

Within the lecture series

## **GENIAL DAGEGEN**

the Bruno Kreisky Forum for International Dialogue kindly invites to the lecture of

## **EVA ILLOUZ**

Professor of Sociology and Anthropology at the Hebrew University Jerusalem

# **EMOTIONAL CAPITALISM**

Curated and moderated by

**Robert Misik**

**Monday | January 26, 2008 | 19.00 h**

Bruno Kreisky Forum for International Dialogue | Armbrustergasse 15 | 1190 Vienna

### **Eva Illouz**

born 1961 in Fes, Morocco. Studies of literature, sociology, and communications in Paris, M.A. in communications at the Hebrew University Jerusalem, Ph.D. in communications at the University of Pennsylvania. Since 2000 she has been teaching sociology at the Hebrew University Jerusalem and, 2006, became a Full Professor at the Center for the Study of Rationality. Her tasks at the Hebrew University include Head of the Academic Committee of Cultural Studies, Member of the Faculty Committee of the Faculty of Social Sciences, Member of the Committee for the Advancement of Full Professors. She also lectured at New York University, Tel Aviv University, Princeton University, and the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris.

Publications: *Consuming the Romantic Utopia: Love and the Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997; *The Culture of Capitalism*, Israel University Broadcast, 2002; *Oprah Winfrey and the Glamour of Misery: An Essay on Popular Culture*, Columbia University Press, 2003; in preparation is *Why Love Hurts: Passion and Modernity*.

### **Robert Misik**

born 1966, journalist, essayist, author. Since 2002 Robert Misik has been working as free lance journalist for Falter, PROFIL, Der Standard and for the German daily taz/tageszeitung (Berlin). In 1989 and 2000 he was awarded the Bruno Kreisky Prize for Political Books and in 2008 the „Österreichischer Staatspreis für Kulturpublizistik“.. Forthcoming Publication: „Politik der Paranoia. Gegen die neuen Konservativen“ (Aufbau-Verlag 2008).

*“Genial Dagegen. Resourceful counter-strategies - Ways and means of overcoming the crisis of the labour society”, a Bruno Kreisky Forum lecture series curated by Robert Misik: “Labour society running out of work” – “Welfare state no longer finance able” – “Emergence of new underclass” – “It’s business only”. These and similar diagnoses dominate the public discourse on the changes pervading our economic systems – a discourse which is conducted in the media as well as in the political and academic spheres. It makes hardly any difference, whether these diagnoses are informed by market liberalism, welfare-state reformism or critique of capitalism. The point at issue is the following: Are we up against patent crisis symptoms – are we living in an era of metamorphosis? Are there any blueprints for a completely new set-up? What will be the future roles of wage labour, of states, of businesses? Answers to these questions are to be provided by experts, politicians and stakeholders from diverse areas who subscribe to radically different approaches, but are united by the visionary character of their perspectives.*

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### **Robert Misik**

Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome. Let me say some words about the series. We had here Wolfgang Engler with his call for a basic citizen income. We had here the scientist Gösta Esping-Andersen who is one of the most famous specialists on the European welfare state. We heard Robert Castel from Paris speaking about the metamorphosis of labor and Eve Chiapello about the new spirit of capitalism, to mention only some. And we had scientists like Kurt Rothschild speaking on hardcore economic issues. But we had also some guests in this series who talked with us about the complex of consumer culture and that what some former generations would have called alienation - Entfremdung. What does the contemporary consumer capitalism do to us? This was asked from different perspectives for example by Richard Sennett who talked about his recent book *Handwerk, Craftsmanship*, by

Benjamin Barber who presented his book *Consumed*, and by the young German researcher Rahel Jaeggi who presented a new modernized concept of *Entfremdung*.

Eva Illouz is our guest this evening, but in some way she was already present at these evenings before because since her study *Der Konsum der Romantik*, in English published ten years ago, in German five years ago, it is impossible to talk about consumer culture and its influences on our lives and the way we think, feel, and love without reference to the work of Ms. Illouz. So I am especially glad to have you here tonight. Thank you for coming, Eva Illouz. She came from Tel Aviv this night to Vienna. Thank you for coming. Eva Illouz became, yes we can say this, famous with her study *Der Konsum der Romantik*. Reviews called this book a milestone, and it is. Her last publication in German is *Gefühle in Zeiten des Kapitalismus* with some strong chapters on emotion and capitalist culture, and some of her arguments we will here tonight. Ms. Illouz teaches at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, but in this month she lives also in Berlin as fellow on the *Wissenschaftskolleg* which is a wonderful institution for the scientific and academic life. Eva Illouz, thank you for joining us today, the floor is yours.

### **Eva Illouz**

Thank you very much, Robert, for this nice introduction. It is a great honor to be in this very illustrious city which has been the city of so many extraordinary people and, of course, I am particularly glad to be in this house which bears also such a significant and illustrious name.

Actually I am not exactly going to talk about my book called in which I have elaborated the concept of emotional capitalism although will refer to it, simply out of desire not to bore those who may have had already read the book. So I will give you some kind of mix of some of my previous research on love and some reflections that have evolved since then.

