

## Digital Silence – Reflective Interview with Vicky Athanasiadou- Full Transcribe Version <sup>1</sup>

*Start recording...*

Anastasia Lata: So, hello Vicky... We are going to have a talk about the Digital Silence performance and I would like you to tell me what happened... or could you remember what was going on during the performance.... what were you asked to do...?

Vicky Athanasiadou: Yes, I can remember what happened, because I used it in my university papers later. So... we were a group of people in an online platform and we were asked to do nothing... just to remain in this online platform for one hour without talking, we could move around in our rooms, we could basically whatever we wanted to, but always with the condition never to turn off our cameras, so we were in a constant exposure... umm... and that's it.

Anastasia Lata: So, you had this condition that the camera must out in a way that you can be seen through it or did you had to go behind it?

Vicky Athanasiadou: There was an instruction, I recall, that you could leave the camera... well I don't really remember that well, but you also had the right to stay in front of the camera.

Anastasia Lata: So, this was also depending on how was your room decorated and placed the laptop.

Vicky Athanasiadou: Yes, depending on how each room was set... and depending on your mood from what I understand...anyway...

Anastasia Lata: Yes, but you were not directly asked to be in front of the camera....

Vicky Athanasiadou: No, we were not directly asked to do that, we were free... from what I understand, from what they were asked us, which I followed was not to speak to the other ones that were seeing through the cameras. That is what explains the Silence.

Anastasia Lata: Can you remember the reason of being Silence... I mean did they tell you about something about this? How did you perceive that?

Vicky Athanasiadou: I think I was like an experiment on how can we stay silent in an online environment, although this experiment shown that there

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<sup>1</sup> The interview was taken in Greek and this is a translated version in English .

is no such a thing as silence... there cannot be absolute silence...because there are so many noises....

Anastasia Lata: Ans you could hear many noises occurring during the performance?

Vicky Athanasiadou: Yes...yes...a lot of different noises...a lot of different discussions...I could hear discussions between people from the Zoom windows... it was an incidence, if I recall correctly, where a girl was her roommate burst into her room and asked her something... so you could hear discussions but not addressing you directly.

Anastasia Lata: During the performance were you trying to listen what was going on.... can you recall your role... did you tried to make any noise... can you recall then what were you were doing during that time?

Vicky Athanasiadou: Yes, I was trying to go away form the camera (*laughs*), so I cannot be visible. And then, because I was bored... yeah, the truth is that I got bored...I started painting...

Anastasia Lata: Oh... that is nice...it is an artistic activity...

Vicky Athanasiadou: Hmm...yeah... I stated doing something that I always do when I have time...that's all... I brought my watercolours form the other room... so I was not just drawing in a notebook...

Anastasia Lata: And what you were drawing was related with the performance or it was something totally irrelevant?

Vicky Athanasiadou: No, it didn't relate with the performance at all.... I don't know...maybe because I was drawing an outside space... I don't know maybe...you know that was representing my need to go outside...and not being in front of the laptop screen once again... this performance happened for me and for the other people that were taking part in this, in a period where we were locked in and we were spending a lot of time in front of a computer working or doing online classes, so to do an experiment like this, which you are basically experiencing it every day.... I did not feel this experiment brings something new... I felt it like a continuous situation following what was happening from the noon because we had lessons before online. It was double frustrating for me....

Anastasia Lata: I liked what you said about drawing and outside space....an open space... while you were being lock downed and trapped in a Zoom meeting...

Vicky Athanasiadou: Yes, maybe...now that I am thinking about it maybe that was the reason why I drew something like this (*laughs*).

Anastasia Lata: I think your subconscious was talking to you...telling “Vicky you need draw this” ...(*laughs*)... You know just as like the prisoners are drawing a sun, because they cannot see it...

Vicky Athanasiadou: Yeah...but the drawing was optimistic nevertheless...I didn't draw my cell (*laughs*)...

Anastasia Lata: You said that you found extra hard this event, because you had online lessons before, right?

