

NOTES FROM THE FIELD

REstART – The restorative justice art movement

Emanuela Biffi*

1 Setting the scene

The European Forum for Restorative Justice (EFRJ) had dreamt for years of organising its first ever art festival. Before getting there, the EFRJ started planting the seeds by including and centring art in its main events and activities.

At the international conferences of the EFRJ in Belfast in 2014 and in Tirana in 2018¹, for example, digital artist and professor Sharon Daniel (USA) presented *Inside the distance*,² a multimedia documentary on victim-offender mediation practices in Belgium (see also Aertsen, Daniel & Pali, 2015; Pali, 2014). The field trips at these conferences also included creative workshops and/or meetings with local artists dedicated to justice-related initiatives. At the conference in Leiden in 2016, writer Reynaldo Adames (The Netherlands) shared his personal journey, when in prison he met the woman who had been victimised during an armed robbery performing a sort of rap poem in the plenary. In Bilbao in 2019, the theatre group Proyecto 43-2 (Spain) performed *La mirada del otro*, a theatre piece dedicated to the restorative encounters in the Basque's cases of political extreme violence, reflecting on the motivations between ETA dissidents and the families of their victims to meet one another. At the summer school in Como in 2017, musician Anna Maria Bordin played a piano concert followed by a conversation with University of Insubria's professor Grazia Mannozi, on the use of music as an instrument for encouraging dialogue between conflicting groups. The programme of the conference in Sassari (planned for 2020 but postponed to 2022) also included the presence of artists: musicians from the music conservatory, actors from a local theatre group and students from the art school all had an active role in the conference programme. In addition, in June 2022, the MichaelDouglas Kollektiv

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1 For more info on the EFRJ events listed in this paragraph, check the EFRJ website: www.euforumrj.org/en/events. All links mentioned in this Notes from the field have been last accessed on 19 October 2022.

2 Information about the artworks, such as links and websites, can be found at the end of the article; see also the Conversation in this issue.

Emanuela Biffi

(Germany) led a participatory public event on polarisation and hate, *The Polarity Party*.³

The annual international Restorative Justice Weeks⁴ have always been occasions for the EFRJ to give space to creativity. Events included film screenings (*Beyond Punishment*, *Je te ne voyais pas*⁵), launch of small video productions⁶ or creative workshops (on digital storytelling, drawing cartoons, theatre as a restorative tool, among others). Some of the members of the EFRJ may remember when No Theatre (Norway) performed *A Conversation* in Leuven in 2015, a play that two years later became a film, subtitled in seventeen languages and screened in only seven days in almost 70 different venues across 26 different countries in Europe and beyond. In 2017, the EFRJ published a collection of 29 articles including reflections, creative projects and artworks in the booklet *Restorative imagination: artistic pathways. Ideas and experiences at the intersection between art and restorative justice*⁷ (see Biffi & Pali, 2017).

2 Living the dream

With such a rich heritage of experiences and connections, the EFRJ had the duty (not only the pleasure!) of organising the first ever restorative justice festival. The date was easy to find: on 8 December 2020, the EFRJ celebrated its 20th anniversary, so it was natural to organise the event around this milestone and celebration (30 November–5 December). In their song *Vent'anni*⁸ (20 years), the Italian rock band Måneskin describes the fears and challenges that young people face at the age of 20, when they do not know if they 'will run straight into the sun or into the dark', and still they have to 'go one step further' and 'explain what colour is to those who see black and white'. This image, of not knowing the future while expected to advance further, also applies to the EFRJ. At a time of great professional growth, the EFRJ is no longer a 'confused teen' but an ambitious young adult, full of energy and creativity to take the restorative justice movement forward.

Part of this moving forward is the challenge of moving beyond the 'black and white' representation of Lady Justice, which adopts a one-size-fits-all approach to the individual journeys seeking for justice and truth. The call for seeking alternative

3 This event is part of the project 'The art of conflict and restorative dialogues: Where choreography and conflict resolution meet', coordinated by the EFRJ, co-funded within the framework of the EU-funded project Perform Europe. More info here: www.euforumrj.org/en/art-conflict-and-restorative-dialogues-2022.