Reflecting and writing on the impact of the French Revolution on social morals Edmund Burke mused on what was in store for humanity. I quote, "All the pleasing illusions that made power gentle and obedience liberal which harmonize the different shades of life are to be dissolved by this new concurring empire of light and reason. All the decent drapery of life is to be rudely torn off. All the superadded ideas which the heart owns and the understanding ratifies as necessary to cover the defects of our weak and shivering nature and to raise it to a dignity in our own estimation, all these superadded ideas are to be exploded as a ridiculous absurd and antiquated fashion." Burke anticipates here what would become later one of the critiques that would haunt modernity, namely the fact that in tearing down the harmonious width of meanings on which traditional power, obedience, and ??? rested, "the empire of light and reason exposes us to forms of truth we cannot bear." "For", as Burke says, "as power withers away our illusions will also fade and this new nakedness will leave us immensely vulnerable, exposing and revealing to ourselves and to others the true ugliness of our condition. To be meaningful human existence requires a modicum of myth, illusions, and lies for only lies and illusions can make the violence of social relationships bearable or put differently reasons in the fatigable attempts to unmask and track down the fallacies of our beliefs will leave us shivering in the cold for only beautiful stories, not truth, can console us."

Karl Marx, perhaps the most forceful heir and defender of the enlightenment, curiously conquered with the ultra conservative use of Burke in his famous dictum that, "All that is solid melts into air. All that is holy is profane. And men at last are forced to face with sober senses the real conditions of their lives and their relationships with their fellow men." Marx like Burke uses modernity as a sobering of the senses, as a violent arousal from a pleasant if numbing slumber and confrontation with the naked bear and barren conditions of social relationships. This sobering realization may make us more clever and less likely to be lulled by the fanciful and vain promises of the church and of the aristocracy, but it also empties our lives of charm, mystery, and a sense of the sacred. Knowledge comes at the price of desecrating that which we believe. Thus Marx like Burke seems to think that cultural fantasies, not truth, make our lives meaningful and connected to others and committed to meanings larger than ourselves. So we can sense here in Marx the same Burkian dread of what lies ahead in a humanity in which nothing is holy anymore and everything is profane. Yet Marx did not reject the empire of light nor longed to the defunct rituals of the pasts. In that of course he is different from Burke. What makes Marx distinctly and profoundly modernist was not his straightforward endorsement of modernity, that is progress, technology,

reason, economic abundance, etc., but precisely his ambivalence towards it. Marx shares with Burke his view that truth is dangerous but he is far more ambivalent towards this than Burke was, obviously.

From the start modernity involved the uneasy acknowledgement both of the extraordinary energies unleashed by reason and of its implacable destructiveness. At the very same time that moderns declared themselves free of the shackles that had fogged the mind and consciousness they began to long for that which they had proudly claimed to release themselves from, namely a sense of the sacred and of the transcendent and the capacity to believe. The triumphant call of reason, dissecting myths and belief became properly modern when it was intertwined with a nostalgic and mournful longing for transcendent objects to believe in and to be persuaded by. So from the start modernity was defined by the fact that it was deeply ambivalent towards its own capacity to demythologize culture.

Max Weber of course is the most radical representative of this ambivalent position. I think it has leant it its most poignant pathos in his very famous view that modernity is characterized by disenchantment. It's a very well know notion. Weber's notion of disenchantment designates the condition of the modern world as one that has been robbed of gods. So disenchantment does not mean simply that the world is no longer filled with angels and demons, witches and fairies, but it means that the very category of mystery comes to be disparaged, mocked. For in their impulse to control the natural and social world the various modern institutions of science, technology, and the market also dissolve a sense of mystery. So modernity has been deserted by the gods because science and economics aim to make the world rationalized, calculable, and predictable, thus disposing of what was beforehand governed by faith, commitment, personal fealty, and charismatic heroes. All this is very well known.

What I want to claim in this lecture is that love as a cultural ideal and as a cultural practice has incorporated the very aeries of modernity, its built-in ambivalence. An ambivalence which neither allows us to trumpet or victories nor to mourn the past which is the very position that Weber himself adopted towards modernity. It's a position which made Weber almost stoic vis-à-vis modernity. And it is a bit of that sense of undisturbed stoicism vis-à-vis the losses that we are faced with in modernity, especially with regard to love, that I would like to share with you in this lecture.

That's a very broad introduction, just to simply to place this short lecture on love in the broader context of a problematic that haunts modernity. Pre-modern marriage was determined according to criteria of social rank, status, and wealth with love playing the secondary role in the selection of a mate. Modern love on the other hand seems to be often unconstrained by such criteria. Yet while modern love is freer and more egalitarian, modern love is also counter-intuitively far more rationalized and far more disenchanted than its pre-modern counterpart. This is what I want to claim. Pre-modern love while bound to society by thousand invisible rules was also in many ways more ardent and more absolute. Modern love is cool and detached. Indeed, the modern romantic condition more often resembles the process of sobering up and waking up from illusions that Burke described and Marx described than it resembles the fervor and frenzy of pre-modern lovers. Modern culture has torn the veils and fantasies that had delicately enveloped men's and women's romantic conditions, and this is what I want to explain now.

Let me refer to the model of love at first sight. The model of love at first sight is a good example of what I mean by enchanted love. In love at first sight love is experienced as a unique event which erupts brutally and unexpectedly in one's life. It is inexplicable, it is irrational, it is not based on cognitive knowledge of another and therefore it is not based on cumulative knowledge. It disturbs one's daily life and provokes a deep commotion of the soul. The metaphors historically that have been used to describe love at first sight have been those of heat, and magnet, and thunder, and electricity, all which come to designate the fact that love at first sight is overwhelming and overpowering. This is how the subject feels himself or herself to be. The object of love illicit overwhelming sentiments, beyond the control of the lover. The value of the object is so high that he or she becomes incommensurable, that is it is impossible to substitute that particular person for another. You cannot exchange that person with another person. The absoluteness and unconditionality of the commitment are thus total. Enchanted love is simultaneously spontaneous and unconditional, overwhelming and eternal, unique and total. I am describing here a prototype. This approach to romantic love affirms the radical uniqueness of the

object of love, the impossibility to substitute one object of love for another, and the refusal to submit feelings to calculation and reason. So love appears here as an absolute sentiment.

