This project as a whole explores the emergence of, as well as the shifting beliefs and ideas about, extraterrestrials and UFOs in the United States. Although easily dismissed as kitsch, fringe and lowbrow, extraterrestrial aliens have very powerful ramifications in American social, cultural, economic, and political life. For instance, despite the fact that there is no tangible proof of their existence, aliens are both popularly and scientifically considered to be a real possibility. That is, ideas about aliens have generated very serious scientific pursuits, from multi-million dollar space explorations, to large-scale projects, like SETI (or the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence), which involve both academic scientists and amateur enthusiasts, who monitor electromagnetic radiation for signs of otherworldly transmissions. Aliens also influence science fiction literature, and staggering profits have been generated from films, television shows, and other commercial ventures that feature aliens. Ideas about extraterrestrials fundamentally transform thinking about time and space, modernity and post-modernity, and the possibilities for intergalactic communication. Moreover, many communities (both in person and online) have become organized around those who believe in, and those who have experienced contact with, extraterrestrials. In this sense, aliens have very real material consequences and profoundly shape the lives of those who believe in them. This is dissertation, then, is about something that, plainly speaking, does not actually exist – aliens have never been proven to be real – and yet, it is also about something that simultaneously exist everywhere. Aliens have invaded popular culture, and while their very being is unproven, the material consequences generated as a result of aliens are quite apparent and incredibly significant.

In order to examine the shifting attitudes about aliens in modern thought, I will draw on the works of a range of social scientists and humanities scholars who have begun to theorize the American fascination with extraterrestrials. These include Jodi Dean (1998), who has considered the significance of alien beliefs alongside the virtual and technological advancements of cyberspace culture; Peter Knight (2002), who has looked specifically at conspiracy theories and the way in which they have been embraced as part of an everyday struggle to make sense of a rapidly changing world; Bridget Brown (2007), whose ethnographic fieldwork with abductees has helped to contextualize the way in which these individuals used abduction to think about their own experiences in the world; and finally Debbora Battaglia, et al. (2005), who have considered how ideas about aliens engage with relevant issues in anthropological research, like ‘host’ and ‘visitor’, ‘subjectivity’ and ‘objectivity’, and ‘home’ and ‘away’. Together, these authors have advanced the perspective that extraterrestrial beliefs are not mere pseudoscience, but generate social and material consequences in the world. Throughout this dissertation, then, I argue that aliens are very powerful cultural creatures that are saturated with meaning and it is the purpose of this project to use various case studies to trace the complexities of meanings associated with extraterrestrials.
Project One: "Uncanny Radio and the Invasion of Aliens in America"

The first project considers the Orson Welles’s radio broadcast “The War of the Worlds” as an exemplary text for both foreshadowing and helping to create a popular belief in aliens in America. The 1938 radio broadcast is often discussed in relation to Orson Welles’s manipulation of radio, the anxious political atmosphere in the United States leading up to World War Two, and the allegedly widespread, panicked reaction to the broadcast; however, little research actually directly addresses the invading Martians from the broadcast, and even less tackles the way that the broadcast powerfully contributed to enduring beliefs and ideas about aliens in American popular culture. I however, argue that the radio broadcast was the first time in popular discourse where aliens were, if only briefly, actually thought to be real, and coming to invade and colonize America. Therefore the effects of this broadcast have profoundly shaped enduring ideas about aliens in popular culture in the United States. While beliefs in aliens are evident in America before this time, especially in esoteric circles and Theosophical doctrine beginning around the 1870s, this was the very first popular incident giving rise to the very real consideration that aliens could invade America. Hence, “The War of the Worlds” is a significant text for bridging the gap between science-fictional ideas about aliens, and factual ideas that aliens do exist and can invade earth at any moment. “The War of the Worlds” was the first time that aliens came to invade America, but it would not be the last. After “The War of the Worlds” broadcast, ideas about alien invasion have maintained a durable presence in American popular thought.

