Introduction to Literary Theory:  
*Thoughts on Power*  
Professor Peter Starr  
COLT 502, Class #22075R, Fall 2008, Fridays 2:00-4:50, THH 105  

The aim of this seminar is to introduce graduate students (and advanced undergraduates) to some of the thinkers, theories and concepts that have come to define what we know as literary theory. To that end, we will be reading a wide range of major theorists, with special attention to what their work tells us about the nature of modern power.  How are we to understand the complex relations between social power, economic power, institutional power, discursive power, and psychic power?  What does it mean to say, with Michel Foucault, that modern power has no “headquarters,” that it is only in retrospect that power’s effects take on the aspect of a “unitary and voluntarist” strategy?  Is there something in our language, in our psyches, or in the demands of narrative representation that forces us to conceive of power as sited (Lacan, Derrida)?  What place should such concepts as “the cultural industry” (Horkheimer and Adorno), “ideology” (Althusser), “writing” (Cixous), “pleasure” (Mulvey), “hybridity” (Bhabha), “signifying” (Gates), “whiteness” (hooks), “enjoyment” (Žižek), or “subjection” (Butler) have in our understanding of modern social power?  How does the nature of advanced capital as an “absent totality” (Jameson), the massive globalization of material and cultural production (Hardt and Negri), or our widespread reliance on distributed “bio-systems” (Kelly) force us radically to rethink inherited paradigms of power?  These are among the key questions we will address.

*Turn Over for Required Texts*
COLT 502: Introduction to Literary Theory

Thoughts on Power

Required Texts


—Plus essays (by Louis Althusser, Hélène Cixous, Henry Louis Gates, bell hooks, Kevin Kelly, Laura Mulvey, Gayle Rubin, Slavoj Žižek, and others) in a course pack.