



*Lecturing in Glasgow, June 2007*

## **Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak**

(born, 1942, Calcutta, India) into a middle class family.

Her mother tongue is Bengali.

**1959:** First class honours degree in English at the University of Calcutta

**1962:** Master's in English from Cornell University (USA),

**1967:** Ph.D. in Literature from Cornell University (USA) while teaching at University of Iowa. Her dissertation was on W.B. Yeats, titled *Myself Must I Remake: The Life and Poetry of W.B. Yeats*. At Cornell, she was the second woman elected to membership in the Telluride Association.

She was briefly married to Talbot Spivak in the 1960s. *The Bride Wore the Traditional Gold* by Talbot Spivak is an autobiographical novel that deals with the early years of this marriage.

She has taught at Brown, Texas at Austin, UC Santa Cruz, Universite Paul Valery, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Stanford, University of British Columbia, Goethe Universitat in Frankfurt, Riydah University, and Emory.

Before coming to Columbia in **1991**, she was the Andrew W. Mellon Professor of English at the University of Pittsburgh.

She is on the editorial Board of many journals, among them *Cultural Critique*, *boundary 2*, *New Formations*, *Diaspora*, *ARIEL*, *Re-thinking Marxism*, *Public Culture*, *Parallax*, *Interventions*.

Professor Spivak is active in rural literacy teacher training on the grassroots level in India and Bangladesh.

Among her publications are *Of Grammatology* (translation with critical introduction of Jacques Derrida's *De la grammatologie*) **1976**, *Imaginary Maps and Breast Stories*

**1997** (translations with critical material of the fiction Mahasweta Devi), *In other Worlds*, *The Post-Colonial Critic*, *Don't Call me Postcolonial: from Kant to Kawakubo* (Harvard) 1998, and *Outside in the Teaching Machine. A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* **1999**



Gayatri Spivak: 2006

Glossary of Key Terms in the Work of  
*Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak:*

[www.english.emory.edu/Bahri/Glossary.html](http://www.english.emory.edu/Bahri/Glossary.html)

Among her regular interventions in the field of Art are yearly seminars with the Independent Study program at the Whitney (New York city).

In **1996-7**, Professor Spivak has delivered keynote addresses, at the Linguistic Conference at The University of Osaka, at the steirische Herbst in Graz (Austria), at the Lancaster University (UK) Conference on Transformation through Feminism, at documenta X, **1997** (Germany), at the Johannesburg and Kwangju (Korea) biennales.

Professor Spivak is known not only as a scholar of deconstructive textual analysis of verbal, visual, and social texts and as a global feminist marxist, she is widely acknowledged as the conscience of the metropolitan politics of identity.

She also publishes and lectures in her native Bengali. Among her numerous current projects is translating for the definitive edition of the *Selected Works of Mahasweta Devi*.

**2006:** *The Spivak Reader.*, Ed. Donna Landry and Gerard Maclean. London: Routledge. **2006**



2006

The text in **Art in Theory**, An Anthology of Changing Ideas

**Edited by:** CHARLES HARRISON (Open University) and PAUL WOOD (Open University)

First edition: pp 1119-1124 , Second edition: pp 1092- 1096

### **Who Claims Alterity?**

First printed in 1989, in *Remaking History: DIA Art Foundation Discussions in Contemporary Culture, No. 4*

*“As a postcolonial I am concerned with the appropriation of 'alternative history' or 'histories' ...”*



<http://www.postcolonialweb.org/>

*“The parents of my parents' grandparents were made over, not always without their consent, by the political, fiscal, and educational intervention of British imperialism, and now I am independent. The I am, in the strictist sense, a postcolonial.”*

*p. 1093*

*A postcolonial, by blood or upbringing (an essentialist notion)?*

“ With the concept of “strategic essentialism”, Spivak attempts to provide a theoretical legitimization for a subversive political practice based on essentialism and to have it approved by deconstruction, despite its theoretical incompatibility with deconstruction...



