Building for Justice:

Imagining Furniture for Restorative Justice Spaces

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In 2012, in Camden, London, new concrete benches, commissioned by the local municipality, were installed in popular public spaces. The benches were modern, attractive, and on the surface, benign; but, the uneven curves and irregular profiles curtailed almost every kind of activity including sleeping, skateboarding, loitering, etc. Only temporary sitting was actually comfortable, thus revealing the true purpose of the Camden bench: to design away undesirable behavior in public space.

This is an example of exclusionary or unpleasant design, which is broadly defined as objects or elements within the built environment that control for “unwanted” or “undesirable” behavior. While I am interested in exclusions in general, for my thesis paper, I draw attention to the form of the above object: that a bench, a piece of furniture, was used to dictate to the meandering public preconceived ideologies of appropriate ways of being. This example shows that furniture is more than just an object to sit upon; rather, furniture and its arrangement in space are tools that can promote or affect hierarchies, power dynamics, control, or preferably, equality.

Challenged by this concept of furniture as more than just pure craft and aesthetics, my thesis begins with this question: if the Camden bench can discourage and demean, what can I build (and in what context) to encourage, connect and support individuals and communities?

From this open-ended question, I narrowed my focus to Peace Rooms, or spaces for restorative justice, in which an offender, victim, families and communities can seek resolution to a harm outside of our criminal justice system. Schools, churches, community centers and more are seeking non-punitive ways of doing justice, and these spaces, thoughtfully designed, can foster positive and restorative interactions between people. Thus, I believe and propose: that if furniture can hinder, dictate, and influence experiences and behaviors in private and public space, then a piece of furniture, designed for a restorative justice setting, can enable feelings of

trust, safety and comfort, which can promote opportunities for increased vulnerability and openness in the midst of often difficult, hard and emotional conversations. Accordingly, for my MFA thesis, I have designed and constructed two seating forms to benefit schools, communities and organizations that are practicing justice in relationally-oriented ways.

Outline

My thesis paper starts with a biography that serves two purposes. First, it communicates my expertise and ability to undertake a project based in furniture construction; and second, it provides an opportunity to share my growth from seeing furniture as pure craft to understanding the powerful influence it can have on human dynamics. These influences can be seen throughout history, and a cursory study that follows includes a look at medieval chairs, 18th century aristocratic France, early communist Russia, and more.

The next section explores restorative justice: what it is, its history, why it is important and for whom. This will show the context and set the stakes for my work.

These two topics, restorative justice and furniture as a social tool, form the foundation for what follows, although, their connection at first glance might not be intuitive. They will be joined by sharing contemporary work being done in the niche field of restorative justice and design. There are two primary firms using design and architecture as a means of improving or normalizing restorative justice practices,[1] and showing their work will ground my own as part of a larger body of research, though my offering is unique in its emphasis on specialty furniture. In addition to this, I will touch on the impact of seating arrangements on learning in classrooms. Put together, this research served as the primary driver for my thesis work and explains the *why* behind my restorative justice furniture designs.

Having established current work in this field and other related research, the paper details my offering to the field of restorative justice design with two different seating forms. The next

[1] Designing Justice + Designing Spaces and Impact/Justice

section includes feedback from local restorative justice stakeholders that could use these stools in practice. The final section discusses the potential for improvement and future opportunities for me.

Furniture as Craft to Communion

Near the time the Camden bench was being installed in London, I was graduating from the Krenov School in Fort Bragg, California. The school was rigorous--forty-eight hours a week in the shop, and romantic--in the redwoods and right on the coastline. Over the two years I was at TKS, I learned almost everything there was to know about wood, tools, joinery, edge-details and finishing. I was deep in the weeds of fine furniture making. James Krenov, the founder of the school, and a prolific author, wrote in his seminal book, *The Fine Art of Cabinetmaking*: "This book...is for amateurs in the true sense of the word: those who love the material and the work of their craft more than anything else about it."[2] If this is true of the book, it was all the more true of the school. He goes on, "We begin with the romance, the smells and the feel of wood and tools, the environment of crafts, the workshop…"[3] In other words, furniture is the means instead of the end--the end is the process, the craft, the opportunity to engorge on exactitude, fine tools and nice wood. I left TKS after two years with only four pieces of furniture. They are precious, but they are backwards-looking: the focus is not on its function or the user, rather, it is an art object aimed at highlighting the extreme processes of its creation.

This kind of work is delightful and slow, and not at all practical in the real world.[4] I learned this all too well during eight lean years as a professional furniture maker in Santa Cruz. Over time I wisened and my understanding of furniture eventually shifted from rarified art piece to a useful, human and home-centered object that primarily serves to bring people together.

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[2] Krenov, James. *The Fine Art of Cabinetmaking*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1977. 6
[3] Ibid., 6.
[4] Knowingly, Krenov also authored a book called, *The Impractical Cabinetmaker.*

Discovering furniture as a medium of communion was refreshing, but it was also a bit naive. For five years, I imagined furniture as a positive (or at least passive) supporter of human interactions. However, at UC Davis, I learned, through examples like the Camden bench, that furniture can dictate and control what we do or how we feel. This next section will detail a brief history of furniture as a social tool, revealing that it is so much more than a vessel for sitting, eating, and relaxing.

Furniture as Power / Control / Status

There is a lot to share in this section--the history of furniture as an object that reinforces social rules, hierarchies, ideals or goals and ultimately reflects power and status is as old as the history of furniture itself. The few examples I have time to touch on span centuries and the globe to reinforce this as a universal concept.

Galen Cranz's *The Chair: Rethinking Culture, Body and Design* undergirds this section, and while her main focus is on the history of body posture in chairs, Cranz devotes her first chapters to describing how chairs have "become a way of displaying hierarchy in complex societies."[5] I will discuss several of these hierarchies in two sections: furniture as power and control, and furniture as social status. Parsing this way is a bit delicate and not a hard-line, social status and power often go hand-in-hand, but for the sake of organization, I have grouped together similar motivations and meanings for furniture in society.

1. Furniture, Power, and Control

Diving deep into history as a first example, Cranz describes Medieval furniture as "either heavy, immovable, and built into the walls, or freestanding and easy to take apart and move to another place."[6] Furniture was built this way, in large part, due to the frequent need of lords to

[5] Cranz, Galen. "The Chair: Rethinking Culture, Body and Design." New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1998. 23.
[6] Ibid., 40.

travel and survey their holdings.[7] Accordingly, most seats in a Medieval home were "folding X-chairs or foldstools."[8] Chairs, meanwhile, remained a rarity. In fact, "Even the richest houses seldom boasted more than one," and they were "reserved exclusively for the master of the household. Massive and stately it was too heavy to move."[9] So much so, that for dining, knock-down tables would be assembled in front of it. Exclusive and immovable, these throne-like chairs reflected "patriarchal style, power, and authority…" and were "rigid, upright symbols of power and rank. Those entitled to use them sat up; no one sat back."[10]

Power represented in furniture through exclusivity, size and weight is not unique to Medieval times, similarly monumental furnishings can also be seen in courtrooms today.[11] Professor Fabian Gelinas writes that "the visual features of courtrooms and courthouses have a role in conveying values that underlie and legitimize the justice system."[12] Some of these values are authority, the rule of law, strength, power, etc.[13] These are displayed externally through "monolithic and grand"[14] exteriors, while inside the chamber, "the presiding officials are seated behind a massive bench which rests on an elevated podium."[15] The judge has the highest seat behind the highest interior wall in the courtroom. Looking down upon the court from their dais, a

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[7] Cranz, 40.
[8] Ibid., 40.
[9] Ibid., 40.
[10] Ibid., 41.
[11] Large chairs are highly desired in classrooms as well. In Australia, "Educational authorities…studied twenty kindergardners who were allowed to choose among various chair heights. The kids said they preferred the largest chairs, regardless of their own stature, although 95 percent dangled their feet when sitting. These children have learned that the bigger the chair, the more power and status accrues to the sitter." (Cranz, 64)
[12] Gelinas, Fabien, et al. "Architecture, Rituals, and Norms in Civil Procedure." Windsor Yearbook of Access to Justice Vol. 32, no. 2, 2015., 214.
[13] Toews, Barb. "Architecture and Restorative Justice: Designing with Values and Well-Being in Mind." Routledge International Handbook on Restorative Justice, Vol. 1, 2018. 280.
[14] Toews, Barb. "'It's a Dead Place': a Qualitative Exploration of Violence Survivors' Perceptions of Justice Architecture." Contemporary Justice Review, Vol. 21, no. 2, 2018. 209.
[15] Hanson, Julienne. "The Architecture of Justice: Iconography and Space Configuration in the English Law Court Building." Arq, Vol. 1, Summer 1996. 53.

hierarchy of authority and control over the proceedings is established.[16] This is further enforced through "Strict segregation...maintained between the various social actors, who are separated from one another by solid barriers and pronounced changes of level."[17] These physical partitions or boundaries, which are "...(specialized boxes, benches, bars, and tables) serve to fix and hierarchically segment lay and expert role players."[18] The victim and/or any family and friends must stay behind a barrier, their role and voice made insignificant by the proceedings and their location.[19]

Some might consider this interior architecture, but I read it just as much as extensive built-in furniture. The massive and millworked dais for a judge is a woodworked structure that for all intents and purposes is an elevated desk. The rest is tables, chairs and partitions that secure spatial order and affirm the authority of the court.

