

Art as a Medium of Peace: An Aesthetic Analysis of Galtung's Conflict Transformation Theory

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the role of art as a medium for conflict transformation and peacebuilding through the perspective of Johan Galtung's conflict transformation theory. This inquiry is important because art not only has the potential to serve as a means of reconciliation and peacebuilding but can also function as a medium for disseminating hatred and legitimizing symbolic violence. The study employs a qualitative approach using a library research method. The data derive from various scholarly sources that discuss conflict transformation theory, philosophy of art, aesthetics, the psychology of empathy, and peace studies. The study analyzes the data through a descriptive-critical approach by examining the concepts of creativity, nonviolence, and empathy, which constitute the core components of Galtung's conflict transformation theory. The findings demonstrate that creativity plays a crucial role in developing alternative and peaceful solutions to conflict, while nonviolence constitutes an intrinsic characteristic of art that distinguishes it from practices of direct violence. At the same time, empathy does not always generate peace because, under certain conditions, it can encourage group exclusivism and hostility toward others. Consequently, conflict transformation requires the development of intergroup empathy (*outgroup empathy*) that transcends the boundaries of social identity. The study also finds that, according to several transcendental aesthetic theories, media intended to disseminate hatred do not fully satisfy the fundamental characteristics of art. These findings suggest that art possesses normative potential as a medium of peacebuilding when it strengthens creativity, nonviolence, and inclusive forms of empathy. The originality of this study lies in its effort to integrate Johan Galtung's conflict transformation theory with the philosophy of art

and aesthetic studies in order to explain the conceptual boundary between art as a medium of peace and art as a medium of hatred.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis peran seni sebagai medium transformasi konflik dan membangun perdamaian melalui perspektif teori transformasi konflik Johan Galtung. Kajian ini penting dilakukan karena seni tidak hanya berpotensi menjadi sarana rekonsiliasi dan pembangunan perdamaian, tetapi juga dapat dimanfaatkan sebagai media penyebaran kebencian dan legitimasi kekerasan simbolik. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode studi kepustakaan. Data diperoleh dari berbagai literatur yang membahas teori transformasi konflik, filsafat seni, estetika, psikologi empati, dan studi perdamaian. Analisis data dilakukan secara deskriptif-kritis melalui penelaahan konseptual terhadap unsur kreativitas, nirkekerasan, dan empati yang menjadi komponen utama dalam teori transformasi konflik Galtung. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kreativitas memiliki peran penting dalam mengembangkan alternatif penyelesaian konflik secara damai, sedangkan nirkekerasan merupakan karakter intrinsik seni yang membedakannya dari praktik kekerasan langsung. Sementara itu, empati tidak selalu menghasilkan perdamaian karena dalam kondisi tertentu dapat mendorong eksklusivisme kelompok dan kekerasan terhadap pihak lain. Oleh karena itu, transformasi konflik memerlukan pengembangan empati antarkelompok (outgroup empathy) yang melampaui batas identitas sosial. Penelitian ini juga menemukan bahwa berdasarkan sejumlah teori estetika transendental, media yang bertujuan menyebarkan kebencian tidak sepenuhnya memenuhi karakteristik fundamental seni. Temuan ini mengimplikasikan bahwa seni memiliki potensi normatif sebagai medium pembangunan perdamaian apabila diarahkan pada penguatan kreativitas, nirkekerasan, dan empati yang inklusif. Keaslian penelitian terletak pada upaya mengintegrasikan teori transformasi konflik Johan Galtung dengan kajian filsafat seni dan estetika untuk menjelaskan batas konseptual antara seni sebagai medium perdamaian dan seni sebagai media kebencian.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past several decades, armed conflicts have increasingly occurred within states rather than between states. These conflicts often arise from narratives of hatred disseminated through various media for political, ideological, or identity-based purposes. Such narratives can reinforce stereotypes, deepen social polarization, and, under certain circumstances, trigger mass violence. The 1994 Rwandan genocide represents one of the most prominent examples of how propaganda and hate speech contributed to large-scale violence. In the twenty-first century, the rapid development of digital media and social networking platforms has accelerated the dissemination of hateful narratives and increased the potential for conflict escalation across different societies (Haq, 2025).

Amid the growing spread of hatred, many scholars and practitioners regard art as a medium capable of fostering dialogue, strengthening social cohesion, and supporting peacebuilding processes. The Baliem Valley Festival, for example, demonstrates how artistic and cultural activities can bring together diverse groups and create opportunities for more constructive social interaction (Haq, 2025, p. 78). However, art does not always function as a medium of peace. In certain contexts, art can also reinforce exclusive identities, disseminate propaganda, and cultivate sentiments of hatred, as illustrated by various white supremacist communities that employ symbols, music, and cultural imagery in digital spaces (Haq, 2025). This condition indicates that the relationship among art, peace, and hatred is complex and requires deeper scholarly investigation.

The urgency of this study has increased alongside the global expansion of the arts sector. Research conducted in France found that attendance at various performing arts events increased by 11% during the 2023–2024 period (Blanchard, 2025). At the same time, digital technologies have expanded the reach of artistic activities through online platforms. Visits to virtual art galleries increased by 45%, participation in participatory art increased by 22%, the number of art fairs grew by 18%, film festivals increased by 15%, classical music streaming rose by 35%, jazz streaming increased by 28%, and global streaming services are projected to grow by 17% annually (WifiTalents, 2025). These data indicate that art exerts an increasingly broad social influence, making both its constructive and destructive potential more significant subjects of scholarly inquiry.

Developments in modern reproductive technologies have also transformed the ways in which art is produced, distributed, and consumed. Walter Benjamin described this condition as technological reproducibility, a situation in which works of art can be reproduced and disseminated on a mass scale through modern technologies (Benjamin, 2008). In contemporary digital societies, this condition has become even more relevant because visual, audio, and audiovisual content can reach millions of individuals within a very short period. Consequently, art no longer exists solely as an individual aesthetic experience; it also functions as a medium of social and political communication with extensive influence.

