DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE: ON THE BORDER OF MADNESS

by

Teaghan Rene Phillips

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with Honors in Environmental Humanities.
Certificate of Approval

This is to certify that the accompanying thesis by Teaghan Rene Phillips has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with Honors in Environmental Humanities.

________________________
Don Snow

Whitman College
May 14, 2014
Down the Rabbit Hole: On the Border of Madness

Table of Contents:

I. An Introduction to Rhizomatic Thinking ............................................. 1

II. A History of Binaries ........................................................................ 18

   A History of Racialized Nationhood

   A History of Confinement

III. Economies of Othering ................................................................. 33

   Migrant Labor and the Economy of Othering

   Madness and the Economy of Confinement

   Securitization of a Porous Border

   Where am I?

IV. Negative Identification .................................................................. 53

   The Formation of the Other

   Who am I?

   The Assemblage of Madness

V. Language ....................................................................................... 64

   Othering Through Categorical Language

   What Nonsense

   The Discourse of Madness

VI. Conclusion: On Developing Invisible Cities .................................... 76

Acknowledgments ............................................................................. 82

Bibliography ....................................................................................... 83
I. An Introduction to Rhizomatic Thinking

It no longer makes sense to think of myself as one person, although I have one name. Each person knows me differently than I know myself, and even my self-perception changes on a momentary basis. This does not mean that I do not exhibit patterns or identifiable personae, for I can always find ways to categorize myself as white, female, and middle-class. I still say I and signify myself Teaghan, but I feel that the meaning behind who I am has multiplied so that it is no longer important whether I signify myself as one person. My multiplicity enables me to see connections with other people, who I also perceive in their multiplicity, because my sense of self and my perception of their sense of self is less of a box, or tree, and more of a metaphorical rhizome—a subterranean, root-like stem that assumes diverse forms, always connecting beyond itself. Biologically, the rhizome is a horizontal underground plant stem (e.g. ginger, hops, asparagus, irises, turmeric, galangal, fingerroot) that sends out shoots and adventitious roots from its nodes and internodes, forming a complex reproductive network.

Deleuze and Guattari write in *A Thousand Plateaus* that the rhizome resists the organizational structure of the root-tree system, which charts causality along chronological lines and looks for the original source, pinnacle or conclusion. A rhizome, on the other hand, “ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles.”\(^1\) The planar movement of the rhizome resists chronology and organization, instead favoring a nomadic system of horizontal growth and propagation, breaks and flows, and deviating lines of flight that never conclude, although they can be disrupted.

\(^1\) Deleuze, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 7.
Unlike rhizomes, the tree as an image represents the binary logic of dichotomy, which dominates our thinking and enables us to produce categories of identity. Swiss professor of linguistics, Ferdinand de Saussure, uses the image of the tree (arbre) to illustrate the branching—and thus binarily distinguished—signified-signifier relationship, which has the capacity to reinforce or deconstruct categorical discourse surrounding identity. The tree has one root that becomes two, two that become four, but all are tied to one principal source of unity—the trunk. In his 1916, *Cours de linguistique générale*, Saussure proposed his theory that language is a system of signs. According to Saussure, linguistic relationships are defined by signs (linguistic or otherwise) made up of two parts: the signifier (*signifiant*) and the signified (*signifié*). The sign itself is the relation between signifier and signified; it holds signifier and signified as a unit of meaning.

Saussure claims that the signified and the signifier are in arbitrary, but generally fixed relation to one another. This means that the signified is not the same as the referent—the object in reality. Once understood as signs, words can no longer be treated as transparent reproductions of reality, although they can be used to frame reality and reproduce ideology. Therefore, the signifier illegal, often used in reference to migrants, is arbitrarily connected to signified concepts of real people, rather than directly to the referent individual in reality. However, we perceive language to reflect reality, rather than the concept of reality. In other words, there is a disconnection between the intention someone has when using a word and the actual implications of that word beyond the context in which it was employed. Each word is connected to a multiplicity of other

---

2 cf. Saussure and Harris, *Course in General Linguistics*.
3 Throughout, when referring to signifiers or signifieds (such as American, Mexican, Fool, and Madman, among others) I will italicize the terms to distinguish their symbolic meaning from referents (objects in reality).
signifiers, whether the speaker knows it or not. I believe that recognizing the flexible, rhizomatic quality of language, and its expansion through discourse, is essential to problematizing strict binaries in public discourse. Thus, Saussure’s arboreal study of language structure must be complemented by rhizomatic thinking in order to capture the network of meaning attached to each symbol.

In Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizomatic thinking, even language cannot exist in itself. Linguistics often claims to confine itself to the structure of language, which can be broken down into distinct parts. However, the use of language affects and is affected by the social construction of meaning and power relations. For example, the word *gay* referred to feelings of being carefree, happy, or showy, until the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century when it came to be used as an adjective and noun referring to people, practices, and cultures associated with homosexuality. Now, *gay* has negative, positive, and neutral connotations depending on its use in discourse.

In rhizomatic thinking, a semiotic system of meaning connects the sign system of language through discourse to “perceptive, mimetic, gestural, and cognitive” processes. Rather than language as binary and fixed, this approach to linguistics makes the relationship between language and social meaning flexible enough to reflect rhizomatic human identities. The signifier *Latino*, for example, can be confined to its common associations with race, geographical orientation, and Spanish, or it can be connected to hundreds of different cultures and ethnicities, skin colors, languages, and geographical locations. Therefore, rather than thinking of the signifier *Latino* as referent to reality, this word should be approached as a symbol, capable of adapting to new infusions of social meaning that break down stereotypical, arboreal categories.

---

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari argue that the dichotomy between the subject and object, the self and other, and all binary logic represented by the tree only cause suffering and reinforce the power of hegemonic systems. In conservative and liberal thought alike, nativism—which prioritizes natives over nonnatives—reduces discussions of immigration to arboreal binaries. Even among migrants, the dualism of self and other—white vs. brown/black, native vs. nonnative, and insider vs. outsider—is prevalent. In other words, nativism, “a preference for the native exclusively on the grounds of being native,” which relies upon the continual reproduction of essentially different groups, pervades national discourses on immigration, revealing our ubiquitous dependence on arboreal logic.⁶

In Nicholas De Genova’s *Working the Boundaries*, we see how binary thought influences migrants themselves. De Genova looks at what he calls Mexican-Chicago, discussing the ways in which migrants negotiate their re-racialization in America by reproducing binary racial signs endemic to nativist discourse.⁷⁸ The presence of potent and inflexible racial categories in Mexican/migrant rhetoric is readily apparent in the discourse of De Genova’s adult migrant students. His Mexican ESL students tell a Pancho Villa joke in which the order to execute the Americans in the force but not the African Americans or Puerto Ricans assumes that the terms American and white are

---

⁷ Racialization, or the construction of binary racial difference, produces a homogenized group of individuals that can then be othered, constructed as a threatening mass, and used as scapegoats for structural problems. Here, re-racialization refers to the process whereby Mexican migrants, who have internalized various racial ideologies, learn and adopt new racial hierarchies.
⁸ I conceive of America as a social construction and exclusive identifier that reflects a history of problematic white nationalism and American exceptionalism. Therefore, throughout I will use the United States when speaking of the political entity and America when I am referring to the socially constructed geographical area tied to exclusive and racialized notions of identity. It is important to note that despite mainstream, George W. Bush-ian use of America as an exclusive identifier, references to the U.S. exclusively as America have long been offensive to other inhabitants of the Americas. Since Mexico is part of the Americas, part of North America, Mexicans, too, are Americans. Thus, the term has ironic implications that reflect dramatic U.S. hubris and assumptions of superiority. Furthermore, co-opting the term American reveals how language is used as a tool of exclusion to reinforce neocolonial relations with Mexico.
synonymous.9 Furthermore, the migrants distinguish between black and brown groups. The battle between transnational migrants represented as Pancho Villa’s soldiers and what De Genova refers to as “variously racialized U.S. citizens” illustrates the fundamentally oppositional nature of the relationship between Mexican/migrants and nonwhite, black citizens of America.10 Thus, even migrants use arboreal logic and language to identify stereotypical racial difference.

