RICERCHE DI S/CONFINE
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Poor, but not lazy.
The screencast as a critical tool in digital media culture

Abstract
L'articolo esamina lo screencast come una pratica mediale significativa all'interno della cultura digitale contemporanea, mettendo in discussione l'idea che si tratti semplicemente di una banale registrazione dello schermo. Facendo riferimento a concetti teorici quali rimediazione e ipermedialità, lo screencast viene qui interpretato come uno strumento capace di rendere visibili i processi di mediazione, mostrando simultaneamente contenuti, interfacce e gesti tecnici. L'autore ne evidenzia il potenziale critico in tre ambiti principali. Nel contesto dei videogiochi e dei social media, per esempio, lo screencasting consente infatti di portare alla luce le strutture ideologiche e algoritmiche che modellano l'esperienza digitale; nell'ambito educativo, supporta le pratiche di apprendimento, i processi di feedback e lo sviluppo della competenza mediale; nelle arti visive, contribuisce all'emergere del cosiddetto desktop cinema, trasformando la registrazione dello schermo in un linguaggio estetico e in un campo di ricerca. Nel complesso, lo screencast emerge non solo come oggetto mediale, ma come un metodo critico e operativo, capace di interrogare i processi della medialità contemporanea e di ridefinire la relazione tra autore, tecnologia e spettatore.

The article examines the screencast as a significant media practice within contemporary digital culture, challenging the assumption that it is merely a trivial recording of the screen. Drawing on the theoretical framework of remediation and hypermediacy, the screencast is interpreted as a technical tool capable of making processes of mediation visible by simultaneously displaying content, interfaces, and technical gestures. The author highlights its critical potential across three main domains: popular media production, education, and the visual arts. In the context of video games and social media, screencasting enables the exposure of ideological and algorithmic structures that shape digital experience; in education, it supports learning practices, feedback processes, and the development of media literacy; in the audiovisual arts, it contributes to the emergence of desktop cinema, transforming screen recording into both an aesthetic language and a field of research. Overall, the screencast emerges not merely as a media object but as a critical and operational method, capable of interrogating the processes of contemporary mediality and redefining the relationship between author, technology, and viewer.

Showcasing hypermediacy

According to its standard definition, the screencast is a «digitally recorded playback of computer screen output which often contains audio narration» (Brown, Luterbach & Sugar 2009, p. 1748). In contemporary media culture, this form of video capture may also involve various devices, such as touchscreen smartphones or tablets. Yet in all such cases, a typical screencast concurrently presents three key components: the audiovisual content, which encompasses any recorded image, video, text, voice, or sound; the graphical interface, which comprises the visual and operative elements that mediate interaction between user and system; and the technical gestures, which include all activities occurring on the screen during the recording (such as moving the pointer, typing, zooming in, or opening and closing files and windows).

Considering this broader definition, it would be overly reductive to dismiss screencasting as a valueless practice. What might appear to be a prosaic action – namely, recording a screen in real time to obtain its exact reproduction – actually constitutes a significant operation within digital media culture, engaging with some of its fundamental theoretical frameworks. Firstly, as we will see, the concept of “remediation” (Bolter & Grusin 2000), which allows us to interpret the screencast as a prime example of “hypermediacy”, capable of illustrating the mediation process as it occurs. Additionally, the screencast manifests as a symptom of the “post-media condition” (Eugeni 2015), a phase in which traditional media lose their prominence as distinct objects, causing the boundaries between different devices, languages, and communication environments to become blurred. Still, the screencast is also connected to “convergent” and “participatory culture” (Jenkins 2006a, 2006b), as well as to “fandom” and “remix cultures” (Navas, Gallagher, & Burrough 2015), which promote and encourage the creation of derivative works, thereby fostering a dynamic and creative ecosystem. Furthermore, it represents an essential solution for daily data storage and management. Not surprisingly, our smartphones include a dedicated folder for screencasts, where the video recordings we rely on to produce content that screenshots cannot capture (such as video clips or navigational paths to specific information) are automatically saved.

This is why we should learn not to take screencasts for granted, but rather acknowledge the importance they deserve within contemporary mediality and recognise that they entail a certain degree of complexity. After all, if the screenshot – the closest relative of the screencast in the post-photographic era (Grespi & Villa 2024) – has been described as «the unglamorous drudge of digital culture» (Frosh 2019, p. 62), mainly due to its «technological easiness […] that doesn't demand any applied creative or visual skills» (Nešović 2022, p. 4), the screencast, by contrast,

can be interpreted as an elaborate and less “lazy” practice (Nešović 2022). Indeed, being a screencaster seems more challenging than simply taking screenshots, to the point that it may at times require a certain degree of technical expertise, particularly in the post-production work that typically follows a video recording (involving editing, the addition of graphics, visual or sound effects, and file compression processes).

Beyond that, it is quite common for screencasters to appear in their videos in various forms of self-presentation. As is frequently the case, in screencasts the authors can intervene with a voiceover, guiding the user through the content displayed on the screen; however, they may also choose to show themselves on video via a webcam, typically using a split-screen or picture-in-picture feature. Talking heads, full-body shots, close-ups of body parts such as the hand (typical in the so-called pencasts), as well as portraits recorded in a studio or domestic setting, can all be regarded as forms of subjective visual representation. These inserts do not necessarily enhance the viewer’s understanding of the information conveyed, although they are highly appreciated by users (Chorianopoulos 2018, p. 298). As a result, the screencaster can be seen as a content creator who performs a role and carefully stages the self, in line with the evolution of self-portraiture in digital media (Villa 2012): a scenario that nowadays, in screencasting, also includes multiple alternatives in place of a human presence, such as animated robots and virtual avatars.

