

Personal Statement

Responsive Environments
Opera of the Future
Center for Constructive Communication

I work at the intersection of mediated and unmediated space.

For the past 10 years, my life as an artist has revolved around Mardi Gras, and with good reason: there is work there.

However, there is a qualitative component of life as a Mardi Gras artist in New Orleans that sets it apart from other American cities: once a year, we own our streets. For a few weeks every year, human bodies convene, commune, and swirl. Business and traffic take a backseat to bodies and celebration. It is a time of spontaneous place-making, during which people assemble into ersatz groups for the sole purpose of adding to the celebration.

As an artist, I have been profoundly influenced by two texts that I consider companions: Guy Debord's seminal work *The Society of the Spectacle* and David Foster Wallace's treatise on 1990s television, *E Unibus Pluram*. Both make the same essential points: that the spectacle exists for the benefit of the spectacle; its returns are reinvested into itself; and any counterarguments to the spectacle are co-opted by the spectacle. There is no doubt a third text that makes these same points about the internet.

As an author of mediated spectacles, I have a personal code:

Good media puts bodies together in space. Less-good media refers users back to more media.

This mindset informs my goals as a Media Lab applicant: as an artist, I am indebted to New Orleans and Mardi Gras. I can think of no greater achievement in my life than to have contributed to this 300 year-old tradition; no more secure an attachment to history than to have dedicated myself to this festival that pre-dates America itself, and no greater cultural cause to which to apply the skills I learn at Media Lab.

I thrive at the intersection of science and art

For nine years, I have worked for Southern Neuro Speciality as an intraoperative neuromonitor, monitoring brain, spine, ENT, and vascular surgeries in New Orleans and throughout the Gulf South.

I took to the job quickly because of my familiarity with multi-channel recording systems: the back-end setup of an IOM case isn't so different from running live sound. Recognizing this fact, I quickly recruited and trained two audio engineers for our growing company, becoming the de facto mentor for new hires.

As a musician in Boston in the 2000s, I kept a studio space at the EMF Building on Brookline Street, right down the road from the Middle East. My mentors in the music scene were punk rock scientists,

who held jobs in labs by day and rehearsed in the evening. I learned from them as they scoured the Swapfest in search of rare amplifiers to add to their studios. I have modeled my life after these people, leveraging my good professional fortune to create space for myself to make art. It was from this vantage point that I first identified Media Lab as a place I wanted to be.

I believe in comedy

Krewe of Vaporwave is the only active post-Katrina Mardi Gras krewe to have been honored with a plaque at the historic Mardi Gras Fountain, a monument on the shores of Lake Pontchartrain that displays the plaques of over 80 historic Mardi Gras krewes. Unlike traditional Mardi Gras krewes, we put the plaque there ourselves: we used 3d scans to create a mold of the plaque, produced a perfect replica, installed it ourselves, notified the press, and reported ourselves to the managers of the monument at Lakefront Management Authority, who summarily removed it. Upon the plaque's removal, I attended 9 months of LMA meetings, delved through years of meeting minutes to deduce the actual requirements for inclusion at the memorial—requirements of which the LMA board members themselves were unaware—and successfully petitioned for our official installation. I paid our fine with an oversized novelty check.

All this to say that my work has a strong spirit of play. I believe that good art tells a good joke. There is a setup and a knockdown. There is an expectation and a subversion of that expectation. Beautiful things make me laugh, and I think that funny things are beautiful. I think that my playful mindset is perfect for a creative, multidisciplinary program like Media Lab, but the truth is that it works everywhere. It works in the OR; it works in interpersonal relationships; it works at the grocery store. I look forward to sharing this spirit of play with the students and faculty at MIT.