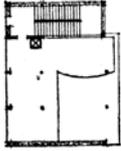
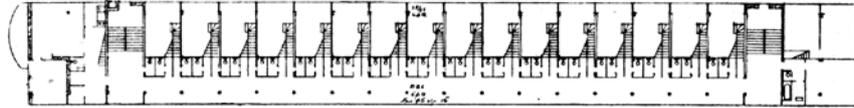


П л а н 4 э т а ж а  
Grundrisse der 4 Stockwerkes



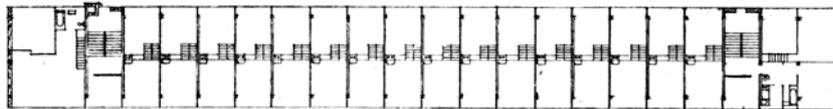
## ДОМ СОТРУДНИКОВ НАРКОМФИНА

М. Гинзбург и И. Миллинис



П л а н ы 5 и 6 э т а ж а  
Grundrisse der 5—6 Stockwerkes

5



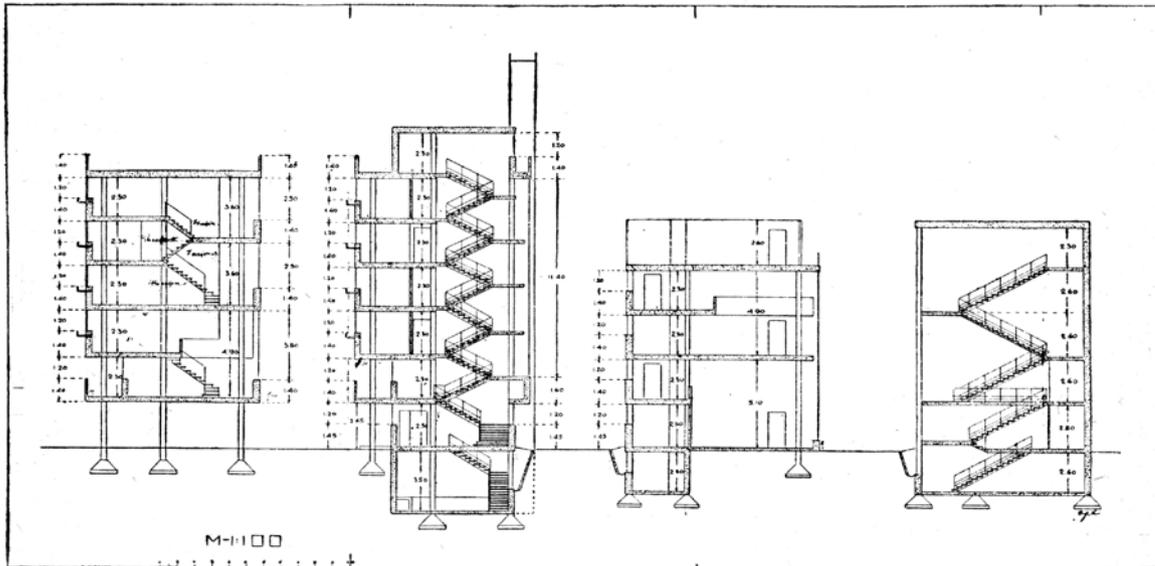
6

160

СА № 5  
1929

Разрезы жилого корпуса

Schnitt durch den kommunalen Flügel



Schnitt durch das Wohnhaus

Разрезы коммунального корпуса

MOISEI GINZBURG: NARKOMFIN  
BUILDING, 1929

MOISEI GINZBURG: OBYTNÁ  
BUDOVA NARKOMFIN, 1929

Source Zdroj: KUBENSKYJ, Eduard,  
2010. Репринт журнала "Современная  
архитектура". [The reprint of the journal  
"Contemporary Architecture"] Moscow,  
Ekaterinburg: Tatlin Publishers

# The Critical Potential of “Total Installations” – The Logic of Ilya Kabakov

## Kritický potenciál „totálnych inštalácií” – logika Ilyu Kabakova

Ana Nikezić, Marija Zečević

Príspevok predstavuje umeleckú formu nazývanú totálna inštalácia, pričom sa zameriava na jej spoločensko-politické, ako aj estetické východiská. Sústreďuje sa pritom primárne na analýzu a výklad inštalácie *Desať postáv* autora Ilyu Kabakova, považovanej za kľúčové dielo pre interpretovanie sovietskych naratívov ako aj pre interpretovanie totálnych inštalácií ako esenciálne sovietskeho fenoménu vychádzajúceho z pochopenia posocialistického kontextu. Prostredníctvom analytických metód skúma socialistické systémové mechanizmy a ich vplyv na podobu umeleckej praxe.

Príspevok je rozdelený do troch častí. Prvá časť s názvom *Kritika – medzi politickým a estetickým postojom* pojednáva o fenoméne sovietskeho socializmu a o postsocialistickom kontexte. Druhá, nazvaná *Komunálka – portrét sovietskeho každodenného života*, predstavuje komunálny byt, osobitú obytnú štruktúru navrhnutú a formovanú tak, aby slúžila svojmu špecifickému politickému kontextu. Naznačuje pritom súvislosti s totálnou inštaláciou Ilyu Kabakova, ako jej kritickým nástrojom. Tretia časť nazvaná *Totálna inštalácia – viac ako len estetická idea* zasadzuje totálnu inštaláciu do kontextu súčasnej umeleckej produkcie a do širšieho spoločenského a politického rámca.

