

**'MISSING: ROMANCE & SLOWNESS  
OF IRRELEVANT TECHNOLOGY'  
CRITICAL RESPONSE BY MEGAN SPENCER**



Bek Berger's Seedpod was an exercise in acknowledging some of the key cultural artefacts and cultural modalities that have marked the passing of time, as experienced in mainstream Australia, over the last 25 years.

Some might call it an exercise in nostalgia, others a 'lament', however 25 year-old performer/producer Bek Berger prefers to call this Seedpod a 'tribute'. She is researching what will likely become a broader installation piece, about outmoded technologies and modalities, and how then to acknowledge the very moment at which that technology or modality passes. It's a lovely idea.

**Lest we forget**

Composed of several, simple elements, Berger used this Seedpod to ask us to listen to her list of 'tributes', in turn inviting us to share ours. Within Punctum's White Space, we, the participants, were also invited to sit around a table and wear "crowns" made from de-threaded videotapes, then to have "a cup of tea and a chat".

Stuck to high ceiling fans set on 'low', long black shiny threads of videotape swirled gently on either side of the table. In the corner, plastic video covers stood at attention, as badges of honour, carefully displayed on a teenager's bedroom shelf. And between each slick was an unlit candle. Viewable from a distance between the strands of swirling tape, this was a shrine indeed, not only to someone's childhood (Bek's), but to the days of the VCR and analogue entertainment.

And there we sat wearing the contents, the guts as it were of each video cassette, that Berger had fashioned almost as a crown of thorns. (There certainly was sacrifice involved and I secretly hoped I was wearing 'The Abyss'.)

**The revolution will not be downloaded**

Berger started proceedings by acknowledging the titular "irrelevant technologies" which had given meaning to her own life, and had allowed her to be part of a collective societal and cultural experience.

Such as: public pay phones, love letters, pen pals, floppy disks, rotary dial phones, then films that were actually made on film; projectionists, being able to get lost, being able be bored... Berger formally gave thanks to each and all, repeatedly, attempting a mantra.

The dead objects and defunct behaviours she gave thanks to were spoken of affectionately, yet without the crushing sentiment that might render this a cheap

nostalgia session about the 'good old days'. It was far more existential. (Plus Berger is too young to behave like a baby boomer). She passed no judgement, neither saying this state of affairs was good or bad – rather it 'just was'. It was all about seeing that moment *pass*.

The lovely part of this experience was that this was also a rare opportunity for a group of strangers to sit together and reflect publicly on such things that were 'no more' - those that we had shared in together somehow, in parallel lives. We spoke about instances of going to the library and researching in books instead of on the internet; old phones with dial faces; the postman delivering a letter... It connected us all and it could have gone on for hours.

It didn't. The finale came when Bek suddenly said, "on that note, here's to analogue", whereupon she got up from the table, turned the fans to 'high' and exited the room. We were left watching black tornadoes of tape slapping each other senseless, in the middle of a very white room. While a little abrupt, it was a still poetic finish to a poetic discussion.

#### **Analogue: something that is similar to something else in design, origin, use**

My only criticism of this 'round table', was that it was too unstructured. At times the public discussion threatened to overwhelm the artist's contribution. I sensed there was much more Berger wanted to say. And I definitely wanted to hear more of her thoughts and concepts – story too. Why was she so wedded to this out-of-date technology? Why wasn't she as disposing of it as the rest of us (i.e. the mainstream)? Why was she putting this consumer flow on 'pause'? I needed a bit more.

(Perhaps if she were to include a public discussion in future versions, timed chats could be used, using an old analogue kitchen timer with a loud ringer, to contain the discussion in a more structured or formal way.)

#### **Gone but not forgotten.**

In 'Missing: Romance & Slowness of Irrelevant Technology', Berger asked us to acknowledge objects and modalities emblematic of a time when things were different, slower, and ultimately now gone, never to return. What kind of effect might this 'absence' have on us now, if any?

Regularly she returned to 'the moving image' as a case in point. Shortly after we sat down, Berger reminded us that this was the week the signal for analogue TV was being switched off, for good. And it wouldn't be very long before this was the same all over the world. Analogue TV would be no more for we have 'gone digital'. And film is on the way out too; how many 'go digital or go dark' campaigns are there now, as cinemas struggle to stay viable in an industry that is 100% at the mercy of rapidly changing technology?

'So what?' you may ask? Aren't we are just humming along nicely – and doesn't digital technology and the rapidity of communication, benefit us all? Why the fuss?

Not really the point; one of the fundamentals of Berger's 'tribute' was to explore the value of *acknowledgement*, of which gratitude is inherent. Do we still have it in us? Are we capable anymore of acknowledgement beyond the cursory and the polite? Has the speed at which we now communicate wiped our memory banks of its value and necessity? Are we worse off as a culture without it?

The answer, we realised at the end of 'Missing: Romance & Slowness of Irrelevant Technology', while tape streamers whirled around us like a dancing tornado, was a resounding 'yes'. A great starting point for a potent installation piece about 'where to from here'...