

From Circulation to Suspension: Infrastructure, Precarity, and Marginality in Gianfranco Rosi's *Sacro Gra* (2013)

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Abstract

In this article, I build on recent work in infrastructure studies to explore how *Sacro Gra* (Gianfranco Rosi, 2013) visualises the social and material worlds that gather around infrastructural margins. I argue that Rosi's documentary provides an especially productive venue for examining the tension between infrastructural aspiration and infrastructural failure, foregrounding the forms of precarity, isolation, and everyday improvisation that arise where infrastructures are incomplete or unevenly distributed. My aim is to expand the critical frameworks through which we interpret cinematic engagements with infrastructure and to suggest that *Sacro Gra* reframes the Roman ring road as a liminal and porous zone in which infrastructural "bleeding" becomes perceptible through rescale, shot composition, and the rhythms of labour.

Keywords: Precarity; Infrastructure; Labour; Documentary; Rosi.

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1 Infrastructure “bleeding”

Material infrastructures, such as roads, water networks, electrical lines, ports, pipelines, sewage systems, operate as complex social, material, aesthetic, and political systems. They structure differentiated experiences of everyday life and orient collective expectations of the future, while also generating zones of precarity for those whose access to these systems is interrupted, unreliable, or systematically withheld. It is precisely these dynamics – namely precarity, uneven infrastructural reach, and the social worlds formed in their wake – that animate Gianfranco Rosi’s *Sacro Gra* (2013). Rather than depicting Rome’s ring road as a circular conduit linking two points and emphasising the mobility it enables, Rosi’s film positions it as a zone of suspension, where inhabitants are immobilised at the margins and living within precarious, quasi-autonomous micro-communities or in solitude. By attending to the lives of those dwelling around the ring road, the documentary offers a commentary on the consequences that arise when an infrastructure – both in its direct operation and in its broader social effects – falls short of its intended purpose.

To develop an understanding of how *Sacro Gra* engages with the ring road and situates it within the broader Roman landscape, I first focus on the notion of infrastructure itself. By creating the ground upon which other systems operate, infrastructures form the base on which modern society and economic life depend. Loosely defined as the material substrate that enables other forms of matter to move, the anthropologist Brian Larkin argues that infrastructures need to be studied not only as built networks that facilitate flows of people and goods, but also as “concrete semiotic and aesthetic vehicles oriented to addresses” (Larkin 2013: 329). While the technical function of a road is to transport vehicles within a space of unimpeded circulation, its semiotic and aesthetic role persists insofar as it generates collective and individual fantasies of autonomy and desires for development. For Larkin, infrastructures are conceptually grounded in the Enlightenment ideal of a world in motion, open to change, and teleologically driven towards progress. Building on Walter Benjamin’s notion of collective fantasy, Larkin argues that infrastructures “encode the dreams of individuals and societies and are the vehicles whereby those fantasies are transmitted and made emotionally real” (Larkin 2013: 333). In other words, as both technical and aesthetic devices, infrastructures establish relations between imagination, ideology, and technology that are historically situated and continuously produce new experiences of the world and structures of feeling.

Drawing on Larkin’s account, one might explore how the promises of infrastructure to provide continuous services and to supply a durable, uninterrupted flow of capital are persistently undermined by failure, interruption, and divergence from their intended functions. In short, infrastructures both uphold and compromise modernity. On the one hand, they channel capitalism’s aspirations toward mobility and prosperity; on the other, as Larkin’s metaphor of infrastructural “bleeding” suggests (Larkin 2013: 328), they also reveal the points at which those systems come undone. Unequal infrastructural provision generates structural inequalities and uncertainties, shaped by relations of domination across gender, ethnicity, race, and class (Lorey 2015). Both individuals and communities are rendered more vulnerable and exposed to conditions of infrastructural deficit, which ultimately produce ongoing dynamics of social exclusion and marginalisation. In this sense, unequal access to infrastructures contributes to what Judith Butler terms precarity – a politically orchestrated condition whereby particular populations are deprived of reliable social and economic supports and rendered differentially vulnerable to injury, violence, and death (Butler 2009). From the Deepwater Horizon oil spill to the Fukushima nuclear disaster, from Hurricanes Katrina and Sandy to the Morandi Bridge collapse, infrastructural “bleedings” pervasively affect communities worldwide, producing conditions of poverty, ruination, and abandonment.

