Crossing the Boundaries of Film Aesthetics: Challenging Avant-Garde Practices and Contemporary Cinema Exhibitions in Indonesia

Erik Muhammad Pauhrizi[1✉], Erika Ernawan[2], Dedi Warsana[1], Zakarias S. Soetedja[1], Rizki Resa Utama[3], Danendra Alfathadiningrat[4]

[1]Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Indonesia
[2]Universitas Kristen Maranatha, Indonesia
[3]University of Applied Arts Vienna, Austria
[4]Vancouver Film School, British Columbia, Canada

Abstract

This study investigates the impact of avant-garde cinema in redefining Indonesian film aesthetics, focusing on its role in challenging dominant cultural and technological narratives in the digital era. Presented at the Cine Future: Radical Cinema on Future Perspective exhibition, the research identifies a critical gap in mainstream cinema's limited engagement with narratives evolving alongside rapid advancements in projection technology and digital reproduction. The study is anchored in the experimental works of film students from Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia's Film and Television Study Program, showcased in the Cine Future exhibition, which exemplifies avant-garde cinema's potential to reinterpret traditional narratives. With the Practice-led Research methodology, this research integrates artistic practice with critical analysis, allowing student filmmakers to explore the complexities of the digital age through creative expression. Findings indicate that avant-garde cinema enables the construction of new, culturally rooted narratives by merging historical aesthetics with modern technology, providing students with a framework for critiquing and interpreting social realities. This research contributes to broader discussions on avant-garde cinema's relevance in academic and creative fields. It demonstrates its significance in fostering critical dialogue and evolving cinema as a dynamic medium for cultural reflection. The study underscores the value of incorporating avant-garde methods within film education to prepare students for a rapidly changing cinematic landscape.

How to Cite: Pauhrizi, E. M., Ernawan, E., Warsana, D., Soetedja, Z. S., Utama, R. R., & Alfathadiningrat, D. (2025). Crossing the Boundaries of Film Aesthetics: Challenging Avant-Garde Practices and Contemporary Cinema Exhibitions in Indonesia. *Harmonia: Journal of Arts Research and Education*, 25(2), 494-509

INTRODUCTION

As a form of new media, film creates complex narratives that often encourage understanding digital technology as a replacement for traditional film forms. This aligns with Slavoj Zizek's concept of a "future perfect" historiography, where outdated artistic forms challenge their boundaries, often pointing toward new

✉Corresponding author:
 E-mail: erikpauhrizi@upi.edu

technological applications (Zizek, 2000). Šuvaković (2018) emphasises film's evolution in Anglo-American contexts as a "New Media" that integrates innovative production techniques, optical transformations, and a diversity of self-expressions (Šuvaković, 2018).

At its core, the film merged traditional elements with modern techniques, reflecting its context's social and political dynamics. Although prior research helps illuminate avant-garde cinema's role in discussions of cultural identity, Knowles (2020) said there remains a need for further exploration into how traditional and modern elements integrate within avant-garde cinema to shape narratives and aesthetics (Knowles, 2020). Experimental film, according to Zhao (2023), plays a crucial role in cinema, advancing its medium through unconventional approaches that challenge both personal and mass cultural boundaries (Zhao, 2023). Furthermore, recent advancements in projection and digital reproduction technologies, as discussed by Ganz & Holloway (2014), offer avant-garde cinema new possibilities for aesthetic experimentation, enabling a rethinking of conventional narratives and fostering innovative visual experiences (Ganz & Holloway, 2006). Despite this potential, a significant gap persists in research on avant-garde cinema's integration with digital technology, specifically regarding its influence on narrative and aesthetic structures (Budi & Ardianto, 2022).

Paolo Cherchi Usai, in "The Death of Cinema," suggests that traditional cinema loses relevance in the digital age, yet also opens the door to more interactive forms (Usai, 2001). His idea challenges Roland Barthes's concept of "The Death of the Author", granting the audience a central role in shaping the narrative (Laura Seymour, 2017; Roland Barthes, 1975, 1977). Barthes argues that the interpretation of an artwork depends more on the viewer than on the creator, a relevant concept for avant-garde cinema, as it encourages the viewer to engage in meaning-making (Laura Seymour, 2017). As discussed by Fredric Jameson, postmodern aesthetics blur the distinction between reality and representation, creating intertextual, complex narratives (Jameson, 2005). Nevertheless, research has not sufficiently explored how these aesthetics address local cultural and social dynamics, especially within the Indonesian context. This gap highlights a need for research on the interrelationship between avant-garde cinema and Indonesia's cultural identity, given the unique socio-political and cultural landscape (Low, 2018; Wardani, 2019).

Despite Indonesia's rich artistic heritage, avant-garde cinema remains underrepresented in artistic and academic discourse and is often overshadowed by mainstream commercial cinema (Klich, 2019; Sendra, 2020). Rath (2011), in their PhD dissertations, explain that this context can be applied to notions of ontologically referential identity metamorphose into conjunctural play of identifications, a discourse of "Media Imperialism" and "Indigenisation" (Rath, 2011). Indonesian cinema's transformation since independence reflects a shift toward experimental themes, yet research has scarcely examined avant-garde cinema's specific role in reshaping cultural narratives through digital means. A lack of studies exploring how cinema can be adapted to Indonesian cultural contexts, as vehicles of artistic representation, has also contributed to this underrepresentation (Manurung & Daud Kameo, 2021). This study addresses these gaps by examining how avant-garde cinema in Indonesia employs digital technology to reconstruct narrative forms and integrate traditional cultural symbols, thereby contributing to broader academic and artistic discussions of Indonesian cultural identity.

The primary objective of this study is to explore how Indonesian avant-garde cinema challenges conventional narrative structures by blending traditional and modern elements (Fitriasari & Hares Kaeksi, 2023; Yazar et al., 2025). Specifically, it examines how avant-garde cinema leverages digital tools to innovate upon established

cultural symbols, allowing filmmakers to create layered narratives that resonate with contemporary audiences while remaining rooted in local traditions. Riksa Belasunda (2014) investigates a postmodern aesthetic approach to deconstructing the structure of film language, examining nonverbal signs in the visual and movement components of film language (Belasunda et al., 2014). Meanwhile, Tsabitah (2022) argues that, in this intercultural era and amid global challenges, a film can be perceived as a practical strategy for developing the meaning and identity of Indonesian culture (Tsabitah et al., 2022).

