



About Installation

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The following conversation took place in 1991, on the eve of the opening of the exhibition *Dislocations*, organized by Robert Storr for The Museum of Modern Art in New York. Ilya Kabakov's contribution to the exhibition was *The Bridge*, an installation consisting of a wooden bridge built above the floor of a darkened space reminiscent of ZhEK (Housing Committee) offices used in the former Soviet Union for political brainwashing or ideological purges. On one side of the bridge, several large paintings were leaned against the wall; on the other, a number of chairs were left in a disorderly fashion—fallen, broken, or overturned. On the bridge itself was a bright spotlight illuminating a text, written in a bureaucratic style, that described the event that had taken place before the exhibition's opening. According to this narrative, there was supposed to have been an official art jury session in this room. Had it occurred, the works on view would have been found unfit for the exhibition. Through a pair of binoculars attached to handlebars, viewers could see an angelic host of tiny paper warriors ("little nude souls," as the artist puts it) dispersed all over the room. They seemed to have been the casualty of some apocalyptic battle, waged against art haters, the party bureaucrats. As for the paintings spared through a divine intervention, the audience was given no opportunity, no second chance, to figure them out.

Ilya Kabakov, Margarita Tupitsyn, Victor Tupitsyn

About Installation

Kabakov: The installation medium continues to make many people nervous. Sometimes it is perceived as an ultimatum: "Give yourself up and come out to face the firing squad." Installation is a three-dimensional invention, and one of its features is a claim to totality, to a connection with universals, to certain models that, in the general view, no longer exist. Such claims take us back to the epic genre, to literature, to something immobile and yet worrisome, like a corn on one's foot. An attempt is being made to encompass all the levels of the world, all of its corners, to describe everything that happens in it. That used to be the business of classical intrigue, of epics from Homer to the twentieth century.

The installations now being made all over the world are of two different types: first, there is the installation that is essentially a collection of objects, of which one large object is composed; second, there is the installation that rejects, or claims to reject, the object as a matter of principle but nevertheless completely transforms space and is the principal agent of such transformation. Of special interest to me is the type of installation that transforms the room down to the smallest detail, so that it is reconstructed, painted over, and so on. All the parameters of the space are re-created anew; a cosmos of sorts is brought to life.

V. Tupitsyn: Many are wary of the fact that to some extent installation represents an intrusion of orthodoxy into the territory of a modernist or postmodernist world picture—not only in the realm of visual representation, but in the arena of social life in general. I am referring to Guy Debord's society of the spectacle, or, in newer terminology, the "society of the installation." Televangelists, political and financial institutions, mass media, advertising, and so



**Ilya Kabakov. *The Bridge*,
1991. Wood, furniture,
found and made objects,
fabric, light fixtures, light
bulbs, and paintings.
Dimensions of room,
13 x 53 x 36 ft. Installation
view, *Dislocations*, The
Museum of Modern Art,
New York.**

on—all, without exception, try to instill certain ideological constructs, identity frames, and images of desire in our consciousness. Thus, the consumers of visual representations become easy prey for those who would force spiritual, political, or material salvation on them. Often, the most advanced—that is, the most technologically equipped—spaces of mass complicity are based on the same principle as archaic ritual spaces, and that’s precisely why I connect this to orthodoxy. Moreover, holy rites, mysteries, liturgies, corporate board meetings, and political actions require props, the reorganization of space—installation metaphors. Ritual has always created itself, constructing not only objects of worship and altars, but the very consciousness of the participants. However, installation is certainly not a priori reactionary. The paradox is that it is orthodox and radical in equal measures. Rather like a cross between a pterodactyl and an airplane.

