

SANTAMÒNICA

# SHOTS

**María Ruido**  
*L'œil impératif*

17.11.2015-10.01.2016

**Cycle:**  
**Shots in the Middle of the Concert**  
From correct distance to proximity



Generalitat de Catalunya  
**Departament de Cultura**



A close-up photograph of a woman with dark hair, focused on sewing at a machine. Her hands are visible, guiding a piece of light-colored fabric. The image is heavily overlaid with a vibrant red color, which is most intense in the foreground and fades slightly towards the background. The background shows the mechanical parts of the sewing machine and some hanging fabric.

**María Ruido**  
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«Art is not political because of the messages and feelings it conveys about the state of the world. Nor is it political owing to the way it represents social structures, conflicts or identities. It is political by virtue of the very distance that it adopts with respect to those functions».

Jacques Rancière

**Shots in the Middle of the Concert. From *correct distance*<sup>1</sup> to *proximity*<sup>2</sup>** is a series of exhibitions centred on the work of six artists who set out to engender a critical vision of the reality around them, while reducing the distance between themselves and the issues they raise in their respective projects in order to declare themselves and in one way or another adopt a position by means of their involvement.

The title of the cycle paraphrases Stendhal's famous remark that politics in a work of literature is like a pistol shot in the middle of a concert. The stories told in his novels had as their backdrop descriptions and analyses of the French society and politics of his time, but above all they were a pretext, a way of using literature to problematize reality, to assault it, to enclose it and resist it. **Shots in the Middle of the Concert**, awkward but difficult to ignore, aims to highlight

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1 'Critique is a matter of correct distance,' Walter BENJAMIN, 'One-way Street', in *One-way Street*, London, Penguin, 2008.

2 'If things have become too close for comfort for us, a critique must arise that expresses this discomfort. It is not a matter of proper distance but of proper proximity. The success of the word 'concernedness' (*Betroffenheit*) grows from this soil.' Peter SLOTERDIJK, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, Minneapolis & London, University of Minnesota Press, 1987.

the responsibility of artistic and cultural practices to work with the contemporary, not from the critical distance advocated by Adorno but from proximity. To deal with reality and engage with it in the sense that Marina Garcés gives those words: *treatment* and *involvement* in two directions, towards the real in order to speak and towards oneself to let oneself be affected.

For some years now we have witnessed the implementation of a new paradigm of political emergence which aims to confront the complex system of interdependent and invisible powers (financial, political, informational) that hold sway in contemporary society. Precisely because they do not show themselves, these powers appear to us to be immeasurable, uncontrollable and difficult to combat. But 'rule by nobody is not necessarily no-rule,' as Hannah Arendt observed; 'it may indeed, under certain circumstances, even turn out to be one of its cruellest and most tyrannical versions.' Precisely in reaction to this rule there has been a proliferation of increasingly influential associations, groups and platforms that aim to create a new culture of collective possibilities to protect and manage the natural, social and cultural *commons*, working in grassroots activism to defend what is common to all and, without belonging to anyone, is the tangible and intangible heritage of each and every one of us. In fact, Rancière situates the beginning of politics at this point – 'when they who have 'no time' to do anything other than their work take that time that they do not have to make themselves visible as sharing in a common world.' In view of this new wave of civic involvement, **Shots in the Middle of the Concert** considers the nature of artists' commitment to the media which their work places at their disposal. How they *treat* the reality that concerns them. How they become *involved* with it. And to what extent their actions go beyond the artistic sphere and expand its limits. • CRISTIAN AÑÓ, CÈLIA DEL DIEGO AND JORDI RIBAS

*Shots in the Middle of the Concert* brings its exhibition cycle to a close with “L’œil impératif” (“The Imperative Eye”), a piece by María Ruido that analyses the political, economic and representative mechanisms that serve to perpetuate the effects of colonialism and neocolonialism in the former Spanish and French protectorates in North Africa through immigration policies, mercantilism, globalization and cultural, aesthetic and social imperialism.

