

# Roberto Rossellini's *Rome Open City*

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## Introduction

### *Open City*: Reappropriating the Old, Making the New

Like only a handful of other works – *Birth of a Nation* (1914), *Potemkin* (1925), *Citizen Kane* (1941), and *Breathless* (1960) come most readily to mind – Roberto Rossellini’s *Roma città aperta* (1945; hereafter referred to in my essay simply as *Open City*) instantly, markedly, and permanently changed the landscape of film history. It has been credited with helping to initiate and guide a revolution in and reinvention of modern cinema, bold claims that are substantiated when we examine its enormous impact, even to this day, on how films are conceptualized, made, structured, theorized, circulated, and viewed. But the film has attained such a mythic power and status that we must be careful not to give in to uncritical enthusiasm. To combat this tendency (as well as to analyze and celebrate the film’s perpetual appeal) the present volume is designed as “revisionary,” offering a fresh look at the production history of *Open City*; some of its key images (particularly its representation of the city and various types of women); its cinematic influences and influence on later films; the complexity of its political dimensions (including the film’s vision of political struggle and the political uses to which the film was put); and the legacy of the film in public consciousness.

Occasionally the effect – and, in fact, the intention – of this re-examination is to demythologize certain aspects of the film and the legends that surround it. For example, several of the essays herein note the various ways that *Open City* bears many traces of the kind of cinema it intends to replace – perhaps supporting the somewhat deflating argument that Rossellini was in fact no thoroughgoing

innovator, but perhaps also indicating that no revolution can proceed *ex nihilo*, and that innovation frequently rests on dialectical continuity and reappropriation rather than clean slates and completely new beginnings. And despite *Open City's* reputation as a watershed moment, not only in Rossellini's development as one of the quintessential modern filmmakers, but also in the emergence of a distinctive and reinvigorated postwar cinema in general, each one of the essays calls attention to unresolved tensions, gaps, contradictions, and loose ends in the film that keep it from being entirely coherent, progressive, and politically and aesthetically consistent. The overall effort, though, is not to undermine but to reaffirm the extraordinary power and ongoing importance of *Open City*, and fine-tune our awareness of how it unquestionably and effectively challenges conventional films, filmmaking practices, and experiences of film by offering an alternative to the classical, Hollywood-dominated, corporate-industrial model of a cinema of distractions, gloss, high profitability, and low seriousness.

#### **ROSSELLINI: BRIEF BIOGRAPHY**

Roberto Gastone Zeffiro Rossellini was born on May 8, 1906, in Rome and had many reasons to describe his childhood as "easy" and "very happy."<sup>1</sup> He grew up in a prosperous and loving family, surrounded by servants, material comforts, and intellectual and artistic stimulation – the latter especially provided by his father, a designer and builder, resolute liberal (during a time when liberalism was often blamed for the country's many problems), dedicated though not very successful writer, and host of a long-standing weekly salon. Rossellini remembered his home as "full of joy and fantasy," but also recalled being "at odds with the world" from "the moment I was born."<sup>2</sup> What might otherwise seem like an idyllic youth was marked by long periods of illness and increasing restlessness, boredom, self-indulgence, and inquisitiveness, all, as it turns out, key elements of his character and, perhaps not surprisingly, his cinematic art.

It is difficult to know exactly how and why he gravitated to a career in filmmaking. Initially, he resisted gravitating to a career in anything and spent most of his time, once he dropped out of school,

living off money from his family and earning a reputation as a free spirit (and spender), fast car driver (at a time when cars were scarce), and romantic adventurer involved in many erotic affairs as well as a quickly annulled marriage to a young actress, Assia Noris. He married, more seriously this time, Marcella De Marchis on September 26, 1936. Perhaps he was settling down a bit. A few years earlier, he had run through his inheritance and, forced to work for a living, turned to the film industry. This may have been a reluctant choice: As he pointed out in a later interview, "Before that I had a nicer job, that of a son, which I liked much better."<sup>3</sup> But it was also a logical step: he had a variety of friends in the business; he had screenplay writing experience, which made him some money and gave him a foot in the door and further contacts in this growing (and government-supported) enterprise; and he found that filmmaking allowed him to pursue much that was dear to him, including his interest in mechanics, his unconventional and still far from settled lifestyle, and what he described as his "zest to understand," a "predominant theme" in his works from the very beginning.<sup>4</sup>

