

LMGM's "Lost: Choirboy" & El Jefe's "Muñoz & La Mission: A Sermon. . ." (in memoriam José Esteban Muñoz)

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Blog post published December 8, 2014 in *Sounding Out!*

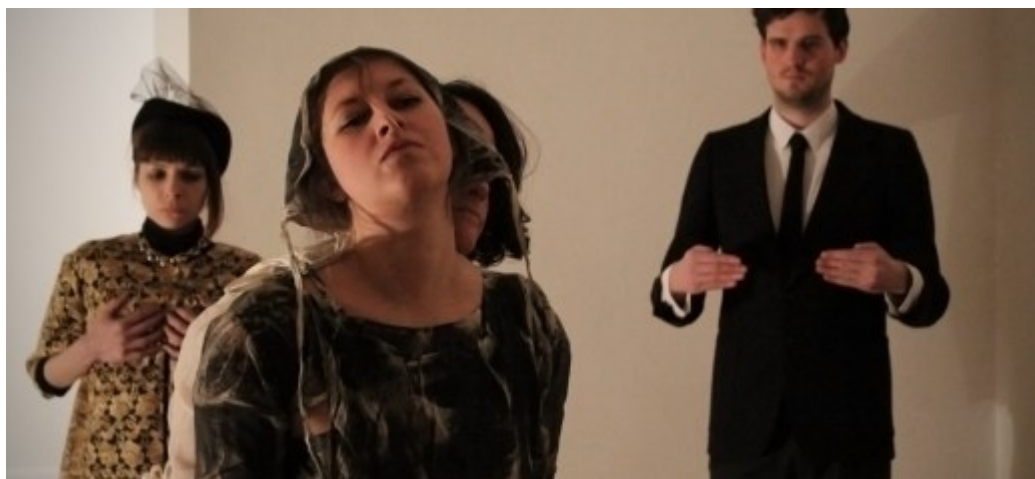
<https://doi.org/10.59350/dqrez-csp62>

Abstract

Come, let us sing of great men. Well, just one man, not men—and masculine gender is not essential for our purposes. Come to think of it, his greatness isn't nearly as important as his fierceness, his queer significance, his brown sensibility.

Keywords

Music (Subfield), Aesthetics, Article, Chican@/Latin@ Studies, Cultural Studies, Dance/Movement



Recommended citation

theluisgarcia. (2014, December 8). LMGM's "Lost: Choirboy" & El Jefe's "Muñoz & La Mission: A Sermon. . ." (in memoriam José Esteban Muñoz). *Sounding Out!*. <https://doi.org/10.59350/dqrez-csp62>

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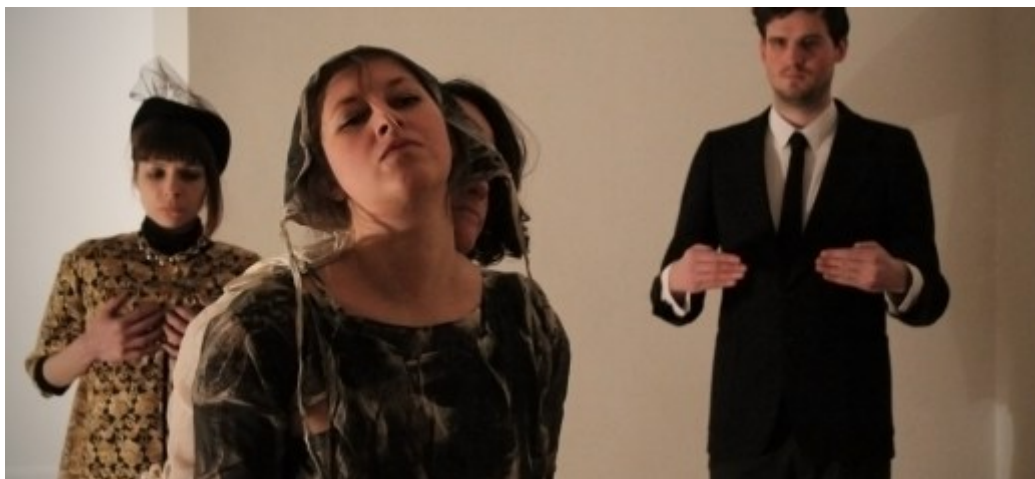
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Come, let us sing of great men. Well, just one man, not men—and masculine gender is not essential for our purposes. Come to think of it, his greatness isn't nearly as important as his fierceness, his queer significance, his brown sensibility. But we're still committed to singing—or at least to music—well, to sound and noise, in any case. [José Esteban Muñoz](#) often wrote about queer scenes where music and sound were central to participants' world-making activities. His archives buzzed with the sounds of West Coast punk, vogue-ball house, cruisy toilets, genderqueer burlesque, and salsa echoing down the barrio streets. And so, for this *Round Circle of Resonance*, we at [La Mission](#) are here to make some noise about a badass thinker who deeply impacted the way we dance/sing/talk/write/sweat about dance music, identity, and politics.