This project addresses how ideas about aliens materialized in the popular consciousness, in part, because of the uncanny nature of Orson Welles’s radio broadcast. I suggest that both the form (of radio) and the content (the Martians) in the broadcast produced an uncanny effect, which registered with listeners’ anxieties and responded to tensions and fears circulating in American discourse. It was the uncanniness of the medium that made it possible for individuals to believe that the broadcast could be real, and it was the uncanniness of the content which registered so strongly in American popular thought, and helped produce an enduring fascination with aliens in America. To explore the uncanniness of the radio broadcast, I look at its ambiguity, the estranging and disembodying effects of radio, and the familiar, yet strange location of the radio in the home, which allowed the broadcast to capture the imagination of many Americans, and ultimately encouraged ideas and beliefs in aliens in the United States. I also look at how the aliens from the broadcast become symbolic stand-ins for a particular American unease and they reveal the tensions inherent in America’s ambivalent identity complex. Through a focused reading of the Martians in the broadcast, I suggest that the aliens expose American fears of isolationism and doubt, which awkwardly mix together with American exceptionalism and ideas about the “great American dream” and its technological, scientific, and military supremacy. The aliens render the ‘home’ of America as both strange and familiar, and uncannily reveal tensions existing in the collective American unconscious. The uncanny blending of fact and fiction ultimately resulted in a hysteric and mythic reaction that opened up
the possibility for imagining alien invasion in the United States, and ideas about invading extraterrestrials from far-away planets have persisted in American popular culture ever since.

**Project 2: “Abducting Invaders and Benevolent Saviours: Exploring Alien Ambivalence in Popular Thought”**

The second project begins where the first project leaves off; that is, it traces the rise of beliefs in, and ideas about, aliens in the popular consciousness during the Cold War and post-Cold War period. This project focuses particularly on the contradictory and ambivalent ideas about extraterrestrials that surfaced in the Cold War environment. As political transparency became increasingly more opaque and furtive, and as anxieties regarding nuclear weaponry surmounted, ideas about aliens in the United States polarized into two very different strands of thinking.

The first line of thinking considers aliens as technologically superior, invading and abducting creatures that have conspired with the U.S. government to create an intergalactic interbreeding program with humans. Specifically, I will focus on highly popular accounts of alien abduction, from the Betty and Barney Hill incident, to the Betty Andreasson affair, and to the Travis Walton abduction. These alien abductees accuse aliens of stealing their eggs, sperm or embryos, penetrating and/or impregnating them, and using their bodies for various nefarious ends. I argue that the invading and abducting tropes about aliens in abductee accounts can be deeply linked to anxieties about the body, the traumas of procreation and reproduction, and the fears of miscegenation and the Other. By foregrounding these fears in uncanny ways, aliens offer new means to articulate how traumas become embedded onto the body, and these creatures bring to the fore ideas about the perceived lack of agency that is often experienced in contemporary American society.

The other popular consideration is that of the benevolent, wise and warning alien, which surfaced during the atomic age, became quite popular throughout the Cold War, and has remained an enduring trope for thinking about extraterrestrials in the present. The idea of the helpful, alien liberator is frequently cited by contactees as the main reason for alien/human interaction. Contactees are a subset of alien believers who have maintained that they have made physical or mental contact with extraterrestrials, but who typically do not feel that this contact is unwanted and invasive, as abduction seems to imply. I will focus on specific alien contactees, like George Adamski, Truman Bethurum, George Hunt Williamson, and more recently, Zendor the Barbarian, to explore how this group of alien believers have typically framed their experiences in positive terms, often to offer political commentary, from warnings of the danger and destruction of nuclear weaponry, to criticisms of capitalism, to fears of environmental degradation, anxieties of mandatory vaccinations, and to concerns over race relations. In a world where war seems inevitable, the benevolent alien responds to desires for freedom and social cohesion by standing in as a God-like figure and by guiding human-beings towards world peace. Thus, this chapter considers how and why aliens reflect two very oppositional ideas – that of
anxiety and fear, and that of hope and desire – and the central aim of this project is to theorize how and why these ambivalent ideas about the extraterrestrial have taken shape.

