

ACTIVATING THE THEATER IN EVERYDAY LIFE

SCOOTER WONDERLAND

Shin-yi Huang (Theatre Critic)

December 3, 2018



Talent Show

Time: 20:30, November 25, 2018

Venue: Chong-tai Scooter Shop

"Re: any gossip on the mod?"

Performer: Derek (Moderator of BBS Scooter Forum)

"26 Trips Around Da-an District"

Performer: Chen-hua Shiu (Former Parking Attendant)

Big Band

Time: 18:00, November 26, 2018

Venue: Chen-xiang Scooter Shop

Performers: Prototype Paradise, A-lin (Owner of Chen-xiang Scooter Shop)

Talent Show

Time: 20:45, November 30, 2018

Venue: S.J. Motor

"Safety First is the Way"

Performer: Chung-hao Chang (Martial Arts Coach),

"Me and My Solitude Time Remodeling Scooters"

Performer: Mr. Chiu (Owner of S.J. Motor)

Coffeeshops, old houses, overhead bridges, parking lots, when the theater is gradually moving outdoors, the performing space becomes more atypical. A production that takes place in a scooter repair shop does not seem surprising at all. Interestingly, the production team said, “We’re not acting in the scooter shops. The experts are there to share and interact with the public.” The team emphasized that “the venue is just an ordinary garage without seating; the audience can only watch as they stand at the side. Hence no registration is required.” [1] No acting? What kind of performance would that be? For a moment, theater-goers who are used to watching performing arts are perplexed.

In 2018, Prototype Paradise was invited by Taipei Fine Arts Museum to participate in the museum’s “Art into the Community” Program. In the span of two weeks, the production, *Scooter Wonderland*, was performed in four scooter shops located across four different districts in Taipei City including Datong, Songshan, Shilin, and Xinyi. The production was comprised of two parts namely, Big Band and Talent Show. The former was predominantly created by Yow-ruu (Yulia) Chen, while the latter, made up of Jimi Zhang, Corinne Hsiao, and Brook Chen, invited different “scooter experts” to a 30-minute session of sharing. Each show consisted of two experts. How did they share? On Prototype Paradise’s Facebook, Yu-ying (Yoyo) Kung, Concept Conceiver/Producer of the group, emphasized, “All the venues are regular scooter shops. The event itself is more like a hybrid of ‘street busker + Speaker’s Corner in Hyde Park + a performance version of home video + a non-Ted Ted Talk’. For the audience, they have to find a spot and stand by the sidewalk to watch the production. They have to find the meat themselves.” (And she actually welcomed you to bring your own food and do things that you won’t do in a theater!)

True to its words, in all nine performances of *Scooter Wonderland* (three were Big Band, the other six were different combinations of Talent Show), I participated in three of them. My first experience was at Chong-tai Scooter Shop near Ningxia Night Market. The moment I alighted the bus, I saw the rehearsal going on in the scooter shop that’s located by the road. All the performers were out in view, so uncharacteristically not behind the curtain that I felt a bit shy and decided to grab dinner first. By the time I’d made a round in the night market, nibbling my burrito and sipping on my drink as I walked toward the shop, the Talent Show had already started. A crowd had gathered at the triangular window of the shop situated at the intersection. Even if the passers-by didn’t plan to watch “a performance,” they would want to take a look.

The Talent Show began with an interview of the experts conducted by the principal creator, in which the interview and the format would differ according to the different participating experts. Moderated by the principal creator, Brook Chen, and the moderator of PTT Standard Forum (similar to Reddit), the world of an internet community was presented through simple Q&A and an explanatory video for netizens. In the second session of the performance, by using a mobile office chair, former parking attendant Chen-hua Shiu demonstrated the work process of the multiple 30-minute trips of billing a parking space she went through every day. (She worked 13 hours per workday, therefore making 26 trips around Da-an district). Chen-hua Shiu even shared her favorite band music and cooked her favorite seafood for the audience in the way she usually cooked after a stressful day. In

another episode of Talent Show that was held in a relatively wide and quiet alley in Hu-lin Street, Corinne Hsiao invited martial arts coach Chung-hao Chang to impart the audience how a martial arts practitioner would pick up and park his scooter to keep his lower back healthy, prevent the attack of gangsters and how to handle everything with care; tackling the changing traffic with the stability of martial arts. Jimi Zhang had scooter shop owner Mr. Chiu demonstrate the remodeling of a scooter onsite with a real-time projection of the details as the pre-recorded story of the owner and scooter remodeling played simultaneously. There was a Q&A following that, and Mr. Chiu generously gave ignorant people like us the opportunity to touch many high-end scooter parts.

