We believe that a change has taken place on a DNA level. We are talking about a generation that is capable of absorbing all the different layers of information, a generation that is able to exist in different dimensions and to easily commute between them.

ASSUME VIVID ASTRO FOCUS. Artist.

The politically charged installation of Vivid Astro Focus at John Connelly Presents in New York City in the summer of 2007 exhibited the contents of the storage space of the gallery. Ladders, plants, and whatever else that usually belongs in the janitor's closet were wrapped in custom-made wallpaper. Its three-dimensional print could be read using masks that were fastened at the door by attractive transvestites. Four letter words emerged from the wall and revealed anthropophagy ideas: ABUS, BUSH, IRAQ, LOVE, HOPE, EVIL, PRAY, and so on. And this winter at Art Basel Miami Beach 2007, aVaf rolled out a specially invited and extraordinarily dressed team of vogeys, b-boys, and skaters to perform on a one-of-a-kind rink, skate. The beach was on fire, adults and children were dancing, and the circus that is the international art world turned into a real carnival.

Geir Handalseth: Whenever I encounter aVaf, I'm always struck by all the references, all the different pointers in the work, whether it is formal issues or content. It could be Tropicalia, Queer Culture, Miami Bass, or skateboarders, all mixed together in collage and performance work. I was reading Carlos Bausada's writings on the idea of cultural cannibalism, and specifically in a Brazilian context, Anthropophagy. It seems to run through Brazilian culture, whether it's visual arts, music, literature or film. For example, the Brazilian Tropicalia movement that originated in the late 1960s and which recently had a revival with major exhibitions touring the US and Europe. Anthropophagy struck me as an interesting approach to view aVaf. How do you see aVaf in terms of Anthropophagy? And what is your relationship to Tropicalia?

aVaf: There is definitely a connection, an inspiration, a background - whatever you want to call it - to Tropicalia. As a [non] art movement it's probably the one that is closest to the ideas of aVaf. The interesting thing, though, is that we believe that the Anthropophagy ideas behind Tropicalia have, in fact, been strengthened and potentialised over the past ten years. In the world we live in we are not just more exposed to the Other, but we are also bombarded by an unprecedented amount of information. We are learning to absorb and transform this massive load of information more rapidly. We truly believe in the power of the internet and its capability to share and improve exponentially our perception and knowledge. In many ways, Anthropophagy is part of what aVaf is interested in the concept of contamination - eat the other and let yourself be eaten. Contaminate and be contaminated. Be contagious, which was our first neon piece. We believe also that there's a new human species breeding from all this experience. We believe that a change has taken place in our way of being conscious of what has been processed it will separate new, already existing, generations from previous ones. We are talking about a generation that is capable of absorbing all the different layers of information, a generation that is able to exist in different dimensions and is able to easily commute between them. And this is the core belief of all aVaf projects. Share, generosity, contaminacy, be contaminated, devour, be devoured, travel, spread.

Geir: So there's a change from the devoured cultures and the Other to a more vital contamination that will evolve into a new human species? Wow. I guess there are similarities to Tropicalia, which had a very strong political motive of change. It was not just about fun and dance, but I feel the political nature of Tropicalia is often downplayed when it is re-assessed and represented in a contemporary context. How does that relate to aVaf, where enjoyment, strong colours, dazzle, sex, 3D, plastic and fun take up a lot of the space? Do you feel the political nature of aVaf is downplayed in the contemporary art world?

aVaf: The political aspect of Tropicalia is underplayed in an international context, which is where the idea of aVaf's military dictatorship as a power vehicle for ideas. It believed in the dissemination of these ideas to the masses and music was the most powerful agent or personification. It's easier for people, especially critics, to relate to works historically by labelling and trying to pin down references and ancestors. As we said before, our work, our genes, our perception has changed and that's why the new-old-isms will not explain what is happening NOW. We would like to propose a test or an exercise to critics: stop relating to the past when writing about an artist's work. Let's stop talking about Old Masters, and let's try to perceive contemporary ones. It's too easy to relate colour to psychedelica or carnivals, but that's really a bore.

Geir: I hear you. I guess I have to do that test later. But I want to return to the idea of the exotic. Most often, the exotic has been based on geographical divides, which in return indicates the lack of a cultural divide. But there are other deviations considered exotic in western culture. Other "others," if you wish. I guess they are mostly often described as sub-cultures, queer, transgenders, and so on, which is also a part of aVaf's vocabulary. One specific example that comes to mind are the masks made for the exhibition a very anxious feeling at John Connelly Presents. The masks covered half the face of the wearer and they were a bit wonky. The face was taken from a photograph of a transvestite and then you added 3D lenses to the mask. What were the ideas behind the masks? Transvestism is an icon for aVaf. The gallery viewer into the Other? And how does the mask fit into aVaf's story? I've seen different versions of this type of mask in a lot of your work.

aVaf: As first the idea of making and wearing masks came out of necessity, pretty much. We wanted to disguise ourselves at openings to avoid being recognised. Then we realised the power of release unleashed by wearing a mask. We decided to produce different masks for the different shows we were developing. Transvestism is an icon for aVaf as a 3D masks. The tranny masks were initially made for our show at Moca L.A. We made an installation that was homage to club culture and how intrinsically related this history is to the births of gay rights and the forming of a gay community.

Geir: I love the extra-sensory idea behind the masks, the parties and the performance. It's an excellent way of losing oneself. The crowd at the Miami Beach performance was really into the show and it seemed like a family event even though you had hardly clad vagrancy, freakish circuit performers, and tough b-boys. I guess it's a viral dissemination of aVaf and the Other and I really hope there isn't a cure.

-Geir Handalseth