

Review: The Problem of Public Sensibility: A Review of the Film, "The Open City"

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The Problem of Public Sensibility: A Review of the Film, *The Open City**

JAMES T. FARRELL

Viewing films such as the Italian production *The Open City* and the Swiss *The Last Chance*, one realizes how starved one has become for a breath of life in a motion picture film. And this stresses all the more clearly elements of the problem of public sensibility at the present time. This problem is not purely aesthetic: we will be far from exhausting its meaning if we conceive it merely as a question of taste and form. Public sensibility and politics are being bound together in the modern world; in fact, Hitler gave a programmatic character to this connection when he discussed propaganda in *Mein Kampf*. He declared that the masses are feminine; he meant that they react more on a feelingful and a sensory basis than they do on an intellectual one. He attacked the intelligentsia not as it might be attacked from the standpoint of socialism for its tendencies merely to follow the leader, or for its vacillations, and the political characterlessness that it so frequently reveals: to the contrary, Hitler attacked the intelligentsia for its progressive virtues, for its representation of variety, disinterestedness, curiosity, reasonableness. One of the progressive functions of the intelligentsia is that of helping to lift the level of public sensibility. Clarity of thought, and a rising level of public sensibility, are now essential in any effort to oppose the propagandistic exploitation of the masses. In his insistence on the "femininity" of the masses, and his attacks on the intellectuals, Hitler was warranting his own practical ideas about propaganda. These include the political use of art. The Hitler technique of propaganda is familiar to us. Hitler said that a big lie should be told. This big lie is then driven into the consciousness of masses by a persistent and all-sided propagandistic effort. In order to assure mass acceptance of the big lie, processes of thought must be rendered rigid. Then the appeal to feeling, to sensations can be made more effectively. The totalitarian propaganda film aims to help achieve precisely such a kind of response. Fact and propagandistically presented lies are, thereby, bound together with an extraordinary cleverness—a cleverness which relies on sensory appeal as one of the means which assist in introducing the big lie into the

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consciousness of masses. This type of film utilizes music, a commentator and other devices: it mixes up fact and myths: it juxtaposes maps, correct statistics, newsreel clips of true scenes with fictionalizations of a propagandistic order. It, thus, shows concretely what Hitler meant by his assertion that the masses are “feminine.” Feeling is appealed to in order to help establish an iron-bound and unquestioned conclusion. Frequently, this type of film even politicalizes meaning by a relative de-politicization of content.

Analysis of Content Essential

The film is one of the paramount instrumentalities of mass culture in our time. The Nazis used it as one of their major propaganda weapons. Today, the political utilization of the films has become a contemporary commonplace. With this, the utilization of totalitarian techniques in Hollywood has now really begun. In consequence, we cannot discuss the film merely in terms of pure art. When thousands and millions of human beings all over the world see current films, when these masses of people go to motion picture theatres with more or less starved sensibilities, when—as so often happens—films concretize the meager conscious streams of reverie of many human beings, when the film affords one of the most magical, stirring, rousing and gripping types of experience which one can know today in the whole field of public life—then we must try to take account of the various types of influences and effects which a film can exert. Furthermore, motion picture films are, with rare exceptions such as Jean Cocteau’s *The Blood of a Poet*, not important for the principal reason that they afford us the object of aesthetic experience. For the majority, motion pictures are important because of their surface content. The analysis of content is a necessary part of a critical and artistic discussion of modern motion pictures. When that content directly or indirectly involves politics, political events and tendencies of immediate world significance, we must refer our analysis to historic events.

