



The Intermediality of Film

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Abstract. Film is from its beginnings an ‘intermedia fact.’ A film screening about e.g. 1900 consists of a celluloid ribbon with a series of images cranked through a projector situated among the audience, accompanied by a piano player and commented by a film lecturer ... At the end of the 1940s a movie like Marcel Carné’s *Le silence est d’or*, which tells us about the early film performance, includes all these elements as a cinematographic medium in favour of the all-embracing illusionary effect of an audiovisual moving picture on the screen of a movie theatre. But after television took over the film as part of its programme for its electronic broadcast, the media properties of film changed dramatically. First analogously and then in digital productions and representations of films as pure data streams no pictures and sounds are used any more to represent moving images and sounds on computer monitors. This leads to the conclusion that there is no single answer to the question ‘What is film?’ (André Bazin) but only a media history of the permanent changing medium will help us understand the ‘film as a multi-media form.’

The title of this article is “The Intermediality of Film.” Of no special film, but of film in general. Film as an “intermedial fact.” It will not be about single films as elements of film history but about media history of film in an intermedial perspective.

The question I shall try to answer is ‘what is film’ from a special point of view. That means, the answer will go to another direction than that, for example, of André Bazin in his collection of essays, *What is Cinema (Qu’est-ce que le cinema?, 1981)*. In the middle of the last century Bazin was principally interested in style, narration and meaning of single films, their aesthetic and cultural relations. Not *what* is a ‘film as film’ was his question, but *how* the film as a realistic art got its way in the Cinema as a department (or section) of the institution of art. Film as a photographic medium for the recording of images and sounds was principally dedicated to realism, in which he agreed with Siegfried Kracauer. Christian Metz, the great theoretician of film as an audiovisual language and as text, stressed the priority of narration towards the medium in which something is told. He and

his contemporaries took the following idea as the indubitable truth, that film is identical with a story told in moving pictures which are to be seen by spectators on the screen of a cinema and can best be enjoyed, remembered and described in this form. Bazin, who died in 1958, also observed that the same films which were originally made for the cinema have also been shown and could be seen in television and that another kind of films have been produced for the television, too. However, from the obvious loss of the “media identity” of the film, which has not been made exclusively for the cinema any more, he could not draw the necessary conclusions for his view and understanding of the cinema. It took a long time until film scholars could accept that film is a multi-media form to be represented by different devices in the cinema as well as in television, by video and computer, analogically and digitally (see e.g. Rodowick 2007).

More than hundred years after the invention of cinematography, film at the beginning of the second millennium became an omnipresent hybrid appearance, which could be fixed to no medium of its production, no particular context of an institution and no particular place of its consumption. Today film includes almost everything that meets us as a moving audio-visual representation at any time and at every place. Film, even today, is still in the centre of the everyday cinema programme, but often we do not know any more whether it is projected cinematographically, which means as a mechanical (optical, photochemical) device or by electronic technical installations, analogously or already digitally. Film today is more than just cinematographically a feature or documentary film. If electronically recorded and transmitted, it is an important component of the television programme. There, it concerns not only features of every kind, but also shorts (e.g. documentary shorts) in television news or magazines. The transition or difference of pre-produced films to the live-broadcast in television as a “real time medium” is blurred. In general, film on television is the name for all sorts of representations, analogous or digital, which are shifted in space and time as opposed to their live transmission. Film is almost everything that is offered as a video, analogously or digitally. Film can be downloaded from the Internet as a feature or short film, for example, with YouTube. Film has become a metaphor for every kind of moving picture. Its history is that of constant “media transformations” of its respective, intermedial constellations.

Film in its conventional understanding is always twofold. On the one hand it is a celluloid ribbon, a carrier material for the recording, treatment and transference, while on the other hand film is identical with the representation of movement on a cinema screen. In this way, film is ideally integrated into the dispositive

structure of the ancient film theatre: as a medium of the representation (a film strip in the film projector behind an audience) and the moving picture shown on the screen. And still today most people insist on the cinema hall for the best experience of the movies. Bazin and with him many others, e.g. Gilles Deleuze, have been interested only in one side of the film, its stylistic construction, its narration and aesthetics and its supposed effects. As the latest since film has left the cinema definitively, we cannot but take into consideration the totality of the different media conditions of cinematic representations, which means the complexity of the media diversity of the film. Nowadays it is impossible to speak of film without saying what is to be understood exactly by it as a media form.

