The Voice of Youth - On Reflexivity in Young Filmmakers' Films

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English abstract

The subject of this article is the films nominated for the Amandus Festival after the turn of the century. It examines how young people present themselves in today’s society and how this relates to distinctive trends in societal development. Our analysis builds on an interpretation of contemporary society as hypercomplex and characterised by choice and uncertainty, calling for a reflexive approach. This is what we have looked for in the films. Films of this kind thematise the way young people relate to this complexity and have a creative and conscious relation to genres, and are thus an expression of the voice of youth.

Keywords: Reflexivity, complexity, film production, youth.
The subject of this article is the films nominated for the Amandus Festival after the turn of the century. It examines how young people portray themselves in today’s society and how this relates to distinctive trends in societal development. Our analysis builds on an interpretation of contemporary society as being hypercomplex and characterised by choice and uncertainty, thereby calling for a reflexive approach. This is what we have looked for in the films, as films of this type thematise the way young people relate to this complexity while simultaneously having a creative and conscious relationship to genres, and are thus an expression of the voice of youth. The main focus, then, has been reflexive approaches both regarding the content of the films and how the content is presented.

The Amandus Festival – a brief history

Amandus had its modest start in Haugesund in 1987 as part of the Norwegian Film Festival. There have been many changes during the lifetime of Amandus, but according to Trygve Panhoff, a former employee of Medietilsynet (the Norwegian Media Authority) and a permanent member of the Amandus jury in the period from 1988–2005, a main aim throughout these years has been “to encourage children and young amateurs aged 10–20 to make films”, so as to give them a better understanding of the medium and how it is used: “Theory is best learnt through practical work. You can’t learn what film is by reading about it” (Panhoff, 2007, p. 9).

The categories currently open for competition are fiction, documentary, animation, junior, music video, extreme sports and scriptwriting. Moreover, a professional prize and a viewer’s prize will be awarded, as well as an “Amandus talent” award offered to the most motivated and talented filmmakers. Since 1990, there have been two age groups only, one for participants aged 10–14 and one for those aged 15–20, and there has been a jury every year consisting of professional filmmakers, representatives of the Norwegian Film Institute and two young filmmakers. Panhoff says that “imagination” and “originality” are two of the main criteria that the jury applies when judging the quality of the young competitors’ films. However, a further essential point is that all the young entrants are to be taken seriously and given constructive feedback, with a natural corollary here being a formative aspect in which not least the jury’s comments are a key factor. The Amandus Festival can therefore be said to have reflected educational curricula from the time that the festival was established and developed (Erstad, 1997; Gilje, 2002). Panhoff also believes that this pedagogical aspect has been a significant factor in the festival’s growth (Panhoff, 2007), which has been formidable; from about 20 films entered in 1987, the number has risen to between 200 and 300 films a year in the present century.

Amandus has also had a variety of hosts. Following its initial years in Haugesund, the festival moved to Trondheim in 1994, in which responsibility for the event was given to Ringve Upper Secondary School. Amandus therefore became a festival in its own right under the title “Ringve-festivalen. Amandus”. In 1999, the Norwegian Film Institute wanted to tie the festival more closely to film and television education in Lillehammer, hence the festival as we know it today was established (Jonassen & Lindrup, 2002; Panhoff, 2007). Since 2001, Amandus has also had its own awards ceremony, which is shown every year on Norwegian television, and is an event with a clear reference to the American Oscars Award show and the more youthful MTV Movie Awards (Stordal, 2011). The Amandus Show, together with a range of film-related seminars, courses, film viewings and meetings between young people and professional filmmakers, means that today the festival has a highly professional profile.


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The Amandus Festival is part of a larger drive to make children and young people more competent filmmakers and conscious media consumers, though it may also be seen as being expressive of a desire to give the voice of youth a channel into society. Furthermore, the time of its inauguration and development coincides with a period in which there is ever-increasing interest in children and adolescents as independent individuals and creative participants in their own lives.

