

Critical Theory and the Critique of Society

**Duy Lap  
Nguyen**

# **Walter Benjamin and the Critique of Political Economy**

**A New Historical  
Materialism**

B L O O M S B U R Y

“Duy Lap Nguyen shows how Benjamin in his later work appropriates a Marx unsuspected by orthodox Marxists, one whose conception of historical time is no less messianic than dialectical. Through wide-ranging and detailed analyses, he demonstrates the fundamental consistency of this new, allegorically framed historical materialism in Benjamin with the earlier metaphysical anarchism that is understood to culminate in the 1928 *Trauerspiel* book.”

Howard Eiland, co-author of *Walter Benjamin: A Critical Life*

“In a challenge to the dualism, sustained by many scholars and intellectual historians, opposing an earlier, pre-Marxist, and Neo-Kantian Benjamin to the later, militantly anti-fascist but unorthodox historical materialist, Duy Lap Nguyen here argues the case for an ultimate, authorial will to synthesis, albeit one decisively mediated by Benjamin’s often startlingly contemporary understanding of Capital and Marx’s mature critique of political economy. In this way he comes as close as anyone has to presenting us with a Benjaminian opus adequate to the contemporary, acute crisis of capitalism. Along the way, Nguyen likewise educates both new and veteran students of Benjamin with careful and often novel interpretations of most of the major and many of the author’s lesser-known works. This is a work of careful and often exhaustive scholarship.”

Neil Larsen, Professor Emeritus of Comparative Literature,  
University of California Davis, USA



### ABOUT THE BOOK

Walter Benjamin and the *Critique of Political Economy* offers a bold new interpretation of Benjamin's historical materialism and its connection to his early philosophy. This philosophy was based on a twofold critique of neo-Kantian and vitalist theories, including those of Edmund Husserl, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Henri Bergson. In Benjamin's late writings, the dialectical criticism of these opposing forms of philosophy is combined with an unorthodox reading of Marx, inflected by the utopianism of Charles Fourier, which emphasizes the critique of political economy and the concept of commodity fetishism. The result is a new historical materialism in which modernity is defined as the phantasmagoria of an historically specific form of society that assumes the eternal appearance of a cosmological fate.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Duy Lap Nguyen is associate professor in the Department of Modern and Classical Languages at the University of Houston and is also the author of *the Unimagined Community: Imperialism and Culture in South Vietnam* (Manchester University Press, 2020).  
<https://uh.edu/class/mcl/faculty/nguyen-d/>

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