

MATTHEW SHAFFER

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RESEARCH STATEMENT

Curiosity may have killed the cat, but it certainly catapulted me into a career that continues to ask questions, share stories, and unite through satire.

While I'm the product of an interdisciplinary MFA program, which absolutely informed my work and character, I am also an advocate for experiential learning.

My approach to research happened organically and accidentally when I was very young. On my fourth birthday, long before smart devices, I received a toy robot, Casey. Casey was an interactive learning device for young children. For me, Casey was research! I was intrigued that this piece of plastic could talk, smile, and share information, but didn't look or feel like me.

After carefully studying the structure of Casey, I discovered that tiny silver screws held him together. Naturally, I went straight to the garage and grabbed a screwdriver--I'd seen my dad use one enough times to understand the basic concept--and got straight to work.

Two hours later, Casey was plastic parts on the ground. My parents, both horrified and proud, asked me what happened. My response, "I wanted to see how it worked."

When I'm creating a piece, I start with a tool, in this case the internet. From there I collect the books, films, and--when possible--first hand accounts of the stories and material I'm exploring.

Like four-year-old me, I remain excited and inquisitive. Once I've gathered the information, I begin writing. I believe our research should tell its own story. This may be different than the piece I'm directing, choreographing, or performing--but like Casey--once I've uncovered my relationship to the origin story, I can start analyzing how I want to move forward with the narrative.

I know my research was done well when an audience can pick up a copy of my book or sit and watch a piece I've created, and connect with the message on a personal level.