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Louis Althusser

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# On the Contemporary Phenomenon of “Fashion”

Translated by Daniel Fairfax

## Translator’s Introduction

Buried among the many hitherto undiscovered treasures to be found in the boxes of written material deposited by Louis Althusser’s estate at the IMEC archive in Caen is his unpublished article “Sur le phénomène actuel de la ‘Mode’.”<sup>1</sup> Consisting of nine typewritten pages, the text is – a handful of typographical errors aside – close to being in a publishable state, although Althusser freely admits to the provisional nature of the remarks made within. For reasons unknown, however, the article never found publication at the time, and was evidently abandoned by Althusser soon after being written. Although the manuscript is undated, the IMEC archivists place its composition at circa 1971, an estimation that appears reliable in light of the text’s content.

For Althusser scholars, the importance of “Sur le phénomène actuel de la ‘Mode’” is manifold. First and foremost, it presents a lengthy exposition of his views on an ideological domain, fashion, which receives little attention elsewhere in his writings – or, indeed, in the entire body of Marxist thinking on ideology. Given the moment of its provenance – soon after the publication of his groundbreaking article “L’Idéologie et les appareils idéologiques d’état” in *La Pensée* in June 1970 – it is also one of the earliest examples of Althusser applying the newly established concept of the Ideological State Apparatus to a particular sphere of ideology: in this case, fashion, and, more specifically, the “contemporary phenomenon” of fashion among young people in the period immediately following the student revolts of 1968.

Notably, Althusser departs markedly from the prevailing attitude within the Marxist movement towards social phenomena such as youth fashion. Rejecting an idealist account of such a phenomenon (that it is the result of the imagination or fantasies of individual designers or consumers), he also refuses what he terms an “economistic explanation” for trends in fashion, as being

incapable of accounting for those sartorial forms that gain in prominence at a given moment. To subsequently categorize fashion as “an *ideological* phenomenon, an *ideological* effect” is by no means a theoretically original move. Where Althusser may surprise readers, however, is in his measured defense of new forms of youth fashion emerging in the wake of the 1968 protests; for the philosopher, they constitute a manifestation (albeit an “inferior” one) of the inchoate sentiment of revolt prevalent amongst young people in the advanced capitalist countries during the period of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Moreover, this revolt is itself a delayed effect of the *ébranlement* (given in this translation as “upheaval,” although “shaking” or “trembling” are closer to the literal sense of the word) and decomposition of the Ideological State Apparatuses in the imperialist countries since the end of World War II.

While Althusser therefore emphasizes the positive nature of contemporary youth fashion (its symptomatic display of an aspiration to revolt, particularly against those ISAs which are most pertinent to the daily life of young people: the family, the education system, the police), he also examines its chief limitation: specifically, the fact that the level of political consciousness it represents “falters at the threshold” delineating social revolt from genuine revolutionary action. Youth fashion is thus an “impotent” form of revolt, an “imaginary Ersatz” or compensation for the perceived failure of more directly political militancy.

Althusser concludes the text with a practical political message: the rudimentary effects of the upheaval of the ISAs in the capitalist world (youth fashion among them) may only be converted into revolutionary praxis by “*their correct inscription*” within the activity of the Communist Party. Such a stance may elicit chuckles from present-day readers, but it was in accord with the philosopher’s chosen political strategy of working within the communist movement in order to re-orient the party towards the layers of radicalizing youth in France – many of whom (including those Althusser was personally close to) were orbiting around Maoist, Trotskyist or anarchist currents instead of the PCF. The final paragraph also points to a broader critique of Communist Party policy: on the issue of youth revolt, in Althusser’s view, “matters are no longer dependent on the youth, but on the CP itself – on its

general politics, which in the end is reflected in its politics towards the ISAs, towards the young, and towards 'cultural problems'."