4 More info here: www.euforumrj.org/en/restorative-justice-week.

5 For a full list of films and documentaries see here: www.euforumrj.org/en/films-and-documentaries.

6 See, for example, the series of video-messages *Why does restorative justice matter?* or the plays *Re-storying a terrorist tragedy: The encounter* and *Re-storying a terrorist tragedy: The encounter* at www.euforumrj.org/en/our-videos.

7 Download the book from here: www.euforumrj.org/en/selected-books. This was inspired by the thematic Newsletter of the same year (EFRJ, 2017). More experiences have been then collected in a book dedicated to restorative justice and arts in prison (see Varona, 2020).

8 Listen to the song here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=XD77aMyCv0Q.

images of justice⁹ has been taken seriously by artists and creative minds that participated in the restorative justice art contest launched by the National Center on Restorative Justice at Vermont Law School (in 2020 and in 2021). Among others, teenagers from Tempio Pausania Restorative City (Italy) drew *The Goddess of Time* to represent the patience and trust that a restorative Lady Justice must have to better support the needs of those involved in a restorative justice process. Looking back, this drawing has been much more than a way of reimagining justice; it has been a prophecy expressing the continuation of life, from past to present to future, despite the tragedies experienced in the exceptional times we are living in.

While the name REstART was chosen as a fusion between the words ‘restorative’ and ‘arts’, at the beginning of 2020, we did not expect REstART to mean much more: a desire, a wish, a hope to restart ‘normality’ in the aftermath of the pandemic crisis. While the festival was taking shape, with a programme including international guest artists as well as creative minds who responded to the open call for abstracts, we witnessed creativity, resilience and solidarity in our local communities. In Leuven (Belgium), the EFRJ’s hometown, residents expressed their feelings and thoughts with drawings and messages on their windows. One of them, drawn by illustrator Lisa Van Der Auwera, became the image of REstART:¹⁰ the poster wished to make the 538 registered participants ‘travel’ to Leuven through a surreal image of hope, solidarity and togetherness. The planets symbolise moving away from a certain and familiar territory towards the unknown and mysterious future, while an astronaut exploring the world upside down asks in French ‘Ça va?’ (how are you?), or maybe, for the most cheerful ones, he or she was simply offering a ‘cava’ champagne to celebrate the end of the pandemic! In any case, the window, giving light in such a dark period, became the image of the links between the inside and the outside world once we finally decided to have a fully online REstART festival. The online live talks (via Zoom) were little windows in the intimacy of each other’s homes, creating connections despite the physical distance.

It is literally impossible to describe REstART in a few words: similarly to restorative practices, the programme was flexible, adjusted to the situation, co-created with participants, inclusive, diverse and thoughtful. The programme included 20 different contributions (15 of which were presented in live talks) from 12 different countries, covering three interconnected themes: justice, solidarity and repair. Films, documentaries, short videos, presentations, photo exhibitions and book presentations were available all week long on the REstART web page. Each day of the festival included up to 3 live talks with artists, activists, practitioners and even witnesses, testimonies of restorative encounters.

Given that originally REstART was planned as a live event in Leuven, after the opening session, we gave the floor to Peter Vermeersch (Belgium), author of the book *Aantekeningen bij een moord* (notes on a murder). Peter welcomed us in the

9 See the TEDx Leuven talk *Art, a catalyst for restorative justice* (Pali, 2018): <http://tedxleuven.com/?q=former-speakers/brunilda-pali>, and the article on alternative images of justice in the Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of Criminology and Criminal Justice (Pali, 2017).

10 The REstART poster, as well as videos and artworks, can be found on the festival web page: www.euforumj.org/en/REstART.