The presence of such racially divisive language in migrant communities might at first indicate the inevitability or necessity of essentialized groups in identity formation. However, De Genova illustrates that migrant use of binary racial categories is a response to widespread racial discrimination. The Mexican protagonists of the Pancho Villa joke are placed in opposition to African Americans and Puerto Ricans, but “such invidious acts of racialized competition, of course, were also very commonly directed against Mexicans.”11 Thus, the nature of groups as deployed by the Mexicans/migrants was fundamentally reactionary—a function of binary relationships. Within the larger political discourse of nationalism, migrants are beleaguered by allegations of undeserving-ness, often from other ‘legal’ immigrants seeking to affirm their membership within the nation. In De Genova’s classroom, it becomes apparent that when the ‘legality’ of his Mexican/migrants is called into question, they rely on internalized mainstream stereotypes that distinguish them from other marginalized groups to deflect the accusation. Thus, in this case, when Mexicans/migrants are identified as the least deserving, they use binary constructions of other groups to combat the categories imposed on them.

9 cf De Genova, Working the Boundaries, 199.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid., 200.
However, Deleuze and Guattari argue that using dualisms to fight dualisms will
never lead to unity or monism. Therefore, rhizomatic thinking, in which dualisms are part
of an “assemblage,” which is “reducible neither to the One nor the multiple,” might offer
new ways of thinking about identity that diverge from the binary logic of nativism.\footnote{12,13}
No singular identity in rhizomatic thought is applied to human beings because the
components of race, class, gender, sexuality, nation, age, and religion are interwoven,
connected and cannot be disassembled.

One might think that the intersectional model—the study of the interactions of
multiple systems of oppression or discrimination—would adequately recognize identity
as an assemblage. Unlike in rhizomatic thought, however, the intersectional model of
identity still presumes the permanency of these categories. Jasbir Puar writes in \textit{Terrorist
Assemblages},

\begin{quote}
As a tool of diversity management and mantra of liberal multiculturalism,
intersectionality colludes with the disciplinary apparatus of the state—census,
demography, racial profiling, surveillance—in that ‘difference’ is encased within
a structural container that simply wishes the messiness of identity into a formulaic
grid.\footnote{14}
\end{quote}

In other words, the problem with the intersectional model is that it often depends on three
main, categorical pillars of difference—race, gender, and sexuality—but is not flexible
enough to perceive the nuances within and outside of these boxed differences. In
rhizomatic thinking, however, everything is messy and should remain that way because
difference cannot be contained; difference must be a network of interconnected, dynamic

\footnote{12} An assemblage is a collection of people or discrete parts and pieces that is capable of producing any number of
effects, rather than a tightly organized and coherent whole that produces one dominant reading.
\footnote{13} Deleuze, \textit{A Thousand Plateaus}, 21.
\footnote{14} Puar, \textit{Terrorist Assemblages}, 212.
micro-roots that connect to other micro-root systems, never fixed. There is no grid, only never-ending points of connection, overlap, and nonlinear movement.

I am still in the process of learning to live and think rhizomatically in multiplicity. Even when I think I have reached a multiplicity, I often realize that I am still relying on a hierarchical solution to organize my thoughts and experiences. Take my identity for an example. I often realize that I have multiple sides that are ever-changing, but then I look at my body and figure that I must be centered in that body. However, my body, too, is an assemblage connected to other assemblages. Inside my body I have many different organ systems working together, hormones being produced, and neurons firing. But the physiological and biological phenomenon of neural communication is not limited to the body. Thoughts escape and affect our external relations, breaking down the border between our bodies and the outside. The smells we emit, the sounds we make, the relationships we build, and the contact we have through our body all constitute a rhizomatic system of ramification, rather than a dichotomous one, for we become through connections, not in a vacuum. Not to mention that we have trillions upon trillions of microbes living on and in us that make up ninety percent of the human body, actively...

