

## *The Coffee Spoon Auditorium* *Comment*

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### **A Comparative Essay, volume 1.**

*Written by Ben Revi.*

On Friday, I took my routine trip to the Wayville Showgrounds in order to stand, frustrated and flummoxed, in a large and unwieldy crowd for the purpose of capturing a brief moment of musical glory.

Each year, Australia's capital cities (plus Auckland in New Zealand, and minus Hobart, Darwin and Canberra) play host to the *Big Day Out*, a frightening musical pilgrimage which sees a handful of brilliant musical artists play to scores of unappreciative partygoers. Somehow, roughly once every two years the line-up seems good enough for me to dispense with my hard-earned coin and brave the stridently disinterested masses to experience glimpses of brilliance. The Flaming Lips in 2004, Soulwax in 2006 and both Björk and Battles in 2008 were easily worth any struggle, or any persecution, I happened to face.

However, when I was there, standing in thirty degree heat, eating awful food and breathing in the stench of (sun)burnt human flesh, I couldn't help but cast my mind back to when I last felt so uncomfortable in the presence of such overwhelming inhumanity.

## *A Comparative Essay: Streaks of Inhumanity from the Big Day Out to Auschwitz.*

The following similarities and differences can be perceived between the Adelaide Big Day Out, 1 February 2008, and a visit to the Auschwitz Concentration Camp, 16 July 2007.

### *1. The Food*

Food at Auschwitz was, in fact, far more edible (and at more reasonable prices) than food at the Big Day Out. Although I was initially perturbed by the hot dog stand which greeted me upon entry, Auschwitz catering offered me the brilliance of mushroom zapiekanki and tasty cookies; Big Day Out catering offered oil-soaked nachos, salt-drenched pretzels and a crusty, burnt vegetarian pizza. Auschwitz did not serve alcoholic drinks (although considering the tone of the visit, perhaps an icy scotch would not go astray). In contrast, the Big Day Out's drink-dispensing system, whereby tokens must be purchased from one counter before punters are herded to the next counter to exchange tokens for drinks, seemed a sprightly rendition of the kinds of food-bartering and rationing systems deployed in Auschwitz in the early 1940s.

### *2. The Fashions*

When visiting the Polish town of Oświęcim on a 38-degree day in mid-July, I heartily recommend dressing responsibly to avoid heat-exhaustion. This, however, is no excuse for taking a tour of Nazi gas chambers while wearing a halter-top and tiny pink short shorts. Nobody surrounded by the haunting presence of death should have to choose between feeling fearfully contemplative, on the one hand, or just giving in to potent human desire.

Such fashion does seem more appropriate at the Big Day Out, although it is surprising how the level of discomfort was eerily similar.

### *3. The History*

When visiting Auschwitz, it is recommended that one takes the train from Kraków, so as to experience the exact same route, and take in the exact same views the Jews were seeing as they were rounded into the camp. There are only a few train services each day, which I will speculate has been designed to ensure that these are as crowded as those which were transporting the prisoners in 1942. Having missed all of the day's rail services, I took the even-more-crowded minibus which, even with the windows open *all the way*, was even more uncomfortable.

Adelaide's new trams - despite being trams and, even more poignantly, despite being new - are appallingly small, and lack functional air-conditioning. The Big Day Out

encourages thousands of foul-smelling teenagers to abuse them. Again: eerily similar.

Also, Auschwitz is a cultural marker dedicated to the past. Given the lineup - Rage Against The Machine, Björk, Paul Kelly, Regurgitator, Silverchair - the same could be easily be said for the 2008 Big Day Out.

#### *4. The Humanity*

By the time I got to Auschwitz - 52 years after the end of World War II - I was able to freely come and go as I pleased, save for the half-hour of being herded into tour groups divided by language and forced into a small cinema to watch one of the most horrifying historical films ever made. I was made to feel humbled, self-conscious, and vibrantly aware of the persecution of those who share my genealogy. In contrast, at the Big Day Out I was treated like a worthless, dirty prisoner.

Each Big Day Out has a d-barrier, a semi-circle of fences constructed several metres from the stage. This is ostensibly designed to control the amount of people allowed close to the stage, in order to prevent surges from people at the back attempting to move closer to the front. In theory, this is a good idea.

In practice, it was a disaster. Despite the acres of space available within the barriers, security had decided that it would be far more amusing to entirely restrict access 45 minutes prior to Björk's set. Throughout this time, eager crowds pushed against the blocked entrance, mashing those in front with complete disregard to human life. When Björk finally began, security immediately thrust the several-thousand enthusiastic punters into the d-barriers through skinny, single-file gates designed to accommodate only a small percentage of average BMI readings.

It is not difficult to imagine what happened next. As the fierce crowd surge which resulted - far worse than anything the d-barrier was designed to prevent - brutally forced its way to the gates, security became helpless, working only to free the trapped arms of frightened teenage girls caught in the boisterous sea of large, bearded men who had surrounded them, all pushing with whatever strength they could muster to work their way to freedom.

Although my tour of Auschwitz gave me a small, visual understanding of what it would have been like for my ancestors to be herded into a camp of misery and death, it was not until my experience with the d-barrier that I was offered a practical re-enactment.

#### *5. Conclusion*

There are many differences between Auschwitz and the Big Day Out. Auschwitz did not have the pure, refined beauty that is Björk; the Big Day Out did not have a glass

cabinet filled with many kilolitres of human hair.

But as a stinging reminder of abject human suffering, the Big Day Out is surely hard to beat.

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<http://coffeespooners.blogspot.com/2008/02/published-comparative-essay-volume-1.html>