

the two bachelards of louis althusser

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One thing that often strikes readers of Louis Althusser's classic works *Pour Marx* and *Lire le Capital* as out of place, if not totally bizarre, is the constant references made to non-Marxist philosophers, indeed, to philosophers whose theoretical positions are commonly held to be thoroughly idealist. Looking perhaps for reader's guides or introductions to Marx's thought, they are met instead with Althusser's passion for theory and scientificity. Classical Marxist themes such as exploitation, alienation, and commodity fetishism, not to mention class struggle, are hardly mentioned. After all, are not philosophers working in Marx's wake supposed to be transforming the world and not merely contemplating it and producing various theories about it? Of course, it is well-known that Marx sought to settle his philosophical accounts with Hegel's idealism (and his young leftist followers) and Feuerbach's attempted materialist reversal of Hegel in texts such as the *German Ideology* and the *Theses on Feuerbach*. Althusser, in his typology of Marx's work, classifies these polemical texts as so-called "works of the break," that is, works wherein Marx had not yet fully articulated and elaborated the dialectical materialist philosophical position that would later be considered one of his greatest theoretical innovations—still under the shadow of German Idealism, Marx had not yet worked out the philosophical position his nascent historical materialism required. We even know today that Marx read and took extensive notes on Spinoza's *Theological Political Treatise* as well selected fragments and correspondence in 1841², but certainly nowhere in these notes does Marx claim, as Althusser fa-

mously will, that Spinoza is “Marx’s only direct ancestor.”³ Rather, as Alexandre Matheron notes, it is difficult to conclude what exactly Marx gleaned from his reading of Spinoza, which is ultimately more of a montage of citations than a close reading: perhaps Marx projected his own ideas on to Spinoza or perhaps Spinoza was a kind of foil for Marx.⁴ Though Marx’s texts themselves do not directly make clear this relation of direct ancestry that Althusser posits, Pierre Macherey, one of Althusser’s most inventive and precocious students, ends his 1977 study *Hegel ou Spinoza* by drawing out this connection between Spinoza and the dialectical materialism Marx sought to found:

In what conditions can a dialectic become materialist? ...What is or what would be a dialectic that functions in the absence of all guarantees, in an absolutely causal manner, without a prior orientation that would attach to it, from the beginning, the principle of absolute negativity, without the promise that all the contradictions in which it is engaged are by rights resolved, because they carry within them the conditions of their resolution?

This would be, as Macherey suggests, a Spinozist critique *avant la lettre* of the Hegelian dialectic, that is, a truly *materialist* dialectic, a dialectic purged of all teleology. Althusser, for his part, only loosely seems to suggest this in an important footnote to his 1961 essay on the Young Marx. Whereas the Hegelian dialectic presupposes a “*rupture* in conservation,” that is to say, “*a substantial continuity in the process*” where the final stage of the dialectical movement contains the “truth” of the previous moments, Marx, Althusser claims, does not produce a science that would be the “truth” of a set of ideologies, but rather, establishes a new theoretical position that “constitutes a *break* [*rupture*] with ideology,”⁵ a break that does not result in ideology’s sublation and overcoming in the form of a science. Science does not take the place of an ideological problematic, but rather *displaces* it. Spinoza’s distinction between the three kinds of knowledge is the obligatory reference for Althusser, and decidedly not Hegelian *Aufhebung*: “Between the first and second kinds of knowledge, Spinoza established a relation that, in its immediacy (if we abstract from the totality in God) implies precisely a radical *discontinuity* [*discontinuité radicale*]. Though the second kind allows for the *intelligibility* of the *first*, it is not *its truth*.”⁶

Althusser’s reference here to Spinoza *contra* Hegel in order to explain the event of the founding of Marx’s new science implicitly relies upon another non-Marxist reference: Gaston Bachelard, the great thinker of *rupture* and *discontinuité radicale*

in the history of science and the formation of the scientific spirit. If a passionate Spinozism, as Althusser will confess in his *Éléments d'autocritique*, was a kind of antidote to the predominant structuralist tendency in French thought⁷, so-called French Historical Epistemology is no doubt the other most important of Althusser's non-Marxist references. Not only was Bachelard Althusser's master's thesis supervisor in 1947—though he apparently did not read a word of the *mémoire* on Hegel that Althusser submitted—but he will become for Althusser, beginning in the early 1960s, a point of reference, both nominally and conceptually, that will mark the entirety of his thought. However, Althusser's fidelity to Bachelard, as well as to fellow travelers Jean Cavaillès, Alexandre Koyré, Georges Canguilhem, and Michel Foucault, earned him scorn among Marxist intellectuals. Michel Vadeé, writing in 1975, in fact dedicated an entire book to this topic. He writes in his *Bachelard ou le nouvel idéalisme épistémologique* that a Marxist philosopher turning to Bachelard represents "...an abandonment of the very foundations of the theoretical conceptions of Marx and Engels."⁸ On this account, Bachelard, who Althusser invokes to defend Marxism's scientificity turns out to be the source of the uncriticized idealist tendencies that Althusser smuggles into his reading of Marx at the expense of losing all materialist credentials!

What follows is a reconstruction of the way in which Althusser borrowed the philosophical category of "epistemological break" from Bachelard while simultaneously transforming its meaning and its theoretical function.⁹ In other words, Althusser does not simply mechanically apply the epistemological break to Marx, but rather in so doing, to borrow an expression from Canguilhem, varies "its extension and comprehension" and confers upon it "the function of a form."¹⁰ Indeed, Alain Badiou writing in 1967 argued that Althusser implicitly defines dialectical materialism "...as being a *formal theory of breaks [coupures]*,"¹¹ that Althusser, in some sense, attempts to both formalize and generalize what in Bachelard's work only remained a kind of philosophical refrain or theme that is never developed systematically.

What's more, however, Althusser's relationship to Bachelard changes in important ways as his own thought evolves. If the language of epistemological break—both *coupure* and *rupture*—and radical historical and epistemic discontinuity remain more or less consistent in Althusser's work, the role that these categories play in his philosophical strategy change significantly. Put rather schematically, Althusser first employs Bachelard in order to produce a novel solution to a loosely Popperian problematic of demarcation¹², that is, appealing to Bachelardian epis-

temic discontinuity in order to guarantee, as it were, the distinction between science and ideology and to produce a theory of this very distinction. In a second moment, Althusser withdraws materialist philosophy from this epistemological debate and from theories of knowledge *as such*. This withdrawal no doubt corresponds directly to Althusser's later claim in his explicitly self-critical texts that "*philosophy is, in the last instance, class struggle in theory*,"¹³ leading some to argue that this new politicized theory of philosophy "formalised the shift away from Bachelardian epistemology"¹⁴ while others used it as proof for the claim that "there never was an Althusserian epistemology."¹⁵

But, on the contrary, what I intend to show is that this redefinition of philosophy as class struggle in theory in fact signals a *rapprochement* between Althusser and Bachelard, and not the former's abandonment of the latter. What will hopefully become clear is that Althusser paradoxically is able to ally himself more closely with Bachelard at precisely the moment when his initial philosophical project, the one propped up most explicitly by an appeal to Bachelard's authority, collapses. By turning to recently published archival material, I aim to show that the Bachelard that Althusser initially constructed in fact evolved over the course of two decades.

Perhaps Althusser only became a faithful student of Bachelard over the course of many years and after laborious reformulations of his philosophical approach. And yet the culmination of Althusser's engagement with Bachelard results in a kind of deconstruction of the classical problems of epistemology, what Badiou will call a "de-epistemologization of philosophy."¹⁶ Tracking this *désépistémologisation de la philosophie* is precisely what I intend to do in the following sections by following the place of Bachelard in the development of Althusser's thought from 1965 to the recently published manuscripts drafted in the late 1970s.

THE ROLE OF BACHELARD IN ALTHUSSER'S *THÉORIE* PROJECT

The *explosion althusserienne*¹⁷, as François Dosse has called it, was fully underway in 1965 when Althusser published his two most well-known works, *Pour Marx* and *Lire le Capital*, in a new collection he was directing at the radical left-wing publishing house François Maspero. The new collection, bearing the name *Théorie*, was no doubt intended to be a larger platform for the philosophical research Althusser himself was inaugurating in the two aforementioned works. What exactly was the goal of this new philosophical undertaking? Althusser explains the *Théorie* proj-

ect in two places. First, in a short text included on the back cover of the original French editions of *Pour Marx* and *Lire le Capital*, Althusser explains that the *Théorie* collection will include texts and essays that will seek to define and explore “the field of a philosophy conceived of as Theory of the production of knowledges” and it is to be both “critical and positive.” Critical insofar as it will attempt to establish a non-idealist philosophical position and positive to the extent that it will propose categories “suited to think the forms and modes of the process of the production of knowledges.” This will in turn require a “theory of the structure of theoretical practice” and its difference from other practices, a “theory of the history of the production of knowledges” and its difference from other histories, and finally a “theory of the structure and the history of non-theoretical practices upon which theoretical practice is articulated.”

This three part theory—theory of theoretical practices, theory of the history of the production of knowledges, and theory of the structure and history of non-theoretical practices—is *in fact* already contained in Marx’s work. Dialectical materialism, as any Marxist knows, is the official name of this “new philosophical project.” However, as Althusser often points out, Marx devoted more time to the development of historical materialism and less time to developing the philosophy of dialectical materialism, which is left in *l’état pratique* in works like *Capital*. But the *Théorie* collection is also greatly inspired by “a certain number of original works in epistemology” as well as works on the history of ideologies and the history of knowledge and scientific research. This new collection will ultimately be the site of an *encounter, une rencontre*, of mutual “examination, exchange, and confrontation” between Marxism and certain works in epistemology and the history of science, which Althusser claims are from this point forward, indispensable to one another.