---

15 A multiplicity is an entity that originates from a folding or twisting of simple, binary elements. Like a sand dune, a multiplicity is in constant flux, though it attains some consistency for a short or long duration. A multiplicity has porous boundaries and is defined provisionally by its variations and dimensions. Deleuze and Guattari redefine as multiplicities many of the key terms of Western political theory—including race, class, gender, language, and state. Their method aims to render political thinking more nuanced and generous toward difference. For example, male and female are quantitative multiplicities, recognized by biological distinctions and assigned cultural roles and norms. Within the realms of Platonism, science, and common sense, this binary aggregate is real and corresponds to a natural division that has been historically solidified and institutionalized. Deleuze supports the feminist project to make females, a “minority,” equal to men, however, he also thinks that this duality conceals a great deal of gender's complexity. Gender is a qualitative multiplicity that enfolds genetic variation, parenting styles, social roles, cultural norms, and public policy. Beneath the crude binary of male and female flow a plurality of tiny sexes. A politics of multiplicity may help these virtual sexes cross the threshold into actuality in such fields as family law, athletic competition, economic justice, and cultural representation. A politics of multiplicity also instills hope that political bodies can be transformed through careful chiseling of their borders.
contribute to the human genome, maintain our gut, encode enzymes, and serve as pathways for vitamin production.\textsuperscript{16}

However, my tendency is always to jump back to the mind-body dichotomy, or the self-other binary, as my primary mode of thinking. This thesis is a thought experiment, making rhizomatic connections between Foucault, \textit{Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland} and the U.S.-Mexico border. Using Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of rhizomatic thinking as a model for thinking about identity in relation to the U.S.-Mexico Border, it becomes apparent that one of the many problems with the Border is that it symbolizes and embodies through its physical presence a politics of \textit{being on one side or the other}. This spatial division represents a social division based on race, ethnicity, and nationality in which people are constructed as colored, white, or in the middle—i.e., contained by categorical difference. However, thinking rhizomatically, it is a political, social, economic, and spatial impossibility to \textit{be on one side or the other}.\textsuperscript{17}

When I say spatial I am referring to the relationship between space and identity formation. Throughout my discussion I will rely on geographer Yi-Fu Tuan’s distinction between space and place. Tuan argues that space is basically neutral, abstract, and defined by openness, while place is infused with emotional meaning and content that makes it feel closer to us.\textsuperscript{18} In addition, Tuan suggests that space allows movement, while place comes from a pause in movement that allows for intimacy and knowledge to develop.\textsuperscript{19} I argue that space, place, and identity must be thought of as a thousand tiny assemblages, all overlapping and interconnected.\textsuperscript{20} Space, race, sexuality, gender, and all

\textsuperscript{16} WHYY, “Bacterial Bonanza,” 1.
\textsuperscript{17} cf. Puar, \textit{Terrorist Assemblages}, 209.
\textsuperscript{18} Tuan, \textit{Space and Place}, 9.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{20} cf. Puar, \textit{Terrorist Assemblages}, 209.
other categories that constitute identity should be proliferated in an attempt to multiply differences—a process I refer to as *overburdening or oversignifying*—until these categories are rendered paradoxical and cacophonic.\textsuperscript{21,22}

From my perspective, the U.S.-Mexico Border is already overburdened with meaning; it is merely a matter of helping thought catch up with the multiplicity of systems we have simplified into dichotomous ones. We are affected by so many political, economic, and social systems that the choices we make cannot be detached from these realities. The Border space and each of our identities are comprise a complex, dynamic assemblage made up of layered characteristics, deconstructing the possibility of having a singular identity. Problems occur when the state, the media, and all of us simplify groups of people in binary terms, categorically othering them to facilitate their exploitation.