Let me just give you very short examples of this prototype. Julie de Lespinasse an 18th century French woman, who wrote letters to her lover, the Comte de Guibert, declares, "I love too well to impose a restraint upon myself. I prefer to have to ask you pardon rather than commit no faults. I have no self love with you. I detest prudence. I even hate those duties of friendship which substitute propriety for interest and circumspection for feeling. How shall I say it? I love abandonment to impulse. I act for impulse only and I love to madness that others do the same by me." What Julie de Lespinasse is in essence expressing here is a rejection of any rule governing intimate relationships. She is offering us here an ethic of self abandon in which amorous fusion is reached through self abandonment, impulse, and sheer emotionality. She affirms her own uncontrolled and unchecked emotionality and individuality.

From a very, very different cultural quarter let me give you another example, extremely different, but still it symbolizes the same type I want to talk about. The example comes from 19th century English gentry in Jane Austen's novel *Persuasion*. In that novel nine years after she broke off her secret engagement to Captain Wentworth because of the pressure of her mentor, Lady Russell, Anne Elliot after nine years she hasn't seen Captain Wentworth meets him again. After she meets him she realizes she has never stopped loving him. But Anne Elliot like the reader is uncertain about Captain Wentworth feeling for her. She doesn't know if he still loves her, and the reader doesn't know if he still loves her. The situation in the novel is complicated by the fact that Anne Elliot is now courted actively by her cousin who is rich and noble. And although her cousin's manners are impeccable and although this match would be very highly enticing for her Anne reacts to the prospect of such promising alliance as follows. "How she might have felt had there not been Captain Wentworth in the case was not worth enquiry for there was a Captain Wentworth. And be the conclusion of the present suspense, good or bad, her affection would be his forever. Their union, she believed, could not divide her more from other men than their final separation." In other words, Anne is here determined to remain faithful to Captain Wentworth whether or not he loves her or not, whether or not they will end up together or not. And even though she has an extremely enticing match here in the person of her cousin she forgoes that match simply to remain faithful to the idea of her love to Captain Wentworth. Anne's determination to remain faithful to Captain Wentworth jars with contemporary sensibility in more than one respect because she subscribes to the view of love as absolute and incommensurable, a view in which character and commitment are irrevocably intertwined with passion which means here a total trust of a person towards another, regardless of its outcome, regardless whether it's good for us or not, as we would say today. Having loved once binds her forever. Anne Elliot's determination to ignore a highly enticing match and to remain faithful to her first love whether reciprocated or not flaunts completely contemporary common sense.

Compare Anne's staunch faith in this love and her commitment to Captain Wentworth to Candace Bushnell and just compare it in terms of sensibility. Bushnell is the celebrated author of "Sex and the City". "When was the last time you heard someone say I love you without tagging on the inevitable if unspoken as a friend? When was the last you saw two people gazing into each other's eyes without thinking yeah, right? When was the last time you heard someone announce, I am truly, madly in love, without thinking, well, just wait until Monday morning?"

The distance separating Anne Elliot from Candice Bushnell is incalculable and makes Anne Elliot's attitude as far from contemporary sensibilities as her own might have been from that of a prospective wife in ancient Greece. If Anne has an unquestionable faith in the absoluteness of love Candace Bushnell on the other hand is thoroughly disenchanted, self-conscious, and supremely ironic.

To understand the nature of this irony why has love become so ironic? I will try and pack in this idea that love has become disenchanted which is what I suggested a few minutes ago. I am going to say something very obvious. The key concept on which the idea of disenchantment relies is that of rationalization. What provokes the disenchantment of the world for Weber is the process of rationalization. According to Weber rational action is whatever is consciously regulated not random, what is habitual and not impulsive. What makes conduct rational is the fact that it is methodical and that it has a general character, that it is systematic, and in Weber's words that

it is controlled by the intellect. So, following this very broad definition let me identify a number of forces which can be said to have contributed to transforming romantic love from an enchanted to a deeply disenchanting feeling. First and foremost is the prevalence of scientific modes of explanation today in our approach to love. Psychology, psychoanalysis, and biology, but not only. I include sociology as well, obviously. But sociology is much less dominant in the public discourse, at least much less so than psychology or biology. Each explain the feeling of love by subsuming it under such categories as the unconscious, or sex drive, or hormones, or brain chemistry, it doesn't matter. All these explanations undermine deeply the view of love as an ineffable, unique, and quasi mystical experience. For biologists a dramatic increase in the amount of dopamine and epinephrine is said to be present in the brain when one is infatuated with another person. So the experience of exultation that one may feel when one is in love is viewed as nothing but a chemical process. And by the way, when I interview people today, when they talk about being in love they talk about their chemical imbalances. People view themselves when they are in love as being chemically unbalanced so that people have completely adopted that kind of scientific discourse about themselves. Whatever the mode of scientific explanation chosen love is reduced to an epiphenomenon, a mere effect of prior causes which are neither mystical nor singular but rather located in involuntary and almost mechanical psychic or chemical. It doesn't matter for me whether it's biology or psychoanalysis, for me it's the same here, in involuntary and almost mechanical processes. With such mode of explanation it is difficult to hold on to the view that love is a unique mystical and ineffable event and feeling. In that sense love has undergone the same process of disenchantment as nature. It is no longer viewed as divinely inspired but rather as a phenomenon in need of explanation and control and bound to evolutionary biological or psychological laws. That's the first element.