Rossellini's apprenticeship took many forms: he was a sound technician, helping to dub foreign films into Italian; a piecework contributor to various screenplays; an assistant director; and the writer and director of a series of his own self-financed short films blending documentary and fantasy. His most substantive early work was collaborating on the screenplay and, according to some sources, directing parts of Goffredo Alessandrini's *Luciano Serra, pilota* (1938), one of the key films of Fascist-era cinema. This was followed by three films he directed, often referred to as his "fascist trilogy": *La nave bianca* (*The White Ship*, 1941), *Un pilota ritorna* (*A Pilot Returns*, 1942), and *L'uomo dalla croce* (*The Man of the Cross*, 1943). In his essay in this volume, Peter Bondanella, without suggesting that Rossellini was a fascist ideologue, argues persuasively for the multilevel continuity among these films and the ones that follow, and in general emphasizes the deep roots of antifascist neorealist cinema in some of the developing "tendencies" in Fascist-era cinema. But there is no disputing the fact that Rossellini's next three films, his so-called "war trilogy," mark a decisive breakthrough in his career and in modern film history: *Open City*, *Paisà* (*Paisan*, 1947), and *Germania anno*

*zero* (*Germany Year Zero*, 1947) established Rossellini as one of the “fathers” of neorealism and helped move Italian films to the forefront of modern cinema, both critically and commercially.

If he was one of the founders and key representatives of neorealism, Rossellini was also one who refused to be bound by any cinematic template. As I argue in my essay in this volume, even his “classic” neorealist works like *Open City* challenge neorealist (as well as other cinematic, political, and moral) orthodoxies, and his films after the “war trilogy” do so even more relentlessly. Not entirely unintentionally, he generated tremendous controversy, and not just in circles where the nuances and future direction of neorealism and Italian cinema were hotly debated. *Il miracolo* (*The Miracle*, 1948) was widely attacked as blasphemous, and even though it was the focal point of a successful fight against film censorship in America, it helped to brand Rossellini, at least in some circles, as a dangerous character. And he made front-page news for his personal life as well: after seeing and being deeply moved by *Open City* and *Paisan*, Ingrid Bergman wrote him a letter, offering to make a film with him, and this was the first step in what was to many a scandalous love affair. They subsequently married, had three children together, and made five films that mark a definable period in Rossellini’s career: the “Bergman films,” including *Stromboli* (1949), *Europa '51* (1952), and *Voyage to Italy* (1953), were commercial failures but dazzling explorations of spiritual distress and failures in communication that solidified his appeal to a new generation of cineastes, especially those gathered around the influential journal, *Cahiers du cinéma*, and helped lay the foundation for cinematic revolutions that we now associate with the French New Wave directors and Italian modernists like Antonioni.

Rossellini never lost his interest in historical subjects: *Il generale Della Rovere* (*General Della Rovere*, 1959) and *Era notte a Roma* (*It Was Night in Rome*, 1960) revisit the war period, examining recurrent issues for Rossellini of fear, loyalty, entrapment, and the ironies of heroic conduct; and *Viva l'Italia* (1960) and *Vanina Vanini* (1961) chronicle events from the pivotal Risorgimento era, a recurrent reference point in the continuing drive for liberty in twentieth-century Italy. But his idea of historical cinema was changing: he was shifting toward a new medium, television, which offered him a new audience



and stable source of funding and technical support no longer available to him in the commercial cinema; he was turning to new subjects from various parts of the world – India, for example, which he traveled to and filmed extensively in 1957 – and a wide range of time periods – the age of Louis XIV, for example, in a film of 1966, and the age of the apostles in a film of 1968; and he was broadening his approach to history, focusing on pivotal moments that represented important shifts in human consciousness as well as long views, durational histories, if you will, that portrayed such things as the centuries-long age of iron (*L'eta del ferro*, 1963) and the perennial human struggle for survival (*La lotta dell'uomo per la sua sopravvivenza* [1967–69]).

