

«I'm an explosives expert. I make things that can be used, when it comes down to it, for sieges, wars, destruction. I'm not favour of destruction, but I'm favour of being able to push through; to move forward; to bring down walls.

An explosives expert's first of all a geologist. He looks at layers of terrain, folds, fault lines. What sort of ground will be easy to dig into? What sort may prove hard? He observes how fortresses have been built. He identifies the features of the relief that could be used for concealment or launching attacks.

Having done that, he goes on to the experimental, trial-and-error stage. He carries out reconnaissance, he posts sentries, he orders reports. Then he works out his tactic. Sapping? A siege? Explosives, or direct assault? The method, in the end, is nothing other than this strategy.»

Michel Foucault, «I'm an explosives expert» («Je suis un artificier» [1975], in Roger-Pol Droit, Michel Foucault, entretiens).

Generalized Flash of Blazes
(Practical guide for desert evacuation)

Ludovic Bablon in *Anne Valerie Gasc Bomb Bunker Buster, Images En Manoeuvres* éditions, Eop édition, Marseille, 2007

« My works are pathetic. It's impotency brought to life. All the empty spaces belong to me. »

On day D of the outburst of hostilities everybody assembled on the edge of the desert for a large-scale operation.

Observe was there and Wait was there and Breathe came too and Understand will join us. These past few days Evacuate had accomplished his job perfectly while Protect cleaned up the terrain with the first salvo that was called artillery preparation. Protect enables care to be taken, attention to be paid, trouble to be dissipated. Protect is however not enough. Heal was beeped but Heal was busy elsewhere, in an appointed place, a hospital or surgery in town. So Warn came to teach us that the access to the great emptiness would be closed one day before the implosion, nevertheless the inhabitants would still be able to find their way calmly home. Destroy is supposed to come but Come is not coming and Getting There is not getting there, when a gentle breeze blew endlessly through the dunes.

For days on end – fresh war, entrenched war – the desert of sand stretches out, infinitely useless, piled up under the immense air of the clear blue sky, compact, gaping and available. Observe is bored behind his lines and is waiting to see while Look with binoculars, posted far off in the shade of a loophole, reveals that there is nothing, that nothing moves, that nothing happens, that there is nothing to do ; at least, one won't be able to complain, one would have been warned of the imminence of the drama that is still expected.

At the hour H Breathe is in position, made up of air for 90% in two main movements which are 1/ spit fire, 2/ breathe out water and 3/ blow. Thus Breathe panics and shouldered by Breathe In and Breathe Out, from the Pant unit which on an average of fifteen times a minute efficiently uses the surrounding emptiness to nourish its next decisive effort. This is why Breathe = Stifle as it consumes the oxygen that is allied twice to hydrogen which is an alkaline metal to form the water that is lacking. In these conditions the ambient temperature is 55° and Stifle is composed of 80% pure anxyogen and 20% nothing. The flame that is produced will obviously come from a chemical reaction between the oxygen in the air and the prospect of dying mouth open before having done anything, - at least that is what the generalismo Attack says, who, his feet of fresh air nonchantly placed on the edge of the desk of rearguard, starts, activates and stops the operations before beginning them understands the necessity to go back to four, three, two, one, zero. Ignition.

At time T of the offensive the absence of troops take up position by deploying power perfectly coordinated, which is why the specially entitled, remunerated and devoted civil servants are sent to define the terms, execute the tasks, put into action every part of the whole plan defined by the headquarters of Attack. Rapidly operational, the ghost army easily infiltrates the centre of gravity of the desert with its technicians and surveyors of the specialized brigade N.A.N. (nihilist-anti-nihilist) and currently keeps it occupied in the prospect of bouncing it like a mother at home does with a child on her knees. You are not dreaming : the event has not yet happened and already its consequences are here : the desert now presents itself in the form of a cubic room open on all four walls which in blocking the horizon enable a completely panoptic eye to carry out a meticulous topographic survey of the destructions to come : a volume of air enclosed, forming the reservoir of exploitable energy, endowed with a calorific and large explosive potential, considering the favourability of the conditions of the ensemble.

Affirmative, my general : at this instant, everything assures us that the scene of the operations should be rapidly reduced to nothing in such a way as to re-establish perfect calm in the whole sector.

So Attack sends Decide to force Stifle to receive the signal : no more than a few instants before ignition.

Neither seen nor heard, the soldier Stifle slips right up into the centre of the desert, and with a spark, provokes an exothermal oxidation reaction there called combustion and which is nothing other than the break up of the liaisons between the molecules of the two bodies. The principle is that of the triangle of fire, a perfect form that reunites he who will set the blaze that which will be set ablaze, in assembling through an energy of activation a combustible to a comburant. As soon as the flame begins to dance and undulate to the rhythm of the chemical exchanges and the movements of air ; it grows in size by increasing the surface of combustion, which intensifies the reaction and provokes the nourishment of a source of air by the phenomenon of aspiration. The temperature in the enclosed space rises and provokes the pyrolysis of everything it contains – thus one assists, powerless, to a sort of slow evaporation of the place. Which fills with emptiness, which melts, which disaggregates, and their steams gather in a layer of smokes that accumulate on the ceiling. The layer of smokes thickens and the neutral plan lowers rather brutally, filling up with highly inflammable combustible gases almost the totality of the disaster area. Obviously one must wait for the presence of the rolls of fire to be the warning sign of the Generalized Flash of Blazes : it is done.

