

MONDAY, MARCH 30, 2009

One minute of freedom per person



Yoani Sánchez just told me: "There's a performance, it's going to be good and I'm going to participate, be there at the Wilfredo Lam Center at 8:00 tonight."

I never could have imagined finding a podium and a microphone ready for everyone, for each one of us. The place was mobbed with people; to make it to the front row I had to squeeze through the crowd saying please, I want to reach the microphone. It all started with a woman who, with a white dove on her left shoulder, made faces without emitting a sound, while two kids, dressed in Ministry of the Interior uniforms, counted down to the end of her time, and threw her back again into the mute crowd.

Immediately after, Yoani came and she spoke of the blogosphere and of censorship, to total silence, and when she finished there was a lot of applause, people knew her and were happy. Then I ran up, I was very nervous; I hadn't been in front of microphone or had an audience listening to me since I was 9 when, dressed as a Pioneer, I stormed a CDR meeting to read an incomprehensible statement. Over time, I developed a particular phobia about this device that only serves to mask the reality of my country.

I prepared a speech on the way that I read with a lump in my throat.

"One day may we all have all the minutes of the day to say anything we want in front of the microphone. And also, may those who have the opportunity today, take a minute, or even less, to speak the truth."

I got down, though I could have said more, and then Reinaldo got up, he didn't have time to finish before the "soldiers" called time and pushed him off the dais; we heard the last of his speech from the floor. The time stretched and no one else got up, people were frightened, an artist went and said:

"Me, what I have, is a lot of fear."

I walked toward the podium again and added: "One day, freedom of speech in Cuba won't be a performance."



I remember other speeches:

Claudio Fuentes asked for a vote: then he spoke of the dictatorship and political prisoners and asked everyone to raise their hands if they agreed with changing things, and almost everyone raised their hands.

A Puerto Rican said that even though he lived in a colony, in his country there was freedom of expression and he asked that the microphone be left open for 24 hours.

An American man: "I don't speak Spanish but: Long live change!"

With a black bag on his head Reinaldo Escobar came up a second time: "I think this should be banned."

Hamlet Labastida, a plastic artist, called for democracy and that one of them would come up, at least one.

Ciro Díaz was going to sing "El Comandante" but the time had expired and it wasn't the boys dressed like soldiers but a sullen soundman who walked up and shouted, "It's over!" while giving orders to those behind him, "Disconnect now!"

A sizable audience kept shouting, "Ciro! Ciro! Ciro!" like it was a Porno Para Ricardo concert and they were asking for another song.

The Rapid Response Brigade was poor, only two people, and I supposed they felt strange, a clear minority and without the power on the platform, a completely new experience for them.

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