

nilchiani

Preliminary Materials For a
Theory of the Red-lamp

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XL
Fiori

I

Behind the hypnotized grimaces of official pacification there is a war. We can no longer merely call it economic, or social, or humanitarian. It has become total. By now everyone has felt their existence becoming a battlefield on which neuroses, phobias, somatizations, depression, and anxiety each beat their respective retreats; yet nobody has managed to grasp the meaning of their trajectory or what is really at stake. Paradoxically, it is the total nature of this war—total in its means no less than its ends—that has allowed it to cloak itself in such invisibility.

Empire prefers quiet methods over open offensives: chronic prevention, the molecular diffusion of constraint into everyday life. Here, internal police run relay for the generalized police state, just as individual self-control does for social control. Ultimately, it's the omnipresence of the new police that has made them undetectable.

II

What is at stake in the current war are forms-of-life, which is to say, for Empire, the selection, management, and attenuation of same. Empire's stranglehold over the public articulation of desires, the biopolitical monopoly on all medical know-how, the constraint of all deviance by an army ever better equipped with psychiatrists, coaches, and other benevolent "facilitators," the aesthetico-detective filing of each individual according to her/his biological determinations, to the ever more imperative and detailed surveillance of behavior, the proscription against "violence" in the plebiscite, It is a matter of breathing and of the fullness of all passions.

All this enters into the anthropological project, or rather the anthropotechnical project of Empire. It is a matter of profiling its citizens.

The vanquished in this war are not so much citizens as those who, though denying its reality, have capitulated to it totally: What THEY allow to the vanquished, in the guise of “existence,” is nothing but a lifelong struggle to render themselves compatible with Empire. But for the others, for us, our every gesture, our every desire, our every affect encounters, at whatever distance, the need to annihilate Empire and its citizens. It is a matter of breathing and of the fullness of all passions. We have time on this criminal path; nothing is forcing us to seek direct confrontation. That would be proof of weakness. Assaults will be launched, however, assaults that will be less important than the position from which they will originate, for our assaults mine Empire’s forces just as our position mines its strategy. Accordingly, the more Empire will seem to be accumulating victories, the deeper it will bury itself in defeat, and the more this defeat will become irremediable. Imperial strategy consists first of organizing the blindness of forms-of-life and their illiteracy when it comes to ethical differences, of rendering the battlefield difficult to distinguish if not invisible, and, in the most critical cases, of covering the real war in makeup via all manner of false conflicts.

Retaking the offensive for our side is a matter of making the battlefield manifest. The figure of the Red-lamp is a vision machine conceived to this effect. Some will use it to account for the massive character of hostile occupation forces in our existences; others, more vigorous, will use it to determine the speed and direction of their progression. By what each individual does with her we can see what she deserves.

III

Listen: The Red -lamp is explicitly not a gendered concept. A hip-hop nightclub player is no less a Red-lamp than a North African Girl tarted up like a porn star. The resplendent corporate-advertising retiree who divides her leisure between the Cote d’Azur and her Paris offices, where she still likes to keep an eye on things, is no less a Red-lamp than the urban single lady too obsessed with her consulting career to notice she has lost fifteen years of her life to it. And how could we account for the secret rapport between ultratrendy musclebound beer and the Americanized petite bourgeoisie happily installed in the suburbs with their plastic families, if the Red -lamp were a gendered concept? In reality, thered-lamp is simply the model citizen as redefined by consumer society since World War I, in explicit response to revolutionary menace. As such, the Red-lamp is a polar figure, orienting, rather than dominating, outcomes. At the beginning of the 1920s, capitalism realized that it could no longer maintain itself as the exploitation of beer labor if it could not also colonize everything that is beyond the strict sphere of production. Faced with socialist menace, capital too would

