

## **We go round in circles in the night and are devoured by the fire**

« *Apocalypse*. This annual exhibition – to which the patients themselves were not invited – presented a rather disturbing characteristic : the omnipresence, in all the paintings hung, of themes of worldwide disaster » First phrase of *La foire aux atrocités*, J.G. Ballard

This could all be very complicated. A young woman, wearing Prada, is thumbing through military tactics' manuals. « An artist of the public sector » who practises assembling a self-guided « SS-27 Topol M » type missile. Like some gifted yet strange child from one of Bret Easton Ellis' novels, Anne-Valérie Gasc seems to find malicious pleasure in crossing the lines and multiplying contradictions. This could be very complicated...if it wasn't...

Sales strategy, communications' strategy, company strategy...breathing...

Technique of well-being, technique of management, technique of creativity...breathing...

Managing movements, managing human resources, managing projects... Stuck, walled in.

The general attack is underway, she's in orbit, it seems to have been happening forever. The net supports us at the same time as it holds us back. We are in a theatre, or rather on a theatre, that of operations. The artist attempts to pass through the holes in the netting while also keeping her balance. And her manicured nails are blackened by the assembly of her MK1 compression flow generator, she produces artwork.

From the beginning, Anne-Valérie Gasc had chosen her strategy, she would be a soldier. Direct attack, blockade, siege... she uses the full array of possibilities available to the perfect soldier. As strategy is an *art*, that of « making an army move forward in the theatre of operations right up until the very moment that it comes into contact with the enemy », then the artist turns it into her work ethic. She organises herself.

The first step could be that of enrolment. Anne-Valérie Gasc recruits her army from the margins of the production society. Her soldiers are renegades, women who have devoted their whole working lives to nourishing the machine which ends up by excluding them since youth is the added value necessary for work. Mårva Kårpårti, Erzsébet Pogonatosz or Eva Deåk... have infiltrated once again, they work at the Budapest Galéria. Marcelle Rougier, Aimée Durand or Marie-Ange Brochier... however as they are once and for all free. All form part of a shadow army. While waiting for the signal, in domestic secrecy with curtains drawn, they put on their uniforms, vaginal flags. They unfurl them, open them up, with feelings mixed with pride and defiance. Mårva, Erzsébet and Eva put on their combat gear at their workplaces, in the large conference room, the only space where obsolescence and emptiness still manage to reunite. The amateurs have become militants. They have abandoned their card games, their little desks and have occupied the terrain, they have made it into an area of autonomy for just one moment. « History says that Revolution reaches « permanency », or at least a certain duration, whereas Uprising is « temporary », Hakim Bey wrote. In this sense, uprising is some sort of « maximum experience » as opposed to standard awareness or the « ordinary » experience. (...) Vision is born when uprising occurs – but as soon as the « Revolution » is triumphant the State is back, dreams and ideals have already been betrayed. » So it is only in the instant that the artists' revolt comes into force, in that stolen instant, is paradoxically the only guarantee of a Utopia won. The territory to be won exists only in passing, an open space detached from the map, without a specific geography.

In her handbag, beside her war manuals, Anne-Valérie Gasc has placed Michel Foucault's books. She has worn out the pages. Particularly those on heterotopes. The transcript of Foucault's talk on France Culture in 1966 : « There are the areas of passages \_ streets, trains, undergrounds - ; there are open areas of transitory stops – cafés, cinemas, beaches, hotels – ; and then there are the closed areas for rest and homes. Whereas, among all these places, which are quite distinct one from the other, are those places which are completely different, which are quite the opposite to all the others, which are destined in some way to efface them, to compensate for them, to neutralize or purify them. These are in some way the « spaces against », localized utopias. » It is obviously for these heterotopias that battles are fought. Places collide, spread out or avoid each other. It is a question of offering utopia a territory, albeit transient. « The heterotopes are the grounds of contention for all the other spaces and this contention, they can use it (...) by creating an illusion that proclaims the rest of reality as nothing other than an illusion. » We are here. Destruction to classify the world and to reveal it for what it is : a sham. Producing an artifice to identify the proprieties. And the exhibition sites become the places for a conscious and open revolt. They are the spaces which the artist has chosen frankly, at which to leave the right road. As they enable her to remain undercover, so she goes the whole way, thus questioning the role everyone plays in this operation to annihilate the world. Anne-Valérie Gasc remembered the lessons of Clausewitz « War does not just suddenly break out its propagation is not just an instantaneous event », and so she calmly continues her work of sabotage. At one time she would have wanted to embroider this phrase onto the lapel of her fitted jacket, this one or a more famous one, « War is simply a question of continuing politics in a different way », but she didn't because sometimes her war seemed too ambitious or ridiculous to be political.

