

The Postcolonial Museum

The Arts of Memory and the Pressures of History

Edited by Iain Chambers, Alessandra De Angelis, Celeste Ianniciello, Mariangela Orabona and Michaela Quadraro, Università degli Studi di Napoli 'L'Orientale', Italy

This book examines how we can conceive of a 'postcolonial museum' in the contemporary epoch of mass migrations, the internet and digital technologies. The authors consider the museum space, practices and institutions in the light of repressed histories, sounds, voices, images, memories, bodies, expression and cultures. Focusing on the transformation of museums as cultural spaces, rather than physical places, is to propose a living archive formed through creation, participation, production and innovation. The aim is to propose a critical assessment of the museum in the light of those transcultural and global migratory movements that challenge the historical and traditional frames of Occidental thought. This involves a search for new strategies and critical approaches in the fields of museum and heritage studies which will renew and extend understandings of European citizenship and result in an inevitable re-evaluation of the concept of 'modernity' in a so-called globalised and multicultural world.

Long overdue, here is a volume that updates and reconfigures the intersection of postcolonial critique with multiple interpretations of the museum and social praxis in globalisation. The Postcolonial Museum charts gaps, achievements and prospects in 20 chapters that re-interpret the connection of past and current imperialisms. Introducing a wealth of new voices, this is essential reading for anyone interested in curatorial practice and theory, modern and contemporary art, ethnography, museology and the interventionist potential of research in the humanities overall.

Angela Dimitrakaki, University of Edinburgh, UK

Cover image: *The Tomb of Qara Kóz* by Ronni Ahmmed and Ebadur Rahman, Venice Biennale, Lido, 2011. Image courtesy of the artist and the curator, Ebadur Rahman.

ASHGATE

Ashgate Publishing Limited
Wey Court East, Union Road,
Farnham, Surrey,
GU9 7PT, England

www.ashgate.com

ISBN 978-1-4724-1567-7



9 781472 415677

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Orabona and Quadraro

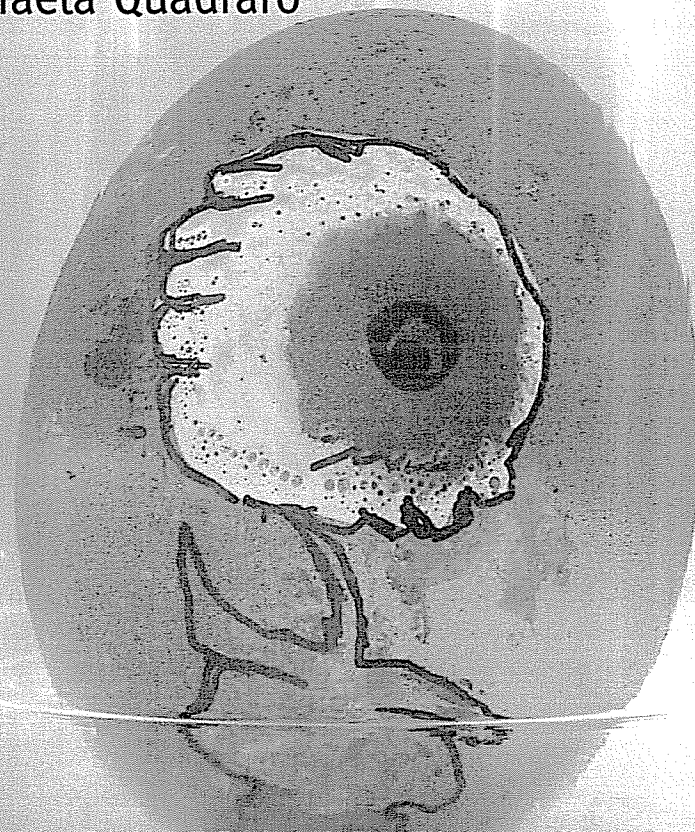
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MeLa – *European Museums in an age of migrations* is a four year long Research Project (March 2011–February 2015) funded by the European Commission under the Seventh Framework Programme within the Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities Sector (SSH-2010-5.2.2, Grant Agreement n° 266757). MeLa is an interdisciplinary programme aimed at analysing the role of museums in the contemporary multi-cultural context, characterized by an augmented migration of people and ideas, and at identifying innovative practices and strategies in order to foster their evolution.

The research activities developed by the MeLa Project are fostered by the cooperation of nine European Partners, and articulated through distinct Research Fields.

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examines the historical and contemporary relationships between museums, places and identities in Europe and the effects of migrations on museum practices.

