Surrealist Utopias and the Cuban Revolution

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"Surrealism always wanted to be, in his own domain, a catalyst of revolt and this ambition corresponds in the political order with the Cuban example. It aspires to become the link between the separate moments of revolution."[1] Affirming this statement in 1964 in its review *La Brèche*, the Paris Surrealist Group publicly demonstrated its recognition of the importance of the revolution that had occurred on the Caribbean Island five years earlier. After the many political disillusions faced by Surrealism, especially during its long and difficult relationship with the French communist party during the mid-1920s and mid-1930s, such explicit support for an established political government can appear astonishing. What in the Cuban revolution seduced the Surrealists during the first years of government?

First of all, Cuba was not a *terra incognita* for Surrealism. Even if André Breton never went to Cuba during his American exile, the island is part of a Caribbean culture that fascinated the Surrealists. In the 1960s, Agustín Cárdenas and Jorge Camacho, two members of the group living in Paris, strongly embodied this sensitive link. There were also historical and political reasons for this support . The hope of a profound political and moral change seemed to vanish since the end of the Algerian war—during which the Surrealists, together with other left-wing intellectuals, strongly demonstrated their anti-colonial commitment —and as the Gaullist regime gave France apparent stability. At a time when the Western working class seemed to have abandoned its revolutionary role and the "socialist democracies" of the East showed no hope of real emancipation, the first years of the Castrist regime seemed to offer a third way, as it promoted a resistance to North American imperialism and to Soviet authoritarianism. Soon it became a leading symbol of Third World revolutionary potential.

Castro's declared willingness to move away from Soviet methods, Guevara's defense of revolutionary internationalism, and proclamations concerning the freedom of art convinced some of the Surrealists to accept Wifredo Lam's official

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invitation to join the "Salón de Mayo," organized in La Habana in July 1967, almost one year after André Breton's death. This trip was driven more by political reasons than artistic or poetic ones. In search of an exhilarating new revolutionary outlet, Jean Schuster and José Pierre enthusiastically inserted frequent praise of Cuban communism in their 1967-1968 political writings. This led to the signature of the leaflet "Pour Cuba." The disavowal of such support however arrived a few months later, when in August 1968 Fidel Castro approved the Warsaw Pact action in Prague. In the meantime, the Surrealist group participated in a scattered manner in the May '68 events in Paris. Among others, these two events are important to understand why the group dissolved in 1969. In the late 1960s, Cuba's revolution and political regime thus appeared as both a magnetic pole for and a threat to Surrealism.

"Lwa bosal" and "Baptised lwa": Artistic Cuban Presence in the Surrealist Group

Surrealism's encounter with and fascination for the Antilles has been widely studied, from the meeting between Breton and Aimé Césaire in Martinique in 1941 to Breton's stay in Haiti in 1945, during a time of political change for the country. The movement was thus attentive to the cultural and political evolutions of the region; but as a non-francophone country, the links between Cuba and Surrealism are less tight and also less studied. Surrealism was nonetheless introduced to Cuban culture through the work of Wifredo Lam at the end of the 1930s; the arrival of Agustín Cárdenas and Jorge Camacho in Paris during the 1950s reactivated the surrealist fascination for the island. Born in Cuba in 1927 and descending from Congolese, Senegalese and Guinean slaves, Cárdenas was the first to arrive in Paris in 1955, thanks to a grant from the Cuban government, that was then extended by the Castrist regime. Through Geo Dupin (sister of Alice Rahon) he rapidly met André Breton and José Pierre, who organized an exhibition in L'Étoile scellée, the surrealist gallery of that time and that he shared with his compatriot Fayad Jamis.[2] Four years after the arrival of Cárdenas, Jorge Camacho came to Paris and met Cárdenas by chance, whom he already knew from Cuba. Cárdenas introduced Camacho to the gallerist Raymond Cordier, who offered him his first solo show in Paris. One year later, in 1961, Breton, along with Joyce Mansour, visited his studio.[3] Camacho quickly became an active member of the Paris Surrealist Group.

The "Cubanity" of the two artists is evoked differently within the surrealist circle. Cárdenas's sculptures were often perceived as rediscovering the strength of West-African religious objects (and thereby, also a rediscovery of the artist's own origins), mixed with an integration of European modernity, especially Hans Arp and Constantin Brancusi. When Breton linked his work to Rimbaud's "African fairy,"[4] José Pierre, the member of the surrealist group most committed to art critique, asserted that "Cárdenas, soon inserted into Western modern art, felt the need to enlighten the relationship of his creative originality with the originality of his cultural situation between Africa and Europe, America curiously appearing absent of his

concerns, except his native land.[5]" In describing the two artists's creative process, where automatism is never far removed, Pierre invokes two types of voodoo possession spirits or *lwa* : the "*lwa* bosal," furious, destructive and chaotic; and the "baptised *lwa*" that the religious community is able to control through rituals. For him, Wifredo Lam (of Sino-Afro-Hispanic origins) arrived at a balance between these two tendencies, whereas Cárdenas (from strict African ancestry) got rid of academism with "the intervention of trance (in this case, automatic drawing then transcribed in plaster).[6]" Equating automatism to trance, and linking ethnic origins to a type of magical relationship to art, Pierre gives an original example of what magical art can be, more specifically, when it originates from the Caribbean. On the contrary, Pierre describes that Camacho, "of Spanish ancestry, lets his violent nostalgia of foaming possessions rise from under the rule of the ritualized spirit."[7] This certainly evokes the controlled method applied by Camacho to create his paintings, based on precise drawings that nevertheless describe closed spaces swept by divisions and violence. Cultural and religious themes are thus mobilized by the Surrealists to integrate these works into their vision.

And if in the surrealist mind this island remains "a sort of bridge between the ancient and the new world, between western civilization and America, Oceania and Africa's flouted cultures, between yesterday and tomorrow," it acquired a more political status after 1959, as Pierre also suggests in 1962 in presenting Cardenas' sculpture as evoking Cuba as "this island where, maybe, our destiny is decided."[8] Two years later, commenting on Camacho's paintings, Breton also points to this common destiny, praising "the Cuban revolution, poignant as of the first day and that we salute without reservation."[9]

Third-Worldism and the Surrealists

At the beginning of the 1960s and after the end of the Algerian war, the political involvement of the French intellectual Left experienced a downturn. As Sophie Leclercq points out, the Surrealists's long-term anti-colonial engagement faced an unprecedented situation. If during the 1920s and 1930s, against the Rif war and Paris Colonial Exhibition, their voice was quite a lone one, the decolonization movements which emerged after the Second World War and the growing involvement of other left-wing intellectuals broke this isolation but also confronted the Surrealists with new issues.[10] For eight years, the Surrealists denounced the long and brutal Algerian conflict. Alongside French anarchists and part of the Trotskyist movement,[11] the Surrealists supported the activists of the Mouvement national algérien (MNA) led by Messali Hadj, and they participated, with other leftist intellectuals, in several anti-colonialist committees.[12] They collaborated with intellectuals who openly supported the FLN action, despite the brutality of its methods against members of the MNA.