And this is just the beginning of our cacophonous, four-part response to Muñoz's intellectual holler. The first installment, written by La Mission's resident essayist / deranged propagandist **LMGM (Luis-Manuel Garcia)** provides a brief introduction to our collective, some reflections on Muñoz's relevance to our activities, and a frame for the next three missives from our fellow cultists. It is backed with a rousing sermon-cum-manifesto from our charismatic cult-leader/prophet, **El Jefe (Pablo Roman-Alcalá)**. In the coming weeks, our Naked Mennonite/randy dramaturge (**Mandie O'Connell**) will prepare and film a urinary performance piece; and our saucy Choir Boy/Linguist (**Johannes Brandis**) will compose a dirge to our dearly departed José (August 9, 1967- December, 4, 2013).

LMGM a.k.a. Luis-Manuel Garcia



La Mission's "(p/A)001: A non-Aristotelian Drama in Five Acts," 2013, Image by Julien Barret

Lost: Choirboy (in memoriam José Esteban Muñoz)

LUIS-MANUEL GARCIA

La Mission

Named after San Francisco's Latino barrio, La Mission is a satirical utopian doomsday cult, a music label, a queer situationist art-gang, a magazine, and a group of dancers with a very dirty sense of humor. We release music on vinyl, publish DIY 'zines, and make performance art, aiming to re-politicize genres of dance music that have been important to queer people of color. La Mission's identity is perhaps best summed up by cult-leader El Jefe's manifesto-sermon, "The Sermon for the Steps of the Ziggurat in our Hearts," published in our first *La Mission* magazine:

La Mission is a Community. La Mission is a Collective. La Mission is a Cult. La Mission is a Situationist Art Gang. La Mission is a Anarcho-Syndicalist terror cell. La Mission is a Family. La Mission is You. La Mission is Us. La Mission is gonna strip you butt nekkid, gonna check all your body cavities, gonna give you a shower, gonna give you a goodie bag, gonna give you a clean sheet and a towel. You at home with us now children, you understand me? You home with us now.



Founders Luis-Manuel, Pablo, and Mandie, caught on film at the performance for LM002, 'a slow mutiny.'

La Mission was first formed in 2012, in a small café in the Neukölln district of Berlin. The collective initially began with just three of us—Pablo Roman-Alcalá, Mandie O'Connell and Luis-Manuel Garcia—but like any good charismatic doomsday cult, it quickly expanded to include a broad

network of lovers and collaborators, led by a core of four instigators (Johannes Brandis joined us later in the year). After a fundraising run in the fall of 2012 (witness our surrealist fundraising video [here](#)), we held our first two performances in the winter and spring of 2013, which involved experimental performance art pieces held in unusual spaces. The performances incorporated music and text from our vinyl EPs and their corresponding 'zines, which were released at around the same time. These multi-channel productions were also conceptually coherent, with (kunst/WORK)001 introducing La Mission's "mission" and (kunst/WORK)002 focusing on the relevance of utopianism to dance music. After a "quiet spell" where we released an [out-of-series vinyl record of "lost remixes,"](#) 2014 has been dedicated to preparing the next volume in the series (due in February 2015), which examines the depredations of capitalism, forced austerity, and false scarcity on music.

