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When Meanings Melt: On the Loss of Halos, Auras, and Enchantment

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ABSTRACT

This study offers a comparative analysis of Marx and Engels' concept of *halo*, Weber's *disenchantment*, and Benjamin's *aura* to examine how each theorizes the dissolution of the traditional world's structures of meaning and value. Drawing on key texts by these thinkers, the study argues that these conceptualizations collectively articulate a core condition of modern life: the dissolution of enduring, sacred, and organic forms of meaning. The concept of *halo* is used to explain how capitalist modernization erodes the sacredness and reverence once attached to social institutions; *disenchantment* seeks to make sense of the retreat of ultimate values from public life under the pressures of rationalization and scientific progress; and the loss of *aura* is conceptualized to understand how mechanical reproduction transforms the authenticity and experiential presence of artworks. Taken together, these ideas offer a framework for grasping a world in which the meanings that once shaped traditional life have melted into air, a condition often interpreted as a defining feature of modern experience. Despite their differing conceptual approaches, Marx, Weber, and Benjamin implicitly converge on the view that the loss of tradition is not merely a historical event, but an ongoing condition that continues to disorient individuals within the structures of modern life. For all its technical progress and newfound possibilities, modernity brings with it a profound sense of alienation, impermanence, and existential uncertainty.

Keywords
modernity • *tradition* • *meaning* • *rationalization* • *social change*

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To illustrate the shift from tradition to modernity, and to characterize the disenchanted social and cultural milieu of his time, Max Weber, in his lecture "Science as a Vocation" (1946) contrasts premodern with modern man. Weber observes that people of the past died "old and satiated with life" because their existence flowed naturally within "the organic cycle of life" (1946, p. 140). To a great extent, they had gotten what life has to offer to them. In contrast, civilized/modern man knows no satiation, but only endless struggle. At best, he may grow tired of life, for he exists "in the midst of the continuous enrichment of culture by ideas, knowledge, and problems." His life lacks unity: "he catches only the most minute part of what the life of the spirit brings forth every anew, and what he seizes is always something provisional and not definitive." Thus, for civilized man, both life and death lose their (traditional) meaning. Weber argues that this conditions emanates inevitably from the "very 'progressiveness'" of modern life, which perpetually defies closure (1946, p. 140).

Modernity is characterized by several defining features: the dismissal of inherited authority, a linear conception of historical development rather than cyclical patterns, and aspirations for both personal and social liberation. This worldview combines an empirical approach to knowledge with what Ellis describes as "a Promethean outlook that regards all difficulties as technical problems to be mastered through human endeavor" (Ellis, 2005, p. 1473). These defining traits, however, did not emerge all at once but developed in distinct historical process, which Marshall Berman maps across three key phases of modernity. For Berman, the first phase approximately commences at the beginning of the sixteenth century and ends with the eighteenth. In this first phase of modernity, people just started to experience modernization and modern life, although the awareness of this experience was mostly absent. In the second phase, a modern public emerged, characterized by a common awareness of the struggles and conflicts inherent in modern life, both in everyday experiences and in the spiritual realm. The ideas of modernization and modernism started emerging during this phase. The last phase of modernity, which, according to Berman, began in the twentieth century. It was during this phase, the process of modernization expanded all around the world, from which developed a culture of modernism in art and thought. Berman asserts that during the last phase, people live "in the midst of a modern age that lost touch with the roots of its own modernity," due to the fact that the expansion of modern public led to a fragmentation, namely, a multitude of ideas regarding the conditions in which the modern man lives (1988, pp. 16–17). Consequently, this causes modernity to lose its "vividness, resonance and depth," and "its capacity to organize and give meaning to people's lives" (Berman, 1988, pp. 16–17). This aligns with Octavia Paz's depiction of modernity's existential tempo as "cut off from the past ... unable to return to its beginnings." (Cited in Berman, 1988, p. 35). Cut off from his beginnings and deprived of organizing powers, modern man, as Weber diagnoses, finds life reduced to a

series of provisional moments, ending not in fulfillment but an endless struggle. Building on this premise, this study examines three analogous conceptualizations of modernity's destabilizing effects: Karl Marx and Friedrich Engel's dissolution of *halo*; Max Weber's diagnosis of *disenchantment* and Walter Benjamin's account of the withering *aura* in art. Through close readings of these texts, this paper traces how each thinkers interprets modernity's erosion of traditional certainties, what Berman metaphorically describes as "melting into air" (1988, p. 9).

