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## Massimiliano Gioni on *Mutter und Sohn* by Ilya Kabakov

In his 1995 book *On the "Total" Installation*, the Russian artist Ilya Kabakov outlined one of the most radical approaches to exhibition making, which has had a tremendous impact on generations of artists and curators, while anticipating the current vogue for "immersive" experiences. Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s Kabakov developed the theory and practice of his "total installations," which are described in almost maniacal detail in this wonderful volume. Kabakov describes them as spaces where the visitor is both viewer and interpreter, detective and victim. As the artist explains, the viewer is "overcome by the intense atmosphere of total illusion" that results from experiencing objects, artworks, and texts as part of a complex but carefully crafted whole. In his vision, the viewer's role in a total installation resembles that of a reader who surrenders to the fiction of a novel and is "submerged in its depth," but remains perfectly conscious of being in the presence of a fabrication. Even when readers willfully embrace the illusion of literature, they remain capable of admiring the tools used to craft it, recognizing an author's style compared to that of other writers, for example, or staying alert to a narrator's distinctive voice. In both literature and Kabakov's notion of the total installation, the reader or viewer is granted the bifold experience of "the illusion and *simultaneously* the introspection on it." According to