The difficulty of supporting Algeria's liberation without approving of the

FLN becomes even more evident with the signing of the "Declaration on the right of insubordination in the Algerian war," best known as the "Manifesto of the 121."[13] Written within surrealist circles with the final help of Maurice Blanchot, the text, signed by most Surrealists but also by Jean-Paul Sartre, was quickly reduced in the press to a Sartrian initiative. At a time when the *Temps modernes*' director publicly supported the FLN and the "suitcase carriers," the "Manifeste" was thus associated with support for the FLN. This led to a strong internal debate within the surrealist group, which is visible in the May 1962 number of *La Brèche*.[14] The risk to Surrealism of explicit support of an insurrectionist movement and not simply an emancipatory cause was highlighted for the first time.

As Pierre Vidal-Naquet[15] points out, the profound crisis generated in France by the Algerian conflict is fundamental to understanding the "geographic transfer of the revolutionary attraction poles"[16] from Eastern Europe to insurrectionist movements of the "Third World."[17] The resurgence, since the mid-1950s, of an extreme-Left opposed to the French communist party increased this phenomenon and involved the Surrealists in several collaborations with other intellectuals. This movement broke with the tradition of political engagement: Third-Worldism moreso emphasizes the opposition between imperialism and the liberatory fight against it than that between capitalism and communism. Thus Third-Worldism tries to escape from cold-war logic: "The freedom movements of the Third World did not and do not fit in neither with our universalist tradition—which doesn't perceive the emancipation outside westernization—nor with the internationalist tradition of the workers movement. It is anti-imperialism that has provided, for Algeria as for Vietnam, the main denominator for the far-Left."[18]

The term "Third-Worldism" was coined in the 1970s to define and criticize an already dying movement among Western intellectuals. At the end of the 1950s, it was triggered by signs of weakness in Soviet, French and British imperialism (Khrushchev's "Secret Speech" and the Hungarian uprising in 1956; the Suez crisis, also in 1956) as well as by the apparent unity of the non-aligned countries proclaimed at the Bandung Conference in 1955. The Third-Worldist current brings together the hopes of Western intellectuals raised by decolonization movements and the struggle against Western imperialism in Africa, Latin America (Cuba in particular) and Asia (with the Vietnamese conflict). In France, Third-Worldist networks were organized mainly around the Maspero publishing house (founded in 1959) and the journal *Partisans* (1961-1973). For the Surrealists, whose anti-Stalinism constitutes a major part of their politics, this anti-imperialist fight had the advantage of incorporating a struggle against the Western and Eastern blocs at the same time, which both carried out an aggressive imperialist policy. Shared by many other French leftist intellectuals—such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir who went to Cuba as early as 1960—this attempt to escape from a strictly western conception of revolution was also an attempt to decentralize a common politics and to give full

importance to "new" actors of subversion.

The intensification of the war led by the United States in Vietnam remobilized French intellectuals, as is shown by the early petitions against the war in Vietnam in 1965. The Surrealists remained discreet on the subject, but some archives show their watchfulness towards this conflict.[19] But according to Jean Schuster, who acquired a leading role in the post-war Surrealist group and even moreso after Breton's death, that moment of the mid-1960s was the "trough of the wave." He thus observed in 1963 that "the idea of Revolution has dissolved. The Revolution has no present."[20] In a text that is certainly addressed to the entire surrealist group, Schuster exhorts his friends to get out of the binary political vision conditioned by the Cold War. According to him, this logic should not condemn Surrealists to global skepticism regarding current liberatory struggles: "Hungarian insurgents, like Cuban insurgents […] first wanted their people's emancipation. That one and the other served the aims of antagonistic imperialisms, who ignores it? But who, even the least serious person, would imagine today a conflict without any effect on the balance of the two blocs? And who, on the contrary, would immediately confine any popular uprising to the two rivals's only strategy?"[21]

Schuster's position on anti-imperialist struggle strengthened. He declared in 1967: "No Guépéou of any kind, no Stalin of any kind, no Mao of any kind, no Aragon of any kind will ever make us renounce the revolutionary ideal and think that it has disappeared forever in its own treason. Today, it is still alive in the Vietcong *maquis* and within South America *guerrilleros*, despite the United States's extreme repression and the so-called socialist states's cautious guidance, for whom it is nothing but an excuse for their own expansion and their own desire for domination.[22]"

1967 was a key moment in the Surrealists's Third-Worldist engagement. Breton had died a few months earlier in 1966, and the Cuban seduction suddenly turned less rhetorical. The arrest of Régis Debray by the Bolivian army as he tried to leave a maquis led by Che Guevara in April 1967 mobilized left-wing French intellectuals and increased their attention toward insurrectionist movements linked to the Cuban regime. The invitation that same year by Wifredo Lam, Carlos Franqui and Jacques Brouté[23] to participate in the *Salón de Mayo* offered the Surrealists an exceptional opportunity to learn about the insurrectional island and its political regime. Before describing the proceedings of this surrealist trip to Cuba, it is important to note that, according to Jorge Camacho, Breton had two years earlier refused an invitation to the island extended to him and Roberto Matta.[24] Breton's prudence wouldn't be repeated by his young friends after his death.

The Surrealists's Trip to Cuba During Summer, 1967

An important surrealist delegation thus arrived in Cuba during the summer of 1967 to participate in the *Salón de Mayo*, an exhibition based on a selection of

works previously shown in Paris at the spring *Salon de Mai*. Agustin Cárdenas and Jorge Camacho, Jean Schuster, José Pierre, and Michel Zimbacca were in the group, as were several intellectuals linked to them such as Marguerite Duras and her partner Dionys Mascolo, the literary critic Maurice Nadeau, and the former Surrealists Michel Leiris and Alain Jouffroy.

The event had an official dimension as it was organized to commemorate the fourteenth anniversary of the attack on the Moncada Barracks on July 26, 1953, which Castro considered to be a founding event in Cuba's fight for liberation from the Batista regime. Furthermore, the exhibition took place at the same time as the first congress of the Latino-American Solidarity Organisation (OLAS in Spanish), under Castro's direction. The OLAS was created one year before in La Habana, during the Tricontinental Conference that marked Latin America's entering the non-aligned movement.[25] The congress brought together representatives of all the revolutionary organizations of Latin America. It was thus evident that intellectuals were invited to participate in a vast communications campaign of the Cuban regime. Intellectuals and artists were invited to attend Castro's speeches, OLAS's public sessions, and even public questioning of anti-Castrist prisoners.[26]