Walter Benjamin warned against the danger of the aestheticization of politics, namely the use of aesthetic appeal to legitimize political power and violence (Benjamin, 2008). This phenomenon appeared in the use of posters, symbols, visual architecture, and mass performances by the Nazi regime to construct images of heroism, racial superiority, and the glorification of war. In response to this condition, Benjamin mentioned the politicization of art. Even though he did not explain the term, it is now understood as the use of art to cultivate critical awareness of social and political realities (Benjamin, 2008; Kuran, 2023).

Research on the relationship between art and conflict has developed along several major trajectories. First, a number of studies position art as a medium of peacebuilding and conflict transformation. Research on the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra demonstrates that artistic practice can create spaces for dialogue among conflicting groups, particularly between Israeli and Palestinian communities (Karamy & Bainus, 2020). Similar findings emerge from Deane's (2021) study of multiethnic theater in Sri Lanka and Rwanda, which shows that theater can strengthen mutual understanding, foster shared identities, and support social reconciliation. Within this line of scholarship, researchers view art as naturally effective to bring conflicting parties together.

Second, several studies emphasize art as an instrument of politics and propaganda. Research inspired by Walter Benjamin's ideas demonstrates that art can shape public opinion, reinforce ideological commitments, and mobilize masses through political aesthetics (Benjamin, 2008; Vassilev, 2023). From this perspective, scholars regard art as a neutral medium. Art can be thought of as a form of technology, as it can function either as an instrument of liberation, domination, peacebuilding, or hate propagation depending on its orientation and intended purpose.

Third, research in the philosophy of art and aesthetics focuses on the nature of art, its intrinsic value, and its social functions. Debates surrounding Marcel Duchamp's *The Fountain*, Andy Warhol's *Brillo Box*, and John Cage's *4'33"* illustrate how modern and contemporary art has shifted attention from questions of form toward questions of meaning, function, and social context (Jones, 2024; Kobl'ížek, 2023; Šterbáková, 2021). Within this intellectual development, it is understood that the essence of art can not be contained solely within the visual properties of art objects.

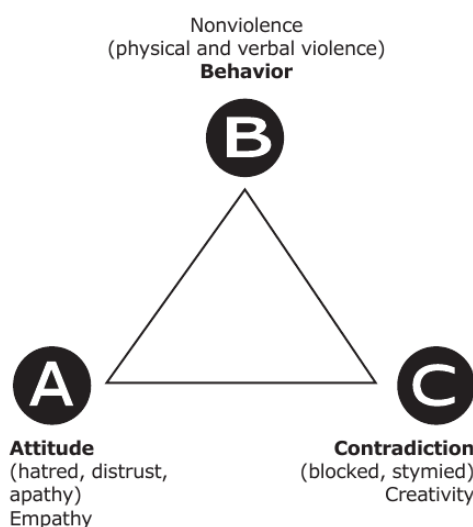
Although previous studies have made significant contributions, important gaps remain in the literature. Existing research generally examines art as a medium of peace, an instrument of propaganda, or an object of aesthetic inquiry in separate analytical frameworks. Studies that integrate these three domains through Johan Galtung's conflict transformation theory remain relatively limited. Yet conflict transformation theory offers a conceptual framework capable of explaining how creativity, nonviolence, and empathy can transform conflict. These three elements maintain strong connections with artistic practice, but scholars have not yet systematically explored the conceptual relationship between them and art.

This study aims to analyze the relationship between art and conflict transformation through the perspective of Johan Galtung's theory. Specifically, it examines how creativity, nonviolence, and empathy explain art's capacity to function either as a medium of peacebuilding or as a medium for reproducing hatred. In addition, the study investigates several aesthetic theories in order to clarify the conceptual boundary between art that supports conflict transformation and media that disseminate hatred.

This study argues that scholars cannot fully understand art as a neutral instrument. Although individuals and institutions may employ art for a variety of political and social purposes, certain aesthetic characteristics associated with creativity, nonviolence, and empathy create an intrinsic tendency that supports peaceful conflict transformation. Consequently, this study not only applies Johan Galtung's conflict transformation theory to the study of art but also seeks to extend the theory through dialogue with the philosophy of art and aesthetics in order to explain the position of art within the relationship between peace and hatred.

This argument draws upon Johan Galtung's understanding of conflict as an inherent aspect of social life. According to Galtung, conflict does not constitute a condition that societies should eliminate because it arises naturally from the diversity of human needs, interests, values, and goals (Galtung, 1978). In his view, conflict can even become a source of social change and development when individuals manage it constructively. Therefore, Galtung distinguishes conflict from violence. Conflict represents a natural and unavoidable condition, whereas violence constitutes only one possible response to conflict. In his writings, Galtung explains that conflict consists of three interconnected components: attitude, behavior, and contradiction (Galtung, 2000). Attitude refers to psychological and emotional dimensions such as hatred, prejudice, fear, and suspicion. Behavior refers to the actions that parties undertake, whether through dialogue or violence. Contradiction refers to conflicts of interests, needs, values, or goals that constitute the primary sources of conflict.

Figure 1. Johan Galtung's Conflict Triangle



Based on this conflict triangle model, Galtung developed the concept of conflict transformation, which seeks to alter conflict dynamics comprehensively through three principal mechanisms: empathy to transform attitudes, nonviolence to transform behavior, and creativity to transform contradictions

(Galtung, 2000). This study argues that these three elements maintain close relationships with artistic practice. Aesthetic experiences can foster empathy toward others, artistic creation prioritizes nonviolent forms of expression, and creativity constitutes a fundamental element that enables individuals to generate new alternatives for addressing social contradictions. Therefore, Galtung's conflict transformation theory provides a relevant conceptual framework for explaining the role of art in peacebuilding. Through a dialogue with the ideas of Walter Benjamin, Arthur Danto, Charles Batteux, George Dickie, Nicolas Bourriaud, Antoon Van den Braembussche, Pitirim Sorokin, Latif Hussain Shāh Kāzmī, Abhinavagupta, and other aesthetic thinkers, this study evaluates the extent to which art possesses intrinsic characteristics that support conflict transformation or, alternatively, can be reduced to an instrument for reproducing hatred.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study focuses on concepts that explain the relationship among art, peace, and hatred from the perspective of conflict transformation. The unit of analysis includes Johan Galtung's conflict transformation theory, particularly the concepts of empathy, nonviolence, and creativity, as well as various theories of the philosophy of art and aesthetics developed by Walter Benjamin, Arthur Danto, Charles Batteux, George Dickie, Nicolas Bourriaud, Antoon Van den Braembussche, Pitirim Sorokin, Latif Hussain Shāh Kāzmī, Abhinavagupta, and other related thinkers. The study analyzes how these concepts explain the position of art as a medium of peacebuilding or a medium for reproducing hatred.