Second element where an enchanted romantic love has been characterized by an ideology or ideals of spontaneity and uniqueness, the emergence of technology such as that of the internet entail a rationalized mode of partner selection which contradicts the idea of love as an unexpected epiphany, erupting in one's life against one's will and reason. So while traditional romantic love was intimately connected to sexual attraction which was provoked by the presence of two physical bodies the new technology of the internet as an instrument of mate selection. I am talking about the internet dating sites which are increasingly used by more and more people in all age categories. So the new technology of internet is based on a systematic rational and disembodied evaluation of other people which precedes both in time and in importance the traditional physical presence and the traditional physical meeting between two people. In the area of the internet the romantic meeting becomes organized under the aegis, under the umbrella of the liberal ideology of choice. I think no technology has radicalized in such an extreme way the notion of the self as a chooser in the idea that the romantic encounter should be the result of the best possible choice whereas in traditional romantic love you don't choose, you are kind of struck by love, you are smitten by love. It's now exactly the opposite. The internet makes you really spell out very, very clearly your priorities, your preferences, your taste, and you are trying to match with highly refined an elaborate taste to that of another. What I am saying is that the virtual encounter, the internet romantic encounter, has become literally, not metaphorically, organized as a market in which one compares people between each other, attributes of value to people, and chooses the best bargain one can get. People actually become really economic actors when they shop for a mate on the internet. So the internet places each person searching for another in an open market of open competition with others, thus radicalizing the notion that one can and should improve one's romantic condition and that partners are eminently interchangeable and replaceable. The internet is a technology of interchangeability, completely opposite to the incommensurability of the prototype of love at first sight. This technology of interchangeability in terms makes us radical relativists in love that is deeply suspicious of love's totality, absoluteness, and durability. In fact we become all quite happily reconciled with love's brevity. That was my second point.

My third point and it will be my final point here to describe this process of disenchantment; I will start it with Marshall Berman who wrote a beautiful book on modernity. Marshall Berman says, "that it is only in modern times that men have come to think of the self as a distinctly political problem". Given the gender used by Berman, he says men, it is ironic that this sentence has been particularly and spectacularly applicable to women in the 20th century, especially the second half of the 20th century. Let me explain. Feminism has exerted perhaps the single most significant influence on women's subjectivity and on the relationships between the sexes in the last forty, fifty years. The second wave feminism has profoundly transformed our understanding of the emotion of

love. So I want to view feminism here as a cultural factor that has deeply contributed to the disenchantment of love, added to the technology of the internet and to the scientization of the feeling of love. Contrary to popular mythology feminists argue love is not a source of transcendence, happiness, and self-realization. Rather romantic love is one of the primary causes of the divide between men and women as well as one of the cultural practices through which women are made to accept and love their submission to men. This is the standard feminist view of love. I am trying to move here to take two steps back. Feminists have had the same demythologizing effect on love. What has interested feminists is the deconstruction of the love mythology. In Simone de Beauvoir's famous words, "Even in love men retain their sovereignty while women aim to abandon themselves".

My point here is that feminism has marked an important influence on the history of love because it has torn down the veils of male chivalry and the feminine mystique on which the whole mythology of romantic love is based. So feminism has torn the veils of male chivalry and feminine mystique which made women both slaves and goddesses and men tormentors and saviors.

Feminism has called on women and men to conform to ideals of equality, reciprocity, and fairness. And in doing that feminism has called on men and women to adopt new rules of conduct in the realm of sexual relations which has made those relations much more directly governed by the intellect, to quote Max Weber again and to quote his definition of rationalization. The so called politically correct language with which by the way as a political person I totally agree, that's not the point, but as a sociologist I am always interested in the effects of new cultural codes and practices, so the rules of speech of the so called politically correct language and rules of conduct, for example in the US you really have a distinctly new behavior between men and women where a man has to ask consent of a woman every time he takes a step with her, before he kisses her, before he touches her breast etc. These new rules both of speech and conduct have made romantic relationships the object of explicit thoughts. They have made them much more predictable and much more likely to conform to a set of pre-established procedural rules and thus more given to self-reflexive monitoring, that is that kind of self-reflexiveness, that kind of self-conscious monitoring is exactly the kind of intellectualization that Max Weber was talking about.

So these three factors, the prevalence of scientific modes of explanation, the use of the internet technology in the search of a mate, and the impact of feminism in regulating inter-personal romantic relationships explain at least partly to a great extent how love once the repository of passion and unreason has become deeply disenchanted. To quote two lines by Rainer Maria Rilke, "Where once an enduring house was now a cerebral structure crosses our path, completely belonging to the realm of concepts as though it still stood in the brain." I am here moving to my last part and conclusion.

While modernity has radically affirmed individualism and the uncompromising rights of passion in early modernity it also rendered later the experience of passion far more difficult, far more rational and intellectual. The demystification of love by political ideas of equality and fairness, by science and by technology has made love into a dispassionate experience and it has made it a part in the broader process of emotional capitalism. Emotional capitalism is a dual process, so not only are emotions systematically exploited in the economic realm such as in corporations or in advertising, but also emotions have become a part of the utilitarian project of the self, that is emotions much serve now one's interest and must be constantly monitored in order to help one make optimum choices.

