



## Editor's Introduction

*We write so that all people who feel wronged by the corporate forces of the world can know that we are your allies. As one people, united, we acknowledge the reality that the future of the human race requires the cooperation of its members.*

*-Declaration of Occupy New York City*

In *Where We Stand: Class Matters*, bell hooks famously says that class is the “uncool subject;” the one that none of the scholars in critical theory want to tackle, and the subject we avoid in our national discourse. And despite the fact that our national situation should turn our conversation to the subject of class — despite the fact that the Occupy movement still looms large in our political landscape — we aren’t talking about class.

We find ourselves, right now, in one of the worst national and global recessions in history, which has turned our national discourse substantially towards money and the best way to spend public money. But such conversations tend to divorce the material reality of money from the political connotations of class. Our country currently legally recognizes corporations as people — immortal people with powerful lobbyists and access to nearly unlimited funds — but the dominant use of “class warfare” in the news lately has described the working class unfairly targeting the wealthy. The presumptive GOP nominee in the 2012 presidential race is a man who makes as much [money](#) from his investments each *day* as the average American family makes each *year*. And besides a few articles and late-night talk show jokes when he released his tax returns, it has not become a topic of national discussion.

Despite these issues, and despite the loud protests of Occupy Wall Street, which are admittedly harder to hear in the Spring of 2012, we are not talking about class. And we need to be. Especially

coming from a public university like the University of Houston, where most of our students come from working class [backgrounds](#), class is an important part of our daily lives as teachers. As graduate students, TAs, and contingent faculty, our classed positions within the labor structures of the academy make us particularly sensitive to issues of class and labor. It is a subject of importance and immediate relevance in our lives.

It is also a subject of immediate relevance to our research in our fields. It applies when we talk about postcolonial theory. It applies when we talk about the conditions of authorship and readership. It applies when we look into the character portrayals in novels. We've gotten pretty good in the academy at talking about other issues of critical theory, like race and gender, but we're still wary about looking at the way that class intersects with issues of racism, sexism, and ableism. Class is uncomfortable, so we often avoid it. We avoid it because talking about our own privilege makes us uncomfortable, and we avoid it because talking about our lack of privilege makes us uncomfortable. We avoid it because it sounds too much like talking about the author's biography, too much like moving away from the text. We avoid it because the idea that liberatory practices and pedagogies should be about something *other* than moving up in the capitalist system is downright scary. But now that class — especially socioeconomic class — is becoming louder in our national discourse thanks to Occupy, we need to talk about class in the academy. We need to talk about the way that class affects what books we read, the way it affects what we teach, the way it affects who our students are. We need to talk about the way it matters to us as graduate students and TAs, the economic underclass of the university.

This issue of *Plaza* introduces essays that try to open a space for some necessary conversations about class in politics, literature, and pedagogy. On behalf of the *Plaza* editorial board, I want to thank Jen Wingard for her support in setting up the Spring 2012 Graduate Conference and this issue of *Plaza* and Dr. Rosemary Hennessy for her thoughtful talk at the conference.

Allison Laubach Wright  
Editor



*Plaza Editorial Staff for Issue 2.2*

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