The tension between aspiration and failure makes infrastructure a productive locus for examining the constitution and reproduction of economic and political life. In recent years, infrastructures have emerged in ethnography – and subsequently in literary, visual, and cultural studies – as analytic tools for examining both abandonment and disconnection, as well as futurity and aspiration. In this paper, I suggest that infrastructures frequently occupy subjunctive states: promises that falter, remnants of unrealised futures, and fragile “relations to ongoingness” (Rich et al. 2023: 13). It is precisely within this infrastructural “bleed” that the most productive analytic terrain emerges – where interruption and breakdown expose the contingent mechanisms through which life is organised, as well as the alternative forms of sociality and experience that arise in their wake.

If I have dwelled at some length on these reflections, it is because I contend that they resonate with the work of Gianfranco Rosi. In his documentaries, one encounters a rich repertoire of infrastructural “bleedings” that render visible the ruptures and vulnerabilities structuring contemporary life. Whether in the Golden Bear-winning *Fuocoammare* (*Fire at Sea*, 2016) or his first debut *Boatman* (1993), Rosi’s camera draws spectators into the materiality of human life in environments influenced by specific infrastructures. Rosi’s observational and humanist filmmaking (Harries and Rhodes 2022; Rhodes 2022) focuses on highly localised communities and individuals who often live in isolation and are nearly cut off from major infrastructures. His documentaries take up positions in worlds where precarity, isolation, and social exclusion generated at the edges of infrastructures are acutely persistent (Wilson 2018). *Notturmo* (*Nocturne*, 2020) is set in spaces of violence on the borders of Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon; *Fuocoammare* is centred on the Lampedusa communities shaken and separated from the infrastructures of the European response to the refugee crisis; *Below Sea Level* (2008), portraying the unincorporated, off-the-grid community of Slab City, California; and, most recently, *Sotto le nuvole* (*Below the Clouds*, 2025), focuses on towns in Campania exposed to seismic activity linked to Vesuvius. It is, however, in *Sacro Gra* (2013) that we find a more direct investigation of how infrastructures in general, and the Roman ring road in particular, produce economic and social voids that sustain processes of social exclusion and marginalisation. In the documentary, infrastructures that appear to possess fixed boundaries are refigured through the filmic encounter as porous, unstable, and intermittently breached.

In this article, I offer a close analysis of the ways in which Rosi’s documentary transforms Roman infrastructure through a radical rescaling and reframing, conceptualising the road as a liminal zone between urban and non-urban spaces, mobility and stasis, while foregrounding the precarious lives of those who inhabit its margins. I argue that *Sacro Gra* reframes the GRA not as a circulatory system of the city but as a porous, marginal zone, rendering infrastructural precarity visible through scale and composition. Through a series of open-ended, fragmentary vignettes, the documentary’s engagement with the profilmic reveals how this porosity prevents the GRA from being reduced to an empty, depopulated infrastructural space. My analysis focuses on two main strategies within the documentary’s rigorous film aesthetics: first, a *mise-en-scène* that diminishes the scale of the GRA and subverts conventional landscape representations; and second, a shot composition that decentralises the ring road itself while foregrounding everyday practices.

2 *Sacro Gra* and the ring road

Located approximately 11 km from the Imperial Fora, the GRA has become a crucial artery in Rome’s transport network, albeit one notoriously marked by chronic traffic congestion. As Letizia Modena writes, “the GRA was conceived in the late 1940s as an external junction, a large ring road far from any settlements [...] in order to connect the consular roads” (Modena 2016: 198).¹ Built under the supervision of the engineer Eugenio Gra, “the acronym corresponds to the surname of its designer, signalling a contemporary revival of the process of naming consular roads” (Modena 2016: 198). The ring road was planned and constructed during the Italian economic boom, when a large-scale infrastructural renewal spread throughout the country. The initial phase of its construction (1948–1951) reflected the then-predominant Keynesian conception of labour: the ring road expanded on a massive yet chaotic scale, with little regard for the urban and environmental consequences it would generate. The ring road was completed and became fully operational only in 1970, although expansions continue to the present day. As Robert Gordon observes, the GRA:

entered Italian and international folklore in 1960, when the Rome Olympics showed off many facets of the new Italy to the world and the GRA featured in the famous barefoot marathon victory of Abebe Bikilla, from Italy’s former colony of Ethiopia, the first ever sub-Saharan African winner of Olympic gold. In 1972, in other words, the GRA could still just about connote a sort of twentieth-century urban utopia of the built modern, bound up with Italy’s post-war economic miracle, a projection of growth, mechanization and prosperity (Gordon 2022: 454).

Unlike the ring road of the economic boom, the twenty-first-century GRA has developed more spontaneously, transforming from an infrastructure designed merely to alleviate traffic congestion into a self-contained reality

1. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are by the author.

in its own right. The GRA is “the aggregation of distinct enclaves. [...] The enclaves are arranged in sequence through junctions and cul-de-sacs; each area seems distinct from the others and governed by its own laws; it takes shape, grows, and transforms on its own terms” (Cao 2005: 11). Administered by *Azienda Nazionale Autonoma delle Strade* (ANAS), the Italian company responsible for the maintenance and management of the national road network, the present-day GRA figures as a dysfunctional and disharmonious transit space, devoid of organisation and emblematic of Rome’s notorious traffic congestion. In comparing the contemporary condition with the original project, Gordon argues that:

what was in 1970 a circle cutting across semi-rural empty space imagining a future harmony between country and city, including evocative ruins of ancient Rome such as the Appian Way (where Bikilla also ran), is now a dense and overspilling continuum of anonymous, dehistoricized and blocked contemporary space (Gordon 2022: 454).

Within this articulated history, the GRA also possesses a distinctive cinematic trajectory. The ring road belongs to a small corpus of films focusing on Rome’s peripheries rather than its centre.² On the one hand, there is a tradition of Pasolinian *borgata* films that, from the early 1960s, extends to Claudio Caligari’s *Non essere cattivo* (*Don’t Be Bad*, 2015). On the other hand, *Sacro Gra* participates in a niche subset of films that focus on Rome’s arteries, including the GRA, in order to portray and evoke an “other” Rome. *Sacro Gra* and the ring road may be situated within a series of films that include Dino Risi’s *Il sorpasso* (*The Easy Life*, 1962), Federico Fellini’s *Roma* (1972), Pasolini’s *Uccellacci e uccellini* (*The Hawks and the Sparrows*, 1966), Nanni Moretti’s *Caro diario* (*Dear Diary*, 1993), and, finally, the late *commedia all’italiana* *L’ingorgo* (*Traffic Jam*, Luigi Comencini, 1979).³ In this lineage, *Sacro GRA* occupies a pivotal position, transforming the ring road from a mere setting or symbol of modernity into a living infrastructure – an inhabited threshold where histories of urban expansion and precarious forms of life converge.

3 Rescaling the “major” economy of the GRA

In an ethnographic survey of Delhi, Maan Barua builds upon Larkin’s metaphor of infrastructural “bleeding” to argue for “a minor ecology of infrastructures”, one that brings to the fore “some of the elusive relations that constitute urban form, modes of inhabitation, and attendant urban economies” (Barua 2023: 26). Barua contrasts two modes of thinking about infrastructures – the major and the minor – drawing conceptually from Deleuze and Guattari’s distinction between major and minor languages. Both represent different treatments of the same urban language. On the one hand, the major refers to dominant epistemologies, namely apparatuses of governmental rationality that organise infrastructures and privilege rational citizens, productive workers, and governable populations. On the other hand, the minor does not simply indicate the expression of a minority; rather, it consists in questioning and continuously varying the majority. The minor denotes a different mode of expression within the space of the major. It always reworks the major “like a thing and its shadow” (Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 16).