**Project 3: An Ethnography of the Roswell UFO Festival**

The final chapter reinforces the discussions raised in my second chapter about the contradictory and shifting attitudes about aliens by using a particular case study, the Roswell UFO Festival. In examining the festival, I am interested in exploring the ambivalent portrayal of aliens in this particular community. I argue that the UFO Festival greatly captures the ambivalent representation of the alien. A kitschy, profitable and celebratory carnival with costume contests, games, parades and vendors becomes juxtaposed with a critical lecture series that encourages serious and ongoing intellectual debates about aliens. During these lectures, various “officials” and “professionals” in the alien community share their developing research to interested believers and skeptics alike. Roswell, then, is a place of intersection between the subversive understanding of aliens that draws on government conspiracies, cover-ups, a lack of transparency and a diminished human agency, and the playful and humorous treatment of UFOs and extraterrestrials. Therefore, the undercurrent of conspiracy and counter-culture criticism becomes awkwardly fused with leisure, entertainment and commodification and both exist in a sort of dialectical tension. Exploring how and why such a dichotomy exists is central to this project and I am interested in the way the site contains both these positive and negative understandings, all at once.

It is my intent to read the Festival as a social space in which vendors, local residents and visitors can come together to organize, discuss and identify with others and I see the Roswell Festival as a site in which groups can gain control of a particular cultural space and challenge dominant ideologies. The festival works to create a community of shared experiences and I argue that despite being perceived as a popular leisure event, the Roswell UFO Festival is not exempt from power relations but is intrinsically connected to the same social and political forces that act on all other aspects of social life. Therefore, I read the Festival as a sphere of struggle in which the fringe community of participants are able to come together and work through the ambivalent tensions captured by the alien image. I suggest that the festival may work to provide opportunities for individuals to resist and rewrite the dominant cultural narratives that work to shape their own lives. I see the festival as neither entirely faithful in conforming to the dominant (it is a space in which conspiracy seeks to challenge the government’s lack of transparency) nor is it fully skeptical (the alien becomes reincorporated into capitalist hegemony). The Roswell UFO Festival, then, is a space of awkward transgression and I am interesting in exploring how both pleasure and politics intersect at the festival by focusing on its ambivalent nature.

I will approach this project with an interdisciplinary methodology. Some of my project will focus on the cultural and social history of Roswell and will involve delving into community archives to explore what factors led to the founding of the UFO Festival and to the theming of the city in its entirety. Most of my project, however, will be based on ethnography. While most
of the current studies on these types of festivals and events focus on the quantitative-based research of surveys and questionnaires, it is my belief that a qualitative-based ethnography will be an important and valuable tool for examining the social world of the UFO Festival and the meaning that it has for participants. With the interpretive lens of ethnography, I will be able to explore how individuals make sense of their social world and the meanings that these individuals both bring to and take from the event. It is my goal to investigate how local residents and visitors at the festival both understand and experience their own community and through in-depth interviewing and my own active participation in the event, I will be able to explore the depth of participants’ motivations for attending the festival and the impact of this experience on both their personal and cultural identities. I am interested in asking who goes to the UFO Festival and why. What shared experiences does the festival evoke and what specific goals and ideologies are promoted? Why are individuals drawn to it? For conspiracy? For fun? What types of individuals are attracted to which parts of this event? Through an ethnographic study, I will be able to explore the multi-vocal and diverse meanings brought forth as a site of activism, play, self-reflection, social commentary and pleasure. This project, then, involves a micro-level case study of a particular festival and town. I believe, however, that this focus on the particular is not at the expense of the general. I argue that the UFO Festival can be used as a lens in which to explore incredibly significant academic debates about authenticity, commodification, heritage, meaning and experience.