*Toni Morrison, Ngahuia Te Awekotuku and Gayatri Spivak, September 2006*

The ideal political role of strategic essentialism that Spivak projects is to enable oppressed people of all kinds – nations, ethnic, sexual and other minorities – to present themselves and pose political demands, but without extinguishing internal differences and internal debates.

It is to be used only temporarily and only for a specific political purpose, because otherwise there is a danger of abuse, nationalisms, totalitarianisms, etc. ”

*Boris Buden, 2007, Strategic Universalism:*

*Dead Concept Walking*

*On the Subalternity of Critique Today*

Translated by Aileen Derieg

[translate.eipcp.net/transversal/0607/buden/en](http://translate.eipcp.net/transversal/0607/buden/en)

Postcolonial here I would argue refers to a (transitory) particularity or specificity rather than an essentialist set of timeless immutable properties.



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*“I am also a feminist who is an old-fashioned Marxist and some of that will enter into this discussion of the cultural politics of alternative historiographies” p. 1093*

*“We produce historical narratives and historical explanations by transforming the socius, upon which our production is written into more less continuous and controllable bits that are readable. How these readings emerge and which ones get sanctioned have political implications on every possible level.” p. 1093*

*“Of all the tools for developing histories -gender, race, ethnicity, class – class is surely the most abstract. ...one might summarize Marx as saying that the logic of capitalism weaves the socius like the textile of a particular set of relationships. Power and validation within it are secured by denying that web...” p. 1093*



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*“...Marx asks the worker to understand (read?) the coat s/he produces as having more signification then it does as itself. Capital is a writing, which we must not read merely in terms of producing objects for use...”*

*“Reading the archives of capitalism, Marx produces a critique, not of cultural, but of economic politics ....of... political economism”*

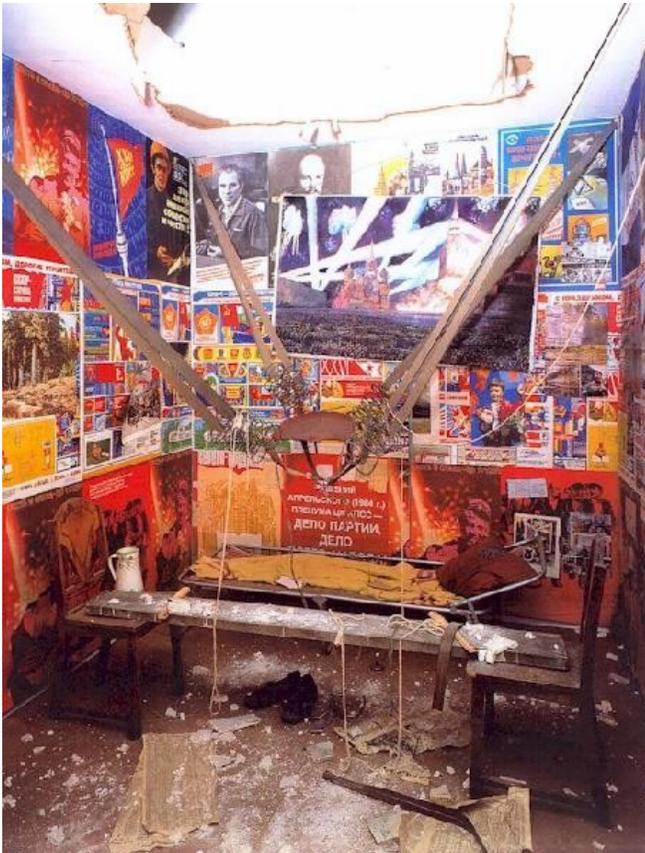
*“In the current global postcolonial context, our model must be a critique of political culture, political culturalism, whose vehicle is the writing of readable histories, mainstream or alternative.”*

p. 1093

*“Power is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation – the social relations of production... where “society” is a shorthand for the dominance of (a) particular mode(s) of production of value.” p. 1094*

*“The most useful way to think of value is as something 'contentless and simple'...  
... the name of what is produced by the human body/mind machine – a thing that is not  
pure form, cannot appear by itself, and is immediately coded...” p. or 1094*

*“...this coding operation is not merely economic, it can be understood in the fields of  
gendering and colonialism... does not involve allegiance to..” only one means of  
reading be it to “modes of production” or “class-analysis”.*  
p. 1094



The Man Who Flew into Space, by Ilya Kabakov.

