

[excerpts from]

**Alias Supernova
– a play with dolls?**

"I shall sell my name and buy me a new one." (*The Viewer*, Miriam Bäckström, 2005)

She asked me to work with her in her next project where she would be the producer and I would be the product. The project would produce material for two exhibitions that were to take place one year after the project was initiated. She expressed a will to do something provocative or dangerous. I accepted after some emailing concerning our interests. The current project has my name and is consequently called *Kira Carpelan*.

The name is relevant when creating an image of a person and many authors start building their characters by giving them a name. This project I find is about that, though who would be the author in this? And who is "Kira Carpelan"? I have argued that Miriam is the author and I am her material, just like the initial description of the project where I would be her work of art. I have also argued that my role is to play the character she will create for me but like all fictional characters I will reflect my author and the result will be a portrait of Miriam Bäckström. We have only agreed on the first part.

The descriptions of this project are many and different depending on who you ask and when you ask. We have video taped our meetings during the last year so most of our shared thought can be recovered. And what wasn't recorded on camera has been kept in notes or in audio recordings. There is therefore easy to follow our working process and I have returned to the notes and emails to try to find a common denominator in all of the descriptions made so far. When I now read the first emails the same questions and thoughts as I had then still occupy my mind. Only I didn't think they would. I thought we would have gotten further and away from them, made them irrelevant. We haven't. In addition to that in all of our conversations we switch points of view so many times and leave so many questions unanswered so that sometimes I wonder if the project has any content at all. What I find is only this made up image of me. And I wonder how this could be interesting to anyone. I also wonder about the reason for it. Is it to bring up the fact that as an artist you need to have an image?

In Miriam's earliest presentation of the project that she gave me she said it would be a project about a person becoming an artist and the questions related to the artistic practice like What is an artist, what is expected from an artist and how does things happen etc. The project name then was "The Artist". So relating to this first intention the project states that to become an artist you have to create yourself an image. (But really?)

Notes on Miriam acting powerful:

She speaks of me in third person when I am present.

She picks hair or other from my shoulders before shooting.

She tells me what to do and even how to think.

She controls meetings by suggesting when and where to meet, and we often work at her house.

She pays for lunch.

She offers me dinner, a lift home or to stay over and spend the night in the guest room if we tend to work late and in that way leave me with no excuses to go home. (I have rejected all but dinner and a lift home once – why I don't know, just gut feeling)

She keeps me up dated on her calendar so that I know she is very busy.

She appears to be well off with money.

She never switch off her phone and she almost always answers it when it is ringing.

Why does Miriam want to be seen as powerful? (She says she wants to be unsympathetic.)

What does a powerful character gain and what does she loose?

Is it necessary for a female artist to play powerful?

Examine the costume of the stereotype art woman. (What's with all the boots?)

The character is made with help from costume, setting and action.

My costume:

What would you like for me to wear?

Mostly I put my art uniform on - black pants and black jumper. It is rather neutral in this case. Once I had my old comfortable trousers. They signal I don't care. They are like a teddy costume. No one can get angry with you in those trousers and you threaten no one. Likewise I had my protective big collar whool jumper the first time we filmed a conversation. I had just got back from hospital and surgery and wasn't feeling to hot. I needed a thick extra skin.

I didn't do anything with my hair and I wore my everyday make up. I had no shoes. Shoes indoors in Sweden is high class, it shows you have continental habits. My character is middle class and not as educated as I am.

From the start I wore my necklace and ring in gold. After a while I realized they became to much of a signature. They are to much me. So I switched them for a sami necklace and no ring. Sometimes I had my Casio 1980s wrist watch.

When working with the shooting I was not performing my character for the film. There was no time so I went the opposite way and deliberately destroyed the project image of me to make sure it would not end up in the finished film. My appearance is "unscreenable" (one day my hair was actually standing straight up) and I act toward the off set camera as if it is a home video shooting.

The set:

I still remember the scene from the entertainment flat and home of a german famil where I experienced something that looked like a crack in the setting. She was in a closed off room next to the entrance hall and had left the door half open while she was folding the kid's clothes. I found that the clash between the high heels and the evening dress she was wearing and the sweaters and socks she was handling made a

fascinating image. It felt like an anachronism. She was suddenly off stage and her costume got so visible in that ordinary environment. She noticed me watching but didn't seem to care. I got the feeling it was because it was really late. The show was over. But maybe I am totally wrong. Maybe this is what is typical – the semi bourgeois habits. Maybe this *was* part of the play and we play only half the part of the bourgeois characters. The other half is the critical or the naive person with a great distance to everything around him or her, like the story teller, the one with the gaze, the omnipresent or the traditional character of the fool. Or as in this case; we are the master *and* the servant. I find that interesting. It is a kind of theatre I can't help enjoying.

The set is Villa Dagaborg. It is an unexpectedly big old looking house in a southern far out suburb of Stockholm. I grew up in the neighbourhood but did not know of this house. It is made as a copy of a 18th century villa facing a small lake. The interior decoration is made of a few as it seems carefully chosen pieces of modern classic design furniture.

Subtitles Image of a portrait – the shooting

Miriam: No there is no time.

Marius: Ok.

Kira: You haven't pulled the focus have you?

Miriam: Thank you! But the expression... I will just show you that image.

Kira: Right.

Miriam: Can you see it?

Kira: Mm.

Miriam: You can hold it up, in front of the lamps. What I think is so beautiful there is that you are... One gets the feeling that one doesn't know if you look at me or at yourself. Understand?

Kira: Yes.

Miriam: And there are a lot of things that are ambiguous. But it is simply just very concentrated. I think that is how I would describe it. While on the others you are much more fair and sweet and pose like one does on a portrait. Here something else happens. It's a shame we can't get those two little dots in the iris again.

Kira: They won't be there now?

Miriam: The reflexes are a lot larger now... from the light. We just have to live with that.

First documented meeting

Miriam in the background talking to her assistant.

Miriam: I have an idea that I would like to try just as a starting point.

Kira: Mm.

Miriam: And that is to... Since I don't have any questions prepared and you probably haven't either, we just continue where we started.. or finished last time. So I thought, if you you start a discussion without any preconditions and either use only the memory to recall things or we transcribe what is said, or we take notes. But next time we can bring up the same questions. So you push the conversation to be better and better, but not so that we repeat ourselves but so that you...

Kira: Think it through.

Miriam: Yes, you go on and on and just continue next time.

Kira: What did we talk about last time?

Miriam: It was... Now where did I put that paper... What I remember that was the most interesting was how we should relate to... Here I have a folder named Kira.

Carpelan do you say that?

Kira: Carpelan.

Miriam: It was empty.

Kira: Darn.

Miriam: No it's not that paper... I thought I would have had time to write it down properly but I hadn't. I'm so unorganised right now. But it is surely some point with it. But what I remember was character...

Kira: Right.

Miriam: And just how we should relate to the project. What should be said and what should not be said.