

An hour late
A broken sign post
and Lola stands on one side of a chain link fence

The Bus Stop:

An Event by the BALAGTASAN Collective

Terry Valen

Finally, a #10 squeals, screeches and hisses to greet her
So she steps forward
Grips the handrail
with the strength of the thousand women who came here before her
She pulls herself up
to the impatient grumbles and roars for her to move on.
And she moves on.

But even if the bus had never come,
Lola would have been o.k.

Just on the other side of the fence
in the heart of Pilipino-town
on the corner of Temple and Robinson
the BALAGTASAN Collective took The Bus Stop
into the SIPA Community Center.

because “The bus stop is a metaphor for life.”

1-23-99

visual artists/activists/students/workers/musicians/poets/performers gathered at “The Bus Stop”—an event organized by the BALAGTASAN Collective (BC). The BC is a recent creation in the Los Angeles Filipino community. On the frontlines of cultural activism, the group takes its name from a Philippine tradition in which participants debate, back and forth, two or more sides of an issue in lyrical form, sometimes rhyming, always freestyling in native tongues. This performance/practice is a pure example of what the group is about—artistic cultural expression to raise awareness or “community consciousness” about important political issues.

Organizers of *The Bus Stop* brought this Philippine tradition into the urban context of Filipino Los Angeles. Through poetry and spoken word; through graffiti art, photography and murals; and through turntablism, mc’s, and live musical performance, the artists and performers were reaching out to Filipina/o youth. They tackled political issues ranging from personal and family struggles, to farmworker and bus-rider unions, to revolutionary movements in the Philippine countryside and globalization. The artists/activists reached across borders and cultures to connect the struggles of Filipina/os to Sri Lankan, African American and Chicana/o struggles. Taking cultural performance back into the heart of the

For a few hours on a Saturday night,

It was o.k. to miss the bus,

To stop and connect with the people around you.

The bus stop is a place from where the Bus Riders Union could be launched, and The Bus Stop is also the beginning of a new organization of LA’s Filipina/o artists/activists—the BALAGTASAN Collective!

struggles of Filipino communities, the event organizers hoped to explore artistically the common grounds for political struggles at every level.

How do traditional forms of political organizing and community mobilization sometimes become the “politics of everyday life”? Are the politics of everyday life already revolutionary? How does artistic and cultural expression liberate, and why is it a necessary component of political mobilization for many communities of color? At *The Bus Stop*, the gathering of a standing-room-only crowd of Filipina/os (mostly youth) from all over California demonstrated the power of cultural forms of mobilizing youth in this different, but still “educational,” setting. Besides featuring some of the up-and-coming, regional and national award-winning, young Filipina/o urban artists and performers from LA, *The Bus Stop* was also a performance space for inspiring and aspiring artists and performers. Ultimately, it was a cultural event for sharing stories and speaking truths about the possibility of connecting the individual and collective struggles of Filipina/os. The events to come will open these possibilities and foster the creative talents of visual artists/activists/students/workers/musicians/poets/performers/...

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