The Cine Future: Radical Cinema on Future Perspective exhibition is a significant case in exploring and addressing these research gaps. For example, Aji Surya's film work, "Mang Ang Ung," combines traditional Sundanese elements with modern digital techniques. Surya uses invisible infrared projection to create a cinematic experience that actively involves the audience in interpreting meaning, aligning with Cherchi Usai's notion of cinema's evolution in the digital era. Agung Z.M. Fitriani (2023) examines the traditional ritual of Jaran Kepang Papat interpretations that emerge from the context, heritage, and significance. The work investigates themes of memory, identity, and critique of modernity (Fitriasari & Hares Kaeksi, 2023). The artists use contemporary projection technology to create works that challenge perceptions and offer new perspectives (Downs, 2019). Digital technology provides powerful tools for experimenting with new ways of creating and presenting art, expanding existing aesthetic and narrative boundaries to create new structural, poetic, metaphoric, and provocative visual experiences (Conttington, 2022; Dragu, 2020; Meigh-Andrews, 2014; Ryynänen, 2022). Aesthetic experimentation, according to Kostopoulou (2023), is at the core of the avant-garde and introduces innovative paths to interpreting reality by combining traditional elements with contemporary techniques. Avant-garde cinema serves as a powerful critical medium for engaging

with and reflecting on the complexities of an ever-evolving world (Alashari & Hamzah, 2022; Kostopoulou, 2023).

While film's evolution as a "New Media" has advanced through complex narratives and innovative technologies (Šuvaković, 2018; Zizek, 2000), a significant gap persists in integrating avant-garde cinema with Indonesian cultural narratives. Prior studies, including those by, have Click or tap here to enter text. explored avant-garde cinema's role in redefining cultural identity and challenging traditional cinema. However, these have primarily overlooked how modern digital technology can uniquely shape the aesthetic and narrative structures of Indonesian cinema. Moreover, few researchers have examined how these technologies can be adapted to enhance avant-garde practices within Indonesia's socio-political landscape (Ferdinanda et al., 2025).

No existing research has comprehensively examined how Indonesian avant-garde cinema strategically integrates traditional cultural elements with contemporary digital technologies to reconstruct narrative forms and aesthetic structures within a practice-led educational and exhibition-based context (Iswahyuningtyas, 2021; Mccormick, 2013; Sendra, 2020). While previous studies have addressed avant-garde cinema, digital aesthetics, or Indonesian film culture separately, their intersection remains critically underexplored (Djagalov, 2020; Tlostanova, 2017).

Therefore, this study aims to examine how avant-garde cinematic approaches in Indonesia leverage digital technologies to reconstruct filmic narratives and aesthetic structures while integrating local cultural symbols. By positioning avant-garde cinema as a transformative medium within the Indonesian film landscape, this research seeks to contribute to critical discourse on film aesthetics and to provide a conceptual framework for filmmakers engaging in cultural critique and identity formation through experimental practice paradigms (Patricia Leavy, 2020; Visse et al., 2019).

METHOD

This study employs practice-led research (PLR) as its primary methodological framework to integrate creative practice with critical analysis (Lopez-Leon, 2020), focusing on the intersections between avant-garde cinema aesthetics and contemporary digital technologies within the Indonesian context (Guntur, 2019). PLR is particularly suited to this research because the study investigates artistic processes, experimental filmmaking, and the production of avant-garde works not merely as outcomes, but as central sites of knowledge generation (Budiawan & Martyastiadi, 2020; Smith & Dean, 2009).

Practice-led research (PLR) was selected because, in avant-garde and experimental cinema, understanding arises through making, reflection, and reconfiguration rather than external application to finished works. PLR views artistic practice as an inquiry that explores aesthetic, cultural, and technological issues from within the creative process (Budi & Ardianto, 2022; Nevill, 2019). By integrating frameworks like non-linear narration, authorship destabilisation, expanded cinematic space, and audience participation into filmmaking and exhibition, PLR helps examine how Indonesian avant-garde cinema navigates cultural identity and digital mediation in an embodied, reflexive way. Thus, PLR addresses research goals holistically, capturing material changes in filmic forms and the reflective knowledge from experimental practice (Rumtini et al., 2024; Sutandio, 2019).

The research involves 32 film and animation students and 11 professionals from Indonesian universities, who exhibit works at Cine Future: Radical Cinema on Future Perspective, within a practice-based, exhibition-driven environment (Iswahyuningtyas, 2021; Mccormick, 2013; Ricciardelli et al., 2020). Participants explored avant-garde cinema themes without strict prompts, fostering diverse experimental responses and revealing how aesthetics, digital tools, and culture are negotiated through individual and collective choices(Martins, 2020). The study uniquely integrates film theory, applying concepts such as Barthes's (Laura Seymour, 2017) "Death of the Author" and Cherchi Usai's (Usai, 2001) theory of "The Death of Cinema" within the creative process, utilising iterative cycles of feedback and reflection (Lopez-Leon, 2020). Data included observations, reflections, notes, and final outputs, which were analysed thematically to compare stylistic, thematic, and digital approaches (Putri et al., 2023). Practice-led research suits avant-garde cinema's subjective, experimental essence, allowing in-depth exploration of how digital technologies influence aesthetic and cultural practices. This approach affirms artistic practice as vital for understanding and advancing avant-garde film.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section explores how avant-garde cinema has transformed Indonesian film aesthetics from a mere art form into a knowledge-generating method. It combines practice-led experiments with film theories, addressing gaps in analysis and comparison in current literature. Findings include descriptive insights and theories developed through creative practice, screenings, and audience participation. This approach reveals how avant-garde challenges traditional standards and socio-cultural contexts, using critical methods like active re-reading to question the cinematic canon and uncover overlooked narratives in Indonesian art history (Wardani, 2019), thereby offering a detailed model for understanding how local identity is shaped through storytelling and cinematic strategies, especially in regional cinema.

Using data from workshops, interviews, textual analysis, visual documentation, and exhibitions, a thematic analysis identified recurring tensions shaping experimental film in academic and exhibition settings. These tensions reveal how Indonesian avant-garde cinema balances aesthetic liberty, spectatorship, and knowledge in the digital age. The study also

explores the links between art, education, and societal impacts (Budi & Ardianto, 2022; Budiawan & Martyastiadi, 2020). It explores how reviving traditional craft in Indonesian avant-garde cinema is a strategic move, producing emotionally and intellectually compelling works (Yazar et al., 2025).