M. Tupitsyn: Installation space is also a surrogate cave. And if, according to conventional wisdom, art was born in the caves, then in this sense the installation metaphor can in fact be seen as a very archaic kind of creative manifestation—as a return to the “origins of art.” It seems to me that your installation *The Bridge*, because it was darkened, created a cave-like atmosphere, the atmosphere of a return to where it all began. It’s interesting that the paintings in the background were simultaneously hidden and not hidden. One could not approach them at very close range, and yet they were dimly lit. This suggested an analogy to the mysticism of the cave paintings, which, in a way, no one had really seen properly, because they could be viewed only in natural light, which was insufficient. I think your canvases functioned similarly in the context of the MoMA installation: they were perceived as mysterious cave paintings. This is a marvelous and witty move, since the introduction to this installation actually emphasized that in modern visual art, there had been a final, universally recognized break between mysticism and cultural activity. The break means that the signification of the artistic gesture no longer connects it to the mysteries, to the sphere of demiurgic claims, even if the author himself intended to do so.

Kabakov: These claims had meaning until the mid-Renaissance, when biblical and gospel stories were given artistic form, to such an extent that artistry ultimately became a measure of religious faith and sincerity. Subsequently, and to this day, because of the secularization of society and the elevation to the foreground of such concepts as quality, artistic production, aesthetic commodity, and the like, claims of mystical powers and otherworldly intervention have become a mark of bad taste. From a certain point, all this has been out of bounds, as it were, and talking about it is like farting at the table.

V. Tupitsyn: We have touched on a very important problem that has to do with the transfer of the center of gravity from the relationship between art and life to the relationship between culture and ritual, which in turn heralds the repetition—to quote Nietzsche, “the eternal return”—of what was once declared passé. This return, however, is not a copy of the past, but a manifestation of it in new circumstances, on a different level, at a different scale. To the question of what has caused such a leap backwards, there is no simple

answer. The steep rise in the prices of contemporary art in the 1980s, and their subsequent fall, were among the factors. The artificial price inflation was meant to convince people who didn't know much about art that it was still a profitable business, a sensible investment. One should not forget that financial wheeler-dealers and wealthy investors suffered from a moral inferiority complex vis-à-vis their opposites—artists, servants of “true art” who would rather be poor than corrupt, and so on. The acquisition of an artwork was a way of atoning for one's sins, of communing with the world of authentic being.

M. Tupitsyn: The irony is that even though art in the 1980s sank into a bog of mercantilism and celebrity seeking, it nevertheless inspired progressive criticism, to say nothing of the extraordinarily lively atmosphere that surrounded the artistic events of the time. Now, alas, there is no money, no criticism, no atmosphere.

V. Tupitsyn: In the early 1990s, falling art prices resulted in two developments: (1) corporations that had invested in art forswore any trust in the art market as a means of increasing their capital for many years; (2) the reputation of art, which had been corrupted over the previous decade, was hopelessly damaged; investors suddenly realized that they were no different from inventors, since artists were just as greedy for fame and money as big businessmen, politicians, Hollywood stars, supermodels, and so on. What happened as a result of this crash? The practice of art certainly didn't disappear, as Jean Baudrillard had naively predicted; rather, there was a temporary breakup between art and life—the life of the 1980s, which more recent art cannot afford. Unable to compete with the mass media and societal spectacles, art in the West once again began to aspire toward a hermit-like, reclusive, monastic situation. Ritual has become far cheaper than culture in the sense that now, mystical depths do not require extraordinary expenses—especially since the stage for this ritual is limited to the artist's workshop or the darkened rooms of alternative exhibitions. Hence, the attempt to return to “auraticity,” to a ritualized mode of production and representation.

The interest in installation merely confirms this. Installation is a doghouse in which contemporary art mourns its defeat and licks its wounds after suffering a fiasco in its relationship with life; this is the place to rest before a new offense, quite possibly in the same direction as before.

