

# ARTHEMIS

Malcolm Turvey (Sarah Lawrence College)  
*Medium Specificity Defended*

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H-407

Hall Building, 1455 De Maisonneuve W.

Medium-specificity, which informed much theorizing about the arts in the twentieth century, has not fared well among theorists recently. Those influenced by the opposition to essentialism in much post-structuralist thought have tended to reject medium-specific arguments as essentialist. However, even theorists who have no such opposition to essentialism have found it wanting. For example, contemporary philosopher Noel Carroll has proposed an essential definition of cinema or what he calls the moving image, in other words a definition in terms of a set of necessary and sufficient conditions, while eschewing medium-specificity and launching an all out assault on the doctrine. This paper defends a version of medium-specificity from the criticisms of Carroll and others by returning to some of the medium-specific arguments of classical film theorists such as Jean Epstein and Dziga Vertov. In the process, it untangles medium-specificity from other doctrines with which it is often confused, such as medium-essentialism, and it ends by explaining why a defensible version of medium-specificity remains relevant today.

Malcolm Turvey teaches film studies at Sarah Lawrence College and is an editor of *October*. He is the author of *Doubting Vision: Film and the Revelationist Tradition* (Oxford University Press, 2008) and *The Filming of Modern Life: European Avant-Garde Film of the 1920s* (MIT Press, 2011), and co-editor of *Wittgenstein, Theory and the Arts* (Routledge, 2001).