Second, Althusser adds one crucial clarification to this understanding of the *Théorie* project in a short section of *Pour Marx*, which is not included in the English translation. In a page-long text that appears between the introduction to *Pour Marx* and the book’s first chapter, Althusser explains why he has chosen to adopt the term *Théorie*. He writes, “the article on the *Materialist Dialectic* [sic] proposes the term *Theory* (with an uppercase) in order to designate Marxist ‘philosophy’ (dialectical materialism)—and reserves the term *philosophy* for *ideological philosophies*.”¹⁸ There is, however, as Althusser himself notes, a precedent for adopting this terminology. Althusser rather confusingly quotes Engels in what he calls “his first preface to *Anti-Dühring*,” by which he means what is today known as

“The Old Preface to *Anti-Dühring*” or as “On Dialectics,” first published in 1925 as part of *Dialectics of Nature*. Engels writes: “If theoreticians are semi-initiates in the sphere of natural science, then natural scientists today are actually just as much so in the sphere of *theory, in the sphere of what hitherto was called philosophy.*”¹⁹ The emphasis here seems to be Althusser’s²⁰ and he immediately follows up this quotation with commentary that reads: “This remark proves that Engels had felt the need to inscribe in a terminological difference the difference that separates ideological philosophies from Marx’s absolutely new philosophical project.”²¹ A terminological difference is thus needed to account for a real theoretical difference, the difference that separates ideological philosophy from the “scientific philosophy founded by Marx.”²²

This is then the point at which Bachelard comes into play. Althusser, as announced in two introductory places in his seminal work, has proposed a terminological difference in order to account for what he insists is a profound theoretical difference between Marx and his predecessors. *Théorie* indicates that philosophy as it has been understood and practiced since its inception must, in light of Marx, be radically transformed. What is important, however, is that Althusser is not claiming that philosophy post-Marx need simply be replaced by revolutionary practice or class struggle, but rather that philosophy is itself a theoretical *practice* and in turn needs to be revolutionized and nourished by Marx’s theoretical discoveries. Indeed, this is the task of *Pour Marx*: to develop in the French idiom a distinctive contribution to Marxist *philosophy*.²³ And Althusser’s wager is precisely that Marxist philosophy is qualitatively different from previous philosophical systems. Marx’s philosophy is *scientific* whereas all previous philosophies are *ideological*. This qualitative difference or “*specific difference...thus takes on the form of the question of knowing whether or not in the intellectual development of Marx there existed an epistemological break [coupure épistémologique] marking the emergence [surgissement] of a new conception of philosophy.*”²⁴ Immediately following this loose invocation of Bachelard, Althusser claims that a Marxist theory and method will be crucial in locating the site of this break: “without a theory of the history of theoretical formations we would not be able to grasp and designate the specific differences that distinguishes two different theoretical formations.”²⁵ Now comes the first mention of Bachelard in the book. Althusser tells us that his usage of the concept²⁶ “epistemological break” is owed to Gaston Bachelard while the concept “problematic” comes from his friend Jacques Martin, despite the clear Bachelardian origins and resonances of the term.²⁷ In order to give an account of the specific difference between the scientific concepts put to work by Marx in *Capital* and the

ideological pre-history with which Marx broke, Althusser believed:

it possible to borrow for this purpose the concept of *'problematic'* from Jacques Martin to designate the particular unity of a theoretical formation and hence the location to be assigned to this specific difference, and the concept of an *'epistemological break'* from Gaston Bachelard to designate the mutation in the theoretical problematic contemporary with the foundation of a scientific discipline.²⁸

Althusser's project during this early period, as described by the young Jean-Luc Nancy, "is not any different than the Bachelardian analysis of the constitutions of modern physics, or the works of Koyré."²⁹ Indeed, Althusser endeavors to show that with Marx the theoretical problematic shifts, old philosophical questions are displaced, new concepts are produced and are in need of elaboration—a materialist dialectic that is essentially overdetermined, a theory of structural causality, a new theory of ideology, etc. Engels too, in his introduction to the second volume of *Capital*, underlines precisely that the history of science is defined by mutations and discontinuities. Marx's discoveries in the field of political economy are analogous to Lavoisier's discovery-production of oxygen, which led to the overturning of the phlogiston theory and the birth of modern chemistry.³⁰ Just as Bachelard claims that "There is thus no transition between Newton's system and Einstein's system. We do not go from the former to the latter by amassing knowledges, double checking measurements, lightly rectifying principles. What is necessary, on the contrary, is an effort of total novelty,"³¹ Althusser too insists in *Lire le Capital* that with Marx we witness "the absolute beginning of the history of a science."³² Engels is then, according to Althusser's reading, a proto-historical epistemologist to the extent that he shows how an apparently circumscribed scientific problematic (phlogiston theory, bourgeois political economy) can give rise to an absolutely discontinuous new problematic that restructures the entire scientific field. *Pour Marx*, it might be said, attempts to establish the specific difference or rupture between dialectical materialism and previous philosophical systems (Feuerbach, Hegel), while *Lire le Capital* performs the same operation with respect to historical materialism by inquiring into the specific difference that separates Marx from the classical economists. Marx formulates the questions to which the bourgeois economists gave answers despite themselves, without realizing that the terms and stakes of the investigation must be fundamentally changed. The theory of symptomatic reading³³ introduced by Althusser at this point in his *exposé* is meant to help detect these changes in theoretical problematics, but is never developed

beyond the introduction to *Lire le Capital*.

Where would Althusser have found inspiration for such claims in Bachelard's work? Althusser never gives any precise references to specific passages in Bachelard, but perhaps he had in mind the final chapter of *Le matérialisme rationnel*: "We believe," Bachelard writes, "that scientific progress always displays a rupture, perpetual ruptures, between common knowledge and scientific knowledge, as soon as we approach an evolved science, a science which, due to the very fact of these ruptures, bears the marks of modernity."³⁴ Reading this passage alongside the one cited above where Bachelard describes a kind of incommensurability between the systems of Einstein and Newton, it becomes clear that "rupture" might here have a double sense: on the one hand, there are ruptures, to greater or lesser degrees, between different scientific theories, between different conceptual systems. In the example given above by Bachelard, it might be said that there is a rupture between Einstein and Newton, but also that Einstein's theory restructures, redefines, and recasts the terms of Newton's theory. On the other hand, there is another rupture, this time more absolute, between what Bachelard calls common knowledge and scientific knowledge. In short, science is, in this view, defined essentially by a break with everyday experience, immediate perception, and common notions. Bachelard of course also sought to analyze the way in which our ordinary experience crystallizes into images that in turn block the path of science, producing what he called "epistemological obstacles."³⁵ The history of science is then neither linear in a crude empiricist sense—science does not simply function by accumulating observations about an unchanging external reality nor is it the slow unveiling of pre-given truths—and a science's development is impossible without the active intervention of concepts and techniques, without an applied rationalism and a technical materialism.³⁶ This second sense of rupture even helps to make sense of Althusser's famous theoretical anti-humanism: does not Althusser, like Bachelard, simply wish to say, by way of this polemical turn of phrase, that knowledge can never be the result of immediacy? Or as Bachelard put it, "when we turn towards ourselves, we turn away from the truth. When we have intimate experiences, we fatally contradict objective experience."³⁷ In other words, Marx does not produce the theory of the capitalist mode of production, that is, knowledge concerning a particular theoretical object, by appealing to first person experience, immediate perception, or to an uncriticized notion of "man", but rather arrives at knowledge of this later by way the detour of theory: "These men [real men] are thus the *point of arrival* of an analysis that begins with the social relations of an existing mode of production, class relations, and the

class struggle.”³⁸ Science begins only by a step beyond immediate sensible experience, beyond what is given to consciousness. The phrase scientific knowledge is, as Georges Canguilhem remarked, a pleonasm since there is nothing scientific nor objective in pre-theoretical knowledge and our everyday experience of the world.³⁹ In the world of phenomenological experience there is only error. In the language of Althusser, we might say that science begins by breaking with ideology and never ceases, beginning with this initial rupture, to break with itself. On this point Althusser and Bachelard certainly seem to converge.

Two points merit being addressed here concerning how Althusser transforms Bachelard’s thought. The first concerns Althusser’s claim, in *Pour Marx* and in contemporaneous texts⁴⁰, that Marx, unlike others who inaugurated scientific revolutions before him (the birth of Mathematics in the ancient world, Galileo, Newton, Lavoisier)⁴¹, in fact founded *two distinct sciences*, Historical Materialism *and* Dialectical Materialism. Indeed, as was suggested above, Althusser is claiming that with Marx philosophy becomes a scientific discipline *for the first time in history*. Althusser writes in “Matérialisme historique et matérialisme dialectique”, an untranslated text from 1966, that “Marx’s philosophy occupies a place of *exception* in the history of philosophy,” that is, like a science breaking with its ideological pre-history, Marx’s philosophy “presents this unique characteristic in the history of philosophy of *breaking with this ideological past*, and installing philosophy on new bases, which confer to it a character of objectivity and theoretical rigor comparable at every point to that of a science.”⁴² The details of what exactly Althusser means by this claim is admittedly not always clear, but he suggests that it is Marxism’s discovery of the continent of history and the development of historical materialism that allows Marxist philosophy to take the place of idealist theories of knowledge that, by their ignorance of the *history of the production of knowledges*, were doomed to “lack and mask the reality of history.”⁴³

Now this claim that Marx founded both a science of history and a scientific philosophy goes against the spirit and the letter of Bachelard’s project. Indeed, nowhere does Bachelard suggest that philosophy has or will ever itself become a unique scientific discipline. On the contrary, as Dominique Lecourt shows in his master’s thesis published in 1969 as *L’épistémologie historique de Gaston Bachelard*, Bachelard never tires of ridiculing philosophers who have failed to appreciate the innovative conceptual power of the sciences to displace classical philosophical problems. The philosopher, by and large, tends towards a double obfuscation of scientific practices. On the one hand, philosophers ignore the conceptual function of words

like “space”, “time”, “substance”, and “matter” in the scientific contexts in which they are produced.⁴⁴ On the other hand, philosophy “wishes with science to get to the bottom of things. And in order to do so, it searches for origins. It returns to the rudimentary...and little by little introduces into the philosophy of sciences the most fully entrenched axioms of the philosophy of knowledge: the axiom that would have it that the *primitive* be always the *fundamental*.”⁴⁵ Bachelard, against the ontologizing and fundamentalist ambitions of the philosopher of immediate experience and intuitive knowledge, precisely sought to *se met à l'école des sciences*, that is, to produce a philosophy subtle enough to be thoroughly informed by the scientific breakthroughs of the 20th century. “Science does not yet have the philosophy it deserves,”⁴⁶ writes Bachelard in the opening chapter of *Le matérialisme rationnel*, and Althusser, for his part, is suggesting that with the advent of Marx’s dialectical materialism that philosophy is finally in a place to authentically understand the history of science conceived of as *the history of the production of knowledges*. Dialectical materialism is, in other words, the philosophy that science deserves.