The position of children and young people in society

From the 1980s onwards, there has been a somewhat radical change in how the position of children and young people in society is viewed. A critical requirement for this is that they must be understood on their own terms, and that their experiences must not be conveyed via adults or through adult eyes (Thuen, 2008), which is clearly indicated in the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Amandus films afford a good opportunity to look more closely at how this position is expressed, though in seeking to identify the voice of youth in these films, we must also try to understand what characterises young people’s social context today in comparison with what took place before. As a means of approaching this, we outline below three different historical phases in social development, and by way of a more general background, it is also interesting to note how the relationship between young people and adults has changed from a longer time perspective. It is usual to date the rise of the term “generation gap” to the end of the 19th century, which was explained by the escalating rate of change with the emergence of modern society, as the transfer of knowledge and traditions from the older generation to the younger was “interrupted” (Øia & Fauske, p. 267). Young people found themselves confronting a society and challenges in which their parent’s generation’s experience was no longer fully relevant. Margaret Mead describes how they increasingly relied on developing their own evaluation criteria in their encounter with the new, as their contemporaries took on the role previously held by their parents and solutions had to be sought in the future. All of this served to displace power relationships in favour of youth, who assumed the new role as Mead put it, to: “lead their elders in the direction of the unknown” (Mead, 1970, p. 94).

The notion of the generation gap was reinforced in the second half of the 20th century, particularly throughout the 1960s and 1970s, with youth rebellions and generational opposition being a dominant topic in social and academic debates. Young people are now perceived as being culturally liberated from previous norms and values and as belonging to a free arena outside society (Ziehe & Stubenrauch, 1983). One interesting question is then what happens to this generational opposition in a society characterised by almost continuous change? Do these changes occur so rapidly and comprehensively that adult experiences from the past and present are not even relevant for the adults themselves in their encounter with the future? If so, then adults too are now dependent on a reflexive approach to the world about them in which their conventional ways of handling it and their value basis are at stake. The result may be a rapprochement between youth and adults, with a consequent obscuring of the boundaries.

But how do generational differences manifest themselves in the use of film as a medium and in the choice of themes? Despite the many common elements in their approach to modern society, it is logical to expect that given the lack of experiences gained by adults, young people will see many things differently, which will also be reflected in how they make films, in their choice of themes and in how they deal with them.
Features of today’s complex society

The Danish media theorist Lars Qvortrup (1998) suggests that societal development in general can be seen as consisting of three types of society: the traditional, the modern and the hypercomplex. This classification reflects the way in which each type of society observes itself in terms of, e.g. power relationships, social order, family, career and perspectives on Bildung. In the English language, the notion of Bildung is most commonly expressed as “formation”, but in an English context we have to bear in mind that it is marked by some educational traditions other than the original concept. “Bild-ung” is rooted in the German language, refers to “image” and can be understood as “Vorbild” in the English “model” (Müller, 2007). The Norwegian translation for this term is “dannelse”.

Both traditional and modern society observe themselves from a single defined centre (Luhmann, 1995). In traditional society, God and the divine constitute an undisputed centre, while modern society is based on the assumption of universal human values as the centre. Although these ways of relating to the world are now open to criticism, all three types of society and observational forms continue to exist side by side, and only gradually succeed each other.

The hypercomplex society is what surrounds us today, which Qvortrup (1998) also refers to as a polycentric society. Contained in this concept is the idea that society does not observe itself from one privileged perspective alone, but from many different centres, as what is experienced as real or true depends on our point of view and is subject to negotiation. In this type of society, Bildung will largely be a matter of form rather than content – of a defined way of relating to the world (Thyssen, 2002). A hypercomplex and polycentric society is also characterised by a high degree of risk and uncertainty, as everything this implies could have been different and everything can change. This situation arises from an abundance of possibilities and is defined by the term contingency (Beck, 1997; Giddens, 1990; Rasmussen, 2005, p. 308). For the individual, this means being continually obliged to make choices, while never being sure that the choice made is the correct one since there was always the possibility of choosing differently. And here there are no longer any clear role models to look toward, as individual and subjective reflections assume a major place.

The possibility of reducing contingency lies in an individual’s ability to think reflexively, i.e. to observe the world while simultaneously observing the basis for one’s own observations. An observation of this nature is called a reflexive observation, and is the reason why today’s society can also be called a modern, reflexive society (Rasmussen, 2005, p. 12).

By describing societal development based on three types of society and presenting the hypercomplex society as a society offering considerable amounts of choices and few clear role models, we have indicated an operationalisation of our approach regarding young people’s films.