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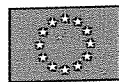
investigates and experiments innovative communication tools, ICT potentialities, user centred approaches, and the role of architecture and design for the contemporary museum.

RF06: Envisioning 21st Century Museums

fosters theoretical, methodological and operative contributions to the interpretation of diversities and commonalities within European cultural heritage, and proposes enhanced practices for the mission and design of museums in the contemporary multicultural society.

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www.mela-project.eu



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
European Research Area



Funded under Socio-economic Sciences & Humanities

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Published by
Ashgate Publishing Limited
Wey Court East
Union Road
Farnham
Surrey, GU9 7PT
England

Ashgate Publishing Company
110 Cherry Street
Suite 3-1
Burlington, VT 05401-3818
USA

www.ashgate.com

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

The Library of Congress has cataloged the printed edition as follows:

The postcolonial museum : the arts of memory and the pressures of history / by Iain Chambers, Alessandra De Angelis, Celeste Ianniciello, Mariangela Orabona, Michaela Quadraro.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-4724-1567-7 (hardback) – ISBN 978-1-4724-1568-4 (ebook) –

ISBN 978-1-4724-1569-1 (epub) 1. Museums – Social aspects. 2. Postcolonialism – Social aspects. 3. Collective memory – Social aspects. 4. Museums and community.

I. Chambers, Iain, editor of compilation.

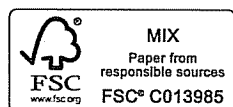
AM7.P59 2014
069–dc23

2013033639

ISBN 9781472415677 (hbk)

ISBN 9781472415684 (ebk – PDF)

ISBN 9781472415691 (ebk – ePUB)



Printed in the United Kingdom by Henry Ling Limited,
at the Dorset Press, Dorchester, DT1 1HD

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Introduction: Disruptive Encounters – Museums, Arts and Postcoloniality

Alessandra De Angelis, Celeste Ianniciello, Mariangela Orabona
and Michaela Quadraro

Postcolonial art is intimately linked to globalisation – that is, to a critical reflection on the planetary conditions of artistic production, circulation and reception. This implies focusing on the interweaving of the geographical, cultural, historical and economic contexts in which art takes place. The relationship between globalisation and art, as Okwi Enwezor observes, conceived and institutionalised by the European history of modern art in terms of separation or simply negation, here acquires fundamental importance (Enwezor 2003). It represents both the premise through which the relationship between art and the postcolonial can be conceptualised, and the matrix that helps to convey the cultural and political value of this relationship, together with its significance as a *disruptive encounter*. Far from being lost in the sterile and abstract, yet provincial, mirror of self-referentiality masked as universalism – with the implicit claim of the autonomy and independence of art from other cultural forms and activities – postcolonial art is deeply and consciously embedded in historicity, globalisation and social discourse. On one hand, it reminds us of how power is organic to the constitution of the diverse relations and asymmetries that shape our postcolonial world, and hence of how ‘bringing contemporary art into the geopolitical framework that defines global relations offers a perspicacious view of the postcolonial constellation’ (Enwezor 2003, 58). On the other hand, postcolonial art also shows how aesthetics today presents itself as an incisive critical instance. Postcolonial art proposes new paradigms of both signification and subjectivation, offering alternative interpretative tools that promote a reconfiguration of a planetary reality.

Analysing the link between modernity and this global reality, we can say that globalisation can be understood as the planetary ‘expansion of trade and its grip on the totality of natural resources, of human production, in a word of living in its entirety’ (Mbembe 2003). It was inaugurated by the Occident through a violent process of expropriation, appropriation and an exasperated defence of property, spread globally through capitalism and its imperialist extension. This is a political economy that is deeply rooted in, and sustained by, the humanist, rationalist, colonialist and nationalist culture of the West. The central phenomenon of modernity, born in a historical exercise of power, was fed by the religion of ‘progress’ and the racist ideology of ‘white supremacy’ imposing itself for centuries as a universal ontological category through the institutions of laws,

Chapter 10

Blurring History: The Central European Museum and the Schizophrenia of Capital

Ivan Jurica

To envision a postcolonial museum within the Central European space means first to think of this space as a site of ideological clashes and divisions, both in the present and in the past. Despite all the current proclamations of a united Europe as a 'space without borders', we still experience a division between Western Europe with its uninterrupted culture and ideology, and Eastern Europe with its socialist past and turbo-capitalist present. The museum, as a state institution, subjected to the dominant ideology, dictates the official form of art and culture. We have to bear this aspect in mind when we analyse the postcolonial Central European museum that operates from a position in between different histories and conditions. Visiting different places in Central Europe, one will experience exhibitions that serve different functions within the political and social structures: so, different museums will be encountered in Austria and Germany, in Prague, Bratislava and Bucharest. Moreover, one may experience the use of an identical 'universalist' form – yet what is the past and present meaning of this form when adopted in different histories?

