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# INFRASTRUCTURE AS FEMINIST METHODOLOGY: UNDERSTANDING THE RIGHT TO THE CITY THROUGH INFRASTRUCTURAL OBJECTS

**ABSTRACT** _____ In this article, we reflect upon the curational process of the exhibition *Hosting in Hostility* in which we explored the porous line between hosts and guests through seeing like an infrastructure. By this, we mean that we used infrastructural objects as heuristic devices to facilitate a nuanced understanding of the tensions inherent to hosting in hostile environments. Our exhibition *Hosting in Hostility* tried to push the boundaries of infrastructure as (feminist) methodology, as over the course of time, infrastructure started to curate us and eventually the exhibition. As a result, we found ourselves unsettled by infrastructure which required a persistent recalibration of our positionality.

_____ Since the 'infrastructural turn' in social sciences and beyond, there is an overall recognition that there is nothing purely technical or material about infrastructure. Instead, as Amin argues in *Lively Infrastructure*, "infrastructures – visible and invisible, grand and prosaic – are implicated in the human experience of the city and in shaping social identities" (Amin 2014: 139). Building on this broad understanding of infrastructure as a socio-technical or socio-material assemblage through which citizens and states negotiate citizenship (Lemanski 2020), our exploration of infrastructure takes a novel direction by framing it as a (feminist) methodology. This perspective emerged organically as we – an *ad hoc* collective of five women coming from different parts of the world and spanning disciplines such as architecture, anthropology, and performative arts – were developing our residency at the San Marino Pavilion of the Venice 2023 Biennale, entitled *Ospite Ospitante* (Guest Hosts). As the title suggests, the provocation of the pavilion was to invite its residents to reflect on the relationship between hosts and guests in a "Hospitality Lab" bearing in mind that "[t]ime, political and historical circumstances, the thresholds of inclusion of different species, and the needs of the moment make the distinctive lines between host and guest porous" (Kaethler / Pierini 2023). By referring to Derrida, curator Michael Kaethler (2023) further complicates our understanding by stating that "[h]ospitality teeters on a fine line between a radical acceptance of the 'other' and controlling that 'other' – it is no wonder then that hospitality and hostility share the same etymological root."
_____ It is in this line that we sought to tease out the tensions that confront and are embedded within acts of hospitality, and hence

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our exhibition and proposed set of interventions was entitled *Hosting in Hostility*. In contrast to conventional notions of hospitality as a reciprocal relation in which the hosting needs to be repaid at a later moment, our conception of hosting in hostility is about radical hospitality (a distinction elaborated on in Kaethler's text). The latter is an unconditional type of hospitality that opens up to everyone with no expectation to receive something in return. It is, in fact, about ensuring everyone's right to the city, everyone's right to access infrastructure, particularly where formal constellations perpetuate exclusionary practices based on structural processes of othering (and artificial divisions between citizens and "non-citizens"). Or in the words of Butler (2015: 127), and in line with the *Feminism for the 99%* manifesto (Arruzza et al. 2019), the "demand for infrastructure" here is "a demand for a certain inhabitable ground, and its meaning and force derive exactly from that lack." It is precisely with this definition of infrastructure in mind, that we, during our residency, incrementally started to develop infrastructure as a (feminist) methodology. In the following, we will unravel that process in four steps.
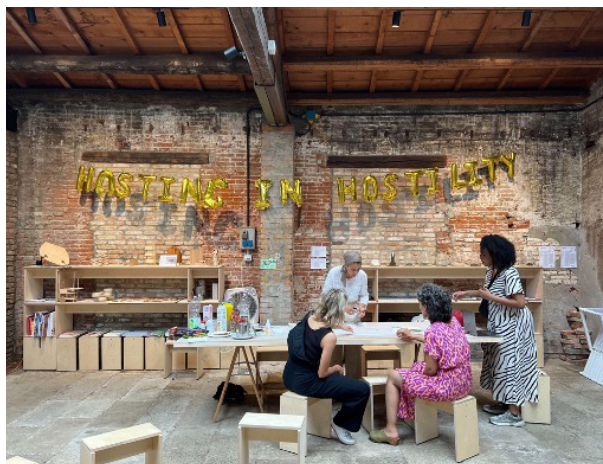


// Figure 1
Photo taken by the authors while setting up the exhibition *Hosting in Hostility* in the San Marino Pavilion, September 11, 2023.