A realistically done film is representation of life. We must look to the type of life that is represented when we discuss such a film. We demand that the artist have independence and sovereignty over his material, and we struggle to retain for him the widest possible freedom over that material. This struggle demands a persistent polemical critical attack on all those who would reduce the appreciation of art to the mere level of testing—usually with rigid concepts—the ideological, the political, the moral presuppositions or conclusions in a given work of art, and then, on the basis of this test, and then, of deciding that art is good or bad in accordance with the degree to which the ideological, the political, the moral presuppositions and formal conclusions of the artist agree or disagree with those of the critic. There is no real contradiction between this position, and the necessity of analyzing and evaluating content in a work of art, especially when

the content reveals a guiding political theme. When characters are selected and developed, when details and events are dramatically organized, and even tendentiously conceived, in terms of a content, then, that content is not an irrelevant feature of the given work of art in which this is the case: this is especially so when it is likely that the content of a given work of art will have a definite and immediate political influence. Thus, it is proper, without any violation of our premises concerning the freedom of art, to analyze and warn people concerning this influence. For motion pictures, films are now being used to form a definite kind and level of public sensibility: the film is becoming a major political weapon.

One of the principal orientative attitudes which movie art is insidiously inculcating into the movie audience is that which indirectly—sometimes even directly—establishes the moral—Follow the Leader! We can, in a general sense, say that this type of movie art is bureaucratic, and that it is an art of the glorification of the functionary.

These general remarks should help us in an effort to deal with the various current films, including the Italian one now being shown in New York City, *The Open City*.

Art Humanizes Knowledge

I have already mentioned the starved feeling one has for motion pictures which give us more than does the usual Hollywood films. Additionally we often also feel starved for more knowledge of what has gone on during recent years, what have been the human meanings of the terrible events of war. What has it done to people? What has life been like all over the world during recent years? What has personal life been like during the time that the Fascist regimes of Italy and Germany held unchallenged power? What has the brutality, the bestiality of fascism done to human beings? Our knowledge of modern life in other countries is largely formal and generalized: it is mainly political, economic, sociological, journalistic. It is insufficiently human and immediate in the sense that our knowledge of life in America is human and immediate. And if we regard art from the standpoint of what it does for us in increasing our knowledge of the world, this function of humanizing our knowledge is one which it can or should perform.

If art does this, it helps to increase our awareness of the human aspect of life: it offers us images, representation of the quality of men in different times and places. Today we need most urgently to expand this price of awareness.

Again and again, when we see Hollywood production, we know that life is not at all like what is being shown to us in this film. The human relationships embodied in the movement and sound before our eyes are all false to what we know, and to what we feel. The love story is adolescent, childish. In order to main-

Roberto Rossellini.
The Open City. 1945.



tain any enthusiasm for, any abiding interest in the film other than one based on child-like, almost deliberate and wishful dreamy indulgence in commonplace fantasy, we must somehow find a way of convincing ourselves that the aims, the destiny, the feelings of the hero and the heroine have some real importance, some real significance, socially, or emotionally and personally. For instance, we must find some way of convincing or deceiving ourselves into believing that the all-encompassing need for some physically beautiful, characterless actress to become recognized and to sing boring songs in a large and gilded cabaret, is an all-important human end, an end which we wish to see her attain. We must ourselves supply what the film lacks—internal conviction. The greater majority of Hollywood films feature the young attractive and childish hero and heroine. They are mainly attractive because of their physical traits, and, in the case of the women, their clothes, and their makeup. Thanks to the roles they play and their very appearance, they become an implicit measure of types. Types differing from them are correspondingly reduced in human significance. Usually a deviation from the norms of youth, health and physical attractiveness must be of secondary significance in these films. Types with a certain kind of deviation are laughed at: the moron, the fat person, the unduly thin person, the ugly woman and so on. Such falseness to life becomes all-sided in Hollywood. We meet people in direct life much differently and we evaluate them differently than we are allowed to in the film. In a direct, an empirical, a vividly immediate way, the Hollywood film is creating a new hierarchical standard of evaluations of human beings, of their physiological and psychological traits and appearance. This is having the result of deforming public sensibility. In recent years, the sense of urgency which we feel concerning the problems of the world has created many dichotomies between

what we need in the way of art and what we get. This need is more complicated and more subtle than that expressed in the demand for films which are formally true to life and history, which tell us what historic events and movements are like. It involves the evaluation of traits of character, of face and body; it involves setting, background, emotional and sensory response to objects, to fields of vision. The element of control, of emphasis in setting, in the types of rooms and homes in so many Hollywood films, even this leaves us starved.