Vicky Athanasiadou: Yes, not only that day, I had online classes all that period of time, I experienced a new experience, because I didn't had online lessons before in my life...uhm... and this performance was something...how to phrase it... not an escape of my reality, it was a continuation of a dull routine for me... so, if I had seen this performance two years ago for example where I still had in person classes and all of a sudden they were putting me in front of this online process, in front of a computer, then maybe would have made me a different impression to me...maybe it would stunned me, because it would made me realize that this double-parallel world exists, this digital world that we are in...but again I believe that this (performance) for our generation wouldn't work, because we are a generation that is grow up in social media, with cameras...with this communication to the digital world...so for me this experimenting performance, and I am being totally honest now, failed...exactly because for our generation it doesn't make any impression... to our parents it would make an impression... for us that we have been raised in a social media culture... I don't know...did it make any impression to anyone?

Anastasia Lata: Do you believe... because you were already in a negative mood towards the online classes and in the general online situation, being all day in front of the computer, influenced you how you are going to perceive the performance and how open you will be towards the performance? For example, did you thought that, ok I have to attend to one more online event today, specifically because this performance was for the students of the university?

Vicky Athanasiadou: No, I did not attend the performance because it happened in the context of the university. I was actually really curious to find out what is this digital silence. During the performance I realizes that it makes me feel tired... that I am nor discovering

something new... I just don't want to be seen by the camera, because I was tired from [the online classes] before... I Just didn't want to be seen in the camera, and I did not really care what other people were doing to be honest...I didn't care what they others were doing and all these digital noises did not trigger me...I don't know maybe this was because of my tiredness, but honestly, I did not have any interest to get to know what was happening to the others at that point... Maybe...and again I am turning this to social media... maybe because we are fed up by all this online platforms, where everyone is showing off what are they doing and where they doing it and what they are eating... all these Instagram stories...we are so trained by this situation that it does not make any surprise to see what the other is doing in the performance....even though the other is doing that that specific time and moment... there are so many existing lives on Instagram, that many people do, we are fed up form this type of performance... at least for me as a social media person...where I was obsessed with social media for a long time...for me this performance was neutral...

Anastasia Lata: What were your expectations when you decided to join the performance?

Vicky Athanasiadou: To be honest, I did not know what were my expectations...maybe it was my need to finally attend any performance, because we attended this performance during the lockdown...The were only few performances back then, so everything that related with the term of performance we were open to join...for example me pre-lockdown era if I had to attend a performance, I would always read the brochure of the play before. During the lockdown and by being in The Netherlands I literally attending every available performance and I spend a lot of money for performances that they were mediocre. I had the need to watch theatre, to attend performances...so, I would "swallow "any performance at that time (*laughs*)... so, that is the reason for attending...when I heard about Digital Silence, I thought that it would be something like [John's Cage 4'33](#), or something similar to that for theatre... so, my mind went immediately there when I heard about the performance...when he [Cage] done something like this was very original and of course it shocked the audience and provoked reactions, and people wondered why they paid to watch something like this...I also wondered why I paid to attend a performance like Digital Silence (*laughs*).... I want to

be honest with you...so I did this association.... I can acknowledge Cage's originality back then and I respect that...but when experience something like this now in the social media age it was disappointed for me...it didn't make any impact to me at all....

Anastasia Lata: Did you not believe... aside the fact that you knew who John Cage was and his theory that every noise can be music...weren't you influenced at all during the performance from the fact that you were part of the performance...that you were participating...that your sounds could contribute to create a new space...

Vicky Athanasiadou: ...Hmm...the truth is that there was this feeling of exposure for a little bit...for just a bit...but because I was not alone [in my house] ...some small personal moments even a quick chat you don't want to be exposed...I wouldn't want my boyfriend to step in the room and call me with a specific nickname that we use in front of everyone (*laughs*)...you know at some point I thought about warning him to not enter the room, but at the same time I was not allowed to leave the room... so, in the back of my head I had this thinking going around, like is he going to enter the room now or not...but that feeling again was just for a while...you know I am very familiar with being exposed...this is subjective... I am familiar with being in the public eye maybe that is not the case for someone else...for the exposure online it's something that I am used to...

Anastasia Lata: Although, during the performance most of the participants could not see you, only hear you through the sounds coming from you space...so, you were exposed via sound...