From 1986 he created this installation of posters, boarded up windows, a parachute, furniture and so on in a corner of an apartment room. Taking this down each evening and reconstructing it, not for aesthetic reasons but in case it should be discovered by the authorities.

That aspect of the work is a real part of its narrative, dare I say 'alternative' narrative or history (the work is now on display in a museum), if we think of the structure of an artwork as being focused on aesthetics.

*“Yet this counterintuitive thought of value should not make us imagine that we can ourselves escape the codes inscribing the real. We are obliged to deal in narratives of history, even believe in them.” p. 1094*

Relating this (also) to Fried's notions of 'objecthood'

<< real propaganda posters vs 'objectified' poster images [Warhol] or popular culture [Pop Art]

<< real parachute vs the 'objectified' found object [ Oldenburg's replicas of familiar objects]

<< real haphazardness vs the 'objectified' mess [Arte Povera]

Back to her earlier statement: *“As a postcolonial I am concerned with the appropriation of 'alternative history' or 'histories' ...” p. 1093*

Acknowledging a 'realism' of a narrative, while being aware that reading this requires taking  
changing  
'alternative' position/s.



*Ilya Kabakov, The Man Who Flew Into Space From His Apartment, 1968-96.*

*"I built the installation **The Man Who Flew into Space** in the corner, I glued Soviet posters from inside of it and I would take it down after each showing for fear that they would drop in, understand, and that would be 'the end of everything.'"* ~ Ilya Kabakov.

Spivak's 'diasporic postcolonial' perspective could be applied to this work by Kabakov.

He employs informed educated approaches in the work, while retaining a connection with his 'indigenous' [here I mean, non-western art world] Soviet cultural situation.

3. I cannot be sure what Spivak means here because she often gives terms her own definitions. In fact she does this so much in her writing that there is a **Glossary of Key Terms in the Work of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak** which defines some of her terms here:

[www.english.emory.edu/Bahri/Glossary.html](http://www.english.emory.edu/Bahri/Glossary.html)

4. Seems to refer to herself, an educated woman from a non-European culture who could "claim the subjectship of an as-yet-unreadable alternative history" p. 1094

Spivak mentions 4 types of subject/positions for *"the disenfranchised female in decolonized space."* also referred to as *"the figure of the gendered subaltern"*

p. 1094

1. *"as an object of knowledge"*
2. *"as a native-informant style subject of oral histories"*
3. *"as imagined subject/object, in the real field of literature"*
4. *"diasporic postcolonial"*  
*"to obliterate the differences between this figure and the indigenous elite woman abroad"*

1. Could I call this a Western perspective? - that the knowledge one has is seen as owned / often earned.

2. *"... the self-marginalizing or self-consolidating migrant or postcolonial masquerading as a "native informant.".. These moves, in various guises, still inhabit and inhibit our attempts to overcome the limitations imposed upon us by the newest division in the world,.. as the "North" continues to "aid" the South.... the type case of the foreclosed native informant today is the poorest woman of the South."*

p. 6, Spivak, A critique of Postcolonial Reason, 1999.