The European Film

In reaction against such films, we welcome European films where the actors and actresses are less standardized, less typed. We react with enthusiasm when we see that setting is placed in closer relationship to character so that a home looks more like a home than it so often does in an American film. The trappings of vulgar glamour are absent from the best of European films. In this sense, one feels of a rush of joy in seeing certain European films because one immediately recognizes that the appearance of the players is more an appearance that makes them seem like human beings. One gains a sense of humanity sitting in a theatre and seeing *The Last Chance* or in viewing certain scenes, at least, in *The Open City*. This fact, plus the additional one that this latter film is presented as an artistic representation of what life was like in Rome just prior to its capture by the Allied forces, endows the latter film with an added interest. History, recent history, our thirst for human knowledge, human awareness, vivid images of humanity engulfed in the floods of recent history—this all cooperates with the makers of *The Open City*. These considerations, then, only make more necessary the need for clear and careful analysis of such a film.

The Open City

The Open City presents a story of Rome in the grip of the Gestapo. Through a minor character—an Austrian deserter—we come to understand that the Americans are at Cassino. Due to the fact that we see a building ruined by bombing, we know that Mussolini has fallen. The hero is an engineer named Manfredi: he is a member of The National Committee of Liberation, and he fought with the “Reds”: he was also an experienced member of the underground prior to the Spanish revolution and Civil War: and he is a member of the Communist Party. Early in the film, he escapes over a roof just as the police come to arrest him. He has been “named,” and the Gestapo and the Italian police are searching for him. He has had a love affair with an actress Marina, a girl who was once poor, but who, through the stage and love affairs has managed to reach a higher level of comfort. He has, we learn, met her during a raid. She and he didn’t go to the shelters. But

he is going to break it off with her. Fleeing from the Gestapo, he goes to the home of Francesco, in the working class district. Francesco is a printer. He is going to marry Pina. She is a widow, mother of a boy who is around ten. Francesco and Pina have had a love affair which began two years before the time of the film and Pina is pregnant. Also early in the film, there is a shot of a raid on a bakery, and through subsequent dialogue, it is revealed that Pina has inspired this raid. Francesco is a worker member of the Liberation movement: he works in the underground printing plant where Liberation papers, or at least, a paper is printed. Francesco, the worker, is distinguished from Manfredi, the member of the Committee of National Liberation. The latter is a professional Communist, but came to have assumed the title of engineer. There is one scene where the two lovers, Francesco and Pina sit in the hall—there is no place for privacy for the two lovers in their homes because they live in crowded quarters—and they talk of the future. Pina is distressed, unsure of the future. Francesco tells her that he is not a cultured man, like Manfredi, and that he cannot clearly explain what he means as could the latter, but that he believes in a better world, that she must also believe and that they must do this for their children.

Because he is a hunted man, it is dangerous for Manfredi to carry necessary money to the armed partisans. Manfredi sends for the local priest, Don Pietro. The latter, a Partisan priest, delivers one million lira, printed into books. (In passing, it is interesting to note that in the film itself, no information is given to us as to why this much money is needed, or where it came from.) The Liberation movement is not shown conveniently as a strong one, and we see only passing glimpses of it in action. Its political character must be assumed since it is not concretely and clinchingly represented. One cannot avoid the question: a movement which can get a million lira should be strong, stronger publicly than this one is. To continue: Francesco is a worker Communist, but yet after years of fascism, during which he has come to hold to revolutionary principles, he cannot explain to his beloved what he and she must really fight for. He is not cultured enough for that. This is all the more glaring when one realizes that he is a printer, that he reads and works on the underground press. He even brings the latest issue of the paper to Manfredi and announces that twelve thousand copies were run off. Francesco and Pina are going to be married in the Church. She believes in God, although at the same time, she appears in the film as the working class and Communist woman, one who has inspired a food raid on a bakery. Besides citing her belief in God as a reason for being married in the Church, she asks Manfredi if it is not better to be married by a Partisan priest than by Fascist municipal authorities. The latter in a fraction of a second, agrees with her.

