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The Soup **Embodying Necropolitics**

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Abstract

My presentation during Performing Space 2025 focused on the audiovisual documentation of *The Soup*, a mixed-media performance which was staged on June 3rd at Fournos Lab, Athens. The performance engages with contemporary geopolitics and socio-economic structures, drawing theoretical grounding from Achille Mbembe's *Necropolitics* (2019), which examines how power structures operate through the regulation of death and the subjugation of life. The performance sought to embody the conceptual tenets of *Necropolitics* by translating its theoretical implications into spatial and performative actions.

The Soup also explored the role of rituals in technologically mediated environments, proposing new forms of embodiment and audience engagement in the context of the present digital era. Central questions examined were: How might our perception of space and time be transformed through contemporary rituals? If rituals traditionally serve to anchor participants in the here and now (Turner, 1969), how is this immediacy maybe disrupted — or enhanced — by multimedia stimuli? Moreover, if audiovisual elements such as video projections serve as “openings to alternative spatiotemporal dimensions” (Manovich, 2001), what implications might this have for presence, participation, and immersion in live performance?

During the presentation, selected audiovisual excerpts from the performance were shown, illustrating how projection, sound, and spatial design had been used to construct a multi-layered performative environment aiming to activate a plethora of perception modes to the audience. Overall, the presentation aimed to reflect on the potential of interdisciplinary performance as both a creative and critical tool for engaging with urgent political realities and evolving modes of human experience.

Keywords: Performance, Food, Rituals, Geopolitics, Necropolitics

The Soup. Embodying Necropolitics

This presentation emerged from the research and creative process behind *The Soup* (2025). The performance was staged on 3rd June at Fournos Lab¹ in Athens. The work was partially funded by PSi Constellate 2025² and was presented online on July 3rd,³ followed by Q&A. *The Soup* was conceived as a contemporary ritual that engaged with the audience through intersecting layers of perception and meaning.

One of my previous performances, *Handle with Care*⁴ (2020), which was shown during B.I.F.P.A. 2025,⁵ was my first performative experiment with food. I will illustrate the performance design of *Handle with Care* and explain how *The Soup* develops on it.

The earlier performance *Handle with Care* was my first performative experimentation with food as a material, sensorial, and conceptual catalyst. Both *Handle with Care* and *The Soup* were conceived as embodied inquiries into deepening audience engagement through heightened sensory experience. In both works, the performances sought to move beyond the visual as the dominant mode of perception, by inviting the audience to engage with the work in a more immersive, multisensory manner.

To facilitate this shift, audience members were asked to wear blindfolds — throughout the entire duration of *Handle with Care* and during selected segments of *The Soup*. The act of temporarily depriving the audience of sight was intended as a gesture of gentle disorientation and reassessment. It was also used as a means of sensitising them to other modes of perception — specifically, touch, smell, and hearing. By deliberately isolating them from the constant visual influx that characterises contemporary experience, both performances aimed to amplify the tactile and auditory dimensions of the encounter, fostering a more intimate and immediate engagement with the performative space. The intention was to isolate them from the intrusiveness of visual stimuli in order to heighten their tactile and auditive perception.

This sensorial reorientation functioned as a key strategy in both works, positioning the audience not merely as observers, but as sensate bodies embedded in a shared, affective field. Prior to each performance, audience members engaged in a tactile exchange, passing the ingredients used in the cooking process from hand to hand. However, while *Handle with Care* aimed to orchestrate an intensified sensory experience, *The Soup* sought to layer this sensory engagement with cognitive and emotional activation. By interweaving heightened

¹ <https://fournos-culture.gr/el/fournoslab/>

² <https://www.psi-web.org/the-soup-psi-constellate-2025/>

³ <http://www.elenivisualart.eu/category/poetics-politics-of-everyday-life/cooking/>

⁴ <http://www.elenivisualart.eu/poetics-politics-of-everyday-life/handle-with-care-2020/>

⁵ <https://www.capartscentre.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/BIFPA2020-Program-Final-Version.pdf>

sensory stimuli with an experimental documentary short film addressing themes of social injustice, displacement, and historical violence, *The Soup* invited a more complex, critical, multi-layered mode of attention and reception. The short documentary was running in parallel with most of the live action of cooking, creating a clear contrast between the familiar (cooking) and the hostile (war-related images, poems, sounds). The short documentary was narrating via a collage of found footage the essence of *Necropolitics*.

Necropolitics and Biopower

Necropolitics is a concept developed by Cameroonian philosopher Achille Mbembe and refers to the power and authority that a state or governing body has over life and death — specifically, the ability to decide who may live and who must die. Instead of governing with the criterion of prosperity and peace, some contemporary governments (but not only) decide to put pressure and exercise their power by creating selected areas/populations where human rights are not observed. In other words, these governments calculate their success and sovereignty in terms of the number of deaths. Building on Michel Foucault's notion of *Biopolitics* (1977), which focuses on the regulation of life, Mbembe extends the idea to examine how modern power operates through death, violence, and control over bodies, especially in contexts of war, colonialism, and systemic oppression. Summing up, *Necropolitics* highlights how certain populations — often racialized, marginalized, or colonized groups — are subjected to conditions of social and political abandonment, where their lives are rendered disposable or ungrievable. In this framework, death is not just a consequence but a deliberate instrument of power.

