

Marina GRŽINIĆ

Academy of Fine Arts Vienna

THE INFLUENCE OF WOMEN ON THE CONTENT AND SYSTEM OF ART EDUCATION

In the following, I would like to highlight some fragmentary practices of art and teaching in order to open a possibility to tell a different story of the positions within the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. Fred Moten states in "Ecology of Eloquent Things," "We live within the history of a double violation, the denigration of things and the coincident devaluation of people that is carried out by what is supposed to be their reduction to things."¹

My idea, therefore, is to strive for a gesture that builds some pillars of thinking to unlearn the repetitive history of white educational institutions arbitrarily employing any other position that might be called a Person of Colour in continental Europe today. This is again a racialised term to protect "white innocence."²

In "The Unquiet Dead: Race and Violence in the 'Post-Racial' United States," J.E. Jed Murr:

focuses in particular on popular cultural repertoires of narrative, visual, and sonic enunciation to read how histories of racialized and gendered violence circulate, (dis)appear, and congeal in and as "common sense" in a period in which the uneven dispensation of value and violence afforded different bodies is purported to no longer

break down along the same old racial lines. [...] Deeply and contested and contradictory [...] in their articulations to other modalities of difference and oppression is alleged to have undergone significant transformation such that, among other things, processes of racialization are understood as decisively delinked from racial violence.³

We are experiencing something similar in the European space, in the institutions of the former West. In the former East, there is an intensified process of ongoing racialisation, subjugation, and discrimination, first against LGBTQI+ communities, and then an overt and poisoning, but EU-supported dispossession of refugees, especially those who are not "white." This text navigates through some important events and positions that have changed the state of affairs and of which we should be made aware. These events and positions are all connected to the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. They bring the future and it is up to us to see how we can unlearn our present to imagine a better world differently.

Part 1.

Introduction: Where I stand

In 2003 I was appointed professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, where I teach the Conceptual Art Studio. I direct the Conceptual Art Studio, which I have conceived as “post-conceptual” (Post-Conceptual Art Practices, or PCAP). This is how many of the contemporary conceptual artworks are seriously defined today because we were too tied to a historical movement with conceptual art. Activism, politics, and theory are paramount to the way we engage with visual practices and the politics of representation in PCAP. Theory is not about old academic theories that stifle art practice, but about contemporary theoretical and critical thinking that helps students develop processes for conceptualising the visual arts and the politics of the world, which has many different levels. Every provider of content and context, from pencil to computer, is supported.

PCAP asks us to rethink what the image is, how the relationship between art, culture, society, and politics is established, and the ways in which students can function as responsible political subjects. The idea of bridging the gap between media and conceptuality means that we look deeply at technology, from film, photography, video, internet, and multimedia to computer technologies, to develop a politically and socially engaged art that can intervene in a larger context. Art is not a tool that can simply be used for a particular, innocent process of producing and disseminating images and knowledge. Education is not a transparent machine for the production and dissemination of skills. PCAP is therefore developing a platform for the discussion and conceptualisation of various artistic, cultural and political issues.

The Academy of Fine Arts Vienna is a polystructured institution that combines art with art education and philosophy of art with the training of future art teachers. Accepting the professorship is a political decision. I think it is a challenge to dismantle the power of hierarchy because it exists. It is one of the fundamental functions of the institution. Danila Mayer, an anthropologist, explained in the

midst of the 2020-2022 Corona pandemic, which is a very neoliberal virus: free movement of goods and money, but total restriction of free movement of people ... the transfer of tax money to corporations and businesses ... the isolation of people at home. The whole world has come to a standstill and the reason is the Covid-19 pandemic.

Suddenly, humanity, touching, hugs, conversation, kindness, celebration and all the "good things" associated with being together seem to have met an early death and insecurity, aggression, depression, fear, hostility, oppression, racism - all forms of discrimination are the order of the day. The community organisation Afro Rainbow Austria has described the consequences of the pandemic. They say that for their vulnerable community, Covid-19 brought job loss, depression, homelessness, and delays in asylum procedures, to name a few. Thus, interventions at the level of production, distribution, and institutionalisation of knowledge are capital's latest attempt to transform even universities and academies into managerial institutions that produce only “skilled” students.

