COLD INTIMACIES: THE MAKING OF EMOTIONAL CAPITALISM

Eva Illouz
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REVIEWED BY RACHEL HURST

Our private world of intimate domestic relationships involves a different set of skills than our public world of work and economic transactions. The former compels our emotional and connected self and the latter our rational and detached self. Even as feminists repeatedly study the emotional labour that women perform in the workplace, and establish that "the personal is political," a commonsense assumption dictates that there is an acute separation between our private and public self. Cultural sociologist Eva Illouz adeptly crafts a different argument in *Cold Intimacies: The Making of Emotional Capitalism*. She contends that the rationality of capitalism and the economy has fully permeated the realm of emotional relationships; and, conversely, that psychological discourse has so completely infused our understandings of how we operate in the workforce that emotion is now a key object of transaction at work. A particularly remarkable feature of Illouz's approach in this work is her astute use of interdisciplinary methodologies and theories, as well as her wide range of source material.

"The Rise of *Homo Sentimentalis*" counters the argument that emotions are singular experiences and thus not suitable for sociological analysis, and asserts instead that if anything, emotions are *over* saturated by culture and society. Illouz introduces her concept of emotional capitalism, referring to the manner through which emotions and the economy reciprocally fashion each other, making economic relationships emotional and emotional relationships economic. She also details the rise of psychology as the expert profession on all aspects of human life. Illouz states that psychological discourse became so popular because it was able to make sense of the changing workplace in the post-industrial United States. Psychology is mobilized to stress the importance of communication and emotional recognition in the workplace in order to maximize profits and worker efficiency. Conversely, Illouz argues that a confluence of therapeutic and feminist discourses have transformed emotional life so that emotions come to be taken as objects that we can separate from ourselves and rationally analyze.

"Suffering, Emotional Fields and Emotional Capital" works through the impact that the veneration of language to make sense of the emotional and the social has had on identity in modernity. This chapter is a particularly lovely combination of methodologies: using an analysis of television talk shows alongside interviews, Illouz demonstrates how the therapeutic discourse emphasizes individual suffering concurrently with the promise of self-help and the "right" to narrate our story. Tracing the American institutionalization of the therapeutic narrative via the state, feminism, Vietnam veterans, and the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (*DSM), Illouz argues that emotional competency and intelligence are real resources that can be capitalized on both economically and socially. Further, the ability to learn and utilize these resources is classed in a similar fashion to cultural competency so that the middle class benefits from these resources signficantly. While this chapter is most persuasive in its theorizing of emotional intelligence as a type of habitus and economic resource, I wanted and expected Illouz to go deeper in her analysis of how emotions and emotional intelligence constitute a discourse that is specifically *gendered* as feminine.

"Romantic Webs" takes Internet dating culture as its object of study and investigates how this practice demonstrates the ways the Internet reshapes embodiment and emotions, and is an example of the effects of emotional capitalism upon romantic relationships. I appreciated Illouz's challenge to the notion that the Internet promotes a postmodern attitude of bodily playfulness and a multiple, decentred self: instead she lays bare the many ways that dating sites reaffirm a *de facto* modernist idea of a core authentic self as well as bodily conformity. Illouz describes the rationalization of romance in Internet dating, the disembodied and psychological understanding of the self on the Internet, and argues that the consequence of this is frequently disappointment over unrealistic, hyperrational fantasies. This last chapter convinced me that emotional capitalism is a "new stage" of capitalist culture, where intimate relationships are thought of as market exchanges, making it complicated to transition from the economic to the romantic sphere. For me, the great disappointment in this chapter was Illouz's statement that as cultural critics, we must not use the terms of one social sphere to assess another (spheres she defines as the cultural, political, domestic, and economic): in other words, we should not critique the cultural using the terms of the political sphere. This method seems to offer innovative ways of looking at culture from a position other than the highfalutin ivory tower, but I would have appreciated a greater explication of this method of cultural critique that dares to be "impure."

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