This work takes its name from a film that Ruido made last year in Tangiers and presented within the framework of the cycle as a diptych alongside *Le rêve est fini* (*The Dream Is Over*), which she produced in Tunisia in 2014. These two documentary essays explore the conflict between hegemonic policies and institutionalized meta-stories in the West, and examine the possibility of other narratives that are developed by the Arab world and offer resistance to European colonial dominance and the capitalist system.

Shortly after the beginning of the Arab revolutions, which, thanks to a series of democratic protests, managed to successively topple several dictatorial regimes in North Africa and the Middle East, Ruido took a close look at the situation in *Le rêve est fini*. Set within the context of these popular uprisings, the film describes the relationships between the new influx of migrants from the African coast to Europe

(and their consequent deaths); the domestic policies of a Tunisian oligarchy that, while not necessarily authoritarian in nature, nonetheless reproduces its patterns and is an obstacle to true revolution; and the diplomatic, administrative, social and family-related difficulties that she and her then-partner, who was of Tunisian origin, encountered. The waves of the Mediterranean, promising both hope and death, provide a rhythm that permeates the entire project. The poetry of the sea is contrasted with the rawness of the testimonies of those who are compelled to cross the water in small boats, and reflects both the desperation of the migrants - and the abuse they are subjected to by the mafias - and the hardening of immigration policies and obsession with border controls fomented by the Frontex agency and the Eurosur information system.

These works by Ruido are transformed into an experience of conceptual and formal complexity, combining appropriation and repackaging of found footage, a vast catalogue of theoretical and philosophical references, recorded interviews and contextualized images, the introduction of clear personal references and an elaborate reflection on visual culture and cinematographic techniques. In accordance with the *nouvelle vague* principle of freedom of technique and expression, the artist subverts the spatial and temporal continuity of the composition in order to accentuate the language of the camera and the creative power of the filming process. By doing so, she assembles carefully structured stories that subsequently call upon the audience to give them meaning.

Likewise, *L'œil impératif* explores the possibility of achieving a genuine visual sovereignty for the former Spanish and French colony of Morocco, one which would enable it to create, control and disseminate its own representations. The project is structured around the domestic films of Monsieur Bensai, a native of Casablanca, which Ruido acquired in the medina of Tangiers and used as a means to analyse the type of images that were recorded, the frames that were chosen and, in particular, how the position of power offered by the role of cinematographer was

utilized in order to assume control of the recording process from outside the frame. Of particular relevance are the comments addressed by the artist to Bensai, in order to gain an insight into the autoethnographic technique he used to portray his country of origin. It is a move that, when extrapolated, reveals the difficulty faced by Moroccan society in generating its own images, as a result of the influences of European cinema and/or causes of a different kind, such as the educational framework imposed on Arab children by the old colonial administrations (as demonstrated in one of the recycled fragments of the film *Marruecos en la paz* (Morocco in Peacetime)), which intentionally aim to prolong cultural colonialism beyond the fact of political independence.

Frantz Fanon said that “the settler makes history and is conscious of making it”. The settler never abandons his status as a foreigner, and, from his position as an outsider, historically represents those whom he considered to have no place among the privileged subjects of history (e.g. colonized peoples, “Orientals”, etc.). Occasionally, Ruido’s camera assumes a meaningful autonomy, such as the moment in which it refuses to focus precisely on the definition of “orientalism”, a term coined by Edward W. Said to describe stereotypes based on a distinction between Western superiority and Eastern inferiority. This refusal of focus on the part of artist and apparatus is at once a symbolic rebellion against Western visual hegemony and a rallying cry for the epistemological emancipation of the East. • CÉLIA DEL DIEGO



The history of European state-based sovereignty is the history of outlines, of the constant creation of dividing lines. By definition, these lines have always been racist. The European geopolitical space has been built on a maxim: each territory corresponds to a *single* language, a *single* culture, a *single* ethnicity, a *single* race. The dividing lines have operated on the basis of eradicating the innate pluralism of the social body and transforming it into a homogeneous community.