Instead of seeing avant-garde cinema just as a different stylistic approach, this research shows that Indonesian experimental film is a crucial way of gaining knowledge. It creates understanding through hands-on experimentation, careful curatorial presentation, and engaged audience interpretation. Within this framework, cinematic form actively influences perception, emotion, and reflection, challenging norms. Avant-garde practice is central to film studies, especially in non-Western contexts shaped by industry, colonialism, and commerce. Film is a vital tool for deconstructing norms and fostering transformation.

This study highlights practice-led experimentation as a key inquiry area, contributing to debates on artistic practice as research in film and media. Findings show theoretical insights emerge through cycles of creation, reflection, exhibition, and reinterpretation, challenging linear models and affirming art as valid research in higher education. This aligns with artistic research as praxis, where practical action and reflexive learning create knowledge beyond traditional methods. It also supports practice-led research, where creators pursue research through their art while engaging with terms like 'practice-based' research. The study explains how practice-based research produces new knowledge, focusing on artefacts and contextual analysis to validate insights.

Conceptual Tensions in Experimental Film Practice

Initial thematic coding identified four key tensions central to experimental film practice, outlined in Table 1. These tensions guide analysis, linking empirical findings with theory. The study uses detai-led descriptive data to explore how these tensions manifest beyond formal analysis, considering broader significance (Yazar et al., 2025). This inductive approach allows theory to emerge from data, aligning with sociological methods that seek underlying patterns across different expressions of meaning.

Table 1. Experimental Film 2021 Group Response

The experimental film emphasizes creative freedom, aesthetic exploration, and subjective interpretation.		
Creative Freedom	vs.	Rules
Aesthetic Exploration	vs.	Chaos
Subjectivity and Interpretation	vs.	Objectivity
Emphasis on Ideas and Concepts		

The four tensions should be seen as dynamic processes that influence educational experimental film, not as simple binaries. Creative freedom means reinterpreting rules flexibly. The tension between aesthetics and chaos shows that perceived instability is deliberate, challenging norms. Focus on subjectivity indicates a move from strict fact to experiential understanding, grounded in embodied engagement. Prioritising ideas over linear stories links these tensions, making cinema a tool for inquiry rather than just storytelling. These tensions give Indonesian avant-garde cinema a unique pedagogical and aesthetic logic, exploring identity, memory, and technology beyond formal radicalism.

Creative Freedom vs. Rules

Participants consistently highlighted that experimental film allows filmmakers to go beyond traditional narrative, structural, and aesthetic norms. Creative freedom was perceived not just as the lack of restrictions, but as a deliberate approach that encourages formal flexibility, non-linearity, and conceptual innovation. Some participants viewed this freedom as a form of opposition to mainstream cinematic conventions, while others saw it as a way to explore different visual and emotional

connections.

This finding aligns with Paolo Cherchi Usai's argument in *The Death of Cinema* that the digital era does not signal cinema's obsolescence, but rather its transformation into hybrid, post-institutional forms (Laura Seymour, 2017; Roland Barthes, 1977; Usai, 2001). In this theoretical framework, intentionally abandoning traditional cinematic rules is seen not as a flaw but as a strategic choice, allowing cinema to serve as a space for experimental research. Unlike earlier studies that were mainly centred on avant-garde formalism in Western contexts (Knowles, 2020), this research carefully shows that creative freedom in Indonesian avant-garde cinema functions as an aesthetic, educational, and cultural intervention in higher education and exhibition practices, providing detailed insight into its complex effects (Linds & Gee, 2023; Mohamed et al., 2022; Šuvaković, 2018).

Aesthetic Exploration vs. Chaos

Participants viewed experimental films as fragmented, unstable, or chaotic, but saw these traits as productive rather than flaws. This tension mirrors debates in postmodern aesthetics, where fragmentation and non-linearity are seen as meaningful responses to modern socio-cultural realities influenced by digital mediation (Ganz & Holloway, 2006; Jameson, 2005; Usai, 2001).

The study suggests that avant-garde aesthetics intentionally disrupts coherence to foster new methods of perception. It shows that aesthetic disruption is crucial in education, aiding emerging filmmakers and audiences in engaging critically with ambiguity, uncertainty, and indeterminacy, moving past traditional narrative closure and improving interpretative skills (Linds & Gee, 2023; Mohamed et al., 2022; Yazar et al., 2025).

Subjectivity and Interpretation vs. Objectivity

A second key tension concerns subjectivity and audience interpretation. Participants noted experimental films resist fixed meanings, inviting multiple interpretations and making viewers active co-producers rather than passive recipients. Some found this openness challenging, while others saw it as the main strength of avant-garde cinema. This supports Roland Barthes's idea of The Death of the Author, which sees meaning in how the work is received, not just in the author's intent (Laura Seymour, 2017; Roland Barthes, 1977). Furthermore, it elaborates on Usai's (2001) argument that digital cinema shifts authorial power to participatory spectatorship (Usai, 2001). Unlike earlier research, which primarily views audience engagement as sensory immersion (Meigh-Andrews, 2014; Ryynänen, 2022), this study highlights interpretation as a form of profound knowledge, especially in educational and curatorial settings, thereby broadening our understanding of the spectator's role in learning.

Emphasis on Ideas and Concepts

Experimental film is seen as a powerful tool for exploring ideas rather than just storytelling. This focus on the concept aligns with practice-led research, which views artistic practice as a means of generating theoretical knowledge. In this framework, meaning develops through exploration and experimentation, rather than in traditional linear storytelling.

The experimental film research process in Figure 1 links exploration, experimentation, reflection, and exhibition. It emphasises ideas and concepts as the main artistic forces, highlighting the importance of creative freedom and personal expression over strict stories (Budiawan & Martyastiadi, 2020; Šuvaković, 2018). Within the academic domain, this methodology serves as a dynamic experimental environment for the systematic examination of theory through active creative engagement. It functions cyclically, with initial concepts consistently reformed and enhanced through material interaction, audience feedback, and insightful curatorial mediation. Consequently, this process establishes practice as a fundamental locus

for knowledge production.