These qualities of order and authority fortified through built-in furniture are also exemplified in Shaker communities. The Shakers, a 19th-century utopian religious sect, for purity and for rigor, separated themselves from the outside world, and within their villages, the Shaker elders used many forms of control to guarantee "godliness." These controls ran the gamut from requiring roommates, which assured mutual supervision, to built-in furniture that mandated organization and precluded spatial creativity.[20] By filling space with immovable objects, opportunities for spatial flexibility and creative rearrangement were lessened.[21] Also, built-in shelving and storage was used for extensive cataloging, tabulating and ordering--which

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[16] Rosenbloom, Jonathan D. "Social Ideology as Seen through Courtroom and Courthouse Architecture." Columbia-VLA Journal of Law & the Arts, Vol. 22, no. 4, 1998. 487.
[17] Hanson, 53.
[18] Spaulding, Norman W. "The Enclosure of Justice: Courthouse Architecture, Due Process, and the Dead Metaphor of Trial." Yale Journal of Law & the Humanities, Vol. 24, no. 1, 2012. 330
[19] Toews, It's a Dead Place, 209.
[20] Nicoletta, Julie. "The Architecture of Control: Shaker Dwelling Houses and the Reform Movement in Early-Nineteenth-Century America." Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, Vol. 62, no. 3, 2003. 368.
[21] Ibid., 380.

emphasized that everything had and must go in its right place.[22] This enabled easy checks of "clothing and other material possessions of those who lived in the houses."[23] All to say, using a combination of architecture and built-in structures, which passively weeded out unique arrangements for interior spaces, while creating a tracking system for order and neatness, the elders, with extreme levels of control and surveillance, simultaneously prevented and spied for any wayward behavior.

While the above examples all use rigid, stolid, heavy, monumental furniture, it is not the only way to imbue power or control; in a domestic setting in mid-20th century America, a different kind of furniture supported patriarchy in twenty-five percent of Americans homes: the cushioned, reclining La-Z-Boy.[24] A chair for relaxation and watching television, Cranz quotes a *New York Times* article from 1991: "Perhaps no piece of furniture in modern times is more gender-specific than the one that has cradled, rocked, pivoted and massaged the American man."[25] The La-Z-Boy supported the indolent behavior of men, and reinforced their role as master of the house; the *Times* article continues: "Women's relations to the recliner was to dust under it or to decorate around it. Women also carried food and beverages to the chairs, some of which were fitted with snack trays."[26] Some six-hundred years later, food is still being brought to an immobile male master, but with a tray instead of a trestle, and with him lounging instead of sitting upright.

Cranz devotes a rather lengthy and interesting section to chairs and gender, and while I cannot summarize it all, I found this quote to be particularly poignant and pithy: "In the late twentieth century, feminists began to criticize the fact that women's posture and use of furniture

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[22] Nicoletta, 368.
[23] Ibid., 369.
[24] Cranz, 52.
[25] Ibid., 52.
[26] Ibid., 52.

were different from men's and that women's conventional posture was contrived to emphasize vulnerability, weakness and debility."[27] This is furniture as misogyny--a reflection and reinforcement of the values of American society, showing the extent and power of patriarchy in a seat.

2. Furniture as Social Status

Furniture is not only about power, it can also affect or confer social status--how we view ourselves ranked or compared to others. I have two examples to share--one affects status through the functional use of furniture, while the second is more symbolic--what it means to own or use certain styles of furniture.

The setting for the former is 18th-century aristocratic France, and the interplay of the elite with high-end, luxury furniture in social settings. To understand the impact of furniture in this context, it is important to underscore its rules: French aristocracy led highly ritualized lives: "behavioral standards...were codified in conduct manuals," and the body was charged with "new prohibitions and sensitivities."[28] To be civil and to have status was to know and perform ritualized movements and rules with ease and graceful leisure. An appearance of natural ease in bodily activity was crucial--to struggle or labor to fulfill them was to fail, for labor was the heritance of the lower classes.[29] Thus, the purpose of furniture in polite French society was to convey meaning "through a spatial and temporal complicity with the cultivated body that produced the appearance of leisured, sociable ease...objects were not simply owned, but indeed *performed*."[30]

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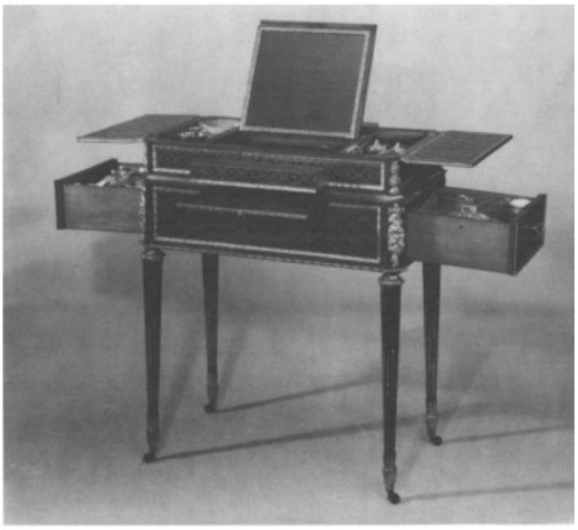
[27] Cranz, 52.
[28] Hellman, Mimi. "Furniture, Sociability, and the Work of Leisure in Eighteenth-Century France." Eighteenth-Century Studies Vol. 32, no. 4, 1999. 422.
[29] "Behavioral correctness, then, was a relative and continuously shifting condition, demanding practices of assessment, analysis, and self-surveillance. This had to be accomplished, however, with apparent naturalness, ease, and spontaneity, for the same system of elite aesthetics that privileged artistic invention over artisanal labor also eschewed any suggestion of laboriousness in social interaction." (Hellman, 433).
[30] Ibid., 417.

One piece of furniture so performed was the *table de toilette*, a dressing table, in front of which, the host would compose "the physical and social self before an audience, arranging the appearance of face, hair, and body while receiving a procession of visitors…"[31]



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As can be seen, the toilette had myriad compartments, movements, mechanisms and adjustments--it was designed to be purposefully complex to create a play or stage for graceful movements of the body in front of another.[33] Hellman writes that "the social progress of the toilette was inextricable from the physical, visual process of unfolding, unpacking, and manipulating the dressing table and its contents."[34] In other words, function inextricably begets or informs the ephemeral concept of human social status. In summary, Galen Cranz writes that "The chair a person sits in often reveals his or her social status."[35] For 18th-century French aristocrats, it was also *how well* a person sits that mattered. Furniture was their vessel or means to "do self with things" and to thusly exhibit that elegant self to others.[36]

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[31] Hellman, 427.
[32] Ibid., 426.
[33] "The greater the formal and functional complexity of a piece of furniture, the greater its capacity to elicit from--or deny--the user an appearance of grace and ease." (Hellman, 424)
[34] Ibid., 428.
[35] Cranz, 16.
[36] Hellman, 428.

My second example flips the class status and studies furniture as a social tool for the proletariat in early communist Russia. In the 1920's, artist Aleksandr Rodchenko designed new furniture concepts for the masses. His prototypes, exhibited in Paris in 1925,[37] were for an updated communist version of a worker's club. The furniture was geometrical and with a color scheme of "red, white, gray, and black."[38] They were also dynamic; his prototypes were movable--to allow for easy rearrangement given the multiple needs of the club, and they were transformable--for the sake of multi-functionality.[39] These design elements prioritized flexibility for various group functions while maintaining a single design language to strengthen group identity.[40]

This latter value is best seen in his chairs. With a straight hard back and high armrests, Rodchenko imagined his chairs would "generate hygienic and respectful behavior on the part of the user."[41] But moreso, by using matching chairs (as opposed to pre-communist worker's clubs that had "heterogenous easy-chairs"[42]), he created the "impression of regimentation and conformity (perhaps one should say democracy)."[43]

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[37] International Exhibition of Decorative Arts and Modern Industry, 1925.
[38] Lavrentiev, Alexander. "Experimental Furniture Design in the 1920's." The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts, Vol. 11, no. 2, 1989. 151.
[39] Ibid., 151.
[40] Ibid., 149.
[41] Bowlt, John E. "The Ideology of Furniture: The Soviet Chair in the 1920's." Soviet Union/Union Sovietique, Vol. 7, pts. 1-2, 1980. 143.
[42] Ibid., 143.
[43] Ibid., 143.

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Rodchenko's designs were intended to represent new values of collectivism through a new style of furniture; what happened though, shows that furniture as a status indicator is not so easily pushed aside, for Rodchenko's "prototypes certainly did not influence the Soviet consumer market…"[45] As architecture moved forward with materials like "reinforced concrete," club members were unwilling to furnish said buildings in a befitting style: "users of the canteen, the club...the proletariat, wished to surround themselves with palatial symbols and hence with pretentious, salon furniture inasmuch as such furniture, by its bourgeois tradition, represented power, wealth and status: after all, the proletariat was now supposed to be tsar."[46] In other words, the masses would accept a new kind of architecture, but they would not accept a new kind of furniture. Status was too wrapped up in the objects of the bourgeoisie to relinquish it for the symbolism of Rodchenko's collectivity.