Kabakov: This theme touches on some sore spots, but there are also things in it that are of vital importance. Your analysis of the transition from the commercialization of vanguard art to auraticity is absolutely accurate, because



Ilya Kabakov. *The Bridge*.

installation is clearly a crude attempt to reunite art with ritual. In this conversation, when we were talking about caves, Margarita essentially described the same model. And, in fact, the heathen temple can probably be understood as a not very well lit place in the cave, where magical exercises took place; meanwhile, in modern art spaces, the images on the rocks become paintings, television screens, and so on, while the rocks themselves become walls. When an artist today asserts in earnest that he wants to bring all this together in art, and yet has little claim to a mystical element in his artistic project, one doesn't know what to say. The point is not his intentions; it is the fact that the method he has chosen works automatically as a catalyst for the synthesis of artistic and magical action. Perhaps there is a paradox here: the author declares his intention to remain within the boundaries of cultural text, but at the same time unconsciously chases us into the pit, into the cave.

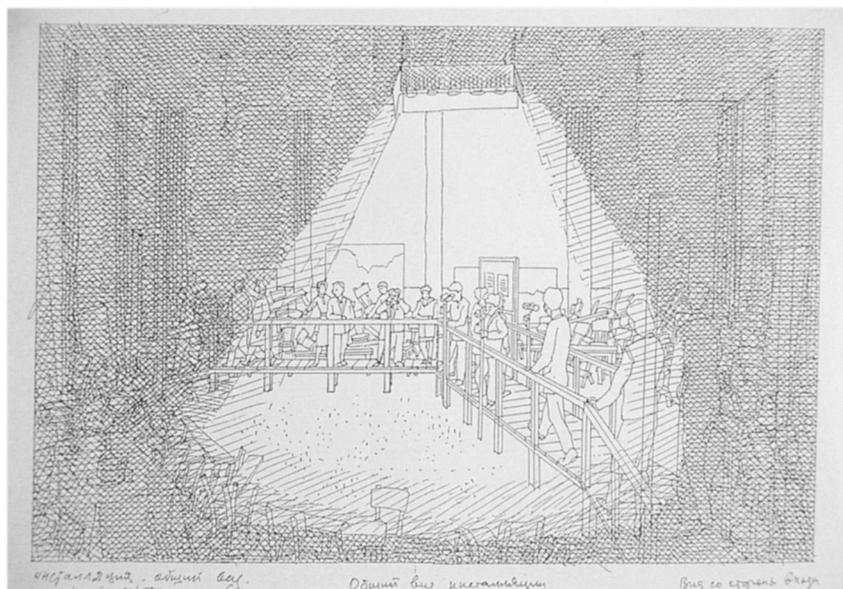
to remain within the boundaries of cultural text, but at the same time unconsciously chases us into the pit, into the cave.

V. Tupitsyn: We seem to be oscillating from one extreme to another. One is the Renaissance, the period when art served as a mediator between the profane and the sacred, life and ritual; another is the 1990s, when ritual has become a mediator between art and life.

M. Tupitsyn: As for the differences between modernist attitudes toward installation and its present status, it's worth recalling that modernists used painting as a point of departure and did this in the context of an

interest in theater, which performed the same functions then as installation does today. Having taken up theater, Russian avant-garde artists, seeking to distance themselves from painting, tried to create a total artistic universe, the way Vsevolod Meyerhold or Nikolai Evreinov did: the audience was seated around the stage, while the theatrical action itself spilled over into the audience or the streets, pulling in real life and merging with it. What's important here, however, is that installation has somewhat different purposes: to separate itself from the world, to become an autonomous metaphor, democratic in form but otherwise closed. The installation vision of the world is a magic crystal in which everything can be surveyed. And that's what we mean when we speak of totality.

Kabakov: Today, the act of going beyond the boundaries of painting has very different purposes. Today as never before, we are witnessing an opposition not between art and life, but between sacral and secular spaces. Installation is the intersection of this opposition, which, once again, has become relevant. Whether or not a connection to life is intended, installation aspires to three-dimensionality—three-dimensionality in the sacralized space of the



Ilya Kabakov. Drawing for *The Bridge*.

temple that is the museum. For me, the status of the location chosen for installation is of utmost importance.