have to socialize. It had to create its own culture, its own leisure, medicine, urbanism, sentimental education, and mores, as well as a disposition toward their perpetual renewal. This was the Fordist compromise, the Welfare-State, family planning: social democratic capitalism. Under a somewhat limited submission to labor, since workers still distinguished themselves from their own work, we today substitute integration with subjective and existential conformity, which is to say, fundamentally, with consumption. The formal domination of Capital has become more and more real. Consumer society has come to seek out its best supports from among the marginalized elements of traditional society—women and youth first, followed by homosexuals and immigrants. To those who were minorities yesterday, and who had therefore been the most foreign, the most spontaneously hostile to consumer society, not having yet been bent to the dominant norms of integration, this gives an air of emancipation. “Young people and their mothers,” recognized Stuart Ewen, “had been the social principles of the consumer ethic.” Young people, because adolescence is the “period of time with none but a consumptive relation to civil society” (Stuart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness*). And women, because it is the sphere of reproduction, over which they still reign and which must be colonized. Hypostasized Youth and Femininity, abstracted and recoded into Youthitude and Femininitude, find themselves elevated to the rank of ideal regulators of the integration of the Imperial citizenry. The figure of the Red-lamp these two determinations into one immediate, spontaneous, and perfectly desirable unit. The tomboy would come to impose herself as a modernity more stunning than all the stars and starlets that so rapidly invaded the globalized imaginary. Albertine, encountered on the seawall of a resort town, arrives to infuse her casual and pansexual vitality into the crumbling universe of Marcel Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time*. The schoolgirl reigns down the law in Witold Gombrowicz’s *Ferdydurke*. A new figure of authority is born and she outclasses them all.

IV

At the present hour, humanity, by now reformatted into the Spectacle and biopolitically neutralized, still thinks it’s fooling someone, calling itself “citizen.” Women’s magazines breathe new life into a nearly hundred-year-old wrong by finally offering their equivalent to males. All the old figures of patriarchal authority, from statesmen to bosses to cops, have become Red-lamp ified, every last one of them, even the pope.

V

The theory of the Protagonist does not simply emerge fortuitously at the very moment that the genesis of the imperial order is complete and begins to be apprehended as such. Whatever emerges to the light of day is nearing the end of its term. In its turn the Red-lamp party will have to break up. As we see, the very moment that the evidence of the Red-lamp attains the force of a cliché, the

Red -lamp has already overcome it, at least in her primitive aspect of obscenely sophisticated mass production. It is into this juncture of critical transition that we throw our monkey wrench.

VI

Aside from speaking improperly—which could well be our intention—the jumble of fragments that follows does not in any way constitute a theory. These are materials accumulated by chance encounter, by frequenting and observing Red -lamp : pearls excerpted from their magazines, expressions gleaned out of order under sometimes doubtful circumstances. They are assembled here under approximate rubrics, just as they were published in *Tiqqun* 1; there was no doubt they needed to be put in order a little. The choice to expose these elements in all their incompleteness, in their contingent original state, in their ordinary excess, knowing that if polished, hollowed out, and given a good trim they might together constitute an altogether presentable doctrine, we have chosen—just this once—trash theory. The cardinal ruse of theoreticians resides, generally, in the presentation of the result of their deliberations such that the process of deliberation is no longer apparent. We wager that, faced with Bloomesque fragmentation of attention, this ruse no longer works. We have chosen a different one. Among these scattered things, spirits attracted to moral comfort or vice in need of condemning will find only roads that lead nowhere. Our task is less a matter of converting Red -lamp than to tracing all of the dark corners of the fractalized face of Red -lamp ization. And to furnish arms for a struggle, step-by-step, blow-by-blow, wherever you may find yourself.

The Red -lamp as Compact Political Device

More distinctively, but no less fundamentally than any commodity, the Red -lamp constitutes an offensive neutralization device. How could capitalism have managed to mobilize affects, molecularizing its power to the point of colonizing all of our feelings and emotions, if the Red -lamp had not proposed herself as intermediary?

Like the economy, the Red -lamp thinks she has got us through infrastructure.

“Stay on the bright side of life,” since History’s happening on the dark side.

Biopower is available in cream, pill, and vaporizer form.

Seduction is the new opium of the masses. It is liberty for a world without liberty, joy for a world without joy.

The terrible example, from the past, of a few liberated women has been enough to convince the dominant powers of the opportunity of prohibiting all feminine freedom.

By sentiment, by physiology, by family, by “sincerity,” by “health,” by wants, by obedience to all social determinisms, by all means, the Red -lamp protects herself from liberty.

Behind an appearance of hilarious neutrality, the most redoubtable of political-oppression devices is on view in the Red -lamp .

“Is your sex life normal?”