Combined with Marxism’s historical analysis, Althusser no doubt thought it possible to develop a non-empiricist epistemology combined with a non-teleological history of scientific practices that would be able to theorize the sciences as distinct historical theoretical practices that produce knowledges according to the immanent norms of their proper development without the need to appeal to external or extra-scientific criteria of truth. In this way, Althusser believes himself to have displaced all of the classical problems of epistemology or theories of knowledge. By classical problems of epistemology and theories of knowledge, Althusser has in mind a number of different philosophical positions. He explains in the recently published *Initiation à la philosophie pour les non-philosophes*, in a chapter entitled “Scientific Practice and Idealism”, that empiricism, formalism, and neo-positivism all share a common philosophical problematic, namely, they all attempt, from a position external to the scientific practice itself, to produce “guarantees” for the validity and objectivity of scientific knowledge, and in so doing, they presuppose the prior existence of certain necessary conditions of possibility and forms of experimentation that govern scientific practice. Philosophers then control and determine the validity and limits of scientific practice from an external position of authority. This externality, Althusser claims, has a precise political function as well: “The philosophical guarantee of science has changed its meaning; instead of basically serving the liberation of the sciences and of men, it becomes a principle of the authority of order.”⁴⁷ Essentially a philosophy of order, the various strands

of idealism all seek to define, delimit, and control scientific practice (and political practice) by defining *in advance* the validity of certain forms of practice.

Materialism, on the contrary, seeks neither to prescribe forms nor to produce speculative guarantees for the content of particular practices. Instead, by conceiving of knowledge as the *effect* or result of distinct theoretical practices, as what is *produced* in and by thought by way of a process of conceptual labor—this is Althusser’s famous reading of Marx’s 1857 *Introduction*⁴⁸—Marxist philosophy is able to open up a new philosophical problematic distinct from that of the transcendental *a priori* conditions of the possibility of knowledge and experience (Kant) and that of the knowing subject (the ego cogito in Descartes or Husserl). Replacing it with a new set of questions and problems, in particular, the materialist epistemological question *par excellence* becomes thus:

*by what mechanism does the process of knowledge, which takes place entirely in thought, produce the cognitive appropriation of its real object, which exists outside of thought in the real world? Or again, by what mechanism does the production of the object of knowledge produce the cognitive appropriation of the real object, which exists outside of thought in the real world?*⁴⁹

In addition, this materialist epistemological question is inserted into a historical problematic. Althusser writes, for example, in a text from April 1965 that:

The object of dialectical materialism is constituted by what Engels calls ‘the history of thought’, or what Lenin calls the history of the ‘passage from ignorance to knowledge’, or what we can call the history of the production of knowledges—or yet again, the historical difference between ideology and science, or the specific difference of scientificity—all problems that broadly cover the domain called by classical philosophy the ‘theory of knowledge.’⁵⁰

Dialectical materialism both can help to address questions about how thought is capable, by means of a purely immanent process, of producing knowledge of the real. That is to say, as Nicos Poulantzas explains, “...producing the most concrete concepts, that is to say concepts that are the richest in theoretical determinations, which allow for the knowledge of real objects, concrete and singular”⁵¹ and permitting an historical understanding of how the distinction between science and ideology plays out in particular conjunctures. Indeed, Althusser writes in

the opening text of *Lire le Capital* that “Marx was only able to become Marx by founding a theory of history and a philosophy of the distinction between science and ideology.”⁵² Althusser, then, it might be said, hopes to use Marx’s materialist analysis of history in order to more fully flesh out a general theory of epistemological breaks or ruptures, that is to say, to reconstruct elements of Bachelard’s epistemological project on the basis of historical materialism.

This leads to the second point concerning the way in which Althusser transforms Bachelard. An important consequence that follows from integrating a theory of epistemological breaks into a materialist analysis of history is the need to produce a new theory of ideology. That is to say, a *materialist theory of epistemological obstacles*. Certainly one of Bachelard’s greatest merits was precisely to psychoanalyze objective knowledge, that is, to refuse to see the history of science as quarantined off once and for all from the intrusion of non-scientific elements⁵³, to argue that for the scientific mind that “Nothing goes without saying. Nothing is given. Everything is constructed.”⁵⁴ Science requires perpetual effort and transformation, a constant vigilance, hence why Bachelard will claim that the philosophical rationalism that ought to accompany scientific practice is always at the order of a recommencement.⁵⁵ And so if Bachelard seems to affirm, in his own way, that knowledge must be conceived of as an historical production, one shortcoming of Bachelard’s thought seems to be that the idea of epistemological obstacles is never put onto a materialist basis. Dominique Lecourt writes, for example, “It must be candidly stated: all that enables Bachelard to think the necessity of the ‘epistemological obstacles’ is a certain conception of the human soul which roots the ‘imaginary relationship’ in the imaginary images produced by the imagination.”⁵⁶ In other words, Bachelard has yet to produce a materialist theory of ideology, one wherein the epistemological obstacle belongs not to the psyche of the individual scientist or some atemporal human nature, but is rather theorized as an instance in the social formation.⁵⁷

BACHELARD AS AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL OBSTACLE

As I hope to have shown in the previous section, Althusser’s two 1965 publications, which sought to reinvigorate Marxist dialectical materialism—re-baptizing it as *Théorie* so as to mark its qualitative difference from all previous philosophical inquiry—results in its identification with an historical epistemology as well as in Althusser’s more elliptical claim that this encounter of Marxism with the works of Cavailles, Bachelard, Koyré, Canguilhem, and Foucault will aid in securing the

scientific credentials of both historical and dialectical materialism. It should of course be noted here that Althusser's argument is explicitly circular and he admits as much. In order to read Marx we must have at our disposal "a Marxist theory of the differential nature of theoretical formations and their history, that is to say a theory of epistemological history, which is Marxist philosophy itself."⁵⁸ Echoing this point Pierre Macherey writes in his contribution to *Lire le Capital*:

Philosophy is nothing other than knowledge of the history of sciences. Philosophers are today those who produce the history of theories, and *at the same time* the theory of this history. The problematic of philosophy is thus double, but not divided: to philosophize is to study *in what conditions* and *on what conditions* scientific problems are posed. For a materialist, these conditions are not purely theoretical: they are first of all objective and practical.⁵⁹

Again, the circularity or double aspect of Marxist philosophy—Althusser suggests at one point that this is in fact what makes it dialectical⁶⁰—implies that, employing the concept of history elaborated in historical materialism, it will be able to give a rigorous account of the historical production of knowledges and their difference from ideologies. This can then in turn be applied to historical materialism in order to show the shift in problematic from classical bourgeois economy to Marx's *Capital* and to dialectical materialism in order to show the shift in problematic from mechanical materialism and idealist dialectics to Marx's new historical materialist epistemological problematic. In other words, by claiming that Marxist philosophy is founded precisely on theorizing the historical difference between science and ideology, Althusser believes that he has proven, in some sense, that both historical and dialectical materialism have earned the title of science. Their retrospective differences with respect to previous theories allows us to draw a line of demarcation between science and ideology.

Yet there is precisely a contradiction at the heart of Althusser's attempt to use Bachelard to help establish both the scientificity of Marxism and to develop the theory of the specific difference between science and ideology that essentially defines Marxist philosophy. The problem is not simply that Bachelard nowhere treats Marxism as a science and devoted none of his efforts to establishing its historical emergence as a unique scientific discourse—focusing instead on physics, chemistry, and mathematics—but rather that nowhere does Bachelard attempt to develop a general theory of scientificity, that is, a general theory of the differ-

ence between science and ideology, science and non-science. Furthermore, in the absence of such a theory, Bachelard never seeks to prove scientificity by seeing particular sciences as evidence for the validity of his general theory, but rather, he seeks to reorient philosophy in the light of the development of particular sciences, demanding that philosophers reform their ontologizing and foundationalist projects alongside and after the sciences recast and transform their concepts and problematics.

For Bachelard then, science leads the way and philosophers should follow, not the other way around. And as the sciences become more specialized and plural, the more it is necessary for philosophy to abandon its attempts at hierarchizing and systematizing knowledge into one coherent over-arching system. If there ever was ever a Bachelardian revolution in philosophy, it lies precisely in this reversal of determination and the demand that a scientifically enlightened philosophy be produced, one attuned to the complexities and subtleties of contemporary physics, chemistry, and mathematics: “When everything changes in culture, and methods and objects, we might be surprised that philosophical immobility is valued. Such a philosopher who at 60 years of age that he is still defending the claim he defended 30 years ago. The entire career of certain philosophers today is thus a ‘constant defense.’”⁶¹ Philosophers, for Bachelard, would do well to stop defending their tried and true positions and instead open themselves up to a productive dialogue with the sciences. Though Althusser seems to affirm this view throughout his work, it is arguably nothing other than this idiosyncratic use of Bachelard that creates a kind of *epistemological obstacle* for Althusser, an obstacle that he will have to address directly in the years following *Pour Marx* and *Lire le Capital*. In fact, it is only in subsequent texts that Althusser will claim that philosophy exists in the wake of scientific and political revolutions, that is, that philosophy is *conditioned* by science and politics.

