*
- *The voice of children in a Restorative Justice process and*
- *Restorative Training Facilitation*

Further details from the [EFRJ](#).

**12th International Conference** 29–31 May 2024 Tallinn, Estonia *Just times: restorative justice*

*responses in dark times* Further details from the [EFRJ](#).

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