The taxonomy of reflection

To connect societal perspectives, reflexive media production and a more detailed description of reflexive observation, we turn again to Qvortrup (2004), who has established a taxonomy of reflection based on various forms of knowledge from qualifications to competencies, creativity and meta-perspectives.

With reference to film production, the qualification level will comprise a factual knowledge of the film medium and technical skills, and in order to be able to use these skills in a defined context,
competence is required. This involves media producers being familiar with the requirements of the different genres, in addition to an ability to consistently reproduce key elements of these genres and expressive forms.

Neil Selwyn’s description of the new reflexivity in today’s society may help to expand Qvortrup’s perspectives. Selwyn distinguishes between “reflections” and “reflexivity”, which in our view could be connected to the relationship between qualifications and competencies on the one hand and creativity and meta-perspectives on the other. According to Selwyn, reflections related to the state described above of a modern society are characterised by common values, with a main intention being for people to develop “an understanding of their place within the structures which bound their lives”. This entails the need to relate to a set of universal values and challenge them if necessary, but to also find one’s own place and identity within this framework. Selwyn goes on to show how the approach to this situation increasingly assumes a reflexive form characterised by a continual negotiation and renegotiation of basic values (Selwyn, 2005).

Based on Qvortrup’s taxonomy, competencies can be used in new and other contexts than those intended, which is the creative level of knowledge. In terms of media production, this implies a conscious, independent and creative approach to the choice of genre and expressive form, which in turn calls for a reflected relationship to any break with genre convention. The film medium is used by young people to observe themselves, i.e. to make observations of their own observations.

In our view, this constitutes a reflexive approach capable of being developed to a meta level. Young people at this level have a more fundamental understanding of the medium’s function, which entails the ability to locate developments in media and technology in a societal and historical context. Qvortrup further argues that in a modern, reflexive society, Bildung is synonymous with reflexive Bildung (Qvortrup, 2004). Bildung is achieved when someone has learned to recognise the differences and relationships between the different levels in the taxonomy of reflection and is capable of critically observing his own and others’ positions in the transitions between them (Fritze, Haugsbakk & Nordkvelle, 2004). Based on Selwyn’s contribution and our own approach, however, we would like to relate reflexivity and perspectives on Bildung more clearly to creativity and meta-perspectives.

The film theorist Robert Stam has applied reflexivity as a concept within film analysis, although to a large extent, Stam’s understanding of reflexivity is restricted to meta films calling attention to their “factitiousness as textual constructs” (Stam, 1992, p. 1). Our concept of reflexivity relates to filmmakers’ observations of themselves as parts of society through the media of film. As a result, the meta film turns out to be one among other possibilities for a reflexive perspective.
Some critical remarks have been made about overestimating theoretical perspectives as part of film analysis (Bordwell, 1989), which is an important point of view that must be taken into consideration. However, we feel that the theoretical concepts have made it possible to see new aspects of young people’s films and to detect different levels of how to analyse and understand films.

The Amandus films

The point of departure for this study is the films nominated for the Amandus Festival after the turn of the century in the period from 2000–2011, a total of approximately 200 films. We have chosen to concentrate on the oldest age category, approximately 100 films, made by young people aged 15–20. We think that it is within this group that there is the greatest chance of finding distinctive features that typify today’s society, as the participants in this group are young people on the verge of adulthood. They are familiar with roles and organisations outside the family arena, and therefore have the experience of reflection in light of the different options that society offers. According to Thyssen (2002), this competence is not developed to the same extent within the safe confines of the family, and films made by the youngest competitors are not equally capable of mirroring social change.

Our study primarily concentrates on two of the three most established genres typical of Amandus from its inception in 1987, namely those of “fiction” and “documentary”. We have done this because it is in fiction films and documentaries that youth's relationships to society are most clearly expressed, though in animation films, most contributors are among the youngest participants. In addition, it appears that the mastery of technical skills has often been at the expense of more reflective content. In 2009 the festival acquired a new category, “extreme sports”. Although this category has existed for only three years, we felt a need to include these films as a source for our understanding of the voice of youth because the genre is a typical adolescent genre developed by youth, and is about young people's exploration of themselves through extreme sport.

Our analyses are based on our understanding of social development, the unique features of the human position in today’s complex society and the taxonomy of reflection. In the sample of the films outlined above, we have looked for examples of reflexive approaches, i.e. in the content of the films and in how the content is presented.