Vicky Athanasiadou: You know as I said you before, I was trying not to be visible at the beginning, but then I didn't care to be visible... that fact that was exposed through sounds only restricted me...uhmm...can you repeat what you said?

Anastasia Lata: Yes. I was just saying that you were not exposed as a person per se, Vicky, instead you were exposed to an environment through the sounds, people couldn't see you... so the sounds could be deriving from anyone....it did not necessarily mean that the sounds were coming from your apartment...so, it is like a mixed exposure...what are your thoughts on this?

Vicky Athanasiadou: This can be used for someone that is afraid of being visible...in order to get lost in the crowd... in that way the performance can work out...it want work for someone who does not really

care about it... and again I was not afraid to be seen...and of course they were other noises that were covering my, and I understand that there is kind of safety in this environment...if that is what you mean...and yes we are safe to do any noise that we want...and where does this conclusion lead us?

Anastasia Lata: Well, for example you could make a noise for on purpose so you can spark the conversation between the sounds... or during that time something like this did not occurred to you, because you were already bored, or you didn't pay that much attention, drawing... like you were kind of in a space out mode...

Vicky Athanasiadou: I think that the digital sounds were so frustrating from me that day, that I was looking forward for the performance to end...Although, I was the last leaving the meeting or second to last leaving the performance... and this was a clearly an argumentative act...as you see for example in theatres people leaving the performance if they don't like it...I stayed until the end, now that I am thinking it, I was just reacting to what I saw, and I wanted to protest and stay until the end to state with my presence that what I experience was not enough for me...that I am waiting from you to give me something, because what I saw was not enough for me...that is the reason for staying until the end...there were people that left the meeting immediately and they did not comment anything...to be honest I paid attention more to people's reactions after returning back in front of our cameras, because they were two parts in the performance, instead when we were away from our cameras...I was so curious to observe...because they were people that I started appreciate in the audience.. I was very curious to see if those people that I share some same interests, how they will react...yes...I was more interesting into that...and I wanted to know if I was the only one that fed up during the performance...was I the only one that wanted to leave the meeting...if the aim of the performance was the concept of frustration...so, if they placed us in this situation in order for us to act and get out from the virtual reality, then I believe that this performance has potential...it can work as an anti-performance for the people that are obsessed being in the internet, which this obsession because of the pandemic became a need, since we couldn't prevent it...If the [this performance] acts as a discouragement for being in these platforms, then I believe that [the piece] worked excellent.

Anastasia Lata: So, if I asked you what moment stood out for you, then you would say your curiosity to see people's reactions?

Vicky Athanasiadou: Yes, because I was so fed up at the time that we were heading back in front of our cameras, that I wanted to figure out if I had the problem.

Anastasia Lata: Because you were one hour silent, when you got back and wanted to see if the others were feeling the same as you...did you speak or you only wanted to observe people's reaction, for example by understanding their body language...as much as you can recognize the body language of someone via Zoom...

Vicky Athanasiadou: I recall saying like a small phrase or sentence...but I wasn't being honest...it was just a general comment...it was not an honest reaction, because if I had to be honest and telling all the things I am telling you right now, either I would leave in tears or them (*laughs*)...I didn't make an attempt to tell the truth, but if someone was asked me to say with honesty your thoughts, then I would have said the truth...I wouldn't be afraid...but I didn't want, you know, just to open an argument by myself all of a sudden...because I didn't want to offend the creators to be honest...I don't know what did they think while creating this piece, but I believe that they created it in a bad timing...it does not work in our age...

Anastasia Lata: After the end of the performance did you feel that impacted you...I mean did the performance provoked you for further thinking or did you discuss the performance with someone else after?

Vicky Athanasiadou: Yes, I did have discussions about the performance... and I was separating the discussion into two parts...first I was discussing the reason why I gave 15 euro...yes I am being honest...not that I am stingy, but I felt like that I was being fooled in a way...because when I pay for a ticket for a theatre play or for any other performance that it is either in a venue or outside, I pay the performer or the actor who used some tools, who spend his time in rehearsals, who trained his voice...who "sell's" his body to my... the raw truth about acting is that the actors are selling their bodies to the audience, the artists are selling their skills by creating a painting and they sell the time that they spend on that painting, and this has to get paid...the artists do not make art as a hobby, and he must get paid and we must appreciate it in order to admire his art...if we want to hang his painting in our walls or if we want to spend two hours watching

a play where a person is either acting or performing in front of us...this person is offering us a show...we buy this show...this is what is called “selling the art”...but there is some people that they don’t want to admit that and they either calling it a hobby or to just say that the artists are not doing anything and we must offer our work for free... I don’t believe in that, I believe that artists must get paid...now from the moment they bring me forward to an online performance, where the platform is for free...although now you need to pay a small fee to Zoom if you want meeting for a certain hour, I think...

