The ancient and multivalent image of the underground has crystallized over the last two centuries to denote sites of disaffection from—and strategies of resistance to—dominant social, political and cultural systems of modernity. We will trace the development of this metaphor from the Underground Railroad in the mid-1800s and the French Resistance during World War II to the Weather Underground in the 1960s-1970s, while also considering it as a literary and artistic concept, from Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Underground* and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* to Chris Marker's film *La Jetée* and Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker*. Alongside with such literary and cinematic tales, drawing theoretical guidance from refuseniks from Henry David Thoreau to Guy Debord, this course investigates how countercultural spaces become—or fail to become—sites of political resistance, and also how dissenting ideologies give rise to countercultural spaces. We ask about the relation between social deviance (the failure to meet social norms, whether willingly or unwittingly) and political resistance, especially in the conditions of late capitalism and neo-colonialism, when countercultural literature, film and music (rock, punk, hip-hop, DIY aesthetics etc.) get absorbed into—and coopted by—the hegemonic socio-economic system. In closing we will also consider contemporary forms of dissidence—from Pussy Riot to Black Lives Matter—where vulnerable individual bodies confront global communication networks.

Required books (available at the Seminary Coop):

- Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground* (Vintage Classics)
  9780380633135

All other assigned readings are available on or through Canvas.

Requirements:

1. Attendance and Class Participation (20%). This is a discussion-based course. The success of our discussions will depend on each individual’s attendance and active participation. Attendance will be recorded, and multiple missed classes will affect your grade. Equally important: you should always come to class having completed the assigned reading and with questions and comments prepared in advance.

Participating in class means not only speaking, but also listening to others and respecting others’ contributions. Therefore electronic devices are to be used solely for reading assigned texts and, if necessary, note-taking. Anyone observed using
devices for other purposes will be asked to stop; repeat violations will affect your class participation grade.

If have any concerns about your participation in class, please come to see us, sooner rather than later.

All students must visit one of the instructors’ office hour at least once before the end of week 6.

2. Response paper, 1000 words each (1500 for graduate registrants) (20%):
Analyze and critique the argument of one of the primary readings concerning the underground from the first four weeks. To be submitted in hard copy within one week of the reading’s assigned date, but no later than 2 May.

3. Midterm take-home exam with essay questions; given 9 May, due 14 May (30%)

4. Final paper, approximately 2000-2500 words (3000-4000 words for graduate registrants), due by 4pm on 14 June (11am on 4 June for graduating students) (30%)

POLICY ON LATE WORK: Late submissions will not be accepted unless a forty-eight-hour extension is requested one week before the due date of the paper. You may request only one forty-eight-hour extension per quarter. PLAN AHEAD! Papers submitted late without advance permission will be penalized one grade (A to A-) for each day the paper is late.

Papers must be submitted in the following format:
— and Word uploaded to Canvas;
— double-spaced;
— readable 12 pt. font;
— numbered pages;
— name and title at top of first page;
— proofread for spelling and grammar;
— indent long quotations as bloc of text, without quotation marks;
— clear and efficient citation system for all sources.

Please familiarize yourself with the University policies on academic honesty and plagiarism; ignorance of these is not a valid excuse. See:
http://facultyhandbook.uchicago.edu/teaching/plagiarism.shtml

The sign-up sheet for Professor Bird’s office hours (T 1-3 at Foster 416) is here:
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1plXo9XAPZn6P3mWx1UMHj0bXtH3PA07e-AEL7t44G6k/edit?usp=sharing
Week 1: Alienation

2 April
Musical motif: The Jam, “Going Underground”

Film motif: James Benning, Two Cabins (2014):
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Na7jNa4uj4

Henry David Thoreau, excerpt from Walden (Library of America) pp. 325-355.
Rick Paulas, “What to Wear to Smash the State”
https://nyti.ms/2kb6eks

4 April
Musical motif: Tom Waits, “Underground”

Fyodor Dostoevsky, Notes from Underground, pt. 1.