**INFRASTRUCTURE AS (FEMINIST) METHODOLOGY** _____ To explore the tensions within hospitality, we draw from two spaces that host in hostility and that were active agents in our thinking, work, and lives over the past years: Globe Aroma in Brussels (Belgium) and The Yalla Project in Nablus (Palestine). Across the two different contexts, both Globe Aroma and The Yalla Project act as spaces of hospitality in hostile environments.

_____ Globe Aroma is a sociocultural organization that specifically welcomes "newcomer artists," irrespective of legal status or origin, and this within a European context that is increasingly anti-immigrant. It supports newcomer artists by offering workspace, materials, and connections in the arts field and acts as a social hub catalyzing community building for newcomers. The Yalla Project is an applied research center on socio-spatial issues related to the everyday lives of communities and their living environment. Within the old city of Nablus, The Yalla Project pursues the revitalization of a part of the city heavily affected by urban warfare and the presence of the Israeli military occupation. It works on the ground through a social enterprise in the sector of hospitality to facilitate the regeneration of the local spatial, economic, and cultural tissue. Core to this effort is

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the Turquoise Guesthouse through which the project aims to build a sense of homeliness and belonging to the city. Using its design and activities, the goal is to create a safe and welcoming space that fosters encounters and exchange between visitors and locals.

_____ In conceptualizing our exhibition, we explored how to represent the tensions that emerge in the daily practice of hosting in hostility of these two spaces. The real challenge was finding a way to capture and move across complex and multi-scalar geographies and power relations from which these spaces of hospitality emerge and the dynamics within them gain meaning. How can we represent, through the mediums afforded to us within the pavilion in the heart of Venice, the context of the Belgian authorities' failure to house asylum seekers in Brussels and the fierce political struggle around it? Or the disruptions caused by Israeli raids on life in Nablus, where streets can transition from festive to battlefields in an instant, and minutes later reverse again from a war scene to the most ordinary everydayness? In other words, how to represent the situated knowledges (Haraway 1988) that are drawn from the specific conditions of each context and space of hospitality and our engagements with them? As many of us are architects and/or actively engage with space as anthropologists or artists, we started to conceptualize space as a 'heuristic device', which is an understanding of space to be added to Heynen's (2013) threefold thought model on the interaction between space and society: space as a receptor (a more or less neutral background to social activities), as an instrument (of social change), or as a stage (on which social life unfolds and on which social life impacts). If we conceptualize space as a heuristic device, it means that we mobilize space to enable our understanding or knowledge of the tensions of hosting in hostility.

_____ Indeed, only when we zoomed into specific moments firmly situated in space, it was possible to highlight the observed tensions within acts of hospitality with more precision. We tried to condense the complex interplay between hosts, guests, space, and history by grasping concrete temporal and spatial instances through infrastructural objects – as particular, functional manifestations of space – such as the wall, the door, the bed, or the table. Infrastructural objects, captured figuratively and literally through photography and film in our exhibition, therefore became methodological tools to understand and represent tensions in hosting in hostility. In doing this, we align with Thompson's (2001: 14132) reading of Haraway (1988), in asserting that situated knowledge is not only about problematizing the subject where "all positionings are open to critical re-examination," but is also conversely about