Located in the Pabellón Cuba on the official Avenida 23, the exhibition in itself represented well the diversity of the French artistic scene, with members of the Figuration narrative (Gilles Aillaud, Eduardo Arroyo, Erro, Bernard Rancillac), representatives of kinetic art (Pol Bury, Julio Le Parc), and lyrical (René Duvillier, Jean Messagier) and geometrical abstraction (Jean Dewasne, Kumi Sugaï). Surrealism was perhaps the best represented movement with a selection of its very diverse production, from oneiric imagery to less figurative experiments. The artists participating in or praised by the Paris Surrealist Group of the time were also well represented, with works by Pierre Alechinsky, Enrico Baj, Hervé Télémaque, Toyen, Max Walter Svanberg, and of course, Cárdenas, Camacho and Lam.[27] Several main representatives of Surrealism, such as René Magritte, Max Ernst, Roberto Matta, Dorothea Tanning and Joan Miró[28] were also part of the show, as well as more marginal figures (Félix Labisse, Georges Malkine).[29] The scenography of the exhibition involved surprising elements such as an anti-aircraft gun and stalls for three live, reproducing bulls at the end of the visit, bought by the regime to constitute a new bovine population for the island, and, rifles could be seen in the rooms. Dionys Mascolo later commented enthusiastically on this scenography, arguing that "by the means of a beautiful simplicity, the works were inscribed perfectly in a world—here again poetically abstracted from cultural limbo, from the weighty boredom that commonly reigns in art-dedicated places."[30] We can see however that propaganda was not far removed from this event.

The making of a huge collective painting, following an idea of Wifredo Lam, seems to have been one of the most exhilarating moments of this Cuban stay. Positioned around a central medallion fashioned by the painter, all the participants

were invited to fill in a box, the whole forming a spiral shape.[31] The composition blends political and poetic messages with graphic compositions. Within these one can identify the participation of Camacho, Pierre and Cárdenas. Mascolo later evoked with nostalgia this "unique moment where we thought we were attending the birth of a brand-new possibility, communism in art."[32] Here surrealist collective practices found a new and very political prolongation.

This collective and collaborative dimension is also visible in Lam's beautiful cover for the exhibition catalogue, in which all the invited artists's signatures are gathered (Fig. 1). After a declaration by Raúl Roa, Cuba's Foreign Affairs minister, a catalogue essay by Pierre indicated to the visitor where to find Surrealism's spirit in the exhibition, as well as in Cuba more generally (as in Las Villas's provincial folk art). Schuster contributed a surrealist warning against the temptation of socialist realism, or an art specifically dedicated to the masses who are presumed to be unable to understand most forms of modern art: "Art must not educate but marvel." He also reminded the reader that "there exists a peculiar sensitivity that evades any culture, a minor sensitivity shared randomly between human beings […] that is spontaneously aroused in the presence of an authentic work of art. This sensitivity, and that alone, justifies that revolutionary power gives total freedom to artists."[33]

During their stay, the *Salón de Mayo* guests wrote a collective text supporting the organization of the La Habana Cultural Congress in January 1968.[34] Several Surrealists present on the island at the time signed it, but none of them would be invited to the second big event that confirmed the Cuban regime's desire to attract the support of western intellectuals. However, the poet Joyce Mansour ensured a surrealist presence. She accepted the invitation issued by Wifredo Lam and Michel Leiris—the two were asked by Carlos Franqui to constitute a French delegation—and frankly and physically protested against the participation of the Mexican painter David Alfaro Siqueiros, who had been involved in the murder attempt against Leon Trotsky in 1940.[35] Roberto Matta also participated in the event and delivered a speech, "La guerrilla interior," about the importance of linking the struggle for political liberation with a fight against "inner tyrants. "[36]

Why the Cuban Regime Seduced the Surrealists: the Surrealist Convention

With the exception of Camacho and his wife Margarita who both stayed longer, all the Surrealists invited to the *Salón de Mayo* returned from the island a month later, and were eager to share their enthusiasm for Cuban socialism with their fellow Surrealists. There are several reasons for this enthusiasm, and that would have major consequences for the future of the surrealist group. They can be found in declarations made after the trip by Schuster, Pierre, their close friend Mascolo, Maurice Nadeau, and long-time surrealist fellow traveler Alain Jouffroy, who was involved in Parisian Surrealism in different publications at the end of the 1940s (Fig. 2). These statements indicate not only the allegiance they felt for the orientation of

the regime, but also what they didn't see—or didn't want to see—during their stay in Cuba.

The first seductive aspect of the Cuban regime was its position on artistic questions. The interest that the Castrist regime first showed for all tendencies of avant-garde art encouraged the Surrealists to distinguish it from the Soviet approach. Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt describes the numerous debates during the 1960s that opposed partisans of freedom and experimental exploration in art with adherants of an orthodox Marxist line, embodied by the CNC (Consejo Nacional de Cultura).[37] The welcome extended to the Surrealists on the island during the Salon de Mayo apparently confirmed this point of view, as Raúl Roa declares: "the revolution guarantees and praises artists's and writers's right to freely express present and future reality."[38] The Cuban regime's acceptance of the eclectic selection of works presented in the Parisian Salon de Mai shows this openness to any kind of contemporary artistic production. Nadeau was pleased to observe that few Cuban artists were tempted by the artistic vocabularies promoted by the Soviet or Chinese regimes: "Just as it is linked to the Soviet and Chinese revolutions, the Cuban one has chosen its own way, just as Cuban writers and artists didn't want to submit themselves to aesthetic dogma created in Moscow or Beijing. None of them, as engaged as he wants to be, has lapsed or has risked the lapse into 'socialist realism.'"[39]

The Surrealists were furthermore seduced by the internationalism that was enhanced by Cuban socialism and embodied in the actions of Ernesto Guevara and his desire to create "one, two, three Vietnams."[40] Schuster admired the fact that, despite the threat of an American invasion and the "national egoism" of the socialist states, Cuba bravely maintained its internationalism, an ideal that was dear to Surrealists and long abandoned by the USSR: "A certain wisdom—this so much estimated political realism—should prompt Cuban leaders to be prudent, which would reassure both opponents and formal friends, and should especially inform the construction of socialism in a single country of America. But Cuba declares itself the first free territory in America, creates the Latino-American Solidarity Organisation (OLAS) and Guevara, the Argentinian, major of the revolutionary army and Cuban minister, dies in Bolivia and embodies, in the eyes of all peoples, the proletarian internationalist cause, and thus prepares the revolutionary conflagration in South America."[41] In the "ideological rigor"[42] of the regime concerning the two blocs, Schuster sees an example to follow for other revolutionary hotbeds: in Vietnam with the FNL, as well as in the heart of the United States, with the Black Power movement.