The Gestapo has a dragnet plan for the capture of the enemies of the



*Rossellini.
The Open
City. 1945.*

Fascists. They know that Manfredi, the hunted, is in the neighborhood where Francesco lives. On the day of the intended wedding, they put their plan into operation in this district. Manfredi and Francesco flee out of a window. While all who live in the huge building are being lined up in the courtyard, they are captured. Pina breaks through the soldiery, and chases after the van in which her Francesco is being carried away, along with all of the other men whom the Gestapo have rounded up. And she is shot down, murdered in the street. The auto vans carrying the prisoners are attacked by the Partisans, and Francesco and Manfredi escape. They go to the rather luxurious apartment of Marina. There, Manfredi makes it clear to her that he is breaking off their affair. He tells her that love holds people together, makes human beings live more fully. But this is the love of men and women, husbands and wives, parents for children, not the sordid love she practices with Fascists, Germans, and others in order to have better clothes, better food, a career, a better home than the one she would have had. She knew Pina as a girl: Pina's sister, a young actress, who wants to escape from working class poverty, has even come to live with her, and during this scene, she is drunk. Marina tells Manfredi that if she had stayed in her class, she would have married a trolley car conductor, and would now be raising children. Manfredi and Francesco discuss plans. Manfredi, through the offices of Don Pietro, could have gone into hiding in a monastery. He has not done so in order to be active in the work of the National Committee of Liberation, which we do not see in the film. But now, he decides to go into hiding. On the morning after this evening at Marina's house, they go to Don Pietro, procure false papers and along with an



Rossellini. The Open City. 1945.

Austrian deserter, are being taken by the priest to a monastic hiding place. But Marina has turned them in and they are caught on the street by the Gestapo. At first, the Chief of the Gestapo offers to make a deal with Manfredi. If the latter will give information, the Gestapo promises the Communist Party freedom from Rome. The Gestapo Chief also tries to persuade Manfredi, by pointing out that Italian Monarchists are not reliable allies. Unlike Molotov from 1939 to June 1941, Manfredi does not think that fascism is merely a matter of taste. He won't talk. He is tortured. He still won't talk. Don Pietro is appealed to, but he refuses to intervene, and sitting in the office, looking through the opened door of the torture room, he sees Manfredi tortured to death.

Marina is at headquarters during these scenes. She is given an expensive coat as a reward for informing, and she is assured that all that will happen to Manfredi is that he'll be questioned and released in a couple of days. But she is tense and anxious, and is given drinks. After Manfredi has been brutally tortured to death, she comes into the office of the Chief with a drunken German officer named Captain Hartmann. (He was in the First World War, and he is cracking, because he sees no future, and thinks that the Germans are making themselves hated all over Europe and leaving behind them a trail of corpses.) Marina faints as she sees Manfredi dead. The coat is taken off of her stricken form. It will be useful the next time.

Hierarchical Concept of Characters

Certain other features of the film also need to be mentioned here. The Partisan priest is one of the most attractive characters. He asks God to curse the Gestapo Chief after the latter has had Manfredi tortured to death: then he prays to God for forgiveness. He is kind to the little boys: he is resourceful in outwitting the police and the Gestapo. He shows a certain leniency towards sinners, for instance, when he walks along a street—carrying money to the Partisans—and hears Pina's confession. That she has sinned by having sexual relationships with Francesco out of wedlock—that is human. We all don't do what we should. Even he. He is a good priest, human and understanding, and is a good patriot, a hero: he dies before a firing squad. The Gestapo Chief points out to him that the Communist Manfredi is an aesthetic foe of religion. But still Don Pietro will not change sides. And he and Manfredi together represent the leading elements in the Liberation. This is done by tendentious selection, by omissions, and by bringing their personal images forward into the action.

And let us note the treatment of children here. There is a child leader, Romoletto. He is, like Manfredi, a character with little temperament. Also, like the adult leader, Romoletto has few important connections of a personal character.



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He is not beaten up by parents when the children come home late, and apparently he has no parents, and lives alone on the roof. After a bombing raid, he addresses the children like a leader talking to his followers, and he thanks them, saying that he is proud of them. He appears in the film only a few times, and for a few seconds in each appearance.