I Hearing José

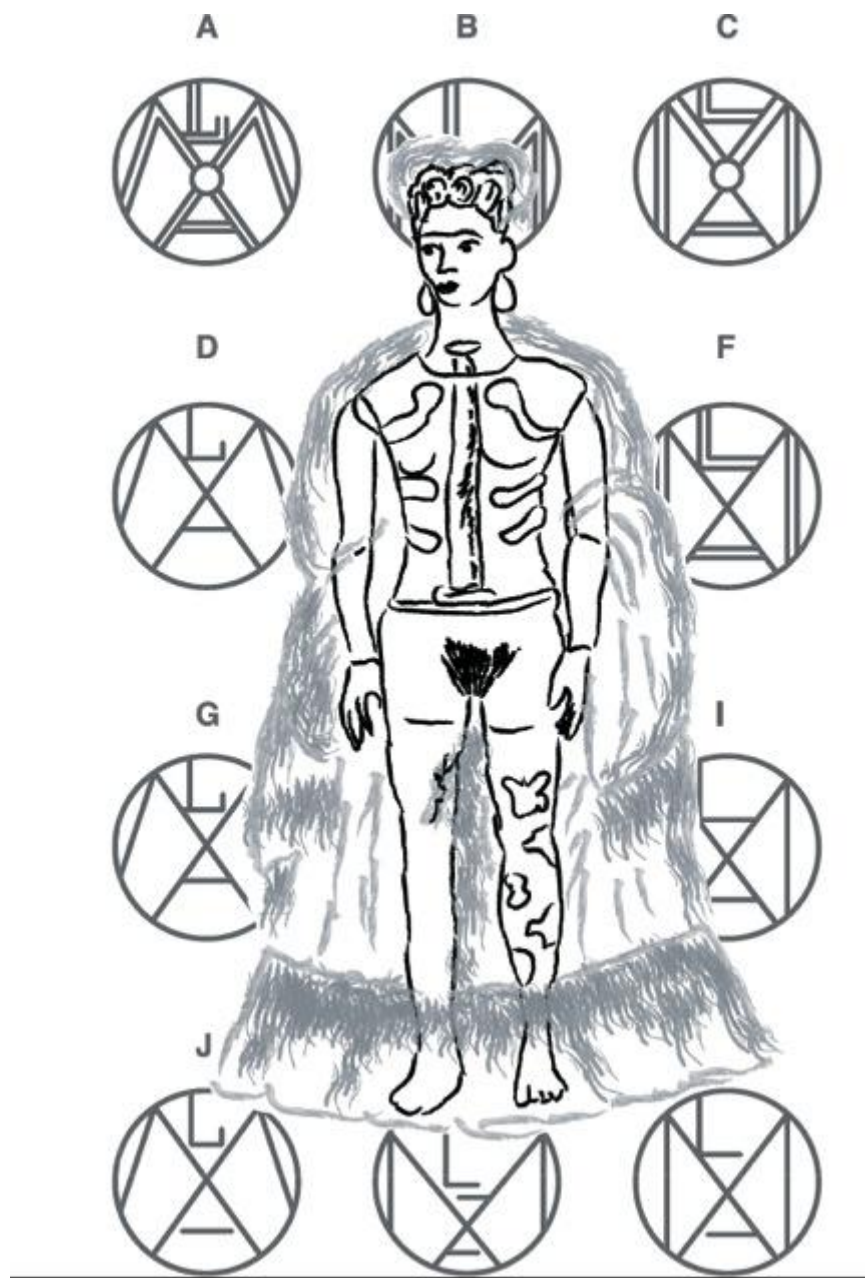
La Mission has no idols, but we do have influences—and José Esteban Muñoz is foremost among them. We share with Muñoz a focus on queer nightlife-worlds, a non-classical take on utopianism, a commitment to intellectual interventions outside of academic channels, and a certain brassy tone of voice. His revival of [Ernst Bloch](#)'s notion of a utopia based in real-life struggles was crucial in helping us reconcile revolutionary politics with dancefloor utopianism; or, put differently, Muñoz helped us find the critical politics latent in the queer, brown, sweaty gatherings that form the core of our scene of commitment. As "EDM" continues to blow up into a primarily white, hetero, cis, mainstream phenomenon, his insights have helped us maintain clarity and critical focus.