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recognizing that "the extraordinary range of objects in the physical, natural, social, political, biological, and human sciences about which institutionalized knowledge is produced should not be considered to be passive and inert." The operation that we propose thus centers specific objects as agentic elements that embody, reflect, and affect. An example is our use of *the sofa* as a heuristic device in the case of Globe Aroma: the sofas in Globe Aroma were acquired after the Brussels Court of Labor found the Belgian State on more than 8,600 occasions in breach of its legal duty to maintain minimum standards for reception conditions. After the Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (Fedasil) failed to pay more than 275 million euros in fines, the Court confiscated its furniture for auction. In an act of political protest, five sofas were purchased at the auction,[1] and together with the *Stop the Reception Crisis* movement, they were equipped with wheels, adorned with banners, and pushed across Brussels to a building occupied by homeless asylum seekers, to bring the reception center to those who are denied access to these reception centers. The last two sofas found a place at Globe Aroma, where they are currently a part of the organization's *hospitality area*, a space in which asylum seekers and other newcomers are welcomed and supported. Within our exhibition, the object's visualization in video and photographs – the sofa on the street in the protest and the sofa used within the space of Globe Aroma – represent the material culture of Belgium's reception crisis and the tensions therein.

_____ The operation of using space, or, in this case, infrastructural objects, as heuristic devices, diffuses the need to set a fixed category of, or boundary between host and guest, as it materializes complex social relations to foreground a momentary encounter or tension. Our varied positionalities are indeed the lens through which we are reading the moments of tension, but we are reading them through the infrastructural object, which in turn reflects the particular dynamics between space, time, and power relations. This interconnectedness between subject and object may represent Haraway's (1988: 595) notion of "material-semiotic nodes" whose "boundaries materialize in social interaction." What is furthermore notable in this approach is that we have been selecting mundane, everyday domestic objects: the door, bed, sofa, table, toilet, etc., to substantiate political and territorial tensions. In relating Globe Aroma to The Yalla Project, we observe how these seemingly universal objects travel across spaces to gain new and different meanings. Hence, we used these infrastructural elements to gather a variety of understandings on hosting in hostility across a variety of borders.

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How the object travels, not only through geography, but also across scales of the building, city, nation, and across borders, became an exciting exercise. It became a creative process to oscillate and map such domestic objects, often integral to notions of hospitality, across the urban scale. Could this set of infrastructural objects be read as a deconstructed home? What would mapping them as fragmented elements on the scale of the city reveal about urban hospitality? In other words, how can we understand the right to the city through infrastructural elements, and what frictions does this lens reveal?

**SEEING LIKE AN INFRASTRUCTURE** _____ It is with these questions in mind that we set up our exhibition in the San Marino Pavilion at the Venice Biennale: not merely as a completed exhibition, but as the beginning of a new chapter in its journey. Throughout our five-day residency, we continued to explore the porous line between hosts and guests. The exhibited images, texts, and video fragments of three infrastructural objects for Globe Aroma (a door, sofas, a wall) and The Yalla Project (a door, beds, and a table) enabled us to transfer our situated knowledges from Brussels and Nablus to Venice and served as a starting point for a conversation.

_____ After having set up the Globe Aroma and The Yalla Project parts of our exhibition, our objective was to expand it with three infrastructural objects from Venice. To achieve this, we embarked on an exploration of the city in which we ourselves were guests, using the same methodological approach: employing infrastructural objects as a heuristic device to identify tensions inherent to hosting in Venice.

_____ Drawing an analogy from Amin and Thrift's (2017) *Seeing Like a City*, we adopted the perspective of 'seeing like an infrastructure.' In their seminal work, Amin and Thrift see like a city, as a means to break away from the dominant (epistemological) frames imposed by nation-states, which, for instance, include the delineation of borders, and determine who is a citizen and who is not. They regard this approach as a specific lens to break with methodological nationalism and a gesture that allows us to see the world-making power of cities both within and independent of nation-states. Building further on Amin's (2014) conceptualization of infrastructure as sociotechnical



// Figure 2
Dinner table in The Yalla Project as shown in the exhibition, September 11, 2023, © Authors/The Yalla Project

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arrangements or assemblages, they posit that "(t)hese arrangements are more than a mere 'infrastructural' background, the silent stage on which other powers perform. The mangle of sociotechnical systems in a city is formative in every respect, regardless of its state of sophistication" (Amin / Thrift 2017: 3). In a similar vein, seeing like an infrastructure enabled us to move beyond a narrow focus on a certain area (or the city as a whole), space, or imagined category of people, and instead take into account intersecting and superdiverse actors across spaces. The infrastructural objects then revealed how the actors are affected by them, what tensions surround them, and allowed the recognition of the differential access they co-produce. Hence, seeing like an infrastructure is a lens that enables us to grasp the broad spectrum of politics and regimes within a city while simultaneously narrowing down our focus.