1.

In the beginning of the history of cinematography, film was a photo-chemically treated celluloid strip, which was manufactured by the Georges Eastman Company in Rochester, New York. It had already been used in science before it became the basis of the cinematographic entertainment industry. Since then, the meaning of film has been split into a material process of the production and post-production of moving images in the form of celluloid strips and a projected moving picture which tells us a story with light and shadow. As soon as the film theatre had become the standard place for the representation of films, the concrete material film and its technical showing with a projector disappeared from the view of the audience behind a wall in the back of the cinema hall, and only the film as a screen projection and a story told in action was left behind. Film became the real illusion of a reality, while its material prerequisites have become invisible.

There is a scenario of a representation of the early cinema in a movie by René Clair from the year 1947, *Le Silence est d'or* (*Silence is Golden*). The story of the film plays about 1900 and begins with a married couple that flees before the rain into a fairground 'cinematograph theatre.' There, a burlesque is seen on the screen. The film is projected from an apparatus which is put up in the middle of the auditorium. Beside the screen, a moving picture lecturer describes and comments the action to be seen there and which is accompanied by a piano musician. The spectators are obviously more interested in them than in the action of the movie. They enter and leave the 'cinematograph theatre' without paying attention to the beginning and end of the programme. [Fig. 1.]

The combined elements of which the cinema performance consists a couple of years later, exist here independently, arranged side by side and only loosely linked

to the screen. Both sides of the film projection can be observed by the audience simultaneously, the work of the projectionist turning the crank and the projected film on the screen. Spectators, interested in the technique of the cinematographic apparatus, could directly look at the projector at work and learn how the film strip is pulled through the apparatus. When umbrellas are opened in the auditorium, they get in the projection ray and are seen as shades on the screen which cause disturbance in the moving picture. Dialogues, comments and music are not yet permanent components of the film, but interchangeable elements of the screening of which the film performance currently consists. The film strip with its series of photographs, which perform the moving picture of the film projection, dialogues and comments, musical accompaniment and – last but not least – the audience are loosely arranged in the cinema space as a specific dispositive, which altogether builds up an arrangement of the cinematograph at about 1900.

However, it is a film again, which shows us this early screening. The film spectators who saw this film in the end of the 1940s in the cinema – and still exclusively in the cinema – saw nothing but the projection of a moving picture on the screen including dialogues, noises and music. In more or less perfect darkness and silence, the perception of the environment of the spectator, including the film theatre and its audience and the technical process of the film projection vanish in favour of the pure experience of the film as action and narration. After the threshold of the credits begin, giving the title, the names of the actors and of the director and the production company, Pathé Consortium Cinéma, only the events told on the screen for which the audience has paid, will count in the end.

So what is film after the cinematography is fully established and has nearly reached the height of its technical and aesthetic development at the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century? It is nothing but this special experience of a story told on the screen under ideal technical and dispositive conditions: we go into a movie and nothing should disturb us in our concentration on experiencing it, which is why the film should disappear as a hybrid technology and the cinema as a place and dispositive structure should for the duration of the film projection vanish from its perception. Film as a “medium” remains in the blind spot of our perception. Under these conditions of a then modern cinema, René Clair tells us in his film, that film itself, at that time and still today within the scope of the Institution of Cinema, is always a compilation of different technologies or of several kinds of art like theatre, music, literature and so on. As an arrangement of different forms of their involved and closely linked media, they can at any

time be separated from the rest – and they are taken apart to become independent again. And exactly at the time when this film was first released, this process of disintegration began. First the dispositive structure of the film screening in a film theatre broke apart, the film left the cinema and became a component of the mass media television, after it had changed technically from the mechanical to the electronic medium. It might be interesting, that the exodus of the electronically turned film and the strict separation between cinema and television could have been prevented by a project called ‘Cinema Television,’ which started in the 1930s with the Swiss invention of the Eidophor (cf. Meyer 2009), an electronic big screen projector, which was definitively ready for operation in 1959. With this electronic device, it was not only possible to project films in approximate cinema quality and in colour, but also television broadcastings as part of the cinema programme. This ‘Cinema Television,’ which was much more attractive than the small grey television images, was fought and suppressed by the rising television industry, which did not want to tolerate a public alternative to its plans for an exclusive private use of television. Only today new considerations of the inclusion of television into cinema programmes have started.