The last twelve years or so of Rossellini's career were his most prolific, aided by his increasingly characteristic use of long takes and a zoom lens, which allowed him to film quickly. This period is his least accessible and appreciated, but must be reckoned with to understand fully what Bondanella describes as Rossellini's lifelong but especially late dedication to "cinema as a didactic tool."<sup>5</sup> He tried to further this project not only in his final films, intended to bring large numbers of people into vital and life-changing contact with key historical events and figures, such as Pascal (1972), Saint Augustine (1972), Descartes (1973), and Jesus (1975), but also by his many interviews and writings on film; his activities as the director of Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia (1968–73), the Italian state-sponsored film school; and his connections with scientists and media technicians and theorists at Rice University in the United States. When Rossellini died of a heart attack on June 3, 1977, his best and most influential films were several decades and more behind him, but he was still at work on projects that consolidate and enhance his legacy as one of the visionaries and builders of a cinema of analysis, education, provocation, and inspiration.

### **CRITICAL OVERVIEW OF OPEN CITY**

Near the beginning of her essay in this volume, Marcia Landy includes a very useful brief summary of *Open City* (pp. 87–88), which the reader unacquainted with the film may turn to for a quick orientation. What I offer in this section is a somewhat more detailed

overview, setting out the main lines of the plot but also attempting to broaden and to some extent complicate the way we look at the film by paying particular attention to its rhetoric and aesthetic techniques as well as its realism, carefully designed structure and repeated allusions to other films, and remarkable acts of reappropriation in service of the “springtime for Italy” its prophecies and attempts to usher in.

Even before the action of the film begins, we are provided with important information by the title and credit sequence. The working title, *Yesterday's Stories*, highlights the immediacy and relevance of the plot, but the final title, *Rome Open City*, is more resonant and specific. It associates what we will see with a well-known genre: this is a “city” film, treating Rome as not only a literal setting but as a living entity, in some ways, as Millicent Marcus notes, “the protagonist of the story” as well as a real and symbolic space that will be traversed, examined, contested, and reclaimed.<sup>6</sup> A key part of the cityscape appears behind the title and credits (although not in the American release version), including the dome of St. Peter’s cathedral, which reappears in the background in the closing sequence as well, the first of many repetitions and echoes that are woven into the film (see Fig. 13).<sup>7</sup> The title alludes to a precise historical period in 1943–44, after the fall of Mussolini but before the Allies completed their successful march through the country, when the Germans agreed to designate Rome as “open,” in effect demilitarized and not subject to occupation, attack, or military control. They disregarded this agreement literally as soon as it was made and proceeded to inhabit and rule the city with the kind of brutality documented in the film, but also attempted to use this designation to shield themselves from Allied attack. Rossellini counts on the fact that his audience would acknowledge the obvious irony and duplicity here, but from beginning to end the film also works on a much deeper and broader level to define what true “openness” entails: a shared personal capacity to accept and transcend some social and political differences and disagreements to establish not only an effective opposition to fascism but a lasting fair and inclusive community, and a cinematic style “open” to basic human needs and able to capture without distortion the often messy and unpredictable reality that rarely figured in conventional films.

The film begins with German soldiers marching in lockstep through a dark street in the city they have occupied, singing a strident military song about their homeland. (The film will end reversing this image, with a group of Italian boys walking silently, but with a stirring orchestral accompaniment in the background, comforting each other in pairs as they move toward the brightly lit city they are in the process of restoring.) The first segment of Rossellini's next film, *Paisan*, actually includes a reference to its dark setting as "like Frankenstein's castle." Nothing like this is specified in *Open City*, but the huge stone building rising up in the shadows in the background immediately places us in the realm of horror. The "monsters" are not supernatural demons but Nazi functionaries, monstrous enough as they carry submachine guns into an apartment and tower over two old women, searching for a man they identify as Giorgio Manfredi. Manfredi, though, looking like a man on the run in a classic mystery film, has already escaped across the rooftop: agility and mobility as well as endurance prove to be defining marks of the members of the Resistance.