Of course, this rhizomatic theory of breaks and flows is relatively easy for me to propose because the real impact of binary, centered thought has benefited me in many ways, making it easier for me to release the less forcefully imposed binaries that define me. I am a privileged white woman who can cross borders relatively easily. My body has not been designated as the racialized Other in relation to the Border because I am white.\textsuperscript{23} My bias must be taken into account as you continue reading. Those most oppressed by binary systems of thought will likely find it more difficult to diverge from that system of oppression and thought because they have been violently defined by it. But foregrounding all bodies as the site of decentering might function as a form of creative

\textsuperscript{21} *Oversignifying* and particularly, *overburdening*, generally have negative connotations. However, I argue that these two processes are good and essential to complicating binary, arboreal thought. I use these terms interchangeably to indicate the need for transforming binary, oversimplified perceptions into complex assemblages of meaning.

\textsuperscript{22} Puur, *Terrorist Assemblages*, 209.

\textsuperscript{23} However, as Simone de Beauvoir notes in *The Second Sex*, I have been othered as a woman.
and critical resistance to dominant modes of externally imposed identity assignment. However, my bias as a white person ultimately limits my capacity to understand what this mode of thought would feel like for anyone who has been othered based on race or nationality; therefore, I can only imagine. Nevertheless, my hope is that this way of thinking can be adapted to whoever chooses to use it.

My ultimate goal is to implicate myself as an actor in the order of oppression that has arisen from and given rise to the neoliberal, hegemonic function of the Border. Buying into the need for a Border by identifying as American, coming from the space within the confines of the fifty-state map of America, I have a U.S. citizen’s rights and freedom of movement that are connected to the use of the Border as a violent weapon of sovereignty and neoliberalism. However, the neoliberal state uses my rights and the privilege I take for granted to disguise and justify the exploitation of noncitizens, whether I am conscious of it or not. In other words, my ignorance and unintentional compliance with binary thought are used to maintain the neoliberal flow of capital that has further institutionalized the exploitation of Latino migrants.

As it turns out, while the argument for, and the rationalization of, racial exclusion and discrimination with regard to immigration politics have changed since slavery was abolished, the outcome has remained largely the same. Although the U.S. and Mexico were both actors, and likely well-intentioned actors, in the neoliberal transborder economy project (for the Mexican State was not a victim), the effect on migrants has been deadly. Latinos are being used as slave labor—paid below the poverty line and denied basic rights, rendering them exploitable and deportable.

---

24 I use the term decenter throughout to refer to the process of transforming binaries into multiplicities through overburdening and oversignifying. In other words, decentering is the process of moving from an arboreal frame to a rhizomatic process.
In other words, the immigration system has emerged as a stunningly comprehensive and well-disguised system of racialized social control. Immigrant detention centers, the newest addition to the prison-industrial complex, reveal how neocolonial structures and “the new Jim Crow” are overlapping, imprisoning people of color. Many migrants are being incarcerated in detention centers, which profit private and state-run prison businesses. However, mainstream binaries are being used to distract the public from the harsh, terrifying reality of neocolonial exploitation of migrant labor, blaming Latino migrants who grow their food, clean their houses, raise their kids, and make the economy tick. Another layer of deception has been added to colonial oppression with the rise and increase of U.S-Mexico Border theatrics, securitization of the border, and the criminalization of migrants: migrants are being used as scapegoats for U.S. and Mexican structural, economic problems that have forced them to leave their homes for employment that barely pays a living wage.

In addition, the conflation of race and nationality in both conservative and liberal border politics—brought about by a history of colonial othering and reinforced by Border theatrics—has been used as a ploy to justify the deportation and exclusion of migrants. Today, the impact of immigration theatrics surrounding the Border manifests itself in the thousands of deaths resulting from Operation Gatekeeper and other militarization and securitization efforts. “Since Operation Gatekeeper went into effect in 1994, an estimated 5,600 migrants have died while attempting unauthorized border crossings.”25 Operation Gatekeeper and its ills have failed in that they have not reduced border crossings despite all of the lives extinguished. Therefore, this project is an attempt to begin deconstructing

---

25 “U.S.-Mexico Border Crossing Deaths Are A Humanitarian Crisis, According To Report From The ACLU And CNDH.”
the binary logic that facilitates neocolonial slavery, racialized notions of nationality, and widespread public ignorance of Border complexities.