[44] Lavrentiev, 153.
[45] Bowlt, 139.
[46] Ibid., 142.

This research is incredibly fascinating to me, and there are so many more subjects to explore like hierarchies in office furniture,[47] and furniture arrangements in classrooms[48] and places of worship. An example of the latter is Quaker worship halls that use an expanding square grid of seating that focuses attention on the community instead of a singular pulpit.[49] While I would like to say more about these other examples, this one is appropriate to end on because its egalitarian arrangement, which responds to *and* reinforces Quaker values, broaches a new idea: nothing constrains or compels furniture to only support the powerful or the patriarchy. Furniture does not have to create hierarchies and command control. If the Camden bench can demean, a different design might empower or equalize. So, it begs the question, what can I make to enable equity and understanding, and for what purpose? The answer to the latter comes first--restorative justice.

Restorative Justice and Circle Processes

1. Understanding Restorative Justice

I have chosen the word *understanding* carefully. Restorative justice is a large topic, and I do not think it possible (or wise) to describe its practices and principles in full. Rather, my goal is to succinctly share key aspects of its history, values, and processes as they relate to or highlight the concerns of my project.

So, I begin with Howard Zehr, the "grandfather" of restorative justice, and his book, *The Little Book of Restorative Justice*. His first sentences are questions: "How should we as a society respond to wrongdoing? When a crime occurs, when an injustice or harm is committed, what needs to happen? What does justice require?"[50] These elemental questions are so

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[47] Vilnai-Yavetz, Iris. "Instrumentality, Aesthetics, and Symbolism of Office Design." Environment and Behavior, Vol. 37, no. 4, 2005.
[48] Sommer, Robert and Olsen, Helge. "The Soft Classroom." Environment and Behavior, Vol. 12, No. 1. 1980. pgs 3-16.
[49] Hinshaw, Seth Beeson. *The Evolution of Quaker Meeting Houses in North America 1670-2000*. MA Thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 2001. pg viii.
[50] Zehr, Howard. *Little Book of Restorative Justice*. New York: Good Books, 2015. 5.

provocative precisely because the "answer" comes to mind so easily and unquestionably: police, lawyers, judges, courthouses, juries, bailiffs, prisons, parole officers etc., a visual parade of justice matched only by their respective television shows and movies. This is not a fiction, however, for a significant portion of American citizens: "With just under seven million of its citizens under carceral control, the United States is number one in the world in incarcerating its own people."[51]

Obviously, its fruits are not positive, and yet, this system is so pervasive that it almost subsumes imagining any other options. This is why, I believe, Zehr begins his little book so simply--it immediately shifts the reader's paradigm from an overwhelming what-is to a what-could or should be. The *what-is*, for Zehr, is a criminal justice system that is exclusionary, and "deepens societal wounds and conflicts rather than contributing to healing or peace."[52] The what-could or should be, on the other hand, is restorative justice: a process that Zehr, among others, has been practicing and promoting since the 1970's to address the "limits and failures"[53] of our carceral system.

At its core, "Restorative justice focuses on the concept that crime harms so justice should heal."[54] This pithy short sentence turns our current legal system on its head: crime is not about law and rules;[55] crime is not tacitly against the state;[56] and justice does not require "the state to determine blame (guilt) and impose pain (punishment)."[57] These are fundamental Western justice values that are readily disposed of; so it begs the question, what does restorative justice uphold in their stead?

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[51] Impact Justice and Yale School of Architecture. *Space for Restorative Justice.* Edited by Emily Abruzzo, et al. 2019. http://spaceforrestorativejustice.org/. 167.
[52] Zehr, Little Book, 6.
[53] Ibid., 5.
[54] Frampton, Mary Louise. "Finding Common Ground in Restorative Justice: Transforming Our Juvenile Justice Systems." UC Davis Journal of Juvenile Law & Policy Vol. 22, no. 2, 2018. 133.
[55] Zehr, Little Book, 30.
[56] Ibid., 21.
[57] Ibid., 30.

To begin, restorative justice, at its foundation, believes that "we are all interconnected."[58] This is not an inherently spiritual belief; rather, it represents the "centrality of relationships…", that "all things are connected to each other in a web of relationships."[59] So, a crime or wrongdoing in restorative justice, "represents a wound in the community, a tear in the web of relationships."[60] The primary goal coming out of a harm then is to restore or heal the community.[61]

This healing process happens through the inclusive participation of all those involved in a harm, directly (the offender and the victim) and indirectly (family, community members etc.). Unlike our current system, which is "conducted by professionals who stand in for the offender and the state…" and is "refereed by a judge"[62], restorative justice emphasizes collaborative participation and conversation amongst those affected by a crime or harm. In this space, a victim has their wants and needs heard, is able to tell their story, and has shared control over the proceedings, which leads to a consensus-decided restitution or vindication for the victim.[63]

Meanwhile, the participatory role of the offender is to listen, share, "understand the consequences of their actions or to empathize with those they have harmed,"[64] accept accountability for their actions and ultimately, to "...put right the wrongs."[65] This restitution process, instead of focusing on punishment, is "intended to contribute to an experience of personal...transformation",[66] and makes space for opportunities to heal "...the harms that contributed to their offending behavior, including personal and historical traumas;" and to treat

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[58] Zehr, Little Book, 29.
[59] Ibid., 29.
[60] Ibid., 29.
[61] Haft, William. "More than Zero: The Cost of Zero Tolerance and the Case for Restorative Justice in Schools." Denver University Law Review, Vol. 77, no. 4, 2000. 804.
[62] Zehr, Little Book, 35.
[63] Ibid., 23.
[64] Ibid., 24.
[65] Ibid., 28.
[66] Toews, Barb. "Architecture and Restorative Justice: Designing with Values and Well-Being in Mind." Routledge International Handbook on Restorative Justice, Vol. 1, 2018. 282.

"addictions and/or other problems;" and find means for "enhancement of personal competencies."[67] In this setting, a specific harm leads to a tailored healing, the offender is not punished but transformed, and the victim is not ignored but heard. Likewise, the role of the state as aggrieved arbiter is diminished and the local community gains agency and strength as it is able to support and provide for the "welfare of their members...including those who caused harm, and to foster the conditions that promote healthy communities."[68]

As way of summary, Deanna van Buren of Designing Justice + Designing Spaces, writes simply and beautifully that the goal of restorative justice "...is to do justice in a way that respects and restores each individual, repairs relationships, and contributes to the common good."[69]

2. *Recognition of Indigenous Practices*

While these worthy values in part developed out of peacemaking programs and victim-offender encounters (sponsored by the Mennonites, a pacifist Christian denomination) in the 1970's,[70] it is imperative to note that the restorative justice movement is deeply indebted to traditional and indigenous practices. Zehr takes pains to acknowledge and honor indigenous peoples, particularly "the Native people of North America and New Zealand,"[71] as their justice-keeping directly inspired and served as precedents for contemporary restorative justice.

Neil Nesheim, court administrator of the First Judicial District in Juneau, Alaska writes that the First Nation People of Canada, like many indigenous peoples, found resolution and healed their community "...through the traditional and time-honored practice of Circles."[72] A

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[67] Zehr, Little Book, 25.
[68] Ibid., 26.
[69] Designing Justice + Designing Spaces. "Creating Restorative Justice Spaces in Schools." https://designingjustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Creating_Restorative_Spaces_In_Schools.pdf 1.
[70] Zehr, Little Book, 18.
[71] Ibid., 19 These are the Maori people; and in New Zealand, due in large part to their influence, the nation's juvenile justice system, since 1989, has been operating within the framework of restorative justice. (Zehr, Doing Justice, Healing Trauma, 3).
[72] Nesheim, Neil B. "The Indigenous Practice that is Transforming the Adversarial Practice." Judges' Journal, Vol. 55, no. 4, Fall 2016. 16.

Circle was a process of gathering together to listen, share and storytell, and to resolve "conflicts and disputes."[73] This practice of resolution however, almost disappeared when "...indigenous groups were assimilated and forced into adopting the adversarial system. This went on for several hundred years and hardly any of it was restorative in nature."[74] The carceral system of the West nearly eliminated restorative indigenous practices, so it is crucial to recognize that its recent flowering in the United States is not sprung from our precedent of punishment and violence, but is grounded in indigneous life and practice, a further debt owed to native peoples.

3. What a Meeting Looks Like -- What it Asks of its Participants

In the above section, the word, Circle, is used twice to describe restorative justice-like situations. For clarity, these two words are not synonyms; a Circle is a hypernym for restorative justice, and is a collection of processes that restorative justice uses (among other forms of mediation[75]) to guide a potentially diverse and discordant group of people through heartfelt and emotional conversations to an end where people feel "good about themselves and about others."[76] This is not an easy task.