Ilya Kabakov vo svojej inštalácii *Desať postáv* vychádza z typickej obytnej štruktúry vyvinutej počas socialistického režimu v Sovietskom zväze, nazývanom KOMUNÁLKA. Ide o obytný komplex pozostávajúci zo štandardizovaných privátnych obytných jednotiek, prepojených horizontálnou chodbou a vertikálnou komunikáciou, koncentrovaný okolo rôzneho verejného mestského či kultúrneho vybavenia. V inštalácii Ilyu Kabakov rekonštruuje časť komunálneho bytového domu so zdieľanou kuchyňou a záchodom, dvoma chodbami a desiatimi individuálnymi bunkami rozmiestnenými po ich stranách, ktoré predstavujú životný priestor a imanie desiatich neprítomných sovietskych občanov. Inštalácia funguje ako metafora života v Sovietskom zväze. Kabakov upozorňuje na dôsledky takéhoto modelu bývania, ktoré morálne odsudzuje sebaizoláciu jednotlivých obyvateľov a popiera ich intimitu a súkromie. Príspevok sleduje kritický potenciál totálnych inštalácií v dvoch simultánnych rovinách. V rovine politickej kritiky interpretuje spochybňovanie socialistického realizmu. V estetickej rovine zas sleduje spochybňovanie fetišizácie neoavantgardného umenia.

Príspevok poukazuje predovšetkým na to, ako Kabakov vo svojej práci využíva lokálnu mentalitu zdôrazňujúcu rolu

spoločenskej reality nastavenej proti individualizácii jednotlivcov a ich súkromných životov. Komunálny byt je podľa umelca nielen sociálnou katastrofou, ale aj bežným stavom zjednocujúcim ruského kolektívneho ducha (pozn. 15). Kabakov týmto spôsobom poukazuje na formy horizontálneho dohľadu, ktoré fungujú nielen v komunálnom byte, ale aj v sovietskej spoločnosti ako celku. Sovietsky štát si nárokoval intímny vzťah s každou jednou osobou, pričom sa pomer medzi intimitou a mocou stával čoraz zjavnejším. Jednotlivec, vedomý si toho, že je ustavične sledovaný, mení svoje správanie. Tento každodenný „teror“, čo je termín prepožičaný od Borisa Groysa, vedie k obsesívnym, maniakálnym a individualistickým predstavám. Takéto maniakálne idey vznikajú podľa Kabakova z nedostatku priestoru na súkromie, ktorý popisuje ako kút, kde je človek sám so svojimi vlastnými utópiami (pozn. 15). Vo svojej inštalácii *Desať postáv* Kabakov znázorňuje tieto individuálne fantázie rozvíjané v jednotlivých celách komunálneho domu ako mikromúzeum osobných tragédií.

Príspevok sa ďalej zamýšľa nad tým, ako Kabakov využíva svoje umelecké dielo na vyjadrenie osobného kritického povedomia o svojej vlastnej situácii ako umelca, pričom utvára individuálnu, ale aj profesionálnu prax nazerania na spoločenskú a politickú situáciu okolia. Toto kritické povedomie sa javí ešte očividnejšie, keď zoberieme do úvahy enormný tlak na alternatívnych umelcov a strach z ich odhalenia v období pred perestrojkou. Kabakov bol ako oficiálny sovietsky umelec závislý od vôle (a nevôle) predstaviteľov jeho krajiny, pričom žil s možnosťou seriózných následkov plynúcich z jeho neoficiálnej umeleckej praxe v rámci moskovského konceptualizmu. Téma totalitarizmu, ktorá je v jeho tvorbe výrazne prítomná, je dôsledkom traumy z kolektívneho života. Svoju osobnú životnú skúsenosť s ním popísal ako fakt, že v rámci totalitného režimu nemal kút sám pre seba (pozn. 25).

Prostredníctvom interpretácie relevantných textov a recenzií od renomovaných autorov ako Claire Bishop či Mark Rosenthal venovaných súčasnému umeniu a inštaláciám príspevok napokon poukazuje na to, že žáner totálnych inštalácií, pôvodne formulovaný Ilyom Kabakovom, predstavuje novú formu umeleckého vyjadrenia v rámci umenia inštalácie. Výraz „totálny“ v pojme „totálna inštalácia“ naznačuje jeho súvislosť s „totálnym umeleckým dielom“ či „Gezamkunstwerkom“. Hoci sa tento pojem vzťahuje na zjednotenie rozličných umeleckých médií usilujúc sa doceliť ich vzájomnú syntézu, Gezamkunstwerk

reprezentuje precíznu predstavu finálneho umeleckého diela ako ukončeného produktu, ktorý nemá byť predmetom ďalších modifikácií. Totálne inštalácie majú za cieľ skúmať vzťah medzi priestorom a objektmi, ktoré ho okupujú, ich reálnymi významami a možnými asociáciami. V myslí otvorene zmýšľajúceho

diváka môžu pôsobiť ako katalyzátor, ktorý rozširuje možnosti ich vnímania a prispieva k širšiemu pochopeniu sociálnej reality, ktorej sme súčasťou. V tomto zmysle príspevok zdôrazňuje špecifickosť totálnej inštalácie ako umeleckého žánru a zasadzuje ho do diskurzu súčasného umenia.