Another urgent question is raised by the role of postcolonial theory within this space. Why do we actually talk about postcolonial theory in Central Europe, which does not seem to be affected by classical colonial history as imposed by the Western colonial powers? Postcolonial theory not only deals with colonial history, but also with coloniality and the history of capitalism and Christianity. If the local official historical narrative excludes any notion of racism and colonial exploitation, this still does not mean that coloniality, as an ideology and mentality, did not and does not exist within these spaces. Further, it is precisely postcolonial theory that enables a different understanding of current processes within the transitional societies in the 'East', as well as in the West. Last but not least, in this sense it is postcolonial theory that provides a radicalised approach to the profound implications of the fascist history and post-fascist present in this space. For postcolonial theory analyses fascism, its historical and current forms, not as a historical error, but as generated by capitalist ideology and practice. So, how can we perceive a Central European postcolonial museum?

The Central European Postcolonial Museum: The 'Grand Narrative' and the West

The 'journey' commences in the centre of a new constellation of Central Europe that is actually not new at all in Vienna. Even though from the geopolitical point of view Vienna and Austria tended, especially before 1989, to be considered (ridiculously) as belonging to Eastern Europe due to their international isolation and provinciality, they are definitely spaces of Western culture and ideology within the Central European space. This fact is crucial in understanding the new, post-1989 role of Vienna and Austria. Their intensive economic growth is based on their renewed positioning between the East and the West, combined with their historical affiliation to the West. This position secured access to the capital necessary for privatising the collapsed Eastern European structures. This might be regarded as the resurrection of a 'grand narrative' (a history that lay forgotten) that, in combination with capital, constitutes the foundation of its reactivation. The privatisation of post-socialist cultures and the resurrection of the new-old centre have gone hand in hand with an emphasis on 'our' common history, traditions and hierarchies. Thus was the post-1989 imperial capital reconstructed (Freudmann et al. 2009).

In 1989, we saw not only the collapse of socialist economies and their ideology, but also the beginning of globalisation processes. Multinational capital changed the character of borders, while the movement of the people within the so-called 'borderless' space remained strictly regulated. The collapse of the Eastern European economies and the war in former Yugoslavia generated, among other aspects, poverty and a multitude of 'naked lives'. The consequence was a massive migration into spaces which seemed promising in terms of a regular job and a safe existence.

The Central European postcolonial museum as an official cultural institution was affected in a twofold manner: the Eastern European situation and the war in former Yugoslavia provided a postcolonial repertoire for the Western museums and their exhibiting policy, and Eastern Europeans themselves became potential visitors – either as tourists or as students and migrants. At the same time, the neo-liberal economic agenda entered the cultural landscape, or to put it differently, the museum was thrown into neo-liberal market structures. Suddenly, the relevance of the museum became economical instead of educational or historical. Or to put it more precisely, the educational and historical relevance was subordinated to economic issues. This does not mean that the historical narrative was not conditioned by economic reasons in the past. None the less, as Walter Mignolo (2011) has put it, in the twenty-first century, society constitutes a part of the economy, while in the past the opposite was the case: the economy was part of society.

The classical historical museum in Central Europe has yet to confront postcolonial theory. There are several reasons for this. First, they have not undertaken the attempt to re-write universal history, but rather the opposite. There are few museums operating within this territory with postcolonial theory

and knowledge at their disposal. In terms of museum organisation, differences are minor but crucial as far as theoretical conceptualisation is concerned – the classical historical museum operates in the temporality of the present, but it does not work with it. The present, meaning the way history is constructed from the current point of view, remains invisible within the 'grand narrative'. In view of historical racisms and processes of exclusion, currently being repeated, this connectivity to the past and the present could be decisive for re-thinking the capitalist order and its ideology in a divided Europe that prosecutes migration.