Now where does that leave us? Let me go now in a slightly different direction because I started opposing enchanted love to disenchanted love. Now I want to bring in as a way to conclude a third category which is the category of seduction. In characterizing the perfect seducer Robert Green indicates the importance of maintaining the incomplete nature of the romantic interaction. Robert Green wrote an advice book about seduction. He says that seduction is about increasing ambiguity, sending mixed signals, mastering the art of insinuation, confusing desire and loyalty, mixing pleasure and pain, stirring desire and confusion, and refusing to conform to any standard. In other words, seduction requires a capacity to play with the rules of ordinary interactions, those rules which require from us to be clear and truthful. A seducer does not break those rules but has to play with those rules. To quote two scholars, Bartsch and Bartscherer, they say, "Ambivalence is built in the erotic phenomenon." So seduction is ambivalent and it is their ambivalence that makes the great reducers of Western culture both

unaccountable to morality and exemplary of freedom. Don Juan, Casanova, Cleopatra embody a kind of sovereignty and self-possession that are not bound by any rules because in his desire to seduce the seducer must use ambiguity and must maintain uncertainty. And it is this uncertainty in many ways that enables the person who uses seduction both power and freedom because what you are doing when you are seducing you are saying something without meaning it. You are saying many things at once. More essentially for my argument I think you are being unaccountable to moral principles. Obviously I am aware that from a moral standpoint such freedom is problematic. Of course I am not denying this, that is not the point. What I am saying simply is that this kind of freedom, this kind of playfulness which is synonymous with crossing boundaries, which is synonymous with producing uncertain and ambiguous meanings is also the precondition for seduction

Let me quote here the philosopher Robert Pippin. He says, "There is something about Eros that cannot be accommodated easily within Christian or liberal egalitarian humanism." Now I would continue Robert Pippin's ideas and I would say that explains, that is the reason why we see the emergence of the ironic mode in romantic love. Let me just explain, and here I am quoting again a scholar of ancient Greece, David Halperin. He says, "Some experiences are incompatible with irony. In order to have them at all it is necessary to banish any hint of irony. Conversely the arrival of irony signals the end of the experience or its diminution. Irony's opposite is intensity. In moments of intense, overwhelming sensation we have little awareness of context and no attention to spare for more than one set of meanings. In such states we become literalists. We can only experience one kind of things. The three cardinal experiences that demand the elimination of irony or that cannot survive irony are rogue grief or suffering, religious transport and sexual passion." Irony is a figure of speech which feigns its ignorance. It feigns ignorance but counts for its effects on the knowledge of the hero. It is the trope of the person who knows too much but refuses to take reality seriously. I would say that modern romantic consciousness has the rhetorical structure of irony because it is saturated with the disenchanted knowledge that prevents full belief and full commitment. If love, as many people have said, is a modern religion it is a peculiar religion for it is a religion that cannot produce any more belief, faith, or commitment. Emotional capitalists are thus the true skeptics and ironists of our times. Thank you.

#### **Robert Misik**

Thank you, Eva. Is irony generally a bad thing, not only in context of Eros and love? Isn't the post-modern self characterized by the way that it takes nothing serious and has an ironic relationship to everything?

#### **Eva Illouz**

Actually I adore irony in general. What I simply wanted to understand is the tone. Sociologists don't pay enough attention to tone. Tone is very important because it points to "Stimmung". Tone really points to the overall emotional organization of experience. What interested me was to understand why when people are in love they feel the immediate urge to mock themselves and to mock others, but first to mock themselves. That would be the trope of self-irony, not irony. So what is it that makes us detached from an experience which only 60 or 70 years ago we would have experienced as connecting us to some kind of higher or transcendent truth? So no, I adore irony. I simply wanted to understand the underpinning for it given that I think this is one of the main tropes which organize today the representation. Even Hollywood, everybody talks about the Hollywood representation of love, but it's not true, Hollywood has become deeply ironic vis-à-vis its own self. Hollywood cannot represent Hollywood anymore.

#### **Robert Misik**

What is the horizon of your critique? One can understand what you said in the way that we can say there is something with Eros which is not compatible with irony or especially not compatible with the liberal ideology of choice. On the other hand, obviously, it is. You bring a lot of examples that is obviously is, that people love in this way now. They organize their erotic life this way. Would you say yes, they do, but it doesn't work? Would you say yes, they do, it works, but we lose something with that? What's the point?

#### **Eva Illouz**

I am saying exactly what you said. You are absolutely correct that I have not maybe made clear enough what it is that I am saying. I don't think I am saying that Eros is compatible with choice or with disenchantment. I am saying

we have these values that we revere which are knowledge, choice, freedom. So these are emancipatory. Both choice, political freedom are things that we value, that we want to cherish, and yet these are the values that lead us to a cooling of passion, that make it impossible to subscribe to passion, to Eros, and to seduction anymore. You said, what is the horizon of your critique? Well, in many ways my critique has no horizon. I want to say that's the point of it, it's exactly to have no horizon. What I like to do is to describe and to show the ways in which we are trapped by our own selves. That's why I started with Burke and Marx because we do not, we cannot give up on reason. I don't think we can, collectively. And yet, it is that very same movement of reason which is apparent in the internet technology, in science, and in political feminist emancipation. It is that same movement of reason that makes it much more difficult to fall in love and to be passionate about it. So it is that kind of paradoxical and tragic nature of modernity which was the intellectual pathos of Weber in his description of modernity. It's that kind of pathos of the modern condition that I want to get at.