## 1. Criticism – between a political and an aesthetic stance

Total installations represent a form of artistic expression which, as an essentially Soviet phenomenon, is positioned at the heart of the post-socialist context. In this sense, any critical thinking concerning total installations requires prior knowledge of post-socialist art and its political and aesthetic implications.<sup>1</sup>

This paper discusses the artistic practice of Ilya Kabakov (Илья Иосифович Кабаков) and the critical potential of the genre of the total installation, initially formulated by the Russian artist himself. Although the total installation may be included in a variety of associative contexts, in this work they are presented as a testing ground for the reading of social reality, which in Soviet conditions was formed in the socialist period and coincides with the presence of its political ideology. In this sense, manner, analyzing the total installations as an aesthetization of an ideological text, their critical potential in this work is monitored simultaneously in terms of a twofold challenge that takes place on the political and aesthetic level.

This paper makes the initial assumption that the transition from socialism to post-socialism is parallel to the transition from modern to post-modern culture. In this regard, the formation of post-socialist art begins with ideological change on the political level, and the reception of post-modern attitude on the artistic level. The political aspect of post-socialist art is reflected in defining its thematic framework through an anti-utopian critique of the socialist ideology of the collective.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, the aesthetic aspect of the post-socialist art is determined through the daily symbolism of the new Soviet daily life with its hidden mythology.

The genre of the total installation is one of the first manifestations of a new direction within the discourse of Western art. At this point, it should be noted that the role of the designation “total” within the concept of “total installation” arguably bears a similarity to the concept of the “total work of art”. This concept represents a precise position on the final work as a finished product that is not subject to further modifications. In his total installations, Ilya Kabakov refers with equal seriousness to each object in the context of a spatial setting, creating a comprehensive, thematically determined atmosphere that allows the viewer to become fully absorbed in the “fiction” of the present work.

In this regard, we can say that Ilya Kabakov, through the genre of the total installation, challenges the ideology of socialist realism by creating specific spatial settings as a cynical image of the defeat of collective socialist ideas. Through these thematically formulated total installations, Kabakov directed the observer’s attention to the textures of life and the residual sparks of utopianism in the Soviet Union, at a time when these textures were undergoing disintegration in the maelstrom of post-socialist conditions, a new liberalization of personal and individual space, with an emphasis on the special and different.<sup>3</sup> In this way, the artist transforms the utopian project of socialism into an object of aesthetic contemplation, pointing to the irresistible power of the human being to verify each context, in all cases, individually.

## 2. “Kommunalka” – A portrait of Soviet everyday life

*Ten Characters (Десять персонажей)* was the first major installation by Ilya Kabakov following the collapse of the socialist utopia, exhibited at the gallery *Roland Feldman Fine Arts* in New York in 1988.<sup>4</sup>

A key exhibition in terms of interpreting the Soviet narratives, the installation worked by expanding themes that the artist had researched since 1970s: the most characteristic area of the domestic landscape of the Soviet Union, the theme of the communal apartment and its distinctive residential units, known as “kommunalka”, was offered to the post-modern artistic discourse of the Western art paradigm.<sup>5</sup> The model of the communal apartment as an object of aesthetic contemplation thematically defined the artistic field of action based on the idea of collectivism.<sup>6</sup> City building is the result of communist utopianism: the idea that people return to extended families, where there is no private property, alienation and individualism.

The idea of collectivism and the desire to achieve a transformation of everyday life were the driving forces behind the socialist society, emerging through the cultural revolution following the Russian civil war in the early twentieth century.<sup>7,8</sup>