Marx, Engels and the Loss of a Halo

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' *Manifesto* (1848/1969) famously begins by announcing "a spectre is haunting Europe," immediately establishing their revolutionary position. The spectre Marx and Engels refer to is communism, for they firmly believed that all the powers of *old* Europe came together to eliminate the upcoming revolution, that is, the overturn of the bourgeois. In 1888 English edition, Engels noted that bourgeoisie refers to the class of capitalists, who owns the means of production (the tools and the raw material) and are the employers of wage labour of the proletariat, who, in turn, refers to the class of laborers whom capitalism forced to rent their labour in order to live. As foreshadowed in the first statement of the manifesto that "the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles," Marx and Engels attempted to describe not just the material conditions that seemed to bring about a revolution but also the social conditions that emanated from this new capitalist order. The same way this capitalist order led to the fall of feudal society, which by no means brought about an end to class struggles, the working class (proletariat), Marx and Engels thought, would overturn the capitalist order for "it established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones" with a difference that it simplified classes into two great one, namely, the capitalists and the wage laborers.

Marx and Engels vividly illustrate how the material realities of capitalism dissolve traditional social bonds and value systems. Wherever the bourgeoisie prevails, it "puts an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations," tearing apart the intricate hierarchies that once bound individuals to their "natural superiors." In their place, capitalism imposes a stark logic of "naked self-interest" and "callous cash payment," reducing human connection to economic transaction. Religious, chivalric, and sentimental bonds are all "drowned in the icy water of egotistical calculation." Personal worth is flattened into mere exchange value, and the many historical rights and protections of older social orders give way to one unforgiving freedom: free trade. Exploitation, once veiled by moral or political ideals, is rendered "naked, shameless, direct, brutal" (1848/1969).

As it is manifest in this contrasting illustration, while the dynamics of the new capitalist order unveiled the old ways of exploitations, it also came to simplify all the prior classes,

be it feudal or religious, and unmask their methods to replace them with its own. In other words, what Marxists calls, 'false consciousness' of the times (and of the classes, particularly that of the subordinate) prior to capitalist society is disrupted to a great extent. Veiled as 'common sense,' religious and political illusions of the premodern society, through which men were subjected to constant exploitation by their natural superiors, were all exposed by the bourgeoisie. For this, Marx and Engels are quite appreciative of the bourgeoisie for it, "historically, has played a most revolutionary part." Even though Marx and Engels acknowledge the bourgeoisie's transformative role in dissolving the old social order, they are sharply critical of what replaces it: a system driven by direct and unmasked exploitation. This critique unfolds not only at the institutional level, but also in the transformation of how individuals relate to one another and to themselves. (Berman, 1988, p. 105).

In "The German Ideology," Marx and Engels state that "the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e., the class which is the ruling material force of society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force" (2008, p. 301). This entails that whoever controls "the means of material production" also controls "the means of mental production." Such a process by all means involves a formation of the consciousness of the society, for "the division of labor ... manifests itself also ... as the division of mental and material labour," and accordingly, the thinkers/ideologists of the dominant class compose "the illusions of the class." The oppressed passively receives these illusions that forms the collective consciousness. However, there might be "certain opposition and hostility" between the two entities. It is part and parcel of the class struggle that, Marx and Engels dreamed of, would put an end to the exploitation, and there will be no need "to represent a particular interest as general or the 'general interest' as ruling," i.e. no class at all (2008, pp. 301–302).