After Hollywood could not prevent film from leaving the cinema, it immediately started a violent competition with its new rival television, in the film market and for the audience. The most favoured means of getting films and the audience back into the cinema was the reintroduction of the wide screen format in combination with colour film. CinemaScope films in colour seemed to blow the small grey television picture into pieces. No doubt these huge films could only be adequately seen on the wide screen in the cinema. In Frank Tashlin’s film from 1957 in CinemaScope and Colour with the title: *Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?*, where the platinum-blond Jayne Mansfield filled the large screen without difficulty, Tony Randell steps in the middle of the movie in front of a curtain and turns to the (imaginary) film audience. He welcomes the television users among the cinema audience and offers them broken views of the ridiculous small and grey television monitor images and compares them to the fantastic large colour image of the CinemaScope film they are just seeing in the cinema. [Fig. 2–4.]

The attempt of the cinema, at the same time, to dig up the electronic media with the 3D format of its films failed after a few years because of imperfect techniques. Today new electronic 3D efforts of the cinema industry are confronted with new television technologies and bigger and bigger monitors which will create the 3D-feeling also in private rooms. In the future, it will be more important that films can be shown and seen digitally on mobile devices at any place and

any time. This has deepened the separation between the local cinema and the now ‘movable moving pictures’ even further. The actual discussion is about the merging of cinema, television and internet. In short, the continually changing relations between film as part of the ‘Institution of Cinema’ and the new electronic media will in the end affect and change all ‘media properties’ of the film.

In the future, it will be a matter of describing film in its hybrid constellation as an “intermedial fact” in such a way that the “intermediality of film” becomes the object of the observation and analysis of films in general. The basic assumption is, that the medial representation (performance) fundamentally determines the aesthetic perception of a film.

2.

Film has by no means been understood from the outset as a “medium” (whatever this means at the moment). In the history of cinema, at first all efforts were directed towards the acceptance of the film as an individual work of art and its definition on the analogy of literature, by author, genres, etc. Film theatres, which in the middle of the 1920s became veritable palaces, offered a traditional and secure location for classical films. Then television integrated the cinematographic film as an element into its permanent programme, where it is linked to an electronic mass medium. Here, a work of art has lost its right for existence. It becomes more and more difficult to distinguish a single work in the endless flow of different parts of the television programme, which is now the dominant media format. The beginning and end of a separate film would normally be suppressed for its better integration into the permanent flow of the programme. Programme information and advertisement invaded the pictures and the space between the shots. In this situation it made more sense to describe film as a text, which is connected with all other texts of the programme and, in addition, of the culture in total. Intertextual relations also reveal connections of films to literary texts or images – pictures e.g., of art history, which are also estimated as visual texts. The film *Le Silence est d’or*, based on an original shooting script by René Clair, was retold as a Ciné Roman immediately after its release. The action was shortened and compressed, while the dialogues were partly taken over from the film. [Fig. 5.]

The first shot of the film reveals an image which comes close to a famous painting of Gustave Caillebotte, the painter of Paris streets at the end of the 19th century: the title of this painting is *Street in Paris in the rain from the year 1877*. [Fig. 6. and Fig. 7.]

In the framework of a textual description or analysis there is no problem connecting a film as a sign process to its literary extension, pictorial tradition or all other cultural phenomena. In the net of texts and intertextual relations there will be no individual or original work of art any more. Every film is an excerpt from interlinked texts which it repeats in quotes or endless remakes as they presently dominate the production in Hollywood. What gets lost in this manner of lumping together very different cultural phenomena in the realm of the text is the perception of the differences between the media properties of films as well as other cultural phenomena. Film as a medium remains in the blind spot of its observation. But the difference, whether a film is seen during a cinema performance or on a Video Tape Recorder is a difference by medial properties, that again makes a decisive difference for the respective notion of film.

But how is an observation of the film as a medium possible? If we take into consideration the state of film under the condition of its representation by a diversity of new media technologies, it is hard to speak of an identical medium of film. Every film is produced at the same time for its exploitation in the cinema (analogously or digitally), as a video (analogous by VHS or digitally as a DVD or Blue Ray) or as a videostream on the Internet. Transformations by copying from one medium to another between cinema, video, DVD and Internet are suited to definitively blur the idea of a uniform or single media identity of the film. And finally the digital computer has abolished the physical differences between not only the technical but also the artistic media film, literature, painting, music, etc. The computer has eliminated the variety of media identities in favour of the one universal machine. It seems that film today is an empty form, which can be filled with forms of the different media, which in turn leave traces on the moving pictures they perform. These traces may transport references to the properties of the relevant media, which take part in every representation or performance by any medium.