The Soup also seeks to engage critically with contemporary geopolitical and socio-economic issues and policies, drawing explicitly on Mbembe's theoretical framework of *Necropolitics*, with the intention of embedding its conceptual underpinnings within the structure of the performance. This is achieved through the deliberate juxtaposition of two temporal and aesthetic layers: the slow-paced, live enactment of cooking an African soup from Eritrea — a process rooted in embodied practice and communal ritual, commonly associated with poor standards of living — is set against a video projection composed of a filmic collage referencing traumatic and politically charged historical events in general starring high rank individuals (predominantly males) taking decisive decisions. These include, among others, the assassination of Congolese Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba and the rise of Adolf Hitler.

The performance unfolds as a dual-tempo experience, confronting the audience with a tension between the immediacy and intimacy of the live cooking — conceived as a site of shared, sensorial experience and intersubjective connection — and the mediated, affectively charged imagery of historical violence and oppression. The live action progresses within a

slow, organic temporality, reflecting the rhythms of everyday life and care, while the projection operates within a much more accelerated and dissonant tempo, exposing the violent logic of state power and necropolitical governance. In this way, *The Soup* invites a critical reflection on the politics of life and death, while simultaneously foregrounding practices of sustenance, sharing, and silent communion as potential sites of resistance and re-humanisation.

The Soup involved a limited number of participants (around 30 people) in order to preserve its ritualistic, intimate character and ensure the emergence of an ephemeral community. According to Victor Turner (1969), rituals are an essential part of stabilising everyday life: they introduce the viewer to a state of transcending ordinary perception and touch the threshold of *liminality*. The work aimed to activate this special connection with the self and the group through a participatory and relational aesthetic (Bourriaud, 2002) event. The suggestion during my presentation at Performing Space Conference 2025 was that the uniqueness of the performance lies in its combination of structure, austerity, and the contemplative nature of ritualistic process with modern technological means.

The performance aims to underscore the enduring significance of communication as a fundamental condition for the cohesion of communal life. This relational dynamic functions as a connective tissue not only within traditional societies but also across contemporary “smart” social configurations, where the reactivation of shared presence through acts of reverence offers a source of existential hope.

This conceptual intention was partially materialised through the spatial design of the performance environment (see Fig. 1). The audience was arranged in a semi-circular formation encircling the performer(s), fostering a sense of intimacy, collective focus, and participatory engagement. Furthermore, the performance area was only slightly elevated in relation to the audience seating, subtly invoking the spatial and symbolic codes of ritual, and reinforcing a sense of co-presence and collaborative witnessing.

The Ambiguous Role of the Co-Performer: Live-Streaming Reality

In *The Soup*, I directed and performed the piece at the same time alongside my co-performer Stratos Papadoudis, who occupied a deliberately ambiguous, liminal role, shifting between performer and videographer (see Fig. 2). His shadowy presence disrupted conventional performance hierarchies by collapsing the divide between subject and observer, embodiment and mediation. Operating a portable camera mounted on a stick, Papadoudis live-streamed the cooking process, which at intervals interrupted the pre-edited video projection, creating a layered audiovisual and kinaesthetic field where live performance, recorded film collage, and real-time streaming were continuously interwoven.

This hybrid media ecology generated a performative environment that blurred distinctions between reality and representation; witnessing and surveillance; and ritual and spectacle. The aesthetic strategy deliberately cultivated a sense of destabilised perception, compelling the audience to reflect on how “reality” is constructed, manipulated, and consumed in modern technologically saturated societies.

Such interplay also resonates with Philip Auslander’s theory of *mediatized performance*, which suggests that the binary between the live and the mediated has collapsed, giving rise to performances that are inherently hybrid, shaped by both corporeal presence and digital mediation (Auslander, 2008). In *The Soup*, this collapse becomes not only a formal device but also a political gesture, revealing how representation technologies shape affective and epistemological access to truth and power.

Figure 1

Pic depicting the setting of the stage before the performance The Soup image courtesy by Eleni Koliopoulou.



The performance critically interrogated the politics of visibility and control. Mbembe (2019) describes how modern regimes exert power through the management of life and death, often mediating public perception through spectacle and disinformation. In this context, *The Soup* staged a chaotic mirroring of reality, where images of historical violence are not just consumed passively but are implicated in the spectacular logic of necropolitical governance. The live-streamed cooking process — domestic, intimate, and nourishing — thus stands in stark

contrast to the projected violence, provoking a critical tension between care and destruction thus inviting the audience to question how reality is 'served' to us and by whom.

Ultimately, *The Soup* offered a kind of metaphorical nourishment — a “soup for thought” — through which spectators are encouraged to question their roles as both witnesses and consumers of mediated violence and communal rituals.

Figure 2

Video still featuring Kolliopoulou and Papadoudis in The Soup, pic by Serafeim Arkomanis.



Conclusion

The Soup invites us to navigate complex conceptual terrains such as *Necropolitics*, to explore questions about freedom of expression — interwoven with poetic fragments that praise peace — and to reconnect with our basic vital needs: food, sharing, silent acceptance. The work embodies the ongoing process of my research into methodologies for integrating the structural logic of ritual within a nuanced conceptual framework, one that is further enriched through the incorporation of contemporary technological media and performative strategies.

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