From the outset, we have also been profoundly influenced by Muñoz's lifelong theorizations of brownness, affect, and (dis)identification. Since three of our four core members are Latina/os in varying states of stripped identity, we have been especially interested in Muñoz's notion of the "brown commons," as he was developing the concept in the last years of his life. In promotional texts that circulated ahead of his speaking engagements on the topic, he described brownness as "an expansive sense of the world, a feeling and being in common that surpasses the limits of the individual and the subject." Notably, he understands brownness and the brown commons as being shaped not only by suffering and struggle, but also by thriving, providing a pool of resources for a better, more vibrant kind of life.



La Mission, (p/A)001: A non-Aristotelian Drama in Five Acts, 2013, Image by Julien Barret

The significance for La Mission's project in dance music culture should be clear already, but we also take great inspiration in how Muñoz developed an expansive view of brownness and the brown commons, using Latina/o experience as an entry-point for "a vaster consideration of the ways in which people and things suffer and experience harm under the duress of local and global forces that attempt to diminish their vitality and degrade their value." We here at La Mission are committed to exploring brownness for its potentials for lateral solidarities among people of color, who may have diverse cultural backgrounds but nonetheless share post-migrant experiences of struggle, devaluation, displacement, and inauthenticity. In fact, Muñoz's work was a direct inspiration for the "Brown Corner" in our *La Mission* 'zine (a parody of the "ladies' corner" and "kid's corner" of American mid-century lifestyle magazines). Published bilingually and featuring post-migrant authors, the Brown Corner reflects on aspects of brownness, as both specific to their contexts and generalizable to a wider "commons" of brown experience. In the process, we hope to highlight shared feelings, narratives, and resources for brown survival in a world of white supremacy.



A hand-drawn re-working of Frieda Kahlo's own self-portrait, part of the Brown Corner for issue 001 of the La Mission 'zine.

Singing into the Horizon

Brother Muñoz, what are we supposed to do with the vinyl records, the zines, the performance videos we had been accumulating for you? We're trying to sing our way into a queer utopian horizon, and we had been counting on your voice. We know you're not coming back. As a radical lefty utopian doomsday cult, we're not so invested in the afterlife, anyway. But it still sucks for us and everyone else you left behind, left in the "here and now" that we struggle to turn into

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something less suffocating. The party was just getting started, dammit. Besides, we had *such* a kickass choirboy outfit picked out for you.

LUIS-MANUEL GARCIA aka "LMGM": LMGM/Luis-Manuel LMGM/Luis-Manuel is a Canadian of Peruvian-Colombian origins, currently an Assistant Professor in Popular Music at the University of Groningen (NL), after migrating between Toronto, Berlin, Chicago, and Paris. He has managed to turn his love of electronic dance music into a PhD in Ethnomusicology at the University of Chicago, and into post-doctoral fellowships at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development and the Freie Universität Berlin. On the side, he writes about food and dances every chance he gets.