One of the popular museums that combines the consumerist expectation of a visitor with the attempt to re-formulate the dominant perception of history is the Vienna Museum. Recently, one of its curators proposed the historical figure of Angelo Soliman with the intention of revealing the long history of Austrian racism. Who was Angelo Soliman? The exhibition booklet *Angelo Soliman – An African in Vienna* introduces him to the contemporary visitor as follows: 'Born around 1721 in sub-Saharan Africa, enslaved as a child ... a man who had enjoyed a distinguished career in the enlightened circles of the capital and was posthumously displayed in a museum as a half-naked "savage", adorned with ostrich feathers and shells' (Wien Museum 2011).

The exhibition space was divided into three parts: first, the life and death of Angelo Soliman were presented, then examples were shown of how art and culture appropriated this historical figure, while the last section displayed current structural racisms of the state, supported and reinforced by powerful mass-media representation, including such cases such as the killing of Marcus Omofuma.¹ So the narration and dramaturgy did not only include Angelo Soliman, but struggled, via the extension into the present, with an attempt to grasp racism in general. Yet how was this actually achieved?

Popular museums obviously cannot avoid presenting their subjects in a popular way. Soliman and Omofuma, both historical figures, were, among others, displayed in the same way as the defeat of Ottoman troops near Vienna in 1683 or the construction of St Stephen's Cathedral or the Viennese underground. I cannot say whether the aim of curators was to intervene in the current and historical racism by way of art. But if this was not their intention, what were they seeking? What they did manage to do was to exhibit the person Soliman (or Omofuma). The attempt to critically discuss white European racisms, via the posthumous display of a non-white European man, occurred through the gaze turned on the 'Other' as object. The desired intervention in dominant ideological structures actually had the effect of conserving and reproducing them. Postcolonial theory here entered a popular institution of the historical narrative, accompanied by questions of historical and current racisms, but the institution itself was not disrupted. Rather, the popular museum was renovated through the life and destiny of Angelo Soliman, and postcolonial theory was institutionalised. But does critical theory really aim to change official institutions?

1 See <http://no-racism.net/rubrik/97/> (accessed 10 March 2013).

In terms of exposing the postcolonial museum as operating within the schizophrenia of capital, a museum of modern and contemporary arts seems to be an even more suitable example. Why? Because, as distinct from a popular historical museum – which is conceptualised rather as a site of aesthetic consumerism and tourism – modern Western museums present themselves as sites of confrontation, where critical knowledge is produced. While this might be true, the crucial point in this context remains what sort of knowledge and what sort of confrontation is implied? Here, with regard to a postcolonial museum, I will examine in more detail the role of art education in modern art museums. It is important to bear in mind that art education in a museum is not just any department, or a simple extension of the museum services. Rather, within Austria's cultural and educational landscape, it has become a top item on the agenda in recent years. So a museum in Austria no longer simply focuses on collection and conservation, but nowadays also on education.

An institution of modern and contemporary art envisages itself as progressive, open to new theories, models, innovative forms and so on. It increasingly asserts its political statements through art. In this sense, the modern museum evokes notions of democracy and democratisation, communicated through the intensification of educational and transmission processes. Yet 'opening up' the museum to the 'outside' is not a sign of change in the bourgeois mentality, but rather of the modified conditions of the modern museum within the neo-liberal market democracies. These processes were intended to reinforce the social and political relevance of the state institution to the market. What does 'democratisation' of the institution and of art mean? If in the past the museum was described by its critics as a space of dead art, now the dead – actually meaning de-politicised – universalistic form has been extended through a diversified museum discourse involving a cacophony of meanings and voices. Everybody can enter the museum, everybody can express him- or herself; the education department is available when needed and will explain all. But the most important aspect in terms of 'understanding' art within the museum – that is, how the museum as an institution functions and how a certain form or practice becomes art – remains invisible. The institution operates in the same way as ideology – it is possible to talk about everything, but not about the museum/ideology itself. If ideology operates as naturalised and omnipresent, so does the museum institution as one of its agents – the meaning and role of the historical narrative shifts out of focus and is blurred.

Here I approach the primary schizophrenia of the postcolonial museum as a capitalist institution. The principal relevance of modern and contemporary art production is interpreted and theorised as a tradition of resistance against the capitalist market, executed by means of formal innovation. So if a critical political agenda was, and still is, a subject of modern and post-modern art production in any form, what relevance does this have in a society that operates under a 'market consumer dictate'? What relevance does an image or the evocation of resistance against the market have if the market and mechanisms of profit dominate and legitimise all fields of contemporary globalised societies, including the education and art system? What is the meaning of a resistance against the market and

capitalism if these are privatised by capital and ideology? Or, to put it another way, what form does, or should, the resistance against exploitative capitalism take? Last, but not least, it is also important that forms of resistance are not free from universal validity.