This study employs a qualitative research design using a philosophical-conceptual approach (*philosophical inquiry*) (de Boer & Zeiler, 2024). The study adopts this approach because its objective is not to measure relationships among variables statistically, but rather to examine, interpret, and evaluate theoretical ideas concerning the nature of art and conflict transformation. Creswell and Poth (2018) explain that qualitative research seeks to understand the meanings that individuals or groups construct regarding social and human phenomena. In the context of this study, the philosophical approach examines the conceptual coherence between conflict transformation theory and aesthetic theories in explaining the social functions of art.

The study draws upon secondary data obtained from books, scholarly journal articles, conference proceedings, and academic documents relevant to the research topic (Setia & Haq, 2023). The primary sources include Johan Galtung's works on conflict theory and conflict transformation, particularly his discussions of the conflict triangle (*attitude, behavior, and contradiction*) and the mechanisms of transformation through empathy, nonviolence, and creativity. In addition, the study utilizes various works in the philosophy of art and aesthetics that discuss the social functions of art, aesthetic experience, art and politics, and art and peace. The researcher selected these sources purposively based on their conceptual relevance to the focus of the study.

The study collected data through library research. The researcher identified, inventoried, and selected literature related to conflict transformation theory, the philosophy of art, aesthetics, art for peace, and art as a medium of propaganda. Subsequently, the researcher conducted a critical reading of these sources to identify key concepts, conceptual relationships, and arguments relevant to the research focus. This technique enabled the researcher to develop a comprehensive understanding of the intellectual developments that form the basis of the analysis.

The study analyzed the data interactively by adapting the model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which consists of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. During the data condensation stage, the researcher identified and categorized key concepts related to empathy, nonviolence, creativity, peace, hatred, and art. During the data display stage, the researcher organized these concepts into an analytical framework that connected Johan Galtung's conflict transformation theory with theories from the philosophy of art and aesthetics. In the final stage, the researcher conducted a critical interpretation to evaluate the extent to which art possesses characteristics that support conflict transformation and to formulate the study's theoretical contribution to the development of conflict transformation studies and the philosophy of art.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Art: Definition and Conceptual Development

The meaning of art has evolved alongside historical, cultural, and philosophical developments. Western traditions use the term *art*, which derives from the Latin word *ars* and traces its roots to the Greek term *téchne* (τέχνη). In ancient Greek traditions, *téchne* carried a broad meaning that referred to various human capacities for making and doing things (Stanić et al., 2023). Consequently, early Western traditions understood art primarily as a practical skill or human capability. This meaning later gave rise to the English terms *technique* and *technology* (Ramić, 2024). Traces of this original meaning remain visible in expressions such as “the art of war,” “state of the art,” and “liberal arts,” all of which extend beyond the common understanding of art (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). The word art in English is commonly used as a noun, but sometimes used as an adjective like in the term “*art film*” or “*art music*”. These two examples demonstrate the positive connotation of the term art in English, as *art film* and *art music* are considered to contain a certain quality that differentiate them from other film and music.

A significant development occurred when Charles Batteux introduced the concept of *beaux-arts* or fine arts as a category distinct from the mechanical arts. Batteux viewed art as an activity that seeks to produce beauty through the imitation of *belle nature*, or idealized nature (Batteux, 2015). According to his perspective, painting imitates visual reality, drama imitates human life, while music and dance imitate emotions. Art does not merely reproduce reality; it perfects reality through creative processes. Batteux’s ideas subsequently became one of the most important foundations for modern understandings of art as an activity oriented toward beauty and aesthetic experience.

In Bahasa Indonesia, the term usually associated with art is *seni*. The Indonesian Dictionary (*Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia*), has three different definitions for *seni*. In the first definition, *seni* refers to something refined, delicate, or beautiful. In the second definition, *seni* denotes the skill required to produce high-quality works or works that emerge from extraordinary abilities. In the third definition, *seni* relates to the intellectual and creative capacities of human beings to create something of significant value (Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia, 2016). What is commonly associated with art are the second and third definitions.

Within the Indonesian archipelago, the concept of art has maintained a close relationship with ideas of refinement and wisdom. Chung (2023) demonstrates that the term *karawitan* in the Javanese tradition also conveys meanings such as refinement, delicacy, complexity, subtlety, and beauty. Similarly, Supangkat (2022) explains that the Indonesian term *seni* emerged as an adaptation of the Javanese concept of *kagunan*. This concept developed from ideas concerning emotional sensitivity, moral capacity, and human wisdom. Through his examination of the ideas of Gusti Panembahan Buminata, Ronggowarsito, and Ki Padmasusastra, Supangkat shows that *kagunan* relates not only to beauty but also to the cultivation of intellect and ethical consciousness. The definition of *kagunan* as “the unfolding of reason that produces beauty” reveals a close relationship among aesthetics, morality, and wisdom (Supangkat, 2022).

Spiritual meanings also appear in several explanations regarding the origin of the term *seni*. Remawa et al. (2021) explain that scholars frequently associate the term *seni* with the Sanskrit word *sani*, which means offering, service, or sincere devotion. In ancient Balinese traditions, the terms *senhi* or *sni* also relate to the idea of self-effacement within spiritual practice. These perspectives suggest that term *seni* is closely associated with transcendence and self-cultivation. Unlike the modern English art, the term *seni* came from an adjective (dictionary first definition) or a verb (Sanskrit *sani*). In modern Indonesian, *seni* retains an adverbial role, as it is not commonly used as a noun by itself, but in tandem with other words such as *seni tari* (dance), *seni rupa* (visual art), or *karya seni* (work of art). This parts of speech of *seni* is important because it requires *seni* to be associated with a quality.