Most importantly, the Cuban revolution appeared to renew the idea of revolution itself and its practical applications, also to promote a new conception of egalitarian society. That is to say, it revived an idea regarding the past that had become dogma. To the Surrealists Fidel's methods appeared to be very different from those applied by the Soviet and Chinese regimes, mainly due to the late

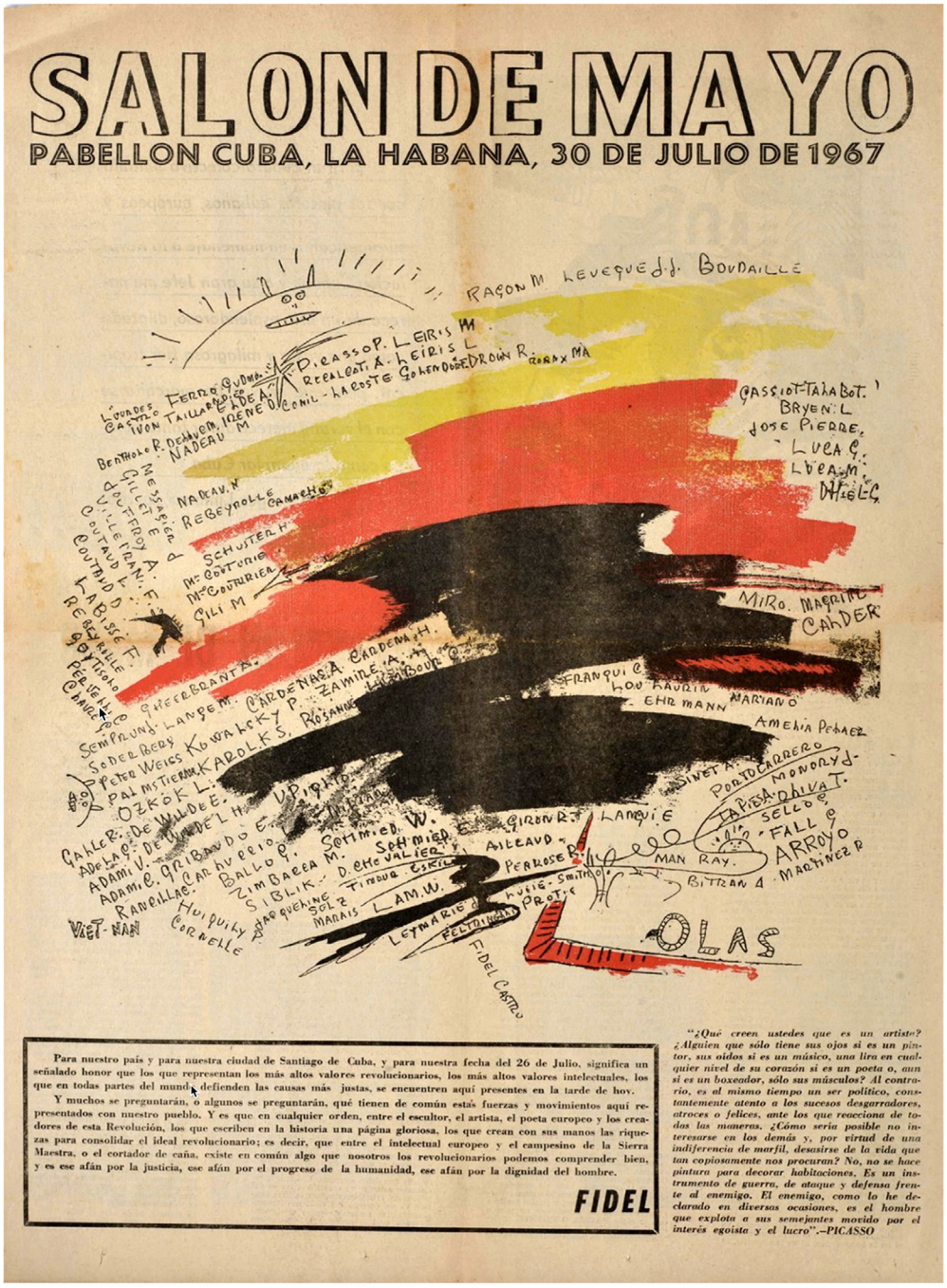

Fig. 1. Salón de Mayo exhibition catalogue, Pabellón Cuba, July-August 1967, cover by Wifredo Lam

foundation of the Cuban communist party in 1965, after and not before its conquest of power. Its formation is original compared to that of the Bolshevik party: its executives were chosen within factories, cooperatives and collective farms and designated by the workers themselves. For the Surrealists, the regime seemed to embody a heterodox communism in contrast to the "line" followed by Moscow and its satellites. As Pierre recalled fifteen years later in evoking Castro's evolution towards a more traditional Marxist-Leninist position,

> What undoubtedly seduced the Surrealists in this evolution is that it was totally opposed to the dogmatic practice of Marxism—as it had prevailed in Stalinism but also in oppositional movements—in reestablishing the essential link between revolt and revolution. Precise material considerations, particularly economic ones, have obviously played a role in the Castrist conversion to Marxism. Nonetheless this conversion contrasts with the brutal manner in which the victorious Soviet Union imposed its Marxism-Stalinism on all of Eastern Europe.[43]

Initially Castro was indeed more influenced by the example of the poet José Martí, Cuba's independence hero, and would convert himself progressively to Marxism, as the Cuban communist party formed itself step by step, in a fusion of different parties remaining after Batista's departure, including the pre-existing Cuban communist party (Partido Socialista Popular), a member of the Komintern that played no role during the 1959 victory. The Cuban communist party was the result of a fusion, in 1965, of the Movimiento 26 de Julio (M-26, led by Fidel Castro), the Partido Socialista Popular (PSP, communist), and the Directorio Revolucionario 13 de Marzo (student movement). These three organizations were first reunited in 1961 in the Partido unido de la Revolución socialista de Cuba (PURSC, United party of Cuba Socialist revolution).[44] Castro thus seemed to embody the possibility of communism that would not be muffled by ideology and the cult of the party. For Dionys Mascolo, Cuba thus allowed western intellectuals to shamelessly feel communist again, without the terrible Stalinist counterexample: "This is how […] in Cuba we could define ourselves as communists, without having to say 'in which way' or for which reasons we have to stay away from the French Communist party."[45]

Schuster sums up the reasons that make the Cuban revolution a model for the surrealist revolutionary scheme, and possibly, if we read between the lines, for Surrealism itself at that moment, concerned with a loss of its legitimacy after Breton's death. This declaration also echoes the one he made a few months before the trip to Cuba, and which I mentioned earlier:

> There is perhaps a good and an incorrect use of political heritage. The incorrect one would be to confine all situational analyses into a

