small secrets in public spaces

David Williams: Blast Theory’s Rider Spoke, Sydney

It’s clear that her stories have taken place in a different city, but as I listen to them while sitting along the Sydney streets they are woven into the local urban landscape. Farr’s intimate disclosures encourage an equivalent sharing, and the more stories I record, the more closely it is examined. As I lurk in booths and crannies out of the flow of vehicle traffic, previous travellers on the street whisper in my headphones intimate reflections upon place, emotion and memory. Every secret story, wish, or promise is linked to every other, with the city reimagined as a web of story traffic. Every other bicycle rider that I pass feels like family—a fellow sharer of private whispers. Rider Spoke seems to propose a mode of urban navigation that borders on sacramental.

A week later I partake for a second time, choosing to cycle right into the gloomy grey of a rainy Saturday afternoon. Chronology goes askew as I cycle further through the rainy and only sparsely populated city streets. I listen as ‘Adem’ describes holding his girlfriend’s hand, and consider my own memories of this experience. Close by, I listen as ‘Sarah’ promises to feel out of sync, and my travels somehow out of space. I traverse the grid of inner city streets, dodging cars and passing pedestrians, and as I travel I feel the weight of other times and places pressing upon me—fleeting experiences whose intensity of feeling suggests an overactive urban landscape.

At times, Rider Spoke feels as if it is navigating the boundaries of a new public privacy, encouraging the making of confessions while surrounded by strangers. In a sense, this is quite an ordinary experience—after all, we do this unthinkingly almost every day as we talk on mobile phones, often discussing the most personal and intimate details in public spaces, often at relatively loud volumes. Somehow we expect that, in the city, no one will listen. Or if they do, that there is no way anyone will remember. In Rider Spoke the city’s booths and crannies, the eddies in its flow of near-continuous movement, are reahmed as spaces of memory, contemplation and intimacy. Small secrets play out privately in public spaces, and their presence suggests the elusive passage of many more, just out of my audio reach, suggesting that if only I could cycle every inch of the city and discover all of its hiding places, every delicate secret might be revealed.