The scene dissolves to the office of the commanding officer of the Germans, Major Bergmann, and Rossellini quickly summarizes the Nazi character, mentality, and method. Bergmann is, to be sure, part caricature, played as an effete and blasé sadist, mincing as he parades around in his administrative domain (we never see him outside) and wincing in annoyance when the torture he ordered causes too much noise for his refined sensibility. He is also part cinematic villain: when he sits at his desk, holds up a series of photographs, and tells the Italian police commissioner how he uses a far-reaching surveillance network to travel through and control the city, he bears an unmistakable resemblance to Fritz Lang's master criminal, Dr. Mabuse. Rossellini adds to this impression of villainy by putting dark shadows across the top of Bergmann's head, as well as that of the commissioner. But along with these stylized touches, Rossellini also begins to build up a picture of a dangerous force that cannot simply be hissed off the stage: the scream of the tortured professor, which will be echoed later by Manfredi's screams, is shockingly real, and is only one of a series of accumulating details that break through the screen, as it were, and remind the audience less of cinematic Mabuses and imaginary houses of horror than real-life tyrants like Gestapo commander

Herbert Kappler, one of the recognizable models for Bergmann, and infamous places of interrogation and torture like the one in the German embassy at 155 Via Tasso.

Bergmann wants to break the unity of the Italian people – the sight of him standing in front of a map of Rome explaining his plan to divide the city into fourteen sectors (see Fig. 14) would presumably be a dramatic reminder to an Italian audience that the Nazis stand for everything that the revered nineteenth-century revolutionary movement, the Risorgimento, successfully fought against – an Italy of fragments, hardly an Italy at all – and smugly argues that the city can be contained (closed rather than opened) by surveillance and terror. As if to counter these claims, Rossellini dissolves to a scene that illustrates how the city will not be so easily controlled. An angry and hungry crowd of people, mostly women, has stormed a bakery and “liberated” it of bread. Rossellini uses comic touches but also direct explanatory statements by some of the participants to carefully establish that this action is not spasmodic, unprincipled, and violent – at least insofar as it does not hurt anyone physically – but just and necessary during times of great need. This scene also introduces us to Pina, evidently one of the instigators of the “celebration” at the bakery, and alerts us from the very beginning that this woman is not only at the emotional and moral but also the political heart of the film. There is some bantering later among the children about whether or not “girls” can be heroes and effective parts of the Resistance movement. Pina’s example settles the issue definitively, although the film also dramatizes that not everyone, woman or man, can live up to her high standards.

Here as elsewhere in the film, Rossellini frequently moves from one scene to another with a vertical wipe. This technique, where one image is replaced by another moving across the frame, is commonplace in early action-adventure and mystery films, reinforces an episodic structure, and quickens the pace by leaving out shots that are merely transitional and establishing, concentrating our attention on what is dramatically essential. But these quick shifts and ellipses in *Open City* are balanced by more drawn-out sequences that call our attention to other essential, although not necessarily dramatic, actions. Several wipes help Rossellini move Pina from the bakery back to her apartment, but when she meets Manfredi, who is looking for

Francesco, his friend and Pina's fiancé, time seems to expand as they get to know one another, moving from initial distrust to friendship and even intimacy as they discuss important and inevitably personal matters (talk about politics flows naturally into talk about love). It is very interesting to see how Rossellini decides what is "essential" and what is not: he uses a wipe to compress even further the time it takes Pina's son, Marcello, to walk down a short flight of stairs as she asks him to go out on an errand, but while Pina and Manfredi are talking, Rossellini holds a shot patiently, even as Pina walks out of the frame and then back in with coffee. An important bond is forming between them, and Rossellini does not hurry them – or us – through the process.