Although it constitutes a more laborious version, it is precisely the screencast’s inscription within the domain of ordinary content – or within the realm of those “poor images” described by Hito Steyerl (2009), so pervasive in contemporary visual culture – that renders it particularly compelling. In the same way that poor images are technically degraded yet socially dynamic artefacts that expose alternative economies and politics of the visual, the screencast operates as a strategic instrument for analysing and deconstructing contemporary media production, prompting reflection on the critical function of digital remediation. Against this backdrop, the notion of hypermediacy proposed by Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin becomes essential for understanding the mechanisms through which this critical capacity is enacted. By simultaneously recording content, interface, and gestures, screencasts render hypermediated structures visible, thereby revealing the technical procedures that underlie them.

It is worthwhile to examine this aspect in greater depth. Unlike immediacy, which tends to suppress signs and traces of mediation, hypermediacy explicitly foregrounds the operations of the medium as they unfold, easing access to information and frequently presenting «multiple representations inside the windows (text, graphics, videos) [that] create a heterogeneous space, as they compete for the

viewer's attention» (Bolter & Grusin 2000, p. 328). From a more radical perspective, the fact that screencasting does not conceal mediation, but displays it overtly, requires us to acknowledge that this visibility is not simply self-evident: it constitutes the very content of the screen recording. As mentioned, in screencasting the process itself becomes central to the output, offering viewers a composite and non-linear mode of communication. Instead of producing a unified and immersive operational system that disappears in use, screencasting draws attention to interfaces that demand that users navigate a fragmented environment that, in Bolter and Grusin's terms, is «too obviously mediated» (p. 328). Significantly, they observe that «in the logic of hypermediacy, the artist (or multimedia programmer or web designer) strives to make the viewer acknowledge the medium as a medium and indeed delight in that acknowledgement» (pp. 334-335).

Building on these preliminary considerations, the following paragraphs will explore the use of screencasts as a critical tool in three primary areas of contemporary digital media culture where they are especially relevant: popular media production (particularly video games and social media); education (including online learning and media literacy practices); and cinema and visual arts (with a focus on what is known as desktop cinema).

What's Wrong? Deconstructing dominant narratives in popular media

«Today I'll be reviewing the mobile version of the famous board game Monopoly. I hadn't played Monopoly in a number of years before downloading the app, and what I'd forgotten (or maybe just never noticed) is that Monopoly is a terrible game» (Green 2009). John Green is an American YouTuber and content creator who, together with his brother Hank, founded the vlogbrothers YouTube channel in 2007. Initially launched as a video-blog project between the two, it has since grown significantly in popularity among gamers, boasting nearly 4 million subscribers. The video under analysis, recorded nine years ago, is titled *What's Wrong with Monopoly?* [Fig. 1] and consists of a four-minute screencast of John playing Monopoly against the CPU (Central Processing Unit)[1]. However, upon watching the video, it soon becomes clear that «Green is doing much more than offering a review of the mobile game» (Hobbs 2017, p. 173).

[1] Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L99xD5lBuV4 [2 April 2026].

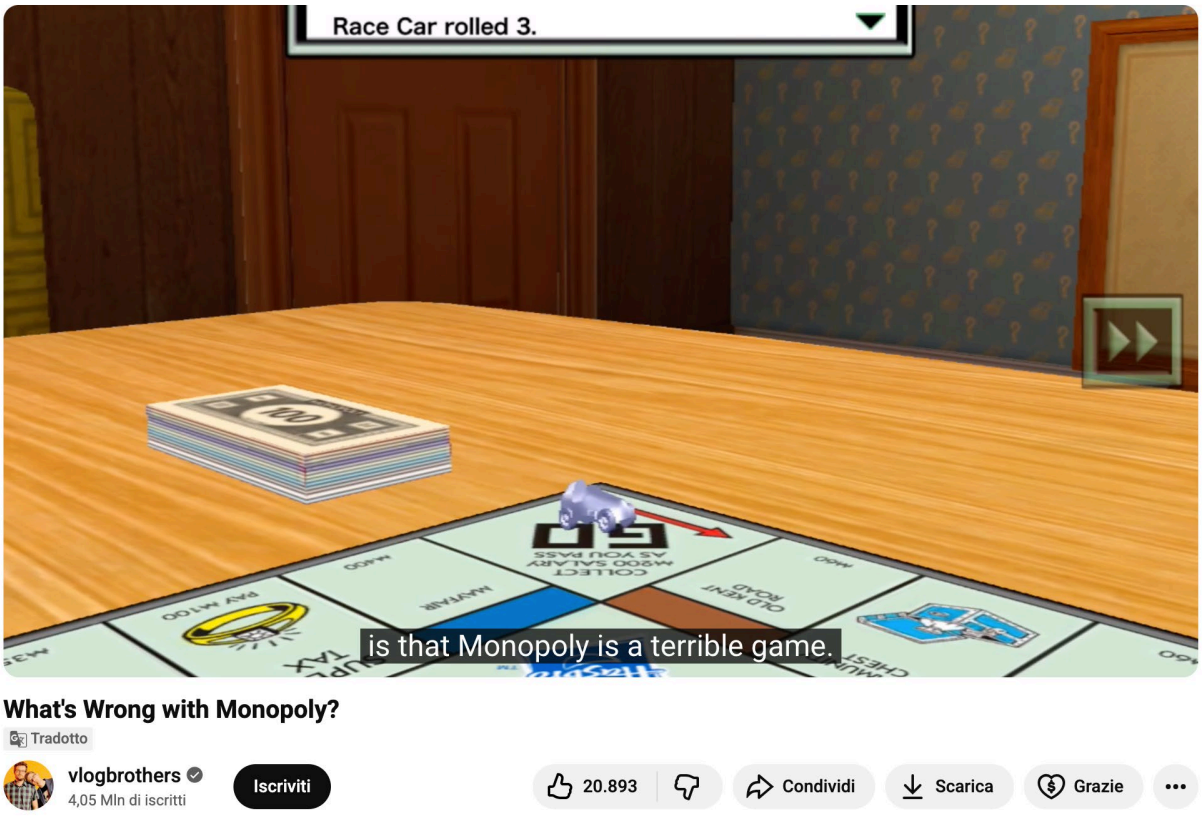

Fig. 1: A screenshot from the video *What's Wrong with Monopoly?*, uploaded to YouTube by the vlogbrothers channel in April 2016.