Étienne Balibar directly addresses these problems in his 1977 talk “The Concept of Epistemological Break from Bachelard to Althusser.” There, Balibar suggests that the appeal to Bachelard indeed feels like an attempt to *guarantee* the scientificity of Marxism—keeping in mind that Althusser’s materialist epistemology appeared not to concern itself with guarantees or juridical (transcendental) questions⁶², but only sought to understand the mechanism by which thought produced knowledge of the real. In other words, the appeal to Bachelardian epistemic discontinuity becomes for Althusser a kind of argument by analogy that Althusser imports into his discussion of Marx. In turn, Althusser seeks a kind of external guarantee

or verification for the scientificity of Marxism in the figure of Bachelard, that is to say, in something extrinsic to the scientific theoretical practice itself:

We can then no longer escape, in one form or another, the hypothesis of an essence of Science [*LA science*], the object of a general Theory that cannot be absolutely distinguished from a theory of knowledge or a Science of sciences (even though Althusser directs his whole polemic against such an idea...we might even ask ourselves if...the concept of ‘epistemological break’ is not for Althusser an *ad hoc* concept intended in advance to *include* Marxism (and psychoanalysis) in the field of science.⁶³

By making use of the category of rupture or break in this way, Althusser tried to formalize a general theory of breaks that would itself be inscribed in the a general theory of the history of sciences conceived of as an historical process of the production of knowledges.

And yet it is this appeal that directly violates, on Althusser’s own terms, one of the crucial aspects of Bachelard’s thought that he also defends in the same breath, namely, the requirement that a science’s criterion of truth and validity be purely immanent to its operation. As Alain Badiou rightly points out, “Althusser is truly an *immanentist* thinker, at every level of its determination. A truth of a theory—if truth exists, if there is something like truth—lies purely within the theoretical process, inside the process of scientific theory and not in the value of an external guarantee.”⁶⁴ After all, Althusser, again reasoning analogically, writes in *Lire le Capital* that “No mathematician waits for physics, where entire parts of mathematics are applied, to have *verified* a theorem in order to claim that it has been demonstrated: the ‘truth’ of the theorem is supplied to it 100% by criteria purely *internal* to the practice of mathematical demonstration, thus by the *criteria of the mathematical practice*.”⁶⁵ Mathematics needs nothing other than itself to legitimize itself, its criteria of truth and normativity are strictly internal to its practice and rely neither upon empirical verification or falsification nor upon any other discourse, such as physics.

But the *Théorie* project, for all its talk of immanence and internal criteria of truth, and despite its attempts to defend the practice of sciences against appeals to transcendental conditions of possibility and empiricist theories of knowledge that seek to ground scientific practice in verification or falsification procedures—what Althusser calls pragmatism⁶⁶—ultimately seems to be propped up by the impor-

tation of the Bachelardian theme of discontinuity as the marker, indeed the hallmark, of the birth of a science.

To my mind, to put it a rather schematically, Althusser has indeed transposed the Bachelardian language of rupture and break into a context—the political-polemical not to mention theoretical context of defending the scientificity and novelty of Marx—where this very notion serves a function incompatible with Bachelard’s project, that is to say, Althusser sees in the category of “epistemological break” the possibility of producing, to borrow an expression from Karl Popper, a “criterion of demarcation.” In order to distinguish between science and pseudo-science, to exclude Marxism and Psychoanalysis from the kingdom of science, Popper famously argued that a science must specify the conditions under which crucial experiments might come to falsify the conjectures that define a scientific theory. Despite the explanatory power of Marxism and its apparent systematic coherence, it, like Freudianism and Adlerian individual psychology, seemed to be able to explain everything and saw every event as a confirmation of an overarching theory that could not be disproven.⁶⁷

Without entering into the details here, it seems to me that Popper and Althusser are in agreement up to a certain point: a science can never be a theory of everything, but rather must produce knowledge of a particular object. For Althusser, what is most important is that the object be constructed in theory—and Althusser is quite clear that Marxism, at least historical materialism, produces knowledge of the theoretical object known as the “capitalist mode of production”⁶⁸—and not confused with real objects existing in the world.⁶⁹ Popper, however, implicitly remains an empiricist—despite his attempts, for example, in his response to Kuhn⁷⁰ where he argues that he always maintained that scientists work within a particular paradigm or “problem situation” and thus maintains that sciences construct their objects in some sense—since he explicitly establishes himself in the wake of Hume’s problem of induction: given that I am limited to my experience, I can never exhaustively verify or confirm a given scientific theory, but at the very least I can hope to *falsify* it. Though Popper’s reversal here is no doubt innovative, it still relies essentially upon the finitude of the knowing subject whose representations limit it to the domain of experience from which it cannot be extracted.⁷¹ Science post-Hume is then not hopeless, rather, it simply does not proceed inductively and by way of verification, but deductively and negatively, by way of falsification. Falsification can thus finally be elevated to demarcate or distinguish between science and non-science. The explanatory power of Marxism might be

interesting, but it is certainly cannot be considered scientific if its practitioners cling to it dogmatically.⁷²

For Althusser, however, demarcation, if we can rightly call it that, takes the form of a historical process, which is already many steps beyond the rigidity of falsification, a notion that many, including Thomas Kuhn have criticized as being an untenable and unfounded in the history of science.⁷³ All theories are falsified all the time, especially when they are first introduced.⁷⁴ Bachelard masterfully articulates this point: “All knowledge at the moment of its construction is polemical knowledge [i.e. neither falsified nor verified]; it must first destroy to clear a space for its constructions.”⁷⁵ Althusser’s historical process of demarcation is above all retrospective, which means, unlike Popper, we cannot appeal to one eternal criterion, “methodological falsification,” which would allow us to know in advance which theories are scientific and which are not. The field of differences and distances that relate sciences and ideologies is never determined once and for all and is above all polemic, defined by relations of forces and shifting conjunctures leaving open the possibility of new forms of rationality. In a 1967 article, “The Humanist Controversy,” Althusser most explicitly explains the nuances of his thinking on this question:

The ideology/science opposition is thus always based on a *retrospection* or *recurrence*. It is the existence of science itself which establishes the ‘break’ in the history of theories which can then serve as the grounds for declaring the prehistory of science *ideological*. This break and this retrospection are, however, the correlatives of a real process, that of the constitution of science (born in ideology) through theoretical work that leads up to a *critical* point which explodes in a break, instituting the new field in which the science will establish itself. Whence a paradox: science is plainly born of ideology and in ideology—yet the ideology of which science is born as it tears itself away from ideology can be given the *name* ideology only by the science born of it and separated from it.⁷⁶

Critics, and there are still many, who accuse Althusser of a rigid and clean distinction between science and ideology would do well to read this important passage.⁷⁷ The “post-structuralist” critique, in many ways influenced by Rancière, that all sciences are ideologies or that there is ultimately no way to differentiate between the two, was already anticipated by Althusser: the sciences swim perpetually in ideology and yet still remain irreducible to it to the extent that scientific practice

produces effects of knowledge distinct from ideology's effects of recognition. In other words, there is still something, some excess or rather, some *effect* that science produces that ideology, strictly speaking, cannot. And in this sense, it is not clear that the distinction science/ideology directly maps onto the distinction science/non-science; ideology is not the opposite of science, but rather a different practice occupying a different theoretical space.⁷⁸ Everything hangs on this distinction between opposition and difference.

But to return to Balibar's point, we must insist on the question: does Althusser simply make use of Bachelard's terminology merely to produce a definition of science that would include, against the prohibitions of Popper, Marxism and Psychoanalysis? Yes and no. This very tension traverses two important texts by Étienne Balibar that justify our hesitant response. In a 1988 article "Coupure et refont: l'effet de vérité des sciences dans l'idéologie," Balibar distinguishes Althusser's project from Popper's: "Far from being able to disintricate them in advance, the concepts of science and those of ideology only begin to exist after the fact of the break."⁷⁹ Against Popper, as we have already seen, nothing comes before the break and the demarcation between science and ideology is strictly retrospective. Thus for Balibar, if nothing comes before the break that distributes and redistributes the positions assigned to sciences and ideologies, then Althusser's problematic has nothing in common with Popper's. Yet, in Balibar's earlier article on the concept of epistemological break, he is forced to admit that despite Althusser's best efforts that he remains "caught in the relation of the specular 'guarantee' that he never ceased to describe: in order to be able to think the 'epistemological break' of Marx, he had to anticipate its form by invoking the epistemological breaks typical of mathematics, physics, and chemistry...'*Bachelard*' is then the guarantor of this non critical anticipation."⁸⁰ In other words, Althusser's argument in this period reasons by analogy and assumes that the breaks that define the history of mathematics, physics, and chemistry can simply be identified in the formation of all sciences, including Marxism and Psychoanalysis. Althusser, in other words, might have, despite himself, produced the very philosophy of immobility that Bachelard never ceased to decry.