Manfredi needs to meet with Don Pietro, a priest active in the Resistance, so Pina sends Marcello to bring him back to the apartment. Rossellini cuts to black, and we quickly see it is the black of Don Pietro's robe. He is in motion (almost always a virtue in *Open City*), and a moving, hand-held camera captures not only the energy and joy of the boys playing soccer (sound is important here as well: their group noise, like that of the crowd earlier at the bakery, is one of the vernacular languages of *Open City*, communal and exuberant) but also the way that the priest is both referee and participant, alternately blowing his whistle and kicking the ball, a precise image of the dual responsibilities he has to negotiate outside the ball field as well. Only after viewing the entire film do we become fully aware of how evocative this scene is, how much of what is to come is implicit here: the ball hitting Don Pietro on the head is a comic touch, but looks forward to a deeper wound, and the moment when he hands his whistle to one of the older boys to take over for him as he departs is surprisingly and almost inexplicably poignant, a preview of how the film must end.

Don Pietro and Marcello walk out through the church to the street, where the real holy actions and confessions happen in the film. (As Martin Scorsese, deeply influenced by neorealism and Rossellini in particular, will say at the beginning of *Mean Streets* [1973], "You don't make up for your sins in church. You do it in the street. You do it at home.") The camera follows them as they walk (a technique repeated later when Don Pietro walks with Pina and hears her confession), and although Don Pietro is not altogether pleased by the radical slogans

Marcello mouths, picked up from his friend Romoletto, about the need to “close ranks against the common enemy,” a sudden extreme close-up (used rarely, as a kind of special effect in the film) of the boy reinforces his sincerity, and whether he knows it or not, Don Pietro is on the way to follow Marcello’s good advice. He meets Manfredi, the “denounced” Communist who must stay in hiding, and agrees to pick up money for him and deliver it to help the fighters in the Resistance movement harbored nearby. There may be a bit of an in-joke here, as the million lire hidden in the books Don Pietro is to carry is exactly the budget-busting amount that Aldo Fabrizi, the actor playing him, initially demanded as his fee. Fabrizi at least gets his hands on a million lire in the film, and also gets an opportunity to show off his comic talents. While waiting in a shop to make the pickup, Don Pietro sees two statues, one of a nude woman, the other of St. Rocco, who appears to be staring at the nude. Don Pietro modestly turns the nude statue around, only to be shocked by St. Rocco now apparently staring at her backside, so St. Rocco needs to be adjusted again. This is one of several delightful comic interludes in the film, and is no less amusing even if we recognize that it was probably lifted directly out of an old music-hall routine – if not from *Behind the Screen* (1916), one of the great short films by an old music-hall master, Charlie Chaplin.

The tone changes markedly though as a wipe moves us from the literally underground meeting of the men planning Resistance activities to the brightly lit nightclub dressing room, where Marina, earlier identified as Manfredi’s lover, sits in front of a mirror and nervously looks in her handbag for drugs (evidently pictured in more detail in shots censored from the American release version). Marina is joined by Lauretta, Pina’s sister, and the two of them chatter about their personal needs and attraction to the “things that are bad for us, but we do them all the same.” When Ingrid, the female counterpart of Bergmann, enters the room, bringing drugs, she completes a triptych that, in almost medieval fashion, depicts an ominous progression: Lauretta is a giggling, flighty young woman, satisfied to enjoy the easy life assured by sleeping with “Fritz”; Marina is a lost soul, soon to betray her man; and Ingrid is a hardened she-Nazi, a woman-seducing demon.