———— More so, the term *infra* denotes "under," while *structure* signifies that infrastructures "structure the spaces all around us" (Easterling 2014). Therefore, a gaze at infrastructural objects reveals what is underneath the structural, such as hidden political and capitalist agendas that are at the base of hostile practices and policies across spaces and geographies. This entry point facilitates the tracing of processes and politics sustaining the gendered and racialized dimension of maintenance and social reproduction. Hence, exploring a social process through the lens of infrastructural objects serves as a method for conducting a feminist critique and enables the exploration of tensions and ambiguities inherent in spatial practices of hospitality, along with some of the political and economic forces acting upon the city. This approach aligns with feminist critiques inasmuch as it critiques the exclusion and disempowerment of (gender) minorities and marginalized groups and "destabilizes those institutions that depend on the reproduction of inequality and injustice" (Butler 2014: 10).

———— We initiated our endeavor to see like an infrastructure by venturing out to explore the city. Guided by background research and information we received from people and collectives, we visited a range of places in Venice that could inform us about hosting in hostility. In a manner reminiscent of Raja Shehadeh's *Palestinian Walks* (2009), which aimed to physically encounter and challenge power geometries, our journey in search for infrastructural objects sought to disrupt idealized imaginaries and to find non-dominant realities and struggle within the city. The wandering of five women with very diverse personal trajectories and the intent to watch, listen, and learn as an act of confrontation with our own patterns of privilege connects with the feminist understanding of *flânerie*

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as a way to enact the ethics of care advocated by de la Bellacasa by moving "away from prescriptive viewpoints and instead tak[ing] up mutual responsibility for our shared ecological communities." (Bellacasa in Sun / Muntean 2021: 98)

_____Over the course of three days, this journey led us to discover three infrastructural objects that were relevant to our critical engagement with hosting in hostility: toilets, beds, and tables. Seeing through these three infrastructural objects, we gained insights into the interconnectedness of diverse immaterial situations and processes and gradually moved into the socio-political and economic textures present in the city. In the following, we will delve into one example: the table. At some point during our residency, we supported and participated in a local protest by joining a *breakfast table* against an eviction from an apartment. This non-violent mobilization was situated within the context of Venice's residential politics, which prioritizes luxury and tourist housing projects over affordable housing for all. Concurrently, the city leaves over 11% of the main islands' social housing units empty, citing inadequate maintenance standards due to decay. As a result, a significant portion of the Venice community has been compelled to leave the island, leading to a steady decline in the number of Venetian residents. The apartment in question had been left empty and neglected by the government before being occupied, and the successful fight for the right to (affordable) housing took place by means of a convivial resistance breakfast table to which we were invited. During the resistance breakfast, the table served as a platform for political action in support of the right to a home: a home where the inhabitants of the occupied building not only live and have their daily breakfast but gather to organize and mobilize against the hostile neoliberal forces that perpetuate inequality and displacement in the city. Hence, the table as infrastructure takes on a "double meaning of 'the infrastructural'", being at once the infrastructural object around which the political performance of resistance unfolds and the condition of the "inhabitable ground" it fights for, a home in which one lives, sleeps, and has breakfast (Butler 2014: 2).

_____After having spent three days exploring and documenting various parts of the city, including decayed social housing estates in Venice and the communities displaced from the island who now reside alongside numerous migrant communities in Mestre, we



// Figure 3
Venice "breakfast table" against an eviction of an apartment, September 14, 2023, © Authors

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identified the table, along with beds and toilets, as significant infrastructural objects in the city.