Pina's son is the child equivalent of Francesco. He is the main child character. Early in the film, the other boys are shown playing soccer with the priest as referee. But Pina's son is not in the game. Rather, he is sent with the important message for the priest to come and see Manfredi. He stands out from the other children just as Francesco stands out from the other workers. Manfredi is set apart, as is Romoletto, in a more important but parallel manner. The same parallel is seen concerning Francesco and Pina's son. As we have seen, Francesco tells Pina that Manfredi can tell what the fight for a better world means. Manfredi dies at the end. The priest is executed. The last shot shows the children walking off, their backs to the camera. For their parents there is only suffering and death and struggle. This suffering, this death, their struggle is necessary to make a better world for children. But they have their leader, the little son of the murdered Pina.

Liberation, the struggle for this better world is organized, hierarchically represented in the terms of human relationships. Here is a world of leaders and led, just as is the brutal world of the Nazis one of leaders and led. It is striking that the dialogue between the Gestapo Chief and Manfredi, victor and victim, is also one between equals. They can understand each other. Manfredi does not oppose ideals to the Gestapo Chief as much as he does loyalty to his own movement. He

won't make a deal. The Gestapo Chief tries flattery, and indicates clearly that he and Manfredi understand one another. They are bitter enemies in a struggle for power, but each is removed from the masses: each lives and thinks on the plane of leadership. This hierarchal structure of human relationships, then, is embodied in the picture in the very characterizations and in the relationships between characters and it is stressed in small details. The priest goes to the underground printing plant. He is introduced to the Director. This title is used, rather than the word Comrade. The Director is set off from the workers in the printing plant, and this fact is established by his little office in a closed-off space. He takes the priest into his office, just like any other executive.

The "New" Communist Woman

Pina is the most spontaneous character in *The Open City*. She is more free emotionally than the other major characters. But her freedom and spontaneity is revealed only in her domestic and purely feminine role. In the first scenes, she appears to us as very charming. Her charm and appeal—she is dressed in character, and is lovely—in itself attracts us more genuinely than the Hollywood star actress can or usually does. Pina is natural, temperamental. She loses her temper with her little boy. She loves genuinely and with a spirit of self-sacrifice. She has suffered, and is a widow. She is pregnant. She feels guilty and needs to go to confession. She has a moment of doubt, about the future, and Francesco assures her, sitting on the hall steps. Manfredi dies in stoical heroism: Don Pietro dies with dignity, declaring to the priest who prays at the end as he walks to be shot that it is not so difficult to die well, for the greater difficulty is found in trying to live well. But when Pina is murdered, she is carried away by frantic emotion, by love and fear. Her emotion gives her strength and courage to break past soldiers with guns, and to run down the street after the truck full of prisoners. As we learn through the dialogue, she inspired a food riot. But then, she relapses to human duties, to those of mother and beloved woman. The actions given to her by the scenarist establish her as the "new" Communist woman. And such, she is differentiated from man. She is hierarchized in this subtle fashion.

The inhabitants of the building where she lives, serve as a human background. We see them in most intimate and personal terms when they are engaged in an argument in a crowded home, concerning children and the difficulties of crowded family life. This constitutes a humorous touch, and elicits laughter from the audience. Only in a humorously humanizing role do they come forward. This fact further reveals the hierarchization within the picture. And contrasted with them, and with Pina, we see the actress Marina. As we have noted, she has escaped from such a life by selling her body as a commodity. But she has found love through a chance meeting with Manfredi. She would, through her love, cause him to forsake the people. She has lost her humanity by breaking from her past. She

compares unfavorably with Pina. She is more nervous. She needs pills and cigarettes and clothes. She has no one to love, no one to live for. Rejected by her lover, she betrays him for a fur coat, and she does not even get this. She is last seen stretched out on the floor of the Gestapo Chief's office, unconscious. The freer woman sexually, the woman with artistic gifts, is not as happy as the mother who is loved by the workingman. For the latter, though, the goods of life are love and struggle, not a change from her present position in the world to one of more freedom. If you have more of the comforts of life, as does this actress, you are not happy. You can live without these, and you can have the emotional goods of life. And you have leaders who know how they can create a better world for your children.