That the watershed moment of May 1968 instigated a profound change in Althusser's thinking on fashion, along with a metamorphosis of his broader conception of ideology, can be seen in a comparison of "Sur le phénomène actuel de la 'mode'" with a set of preliminary manuscripts entitled "Notes sur la révolution culturelle et l'idéologie" from 1966, also held in the IMEC archives.<sup>2</sup> Here, Althusser hews much more closely to Marxist orthodoxy in squarely ascribing fashion's ideological role in class society to that of distinguishing and recognizing class divisions, as the following passage attests:

*For example, fashion is part of ideology. We do not merely dress ourselves to protect our body from inhospitable weather, but also to wear the clothing suitable for a particular profession, and thus to take our place within the technical division of labor. In this way, we also dress to be recognized – as a mason, a train driver, a teacher, etc. – and to distinguish ourselves. At the same time, we dress to "be correct," to respect a certain number of social (or moral, or aesthetic) norms; in short, to "situate" ourselves within society at large. Fashion thus fulfills its proper function, since it "situates" – that is, inserts and secures – the individual and "assures" his secure position within society, in a determined place.<sup>3</sup>*

*And yet, in class society, the division into classes also takes possession of fashion and its function, and imposes on it a class function. As such, we also dress a certain way to show that we belong to a particular social class, and this is especially the case with the dominant class; one also dresses to show – with one's wealth, one's "taste", and one's "freedom of spirit" – either that one does not belong to the "lower" classes, or that one places oneself "above class." One dresses to be "distinct": to not be confused with the lower classes, even when one belongs to them (the petty-bourgeois), or to look as if one belongs to the upper classes, even when one does not (again: the petty-bourgeois). Fashion thus becomes a sign of class distinction and recognition. This aspect can, depending on the historical conjuncture, remain*

*superficial; in other cases, however, it can assume a serious political significance. The history of the French revolution suffices to convince us of this: during the Thermidorian reaction, fashion was quite assuredly a sign of political allegiance in the class struggle. In each instance, therefore, we must precisely estimate the virulence or non-virulence of the class distinction in this sector of ideology (mores) that is fashion.*

Intriguingly, Althusser immediately follows this passage with a brief discussion on the relationship between art and ideology – one of the most vexed issues within the Althusserian theoretical tradition – and exposes his embryonic idea that ideology consists of “montages” of ideas and behaviors/gestures. The suggestion is thus made that fashion and art possess a comparable relationship with ideology, and that his comments on fashion can be applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to other aesthetic forms. But this question, as Althusser himself would say, must be developed further elsewhere.

## **On the Contemporary Phenomenon of “Fashion” (ca. 1971)**

[1]

Without claiming for an instant that I am presenting *even* an “element” for a general theory of fashion, I would like to make a few superficial remarks on the reasons for the mass diffusion of contemporary *forms* of fashion among today’s *youth* (diffusion = “takes” [*prise*], in the same way that in French we say that mayonnaise “takes” [*prend*]).<sup>4</sup>

It goes without saying that I shall refuse two widespread types of explanation:

1. An explanation ascribing this phenomenon to fantasy, the need for change, the imagination (in this case, among young people), etc.
2. A purely economic explanation: ascribing it to the competition between fashion labels for the conquest and renewal of the market, for the conquest of the market through renewal – even while taking account of the fact that

this economic competition enables a different model of capitalist fashion labels (both the major fashion houses and the mid-size labels) to enter the market, as well as the current and recent forms of competition (designer dresses, mass-produced high-end fashion, prêt-à-porter, etc.).

The first explanation is psychologistic and tautological: it explains nothing. The second explanation explains everything – except the success of the *forms* of fashion that actually do succeed.

I shall begin with a principle that will not be justified here, but only illustrated. This principle can be articulated in the following way: the success, the diffusion, the "taking-up" of definite forms of a new fashion represent an *ideological* phenomenon, an *ideological* effect. In order to understand what takes place in present-day life, and thus to understand what is "ex"-hibited in the outfits<sup>5</sup> worn on the streets of the Latin Quarter (as well as just about everywhere else in Europe and throughout the world), we have to return to this *ideological* "cause" and define it as much as is possible. *Note*: in limiting our investigation to this (ideological) cause and its effects, we should not lose sight of *other* determinations, without which what we are about to describe would only be partially intelligible. (We should not lose sight, for instance, of the *encounter* between this ideological cause and the mechanisms of the pursuit of profit in the fashion market; nor should we lose sight of the fact that this *specific* ideological cause is only a particular instance of the effectiveness of ideology *in general* on the forms of fashion as such; we should not lose sight of these facts, but, unable to say everything at once, we will not speak about them here).

What, then, can be said about this ideological "cause"? Roughly speaking, I believe that we can defend something like the argument contained in the following remarks. Our starting point is a fact: to wit, the fact that the phenomena of contemporary fashion are noteworthy for their mass diffusion [2] *among the youth of all* capitalist countries (and perhaps, too, in certain "socialist" countries?). It will also be a principle: we must consider this fact as the result of an entire process, which has unfolded over the course of many years.