In tune with rhizomatic thinking, the following should be approached as an assemblage connected to and containing other assemblages. This exploration is not meant to be taken by itself, but in conjunction with other literary, theoretical, political, and social assemblages. I argue that the Border can be understood as yet another assemblage, in this case laid out on a plane with Foucault’s *Madness and Civilization* and Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. Foucault’s *Madness* challenges the binary between reason and madness by overburdening madness with a multiplicity of spaces and identities, while *Alice’s Adventures* reveals the ways in which overburdening space and oversignifying language can decenter identity. However disparate these references appear at first sight, my intention is to assemble them, so that each component of this thesis is relational. My intention is not only to critique the Border in the first place, but also to critique the type of binary thought processes that give rise to the Border, the confinement of madness, neocolonial enslavement, and the prison-industrial complex.

Beginning with a brief history of the formation of the Border, I will discuss how it is that the Border has solidified and become a tool of oppression and division, when such was not always the case. The Border space and resulting metaphorical divisions in identity are already overburdened with contradictory meaning. Latino migrants, located throughout the Northern American continent in various places, have inherited the manifold consequences of a complex history tied to the physical Border. Still, they

---

26 I use the term migrant, as the anthropologist Nicholas De Genova does in *Working the Boundaries* to reject the term immigrant, which implies “a one-directional and predetermined movement of outsiders coming in and thus are conceptual categories that necessarily can be posited only from the standpoint of the (migrant-receiving) U.S. nation-state. Migrant retains “a sense of movement, intrinsic incompletion, and consequent irresolution of social processes of migration”[10]
have been, and continue to be, critical participants in the making of that history and their
distinct location within it. Migrants have a sense of mobility that can situate them at the
center of transformative, open-ended historical processes. My focus, however, is less on
the very real, significant boundaries that Latino migrants face on a daily basis and their
responses to these boundaries than on re-imagining how all of us think about lines of
division imposing order on disordered space, identity, and language. Rhizomatic thinking
can help us break down and deterritorialize the oppression of socially constructed, non-
white Others by challenging our normalized, arboreal thinking.

More specifically, I am concerned with theoretically deconstructing and
deterritorializing the neoliberal State’s capture of movement, partition of space, and
creation of hierarchical, racial structures through which people and their identities can be
harnessed and controlled for the benefit of neoliberal markets. David Harvey, in a *A Brief
History of Neoliberalism*, defines neoliberalism as “in the first instance a theory of
political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by
liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional
framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade.”
But neoliberalism is more than just a theory, because it has been incorporated into our
discourse—the way we think about and use language. Many of us have adopted it as a
“common-sense” approach to the world. Since the 1980s, neoliberal thought has
influenced divisions of labor, social relations, welfare provisions, reproductive activities,
and ethical beliefs. Upholding market exchange as an ethic, neoliberalism is capable of

---

27 I will use *Border*, in upper case, to refer to the physical border wall, and *border*, in lower case, to refer more broadly
to metaphorical barriers that exist throughout space in people’s daily lives.
29 cf. ibid., 3.
guiding human action and substituting for ethical beliefs among other things. “It holds that the social good can be maximized by maximizing the reach and frequency of market transactions, and it seeks to bring all human action into the domain of the market.”

Guiding the global marketplace requires information technologies. The proliferation of technology in the last thirty years has “compressed the rising density of market transactions in both space and time […] The greater the geographical range and the shorter the term of market contracts the better.” This emphasis on technology, globalization, and the compression of space and time has drastically increased the amount of information we process. Despite the amount of information we are receiving, however, we still categorize and compress information in a similar way. The binary, hierarchical ways in which we think serve the hegemonic systems that produce labor for, and dependence on, the neoliberal-State apparatus.