Sacro Gra’s final shot – twenty-five CCTV traffic camera screens – reveals that the GRA is not merely an otherness, a separate and quasi-autonomous zone, but is deeply enmeshed within the networks of circulation and surveillance underpinning contemporary infrastructure. If CCTV images possess a form of “temporal indexicality”, that is, images whose truth is “guaranteed by the fact that it is happening in so-called ‘real time’” (Levin 2002: 592), the documentary invites viewers to consider the mechanisms of control exercised upon the GRA. This intermedial configuration suggests that the lives of its denizens remain shaped by the dynamics of mobility that define infrastructural space, encapsulated in the ceaseless flow of traffic captured by the CCTV cameras. However, aside from the final shot, *Sacro Gra* persistently subverts the notion of infrastructures operating in the “major” key, contrasting it with a “minor” approach, one that reworks “a major language from within, to formulate concepts and denominations of the urban canon differently” (Barua 2023: 23). The documentary reconfigures the GRA from a “major”, closed system of mobility into a “minor”, living, permeable

2. For an overview of Rome’s cinematic history, see Holdaway and Trentin (2013).

3. On *Sacro Gra*’s relationship with Fellini’s *Roma* (Fellini 1972) and Pasolini’s *Uccellacci e uccellini* (Pasolini 1966), see Gordon (2022) and Sartori (2019), respectively.

environment where the boundaries between movement and stasis, interior and exterior, infrastructure, life, and labour are continually renegotiated. In contrast to the Keynesian “major” labour that occurs around the GRA, Rosi’s documentary gestures towards a “minor” economy, one that bleeds into the infrastructural fabric of everyday life and is not organised by efficiency or capital, but by necessity, attention, and endurance.

The slow unfolding of the ring road and the lives of its inhabitants reflect the filmmaker’s prolonged immersion in this territory, with short shooting sessions following months of observation. *Sacro Gra* establishes an original relationship with Italy, even though the country it depicts is geographically, sociologically, and politically marginal to the national map.⁴ The documentary completes a four-year project of “transmedia storytelling” (Modena 2016), comprising writing, video, photography, cinema, and a website devoted to the GRA.⁵ Writer, landscapist, and filmmaker Nicolò Bassetti initiated a 300-kilometre walking exploration of the ring road.⁶ Bassetti’s approach produced a loosely defined cartography of the GRA, beginning from the ancient Appian Way and tracing the full 67 km of the ring to reach less-known zones such as *Torre Spaccata* and *San Basilio*.⁷ By contrast, in *Sacro Gra*, as Rosi declares in an interview, “the place has been transformed – you don’t recognise the location anymore. [...] So, for the film I was imagining this place” (Ombres 2014⁸, emphasis added). Although the documentary takes a stance on Bassetti’s transmedia project, Rosi admits to embarking on a more personal intervention. *Sacro Gra* departs from Bassetti’s walking exploration of the GRA to become “something more comprehensive, [...] starting from an encounter, sometimes within a place I have to find characters” (Gili 2014: 34). Rosi’s relationship with the ring road shifts from an exploration of a liminal territory to an intertwining of inhabitants and environment. His GRA emerges as a “place of abstraction, a place of silence, and a place of transformation” (Gili 2014: 34), shaped by – and in turn shaping – the lives of those who inhabit it.

Composed of short stories about individuals, situations, and places scattered around the ring road, *Sacro Gra* adopts a highly episodic structure. It resists traditional structuring: its stories remain largely unconnected and, for the most part, unfold away from the ring road itself – the only partial exception being the paramedic, who is occasionally shown inside the ambulance. Rather than presenting the GRA as a road linking two points – or, in the case of a circular road, as connecting centre and peripheries – *Sacro Gra* explores this infrastructure as an edgeland, a space of disconnection where movement ceases to matter. In documentaries about roads, there is a prevailing sense of kineticism, coupled with a sense of freedom typically associated with infrastructure. As Laura Rascaroli argues, this movement is reflected in a shot composition privileging

the framing of landscape through a windscreen, which functions as a *mise en abyme* of the cinema screen. As such, through framing, the road movie creates an intensified and magnified ‘cinema situation’, which heightens the exhilaration created by the mobilization of the spectatorial eye through the exploitation of kinetic and scenic pleasures (Rascaroli 2022: 483).