Although the concepts of *seni* and *art* developed within different cultural contexts, both traditions exhibit similar tendencies. Both Indonesian and Western traditions associate art with qualities considered valuable, such as refinement, skill, wisdom, beauty, and spirituality. Consequently, neither tradition understands art as a neutral concept. These positive connotations explain why societies frequently employ art as a medium for education, character formation, and peacebuilding. At the same

time, these same connotations explain why political actors can use art to construct ideological legitimacy and generate emotional support for particular political agendas. As Benjamin argued and Vassilev (2023) later developed, the aestheticization of politics operates effectively precisely because art carries positive symbolic value that influences how societies perceive ideas, identities, and actions.

Creativity as a Dimension of Conflict Transformation in Art

Johan Galtung identifies creativity as a central element of conflict transformation because conflicts always contain contradictions that arise from differences in goals, needs, and interests among parties (Galtung, 2000). In many situations, people interpret these contradictions through a zero-sum framework that defines one party's victory as another party's defeat. This mode of thinking fosters hostility and reduces opportunities for productive cooperation (Fearon et al., 2021). As a result, parties often resolve conflicts through domination or violence that forces one side to yield. Galtung argues that sustainable conflict resolution cannot emerge through win-lose mechanisms; instead, it requires the capacity to create new possibilities that accommodate the interests of multiple parties simultaneously.

Within the conflict transformation perspective, creativity functions as a mechanism for generating alternatives that did not previously exist within the conflict structure. Creativity enables parties to move beyond win-lose dynamics and develop mutually beneficial outcomes (*win-win solutions*) (Galtung, 2000). Research in conflict psychology demonstrates that creative thinking helps reduce cognitive biases that reinforce social conflict (Fahoum et al., 2022). Subsequent studies further indicate that divergent-thinking training significantly decreases negative emotions toward opposing groups and increases openness to alternative perspectives (Fahoum et al., 2024). These findings suggest that creativity represents not merely the capacity to generate new ideas but also a social capacity that facilitates the transformation of intergroup relationships.

The role of creativity in conflict transformation appears in various conflict-resolution practices that successfully address contradictions through innovative approaches. For example, power-sharing agreements allow formerly hostile groups to establish joint governance structures, as demonstrated in South Africa and Sri Lanka. Similarly, replacement agreements modify rules or structures that generate conflict and thereby create opportunities for new social arrangements (Afyare, 2024). One particularly relevant example comes from Johan Galtung's proposal regarding the Ecuador-Peru border dispute. Galtung suggested transforming the disputed territory into a jointly managed binational conservation area. Although negotiators initially considered the proposal overly creative, the idea later became one of the foundations of the peace agreement between the two countries (Bartolucci, 2024). This case illustrates how creativity enables parties to move beyond the perceived limitations of entrenched conflict dynamics.

The relationship between art and creativity possesses deep conceptual roots. Etymologically, the word *creative* derives from the Latin *creare*, meaning to bring something into existence or to make something real. This word was initially reserved for creation by the Divine (Moreno & Jurado, 2023). This meaning closely resembles the concept of *téchne*, one of the historical foundations of art as a human capacity to make, create, and transform the world through creative action. Throughout history, scholars have frequently associated creativity with artistic activities such as musical improvisation, dance, and other forms of aesthetic expression (Moreno & Jurado, 2023). Therefore, art does not merely employ creativity as an instrument; art also serves as one of the primary spaces in which creativity emerges and develops.

Research in cognitive psychology demonstrates that creativity involves the ability to generate ideas, solutions, or products that are both novel and unexpected. This process unfolds through the exploration of multiple possibilities before individuals select and refine specific alternatives (Brown, 2024). Within artistic practice, creativity works in tandem with aesthetic judgment. Brown (2024) explains that creativity generates variation, whereas aesthetics functions as a mechanism for selecting among those variations. Their interaction creates a process of cultural evolution that enables societies to develop new forms artistic expressions. Therefore, creativity and aesthetics constitute inseparable dimensions of artistic practice.

The processes of artistic creation and appreciation involve interactions among artists, artworks, and audiences that generate aesthetic communication through both verbal and nonverbal forms (Miyarta et al., 2023). Through these mechanisms, art can communicate aspirations, critiques, and social experiences without relying on confrontational language that often intensifies conflict. The findings of this study demonstrate that art maintains a strong relationship with the creativity component of Johan Galtung's conflict transformation theory. Art provides a space for social imagination that enables individuals and groups to envision alternatives beyond established patterns of conflict. Within this framework, art functions not only as an aesthetic object but also as a medium of communication that brings diverse perspectives into a shared dialogical space.

The dialogical function of art also gains support from the positive connotations historically associated with the concept of art itself. These connotations make art a relatively open medium for exchanging ideas compared with other forms of communication that explicitly promotes hatred. Public rejection in Germany of artworks perceived as antisemitic during the controversy surrounding Documenta 15 demonstrates how aesthetic responses can function as social mechanisms that limit the normalization of hateful messages within artistic spaces (Greenberger, 2022). This finding suggests that artistic creativity not only generates new forms of expression but also contributes to the development of more reflective and dialogical public spheres.

The role of art in fostering creativity also appears within educational contexts. Numerous studies demonstrate that artistic activities such as improvisation, experimentation, and reflection help develop divergent thinking, psychological resilience, and empathy, all of which are essential for conflict transformation (Hernandez, 2023). Conversely, art education systems that focus excessively on technical reproduction, formal evaluation, and competition can hinder students' creative development. Luo (2024) demonstrates that art education practices emphasizing memorization, technical demonstration, and purely visual achievement tend to neglect critical thinking, human sensitivity, and reflective capacities. Therefore, art education that encourages openness, exploration, and intrinsic inquiry makes an important contribution to strengthening societies' capacities for conflict transformation (Luo, 2024).