The film *Le silence est d'or* by René Clair has demonstrated that the cinematographic film at that time (1947) was a hybrid media compilation, which conceals its media differences on the first, and exposes them on the second, self-reflexive content-level as forms, indicating the common conditions of film at the beginning of the last century. We look at the involved media as forms, which contribute to the performance of a film, which is formulated by its medial forms. We analyse the underlying conditions of the production and the representation of film in their complex development. Presently, hence, it makes much more sense to observe and to describe film as a compilation of media (instead of a piece of art or text). More than everything else, films are products of their intermedia relations.

Now, what is film as a medium and intermediality?

The semantic field in which the concept “medium” is to be understood includes the meanings of ‘connections,’ ‘spaces between,’ the ‘transferences’ (of film). Media is a means for the purpose of bringing something out to the world and of communication in general. At this level, there are two media concepts, which are different in their consequence. One means simply the institutions, technologies and in the broadest sense all devices of (mass-) communication. The other is more basic and distinguishes media from the forms they produce.¹ This second notion of media means that they can be observed not like the objects of the reality, but only in the effects or forms they produce and in which they appear. Time, for example, as a medium which determines our modern reality like no other, is observable, however, only in the forms in which time is represented. Time by itself does not exist – except as a concept or mere condition for the representation of time on watches, in calendars, as a measure of movements, etc. Everything I perceive are forms of their peculiar media, which they formulate and which they assume as their conditions of appearance. Forms point back to the media and can become media again enabling new forms.

The notion of medium in connection with film (as opposed to film as a piece of art or text) often means its description as a technical, aesthetic or socio-cultural complex within the scope of the institution of cinema. Media then compares film with other phenomena at the same (institutional, cultural etc.) level, however, it says nothing about itself and its (inter-)media conditions. Here the notion of film as a medium is used in a restricted, only technical sense. But if film as a medium means a variable form which changes on account of its respective media conditions, then intermediality as a dynamic interdependence and changing complex of media forms becomes observable. In this general sense the definition of film as a medium must do justice to the complexity and hybrid constellation of film as a combined form. Films, just as works of literature, painting, music, etc. are as media nonentities, but changing complexes of their various media conditions which they formulate in this special form. Certain forms of their media conditions can appear in other media again: in the filmed literature it

1 “Media,” Niklas Luhmann says, are observable in the forms they enable, because “on the other side” of the form they are observable as a (double-sided) form again. Media generate forms which are generating forms themselves etc., meaning that media appear as forms and can only be observed in the forms they generate: as a medialised form and as the form of its medium, resulting in their general reflexivity. Media are no objects, but conditions or possibilities of their forming processes and the observation of these. “This leads to the realisation that the distinction between medium and form is itself a form, a form with two sides, one of which – the side of the form – contains itself.” That means, the differentiation “reenters itself and reappears within one of its sides.” (Luhmann 2000, 104.)

will never be the “book” in its physical condition, which is supposed to become transformed, but a certain form of the narrative, of language, style, etc. arranged and printed in a book, has become transformed into another media. Writing, pictures etc. could be likewise transferred as forms of their media.

Forms allow the observation of differences, for example, of figure and ground. Here the form is the medium of differentiation of what it is not, of system and environment, inside and outside. While forms articulate the properties of their media, they differ from other media in their perception as forms. A picture, for example, as an object differs from the object it represents on its surface (iconic difference [Ikonische Differenz, Boehm 1994, 11–38]) and it also differs from other pictures with other media conditions, as, for example, paintings in relation to photographs which may show the same items, but are different on behalf of their different media properties. Intermediality is the introduction or repetition of a medium – as its form – “in another, media form.” This assumes that in the same representation different forms can be observed which formulate, besides, different media properties. The intermedial representation of a painting in a film will not contain the painting as such, but the formulation of its media qualities in the form of its representation in the other medium: film.