V. Tupitsyn: The address of the “church.”

Kabakov: Yes, its address, its prestige, and also the names and the rank of the priests. Prestige is extremely important! Not because it raises the status of your artworks, but because of the status of power—the power of the sacrament. On several occasions, I have had a choice of sites, and I could always see that what matters is not the quality, the lighting, or the amount of space but, above all, the status of the space where the installation could be constructed. This shows that installation is a doubling of the sacrament. It’s like a din that gradually increases in volume. Today, the space of the museum is a place where the Holy Spirit dwells; it is a new church where sacred relics and wonder-working objects are kept. That is why, when viewers (the parishioners) come to the museum and enter an installation filled with trash, dirt, and old rags, they still realize that they are in a temple. And in a temple, no one notices trash, even if it’s there in abundance. We see only the glittering opulence, the gold and the diamonds. This is a doubling that takes place in our consciousness. The ritual is doubled because the installation, placed inside the museum, contains within itself its own ritual spaces and magical sites.

V. Tupitsyn: In fact, there are two rituals: the first is performed inside the installation space, but as soon as the crowd of people, yearning to know exactly what it is, flows into that space, a second ritual takes place: everyone becomes initiated into the mystery, and the mystery becomes commonplace. These two rituals, when they fuse, create a very powerful field—two streams meeting each other.

Kabakov: Let’s talk about the fact that installation, as a genre, aspires to anonymity. I’ve noticed that when people enter a large and seemingly self-contained installation, the thought of its authorship never even occurs to them; that is, the installation is treated as if it were a construction from an unknown era, belonging to no country or nation that anybody knows of. The emotional states experienced by the viewer are directed at anything but the creator of these objects. You know, of course, that a child would never ask, “Who wrote this book?” or “Who illustrated it?” It’s as if the book, and the bunny in the picture, had always existed. Children do not remember the names of authors.

M. Tupitsyn: But if you believe that installation presupposes the death of the author, that it erases authorship, as it were, then what is the role of your paintings standing against the walls of the MoMA installation?

Kabakov: In the anonymous space of the installation, the author’s claims are leveled. To the question, “Whose paintings are these?” the installation itself answers: “No one’s!”

M. Tupitsyn: Yes, but isn’t it nonetheless clear that they are yours? They are, after all, included in an artistic event associated with your name. It is possible that the anonymous environment itself creates an irresistible need for someone to assume the burden of authorship. It seems to me that this question will matter a great deal to your viewers.

Kabakov: This does not fit my own understanding of the effects of the installation. In it, the paintings have an entirely different function. They are not specific paintings; rather, they represent the concept of painting. The same is true of my installation *He Lost His Mind, Undressed, and Ran Away Naked*, which I showed at Ronald Feldman Fine Arts in New York in 1990.

M. Tupitsyn: But the public will still try to find out who painted these paintings. Besides, all this is happening at MoMA, where paintings and proper names play a vital role and where it's impossible not to take an interest in such things. MoMA, as you said yourself, is a temple, and the power of the temple is not to be underestimated. It matters, too, that they (these canvases) are large and apparently quite expensive; therefore, the question, "What are these?" has to be important to the viewer. After all, if I suspect that these may be real masterpieces, I want to know the author's name.

Kabakov: What about the fact that they are lined up on the floor?

M. Tupitsyn: Maybe they just haven't been hung yet.

Kabakov: I have no answer to that. When you put it that way, it's a real kick in the teeth, because I thought I had dealt with that question.

M. Tupitsyn: This is not a reproach but more like a simulation of the viewer's reaction to your installation.

Kabakov: What's remarkable about this analysis is that when viewers ask, "But whose paintings are these?" they are telling us that they are not ready to look at the installation, but that they are ready to look at the paintings, which is quite likely.