Table 1. Creativity as the Transformation of Contradictions in Galtung's Theory and Artistic Practice

Aspect	Galtung's Conflict Transformation Theory	Manifestation in Art
Source of the Problem	Contradictions emerge from differences in goals, needs, or interests among parties	Art represents diverse social perspectives within a shared aesthetic space
Transformation Mechanism	Creativity generates alternatives beyond win-lose logic	Artistic processes encourage exploration, experimentation, and social imagination
Psychological Capacity	Creative thinking reduces conflict-related biases and increases openness	Artistic activities cultivate divergent and reflective thinking
Space of Interaction	Conflicts require spaces that foster new possibilities	Art functions as a medium of aesthetic communication between artists and audiences
Transformation Outcome	Movement from zero-sum outcomes toward <i>win-win solutions</i>	Art creates spaces of social imagination that transcend the boundaries of conflict

Source: Adapted from Galtung (2000), Fahoum et al. (2022, 2024), Miyarta et al. (2023), and the author's analysis.

These findings demonstrate that art contributes to conflict transformation because it cultivates creativity that may generate new social possibilities unavailable within conventional conflict logic. Creativity in art enables individuals and groups to move beyond win-lose thinking, open spaces for

dialogue, and imagine more inclusive forms of social relations. Therefore, art does not merely represent creativity as an artistic skill; it also operationalizes creativity as a mechanism for transforming contradictions, as articulated in Johan Galtung's conflict transformation theory. However, this transformation power of art depends on how art education is conducted.

Nonviolence and the Intrinsic Character of Art in Peacebuilding

In Johan Galtung's conflict transformation theory, nonviolence functions as a mechanism for transforming the behavioral dimension (*behavior*) of conflict. Behavior refers to the concrete actions undertaken by conflicting parties, whether violent or nonviolent, and may appear in both verbal and physical forms (Degortes, 2024). Galtung argues that behavior often manifests attitudes, emotions, and perceptions that develop within the attitudinal dimension (*attitude*). Consequently, conflict transformation requires more than changing patterns of thought; it also requires transforming the actions that parties choose to undertake. At its most basic level, behavioral transformation begins with the cessation of direct violence, such as ceasefires or the termination of repressive actions.

This concept relates closely to the distinction between negative peace and positive peace introduced by Galtung. Negative peace refers to the absence of war or direct violence, whereas positive peace refers to the elimination of various forms of violence embedded within social and cultural structures (Bartolucci, 2024). Therefore, conflict transformation seeks not only to stop violent actions but also to change the conditions that allow violence to persist and reproduce itself. This perspective positions nonviolence not merely as a practical strategy but also as a normative principle that directs behavioral change toward more constructive social relationships.

Galtung distinguishes three primary forms of violence: direct violence, structural violence, and cultural violence. Direct violence occurs when specific actions physically or psychologically prevent individuals from achieving their full potential. Structural violence emerges through social systems that generate inequality and suffering, whereas cultural violence operates through values, symbols, and beliefs that legitimize injustice (Bartolucci, 2024, pp. 273–274). Within this framework, violence does not constitute a fundamental human instinct; rather, it represents a potential outcome that develops when parties fail to transform conflicts constructively (Galtung, 2000). Consequently, nonviolence becomes a fundamental prerequisite for peacebuilding because it prevents conflicts from escalating into destructive actions.

The findings of this study demonstrate that art maintains a close relationship with the principle of nonviolence. In its most common forms, artistic activities such as painting, sculpture, literary writing, music composition, dance, and theater constitute creative acts that do not involve direct violence. Art produces symbols, representations, and aesthetic experiences rather than physical actions that inflict harm upon human bodies. Even when artists use art to express criticism, protest, or social dissatisfaction, they continue to communicate through symbolic media. Therefore, art possesses a fundamental character that differs from violent action because art operates through the creation of meaning rather than physical destruction.

The nonviolent character of art becomes even clearer when analyzing political propaganda that contains messages of hatred. Nazi propaganda posters, ISIS publications, and *fashwave* visual culture within far-right communities may incite hatred and reinforce the legitimacy of violence, yet even these works do not directly inflict violence upon their targets. Botz-Bornstein (2019) demonstrates that ISIS propaganda employs sophisticated visual techniques, including modern graphic design, image manipulation, and cinematic effects, to glorify jihad and warfare. Similar strategies appear in various forms of far-right propaganda that utilize aesthetic symbols to construct collective identities and normalize hatred (Bogerts & Fielitz, 2023). These phenomena indicate that art can support violence, but such support operates through symbolic representation rather than direct physical action.

The distinction between artistic action and violent action demonstrates that art performs a sublimative function within social life. Through art, individuals can express emotions, anger, frustration, and social tensions in symbolic forms that do not harm others. Art enables individuals and

groups to relocate conflict from the arena of physical destruction to the arena of representation, reflection, and communication. In this sense, art functions as a space that allows people to express experiences of conflict without reproducing the violent actions that generate suffering. This sublimative function makes art particularly relevant as a medium of conflict transformation because it provides channels of expression that align with the principle of nonviolence.

Nevertheless, these findings also indicate that nonviolence in art does not automatically produce peace. Political propaganda, the glorification of war, and the aestheticization of hatred demonstrate that artistic media can reinforce hostile attitudes that eventually encourage direct violence. From Galtung's perspective, this condition emerges because behavior cannot be separated from the attitudinal dimension (*attitude*) that underlies it. Art may not directly commit violence, but it can shape perceptions, identities, and emotions that influence social behavior. Therefore, the capacity of art to support peacebuilding depends not only on its nonviolent character but also on the values and empathic experiences cultivated through artistic practice.

Table 2. Nonviolence in Conflict Transformation Theory and Artistic Practice

Aspect	Conflict Transformation Theory	Manifestation in Art	Implications for Peacebuilding
Focus of Transformation	Nonviolence transforms the behavioral dimension (<i>behavior</i>) of conflict	Art operates through symbolic expression rather than destructive action	Provides channels for expressing conflict without direct violence
Form of Violence Avoided	Direct violence that causes physical or psychological harm	Painting, music, theater, literature, and dance do not inflict physical violence upon others	Reduces the likelihood of conflict escalation into destructive actions
Mechanism	Transforms confrontational actions into constructive actions	Conflict is expressed through representation, reflection, and aesthetic communication	Encourages dialogue and understanding without coercion
Fundamental Character	Nonviolence serves as a principle of behavioral change	Art creates meaning rather than destruction	Art possesses an intrinsic tendency that aligns with the principle of nonviolence
Limitation	Behavior is influenced by underlying attitudes (<i>attitude</i>)	Propaganda and the aestheticization of hatred can reinforce hostility	The nonviolence of art does not automatically generate peace
Contribution to Peace	Prevents the reproduction of violence in conflict	Art functions as a sublimation of emotions, anger, and social frustration	Opens spaces for peaceful conflict transformation

Source: Adapted from Galtung (2000), Bartolucci (2024), Botz-Bornstein (2017), Bogerts and Fielitz (2023), and the author's analysis.