“Fiction” and “documentary” comprise a core, despite interesting variations in which fiction has partially been replaced or supplemented by other genres such as “music video”, “theme”, “horror”,

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<th>Knowledge forms</th>
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<td>Qualifications</td>
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<td>Competencies</td>
<td>Use of skills in a defined context – must be familiar with, and able to apply, genres and expressive forms</td>
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<td>Creativity</td>
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<td>Meta-perspectives</td>
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“experiment”, “drama” and “open class”. It is interesting to note that fiction as a separate category has been omitted twice. The first occasion was in 2001, when the categories “theme”, “horror” and “open class” were introduced, whereas fiction was also absent in 2004, replaced by “experiment” and “drama”. We have not undertaken any systematic study of the differences between these various categories of fiction, as we have mainly treated them collectively. There are indications that to replace the well-known genres and to use more open categories can encourage more independent and creative approaches to filmmaking. It is also interesting to note how this results in part from challenging the traditional fiction genre. The classical narrative is less clear, as the films become more experimental and philosophical, and the young people partly act as themselves. Hence, the distinction between fiction and documentary becomes blurred. The metafilm is also a clear alternative: the medium and the narrator’s relationship to the medium are thematised, and by applying the taxonomy of the reflection presented above, we can therefore discern a movement towards the creative and meta level. We shall subsequently return to this in our concluding discussion.

It is important to stress that our presentation contains no normative assessment of young people’s films, and we do not set out to judge these films on the basis of their technical quality and content; our main interest is in understanding how young people present themselves in today’s society. We have paid particular attention to what constitutes the voice of youth – how young people depict themselves through their own films.

Fiction films about choices and uncertainty

From the point of view of how films can be seen to express typical contemporary traits, it is interesting how some fiction films dwell on the question of choice while problematising conventional solutions and accepted truths. An illustrative example is Dybdeskarphet (Clarity of Depth), which was the winner of the fiction prize in 2006. The film primarily takes the form of reflections over the life and conditions of young people in current-day society. It hints at different levels, and at a relationship between a surface and something beneath. This is already indicated at the start of the film in the relationship between an apparently normal street scene and a more challenging situation with a drug addict selling the magazine =Oslo. The same ambiguity is brought out in the contrast between a scene in which the male protagonist is shown dancing to public applause and those parts of the film that give us an insight into his difficult life. The film problematizes life and living. There is so much to think about and understand that we do not get the chance to change what we have done. It is a constant battle, and there is so much pure chance that it takes so little for everything to go wrong. The last words in the film are: “Works fine – on the surface”. In the final scene the boy is lying dead in the bath, and an earlier comment hints at what will happen: “Life and death go hand in hand. Sometimes it would be better if everything was over.”
Choices and questioning the conventions are key aspects in Dybdeskarphet, and it is of some interest that this type of film seems to be well represented in 2004. As previously noted, this was a year without a specific fiction category, with an illustrative example of this being Oskar, which was the best film in the drama category. Here, it is not so easy to identify a theme, as the film is largely about moods. This is reflected both in the film’s poetic language and in its dramatic shifts from teeming rain to sunny weather and the chance of bathing. These switches are accompanied by abrupt swings in mood between the main persons, an expression of what it is like to be young, with emotions and opinions shifting rapidly according to context. At the beginning of the film evil is thematised, and we hear it remarked that rain makes people bad. The two boys speculate about stopping a tyrant, about killing Oskar, but a marked change of mood in the film, which is emphasised by the sun coming out, also brings about a change in the boys’ plans. They then decide that they “don’t give a shit about Oskar” and go off to swim.

In 2004, there were also films with clear meta-perspectives, though these films were difficult to categorise by genre since they contained elements of both fiction film and documentary. This applies to the winner of the experimental category, Til slutt så rablet det for meg (Finally I hit rock bottom), a film which reflects on making films and the manipulative power of the film medium. There is a constant discussion of the use of filmatic effects such as slow motion, voice-overs, music and images, and how these can be used to manipulate and create harmony. In this, there lies a general challenge to think about the medium of film as a result of conscious choices, as the film makes visible an awareness of the medium’s place in society that would probably not have been natural 10 years earlier (Stam, 1992).
Finally I hit rock bottom. Just before the film goes into black the director concludes: “With this black screen I draw your attention to me. That is the power I have as a filmmaker. There is always a human behind”. (Used by permission of the filmmakers.)