**Concluding Remarks:**

Individually, then, each project stands alone and offers a distinct entry into American popular thought about extraterrestrials. The projects are in arranged chronologically, with the first offering a particular instance in the emergent ideas about aliens in popular thought; with the second exploring the mutable and shifting ideas about the alien image; and with the third, offering an important case study into a particular community that has become arranged by ideas about extraterrestrials. Taken together, the dissertation will expand understandings of the American social and historical landscape by reading the figure of the alien as a symptom of both the fears and desires that have manifested in the collective American social consciousness over the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.
Finding Space, Making Place: Understanding the Importance of Social Space to Local Punk Communities

For participants in punk, or indeed any music-based subculture, the identity of their particular local scene and sense of community is linked inextricably to the physical locations that provide a location to gather as a group. Any location, ranging from bars and concert halls to community centres, churches and private homes can become arenas to display lifestyle, identity, and membership for those who occupy them. Participants actively turn these various spaces into meaningful places that become sites of socialization and integral focal points for the community at large. On a collective level, social space assists punk communities in becoming publicly visible as a cohesive group. On an individual level, these spaces allow for the creation and demonstration of personal identity, as well as an individual’s social role and function within the larger group dynamic. The focus of this project is on a very specific type of place; namely, music venues and their importance to local Canadian punk scenes. Live shows are often the primary reason punks gather since music, whether it is heard on a stereo in a bedroom, through headphones on a bus, or live on stage in a club, helps to delineate physical and cultural space for its listeners (Paul Willis, *Common Culture* 70). As Paul Willis writes, "by listening to music together and using it as a background to their lives, by expressing affiliation to particular taste groups, popular music becomes one of the principal means by which young people define themselves"(*Common Culture* 69). Given the importance of social space in the construction of individual and collective identities, the existence and maintenance of these locations is an important subject of inquiry. Unfortunately, a major issue facing local Canadian punk scenes is that the existence of all-ages punk music venues is under threat. A major issue facing punk scenes across Canada is the lack of available space for punks to socialize. Without access to all-ages venues, many members fear that the decreasing influx of youth will eventually cause their scenes to disappear. This study will examine the construction of identities through shared value systems connected to particular physical spaces and the correlations between the loss of space and identity construction/reconstruction. Ultimately, this project is an attempt to render visible what is often made invisible: the cultural practices of local youth, reaffirming the position that youth-based subcultures are not separate from the world, but an integral part of it.

Project 1 - Building and Maintaining Community in a Small Ontario Town

The first project deals directly with the position and function of a music venue within the context of a local scene. For the purpose of this study, this analysis is focused on The Spill; a cafe/bar/all-ages music venue located in Peterborough, Ontario. The Spill is studied as a physical space on both a macro and micro level. On a macro level, this project considers the history of The Spill within the context of the changing developments in Peterborough's downtown live music community. On a micro level, this project narrows its focus on the layout of the physical space itself, as well as the effects of this physicality on the organization of bodies that occupy it. The Spill is a venue that caters to a wide variety of artistic and musical genres beyond that of punk, therefore this study attempts to understand how different social groups change a single location and adapt it to their own immediate needs.
To understand the practice of contributing to a local scene and building a part of the community, the second half of this project discusses my own experience of taking on the role of a promoter, subsequently organizing three separate live music events featuring local and touring punk acts at The Spill. As a newcomer to Peterborough and an initial outsider to its punk scene, I faced a unique set of challenges in my efforts to contribute to its local community. Through this experience, it became apparent that entry into a local scene's inner network is often made through establishing oneself as a legitimate contributor to punk's overall culture. With field observations and interviews, this project begins to map out the people and places that Peterborough's punk scene consists of and positions The Spill within this network. Following the theories set out by such cultural theorists as Raymond Williams, this project strives to illustrate the everyday lived experience of participants in Peterborough's punk scene in order to confront general assumptions about youth-based subcultures.

Project 2 - Spatial Tactics of Rebuilding Social Space in Vancouver and Peterborough.