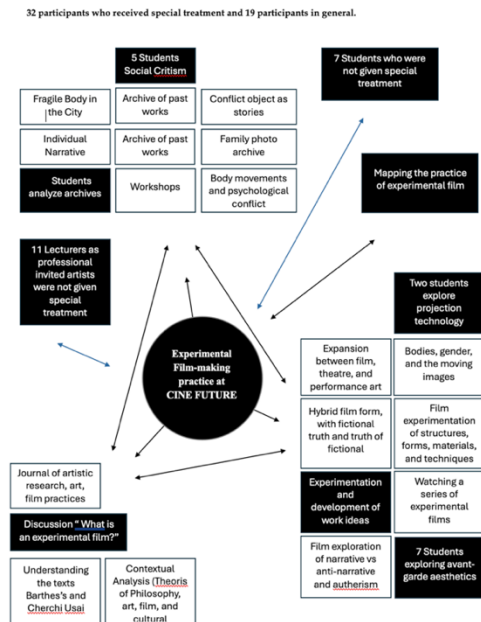## Experimental Film as Practice-Led Knowledge Production

Figure 1. The Research Process Steps of Experimental Film at the Cine Future Exhibition.
(Source: Author)

The experimental film research process, shown in Figure 1, includes exploration, experimentation, reflection, and exhibition. It emphasises that ideas and concepts fuel artistic creation, prioritising creative freedom and personal expression over fixed stories. This study's analysis of experimental film goes beyond aesthetic critique, framing it as a methodology for the production of practice-based knowledge. It explains how avant-garde cinema offers unique theoretical insights rather than merely illustrating existing theories. Results support artistic practice as a valid research form capable of producing new understandings beyond traditional scholarship (Alashari & Hamzah, 2022; Šuvaković, 2018). This aligns with current academic efforts to expand definitions of knowledge and research methods, especially in the humanities and creative arts (Budi & Ardianto, 2022; Linds & Gee, 2023).

Experimental filmmaking's cycle of conceptualisation, creation, and display encourages practitioners to engage with theoretical issues practically. For instance, balancing "Creative Freedom vs. Rules" is a practical challenge, not just a philosophical debate, and it is solved through artistic choices. Choosing non-linear narratives questions traditional notions of time and causality, impacting narrative theory beyond mere analysis. Art research views the creative process as a knowledge source, with the artwork as data and its creation as inquiry (Lopez-Leon, 2020; Šuvaković, 2018).

Furthermore, the practice-led experimental film in Indonesia fosters a dialogue between local culture and global avant-garde traditions. While experimental cinema explores universal themes, Indonesian practitioners often embed sociopolitical and cultural critiques relevant to their contexts (Alashari & Hamzah, 2022; Dragu, 2020; Low, 2018). This lens shows how practice-led research challenges and extends universal theories, revealing how abstract ideas take on new meanings in different cultures. The 'findings' are not just about art-making but also contribute to film theory, media, and cultural studies with empirically grounded, practice-informed views, proving the approach's academic rigour. For example, Indonesian batik motifs evolve by blending tradition and innovation through digital techniques, paralleling the experimental film's embrace of new forms rooted in culture (Ferdinanda et al., 2025; Yazar et al., 2025).

Table 2 shows that practice-led research in avant-garde cinema involves collective, dialogical inquiry beyond individual expression. Activities like archival exploration, simulation, and cross-disciplinary collaboration are vital for producing cinematic knowledge, grounding theories in tangible acts, and refining hypotheses through experimentation (Martins, 2020). Unlike traditional film research focused on textual or historical analysis, this approach emphasises process documentation, material experimentation, and audience interaction as empirical data, aligning with

debates that knowledge emerges through practice rather than observation. In Indonesia, this approach enables filmmakers to engage with local histories and cultural narratives that are often marginalised, capturing subjective and affective knowledge that linear models usually miss.

Table 2. The integration of Practice-Led Research, Research-Led Practice, and Academic Research

Application of Research Practices
Exploring archives and personal material
Experimentation with new techniques and media
Repeated simulation and evaluation
Interaction with cross-disciplinary art practices
Creative process documentation as research data
Identity and social critique through visual symbols and narratives
Exploring Memory and Identity Through Non-Linear Narratives
Personal and Familial Themes in Avant-Garde Exploration
Multi-Channel Installations and Hybrid Art Forms
Cultural Identity and Technology in Contemporary Critique

Archival and personal materials shape memory and identity. Experimental methods and repeated review encourage reflection, while cross-disciplinary collaboration broadens cinematic language, highlighting cinema's post-institutional character. Documenting the process yields data, thereby validating artistic practice as a form of knowledge production (Nevill, 2019; Patricia Leavy, 2020; Smith & Dean, 2009). Although Table 2 outlines activities, they are part of an iterative, cyclical framework in which theory, practice, and reflection continually inform one another. This study uses an Iterative Cyclic Web model, integrating various research methods into a cohesive system rather than using separate approaches (Lopez-Leon, 2020).

This practice-led methodology in Figure 2 illustrates the Iterative Cyclic Web research process supporting the study.

It views avant-garde cinema as a cycle of experimentation, reflection, and inquiry. Research-led practice guides creativity with theory; practice-led research offers insights through experimentation; and academic research synthesises these into reflective knowledge (Budiawan & Martyastiadi, 2020; Mohamed et al., 2022).
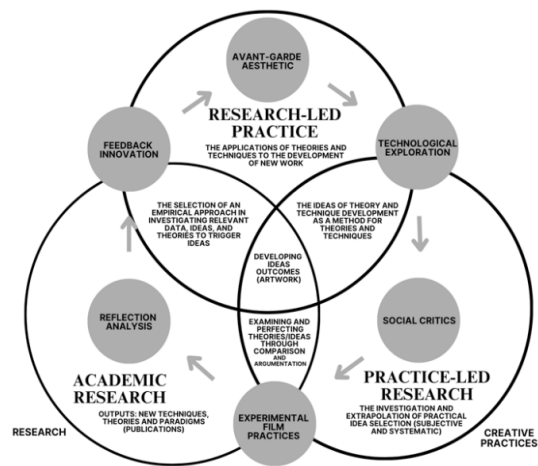

Figure 2. The Iterative Cyclic Web Research Process. *(Source: Author)*

Knowledge develops through repetition, revision, and dialogue, with findings evolving via feedback, curatorial dialogue, and audience interaction, highlighting experimental cinema as a living research space (Knowles, 2020; Zhao, 2023). This method is vital for Indonesian avant-garde cinema, where cultural identity, memory, and technology require flexible, non-linear models that capture subjective, emotional knowledge. Linear models often miss these aspects. The Iterative Cyclic Web enables re-evaluation and diverse inputs, validating culturally specific knowledge (Lopez-Leon, 2020; Usai, 2001).