The more specialized the profession is, (such as vehicle remodeling, parking fee collection), the more tangible the curiosity of the audience is. Questions came one after another. The experts are all associated with scooters in a different way, and what they do is what we ordinarily see, but we never thought to ask anything if not for such circumstances? As an everyday vehicle for Taiwanese, the scooter repair shop is also a necessity for every scooter rider. It's the place for safety maintenance and the local point for the exchange of information. Everyone who has come into contact with a scooter has also established their own life stories with a scooter. [2] These hidden experts in our lives, these "experts of the everyday" hailed by Rimini Protocol, are just like us, working a certain job, living a similarly not-so-exciting life. [3] But they become very interesting when the art spotlight is shined on them. Different life experiences are connected at that moment, displaying the uniqueness and richness of one another. When we, as audience, stand outside the entrance of a scooter shop to watch the performance that takes place in such an everyday background, at a certain point, what we're watching is no longer a "performance;" we are participating in the fun of life, and participating in one another's life.

At those scooter repair shops found in street corners, Prototype Paradise's performance did attract a diverse audience who participated in the fun: mothers taking their children home, scooter riders passing by on their scooters, residents on their way home from work, and couples walking pass. Some stopped by a moment, finished the entire performance and raised their hands to ask questions. Some stunned that it was an "artistic performance" and left. Some maybe said, "What's that? I don't understand!" And some astonished that a performance could be possible here! A free performance that literally happened in small alleys without the boundary of a stage, through these scooter shops, *Scooter Wonderland* did not only employ these spaces as a stage but also brought back the dramatic properties of these spaces, minimizing the distance between life and arts in an inobnoxious way. (Nowadays in Taiwan, the word "scooter" is used by young people as a slang to mean "obnoxious".)

The distance between arts and life is reduced by changing performance space, but also by the performance approach applied, such as the direct demonstrations from the experts. Another example is the live music performance in the series Big Band. Big Band adopted the soundscape and the tools of the repair shop as performing elements with pre-arranged actors or actual clients of the shop, allowing the owner to perform/provide repairing service during the performance. A scooter shop with the smell of oil-slicked parts, exhaust drifting in the air, thick calloused hands of the shop

owner, and a live show that's usually found on a stage, with musicians adorning overalls; the scene was bewildering and yet unusually compatible. Be it the hands of the experts or the hands of the performers, both display techniques and diligence, capturing the attention of the audience. During the show at Chen-xiang Scooter Shop, the audience could also randomly change the spot where they wanted to watch the performance and even was given a scooter part to play with the band. The artistic potential of life shone through the stories of the experts, as it did through readily available items. Similar to the CCTV in Chen-xiang Scooter Shop that displayed different angles of the shop, demonstrating the diversity of all in one, and one in all, it is a metaphor how the fusion of our similarities and differences manifest into something worthwhile being watched. The theater exists in our everyday life, and we have always been on the stage.

Scooter Wonderland is not complicated. It may be a little unrefined, dotted with the uncertainties of life. But it is such imperfections and irregularities that allow that production to strike a chord with reality, [4] essentially transforming an everyday character such as a scooter repair shop into an extraordinary stage, in which one may enter and leave as one does in their daily life. The scooter shop will always be there, maintaining its objectives despite having been watched. The same goes for the scooter experts who can display their individuality without playing a character. It is with such awareness that art/theater can then be a part of our lives.

Notes:

1. From Prototype Paradise's Facebook page "2018 *Scooter Wonderland*", posted on Nov 3, 2018.
2. Fieldwork research notes on many scooter shops can be found on Prototype Paradise's Facebook page, such as the information collaboration between the police and the shops, the relationship between the shops and its clients, etc.. Even the scooter shops that participated in the performance were introduced through connections.
3. Refer to Eva Behrendt "Spezialisten des eigenen Lebens: Gespräche mit Riminis Experten" in "Experten des Alltags: das Theatre von Rimini Protokoll". Alexander Verlag Berlin, 2007. S.64-73.
4. Found on the flyer of *Scooter Wonderland*, "The shops and the experts agreed to participate in this project as a friendly gesture. Life is dotted with uncertainties; the event reserves the right to make any changes and amendments." In fact, female drag racer Ya-ya Wang was invited to be a part of Talent Show: "*A Girl who Loves Drag Racing*", but was absent for the two shows due to a road accident. Apart from that, the occasional incidents that happened during the performances allowed the audience to experience the genuinity of a live performance. It's also these "mistakes" that make art more relatable to our lives. As Eva Behrendt said, "Essentially, the stability of a work lies in its instability; it should not be a re-produced work." ("Eigentlich liegt die Stabilität des Stücks in seiner Instabilität. Es darf kein abgespieltes Stück werden.")

* The original article in Chinese: <https://pareviews.ncafroc.org.tw/?p=32561>

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