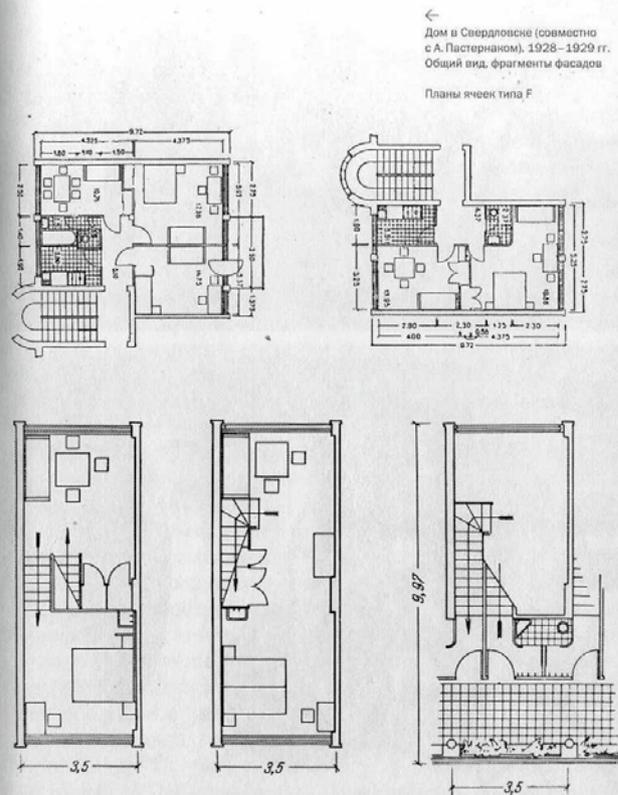
Despite the lack of experienced urbanists and the corresponding base of statistical data, the Soviet Union, especially during its rapid industrial development, became a promised land for urban and spatial planning – although actual achievements fell far behind what could have been accomplished. Although often very primitive in its technical aspects, Soviet urban planning stood apart from any other practice in the world through its uniqueness, creativity and dynamism. On the other hand, even though Western urban and spatial planning was marked with sophisticated elements, they often remained theoretical and formal in nature, leading to decades of anticipation rather than action. It might seem that the Soviet urbanists would have had an easy task considering they worked in a country that aimed its national politics at the transformation of lifestyle and society in general, while their colleagues in Western Europe had to face the struggle against governments and powerful private interests. The first five-year plan confronted the Soviet architects with the problem of planned construction of new towns and defining a new spatial model – the communal residential building. However, the main problem of this new socialist town lay in a certain specific social and industrial relationship with its homogenous population, exclusively comprised of workers. Furthermore, the problem arising from the concept of the communal residential building concept emerges in the need for collective services designed to take over traditional family functions.

Related to the new residential model, both architects and the government fell victim to the inevitable differences shaking the society, which had to compensate for serious economic and technical demands at a time when these tasks should have already been dealt with and completed. On one hand, architects were confronted with the construction of industrial centres planned according to existing models, lacking substantial innovations. Theoretical discussion, on the other hand, took as its goal the determining the precise nature of the new socialist town and the new residential model. A combination of several factors, such as the very novelty of this problem, the absence of any research possibilities and the existence of a desire to find an indirect solution to benefit the already initiated projects, led some of the top architects on the slippery road to utopia.

Architectural and research institutions established by the Soviet Union conducted systematic research to determine the nature of the architectural forms of this new lifestyle, and consequently a new type of housing. The communal residential building concept was of immediate interest to the architectural research of the Soviet constructivists. The architects of the *OSA* group (Объединение современных архитекторов) were the leaders of this project, incorporating rational and scientific methods into their professional practice. Through their spatial models, the Russian constructivists attempted to shape the environment that would be suitable for socialist society, and tried to accelerate the establishment of that society by influencing the human individual, using architecture as a medium. This architectural group used the phrase “social condenser”, metaphorically speaking, the architecture itself and the potential influence it could have on the structure of the society as a whole.<sup>9</sup>

By means of these social condensers, architects and urbanists alike hoped to accelerate the arrival of the new socialist man, who would, in line with the new way of life, spend his time in productive work, individual or collective learning or cultural activities. As the utopian idea of the social condenser demanded its verification through experiment (build, test, reassess), consequently architects designed the physical framework of a new way of life which was to be achieved through the idea of a communal residential building known as the “communal house” (“дом-коммуна”). This spatial model, aimed at the satisfactory level of value determination towards the universal requirements of a community, was to encourage the collective spirit, cancel out class differences and shape everyday behaviour.

In architectural terms, a communal building was characterised by a double requirement: a more economical layout of residential units and services and the creation of a new form of the living environment. It was a residential complex consisting of standard housing units, interconnected by a horizontal corridor and vertical communications, and various municipal and cultural facilities. The basic element of the communal house was a standard housing unit, with the “F-type housing unit” being quite revolutionary. This dwelling unit was not a product of purely technical and architectural research but the outcome of a process where political and social factors were



**MOISEI GINZBURG: OBLOSOVIET  
HOUSING, A-TYPE HOUSING  
AND F-TYPE HOUSING,  
YEKATERINBURG, 1929**

MOISEI GINZBURG: OBYTNÝ  
KOMPLEX OBLOSOVIET, BYTOVÉ  
JEDNOTKY TYPU A A TYPU F,  
JEKATERINBURG, 1929

Source Zdroj: misfits' architecture.com  
[online] MCKAY, Graham, Brenton,  
2015. Architecture Misfit #17: Moisei  
Ginzburg. [accessed 6. 12. 2017]  
Available at: <https://1.wp.com/misfitsarchitecture.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/oblosoviet-housings-in-sverdlovsk-yekaterinburg.jpg?ssl=1>

essential. The communal house with its specific housing unit matched the doctrine of the previously discussed social condenser within the fight against waste, freeing women from housework and increasing society's productivity, as well as the promotion of the collective spirit as opposed to the bourgeois individual spirit, of domestic, comfortable and completely traditional relations in space, and towards things. Political leadership focused on the key experimental attitude towards Russian everyday life, emphasizing the values of egalitarianism and the liberation of the essential.

