

## INTERACTIVE ART

### **Rider Spoke**

Barbican, London

Blast Theory made quite a splash a decade back with *Kidnap*. That art/theatre project took willing participants by surprise and held them hostage for 48 hours – bringing a whole new meaning to the term captive audience.

*Rider Spoke* is equally immersive and reliant on its audience's participation, if not quite so aggressive. It's a great idea with tons of potential, but in its current form is a frustratingly flawed experience. It works like this: you choose an hour's time slot and make your way to the Barbican. There, with your companion riders, all as eager and excited – and soon to be as disappointed – as you are, you are issued with a bike, a helmet and a hand-held computer console, which is strapped to your handlebars. The console, you are told, will tell you what to do through its onscreen instructions and via the headphones you are asked to wear. You also, as part of the game, have to record your voice when asked to do so through a microphone. Do not, the stewards say with a mortal seriousness, attempt to do any of this while you are riding.

I pedalled off optimistically: out of the underground car park and around the block, earphones on, an eye on the screen and slightly paranoid about being squashed by a passing bus. A soft, slightly seductive voice appeared in my ear. So soft, in fact, I could hardly hear it. I wobbled, collided with the kerb and decided to pull over. Her vocal instructions were then duplicated on screen.

I was to press record on the console, speak into the microphone and, on this occasion, describe myself. The resulting message was stored on the computer to then, I discovered, be beamed to other people's consoles as they cycled nearby. I could hear their musings, too, in response to instructions that asked you to describe holding hands with someone, or an important party you went to aged 16, or to find a place on your bike ride that your dad would like and describe it. I fumbled for answers and then laughed in sympathy when I heard Toni's offering beamed to my console: "My name's Toni and I'm not very good on my bike."

*Rider Spoke* has the potential to animate a city. It could even work as a novel take on speed dating – but not, it has to be said, with those questions. It's a good idea, but the execution doesn't yet match it.

★ ★ ☆ ☆ ☆

Tel 0845 120 7550

**Mark Espiner**