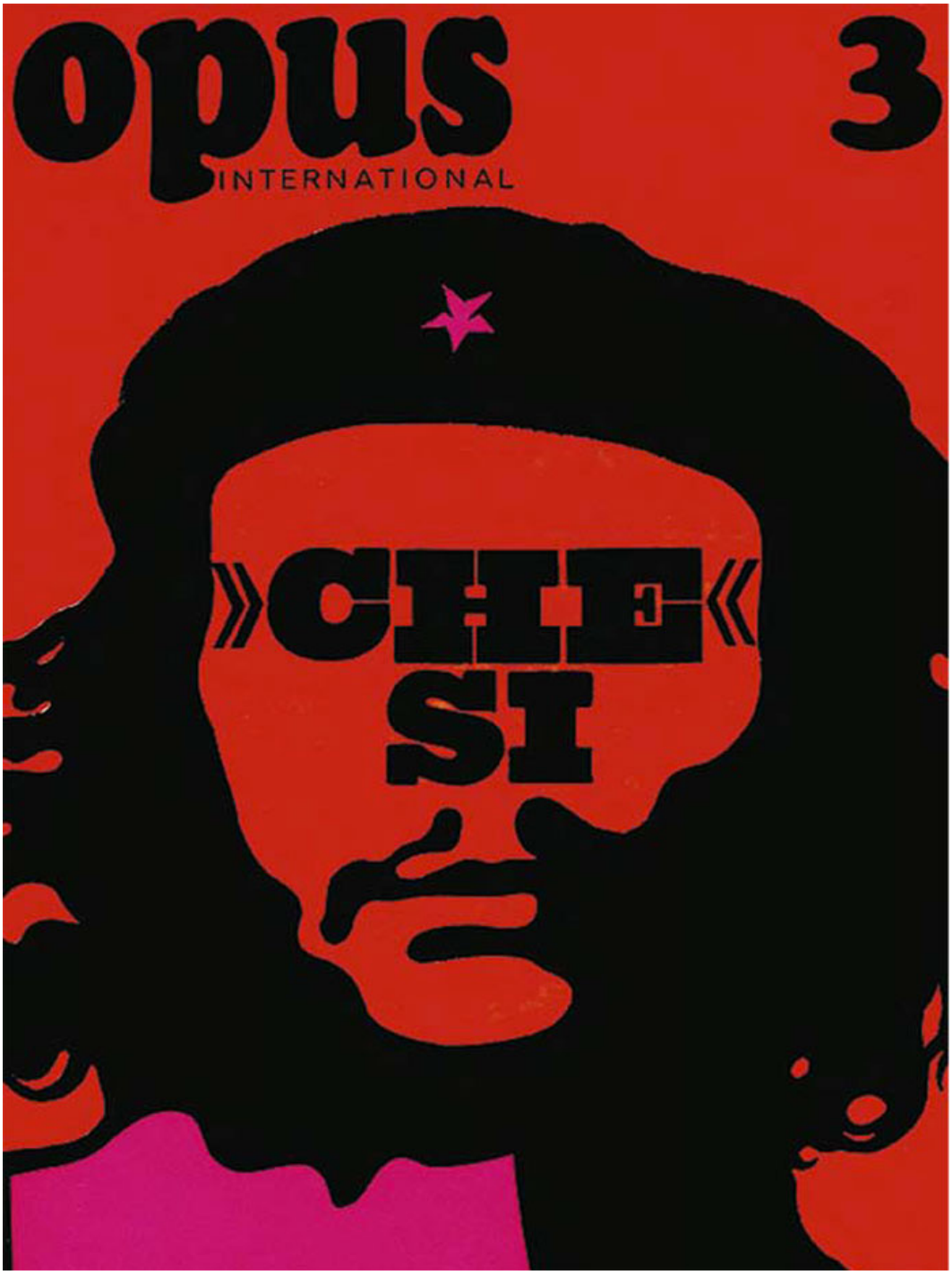

Fig. 2. *Opus International*, no. 3 (October 1967), cover by Roman Cieslewicz

> theoretical pattern, disregarding variables or disguising them as constants, and ignoring new factors that have appeared since the elaboration of the schema. The immediate consequences are the schema's dogmatizing, reducing it to the role of authoritative argument in the debate and, beyond the verbal context, reducing any new idea. From the human point of view, it is the greyish reign of epigons, clamped to a literal interpretation, whereas the spirit continues its course, looking for a new formulation. The good use would be the updating of the theoretical schema considered as a mediator between principles and the situation. It is this good use that I believe I've seen in Cuba and that we should practice—but even more harshly, more abstractly—if we don't want to miss revolutionary Cuba.[46]

Without quoting him, Schuster draws inspiration from Régis Debray in *Revolution in the Revolution* (Fig. 3), a book written after long discussions between the young French revolutionary and the main leaders of the insurrection (Castro, Guevara). Published in 1967, this book was a major editorial success in France, heightened by Debray's arrest and imprisonment in Bolivia that same year, and explains in part why the country was so aware of the Cuban revolution.[47] The journalist K.S. Karol, who was in Cuba during the Salon de Mayo, sums up Debray's conception of modern revolution in the light of the Cuban insurrection:

> For Debray, the Cuban revolution was the crowning achievement of a totally new socialist revolutionary process, as distinct from the 'democratic bourgeois' schemas as from Leninism, Trotskyism and Maoism. In this process, the main role was held by a guerrilla avant-garde, without any precise social integration, acting in the mountains. Only this avant-garde could express and awaken the needs of the population, an exploited class in a society that had neither a real bourgeoisie nor a developed proletariat.[48]

Such a renewal had already been underlined in the pages of the surrealist review *L'Archibras*, in a note briefly commenting on the OLAS's first congress and where several Surrealists were present:

> What is… IMPORTANT: the OLAS (La Habana, August 1967). Definition of a revolutionary strategy, on the base of the armed struggle, breaking not only with the legalist line imposed by Moscow upon Latin-American communist parties, but also with the tactic common to most Marxist or pseudo-Marxist tendencies that subordinates the triggering of the guerrilla to the masses's revolutionary

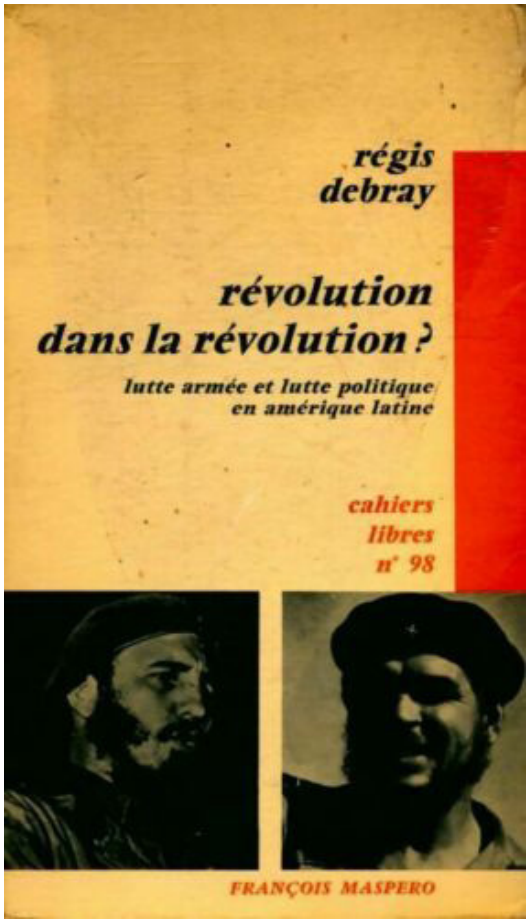

Fig. 3. Régis Debray, *Révolution dans la révolution* (Paris: Maspero, 1967)

maturity.[49]