### **Robert Misik**

We talked a little bit already in the telephone interview we made. Your book has a very optimistic sound although it deals with issues where a lot of people would not sound so optimistic. You describe the instruments, the tools, the gadgets, and the goods we use don't alienate our romantic life, they help our romantic life. So you had a very optimistic sound in this book, it was written ten years ago. Now you sound a lot more pessimistic. Did you change or did something in the reality change in these ten years which made you more pessimistic? Were the old tools, and the old instruments, and the old goods good for our romantic life and the new ones are bad?

### **Eva Illouz**

Thank you for the question, it's a very important one. First of all again, that goes back to the critique question in the sense that although as a private person I have strong feelings just about anything you can think about. In my scholarship I really try to be neither pessimistic nor optimistic. Again, it's a more scientific point. And the point is that I reject the theological distinction between the spiritual and the material. And I think that theological distinction is at the heart of a lot of the Marxist critique of consumption. I don't think that objects are antithetical with relationships, and with emotions, and with feelings. So one of the things I try to do in my first book is precisely to show how human actions, and human relationships, and emotions really need objects, that we need the world of object to transact with each other. My standpoint there was a radical departure from the Marxian critique of commodity fetishism. That's why I tried to show how objects can aid in organizing and generating romantic sentiments. Having said this, you are absolutely correct, when I turn to the internet and when I try to see what people do and get out of it and methodologically I remain the same. You are right that there is a different attitude towards capitalism and technology. But this difference is actually underlined by a continuity. And what is the continuity? It is that I try to stick as closely as possible to what people say and to their tone, to how they interpret their own experiences. When I approach people who use the internet there was a tone of cynicism and despair which I had not heard before. And this is what arrested me and caught my attention. Now what has changed dramatically, I think, from the mid-1980s, when I did my first research, to the mid-late-1990s, when the internet was being very much used, is the culture of choice. That has changed dramatically. The mid-1980s were still organized in a traditional mode. In other words you met each other face to face and you did it through personal connection or at work, etc. What the internet, the internet was really a disembodied technology. It really completely tore apart the kind of bodily, of physical organization of the romantic encounter. And with the help of the technology of psychology, you have two technologies, the internet and psychology, really made the romantic encounter function as a consumer choice, as a pure consumer choice. One of the things that I was forced to reckon with was one of the things that psychologists who have researched consumer choices have observed which is that what happens when we have much more choices. There are a lot of experiments that really tend to show that when you give a lot of choice to people it makes them confused for one thing. It creates a real confusion. It creates a lot of information overload. It creates apathy because people typically are going to withdraw when they have too much information. And it creates what Herman Simon, the Nobel Award economist, called a shift from satisfyzing to maximizing. Herbert Simon says, satisfyzing is the personal who settles for the good enough choice. You want to choose a TV channel, so you go to the first, second, and then you are going to settle on the third or fourth. This is the good enough mentality. That's how also people married sixty years ago. They married when they found a person that was good enough. Herbert Simon contrasts satisfyzers with maximizers and he says, maximizers are those who want to increase their option all the time. In TV channels

it is the phenomenon of zapping. You try to choose a channel and you can't find something satisfying, so you are constantly zapping, and zapping, and zapping. Cognitive psychologists are able to show that people who start out as satisfiers, in other words people who are used to settle for the good enough choice, once you give them a lot of choices they become confused, and they become hesitant, and they actually don't settle for the first good enough choice. The mechanism is anticipation of regret. They are really fearful of missing out on a good opportunity, so they continue the search, and continue, and continue, and continue it. That's what has changed. It is the culture of choice. So in a way that enables me to nail down better my critique of capitalism. It's not objects that are the problem, it's choice, it's the culture of choice.

### **Robert Misik**

What is first, the technological instruments or the ideology? We all live since twenty years at least in a society where the idea is, don't be satisfied with the thing you have, look out for a better life, look out for a more risky life, look out for a more adventurous life. Are this dating culture and these instruments in the internet only the necessary technological tool for this generalized ideology? Or is the ideology the result of the possibilities which are also given by the technological instruments? Or are both interconnected with each other?

### **Eva Illouz**

I would think that the ideology of for example self-realization which is an ideology we all value deeply and which comes from broadly put psychology. So this idea that you must try to constantly improve your life conditions, and realize yourself, and realize a higher and better self, and do this by choosing the right partner who will help you reveal your best self and your true self, this idea which is actually at the cornerstone of that frantic rational pursuit of the best partner proceeded by far the internet. If I was pushed in a corner and I had to choose one of the positions I would choose the first position and would say that this idea of self-realization which is extremely paramount in the definition of contemporary individualism is really at the heart of it.

### **Question**

We are talking here constantly about romantic love and this rationalization of the romantic love. There are other forms of love. There is the love towards your child, love towards your parents, love towards your friends. Do you think that this rationalization also entered these other forms of love? Do we know these patterns here?

### **Eva Illouz**

It's a good question and I am not sure I know how to answer it because it goes both ways. I am sure you and I constantly hear people say, I stopped being in touch with my mother because it doesn't do good to me, I'll just feel bad when I see her. So there is no a priori loyalty to one's kin or relationship just because this is family. I am not saying it has disappeared, but it is in severe competition with the idea that I should do only what feels good to me. And that is certainly true for friendship. Certainly I would say friends are friends only as long as they respect a kind of basic psychological narcissism or something like that. About parent to children I don't know. I am confused there about what is happening. But I would say definitely on the side of children to parents. And with regard to friendship you definitely see those relationships moving towards a kind of cultural narcissism, not psychological narcissism, but cultural narcissism in the sense that they must become submitted to that model of the wellbeing of the self. They don't take precedence as relationships over the self. On the contrary, they are to be submitted to the self.