This situation turns out to be even more absurd when dealing with migrants or their children of the second or third generation. The constant confrontation with racist state power in terms of control and disciplining is here focused on their integration into the official system and structures. One of the most frequent demands is inclusion in the job market as a guarantee of possible and successful integration. As integration in the job market apparently results in cultural integration, this leads to participation in the state culture that is the basis of a non-reflexive dominant racist cultural history. In a similar fashion, museums of modern and contemporary art deal with activities and resistant cultural and societal forms, while migrants experience the exact opposite within these cultures as they are increasingly reduced to passive objects.

Against this background, it is possible to argue that art education within the modern museum institution, presented in terms of democratisation, operates as a mythology. The talk about art, its form and content, the attempt to transmit this knowledge to students and pupils, end up, once again, as an overarching seductive narrative. The audience is capable of following what the educator is talking about, it is even very interesting, but that is all. So the topic of resistance in a modern museum is maybe relevant to resistance-as-a-game within the virtual space – for the participant should stimulate a resistance, he or she should make it possible. In the end, however, it actually reinforces the exterior system that is repeated and relayed inside the museum.

The museum is not only about artworks, it also involves employees and their working conditions, with precise hierarchies and huge income differences. The postcolonial status of the institution might well be represented by the following, actually stereotypical, scenario: an exhibition space full of modernist paintings or images representing modernist utopias, post-modernist criticisms of the system, even postcolonial positions, all for the sake of evoking a progressing institution and society. And a team of cleaners, consisting of poorly paid migrants, is at work between the objects. These exploited 'cultural workers' are like shadows – they work very early in the morning, as during opening time their presence would disturb the visitors, the staff, and above all the artworks. Alternatively, this scenario could itself be a work of art.

The Central European Postcolonial Museum/the Colonial Difference and the East

As the topics of migration and colonial history became urgent in the field of contemporary art production, postcolonial theory also became relevant to the Central European space. While postcolonial theory turned the gaze back on to

white racist Western societies and their ideology within the framework of the history of classical colonial powers, in the Central European space these issues still concern the other(s). It was a theory by the 'Other' about the others, about the white bourgeois mentality of producing and exploiting colonial difference. This happened *there, somewhere else, far away from here*. In terms of the structure and the form of a museum, and in terms of the structure and nature of a historical narrative that appears to be segregated from the present, postcolonial theory was again turned by institutionalised processes into a curiosity. It signalled the progress of the institution. In the end, it re-produced colonial thought and the 'Other'.

In this respect, the post-1989 privatisation of the Eastern European space and structures via Western, as well as local, capital was represented in the colonial rhetoric of modernisation, renovation and progress of the post-socialist cultures. If, in the 1990s, the notion of 'self-colonisation' became popular for indicating the processes of transformation from socialism to turbo-capitalism, one important factor was missing from this formulation: an alternative to a straightforward subjugation to the West. Populist promises of a better future based on a desire for unlimited consumption and nationalist pride provided a basis for the future order of this space. The collective disillusionment with the dream of capitalist democracy as the guarantee for equality and justice within the post-socialist societies quickly followed. Forty years of a patriarchal totalitarian socialism has had a bitter consequence. Given that socialist and communist ideology generated a radical criticism of capitalism, currently any kind of criticism against turbo-capitalism is immediately viewed as socialism, with its associated totalitarian structures and communist ideology. Of course, the issue of appropriating postcolonial theory in Central Europe or post-socialist societies is awkward. In the context of nostalgia for the totalitarian past within the totalitarian present, postcolonial theory not only focuses on the history of colonialism, but also on the history of capitalism, Euro-centrism, Christianity, and on the dominant historical narrative as well. If, for example, socialism constituted and legitimised itself via anti-fascist resistance during the Second World War, the turbo-capitalist present constitutes and legitimises itself by means of its anti-communist ideology. While currently the socialist past is presented as the darkest era of Central European modernity, the fascist past as generated by capitalism is increasingly rehabilitated and legitimised.

