

Conversation with Cay Sophie Rabinowitz about avaf acronyms

Announcing Vital Answers Finally
by Cay-Sophie Rabinowitz, October 2010

Dear Eli,

You sent me an amazing selection of phrases with four words that begin with the letters a, v, a, f. Some of these you wrote yourself but many others have been created by others [see below.] I myself always feel the urge to send you a version at the end of an email or edit. In my essay for your newly published monograph I wrote about some of the apparent Situationist strategies in your oeuvre, but now it occurs to me that I failed to even think about this particular aspect of your work. And yet this is such a great example of both derive and détournement. Somehow, this syntactical situationism inspires in others a radically refreshing willingness to do something out of the ordinary. People come into contact with the suggestive letters and thereby become collaborators. Sometimes I wonder if anyone knows who did what version or if it matters if any one variation can be attributed. Ongoing and all-encompassing, ‘avaf’ (wearing the garb of asymmetrical voluminous ass fuckers, or another vixen acts furious, or even a very audacious fart!) motivates action. Certainly, anonymity is a part of this. Who writes what, and what belongs to whom, just doesn’t seem to be of issue when it comes to avaf activities like this.

The nature of your practice is always collaborative — in public just as in print — and it immediately made sense to me that Simon would compare this collective poetry production to the Surrealist’s exquisite corpse, where one person initiates a mark, which generates another person’s mark making, which in turn hides the previous mark while unveiling its new mark to the next one. Each mark gets revealed and concealed consecutively and consequently. What do you think about the term consecutive consequence? Does it seem too forceful? Or is there always a bit of arm-twisting that happens when rounding up your Situationist participants? Does real change usually hurt just a bit?

Revealing and concealing are also offered up in the masks that you make and circulate at gatherings. You have even included one in the end pages of your book. Do you see a relationship between this way of finding creative inspiration through the ‘mask’ of a certain poetic scheme, and the liberation people seem to experience when they don a mask (as in a costume) and join the parade?

And how about the literary syntax in your avaf phrases: can you say something about the role of punctuation in the selections you made for us to discuss? Are exclamation points really there to exclaim and question marks there to ask questions? Or might there be a way to let the grammatical conventions assume other guises and convoke with the alphabet on another level? Perhaps, may I call this community of avaf authors a new society of the spectacular?

Always vigorous alluring fondness,
Cay Sophie

Another Vivacious Admiring Friend
by Eli Sudbrack

Hey Cay Sophie

First of all THIS IS FANTASTIC. I was/am so happy to read your text/questions. You know when developing projects like ours – because of the amount of layers we work with, because of the spontaneity we try to keep, because when working with other people you have to let go of your own control-freakness a lot, because of a bunch of institutional restrictions we usually need to face, and because a lot of what we make is created on a very small scale at first and then blown up/magnified when materialized - we are always confronted with elements of our shows that are either very successful and quite often surprising, and other elements which failed to exist to the potential we envisioned before (which in reality we never see them as failure).

The avaf acronyms became pretty much the ultimate realization of our projects, the simplest, most playful and one of the most successful ways to set our beliefs in motion. The level of freedom it represents and the extend of interactivity it ignites was/is incomparable among our works and also somehow surprising. We set that in motion without fully knowing if/how it would actually function. We started creating these different avaf combos because we wanted to have a different pseudonym for each show we did. We wanted to confuse even more, we wanted the “artist name” to be playful and not monolithic; we wanted it to be fluid and not representational of "geniousness." As the group of artists involved in each avaf project changed, why not change the name we all go under as well?

Unfortunately that never happened (a lot of protest from our gallerists - hahaha) but we decided then to use the a,v,a,f initials as a starting point for titles of our different projects and exhibitions. We also started using these different a, v, a, f combos as "signatures" at the end of our email messages. And this is when other people started interacting and responding back to us with their own avaf acronyms.

The contamination ideas we usually work with (contaminating others and being contaminated) are fully realized in this avaf acronyms interaction and for that reason we decided to not keep track of the submissions we receive (who sent us what). As you said, anyone anonymously can become a collaborator. We incorporate every single new acronym people send us into our list. Mostly, we only “reject” submissions with made up words or words that are a combination of two words together – but that is not 100% true, we make some exceptions as well. We don't usually change someone's contribution either, but there are exceptions there as well.

Consecutive consequence sounds like an extremely appropriate term to describe one of the types of movement that is ignited with this practice since many of them are also a response to already existing acronyms. But when creating our own combos, we have different construction strategies and our collaborators follow similar paths. The most common is the construction of an actual sentence that makes sense, which often very emblematic (like acrobatic vampire anticipates freefall), other times we split the four letters in two groups and make two separate meanings by

the combinations which exude conclusion (like alternative versions additional formats or activate vanguard anthem force), other times we create acronyms out of adjectives which often have a somehow humorous and affected approach (like amorous voluminous atrocious ferocious), or calls to action (like arms viable and fast). Revealing and concealing are part of the usual tensions (like sex and no sex, aggression and sweetness, contemplation and explosion, freedom and repression) we use as strategies already in our work, and both the masks and the acronyms carry these aspects for sure.

Thank you sooooo much!

lovelove

Eli

asymmetrical voluminous ass fuckers
ancient virus attacks francophones!
amsterdam visitors accept feedback
archaeologist verifies acid flashbacks
athletic vigor accentuates fascism
aryan visagist assassinates fassbinder
acrobatic vampire anticipates freefall
astronomer verifies asteroid fears
ambulatory vaccinations anger fashionistas
asexual virtuoso ascertains fetishes
another vixen acts furious
austrian vizier admits fellatio
acid vaporises anal fissures
apocalyptic vaseline annihilates fistfuckers
adolescent vasectomy arouses father
a very ambiguous faggot?
absurd vanilla anus flavor
aimez vous avec ferveur

are vipers always fanged?
argue verify and forgive
a voi amici fantastici
axé vatapá alegria feijão
a very audacious fart!
all vaginas accept fingers!
asparagus vegetables are fun
always vomit after formalities
announcing victory as failure

aimez vous avec ferveur
anfíbios voladores alargadamente fabulosos

another violet alien fetus
automatic vibrator at first
another vagina acting ferociously!

ants visit antarctica finally
arms viable and fast
american virgin astonishing fecundity
amorous vitality affirms fury
adore voluptuous actresses forever
aujourd'hui vous aurez faim
another vivacious admiring friend
artichokes vaccinate against fungus
activate vanguard anthem force
a very anxious feeling

adulterated vindaloo accelerates flatulence
alternate various aphrodisiacs freely

are vishnu acolytes fundamentalists?
a volcano acting fast
arcanos viscerales anteriormente fabricados

artilugios viscosos asfixiantemente figurados

astronauts validate actual fantasies

a vaporous affair foretold