Anastasia Lata: Yes, but it seems that what you are saying now comes to a contradiction...that the artists must get paid and that we must consider art as an actual profession, which I totally agree with you... don’t you thing in this performance [Digital Silence] they sure paid the Zoom meeting, people that were in the technical department, people that they come up with the concept and spend some time on how to design that, the idea behind...

Vicky Athanasiadou: Uh...yes...but only that... I mean I think that is was little, not enough... to set t differently so you can understand it... how am I supposed to give 15 euros to a person... in the same period and in the same country in The Netherlands... that learned a breathing technique, I am talking about another performance that I didn’t like...but I did not said why I paid 25euros for that... I understand why I paid this amount of money... how am I supposed to give the same 15 euros to the people who came up with the idea of placing us into a digital environment, as we the person that learned by heart a whole piece with notes and performed in front of us via breaths ... he damaged his vocal chords and spend a lot of time rehearsing that piece...because I have done music myself I know that it takes a lot of time to learn a song in the piano...so, to manage to perform a music piece with only using breaths is extremely hard...your body can not handle something like this...your body at some point starts to “complaining” at some point...we saw it in front of our eyes, because the performer started turning read, he was drinking water...so, I cannot compare this instance with a group of people that decide to put us all together in a Zoom call...

Anastasia Lata: So, in way, the performance [Digital Silence] provoked you for further thinking of what is art and the evaluation of art?

Vicky Athanasiadou: They need to persuade me...I mean neither [Malevich](#) did something when he painted the black square ...he just drew a black square why it was sold for a one million euros... yes, but there is a huge context behind that black square where for its time was revolutionary.... for our era Digital Silence how can be revolutionary for an audience that is trained with social media...what difference Digital Silence proposes that for example Instagram hasn't prospected 10 years now...

Anastasia Lata: Do you feel that from now on...since you have attending a performance like this that tries to build a conversation...you will change the way that you will attend the next performative conversations?

Vicky Athanasiadou: What...sorry..., can you repeat...

Anastasia Lata: Yes, I am asking you that since you have participated in a dialogue, which obviously you felt that was not enough for you as you said, does your perception towards these conversations or performances has changed or will you attend such performances again?

Vicky Athanasiadou: Of course, I will have an online performance in my mind to compare it with others...and I have already put myself in this process of comparing...and very recently...and I will tell you why. As I said, yes it was not enough and yes it did not shock me...how to say it... it does not have what it takes to prove to us that it will change the existing artistic history...since you are asking me this and since I had the joy to attend another online performance, Hamlet's playground, which it did had some technical problems, because we were in a digital environment that people got lost or others couldn't follow what was happening...so, they were some technical problems that they need to shorted out...but I did enjoyed it a lot more since in comparison with Digital Silence it was obvious that the this team really tried to think how can use an online platform, how the spectator can live a theatrical experience in an online platform... and in a way where I found it really cute since with all these avatars that this platform offers it becomes indeed a playground, so it was very smart that they used this specific platform for a playground... this shows me that this performance might have some problems, because now they are testing it...they left a much better impression to me... and to point out that for us because the creators new that were in this experimenting level, it was a free of charge performance... although, I would pay to see this performance...with all its

flaws, because I saw a use of the platform which it was worth it...just like when I go to a restaurant if I don't like the food or if it is wrongly made I will make complains and I won't pay for that... even though the cook spend some time making it...nevertheless, everything that it is offered to me I want to valuate it...yes for me art should be evaluated as everything else...

Anastasia Lata:

Ok, then I think that's enough to work with... thank you so much... I will now stop the recording.

*Stops recording...*