On contact between the overheated smokes and the oxygen of the air aspired in backup, the surface combustions spontaneously appear : these are the rolls of fire. As the temperature of the smokes continues to rise, everything, - the combustibles present in the room heated just to their point of selfdestruction, - everything, - the ensemble of

the air contained and the sands reduced -, blazes.

It is the Generalized Flash of Blazes.

The combustion is brief, the breaking up complete.

Where once was desert, now stretches its new ruins.

At a signal, the spectre of the liaison officer assures us that everything has gone well ;
we breathe a pure toxic atmosphere again.

It is our next target.

Courage, let's begin again.

We go round in circles in the night and are devoured by the fire**Guillaume Mansart****in *Anne Valerie Gasc Bomb Bunker Buster*, Images En Manoeuvres éditions, Eop édition, Marseille, 2007**

« 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 Vermillon 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 oscillate 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 neverending 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.

Notes :

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.

Dear Anne-Valérie,

Hitler's mother's doctor was called Kafka. He was a distant cousin of Franz. Absurdity, despair, distinctive relationships and unresolved questions are hidden in the intimate. Forgive me for starting this preface to your catalogue on a note of tragedy, but since the day I first came across your work I've experienced it in all its gravities and necessary hesitations it runs the gamut of flights into the unseen things of the world.

Your work, with its diversities of proposals and resources, deals with that which resists being pinned down; that which appears and disappears; that which is said, and which evades expression through language. «Standing apart from things, to the point of blurring many of their details, adding a lot of looking, so as to see them again or looking at them from a certain angle or positioning them in such a way that they deliver themselves up only in a breakaway or again, looking at them through coloured glass, or in the gleam of the setting sun or, finally, giving them a surface, an epidermis that is not quite transparent.» (Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*)

Writing about your work cannot be a linear process. During your travels you draw together scattered clues which you subsequently incorporate into your projects and installations. The Danube, with its perpetual meanders and divagations, comes to mind. Watering huge territories, it is the opposite of those rectilinear rivers that rush headlong towards the sea.

The image is of a thought process or a work that is going to surround us, disorientate us and uncover us in the same movement, faced with the landscape of our existence, its silences and ruggedness.

You've returned from Budapest, and soon you'll be taking part in the Warsaw biennial. The reference to the Danube also expresses our shared feeling for eastern Europe Mitteleuropa which has witnessed excesses in the past, but also contradictions and contractions in our own day. Eastern Europe, whose borders, origins and history are in a constant state of fluctuation, and where the present is a subject of improvisation, reminds me of Heidegger's dictum, «To be truly in the present is to be in a future memory», or again Robert Antelme's comment on «the silence of ashes strewn over a plain [where] under the pressure of that which no longer appears [...] these few fragments of day and darkness burst forth.»

«Sapping» is one of your «strategies», and it illustrates certain facets of your work. In the light of the photographic and topographic investigations you carried out on the site of the Budapest ghetto, it is just the right term.

In another «strategy», i.e. «Enlistment», your dresses, with their disproportion and delicate folds representing the vagina (that eternal flight), are worn with delectation by elderly ladies in a retirement home in France, and hieratic caretakers at the Budapest Galéria, allowing the unconscious mind to find expression, and to free itself from necessity.

The micro-events (or, better still, the epiphanies) that you make use of, or create, give a true account of signs that are dispersed, sometimes dissimulated in the disturbing banality of the everyday, the non-adherence of the world and its images. During your investigations in the public buildings of Budapest you became acquainted with those dangerous lifts that go by the grave and ironic (absurd?) name of «paternoster». They recited the interminable litany of office workers ascending and descending. Without special effects, but with the radicality of astonishment, you filmed the comings and goings of people caught in the itinerance of an incomprehensible activity between heaven and hell, basement and upper floor, work and relaxation.

Your perceptions of the world can be matched up with a martial vocabulary. The apparent irony in the titles of your works also evokes your unflinching struggle to emancipate a depiction of reality. In fact, you implicate yourself in the world, and give yourself up to the risks of errancy, and error.

The artist in a permanent state of siege, hemmed in by the nature of things and that of images, continues from the very first day, with obstinate rigour, to transform the blocks of consistency of that which surrounds us, and marks out our space in infinite blocks of feeling.

«The thinker, enclosed in a cage, paces interminably between four words.» (Paul Valéry)
Dear Anne-Valérie, these discontinuous lines are for you. I've attempted to define my displacements and observations through your «pre-occupation» with unbounded spaces.

«Given that we construct our worlds by combining phenomena, I would not be surprised if, right at the start of time, there was a gratuitous, recurrent association that set out a direction within chaos, and laid down a certain order.» (Cosmos, Witold Gombrowicz)

Eric Corne, Paris, September 2005