Sacro Gra subverts and problematises many of the characteristics of this mode of composition. Documentaries about infrastructure often employ establishing and panoramic shots of depopulated landscapes to challenge viewers’ sense of scale and perspective. These shots emphasise how scale responds to the imperatives of movement, efficiency, and operability. In Rosi’s film, a brief 25-second sequence set near the Capannelle Racecourse radically destabilises the scale of the ring road, adhering to a logic of circular, looping movement that constrains rather than facilitates human mobility. A tilt-pan downward from a close-up of what initially appears to be a racetrack lingers on miniature cars before suddenly revealing, in a static long shot, that the scene is, in fact, framed against the backdrop of a massive viaduct. This static long shot divides the frame

4. For discussions of Rosi’s positioning as a “global” director in terms of industry presence, background, and filmmaking practice, as well as his relation to Italian film history, see Harries and Rhodes (2022) and Caminati and Sassi (2017). An account of Rosi’s international success would require a more extensive examination than is possible here. For *Fuocoammare*, see Johnson (2023) and Garofalo (2020).

5. See also the official website *Sacro GRA. Il progetto. Il libro. Il film*. <https://sacrogra.it/> (last accessed 01-10-2025).

6. Developed in collaboration with urbanist Renato Nicolini, the project interwove elements of psychogeography, Gilles Clément’s *Manifesto of the Third Landscape* (2005), and literary influences such as Italo Calvino’s *Le città invisibili* (1972).

7. In an edited collection summarising the project, Bassetti uses a series of metaphors to describe the GRA: “Grande Serpente”, “Enorme Orifizio” and, in homage to Fellini’s film, “Anello di Saturno”. Bassetti and Matteucci (2013: 14).

8. See Ombres, Frank (2014). “Open Roads Interview: Gianfranco Rosi”. *Film Comment*. <https://www.filmcomment.com/blog/intervew-gianfranco-rosi/> (last accessed 01-10-2025)

horizontally between the intertwined curves of the viaduct in the background and the miniature racetrack in the foreground, whose hairpin bends visually merge with those of the viaduct behind it (Fig. 1). Rather than pausing on the movement of real cars, Rosi frames miniature vehicles against the backdrop of a viaduct, their looping, circular motion metonymically encapsulating the repetitive and anonymous flow along the GRA. The circular geometry of the racetrack is paired with that of the ring road within the same shot, subtly relativising the scale of the latter. This formal contraction of scale erodes distinctions between macro and micro, between the monumental scale of the GRA and the intimate scale of everyday life.



Fig. 1. – Contrast between miniature and monumental scales within an overcast urban landscape.

This gesture positions the ring road as a syncretic urban fabric connecting Rome to its outskirts, while also emphasising the “minor” forms of labour conducted at the margins. By concentrating on precarious lives shaped by the forces of late capitalism, Rosi’s *mise-en-scène* offers a particularly revealing perspective for examining these existences. Two episodes, I contend, exemplify this approach: sex work and fluvial fishing.

4 Windscreens, parked vans, and fluvial boats

The figure of the sex worker is traditionally associated with urban space. Walter Benjamin casts the sex worker as an allegory of urban modernity, symbolising the intersections of sex, pleasure, consumption, and the logic of money. Similarly, Mary Ann Doane argues that “the free and unanchored circulation of sexuality and money epitomised the modernity associated with the increased traffic of urban space” (Doane, 1991: 263). Rita Felski further observes that the female street sex worker is both a figure of “public pleasure” and an epitome of “the abyss of a dangerous female sexuality linked to contamination, disease, and a breakdown of social hierarchies of the modern city” (Felski 1995: 19). Globally, as cities have become the primary sites of capitalist consumption, cinema frequently dramatises the visibility and labour of sex workers.⁹ At the level of form, films often engage the sex worker’s physicality by inscribing it within the spatial dynamics of the street, using hand-held camerawork and recognisable locations. *Sacro Gra*, however, subverts this convention by confining two sex workers to a van in an anonymous location. Here, a static camera frames the two sex workers through the windscreen, rendering them objects of the spectatorial gaze. Comparing this sequence to road movies, Rascaroli observes that “the typical use of the windscreen as a *mise en abyme* of the cinema screen through which the spectator is invited to admire a moving landscape together with the driving character(s) is reversed” (Rascaroli 2022: 483). The entire sequence inverts the conventional relationship between inside and outside, placing the spectator *inside* the parked, static vehicle. Rather than immersing the sex workers in an urban environment, this moment destabilises the binary oppositions of inside/outside and interior/exterior and, by extension, the idea of the GRA as the outer limit of the city. The reversal of interior and exterior also reveals a fundamental economic dislocation: sex work, once bound to the city’s circulatory networks, is now rendered static, peripheral, and economically suspended at the margins of the GRA.