Stalinist Functionary—Superman

This hierarchization is further stressed in the very characterization of Manfredi. He is nearly always calm. Only when he is subjected to unbearable tortures in the torture room, does he scream out. But hunted by the Gestapo, living in danger, he never loses his composure. He has far less temperament than Pina. Unlike the priest, he is faced with no inner contradictions. He has made a clear decision to break off his love affair with the actress—an alien element. He speaks clearly to her as to why he breaks it off. He suffers no strain in making other decisions. When he sees the necessity of going into hiding, he makes the decision with promptness. At the same time he is attentive to others. Francesco is shaken after his beloved Pina is murdered: at Marina's apartment, and he needs aspirin. Manfredi perceives this and also that he needs sleep. He gives Francesco the couch on which to sleep—he takes the chair. He is, at the same time, modest and unassuming. He points out that he is no hero, but that others have died before him, without talk and he hopes that he may measure up to them. His milieu is one of danger and has been this for years. But danger has left no strains on his personality. In brief, he is the functionary, who has courage. He takes risks willingly, but he is not foolhardy: the Hollywood hero is always foolhardy, determined to win by sheer bravery, physical power, and shrewdness against odds, and his actions are usually stupid and preposterous. The movie audience is used to such heroes, and in fact, for an American audience endows Manfredi the more with a human attractiveness. His stoicism is magnified. As we learn, his love affair began during a raid: he found this girl who was like him, unafraid and they both remained where they were instead of going into shelter where there was more protection. He talks to others mainly about their problems, or about practical details, not about ideas. He says very little about himself. In this characterization then, we see a most subtle tendentiousness: the function of this tendentiousness is that of further embodying this new hierarchization. We have, in Manfredi, the new Stalinist functionary.

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Myth of CP Role

The Open City depicts the new Stalinist myth concerning the role of the Communist parties. We have been familiarized with this myth in successive revolutionary situations ever since the Chinese revolution. On the political level this myth conceals the programmatic policies of the Stalinists: on the personal level, it brings forth the Stalinist heroes. In this movie, the hero and leader stands in front, and the politics are only passingly indicated. The only political party mentioned in the film is the Communist Party, although we know that in the Badoglio period of recent Italian history, there were six parties. The Catholic appears in the role of a priest, not a Catholic political leader. At one point in the film, the Gestapo Chief is at his desk, looking at the latest editions of the underground press. There are a number of these papers with different names: but yet only one left political tendency is positively named, the Communist. In effect, the Communist Party is almost the only party. Another tendency, monarchism, is referred to, however, as an unreliable ally for a Communist. But the Communist Party is so significant that the Gestapo can propose a deal with its leader, guaranteeing it freedom in Rome. As yet, we need to gain much more data on what happened in Italy just prior to and immediately after the fall of Mussolini. But we know enough to be certain that there was a higher and more tense political atmosphere. Prior to Mussolini's fall, there were tremendous strikes in the North: in Rome, Mussolini had no sooner fallen than the underground papers were out,

and political parties with their leadership came into the open. Such facts as these predicate both a different political atmosphere and a different level of political consciousness in the masses of Rome than that concretized in this film. In brief, the movie is made to rewrite history in myth.