### **Question**

You said that emotional skepticism would be some modern way of dealing with this. I didn't understand that. About emotionality, there is this emotional quotient, and people say it is more important than IQ to have a good EQ. How important is this EQ? Don't you think that there were always a lot of choices? As you said, in the internet you are overloaded with choices. All the time people had to decide which to choose, to make a good choice from the beginning or be overloaded. There was always the decision.

### **Eva Illouz**

Skepticism, I might have used the term too loosely. But I really meant to use skepticism as a synonym in the context of my lecture to the notion of irony. What is skepticism? It is the incapacity to believe. That's what I

mean. And that is the process that interests me in love. It's the process by which we are both in love and unable to believe in it. So it's this withdrawal of belief from the experience of love that I call skepticism in this particular case.

What I think about emotional intelligence? It's a useful notion in the sense that it enables the social valuing of different skills. And we are all for that, valuing different skills in different people. At the same time I am very skeptical about this notion because what I think it does is to really make rigid some emotional categories. For example things that are included in emotion intelligence are things like self control and empathy, capacity to understand others. I'm a bit worried about the fact that it really reifies and reduces our understanding of the human person. It really reduces them to very discreet and perhaps in the end not very interesting emotional categories.

About your third question. I would have to vastly disagree. I think that even a powerful king who was polygamous had fewer choices than an ordinary person using the internet today. Think about Emma Rouault, the whole tragedy and misery of her life comes precisely from the fact that she had very little choices and she married the first guy who was reasonably or remotely adequate. Emma Rouault marries Charles Bovary because he is the first guy. And she knows that if she misses that opportunity another one may never come again. So that's why she marries him. I am sure many women did that too.

### **Question**

Are you really thinking that irony goes along with the cooling of passion? Because if I think of "Sex and the City" this is pure hysteria. They are feeling so much. And it is more an increasing of passion what we are now seeing. And this goes along with irony. I think you can have both. We can be ironical and we can be deeply passionate. Or do you think this is contradictory?

### **Eva Illouz**

I see your point because what you are saying is they are on the one hand deeply ironic or self ironic on the other they are all looking for the big love story. And yet when they have it, Mr. Big for example, you can never just relax and see them in love. It never happens as a matter of fact. What you get is a constant reflection on what is happening. That is the structure of "Sex and the City". It is that kind of intellectualized self-reflexive structure. The very *raison d'être* of the TV series functions as a reflexion on the underpinnings and the beliefs that make up romantic relationships. So they are striving for the big love. In that you are right. I am not saying it has disappeared. But what they actually experience and what you actually see is only their intellectualized reflections on their own self wanting that relationship and asking themselves all the time, well, what is it exactly that I want. And they are constantly doing that. They are striving for it, they are not reproducing that. That's the point. They can't anymore. I guess that is exactly my point. My point is that you have it as a horizon but we do not have anymore the cultural resources, and maybe we shouldn't. I am not saying we should. We do not have anymore the cultural resources to reach that ideal. I am not saying it's a bad thing, it might be a good thing.

### **Question**

I believe that there are more problems in life that make the idea of love difficult than internet and feminism. Every day getting up in the morning makes it difficult to love, to go on in the world. I think the whole evening we are talking about the same. You talked about the perspective of biology and psychology. I think it is all more a perspective of personal spirituality and to come to the personal idea of love. Do you think that sometimes analyzing the idea of love makes it more difficult for the reality to feel it? Shouldn't it be better to just do it, not to analyze it?

### **Eva Illouz**

That's what I have been saying all evening.

### **Question**

I want to make a comment on your theory of the disenchantment of love. In their theory of modernity Beck-Gernsheim have the theory on the contrary that love today is a new religion. It is considered to be the only way to

salvation. So I think there are a lot of reasons to consider this a tool to interpretation of the role of love. They say that in a time where there is no god, where the family has lost a lot of importance, the other person is the only one to be important. Naturally this doesn't touch the rhetoric of love. The rhetoric of love is another thing. You gave very beautiful examples of the 18th century. In the 18th century the rhetoric of love was a great rhetoric. Today this rhetoric doesn't exist anymore. But the importance of another person is very, very strong. What do you think on this? Secondly I want to make a comment on the internet. Two years ago in the context of the Viennese festival you could hear in various coffee houses of Vienna love letters from the 1950s until today. The first time I heard love letters which were written in the internet, emailed between two persons who never met. I must say that I really was astonished by the quality of these letters, quality because when you don't know a person you are full of imagination. These letters really have an erotic quality and ecstatic quality which was incredible for me. So I would like to emphasize also this point concerning internet because people also write because generally writing is not any more a very high knowledge or value in our society. And writing in the context of love, historically seen, was very, very important. So internet has this kind of quality.

### **Eva Illouz**

I am not exactly sure what your question about the Becks was. You are absolutely that this is what the Becks say, but I don't feel myself completely bound to their conclusions. Actually the end of my talk was an allusion to their thesis. In English the name of their book is "The normal chaos of love". Obviously it's not that they think in any way that love is providing the sense of security and transcendence that traditional religion did. Obviously one of the things they are describing is the ways in which relationships are disorganized. I think that even their claim that love is a religion is an outdated one, not in the sense that people don't aspire to it but in the sense that it is a belief without belief, if you want. It's a belief that we hold and at the same time we have a whole apparatus of other beliefs that want to undermine that belief. That's the only thing I am trying to describe. It's exactly that process. It's as if we wanted to believe in god on the one hand, but we had in our hands a lot of types of knowledge and practices which really would prevent us from being believing people. It's that process of emptying, of longing for something and yet being unable to fully subscribe to it that interests me. That's exactly that kind of dual paradoxical property that I am claiming is happening today.