Ever since its beginning, film has always been a hybrid intermedial construction on its technical as well as its aesthetic level. As an always-changing arrangement of different media, it is constituted by the cooperation of their different media forms. Film as we have seen is a two-sided form. On one side, the film is photographed with a camera “on film” as a celluloid carrier medium and film ribbon, and on the other side you have the projected moving picture as a bare-light performance. Outgoing from this basic arrangement, one can describe the complicated media forms in their interdependence and interaction. Actually, film, in this context, is just an intermedial construction, which has to be reconstructed in each case historically and systematically from the process of its media forms. Despite all its variability, the film as a two-sided form seems to have remained the same till today: also today every film must be photographed or taped first and be exposed afterwards – this temporal shift identifies ‘film.’ The spatial and temporal distance between both processes can vary depending on the involved media and their properties, it is rather large in the case of photographic recording and small in the case of digital recording. The distance between recording and representation or projection of a photographic film opens the space for its (montage-) treatment and transference, which can take in case of the cinematography months and years and for digital productions only a few minutes of footage. If there is no spatial

and temporal difference between the recording and its representation any more, the media form of ‘film’ is abolished in the so called live transmission.

3.

A short description of the opening sequence in René Clair’s film *Le Silence est d’or* as an example for a film in its intermedial complexity and procedure will now be given. In this sequence, film is relevant at three levels: 1. As a projection in a fairground screening around 1900. 2. This screening is shown as part of its narration in a sound film from the year 1947. 3. And because there normally would be no (original) celluloid film available for its scientific scrutiny, a digital recording and reproduction of the film on a DVD or digital data carrier (USB-stick) is used for its demonstration. The film from the year 1947 contains the earlier film (i.e. film projection) by the turn of the century of 1900; the DVD serves merely as a carrier of the digital recording and reproduction of the older analogous or photographic film.

While the film of Marcel Carné is hidden as a film and its media form behind its narration or content, it shows (another) film as a complex dispositive of the projection and adoption in its complex media arrangement. Projector, screen and spectator form an ensemble to which the sound is separately added as piano music and as dialogues from a film lecturer. Remarkably, the origin of the sound is shown as accompaniment of the silent film and to be heard only by the invisible sound film. The projector contains (as before the camera) a film ribbon with series of photographs cranked by the hand of the projectionist and projected with the light of an electric arc lamp on the screen. Film as a medium and technical complex is only observable as forms to be shown as content of another film and its own media properties (e.g., sound film). The film of the first order by René Clair repeats as a narration, demonstrating (older) media forms, the film of the second order in a media-reflexive turn. Only at this second reflexive level ‘film as a film’ is observable.

In 1947 René Clair could assume that the conditions of the screening of his film and the order of the audience in a film theatre were basically similar to that of the film in the fairground cinema shown in his film. The dispositive structure of the representation and adoption of the early cinematograph would recur in the representation and adoption of his own film in the film theatre – with the significant divergences as the effect of the historical development of the cinema generally: i.e. the projector is beyond the auditorium and invisible, hidden behind a wall, picture and sound are dubbed on the same film ribbon etc. And

probably no umbrellas will be opened during the screening, because it will not rain any more into the auditorium as in the fairground cinema. [Fig. 8.]

This structural analogy between the dispositive structures of the screenings on both levels can be abandoned after the film is not recorded any more in its cinematographic mechanical and photographic form, but digitally i.e. on DVD, when no fixed dispositive order of an audience in a film theatre must be obeyed any more for a film screening: the monitor assumes almost no particular position of spectators in front of its pictures and sounds, its consumption is possible at any time at every place with every arrangement. As long as the ancient film theatre was the model for the consumption of films, in 1900 as well as in 1947, René Clair could play in his film with the confrontation (or continuation) of two similar but historically different spaces for the audience, where the one turns back to the other in a media reflexive way. In the digital projection this exists, if at all, only as an allusion or citation.

4.

This finally leads to the question, how the conditions of the “intermediality of film” have changed after film is given exclusively in the digital medium. The presupposition that all represented forms transport properties of the media by which they are caused, meant for the cinematographic (mechanical) film that the projected moving picture on the screen is essentially formulated by the mechanics of camera and projector and their effect on the projected image. Analogous to the mechanical clockwork, which represents a continuous time flow by switching step by step in seconds and minutes, the film projector switches step by step 24 pictures/sec. for the representation of continuous movement. The photographic film gives the appearance of a mimetic representation of pre-cinematic movement in reality by the differences between the 24 pictures/sec., switched from one picture to the next. The suggested ontological status of the photographic image makes every film a documentation of a pre-cinematic reality (what has been in front of the camera during the shooting) and only the intention towards the filmed reality causes a differentiation of document or fiction. Photographically recorded pictures and sounds maintain and transport the properties of their media, which they formulate cinematographically.