As evidence that Monopoly is terrible – precisely because it mirrors real life too closely – Green's voiceover accompanies the edited video, which condenses the gameplay into a few minutes, highlighting pivotal moments while tracing the origins of the game. His screencasting work uncovers several troubling aspects of Monopoly, which begins to appear far from a harmless pastime. The game, in fact, allows players to accumulate wealth largely by chance, primarily through the roll of the dice; it reinforces a culture of ruthless competition, capital concentration, and unlimited accumulation; it encourages monopolistic behaviour, driving opponents into bankruptcy to gain total control of the property market. Moreover, the game never addresses the struggles of those who lose or the reality of poverty, focusing solely on the success of the winners. Therefore, a game that is likely present in many homes in its board version, ultimately reveals itself, according to Green, as «a convoluted self-contradictory analysis of capitalism» (Green 2009).

A similar position also emerges from Green's gameplay videos, realised with other video games known for their violence and controversial content. For example, in the project *John Green is a Fortnite Pacifist* (2018), the YouTuber shares an

unusual experience within the acclaimed game *Fortnite* through a series of narrated screencasts, exploring the game while consciously avoiding combat and focusing instead on exploration, passive survival, and creativity. Similarly, in *John's Moral Journey Through Grand Theft Auto* (2015), Green employs the same technique to navigate the chaotic and morally ambiguous world of *GTA*, aiming to refrain from committing crimes or causing unnecessary destruction.

What can we learn from John Green's media production? First and foremost, it demonstrates that screencasting – beyond its widespread use in the video game community for sharing online reviews, as well as for creating works that blur the boundaries between cinema and video art, such as *Machinima* (Ng 2013; Bittanti 2017) – can also operate as a form of hypermediacy conducive to critical cultural reflection. As discussed earlier, the expository nature of screencasting, articulated through a visual narrative that is simultaneously interactive and accessible, enables viewers to re-engage with gameplay videos and reflect on how the most popular video games contribute to shaping contemporary worldviews. The critical inquiry that emerges in these cases is not necessarily directed at the games themselves, but rather at the economic, social, and cultural structures they express: structures that such games often unconsciously reproduce without the players' awareness. From this standpoint, *Monopoly* exemplifies how entertainment can mask ideological frameworks and developmental paradigms that demand closer examination. Likewise, choosing to embody a pacifist or non-violent character within games fundamentally built around survival through armed conflict produces an effect that is both unexpected and unsettling. This act directly challenges the aggressive and competitive dynamics inscribed in the design of such games, effectively subverting their conventional "rules of engagement".

Certainly, the use of screencasting in critical practices of cultural consumption is not limited to video games but can be extended to many other forms of digital entertainment. Consider, for instance, the pervasive influence that social media exert on our daily lives: how deeply they infiltrate our routines, and how difficult it has become to recognise and dismantle their inner workings. In this regard, the screenshot (Hayden, Carah, Robards & Dobson 2024) and the screencast not only contribute to the renewed circulation of textual and visual content within social discourse, but also serve as tools for deconstructing the rhetoric of the platforms that increasingly dominate our modes of communication. Prompting us, once again, to ask what is wrong with them. In fact, when adopted as investigative instruments that expose the operational logic of social media, screencasts in particular can reveal the less visible principles at work – such as opaque algorithmic programming, filter-bubble and echo-chamber dynamics, manipulative design and dark patterns, layouts

optimised for user retention, targeted advertising, sponsored content linked to past searches, user-profiling mechanisms, and various forms of unequal treatment among users.

A recent study specifically investigated this critical use of screencasting, employing it to analyse how TikTok behaves and to elucidate the deeper nature of its typical user experience (Faltesek *et al*. 2023). Researchers at Oregon State University participated in an experiment in which each of them created a “virgin” TikTok account, devoid of history and preferences, to observe the algorithm’s behaviour without interference. For ten days, at set times, they recorded sessions of about ten minutes, scrolling through videos and avoiding any interaction – no likes, no comments, no extended viewing. This methodological choice aimed to capture the stream of content that the platform delivers to a newly registered user, considered the “core sample” of the system. The collected videos were subsequently transcribed, described, and coded into thematic categories (e.g., comedy, life hacks, storytime, advertising) to construct a model of the app’s typical flow.

The notion of “flow” is indeed central to this discussion. Unlike the literature on TikTok that primarily focuses on content or user networks, the authors of this study suggest a shift in perspective. By applying a concept initially formulated by Raymond Williams (1974) to analyse another popular medium (television), they note that flow does not pertain to a single broadcast (or, in the case of TikTok, a single video). Instead, it refers to the continuous engagement created by the programmed sequencing of content. The uninterrupted recording enabled by screencasting, deployed here as an analytical tool for media research, makes it possible to visualise this dynamic media logic with particular clarity. Therefore, the use of the screencast demonstrates, on the one hand, that TikTok does not privilege bonds of friendship, collaborative communities, or continuity between offline and online worlds. On the other hand, it shows that the impersonal continuum regulated by algorithmic arbitrariness organises videos in such a way as to sustain attention, offering a mode of entertainment comparable to channel surfing on analogue television or to the late-night flow of sketches, commercials, and variety shows.

