

I go to the gallery to see Iwona. Iwona is not there; instead I find an 8 x 11 white sheet of paper pinned to the wall. It is a note from the gallery asking "where is our superstar?" Betrayal?

Iwona Majdan is not present during her 'occupation.' She is, apparently, enjoying a sun-filled vacation in Mexico. We receive this information the next day on a P.R. postcard that shows the artist

as a "superstar" in various poses against a palm-dotted beach and a blue sky. What appears at first as a radical distancing from any engagement with the gallery public becomes rather a performance which highlights this very relation.

The project room at La Centrale gradually fills with daily messages pinned to the wall. Iwona tells us we can "expect a special surprise."¹¹ We are presented with her "latest music videos."¹² The superstar is constructing a persona—a persona which positions us as either accomplices to her performance, or outside of it. If we accept the role as her Adoring Public, we accept a questionable relation to the artist-as-object—a relation that implicitly negates the possibility of moving beyond any consumerist model. For Iwona places herself in the dazzling light of the commodity, the object that is desired and always just out of reach. The commodity that some say performance art displaces is now centered on the persona of the performer.

And yet in the end, Iwona resists this reading; she does not offer herself up to an exchange, but rather ruptures her initial staging to foreclose on her promise. She returns from her vacation and enters La Centrale as the trendy, chic, art star: black skirt, spiked heels and a self-contained attitude. She maintains a cool distance from those gathered to greet her, a distance that refuses to acknowledge the other as desiring.

This performance foregrounds and intertwines both labour divisions and exchange mechanisms. Iwona, in Mexico, on vacation, performs the leisure image, sun and sea evoking an eroticized space. La Centrale, in Montréal, performs the labour function: selection process, grant application, gallery set-up, and audience marketing. La Centrale's labour produces the gallery space, physical and conceptual, which the artist then vacates. The product produced through the gallery's labour is then transferred to the artist and in turn spills into the vacated space for the audience to consume. La Centrale plays into this constructed transaction which positions the audience as consumer, and as such, underscores spectator expectations, spectator desires. This tease, of titillation, of fulfillment, (we will receive a special surprise), is proposed as the lure that keeps the artist/gallery/spectator exchange functioning, that keeps us coming back for more.

And yet did Iwona unnecessarily complicate her performance: Iwona room, Iwona messages, Iwona videos, Iwona promise of return? What would have happened if the 8 x 11 white sheet of paper pinned to the wall was it, a performance of total absence? A starkly conceptual work which questions the validity/currency of performer/gallery expectations.

What is expected by La Centrale when a performance artist is given and accepts a space in the gallery? What is being set up when the *le Mois* poster announces Iwona's laboratory in the project

room, from the 21-30 November, free admission? In my introduction to this piece I said the word betrayal. My feelings of betrayal. Betrayal as a programming member of La Centrale who supported Iwona's dossier and expected something other than this piece of paper pinned to the wall. Betrayal as a spectator informed by friendship who made the effort to go to the gallery to see Iwona. Betrayal as a performance artist who still believes in the physical presence of the body as primary. Real time, my body and your body inhabiting the same time the same space, breathing the same air together.

In the space of the time it takes me to read the note pinned to the wall all my expectations are turned back at me. I feel hurt and angry and foolish all at once. My position is interrogated. Does an artist have to do what she says she might do? What about creative freedom and personal integrity? Why am I really going to the gallery anyway; what am I hoping for, wanting? To pat myself on the back about the brilliance of my choice, to feel good about myself as a source of support? To have my already established preconceptions mirrored back at me? Is the physical presence of the performer really necessary anymore? Is not the initiation of the performance activity (through betrayal or any other means) valid in itself? A strategy which evokes a highly stimulating and provocative process. My initial assumptions stare back at me and I am no longer sure of my feelings. Caught between my beliefs as a performance artist and my passion for La Centrale. Conflicting places.