We see something similar in Filmen (The Film), which deals with the actual production process of a fiction film. It employs apparent breaks in the film’s narrative, or so-called *verfremdung* effects, when for example, the interview object in the story runs away with the microphone. The final product turns into a documentary film about filmmaking.

Difficult choices, uncertainty and serious consequences are emphasised in the fiction film *Little Norway* (2002), which raises challenging questions related to ethnicity, but from a Muslim perspective. At the heart of the film is a Muslim girl who has made a date with an ethnic Norwegian boy. This causes serious conflict within her family, in which her brother has a violently negative reaction, although the complexity of the situation is underlined when the father distances himself from his son. For the girl, however, events have fatal consequences. We see her swallowing pills, and the film ends with her Norwegian boyfriend finding her dead.

It is interesting how rapid changes and restlessness form the main themes in two films in 2010, but in different ways. In *I need a change* (2010), which was nominated as the best fiction film and for the viewers’ award, it is clearly shown how everything changes and how it can all be difficult to relate to. For the protagonist, this becomes an almost intractable problem and the film ends in resignation. *Transmissions* (2010), which was nominated for the professional prize, addresses change in a different way, firstly by giving visual expression to what is occurring and then by simultaneously suggesting new artistic possibilities. The film presents original angles and cross-sections of city life, as well as using images that are experimental and reminiscent of art photos, thereby giving an impression of new perspectives. Moreover, change and restlessness are omnipresent features.

The winner of the viewers’ prize in 2011, Snøkulen (The Glass Snowball), takes a different approach, introducing a scenario that is seemingly a fatal consequence of choices made. We see a world in ruins, with refuse and fragments of human bone strewn around, a situation typified by a complete breakdown, total uncertainty, aggression and lawlessness. In the midst of all this we follow a lone survivor, a little girl. The only bright spot comes from a glass snowball that the girl finds in the ruins, which reminds her of the last day before the catastrophe. It is Christmas Eve and she is unwrapping...
the ornament, and out in the ruins the snowball smashes, though there is still a glimpse of a smile on the girl’s face, and the film ends with a tiny ray of hope.

Another approach to today’s society is found in films that highlight negative traits and distance themselves from these, but point out more or less explicitly that it is necessary to remember, or return to, ideals and values generally held to be those on which society should be built. For example, we see this in the criticism of care of the elderly in the only animation film mentioned in the article, *Aftenfryd* (Evening Delight) (2009). The film shows an old folk’s home where everything is automated, with the implicit alternative being that we must make a better place for humanity and care, both of which are elements acknowledged to have been basic premises for the Norwegian welfare state. An earlier example may be *De nære ting* (Things Close to Us) (2002), which depicts development from 1960 onwards. Modern-day life, as symbolised by telephones and briefcases, is presented as stressful, taxing and lacking in humanity, and the protagonist collapses. The problem is solved when an IT professor destroys the cell phone network and people begin face-to-face communication again. These types of films succeed in expressing important social criticism, but allow little scope for new, uncertain and more challenging aspects.

**Subjective perspectives in documentary films**

With the exception of the years 2004–2006, there has been a documentary film category at the Amandus Festival since 1989. In fact, despite this gap, there have always been documentary films in the competition, although they have been listed under categories such as “open class”, “experiment” and “essay”.

The current more subjective discourse in the world of film, TV and the Internet has also influenced the classic documentary film in the form of a greater inclusion of fiction film elements and a much clearer I-narrator (Pedersen, 2010), which harmonises with what we have referred to as unique characteristics of today, in which understanding must be related to the observer.

An illustrative example of the more subjective voice in the documentary genre among the Amandus films is the film *Kampen om tilværelsen* (Fight for Survival), which was the winner of the open class in 2002. It tells the story of a girl with an eating disorder, who had been a healthy and active child, but felt she was being scrutinised and judged by external criteria. An inner voice persuades her to stop eating, and it starts by taking small steps. She drinks a lot of water instead of eating, does not eat in front of people, swallows and throws up. She shuts herself in and is always hungry, but cannot eat. The subjective perspective is made clear here by emphasising that the story is not dealing with a purely fictive person or issue, and the film is subtitled “based on a true story”. It does not concern eating disorders in general, but a specific case. The film conveys a picture of something throughout that is unique and personally experienced, as expressed in unusual comments such as: “Hate the taste of hungry breath.” An interesting point is that this is a documentary which has not been placed in that genre, but in the open class, possibly because it is seen as presenting a challenge to the more traditional documentary genre.

