How is a Staged "Digital" Performance about the Life and Ideas of George Vizyenos Possible?

Virginia M. Giouli, PhD
University of Reading
United Kingdom

A. A Plea for Directing on Stage a "Digital" Vizyenos

On a "consumed" theatrical stage, i.e., one reduced to a non-existent condition, one can envisage a research project approaching the life of Vizyenos (a Greek scholar, b. 1849, in Vize, Eastern Thrace – died in 1896 in the Dromokiteio mental asylum, Athens, Greece), arising from V.M. Giouli's monograph *The Imaginary in Vizyenos' Philosophy, Ancient and Modern Components*, Govostis, 2022 and her pending article "The Imaginary in Vizyenos' Political Philosophy; Art and Race". Following Hito Steyerl's "Too much World: Is the Internet Dead?", Vizyenos' life is seen as discharging stormclouds of data into materially incarnated images. Vizyenos' data moving across digital screens and stages suggests open access to ideas in a "metaverse" cosmos. What is needed is an open-access cyberspace (a parallel to Ikeda's performance *Centaur*) to accommodate a most fitting context to express Vizyenos' two focal points (the infant babbling and gender play) which compose and decompose identities. For Kristeva, babbling determines how an unstable self seeks the right way to establish her/his/@ gender identity before pronouncing sentences that conform with rules and laws. These processes determine the style of acting in this performance: audio and visual design AI forms alternate with targeted algorithms, whose tailor-made content is specific and individual to actors acting dynamically within an animated space which incarnates images and discharges data. Virtual reality creates digital codes which condition identities composing or decomposing on screen or stage, so that the whole work of art is structured in a recomposed spatio-temporal order.

While the actors perform inside this animated space, they are able at the same time to communicate on a cyberspatial stage "consumed", i.e., relegated to a non-existent condition, with the use of digital tools and equipment. This is the open "metaverse" cosmos with objects and images abstracted from the events in which they occur.

B. Tools and Trends

Objects and images (as abstractions from the circumstances in which they are occur) are our only chance for the meeting of the self with a menacing and revolutionary "other", attempting to disrupt (and/or hence enrich?) the identity of the self. Following Aristotle, the urgency of this idea links with modern scrutiny as regards VR through AI in pursuit of the logical impossible. This is demonstrated in V.M. Giouli's long series of publications, monographs and papers presented at International Congresses regarding also present-day experiences. According to Kristeva, infants' babblings arise from the instability of identities, a subject which Vizyenos demonstrates in deliberately babbling verse (M. Feis, *Greek Insomnia*, Patakis, 2004). At one point we hear an infantile melody resembling the ding-dong sound a blacksmith makes while forming iron objects; at another the tapping sound of a baker making bread. Urah! shows joyful summertime, while snow-white marbles are accompanied by the sound diiiiingggg! Sounds accompany Mary's washing of clothes and dee and dii accompany calves moving. The comic is absorbed into the diversity of national, social and aesthetic elements that form his hero Selim's precarious environment. *Selim*, was written while Vizyenos was confined in a psychiatric asylum, though having become both Greek and Russian without suffering trauma, he enjoyed full social and institutional rights. The lack of racial prejudice is enhanced by the lack of gender prejudice as he, wearing the clothes of a khanoum, is vested in her female nature, when she was a little girl; but his manhood never vanishes.

C. A Staged "Digital" Performance about the Life and Ideas of Vizyenos Comes From the Future

Terzopoulos' "Method" (the ECCD paid tribute to it), powered by OCC (2018) is a forerunner of Giouli's project and is perfect for the locality of Onassis Air: the locality can give birth to the project and it can also expand it in order to realise social and political values, as happened with Plato's idea of τιθήνη, the matrix of history. Terzopoulos' method, aiming to reinstate the human body at the centre of theatrical creation with performers undertaking intense training based on

breath control, techniques of concentration and energy centre activation, points to the importance of the above-mentioned "babbling" process. Such incurably physical theatre forms remain digital, as happened with Adam's "We are in the Army Now" (Onassis Stegi 2022). Adam indicates a modern reality similar to Vizyenos' babbling language. Emojis and the concomitant crushing and crushed bodies and minds suggest language bursting out in psychosis in Vizyenos' way: not to betray the meaning of the unknown, pursuing the impossible. Kennedy also (2022 Onassis Stegi) created an immersive performance as a psychedelic trip towards self-awareness through the fabric of spacetime. Responses to such challenges pass through hallucinatory environments, as the function of signs and symbols enhance our pursuit of values. This foreshadows an "immersive theatre" in which self is decomposed and then re-composed out of the chaos which conditions the proposed performances. Hence, being incessantly in conversation with the forerunners of Vizyenos' project means addressing Athens and the broader region, to pursue its identities and values.

D. Concluding Remarks

To run this performance focusing on the remaking of the self, or on transsexualising Marxism as a possibility in Vizyenos is a most suitable project, as Onassis Stegi has hosted, e.g., Maria Dolores, Guest in the "Top Tens" exhibition in *Shadow Libraries: UbuWeb in Athens* (16.3-18.3.2018). Here we were shown queer feminist archives as specific traumas, and spoken words created loci for different languages to rebel against the white cisgender body of the vanguard or to circulate digitally like a virus among them. This runs parallel with Vizyenos' ideas on transition to new communist selves, new ways of being and relating to one another beyond the artificial bisection of genders. Vizyenos was open to a change defined by his longing for the (logically) impossible. Arriving in a cyberspatial future with queer feminist moving images, Vizyenos uses incantatory sentences to heal psychosis into which his language bursts out.