M. Tupitsyn: The question of the authorship of the paintings can be compared to the question, "But whose fly is this?" posed in a series of your works of the 1980s—a series that later became an installation, *The Life of Flies*, which you showed at the Kölnischer Kunstverein in 1992.

Kabakov: It's an absurd question—absurd because nobody owns a fly, and anyway there is no fly. And when there is nothing at all, there is no author either.

V. Tupitsyn: Judging by many installations, paintings—in terms of the multiplicity of their roles—have become similar to characters in your albums.

M. Tupitsyn: Yes, the paintings could be seen as *Ten Characters*, the series of conceptual albums you produced from 1972 to 1975, which was the basis of the installation you exhibited at Ronald Feldman Fine Arts in 1988. But what's interesting here is the development of your approach to the installation—particularly since the descriptive text says that members of an official commission were planning to censor the paintings but didn't show up. The result is that you censored yourself, as it were, by hiding the paintings from the light and obscuring their authorship.

Kabakov: But there is another interpretation. This hasn't occurred to me before. The paintings in the MoMA installation were intended as a sacrifice, to

be “slaughtered” by art scholars and critics, i.e., to be destroyed. But higher powers had intervened in this tragedy and chased the evildoers away. This theme echoed the 1937 exhibition in Germany, in which modernist paintings were exhibited as objects of derision. But that time, alas, nobody intervened. On an unconscious level, my installation compensated for this nonintervention.

M. Tupitsyn: But at least, in the case of the *Degenerate Art* exhibition, one knew the names of the artists. With regard to your installations, I would also like to discuss the mechanisms of control over the viewer. For instance, how do you force him or her to read the text while the passage is blocked, as is in the case in *Dislocations*, by people looking through the binoculars? What happens here is a clash of the feeling of freedom, since the very idea of installation fundamentally presupposes contact with authoritarianism and totality.

Kabakov: The fact of the matter is that I do not plan for any installation to be smooth and naturalistic; rather, it is meant to be an entry into repressive, communal zones. I’m talking about places where you come in response to a notice of a sale—to a dark house or apartment. The person coming in sees that, actually, life is pretty bad in there, but it has nothing to do with him; he’s not responsible for anything and not to blame for anything. He

just wanders around, as if at an auction. And this seems to be the norm—that is, the artist is imitating the state of viewers who wander around a dark but otherwise normal hall. In this case, I designed this entire scene ahead of time when I was planning the installation. Generally, we’re touching on a very important subject here: the subject of freedom, and of the coercion of the viewer in the installation space. In normal conditions, viewers forget about their bodies, which helps create the aesthetic effect. But what if they have to push their way past something or someone, as part of the author’s artistic agenda?

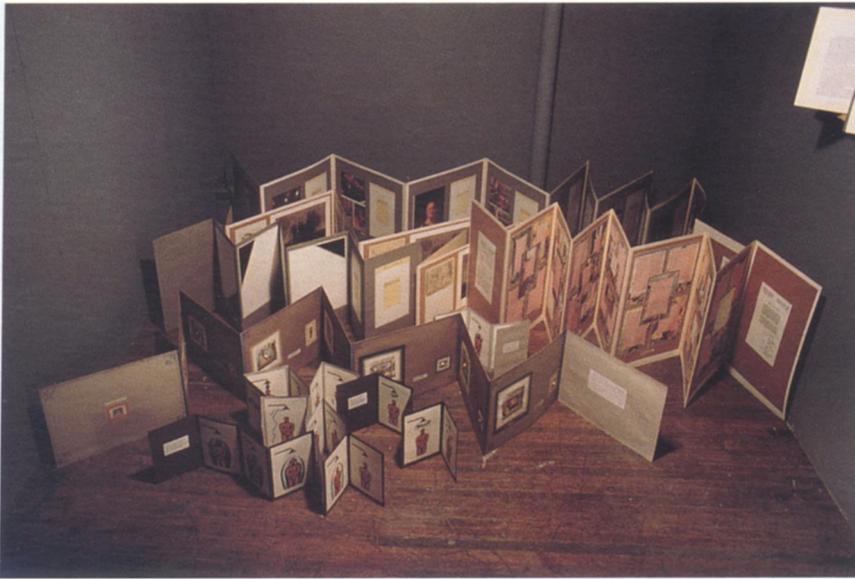
V. Tupitsyn: Then, it becomes necessary to compensate for the impossibility of instant aesthetization, which is realized later within the framework of a posteriori understanding—and usually in hyperbolic form. Strangely enough, the compensation is far more lengthy than what it’s compensating for: books and films about war are, if they are all put together, much longer than the war itself. By the way, the analogy with Munich in 1937 is further proof that the MoMA installation is an apocalyptic narrative. The army of tiny white