Subjective perspectives are often based on individuals’ unique observations, in which an objective approach would have chosen a more distanced position. We can see this applied in the documentary, *En råners liv* (Life of a Car Cruiser) (2002), whose key points are self-experienced and thus wholly individual events and observations. The representative aspect is not the primary concern, as seen in idiosyncratic views about a family future involving “weekend car-cruising” or “car-cruising to the
kindergarten”. The film therefore also allows some scope for contrasting the problematic or combative aspects of a car-cruising existence with a more conventional family life. Here, we see an illustration of how the objective approach modelled on the traditional TV documentary tends to be treated more loosely.

Further examples of how more subjective elements are being introduced can be seen in Bak lukkede dører (Behind Closed Doors) (2011), a documentary about the old Lier psychiatric hospital. The subjective view is emphasised from the start through the use of a handheld camera that takes us into the old, derelict buildings, aided by fictional elements, music and filmatic effects reminiscent of horror films. The documentary is otherwise based on the narrative of a nurse who recounts his own shocking experiences from the hospital. We get the impression that a perspective has been chosen, with a new look at the institution that deviates from the official view and an emphasis that there is no generally accepted version of events.

In part, we get the same impression from the documentary Livet under 1.30 (Life under 1.30) (2011), which tells the story of a girl with stunted growth. It is the unique situation of this girl in particular that forms the basis of the film, and there is no attempt to raise any issue about dwarfism as a phenomenon. It may be a matter of opinion as to how this presentation differs from earlier ways of portraying people, but what is striking is the degree to which the unique characteristics of this person are brought out. The individual perspective is additionally emphasised in the opening scenes of the film, in which a handheld camera is used to present the subject’s perspective.

We have noted a tendency in documentary films for the subjective aspect to be given greater prominence, with the traditional TV documentary beginning to lose its place as the sole and most influential model. Nevertheless, far from all the films deal with a theme of particular relevance to youth, in which young people use the medium of film to try to see themselves from the outside. In our view, this element is important if we are to talk about the voice of youth and it is something that emerges in films about extreme sports.

**Extreme sports – unique experiences and self-assertion**

The Norwegian film theorist Gunnar Iversen (2008) believes that today’s extreme sports films belong to one of the most popular subgenres within the documentary and body-oriented sports film category. The extreme sports concept appeared at the end of the 1980s, and is defined as “a [...] sport in which the participants expose themselves to greater risk than in more traditional types of sport” (Iversen, 2008, p. 4). In addition to the hazards involved and the risk of serious injury, extreme sports are by nature a kind of anti-sport, with few fixed rules and a playful, youthful urge for rebellion. Iversen refers to the 1994 snowboarding film Getting Some, in which “soul” is presented as the leading feature of the sport: “Individualism in the purest form. Be the one you want to be, live the way you want to live, ride the way you want to ride” (ibid., p. 5).

Through the narrative voice in the film Fri (2005), some of the hallmarks of extreme sports are highlighted: individuality, the sense of freedom (“the mind is free”) and creativity (“create something yourself”). In the film Overskyet Varingskollen (Clouds over Varingskollen) (2010), there is again a strong emphasis on communicating a sense of the sport’s soul and the filmmakers experiment with the medium, using special camera angles and detailed close-up shots. The sport’s risky and aesthetic elements are also emphasised through a marked use of slow motion. As with professional films on the topic, the mechanics take on a significance of their own through mood-creating close-ups of
skis, bindings, boots and ski lifts. Like the warrior’s, the details of the participant’s equipment become critical for life or death.

Even so, we believe that many of these films can be identity-forming for young people. In the first place, the young are co-producers of their own identity, with themselves in the main role when they tell a story which in form refers to the characteristics of the genre, often building on elements from the narratives of exemplary and professional practitioners of extreme sports. A second typical feature is the rather repetitive form, in which the participant keeps performing neck-breaking jumps. In a way, these repetitions develop a poetry of their own, in which the youthful performers defy the laws of gravity and fly through the air, often accompanied by music or a poetic voice-over.