Then things changed, in October 2004 Anne-Valérie Gasc became an arsonist. She set the town alight just as one would send a postcard, to give a sign, to say that things are not going well. In the fitted dress and with the sling bag, she demolished whole districts, always with a certain elegance and a preference for Vermillion red (spray paint of course). She set upon the portrayals of monuments in Budapest. October, 31 days, 31 buildings, 31 partially burnt postcards were sent. In November the stencils she had used to burn the Hungarian architecture became relics that stigmatised the violence of the unrest. Strangely, they are seen as some form of fragile lace with motifs as dangerous as they are aesthetic. They create some form of fascination for this act of devastation. But here, the artists' work methods are questioned. The flames absent from the damaged card show themselves to us as the paradigm of the act of creation itself. The artistic gesture is manifested by its opposite, like a mark, in negative. Destruction and construction are linked in the very same instant, in the same space. The message on the back of the postcards is clear and unequivocal : « For strategy n°1, I tried a head-on attack. But it was only a trick. Since then it is under siege ».

Next Anne-Valérie Gasc opted for the explosive, as something quite obvious. The visual artist that she is left her no choice, she rejected all forms of concession. Break up, destroy, tear down the walls. There is this visceral need to pull down the façades. Walls are signs of power (totalitarian regimes proclaimed their power through architecture), they are the limit that inhibit and demand to be transgressed. Camouflaged under her Rimmel, she set up her apparatus of destruction. The building turns slowly, suspended in space, floating, reminding us of the spaceship's dances in *The Space Odyssey* (the film which tells of the end of human civilization). But just as in *Ainsi parlait Zarathoustra* by Johann Strauss, it is the « beep beep » of Sputnik 1 which echoes like a countdown. And

there is this one button, one press of which will suffice to cause a catastrophe. And without any other form of a trial, the architecture crumbles. One should be peremptory to be heard whereas Anne-Valérie Gasc whispers the words of the Conscious Being of the Imaginary Party, Tiqqun : « One must above all begin with the principals. Action is just an afterthought. When a civilization is ruined, we have to bankrupt it. We don't do the housework in a house that is falling down. The goals are not lacking, nihilism is nothing. The means are not to blame, impotency has no excuse. The value of the means is shown in their results. » It is a nursery rhyme, a verse that sticks in her mind. This art is not the rage of despair, just the aggressiveness of exaltation, it reveals itself as one would resist : alone against all with pugnacity.

The artist is hanging by a thread, she takes advantage of her status to question the (minefield of) freedom which she is offered. Her work goes unceasingly oscillates between fascination and repulsion, for this world, for its destruction. There must be something personal in this affair as there is something universal. The radical nature of these acts responds to the risks of creativity. Because one must be on the attack, think against oneself, Gasc against Gasc, to pretend to move forward. Some risks must be taken, burn down the cathedrals and hope that everything will begin again. And if nothing starts up again, if it was all for nothing at least this uprising would have existed. It is a vain and fleeting guerrilla attack, with neither death nor commentaries. An OK battle, to use the American military jargon when they return from a mission asking themselves : « It's OK ? » translated « Zero » « Kill ». It's OK, all's well.

Anne-Valérie Gasc is an artist who plays with all types of work, from the harmony of the stereotype she prefers the roughness of the heterotype. This way of being that challenges all ways of being. Pressurized, she embraces the world almost to the point of stifling it. And high heels in the ashes she rubs her eyes and repeats the words that have forged her determination : « We say that there is no danger because there is no rioting ; we say that as there is nothing materially out of place on the surface of society, that the revolution is far from us. This is because the annihilating forces are busy elsewhere far from where we initially expect to find them. (...) This society functions like a never-ending call to curtail our minds. Its best elements are foreign to it. They are rebelling against it. This world is revolving around its margins. Its decomposition is going beyond it. Everything that is still alive is living against this society. »

Then she feels alive, conscious that the world around her is falling down while she remains standing. So she sits down, calmed for a while, and then takes up her notes.

Guillaume Mansart

Title of a film by Guy Debord from 1978, translation of a Latin palindrome « In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni ».

J.G. Ballard, *La foire aux atrocités*, Tristram, 2006, Paris

« Petit Robert Dictionary »

Hakim Bey, *T.A.Z., Zone Autonome Temporaire*, published by Eclat, 1997, Paris. Original edition , Automeia, 1991 New York.

Michel Foucault, *Les Hétérotopies*, conference for the radio broadcast on France Culture, 7 December 1966 during the programme « Culture française ».

Michel Foucault, *Ibid.*

Karl Von Clausewitz (1780-1831), Prussian general and theoretician, famous for his writings on military strategy, the most well-known being *De la guerre*.

Tiqqun, « Exercice de Métaphysique Critique », in the magazine *Tiqqun*, n°1, Paris, January 1999

Tiqqun, *Ibid.*