

And they gave us the microphones...

An unforgettable night yesterday at the Wilfredo Lam Center, thanks to the performance artist Tania Bruguera. A podium with microphones, in front of an enormous red curtain, formed part of the interactive installation in the central courtyard. Everyone who wanted to could use the podium to deliver—in just one minute—any rousing speech they pleased.

As microphones are rare, certainly I never met up with any in my time as a Young Pioneer reciting patriotic verses, I took the opportunity of the occasion. Advised ahead of time by friends in the know, I prepared a speech on freedom of expression, censorship, blogs, and that elusive tool that is the Internet. In front of the lenses of national television and protected by the foreign guests at the X Havana Biennial, I was followed by shouts of “Freedom,” “Democracy,” and even open challenges to the Cuban authorities. I remember one boy of twenty who confessed that he had never felt more free.

Tania gave us the microphones, we who have never been able to deliver our own speeches, rather we have had to suffer under the hot sun the speechifying of the others. It was an artistic action, but there was no game in the declarations we made. Everyone was very serious. A dove rested on our shoulders, probably equally well-trained as that other one fifty years ago. However, none of us who spoke considered ourselves chosen, none wanted to stay—for fifty years—shouting into the microphones.

* The video—very amateur—that was made yesterday.