In this regard, the F-type housing unit was an important step towards communal living, in that it paid attention to the process of family differentiation and the increased use of common areas.<sup>10</sup> This unit, with its surface area of 27 m<sup>2</sup>, was made more efficient by reducing the service areas and transforming them into common spaces. Insisting primarily on the single-family dwelling, the F-type housing unit managed to preserve the key values of any lifestyle, communal or not: the privacy of family life, the independence of neighbouring families, the possibility of separation, etc.<sup>11</sup> New residential units exuded purity, unburdened by any traces of the past and free from any connection with the domestic. All domestic needs traditionally placed in the kitchen and dining room are made part of the everyday mandatory collective. Corridors and arcades become epicenters of interaction, social niches as carriers of an equalizing society.

Still, the attempt towards the systematical and comprehensive conversion of Russian everyday life as a whole, without formulating intermediary stages or recreating standard solutions, arrived at a result essentially unbearable for a society whose everyday life followed another, often more traditional Slavic and inherited sense of space. Completely discarding the need for the substantive determination of the individual, the collective field erases any trace of the individual with its exclusive emphasis on the productive values of space and life. Obviously, collective infrastructure could not accept individual spiritual values.





**COMMON AREAS, A CORNER OF  
A COMMUNAL KITCHEN**

SPOLOČNÉ PRIESTORY, KÚT  
S KOMUNÁLNOU KUCHYŇOU

**Source** Zdroj: Comunal living in Rusia. cfm.[online], 2006 – 2008, [accessed 6. 12. 2017] Available at: <http://kommunalka.colgate.edu/cfm/photos.cfm>

**ILYA KABAKOV: THE MAN WHO  
FLEW INTO SPACE FROM HIS  
APARTMENT, DETAIL OF THE WALL,  
1988**

ILYA KABAKOV: MUŽ, KTORÝ ULETEL  
DO VESMÍRU ZO SVOJHO BYTU,  
DETAIL STENY, 1988

**Source** Zdroj: BISHOP, Claire 2005. Installation Art: a critical history. New York: Routledge, p. 18

cultural amenities made available to each individual resident. Nonetheless, for the functioning of cultural amenities such as libraries and clubs, it was necessary to provide professional staff for their management. There is an irony in the idea of respecting and using cultural and other services that were made available to the population that barely overcame the stage of true cultural deprivation. Individual examples built in the first half of the 20th century were soon converted (sometimes using very primitive means) into a form more similar to a home in a conventional sense.

The fall of the socialist ideology at the end of the 20th century was supposed to bring about changes in the field of housing. In 1989, at the start of these changes, a quarter of the population still resided in kommunalkas, sharing a common kitchen, toilet, etc.<sup>14</sup>

### **3. A lone tenant – the visual character of the Ilya Kabakov album**

The communal apartment in *Ten Characters* acts as a metaphor for life in the Soviet Union.

Kabakov draws attention to the consequences of a housing model that excludes the intimacy and privacy and morally condemns self-isolation. According to the artist, the communal apartment is not only a social disaster but the normal state of unity of the Russian collective psyche.<sup>15</sup>

In such a way, Kabakov comments on the forms of horizontal supervision that function not only in the communal apartment but in Soviet society as a whole. The artist highlights the demands of the Soviet state for an intimate relationship with each and every person, with the close relationship between intimacy and power becoming made increasingly apparent. Constantly aware of being observed, individuals change their behaviour. This daily “terror”, if we were to borrow the term of Boris Groys, leads to the obsessive, manic, individualistic ideas of physically cramped Soviet citizens. Kabakov finds the origin of these manic ideas in the lack of a space for privacy, which he describes as a corner where individuals are alone with their own utopia.<sup>16</sup> These individual fantasies, taking place in the cells of a communal house, is what Kabakov depicts with his *Ten Characters* as micro-museums of personal tragedies.

As a result, the *Ten Characters* installation represented a communal apartment with a shared kitchen, a toilet, two corridors and ten individual cells placed on either side of the corridor. This





**ILYA KABAKOV: THE MAN WHO FLEW INTO SPACE FROM HIS APARTMENT, DETAIL OF THE MACHINE, 1988**

ILYA KABAKOV: MUŽ, KTORÝ ULETEL DO VESMÍRU ZO SVOJHO BYTU, DETAIL STROJA, 1988

Source Zdroj: BISHOP, Claire 2005. Installation Art: a critical history. New York: Routledge, p. 19

series of ten cells indicated the living space and property of ten absent Soviet citizens, whose lives were described through a comprehensive narrative of individual property, newspaper articles and diaries that met every single treasury. In the words of Boris Groys, each cell is embodied with the illustrated story of the life and death of a person.<sup>17</sup> Using extensive narratives and theatricality of each individual performance, the artist invites the observer to be a psychologist and an archaeologist at the same time, to look for the meanings in the details of life and the fragmentary reports of these unseen characters. Also, the viewer is placed in a position to observe and interpret social reality and what that social reality means for individualization, balancing between confusion, disbelief and sympathy.

