

## *Allusive Stratagem*

Artwork from the « Anxious Objects » series

MICHEL TOMBROFF



*Allusive Stratagem* (2022)  
Printing press, industrial spring.  
Variable dimensions.

In *The Anxious Object*, a book published in 1966, when Abstract Expressionism was living its last moments, Harold Rosenberg noted that the objects of Pop and Minimalism – we could say, more generally, the objects of Postmodernism – seemed to speak of anything but anxiety. After the anxiety of Ad Reinhardt's dark shades and the sublime of Barnett Newman's divided surfaces, welcome to the kitsch; after the nausea of the post-war existentialism, welcome to the rigidity of the structures and to the proliferation of the signs. Conceptual art, in particular, in its quest for the universal determinations of art through linguistic and anti-formalist means - Joseph Kosuth who declared in 1969, in *Art after*

*Philosophy*, that "Works of art are analytic propositions" - obliterated all trace of aesthetics, and therefore of anxiety, under a cover of tautologies, series and repetitions.

This abandon of anxiety identified by Rosenberg, Octavio Paz expressed it differently a few years later, in 1972, when he affirmed that "Modern art begins to lose its powers of negation. For some time now, its negations have been ritual repetitions: rebellion has become method, criticism has become rhetoric, transgression has becomes ceremony. Negation has ceased to be creative. I do not say that we live the end of the art: we live that of the idea of the modern art ".



*Allusive Stratagem (2022) - details*

My objective has not changed since the publication of *The axiom of choice* in 2019: it is to reconcile the syntagms of "conceptual art" and of "modern art", by freeing the former from the jurisdiction of language and by liberating it from the influence of democratic materialism, this ideology that Frank Ruda requalifies as "materialism without ideas". To achieve that, I conjectured that it is necessary to turn to the doctrine of the materialist dialectic, the contemporary dialectic renewed by Alain Badiou, where the difference between idealism and materialism is reinscribed in materialism itself, where negation is replaced by the affirmation and denial (*Aufhebung*) by the subtraction. I therefore had to find a way to materialize, in an artwork, the dialectic.



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It is the text of Gilles Châtelet - mathematician, physicist, historian, and philosopher, who died tragically and prematurely in 1999 - that inspired me. In *Les enjeux du mobile* (1993), he defined dialectic in an original way: "Dialectic is not the synthetic neutralization of two pre-existing and opposed terms, but the discovery of the articulation that unfolds the dimension along which they will arise as 'sides'." And a few lines before that, in support of that definition, he speaks about particular devices, producers of ambiguity, that he names "allusive stratagems". An allusive stratagem, Châtelet explains, "compresses and deploys but is not the same as either an abbreviation or an explanation," and he adds, to conclude, that these devices can be conceived "as 'dialectical scales' that bring to light a center of indifference."

It seemed to me that in these profound thoughts of Châtelet "impregnated with German romanticism, haunted by the magnetic field, attraction and repulsion, polarity, and elective affinities", one could find possible representations of the dialectic, clues to a possible synthesis between the conceptual and the modern, and the possibility of an affirmative return of anxiety.

Michel Tombroff

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