On the one hand, it appears that Althusser transforms Popper's problematic by making the the science/ideology distinction the result of an immanent and historical process where the two terms do not pre-exist their retrospective distinction. On the other hand, in order to establish this distinction, even minimally, and even if it only is produced *après coup*, after the break, Althusser needs the category of

epistemological break he borrows from Bachelard to guarantee scientificity. If one can locate a break between two theories then one has successfully baptized a new science. This ultimately requires the intervention of a historical epistemologist, in this case Althusser, capable of reconstructing the historical process by which the new science is born out of an ideological configuration, subsequently making the ideology appear, for the first time, *as* ideological. In the same text that was cited above where Althusser provides a sophisticated account of retrospection, he writes that “If Marx had not produced the new concepts appropriate for thinking the objects of his discovery, we would not be able to pronounce the Judgement of ideology that we apply to the notions with which he had to break.”⁸¹ It is Althusser here who capitalizes the J in Judgement and insists that it is indeed a question of a retrospective *judgement* that is capable of identifying ideology in the theories with which Marx broke on the basis of Marx’s new scientific concepts. Again, to even distinguish minimally between science and ideology one must have recourse to a judgement, which in turn presupposes a criterion of demarcation. It is worth recalling that the Greek *kriterion* means principle, element of reference that permits adjudication, estimation, or the defining of something as well as, in mathematics, a practical method permitting one to verify if a mathematical object possess or not a determinate property. Marxism’s scientificity is thus in the hands of dialectical materialism, that is, in the hands of philosophy, and not immanent to its theoretical practice.

ALTHUSSER’S DECONSTRUCTION OF EPISTEMOLOGY

What I would like to propose in this final section is that, if Althusser wants to defend a theory of science wherein normativity and a knowledge producing power are immanent to scientific practice while maintaining that Marxism is a science, then what needs to change is precisely Althusser’s definition of philosophy as *Théorie*. In turn, he must, on his own terms, renounce both that Marxist dialectical materialism is a scientific philosophy *and* that Marxist philosophy, scientific or otherwise, takes as its object the historical difference between science and ideology. This, I maintain, is the major focus of Althusser’s self-critical period and is the only way to begin to understand Althusser’s subsequent writings such as the 1968 talk “Lenin and Philosophy” and its final claim that Marxism is not a new philosophy of practice—indeed, from now on there is no such thing as a new philosophy for Althusser—but a *new practice of philosophy*.⁸² Far from being “the most obscure and sterile moment of Althusserianism,”⁸³ “the least profound text Althusser ever published”⁸⁴, or “sheer non-sense,”⁸⁵ Althusser’s re-discovery of

Lenin's philosophical writings is the necessary philosophical adjustment needed to escape the aporias of *Théorie*. Though many associate this *Kehre* with the publication of *Éléments d'autocritique* in 1974, Althusser, in many places, indicates that he in fact began questioning the efficacy of the *Théorie* project as early as the autumn of 1967. Indeed, it could easily be shown that the self-critical phase begins with Althusser's "Philosophy Course for Scientists," a lecture series he held at the École Normale Supérieure during the 1967-68 academic year (not published, and only partially, until 1974) and which marked an important shift in the Althusserian theory of science and its relationship to philosophy.

What is essential in this period is that Althusser fundamentally changes his definition of philosophy. No longer is Marxist philosophy concerned with answering epistemological questions such as the one posed at the end of the introduction to *Lire le Captail*, namely, the supposedly materialist question of the cognitive mechanism by which thought grasps the real in thought, nor does it attempt to produce a general theory of science and scientificity (the passage from ignorance to knowledge), rather, philosophy is henceforth defined as a distinct theoretical practice without an object, and will later become nothing other than class struggle in theory, the continuation of the proletarian class struggle in the domain of theory. If philosophy no longer produces a general theory of science it is because philosophy now defends the scientificity of science in the class struggle in theory—like in Bachelard, philosophy for Althusser becomes essentially polemical and functions by drawing lines of demarcation between idealist and materialist theses. Thesis 20 of Althusser's course reads: "Philosophy has as its major function to trace lines of demarcation between the ideological of ideologies on the one hand, and the scientific of the sciences on the other hand."⁸⁶ This change of language is important even if subtle. Althusser's claim is precisely that philosophy no longer produces a *theory of scientificity and ideology in general*, that its essential task is to theorize the historical passage from ignorance to knowledge, but rather that philosophy is now said to intervene in the theoretical domain of the philosophical by drawing lines of demarcation or distinguishing between the scientific-ness of the sciences and the ideological-ness of ideologies. In other words, it mobilizes distinctions in a polemical theoretical field to produce certain effects, to produce a defense of scientificity *against* the ideological, but without producing a general epistemological theory or seeking philosophical guarantees for the legitimacy and validity external to scientific practice.⁸⁷ As Giorgos Fourtounis writes, "Marxism's epistemological claim can function epistemologically *only as a thesis*...and thus it is not submitted to a *judgement* that would operate by subsuming Marxism under

a general concept of science produced in turn by a philosophy external to it.”⁸⁸

By producing a finally object-less philosophy, Althusser can begin to assume the materialist position he had been sketching throughout his earlier works *against* the juridical-epistemological position essential to idealism:

It is not by chance if, in order to respond to the ‘question of right’, the classical theory of knowledge puts to work a category like that of the ‘subject’ (from the Cartesian ego to the Kantian transcendental Subject and ‘concrete’ Husserlian transcendental subjects). This category is only the reprise, in the philosophical field, of the ideological notion of the ‘subject’, itself taken from the juridical category of the ‘subject of right’. And the couple ‘subject-object’, ‘the subject’ and ‘its’ object, only serve to reflect in the philosophical field, and within a properly philosophical mode, of the juridical categories of the ‘subject of right’, ‘owner’ *of itself and* of its goods (things). Thus ‘consciousness’ is the owner of itself (*self-consciousness*), and of its goods (*consciousness of its object, its objects*)... From this analysis we will thus retain the following: the immense majority of philosophies, whether religious, spiritualist or idealist, maintain a relation of *exploitation* with the sciences. This means: the sciences are never taken for what they really are... exploiters, in general, and not only in philosophy, never have the impression of being exploiters.⁸⁹

It seems to me, that in such a passage, Althusser has re-oriented and re-adjusted his theory of philosophy—and important to Althusser’s thought in this period is the claim that philosophical theses are indemonstrable, neither true nor false, but rather ‘correct’ [*justes*]⁹⁰—so as to let philosophy operate polemically, not in order to control or limit scientific practice, but rather to aid scientists in overcoming their spontaneous philosophical prejudices. Materialism, though its historical forms change⁹¹, always seeks to defend, and not prove, the real existence of diverse scientific practices producing knowledge of well-defined theoretical objects, while idealism searches for conditions of possibility, guarantees for the objectivity of knowledge, and poses insurmountable obstacles to what is knowable, insisting on the finitude of the subject before an unknowable reality that constantly recedes from thought.⁹² Like Bachelard, Althusser is attempting to produce the philosophy that the sciences deserve, one that does not exploit them for the sake of practical ideologies, but rather is allied with them, that shares their values and interests. Philosophy intervenes in historically determined theoretical

struggles and conjunctures in order to defend scientificity and objectivity without producing epistemological theories. To take a position in theory, Althusser is suggesting, is thus always a political undertaking⁹³, that it is to say, the *representation* of a class position within a specific conjuncture. Epistemology *qua* theory of knowledge, Althusser tells us in a long footnote of his *Elements d'autocritique* is an idealist undertaking by definition since it always attempts to justify the self-legitimizing and self-norming scientific practices in a discourse extrinsic to the scientific practice itself.⁹⁴ Materialism, by refusing to see knowledge as a problem to be solved philosophically, displaces the classical epistemological problematic, making the objectivity and existence of scientific knowledge a *thesis* to be defended, not justified philosophically.

During this period, Althusser was no doubt influenced by the works of his young student, Dominique Lecourt, who was one of the first to systematically and explicitly spell out the theoretical kinship between Bachelard and Althusser. In recently published manuscripts such as *Initiation à la philosophie pour les non-philosophes* and *Être marxiste en philosophie*, Althusser positively cites Lecourt's 1973 book, *Une crise et son enjeu*, where Lecourt analyzes at length Lenin's non-epistemological defense of scientific objectivity and his specific way of intervening into the class struggle in theory against the philosophical position known at the time as empirio-criticism. Led by Ernst Mach, the Austrian physicist and philosopher, empirio-criticism sought to marry idealism and materialism into a new epistemological and ontological theory. However, following Engel's famous claim that the history of philosophy is an age-old struggle between idealism and materialism, Lenin, as read by Lecourt, shows how empirio-criticism is simply the wolf of idealism in sheep's clothes—philosophy is thus this strange theoretical practice where every position is already accounted for, “every space in the first is already taken”⁹⁵, and within which there appears to be no history other than “a history of the displacement of the indefinite repetition of a null trace whose effects are real.”⁹⁶ For Lenin, Mach only re-packages and repeats Hume and Berkeley, forcing Lenin to play the role of Diderot against them. There is then, no third way, no position outside of the struggle between materialism and idealism, and the task of dialectical materialism, is to affirm and defend the following theses in the following order: 1) being has primacy over thought, or the primacy of practice over thought 2) there are scientific practices that produce objective knowledge.⁹⁷

Arguably Althusser too read Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* seriously for the first time beginning in 1967, that is, after having complained to Franca

Madonia in a letter from December 1962 that he is “reading (rereading) Lenin’s theoretical texts philosophy. God, its weak.”⁹⁸ This is the very same Lenin, and for that matter, Engels, that Althusser too quickly dismissed in his writings from the early 1960s⁹⁹ with the single exception being a little-read article from 1964, which served as an introduction Pierre Macherey’s systematic reading of Georges Canguilhem in the article “Georges Canguilhem’s Philosophy of Science: Epistemology and History of Science.” Here Althusser suggests that Lenin was the first to realize that rationalism need not be idealist, but might in fact be compatible with dialectical materialism.¹⁰⁰ However, this new encounter with Lenin is absolutely crucial—Althusser suggests as much at the end of his second lecture in the course for scientists.¹⁰¹ It is as if, writes Warren Montag, “his earlier view of Lenin is not simply corrected or rejected in 1967-68, but is strangely reversed, as if Althusser’s initial denial of the perpetual war in and of philosophy simultaneously affirmed and denied the nature and stakes of this conflict, leaving them visible even as he crossed them out.”¹⁰²