Marx and Engels present a stark contrast between modern and premodern social conditions, rather than material ones. As Berman observes, this fundamental polarity between "what is open or naked and what is hidden, veiled, clothed" reflects a perennial dichotomy in both Eastern and Western philosophical traditions (1988, p. 106). It implicitly refers to a distinction between a real/true and illusory world. While in Buddhist tradition, the true world, one must transcend his body as well as space and time that restricts it. In other religious traditions, the reality can only avail itself through meditation or reveal itself after death. The transformation that Marx and Engels describe no doubt has its roots in the age of the Renaissance and Reformation. The distinction of the real world and illusory one, Berman writes, "placed both these world on earth, in space and time, filled wing human beings" (1988, p. 106). That is disjuncture of the concept of the Great Chain of Being and reenactment of antique claim that "man is the measure of all things." In Marx and Engels' writing, the false/illusory world, (mostly a realm of religion/religious experience

or filled with mysticism), Berman asserts, is seen nothing but a historical past and lost; what is important and real is our physical and social forms and our presence in time and space (here and now) (1988, p. 106).

To fully grasp Marx and Engels' conception of modernity's dissolution of the *halo*, we must first examine the material conditions that generated these social transformations. The erosion of traditional sanctities cannot be understood apart from the revolutionary economic changes that precipitated them. In *Manifesto*, Marx and Engels trace the bourgeoisie's historical genesis, from its origins in serfdom to its ascendancy following the 'discovery' of the Americas. They argue that through colonial expansion, global commerce, and industrial development, this rising class systematically dismantled both feudal relations and the earlier manufacturing system. The shift also marks the birth of modern industry. The establishment of a world market through discoveries led to immense advancements in commerce, navigation and communication. This brought about the demise of local markets and industries, for they were unable to keep up with such advancements and mass production. The new capitalist also involved a concentration of capital in fewer hands and centralized and rationalized production systems, that is, highly automated factories. Such a constant development brought about emergence of new cities and an increase of the urban population. This constant development led to new cities and growing urban populations. The "constant revolutionising of production" brought systemic changes, like centralised administration to ease the transition. These are what Marshall Berman calls the "solid institutional core of modernity" (1988, pp. 90–91).

The loss of the *halo* in Marx's analysis signifies a broader process of disenchantment and social upheaval under capitalism. This is captured in the famous declarations that "all that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned," compelling individuals to confront "the real conditions of their lives"; and that the bourgeoisie had "stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honored," reducing professionals to "paid wage laborers." These passages describe what Marx saw as capitalism's "uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions," its relentless transformation of "all fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices." This is what Berman so aptly describes as the "metamorphosis of values" at the heart of modernity (1988, p. 111). As Berman puts it, Marx's paradox is that capitalism makes human dignity measurable only through exchange value, reducing all forms of worth to market terms. Following Marx's critique, this system paradoxically both enables and cripples human development, aggressively nurturing market-useful traits while repressing or ignoring all others, resulting in a distorted, incomplete realization of human potential (1988, p. 96). Only through a comprehension of the condition under which we live, of what is lost and absent, that is "the aura of holiness," Marx seems to suggest, we can understand the present condition,

the new capitalist society and the disturbances it has brought about for it is a process which melts everything solid into air; everyone at once is both subjects and objects of this "pervasive process" (Berman, 1988, p. 89). This "the aura of holiness," as Berman describes, is related to *experience* that shapes religious life. So, it is not belief or theological formation, but experience that is of utmost importance, for it delimits life into sacred and profane, and consequently creates an aura around a given person associated with those of religious. For Marx and Engels, this experience of holiness by all means is shattered by capitalism. The loss of aura/halo of premodern times, for Marx, is not something of a concern. On the contrary, it entails a possibility of "a condition of spiritual equality;" it is the first instance in the course of history that everyone seems to be "on a single plane of being" (Berman, 1988, pp. 115–116). However, another problem arises: the bourgeoisie not only shatters the haloes of the pre-modern and pre-capitalist world, but also succeeds in producing its own, most notably through the fetishism of commodities, to the extent that it ultimately establishes a kind of pseudo-religiosity (Berman, 1988, p. 116).