When the sequence cuts to a close-up of them at the front of the van, one sex worker applies blush to the other’s eyes. This quotidian, intimate, and unhurried gesture is coupled with a glimpse into their lives – they

9. See Hipkins and Taylor-Jones (2017).

recount criminal proceedings for alleged public obscenities and share food, drinks, and cigarettes. Their van, parked at the edge of what appears to be a secondary road with deflated wheels, becomes the focal point of the sequence. The sex workers are confined to an anonymous, indeterminate space that bears no trace of the GRA's structures or any resemblance to Rome itself. The fixed camera, shooting through the windscreen, circumscribes the workers' bodies within the enclosed space of the vehicle – a site that is at once the locus of sexual transactions and a surrogate domestic interior.

As de Villiers argues, representations of sex work in documentaries often speak to social and economic changes in response to crises in sexuality, labour, and national identity. Documentaries addressing sex work generally frame it as follows:

as an *exceptional* economic activity and form of labor (even as they show sensitivity to material concerns of livelihood and survival). Such films often ask questions preoccupied with risk and disease, sexual behavior and sexual identity, and confessional modes of testimony (all of which tend to heighten rather than alleviate stigma) (de Villiers 2017: 4).

In the Italian context, for instance, Pasolini's *cinéma vérité* interviews in *Comizi d'amore* (*Love Meetings*, 1964) engage with sex to explore the discursive distribution and labour conditions of sex work following the Merlin Law (1958), which led to the closure of brothels. Through street interviews, Pasolini captures the contingent and transactional nature of sex work, anchoring it in public dialogue across different social classes, including subaltern groups, and emphasising its economic dimension in the testimonies of interviewees. While *Comizi d'amore* situates sex work within a public and urban discursive sphere, *Sacro Gra* withdraws anecdotal and mundane discourses into a space of stillness and enclosure, transforming a mobility-emblematic vehicle into a paradoxical site of intimacy, exclusion, and endurance at the edge of the infrastructure. Rosi's focus on the two sex workers serves to decentralise and de-urbanise the figure of the sex worker, transforming it from a flaneuse of modernity into a stationary inhabitant of a marginal place. The episode on sex workers renders, with quiet lyricism, the fragile condition of an existence in which sex work becomes an immobile form of labour, poised at the edge of the GRA and suspended between reliance on, and refusal of, the ring road's restless circulation.