Ilya Kabakov. *He Lost His Mind, Undressed, and Ran Away Naked*, 1990. Four socialist realist murals, acrylic on paper, and seven masonite panels. Installation view, Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York, January 6–February 3, 1990. Courtesy Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York. Photo D. James Dee.

figures seems to have descended from the heavens to battle some dark force that was going to devour art—that is, the paintings lined up against the walls. The paintings were saved, but the little white men died.

Kabakov: Or maybe they're still fighting, who the hell knows? I'll give you a wonderful example as an illustration of exactly what we were just talking about. Once in Paris, I was walking with a female friend. It was late at night and dark; we were in the Montmartre, a rather nasty place. And suddenly, under a streetlight, we saw an awful scene: a group of six or eight men was pummeling another such group. They had all melded into some horrible blob that swirled around a small spot—a horrifying sight. Naturally, as any normal coward would do, I quickly suggested to my companion that we turn around and walk another way. She, a French woman, calmly replied, "This has absolutely nothing to do with us." And then, we moved straight ahead—exactly as in this installation—toward the carnage, where the men were savagely pounding and kicking one another. But when we approached, we went through this churning, screaming mass, like a knife through butter, because they fought without ever touching us. What's more, I noticed that one of the men moved aside to let us through, like a passenger on a bus, all the while bashing another man over the head with a stick. What's truly remarkable is that we did not become part of their reality; we passed through it, through these writhing and squishing bodies, like shadows—like Dante and Virgil. It was hell, but not our hell. To some extent, by the way, the installation resembles Disneyland.



Ilya Kabakov. *The Short Man (The Bookbinder)*, 1981–88. From *Ten Characters*. Courtesy Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York. Photo D. James Dee.

V. Tupitsyn: It also resembles Noah's ark. But let's go back to the problem of authorship.

Kabakov: The idea of the author as curator has been discussed many times before.

M. Tupitsyn: Tell me, in what condition will people leave the space of the installation? And how soon will they be able to figure out what they have gained from this manipulation, the manipulation of their psyche and their sense of reality?

Kabakov: I can say that I have had two experiences, both related to the *The Red Wagon*, shown at the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf in 1992, in which everything was built around the relationship between the outer space and the inner space. That is, viewers saw the installation, looked it over from every side, and walked past it. There was a main staircase leading to an entrance that the public was supposed to walk through; but the door was locked, making it clear that it was not meant for anyone to enter. And so viewers would start to walk around the front, moving along the red wagon. As they walked along the car, they could