Kay Pranis, author of *The Little Book of Circle Processes*, writes that "...a Circle requires more than putting chairs in a circle."[77] Superseding any furniture arrangement, values like honesty, respect, equality and inclusion are required for success during these collaborative meetings.[78] This does not preclude anger, conflict, frustration, silence, etc. A "Circle is a container strong enough to hold"[79] these feelings, and in fact, supports them, as long as they

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[73] Nesheim, 16.
[74] Ibid., 16.
[75] Zehr, Howard. "Doing Justice, Healing Trauma: The Role of Restorative Justice in Peacebuilding." Peace Prints; South Asian Journal of Peacebuilding, Vol. 1, no. 1, Spring 2008. 2.
[76] Pranis, Kay. *The Little Book of Circle Processes: A New/Old Approach to Peacemaking*. New York: Good Books, 2005. 6.
[77] Ibid., 7.
[78] Ibid., 8.
[79] Ibid., 9.

are shared within the framework of the Circle process. That framework has many key principles, for brevity's sake, I will share only those that have influenced my project.

First, a Circle is a mediated process. There is always a trained facilitator to support conversation and to stimulate "the reflections of the group through questions or topic suggestions."[80] When there is anger and hurt feelings, the role of the facilitator is to assist "the group in creating and maintaining a collective space in which each participant feels safe to speak honestly and openly without disrespecting anyone else."[81] A facilitator, in other words, helps create an emotional space that upholds Circle values; they also create a physical space that succors to it as well.

Participants in Circle sit in a ring of chairs with no tables.[82] A spatial circle "symbolizes shared leadership, equality, connection, and inclusion."[83] To instill these values further, "objects that have meaning to the group are placed in the center as a focal point to remind participants of shared values and common ground."[84] This is called a centerpiece and it is an important physical representation of ceremony, a crucial aspect of a Circle.

Beginning and ending every Circle is a "ceremony or intentional centering activity...to mark the Circle as a sacred space in which participants are present with themselves and one another in a way that is different from an ordinary meeting."[85] Opening and closing ceremonies, guided by the facilitator, help set the experience apart from the rest of the day and reminds participants of core values, all while promoting present-ness.[86] These moments hold space for the meeting as bookends, but *during* Circle, another ritual, the passing of a talking piece, is used to promote equal listening and sharing.

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[80] Pranis, 12
[81] Ibid., 12.
[82] Ibid., 11.
[83] Ibid., 11.
[84] Ibid., 11.
[85] Ibid., 12.
[86] Ibid., 33.

A talking piece is a small object, often imbued with meaning, that is passed around the circle person-to-person in a single direction. Only the person with the talking piece can speak. This way, a "Circle regulates the dialogue as the piece" moves "around the group. The person holding the talking piece has the undivided attention of everyone else in the Circle...The use of the talking piece allows for full expression of emotions, deeper listening, thoughtful reflection, and an unhurried pace."[87] This functional object promotes the symbolic understanding that all are equal and worthy of being heard. This is crucial for restorative justice meetings between disparate groups of people, and ultimately reinforces the concept that we are all connected and that "we need the person for whom the Circle is formed just as much as that person needs us."[88]

This shared understanding of mutual need and support does not come easily, it must be earned through relationship-building. Pranis writes that, "Before trying to work out issues or move to action, the Circle Process must first spend time helping participants connect as human beings."[89] Thus, the casual act of getting acquainted with one another is crucial at the beginning of a Circle.[90] Without developing this basic human connection, which begets understanding, it might threaten the entire meeting; Pranis writes that, "If a group of people has not developed a sense of connection and trust, discussion of issues often remains at a superficial level."[91] Or, conversely, if the slow work of relationship-building is given time, intentionality and vulnerability can flourish, and from there, "...trust begins to build."[92] And for Pranis, trust is crucial: "The level of connectedness and trust directly impacts the effectiveness of the discussion of issues and the development of plans to address the issues."[93] These symbolic and functional

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[87] Pranis, 12.
[88] Ibid., 27.
[89] Ibid., 41.
[90] Ibid., 41.
[91] Ibid., 43.
[92] Ibid., 42.
[93] Ibid., 42.

processes support opportunities to build trust, enabling diverse participants to find a consensus decision that works for the good of all.[94]

4. Circle Practices and Restorative Justice: Who / Where / Why

All of the above so far is restorative justice in a vacuum; I've mentioned its values, processes and principles, which are good to be sure, but why does it matter? In this section, I want to set the stakes of my work: why restorative justice matters; who it is serving; and where. This section will broach systemic and structural issues related to racism, education and imprisonment, but at best, I can touch on them only lightly. This is not intended to diminish their importance.

Currently, restorative justice is being practiced in all corners of the world. New Zealand, for instance, uses it as its judicial process for all juvenile crimes.[95] In the United States, it is integrated into many local District Attorney's offices, including here in Yolo County. Yolo Neighborhood Court serves as an adult diversionary program for low-level offenses and diverts hundreds of cases a year from our criminal justice system. As a formal practice of the state its use has increased in recent years, but diversion programs are not the extent of its growth; Howard Zehr writes that restorative "...approaches and practices are also spreading beyond the criminal justice system to schools and universities, to the workplace, and to religious institutions."[96] A local example of community-based restorative justice is the Yolo Conflict Resolution Center in Woodland. They provide free mediation services for the Yolo community and use Circle practices for their meetings.

Restorative justice is a highly fluid program and can be "implemented in a wide range of applications,"[97] but for communities of color it has become a life-line from a racist criminal justice

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[94] Pranis, 38.
[95] Zehr, Doing Justice, Healing Trauma, 3.
[96] Zehr, Little Book, 7.
[97] "Creating Restorative Justice Spaces in Schools", 1.

system. Over seven million people are currently under some form of carceral control in the United States, and "A grossly disproportionate amount of them are men and women of color, which tells us we have created a criminal justice system that is structurally racist."[98] Michelle Alexander in her book, T*he New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, details this with truly frightening facts and clarity. Simply put, our criminal justice system targets people of color[99] and feeds them to the prison industrial complex. Erica Meiners and Maisha T. Winn describe this as the "structure that encompasses the expanding economic and political contexts of the detention and corrections industry in the United States. The PIC is a network that sutures capital, communities and the State to a permanent punishment economy."[100]

This networked system of punishment and profit is also insidiously functioning inside American schools; this is evident through an ever-increasing police presence,[101] zero-tolerance policies and the "criminalization and juridification of school discipline."[102] For Meiners and Winn, these policies together represent the school-to-prison pipeline, which is "the under-education of select populations and how young people are shaped through schools as 'superfluous' to education, and in need of surveillance and containment…"[103] They write further, the pipeline is "...the over-representation of youth of color in our nation's juvenile justice system and in school-based disciplinary actions as early as pre-school."[104]

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[98] *Spaces for Restorative Justice*, 167.
[99] Alexander, Michelle. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindedness*. The New Press, 2012. 8.
[100] Meiners, Erica R. and Winn, Maisha T. "Resisting the School to Prison Pipeline: The Practice to Build Abolition Democracies." Race Ethnicity and Education, Vol. 13, no. 3, 2010. 271.
[101] "School policing is the fastest segment of growth in law enforcement" (Schepot, 99).
[102] Schepot, Judah, et. al. "Building, Staffing, and Insulating: An Architecture of Criminological Complicity in the School-to-Prison Pipeline." Social Justice Vol. 41, no. 4, 2014. 97
[103] Ibid., 273.
[104] Ibid., 273.

Against these racist school policies that funnel youth into pre-carceral control; against states that fund prisons over secondary education;[105] against a legal system that puts black and brown people in prison for profit as a "way of disappearing people in the false hope of disappearing the underlying social problems they represent,"[106] restorative justice organizations fill the breach and put forth a different kind of justice that upholds and supports their vulnerable communities. Instead of the state powering over they proffer a "power-with"[107] approach. Some of these organizations (I have listed only those in the Bay Area) include Restorative Justice for Oakland Youth, the Restorative Justice Vision Project in Sacramento, Restore Oakland, UC Davis' own Transforming Justice in Education, Impact Justice and DJ+DS. Mass incarceration, the prison-industrial complex and the school-to-prison pipeline are structurally embedded into American systems, the above organizations are fighting a desperate battle to save lives and every advantage is useful--for Impact Justice and DJ+DS, design is a crucial one to help repair, reconcile and reassure.[108]

Restorative Designing

Furniture and restorative justice, my two primary topics, are rather disparate at the moment. In this section, I bring them together by detailing the work and research of Impact Justice and DJ+DS, two firms that are using design and architecture to improve and normalize restorative justice practices.

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[105] "In 2010, the Governor of California, Arnold Schwarzenegger, was publicly apologetic about the reality that his state spent more on corrections than higher education. What states build prisons and not public colleges -- since 1985 Illinois has built over 20 new prisons, work camps or other detention facilities, and no new institutions of public higher education -- the planned pathways for youth are clear." (Meiners, 272).
[106] Meiners, 273. Whereas, restorative justice philosophy "...calls us to contextualize crime and other harmful behaviours within the reality of unjust social structures which give rise to crime and understand the social consequences of existing justice practices, especially on already marginalized groups of people." (Toews, Architecture and Restorative Justice, 28.)
[107] Restorative justice shifts "the power dynamic from holding power over others...to sharing power. The "power with" approach invites collaboration and collective decision-making." (Spaces for Restorative Justice, 16).
[108] Haft, William. "More than Zero: The Cost of Zero Tolerance and the Case for Restorative Justice in Schools." Denver University Law Review, Vol. 77, no. 4, 2000. 807.