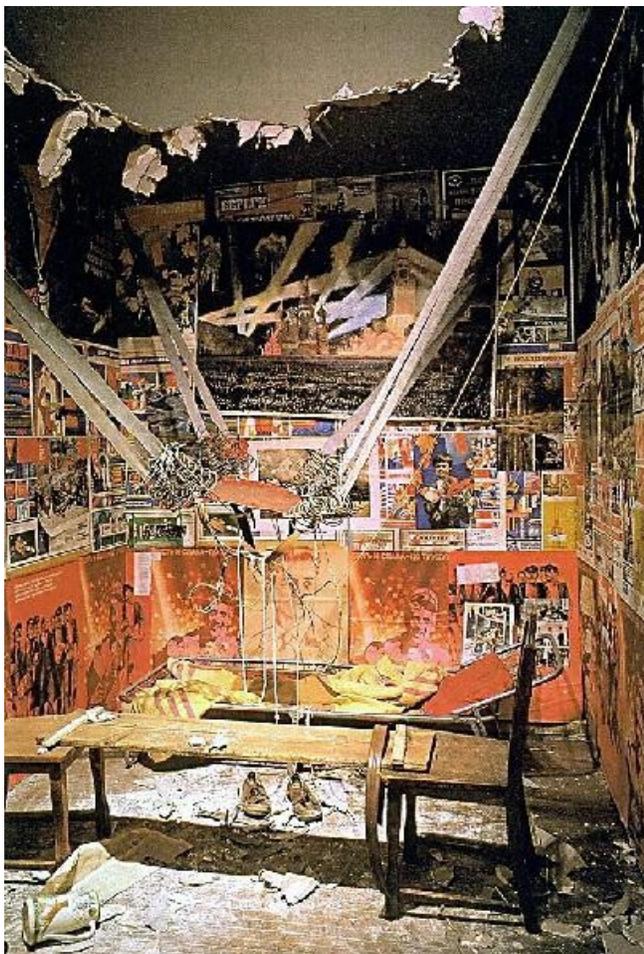


Ilya Kabakov, *The Man Who Flew Into Space From His Apartment*, 1968-96.

*"...counterintuitive imagings... must be grasped when history is said to be remade, and a rupture is too easily declared because of the intuition of freedom that a merely political independence brings for a certain class.*

*Such graspings will enable us to perceive that neocolonialism is a displaced repetition of many of the old lines laid down by colonialism... the diasporic postcolonial can take advantage... of the tendency to conflate the two..."* p. 1094

*"The masterwords implicated in Indian decolonization offered four great legitimizing codes... nationalism, internationalism, secularism, culturalism"* p. 1093



*"The pyrotechnics of the harshly lit Man Who Flew into Space drew the most attention, in part because it looked so Soviet. This man had papered*

Spivak's objection to these four "concept-metaphors" is that they are *"the culture of imperialism"* p. 1093

and she suggests

*"an alternative and perhaps equally fragile mode of resistance... through a strategic acceptance of the centrifugal potential of the plurality and heterogeneity native to the subcontinent."* p. 1095

*"Yet heterogeneity is an elusive and ambivalent resource"*

*"...scrupulous interventions are in fact our only contribution to the project of remaking history or sustaining ever-shifting voices with an alternative edge.*

*In a sense our task is to make people ready to listen, and that is not determined by argument."* p. 1095

*"I propose the persistent establishment and re-establishment, the repeated consolidating in undoing, of a strategy of*

his walls with Soviet propaganda posters and built a makeshift catapult with which he had apparently launched himself through the ceiling, into the beyond. All that remained in the room were the bed, the table scattered with drawings, the catapult and an impressive hole in the ceiling from which light poured in. The room had been boarded up by the authorities, as a text panel informed us in the most bureaucratic of languages.”

from **Ilya Kabakov Flies into His Picture**,  
Amei Wallach Art in America, Nov, 2000.

*education and classroom pedagogy attending to provisional resolutions of oppositions as between secular and nonsecular, national and subaltern, national and international, cultural and socio/political by teasing out their complicity.”*

*“This, strictly, speaking, is de(con)structive pedagogy”* p. 1096

Which Literary tropes does Spivak employ for her arguments?