hear the sounds of music getting nearer and nearer. Finally, it turned out that the music was coming from the back of the wagon, which one could enter through the back door. Driven by curiosity, viewers would walk up the stairs and enter the car. Once inside, they discovered a dark space and, behind a barrier, a panorama of the future Soviet paradise, lit up from below. But what was most important was that inside the wagon, Soviet melodies of the 1930s, such as "Come On, Sun, More Light!" were playing at full volume, mixed with a tango—a mix of Soviet and Hollywood music. And, of course, there was also a bench where one could sit down, look at this utopian paradise, and listen to the music. The really interesting thing was that no one who went inside that box wanted to come out. It turns out that the metaphor of going inside is, of course, a return to the mother, to the womb, a journey into one's past—an incredibly soft and beautiful one. Everyone understood that there is nothing more beautiful than the past. There was no irony, no derision: people rose reluctantly and sluggishly and walked out, so overwhelmed with emotion that they were unsteady on their feet. In other words, it was a terrific success. Coming back to the question of the exit from the installation, the question arises: What if the visitor wants to linger inside? I am talking about the twilight state between dog and wolf, between sunset and sunrise, which, once it has taken over the zone of our psyche, makes us powerless to decide. What I'm saying is that the installation in general appeals to a semiwaking state. The viewer, as it were, is simultaneously asleep and not asleep.

V. Tupitsyn: The twilight, senile state of consciousness. In a historical perspective, the creation of a total installation that one couldn't leave is a utopia that triumphed only in countries like Russia or North Korea. Today, such things are beyond the reach of artists. And, indeed, the tragedy of those who create installations is that sooner or later, the viewer will be able to leave. And then what?

Kabakov: And then he wakes up again and says, "Dammit, where the hell am I?" or, "Look at all the nonsense they've put up here. I can't believe I've wasted so much time on this! And where am I, anyway?" When a person looks at a painting hanging on the wall, he never feels that he's wasting time because, after all, "This is Rembrandt, dammit!" That is, "Not only am I in a museum, but they even have Rembrandt here!" In other words, no one's deceiving you. With an installation, there's always an element of a magical spell. You feel as though someone were holding you and not letting you go. "And who would that be? Obviously some demon. No wonder they told us this fellow uses forbidden arts!"

V. Tupitsyn: Finally, I'd like to touch on the issue of catharsis. I am particularly interested in the viewer's interaction with the space of the installation. These concerns go back to the Aristotelian model of catharsis as a merging of the subject and the object of aesthetic perception. In the case of Socialist Realism, the use of this model meant the power of representation over the viewer. The inhabitants of the Soviet Union were the citizens of the paintings and the films that they were shown. When viewers looked at these images cathartically, the images essentially swallowed them up, devoured them in the sense that there was no space left separating viewer from image. And that's precisely what the

installation borrows from Socialist Realist representation. The moment of reflection occurs only after one leaves the premises of the installation space, with a delay.

Kabakov: In order to “enter” the painting, the viewer must regard it as reality. And that’s precisely what Alice did when she went through the looking-glass. The installation has a provocative potential in the sense that it demands another, extra effort from the viewer. When you enter a space where chairs, tables, and paintings are set up around you, you get the feeling that you are in a room or an office of some kind. And yet, at the same time, you are told, “This is not a room or an office—it’s art.” This requires a certain amount of effort. “What do you mean, art, if when I look straight ahead I don’t see what’s behind me? Art is something that stares me in the face.” “No,” they tell you, “not in the face, it’s something that’s all around you.” On the other hand, there’s this article I read the other day that said there’s no such thing as an installation; it’s just a kind of sculpture that allows the viewer to get inside it.

M. Tupitsyn: Obviously, installation can play the part of a sculpture. Take George Segal, for instance. And those who have read Victor Hugo will remember that one of his heroes, Gavroche, lived inside a statue.