It is typically thought that Althusser wrote and published little during the 1970s, that is, after the events of May 1968, which cemented his status an intellectual out of touch with popular movements. The supposed silence on Althusser’s part is today being contested by the discovery and publication of complete manuscripts at the IMEC archives in Caen that Althusser had composed during this time. As the title of Lecourt’s second book already suggests—*Pour une critique de l’épistémologie*, for a critique of epistemology—there is something fundamentally incompatible about the classical project of epistemology and philosophical materialism, two opposing projects that Althusser once sought to unite by way of Bachelard. In the preface to the English edition of Lecourt’s early writings, *Marxism and Epistemology*, Lecourt sketches an underground materialist current that runs from Spinoza to Bachelard, by way of Marx and Lenin. After citing a passage from *L’activité rationaliste de la physique contemporaine* where Bachelard describes the role of rational values that impose themselves autonomously in the history of a scientific practice, Lecourt writes:

Bachelard is stating...the philosophical thesis that underpins all his epistemological works: that the truth of a scientific truth *‘imposes itself by itself*. In Spinozist terms: ‘*veritas norma sui*’ (the truth is its own measure). In Leninist terminology: Bachelard is posing the thesis of the objectivity of scientific knowledges. He is posing it, not discussing it. He does not seek to found, to *guarantee* this objectivity. He is not concerned to pose to sci-

entific knowledge the traditional question of its claims to validity. This point is crucial, for we maintain that this position is a *materialist* position. A position which enables to take a step outside the theoretical space of what idealist philosophy in its classical period called the ‘problem of knowledge.’¹⁰³

The materialist position in philosophy according to Lecourt, who clearly is developing Althusser’s thought on this point, consists in refusing to make scientific knowledge’s possibility and its objectivity *problems* to be solved by philosophical speculation. To attempt to solve them interior to philosophy can only lead to theories of objectivity, validity, and truth that are external to the scientific practices in question. The history of philosophical idealism is, according to Lecourt and Althusser, an attempt to solve a problem that simply does not exist for Spinoza, Bachelard, and Marxism-Leninism.

A similar declaration is made by Althusser in his *Être marxiste en philosophie*, an introductory philosophy manual he completed drafting towards the end of 1976 before abandoning the manuscript. Spinoza and Marx, writes Althusser, affirm the existence of scientific knowledge “without any commentary.”¹⁰⁴ Spinoza’s *Habemus enim ideam veram* is for Althusser a primitive fact on the basis of which materialism must intervene against all forms of idealism. The same goes for Marx who, according to Althusser, “begins from the *fact* that knowledges exist, some scientific, others not...and thus *rejects the possibility of a prior juridical question*.”¹⁰⁵ Materialism thus seeks to defend the scientificity of scientific knowledges without first posing juridical questions about the subject’s right or cognitive ability to know. Althusser, though he had attempted to critique the juridical foundations of epistemology in *Lire le Capital*, ultimately repeated the very same problematic by posing the question of the cognitive mechanism by which thought grasps the real.¹⁰⁶ Hence why Badiou argued in 1967 and more recently that Althusser’s early epistemological problematic requires a kind of Kantian schematism to link thought to the real, to explain how the real object remains distinct from the object of knowledge and how theoretical concepts help to organize our understanding of the empirical world.¹⁰⁷ Returning in the mid-1970s to Marx’s 1857 *Introduction*, the same text that Althusser commented on at length in 1965, he now argues that Marx sidesteps the entire problematic of epistemology and the theory of knowledge as such “by his simple silence with respect to every question of right, which constitutes the idealist theory of knowledge as a theory of knowledge.”¹⁰⁸ Like Spinoza’s true idea, Althusser describes a Marx advancing almost axiomatically

from the existence of scientific knowledges:

Marx begins from the *fact* that knowledges exist, some scientific, others not. To begin then from the fact (in Spinoza like in Marx) is clearly to refuse the question of right (what can man know, his faculties being what they are?), it is to refuse that idea that we should have to pose to the fact of knowledge (non-scientific then scientific) the question of its titles of legitimacy: for example, the question of knowing if metaphysics, rational psychology (which deduces the properties of the human subject from its faculty of thought and of freedom), rational theology (which deduces from the total perfection of God his faculties and intentions), rational cosmology (which deduces the world's properties from its unity) are or are not scientific knowledges, and the question of what (in chemistry or in psychology) scientific knowledges that man might someday attain, etc. This is —and we must not shy away from it—a very strong idea, which amounts to recognizing the primacy of the fact and the derivative character of right, which rejects the possibility of a prior juridical question...¹⁰⁹

This long passage indicative of what might be called Althusser's deconstruction, or even destruction, of epistemology, resonates with a similar remark Althusser makes in the contemporaneous "Soutenance D'Amiens" where Althusser again treats Spinoza's *Habemus enim ideam veram*:

What does Spinoza in fact mean when he writes in a famous phrase, "*Habemus enim ideam veram...*"? That we have a true idea? No: the weight of the phrase lies on the "*enim*". It is *in fact* because and only because we have a true idea that we can that it is true, because it is "*index sui*". Where does this true idea come from? That is quite a different question. But it is a fact that we do have it (*habemus*), and whatever it may be that produces this result, it governs everything that can be said about it and derived from it. Thus Spinoza *in advance* makes every theory of knowledge, which reasons about the *justification* of knowledge, dependent on the *fact* of the knowledge which we already possess. But this does not prevent Spinoza from talking about knowledge: not in order to understand its Origin, Subject and Justification, but in order to determine the process and its moments, the famous 'three levels' ...¹¹⁰

Spinoza, like Marx, Lenin, and Bachelard, it seems, give us knowledge without epistemology, that is without a foundationalist justification for its possibility and

existence, and without the elaboration of the origin of knowledge (in the subject or the object) or the subject's right to know or possess such knowledge. A materialist epistemology, writes Lecourt in his *Bachelard: Le jour et la nuit*, is a true "theoretical monstrosity,"¹¹¹ and the Althusser post-1967 would no doubt agree. To enter in the field of classical epistemology is to admit necessarily that scientific knowledge is a *problem* and that its existence must be justified and secured philosophically by a theory of knowledge that guarantees its objectivity, validity, as well as a theory of the subject's right to knowledge. The true materialist position, as Lecourt explains in his treatment of Lenin, is to simply affirm that objective scientific knowledge exists. Marxist philosophers caught up in the class struggle in theory are then tasked with defending the unique knowledge produced by historical materialism, since, as Lenin once said, it is the only knowledge whose truth implies the complete and necessary destruction of the prevailing capitalist mode of production.¹¹² If Marxism is an exceptional in the history of sciences, it is because the knowledge it produces is directly implicated in the political practice of the proletarian class struggle. This is why Althusser will later say in his essay "Sur Marx et Freud" that Marxism and Psychoanalysis are conflictual sciences.¹¹³

We can thus say that Althusser's philosophical position was always a kind of "scientism," as William Lewis has recently argued¹¹⁴ insofar as scientific knowledge was always considered politically efficacious and essential when inserted into the proletarian class struggle. What changed, however, was Althusser's theory of philosophy, which shifted from attempting to produce novel solutions to classical epistemological problems, to contesting and refusing epistemology as such. Philosophy was always a distinct theoretical practice for Althusser, but the nature of this peculiar practice changes drastically between 1965 and 1967. Materialism affirms the prior existence of scientific knowledges and seeks to defend them in theory; philosophy is then a theoretical *practice* of intervention, of drawing lines of demarcation between necessarily opposed and incompatible positions. One way to recognize idealism, Althusser seems to be suggesting, is to look for epistemology and theories of knowledge. Against the earlier writings from *Pour Marx* and *Lire le Capital*, Althusser, beginning in 1967, undertakes a deconstruction and destruction of the classical theory of knowledge that he once that Marxism could produce, but only at the cost of repeating Kant's schematism and Popper's problem of demarcation. Althusser's rejection of epistemology, however, is coupled with a militant defense of scientificity, knowledge, truth, and objectivity making his thought anathema to post-modern philosophers. It is a question of defending the knowledge produced by Marxism that is ultimately crucial to the working

class' struggle against capitalist exploitation. Defending the scientificity of Marxism means to recognize the power and efficacy of knowledge in class struggle at the theoretical, political, and ideological levels.

To conclude, I would like to emphasize again that despite positively citing Bachelard throughout his entire philosophical career, Althusser only ever becomes a materialist *and* a faithful Bachelardian by eliminating precisely the epistemological problematic that defined the theoretical stakes of *Pour Marx* and *Lire le Capital*, which are perhaps the two Althusserian works most explicitly indebted, but only on the surface, to Bachelard. As soon as the question of the scientificity of science ceases to be the central Althusserian philosophical question Althusser can authentically assume Bachelard's thought. To be a materialist, Marxist *and* a Bachelardian in epistemology means quite simply to no longer do epistemology in the classical sense. Alain Badiou is absolutely right to claim that Althusser initiated a radical "de-epistemologization of philosophy." Whence the paradoxical conclusion: Althusser is one of the most important inheritors of French historical epistemology precisely at the moment when he refuses epistemology.