Positioning this methodology as a research outcome emphasises it as more than just a set of procedural steps (Linds & Gee, 2023; Patricia Leavy, 2020). Unlike traditional film research, which separates theory, creation, and analysis, this model demonstrates how avant-garde knowledge emerges from continuous interaction among making, thinking, and exhibiting (Yazar et al., 2025; Zhao, 2023). This appro-

ach addresses critiques of practice-based research by showing experimental cinema follows a structured yet flexible logic. The cyclic blend of practice, academic, and practice-led research provides deep analysis while maintaining the openness vital to avant-garde experimentation.

The framework is both a method and an analytical lens for interpreting findings. It demonstrates how avant-garde cinema generates knowledge through ongoing negotiations among theory, material, and reflection. Unlike traditional models, where theory is applied after completion, this cycle allows theory to evolve during creation. Concepts like authorship and temporality are refined via workshops, exhibitions, and audience feedback (Iswahyuningtyas, 2021; Mccormick, 2013; Sendra, 2020). This openness is crucial in non-Western contexts, where rigid models often overlook embodied, affective knowledge (Djagalov, 2020; Ferdinanda et al., 2025; Low, 2018). By making methodology a research outcome, this study advances debates in artistic research, positioning avant-garde cinema as art, pedagogy, and scholarship.

Grounded in this iterative methodology, the thematic analyses explore how identity, memory, technology, and audience participation are interconnected in Indonesian avant-garde cinema.

Thematic Findings Across Artistic Works

This study identified key themes recurring in experimental films, underscoring Indonesian avant-garde cinema's role within film studies, cultural theory, and postcolonial analysis. Each theme links to existing theories and previous research, highlighting its importance.

Identity and Social Critique

Finding: Throughout the experimental films, a key theme was engaging critically with Indonesian identity, often challenging social norms, historical narratives, and politics. The works explored hybrid identities, postcolonial subjectivity, and critiques of power, both historical and modern (see Figures 3, 4, 5, 6). The cinematic language, including fragmented narratives, non-representational imagery, and symbolism, aimed to deconstruct single interpretations of identity, prompting viewers to question official histories and see multiple perspectives.

Theoretical Linkages & Comparative Research: This finding supports the view that artistic creation serves as a powerful form of social commentary and cultural critique, especially when dominant narratives suppress alternative views (Alashari & Hamzah, 2022; Low, 2018). Indonesian experimental films deconstruct self and nation, resisting singular interpretations. They align with Usai's idea of cinema's power to challenge established forms and meanings in the digital age (Laura Seymour, 2017; Roland Barthes, 1977; Usai, 2001). This is more than a stylistic choice; it symbolises resistance, preserving cultural heritage amid modernity (Budiawan & Martyastiadi, 2020; Knowles, 2020). Experimental film's ambiguity offers a nuanced social critique that contrasts with mainstream histories. Art archives deepen cultural memory and challenge traditional art histories (Wardani, 2019). In contemporary art, appearance often uses ideas and forms to boost personal or group identity (Fitriasari & Hares Kaeksi, 2023; Yazar et al., 2025), reflecting a parallel artistic strategy.

Works like Shelvira Alyya's *"I Show You The Red One (Si Merah)"* use colour symbolism, gestures, and text to examine feminine identity within patriarchy (figure 3). Aji Surya's *"Mang Ang Ung"* combines digital projection with traditional elements to explore cultural identity amidst globalisation (figure 4) (Usai, 2001). Annisa Faradilla's *"The Fragility of Humanity in Cinema's Body"* explores cinema's physical and technological aspects, linking cinema to memory and personal history (figure 5) (Downs, 2019; Ryynänen, 2022). The diversity of technological creativity in Cine Future is shown through works by Gan and M. Akbar (Figure 6).

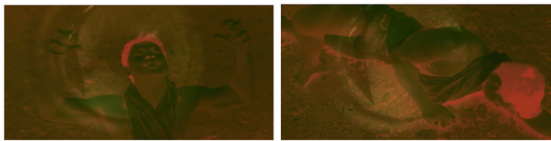**Figure 3.** Shelvira Alyya's work in "*I Show You The Red One.*" *(Source: Author)*

Figure 4. Still from the experimentation of Al-lit's work. *(Source: Author)*

Figure 5. Annisa Faradilla, "Human Fragility in the Synthesised Body". *(Source: Author)*
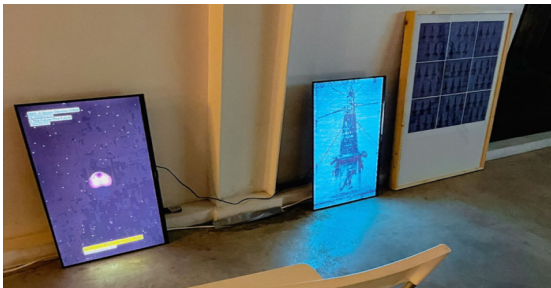

Figure 6. Gan and M. Akbar's work was featured at the Cine Future. *(Source: Author)*

Memory, Non-Linear Narratives, and Postcolonial Reflection

Finding: Numerous experimental films explore themes of memory using non-linear narratives, archival footage, and abstract time portrayals (see Figures 7-10). They revisit traumatic events, challenge official histories, or examine personal experiences of displacement and cultural loss within a postcolonial context. Disrupting chronological order highlights the fragmented, contested nature of memory.

Theoretical Linkages & Comparative Research: These findings align with debates on the malleability of historical narratives and the role of artistic media in shaping cultural memory. Usai's claims about the "death of cinema" and its digital evolution highlight how film can reconceptualise engagement with history and memory through non-traditional, non-linear approaches (Laura Seymour, 2017; Roland Barthes, 1977; Usai, 2001). Non-linear narratives embody Fredric Jameson's utopian aspiration by exploring alternative futures through a sophisticated engagement with the past (Jameson, 2005). This approach sets experimental film apart from traditional histories by exploring memory's subjective and emotional aspects. It questions linear history and offers a platform for symbolic reflection on transitions and cultural heritage (Budiawan & Martyastiadi, 2020; Djagalov, 2020; Knowles, 2020).