Max Weber and Disenchantment of the World

The corrosive force of modernity, as articulated in Marx's account of the bourgeoisie stripping sacred halos from all that is holy, finds its epistemological counterpart in Weber's diagnosis of the systematic "disenchantment of the world." Modernity, for Weber, is a "a world robbed of gods" (Cited in Smith, 2008, p. 7; Weber, 1959, p. 283). It is through the rationalization of reality and the quest of intellectualism to strip off the irrational elements and to possess the supernatural values of prior times, what Weber calls "the unity of the primitive image of the world" came to shatter (Weber, 1959, p. 283). In other words, now we can only talk about two separate realms to perceive the existence: while with intellectualism came to the fore a rational understanding and mastery of nature, the irrational elements and the supernatural values became merely mystic experiences, and thus, Weber asserted that "the inexpressible contents of such experiences remain the only possible 'beyond,' added to the mechanism of a world robbed of gods" (1959, p. 283). From such a split, Weber implies, emanated profound consequences in every spheres of life, including economic life, for one can no longer talk about the centrality of religion, or mysticism with regard to regulate one's daily life, including intellectual as well as economic activities.(1959, p. 283).

In his seminal 1917 lecture "Science as a Vocation," Weber articulated the modern condition with characteristic clarity. "The fate of our times," he declared, "is characterized by rationalization and intellectualization," through which "disenchantment of the world" occurred (Weber, 1946, p. 155). For Weber, at the very heart of modernity lies this phenomenon (Jenkins, 2000, p. 12). The modern condition, for Weber, entails incorporation and colonization of human experience by scientific means and rational

government, i.e. bureaucracy. Predicting, knowing, understanding and taming nature (including that of human) have come to be of utmost importance, while paradoxically the world became more human-centered and the universe more impersonal (Jenkins, 2000, p. 12). Such a rationalization and intellectualization, in turn, led to the retreat from public life of "the ultimate and most sublime values" that had long enchanted the world (Weber, 1946, p. 155).

Scientific progress, according to Weber, is most significant fraction of the process of intellectualization. This "intellectualist rationalization" does not, however, mean that one has extensive knowledge about the conditions of life. A savage, for instance, tend to know more about his conditions as well as his tools, while a civilized person know proportionally comparatively less about the conditions of his life as well as the dynamics of the tools he employs; he only relies on them. Thus, intellectualization and rationalization entail not having extensive knowledge of the conditions under which we live and the tools we make use of, but a possibility that one has access to knowledges of these things. Under this new condition, one can principally master anything through calculation and technical means, while there is no mystery, nor magical means or incalculable forces in obtaining knowledge (Weber, 1946, pp. 138–139).

Stephen Karlberg (1980) identifies four different types of rationality: 1) Practical rationality refers to an individual's perception of day-to-day activities as it is, that is, the individual tend not to question the given realities but rather attempts to overcome the difficulties of life through calculation of the best means possible. In other words, this type of rationality is a manifestation of an individual capacity to organize, adapt and/or master mundane routines and sophisticated aspects of his daily activities rationally through a means-end approach. All the impractical and utopian inclinations that promises to go "beyond," be it religious or secular are refused. 2) In a striking contrast to practical rationality, theoretical rationality is intellectual attempts to master the nature/reality not through action but abstract concepts. Theoretical rationalization, thus, refers to philosophical or religious attempts to go "beyond" the mundanities and attempts to understand the reality as something "meaningful." 3) In contrast to practical rationality, substantive rationality involves not means-ends calculations to the problems arising from day-to-day, mundane routines of everyday life, but rather, operates within the contexts of value systems. Though their solutions may differ from one another, all the -isms and systematic approaches, e.g. religions, as well as the concepts such as friendship as long as they adhere to values like loyalty, mutual assistance etc. are exemplary of substantive rationality. 4) Formal rationality involves a means-ends approach, that is, to calculate and propose solutions to day-to-day problems. Although in this respect, it resembles practical rationality, formal rationality centers upon universalism, that is, universality of rules,

laws and regulations, not egotistic and pragmatic interests of individuals. In Weber's sociology, it is with the domination of formal rationality that life has become an "iron cage." While all the other types of rationality existed in premodern times and have "inter-civilizational and epoch-transcending character," formal rationality only came it being with industrialization in the West (Kalberg, 1980, pp. 1151–1160; Ritzer, 2005, pp. 54–56, 2011, pp. 136–146).