In other words, the screencast analysis challenges «the theory that TikTok is a connected mimetic social network. Mimesis in this sense seems much closer to using a format provided by an editing suite, than riffing with friends» (Faltesek *et al.* 2023, p. 7). This indicates that the TikTok user experience may appear innovative only to those who, like generations raised on on-demand streaming, «have never had access to an analog channel-changing experience» (p. 10) – suggesting that users belonging to these generations have developed only a partial understanding of the platform’s operability, despite devoting a substantial portion of their daily time to it.

On learning. Screencasting in digital media literacy and online teaching

Their simplicity and effectiveness in explaining “how-to” situations (Kawaf 2019) have made screencasts particularly widespread in virtual learning environments. Over time, video tutorials – especially those created to demonstrate software operations – have become the dominant media format in this context. By recording the experience of using software directly from a content creator’s screen, users are guided step by step through the exploration process and acquire skills more easily. After all, it is well established that many computer users who need to become familiar with new software prefer watching a recorded demonstration to reading an instruction manual (Swarts 2012, pp. 197-198).

The use of screencasting has also proven to be fundamentally important in the broader field of education, as demonstrated by its applicability to the creation of MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses), e-learning programs, and lessons or meetings conducted on online platforms (Kılıçkaya 2016). In this framework, many forms of distance learning underwent rapid expansion during the COVID-19 pandemic. Over that period, the health emergency inevitably redefined the relationship between teachers and students within the digital sphere, and teaching had to develop new modes of delivery, engagement, and archiving (Sedghi *et al*. 2023). It was precisely in that phase that screencasting practices firmly established themselves as a strategic resource for remote teaching. At a time when the learning environment had shifted entirely into the digital space, the ability to navigate it critically and effectively became an essential skill. Screencasts responded to this need, becoming an educational method that students themselves «strongly recommend» (p. 44).

In fact, screencasts proved to be not only effective for transmitting content but also essential in enabling teachers to guide students in understanding digital processes and environments. Screencasting, therefore, offered a form of teaching that was not only content-based and designed to clarify concepts, but also meta-reflective, concerned with how those concepts are conveyed. As students became increasingly oriented toward developing digital competencies, screencasts helped them become more digitally aware users, promoting both synchronous and asynchronous learning practices and making possible an inclusive approach adaptable to different cognitive rhythms and heterogeneous access conditions. However, the extensive use of screencasts during the health emergency also contributed to redefining the teacher’s role: no longer merely a transmitter of content, but also a technological mediator capable of translating the logic of knowledge into digital media languages.

It is worth noting that, even before the pandemic, screencasting had already proven to be a valuable ally in the context of digital learning, developing effective and innovative forms of media literacy (Hobbs 2011; Buckingham 2019; Potter 2021). Media literacy is a fundamental skill that allows individuals to examine their daily interactions with media critically: not only by understanding its intrinsic functioning, appreciating its virtues, and evaluating its risks; but also by learning how to use media as operational tools and by actively participating in media culture through the conscious production of self-created content (videos, posts, articles, podcasts). In summary, being literate in media use means not being subjected to their logic, but rather interpreting and appropriating them responsibly. This becomes even more relevant in the educational field, particularly concerning those who, due to a simplification that often leads to a misunderstanding, are commonly but inappropriately defined as "digital natives" (Boyd 2014, p. 176).

A significant example of how screencasting can contribute to the development of digital literacy, particularly among younger users, is the *Screencasting & Critical Analysis* project[2] (2015) promoted by the Media Education Lab, a public-benefit organisation founded in 2003 by Renee Hobbs that advances media literacy education through leadership training, academic research, scholarly publications, and community engagement. This specific project was implemented in educational settings with the aim of fostering students' analytical skills by examining an Irish television commercial released in the same year by McDonald's, titled *The Realm of Happiness*. Drawing on the foundational questions of media literacy – Who created the message, and for what purpose? Which techniques were employed to capture the viewer's attention? What values are represented or excluded? How might different audiences interpret the message in divergent ways? – instructors guided students in developing a deconstructive interpretation of the advertisement, culminating in the production of a series of original videos.

Through the use of screencasting, students recorded specific visual sequences from the McDonald's commercial and reworked them using multimodal practices with Screencast-O-Matic, a widely used and highly user-friendly screencasting software. By integrating oral commentary, modifying the flow of images, superimposing textual elements, and carrying out symbolic editing operations, screencasting enabled students to construct meaningful counter-narratives from an existing media text. The outcomes were often remarkable, both for their originality and for the level of critical awareness demonstrated [Fig. 2].

[2] Available at: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLco-85JPbPYTFns_Y8We24ys1s09VvtKi [2 April 2026].

Viewed in this light, the McDonald's advertisement – initially portraying the fast-food chain as a magical and enchanted "realm" for families – was, for example, remixed by incorporating images of identities excluded from the original narrative (such as individuals who are not white, not slender, or not considered conventionally attractive), reinterpreted from the viewpoint of a single mother (thus challenging the idealised model of the nuclear family promoted by the company as its preferred consumer target), or even visually compared to *Pinocchio*, the well-known fairy tale about a wooden puppet (traditionally associated with falsehood and deception).

