

Title: Framing the Real: Lefèbvre and Neo-Realist Cinematic Space as Practice

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Architecture_media_politics_society. vol. 5, no.4.

October 2014

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Abstract:

In 1945 Roberto Rossellini's Neo-realist *Rome, Open City* set in motion an approach to cinema and its representation of real life – and by extension real spaces – that was to have international significance in film theory and practice. However, the re-use of the real spaces of the city, and elsewhere, as film sets in Neo-realist film offered (and offers) more than an influential aesthetic and set of cinematic theories. Through Neo-realism, it can be argued that we gain access to a cinematic relational and multi-dimensional space that is not made from built sets, but by filming the built environment. On the one hand, this space allows us to “notice” the contradictions around us in our cities and, by extension, the societies that have produced those cities, while on the other, allows us to see the spatial practices operative in the production and maintenance of those contradictions.

In setting out a template for understanding the spatial practices of Neo-realism through the work of Henri Lefèbvre, this paper opens its films, and those produced today in its wake, to a spatio-political reading of contemporary relevance. We will suggest that the rupturing of divisions between real spaces and the spaces of film locations, as well the blurring of the difference between real life and performed actions for the camera that underlies much of the central importance of Neo-realism, echoes the arguments of Lefèbvre with regard the social production of space. In doing so, we will suggest that film potentially had, and still has, a vital role to play in a critique of contemporary capitalist spatial practices.