Weber argues that modernity's revolutionary character, its triumph of formal rationalization, culminates in bureaucratization's disciplinary regime. As he observes, "whole process of rationalization...especially in the bureaucratic state machine" creates systems where "discipline inexorably takes over ever larger areas," displacing charismatic authority with impersonal control (Cited in Ritzer, 2005, pp. 56–57). While the bureaucracy and the other modern structures constituted in accordance to formal rationality, on the one hand, enables individuals to accomplish certain goals, they also what imprison them into an "iron cage" of rationality (Ritzer, 2005, p. 57). At this point, Weber diverts from Marx that capitalism is the chief source of the modern condition, to claim that it is only one of the rational systems which came into being with modernity. Weber simultaneously recognized capitalism's "cage-like" character, an "immense cosmos" that confronts individuals as an immutable reality, coercing compliance with its logic through market discipline (Cited in Ritzer, 2005, p. 57)

As summarized by Mark Schneider, "In the face of the seemingly relentless advance of science and bureaucratic social organization," Weber thought, enchantment would be further dispelled from our culture to the extent that such a process, the rationalization, "would turn life into a tale which, whether told by an idiot or not, would certainly signify nothing, having been evacuated of meaning" (Cited in Ritzer, 2005, pp. 57–58). Nevertheless, Jenkins notes that, one can sense in Weber's accounts of the modern condition an acknowledgement that progress is not an illusion and that he is appreciative of change, and the modern condition enabled individuals to achieve certain things and brought about certain improvements, e.g. citizenship. Then, what Weber points out is the dark side of modernity (2000, pp. 11–12).

Weber's diagnosis of modernity thus presents a paradox: where Marx saw capitalism as the singular engine of alienation, tearing away the sacred *halos* of tradition, Weber identifies a broader "iron cage" of rationality, as a system where bureaucracies and markets alike enforce impersonal control through *disenchantment*. Yet unlike Marx's revolutionary teleology, Weber's vision admits nuance. The divergence, however, is telling: Marx's vanishing *halo reveals ideology's material basis, while Weber's disenchantment traces the existential cost of rationalization itself. Both, however, converge on modernity's central tragedy: its transformation of liberation into a new form of domination.*

Walter Benjamin and the Loss of Aura

Almost two decades following Weber's speech, Walter Benjamin penned an article, in 1936, in which he not just attempted to elaborate concepts "useful for the formulation of revolutionary demands in the politics of art," but also explained as to how capitalism transformed the perception of art in the long term (1968, p. 217). Benjamin commences his article, entitled "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," with an assumption that the capitalist mode of production that Marx explained was not completely developed at the time, thus, the full impact of capitalism on cultural spheres took some time: "The transformation of the superstructure, which takes place far more slowly than that of the substructure, has taken more than half a century to manifest in all areas of culture the change in the conditions of production. Only today can it be indicated what form this has taken" (1968, pp. 217–218). Although Benjamin's main endeavor was to develop a theory through which politicizing of art for revolutionary purposes can be brought about, as opposed to aestheticization of politics, which Benjamin assert is how fascism renders aesthetics, his unique account of the transformation of the value of art at some points converges with those of Marx and Weber explained above, only with a difference that Benjamin's explanation focus solely on the impact of capitalist/modern condition on art/culture.

