

To Write or Not to Write: A Reflection on the Process, Creation and Employment of a
Writing Style in a Film Review

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Reflection is a significant part of any creative practice. It is vital that when ensuring that our work grows and changes as we in turn grow and change, and by reflecting on our past practices, we take the successes and failures forward in order to create something better. As someone with an interest in research and writing, reflection is important in ensuring that whatever skills I learnt on a past project is brought forward onto my next project. In taking part in the practice-based work that I have completed this year, my skills and abilities have grown significantly as I have begun to recognise what I am best at and what needs more work, which has helped me to overcome roadblocks in order to make a finished work that I am proud of. In this essay, I will dissect the process and reflect on each step of the creative process of my film review on *tick... tick... BOOM!*.

The first step that I will be reflecting on is the creation and the establishment of a writing style. There are many writing styles that are used in review work, the most significant to me being whether a work is written in a descriptive style or in a persuasive style. Having a distinct and individualised sense of writing style is important in making sure that one's work is an accurate and fulfilling representation

of your own thoughts and feelings translated into writing. Screenwriter Emeric Pressburger once said that 'I think that a film should have a good story, a clear story, and it should have, if possible, something which is probably the most difficult thing - it should have a little bit of magic' (Pressburger, 1980). In other words, our writing must have something that stays with us - the 'magic', in Pressburger's words. Our writing, be it screenwriting or review work, must have something that makes it stand out and stick with the audience outside of the basic building blocks that naturally must all work too. In order to develop a writing style that I felt was a true reflection of myself and could stay with an audience, I had to find what exactly was that 'magic' that could create in my work - what style worked best with me and my creative choices. In exploration, I had to make sure I was aware of the writing styles that we used in film reviews and what specifically other writers employed in order to make their work shine in a specific way. Understanding what made a work descriptive versus persuasive and whether or not this gave my work the 'magic' that Pressburger discusses that made it not feel basic or boring was important - to prove Pressburger's words I needed to ensure I was writing in a true reflection of self. A practice-based example that I chose to focus on as part of this exploration and development was a review in the film review magazine *Little White Lies*, written by Lillian Crawford titled 'Earwig and the Witch' (Crawford, 2021). From looking into this work, I found that I enjoyed the more descriptive areas of Crawford's writing alongside the more persuasive areas. I found Crawford's mixture created something similar to a well-established defence, one that gave its audience a solid understanding of what exactly the 'case' was, by discussing the plot and the characters, alongside an argument of a certain point, in this situation the use of 3D animation. This to me was the 'magic' of the writing - and when I employed this in my

work, I found that this mixture of persuasive and descriptive felt more authentic and engaging for the reader.

Now with a clear and distinct sense of style that made my work feel more unique and impactful, the next step in my practice-based work that I am going to be reflecting on was the research section of my work. As someone who has a large passion for research and for learning, an important part of my creative storytelling process was ensuring that work was backed up and that I had a solid understanding of my topic. For my practice-based work, I chose to write my essay with two key points in mind - a review on the Lin-Manuel Miranda biopic/ musical drama *tick... tick... BOOM!* and one stand-out concept that I got from the film, which ultimately was the idea of hope making us desperate. Critic Pauline Kael once said 'In the arts, the critic is the only independent source of information. The rest is advertising' (Kael, 1973). In other words, a review must paint a clear image of the film and what they as an individual believe about it. The film review paints an image of the film in the colours that its author best believes represents what exactly the film meant to them - the successes, the failures, the history, the people involved. The exploration of this idea of being an independent source of information, specifically focusing on this notion of independence, shaped my work. To prove Kael's words I needed to ensure that I knew exactly what I wanted to say about the film in question, certifying that I was giving a true reflection of the film in my review. To do this, I completed a comp analysis in several reviews, including the *Variety* review of *tick... tick... BOOM!*, written by Peter Debruge (Debruge, 2021). In Debruge's review I specifically focused on looking into the tone, language and style of his review in order to see what he chose to focus on and what kind of review writer he was. From my analysis of the

review, I have found that Debruge's focuses specifically on giving a precise overview of the film, alongside a short retelling without diving too deep and simply retelling the film in its entirety. Debruge also highlights certain areas of the film that he feels was the most effective, like the impact of the music in the film and the lead actor's performance. What I found specifically important in the work, which in reflection had a large impact on how I wrote my own review, was how Debruge discussed the film in connection with its portrayal of a creative person. Debruge's language and tone feels personal and genuine, in a way that audiences can relate to. This gave it this sensation of independence that Kael discusses, and cemented the idea to me that review work should have an air of distinct personality in order to strengthen its defence and its magic.

With this strengthened concept of my review, the next step in my practice-based work was to ensure that I presented this personal connection in my work. In reflection, the reason why I chose to write my review on *tick... tick... BOOM!* and on the concept of hope making us desperate was because the film was incredibly impactful on me as a creative, with this area in particular - the notion that it is the hope of success that makes a person become more desperate - resonating with me the most. Critic Robert Ebert once said 'Of all the arts, movies are the most powerful aid to empathy, and good ones make us into better people' (Ebert, 2002). In other words, films are capable of reaching us in the most personal of ways. Films teach us how to better understand one another, and help to grow and change as we see the often painful experiences that they are forced to endure. Often the pain that this reflects in these films is a familiar one to its creator, and to those within the same circle. In that sense, a reviewer's most magical work will come when one sees

themselves truly reflecting on the big screen. To prove Ebert's words, I wanted to ensure that my work showed a deep understanding of the pain of the character, and a sense of growth surrounding the idea of creative desperation. This can be seen in the Film School Reject's review of Black Swan by Mary Beth McAndrews (McAndrews, 2020). In this review, McAndrew reflects on how the mannerisms and the actions of the main protagonist are reminiscent of her own experiences with OCD, and how this portrayal impacted her. I wanted to ensure that the same level of passion that McAndrew expresses in her work was reflected in mine.

Overall, I feel as though I was quite successful in my creation of my practice-based work, and that following this creative storytelling process has helped me to create something impactful and unique. On reflection of my work, I feel as though I was able to create a writing style that was a solid mixture of both descriptive and persuasive styles of writing, though going forward I feel that I should make sure to have more solid research, as feel that my review lacked as much background information as others that I studied as part of my comp analysis. Furthermore, I feel I was successful in getting across my personal connection to the idea and its main concept, and was able to show how it impacted me. Going forward, I will be sure to carry everything I have learned from completing my work and from my reflection in this essay into my next projects to further improve them.

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