I would even say that the crisis of imperialism – marked by World War II, the wars of national liberation and the popular-socialist wars after World War II, and their repercussions in the class struggle within the capitalist nations – has been progressively translated (progressively: that is, through an accumulation of events which end up acquiring significance) into a profound upheaval [*ébranlement*] of the Ideological State Apparatuses to which young people are (more or less specifically) subjected, and above all by the upheaval of the Religious Apparatus, the Family Apparatus, the Educational Apparatus and the Cultural Apparatus. Furthermore, I would say that – due to the radical non-explanation of the causes of the Stalin era, the reformist evolution (under governmental forms apparently in contradiction with this reformism) of the “socialist” countries, the crisis of the international communist movement, the Cultural Revolution, etc. – the section of the ISA that interests us here (that is, the Communist Parties) have also undergone a considerable upheaval (which can be perceived in their “tail-endism” [*suivisme*]<sup>6</sup> and their incapacity to confront the present situation – which is, briefly put, the crisis of Imperialism and the upheaval of the great Ideological State Apparatuses of the bourgeoisie).

The result can be described as follows. Today’s youth has experienced the effects of the upheaval of the Ideological State Apparatuses in question (and *this is a good thing*), without, however, having found an *organization* capable of confronting the effects of this upheaval, and without having found an organization equipped to transform this anxiety, this “disenchantment,” this upheaval of traditional “values,” into *action*. In short, the *crisis* of youth is expressed in *revolt* (and not in revolution).

Such a judgment warrants being considerably nuanced. For this *revolt* has often been accomplished in the light of real, effective revolutionary movements that truly exist in the world: Cuba, Vietnam, China, the Cultural Revolution. Nonetheless, the transposition to advanced capitalist countries of these exotic models – borrowed either from “under-developed” countries, or from communist countries – has proven to be extremely difficult, and the reasons for this are by no means accidental (the *Little Red Book* cannot be directly applied in France). This revolt saw itself as revolutionary, but often faltered (whether in the short or long term)

[3] at the threshold of mere revolt – such is the history of the *groupuscules* formed after May 68. This failure (of every single one of these *groupuscules*) will later appear as a proof of the impossibility of importing external forms into a country where the requisite forms are absent (for definite historico-political reasons).

Let us go further back than the recent period, for its causes themselves must be put in perspective once again. That is, they must be related to a longer-term period – that to which we alluded when we spoke of the upheaval of the Ideological State Apparatuses, and of their effects on today’s youth. This upheaval began well before May; it produced effects well before May. As I said earlier: these effects are fundamentally effects of revolt, or effects of liberation with respect to given values, institutions, *commands* [*ordres*] and *prohibitions*.

After having said a word (in order to mark, at one and the same time, both its exceptional character and its implacable limits) about the *superior forms* of this revolt, that is to say, after having said a word about the organizational forms of May, or those that came out of May, I am now obliged to take stock of the *inferior forms* of this revolt, in order to finally speak about fashion. I shall mention only briefly (because a serious study is necessary, whereas I can only offer a handful of pointers and recollections) those “fashions” which are not related to clothing, and which for a time reigned over the youth of the day. For example, the mythology of the generation gap in France – young people in opposition to old people, to the “fogeys” [*croulants*] and the “WMIPWs” (“won’t-make-it-past-winter”) [*NPPH*, “*ne passera pas l’hiver*”],<sup>7</sup> etc., which was merely role-play, but which was nonetheless symptomatic (albeit very limited in its effects). Or, to take another example, the “fashion” of new-look<sup>8</sup> singers such as Johnny Halliday in France (and without doubt many others of the same style, not to mention the Beatles, who are a borderline case), among others. It was in these different fashions that young people found the (“cultural”) forms of their “liberation.” That is to say, they *realized* an ideology of liberty-demarcation-refusal-liberation. We can, however, say that at the same time as the youth “realized” this ideology, the same ideology (and this is indeed what is at hand here) *was realized in these forms*.