In the last twenty years, the post-socialist state museum, as an agent of official ideology, has been intensively concerned with its universal re-positioning in terms of its inclusion in the Western art system and market – thus it has focused on its own re-historicisation. The postcolonial Eastern European museum is struggling, as Jürgen Habermas put it at the beginning of the 1990s, with the institutionalised 'catching up of the West' (Habermas 1990). In the post-socialist context, this implies a re-construction of modernity and of the universalistic modernist form. In terms of Slovakia or the Czech Republic, it is a mutation of the former avant-garde into official art history and power. Both the museum and art production serve as evidence of the 'correct' universal history of civilised societies that is

worth integrating into Western structures: they provide evidence of how to fill the gaps of the post-socialist colonial difference. The history of socialist realism has to be deleted, while at the same time this history is used to evoke capitalism as independent and free. In this context, the art of socialist realism is subject to deletion, or else is exposed in amusement parks or museums of terror.² The twentieth-century socialist past is currently conceived and presented as a historical error that could be defeated.

But how does this re-historicisation in the context of a universal history affect the comprehension of the universal art form? This might also answer the question of why the booming Western interest in Eastern European art production faded away so quickly in the first half of the 1990s. In this context, the Slovakian art historian and curator Petra Hanáková (2010) refers to a paradox: the politically rather left-wing universalistic Western art form represents exactly the opposite within the Eastern European context. The form taken from the West was previously adopted and developed as representing the unofficial art scene, as a counter-position to socialist realism and culture. Hanáková describes the subsequent situation in the 1990s as a mutual disappointment: the heroes of the internationally canonised art history from the West were now regarded by their Eastern European colleagues as being communists, and vice versa.

Collecting Art – Relocating the Profit of Relocated Production

Another example of a postcolonial museum in Central Europe – viewed in the context of the capitalist establishment of an art collection – is the Essl Museum in Klosterneuburg, near Vienna.³ The Essl Museum is part of the estate of the Essl family, who founded and owned the Austrian Baumaxx company that has been widely active throughout Central Europe since the fall of the Berlin Wall. The Essls are known as rather untypical art collectors – they truly love art; without any art education, they simply like what they like. Money is never an issue when it comes to art, and their shopping trips in the art scenes worldwide, including various more or less 'exotic' territories and cultures, are legendary. In this context, it is also interesting to note their engagement with the nascent Eastern European art scene in the form of the popular Essl Award. This competition assembles young talent as well as well-known theoreticians of the local art scenes. The Austrian political economist Hannes Hofbauer writes in this context about obligatory models of enterprise for Austrian and German companies. Since the 1990s, when the first Western companies relocated their production to post-socialist countries, this relocation of production from Germany or Austria to a post-socialist country indicated serious and competent economic management – leaving the production in Germany or Austria was considered economically irresponsible towards the

² See, for example, the film *Red Tours* by Joanne Richardson and David Rych (2010).

³ See <http://www.essl.museum/english/index.html> (accessed 10 March 2013).

company (Hofbauer 2010). The establishment of foundations and art collections might be considered part of such obligatory enterprise models. On the topic of the repetition of colonial processes, Hofbauer remains careful, but beside the exploitation of cheap labour, he considers the obverse relocation of immense profits to the head offices in the West as a possible moment of colonial repetition. The Essl Collection might be understood in these terms: their museum and the collection are products of relocated capital and the relocation of profit.

And Lastly ...

A good example of an activist art project, deploying postcolonial theory with the intention of cracking the bourgeois hegemonic image and representation in the Central European space, might be the *Hidden Histories – Remapping Mozart* project, realised in 2006 in Vienna on behalf of the ‘Mozart Jahr’, celebrating the 250th anniversary of Mozart’s birth.⁴ The project featured four exhibitions in four locations in Vienna involving a network of scientists, artists, theoreticians and activists. The project actively and critically examined historical and contemporary problems in art, in politics and society. It shifted established perceptions and created new meanings. The exhibitions, called ‘configurations’, used quotes from the libretti of Mozart operas and gave the four configurations a frame, focusing on and intervening in themes such as orientalism, exoticism, racism (anti-Roma), the appropriation of Mozart by the Nazis and the Second Austrian Republic, and the criminalisation of desire, with the corresponding counter-strategies. Against this background, the activities of the anti-racist collective Pamoja – Research Group on Black Austrian History and Presence also deserve mention. This collective, as the name implies, intensively researches Austrian history in terms of coloniality, colonialism and racism. Another important initiative is Maiz, an independent organisation founded and operated by and for migrant women, based in Linz, Austria.⁵ Both of these organisations act at the core of anti-racist self-determination and represent a counter-strategy to, among other things, the divided postcolonial present and colonial past in the context of a society of ‘equal rights’.

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4 See <http://www.remappingmozart.mur.at/> (accessed 10 March 2013).

5 See <http://www.maiz.at/en> (accessed 10 March 2013).

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