_____ Leveraging our disciplinary backgrounds in architecture, anthropology, and the arts, we processed the objects by drawing on the visual and tangible dimensions present within these infrastructures. Using printed images of the objects as placeholders, we engaged in conversations and critical thinking processes, weaving together the storylines we had captured during our explorations of Venice. We arranged the printed images on a large table. This allowed us to sort, shuffle, and rearrange them, facilitating connections between different situations and highlighting underlying tensions. For instance, we had come across and photographed signs in touristic areas restricting toilet use to customers only. This limited access to toilets in the city disproportionately affects street vendors who, due to the aforementioned housing politics of Venice, live on the mainland and commute to the touristic parts of Venice Island. To use a toilet, they are forced to walk long distances between their sales stand and storage space. By linking the image of a third infrastructural object, our own beds, to discussions around housing accessibility (the tables) and sanitary facilities (the toilets), we were able to reframe our own position within the broader dynamics in the city leading to displacement and resistance. Additionally, the beds opened a discussion about those who maintain our tourist beds, i.e., mostly migrant women performing exploitative shadow work. Hence, the elements of a home allow us to think of infrastructures as social reproduction that play an active part in the interlinkage of processes, practices, and people that maintain and sustain existence (see Hall 2020).

_____ Our work with images following our fieldwork not only deepened our understanding of some of the hidden ways in which the lives of people are (infra)structured, but also structured our understanding of the relatedness of the situated stories in various geographical locations. The images enabled us to interlink the various struggles and positions people inhabit in the city and included our own position within them. They are indeed "the overt point of contact and access between us all – the rules governing the space of everyday life" (Easterling 2014: 11). In this sense, this approach



// Figure 4
Activist table in a decayed social housing estate in Venice, September 12, 2023,
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// Figure 5
Tabel discussion with the team around printed images, September 13, 2023,
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offered a further elaboration of the situated work we started in Globe Aroma and The Yalla Project, as we now explored infrastructural objects across multiple environments and positionalities in the city. The work with infrastructural objects, as Mitropoulos suggests, became "a field of experimentation and variation rather than repetition of the self-same, to amount not to reproduction and therefore standardisation but, instead, to an ongoing and critical engagement with the between" (Mitropouos 2021: 177).

_____ In the next sections of this paper, we will discuss how we shared our findings in the exhibition space, as well as our positionality. Before venturing into our final day's exchange with the visitors of the pavilion, where we reflected (on our residency, method, and gathered knowledge) to think forward (by imagining alternative scenarios for the city), it is essential to acknowledge our own immersion in the tensions present in the city. We, too, slept in beds in Venice, used its toilets, and dined at tables. Therefore, it is crucial to discuss our own positionality within the complex fabric and tensions present in the city.

**INFRASTRUCTURE TO UNSETTLE (OURSELVES)** _____ The transference of the method from Brussels and Nablus to a different geographical context contributed to other forms of situated knowledge, one of which involved a reflection on our own positionality. Following approaches within relational ontology, we see infrastructural objects as being inherently relational, hence "existing within a relational context of action, material, and environment" (Ingold 2007: 175), an approach which is reminiscent of Haraway's "material-semiotic nodes" (1988: 595). We therefore start from the assumption that it is impossible to analyze infrastructural objects without looking at ourselves while observing them. María Puig de la Bellacasa (2012) goes a step further by stating that because situated knowledge is relational, it is inherently related to thinking with care. For de la Bellacasa, however, knowledge-making based on care is not a smooth process: "a feminist inspired vision of caring cannot be grounded in the longing for a smooth harmonious world, but in vital ethico-affective everyday practical doings that engage with the inescapable troubles of interdependent existences" (ibid.: 199, see also Fitz / Krasny 2019). In what follows, we will adhere to de la Bellacasa's non-idealized and non-innocent approach of caring in relating while we reflect on our own positionality through the infrastructural objects.

_____ During our residency, we started observing how we ourselves interacted with the infrastructural objects that we were analyzing

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and recognized how our own positions intersected with and sometimes even contributed to larger structures of exclusion within the city that we tried to understand. This process of self-reflection through infrastructural objects enabled us "to name and interrogate the intersections between self and society, the particular and the general, the personal and the political" (Adams et al. 2015: 2). While at times unsettling, it also revealed "the political potential of valuing the world of sticky mediations" (de la Bellacasa 2012: 210). Or as Haraway asserts in her rejection of purity: "one must be in the action, be finite and dirty, not transcendent and clean" (Haraway 1997: 36).