Faced with the mutations of these state-forms, and the nature and forms of their governance and political configurations, it is necessary to comprehend the historical formation of the modern state with a view to overcoming it, rather than reinforcing it. Today, we are presented with a multi-level system of government in which the production of *nomos* is no longer the exclusive preserve of state sovereignty, but also falls within the remit of supra-national bodies (such as the European Union, financial institutions, various international trade agreements, etc.). One might think that the problem of Europe's democratic deficit is related to a lack of national sovereignty, and that a supposedly democratizing political strategy should focus on recovering this expropriated sovereignty. However, this strategy could not be more paradoxical: it proclaims the ideology of taking back a power that is already breaking down, and thereby rebuilding

that power, all the while ignoring the material basis of this mutation of sovereignty.

Thus, the strategies of antagonism can no longer be employed in relation to the nation-state. Rather, it is necessary to create a common political entity, one which supersedes and transcends the state-form, breaking the nation-state-oriented oligarchic European constitution. A political space dominated by nation-states is a competitive space in which the strongest prevails (e.g. Germany against Greece). This is the danger of returning to “sovereign” government in fragmented political spaces: its great fragility and weakness in the face of the global order.

Between the national space and the European space it is necessary to create another, zoned space, as it is in this interstice where the struggle will take place, where it will be possible to articulate social change based on non-continuous, fragile, ambivalent forms of struggle that prefigure an alternative society and propose a new constitutional architecture. We must dare to think in plural and learn how to live with complex, cross-cutting articulations. The racist language of the nation-state talks about integrating migrants; we need to highlight the value of the different ethnicities that live within our cities. The racist language of the nation-state talks about diversity; we need to consider the composition of difference and subvert the neutralizing force of liberal pluralism. The racist language of the nation-state talks about inclusion and exclusion; we need to highlight the value of every individual life as a starting-point: a life determined by life itself. • ANTONIO GÓMEZ VILLAR, PHILOSOPHER

An invitation to think collectively about  
colonialism, coloniality and visual sovereignty

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As has been accurately observed since the 1960s by writers in the field of decolonial thinking (such as Frantz Fanon, Boaventura de Sousa, Achille Mbembe, Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui and Gloria Anzaldúa), and as has been noted by certain visual studies theorists (such as Nicholas Mirzoeff in his book *The Right to Look*), the traditional form of colonialism initiated in 1492 and present-day coloniality are not only sustained through foundations of political interventionism or economic exploitation, but also construct a hierarchy of thinking; an epistemological hegemony that justifies the order built around their dominance while sclerotizing the possibility of subverting the “other”, that which is “outside of euro-centric civilization”, naturalizing the inferiority of its knowledge and representations.

My current work is positioned in this field and is closely related to the call to think of colonialism (and modern coloniality) as a fundamental part of the origins of capitalism and Western modernity. The aim is to think about ways to recover, establish or develop other visual genealogies that make it possible to conceive of visual sovereignty in pluralistic terms.

The visual essays presented here, and especially *L'œil impératif*, which has been produced in Morocco since June 2014 specifically for Arts Santa Mònica, offer an interdisciplinary reflection on the role that

the system of visibility acquires within colonial and neo-colonial processes, which are understood to mean not only forms of political and economic exploitation but also a constant “abyssal thinking” (in the words of Boaventura de Sousa) that dominates the global system. This film, constructed using rewritten texts by Fanon, Mbembe, Mohamed Choukri and Susan Martin-Márquez, presents Morocco as a case study. It also offers a reflection on the possibility of constructing a form of cognitive justice outside the hegemonic system of knowledge and representation (in all the senses of the system of representation), and in doing so it asks us to what extent true visual sovereignty/ies is/are possible and what political potentialities it/they might have.