In this set of ten installations, perhaps the most striking piece is the installation *The Man Who Flew into Space from His Apartment* (*Человек, улетевший в космос из своей комнаты*) which was separately discussed by Groys.<sup>18</sup> This installation illustrates the ideological claustrophobia, completely devastating to an individual, that forced him in panic to abandon the space of socialist utopia. With this installation, Kabakov sets up a narrative scene for the spectator to interpret. The spectator enters the room through a poorly furnished hallway with hung coats and hats on one wall. On the other corridor wall, there is a shelf with numerous frames containing reports on the accident. An amateurishly made wooden door hides the room of the “escapist”. And then, the design of the room inhabited by *The Man Who Flew into Space* gives the impression of a kind of socialist temple: intense red lighting and propaganda posters with socialist iconography placed on the walls, divided in three thematic sections. This prominent citizen displays the image society wishes to see, yet after his departure into space, he leaves that image as the pathetic waste material of a failed ideology. The big hole in the ceiling and the machine which enables flight into space suggest the existence of an emergency getaway rather than the idea of flying as a primary inspiration.

American theorist Claire Bishop stresses that the installation *The Man Who Flew into Space from His Apartment*, as well as later works by Kabakov evoking the institutional spaces of Soviet life – schools, kitchens etc. – represented a category immediately recognised by the Western world which

exists in the experience of each individual. Bishop explains that the spectator perceives these works as his own, personal recent past, since the installation, as a genre itself, has the potential to direct the spectator's attention to the inner self, the individual cultural and historical past.<sup>19</sup>

Observing the installation as a whole, yet by means of performing a reading of one of the individual parts of the compositions in its entirety, we recall what Claire Bishop proposes in her book *Installation Art: A Critical History*. Here, Bishop extracts a set of conventions that categorize the installation, and formulates four types of the genre, of which the most relevant to our interpretation are the types that she terms the "dream scene" and the "actively engaged observers". The category of the "dream scene" involves a type of participation based on Freud's psychoanalytic analysis of dreams, while the actively engaged observer is placed in the position of the analyst, who reads the overall scene no matter how bizarre or unknown it may be. The methodological apparatus of this category of artistic installation draws upon psychic automatism, free associations and symbolism. On the other hand, the fourth category of activated spectatorship is based on contemplative criticism, yet conjoined to a socially and culturally involved spectator. As such, the observer critically interprets the scene within which he is located, and recognizes the political and cultural attitudes that the artist reveals through the scene. Finally, Kabakov proposes the idea of the total installation as a method of immersion into a represented scene, a method that can, in a way, be matched with Bishop's first category of installations and even further interpreted through the post-modern strategies of seduction.<sup>20</sup>

Very similarly to the first category of installations according to Bishop's categorization, the theorist Mark Rosenthal classifies, in his terms, "filled-space installations", characterized by the coherence of the parts that make the installation's whole. For Rosenthal, this type of installation is predominantly determined by literary and psychological factors.<sup>21</sup> Filled-space installations can be further classified depending on their subgroup – suspension of disbelief or imitation. In turn, total installations could be brought into relation with both subgroups. The first subgroup, which comprises the creation of metaphysical or metaphorical spaces, brings the observer to a state of awe or contemplative immersion, as is the case with total installations.<sup>22</sup> The second subgroup of installations, which fill actual physical space, consists of installations that pose as imitations and could confuse observers, such that an observer may not recognize the work observed as a product of art. The false representation of the artist's own work as a non-artistic product relies on a specific anti-aesthetics, while the incorporation of everyday life in the artwork offers an artistic criticism of contemporary social and cultural circumstances.<sup>23</sup>

It is not wrong, then, to say that the artistic installation can be linked to the creation of interior space – the interior, which is known to represent a specific ground of differentiation of codes that convey the intimate but also economic, political and social conditions of one person's life. Establishing a correlation between total installations and interiors reaffirms the importance of the relationship between space and the subject and implies that spatial representations cannot exist without a subject, since the subject is constituted through the complex textures of everyday life. Furthermore, in the interior that is a living space, as in the case of the installation *The Man Who Flew into Space from His Apartment*, the relation of the subject to the space is necessary for making the reality obvious. Hence the space becomes a cultural text that describes objects and the relationship between objects and subjects.

The political aspect of Kabakov's work, known for its critical translation of Soviet everyday objects in artistic discourse, represents a primary characteristic, but not the only one, of total installations. Use of socialist iconography could be interpreted as a tool for the infiltration of post-socialist art into the global artistic discourse of the Western paradigm. Methodologically speaking, this type of artistic installation possesses two essential characteristics, one referring to the thematic frame and the other to the apparatus for the realization of the final spatial setting.

To understand the specifics of the genre of the total installation, it is necessary to clarify the very form of the art installation with special emphasis on its profiling in the West – a question of vital importance if considering that Kabakov performed his first important installations outside the USSR and inside the artistic discourse of the Western paradigm.

For Kabakov, the artistic expression in the formulation of total installations is based on using the local mentality and interpreting his own experience of the failed socialist ideology. With his total installations, he expresses a critical awareness of the Soviet citizen's situation from within, from the personal, intimate forms of thought and action.

Through a kaleidoscope of information, fragments and levels extracted from the texture of everyday life of Soviet citizens, Kabakov creates a specific framework that emphasizes in the observer's memory what the artist wants to be remembered. With irony, precision and mysticism, Kabakov constructs a magical space in which Western viewers can perceive the world through the eyes of the residents of the failed Soviet experiment. Moreover, he uses auto-suggestion and critical treatment of fragmented information to direct the viewer's perception, modifying the nature of the experience.