Later, Rossellini will insert a blunt verbal critique of this shallow and dangerous way of life when Manfredi finally confronts Marina, but here the commentary is conveyed visually, by what I describe in my essay in this volume as ethical intercutting. The scene shifts from the immoral glitter of the dressing room to the poverty of the cleric's room, with cabbage cooking on the heating stove. Agostino, the sexton who earlier in the film had overcome his momentary hesitancy and, after making the sign of the cross – which both begs forgiveness for what he is about to do and blesses the event – joined in the looting at the bakery, recalls that episode to Pina and condemns the actions of “you fanatical women” who “will yet bring tragedy,”<sup>8</sup> but his accusation fits the women of the immediately previous scene more than Pina. Pina is obviously the opposite of these women, visually and morally, and as she walks with Don Pietro to help him deliver the money, she confesses her sense of guilt in a way that confirms her ethical integrity. Echoing Marina, she says that she has done many things that she shouldn't have – most obviously, her wedding to Francesco is tomorrow, and she is already pregnant – but the fact that she has acted out of deep love, during a time when love is especially precious and needed, makes this “sin” relatively insignificant. Don Pietro tries to soothe her anxiety – she asks, “Doesn't Christ see us?” – by running through some doctrines about self-examination, deserved punishment, prayer, and pity, but he is most helpful when he shares with her a moment of justifiable anger. Throughout the film, Rossellini “resolves” some key dilemmas by turning from the abstract to the concrete: here the sight of the Nazis in the street harassing someone ends any confusion about what the real sins are and what is to be done.

At night, because of the curfew, the main characters gather inside the claustrophobic apartment building, and the pressures of day-to-day life erupt. The sequences in this section – which would provide models for many later American film and television dramas of tenement life, moving the “Grand Hotel” format of intertwined lives into a not-so-grand environment filled with combustible families and neighbors and dinner-table and stairwell arguments and conversations – show the perils and pains of domesticity. Family life is particularly treacherous: Pina and Lauretta have a violent argument, which

leaves Pina, on the eve of her wedding, discouraged and fearful. Mothers and fathers routinely scream, threaten, and slap, especially when their sons return home late: ironically, the very disciplined and well-organized boys have just bombed one of the Nazi's gasoline tanks and come back safely, only to be spanked and berated by their parents for worrying them.<sup>9</sup>

But life in even a sometimes claustrophobically tight family and community has its advantages as well. Several of the vignettes in this part of the film vividly capture the sustaining warmth of close human contact. Interestingly, these vignettes revolve around Francesco, who is not usually given as much critical attention as Manfredi, Pina, and Don Pietro, but plays a key role in the film. The scene of Francesco and Manfredi sitting at a table eating is both simple and sacramental. Francesco's brief talk with Marcello as he tucks him in bed not only confirms that they, along with Pina and the baby yet to be born, are creating a new family, but also illustrates that some fathers are not tyrannical and will respect the needs of their sons for freedom and privacy. (The virtues of family, motherhood, and fatherhood were colonized and contaminated by the Italian government under Mussolini, which used them as mechanisms of oppression and control; *Open City* redefines and renovates these as well as a variety of other roles and institutions.) And in the most touching scene in this part of the film, Francesco consoles Pina, reenacting their first meeting, reconfirming their deep love, and then tying this love to a broader force that will move not only them but the whole country from winter to a new springtime.

The dawn of the next day, though, does not bring with it this hoped-for change. Manfredi has been identified as an escaped anti-fascist fighter, and has been spotted in the area and linked to the previous night's bombing raid. This prompts a *rastrellamento*, all too vivid in the memory of the Italian audiences of the time, a sudden armed search of the apartment building. High-angle and long shots establish a geography of terror as we see the extent of the Nazis' show of strength against an entire population, blocking streets, closing entrances and exits to the building, and herding out all the occupants – mainly women, since the men have been able to escape through an alleyway. The inefficacy of the raid affords some relief and nearly turns the incident into a grimly comic one, with the Nazis milling



around, all dressed up but no one to shoot – unfortunately, never a lasting problem with Nazis, as we will soon see – but the tension remains, expertly choreographed by Rossellini in a complex pattern of strain and relief.