Works such as Kinandhi Ibrahim's "*Man in Black*" (Manusia Hitam) (Figure 7) use non-linear structures, repetition, and fragmentation to explore colonial history and cultural memory. Halimah Mimi's clay work in "*Why Me? "(Kenapa Aku?)*" (figure 8) explores emotional restraint and parent-child bonds. Alim Alghani's "*Human Sign*" (figure 9) employs digital projection for interactive cinematic storytelling, prompting active interpretation (Yazar et al., 2025). An example of personal themes, such as family memory and emotional closeness, is turned into interactive experiences that encourage viewers to shape the narrative rather than passively viewing. Made Virgi's "*I Breathe Life into You through Archives*" (figure 10) to animate personal photo archives, evoking early cinema and recontextualising it within a narrative of loss (Dragu, 2020; Ferdinanda et al., 2025).

Figure 7. Kinandhi Ibrahim's "*Man In Black (Manusia Hitam)*" Experimental Film Work. (Source: Author)

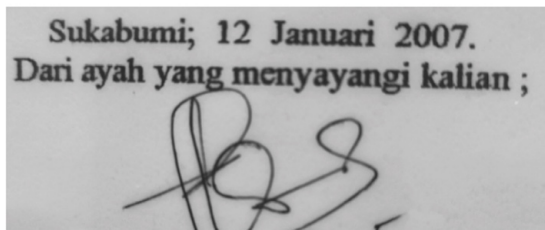**Figure 8.** Halimah Mimi uses clay in exploring her experimental film work "*Why Me?*" *(Source: Author)*

Figure 9. A note from a parent is presented in Alim Alghani's work "*Human Sign,*" which reads, "*From Dad who loves you.*" (Source: Author)
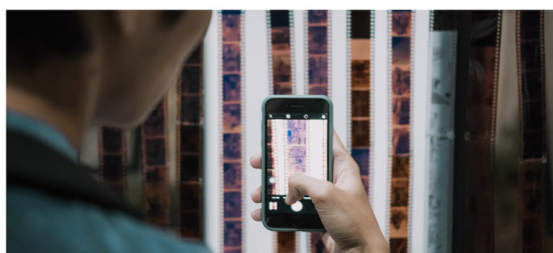

Figure 10. Audience Response to Made Virgi's "*Aku Menghidupkanmu Melalui Arsip.*" *(Source: Author)*

Expanded Cinema, Technology, and Spectatorship

Finding: Many scholarly works have expanded traditional cinema through "*ex-panded cinema*" concepts such as multiple screens, interactivity, live performances, and digital technology (see Figures 11 and 12). These blur the lines between film, installation art, and digital media, transforming the viewer's experience. Technology is used not just for novelty but also to critique digital media's influence or create immersive environments that challenge passive viewing.

Theoretical Linkages & Comparative Research: This aspect of experimental practice aligns with Usai's analysis of cinema's evolution in the digital age, in which film expands beyond its traditional form to incorporate new technological and experiential elements (Laura Seymour, 2017; Roland Barthes, 1977; Usai, 2001). The integration of diverse media and interactive elements reflects a broader trend of re-evaluating the cinematic apparatus and its relationship with the audience, moving towards a more fragmented yet immersive experience. This transformation in exhibition modalities and the role of technology can be linked to the changing landscape of visual culture, where digital tools enable new forms of artistic expression and engagement, much like digital methods are impacting the creation of ethnic and traditional knowledges (Budiawan & Martyastiadi, 2020; Djagalov, 2020; Knowles, 2020). The challenge to passive spectatorship re-emphasises Barthes's concept of the active reader/viewer, whereby the audience's interpretive efforts are integral to the process of meaning-making (Roland Barthes, 1975, 1977).

The integration of analogue and digital formats documents Hang Jun Lee's "*Why Does the Wind Blow?*" (figure 11), showing celluloid works in a digital setup. Lee's piece uses 16mm film and sound improvisation for an immersive experience that emphasises cinema's memory. "*Ein Drehbuch*" (figure 12), the author's installation, transforms a movie script into light-art text pieces, broadening the boundaries of film (Belasunda et al., 2014; Klich, 2019; Sendra, 2020). It questions the narrative emphasis in film, using tension to create

meaning. The installation invites viewers to reconsider the relationship among narrative, language, and visual art, reflecting on everyday story comprehension and the influence of tech and media. The author's installation practice demonstrates how experimental strategies are shared in education (Linds & Gee, 2023; Mohamed et al., 2022; Rumtini et al., 2024).

Figure 11. Documentation of Hanjun Lee's presentation of his celluloid works in digital format. *(Source: Author)*

Figure 12. The work of Erik Muhammad Pauhrizi, *"Eind Drechbuch,"* is an example for the students. *(Source: Author)*

Audience Participation and Exhibition as Method

Finding: Exhibition of these experimental films often became participatory, with audience engagement crucial to interpreting the work. This included interaction with installations and open discussions after screenings, where responses were considered essential to the artistic and research process. The environment became a space for inquiry and shared experience, blurring the line between artist and audience.

Theoretical Linkages & Comparative Research: This emphasis on participation and the exhibition as a methodological element aligns with the notion that meaning is co-constructed between the artwork and its audience, rather than solely residing with the artist, a concept elucidated by Barthes's theory of authorial

decentralisation (Laura Seymour, 2017; Roland Barthes, 1977; Usai, 2001). Furthermore, it relates to Usai's perspective on the redistribution of authority in the digital age, in which the role of the spectator is increasingly active and constitutive of the cinematic experience. (Roland Barthes, 1975, 1977). In the context of practice-led research, these participatory elements are not merely artistic gestures but serve as crucial feedback loops, generating qualitative data that informs ongoing creative and theoretical development. This approach extends previous discussions on engagement by demonstrating that the *design* of the exhibition environment itself can serve as a research tool, transforming viewers into co-researchers and making the reception process an integral part of the art-making and knowledge production cycle (Šuvaković, 2018).

Synthesis

This study shows that avant-garde cinematic practices in Indonesia go beyond aesthetics; they serve as a form of knowledge generation, challenging traditional cinematic and socio-cultural narratives. Examining "Conceptual Tensions," such as creative freedom versus rules, aesthetic exploration versus chaos, subjectivity versus objectivity, and ideas versus narrative, reveals core methodological and philosophical bases. These tensions serve as dynamic sites of inquiry, prompting reconsideration of the film's nature, production, and reception, fostering new understandings aligned with art as research. (Šuvaković, 2018).