"Portrait of La Mission" by Ben Hammond, who has not seen any of its members naked

Muñoz & La Mission: A Sermon for the Imagined Sanctuary We Built Together

PABLO ROMAN-ALCALA

Welcome. La Mission is a family. A family of chosen comrades, chosen brethren, chosen hermanos, chosen сестры, chosen lovers, chosen students, chosen teachers, and chosen arms. Arms, linked and brandished through common thought, common feeling, common goals. It is with a heavy heart that we find ourselves here, remembering one of our family who (though never officially an

acolyte or collaborator) was one who contributed to the ecstasy that we have felt and will feel for many years. José Esteban Muñoz was said to be a believer. Ernst Bloch and the New Revolutionary Epoch. Our utopias were described and imagined and realized and experienced. Rise up, my brown brethren, and let us celebrate Brother Muñoz's legacy!



La Mission's "(p/A)001: A non-Aristotelian Drama in Five Acts," 2013, Image by Julien Barnett

The words and deeds of this fellow freedom-fighter, who infiltrated the bourgeois *güero* academy and infected it with a polylateral program for de- and reprogramming, has been our parallel and our inspiration. Colleague and comrade. A representative of our struggle. Not quite a patron saint—that honor we've reserved for *communarde* [Louise Michel](#)—but no less a visionary. As queers, as minorities stripped of identity, as angry and happy children in revolt for something better, we must all learn from each other as equals.

Brother Muñoz made utopia political again and located that utopianism in performance. La Mission's performances bring forth utopias from our queer future through fleeting mindfuck happenings in the present. Through the work of Sister O'Connell and her band of terrorizing miscreants, we present a non-narrative and non-paternalistic path towards redemption, one of our own making. Can I get a "Fuck, yeah!"?



La Mission at Import Projects, 2013

Brother Muñoz loved music and dancing and life-worlds connected by the beat and said, "[Take Ecstasy with Me.](#)" He revealed to us the connections between collective dancing and feeling utopian. In his spirit, La Mission's music strives to bring forth utopia through that ever-lasting beat. Through disassociation and reassociation, through transcendental repetition, and through getting the fuck down! Can I get a "Fuck, yeah!"?

Brother Muñoz believed in learning and critical thinking. Analysis and the great revolutionary trek through the jungle of our critically thinking minds. La Mission's tracts enact utopia through a constant vomiting out of our recently digested learnings into the baby-bird mouths of those who read them. The brother was also a hilarious motherfucker, and from this we realize that it is not through the shrill screams of egoism disguised as activism that we will prevail. It is through the joy of laughter combined with thought that we will win our bread. Can I get a "Fuck, yeah!"?

Brother Muñoz loved fucking. La Mission's fucking creates utopias through the ecstatic act in and of itself. If you aint fucking to make yourself a Temporary Autonomous Zone of happiness, then you aint doing it right. Can I get a copulatory "Fuck, yeah!"?

It is not all loss, though. The ideas live on. *Caminamos juntos*. On the dancefloor. In the reclaimed [Torre David skyscraper](#) and the [Taller Tupac Amaru collective](#); in the informal classrooms and the sweaty bedrooms. Our hearts must burst after sagging, our heads must fill after hanging low, and our linked arms will raise! Oh honey, please don't give your heart to a world system based on exploitation of the luckless, give your heart to US!

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La Mission at Import Projects, Common Revilings Project, 2013, Image by Julien Barrat

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All images courtesy of La Mission

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PABLO ROMAN-ALCALA: *Yo. I am Pablo aka “Beaner” aka “Skirtchaser” aka “El Frijolero” etc. I am an internationally working musician and dj who has enjoyed a modicum of success, but who doesn’t like what has happened to the musical landscape vis-a-vis “conservatism” in respect to both Money and Art. I mean the relationship of the two, okay? It sucks. And I want to change it.*



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Freedom Back: Sounding Black Feminist History, Courtesy the Artists—Tavia Nyong’o

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"New Wave Saved My Life*" -Wanda Alarcon