These tropes (figures of speech) often associate a heightened sense of the physical to abstract terms such as: “our production is written” “readings emerge” “the privileged subject.... masquerades” “a rupture for the colonized” “scrupulous interventions”



Perfect Vehicles (1985) by Allan McCollum  
installed in Central Park, Manhattan, NYC., 2004-5

Even though it is possible to walk 'in' between the objects of McCollum's sculpture, there is no possibility to actual be in the work either literally or psychologically. The spaces between function as negative space or in Kabakov's own words are “exaggeratedly indifferent.”

Ilya Kabakov's use of the word “in”  
in his text titled 'In the Installation'

(**Art in Theory**, An Anthology of Changing Ideas **Edited by:**  
CHARLES HARRISON+ PAUL WOOD  
Second edition: pp 1175- 1188)

is partially poignant because he goes on to contrast a western attitude to focus on “*the thing, the article, the object*” ignoring the spaces around. The western European and North American attitude he writes is that “*the object is being dissected and assembled, everyone is interested in how it functions, it is imbued with all inventiveness.. The objects... have an independent life. The interrelationships between these objects, however, are exaggeratedly indifferent.*” p. 1175

*“Such objects are indifferent to the surrounding space. Only one thing is demanded from that space: that it mustn't interfere with the object existing and demonstrating itself.”* p. 1176



*The toilets 1992, first shown at Documenta 1992, now in de SMAK, Gent.*

*You are not only physically inside but the act or sitting or walking through has affect on the aesthetic experience because there are no borders between objects. All spaces between are part of the narrative and because of this, I'd argue, it allows for alternative readings of histories. Do the toilets refer Duchamp's urinal, to our own experiences of public toilets? To the our ideas of what is a home or home comforts? Or to a Soviet real-life living situation? A fictional 'foreign' living situation. Or as an indicator of social status.*



In contrast Ilya Kabakov's **The toilets** is experienced by walking inside the building and you can sit at the table if you wish.



*“In Russia... (i)tems as real objects don't have any significance... objects act as indicators of the social membership of its owner, his social status...*

*it is not important for us 'what kind of thing it is' and how it works, but where and in what sense it is presented. For us, a thing doesn't speak about itself, but about the one who owns it and why he owns it.*

*These incidental circumstances, which are often insignificant for a Western person, have an extraordinary significance in our country and are 'read' instantaneously as the most important information....*

*This inseparable connection between the material object and remote readings creates a dense contextuality around any object, thing or event itself. That's why the space where you find yourself in or where something is located or occurring plays the paramount role.”*



**Detail of “Het Archief” (The archive) an installation by Ilya + Emilia Kabakov in the Stedelijk, Amsterdam, 1993.  
Below: Sketch for this work.**



*“The very same table in your home and in the office is two different tables.”*  
p. 1176

*“You... are completely different at the post office or at the market, in an official establishment or at home: your individuality entirely depends on the space you find yourself in...”*

*What automatically comes to mind is the medieval notion of the 'genius' or spirit of a place...*

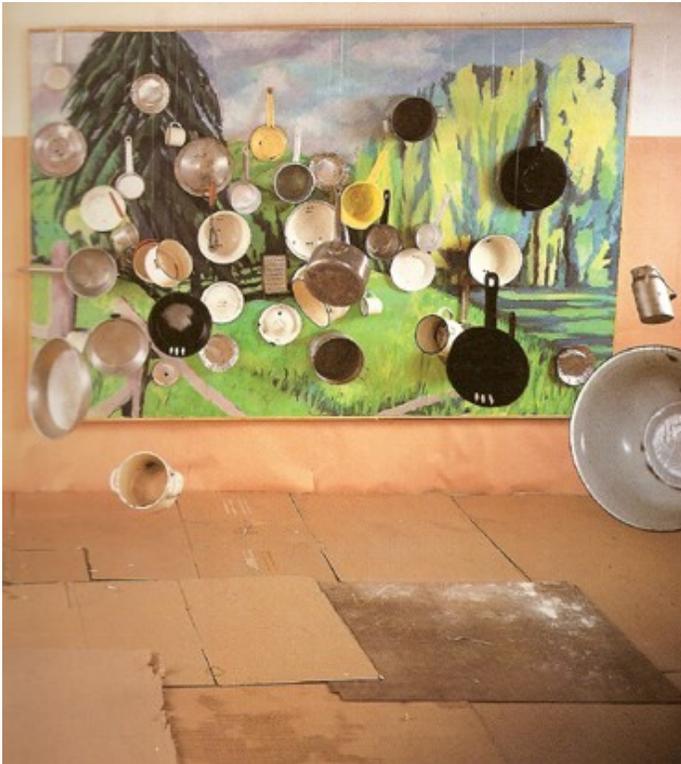
*How does this 'spirit of the place' seize you? In the first place, the rooms are always deconstructive, asymmetrical to the point of absurdity or, on the contrary, insanely symmetrical...*