While the classic documentary film is often interpreted as a mirror held up to society or as sober discourse, the extreme sports film does not seek to improve the world or to appear objective. On the contrary, it throws a subjective light on the practitioner and the aesthetic experience of the dangers he exposes himself to. The extreme sports film wants to give back to the modern citizen something of the risk and uncertainty that revitalises life and the world: “The citizen becomes a warrior of the waves, the snow or the asphalt, in the battle with the elements and oneself” (Iversen, 2008, p. 8).

*Menneske* (Human) (2011) can be said to represent the typical and unique aspect of this type of film. It offers a blend of magnificent scenery and action-packed shots of parachutes, off-road cycling, river-paddling and skiing. These sequences are cut together and the transitions are made at a rising tempo, with the growing intensity also emphasised by the music. The presentation is supported by voice-over sequences that contain much of the philosophical basis for extreme sports: “There will always be an emptiness in your life. Fill it with excitement, glory and honour”, ”A battle to win the victor’s crown, an endless battle against yourself” and ”When the ferryman is fooled and I fly, that’s when I know I’m finally alive.” The film brings out many of the spectacular aspects of extreme sports. However, we do not see it as being particularly concerned with a young people’s perspective, but rather as reflecting general values with a focus on the human need to test limits. It is also paradoxical that the “poem” is read by an adult, thus giving the impression of a god-like perspective.

The 2010 skateboarding film about creativity, *Ta til gatene* (Take to the Streets) (2010), is important. As presented by the filmmakers, it is about “finding new and different ways of skating”. The “Jibbers” spend hours and days practising risky experiments on steps and railings, usually ending the day with weary and aching bodies. Through repetitive practice they quest for the one, the unique trick that no one has seen before.

Young people’s filming of themselves can be seen as a way of observing themselves, and hence as a form of reflexivity. When they observe the world through a camera, this in itself implies a thinking-through of familiar ways of communicating. The novel communicative situation offers other settings and other possibilities for communicating, thereby stimulating reflection over the naturalness of face-to-face communication (Buhl, 2008). Through the many repetitions of physical feats in these films, the camera takes on the function of the young people’s mirror, in which they can study themselves and their physical performance from several different angles.

Nonetheless, we should not overlook the fact that the extreme sports film has also been established as a separate (sub-) genre with its own norms. This means that on the one hand, we find films that
adhere to the norms of the genre and concentrate on copying its typical features without really having a reflexive attitude to youth, the sport and the medium, while on the other hand, there are films in the competition that also attempt to tell us something special, in which the young filmmakers play with the conventions of the genre. In some films the young people step out of the film’s universe and explain why it is so fascinating to work with this, and in doing so, they come closer to an observation of themselves as young people in today’s society. We see this for example in the film, It’s what we do (2010), which is about freedom, and about working with natural elements instead of the man-made facilities on the ski-slopes.

Figure 4. It’s what we do. One of the filmmakers has just made a jump for the photographer. (Used by permission of the filmmakers.)

This can be both unique and spectacular, though at the same time this type of extreme sports film can be seen as an expression of the voice of youth, as these filmmakers convey a theme relevant to this age-group by being concerned with what young people do.

Young people with their own voice

According to Jo Sondre Moseng (2011a), the themes for what are termed “teen-pics” have remained more or less constant since this type of film genre first appeared in the 1950s. These themes include independence, love, gender, sexuality, group pressure and friend relationships, but whereas the teen-pic is about youth and is made by adults, we are concerned with films made by youth, even though they are not all about youth. Common to many of the films in the competition is in fact a desire to copy and master models such as mystery, thriller and horror genres. In so doing, the young filmmakers find themselves putting on adult hats, with the consequence being films made by youth but about adults.

As discussed in our introductory section, there are signs that the generation gap is changing character today since both youth and adults have to relate to so many of the same challenges arising from the rapid pace of change. However, in a hypercomplex society in which reflexive observations are a necessary condition for managing complexity, individual and subjective perspectives will tend to
dominate. Furthermore, it is natural in such a context that adults and young people in different phases of life and with different life experiences should also have different views of themselves and society. In accordance with this, the teen-pics analysed by Moseng differ from the Amandus films presented above. In the films about youth made by adults, the solution to the challenges experienced by youth is to struggle for more insight and finally to be able to establish an adult’s identity (Moseng, 2011b, p. 165). In some of the young people’s own films, there are no simple solutions of this kind, as they are not about becoming adults. This is in line with Thuens (2008) description of the radical change in how young people are viewed, not via (through) adult’s eyes, but on their own terms.