The next dramatic flare-up occurs when Marcello tells Don Pietro that Romoletto has bombs in his attic. The two of them rush to the apartment building; walk through the guards, claiming that they are going to minister to the paralyzed old man still in the building; and make their way up to Romoletto's, where they take away his bomb and submachine gun. With one catastrophe narrowly averted, they face another potential one immediately, which Rossellini portrays comically: when they attempt to hide the bomb and gun in the old man's room, Marcello accidentally knocks the bomb off the table and it is caught just in time by Don Pietro in a move worthy of Chaplin or Keaton; then the old man raises a ruckus, thinking that the priest is there to administer the last rites to him. Unable to quiet him otherwise, Don Pietro applies the sacrament of the frying pan to his head (we don't see this, but hear a resounding noise and imagine the rest), and when the Nazis come into the room, all they find is an old man peacefully unconscious, attended by a priest and his young helper.

The relief we feel is substantial, but not lasting. Outside the building, Francesco has been seized, and as he screams Pina's name, she breaks from the guards and chases after the truck carrying him away, a dramatic episode based, as Tag Gallagher notes, on a real-life argument Anna Magnani had with her lover at the time and Rossellini's recollection of a very famous scene in Vidor's *The Big Parade* (1925).<sup>10</sup> Suddenly, Pina is shot and falls to the ground. (Years later, Alfred Hitchcock will take credit for disrupting audience expectations in *Psycho* by the unheard-of innovation of killing off the character played by the main female star midway through the picture, but this had already been done in *Open City*.) Rossellini uses quick cuts and shifting camera positions to heighten our shock and disorientation – the film *Celluloide*, discussed later in this volume in Millicent Marcus' essay, recreates in detail Rossellini's careful adjustments to the editing and timing of this sequence to make it as powerful as could be, a classic example of artistry serving "realism" – and in one of those moments that seems both instantaneous and never-ending, we

witness the death of Pina, Marcello's almost unbearable grief, and Don Pietro's last act of comfort for Pina, cradling her in a pietà-like embrace (see Fig. 10). The murder of Pina is more compressed but has much in common with the Odessa Steps sequence in Eisenstein's *Potemkin*: in exemplifying tyranny (Rossellini might well have used an intertitle with the word "Nazis" on it, just as Eisenstein used one with the word "Cossacks"); in placing the murder of innocence at the center of a work of revolutionary struggle; and in mobilizing the resources of montage to create an unforgettable drama, surely one of the most memorable moments in all of film history. This sequence is followed immediately by a partisan attack on the trucks, freeing the prisoners, and some critics feel that this reinforces the irony, even the uselessness, of Pina's protest that led to her death. But it may well be that Rossellini had in mind the deeper structure and logic of the Odessa Steps sequence, which concludes with a shot of a gun going off, destroying a czarist building presumably in retaliation for the massacre. Similarly, Rossellini's sequence invokes not pathetic victimization but determination, resolve, and counterattack.

Comic episodes frame the death of Pina, but the difference in tone is striking. The light slapstick of Don Pietro and the frying pan gives way to the dark humor at the restaurant where Francesco, Manfredi, and Marina meet. German soldiers bring in several sheep, which they prepare to shoot and eat, prompting the restaurateur to comment that the Nazis are indeed good butchers. The "joke" is predictable, but compelling, as Rossellini joins a long line of savage ironists who take metaphors literally. This list includes Eisenstein, and Rossellini may well be giving his version of a key section of *Strike*, where shots of workers being killed by soldiers are intercut with graphic shots of an animal killed in a slaughterhouse. Rossellini does not use quick cuts, but he creates much of the emotional effect and intellectual insight of montage even when the images he connects – in this case, the death of Pina and the butchering of the sheep (the latter, I should add, not shown directly in the film) – are dispersed rather than successive or simultaneous.