1. Impact Justice

Coming out of Oakland, this "national innovation and research center" is singularly focused on imagining, innovating and accepting "absolutely nothing about the status quo of our current justice system."[109] Founded in 2015, the breadth of their projects in combating this system at all fronts (pre/intra/post-incarceration) is astounding. Most influential for my work, however, is their recently completed "Building Justice Project", which brought together architecture schools SCI-Arc and Yale with legendary architect Frank Gehry in the pursuit of designing not just a new prison, but looking to "find a way out of the prison."[110] In 2018, this yielded a collection of designs for hypothetical community justice centers in Connecticut. The end goal was to explore these centers "...as an antidote to mass criminalization and the erosion of community that results from overly punitive and racially disproportionate responses to crime."[111]

These designs, which seek to support justice experiences through buildings and landscaping, are admittedly broader than my own approach. Still, I found their use of architecture to functionally and symbolically succor restorative justice practices and needs influential. Below is a small snippet of their work published in the book, *Spaces for Restorative Justice*.

2. Building for Privacy, Process and Progression, Ritual and Ceremony

One restorative justice principle that was frequently used to inform and influence architectural concepts was privacy. Feelings coming out of harm and into healing are intensely personal and private experiences. A community center needs to honor that; and yet, restorative

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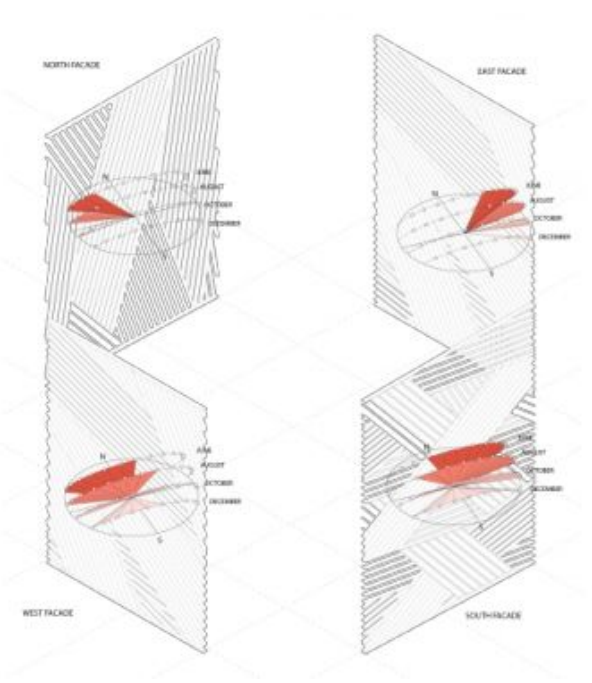
[109] "Impact Justice-About Us". Impact Justice, https://impactjustice.org/about-us/, 2020.
[110] "Impact Justice-Building Justice Project." Impact Justice, https://impactjustice.org/impact/building-justice-project/, 2020.
[111] "Impact Justice-Space for Restorative Justice Book." Impact Justice, https://impactjustice.org/space-for-restorative-justice-book/#:~:text=As%20Impact%20Justice%20President%20Alex,and%20relocating%20justice%20in%20America.%E2%80%9D, 2020.

justice is community-based, and is strengthened by community-involvement. This creates an interesting tension point between private and public, seen and unseen. In one project, a student forgoes oblique exteriors and instead uses “an extruded lattice of rotated louvers” for the



facade, so that “from some vantages the program inside can be seen, but from the oblique the line of vision is obscured.”[112] In another, the meeting room is designed to float over the “center’s main atrium with glass windows positioned close to the room’s floor.”[113] This design gives participants privacy, while still allowing community members to non-invasively observe “healing and connection underway.”[114] Both of these examples, one symbolically and one functionally, seek to insure privacy for a process that also needs to become more public.[115]

Another restorative principle that students sought to highlight in their structures was process and/or progression. One example uses materiality to expedite the aging process of the

[112] *Space for Restorative Justice*, 114.
[113] Ibid., 19.
[114] Ibid., 19.
[115] Ibid., 114.

building--the roof is made of steel, which will quickly rust and stain the concrete exterior.[116] This will allow the "...relatively new practice of restorative justice...to seem as if it has been in use for a longer period of time, increasing its legitimacy within Middletown."[117]

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A second example uses progression in a more traditional manner, emphasizing bodily movement. Participants walk on an "elevated walkway with expansive views...which individuals would traverse before and after the circle process. It connotes the idea of a transformative journey and...functions as an avenue for preparation beforehand and for reflection and decompression afterwards."[119]

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[116] *Space for Restorative Justice*, 119.
[117] Ibid., 119.
[118] Ibid., 119, 147.
[119] Ibid., 19.

Functionally, it is just a walk, but symbolically, it is a transformative act that creates a ritual (or ceremony), which imbues the experience of mere movement and viewing with deep meaning. This concept of ritual is referenced multiple times in *Spaces for Restorative Justice.* Deanna Van Buren comments that, "A communal kitchen and cafe anchor the buildings, providing spaces for breaking bread and holding ceremonies to "close" the restorative justice circle process--rituals that connect people."[120] Rituals abound in restorative justice, providing consistency, continuity, a structure for listening, and opportunities to connect. This is fruitful ground for architecture to affect restorative settings, given that:

> "'The architecture of the Romans was, from first to last, an art of shaping space around ritual.' If we accept this statement, the study of the ritual should become the starting point for the design process. The projects developed by the students, many of which begin with restorative justice's circle process, have perfectly understood this ritual dimension of architecture."[121]

Creating rituals with architecture is an incredibly potent opportunity for design to positively influence restorative justice; it is important in my work as well. There are further examples worth discussing, but to stay succinct, I will move on and summarize what all of this means.

3. The Importance of Designing and Building

Fair to say, when thinking about justice in America, these buildings are not what comes to mind. Ashlee George, associate director of the Restorative Justice Project at Impact Justice, believes these buildings are an opportunity to fix that. She writes, "These multi-purpose centers are a welcome contrast to the iconic courthouse that operates in isolation," and are "designed specifically to support healing and restoration in wake of harm."[122] She continues, "The impediments to the widespread use of restorative justice are structural in nature, which is why it's so important for us to design and build physical structures...that challenge the status quo by

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[120] *Space for Restorative Justice*, 168.
[121] Ibid., 104.
[122] Ibid., 16.

envisioning something altogether different."[123] For George, imagining *and* making these spaces is key to begetting change. What we build matters--Professor Barb Toews writes that "Architecture is not neutral; it represents the beliefs and values of society."[124] I believe (and have shown) that this is true of furniture as well--and while I deeply appreciate the consideration that went into imagining how a building might function to heal and symbolically support that healing process, I did notice a recurring theme that I perceive as a missed opportunity: every elevation, scale model or rendering that included furniture used a basic, stand-in, stereotypical chair.




[125]

[123] *Space for Restorative Justice*, 20.
[124] Toews, Architecture and Restorative Justice, 280.
[125] *Space for Restorative Justice*, 186, 35, 118, and 117.

In other words, the functional or symbolic impact of these community centers ended at the objects that participants most intimately interact with. Granted, these are architectural students working within their expertise as I work within mine, but I wonder if anyone considered: if we can design a building that supports and succors the healing process, can we not do better than an Ikea chair at the crux of the building's purpose? My work is staking the claim that, yes, we can.

4. Designing Justice + Designing Spaces

I am basing this yes on a multitude of sources, but the most important one comes from DJ+DS, an architecture firm dedicated to ending mass incarceration and structural inequity through design and building. Of their many projects, "Creating Restorative Justice Spaces in Schools" helped me the most. Using evidence-based design and well-known architectural principles, DJ+DS lays out a design plan for schools to make the best restorative justice space possible. These design principles include daylighting, lines of sight, neutrality and privacy, color, acoustics, organization etc.[126]



[127]

This pamphlet also speaks to furniture needs in a meeting room, recommendations include:

> "Use soft furniture such as lounge chairs or couches for one-on-one dialogue and relaxing."

[126] "Creating Restorative Justice Spaces in Schools," 12.
[127] Ibid., 10, 3.

> "Use movable furniture (bean bags, large pillows or ottomans on casters) to give people control over how they want to occupy the room."
>
> "Stick to non-hierarchical furniture, for example, a circular table instead of a desk. Use chairs for the circle that stack or roll so circles of different sizes are easy to configure and remove."

And last, when gathering data from the non-profit, Restorative Justice for Oakland Youth (RJOY), director Eric Butler shared that high school students "didn't want to sit in the chairs but preferred to sit on the floor when in circle."[128] This is helpful, straightforward advice for restorative justice designing.

4. Further Evidence-Based Research for Restorative Spaces

Another useful source in this field is University of Washington professor, Barb Toews. In partnership with DJ+DS, she has also done extensive qualitative research that is worth taking a moment to look at.