If this hypothesis is not arbitrary, it can be applied to contemporary “fashion” (in the stricter sense of clothing). Several features are striking. The most striking is without doubt (and this has already been mentioned) its *mass diffusion* and its irresistible *contagion*. Another feature: this fashion is not uniform; on the contrary, it offers an extraordinary variety of forms, from very short to very long dresses, from the distinction between the sexes to their confusion, etc. It is as if every [4] individual (whether a young woman or a young man) were offered such a varied and contradictory range of choices that they could truly find, here, the figure of their liberty.

It was in this way (the apparent disaggregation of all forms of clothing into the multiplicity of its baroque variations) that the ideology of the liberty of youth found the forms of its realization. Of course, this liberty is, as with every revolt, a liberty *against: against* the classical forms of dress and hairstyles, against the classical forms of the absolute distinction between the sexes (through their clothing or hairstyles), and, above and beyond the classical forms, against the classical rituals and practices of everyday cultural existence.

This form of protest/revolt is often quite touching. What strikes me the most is another feature, of which I have not yet spoken, but to perceive which one only needs to observe the comportment of young people in the streets, wearing their new outfits: namely, that *this liberty is equal for all*. The protest realized in the forms indicated is also a protest against an old fatalism, inscribed in the ancient forms of fashion – between, let us say, beauty and ugliness. It is as if the fact of adopting the clothing of the new fashion rejected this distinction, and rejected it *in practice*. Whatever their size, whatever their face, it is as if the boys and girls who are followers of the new fashion had henceforth entered a world where they could gain a new appearance of which only they were the judges. This world is that of their equality, and even of their liberty.

Here we can perhaps better take the measure of this ideology, or rather of the forms of its existence. It does not only exist in the world of clothing, but also in the allure and the gestures inherent in this fashion, and in a certain ritualized conduct that *goes hand in*

*hand* with this fashion. This ritualized conduct is, first of all, conduct that relates to the attributes of this fashion (the ways in which a given item of clothing is used) and its effects (the ways in which one's dressed body is used); it is also a way of conducting oneself among peers, and towards others. This ritualized conduct is inscribed in a whole series of *practices* and *lifestyles*, which can concern a given existing institution (the Family, the School, etc.), or which can function within new institutional relations (cf. the Hippies and other groups).

[5]

\* \* \*

If these scattered remarks are not merely imaginary, they deserve, first of all, to be seriously examined and completed.

But in their present rudimentary state, they would permit us to note:

1. If the phenomenon of "fashion" in clothing that can be observed has such an exceptional prevalence among today's youth, and is centered on them, this is due to historical reasons which must be at least *as important as* the phenomenon itself – and not less important. An example: it is not enough to invoke the need (the simple need) to defy a sexual taboo in order to explain the phenomenon of the miniskirt. It suffices to "see" the manner in which young women conduct themselves with respect to this fashion, and with respect to their visible body, to be convinced that this defiance of a sexual taboo is only a tiny part of a much greater act of defiance, in which it is present, but primarily on a symbolic level, and which infinitely outstrips it.

2. If the phenomenon of "fashion" in clothing can be ascribed to historical reasons, these historical reasons can only be produced by a long process, and are not sudden occurrences (a particular event, or a particular inspiration). These reasons lead to other "elements," "forms" and "realities" intervening that are quite distinct from clothing fashions: "cultural" reasons and realities (it would be necessary to study the history of mass cultural practices: singers, dance music, etc.), reasons and realities that are "cultural" in

another sense (the upheavals of the ISAs about which we spoke above), and finally political reasons and realities.

3. If the phenomenon of contemporary fashion in clothing can be ascribed to an ideological “cause,” it is thus an effect that, in order to be understood, must be situated *among other present or absent effects*, produced by the conditions that have rendered this “cause” effective. It was in this capacity that I was able to speak of *inferior forms* of revolt, in opposition to “*superior forms*” (by alluding, as it were, to their faltering at the threshold of revolt). This necessarily leads us back to the economico-politico-ideological analysis of the general conditions of the historical period that has given rise to these inferior and superior forms. This *positioning [mise en place]* would have the significance of bringing the plenitudes and voids of a given historical situation to light, the *voids* being just as interesting as the plenitudes, if not more so. From this moment on, the phenomenon of contemporary fashion in clothing is no longer one fact among others: it possesses, by dint of its positioning, a precise, *diagnostic* political signification. In other words, it poses the problem of what a non-bourgeois mass cultural politics should be [6], on the basis of the diagnostic elements that it provides. Better than this, it poses the problem of knowing, from the point of view of the masses, what “culture” is (because we don’t give a damn about what “cultivated people” think of culture, since, as soon as they believe themselves to be cultivated, they are only ever the ideologues of the dominant class), what this culture is “made” of, what the truly determinant elements in this “culture” are, and how they should be addressed from a proletarian point of view.

