

Reflection Statement

How to Make Fetch Happen

The word *fetch*, derived from the Germanic word *fatian* which means ‘to grasp’, was archaically defined as a stratagem or trick. Thus, making Tina Fey’s²⁷ redefinition of it to signify à la mode popularity, and society’s redefinition of it to apply to politics, all the more fittingly brilliant. Born out of my passion for the complex intricacy of language and semantics, *How to Make Fetch Happen* was always bound to be, in some part, a critical analysis. My fascination with the inner workings of linguistics was aroused by my study of Latin coupled with my bilingual heritage. Both enabled me to notice the nuanced discrepancies in the varied syntactic structures of different languages to convey the same meaning. Inspired by the study of Orwell’s *1984* and his exploration of concepts of Newspeak and Doublethink (in the Texts and Human Experiences, Advanced English Common Module) my major work is centred around Machiavellian political oratory and the deliberate language choices made to manipulate the perception of meaning and thus influence the reactions of the responder to language itself.

Given my utter captivation with the labyrinthine sophistication of semantics, I was mulishly stubborn that I would engage in an investigation of the English Language itself; rather than the pursuing a niche or specific argument. However, the search for such an all-encompassing thesis proved to be a mammoth of a task. After weeks of ransacking the internet’s archives for any idea that was not completely shop-worn, I was left with a waning faith in Google’s almighty omnipotence. As I laboured through what felt like the hundredth article of that week, looking up word after polysyllabic word, I asked myself in a bout of exasperation, “Why could people not just say what they mean?”.

My thesis had found me.

²⁷ Screenwriter for the film *Mean Girls*

No more than a few days later, I stumbled upon the godsend, Chi Luu's *The Linguistics of Mass Persuasion*²⁸, possibly the only useful source out of the many (and I do mean *very* many) that I had perused before then. However, my days of speed reading *JSTOR* articles and critical readings were not nearly at their end, for a further three trying weeks of research ensued.

Now armed with knowledge gained from both the Advanced English course and extensive independent research, I breathed life into my thesis that, previously, had been but a fleeting concept in the recesses of my mind. I was going to expose the linguistic constituents of the political gambits used by orators and leaders to sway opinions and manipulate beliefs. Having picked a few good speeches to analyse, I set out to start the composition. Though it did not take long for me to realise that no professional composer, let alone myself, could make five-thousand-word slab of analysis captivating.

Thus, began the three weeks of research into form.

My salvation was a ficto-critical piece I had read during the summer break: Frances Schmiede's *The Déjà vu of Australian Hip Hop*²⁹, that galvanised my desire to experiment with a hybrid form, for I believed that a response the tip-toed on the line between a creative and an analytical piece would keep me on my own toes for the months to come. Therefore, I resolved that I would compose a guide that, at first glance, deconstructs the philology of the constituent elements of linguistic obfuscation so that others may emulate such language in their own vernacular. However, under the guise of a *How to* article, my piece was to—in a litotic manner—instruct readers *How NOT* to be hoodwinked and cozened by political doublespeak. As such, in my inexplicable quest to make the task more difficult for myself, I realised that this would require me to sustain a cynical, 'tongue-in cheek' tone throughout the

²⁸ Luu, (2019).

²⁹ Schmiede, (2011).

work and sardonically jape with my own work, and make, somewhat, a mockery of it (An accomplishment that I most pride myself on).

With a clear purpose in mind, I embarked on the writing process.

Considering the fact that this *How to* guide was targeted, not at high-brow political theorists, but the common voting public, perhaps to be published in a local English Journal or the school magazine, I attempted to avoid pretentious and highfalutin diction in favour of cohesive but specific language to effectively convey my messages. Now all that was left to be done was to knuckle down and write.

While I cannot deny that the composition process was arduous and challenging at times, I am glad to say that it was enjoyable and rewarding. My fascination with the subject matter was the impetus for my late nights of writing, editing and revising that I, quite surprisingly, did not mind. A notion that made me feel as though I had somehow finagled a free ride through the English Extension 2 Course. In light of my investigation into the use of language to facilitate manipulation, the process of revising my work, forced me to analyse the motivations behind my own language choices and their potential effect on audiences, a task I never found the need to undertake in the Advanced and Extension 1 courses.

The seemingly never-ending process of research pervaded even the composition process of my major work. Initially intended to analyse multiple speeches and thus extrapolate the exact elements that make them compelling, and how modern speakers can adopt such features to achieve the same effect. However, upon reflection I realised that I had unwittingly selected a range of speeches that were all presented by males in Western politics, which undermined my exposition of the ubiquitous nature of linguistic manipulation despite contextual barriers. Thus, I set out to diversify my analysis by replacing Obama's *Address to the Nation on Terrorism* (2015) with Pauline Hanson's Maiden Speech to the Senate (2016)

to add both a female and right-wing perspective. Similarly, instead of analysing President Trump's Inaugural Address (2017), I decided to examine his more recent debates and tweets to provide further variety in the text types I was using as examples.

Upon composing my second draft, I was met with the glaring issue that though I started with an allusion to *Mean Girls* and popular culture in the abstract, the metaphor of representing linguistic manipulation as a popularity paradigm was not sustained throughout the piece. Unfortunately for me, this fragmentation in my work also manifested in the dissonant tone and register of my work, between the analysis and the direct address to the audience. As I embraced the need for impartiality in analysis, I had inadvertently espoused the insipid vapidness. As such, I decided to extend the metaphor further by including relevant quotes from contemporary films, lyrical music and television to cement the hypocatastasis of politics being akin to celebrity. For example, when explaining the potential for neologisms to persuade audiences, I introduced a quote from the television series *How I Met Your Mother*: “*The Possimible. That which is beyond the impossible, at the place where possible and the impossible meet*³⁰.” not only to sustain the extended metaphor, but also to better bridge both critical analysis with the creative instructional writing which constitute my hybrid form.

After such arduous composition, revision and ‘*re-revision*’, I am pleasantly surprised by the quality and cohesion of *How to Make Fetch Happen* and have grown incredibly as both a composer and an individual. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to stray from the strict prosaic structure of essay writing and to venture into creative analysis, a task that proved to be extremely rewarding.

³⁰ Major Work Page 15

According to Webster Dictionary, the word *fetch* was used to describe the drawing of breath or blood. In modern times however, it is used to describe the drawing of attention, compliance and celebrity through language.

As such, there is but one thing that I hope readers take away from this guide:

Without an exploitable audience, *fetch* will NEVER happen.

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