Emanuela Biffi

Belgian criminal justice system, which offers concrete space to restorative justice, while reflecting on the concepts of justice and injustice and the rituals behind justice, punishment and the blame culture. Also under the justice theme, we had the opportunity to engage in a discussion, facilitated by Marie Keenan, with the protagonist of the film *The Meeting* (Ireland) directed by Alan Gilsean, based on the restorative justice meeting between Ailbhe Griffith and the man who, nine years earlier, had sexually violated her. Actress Siw Risøy (Norway) and mediator John McDonald (Australia), protagonists of *A conversation*, joined us to share details about the making of this theatre play where two families meet, 'connected' by the rape and murder of a young girl. The reading of the theatre play *Stronger* (Ireland), about the restorative meeting between a teacher and the student who raped her, was followed by a talk with the writer Geoff Power. The live talk with María San Miguel, director of Proyecto 43-2 and actress in *La mirada del otro* (Spain) was also attended by Alberto Olalde, one of the senior mediators who facilitated the restorative encounters between ETA prisoners and the families of their victims. Sharon Daniel (USA) presented the follow-up of *Inside the distance* with re-enactments about restorative justice encounters as described by victims, offenders and mediators from Belgium. We met with the artistic director of the Motus Theater (USA), Kirsten Wilson and monologist Juaquin Moble concerning the *JustUs performance*, a series of autobiographical monologues of racial injustice within the criminal justice system, a talk supported by the views of special guests Fania Davis and Tunde Adefioye.

Under the theme of solidarity, we continued to travel across continents. The Parents Circle – Families Forum (Israel/ Palestine), represented by Robi Damelin and Laila Alsheikh,¹¹ presented the photo project *The presence of the void*, made by ten Palestinian and Israeli bereaved women seeking to photograph the presence of their lost loved ones and to give voice to the absence. Robi is also the protagonist of the documentary *One day after peace* (directed by Erez and Miri Laufer), in which she shares her attempts to initiate a dialogue with the one who killed her son David while wondering if the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission could ever be applied to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Some creative minds, working on a community building project in Central America presented the restorative-oriented board game *Journey to discover the other* (Italy-El Salvador): after rolling dices, the players move pieces around the track of 63 squares for walking the twisted roads of feelings, prejudice, fears, joy needed to move towards the encounter. Artist and restorative justice practitioner Clair Aldington (UK) presented her research findings and handmade artefacts (i.e. a series of solidarity wrapping clothes) on the potential role for gift making in engendering solidarities between participants in restorative justice processes. In solidarity with the movement, with the aim of raising awareness about restorative justice, the National Center on Restorative Justice (USA) hosted the art contest *Reimagining justice* as explained previously, asking creative minds to submit images, photos and symbols on restorative justice, and we had the opportunity to meet the (young) winners on the last day of REstART. Tempio Pausania Restorative City (Italy) contributed with a virtual

11 See also the *Notes from the field* in issue 5(1) of this journal.

exhibition of paintings, poems and short texts by the prisoners of the local high security prison and the students of different high schools, narrating their restorative justice experience and their inner journey of transformation and new relationships. Similarly, the virtual exhibition of the social cooperative Ut Unum Sint in Nuoro (Italy) included photos from different art workshops done in the community, bringing together prisoners, their families, victims and students. From Belgium, two artists, Laurent Quillet and Despina Pymarnou, presented the individual art books with self-portraits of prisoners in Brussels while two activists, Lies Kortleven and Bart Schoovaerts, proposed a slide show of art projects with prisoners, victims and other citizens in Leuven.

For the theme of repair, restorative justice practitioner and art therapist Marian Liebmann (UK) delivered a workshop on the use of comic strips for storytelling, a method she uses especially to engage with young offenders. We were inspired by Gema Varona and her mother Chón (Spain), who reflected on the art of bookbinding as metaphor for repairing and finding new ways for living together, while showing the book they created out of different pieces crafted in paper and cloth by participants of restorative justice programmes in cases of terrorism in the Basque Country. We met with Kathleen Pequeño, the protagonist of the film *The Worst Thing – To Germany, With Love (USA–Germany)*, directed by Desireena Almoradie, sharing the story of Kathleen's journey to engage in dialogue with former members of the Red Army Faction, a violent leftist group responsible for her brother's murder (see also Pali, 2021). We met artist Maria Lucia Cruz Correia (Belgium), who explained her works in the field of environmental restorative justice, such as *The voice of nature: the trial* and the *Kinstitute*. Linked to the EFRJ conference in Sassari, Viviana Sanna (Italy) produced a video about the wounds of the land of Sardinia and its inhabitants. If only REstART had happened live, the piano concert on the links between Beethoven and restorative justice would not have been pre-recorded but would have been scheduled as the closing event of the festival; Anna Maria Bordin, Alessandro Marchetti and Grazia Mannozi (Italy) offered an unusual and innovative perspective both in the panorama of musicological studies and in the varied world of restorative justice.