The second project builds on and extends the theories in Project 1 to consider music venues in both major metropolitan cities and smaller regional towns. While past academic and non-academic studies on punk culture focus primarily on scenes located in major cities (ex// London, New York, etc.), very little has been written on smaller cities and towns. The strategies involved in creating local scenes vary from place to place, and those employed by major cities in terms of maintaining live music venues contrast greatly to those in small towns. These strategies are more clearly demonstrated when participants in local scenes are faced with the dissolution of their gathering places. A question that remains at the forefront of this study is what happens to these punk communities when their places are lost. On rare occasions, punk places stand the test of time, providing a location to house activities of the local scene. Yet for the majority of instances, these locations are temporary, as many punk venues last for a finite period of time before being shut down, leaving only traces in the form of oral histories and photographs.

When faced with the dissolution of their gathering places, local punk communities regroup and continue spatial practices of transformation in a new location, even if it only a temporary fix needed to address the demands of the community at large. To illustrate these strategies, this project will compare and contrast the punk scene in Vancouver, British Columbia to the one that currently exists in Peterborough. Vancouver's punk scene is a unique case in Canada because of several challenges that continue to threaten its live music venues, including processes of gentrification within older neighbourhoods brought on by the 2010 Winter Olympics, as well as recent restrictions brought forth by B.C.'s Liquor Control Board resulting in the closure of many all-ages live music venues.

Project 3 - Online Organization and Activism: Building Virtual Community.

The third and final project continues the previous project's concern with the effects of losing social space but extends this analysis to consider the role of online social media in creating/maintaining community. This project comes full circle in connection to Project 1 by the inclusion of my own attempts to contribute to a local community. In September 2014, out of an apparent lack of an online group dedicated to Peterborough's punk scene, I created "Electric City Punk Rock," a public-access Facebook group dedicated to promoting and supporting venues and bands within the scene. It is my intention to document the growth and activities of the group and compare/contrast this experience with real world attempts at creating community. Punk as a
subculture has been in existence for almost forty years, and so it is important to look at how strategies of maintaining local scenes have adapted to the increasing role of technology and social media in everyday life. Another question this study asks is how do individuals make use of such technology and how does it conform to the traditional punk ethos of "do-it-yourself"?

In the context of this project, two other case studies will be considered. The first is the Safe Amplification Site Society (SASS), based out of Vancouver, British Columbia. Established in February 2009 after the closure of several local music venues, SASS is a non-profit organization founded by a self-proclaimed "group of passionate indie and punk musicians with a 'do-it-yourself' work ethic" (SASS Feasibility Study 4). In four years, the organization claims to have over 250 members and an online community consisting of 2,500 volunteers (SASS Feasibility Study 4). With the establishment of their own temporary music venue, Astorino's, in East Vancouver, SASS hopes to create a permanent site by spring 2014 (SASS Feasibility Study 5). Unlike the strategies employed by punks in the creation of temporary (and sometimes illegal) spaces as discussed in Project 2, SASS works within the legal limits set out by the British Columbia provincial government in order to create more permanent spaces for youth to socialize and ultimately affect changes in legislation regarding all-ages music venues.

The second case study is the Music Venue Trust; a non-profit organization established in January 2014 in an effort to prevent the closure of places within the UK small venue circuit. Its primary focus is to secure the long term future of historically important venues such as the 100 Club, Southampton Joiners, Tunbridge Wells Forum, etc. Their argument is that these venues have played a key role in the establishment and development of the British music scene for over forty years, "nurturing local talent, providing a platform for artists to build their careers and develop their music and their performance skills" (Musicvenuetrust.org). In order to save these sites, the Music Venue Trust hopes to attract individuals to act as "champions" for their local music venue and work within government legislation to have such sites deemed as Assets of Community Value (ACV). In the organization's own words:

"Getting a venue listed will not only help change the perception of it with the local council and help us build a map of valued venues, but also means that if the owner puts the building up for sale we can pause the process to attempt to purchase the building ourselves. [...] This is a long-term plan rather than fire-fighting" (Musicvenuetrust.org).

The inclusion of an international case study demonstrates that the loss of music venues is not just an issue plaguing Canadian punk scenes, but a global issue that effects even the so-called "birthplace" of punk culture. Both the Safe Amplification Site Society and the Music Venue Trust are just recent developments, demonstrating that this project is on the forefront of contemporary issues in subcultural studies.