For Benjamin, as the title of his article implies, the mechanical reproducibility of art in modern times led to dire consequences, in a similar vein as the mechanical reproducibility of writing did in literature. In the sphere of art, it was photography (and later cinema, as an extension to some extent) that transformed traditional perception and value of art. Once a work of art is reproduced, not matter how perfect it is, according to Benjamin, its condition of the presence (in time and space) is lost; it is never here and now. It is this unique and abstract condition that constitute the authenticity and originality of a work of art; They are now lost with technical reproducibility. Benjamin terms what is eliminated with the new condition as *aura*: "that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art" (1968, p. 221). For Benjamin, this represents "a symptomatic process whose significance points beyond the realm of art" (1968, p. 221). He develops this argument systematically: mechanical reproduction fundamentally alters art's relationship to tradition by substituting unique works with mass-produced copies. This transformation has two key effects. It liberates art from ritual while simultaneously destroying its "aura" of authenticity. As Benjamin states, these processes produce "a tremendous shattering of tradition" that reflects modernity's dual nature of crisis and renewal. Importantly, he emphasizes this phenomenon's inseparable duality: the "positive" democratization of art remains "inconceivable without its destructive, cathartic aspect," what he terms "the liquidation of the traditional value of the cultural heritage"(1968, p.

221). The decay of the *aura* not only was brought about with the new technique and form but also these transformations themselves both led to a new understanding of works of art and are interconnected with the modern social conditions.

Benjamin expounds the concept of *aura* in connection with "cult value" and "exhibition value." The two, according to Benjamin, constitutes polarity of a work of art; One of the two dominates the characteristic of a work of art. Cult value of a work of art refers to its magical and ritualistic roots. The presence of such images is more important than their exhibition. They are sometimes an instrument of magic and targeted at spirits. Exhibition value, on the other hand, refers to the emancipation of artistic production from its ritualistic aspects, that is, the emphasis of the other polar end of a work of art in terms of value. It is with this historical shift, mechanical reproduction of a work of art, that shattered the strong emphasis of cultic value of artistic production from that of exhibition on the sphere of art. This eventually led the removal of authenticity and originality of a work of art, then marked the decay of *aura* and traditional values. Such a shift for Benjamin, which emancipated "the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual" (1968, p. 224) and led to "the absolute emphasis on its exhibition value" (1968, p. 225) is interconnected to "the growing proletarianization of modern man and the increasing formation of masses" (1968, p. 241).

Kristina Karin Shull (2005) relates Weberian notion of disenchantment with Benjamin's *aura*. While Weber points out the retreat of magical, mythical and religious element from every day, and their replacement with those of logic and knowledge, Benjamin discusses the shift in terms of artistic production. As it is indicated above, there exists primordial connection between art and ritual: "the earliest works of art," writes Benjamin, "originated in the service of a ritual—first the magical, then the religious kind" (Cited in Shull, 2005, p. 62). For Shull, both thinkers agree upon the fact that the advancements in science and the rise of intellectualism transformed the role as well as the reception of art and artistic production in society. Arts, especially for Benjamin, disconnected from its ritualist roots, transformed into a commodity in the age where mechanical reproduction prevails (2005, p. 63).

With respect to the earliest connections between art and magical religiosity, the ideas of that of Weber and Benjamin also converge. According to Weber, religion and magical religiosity became a great source and offered opportunities for artistic creation; from idols, icons and other religious artefacts to music to elevate spirit and for magical purposes. It was the scientific progress, and intellectualism and the rationalization of life which came along with it transformed the means of artistic productions as well as its reception. Under the new/modern condition, the link between religion, be it ethical or magical, is loosened, if not broken, so that the reception of art becomes a more conscious process and

provides a this-worldly salvation from the mundane routines and practices of everyday life. Different from Benjamin, however, Weber asserts that under the modern condition arts came to compete with (ethical) religion in terms of salvation, especially to mitigate the effects of growing intellectualism and rationalism, and asserted its complete independency through a conscious discovery of aesthetic values (Weber, 2003, pp. 46–48). According to Weber, the transition from a state of tension between art and ethical religion to a complete rupture of the two came about not with the introduction of new modes of production and its impact, as Benjamin asserts, but with "rationalization of mystical contemplation," as well as rationalization of the other spheres of life, of economic, military, administrative, science and technique. This is also the case in every sphere of Western culture. What once shaped the conduct of people, "the magical and religious forces, and the ethical ideas of duty based upon them," are no longer effectual in modernity.