3 ... to be continued

This short and concise journey through the (making of the) REstART festival may not give full credit to the work and commitment of those who actively contributed to the event. The EFRJ web page of REstART continues to collect (video) materials, keeping track of the creativity and wisdom shared throughout the week. These artworks are great means for awareness-raising and educational purposes, conveying the principles and practice of restorative justice to people in a much more effective (and affective) way than statistics and reports. After this successful initiative, the EFRJ decided to use the 'brand' REstART for all upcoming events related to arts and restorative justice (see EFRJ, 2021). We wish to create a forum for exchanging ideas and creating synergies between different professionals, to inspire practitioners with participatory art methodologies and to support artists in

Emanuela Biffi

presenting in safe and caring spaces when their artworks include difficult or painful stories. You can already save the date: on 8 December of every year, to celebrate its anniversary, we offer the EFRJ community the gift to be inspired and encouraged by the creativity and originality of artists working in the field of restorative justice. One thing is sure: the REStART restorative justice art movement has just begun.

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List of artists, artworks and other creative contributions¹²

- Adames Reynaldo: www.adames.nl.
- Aldington Clair: www.clairaldington.com.
- Almoradie Desireena – *The Worst Thing*: <https://worstthingfilm.com>.
- Bertagna Guido – *Journey to Discover the Other*: www.euforumrj.org/en/board-game-journey-discover-other.
- Bordin Ana Maria: <https://annamariabordin.it/projects>.
- Cruz Correia Maria Lucia – *The Voice of Nature Kinstitute*: <https://voiceofnaturekinstitute.org>.
- Daniel Sharon – *Inside the distance*: www.sharondaniel.net/inside-the-distance.

12 The order in the list follows the alphabetical order. All links were last accessed 15 January 2022.

- Gilsenan Alan – *The Meeting*: <http://themeetingfilm.com>.
- Kohler François – *Je ne te voyais pas*: <https://ps-productions.ch/project/je-ne-te-voyais-pas/>.
- Kortleven Lies and Schoovaerts Bart: www.euforumrj.org/en/art-projects-prisoners-victims-and-other-citizens-belgium.
- Lauffer Erez and Miri – *One Day After Peace*: <http://onedayafterpeace.com>.
- Liebmann Marian – *Comic Strips*: www.euforumrj.org/en/art-therapy-and-restorative-justice-uk.
- MichaelDouglas Kollektiv – *The Polarity Party*: www.mdkollektiv.
- Motus Theater – *JustUs*: www.motustheater.org/justus.
- National Center on Restorative Justice – *Reimagining Justice*: www.vermontlaw.edu/rj-art.
- No Theatre – *A Conversation*: www.euforumrj.org/en/film-a-conversation.
- Power Geoff – *Stronger*: www.gunanua.com.
- Proyecto 43-2 – *La Mirada del Otro*: www.proyecto432.com.
- Quillet Laurent and Psmarnou Despina: www.euforumrj.org/en/self-portraits-prisoners-testimonials-and-art-books-belgium.
- Sanna Viviana: www.euforumrj.org/en/film-wounds-and-restorative-future-sardinia-italy.
- Siegert Hubertus – *Beyond Punishment*: www.beyond-punishment.de.
- Tempio Pausania Restorative City: www.euforumrj.org/en/photo-exhibitions-prisoners-and-students-sardinia-italy.
- The Parents Circle - Families Forum: www.theparentscircle.org.
- The Theater of Changes & EFRJ - *Re-storying a terrorist tragedy: The encounter* and *Re-storying a terrorist tragedy: The encounter*: www.euforumrj.org/en/our-videos.
- Van Der Auwera Lisa: www.lisavanderauwera.be.
- Varona Gema and Martínez María Ascensión: www.euforumrj.org/en/bookbinding-and-restorative-justice-spain.
- Vermeersch Peter – *Aantekeningen bij een moord*: www.petervermeersch.net.