// Figure 6
Discussion at the dinner table of Morion,
September 12, 2023, © Authors

_____ Our own beds served as an example of this dirty, reflexive work between the self and society. During our stay in Venice, the number of tourist beds had just surpassed the number of Venetian residents, exacerbating the housing crisis. Looking at our own Airbnb beds and knowing how we were part of the touristification and housing challenges unsettled us, and served as a mirror to question the impact on the city through our exhibition. Another example of beds that we came across during our residency were those from German architecture students who stayed in the social center Morion for a few months while doing renovation work in the city in the framework of the German pavilion. These beds shed light on another tension. A discussion over dinner with two young Italian women from the Venice housing movement ASC (*Assemblea Sociale per la Casa*) informed us about the frictions between the city and the Biennale. In their opinion, a short stay such as ours in the framework of the Biennale cannot build up a meaningful relation to the city and its local population, but rather intensifies the extractive pressures of tourism. An analysis of our Airbnb beds and the beds in Morion revealed the tensions between extraction and contribution, between short-term and long-term engagement with the city.

_____ The method of thinking through infrastructural objects, and the unsettling feelings this evoked, prompted us to reassess our approach and our relationship with the city and its residents in a more sustainable manner. Conscious of the potential ambiguity of our role as tourists, we arrived at the Biennale with an awareness that our actions could inadvertently contribute to hostility. Therefore, we had decided to focus our interventions in the Hospitality Lab of the San Marino Pavilion on the theme of hosting in hostility.

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Initially, our aim was to seek out people in need of space in the city and to utilize our privilege of having temporary access to infrastructure by offering it to them. We hoped that by doing so, we could challenge and disrupt the power relations between guests and hosts. Our intention was to detect potential hosts in the city who could transform the pavilion into an infrastructure of hospitality. We imagined activists needing a space to meet, local organizations needing a space to organize a dinner, or (homeless) people needing a place to charge their phones.



// Figure 7
Table conversations with passers-by during lunch in front of the pavilion, September 11, 2023, © Authors

_____ However, on our first day in Venice we realized that we, too, were guests in the city and that the act of *allowing* people a space in *our* pavilion and to host people to host in our pavilion, "highlighted the self-contradictions and limits in the performative act of hospitality" (Katz 2022: 4). By looking for people that *we* thought were in need of space, and by offering them space in the framework of the Biennale, we disregarded a genuine and profound engagement with the local community. Prior to taking on the role of hosts in a foreign city, we recognized the significance of embodying the qualities of good guests. This involved approaching people without preconceived agendas and sincerely listening to their stories and experiences, allowing us to grasp the multi-layered realities of hospitality in Venice.

_____ During the first days of our residency, as we conversed with visitors at the pavilion, exchanged greetings with passers-by during lunch in front of the pavilion, and established connections with local organizations, a tangible unease began to permeate within us. As a group of five women, these feelings were shared and acknowledged and became an important epistemic vehicle for personal and political transformation. The heightened awareness of embodied experiences and situated language among women echoes the ethos of the *autocoscienza* groups in Italian feminism during the 1970s, "where it was possible to consider as meaningful matter for discussion what have been previously understood as unpolitical or pre-political, for example experiences, feelings, and even silences" (Equi Pierazzini et al. 2021: 1265), and how those experiential relatings allow one "to construct a common political consciousness" (ibid.).

_____ On the second day of our residency and after sharing those feelings with each other, we collectively decided to refrain from pursuing our initial intention of seeking hosts in the city under the guise of an artistic intervention. Instead, we embraced a new

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approach, viewing our residency as a form of field research. This shift from coming to Venice with a tentative agenda, to allowing ourselves to get affected by the conversations that arose around the infrastructural objects, seems reminiscent of what Ingold (2014) describes as "the creativity of undergoing." By actively immersing ourselves in the unknown, we relinquished control and allowed our research to be guided not by mastery but by submission (ibid.). This willingness to be affected and unsettled became the driving force behind our research.