In Debray's book, revolutionary history is indeed criticized in light of the Cuban experience, its pragmatism and its capacity to constantly adapt itself to the specifics of the situation. But in criticizing "auto-defense" and "Revolutionary spontaneity," he remains in the Leninist schema. Even if for him the revolutionary motivating force is no longer the party but the guerrilla, Debray takes up again, on the basis of Castro's conceptions, the principle of an acting minority, an "avant-garde" that provokes and then leads the insurrection: "Fidel Castro simply says that there is no revolution without an avant-garde; that this avant-garde is not necessarily the Marxist-Leninist party; and that those who want to make the revolution have the right and the duty to constitute themselves into an avant-garde independent from these parties."[50]

Could Cuba's example enable Surrealism to get out of a timorous relation to revolutionary struggle, a relation based on the painful memory of its own history, but that is also likely to exclude it from the march of history? This is what the "Surrealist Convention," organized in Paris in October of 1967 on the initiative of Schuster, tried to achieve. Previously sent to most of the participants, the meeting's agenda opened with a reflection on "Cuba and Surrealism":

> Convention Agenda [...]
> 1.Cuba and Surrealism
> A) For Surrealism, is the revolutionary idea an abstraction, if not a nostalgia, or, on the contrary, is its historical manifestation, with the imperfections it implies, possible? The Surrealists who went to Cuba hope to share with the majority of their comrades their hope in the Cuban revolution, and determine the influence it can have on the future surrealist stance.
> B) Cuban revolutionary power and intellectuals.
> C) La Habana Congress in January 1968. Shape and character of the surrealist contribution.[51]

Several Surrealists who had stayed in France (Philippe Audoin, Michel Zimbacca) posed questions regarding the democratic management of the Cuban regime. The answers given by the Surrealists who had travelled to the island were reassuring.[52].

Quite surprisingly, a non-surrealist participant in the meeting, Marguerite Bonnet, former Trotskyist activist in the Parti communiste internationaliste (International Communist Party, PCI) and anti-colonialist militant but also one of the first French scholars to work on Surrealism and friend of Breton since the mid-1960s, suggested the drafting of "a public declaration of solidarity with the Cuban revolution, coming from the Surrealists. They are indeed considered as particularly watchful concerning any form of oppressive government. Their adherence to the Cuban thesis would have strong repercussions among the other revolutionary movements of the world."[53] The Convention unanimously adopted a collective resolution, stating that "The unanimous assembly […] expresses its support of the developments of the Cuban revolution and, more generally, of the armed struggle in Latin America, following the OLAS thesis. Decides upon the creation of an information bureau concerning Latin America and relations with comrades of this continent."[54]

Following this statement, the collective declaration "Pour Cuba" was signed one month later by all members of the group and published in *L'Archibras*. It asserted that the surrealist movement

> 1. Subscribes without reservation to the conclusions of the Lati-

> no-American Solidarity Organisation (OLAS) Congress;
> 2. Salutes the memory of Commander Guevara, whose example will continue to animate armed struggle in Latin America, pays tribute to the admirable fight of the Vietnamese, and to the struggle led by the Black people of the U.S.A. and of Africa under Portuguese domination;
> 3. Denounces the maneuvers of parties that, in endeavoring to promote the methods of parliamentary democracy, use Guevara's death as an argument against the guerrilla;
> 4. In considering the diversity of objective conditions, thinks that the creative imagination is an essential revolutionary motivation and that it has to define in every circumstance original ways that lead to the conquest of power; after the conquest of power, recognizes the action of this same motivation in the Cuban revolution and with the greatest hope welcomes its refusal of any fossilizing of political, economic and cultural domains;
> 5. Locates the consistent principles of its activity in Castro and Guevara's proposals regarding the role of intellectuals and aims to contribute to the ideological struggle of the Cuban people in every domain.[55]

The text was signed by almost all in the surrealist group. Three years after it initially addressed the new rulers of the Caribbean island, the surrealist group then officially recognized the validity of Cuban socialism. In doing so, it ran the risk of seeing its hopes as well as its political foresight disavowed. Some of the group members who were linked to Trotskyist groups had indeed already expressed concerns in 1967 about the repression of political opponents in Cuba. Grandizo Munis, a Trotskyist activist and friend of Benjamin Péret—with whom he fought against fascism during the Spanish Civil War—informed Alain Joubert and his partner Nicole Espagnol about Castrist repression. The surrealist dissident review *Front noir*, directed by Louis Janover and in which Munis participated, published a paper as early as 1963 which denounced the "Stalinist" tendencies of the Cuban government.[56]

The first years of the Castrist regime were marked by several repressive operations conducted by Raúl Castro and Ernesto Che Guevara, among others. In March of 1960 the French newspaper *Le Monde* published the number of executed opponents.[57] Between 1964 and 1968, the Cuban regime organized the UMAP (Unidades Militares de Ayuda a la Producción, military units for productive help), penitentiary working camps that gathered clergymen, pimps, political opponents and homosexuals, with the latter particularly persecuted by the regime.[58] Nicole Espagnol even relates that Schuster had been warned about the repressive situation

in Cuba before the Surrealists's journey: "At the beginning of 1967, a list of disappeared, imprisoned, and tortured Cubans was communicated [to Schuster] (rebels from the outset, anarchists, Trotskyists and also homosexuals, all counter-revolutionaries of course!)."[59] The tensions that first appeared about how to support Algerian independence thus returned seven years later. Was it possible for Surrealism to explicitly support not only a political cause but a specific and established revolutionary movement, and moreover, one that had come to power? This question played an important role in the disintegration of the Paris Surrealist Group.

Aftermaths and Epilogue

As were other left-wing intellectual and artistic movements, Surrealism was blown away in the turmoil of events of the year 1968. A surrealist delegation went to Prague in April that year to meet their Czechoslovakian surrealist comrades, and for the opening of an exhibition organized around the Freudian concept of the "pleasure principle"[60] and which had already been realized in the earlier 1965 international exhibition "L'écart a*bsolu*" in Paris. The basis of an important text, *La Plate-Forme de Prague* (*Prague's platform*) was written by French and Czechoslovakian Surrealists during that stay. The text develops a critical approach toward revolutionary history, shedding light on anarchism and utopian Surrealism in addition to Marxism. The platform is particularly interesting when it proposes a renewal of the revolutionary process, in that it links the Cuban experience to the recent democratizing of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic:

> We declare the primacy of revolutionary activity over the provisional results of this activity. We declare its primacy over achievements whose consolidation would generate immobility, or, would lead to the most serious damage, as seen with Stalinism. Under these conditions, reconstruction forces should, according to us, rally around the idea of a permanent revolution, Marx's brilliant slogan, then developed by Trotsky, whose actual content should be interpreted according to new forms adopted by repressive systems. […] Today we see in Cuba and Czechoslovakia two places in the world where early conditions are in place for the constituting of a new human consciousness against left-wing or right-wing repression.[61]