At the dinner meeting, Marina arranges to hide Francesco and Manfredi in her apartment, but when they arrive, we instantly recognize how out of place they are. The American jazz music blaring from her radio (which seems particularly offensive as it is contrasted with the

sound of a church organ in a brief scene immediately before it), the gin that Marina offers, clearly a gift from the Nazis, and the bright-lit but artificial cheeriness of the atmosphere do not suit the seriousness of Francesco and Manfredi, deep in mourning for the death of Pina even as Marina and a tipsy Laretta seem oblivious to it. When Manfredi finds drugs in Marina's bag, he initiates a confrontation that escalates quickly. Marina defends her choice to do what she has to do to get through these hard times, which she defines in terms of poverty, hunger, and hard work, even if that means prostituting herself. Manfredi counters by talking about the only thing that makes life bearable, love – “love for one's husband, children, friends” – but Marina hears this only as “preaching,” especially when he adds “that which you call love is sordid by comparison.” In the context of this film, focused more on mobilizing and sustaining the Resistance efforts than anatomizing a relationship or fathoming the depths of a confused woman, Manfredi is ultimately more credible and sympathetic than Marina, but in his severity and indelicate handling of his lover, and in the real pathos of Marina's desperation and plea that his love “should have changed” her, we get a brief glimpse of some of the complexities that will characterize Rossellini's later films (such as *Stromboli* [1949] and *Voyage in Italy* [1953]) that do focus on personal relationships and typically follow a woman more like Marina than Pina.

Increasingly in the remainder of the film, Rossellini uses careful composition in depth to let the position of characters in the film frame convey their emotional state and relationship with other characters. Marina stands silently in the far background as Manfredi and Francesco talk about the work yet to be done in a continuing struggle that she has excluded herself from, and after Manfredi doesn't even turn to face her as she moves closer to say good night, she walks out and closes the door. Doors become especially charged with significance at the end of *Open City*, as real props and symbolic “thresholds,” here a threshold of betrayal, as Marina, out of a mixture of anger, weakness, and hope for reward, calls Ingrid and informs her where Manfredi can be picked up the next day.

Not only doors but cigarettes as well proliferate at the end of the film: as part of the accumulation of detail that one would expect in a realistic film; as part of the cinematic fascination with smoke

that characterizes the genres that *Open City* associates itself with, especially war, mystery, and suspense films; and as part of a carefully elaborated pattern establishing cigarette smoking as a kind of index of character.<sup>11</sup> Marina's nervousness, Ingrid's vampish sophistication, and Bergmann's mannered and ruthless authoritarianism (the latter quality visible particularly when he lights a cigarette from a fancy candleholder in a gesture that echoes the way one of Manfredi's torturers casually lights his cigarette from a blowtorch) are all revealed in the way they smoke. Don Pietro smokes too, as we see in the scene where he is at his desk assembling the forged identification papers for Manfredi, but the significance is very positive. Some years later, in a film deeply influenced by Italian neorealism, the priest in Elia Kazan's *On the Waterfront* (1954) confirms that he is beginning to step farther from the church and into the crucible of the real world by lighting up a cigarette. Similarly, a cigarette is yet another sign that Don Pietro's true holiness is this-worldly.

Don Pietro has done his best to protect Manfredi and also a runaway Austrian soldier who has been hiding with him, but as they leave the church, all three are arrested by the Nazis, shown by Rossellini from a distance perhaps to increase the documentary look of the sequence. Francesco escapes capture only because he had paused for a moment to say goodbye to Marcello, who gave him a parting gift of one of Pina's scarves. This is the last we hear of Pina and Francesco in the film, which now bears down heavily on the fate of Manfredi and Don Pietro.

The last part of *Open City* contains many realistic details and directly alludes to familiar characters and events of recent days that the original audience would recognize, but it is also perhaps the most stylized and symbolic part of the film. One of the more subtle bits of symbolism comes as Marina gets her reward for informing on Manfredi: Ingrid gives her not only drugs but a fur coat. The fur coat calls to mind vanity and corrupt luxury, of course, conveyed most vividly as Ingrid and Marina, arm in arm, stare at their image in a mirror (see Fig. 11), but is also associated with an alien and oppressive culture: of the North rather than the South, of restrictive rather than loose clothing, and of obsession with hate and death rather than acceptance of love and life. Rossellini elaborates on this more fully in some of his later films, especially *Voyage in Italy*, which revolves around the clash between cultures and mentalities defined by tightly