[7]

*Note:*

The touching aspect of what this phenomenon of contemporary fashion (among the youth) represents, and of the *ideological protestation* and *aspiration* that are linked to it, lies in the following contradiction:

- a. its positivity.
- b. its impotence.

*Its positivity.* We cannot understand it (this protest/aspiration: that is, its refusals and hopes) if we do not relate it to a vast series of other events, which culminated in May, and which subsist in the failure of the present period. In actual fact, the (almost ineluctable) disaffection of the micro-groups should not lead us to conclude that young people are prone to discouragement and despair. It is not only the case that the rest of the world, from Cuba to China, by way of Vietnam and Palestine, *always* gives young people reasons to persevere in a state of encouragement and hope; it is not only because the advanced capitalist countries, cutting their losses on a bet that they cannot win, leave enough room to these young people (even in schools and universities, in spite of the repressive measures undertaken) for them to organize the existence of their “dreams”; it is because the *decomposition of the ISAs* of the capitalist world necessarily produces this revolt, and because this decomposition, *which is irreversible*, will not be interrupted, and will not cease to be accentuated. Why? Because between the effects of the decomposition of the ISAs in the capitalist countries, on the one hand, and the global (and national) class struggle, on the other hand, there exist objective links which are – for better or for worse, and in spite of all the obstacles and deformations – felt, more or less obscurely, more or less confusedly, but *felt* all the same. It is for all these reasons that, *at its core*, the ideological reaction of protest/aspiration of today’s youth is utterly positive.

This is why it is only *secondarily* that we will note all the negative elements that can tarnish a given ideological reaction. As far as the fashion in question is concerned (and, more generally, other cultural phenomena?), there are obviously *petty-bourgeois* aspects, which are those of the majority of forms of *revolt, defiance* and, in a general manner, of the realization of “liberty” in symbolic practices. These can even go so far as to negate the objectives pursued.

[8]

*Its impotence.* We cannot avoid noting the objective “play” that has been observed (and that is still observable today) between the different *forms* of realizing this protest/aspiration. There was a shift from May to fashion. Fashion (and other collateral cultural phenomena) can, in this respect, be conceived as an *inferior* form,

a a form of *replacement*, or a form of substitution for the *more elevated (political)* forms of realization. Ultimately (and this is certainly the case in an entire fringe, and possibly more?, of today's youth), it can even be conceived as an "imaginary Ersatz," akin to a compensation, an imaginary compensation, for the failure of political forms. We can even say that, for a section of today's youth, fashion functions in its classical form at the same time as it functions in this imaginary form: as an index of discrimination, distinction, recognition-distinction, under the alibi of the realization of liberty.

If we must take this limitation seriously, then we should ask the question: *why this impotence?* Several reasons come to mind.

1. Youth, in and of itself, does not exist. We cannot speak of young people without taking into account the social classes from which they are drawn. And yet, in the phenomena considered above, those young people who seem to have the most important part, and who are playing the leading role, are the urban youth (and, what is more, the urban youth of the biggest cities) – which would not be a social determination if we did not add that they are, for the most part, petty-bourgeois (as indistinct as this term is) and bourgeois, *or* subject to petty-bourgeois ideological influences. The ideology of revolt, liberation and defiance would find its meaning and its limits within petty-bourgeois ideology.

2. I believe that this does not suffice. Not only because we cannot make an abstraction of working-class young people (who are also urban), but also because a remarkable quality in an entire series of contemporaneous phenomena is their extension-contagion (May is the most famous example of this). I would thus invoke another "cause" of the impotence in question. It is tied to the very cause that has been invoked: the upheaval of the ISAs. Here we touch on realities that have not been studied, or that have been poorly studied (at least to my knowledge). What does *the upheaval of an ISA* mean? What did Marx mean in the *Communist Manifesto* when he announced the "dissolution of the bourgeois family"? What is the significance of the upheaval of the Educational Apparatus? Experience shows that these Apparatuses possess an extraordinary degree of resistance and extraordinary [9] resources of permanence and re-establishment, as well as prodigious