The following month, after the arrest of pro-Vietnam activists, a vast student uprising began in Paris and rapidly spread to other universities, and then to factories and all other sectors of the French society. From the first days of the student movement, the Surrealists showed their absolute enthusiasm for the insurrection by publishing a tract where they modestly affirmed to be "at the students' disposal for any practical action intended for the creation of a revolutionary situation in this

country."[62] The Surrealists joined with hope during the two insurrectionist months, but anonymously and in a scattered way, and without ever waving the surrealist banner. The crowd of activists and protesters experimented with new forms of political actions in the streets and in "action committees" (*comités d'action*), far removed from an authoritative insurrectionist model, and contesting the Leninist avant-gardist framework still promoted by Socialist Cuba and its admirers.[63]

In August, a terrible rejection of the surrealist support of Cuba occurred when Fidel Castro publicly approved the repression of the Prague Spring by Warsaw Pact troops. The fragility and risk of such engagement appeared brutally and in a particularly cruel manner, given the strong surrealist links that had been established between Prague and Paris. The group published a special issue of *L'Archibras* to condemn the Prague invasion, inserting it in an "Open letter to the Communist party of Cuba"[64] that denounced the lies upon which Castro based his support of the Soviet action. A range of internal debates and arguments around surrealist political action nevertheless followed and profoundly damaged the group's unity.

A series of meetings were organized at Mimi Parent and Jean Benoît's home in the autumn of 1968, which led to the constitution of "a kind of list of grievances"[65] addressed to Jean Schuster and his support in the group. The list was then read at the café with the intention of redesigning the group's activity. But it was not enough to avoid the rising internal dissension that finally led to a process of the group's dissolution between March and October 1969. It is not possible to reduce the end of Parisian Surrealism to a political problem. Breton's death in 1966, the necessary reorganizing of the group's management that led to the growing influence of Schuster, and the disruptive months of May and June 1968 were also important factors. As felt by the Surrealists—and even if shared by many other French intellectuals—there is no doubt that the Third-Worldist answer to the necessary reformulating of the revolutionary project led to a dead-end.

Surrealism's model of revolution has never been monolithic and should be considered to be in constant motion, nourishing itself from several sources and according to historical circumstances. The vast decolonizing process is at the same time a confirmation of Surrealism's long-term anti-colonialism, and challenges its capacity to react to such an event. In contrast to the interwar period, the voice of the colonized person was now audible and it took on the status of a revolutionary subject. Until then regarded as an object of fascination by Surrealism, the Third-World now played the role of a tangible model. But despite the attempt to create a true Non-Aligned Movement across the world—with Cuba acting as a key member —cold war logic struck back violently in 1968. Benjamin Péret, who died in 1959, argued during the Algerian conflict that the surrealist position regarding independence movements should be one of "critical support."[66] The support of a legitimate cause should not lead to unanimous approval of the political movement

that leads this cause. If such a position was not followed by Parisian Surrealism in its final years of existence, it is perhaps because of its excessive attachment to an avant-gardist revolutionary scheme, and its belief that a conscious minority could lead the masses towards their emancipation—a conscious minority with which the group couldn't help but identify itself.

1 "L'exemple de Cuba et la révolution," *La Brèche*, no. 7 (December 1964): 104.
2 José Pierre, *La sculpture de Cárdenas* (Bruxelles : La Connaissance, 1971), 6-11. See *Agustín Cárdenas, sculptures, Fayad Jamis, peintures* (Paris: L'étoile scellée, 1956).
3 Anne Tronche, *Jorge Camacho, Vue imprenable* (Plomelin : Éditions Palantines, 2004), 238.
4 Arthur Rimbaud, "Jeune ménage," *Œuvres* (Paris : Classiques Garnier-Bordas, 1991), 164, quoted in André Breton, " Agustín Cárdenas" (Paris : Gallimard, 2008), 738.
5 Pierre, *La sculpture de Cárdenas*, 9.
6 José Pierre, *André Breton et la peinture* (Paris : L'Âge d'Homme, 1987), 268.
7 *Ibid.*
8 José Pierre, *L'Abécédaire* (Paris : Losfeld, 1971), 136.
9 André Breton, "Jorge Camacho," *Œuvres complètes*, IV (Paris : Gallimard, 2008), 836.
10 Sophie Leclercq, *La rançon du colonialisme : les surréalistes face aux mythes de la France coloniale (1919-1962)* (Dijon : Les Presses du Réel, 2010), 305.
11 During the Algerian war, French Trotskyism is divided between the lambertistes, supporting Messali Hadj's MNA whereas from 1954 the pablistes support the FLN. See Pattier Sylvain, *Les camarades des frères. Trotskistes et libertaires dans la guerre d'Algérie* (Paris : éditions Syllepse, 2002).
12 They are first involved, between April 1955 and November 1956 in the Intellectual action committee against the pursuit of the war in North Africa (Comité d'action des intellectuels contre la poursuite de la Guerre en Afrique du Nord), that gathered surrealists, members of the "Rue Saint-Benoît" group (Marguerite Duras, Robert Antelme, Dionys Mascolo) and writers of the *Temps modernes*, but also members of the Communist party. At the end of 1956, some surrealists join the Revolutionary intellectuals circle (Cercle des intellectuels révolutionnaires), devoted to the denunciation of all kind of imperialisms.
13 *Déclaration sur le droit à l'insoumission dans la guerre d'Algérie* (Paris: 1 September 1960).
14 "La déclaration des 121 'Sédition' et les surréalistes," *La Brèche*, no2 (May 1962) : 61.
15 Pierre Vidal Naquet, *Face à la raison d'État. Un historien dans la guerre d'Algérie* (Paris : La Découverte, 1989), 60-61.
16 Jean-François Sirinelli, in Pascal Ory, Jean-François Sirinelli, *Les intellectuels en France, de l'Affaire Dreyfus à nos jours* (Paris : Perrin, 2004), 320.
17 The word is generally attributed to French sociologist Alfred Sauvy who uses it for the first time in 1952 in a paper published in *L'Observateur* and links it with the Third Estate (tiers état).
18 Claude Liauzu, *L'enjeu tiers-mondiste : débats et combats* (Paris : L'Harmattan, 1987), 167.
19 See the unpublished and anonymous text ["Plus que jamais, liberté et révolution sont aujourd'hui des mots vietnamiens ," 1967], Jean Schuster papers, SCR25 ACTUAL, Institut Mémoire de l'Édition Contemporaine.
20 Jean Schuster, "Réflexions du creux de la vague", *La Brèche*, no.5, (October 1963): 59.
21 Ibid., 61.
22 Jean Schuster, "Interview par Bernard Pivot," *Archives 57/68, Batailles pour le surréalisme* (Paris : Losfeld, 1969), 133 (first published in *Le Figaro littéraire*, May 29, 1967).
23 Cuban writer, art critic, and political activist Carlos Franqui was part of the 26 July Movement led by Castro and during the first years of the revolution he directed the newspaper *Revolución*. Condemning Castro's support for the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia in 1968 he left the island the same year. Jacques Brouté, former surrealist member who left Paris to live in Cuba, was very close to the new power who named him artistic director of the official newspaper *Granma*.
24 Jorge Camacho, *Les détours de soi, un entretien avec Gérard Durozoi* (Maubeuge : Idem+Arts, 1998), 7-8.
25 See *L'Archibras,* no. 2 (October 1967): 78: "What is… IMPORTANT: the OLAS (La Habana, August 1967). Definition of a revolutionary strategy, on the base of the armed struggle, breaking not only with the legalist line imposed by Moscow to the Latin-American communist parties, but also with the tactic common to most of Marxist or pseudo-Marxist tendencies that subordinates the triggering

