

# Shapes Stains Sounds

explores the shifting soundscape of Grand Central Market, inviting participants to consider the sounds of the market while working together on a large textile print that will then be transformed into garments in a workshop led by Nancy Stella Soto and translated into movement in a performance workshop led by Mecca Vazie Andrews. As Step One in this process, I invite the group to reflect on our relationships to the market through sound: the way social relationships, hierarchies, economic and environmental changes are revealed through analysis of sound.

Tuning in, we immediately perceive the density of activities collected in the market—the hustle and bustle of people converging, the crunch and murmur of eating, the buzz of voices amid the splatter and crash of food preparation, the bang and thwack of construction, the ring of commerce, the hum of traffic. Listening directs us to patterns and flows of intensity, engaging with notions of resonance, harmony or dissonance. Through attentive listening we can discern signs of class structure, the economic and cultural background of workers and consumers populating the market. Hearing the market's soundscape as the product of social structures at work in a particular moment, what sounds are lost and what sounds are gained as the market changes over time?

Over the years, I have made several field recordings of downtown Los Angeles with long stretches of time elapsing between listening sessions. One recording made in collaboration with Luke Fischbeck in 2013 at the site of Ace Hotel, then under construction at Ninth and Broadway, attempted to capture the sounds of the area around Grand Central Market and Broadway, with the knowledge that a dramatic shift was about to occur in the soundscape of a rapidly-gentrifying Downtown. This recording was

intended to preserve something for the historical memory, an aural experience of walking down Broadway in the early 2010s.

Returning to those recordings, Grand Central Market sounds remarkably different today. Gone are the sounds of tires rolling over wet gravel, a moment when the surface of Broadway was loose in patches and store owners hosed down the sidewalks with water and bleach each night, flushing debris into the streets. Gone is the Cumbia music rising from store fronts and the Corta Venas emanating from passing cars.

Listening to Grand Central Market over several years, we hear differences—in the languages spoken, the music played, the technologies used (from radio, to cell phones, to smart phones). Gentrification performs a transformation on the soundscape that might be recognized in the privileging of English as the primary spoken language, fewer trucks and newer cars roll by on freshly paved streets, smartphones replace burners and Nokia's, online playlists waft through distributed bluetooth speakers to replace the competing distortion of individual radios and boomboxes turned up to full volume, EDM and chillwave take the place of Cumbia and Corridos, evenly distributed lighting provides a new hum, centralized fans circulate air in a new rhythm and frequency. These are just some of the more obvious differences, others are more subtle and difficult to describe. Everything we hear is a combination. Every sound in the environment merges and interferes with other sounds, a matter of physics as air molecules bounce around the listener, but also a product of new patterns of attention. Comparative listening indicates that Grand Central Market is populated with a new and different public, new and different workers. How do we describe this transformation?

How does the sound of Grand Central Market compare to the sound of other market places in landmark locations? Listening to the market, is there a distinctively "Los Angeles" sound? Are there specific combinations of sounds that can only (co)exist in Los Angeles? Or does gentrification establish a kind of globalizing homogeny—bringing the sound of Grand Central Market closer to the sound of "renewed"

walla, sizzle, squash, chew, slurp, clink, fizz, zip, ting, thwack, hustle, bustle, whiff, splash, crunch, trickle, whoosh, pop, rat-

chop, murmur, babble, plunk, splash, swoosh, bang, nom nom, squeak, clack, buzz, smack, beep, clang, ring, gurgle, walla, sizzle, squash, chew, slurp, clink, fizz,

chew, slurp, clink, fizz, zip, ting, thwack, hustle, bustle, whiff, splash, crunch, trickle, whoosh, pop, rattle, crash, hiss, crackle,

the, crash, hiss, crackle, chop, murmur, babble, plunk, splash, swoosh, bang, nom nom, squeak, clack, buzz, smack, beep, clang, ring, gurgle, walla, sizzle, squash,

and “reimagined” markets in other major cities? Is the idea of “local” as equally constructed and mediated as the “global”? Can renewed interest in the “local” combat globalization? In *Empire* (2000), Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri describe the localization of struggles aimed against globalization as resting on a false dichotomy:

Globalization, like localization, should be understood instead as a regime of the production of identity and difference, or really of homogenization and heterogenization. The better framework, then, to designate the distinction between the global and the local might refer to different networks of flows and obstacles in which the local moment or perspective gives priority to the reterritorializing of barriers or boundaries and the global moment privileges the mobility of deterritorializing flows.<sup>1</sup>

How might we consider the soundscape of Grand Central Market in terms of the production of identity and difference with localizing boundaries and globalizing flows operating simultaneously? I pose this question, in order to avoid characterizing the soundscape of the market captured in 2013 as representative of an origin or pre-existing state that embodies pure locality. The market has always existed at the intersection of local and global forces, homogenizing and heterogenizing networks and flows. The underlying question is: how have definitions and assumptions surrounding the idea of local and global shifted? What localizing or globalizing priorities are revealed when we compare the sound of the market over a time span of six years?

When searching YouTube for “Marketplace sounds” the algorithm presents a bias toward European markets and speculative reconstructions of Medieval market soundscapes, suggesting that the sound of the marketplace might be one of the pre-eminent symbols of historical change, a fertile site for collective simulations of the past, and an indicator of social structures overlaid with contemporary technologies of surveillance and commerce. I was surprised

to learn that such recordings are often tagged as sleep aids and study aids— suggesting that the market soundscape is somehow both relaxing and focus-inducing. I want to probe the kind of attention produced by the market soundscape: in what ways is listening supported or discouraged? What kinds of attention allow us to differentiate information or conversely to immerse in the cloud of sound as if it were a single surface or depth? How might a listener move meaningfully between these modes of attention?

Eurocentrism is embedded in the algorithm’s cultural construction of the market soundscape, suggesting that we should take care to notice signs of Eurocentrism when listening to Grand Central Market. In what ways does the re-designed market soundscape resemble (or not resemble) the sounds of markets linked to the global north? In what ways has the redesign of the market privileged sounds linked to Eurocentrism? Can we make the claim that dominant hegemonic systems carry with them signature sound palettes? If so, what sounds might be linked or recognized as symptoms of late capitalism? Listening to the market, what forms of labor are audible and which are inaudible?

For this workshop, *Shapes Stains Sounds*, foods sourced from the market are offered as printing materials corn, nopales, potatoes, beets, turmeric, coffee alongside a series of large stamps that point to sounds from the market: walla, sizzle, squash, chew, slurp, clink, fizz, zip, ting, thwack, hustle, bustle, whiff, splash, crunch, trickle, whoosh, pop, rattle, crash, hiss, crackle, chop, murmur, babble, plunk, splash, swoosh, bang, nom nom, squeak, clack, buzz, smack, beep, clang, ring, gurgle. The action of collaboratively printing on The textile becomes a prompt for opening a conversation on listening, -- and the way that sound operates in the space of the market, the specific information conveyed by sound regarding social relationships.

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<sup>1</sup> Hardt, Michael and Negri, Antonio. *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2000) p. 45

plunk, splash, swoosh, bang, nom nom, squeak, clack, buzz, smack, beep, clang, ring, gurgle, walla, sizzle, squash, chew, slurp, clink, fizz, zip, ting, thwack, hustle,

bang, nom nom, squeak, clack, buzz, smack, beep, clang, ring, gurgle, walla, sizzle, squash, chew, slurp, clink, fizz, zip, ting, thwack, hustle, bustle, whiff, splash,

bustle, whiff, splash, crunch, trickle, whoosh, pop, rattle, crash, hiss, crackle, chop, murmur, babble, plunk, splash, swoosh,