

Self-Introductions

I should be good at introductions by now. For three years after I graduated from college, I lived in Nakatsu, a small town in southwestern Japan, where I worked for the local board of education and taught English lessons at elementary and junior high schools and a community center for young adults. I have had plenty of practice giving the same presentation hundreds of times in my slow carefully enunciated English teacher diction:

Hello class. My name is Lee-Sean Huang. Nice to meet you. I am from Scottsdale, Arizona, USA...It is in the desert. This is picture of a cactus. Do you know what a cactus is?...I enjoy music and cooking. I play the piano and the cello. I love karaoke too...

I went to rural Japan hoping to immerse myself in a foreign culture and language. I was looking for inspiration and an opportunity to develop my creative interests. I learned Japanese. I had the chance to travel around Japan and Asia. I honed my vocal chops belting out karaoke renditions of classic rock and 80's pop at 4 AM. I performed my own songs at local clubs, played keyboard with a Japanese girl-rock cover band, and jammed with a local salsa band at a big summer Latin music festival. And of course, I got to introduce myself to hundreds of energetic and inquisitive kids.

Self-introductions are different these days. I mainly deal with “grown-ups,” and I no longer have the pseudo-celebrity status of a foreign English teacher in a small Japanese town. I am a 20-something college graduate in New York City, a city full of talent and ambition, a city where self-introductions seem to be invariably followed by the question: “So, what do *you* do?” I do not have a quick answer to that question, and if I get into ITP, I will have even more explaining to do. I am an activist, a musician, and an entrepreneur. After moving to New York from Japan, I worked for a year helping to start

up Avaaz.org, an online international multi-issue progressive political advocacy organization. I am currently working at Human Rights Watch, helping to develop their new online advocacy and outreach strategy. I also continue to produce original music and work on freelance graphic, web and video projects through the company I co-founded, Hepnova Multimedia.

I have always been interested in the unorthodox, the experimental, and the avant-garde. I love to improvise and learn best from hands-on experimentation. I rarely read the instruction manuals to new gadgets before I dive right in. I get great joy out of finding innovative solutions to problems and finding new applications to existing technology. I am an idealist. I am interested in how technology can change society, and I would like to be part of the process. By joining the ITP community, I hope to develop the necessary skills to be at the forefront of creative innovation.

Technology + Rebellion = Revolution?

On one of my weekend trips to Fukuoka, the closest major city to Nakatsu, I found Finnish philosopher Pekka Himanen's *The Hacker Ethic and the Spirit of the Information Age* in a bookstore bargain bin. Seduced by its intriguing title printed in a sexy san-serif font, I judged the book by its cover and bought it. In the epilogue to the book, sociologist Manuel Castells asserts:

There are no technological revolutions without cultural transformation. Revolutionary technologies have to be thought of. This is not an incremental process; it is a vision, an act of belief, a gesture of rebellion.

I had been interested in technology and rebellion for as long as I remember, but only when I read Castells's words did I realize their true synergistic potential. By attending

ITP, I hope to develop a structured foundation of technological skills and to immerse myself in a diverse community. I am looking to engage in creative dialogue in an inspiring environment. I am particularly drawn to ITP's openness to experimentation.

As an activist and an entrepreneur, I am interested in technology's capacity to help and empower people, to unlock their creative, social and political potential, and to improve the quality of their lives. I believe that those who have the privilege to harness the great the power of technology also share in the burden to use it responsibly. I am particularly interested in issues of sustainability and green technologies; open source and the free flow of information; and ways to democratize technology in an effort to bridge the digital divide of access to information and technology that separates the haves and the have-nots of the information age. As a musician I would like learn how to develop new musical instrument interfaces and new ways of generating sound. I hope to be able to use these interfaces for cutting-edge performances and "happenings" that integrate sound and visuals that respond to the physical environment and react to audience inputs in a way that blurs the distinction between the performer and the spectator.

"Tourist You Are the Terrorist"

One of my most interesting failures is an album I produced with my band, which was named The Ronald Raygun at the time before we re-branded as Hepnova in 2007. The title of the album, "Tourist You Are the Terrorist," came from a photograph I took of some graffiti painted on a wall in Barcelona. I formed the band with some friends I met during my first year of college at Arizona State University. While I have some classical

piano and cello training, the band and the album embraced a genre-spanning, improvisational, do-it-yourself, deconstructionist methodology and aesthetic. While producing the album, I taught myself how to write and record songs on a computer as we went along. I embraced and took ownership over the limits of my technique as a musician and the limits of the technology available to me as a producer, and found ways to work around limitations, to discover beauty in the imperfect urgency of glitches and first-takes.

While the experimental methodology proved to be personally and creatively fulfilling, our self-published album proved to be a commercial failure. We had CDs printed, but despite our growing following from our local performances, we never managed to sell more than a few dozen albums. We did not know anything about the music business or marketing. I think the biggest mistake was not seeking the advice of those who could help. In addition, the internet had not yet become a viable medium for bands to market themselves and to distribute their work. Technology has changed the way people learn about and listen to music. Thanks to this technological and cultural change, I think independent musicians have a much greater potential to market their music through the internet today than several years ago. I have learned the importance of learning from and dialoguing with others in the creative process and also the potential of technology to empower and facilitate creative expression. I hope to continue this learning process at ITP.