Afro Rainbow Austria [ARA], *Wearable Vocabulary, Smashing Wor(l)ds Summercamp*, June 26, 2021. Summercamp was organized via the project *Smashing Wor(l)ds: Cultural Practices for re/Imagining & un/Learning Vocabularies (2020–2022)*, funded by the Creative Europe programme of the European Union. It was a gathering of the Austrian partner organisations with Afro Rainbow Austria [ARA], Queer Base, Silent University Austria and the PCAP Students at the Academy of Fine Arts.

The final point of this intervention, which capital has already exercised at every other level of contemporary society, from public space to government agencies, civil rights, and the arts, is depoliticisation. Everything from business to education is now being transformed into a non-political form and agency. What is feared is the entry of the state neoliberal apparatuses into the public education system, which means that students will be controlled and monitored to expediently get a job and pay taxes.



Opening by Marissa Lôbo, Marina Gržinić, *Smashing Wor(l)ds Summercamp*, June 26, 2021. Photo by Rui Bai.



Smashing Wor(l)ds Summercamp, Kleine Stadtfarm am Schillerwasser 26.06.2021 Photo J. Pristovsek

What is going on can be aptly described by Kirsten Forkert's thoughts on the contradictions of post-studio practices in relation to the academy in the current political climate. For Forkert, the changes that are taking place have much to do with the commodity value of art and the role of the artist in comparison to another figure, the employee. They are both symptom and reaction to certain political and economic changes.⁴

We seek to open a radical platform for the discussion and conceptualisation of issues as formulated by Forkert in her reflections on post-studio practice:

Post-studio practices challenge the assumptions that art is about technical virtuosity or mute creative expression, and that what happens in the studio or classroom is separate from the rest of our lives. Certain aspects of post-studio practice also question the definition of the artist as a romantic, heroic individual (also

imagined as white and male) – one who does not consider the political or economic context of his work. On the other hand, how much do post-studio practices, as they are taught within the academy, really challenge conventional definitions of authorship or signature style?⁵

In such a context, no tool (if we think of technology) and no paradigm (if we think of theory, the visual, etc.) can be considered a tool or category that can be applied to a particular, innocent, collaborative process of knowledge production and dissemination. In this way, not only can the institutions of knowledge escape connection to power, capital, and economic "rationalisation," but also the methods and technologies used in the process of knowledge production and dissemination are not simply seen as pre-political categories that can be connected exclusively to ideas and discourses of improvement, facilitation, and valorisation.

Part 2.**Wo/men, LGBTQI+ initiatives,
community, publishing projects by
and with PCAP (2005–2022)**

Over the past decades, as specific projects of the art studio I direct, Post-Conceptual Art Practices, or PCAP, including 2022, we have published five books.

The books were part of the activation with and by the students of Post-Conceptual Art Practices, or PCAP, of different decades and generations.

The first book, *Medialization/Labour/Spatialization/(Re)Politicization*, published in 2005, addressed and critically countered antisemitism.⁶

The second, *Are You Talking to Me? Discussions on Knowledge Production, Gender Politics and Feminist Strategies*, published in 2008, dealt with feminism, and the post-feminist condition.⁷

The third, *INTERSECTIONS. At the Crossroads of the Production of Knowledge, Precarity, Subjugation, and the Reconstruction of History, Display and De-linking*, published in 2009, dealt with the analysis of education and activism.⁸

The fourth, published in 2013, which we call *The Vocabulary of Decoloniality*, for short, is entitled *Utopia of Alliances, Conditions of Impossibilities and the Vocabulary of Decoloniality*.⁹

In 2022 we published a picture book, *I'm 10 and my hobby is flying*.¹⁰ The book is a project by Cathérine Lehnerer to “unlearn” by the class 4b (Lupo class) of GTVS 3 (primary school and speech therapy school in Vienna). The book was produced as part of the Art Studio for Post-conceptual Art Practices program, Prof. Gržinić, IBK, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. Financially supported by the Publication Fund of the Rector of the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, 2022.

