

EDITOR'S NOTE

When students arrive at the university, they enter *in medias res*—that is, they confront a multitude of disciplines and discourses with long, complex histories and are asked immediately to participate in pushing them forward. Boston University, the College of Arts and Sciences, and the CAS Writing Program are all charged with helping students become civically minded thinkers who will use the knowledge and experiences they acquire in their undergraduate years to make a difference in their fields and communities. This goal is made immediately apparent to students in their writing classes, in which they must take stock of both inherited traditions and cutting-edge theories and use (and at times revise) these methods in order to interpret past and/or current events, debates, and cultural representations. Here in Issue 6, in which we've published eleven superb essays from a pool of 430, you'll see how the best writing asks readers to see things differently.

In essays written for WR 100, Morgan Barry and Patrick Allen interpret cultural forms we're familiar with—television, literature and film—in order to get at bigger questions, but they do so in compellingly contrasting ways. In “What’s Out of Sight Is Not Out of Mind,” Barry drills down into a handful of moments in the landmark television series *The Sopranos* to show us how the soundtrack picks up on the show’s discourse about psychoanalysis. Conversely, in “The Dichotomy of Science” Allen zooms out, using the figure of the mad scientist to place two timelines—one literary, one scientific—side by side. Both approaches allow these writers to contribute to and open up interdisciplinary lines of inquiry. Jamie Tam and Ryan Lader also ask us to see things differently, but they

do so by offering a more complex understanding of context. In “Beyond Beneficence,” Tam lends historical context to our understanding of past medical practices, compelling readers to consider current ethical debates in a similar way. And in “The Artist Is Present and the Emotions Are Real,” Lader provides theoretical context for analyzing a recent piece of performance art, showing readers how theoretical engagement can facilitate readings of all sorts of cultural forms, complicating and even overturning our initial assumptions.

In WR 150, students continue to put these methods to use, but their essays are enriched with in-depth independent research. Again, the exceptional student writers whose essays are featured here strive not only to interpret specific evidence persuasively, but also use these interpretations to propel new understandings of the world. In these essays, students are even more active participants in the revision and creation of discourses, making adjustments, filling holes, and even proposing new work to be done. Carly Sitrin writes back to dismissive scholars in “Making Sense: Decoding Gertrude Stein,” addressing a challenging body of work with clarity and purpose; Thomas Laverriere recovers an overlooked theme in “Cross-dressing in Renoir’s *La Grande Illusion*,” reinvigorating the conversation on an iconic film by bringing recent scholarship to bear in his fresh interpretation; and Andrea Foster deploys an alternative genre “Crossbones” to propose a nautical excavation that could have far-reaching implications.

While many of the best essays set out to solve problems, others do the work of raising new sets of questions. Nicholas Supple and Laura Coughlin use their research to question the assumptions behind contemporary political movements. In “That Ayn’t Rand,” Supple responds to the loud voice of a popular political commentator by questioning uses and misuses of major socioeconomic theories, while, in “Fitting Animal Liberation into Conceptions of American Freedom,” Coughlin uncovers the root of failed attempts made by animal activist groups in their foundational rhetorical approaches. Julie Hammond and Hannah Pangrcic raise questions that are, in a way, about how we raise questions. Hammond’s “Eusociality” worries about questions raised in disciplinary isolation, calling for more collaboration across fields. And Pangrcic’s “Borat” takes a level approach to a highly charged and controversial documentary, raising questions about the very definition of the term.

Each of these essays has been selected because the writer has taken a risk and followed through with confidence. The essays span disciplines and at times even question disciplinary boundaries. These students arrive in the middle of things, but they write to move us forward—not just for the sake of it, but with a clear sense of purpose, with an eye to the future.

— Gwen Kordonowy, Editor