This study finds that art possesses an intrinsic tendency that aligns with the principle of nonviolence because artistic expression replaces physical destruction with symbolic representation. Art allows individuals and groups to express, understand, and negotiate conflicts without translating them into direct violent actions. This finding reinforces the second element of Johan Galtung's conflict transformation theory by demonstrating that art can function as a medium for behavioral transformation because it provides forms of expression that are more constructive than violence as a means of resolving conflict.

Aesthetic Empathy and the Ambivalence of Art in the Relationship Between Peace and Hatred

In Johan Galtung's conflict transformation theory, empathy functions as the primary mechanism for transforming the attitudinal dimension (*attitude*) that underlies conflict. Attitudes encompass perceptions, emotions, prejudices, fears, and images of others who may be perceived as either allies or enemies. Negative attitudes toward others often become a primary source of conflict reproduction because they shape how individuals and groups understand social reality. Consequently, conflict transformation requires more than structural or behavioral change; it also requires transforming perspectives toward others. Within this context, Galtung conceptualizes empathy as the ability to understand, experience, and acknowledge the perspectives of others so that hostile relationships can evolve into more constructive forms of interaction (Degortes, 2024).

However, empathy is not as straightforward as peace discourse often assumes. Malbois and Hurst-Majno (2023) argue that empathy constitutes a *thick concept* that simultaneously contains descriptive and evaluative dimensions. When people describe someone as empathetic, they not only identify a particular mental state but also make a moral judgment that generally carries positive connotations. Within psychological traditions, scholars commonly define empathy as the ability to enter into or share the emotional experiences of others (Malbois & Hurst-Majno, 2023). As a result, many scholars regard empathy as a moral foundation that enables care, solidarity, and prosocial behavior.

Research in cognitive science demonstrates that empathy consists of several distinct components, including *perspective taking*, *affective empathy*, *emotional contagion*, *empathic concern*, and *empathic distress* (Malbois & Hurst-Majno, 2023). *Perspective taking* refers to the ability to imagine another person's perspective. *Affective empathy* refers to the ability to experience another person's emotions while maintaining self-awareness. *Emotional contagion* occurs when individuals absorb the emotions of others without distinguishing the source of those emotions. In addition, *empathic concern* generates care for the suffering of others, whereas *empathic distress* produces psychological discomfort in response to observed suffering. These distinctions demonstrate that empathy does not always generate identical social consequences.

Psychological research even suggests that empathy can produce outcomes that contradict the goals of peacebuilding. Malbois and Hurst-Majno (2023) explain that *empathic distress* may trigger aggressive behavior when individuals attempt to eliminate the source of their discomfort. Under certain conditions, empathy can also reduce objectivity and strengthen emotional bias toward specific groups. These findings indicate that empathy is not inherently synonymous with peace. Instead, empathy may become a source of social exclusivism when individuals direct it only toward their own groups and fail to extend it to others.

This implication carries significant importance for conflict transformation theory. Within peacebuilding contexts, scholars must distinguish between *ingroup empathy* and *outgroup empathy*. Bruneau et al. (2017) demonstrate that empathy toward outgroups reduces the likelihood of violence, increases willingness to provide assistance, and strengthens opportunities for intergroup reconciliation. By contrast, empathy that operates only within the boundaries of one's own group may reinforce internal solidarity while simultaneously increasing hostility toward outsiders. Therefore, the empathy envisioned within Galtung's conflict transformation framework cannot be understood merely as the capacity to share emotions. Instead, it must be understood as the capacity to understand the perspectives of others without abandoning moral objectivity.

Unlike creativity and nonviolence, which appear relatively clearly within artistic practice, empathy has often remained neglected within the philosophy of art. Braembussche (2006) identified the focal point of classical and modern theories of art: the relationships between artworks and reality (imitation theory), artists and artworks (expression theory), the artwork itself (formalism), artworks and audiences (Kantian aesthetics), artworks and historical context (Hegel and Danto), art and social context (Neo Marxists), phenomenology of art, and post-structuralism. Although these approaches address various dimensions of aesthetic experience, they rarely place intersubjective human relationships—the very core of empathy—at the center of analysis. Even

such a comprehensive survey of the philosophy of art does not mention empathy as a significant concept (Braembussche, 2006).

While art had been the subject of philosophy since the time of Plato and Aristotle, it was Baumgarten who started aesthetics as a separate field of philosophical inquiry. He positioned aesthetics as a distinct form of knowledge (Guyer, 2020). Kant developed a theory of aesthetic judgment centered on the subject's experience of beauty (Braembussche, 2006). Johan Herder further advanced these ideas by arguing that experiences of beauty arise through humanity's capacity to empathize with other forms of existence (Guyer, 2020). Herder's perspective, while not included in Braembussche's list, is particularly important because it opens the possibility of understanding aesthetic experience as a relational experience involving emotional connections between human beings and the world they encounter.

The empathic dimension of art is more apparent in Nicolas Bourriaud's theory of relational aesthetics. Bourriaud argues that participatory art produces not only aesthetic objects but also relational spaces that facilitate social interaction (Kanık, 2025). Within participatory art, audiences no longer remain passive spectators; instead, they actively contribute to the formation of artistic experiences. Art therefore functions as a space of encounter that enables individuals to interact with others in ways unavailable within everyday life. The relational aesthetics, however, is limited to the practice of participatory art, which itself is a specific development in Western contemporary art. While it describes the empathic dimension of cooking *padthai* in an art gallery, in contrast to Herder's theory, relational aesthetics is not applicable to paintings or sculptures.