NOTES AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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1. Louis Althusser, *Pour Marx* (Paris: Maspero, 1965), 26.
2. Karl Marx, “Le *Traité Théologico-Politique* et la *Correspondance* de Spinoza: trois cahiers d'étude d'année 1841” in *Cahiers Spinoza 1*, (Paris: Éditions de Réplique, Été 1977).
3. Louis Althusser, *Lire le Capital I* (Paris: Maspero, 1968), 128. References to *Lire le Capital* are to the second edition published in 4 volumes between 1968 and 1973 in the series “Petite collection Maspero”.
4. Alexandre Matheron, “Le *Traité Théologico-Politique* vu par le jeune Marx” in *Cahiers Spinoza 1*, 212.
5. *Pour Marx*, n40, 75.
6. *Ibid.*, n40, 75.
7. Louis Althusser, *Éléments d'autocritique* (Paris: Hachette, 1974), 65.
8. Michel Vadée, *Bachelard ou le nouvel idéalisme épistémologique* (Paris: Éditions Sociales, 1975), 8.
9. It is worth mentioning that, as Étienne Balibar and others have pointed out, Bachelard does not use the language of *coupure épistémologique*. He speaks rather of a “rupture épistémologique” on page 104 of *Le rationalisme appliqué* and of a “rupture entre connaissance commune et connaissance scientifique” on page 102 of this same book. The final chapter of *Le matérialisme rationnel* also treats the rupture between common and scientific knowledge. Balibar is right to claim that the point of commonality between Bachelard and Althusser seems to be more generally the “idea of *discontinuity*”. See Balibar's essay “Le concept de ‘coupure épistémologique’ de Gaston Bachelard à Louis Althusser” in *Écrits pour Althusser* (Paris: La Découverte, 1991). Balibar will go on to expand his treatment of Althusser and *la coupure épistémologique* in his essay “L'objet d'Althusser” in *Politique et philosophie dans l'œuvre de Louis Althusser* sous la direction de S. Lazarus (Paris: PUF, 1993).
10. Georges Canguilhem, *Études d'histoire et philosophie des sciences* (Paris: Vrin, 1970, 2edition), 206.
11. Alain Badiou, “Le (re)commencement du matérialisme dialectique” in *Critique*, N°240 mai 1967, 452.
12. Though I am certainly not the first to have pointed out the role of the demarcation problem in Althusser's thought, I tend to side with Étienne Balibar's subtle analyses, which I will treat explicitly below. In other words, I do not think Althusser and Popper formulate and address the problem of demarcation in the same way. Paul Patton suggests the opposite when he writes “Thus, from the standpoint of this broader perspective, Althusser's theoretical tactic of defending Marxism as a science occupies the same theoretical space as Popper's denunciation of it as a non-science some 30 years ago” (“Althusser's Epistemology: The Limits of the Theory of Theoretical Practice” *Radical Philosophy* no. 19 (Spring 1978), 18). More recently, William S. Lewis echoes this claim “Dur-

- ing this period [1960-1965], Althusser solved the problem of demarcation by bringing in Marxist philosophy as arbiter” (“Althusser’s Scientism and Aleatory Materialism” *Décalages* vol. 3 (1), 2016, 11).
13. Louis Althusser, *Réponse à John Lewis* (Paris: Maspero, 1973), 11.
 14. Margaret A. Majumdar, *Althusser and the End of Leninism?* (London: Pluto Press, 1995), 82.
 15. Pierre Raymond, « ...et la théorie dans la lutte des classes » in *Dialectiques* n° 15/16, Paris, automne 1976, 138.
 16. Alain Badiou, “Qu’est-ce que Louis Althusser entend par ‘philosophie’ ?” in *Politique et philosophie dans l’œuvre de Louis Althusser* sous la direction de S. Lazarus (Paris: PUF, 1993), 33-4.
 17. François Dosse, *Histoire du Structuralisme. Tome I: Le champ du signe 1945-1966* (Paris: La Découverte, 2012 [1991]), 343.
 18. *Pour Marx*, 33.
 19. <http://marxists.anu.edu.au/archive/marx/works/1878/05/dialectics.htm>
 20. It is worth keeping in mind that Engels, in the passage quoted above, is simply stating that a scientist’s knowledge is always necessarily limited to the particular domain a scientist researches, and that outside of that circumscribed scientific domain, every scientist is a “layman”, a “semi-initiate” or “*vulgo*.” It follows in turn that all scientists will be semi-initiates in other sciences and in philosophy, just as all philosophers will have to become semi-initiates in science. Engels says as much to prepare the reader that he too is going to appear as a lay-person or semi-initiate the discussion of natural science that readers would ostensibly find in *Anti-Duhring*.
 21. *Pour Marx*, 33.
 22. *Ibid.*, 33.
 23. *Ibid.*, 11-21.
 24. *Ibid.*, 24.
 25. *Ibid.*, 24.
 26. It is worth noting that Althusser calls both epistemological break and problematic “concepts.” His later redefinition of philosophy will require that we refer to them as “categories.” For the sake of this article, I have chosen to call them categories except when quoting Althusser or referring to these direct quotations.
 27. Patrice Maniglier “What is a problematic?” in *Radical Philosophy* 173 (May/June 2012): 21-23.
 28. *Pour Marx*, 24.
 29. Jean-Luc Nancy “Marx et la philosophie” in *Esprit* 394 (mai 1966), 1076.
 30. Althusser comments at length on this passage in *Lire le Capital II*, in particular section VI. on “Epistemological Propositions of *Capital* (Marx. Engels).”
 31. Gaston Bachelard, *Le nouvel esprit scientifique* (Paris: PUF, 1999 [1934]), 46.
 32. *Lire le Capital I*, 12.
 33. *Ibid.*, 28.
 34. Gaston Bachelard, *Le matérialisme rationnel* (Paris: PUF, 1953), 207.
 35. Bachelard treats epistemological obstacles in particular detail in the first chapter of *La formation de l’esprit scientifique* (Paris: Vrin, 1938).
 36. On this point, see *Le rationalisme appliqué* and *Le matérialisme rationnel*.
 37. Gaston Bachelard, *La psychanalyse du feu* (Paris: Gallimard, 1965 [1938]), 14.
 38. *Réponse à John Lewis*, 33.
 39. Georges Canguilhem, “Science et philosophie” (Interview with Alain Badiou) in *Revue de l’enseignement philosophique* (décembre 1964-janvier 1965), 10-17.
 40. In particular two texts with a strange publication history: the untranslated “Matérialisme his-

- torique et matérialisme dialectique.” *Cahiers Marxist-Léninistes*, no. 11, Avril 1966 and “Theory, Theoretical Practice and Theoretical Formation: Ideology and Ideological Formation.” *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists & Other Essays*. Ed. Gregory Elliot. London:Verso, 1990, which has yet to be published in French, but was circulated to the likes of Jacques Rancière who makes extensive use of this text in his polemic *La leçon d’Althusser* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974).
41. For a full list of scientific revolutions and their corresponding philosophical inheritors see Louis Althusser *Sur la reproduction* (Paris: PUF, 1995), 37-38.
 42. “Matérialisme historique et matérialisme dialectique”, 113.
 43. *Ibid.*, 114.
 44. Dominique Lecourt, *Marxism and epistemology* trans. Ben Brewster (London: NLB, 1975), 36.
 45. Gaston Bachelard, *L’activité rationaliste de la physique contemporaine* (Paris: PUF, 1951), 6.
 46. *Le matérialisme rationnel*, 20.
 47. *Initiation à la philosophie pour les non-philosophes* (Paris: PUF, 2014), 200.
 48. *Lire le Capital I*, 38 sq.
 49. *Ibid.*, 67.
 50. Louis Althusser, “Theory, Theoretical Practice and Theoretical Formation: Ideology and Ideological Formation.” *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists & Other Essays*. Ed. Gregory Elliott. (London:Verso, 1990), 8.
 51. Nicos Poulantzas, *Pouvoir et classes sociales I* (Paris: Maspero, 1972 [1968]),12.
 52. *Lire le Capital*, 14.
 53. See the final chapter of *Le matérialisme rationnel* for the critique of “continuists”, 207-224.
 54. *La formation de l’esprit scientifique*, 14
 55. *Le rationalisme appliqué*, 123.
 56. *Marxism and epistemology*,140.
 57. See Ben Brewster’s article “Althusser and Bachelard” in *Theoretical Practice* no. 3 + 4 (Autumn 1971): 25-37.
 58. *Pour Marx*, 31.
 59. *Lire le Capital IV*, 9.
 60. *Pour Marx*, 31.
 61. *Le rationalisme appliqué*, 43.
 62. In *Lire le Capital I*, we read: “The question we are posing [the question of the cognitive mechanism of appropriation]...is not a question of *guarantee*” and on the next page “The simple substitution of the question of the *mechanism* of cognitive appropriation of the real object by means of the object of knowledge for the ideological question of *guarantees* of the possibility of knowledge contains in itself this mutation of problematic that delivers us from the closed space of ideology, and opens for us the open space of the philosophical theory that we are seeking.” (66-67)
 63. “Le concept de ‘coupure épistémologique’ de Gaston Bachelard à Louis Althusser”, 26.
 64. Alain Badiou, “The Althusserian Definition of Theory” in *The Concept in Crisis: Reading Capital Today* ed. Nick Nesbitt (Durham: Duke UP, 2017), 23.
 65. *Lire le Capital I*, 71-72.
 66. *Lire le Capital I*, 67 sq.
 67. Popper explains his motivations for developing his theory of falsification in his 1953 talk “Science: Conjectures and Refutations” reprinted in *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge* (London and New York: Routledge, 1963).
 68. Althusser writes in “Sur le travail théorique: difficultés et ressources” (*La Pensée* no. 132, avril 1967) that “Marx’s *Capital* analyzes not a social formation (a real concrete society), but *the capital-*

ist mode of production: we will say it bears on a *formal or abstract object*” (7).

69. Borrowing from Spinoza, Althusser also finds this same distinction in Marx. Cf. *Lire le Capital* I, 39 sq.

70. Karl Popper, “Normal Science and its Dangers” in *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge* ed. Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1970), 51.