THE VOCABULARY OF DECOLONIALITY

The Vocabulary of Decoloniality, as the Editorial Group explains in an introduction, focuses on the social and political antagonism of our artistic and epistemological formation in the present: past colonialism and present forms of coloniality, with an emphasis on anti-racism and the new political figure—the migrant! The Editorial Group emphasized that the volume not only provides a cultural framework for analysing racism, colonialism, and strengthened antisemitism, but also looks at their political, social, and economic implications. This includes thinking not only about historical colonialism, but also about the ways in which capitalism shapes the world we inhabit here and now.¹¹ The concept of decoloniality offers a radical way to rethink learning processes from positions that are not exclusively Western-oriented but are informed by other political-social contexts and perspectives. The concept of decoloniality offers a rebellious position in the history of colonialism and in all its contemporary forms of colonial subjugation, exploitation, and discrimination.¹²

The Editorial Group stressed the importance of analysing the continuities of colonialism, Nazism, and fascism in today's neoliberal global capitalist democracies. Using these continuities, it is possible to define contemporary racism, Islamophobia, anti-Romaism, and antisemitism without forming competing histories of oppression and persecution.¹³ As they write, “Many questions could not be answered here and now, yet it was clear that we wanted to reflect upon memory politics as well as upon how to make alliances between present forms of anti-racist, anti-colonial, political, theoretical, critical and artistic works.”¹⁴



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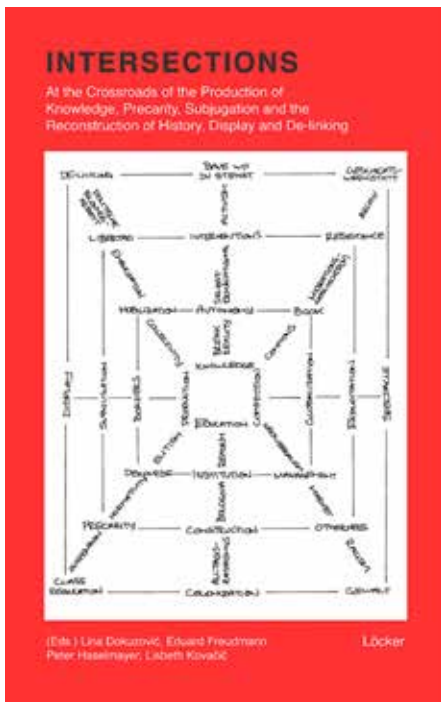
1. *Will You Marry Me? Marriages of Convenience in Times of Crises. The Nazi Era and Nowadays*, lecture by Henrie Dennis (speaking) and Prof. Dr. Irene Messinger, FH Campus Wien, social work. Organized by the PCAP Studio and Prof. Marina Gržinić at the Institute of Fine Arts, June 27, 2022. Photo by J. Pristovšek

2. Jennifer Ndidi Iroh, *(M)EIN BILD VON MIR – Selbstwahrnehmung in der Fotografie*[A photograph (my) from me – Self-Perception in Photography], first "Memory-Labs" session as part of the project *Citizens' Memories and Imaginaries: Democratic Citizenship* (FWF, TCS 119), Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, May 19, 2022. Photo by J. Pristovšek

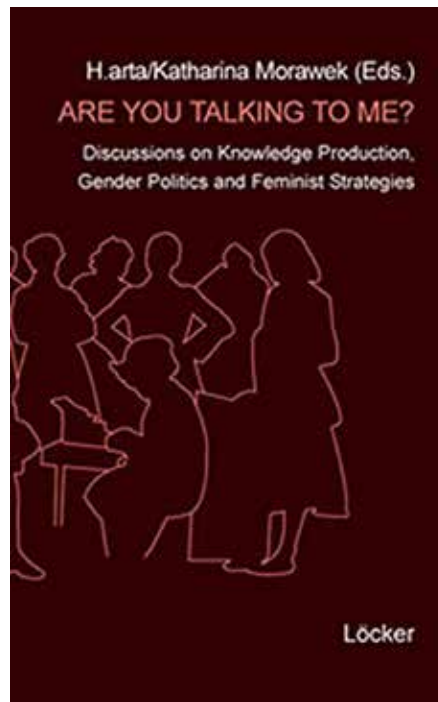
3. Asma Aiad, *The Ninth of November 2020*, installation view, *Muslim* Contemporary*, Prospekthof, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, November 2021. Photo by J. Pristovšek

