

ΕΤΕΡΩΝΥΜΑ

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White Night 2016: celebrating life in Melbourne



Last year more than 500,000 Melburnians roamed the streets of the Central Business District from 7pm to 7am, in order to celebrate, as the organisers put it, a White Night of artistic festivities of all sorts and of all shapes. Mostly young people, but also numerous others, families, middle-aged and elders, were roaming the streets of the city looking curiously or photographing impressively lit-up buildings, dancing, eating, or queuing up in order to participate in various artistic happenings.

The idea of Melbourne staging a White Night took off two year ago, as an initiative of the then Premier and Arts Minister of Victoria Ted Baillieu, in the spirit of Nuit Blanche in Paris, he said, and in the hope of adding another major event to Melbourne's annual calendar.

However, if you search around trying to find the origins of this celebration of the arts, of urban centres, of life in general, you will find that this kind of all-night arts festival in many cities around the world, during summer time, was born in Saint Petersburg (formerly Leningrad) in Russia. The idea was born in an imperial cultural centre of the northern hemisphere, where the

sunset is very late in June, the sunrise is early and the twilight lasts almost all night.

The first city outside of Russia to host such a festival is considered to be Paris, which has had its own Nuit Blanche (White Night) festival since 2001.

Rome, Florence, Amsterdam, Toronto, Montreal, Chicago, Sao Paulo, Lima, San Antonio, Leeds, Tel Aviv and tens of other cities around the world stage their own White Nights during summertime.

Announcing the birth of the first White Night in Melbourne in 2013, the then Victorian Premier said: «There's a great appetite for events in Victoria, and White Night will sit proudly alongside major events such as the Australian Open, the Melbourne Cup Carnival, the Australian F1 Grand Prix and Melbourne Winter Masterpieces, as well as our renowned arts and cultural festivals.»

However, what I did witness personally, along with many others, in the streets of Melbourne in last years' White Night festivities, was something bigger and deeper than a major arts event, I think. When half a million citizens of greater Melbourne take to the streets and the paramedics treat only 70 people for

injuries, drunkenness or drug use, while the police arrest only 10 people, there is a 'moral' there.

The moral is that Melburnians of all walks of life were fronting up in the heart of this metropolis of the South last year in order to celebrate the joys of life, the joys of their life, in this part, in this city, in this modern Babel of the world.

Unfortunately though, the significance of that night was not picked up early enough on Sunday morning 2014 by all major television and radio media outlets in Melbourne and in the rest of Australia. White Night 2014 entered the main television and radio news bulletins late in the Sunday morning!

Also, instead of concentrating the discussion on the number that attended the event, or on the possible inadequacies of public transport and public authorities to deal with the masses, it could have been better if we attempted to go a bit further.

When the plurality of an urban complex such as Melbourne, that is when people, space, time all come together for twelve hours, on such a large scale, to celebrate above all life, then urban philosophers and urban demographers

have to be mobilised in order to account for this White Night event. The deep, subjective, very complex and very close relationship that exists between individuals, groups of people, places and landscapes-streetscapes was exhibited on a massive scale last year in Melbourne and it is expected to be displayed again this Saturday evening and Sunday morning.

This massive twelve hour long interconnection of Melburnians with their city and with each other, away from their own private space, away from their own home, apartment or car, is to be noticed, highlighted and analysed.

P.S. This article, with slight alterations, was first published in Neos Kosmos English Edition in March 2014. The photo of this posting, borrowed from the official White Night website (<http://whitenightmelbourne.com.au/>), depicts one of this weekend's projects. In celebration of the sesquicentenary of the publication of Lewis Carroll's 'Alice's Adventures in Wonderland', and referencing the State Library's own 'Alice' collection, projection artist Nick Azidis will transform the exterior of the State Library of Victoria into the beginnings of our own Alice in Wonderland adventure.