The fantasism of racialization, exoticism and the fear of otherness, the stereotypes of orientalism, and also the practice of convincing local elites to adopt the colonist’s point of view (in order to enable the continuity of the colony after independence, as explained by Fanon) form the substratum of the film. Like the project presented alongside it, *Le rêve est fini*, the film seeks to rethink the forms of the current cycle of colonialism after formal independence and explore the possibility of an alternative view from outside the northwestern system of representation.

By extension, both films (*Le rêve est fini*, 2014, and *L’œil impératif*, 2015) question our role as colonizers and ask to what extent a true sovereignty or a real emancipation is possible, following the cycle of African independence between the 1950s and 1970s and within the modern framework of globalization, a time in which the concepts of traditional sovereignty and the nation-state (the pillars of the hegemonic euro-centric political order) are undergoing a mutation; a mutation that is also related to the enormous influence acquired by supra-national institutions such as NATO, the EU and the IMF, which are undermining (if not entirely dismantling) our traditional political foundations.

Against this context, how can we redefine internal and external neocolonial relations? With the new tools

and scenarios offered to us by the new ecologies of knowledge that challenge abyssal thinking, do we have the capacity to rethink the visual system from a standpoint of plurality, difference and a multiplicity of otherness? Or will the visual system remained anchored and endemically intertwined with the oligarchies (a viewpoint that is seemingly reaffirmed by popular spectacles, the marketplace and the internal obstacles posed by institutions of art and cinema)? Will we, at last, be able to rewrite the concept of visual sovereignty/ies and update it according to the new needs of a profoundly heterogeneous and collectively intelligent multitude? • MARÍA RUIDO



*Le rêve est fini, 2014*

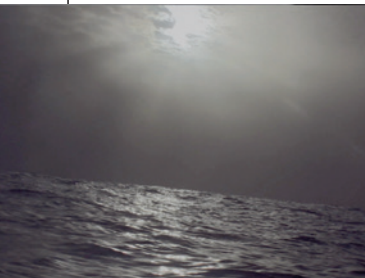








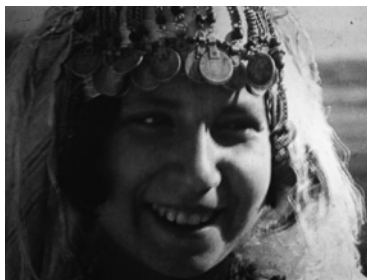






*L'œil impératif, 2015*



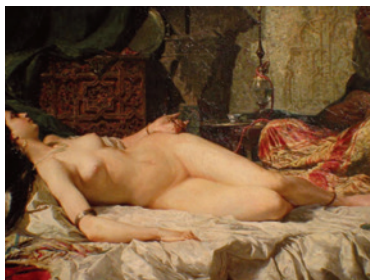












In this last exhibition, **microRavals\*** presents an idea that, although based on some of the questions explored in the work of María Ruido, allows us to focus on certain issues that go beyond the specific exhibition of each artist and which are raised by the mediatory position of ***Shots in the Middle of the Concert*** itself. They are issues related to the possibility of working in an art centre with an established context (such as the Raval neighbourhood, in this instance), the types of relationship that can be established and the nature of the value and visibility of the cultural and artistic production that is derived from the related processes. How can contributions produced on the basis of context be integrated and recognized within an artistic institutional structure? An added difficulty is that these practices do not have as their basic aim the achievement of artistic excellence, or incorporate broader criteria that take into account other values to the extent that the work process facilitates participative collective processes in order to enable local residents to propose their own means of representation (and for these to be presented at the arts centre).

For each exhibition, **microRavals** has taken the opportunity to engage in collaborative activities with organizations or schools based in the Raval. These activities represent a dialogue between the context,

Arts Santa Mònica and the work of the artist. In relation to Maríá Ruido's *L'œil impératif*, **microRavals** asked third-year degree students from the Theory of Context course at Escola Massana to produce a practical reflection on the idea of visual sovereignty/ies, based on the exploration of (and collaboration with) archives of visual materials located in the Raval neighbourhood. It is an exploration that is both an observation and a coming-together.