Week 2: From Alienation to Mobilization

9 April
Musical motif: Sex Pistols, “Pretty Vacant”

Fyodor Dostoevsky, Notes from Underground, pt. 2.
Henry David Thoreau, “On Civil Disobedience”

Screening 10 April:
Robert Bresson, A Man Escaped (1957)
Cauleen Smith, Three Songs about Liberation (2007)

11 April
Musical motif: John Coltrane, “The Song of the Underground Railroad”


Week 3: From Mobilization to Conspiracy

16 April
Musical motif: Gogol Bordello, “Through the Roof ‘n Underground”

Mikhail Bakunin, “Revolution, Terrorism, Banditry.”
Sergei Nechaev, “Catechism of a Revolutionary.”
Vera Figner, excerpt from Memoirs of a Revolutionist.
Evgeny Zamiatin, We.

18 April
Musical motif: The Manhattan Transfer, “Notes from the Underground”
Evgeny Zamiatin, *We*

**Week 4: Going Invisible**

23 April

Claude McKay, “The White City”
Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*.

25 April
Musical motif: Curtis Mayfield, “The Underground”

Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*.

**Week 5: Cold War Noir**

30 April
Musical motif: Curtis Mayfield, “The Underground”

Week 5: Cold War Noir

**Screening 1 May:**
*Pickup on South Street*, dir. Sam Fuller (1953)
*La Jetée*, dir. Chris Marker (1962)

2 May (last day for submitting response papers)
Musical motif: Lloyd Cole, “Holier Than Thou”

Philip K. Dick, “The Variable Man.”

**Week 6: Deviance**

7 May: Dissidence
Musical motif: Jamiroquai, “Deeper Underground”

William S. Burroughs, excerpts from *Junky.*

**Warning: Sexually explicit; drugs; racial and gender-based slurs**
Allen Ginsberg, “*Junkie: An Appreciation*”
William S. Burroughs, “*Manhattan Serenade*” from *Naked Lunch*

**Warning: Sexually explicit; drugs; racial and gender-based slurs**
Marshall McLuhan, “Notes on Burroughs”

**Screening 8 May:**

**9 May: Navigating the Apocalypse**
Musical motif: Ben Folds Five, “Underground”
Week 7: From The Velvet Underground to the Weather Underground

14 May: The Velvet Underground (midterm due)
Musical motif: The Velvet Underground, “Venus in Furs”
Film motif: *The Velvet Underground and Nico*, dir. Andy Warhol (1966) 70m.

Guy Debord, excerpts from *Society of the Spectacle*.

**Warning:** Sexually explicit; drugs; gender-based slurs
Amiri Baraka, selections from *SOS: Poems 1961-2013*.

**Screening 15 May**
*Taxi Driver*, dir. Martin Scorsese (1976) 114m.

16 May: The Weather Underground
Musical motif: Gil Scott Heron, “The Revolution Will Not Be Televised”


Week 8: Ecological Resistance

21 May
Musical motif: Patti Smith, “Waiting Underground”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Na7jNa4uj4

Murray Bookchin, from *Ecology and Revolutionary Thought*.
Ted Kaczynski, “The Unabomber Trial: The Manifesto” ## 1-76, 114-120

**Screening 22 May**

23 May: The Red Army Faction
Text to be assigned.

Week 9: Punk and Hip-Hop

28 May
Musical motif: Ianka Diagileva, “Along the Tram Tracks”

The Sex Pistols, “Anarchy in the UK”
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=96LT7xPW82k
The Clash (with Allen Ginsberg), “Ghetto Defendant”
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=raGsgsuPFAw


**Screening 29 May:**

**30 May:**
Musical motif: 2Pac, “Rebel of the Underground”

Grand Master Flash and the Furious Five, “The Message”
The Notorious B.I.G., “Juicy”

**Week 10: Digital undergrounds: Pussy Riot, Black Lives Matter, Antifa, Anonymous, CCRU, Alt Right**

**4 June**
Musical motif: Blondie, “Underground Girl”

  [https://www.eff.org/cyberspace-independence](https://www.eff.org/cyberspace-independence)
Cybergothic selections from the CCRU (Cybernetic culture research unit)