Although the display of *Ten Characters* became crucial in the interpretation of the Soviet narrative, theorist Victor Tupitsyn points out that this exhibition enabled Kabakov to launch his own authorial "Self" behind the legion of characters.<sup>24</sup> This explication seems particularly obvious when one considers the enormous pressure on alternative artists and the fear of identification before perestroika. As an official Soviet artist, Kabakov depended on the will of his country and lived with the possibility of serious consequences arising from the unofficial practice of *Moscow Conceptualism*. The pronounced idea of totalitarianism in his work is a result of one of the traumas of collective life that he too, as an individual, experienced and described: within the totalitarian regime, he did not have a corner for himself.<sup>25</sup>

In his later work, as in the installation *We Are Living Here (C'est ici que nous vivons)* exhibited in Paris in the Pompidou Centre (*Beauborg*)<sup>26</sup> in 1995, Kabakov explains the role of the individual in the collective goal accomplishment. Hungarian essayist Yvette Bíró, in her interpretation of the installation *We Are Living Here*, raises the crucial question: do Kabakov's installations process only the past of one social system or do they draw attention to the questionable present in which we all actually live? Bíró warns against overly cautious interpretations of Kabakov's works and of the dangers of making hasty conclusions, because, at the end of the day, the destiny of others could become our reality as well.<sup>27</sup>

#### 4. Conclusion

The decade of the 1980s witnessed the appearance of a number of key changes. The most important change, and in fact the starting point of this paper, related to the simultaneous transitions from modernism to post-modernism and socialism into post-socialism. However, before we make the assumption of our concluding observations, it is necessary to recall that the 1980s also brought about a significant change in the artistic paradigm.

The idea of observers' active involvement in the work of art, which began in the environments and happenings during the 1960s and 1970s reached culmination during the 1980s in the wide array of projective, participatory and discursive artistic practices. It is the interactive observer, respectively the practice of direct and physical involvement in the project installation, that set the basis for the development of Nicolas Bourriaud's concept of relational art, which in its turn has determined the direction of development of contemporary art installations today. It can be said that social engagement and participation became key aspects of art installations until the 1980s, after which they were implied *a priori*. Therefore, the concluding observations of the artistic standing of the "total" installation must be analyzed in the above relation.

Analysis of Ilya Kabakov's installations clearly points to the artist's vital interest in the viewer's response, and his special interest in the type of installation that to the smallest detail works with the transformation of the space where the installation is carried out in a completely new, autonomous universe. This brand-new universe is brought back into life in the contemplation of what is generally considered to be past and forgotten. In this sense, the total installations represent an epic genre, resembling literature in their thematization of the past in the present. In support of this interpretation, we could also mention Yvette Bíró's previously cited claim that Kabakov uses his installations not only to select the history of a social system as a theme, but also to challenge the suspect universal and current system in which we all live. Hence, in his installation *The Man Who Flew into Space from His Apartment*, where he uses a communal apartment as a metaphor, Kabakov raises the more universal question of the state of the society through the psychological portrait of everyday life in the Soviet Union.

To be sure, one may well conclude that the installation of 10 characters imagines, above all, a metaphorical investigation of the social and psychological failure of the communist ideology, as spatially manifested in the communal apartment in particular. Yet what makes this installation particularly interesting is how Kabakov, representing the Western European artistic discourse,

**ANA NIKEZIĆ, PH.D.**

UNIVERSITY OF BELGRADE  
FACULTY OF ARCHITECTURE

Boulevard of King Alexander 73/II  
11000 Belgrade  
Serbia

ana.nikezic@gmail.com

**MARIJA ZEČEVIĆ, PH.D.**

Borivoja Stevanovića 27  
11050 Belgrade  
Serbia

marijarhi@yahoo.com

counts on the observer's intuition. This intuition allows the viewer to experience what it is that people from completely opposite social and political and economic contexts are trying to present, no matter how strange or obscure this scene (i.e. the communal apartment) may appear.

Here we can talk about the provocative potential of the "total installation", given that they require extra effort from the viewer to move through the unknown, which inevitably carries a dose of anxiety and nervousness. In this way, the viewer is forced to interpret and react to the context that is known little or not at all, but it also understands that the same context is a part of a wider reality to which he belongs.

Finally, in the world of contemporary art, there are several artists who, subtly or provocatively, comment on the important issues in recent history and contemporary society. For open-minded spectators, this commentary can act as a catalyst that extends the capabilities of perception, contributing to a broader understanding of the social reality to which we belong. In the assumption that the past is always reconstructed within the current social context, and that nostalgia can also be politically motivated, Ilya Kabakov's total installations create a chance to generate interest for observation and reflection, through common sense and a certain degree of constructive criticism.

**1** BOYM, Svetlana, 1995. From the Russian Soul to Post-Communist Nostalgia. *Reflections*. **132**(48), pp. 453 – 464.

**2** GARCELON, Marc, 1997. The Shadow of the Leviathan: Public over Private Communist and Post-Communist Society. In: Weintraub, J. a Kumar, K. (eds). *Public and Private in Thought and Practice*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 303 – 322.

**3** STITES, Richard, 1989. *Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution*. New York: Oxford University Press.