The findings of this study indicate that empathy constitutes a far more fundamental dimension of art than Western philosophy of art has generally assumed. In many artistic practices, artists create works because they possess the capacity to understand the experiences of others, while audiences engage with artworks through emotional identification with the experiences represented. Pijarski (2015) explains that human beings project their embodied experiences onto the objects they observe. Consequently, viewers can feel the struggle of an elephant in Douglas Gordon's video work *Play Dead* even though they encounter only a visual representation. This mechanism demonstrates that aesthetic experience operates through empathic processes that allow individuals to enter experiences that are not their own.

The relationship between art and empathy is more explicit within Indian aesthetic traditions through the theory of *rasa*. In the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, the success of a performance depends upon its ability to evoke a particular *rasa* in the audience through the transmission of emotional experience by actors (Muni, 1951). Abhinavagupta later expanded this concept by interpreting *rasa* as an aesthetic experience that transcends everyday life and provides access to higher forms of reality (Baghel, 2024; Masson & Patwardhan, 1970). This perspective suggests that aesthetic experience fundamentally constitutes an intersubjective experience created through the sharing of emotions and meanings. Within this framework, empathy does not merely emerge as a by-product of art; rather, it serves as the foundation that makes aesthetic experience possible.

The transcendental dimension of art further strengthens its empathic function. Sorokin viewed art as a manifestation of the creative power of altruistic love capable of generating social energies that unite and harmonize humanity (Paglione, 2024). Similar perspectives appear within Islamic aesthetics, which regard beauty as a reflection of divine beauty (Jalees et al., 2021), and within Chinese aesthetic traditions, which understand artistic experience as a path toward higher awareness through the concepts of *yijing* and *wu-wei* (Hongmei, 2023; McNiff, 2016). Although these traditions emerged within different cultural contexts, they share a common theme: art connects human beings to realities that transcend individual interests and creates opportunities for deeper relationships with others. This transcendental dimension of art determines the scope of empathy within a work of art. The works produced by the alt-right communities and ISIS fail to transcend the ingroup empathy.

Table 3. Empathy in Conflict Transformation and Aesthetic Experience

Aspect	Empathy that Supports Peace	Empathy that May Generate Hatred
Form of Empathy	<i>Outgroup empathy</i> (empathy toward others)	<i>Ingroup empathy</i> (empathy toward one's own group)
Emotional Orientation	Understands the suffering of others inclusively	Prioritizes the suffering of one's own group
Social Impact	Encourages dialogue, assistance, and reconciliation	Reinforces polarization and hostility
Impact on Conflict	Reduces tendencies toward violence	May increase the justification of violence
Role of Art	Creates opportunities for identification with the experiences of others	May reinforce exclusive forms of solidarity
Implications for Peacebuilding	Supports the transformation of <i>attitude</i> toward peace	May reproduce conflict and hatred

Source: Adapted from Galtung (2000), Malbois and Hurst-Majno (2023), Bruneau et al. (2017), and the author's analysis.

Based on the overall analysis, this study finds that empathy represents the most complex dimension in the relationship among art, peace, and hatred. Unlike creativity and nonviolence, which remain relatively inherent in artistic practice, empathy possesses an ambivalent character. Empathy is virtually absent in Western philosophy of art. In turn it affects the definition of art within the Western culture, commonly understood as aesthetic works that may contain anything including the propagation of hate. Nevertheless, empathy is the foundation of aesthetics according to Herder, Abhinavagupta, and more recently as explained by Pijarski.

Art can cultivate the capacity to understand the experiences of others, broaden moral horizons, and create opportunities for reconciliation. However, the same empathic processes can also strengthen exclusive identification with one's own group and generate hostility toward outsiders. Consequently, empathy does not automatically produce peace. Empathy contributes to conflict transformation only when it develops into *outgroup empathy*, namely the capacity to understand and recognize the humanity of others beyond the boundaries of group identity. This finding extends Johan Galtung's conflict transformation theory by demonstrating that successful transformation of *attitude* depends not merely on the presence of empathy but also on the direction and scope of empathy cultivated through social and aesthetic experience.

Discussion

This study demonstrates that the relationship between art and peace cannot be understood through the simplistic assumption that art always produces positive outcomes for society. The analysis of creativity, nonviolence, and empathy reveals that art maintains a strong relationship with Johan Galtung's conflict transformation theory. Creativity enables the emergence of new alternatives for addressing social contradictions, nonviolence allows individuals and groups to express conflict without physical destruction, and empathy enables individuals to understand the experiences of others through aesthetic experience. Together, these three elements demonstrate that art functions not only as a means of communication or entertainment but also as a social space in which transformation can occur at the levels of contradiction, behavior, and attitude. These findings indicate that artistic practices can serve as effective media for transforming conflict dynamics without relying on coercive mechanisms or systems of domination.

These findings can be explained through the fundamental characteristics of art that distinguish it from other forms of social communication. Creativity in art generates social imagination that allows individuals to envision possibilities beyond established patterns of conflict. At the same time, art operates through symbols, representations, and aesthetic experiences and therefore does not directly

inflict violence upon others. Furthermore, aesthetic experience enables individuals to enter perspectives different from their own through empathic mechanisms that are difficult to achieve through purely argumentative or political forms of communication. Consequently, the effectiveness of art in conflict transformation does not derive solely from the content of the messages it conveys, but from the aesthetic mechanisms that simultaneously activate creativity, nonviolence, and empathy. These findings help explain why artistic practices frequently succeed in opening spaces for dialogue and reconciliation even when artists and participants do not explicitly design them as peacebuilding initiatives.

The findings of this study share both similarities and differences with previous research. Consistent with the work of Karamy and Bainus (2020), this study confirms that art can function as a medium of dialogue that brings together conflicting groups. The findings also support Deane's (2021) research, which demonstrates that multiethnic theater can strengthen mutual understanding and promote social reconciliation. However, this study extends beyond previous research by explaining the conceptual mechanisms through which art contributes to conflict transformation via creativity, nonviolence, and empathy. The findings also align with studies inspired by Walter Benjamin's ideas regarding the capacity of art to shape public opinion and mobilize collective action (Benjamin, 2008; Vassilev, 2023). Unlike those studies, however, this research demonstrates that the ability of art to support either peace or hatred depends not only on its political function but also on how empathy operate within aesthetic experience. Therefore, the novelty of this study lies in its integration of peace studies, the philosophy of art, and Johan Galtung's conflict transformation theory, three fields that have often developed independently from one another.