// Figure 8
**Table debate with food and drinks in the pavilion, September 14, 2023, © Authors**

_____Our collective sense of unsettlement ultimately culminated in the collaborative act of re-editing the exhibition text during the final days of our residency. Gathered together, the five of us sat before the text, crossing out words and rewriting sentences, creating a visible palimpsest of our situated knowledge-making for the visitors of the pavilion.

**INFRASTRUCTURE AS CONVERSATION** _____ The closure of our Venetian journey took the form of a conversation centered on the significant infrastructural objects encountered in the field. We engaged with representatives from the realities we came across, and from which the same meaningful objects were taken. Confronted with the subjectivity and limitations of our understanding of these infrastructural objects and the underlying realities they belong to, we felt the urge to engage directly with those who daily operate with and through these objects. In a quasi-forensic manner, we laid out symbolic representations of these objects in the form of images on our table in the San Marino Pavilion.

_____The table, well-filled with food and drinks, served as a setting for these images, which in turn functioned as bodies of evidence during our conversation with the representatives of the social center Morion and of the *Assemblea Sociale per la Casa* (ASC), who joined us for a talk.

_____The bed, the toilet, and the table worked as media to challenge our preconceived notions about local realities by considering the point of view of the communities we met in Venice. The relatability and tangible nature of these infrastructural objects facilitated discussions ranging from mundane issues to more general and theoretical arguments. Starting with inquiries about who each of us thought a certain bed, toilet, or table belonged to, and what it was for, we delved into discussions about the right to the city and

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the frictions between hosting and hostility in Venice based on our respective experiences with these significant objects. Eventually, the conversation led to the least visible sources of these tensions and disparities, tackling the impact of global economic trends on an iconic location, the local political apparatus, and its neoliberal policy that progressively shifts Venice from being a city *for its citizens* to a commodified *city-as-an-attraction* (Salerno 2022), where revenues from destination consumption and overtourism (Visentin / Bertocchi 2019) are prioritized over the needs of local communities.

_____ Here, the infrastructural objects steered the discussion towards a constructive critique aimed at envisioning possible solutions and counteractions. Through their tangible presence, toilets, beds, and tables helped us to imagine alternative, fairer scenarios in Venice, and to consider how these could be achieved. The reflection began within the space where we were meeting, the San Marino Pavilion, a former warehouse, recently acquired by an affluent family expanding its activities to arts patronage. Situated in the San Lorenzo neighborhood, one of the few remaining places in Venice still vibrant with a rich local community, the space was adapted to be more conducive as an exhibition space, adding first of all a toilet – again. We collectively imagined how a space like this could be the ground for negotiation between local residents and external property owners in Venice, and how a major urban stakeholder such as the Venice Biennale could be drawn into a more virtuous process.

_____ The reflection scaled up to explore opportunities that could benefit the broader city, identifying a potential site in the Biennale's Giardini, a conspicuous and unique part of the city owned by the Biennale, usually only accessible during festivals upon the payment of an entry ticket. This area could instead be made freely accessible all year round and integrated with facilities and services for residents to respond to the overall lack of spaces dedicated to families, children, and recreation. Our conversation eventually dwelled on potential processes to initiate a dialogue with the owners to gain their consideration, as well as the role universities and the local school of architecture at the Università Iuav di Venezia (IUAV) could play in supporting this process with mature proposals encompassing design, policies, and practical implementation.