capacities to disguise their conservation under the appearance of renovation (cf. Edgar Faure’s Orientation Law<sup>9</sup>). In other terms, the revolution against the ISAs is carried out in forms which, in spite of the extremism that adheres to them, manage to break the “umbilical cord” that links them to the ideology in question only at the price of infinite difficulties. I signaled above that many years were needed for the process of the upheaval of the ISAs to produce visible effects. One can add that even when these effects become visible, they dissimulate other effects, which are, this time, effects of *conservation*. If the ISAs in question are truly the immediate milieu in which young people live, it is their ideology that weighs on these very young people, including on the forms of their revolt, as well as on the meaning of their revolt. A simple comparison would here permit us to take the measure of the facts in question. Lenin in the USSR, when speaking about the school system (cf. Krupskaya<sup>10</sup>), and Mao in China, when speaking about the Cultural Revolution, both *insisted* on the long struggle (years and years) indispensable to revolutionize the old ISAs. And these declarations were made about socialist countries. They give an idea of the limits of what we may call the upheaval of the ISAs in countries that are still capitalist. This upheaval, experienced by many as radical/definitive and thus as imminently revolutionary, can only be *very limited*, if we consider objective reality. That it is *very significant* does not prevent it from also being very limited. Its effects on youth “consciousness” are also limited, even if young people experience these limited effects in the form of extremism. This form of extremism is only the inverted form of this limit, and what permits us to tolerate it, all proportions guarded, in its denegation.

3. To get to the bottom of matters, the effects (even if they are limited) of such an upheaval can only receive their full meaning and utility – that is, they can only be converted from dreams into reality, from revolt into revolutionary activity – through the Communist Party. It is by *their correct inscription* in the revolutionary activity of the CP that the limited effects indicated above can outstrip their limits, and surmount their impotence. In order for them to be inscribed in the activity of the CP, it is necessary: 1. that their cause be known and recognized [*connue-reconnue*], and 2. that a place be found for them within the activities of the CP – *their place*. In this sense, we can say that

matters are no longer dependent on the youth, but on the CP itself – on its general politics, which in the end is reflected in its politics towards the ISAs, towards the young, and towards “cultural problems.” But this question must be developed further elsewhere.

### Translator’s Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Louis Althusser, “Sur le phénomène actuel de la ‘Mode’,” IMEC archives, file number ALT2.A18-03.10. The pagination of the original manuscript is provided in square brackets in the translation.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Louis Althusser, “Notes sur la révolution culturelle et l’idéologie,” IMEC archives, file number ALT2.A7-01.04. The following quote appears on page 7 of the first of four manuscripts contained in this file.

<sup>3</sup> The following phrase is appended to the end of this sentence, but has been struck out by Althusser: “while letting him enjoy his liberty, because he believes that it is he who has chosen this place.”

<sup>4</sup> Althusser’s explanation of his use of the word *prise* in relation to the mass diffusion of fashion trends relies on the idiomatic French expression “*la mayonnaise prend*”, which literally pertains to the manner in which the ingredients of mayonnaise congeal with one another, but which is also used to refer more generally to the elements of any situation or process cohering together.

<sup>5</sup> Althusser here uses the unorthodox variant *vestmenture*.

<sup>6</sup> In the Bolshevik political tradition, “tail-endism” or “tailism” (*khvostism* in the Russian) is used to refer to those opportunist tendencies of the socialist movement that have a propensity to pander to existing working-class political sentiment, rather than seeking to win working-class layers over to a revolutionary consciousness. *Suivisme* is more widely used in French than its English equivalent, but Althusser is clearly using the term in its Marxist-Leninist sense.

<sup>7</sup> Both of these expressions – *croulant* being roughly equivalent to *fogey*, while *NPPH* has no adequate English counterpart – already sounded dated by the time of the article’s writing.

<sup>8</sup> “New-look” is in English in the original.

<sup>9</sup> The “Orientation Law,” also known as the “Faure Law” after the Gaullist minister of education Edgar Faure, enacted a far-reaching reform of the French higher education system in the wake of the May 1968 protests, and included the founding of the “experimental” university at Vincennes.

<sup>10</sup> The exact citation Althusser has in mind here is uncertain, but it is probable that he is making reference to Nadezhda Krupskaya’s *Reminiscences of Lenin* (trans. Bernard Isaacs, New York: International Publishers, 1960).