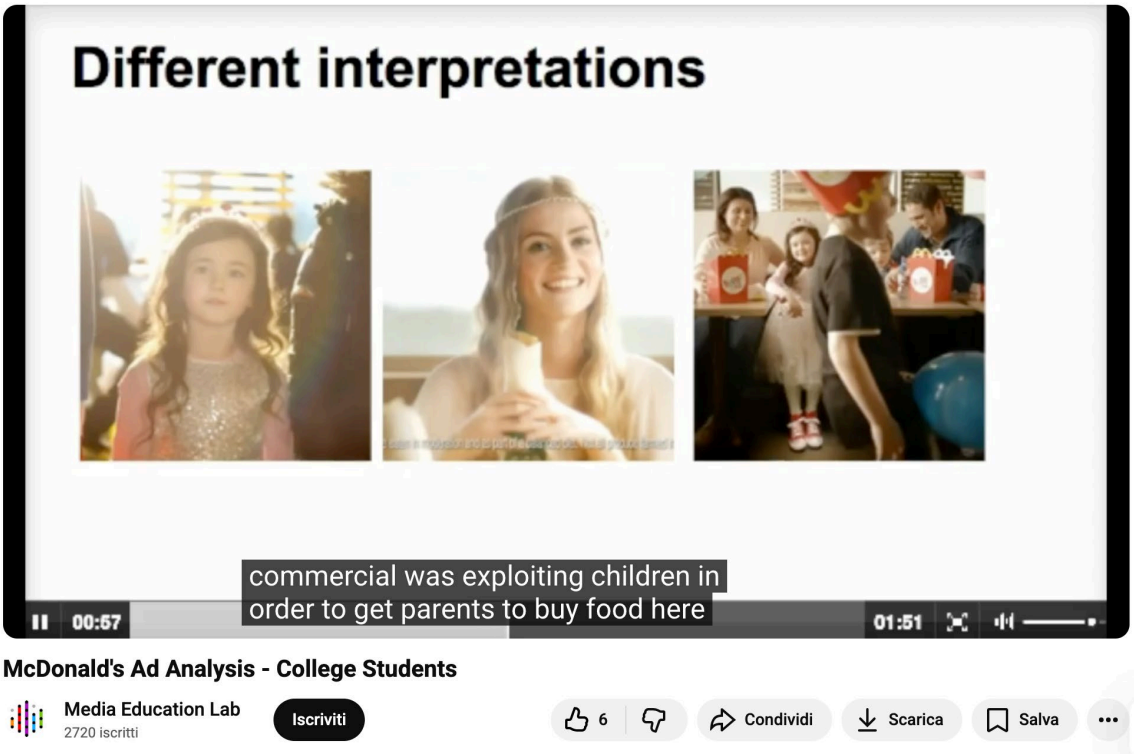

Fig. 2: A screenshot from the video *McDonald's Ad Analysis – College Students,* uploaded to YouTube by Renee Hobbs in August 2015.

Nevertheless, any analysis of the crucial role that screencasting has acquired within digital teaching practices would remain incomplete without addressing the evaluative dimension – namely, the choice by teachers and educators to provide feedback on students' assignments through video recordings (Bahula & Kay 2021). Screencasting, which combines the computer screen with synchronous audio narration, permits students to integrate the visually oriented feedback they receive with oral commentary.

Several international studies investigating the assessment of tasks designed to evaluate both writing (Bush 2021; Inan-Karagul & Seker 2021) and mathematical

skills (Bjerknes, Opdal & Canrinus 2023) have demonstrated that this modality transcends the limitations inherent in traditional written feedback, which is often perceived as impersonal or insufficiently transparent. Screencasting, by contrast, cultivates a more empathetic and comprehensible mode of communication. The integration of voice and visual elements enables instructors to guide learners systematically through the revision process, illustrating errors, potential improvements, and corrective strategies. This process mitigates the risk of misinterpretation and re-establishes a sense of dialogue, even within distance learning contexts. Furthermore, screencast-based feedback supports learners' self-regulation within an asynchronous temporal arrangement: students may revisit explanations, pause them, take notes, and thereby internalise the corrective process with greater efficacy.

More systematic reviews, comparing screencast feedback with traditional written feedback, have indicated that evidence concerning the actual effectiveness of this procedure remains inconclusive (Penn & Brown 2022). Moreover, although the use of screencasting appears to benefit students, it entails additional demands on instructors – including greater time investment, the development of digital competencies, and the adoption of less conventional teaching methodologies. Nonetheless, it is difficult to deny that, by fostering more engaging interaction between instructors and learners and promoting deeper, more personalised learning, the use of screencasting supports an innovative educational approach: oriented not merely towards assessment, but also towards personal growth and the cultivation of digital literacy.

Screencasting and visual arts. Desktop cinema between screenlife, video-essay and documentary

At the 2013 Toronto International Film Festival, *Noah*, a short directed by film students Walter Woodman and Patrick Cederberg, was screened[3]. The premise seems quite ordinary: a teenage couple experiences a breakup; sensing emotional distance, the boy confides in a friend and tries to find out whether his girlfriend is interested in someone else. What sets the film apart, however, is not the story itself but its mode of storytelling, as the entire narrative unfolds through the interface of the protagonist's computer. Instead of physical bodies or tangible settings, the film takes place within Facebook timelines, Skype calls, YouTube windows, Spotify playlists, chats, and search engines [Fig. 3].

[3] Available at: https://vimeo.com/65935223 [2 April 2026].