_____ Reflecting on our journey and presence at the Venice Biennale, we observe a notable shift in the role of infrastructural objects throughout the process. A consistent element in this transformative process was the power of infrastructural objects to move people into different realities by evoking ordinary scenes

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of others' everydaynesses. In the preparatory phase, significant items served as means to encapsulate, transport, and stimulate conversations around the diverse experiences of Brussels' Globe Aroma and Nablus' The Yalla Project. However, during the residency, objects took the agency as guides in the exploration of an unknown context: their materiality and ordinariness offered a sense of the local, socio-spatial complexity and provided an entry point to the everyday experiences of some of the city's communities, offering tangible insights into routines, conditions, and spaces. In the closing phase of the residency, these everyday infrastructural objects turned into a collaborative medium for envisioning and debating alternative scenarios (Kemp 2011). The bed, the toilet, and the table belong to the individual, domestic sphere. However, they also evoke the more complex systems they are part of. Consequently, the negotiation around these objects could extend to dynamics of homing the city, exploring ways to make them more inclusive and fairer (Low 2016).

**INFRASTRUCTURE AS A METHODOLOGY FOR CURATION** _____ Recently, some scholars have reconceptualized curation beyond the museum as a qualitative research methodology to collect, organize, research, conceptualize, select, contextualize, arrange, interpret, and, finally, transfer findings surrounding a particular topic (Persohn 2021). It was with this perspective in mind that we stepped into the curational process of our exhibition *Hosting in Hostility*. As argued by Persohn (2021), the curational process, oftentimes long, iterative, and demanding, provides "a lens for seeing other meta-ideas" across the material. Indeed, we used the format of an exhibition, and the act of curation in particular, to examine tensions related to hosting in hostility across scales and borders. Taking up our curating role necessitated distancing ourselves from the work we were doing in the two (and later three) spaces of hospitality (in Brussels, Nablus, and Venice). This was essential to ensure that the content became comprehensible and ultimately transferrable, utilizing the visual realm as the medium of transfer. As a (transferrable) method, curation appeared to be open for experimentation, creativity, and care (towards others and ourselves), all features that we value but that we often miss in more conventional methods (a similar remark was given by Bruno Latour on the thought exhibition *Reset Modernity!* that he curated). In that sense, and as highlighted before, the exhibition also functioned as a conversation that we moderated, echoing Farver's (2001: 59–60, cited also by Persohn 2021) words: "As moderator of the 'discussion,' the curator must be able to elicit passionate, even extreme, opinions, yet keep the dialogue lucid and well-paced."

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INFRASTRUCTURE AS FEMINIST METHODOLOGY: UNDERSTANDING THE RIGHT TO THE CITY THROUGH
INFRASTRUCTURAL OBJECTS

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_____ It is not exaggerated to say that our exhibition *Hosting in Hostility* pushed the boundaries of infrastructure as a (feminist) methodology, as over the course of time we relinquished control as curators. Instead of us curating the exhibition, the infrastructural objects we emphasized as heuristic devices from the very start started to curate us and eventually the exhibition. Hence, infrastructure, as a methodology to understand tensions related to hosting in hostility, began to curate *Hosting in Hostility*. This shift raises important questions about the role of infrastructure as a curatorial methodology. What does it actually mean when infrastructural objects start to curate? When infrastructure becomes a methodology for curation? For us, it means that we ourselves are no longer central in the curational process. The infrastructural objects instead become the lens through which we perceive structuring forces, underlying agendas, and their daily consequences, and ultimately become a decisive force in the curational process. We did not intend to write ourselves out of the exhibition. On the contrary, the objects also tell our story. They tell a multitude of stories on hosting in hostility, as many as there are people to think through infrastructure. By sharing our curatorial position through infrastructure, we aimed to distribute authority more evenly. Indeed, the infrastructural objects allow for a (relatively) horizontal sharing of knowledge because they function as "material-semiotic nodes" (Haraway 1988: 595) that generate all kinds of stories including all kinds of positionalities. It is here that Butler's claim of vulnerability "as a form of activism" materializes in infrastructure, as infrastructure opens up unknown ways to share new narratives and thus resist dominant discourses. (Butler 2015: 123) Acting as moderators of the discussion, the infrastructural objects invite everyone to step in.

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Figure 1: Photo taken by the authors while setting up the exhibition *Hosting in Hostility* in the San Marino Pavilion, September 11, 2023.

Figure 2: Dinner table in The Yalla Project as shown in the exhibition, September 11, 2023,

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