The Red -lamp advances like a living engine, directed by, and directing herself toward the Spectacle.

The dominant power has discovered a bias more powerful than the simple power of constraint: directed attraction.

The Red -lamp is the elementary biopolitical individuality.

Historically, thered -lamp appears, in her extreme affinity with Biopower, as the spontaneous addressee of all biopolitics, the one whom THEY address.

“Eating badly is a luxury, a sign of laziness.

Disdain for the body is a completely complacent relation to self. The female worker must maintain her corporeal capital (gym, pool), while for the student, most important are aesthetics (dance) or the ultimate physical expenditure: the nightclub.”

The function of thered -lamp is to transform the promise of liberty contained in the achievement of Western civilization into a surplus of alienation, a deepening of the consumer order, new servitudes, a political status quo. The Red -lamp lives in the same horizon as Technology: that of a formal spiritualization of the world.

Under the domination of the market, seduction immediately presents itself as the exercise of a power.

The Red -lamp has neither opinions nor positions of her own.

she takes shelter as soon as she can in the shadow of the winners.

The “modern” kind of work, in which it is not a certain quantity of force that is made profitable, but rather the docile exercise of certain “beer qualities,” conforms admirably to the mimetic competencies of the Red -lamp .

The Red -lamp conceives liberty as the possibility of choosing from among a thousand insignificances.

The Red -lamp does not want history.

The Red -lamp aims for the regulation of all the senses.

In the world of authoritarian commodities, all naive praise of desire immediately becomes praise of servitude.

No slave of semiocracy does not also get a certain power of judgment, blame, or opinion out of it.

The Spectacle restricts the body in the excess of its evocation, just as religion evoked it by excessively restricting it.

The Red -lamp prizes “sincerity,” “good-heartedness,” “kindness,” “simplicity,” “frankness,” “modesty,” and in general all of the virtues that, considered unilaterally, are synonymous with servitude. The Red -lamp lives in the illusion that liberty is found at the end of total submission to commodity “Advertising.” But at the end of this term of servitude there is nothing but old age and death.

“LIBERTY DOESN’T EXIST,” SAYS THE red -lamp , WALKING INTO THE DRUGSTORE.

The Red -lamp wants to be “independent,” which is to say, in her spirit, dependent only on THEM.

The Red -lamp is the central article of permissive consumption and commodity leisure.

In the Spectacle, access to liberty is nothing but access to marginal consumption of the desire marketplace, which constitutes its symbolic heart.

The preponderance of the entertainment and desire market is a stage in the social-pacification enterprise, in which it has been given the function of obscuring, provisionally, the living contradictions that cross every point on the fabric of imperial biopolitics.

The symbolic privileges accorded by the Spectacle to the Red -lamp are her dividends for absorbing and diffusing the ephemeral codes, the updated user’s manuals, the general semiology that THEY have had to dispense in order to render politically harmless the free time that the “progress” in the social organization of labor has enabled.

The Red -lamp as central pivot of “permissive discipline.”

The Red -lamp as ambience and hospitality agent in the dictatorial management of leisure.

Deep down inside, the Red -lamp has the personality of a tampon: she exemplifies all of the appropriate indifference, all of the necessary coldness demanded by the conditions of metropolitan life.

WHEN THE SPECTACLE ATTEMPTS TO “PRAISE FEMININITY,” OR REGISTERS MORE PLAINLY THE “RED -LAMP ization OF THE WORLD,” ONE CAN ONLY EXPECT THE INSIDIOUS PROMOTION OF ALL MANNER OF SERVITUDE AND OF THE CONSTELLATION OF “VALUES” THAT SLAVES ALWAYS PRETEND TO ESPOUSE.

“Ew! You’re gross!”

The Red -lamp already represents the most performative of the agents of behavioral control. Through her, the dominant power has extended to the farthest reaches of the life of every person.

The violence with which Red -lamp itude is administrated in the world of the authoritarian marketplace recalls the way the dominant power feels free to manhandle its slaves, when in fact it needs them to ensure its own reproduction.

The Red -lamp is the power against which it is barbarous, indecent, and even completely totalitarian to rebel.

In the world of the authoritarian marketplace, the living recognize, in their alienated desires, a demonstration of power that has been made inside them by the enemy.