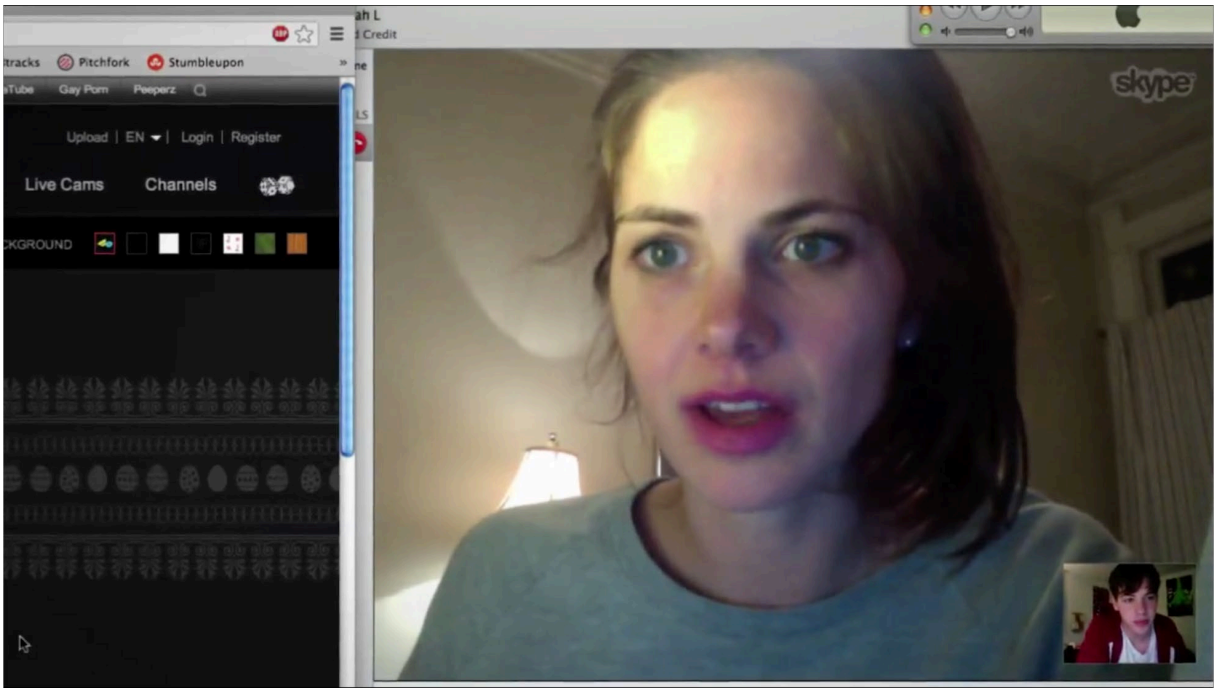

Fig. 3: A screenshot from the film *Noah,* uploaded to Vimeo by Patrick Cederberg in May 2013.

The mouse pointer, gliding across the desktop, becomes the narrative's anchor, shaping the pace of the story and implicitly expressing hesitation, anxiety, and impulsive choices. *Noah* thus captures how, in the age of digital platforms and social media, personal identity and public exposure emerge within technologically mediated dynamics, where each interaction helps construct (or destabilise) affective bonds. But thanks to its experimental design, Woodman and Cederberg's work also condenses, within the brevity of its 18 minutes, the profound shifts resulting from the incorporation of screencasting into a filmic format.

Noah, insofar as it assumes a different orientation from films that use the camera to frame the external world, rejects the conception of the screen as a window in the Albertian sense. Instead, it treats this visual surface as a functional workplace – or a "scrapbook" (Casetti 2015, p. 168) – hosting multiple windows that operate as constitutive elements of a graphical user interface. In this way, the short film rethinks cinema's connection with the language of digital media, organising not so much the temporal unfolding of a story as a spatial and navigable arrangement of data, folders, and applications (Manovich 2001). This configuration also produces a different performativity of bodies: those of the actors, whose gestures are no longer perceived directly but only through their effects on the screen (Ugenti 2021); and those of the spectators, since the viewing experience established by the film implies a user-to-

user mode of spectatorship rather than the traditional spectator-to-character relationship underpinning cinema (Tuan 2020).

Therefore, *Noah* can be regarded as one of the first works to fully adopt the language of "desktop cinema" (De Rosa 2024): an expression that designates an aesthetic form closely connected to the practice of screencasting, thus transforming a technical procedure into a cinematic language. This language was later popularised for a wider audience through the "screenlife" genre. For instance, *Host* (Rob Savage, 2020) – a horror movie that transposes the intuition first explored in *Unfriended* (Levan Gabriadze, 2014) into the context of the pandemic – takes place entirely on a computer screen during a Zoom call among friends who, while in lockdown, participate in an online séance. Conversely, in *Searching* (Aneesh Chaganty, 2018), a father desperately looks for his missing daughter by navigating her computer: he opens emails, inspects files, accesses livestreams, creates fake profiles, and consults Google Calendar and YouTube, treating the girl's desktop simultaneously as a life archive and an investigative field.

Alongside an entertainment-oriented logic, desktop cinema also develops an alternative model, informed by more documentary, artistic, essayistic, and reflective modes of filmmaking. In this sense, distancing itself from the commercial rationale typical of fictional screenlife and aligning more closely with the video-essay approach (Grant, Keathley & Mittell 2019), desktop cinema becomes «a critical response to the options offered by technology and the graphic interface it employs», responding «to the easy sampling and exacerbated decontextualisation present in contemporary visual cultures» (De Rosa 2024, p. 35). Within this lens, the computer desktop is no longer conceived as a digital space in which fictional events take place, but rather as a visual laboratory where screencasting articulates its own critical inquiry.

From an artistic perspective, *Grosse Fatigue* (Camille Henrot, 2013) holds primary significance (De Rosa 2024). Presented in a prestigious context such as the 55th Venice Biennale, the work was awarded the Silver Lion. Created during the period in which the artist had access to the collections of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., the piece seeks to narrate, in a condensed and symbolic form, the creation and evolution of the Universe. While the voice-over (narrated by multimedia artist Akwetey Orraca-Tetteh) delivers a text in the performative style of spoken-word poetry, archival images (museum artefacts, images of animal and plant species, natural environments, cosmological visualisations) appear sequentially on the desktop screen. This compositional practice appears to rethink montage logic, redesigning the juxtaposition of materials with the use of screencasting. Through this strategy, Henrot constructs a visual and, above all, mental map in which, according to renewed principles of a screen-based museification, an encyclopedic desire for

possession coexists with the fatigue induced by the cognitive overload that pervades contemporary visual culture.