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\***microRavals** offers two levels of reflection on the notion of *implication* and its representation. On one level, that of the production of culture and the sphere of cultural policy, it poses the question of how to combine, in a practical sense, the cultural logic of a large team and the micropolitics with which the project interacts; micropolitics which, in general, take the form of cultural and artistic practices headed by agents and projects of limited dimensions and resources. In this respect, the mediation project is an essay on the potential forms of implementation that can be generated between a cycle and its artistic teams and other ongoing projects in the neighbourhood, with the aim of developing, from the perspective of cultural and ecological sustainability, a communal project positioned halfway between the willingness to become a resource and the opportunity to act as a potential catalyst for reflection and action that is located, and bonded to, each specific collaboration.

On another level, **microRavals** acts as a loudspeaker, broadcasting the richness of the Raval's cultural production while offering a dialogue between the artistic project being displayed and the working processes that lend it visibility. It is a relationship in which the power of representation inherent in the artistic projects comes into contact with working processes deeply rooted in the local area.

## Shots in the Middle of the Concert

From correct distance to proximity

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**Daniela Ortiz**

20.01-22.02.2015

**Núria Güell**

12.05-05.07.2015

**Cristina Lucas**

22.09-08.11.2015

**Democracia**

03.03-19.04.2015

**Frederic Perers**

15.07-13.09.2015

**María Ruido**

17.11.2015-10.01.2016

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## Implic/Accions

This programme of activities is open to everyone and provides an opportunity to connect with the issues that pervade the work of María Ruido.

*Tuesday 3 November, 9pm.* Inaugural session of the **10th Catalan Exhibition of Arab and Mediterranean Cinema**, dedicated to Morocco. Screening of two films that have practically disappeared from view, *Marruecos en la paz* (Morocco in Peacetime) (1951) by Rafael López Rienda and *Mémoire 14* (Memory 14) (1971) by Ahmed Bouanani, both of which tackle the subject of colonialism in Morocco, its stereotypical constructs and its consequences on both sides of the Mediterranean. Filmoteca de Catalunya (Pl. de Salvador Seguí, 1).

*Wednesday 18 November, 6.30 to 9pm.* Round table: “**Colonialism, Coloniality and Visual Sovereignty/ies: The Visual System as a Colonial Tool, from the Cold War to Globalization**”, with **Paula Barreiro, Olga Fernández, Jonathan Harris, the Poble Sec Fiction Workshop and María Ruido (moderator)**. This activity forms part of the University of Barcelona’s research project on “Decentralized Modernities: Art, Politics and Counterculture in the Transatlantic Axis during the Cold War” (ref. HAR2014-53834-P). Sala Aleix Carrió, Escola Elisava (La Rambla, 30-32). Free admission. Places are limited.

*Friday 20 November, 8pm.* Discussion between **Xavier Bassas**, philosopher, translator and editor, and **María Ruido**. Espai Contrabandos (C. de la Junta de Comerç, 20). Free admission. Places are limited.

*Saturday, 19 December, 1pm.* Analysis of the exhibition by the sociologist **Gaetano Davide Iannello**. A guided tour in which Davide offers alternative interpretations of the artist’s work. Arts Santa Mònica exhibition area. Free admission. Places are limited.

**Paula Barreiro López.** Lead researcher, MoDe(s), and full-time lecturer on the Ramón y Cajal programme at the University of Barcelona's Department of Art History. Since 2007 she has worked at European institutions such as the National Institute of Art History in Paris, the University of Liverpool, the University of Geneva and Spanish institutions such as CSIC's History Institute.