4. *WTF Is a Non-Binary University? Readings & Contributions*: Felix Deiters, Oke Fijal and Finn Mühl, Rundgang 2022 with PCAP class at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, January 20–23, 2022. Photo by J. Pristovšek

5. Book cover *Utopia of Alliances, Conditions of Impossibilities and the Vocabulary of Decoloniality* (2013)



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1. Book cover *Intersections: INTERSECTIONS. At the Crossroads of the Production of Knowledge, Precarity, Subjugation, and the Reconstruction of History, Display and De-linking* (2009)
2. Book cover *Are You Talking to Me? Discussions on Knowledge Production, Gender Politics and Feminist Strategies* (2008)
3. Book cover *Medialisierung/Arbeit/Spatialisierung/(Re)Politisierung: Ein Projekt der StudentInnen der Klasse für Post-Konzeptionelle Kunst und der Klasse für Performative Kunst & Bildhauerei – Medialization/Labour/Spatialization/(Re)Politicization: Project by Students of the Post-Conceptual Art Practices Class and Performative Arts – Sculpture Class* (2005). Photo by M. Gržinić
4. Book cover *I'm 10 and my hobby is flying* (2022)

Part 3.**A New Generation of Artists at the****Academy of Fine Arts Vienna:****Marissa Lôbo, Asma Aiad, Jennifer****Ndidi Iroh**

A new generation of artists developing anti-racist, lesbian, and anti-binary gender structures is a powerful undertaking for a new aesthetic of tomorrow. The presentation will aim to reverse a possible narrative about what a decolonial Muslim/lesbian/queer position can do to the ossified academies of fine arts in Europe.

Most influential is the process of establishing the discourse of anti-racism, anti-black racism, and anti-Muslim racism, which undermines the persistent biological gender divide that holds that the boundary between men and women runs only along the heterosexual patriarchal system. Racism is a poisoning, institutional, structural social system of categorisation, of subjugating people based on the colour of their skin.

Marissa Lôbo is a Black feminist activist, member of *maiz* – Autonomous Center of and for Migrant Women in Linz, she studied at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, Post-Conceptual Art Practices. She lives between precarity and utopia and is involved in various initiatives against racism and sexism. As an Afro-Brazilian migrant living in Europe, she reflects on the continuities of colonialism and its everyday impact on black subjects in terms of sexism, homo/trans phobias, and racism. Her work is a constant in the struggles against the perpetual processes of racialisation, segregation and discrimination in the European Union. Lôbo is engaged in the process against the ongoing racialisation of refugees in the EU. They are exposed to the toxic characteristic of their skin colour. Some refugees who are white (in the context of the war in Ukraine and on the borders with Poland and Hungary) are considered the real refugees, others are called “not our” refugees.

In 2016, PCAP, in collaboration with Marissa Lôbo, we organised Yuderkys Espinosa Miñoso’s lecture entitled “A Genealogy of the Practices of the Present: A Critique of the Colonial Feminist Reason, Coming from the Historical Experience in Latin America.” Espinosa Miñoso is a thinker, activist, writer, and lecturer involved in radical movements against racism, (hetero)patriarchy, and colonialism. She was born into an *Afromestizo* family and grew up in the popular neighbourhoods of Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic. Early on, she took up María Lugones’ proposal to develop a decolonial feminism and eventually became one of its most important spokespersons in Latin America.

Espinosa Miñoso’s lecture was about answering the key question:

if we propose a genealogical method to be applied to the field of feminism, it means: how did we become the feminists we are? What are the possible conditions that have enabled feminism to believe what it believes, to say what it says, to do what it does, in a region geopolitically determined by its status as a “Third World” and carrying with it colonial trauma as a condition for being what we are today?

From these questions comes the opportunity to reflect on some key themes of feminism in Latin America and its history of dependency. Not about a Latin American feminism, but about a feminism in Latin America. We see that there is no universal feminism as envisioned by the legacy of Eurocentric modernity. If we find no surprises in the statement that feminism encounters modernity, we must nevertheless ask ourselves how one can be willing to follow it in regions of the world where modernity turns out to be only what it is: racist, Eurocentric, capitalist, imperialist, and colonial.