Toew's shares that her "...early vision of design revolved around metaphors of sanctuary and refuge...many of these design "principles" were articulated more as values or the "feelings" to be experienced by the user…"[129] This strikes me as akin to student work in *Spaces for Restorative Justice*, where, for instance, aged materials are supposed to hint at rootedness and wisdom, which *could* yield feelings of confidence or respect for Circle processes. Her later work, however, is based on interviews with incarcerated individuals, victims and community members, in which she gathered data on what they would like to see in restorative spaces. Qualities included places for fellowship (cooking and eating), spaces that feel like home, private spaces, and conversely, engaged spaces "that are active and show signs of creativity and life."[130] The two that are most important to my work, however, are nesting and flexible design.[131]

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[128] "Creating Restorative Justice Spaces in School," 12.
[129] Toews, Architecture and Restorative Justice, 287.
[130] Ibid., 289.
[131] Ibid., 289-290.

Nesting is comparable to privacy, but instead of complete separation from others, nesting is an opportunity to feel enclosed or safe while still public-facing. Toews argues that nesting is particularly important for incarcerated individuals, in which "...people are contained...within a space. This containment, however, is not like that of incarceration which serves to punish, dehumanize, and segregate....the intent is to "hold" the individual, and by extension, hold their experiences in a way that is supportive, validating, and relational."[132] For Toews, opportunities for nesting include "spaces of containment" that "are permeable…" and "may be constructed with translucent walls, big windows, cosy corners in larger rooms, and spaces nested within trees. These are spaces of "communion with self," even though they are open and accessible to the outside world."[133] Nesting, in other words, does not exclude external interactions, it merely creates a safe space or protective layer in which to experience them.

Next, Toews lists flexible design as an important quality that serves restorative spaces. She writes, "Design concepts and preferences consistently reflect the need for flexibility at the building and room scales, as well as in furnishings. There need to be spaces for individual, interpersonal, small and large group work and furniture to accommodate different numbers of people and meeting configurations."[134] The opportunity to be flexible emphasizes preparation, intentionality and an opportunity to cater to particular needs. Justin Carbonella, director of Youth Services Bureau in Middletown, Connecticut, speaks to this need for catering when he writes, "We've learned that space matters, even the *furniture* matters. The logistics of where and how people sit before entering the circle room matters. Unfortunately for us...doing youth justice, peacekeeping, and community building is that we're often working in spaces designed for other purposes."[135]

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[132] Toews, Architecture and Restorative Justice, 289.
[133] Ibid., 289.
[134] Ibid., 290
[135] *Space for Restorative Justice*, 98. Emphasis added.

This is finally beginning to change with Impact Justice and DJ+DS, backed by the research done by Toews. Alltold, these organizations are envisioning what justice spaces can and should be, even recognizing that furniture too, has a role to play in affecting justice. So if furniture, alongside architecture, can "enhance the justice experiences of victims, offenders, and community members,"[136] then it is crucially important to imagine and build objects that can support Circles, particularly when so much is at stake for vulnerable communities.

3. Related Design Concepts

While the above influenced my exploratory work the most, there are other design concepts I studied as well. Some of these include proxemics (the study of comfort zones and interpersonal space) and sociopetal/sociofugal furniture arrangements (bringing people together versus pushing people apart). I have read a number of articles on these subjects,[137] and also found Christopher Alexander's, *A Pattern Language*, a useful guide when analyzing ideal group size[138] related to hearing, sight and movement constraints.[139] He also has an interesting write-up on nesting spaces for children,[140] but to be concise, I will put it in my notes.

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[136] Toews, Architecture and Restorative Justice, 293.

[137] Patterson, Miles L. et al. "Seating Arrangement, Activity, and Sex Differences in Small Group Crowding." Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin Vol. 5, no. 1, 1979. pgs 100-103.
Patterson, Miles L. et al. "Effects of Seating Arrangement on Small-Group Behavior." Social Psychology Quarterly Vol. 42, no. 2, 1979. pgs 180-185.

[138] "It has been shown that the number of people in a group influences both the number who never talk, and the number who feel they have ideas which they have not been able to express…""...There is no particularly natural threshold for group size; but it is clear that the number who never talk climbs very rapidly. In a group of 12, one person never talks. In a group of 24, there are six people who never talk." (Alexander, *A Pattern Language*, 713).

[139] Furthering the justification for small groups, Alexander writes that "We get similar thresholds when we consider comfortable distances for talking. Edward Hall has established the upper range for full casual voice at about 8 feet; a person with 20/20 vision can see details of facial expression up to 12 feet; two people whose heads are 8 to 9 feet apart, can pass an object if they both stretch...Thus a small group discussion will function best if the members of the group are arranged in a rough circle, with a maximum diameter of about 8 feet." (Alexander, *A Pattern language*, 714).

[140] "In the course of play, young children seek out cave-like spaces to get into and under--old crates, under tables, in tents etc.…They try to make special places for themselves and for their friends--most of the world about them is "adult space" and they are trying to carve out a place that is kid size." (Alexander, *A Pattern Language*, 928).

That said, there is one last study I want to mention, which is research on classroom seating, and how different arrangements can affect educational opportunities for students.[141] In his article on circular arrangements, Joseph Falout, writes that a circle "...has become a worldwide symbol of unity and strength and simply sitting in a circle promotes the same effect."[142] And in a classroom, where distance from the teacher directly correlates to attention or inattention, participation or avoidance, a circle or semicircle can turn an entire classroom into an "action zone," which Falout defines as "areas in which the most interest, excitement, and class participation takes place."[143]

Circular seating integrates more students into the action zone and ultimately acts as a sociopetal space that can "endear each one to the others, create an atmosphere of mutual care, and stimulate the entire circle."[144] Falout does hedge, though, arguing that a circle is not inherently magical: "Circular seating by itself is not what brings people together; it is the people within this seating arrangement and how they feel, think, respond, and interact with each other, both inside and outside of the circle, that potentially brings them together."[145] This reinforces what Kay Pranis wrote in her book--that a spatial circle is an incredibly useful tool for conversation and connection, but for it to be effective, it must be activated by the trust, care and relationship-building of the people within it.

With that said, I am ready to detail my restorative justice furniture, with a caveat that I cannot just put chairs in a circle and say all is well. My furniture must do something more--it

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[141] O'Reilly, Mary Rose. "The Peaceable Classroom." College English Vol. 46, no. 2, 1984. pgs 103-112.
Aronson, Elliot.
"Building Empathy, Compassion, and Achievement in the Jigsaw Classroom." *Improving Academic Achievement*. England: Emerald Publishing, 2002. pgs 209-225.
[142] Falout, Joseph. "Circular Seating Arrangements: Approaching the Social Crux in Language Classrooms." Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching Vol. 4, no. 2, 2014. 279
[143] Ibid., 279.
[144] Ibid., 279.
[145] Ibid., 282.

must foster opportunities to create trust or a ritual, hold space for individuals dealing with harms and hurts, or bond individuals together. Architecturally, this is what DJ+DS and Impact Justice are doing; it is my goal to bring their ideas down to a smaller scale.

Restorative Justice Furniture

1. Summary of Salient Qualities that Informed my Work

Having set the stakes for restorative justice, shared the effect of furniture in society, and evaluated the work being done in restorative justice design, I will now share what I have made, although I quickly want to recapture some of the biggest influences on my final seating forms.

- Nesting / Privacy
- Flexibility / Agency
- Adjustability
- Trust
- Ceremony / Ritual
- Process / Progression
- Support for Individuals and the Group
- Collaboration / Togetherness[146]

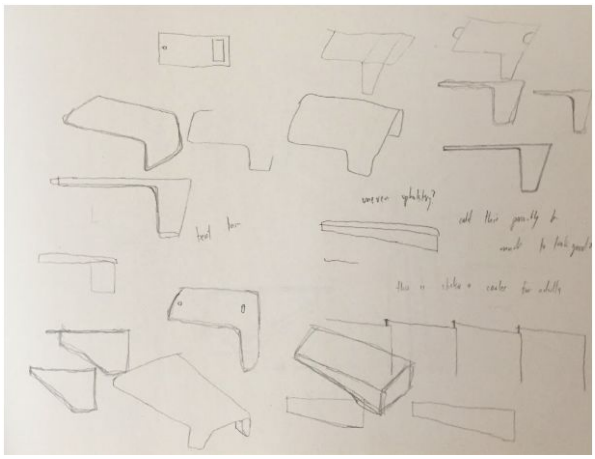
These characteristics and qualities, deeply researched and written about in books and articles, were crucial to my exploratory work. In addition to all of these, there is one final influence I need to mention that arose from a conversation with Yolo Conflict Resolution Center executive director, Kara Hunter. Asking her what she might want out of specialty furniture for these spaces, Ms. Hunter described crucial moments before formal openings in which the facilitator and participants often mingled awkwardly with no one quite sure how to break the ice. Kara

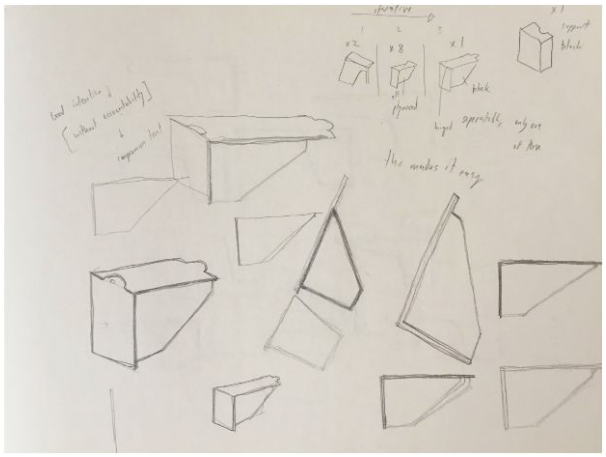
[146] These are not the only characteristics that could inform potential restorative justice furnishings; for instance, DJ+DS recommends couches for comfortable lounging and bean bags for fun and flexible arrangements. I am not an upholsterer and cannot make furniture this way. The qualities listed above are merely the ones that influenced me the most.

asked if a piece of furniture could somehow serve as an *icebreaker* itself, being an object that could help initiate restorative musings without going immediately to personal subjects. I found this idea of furniture as icebreaker immensely intriguing, and functioning as a catalyst for conversation that is not mere filler, ie. small talk about the weather, but is instead a legitimate bridge to values and experiences the group will soon need to activate. Icebreaking furniture, along with many of the other above characteristics, can be found in my modular, linking stools.