In Lieu of a Conclusion

Broadly speaking, scientific and intellectual activities that accelerated during the Renaissance had a significant impact not only on their own era, but also laid the groundwork for enormous social and cultural transformations in the centuries to come. Later, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, these developments, combined with the intellectual endeavors of the Enlightenment, fueled the Industrial Revolution, which had an even greater impact on nearly every sphere of human life in Europe and eventually across the globe. It was from this crucible of intellectual, scientific, and industrial change that modernity as we understand it emerged. Both nineteenth-century thinkers and their twentieth-century successors sought to comprehend their evolving social conditions, for modernity's transformations were never complete. Its fluid nature, continually reshaping economic systems, cultural norms, and moral frameworks, made sustained connection with traditional meanings as well as customs and values (whether religious, mystical, or cultural) increasingly difficult. Where Marx theorized modernity's material contradictions (alienation) and Weber its existential ruptures (disenchantment), Benjamin revealed their convergence, together mapping modernization's paradoxical nature as simultaneously emancipatory and destabilizing.

Despite their differing conceptualizations, Marx, Weber, and Benjamin converge on modernity's transformative erosion of traditional values. For Marx, this manifested as the dissolution of the sacred halo surrounding social relations, a mystique that capitalism reconfigured into new ideological forms. The rise of capitalism and the emergence of the bourgeois class not only exposed the oppressive dynamics of feudal and patriarchal relations in premodern societies, but also replaced the old order with its own economic and ideological structures. The new capitalist order in turn transformed not only the means of production but also how people interact with one another. In other words,

capitalism and money relations had a transformative influence on every sphere of social and cultural domains. For Marx, the concern is not the loss of the sacred halo, for he was appreciative of such a loss as well as the dynamism and activism that the bourgeoisie brought about, but rather the bourgeoisie's replacement of that mystique with its own dominant ideology to consolidate power.

In a similar vein to Marx, Weber also believed that modernity reconfigured social and cultural relations and ultimately led to the disenchantment of the world. However, unlike Marx, Weber placed the responsibility on perpetual rationalization and intellectualism that emerged from scientific endeavors. Capitalism, for Weber, is only one aspect of the problem, rather than being the root as in the case of Marx's writing. He argued that what truly transformed modern life was the replacement of substantive rationality, in which personal relationships, ethics, and values were guided by tradition, with formal rationality, based on calculability, efficiency, and impersonal rules. Formal rationality, on the other hand, involved a means-end approach, and universalities of rules, laws and regulations and eventually came to dominate every aspect of life, be it economic, cultural or social. The domination of formal rationality imprisoned people into an "iron cage." In this context, unlike the premodern, who could draw meaning from enchanted worldviews, the modern individual, despite material and cultural advancements, becomes fatigued and spiritually disoriented.

Benjamin's conceptualization of what he calls aura (of a work of art) shares some similarities with Marx's halo, particularly in expressing a loss of uniqueness or sacred presence under modern conditions. Besides, unlike Weber, Benjamin also followed a similar way of thinking with Marx, namely, there is a firm relationship between the base and the superstructure. The material conditions and modes of productions led to alterations in the superstructure where social and cultural relations reside. Thus, while Marx and Benjamin both attributed the loss of halo and aura to the capitalist organization of life, for Weber, the primary force was the rationalization that permeated all spheres of social life. However, what the three authors seem to agree upon is that modernity melted away the meanings once preserved in the vault of tradition. For Marx and Benjamin, this was a hope for a change, for they believed in a historical understanding based on dialectics and hoped for a revolution. Weber, on the other hand, expressed no such hopes for revolution and change. He only attempted to understand the conditions in which people live. Despite their differing conceptualizations, Marx, Weber, and Benjamin converge on the insight that the loss of tradition is not merely a historical fact, but an ongoing condition that continues to disorient individuals within the structures of modern life.

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