Perhaps women, gender, and despised sexualities have succumbed to the notion, based on theory and feminist thought, that

the past was always worse for us. Perhaps we could say that feminism claims that our struggle cannot be anything but modern when it proclaims modernity as a historical time that allows us to free ourselves from it. This argument illuminates the divergent interests between feminism and anti-racist, anti-colonial, and decolonial struggles in the region. It allows us to uncover the hidden pattern of feminist struggles and their engagement with coloniality.¹⁵

Asma Aiad is a Viennese conceptual artist, activist, and youth worker. She holds a bachelor's degree in political science and completed her master's in Gender Studies at the University of Vienna on the topic of Islamic feminism. She is a co-founder of Salam Oida, an initiative to promote Muslim culture and arts in Austria, and a spokesperson for the anti-racism referendum Black Voices. Her activism and artistic work deal with anti-racism, feminism, and the deconstruction of stereotypes. Aiad curated *Muslim* Contemporary* (Atelierhaus Prospekthof, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, November 8–12, 2021), a multidisciplinary, participatory, and dialogical project that aims to reflect on the place of Muslim communities in Austrian society through education, art, dialogue, activism, and culture.^{16j}

In the 1930s, the Nazis galloped toward the Reichstag. Today we have fascist populism, the rise of antisemitism, and we know that Austria never underwent a harsh denazification. We are alarmed by the rise of anti-Muslim racism, which is mixed with racism against Black people and Asian communities and calls everyone to action.

Jennifer Ndidi Iroh graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna in 2022 with a Master's degree. Her artistic focus is on analog film and photography and other visualizations of Black queer*ness and feminism, highlighting themes of home, safety, and utopia. Her master's thesis in Critical Studies at the Academy, titled "Re/configurations of Photographic Practices,"

deals with the topics of decolonisation and re/configurations of hegemonic photographic approaches. Beginning with the colonial gaze and its effects, it displays how photography was used as a weapon and tool to carry out colonial practices, which still exists in the present. Furthermore, the focus lies on exploring different ways of perceiving and experiencing images, as well as questioning and re/imagining the archive of visual material to expand the possibilities of making marginalized positions visible. Questions such as, how can images be read beyond their margins?, and what does it take to transfigure the gaze? are explored here. Finally, processes of self-defined photographic works are presented with the example of the two photographers, Zanele Muholi and Mikael Owunna, as well as photographic methodologies displaying the relationship between the photographer, the camera lens and the person being photographed.¹⁷

A very important reference for Iroh is the work of Tina Campt. In her book *Listening to Images*, Campt says: "Redirecting Ariella Azoulay's evocative proposal to 'watch' rather than look at photographs [...], the choice to 'listen to' rather than simply 'look at' images is a conscious decision to challenge the equation of vision with knowledge by engaging photography through a sensory register that is critical to Black Atlantic cultural formations: sound."¹⁸

In *The Civil Contract of Photography*, Ariella Azoulay posited:

Anyone who addresses others through photographs or takes the position of a photograph's addressee, even if she is a stateless person who has lost her "right to have rights," as in Arendt's formulation, is nevertheless a citizen—a member in the citizenry of photography. The civil space of photography is open to her, as well. That

space is configured by what I call the civil contract of photography.”¹⁹

In a recent interview, Azoulay argued:

In *The Civil Contract of Photography* I speculated on the existence of a civil contract (in distinction from the tradition of the social contract), that I then labored to find its manifestations at different places and times, as proof that speculation is never simply speculation, but actually an attempt to provide the language with which the participation of others can neither be denied, nor the power we exercise against them when the existing language that makes them irrelevant, invisible, or uncounted is being used. Therefore, the idea started to be: let us acknowledge the ways in which people were always engaged with photography, not only the photographers; and let us account for the ways in which they were engaged in photography.²⁰

What we are witnessing these days and in recent years is the takeover of public space by the right-wing mob, fake news and looting by the political elite, hostility, fear, a breakdown in the distribution of what is reasonable, and our inability to think of a future. With these positions and events, a constant process of reflection is set in motion.