Exploring the documentary side of desktop cinema leads to the theoretical and artistic work of Kevin B. Lee, a media scholar and pioneer of the "desktop documentary" (Lee 2023). Among his works, the seminal video essay *Transformers: The Premake* (2014) stands out as a true milestone of the genre[4]. Starting from the trailer of *Transformers: Age of Extinction* (Michael Bay, 2014), Lee presents scenes from the film but, through screencasting, places them in dialogue with a vast amount of amateur footage uploaded online, which, together with blogs, maps, and social media feeds, reveals various factors of the film's production process [Fig. 4].

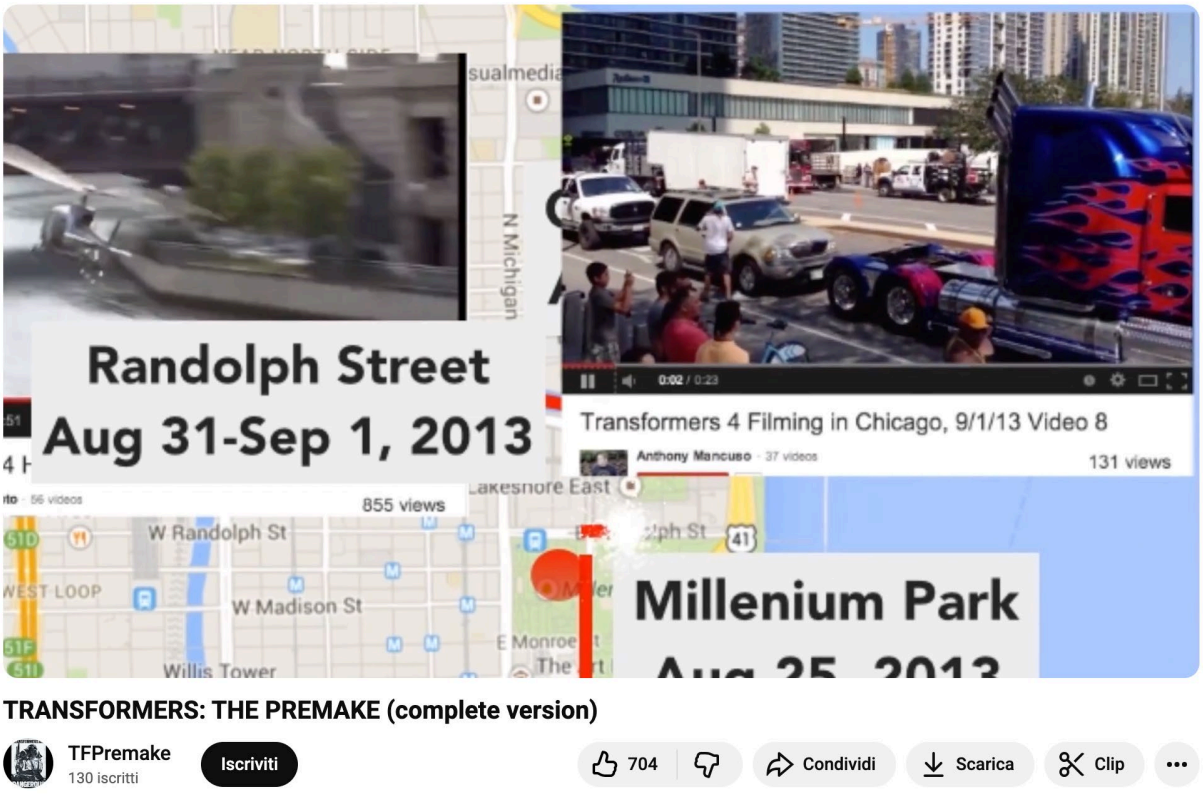

Fig. 4: A screenshot from the video *Transformers: the Premake,* uploaded to YouTube by the TFPremake channel in June 2014.

The result is a metacinematic deconstruction of Bay's blockbuster that sheds light on aspects largely overlooked by the public, such as economic agreements, marketing strategies, and diplomatic and commercial relations. By simulating elements of cinematic language (zooms, pans, editing techniques) within a digital desktop environment, the act of documentary direction overlaps with – and ultimately

[4] Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dD3K1eWXI54 [2 April 2026].

coincides with – the act of research (Lee 2015). *Transformers: The Premake* thus becomes a reflection on mainstream cinema, on the role of spectators as content creators, and on the politics of the image.

Finally, on a more auteur-driven, intimate, and personal level, a central work is *Watching the Pain of Others* (Chloé Galibert-Laîné, 2019)[5]. A refined example of "netnographic cinema" (Galibert-Laîné 2020), the film emerges as a response to the documentary *The Pain of Others* (Penny Lane, 2018), in which several women recount, on YouTube, a mysterious condition known as Morgellons disease. Galibert-Laîné records her own desktop and webcam video while watching Lane's documentary; in doing so, she exposes herself, on the one hand, as a first-person spectator-body implicated in the viewing, revealing an uncertainty that appears to oscillate constantly between empathy and suspicion.