The digital process of the recording, storage and processing, as well as representation differs basically from the material conditions of the original media. Pictures and sounds which are taped, stored, processed and represented

in accordance with their algorithmic programming have no analogue (mimetic, ontological) relation to our perception of reality. All we see and hear digitally produced on the monitor or as a beamer projection we owe to the specific programming of the data which give us the suitable pictures and sounds. Everything that has remained of the material qualities of the media programmed and performed digitally are merely forms of the quoted media without any material basis or 'ground' any more. Film is now in its original intermedial complexity a digital construct which is reconstructible concerning all media components in their forms. A very nice proof of this sort of interchange of media forms is the repetition or retake of characteristic cinematographic forms in digitally produced films. (Stalf 2004, 211–221; Flückiger 2004, 407–428) It turned out that high-resolution images made possible by their digital production are too sharp, too proper or too cool and miss certain favoured qualities of the old cinematographic film. Cinematographically, the moving image on the screen is always a little blurred or fuzzy and the projection is somehow trembling. This imperfectness is an effect of the properties of the photographic film and its mechanical projection. The silver-nitrate grain on the surface does not return in every of the 24 projected pictures in the same position. This is why a constant movement or 'noise' on the surface can be perceived. Inevitably, the smallest mechanical divergences in the film projection make the moving image tremble a little. Because these minimal defects and their welcomed effects will not occur in digitally produced images, they are added to them as planned disturbances in order to give these too straight images and their synthetic look the nostalgic atmosphere of ancient cinematographic films. This device might change in the near future in relation to a new generation of 3D films. Cinematographically produced 3D films were not successful, because the same effects of blur and mechanical inaccuracies caused headaches with the spectators of these films. These disturbances can be avoided digitally and only the still inevitable glasses are an obstacle on the way to the perfect pleasure of the complete 3D space experience in the cinema. This experience has, up to now because of technical reasons, only been possible in big picture formats in the traditional dispositive of the cinema, which gives the cinema institution again an advantage over the competing new media with their small (but movable) monitors. But this also will change in the near future.

So, also in the digital age film is an intermedial phenomenon. All involved media are now present in nothing else than quotations of their qualities in forms, which represent them. New electronically uttered forms appear in performances of new, digital media art. Also, digitally produced films are defined by the different

media forms of their representation, be it in traditional cinemas, on television, by DVD and, above all, on the internet via computers or mobile phones where they are about to grow together. Technical fantasies of new projected (immersive) spaces we can step into and we can live in emerge from the laboratories of New Media Companies. We shall see what happens with the intermediality of film in those new media surroundings where film cannot be distinguished any more from what it is not. Utopian cinema fantasies, which arose after 1945 (i.e. by André Bazin [Bazin 1981, 19–24; Barjavel 1944]) dreamed of a second cinematographically realised reality. But when new synthetic realities occur, it will not be in the framework of the cinema, when new synthetic realities occur. It's the internet, which offers global interactive spaces, 'Second Worlds' and 'Social Networks' for new social experiences. New media with new properties will open new medial forms beyond the film.

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Figures 2–4. Frank Tashlin: *Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?* (1957)

Figure 5. Cover of the Ciné Roman *Schweigen ist Gold* (*Le silence est d'or*) of the series: Guter Film – fesselnd erzählt

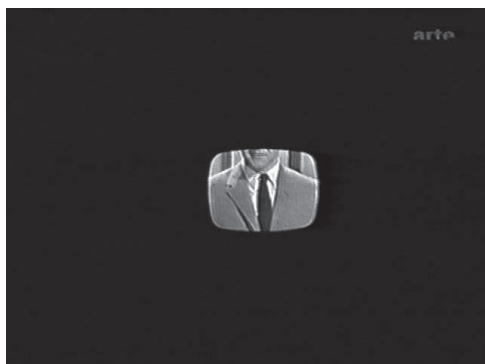




Figure 6. Gustave Caillebotte: *Street in the rain*



Figure 7. Still from the first shot of *Le Silence est d'or*



Figure 8. Still from René Clair: *Le silence est d'or*