Notes

- ¹ Fred Moten, “Ecology of Eloquent Things” (lecture, Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indianapolis, April 8, 2011). Quoted in J.E. Jed Murr, “The Unquiet Dead: Race and Violence in the ‘Post-Racial’ United States” (PhD diss., University of Washington, 2014), 3.
- ² Gloria Wekker, *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).
- ³ J.E. Jed Murr, “The Unquiet Dead,” n.p.
- ⁴ Kirsten Forkert, “Can Post-Studio Art School Function as a Place of Resistance in an Immaterial Economy?,” in *Mind the Map: History Is Not Given*, eds. Marina Gržinić, Günther Heeg and Veronika Darian (Frankfurt am Main: Revolver, 2006), 224.
- ⁵ Forkert, “Can Post-Studio Art School Function as a Place of Resistance in an Immaterial Economy?,” 226.
- ⁶ Marina Gržinić and Monica Bonvicini, eds., *Medialisierung/Arbeit/Spatialisierung/(Re)Politisierung: Ein Projekt der StudentInnen der Klasse für Post-Konzeptionelle Kunst und der Klasse für Performative Kunst & Bildhauerei = Medialization/Labour/Spatialization/(Re)Politicization: Project by Students of the Post-Conceptual Art Practices Class and Performative Arts – Sculpture Class* (Norderstedt: Books on Demand, 2005).
- ⁷ H.arta [Maria Crista, Anca Gyemant and Rodica Tache] and Katharina Morawek, *Are You Talking To Me? Discussions on Knowledge Production, Gender Politics and Feminist Strategies* (Vienna: Löcker, 2008).
- ⁸ Lina Dokuzović, Eduard Freudmann, Peter Haselmayer and Lisbeth Kovačič, eds., *Intersections: At the Crossroads of the Production of Knowledge, Precarity, Subjugation, and the Reconstruction of History, Display and De-linking* (Vienna: Löcker, 2009).
- ⁹ Editorial Group for Writing Insurgent Genealogies [Carolina Agredo, Sheri Avraham, Annalisa Cannito, Miltiadis Gerothanasis, Marina Gržinić, Marissa Lôbo and Ivana Marjanović], ed., *Utopia of Alliances, Conditions of Impossibilities and the Vocabulary of Decoloniality* (Vienna: Löcker, 2013).
- ¹⁰ The book is a project by Cathérine Lehnerer who is currently a PhD candidate in philosophy at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna.
- ¹¹ Editorial Group for Writing Insurgent Genealogies, *Utopia of Alliances*, 11.
- ¹² Editorial Group for Writing Insurgent Genealogies, *Utopia of Alliances*, 11.
- ¹³ Editorial Group for Writing Insurgent Genealogies, *Utopia of Alliances*, 11–12.
- ¹⁴ Editorial Group for Writing Insurgent Genealogies, *Utopia of Alliances*, 12.
- ¹⁵ Yuderkys Espinosa Miñoso, “Hacer genealogía de las prácticas del presente: Una crítica a la colonialidad de la Razón feminista desde la experiencia histórica en América Latina” [A Genealogy of the Practices of the Present: A Critique of the Colonial Feminist Reason, Coming from the Historical Experience in Latin America] (guest lecture, PCAP (Post-Conceptual Art Practices) Study Program, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, June 21, 2016). The abstract is available at <https://m1.antville.org/stories/2239994/>. It has been slightly linguistically revised here.
- ¹⁶ See Muslim* Contemporary website at <https://muslimcontemporary.at/>.
- ¹⁷ Jennifer Ndidi Iroh, “Re/konfigurationen fotografischer Praxen” [Re/configurations of Photographic Practices] (master’s thesis, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, 2021), 100.
- ¹⁸ Tina M. Camp, *Listening to Images* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 6.
- ¹⁹ Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, trans. Relá Mazali and Ruvik Danieli (New York: Zone Books, 2008), 81.
- ²⁰ Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, “Ariella Aïsha Azoulay – Unlearning,” interview by Filipa Lowndes Vicente, *Análise Social* 55, no. 235 (2020): 425, <https://doi.org/10.31447/as00032573.2020235.08>.

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