Thematic Findings Across Artistic Works, covering Identity, Social Critique, Memory, Expanded Cinema, Technology, and Audience Participation, show how conceptual tensions yield valuable academic and cultural insights. These themes interconnect as parts of a unified, critically engaged practice. For example, exploring hybrid identities and postcolonial memory through non-linear narratives relates to creative freedom in breaking traditional storytelling and fostering subjective views

via fragmented aesthetics. (Jameson, 2005; Roland Barthes, 1977; Usai, 2001). Similarly, the use of expanded cinema and new technologies to foster audience participation challenges traditional notions of spectatorship and cinematic meaning, echoing Barthes's emphasis on the viewer's active role and Usai's insights into digital transformation (Roland Barthes, 1975, 1977). These artistic practices are also contributing to the maintenance of local cultural wisdom (Ferdinanda et al., 2025; Yazar et al., 2025) and redefining national icons (Putri et al., 2023).

This research moves from describing experimental film to using an analytical framework that positions artistic practice as a credible scholarly method. It correlates the findings with established theories, including Usai's insights into the evolution of digital cinema (Laura Seymour, 2017; Roland Barthes, 1977; Usai, 2001). Through Barthes's theories of interpretation (Roland Barthes, 1975, 1977) and broader concepts of cultural memory and social critique (Knowles, 2020; Low, 2018; Rath, 2011; Wardani, 2019), we have addressed a significant gap in the literature on Indonesian avant-garde cinema and enriched global art-as-research discourses. The study highlights how Indonesia's cultural and historical context influences and reshapes universal artistic concepts, offering a valuable non-Western perspective. Exploring experimental film as a form of knowledge production advances understanding of art trends, especially within a post-SWOT framework that examines new societal roles for art (Budi & Ardianto, 2022).

In conclusion, this study shows that experimental film in Indonesia is a dynamic space for innovation, methodological growth, and socio-cultural insights. It exemplifies practice-led research, demonstrating how creation can lead to new understandings, question norms, and advance knowledge in film and other fields. The results highlight the important role of avant-garde artists as critical thinkers and knowledge creators in academia.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that Indonesian avant-garde cinema is more than aesthetic experimentation; it's a practice-driven knowledge form. It analyses tensions such as freedom versus rules, chaos versus order, subjectivity versus objectivity, and ideas versus narrative, revealing their philosophical roots. These tensions foster inquiry, helping practitioners and audiences rethink the nature of film and leading to new art-as-research insights. The diverse works explore identity, social critique, memory, postcolonial themes, expanded cinema, technology, and audience participation, demonstrating their cultural and academic value. Themes are interconnected, such as hybrid identities linked to deconstructing stories and fostering interpretive spaces, or using expanded cinema and tech to challenge passive viewing, aligning with Barthes and Usai on cinema's digital evolution. These practices protect and evolve local culture and reshape icons in contemporary contexts.

The research moves beyond description to establish a framework that treats artistic practice as serious inquiry, connecting findings to theories such as Usai's on digital cinema and Barthes's on interpretation, thereby filling gaps in Indonesian avant-garde cinema studies and enriching global art-as-research discourse. It highlights how Indonesia's context shapes and redefines universal concepts, offering a vital non-Western perspective. This work advances understanding of experimental film as a form of knowledge creation, especially in a post-SWOT era exploring art's societal role. Overall, it argues that Indonesian experimental film is a hub of innovation, methodology, and social commentary, exemplifying practice-led research that generates insights, challenges paradigms, and advances film studies and the humanities, validating avant-garde practitioners as critical thinkers and knowledge producers.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

REFERENCES

Alashari, D., & Hamzah, Abd. R. (2022). The Role Of Feldman's Theory In Art Criticism: An Analytical Study. *Jurnal Kemanusiaan*, *19*(1), 36–40.

Belasunda, R., Saidi, A. I., & Sudjudi, I. (2014). Hibriditas medium pada film Opera Jawa karya Garin Nugroho sebagai sebuah dekonstruksi. *ITB Journal of Visual Art and Design*, *6*, 108–129.

Budi, S., & Ardianto, D. T. (2022). Trend in Art Studies Post SWOT Analysis. *Lekesan: Interdisciplinary Journal of Asia Pacific Arts Journal Homepage LEKESAN: Interdisciplinary Journal of Asia Pacific Arts*, *5*(2), 2598–2192. https://doi.org/10.31091/lekesan.v5i1.1600

Budiawan, H., & Martyastiadi, Y. S. (2020). The explanation of life experience reflection as ideas of artistic research. *International Journal of Creative and Arts Studies*, *7*. https://doi.org/10.24821/ijcas.v7i2.4658

Djagalov, R. (2020). *From Internationalism to Postcolonialism: Literature and Cinema Between the Second and the Third Worlds*. McGill Queens Univ.

Downs, E. (2019). The dark side of media and technology: A 21st Century Guide to Media and Technological Literacy. In *The Dark Side of Media and Technology*. Peter Lang. https://doi.org/10.3726/b14959

Dragu, M. (2020). Form and meaning in avant-garde collage and montage. In *Form and Meaning in Avant-Garde Collage and Montage*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429317552

Ferdinanda, Guntur, & Sugihartono, R. A. (2025). The Panginyongan Film Identity: Narrative and Cinematic Approaches of Local Cinema. *INJECT (Interdisciplinary Journal of Communication)*, *10*(2), 455–476. https://doi.org/10.18326/inject.v10i2.5078

Fitriasari, Rr. P. D., & Hares Kaeksi, M. (2023). Exploring the traditional ritual of Jaran Kepang Papat: context, heritage, and significance. *Dewa Ruci: Jurnal Pengkajian Dan Penciptaan Seni*, *18*(2), 167–176. https://doi.org/10.33153/dewaruci.v18i2.4896

Ganz, A., & Holloway, R. (2006). Digital cinema: The transformation of film practice and aesthetics. *New Cinemas: Journal of Contemporary Film*, *4*(March). https://doi.org/10.1386/ncin.4.1.21

Guntur, G. (2019). A conceptual framework for qualitative research: A literature studies. *Capture : Jurnal Seni Media Rekam*, *10*(2), 91–106. https://doi.org/10.33153/capture.v10i2.2447

Iswahyuningtyas, C. E. (2021). View of Strategies and Challenges in Conventional and Digital Film Distribution and Exhibition in Indonesia. *Jurnal Komunikasi*, *13*. https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.24912/jk.v13il.10033

Jameson, F. (2005). Archaeologies of the future: The desire called utopia and other science fictions. In *Utopian Studies*. Verso.