Art is given a practical political function. This function is not performed by a simple and obtuse didactic emphasis, but rather with the aid of tendentious characterization, tendentious organization of plot, a tendentiousness in details. This tendentiousness serves, further, the purpose of distorting and concealing the politics of a political movie: a political movie, furthermore, which was made in Italy in a time of tense and centrally important political crisis. Formally, the film embodies the idea of national unity; more intimately, it establishes the leadership principle. The leader has, further, a definable social character. He is a cultured man, an engineer. He is the new intelligentsia, or the intelligentsia in its new role. Stalin, we know, has defined the intelligentsia of the Soviet Union and "a layer between classes." Hitler attacked and destroyed the old liberal intelligentsia, and put the intellectuals to work under his service. They were the carrier of propaganda, the rigidifiers of the public consciousness. From the standpoint of Stalinism, we have here something that is parallel. Manfredi is in, as it were, the layer between classes. He has contacts of a wider variety than Francesco or Pina; he can have a love affair with an actress; he can meet her in a restaurant or café, obviously one which is not patronized by workers. His province is ideas; his function in relationship to the masses is that of serving as an example, of listening to their talk of their problems, of making decisions, of giving the orders and blue-printing the plans for the better world that the children will know. He has the parallel in the child who, even in boyhood, is being trained in life as the new leader, and as such, the next generation of men who serve as the layer between classes.

Public Sensibility vs. Totalitarian Art

This is the content of the film; this is its significance, its "message." The condition of public sensibility in America suggests that this message will be readily accepted by many serious persons. We have noted some of the reasons for this. The political and the artistic character of this film come together, as it were, and with this linkage of art and politics, the condition of public sensibility can be seen to be a crucial problem. I have emphasized the point that Francesco tells Pina that he is not cultured and cannot, like Manfredi, tell her what the better world is really to be like. Manfredi has the ideas and the program in his head. These he doesn't state in the film. The audience is left in the same state as Francesco and Pina concerning the aims and ideals of this terrible struggle that is going on. A confused intellectual condition in the public is necessary for this picture to achieve its effects. This intellectual confusion, in itself, smothers aesthetic sensibility, reduces it. Such being the case, the audience is likely to be less demanding. It

is likely to miss this crucial flaw, both political and artistically, in the film. Just as the working people must rely on the leaders, so must the audience trust to faith. The picture is subtly ideologically without a statement of its ideology, a presentation of it in the film. In this sense, it doesn't carry its own full power of inner compulsion. It relies on historic events in the terms of their presentation and interpretation from the standpoint of an all-class, Popular-Front, National-Liberation conception of fascism. Both inside of the film, and in the world of History we have the bestial Nazis, hated by millions on millions all over the world. Hatred of the Nazis must help the makers of this film to achieve their effects. Since the Nazis are bestial, then opposition to them, is, in itself a sufficient motivation. But, in the picture, this is turned into the Stalinist opposition. It is in this way that history is relied on to give to the film the compulsion and conviction which it does not fully carry within itself. The artistic flaw of *The Open City* serves as a means of establishing its real ideology, if the conception of trusting and following the leader be considered an ideology.

If you add to a political and intellectual confusion, a low and relatively starved aesthetic and public sensibility, then you can grasp more clearly the special nature and significance of this film. When public sensibility is sufficiently low, diverse and uncritical emotional reactions dominate the response of the audience. The person sitting in the audience reacts favorably to heroism, and unfavorably to brutality, cruelty, injustice. Besides the direct presentation of these contrasts, the hero is anti-Fascist; the brutes are Nazis. The anti-Fascist hero wins the favor of the audience. And the leadership conception is thereby stamped into the mind of the audience.

This analysis should help to demonstrate, not only the importance of serious and clear political analysis; it should also suggest something of the problem of art, of the questions of sensibility in our own age. With mass distribution or circulation of art, the problem of lifting mass sensibilities becomes paramount. This need was implied by the very early writings of Marxism. Engels stated in *Ludwig Feuerbach* that the German working class was the heir of German classical society. The socialist conception of culture is a conception of a human culture, based on the highest possible standards. But this is not, any longer, a problem of theoretically posting the conception of a human culture in the future. This has now become a practical problem demanding the most serious consideration and attention here and now. Aesthetic sensibility, in our time, will help to provide one more barrier to the subtle appeal embodied in totalitarian art. For this art plays on the senses, the feelings. It divorces ideas and feelings, and rigidifies the former; it then uses all of the wealth of modern technical imaginativeness to attract the feelings. The Hitler technique of propaganda has entered the field of world art. The major art in which that technique is being utilized is the movies. *The Open City* is one of the most subtle, clever, appealing illustrations of just this fact.