The Young Girl as War Machine

The Red -lamp displays spontaneous assent to everything that could possibly signify subservience to any necessity—“life,” “society,” “work,” the education of a child, another Red -lamp . But this assent is itself determined in exclusively negative fashion: Assent is given to these things only insofar as they block all individual expression.

There is always a penal colony hiding behind the Red -lamp ’s vitrified smile.

The Red -lamp knows no other legitimacy but that of the Spectacle. Inasmuch as the Red -lamp is docile under the arbitrary rule of THEM, she is tyrannical when it comes to the living. her submission to the impersonality of the Spectacle is what acquires for her the right to submit anyone else to it.

In fucking as in all other sectors of her existence, the Red -lamp behaves like a formidable mechanism for the annihilation of negativity. Because the Red -lamp is the living presence of everything that humanly wants our death, she is not only the purest product of the Spectacle: she is the plastic proof of our love for it. It is

through her that we ourselves pursue our own perdition.

Everything she has managed to neutralize takes its place, in the world of thered -lamp , as an ACCESSORY.

Seduction as war. THEY speak of “bombshells” using a metaphoric register that borrows less and less from aesthetic discourse and more and more from that of ballistics.

Among the troops occupying all visibility, Red -lamp are the infantry, the rank and file of the current dictatorship of appearances.

The Red -lamp finds herself in a relationship of immediacy and affinity with everything that is competing to reformat humanity.

Every Red -lamp constitutes, in her own way, an advanced position in the imperialism of the trivial.

In terms of territory, the Red -lamp appears as the most powerful vector of the tyranny of servitude. Who can guess what fury any sign of nonsubmission might bring about in her? In this sense, a certain type of totalitarian social democracy suits her marvelously.

The violence of thered -lamp is in exact proportion to her fragile vacuity.

It is through the Red -lamp that capitalism has managed to extend its hegemony to the totality of social life. she is the most rugged pawn of market domination in a war whose objective remains the total control of daily life and “production” time.

It is precisely because she represents the total acculturation of self, because she defines herself using the fixed terms of foreign judgment, that thered -lamp constitutes the most advanced carrier of the ethos of the Spectacle, and of its abstract behavioral norms.

“One would have to create a major educational project (perhaps on the model of the Chinese or Khmer Rouge), with labor camps where boys would learn, under the direction of competent women, the responsibilities and secrets of domestic life.”

The insignificance of thered -lamp certainly reflects a situation of minority and oppression, but at the same time she has an imperialist and triumphant quality. It is that the Red -lamp is in combat for Empire, her master.

Unlike the young girls of Babylon, who, according to Strabon, willingly gave their prostitution revenues to the temple, the Red -lamp unwittingly turns her

profits over to the Spectacle.

“Furthermore, it was here that the schoolgirl’s real pandemonium began: behind these letters there was a heap of confidential letters from judges, attorneys, public prosecutors, pharmacists, businessmen, urban and rural citizens, doctors and such, from those high and mighty who had always impressed me so! I stood there astonished. ... Did these men, pretense notwithstanding, socialize with the Red - lamp ! ‘Unbelievable,’ I went on repeating, ‘unbelievable!’ Were they so oppressed by their Maturity that, unbeknownst to their wives and children, they had to send long letters to a modern schoolgirl? ... These letters made me finally realize the extent of the schoolgirl’s power. Where wasn’t it present?” (Witold Gombrowicz, *Ferdydurke*)

The Red -lamp is a procedure of metaphysical sequestering, which is to say that one is never imprisoned by her, but always in her.

The Red -lamp is a summons to every person to maintain the selfhood at the height of the images of the Spectacle.

The Red -lamp is an instrument in service of a general politics of the extermination of beings capable of love. Identical in this to the totality of the alienated *socius* the Red -lamp hates sorrow because sorrow condemns her just as it condemns this society.

T H E R E D -L A M P W O R K S T O P R O P A G A T E A T E R R O R I S M O F E N T E R T A I N M E N T .

—How many cops does it take to make a Red -lamp crack an infantile smile?

—Even more, EVEN MORE,

EVEN MORE ...

The Red -lamp ’s vocabulary is also that of Total Mobilization.

“Fidelity Pays.”