Klich, R. (2019). Visceral dramaturgies: Curating sensation in immersive art. *Body, Space and Technology*, *18*(1), 175–197. https://doi.org/10.16995/bst.319

Knowles, K. (2020). *Experimental Film and Artists' Moving Image*. Springer Nature Switzerland AG. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-44309-2

Kostopoulou, L. (2023). Intermediality in European avant-garde cinema. In *Intermediality in European Avant-garde Cinema*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/b23340

Laura Seymour. (2017). *An analysis of Roland Barthes's "The death of the author."* Macat International Ltd. www.macat.com

Linds, W., & Gee, T. (2023). *Studies in Arts-Based Educational Research - Workshop: The Art of Creative Inquiry*. Springer.

Lopez-Leon, R. (2020). Visual Awareness: Enabling Iterative Thinking through Photography. In *Journal of Visual Art and Design* (Vol. 12, Issue 1). https://doi.org/10.5614/j.vad.2020.12.1.5

Low, Y. (2018). Feminisms and Contemporary Art in Indonesia: Defining Experiences by Wulan Dirgantoro. *Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia*, 2(2), 227–231. https://doi.org/10.1353/sen.2018.0018

Manurung, M., & Daud Kameo, D. (2021). Creativity and its paradoxes: How the Indonesia movie industry can survive. *Jurnal Ekonomi Dan Bisnis*, 24(1), 27–46. www.ejournal.uksw.edu/jeb

Martins, F. (2020). *Memory and Aesthetic Experience. January 2020*.

Mccormick, I. D. (2013). *Community film exhibition. 1*(July), 1–21.

Meigh-Andrews, C. (2014). *A History of Video Art*. Bloomsbury Publishing Inc.

Mohamed, M., Rashid, R. A., & Alqaryouti, M. H. (2022). Conceptualizing the complexity of reflective practice in education. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *13*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.1008234

Nevill, A. (2019). Cinematography and filmmaking research: Reflections on a practice-led doctoral process. *Alphaville: Journal of Film and Screen Media*, 188–196. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.33178/alpha.17.13

Patricia Leavy. (2020). *Method meets art: Arts-based research practice* (3rd ed.). The Guilford Press.

Putri, I. P., Sos, S., Si, M., Nasruddin, E., Wahab, J. A., & Nurhayati, K. (2023). Rethinking national identity construction through independent films in the Indonesia creative industry. *ProTV*, *7*(2), 183–200. https://doi.org/10.24198/ptvf.v7i1.41905

Rath, A. K. (2011). *Contextualizing "contemporary art": Propositions of critical artistic practice in seni rupa kontemporer in Indonesia*. Cornell University.

Ricciardelli, L., Shanahan, J. O., & Young, G. (2020). *Undergraduate research in film: A guide for students*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

Roland Barthes. (1975). *The pleasure of the text*. Hill and Wang. https://doi.org/10.1086/595628

Roland Barthes. (1977). *Image, music, text*. Fontana Press.

Rumtini, R., Suwartono, T., Sulistyo, H., Sartika, E., & Ma'rufah, D. W. (2024). Seeing education in Indonesia: How movie represents inequality in Eastern Indonesia. *Panacea Journal of Linguistics & Literature*, *2*(2), 317–333. https://doi.org/10.59075/pjll.v2i2.345

Ryynänen, M. (2022). Bodily engagements with film, images, and technology: Somavision. In *Bodily Engagements with Film, Images, and Technology: Somavision*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003248514

Sendra, E. (2020). Video essays: Curating and transforming film education through artistic research. *International Journal of Film and Media Arts*, *5*(2), 65–81. https://doi.org/10.24140/ijfma.v5.n2.04

Smith, H., & Dean, R. T. (2009). Practice-led research, research-led practice in the creative arts. In *Practice-led Research, Research-led Practice in the Creative Arts*. Edinburg University Press Ltd. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780748636303

Sutandio, A. (2019). Cinematic representation of Chinese-Indonesians' trauma in Jason Iskandar's The day the sky roared. *Lingua Cultura*, *13*(4), 275–281. https://doi.org/10.21512/lc.v13i4.6000

Šuvaković, M. (2018). Fragments over

experimental film: Liminal zones of cinema, art, and theory. *AM Journal of Art and Media Studies*, *Experimental Film*. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.25038/am.v0i15.225

Tlostanova, M. (2017). *Postcolonialism and Postsocialism in Fiction and Art: Resistance and Re-existence*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Tsabitah, M., Lie, N. J., Magdawati, R., & Izzizti, N. (2022). Cultural Global Hegemony and Globalization: Hollywood's LGBTQ+ Impacts in Asian Film Industry Article Info. *Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, *12*.

Usai, P. C. (2001). *The death of cinema: History, cultural memory and the digital dark age*. BFI.

Visse, M., Hansen, F., & Leget, C. (2019). The Unsayable in Arts-Based Research: On the Praxis of Life Itself. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *18*. https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406919851392

Wardani, F. (2019). Finding a place for art archives: Reflections on archiving Indonesian and Southeast Asian art. *Wacana*, *20*(2), 209–232. https://doi.org/10.17510/wacana.v20i2.736

Yazar, S., Yörük, Y., Kavrama, Z., Çağda, D., Teknikler, G., Odaklı, F., Bütünleşmesi, S., & Tarihi, A. (2025). From Craft to Concept: The Fusion of Traditional Techniques and Idea-Driven Art. *Araştirma Makalesi (Research Article)*, *7*(2), 157–174. https://doi.org/10.54976/tjfdm.1717782

Zhao, Y. (2023). Research on Experimental Film-Based on Comparison of Experimental Film and Traditional Film. *Communications in Humanities Research*, *9*(1), 123–127. https://doi.org/10.54254/2753-7064/9/20231145

Zizek, S. (2000). *The art of the ridiculous sublime*. University of Washington Press.