71. I have in mind here Quentin Meillassoux’s claim that Hume is the first correlationist philosopher. For Meillassoux, Hume “inaugurates the properly correlationist form (a sceptical form, in fact) of the ‘correlational circle’: from the circle, he no longer deduces that all reality is spirit, but that we cannot extract ourselves from the sphere of impressions and ideas, and that the thing in itself must remain irreducibly unknown to us.” (See Meillassoux’s paper “Iteration, Reiteration, Repetition: A Speculative Analysis of the Meaningless Sign” available online: https://cdn.shopify.com/s/files/1/0069/6232/files/Meillassoux_Workshop_Berlin.pdf)

72. Imre Lakatos writes, for example, “Thus the early predictions of Marxism were bold and stunning but they failed. Marxists explained all their failures...the Marxian lagged behind the facts and has been running fast to catch up with them.” (“Science and Pseudo-Science” in *The Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes* ed. John Worrall and Gregory Currie. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1978), 6).

73. Thomas S. Kuhn *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (2nd edition). (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

74. In recently published archival texts, Althusser explicitly treats Popper’s theory and agrees on the importance of falsification and experimentation in science, but believes that Popper’s idea of falsification and experimentation are too narrow. Althusser seems to suggest that class struggle is itself a field of possible experimentation and falsification. Not to mention that Althusser’s Spinozism combined with Leninism led him to redefine verification and falsification, which he explains with respect to Lenin’s famous “Marx’s theory is all powerful because it is true.” In “The Althusserian Definition of ‘Theory’” (cited above), Alain Badiou explains Althusser’s anti-pragmatic position, which claims that true theories are not true because they are tested in practice, and in this way, Althusser destroys all dialectical relationship between theory and practice (See in particular page 22). For Althusser’s discussion of Popper and falsification see *Être marxiste en philosophie* (Paris: PUF, 2015) pages 94-97 and *Initiation à la philosophie pour les non-philosophes* (Paris: PUF, 2014) in particular chapter 9 “Scientific practice and idealism”.

75. Gaston Bachelard, *Dialectique de la durée* (Paris: Boivin, 1936), 14.

76. Louis Althusser, *The Humanist Controversy and Other Writings (1966-1967)*. Ed. François Mathéron. Trans. G.M. Goshgarian. (London:Verso, 2003), 268.

77. We read, for example, in Agon Hamza: “...we can say that the very distinction between science and ideology is *ideological in itself*.” (“Fidelity that is not Interpellation: Reading Althusser’s Misreadings” in *Crisis & Critique: Reading Capital 50 Years Later* vol. 2, no. 2 (2015), 269).

78. Pierre Macherey clarifies this point in detail in “A propos de la rupture” in *La nouvelle critique*, n° 166, mai 1965. He writes, “This is why we cannot say that science replaces ideology, nor that it is preferable to ideology or superior: science is not ‘better’ than ideology, since precisely these two terms cannot be compared” (138).

79. Étienne Balibar, *Lieux et noms de la vérité* (La Tour d’Aigues: Éditions de l’Aube, 1997), 129.

80. “Le concept de ‘coupure épistémologique’ de Gaston Bachelard à Louis Althusser”, 25.

81. *The Humanist Controversy*, 268.

82. Louis Althusser, *Lénine et la philosophie suivi de Marx et Lénine devant Hegel* (Paris: Maspero, 1972), 44-45.

83. Emilio di Ípola. *Althusser, el infinito adiós* (Buenos Aires: Siglo veintiuno editores, 2007), 62.
84. Éric Marty. *Louis Althusser, un sujet sans procès: anatomie d'un passé très récent* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), n3, 90.
85. Helena Sheehan, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Science: A Critical History* (London: Humanities Press, 1985), 145-146.
86. Louis Althusser, *Philosophie et philosophie spontanée des savants* (1967) (Paris: Maspero, 1974), 26.
87. For a close analysis of Althusser's course, and thesis 20 in particular, see Pierre Macherey, "Althusser and the Concept of the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists" trans. Robin Mackay. *Parrhesia* no. 6 (2009): 14-27.
88. Giorgos Fourtounis, "Balibar and the Philosophy of Science: The Question of the 'Epistemological Break'." *Balibar and the Citizen Subject* ed. Warren Montag and Hanan Elsayed (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2017), 204.
89. *Philosophie et philosophie spontanée des savants* (1967), 93-95.
90. *Ibid.*, 14. Though the term "correct" in English is perhaps a bit clunky, the English expression "to adjust" or "adjustment" nicely captures what Althusser has in mind when he redefines philosophical practice in this way.
91. This is precisely why Alain Badiou's thought is materialist. It is not because he produces a theory of matter or takes into account material conditions, but because he has drawn out the immense philosophical implications of axiomatic set theory. Infinity, in the current scientific-political conjuncture, is the materialist category *par excellence*.
92. Is this not the position maintained today by most speculative realists? Objects ultimately belong to a strange science-fiction universe wherein their being is irreducible to their primary and secondary qualities, resulting in the inexhaustibility of their essentially mysterious nature. A line of demarcation must be drawn between the work of Quentin Meillassoux, who defends the power of mathematical formalization to exhaust the real, and somebody like Graham Harman, who simply radicalizes Kant to claim that not only can humans not have direct access to the real, but objects cannot even be said to interact with each other directly since they too lack access to the real. Does he not, in expanding Kant in this extreme way, simply apply mechanically to the entire universe the finitude Kant reserved for the human subject? Is this not the most crude anthropomorphism despite Harman's attempt to produce an *object oriented* philosophy?
93. Knox Peden's recent treatment of Althusser in his ambitious and thoroughly researched *Spinoza Contra Phenomenology: French Rationalism from Cavaillès to Deleuze* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2014) insists throughout that Althusser's commitment to science (rationalism) forecloses any possible political commitment (see page 14-15, 174-17, 262-263 and *passim*). Indeed, this is the thesis of Peden's entire book. Peden substantiates this claim by quoting Althusser saying "In the same way, it may be said that the science of politics is not political," but rather than suggesting that science is "neither...determined by the political nor does it have an effect on the political" (174), I take it that Althusser is in fact arguing that science *qua* internal theoretical consistency of its theoretical practice is politically indifferent. In other words, truths *qua* being true are not automatically politically efficacious, but, for Althusser, must be fused with the class struggle of the proletariat. Was it not Spinoza who radically re-thought the Cartesian distinction between true and false to make it such that the sheer presence of truth is not enough to dissolve what is false? And is this not commensurate with Althusser's thought?
94. *Éléments d'autocritique*, n1, 51-53. "a word...*Epistemology*. It led us to Bachelard who constantly used the word, and to Canguilhem, who, we did not notice, rarely used the word. We abused it (myself above all) and we did not know how to control it...What do we mean by *Epistemology* Lit-

erally: the theory of the conditions and the forms of scientific practice and its history in different concrete sciences. But this definition can be understood in two senses. In a *materialist* sense, it could have led us to study the material, social, political, ideological, and philosophical conditions of theoretical ‘modes of production’ and ‘processes of production’ of existing knowledges: but then this would domain would fall under Historical Materialism! And conversely in a *speculative* sense, Epistemology could have led us to formulate and develop a theory of *Scientific Practice* [la *pratique scientifique*] in its difference from other practices: but how is this different from philosophy defined as well as “Theory of theoretical practice”? We were this on the terrain of ‘Dialectical Materialism’, since philosophy was, and only was, Epistemology...If Epistemology is philosophy itself, their speculative unity cannot but reinforce theoreticism. But if Epistemology falls under...Historical Materialism, then we must inscribe it therein, and, at the same time, recognize the illusion and imposture of its project. We must (as we have since noted) renounce and criticize idealism and the trace of all Epistemology.”

95. *Philosophie et philosophie spontanée des savants*, 116.

96. *Lénine et la philosophie*, 40-41.

97. Dominique Lecourt, *Une crise et son enjeu: essai sur la position de Lénine en philosophie* (Paris: Maspero, 1973), 47 and *passim*.

98. Louis Althusser, *Lettres à Franca: 1961-1973* (Paris: STOCK/IMEC, 1998), 306.

99. We read for example in “Matérialisme historique et matérialisme dialectique” that Marx’s philosophy is still in the practical state, unlike historical materialism, which Marx was able to elaborate in depth in *Capital*. “It [Marx’s philosophy] is presented in a still *partially ideological* form in the great polemical texts of Engels and Lenin. In none of these ‘works’, is Marxist philosophy given to us in a truly adequate and rigorous form.” (98)

100. Louis Althusser “Présentation” of Pierre Macherey’s “La philosophie de la science de Georges Canguilhem: épistémologie et histoire des sciences” in *La pensée* no. 113 (janvier-février 1964): 50-54.

101. *Philosophie et philosophie spontanée des savants*, 78.

102. Warren Montag, “Althusser’s Lenin” in *diacritics*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (2015), 61.

103. *Marxism and epistemology*, 12.

104. *Être marxiste en philosophie*, 173-4.

105. *Ibid.*, 173-174.

106. Althusser, *Lire le Capital*, 65-85.

107. “The Althusserian Definition of Theory”, 33.

108. *Être marxiste en philosophie*, 172.

109. *Ibid.*, 173-174.

110. Louis Althusser, “Is it Simple to be a Marxist in Philosophy?” *Essays in Self-Criticism*. Trans. Grahame Lock. (London: New Left Books, 1976), 187-188.

111. Dominique Lecourt, *Bachelard: Le jour et la nuit*. (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1974), 170.

112. Lenin, “Marxism and Revisionism (1908)” in *Collected Works, Volume 15* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1973), 29.

113. Louis Althusser, “Sur Marx et Freud” *Écrits sur la psychanalyse*. (Paris: Stock/IMEC, 1993), 229.

114. William S. Lewis, “Althusser’s Scientism and Aleatory Materialism” in *Décalages*, Vol. 2, no. 1, 2016.