of the guerrilla to the masses' revolutionary maturity.".
26 See Alain Jouffroy, "'Che' si", *Opus International*, no. 3 (October 1967): 26.
27 Wifredo Lam exhibited *La Toussaint*, 1966, oil on canvas, 210 x 250 cm, private collection, Brussels.
28 Joan Miró exhibited *Poème*, 1966, 290 x 174 cm, private collection.
29 Georges Malkine exhibited *Demeure d'André Breton*, 1967, oil on canvas, 25,5 x 36,6 cm, location unknown.
30 Dionys Mascolo, "Cuba, premier territoire libre du socialisme," *Les Lettres Nouvelles*, special issue "Écrivains de Cuba" (December 1967-January 1968): 256.
31 *Cuba Colectiva*, 1967, oil on canvas, 501 x 1083 cm, Museo de Bellas Artes, La Habana.
32 Mascolo, "Cuba, premier territoire libre du socialisme," 256.
33 Jean Schuster, "Notas sobre el arte en la revolución," Salon de Mayo, exhibition catalogue, Pabellón Cuba (La Habana, 1967).
34 "Pour le congrès culturel de La Havane," La Habana, 30 July 1967, *Opus International*, no3 (Octobre 1967): 33.
35 See Marie-Laure Missir, *Joyce Mansour: une étrange demoiselle* (Paris: Place, 2005): 148-154.
36 Soledad Novoa, "Matta Qui? /Matta Óu?" *Matta 100*, exhibition catalogue, Santiago (Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, 2011), 34.
37 Rebecca J. Gordon-Nesbitt, "The Aesthetics of Socialism: Cultural Polemics in 1960s Cuba," *Oxford Art Journal* (November 2014): 1-19.
38 Raúl Roa quoted by Alain Jouffroy, "'Che' si," 26.
39 Maurice Nadeau, *Les Lettres Nouvelles*, special issue "Écrivains de Cuba," 18.
40 Ernesto "Che" Guevara, *Créer deux, trois, de nombreux Vietnam, voilà le mot d'ordre* (Paris: Maspero, 1967).
41 Jean Schuster, "Flamboyant de Cuba, arbre de la liberté," *L'Archibras*, no. 3 (March 1968): 80.
42 Ibid., 81.
43 José Pierre, *Tracts surréalistes et déclarations collectives,* t. II (Paris: Losfeld, 1982): 407.
44 K.S. Karol, *Les guérilleros au pouvoir* (Paris : Robert Laffont, 1970), 158-187.
45 Mascolo, "Cuba, premier territoire libre du socialisme," 232.
46 Schuster, "Flamboyant de Cuba, arbre de la liberté," 164-165.
47 Jérôme Duwa, *1968, année surréaliste. Cuba, Prague, Paris* (Paris : IMEC éditeurs, 2008) : 24.
48 Karol, *Les guérilleros au pouvoir*, 158.
49 *L'Archibras,* no. 2 (October 1967): 78
50 Régis Debray, *Révolution dans la révolution* (Paris : Maspero, 1967), 103.
51 This document is preserved in Philippe Audoin and Claude Courtot's archives in the Institut Mémoires de l'Edition contemporaine (IMEC, France) and is reproduced in Alain Joubert, *Le mouvement des surréalistes* (Paris : Maurice Nadeau), 245 and in Duwa, *1968, année surréaliste: Cuba, Prague, Paris*, 31.
52 See "La convention surréaliste," handwritten draft by Philippe Audoin of the surrealist convention, 17 pages, ADI 3, Philippe Audoin Papers, IMEC.
53 "Procès-verbal de la Convention surréaliste", Jean Schuster papers, IMEC, published in Jérôme Duwa, *1968, année surréaliste*, 30.
54 "Convention surréaliste" in Duwa, *1968, année surréaliste*, 40.
55 "Pour Cuba," collective declaration, Paris, le 14 novembre 1967, *L'Archibras*, no3 (March 1968): 3.
56 Interview by the author with Alain Joubert, August 2016. See J. Hartley, "Contre-révolution à Cuba," *Front Noir*, no. 1 (June 1963): 23-31. The text is taken from the Workers' League publication, *Workers News Bulletin* (London) of February 11, 1961.
57 Claude Julien, "Cuba ou la ferveur contagieuse—Les deux frères," *Le Monde*, no 4716 (21 March 1960), 3.
58 Pierre Rigoulot, *Coucher de soleil sur La Havane: la Cuba de Castro* (Paris : Flammarion, 2007), 169-172.

59 Nicole Espagnol, "Défauts, faux et usage de faux," first published by Terrain Vague editions (Paris: 1990) and later in Alain Joubert, *Le Mouvement des surréalistes*, 370.
60 "Princip Slasti (Le principe de plaisir)" exhibition in Brno (18 February - 17 March), Prague (9 April -12 May) and Bratislava (mid-June – July).
61 "La Plate-Forme de Prague," *L'Archibras,* special issue no. 5 (September 1968) 11-15, republished in José Pierre, *Tracts surréalistes et déclarations collectives*, 281.
62 *Pas de pasteurs pour cette rage !,* leaflet (Paris: 5 mai 1968), published in Pierre, *Tracts surréalistes et déclarations collectives*, 276.
63 Especially the Comité d'action étudiants-écrivains (Students-writers action committee) and the action committees of the Mouvement du 22 mars. See Anne Foucault, *Reconsidération du surréalisme 1945-1969, du Déshonneur de poètes au "surréalisme éternel"* (Université Paris Nanterre, 2019).
64 "Lettre ouverte au Parti communiste de Cuba," *L'Archibras*, no. 5 (30 September 1968): 9.
65 Alain Joubert, *Le mouvement des surréalistes*, 261. The meetings gathered Alain Joubert, Nicole Espagnol, Bernard Caburet, Xavier Domingo, François-René Simon, Jean-Pierre Le Goff, Georges Sebbag and Jean Terrossian.
66 Benjamin Péret, "Nationalisme ou anarchisme," text dating from 1957, republished in *Œuvres complètes*, VII (Paris: José Corti, 1995), 189-190.