*The main thing is that the light both during the day and at night is arranged so excruciatingly, so awkwardly that it creates a peculiar discomfort distinctive to that place alone... it is old in the sense of being decrepit and useless...*

*But the sensation is even stronger that these rooms, including private apartments, do not belong to anyone, that they are no-one's and that, in essence, no-one cares in the least about them. No-one loves them...”*

p. 1176-7

*“...I was always unbelievably sensitive to other people's places into which I have constantly been thrown since my earliest childhood”*



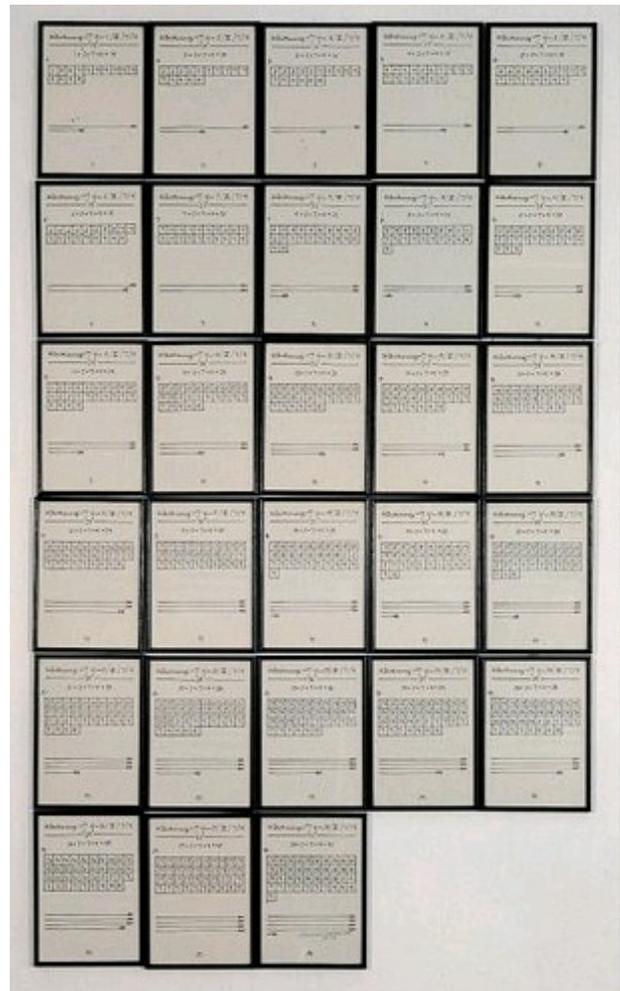
*Detail of "L'incident dans le couloir, devant la cuisine" (Incident in the corridor in front of the kitchen) by Ilya Kabakov 1989, Galerie de France, Paris.*



*Minutiae by Robert Rauschenberg, 1954. Freestanding combine. 214.6 x 205.7 x 77.4 cm (84 1/2 x 81 x 30 1/2 in.). P.Coll., Switzerland*

*"..in the West, the object is exhibited as the main hero and the surrounding space doesn't exist at all, 'we' on the contrary, should perhaps primarily exhibit 'space' and only then arrange objects in it. This theoretically leads to the necessity of creating a special kind of installation – the 'total' installation"*  
*p. 1178*

Compare this work to Hanne Darboven's work below where the subject matter concerns time or to Rauschenberg's freestanding combine constructed for Merce Cunningham's ballet.