2. Building your Circle

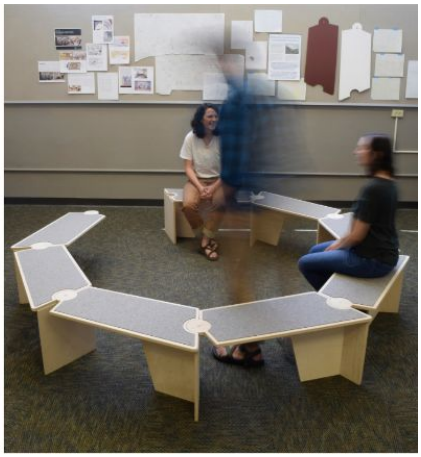
I designed and made this seating form over Winter quarter; chronologically, my second stool. It responds to ideas of ceremony and ritual, inclusive participation, flexibility, trust, support, interconnectedness, and breaking the ice.





The most obvious feature of this stool, from first iteration to final concept, is its unique cantilever--a rejection of the traditional “post and lintel” structure of furniture. The resultant horizontal-L-shape begets an imbalance that has only one solution: the matching L-shaped stools must be linked together in a chain (of open-ended length) for stability. In other words, the adjacent stool completes the post and lintel for its neighbor. Stripping away any abstraction, the design at its core--its very structure--imparts a clear message of continuous and required support that ends only by orienting them in a closed loop, or by adding an end-cap, a last post.





Instead of passively sitting on an already-chained Circle, whereby the message might be missed, at the beginning of a meeting, the facilitator can discuss and exhibit an imbalanced stool as an icebreaker, then invite participants in an opening-ceremony ritual, to construct their circle. While laying down and connecting stool after stool, participants are brought into a physical experience of working together to make unstable stools stable. The woodworking joinery, a dowel joint, on each stool end provides a satisfying push of connection, which is mated with an equally satisfying and utterly clear symbolic message: just as these stools link together and support one another, so too, each person that has built the Circle is linked to and is supported by every person within.

These functional moments of connection, support, and inclusive and active participation provided by the stools connotes symbolic meanings of interconnectedness, shared experience, trust, and care. Symbolism, as previously discussed, is a powerful tool used in architecture to emphasize values and beliefs. *Spaces for Restorative Justice* proffers opportunities to promote and strengthen restorative justice practices through various symbolisms. Ashlee George attributes value to a building “designed without 90-degree angles,” whereby, “Curved walls throughout the building create a feeling of fluidity and wholeness, without a clear beginning or

ending--much like an evolving relationship."[147] In this example, meaning is imbued through symbolism on a macro-scale as bodies experience "wholeness" while meandering on non-linear pathways;[148] in another, a transformative journey arises by traversing a long walkway that gives time for thought and reflection.[149] Other such concepts abound in the book, but none of these integrate human manipulation and activity into their stories. Involvement is passive as individuals or groups cannot change, participate in or affect the immutable functions and symbolisms of the building.

If furniture is given the same opportunity to speak with symbolic (and, of course, functional) purpose as a building with only curved walls, it has a unique opportunity for impact: on the micro-scale, participants get to *realize* symbolic meaning through function by using their own hands, eyes and body to create and shape a circle with others that inherently requires and sustains interconnectedness.

All this said, I do not mean to demean architecture or to stake a claim that these modular benches are better at imbuing meaning than buildings; rather, I just want to emphasize furniture's opportunity to meaningfully and uniquely support the values and concepts of a restorative justice program inside a designed space.

3. Finding your Comfort

This stool, my first, was designed and made over the summer and fall. It responds to concepts of nesting, progression, sitting on the floor, and agency to choose how you want to sit and experience the Circle. I see this seating form being used primarily in school settings.

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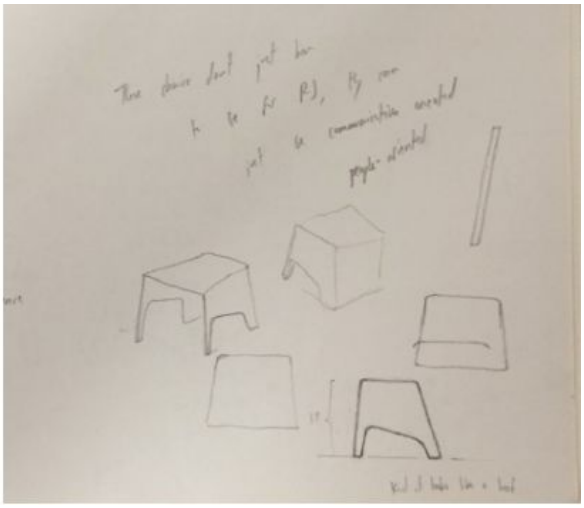
[147] *Space for Restorative Justice*, 19.
[148] Ibid., 187.
[149] Ibid., 19.



This stool sprung from Eric Butler, director at Restorative Justice for Oakland Youth, when he mentioned that young women like to sit on the floor while in Circle at school. A functional concept--this immediately informed a shape that allowed students to comfortably lean against the stool. This became the stool's "back". It also broached a bigger idea: are there other ways that a young person might like to sit and experience Circle? What if a stool had multiple options for sitting and gave students agency to find their own comfort?

To answer the first question: when reflecting on the concept of nesting as described by Toews (which encourages participants to find safety in partially enclosed spaces like a nook or alcove), I realized there was an opportunity to hold space for a body underneath the stool. Acting as a protective shell, a Circle participant can have their body contained by the stool without limiting listening or affecting interactions with the group. The unusual curve of the side-profile was specifically designed and shaped to allow for cross-legged knees to jut past the stool sides. This insures comfort and communicates intention.

Finding your Comfort, thus provides three different ways to sit or be in Circle, which promotes choice and agency in a restorative justice setting. DJ+DS recommended movable

furniture in these spaces, but this stool promotes a mobile participant, which strikes at any preconceived hierarchies in the meeting room or classroom. In the history of the latter, rows and columns, uncomfortable seats and the mere requirement of sitting has been used to control students.[150] A stool that encourages them to sit on the floor changes the rules of the space--it puts students or participants first, it considers what they want or what their needs are--this over the convenience or efficient control of the conversation by a teacher, leader or facilitator. In other words, it posits a non-hierarchical philosophy that matches the ethos of restorative justice.

An unexpected outcome from these three positions (nesting, leaning and sitting), which may correspond to different levels of personal comfort while being in Circle, is a chance for progression and growth from needing safety and security during hard conversations to accepting exposure and vulnerability. This progression through posture mimics the path of

[150] Cranz, 60-63, 198-199.

relationship-building in restorative justice, which gives people time to become comfortable with one another and encourages people to think and feel at their own pace.

This stool is more than just a collection of its postures. It helps create a non-hierarchical environment where all are equal, it creates a safe space for those that are feeling most vulnerable, and finally, it exhibits intentional care for the experiences and growth opportunities that happen in Circle--all of which will be noticed and felt for the good.[151]

Methodology

This section was always going to be a challenge for me. In the early fall, with no seating forms complete, I made the decision to forego the IRB process. I did not think I would have enough time to mass produce a set of stools that a class or small group could use in Circle as a quantifiable test of my objects. Admittedly, this is a blemish on my final project and going forward, it will be crucial to gather evidence through testing to discover the value/efficacy of these objects. Without this research, it remains a speculation this this furniture can do and impart the feelings I describe above.

In substitute of the IRB process, I intended to gather feedback and opinions from restorative justice stakeholders throughout Northern California. Over the past year, I've developed a relationship with a number of organizations and educators, including, Transforming Justice in Education, Yolo Conflict Resolution Center, Yolo Neighborhood Court, and Impact Justice.

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[151] Social Psychologist, Elliot Aronson, in the below quote, describes how much students can glean about their perceived value given the physical state of their school. He writes this from a negative (lack of care), I am using it to imply a positive (thoughtful care): "...the classroom curriculum constitutes only a small part of what a youngster actually learns in school. Students pay close attention to and learn from just about everything that happens in and around their school. For example, if the building is drafty, has broken windows, unwept floors, grimy walls, cracked linoleum, and leaky toilets, the students get the message that the adult community does not care a lot about their education." Aronson, Elliot. "Building Empathy, Compassion, and Achievement in the Jigsaw Classroom." *Improving Academic Achievement*. England: Emerald Publishing, 2002. 209.