Kabakov: Once viewers enter the installation, they sometimes experience utter horror, complete incomprehension, discomfort, and a desire to get out as soon as possible without even trying to understand anything. In essence, installation rests on the idea of a man walking along the shore with one foot on the ground, while he dangles the other in the water, which has to do with the idea of security. He is, as it were, on the border between the museum and the space beyond the museum. But there is another aspect as well. Usually, viewers who look at a painting have to see a large part of the wall beside it. Or, when they look at a sculpture, they try to hold in their field of vision, first, the works standing next to it and, second, the people on the right and the left. In other words, viewers have to remain in a safe zone of spectatorship. Here, the trick is that they are invited to walk through unfamiliar territory—for what is an installation? It is a place for walking, in which every point is related to a new level of danger. Basically, there is no guarantee that Petrovich won’t appear from around the corner and hit the viewer in the face yelling, “What are you walking around here for, you son of a bitch?” In general, when a man is walking through an unknown space, it creates anxiety all by itself. For instance, when making our way through a strange apartment, we don’t know whether we should go inside the bathroom or peer into the closet: we don’t know what awaits us there.

M. Tupitsyn: Yes, that’s true; paintings or sculptures are “safe.” They don’t bite; they have been tamed and corrupted long ago. They are like household pets. In an installation, on the other hand, the measure of chaos and entropy can exceed the level of risk to which we would consent. I am talking about the mental discomfort from which an installation offers no insurance.

Kabakov: But there is something about an installation that the viewer must not and cannot foresee. Like the man who wandered into Stalin’s funeral by

accident. When the crush began, the desperate look in his eyes seemed to say, "Just fifteen minutes ago, I was on my way to have dinner with Solomon Yakovlevich, and now the man standing next to me has had his breastbone smashed, and I can feel my own ribs beginning to crack. And how did I get here, anyway? What am I doing in this crowd, in this crush? It's a disaster! What a mess. And it all happened so suddenly. No one gave me any warning. When is this finally going to end? No, I'm not going to get out of here alive."

V. Tupitsyn: In this sense, speech is the ideal installation; because it never begins or ends, there is no exit from it.

Kabakov: I agree, but is art a nondiscrete text without interruptions?

V. Tupitsyn: There is a tendency to search for things and situations that have an innate immunity to words—for spaces, in which the ecstasies of speech have not been implanted as a secret score, for things that cannot be read at the level of the mental optic, since they require a bodily vision.

Kabakov: But there is in this, it seems to me, a manifestation of the grandiose ambition of text, of discourse—its claims to totality, to victory. When we say that everything is speech, we are constantly immersed in the river of speech, and therefore we basically cannot say anything.

V. Tupitsyn: We cannot say anything that is beyond speech.

Kabakov: But what about Minimalism? When you look at Barnett Newman, Ad Reinhardt, or Donald Judd, you just magically feel speech ebbing away inside you—that is, you find yourself in a space beyond speech. Anesthesia takes over, the toothache of words disappears, and a welcome silence comes at last.

V. Tupitsyn: Minimalism and Abstract Expressionism are not a solution to the problem: in them, one can still feel the pulse of speech. Their silence is "eloquent." After all, the pause between units of speech (the caesura) is also a part of speech, and that's precisely the role Minimalism plays in twentieth-century art. The role of the pause that sounds. Beyond this, on the level of the unconscious, Minimalism's search for the Holy Grail of visuality was somewhat similar to a man's obsession with his bride's virginity.

Kabakov: There must be certain nodules that speech never penetrates, and about which we literally have nothing to say. Either these nodules are so tiny and insignificant that next to them, words are like Gullivers among the Lilliputians, or else they are inaccessible to language and impossible to describe. It would be good to try to develop a concept of installations that do not work on speech frequencies.

This conversation was transcribed, edited, and updated in 1997. It was translated from the Russian by Cathy Young.

Ilya Kabakov is a Russian-born artist who lives in New York. A retrospective of his work is scheduled to open at the Kunstmuseum Basel in 2001.

Margarita Tupitsyn is the author of *El Lissitzky: Beyond the Abstract Cabinet*. She is currently organizing an exhibition entitled *Bauhaus: Dessau-Chicago-New York*.

Victor Tupitsyn is the author of *The Other of Art* and of *The Communal Post(Modernism)*. His new book, *Museological Unconscious*, is forthcoming from Gordon and Breach Arts International.