

Title: Viewer as Narratee in Ilya Kabakov's "Total Installations"  
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The artist Ilya Kabakov's "total installations" create encompassing spatial environments that are at once culturally and historically situated and "relat[able] to any person in any society" (Kabakov, "Monument to a Lost Civilization"). The visitor to Kabakov's installations becomes immersed in their spaces not only as a viewer, but as a reader of the artist's detailed textual commentaries that form an integral part of his work. Kabakov's art has been described as "emphatically narrative-driven" (Groys 2006; Boym 2001), this having much to do with the installation spaces depicting the aftermath of an extraordinary event ("The Man Who Flew into Space from his Apartment"), the anticipation of such an event ("How to Meet an Angel"), or positioning the viewer as a voyeur who has entered into the material spaces inhabited by his "protagonists." In my presentation, I will investigate the viewer-reader's encounter with the texts that accompany the installations. Kabakov works under invented names and identities; he presents the "heroes" of his installations without claiming to be the "author" of their lives: we must subsequently assume he does not claim a traditional authorial relationship to the texts that accompany his works. With reference to poststructural reception theory and Ross Chambers' treatment of the reading effects of irony (*The Writing of Melancholy*, 1993), I elucidate the imaginary unity and ironic distance that obtains as Kabakov's authorial alter egos relate their ideals for their work while construing the viewer as a narratee immersed in the physical environments where the stories take place.