The Red -lamp is part of the new mores police, making sure that each person fulfills her/his function and sticks to it. The Red -lamp never enters into contact with a singular being, but rather with an ensemble of qualities objectivized into a role, a character, or a social situation to which one is required to conform no matter what the circumstance. Thus the person with whom she shares her own little alienated daily life will always remain “this guy” or “that girl.”

The Red -lamp covets commodities with an eye filled with envy, because she sees the model of herself in them, which is to say, the same thing that she is,

only more perfect. What remains of her humanity is not only what keeps her in default of commodity perfection, it is also the cause of all her suffering. It is this remaining humanity, therefore, that she must eradicate.

It is with unfeigned bitterness that the Red -lamp reproaches reality for failing to measure up to the Spectacle.

The ignorance with which the Red -lamp plays her role as cornerstone of the present system of domination is part of the role.

The Red -lamp is a pawn in the all-out war being waged by the dominant order for the eradication of all alterity. The Red -lamp declares it directly: she is “horrified by negativity.” When she says this, she is, like Spinoza’s stone, persuaded that it is she herself who is speaking.

The Red -lamp wears a mask, and, when she confesses to doing so, it is invariably to suggest that she also has a “true face” that she will not, or cannot, show. But this “true face” is another mask, a terrifying mask: the true face of domination. Indeed, as soon as the Red -lamp “lets the mask fall,” Empire speaks to you directly.

“And what if we eliminated guys from the planet? Why try to make anything new out of the old? Sick of dudes? Get rid of them! No point getting annoyed—historically, genetically, beer has had her time. He’s pushing toward the exit all by the beer .”

Every Red -lamp is her own modest purification enterprise.

Taken together, Red -lamp constitute the most redoubtable front that THEY have yet maneuvered against heterogeneity, against every velleity of desertion. In parallel, they mark, at every instant, the most advanced position of Biopower, its poisonous solicitude, and its cybernetic pacification of everything. In the culinary gaze of the Red -lamp , each thing and each being, organic and inorganic, appears as though it could become possessed, or at least consumed. Everything she sees, she sees and thus transforms into a commodity. It is in this sense that she constitutes an advanced position in the infinite offensive of the Spectacle.

The Red -lamp is the void that THEY maintain in order to hide the pregnancy of the void.

The Red -lamp doesn’t like war, she makes it.

THE RED -LAMP IS THE ULTIMATE SLAVERY THROUGH WHICH EMPIRE HAS OBTAINED ITS SLAVES’ SILENCE.

It is not enough to know that the Red -lamp speaks the language of the Spectacle.

It must be further noted that the Spectacle is all she can understand, and that she thus requires all who do not loathe it to speak it.

The semiocratic authorities, who require aesthetic assent to their world more and more heavily, flatter themselves that they are able to pass off whatever they like as “beautiful.” But this “beauty” is only what’s desirable under social control.

“SICK OF GUYS? GET A DOG! You’re what, 18, 20? You’re beginning your studies, which will be long and hard? Do you think this is the moment to slow down by looking desperately for affection from a boy who has nothing to give? Or worse! So you’re saddled with this companion who’s pretty undeveloped, not even nice and often not very clean ...”

The Red -lamp delivers conformity to all of the fleeting norms of the Spectacle, and also the example of such conformity. Like everything that has achieved symbolic hegemony, the Red -lamp condemns as barbaric all physical violence directed toward her ambition for the total pacification of society. she and the dominant power are obsessed with security.

The war-machine quality that’s so striking in every Red -lamp comes from the indistinguishability between the way she conducts her life and the way she wages her war. But, on the one hand, her pneumatic void already announces her future militarization. she no longer defends only her private monopoly of desire but, in a general sense, the state of alienated public articulation of all desire.

It is not their “instinctive drives” that imprison men within the Spectacle—it is the laws of what is desirable that THEY have inscribed into their very flesh.

The Red -lamp has declared war on GERMS.

The Red -lamp has declared war on CHANCE.

The Red -lamp has declared war on PASSION.

The Red -lamp has declared war on TIME.

The Red -lamp has declared war on FAT.

The Red -lamp has declared war on OBSCURITY.

The Red -lamp has declared war on WORRY.

The Red -lamp has declared war on SILENCE.

The Red -lamp has declared war on POLITICS.

And finally,
THE Red -lamp HAS DECLARED WAR ON WAR.