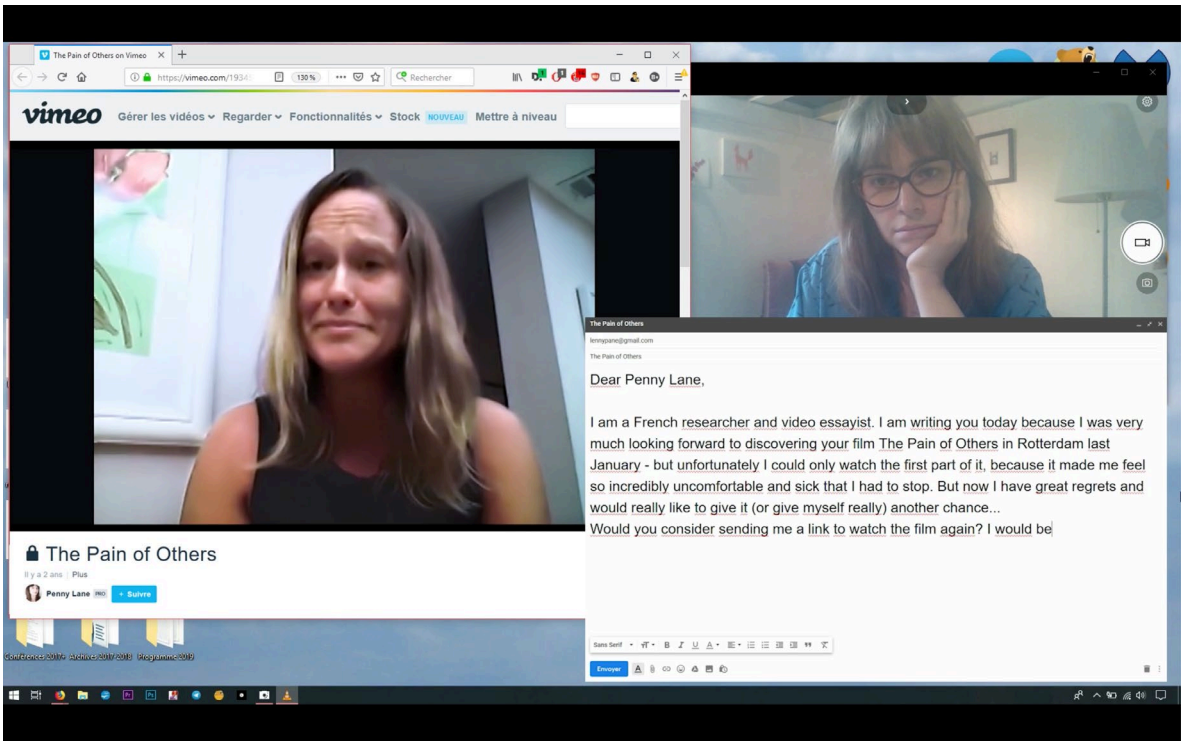

Fig. 5: A screenshot from the film *Watching the Pain of Others,* uploaded to Vimeo by Lého Galibert-Laîné in November 2018.

[5] Available at: https://vimeo.com/298425068 [2 April 2026].

On the other hand, she informs her viewers about the research she conducts during the screening, including the search engines she uses, the forums she consults, the notes she takes, and the messages she sends to acquaintances. In this way, the spectator of *Watching the Pain of Others* is invited to witness a kind of third-degree viewing: not only confronting Lane's documentary and resonating with Galibert-Laîné and her emotional reactions, but also following, step by step, the way her analytical material is introduced and positioned on the desktop screen – which thus takes on the dual role of an image-making workshop and a confessional space [Fig. 5].

Situated at the intersection of video art, the video essay, and documentary tradition, these examples of desktop cinema demonstrate how screencasting can no longer be understood merely as an instrumental device. Rather, it becomes an aesthetic form capable of renewing cinematic protocols – particularly those associated with found-footage cinema (Larsen 2019) – through new modalities of appropriation, manipulation, and artistic resemanticization. Within this renewed conceptual setting, the screencast generates a distinctive heuristic paradox. While it constitutes a paradigmatic instance of hypermediacy, in its capacity to «collapse the boundaries between making and presenting» (Kiss 2021, p. 102), it can simultaneously be construed as a gesture of creative transparency on the part of the author. The experiments of desktop cinema explicitly reveal the multiple layers that compose the digital interface (windows, cursors, browsers, editing software, etc.); yet, it is precisely through this "hypermediated" foregrounding of the technical infrastructure that screencasting produces the illusion of transparent and "unmediated" access to the work, conceived as a direct emanation of the author's creative process.

In conclusion. The screencast from object to method

Throughout the trajectory traced thus far, screencasting has emerged as a media routine that is only ostensibly utilitarian and ordinary. In reality, it demonstrates a remarkable capacity to traverse diverse domains – from the examination of popular media content and its uses within digital education to the relationship it establishes with cinema and the visual arts. This versatility enables screencasting to assume a critical function that may be analytical, pedagogical, or curatorial in nature. In all these cases, recording the screen entails subsuming process within output, exposing the mechanisms through which one can dismantle a dominant media narrative, rethink learning within digital environments, render explicit the workings of an algorithm governing the flow of content, or gather heterogeneous materials and

artistically assemble them through a computer desktop. Understood as a fundamental manoeuvre of hypermediacy, screen recording must therefore not be regarded as a mere representation, the image "of something". Instead, it should be seen as a "screenic image": a genuine field of action, the trace of an operative surface (the screen) that incorporates within itself the material, technical, and gestural conditions of digital interaction (Strauven 2016).

Reframed as a digital articulation of display practices (Modena 2024), the screencast, within digital media culture, ultimately reveals its nature not so much as an object but as a method: a critical intervention that generates meaning through the recontextualisation and manipulation of images. Far from assuming the role of a mere derivative copy of screen content, it thus asserts itself as an authentic act of thought – capable of reconfiguring the relationship between author, medium, and viewer, disclosing the layers of contemporary mediality and reclaiming them as a site for inquiry and experimentation.

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