From an analysis of the Amandus films, we believe that young people are increasingly expressing themselves with a voice of their own. The voice of youth can be understood like films, in which young people describe important aspects of today’s society while these aspects are simultaneously related to themselves as youth. When young people deal with society’s problems by observing their own observations through the medium of film, their films become reflexive. With reference to the taxonomy of reflection presented in this article, we can say in general that they represent a transition towards the categories of creativity and meta-perspectives, as we have attempted to summarise in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competence</th>
<th>Creativity</th>
<th>Meta-perspectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is familiar with, and can use, genres and expressive forms</td>
<td>Independent and creative approaches to genres and expressive forms</td>
<td>The illusion of film as reality is broken – deconstruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is produced often within a particular genre</td>
<td>Transgresses genre boundaries and is often experimental</td>
<td>Transgresses genre boundaries and is experimental</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issues raised subject to genre</td>
<td>Issues raised often related to themes of being young in today’s society</td>
<td>Issues raised related to young people’s understanding of the medium in today’s society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often uses a classical narrator model</td>
<td>Non-classical narrator model</td>
<td>Meta-narration with or without a classical story – narrator and medium central</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often uses explicit roles</td>
<td>The young people “act as themselves”</td>
<td>The young people “act as themselves”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The medium and narrator are hidden</td>
<td>The medium and the narrator can be made visible through a subjective perspective</td>
<td>The medium and narrator are made visible by being the subject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young people with an adult voice</td>
<td>Young people with their own voice</td>
<td>Young people with their own voice – about the medium</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5. Young people’s films related to types of knowledge.

The creative and partially experimental approach applies to the type of genre and expression, themes and issues raised, which roles are central and how narrators are used. In this article, we have referred to creative films in different categories: fiction, documentary and extreme sports.

The meta-perspective is also clear in a number of Amandus films. By a meta-perspective in film, we mean that the film draws attention to itself as film and comes close to deconstructing itself, while the illusion that what we are looking at is reality is broken (Bergan, 2009; Stam, 1992). It is also important to stress that we have identified new trends based on a sampling of films that constitute clear and significant tendencies, which in our view are expressive of the characteristics of today’s
society. In contrast, the majority of the films studied follow a more conventional approach, in both fiction and documentary.

The taxonomy presented above illustrates a relationship between various levels of reflections regarding films, which might also be seen in part as a relationship between the way of observing in the modern and the hypercomplex society. In his film analysis, analogues, Stam (1992) focuses on a relationship between “illusionism and reflexivity” (p. 1).

The reflexive Amandus film – concluding comments

In this appraisal the main focus has been reflexive approaches in young filmmakers’ films both regarding the content of the films and how the content is presented. We believe that analyses of these kinds help to typify what can be understood as the reflexive film that relates to the voice of youth. The main characteristics of the reflexive film can be summarised as follows:

The reflexive film relates to today’s society, and attempts to describe significant aspects of this society, including the multiplicity of choice and extensive uncertainty associated with deciding what to choose. It also shows that society is complex, and that there are no simple solutions or accepted truths.

The reflexive film is an expression of the unique voice of youth, because these are films made by and about young people. These films also seek to deal with contingency by adopting a reflexive point of view to show different aspects of being young in today’s society. This is often accomplished by means of a more subjective approach, in which the camera shows the position of the young person among multiple alternatives.

The reflexive film has a conscious and creative relationship to genre and expressive form. As a result, these films often transgress the boundaries between different genres and between fact and fiction. Here, the fictional film is often closer to reality and the young person’s life than the documentary film, whereas conversely, the documentary film uses typical fiction film features in its communication of the young person’s reality. The young people often “act as themselves” as they tackle issues related to the situation of being young in today’s society, and are not role figures in genre films.

We can therefore say that in the reflexive film, the film medium is used by the young filmmakers to observe themselves – to make observations of their own observations.

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1 All translations in the article from Norwegian to English are done by the authors.
2 In fact the first extreme sports film appeared in 2005, with *Fri* (Free), which was about longboard surfing.