**4** The series of albums *Ten Characters* was initially created from 1972 – 1975.

**5** Unlike collective housing, with its universal model well-known in the 1980s, emerging as a specific social concept through the Pruitt-Igoe demolition and its subsequent interpretation, the consequences of living in a communal apartment seemed to be particularly interesting. The communal apartment appears in Western consciousness as an essentially and exclusively Soviet phenomenon.

**6** After the Revolution, architecture became one of the key arenas of ideology. It was actually believed that carefully designed living quarters could eliminate the conditions for individualistic and meshchansky (petty-minded bourgeois) ways of life, and on this basis a new human type would become a norm: Socialist Man and Socialist Woman. A new kind of building, the House Commune (*dom kommuna*), would provide the infrastructure. Previous social groupings, such as the patriarchal family, the private firm, or the peasant household, would give way to the new ideal,

the labour collective, which would embody the ideas of egalitarianism, self/service, good neighbourly relations, collectivism, communal work and leisure, rejection of accumulation of personal property, and the reorganization of goals and interests from the individual to the social.

**7** KHARKHORDIN, Oleg, 1999. *The Collective and Individual in Russia*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

**8** CHULOS, Chris, 2001. *The Collective and the Individual in Russia. The European Legacy. Toward New Paradigms*. **6**(4), pp. 513 – 516.

**9** In 1926, the OSA Group began publishing its own magazine called *Современная Архитектура* [Contemporary Architecture], in which the first issue carried a slogan that insisted on the task of modern architecture being to crystallize a new socialist way of life. This slogan invited the architects to participate in the creation of facilities for new social needs of the so-called "social condensers of the epoch". O. KHAN-MAGOMEDOV, Selim, 1987. *Pioneers of Soviet Architecture: The Search for New Solutions in the 1920s and 1930s*. New York: Rizzoli, pp. 594 – 598.

**10** BOKOV, Anna, 2017. Soviet workers clubs: lessons from the social condensers. *Journal of Architecture*. **22**(3), pp. 403 – 436.

**11** F-type housing unit was built in 1929, as part of the *Narkomfin Building* project designed by the architect Moisei Ginzburg (Моисей Яковлевич Гинзбург).

**12** Sabsovič, L. M., 1930. O Proyektirovanii Zhilykh Kombinatov. *SA (Современная Архитектура)*. **3**, p. 7.

**13** For example, for a communal kitchen or laundry room to function, the appropriate equipment was necessary, but infrastructural demands for that kind of project were not met.

**14** GERASIMOVA, Katerina: Public Privacy in the Soviet Communal Apartment. In: David Crowley and Susan E. Reid, (eds.) 2002. *Socialist Spaces: Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc*. Oxford/New York, Berg, pp. 207 – 231.

**15** STORR, Robert, 1995. *An Interview with Ilya Kabakov*. *Art in America*, pp. 60 – 69.

**16** Stoor, R., 1995, pp. 60 – 69.

**17** GROYS, Boris, 2006. *The Man Who Flew into Space from His Apartment*. London: Afterall Publishing.

**18** Groys, B., 2006.

**19** BISHOP, Claire, 2005. *Installation Art: A Critical History*. New York: Routledge.

**20** In the text *A Story About a Culturally Relocated Person* Kabakov states: I invented the "total installations" genre. It means that the viewer finds himself in a space where he sees many things: paintings, sketches, objects, texts, essentially, the same things he sees in other artists' work, in other installations. But there is a whole collection and the viewer immerses in a completely different atmosphere, specially designed for that purpose in a constructed space – and that atmosphere is additionally accentuated by specifically painted walls, ceilings and floorings and special illumination. That medium, that beam which brought me here to the West, represents my, our Russian-Soviet atmosphere: heavy, repressive,

dull-grey, hopeless and infinitely sad. And if a Western spectator is able to stay indifferent standing in front of such "strange things", he cannot be indifferent when he is surrounded with "such a beam". That is the atmosphere, the magnetic field which unexpectedly emerges under the new circumstances, that is the mere context which participates in proper display of plot, story or event author wishes to communicate to his new viewer/listener. And experience showed that in those cases, that speech, that communication is correctly understood. KABAKOV, Ilya, 2001. Priča o kulturno relociranom čoveku. *Revija slobodne misli*. **99**, pp. 53 – 62.

**21** ROSENTHAL, Mark, 2003. *Understanding Installation Art: from Duchamp to Holzer*. New York/London, Prestel Publishing, pp. 47 – 57.

**22** Rosenthal, M., 2003, pp. 47 – 57.

**23** Rosenthal, M., 2003, pp. 47 – 57.

**24** TUPITSYN, Victor, 2009. *The Museological Unconscious: Communal (Post)Modernism in Russia*. Cambridge/London: The Mit Press.

**25** BOYM, Svetlana, 2001. *The Future of Nostalgia*. New York: Basic Books, pp. 313 – 320.

**26** Popular name for *Centre national d'Art et de Culture Georges Pompidou* – Center Georges Pompidou.

**27** BIRO, Yvette, 1996. Digging around the Ruins of Utopia. *Performing Arts Journal*. **18**(3), pp. 58 – 65.