If the sequence with the two sex workers reverses conventional relationships between interior and exterior, the episode on fluvial fishing reiterates this reversal while offering a more nuanced reflection on the GRA's impact on the lives and labour of its denizens. *Sacro Gra* is attuned to performing “national belongings”, while “local spaces are constructed through migratory flows, across complex temporalities and encounters” (Olivieri 2016: 136). In Rosi's vision, the GRA emerges from the mingling of human and animal remnants, driven by both the local disorder of the ring road and broader global economic currents. Figures such as Francesco, the botanist studying the effects of the red palm weevil, exemplify the entanglement of local knowledge, ancient practices, and technologies, all exposed to globalisation and transnational migration.¹⁰ A similar entanglement structures the life of Cesare, an eel fisherman near the GRA, who sails the Tiber daily in a vanishing form of labour. The eel population is declining, and the fishing industry has embraced globalisation by importing non-native species into Italian rivers. Though Cesare expresses anxieties about multiculturalism, his life is embedded within a multicultural environment – his wife is Ukrainian and his helper is South Asian. The documentary's observation of these socio-economic dynamics is articulated through the same reversal between interior and exterior. In a domestic scene in which Cesare and his wife discuss Italian food habits, Rosi positions the camera on the kitchen table, using a customary angle to map the house's interior. If we look closely at the scene, however, we notice that the window is unexpectedly closed, redirecting the view from the Tiber's landscape to the congested ring road (Fig. 2). Rosi frames an intimate domestic scene while signalling separation from the “major” economy. The closed window and the panorama of the GRA suggest that Cesare and the *fumaroli* live apart from Rome – detached from the “major” economy that the infrastructure sustains. This closed aperture symbolically detaches the household from the riverine labour that sustains it, aligning their everyday life with an infrastructural world in which such labour is marginal. The shot encapsulates a disjunction: Cesare's labour belongs to a disappearing ecosystem, while the GRA represents the dominant economy from which he is spatially and economically excluded.

10. In Rosi's documentaries, there is meticulous attention to the role of technological tools, such as computers, radars, and sonars, as well as aural and visual recording mechanisms used to observe and track the world; see Casetti and Zucconi (2021).



Fig. 2. – Domestic spaces at the margins of the GRA.

The *fumaroli*, based in southern Rome in Drizzagno del Tevere – an artificial canal constructed through a lock system during the Fascist period – represent a vanishing Roman river culture. As Cesare acknowledges, the encroachment of industrial fishing and environmental degradation has rendered this way of life nearly obsolete. Yet his labour remains anchored in the rhythms of the river and the species it nurtures. Fishing in Italian cinema, from Visconti's *La terra trema* (*The Earth Trembles*, 1948) to Antonioni's *Gente del Po* (*People of the Po Valley*, 1947), politically emphasises a connection to an enduring past, traditional practices, and the marginality of human life along the river (Pucci 2013). In Visconti's portrayal of fishermen in Aci Trezza, transmissions and reiterations of knowledge and practices among fishermen become narratives of political awakening. The relationship between primordial fishing practices and political discourses is visually framed in scenes that show boats returning to the sea, restarting the fishermen's daily cycle of labour and lending their toil an almost heroic dimension. Similarly, in *Gente del Po* (1947), Antonioni's camera captures the slow movements of boats on the water, insisting on the marginality of human life in the Po Valley and lingering on an empty, desolate image of the river (Quaresma 2011). In both films, fishing communities are ancestrally embedded in the aquatic element. In *Sacro Gra*, similarly, Rosi's camera follows Cesare's return from fishing, pausing on the boat's slow, flat movements along the river and ultimately emphasising his almost symbiotic relationship with the water. Ultimately, in *Sacro Gra*, fishing emerges as a marginal form of labour rooted in the local environment and sustained by a network of ancient, localised practices. Like sex work – stationary and distanced from the primary flows of the GRA – it exists within the orbit of the infrastructure yet remains fundamentally peripheral to its economies of movement and production.

Sacro Gra establishes a uniquely unsettling gaze on an infrastructure in which the microtextures of labour shed light on the economic structures operating at its margins. *Sacro Gra* highlights how infrastructure generates social and economic voids that prompt exclusion and marginalisation. Instead of enabling mobility, the GRA blocks, isolates, and alienates communities and individuals from the “major” economy. Ultimately, the documentary inscribes forms of labour that unsettle the perception of the ring road as a seamless infrastructure, puncturing its presumed smoothness with instances of contingent and resistant alterity. Through gestures of stillness, contraction, and resistance, Rosi's documentary reclaims the GRA as a site of “minor” economies – those of necessity, care, and survival – that resist homogenising capitalist circulation.