**Olga Fernández López.** Lecturer at the Department of Art History and Theory (Madrid Autonomous University) and guest lecturer on the Curating Contemporary Art programme (Royal College of Art, London). She has participated in a European research project, "Museums and Libraries in/of the Age of Migrations", and is a member of the consolidated research group SUMA: University + Museum (Madrid Complutense University), as well as the coordinator of the "Peninsula: Colonial Processes and Artistic and Curatorial Practices" group at the Reina Sofia Museum Study Centre.

**Jonathan Harris.** Professor at Birmingham City University, UK. He has written and edited 20 books, including *Modernism in Dispute: Art since the 1940s* (Yale UP, 1993) [Spanish ed.: *El modernisme a debate*, 2003]; *Federal Art and National Culture* (Cambridge UP, 1995); *The New Art History* (Routledge, 2001); and *The Utopian Globalists: Artists of Worldwide Revolution, 1919-2009* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).

**Poble Sec Fiction Workshop.** A collective that uses audiovisual screenings to explore the connections that can be made between the neighbourhood its members live in and works of fiction. To achieve this, the collective uses sounds and images that relate to different places within Poble Sec where some form of political struggle took place, in order to rethink these events and introduce a new, polemical form of common sense (*tallerdeficcio.barripoblesec.org*).

**María Ruido.** Artist, researcher and lecturer at the University of Barcelona's Department of Visual Arts. Since 1998 she has worked on multi-disciplinary projects involving the social construction of the body and identity, the stereotypes of work in Post-Fordist capitalism and the construction of memory and its relationship to the narrative forms of history. More recently she has been working on the new stereotypes of decolonization and the corresponding potential for emancipation.

**Xavier Bassas.** Philosopher, translator and editor. He has a doctorate in French and Philosophy from Sorbonne-Paris IV University and the University of Barcelona, where he currently lectures in the Department of French Studies. His work focuses on the study of phenomenology and its relation to language, and he also translates works of contemporary French philosophy and edits volumes of a political nature (e.g. *The Emancipated Spectator*, J. Rancière; *The Meaning of Sarkozy*, A. Badiou; *Suspended Democracy*, G. Agamben, J. Rancière *et al*; *The Time of Equality* and *The Distances of Cinema*, J. Rancière; *What Is a People?*, A. Badiou, J. Rancière *et al*; and *The Lost Thread*, J. Rancière, among others.). Since 2010 he has jointly coordinated (alongside Felip Martí-Jufresa) the Philosophy Congresses, in collaboration with Arts Santa Mònica, the CCCB and the French Institute, among others, in order to provide a space for discussing and developing specific and current issues from an interdisciplinary perspective.

**Gaetano Davide Iannello.** Trained as a sociologist, with a degree from La Sapienza University in Rome, since 2006 he has worked as an educator and integrator for various associations, NGOs and institutions (including the Barcelona Red Cross, the Prevention Foundation, Asaupam, the Barcelona Public Health Agency and the Government of Catalonia) to provide social and health-related care for people suffering from drug dependency. He is a founder-member of the Immigrant Space, where he works as a volunteer social worker providing advice and support to immigrants.

**Catalan Exhibition of Arab and Mediterranean Cinema**  
([mostracinearab.wordpress.com](http://mostracinearab.wordpress.com)).

**Escola Elisava** ([elisava.net](http://elisava.net)).

**Espai Contrabandos** ([espaicontrabandos.com](http://espaicontrabandos.com)).



**Shots in the Middle of the Concert. From correct distance to proximity** is a series of exhibitions curated by Cèlia del Diego.

**microRavals** is a project of mediation in relation to associations, institutions, schools and local residents curated by Cristian Añó (Sinapsis).

**implic/Accions** is a cycle of activities curated by Jordi Ribas.

**Texts**, Cristian Añó, Cèlia del Diego, Antonio Gómez Villar, Jordi Ribas and María Ruido.

**Graphic design**, Bildi.

**Exhibition design**, Xavier Torrent.

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