I envisioned exhibiting both seating forms at all their respective offices, so we could build a circle together and sit on the floor. While not formalized data, I would have gathered their opinions, impressions, and critiques about the feasibility, value, and impact these forms might have in actual practice. Given their expertise in the field of restorative justice, this feedback was going to serve as the evidentiary support of my work.

Unfortunately, even this little bit of methodology was denied me as shelter-in-place mandates by the state of California were enforced in response to the 2020 COVID pandemic. Sharing my work tangibly was impossible, and I was left to photographs. After a photo-shoot with my housemates as models, I sent a pamphlet of my work to these organizations. In lieu of formal interviews or in-person conversations, I have a limited amount of stakeholder feedback that I can share. While informal, the responses were very positive.

- From Kamilah Mims at Impact Justice: "I just looked through your pamphlet and I think this furniture is so dope! I love the flexibility of both of the pieces to use either in a variation of ways or to fit more or less people in the circle. I also love how the "Building Your Circle" seats are symbolic of how we are all in community with each other and cannot stand alone, but rather need those around us as well. I hope these pieces expand to RJ circles in different communities."[152]
- Kara Hunter at the Yolo Conflict Resolution Center wrote: "I am so impressed with your furniture design! I love the flexibility of it as well as its simplicity! Well done! I can imagine the possibilities in having that type of furniture as we create restorative and healing spaces for people. Wow!"[153]

[152] Kamilah Mims, Impact Justice, Email, May 26, 2020, "A Space for Restorative Justice Conversation"
[153] Kara Hunter, YCRC, Email, May 13, 2020. "Furniture for Restorative Justice"

- Professor Torry Winn with Transforming Justice in Education responded: "The furniture that you are making in isolation will be greatly used when we all emerge from our silos. The photos are amazing!"[154]
- During a meeting in March at the TJE offices, I had the opportunity to present my work (early stage) to researchers and students. Their feedback was positive, calling it fascinating, curious, dope, and ultimately, believing it had the opportunity to engage students.

While I am awaiting responses from Professor Barb Toews and others at Impact Justice, at this point, this is all the feedback I have from significant stakeholders. It puts my work in a particularly speculative place, though trending positive.

Moving Forward

1. Room for Improvement

The obvious answer is my methodology; after a year's worth of work, to have no empirical data or formal feedback from restorative justice stakeholders is a bit of a disappointment. These two seating forms have the potential to speak to many restorative justice needs, but it is yet to be seen if they actually do. Now that I have full-size objects to share and justifications for their forms, I hope that upon reaching out to various organizations, I might have a better chance to hold their attention and get my foot in the door. Ideally, this could lead to co-designing further prototypes.

This future exploration though, needs to be tempered by a lesson from Galen Cranz. In her she speaks against the concept of a single, perfect chair. So does Christopher Alexander in *A Pattern Language*[155]. Over the summer and fall though, I pursued a perfect chair for

[154] Torry Winn, TJE, Email, May 6, 2020, "RJ Furniture Update"
[155] "Designers have for years been creating "perfect chairs"--chairs that can be manufactured cheaply in mass. These chairs are made to be comfortable for the average person. And the institutions that buy chairs have been persuaded that buying these chairs in bulk meets all their needs...Obviously, the

restorative justice as if it existed. In the quote below, Alexander is describing what a lively sitting room needs, a different context than a meeting room, but still, he proposes a haberdashery of chairs, couches, loungers and upholstered seats that will promote movement, change, and *finding* a comfortable piece of furniture for yourself. This is the opposite of Rodchenko's matching chairs that elicit conformity. Do mine as well? Would it be better not to build a set, but to instead buy mismatching chairs so participants can explore without a designer holding any of the strings? In some regards, designers, myself included, fall prey to the perfect object for a specific purpose, setting, or experience. I have imagined and made specialty furniture that can speak to certain needs and feelings within a Circle, but is this any better than Alexander's haberdashery? To truly answer this question, I must gather data and feedback.

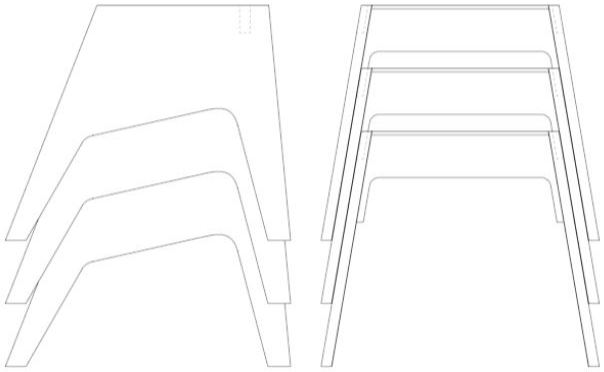
2. Next Steps

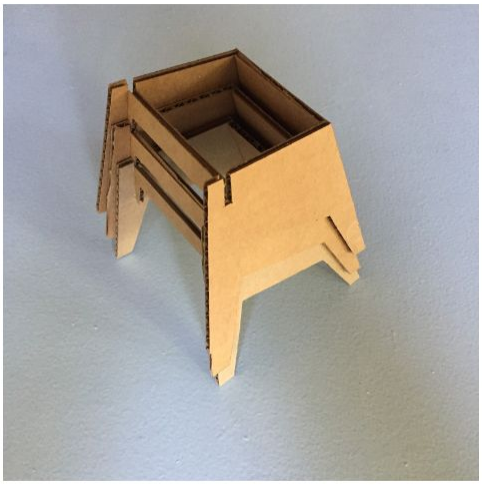
While *Building your Circle* is the more intriguing object (in my opinion), it is harder to fix some of its issues, foremost of which is storability. It is a big stool in wood, given the cantilever. A shift in material to bent lamination or metal would make it lighter and less bulky. Iterations continue on this, but the better opportunity to make substantive progress is simplifying *Finding your Comfort*. It would be very easy to make this design out of plywood and use a CNC-machine to mass produce it. Even more, I could use the open platform website, OpenDesk, that easily connects clients, designers, and CNC shops. A CNC file for *Finding your*

"average chair" is good for some, but not for everyone...and although situations are roughly uniform--in a restaurant everyone is eating, in an office everyone is working at a table--even so, there are important distinctions: people sitting for different lengths of time; people sitting back and musing; people sitting aggressively forward in a hot discussion...If the chairs are all the same, these differences are repressed...What is less obvious, and yet perhaps most important of all, is this: we project our moods and personalities into the chairs we sit in. In one mood a big fat chair is just right; in another mood, a rocking chair; for another, a stiff upright; and yet again, a stool or sofa. And of course, it isn't only that we like to switch according to our mood; one of them is our favorite chair, the one that makes us most secure and comfortable; and that again is different for each person. A setting that is full of chairs, all slightly different, immediately creates an atmosphere which supports rich experience; a setting which contains chairs that are all alike puts a subtle straight jacket on experience." (Alexander, *A Pattern Language*, 1159).

Comfort would be on the OpenDesk website, and if a school was interested in purchasing a set, a local (to the school) CNC woodshop could download the file and produce them. This pulls me out of the chain of making, while opening up the stool to a massive audience.

Furthermore, the next iteration will be stackable, which I have prototyped in cardboard and designed in Adobe Illustrator. This will allow for easy storage, which is important for schools, community centers, etc.





3. Future Opportunities

This summer, I was invited to present my thesis work at the The Furniture Society 20 Conference in Asheville, North Carolina. Due to COVID, the conference has been pushed back until next summer. Fortunately, my speaking spot is reserved and I will still be able to share my thesis work just one year delayed. This will be a great opportunity to network with other designers, educators, and nonprofits as I look for jobs. While rare, I am hoping to find a teaching position in furniture design and woodworking. I must admit, given the times and my niche skills, I am nervous about my employment prospects.

Conclusion

This project was a decade in coming. I have been woodworking and making furniture since 2010, and my relationship with it has been ever-evolving; but now, I am finally coming to understand the true power of the objects that I make. From pure art and craft, to communion to the Camden bench, I have learned so much these past ten years. My time at UC Davis has been particularly fruitful, and I deeply appreciate all the guidance and support I have received while a student here. Overall, I am very proud of the work that I have done. I recognize, though, that it is incomplete with such little data to support it.

Still, these stools have changed me, and I believe they can change and positively impact restorative justice meetings. *Building your Circle* creates a meaningful ritual that supports people and binds them together; while *Finding your Comfort* prioritizes and holds space for each individual's experience and needs. Both of them reinforce restorative principles in different ways and would be useful in different settings. Additionally, other ideas for seating forms abound that would highlight different moments and needs--one idea, still in the brainstorming stage, is to provide interlocking blocks or pieces that give participants even more freedom to construct their Circle.

The fact that there are so many other ideas (in my own head and shared with me) is exciting and meaningful: as we continue to imagine different kinds of stools, chairs, or seats for Circle processes, we are simultaneously envisioning and normalizing on a micro-scale a new form of justice that rejects the structural racism and violence of the status quo. When Zehr asks his elemental question--what does justice require--we may picture, instead of a visual parade of authority, a meeting room with a circle of unusual chairs filled with people talking out a problem.

Thank You

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