About the quality of letters on the internet. Yeah, sure, some people write well. But I don't think it has much bearing on the intensity or quality of their sentiments. What you are saying, and in this I completely agree, the internet is or at least started out as a literate medium. And in that sense it is definitely an interesting medium. I've never tried to say it is an uninteresting one, it is a highly interesting one. It is also interesting to see how language and spelling for example create new hierarchies. In the real world if it's the guy who goes to the gym who has an advantage, well, on the internet it is the guy who knows how to write well who has an advantage vis-à-vis other guys. So there are interesting ways in which it creates new hierarchies and ways in which it makes literacy, a certain kind of literacy into an advantage. I completely agree with you. The problem of the internet is the shift or the passage from the kind of disembodied knowledge of another you have that can be created by good writing for example to the actual physical language. One of the very interesting things that I observed is that even very good writing cannot substitute for a very good body for physical interaction. Again, I am not saying this in a bemoaning tone. In that sense I was forced to subscribe to the philosophy of the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty which says that the body is the first and unsurpassable means to connect with each other. That's what I have learned about the internet. Even good writing cannot substitute for that.

### **Question**

I would like you to comment on the question of animality in this debate about love and emotionality because I see there are certain kinds of contradictions or ambiguities connected to emotions and animals, or even love and animals. On the one side you have a huge industry. There are billions of Euros spent on animals, feeding them etc. And on the other side there are arguments that animals have a therapeutic positive role on mass murderers and people who are emotionally captive or whatever. On the other side you have a lot of people who would choose their animal more than somebody like immigrants or somebody else to be saved. And these people are regarded to be kind of political or emotional losers. Would you agree to a certain humanist viewpoint that when a human and an animal are in a social relationship there you find two losers like the human who cannot find somebody real to love and a dog who cannot love at all on the one side? Or would you agree more with people

like Jacques Derrida in his last text about animality or Barbara Noske who argue that animals are more other words than lesser humans? What about animals and love? Losers or possible winners?

### **Question**

You said very little about the role of sex and the internet and meeting the perfect match, very soon it becomes a question of doing it. If you are not doing it then zap to the next partner. And if you have done it maybe also the impulse to zap to the next partner.

### **Question**

What I find difficult is that when you refer to pre-modern romance you quote things like Jane Austen and this is a romantic ideal.

### **Eva Illouz**

It's not romantic, by the way.

### **Question**

But Jane Austen was not what happened to most people then. And I think it's very difficult to compare a romantic novel to an internet dating platform which is a reality for most people. But they don't see it as an ideal whereas a lot of romantic literature or love letters from the 19th century and 18th century would be what people sought what they wanted. And that still is the same, but not what they had. You had things like pre-arranged marriages and a lot of constraints from society upon love before the internet. That's where I could not follow the change between modernity and pre-modernity.

### **Eva Illouz**

Let me start with the end. I am really a cultural sociologist. Imagine a bat that enters a dark grotto and is sending out signals to figure out what are the limits of the space the bat is moving in and how it should move in. And I think that's what culture does. Culture tells us more or less how to move around, what limits we can cross and when we cannot cross them. In that sense for a cultural sociologist the distinction that you make between real and unreal, I am not saying it does not exist, but you often see when you actually analyze for example novels and what people tell you they want in their lives, you can see that this distinction is a very tenuous one. Because in both cases, both novels and people have a fairly elaborate sense of those boundaries. You are correct to say that these are not equivalent. On the one hand I can see why you say that. On the other hand there is a sense in which that distinction between reality and fiction is not terribly relevant for a cultural sociologist if what you are interested in is the question of what can be said and what cannot be said. So it is obvious to me that today with the models of psychic health we hold, if a woman decided to remain faithful to a man about whom she is not even sure whether he reciprocates her love at all, that kind of cultural claim is not possible anymore. That was my only point. So one of the questions is, why was that not only possible but commendable in Jane Austen's time and why is it not not only possible but really viewed as a sign of a really weak psyche whereas Anne Elliot in her time remaining faithful to possibly a man who does not love her anymore really displays great strength of character, the fact that it has become the sign of a very weak character must mean and must say something which is exactly what as a cultural sociologist I am interested in clarifying.

Sex and the internet. You are right. I almost never speak about sex in my research although you really would think rightly so that it's deeply connected to love. I would say two contradictory things. One is that sex is different from emotions. And really what I am interested in after all is the intertwining of rationality and emotion. It's tracing that history that interests me. And sex is just not my topic. And at the same I am going to say something opposite because I think that what you described briefly in your question about sex and the internet is actually very similar to what I described with reference to love. I don't think there is a radical difference between the culture of choice in sexual encounters and the culture of choice I described in romantic encounters. I would view them both, sex and love, as subsumed by the same broad process of increasing rationalization of the sexual, erotic conduct. I talked about Eros, but it's true that I didn't talk specifically about sex. But still I think that my analysis holds correct for sex as well.

And about animals, I have nothing to say about it. It is a very interesting question, but I really don't know.

**Robert Misik**

Thank you, Eva, for this wonderful hour. Thank you for being here. I hope we did not too much disenchantment today because we heard disenchantment is one of the tragic aspects of modernity. But we have to live with these tragic aspects.