

A QUARTER OF HALF THE VOID

MANUELA LALIC

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In her twenty years of art practice, Manuela Lalic has explored society's structural, operational and symbolic articulations. Among the issues that emerge from her work, collectively engrained behaviours, modes of mass production and the power of consumer objects that have escaped from their primary function reach both political and ecological considerations. Through strategies of accumulation, subtraction, segmentation and association, Lalic reveals, often with humour, the reflections and setbacks of living together.

Marked by reflections on the principle of subtraction, and its potential for generating fictional spaces, *A Quarter of Half the Void* speaks to the ideas of collectivity and free will. From the outset, the twofold spatial organization of the installation strikes us, expressed as it is through an imposing line of used tables, attached end-to-end and surgically cut in two, so as to divide the exhibition space in half. One side is empty, while the other is filled with a multitude of forms, materials and objects in disarray, spread out over the floor and walls suggesting a drift while giving rise to encounters that alternately tend towards fusion or tension. From the outset, this division forces the viewer to make a decision: either move into the vacant space, or opt for its overloaded counterpart. Far from being anecdotal, this double circuit is designed to foreground the importance of considering the individual's point of view in a given situation. Should we choose to contemplate this scene from a distance, or rather plunge into the mass of heterogeneous elements?

The question of personal decision here comes face to face with that of community. Through their varied forms and materials, the tables found by Lalic during her urban wanderings, and now forming the linear heart of the installation, recall numerous domestic and professional functions (such as kitchen tables, office tables, coffee tables, patio tables), more often than not evoking encounter, exchange and sharing. In light of these utilitarian and social ramifications, the imposing and almost clinical cross-sectioning of the tables seems to embody an X-ray of their communal function, one that belies the fact that beyond symbolic associations, there is a real, physical relationship of support between pieces of furniture that essentially hold this world together, in delicate balance. Moreover, this line of force marks the passage towards another register, where axial juxtaposition makes way for a more chaotic mode of dissemination. As Lalic herself notes: "By affirming a heterogeneous but close-knit collective body, [the tables] express a perspective that is in opposition with the idea of an installation made up of segmented, individual actions waiting patiently to be assembled."

Indeed, in the adjoining space, we are faced with an entirely different structural and semantic energy. Spread out in a fragmented composition, objects such as work lamps, T-squares, clothes irons, hinges, reflective polystyrene insulation, industrial staplers, stepladders, colourful tassels,

beach sandals, extension cords, disposable plates, cardboard boxes, wrapped-up bone, rolls of tape, rolls of toilet paper, neon lights, mirrors, and servings of ramen noodles are brought together sometimes intertwined or even merged in order to produce new entities. Recalling a domestic dream-space, a carnival-like construction site, or a Dada-inspired environment (such as Kurt Schwitters's *Merzbau*), this half of the installation embodies a dimension Lalic herself identifies as being *trans*, in the sense that it resists rigid categorization. In this strange and shimmering world evoking freedom of thought, the idea of collectivity expresses itself largely through a caricature of entertainment and artifice. However, the fictional micro-landscape of the installation also suggests an environment set adrift, with consumer objects scattered, abandoned, almost floating, left to their own devices.

On a more political note, in light of her Marxist convictions, and having personally experienced factory assembly-lines where every detail of the work environment is based solely on productivity, Lalic also views *A Quarter of Half the Void* as a way of critiquing Taylorism. Indeed, she brings into play various objects and materials relating to community, celebration and industry, all of which she juxtaposes within ergonomically dysfunctional spaces that convey carefree exploration and a curiosity for the here and now.

In keeping with the logic of *mise en abyme* and of the multifaceted complementarity between emptiness and plenitude, which here is fragmented and eternally coming into being, Lalic also plans to present several ad hoc actions within the installation over the course of the exhibition. These performative insertions will allow the public to better understand how the artist refines the dialogue between objects and the presentation space, and how this space modulates her own decisions.

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