5 Conclusion

The infrastructural “bleedings” and the “minor” economy on which *Sacro Gra* lingers recall modes of politically, economically, and socially driven precarity, such as uncontrolled, scattered urban development, which oftentimes undercut the capacity to live a good life (Berlant 2011). Living at the margins of the GRA entails a profound hiatus between a promise of the good life, dependent on an equally distributed access to infrastructures, and the present reality of isolation and marginality. The sex workers' and Cesare's vignettes, alongside

the other characters populating the diegesis, ultimately gesture towards this hiatus, emphasising the lack of perspective and futurity that the GRA has contributed to generating. This hiatus, in closing, takes us back to Renato Nicolini, a key inspiration for both Rosi's film and Bassetti's walks. Rosi shoots a 30-minute accompanying short film, *Tanti futuri possibili* (*Many Possible Futures*, 2013), which frames Nicolini in the back seat as they ride the ring road. Rosi decides to shoot from a rear-facing perspective within a car moving forward along the GRA. The short film is fundamentally a series of scenes in which Nicolini moves forward in a car, with windows, the windscreen, and side mirrors offering multiple views of the GRA. These scenes are accompanied by Nicolini's free and eloquent reflections on the ring road's history.

In his continuous, flowing reflections, Nicolini compares Rome's GRA to the Rome evoked by Freud in *Civilisation and Its Discontents* (1930). For Freud, Rome becomes a vast metaphor for the human psyche: a place where the past – its ruins – remains ever present and coexists with the living present. For Nicolini, by contrast, the GRA exists as a place where the past is displaced by “many possible futures” presented as we travel along the ring road. This, he reminds us, is the “Rome of 2040, 2200, 3500”. Rosi's GRA, in turn, emerges as a variation on this plural and chaotic humanity. That the film chooses to show “many possible futures” is thus emblematic, for it is precisely this gesture that signals the lack of futurity in which the characters live. These are futures that the GRA itself sometimes forecloses, such as for the two sex workers in the van. At other times, as with Cesare, even imagining a possible future only highlights the impending disappearance of the *fumaroli*'s work.

In so doing, *Sacro Gra* asks us to reckon with the GRA's promises of progress, modernity, efficiency, and development in a manner that resonates with what Hannah Appel, Nikhil Ananda, and Akhil Gupta conceptualise through a set of grounding questions:

What kinds of futures and future politics will today's infrastructures leave behind? [...] When the infrastructures of history continue to reverberate in our figurations of the future, what kinds of structures and limits do they leave us with? As the infrastructures we live with are remade, they provide us with an opportunity to think, imagine, and rebuild the world differently. Can we produce a world that can be distinguished from the constitutive divisions of modernity and its progressive readings of the future, given that the epistemic and concrete glue of infrastructure binds that future to our present and our past? (2018: 30–31)

Such questions resonate with *Sacro Gra* in a number of ways. First, while the documentary depicts infrastructural “bleedings” and their role in producing social marginality and a “minor” economy, it also foregrounds how these dynamics generate a suspension of both mobility and futurity for those living around the GRA. At the same time, *Sacro Gra* underlines that infrastructures “address the people who use them, stimulating emotions of hope and pessimism, nostalgia and desire, frustration and anger, that constitute promise (and its failure) as an emotive and political force” (Larkin 2018: 176). The film draws on the GRA's history of uncontrolled and dispersed urban development to reinforce the sense that its characters inhabit a temporality of suspension, in which neither past nor future fully materialises. Through deliberately fragmentary, pluralistic narration, the characters are shown living within the impasses of a precarious present, their worlds bounded by the continuous presence of the ring road. This is achieved, as I have argued, through a reversal of perspectives between interior and exterior and a rescaling of the infrastructure that challenges how both characters and viewers relate to the GRA. If, on a macrostructural level, the film aims to create a microcosm, its insistence on the GRA's visible and invisible presence makes us acutely aware of the extent of marginality and precarity experienced by its inhabitants.

No doubt this plenitude of almost self-contained individuals must contend with the film's equally insistent focus on how the GRA itself is actualised through broader social structures. Through precarious forms of labour, such as sex work and fishing, we observe the pressures exerted by homogenising processes of late modernity and by ideologies of unbounded urban development that displace people across the metropolitan periphery. At the same time, we witness the coexistence of rapid globalisation and traditional practices and forms of survival, illuminating the contradictions that define life along the GRA.

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