From a historical perspective, the findings reveal a continuity of ideas regarding the relationship between art and human values across diverse cultural traditions. The concept of *kagunan* in Javanese thought links art to wisdom and intellectual cultivation (Supangkat, 2022), while the theory of *rasa* in Indian aesthetics positions aesthetic experience as a medium for sharing emotions and human experiences (Baghel, 2024; Masson & Patwardhan, 1970). Similarly, Sorokin's conception of altruistic love emphasizes creativity as an integrative force within social life (Paglione, 2024). Across these traditions, scholars consistently associate art with the cultivation of more harmonious human relationships. From a social perspective, the findings demonstrate that art possesses the capacity to expand spaces of dialogue and strengthen social cohesion through shared experiences that transcend the boundaries of group identity. These findings align with research on the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, which demonstrates the ability of art to foster dialogue among conflicting groups (Karamy & Bainus, 2020), as well as Deane's (2021) study highlighting the role of multiethnic theater in strengthening mutual understanding and social reconciliation.

From an ideological perspective, the findings reveal that art constitutes an arena of contestation over meaning that can serve either to strengthen peace or to legitimize hatred. This conclusion corresponds with Walter Benjamin's critique of the aestheticization of politics, which allows art to mobilize masses and construct ideological legitimacy (Benjamin, 2008), as well as Vassilev's (2023) analysis of the role of art in shaping public opinion and collective identities. Therefore, scholars cannot regard art as a completely neutral medium, nor can they reduce it to a mere political instrument. Art possesses its own aesthetic logic that can both reinforce and constrain ideological projects that seek to appropriate it (Bourriaud, 2022; Braembussche, 2006).

Nevertheless, this study also identifies both functions and dysfunctions in the relationship between art and conflict transformation. The primary function of art lies in its capacity to cultivate creativity, provide channels for nonviolent expression, and foster empathy that supports social reconciliation. However, this study also demonstrates that art, understood as aesthetic works, can be used to produce propaganda, construct exclusive forms of solidarity, and reinforce sentiments of hatred. These risks become evident in the aestheticization of politics, where symbols, images, music, and visual representations serve to construct ideological legitimacy and mobilize collective emotions (Benjamin, 2008; Vassilev, 2023). Such risks emerge particularly when empathy remains confined to one's own group (*ingroup empathy*) rather than expanding into empathy across group boundaries (*outgroup empathy*). In intergroup conflicts, empathy directed toward one's own group can strengthen

internal solidarity while simultaneously increasing hostility toward others (Bruneau et al., 2017). Under these conditions, art retains its nonviolent character as a form of symbolic representation, yet it may simultaneously contribute to the reproduction of attitudes and structures that support violence (Bartolucci, 2024; Galtung, 2000). These findings indicate that the social impact of art depends on the value orientations that shape the processes of artistic creation, distribution, and reception.

Based on these findings, this study proposes several practical implications for peacebuilding. First, art education should focus not only on technical artistic skills but also on the cultivation of creativity, critical reflection, and empathy across group boundaries. Second, peacebuilding programs can utilize art as a dialogical space that enables diverse groups to develop mutual understanding through shared aesthetic experiences. Third, cultural institutions should promote critical literacy regarding various forms of the aestheticization of hatred that may mobilize social conflict. Fourth, cultural policies should encourage artistic practices that bring diverse social groups together within equitable spaces of interaction. The importance of art institutions in peacebuilding relate to its ability to influence the boundaries of what is considered art, as described by Dickie's institutional theory of art Rethinking the Institutional Theory of George Dickie: The Art Circles. This in turn ensures the alignment between art and peacebuilding through proper understanding of creativity and outgroup empathy, supported by transcendental aesthetics traditions. Through these measures, art can function not merely as a form of cultural expression but also as an arena of conflict transformation that supports the development of a more inclusive and sustainable peace.

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the relationship between art and peace cannot be understood through the simplistic assumption that art always generates positive outcomes for social life. The analysis of Johan Galtung's conflict transformation theory reveals that art maintains a close relationship with the three core elements of conflict transformation: creativity, nonviolence, and empathy. Creativity enables individuals and groups to develop new alternatives for addressing social contradictions that generate conflict. Nonviolence positions art as a form of symbolic expression that replaces physical destruction in the communication of ideas and human experiences. Empathy, meanwhile, enables individuals to understand the experiences of others through aesthetic engagement. However, this study also finds that empathy does not automatically produce peace. Empathy can strengthen solidarity within one's own group and may even contribute to the reproduction of hatred when it fails to develop into *outgroup empathy*. These findings demonstrate that art possesses the potential to support either peace or hatred, depending on the ability of artists to transcend ingroup boundaries.

The primary scholarly contribution of this study lies in its integration of Johan Galtung's conflict transformation theory with the philosophy of art and aesthetics within a unified analytical framework. This study confirms the relevance of creativity, nonviolence, and empathy as core elements of conflict transformation while simultaneously extending Galtung's theory by demonstrating that these elements operate not only within social practices generally but also within artistic practices. Furthermore, the study offers a conceptual contribution by emphasizing that successful attitudinal transformation depends not merely on the presence of empathy but on empathy's capacity to transcend the boundaries of group identity. These findings position art not simply as an instrument of peacebuilding but as an arena in which conflict transformation occurs simultaneously through creativity, nonviolence, and empathy.

This study also has several limitations. The research employs a philosophical-conceptual approach grounded in literature analysis and therefore does not empirically examine how creativity, nonviolence, and empathy operate within artistic practices in specific social contexts. In addition, the study focuses primarily on the conceptual dimensions of the relationship between art and conflict transformation and therefore does not explore in depth the variations among artistic forms, cultural contexts, or institutional factors that may influence the effectiveness of art in peacebuilding. Future research can build upon this study through field research, case studies, or participatory approaches that examine how aesthetic experiences contribute to conflict transformation across diverse social,

cultural, and political contexts. Future studies may also explore more deeply the role of *outgroup empathy* in artistic practice as an important mechanism for achieving sustainable peacebuilding.

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