*Ein Monat (Februar 1974), by Hanne Darboven, 1974, Tinte auf Papier/Inchiostro su carta 28-teilig je 29,1 x 21 cm*



*Installation, during the 2003 Venice Biennale  
by Ilya + Emilia Kabakov*

*“Painting is like a senile grandmother living in a family. She has been crazy for a long time, she urinates and defecates, but everyone in her own family knows how to treat her, how to talk to her. No one is surprised at what she does.”*

*p. 1178*

*“It is a completely different situation with installation art, which is like a little girl who has just been born; she is still an infant, and no one knows what she will grow into.”*

*p. 1179*





*Installation, during the 2003 Venice Biennale by Ilya + Emilia Kabakov*

*“Moreover, she has been born into a family in which a grandmother is already living, and says, 'We know everything about your grandmother, but where did you come from, what new things can you tell us? And if you behave badly we'll just throw you out because we don't know if you'll even survive.' In the same way, people just don't know what installation art is; they don't realise that this little girl has moved in with us forever.”*  
*p. 1179*



*“As far as I can judge, the roots of Western installation lie in Happenings and Actions; the installation is actually the remains of events frozen in time, like the installations of Beuys, Kounellis and Merz. The origins of the East European installations lie in painting. Here the viewer falls into the painting, makes the passage to the other side of the glass.”*

Fried's argumentation:

*“The Western installation is oriented toward the object, toward the appearance of different objects after the action. The Eastern installation is oriented toward space, toward the atmosphere of a particular situation.”* p. 117

p. 1179



**Ilya Kabakov** (born 1933, Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine) grew up in Moscow and while working as children's book illustrator was a major figure in the underground community of dissident artists and intellectuals known as the Moscow circle of conceptualists.

**1951:** Studied at Moscow Art School

**1957:** Graduated from V.A. Surikov Art Academy, Moscow

**1985:** His solo show at the Kunsthalle in Bern.

Book of Illustrations from the 1980s.



*Emilia + Ilya Kabakov, c. 2000*

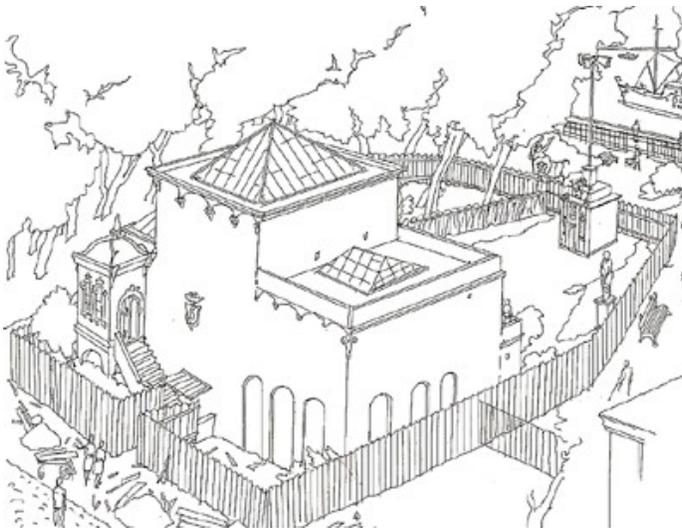
was a highlight in western art circles.

**1987:** He moved to the West doing an arts residency in Graz.

**1989-99:** Lived and worked in Berlin. Participated in many exhibitions throughout Europe.

**1992:** Moved to New York. Participated in Documenta. Married Emilia Kanevsky (b. 1945, Dnepropetrovsk). They have worked collaboratively since 1989.

**1993:** Represents Russia at the Venice Biennale



*Ilya Kabakov's sketch of the Russian pavilion installation, **The Red Pavilion**, for the 1993 Venice Biennale.*