As Deleuze and Guattari describe it, the State is concerned with the striation of space or organizing it into a hierarchical system of relations, which places the occupants of each stratum at odds with those of other strata, harnessing economic and political energy by creating inequalities. The State aims to produce fully legitimated subjects who accept and reproduce these hierarchies of relations. The State produced these subjects of rationality, particularly through language structures, so that each mind is an analogously organized mini-State, morally unified by the supermind of the State structure. Ultimately, the State’s objective of unified rationality is achieved by deriving everything from an original principle (truth), by relating everything to an ideal (justice), and by unifying this principle and this ideal to a single idea (the State). I would add that now, in

---

30 Ibid.
31 Ibid., 4.
32 cf. Deleuze, _A Thousand Plateaus_, 385–386.
conjunction with these moral and spiritual goals, the State is concerned with political economy. The State works to stabilize markets and facilitate conditions for capital accumulation, reacting to the neoliberal order, and thus is beholden to the global capital market that transcends State sovereignty. In *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, David Harvey suggests that the State has to guarantee the integrity of money, set up military, security, and legal structures to secure private property rights and to guarantee, often by force, the functioning of markets. Neoliberalism thus requires the cooperation of States, upon which it depends to create and preserve an institutional framework flexible enough for free trade and a steady supply of labor.

I aim to suggest that we can and must deterritorialize the neoliberal U.S. State’s organization and striation of space and people. We can do this by purposefully overburdening space, as well as individual and group identity, with overlapping strata of meaning, and by oversignifying language with the multiplicity of discourse. I want to radically decouple the signified *American/Mexican* from the geographical spaces known as *America/Mexico* by overburdening these spaces and related identities. The assumed association between race and national identity, symbolized by the arbitrarily drawn Border, reifies neoliberalism’s use of State sovereignty. The neoliberal State intentionally produces vulnerable populations of nonwhite Others as a source of exploitable labor, distracting from the root causes of transborder socioeconomic inequality. This is not to say that borders are inherently destructive and unnecessary, but that the U.S.-Mexico Border is currently ineffective and reflective of violent, binary, discriminatory structures

---

33 Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 2.
34 I refer to plural “States” here because all governments are enmeshed in the neoliberal market. Although both the U.S. and Mexican States are deeply involved in neoliberal enterprise, within the scope of this paper I will mainly focus on the American State.
35 I use the term deterritorialize to refer to the process of deconstructing strict spatial, territorial binaries, such as the division between America and Mexico.
of power and thought that are killing and otherwise doing harm to thousands of innocent people.

Before moving forward, we must understand the theoretical origins of the Other. Understanding identity formation and the theory of othering is essential to this project of deterritorialization. In theoretical and philosophical traditions, beginning with Hegel’s theory of “self and other” in *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, the juxtaposition against the Other constitutes and clarifies the self through a process of negative identification.\(^{36}\) And later, the literary theorist Edward Said wrote of a European imagined geography, which constructs the Orient as Other by reducing, alienating, and fixing the region and its people in order to incorporate them into European structures of power.\(^{37}\) In addition, psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan demonstrated that language plays a key role in constituting identity, which enabled Louis Althusser to coin the term “interpellation”—the “notion that individuals are hailed by ideology to occupy specific subject positions, thereby achieving identity”—and argued that identity is fundamentally gained in the gaze of the powerful.\(^{38}\) Althusser thus emphasized how the institutionalized ideological situation precedes the individual or collective subject. Individual subjects are principally presented as produced by social forces, rather than acting as powerful independent agents with self-produced identities. However, for the purpose of this thesis, it is important to note that Althusser failed to acknowledge the degree to which self-identification interacts with externally imposed, situational interpellation. Drawing on these main theorists, Gayatri Spivak systematically developed the concept of othering as a classed, racialized, and gendered process, which would later be conceptualized as intersectionality. In his article,  

---

\(^{36}\) For more information on Hegel’s theory of the self and other see Denker and Vater, *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit.*  
\(^{37}\) To read more about Edward Said’s theory on othering see his book *Orientalism.*  
\(^{38}\) Sune, “Othering, Identity Formation and Agency,” 64.
“Othering, Identity Formation And Agency,” Sune Jensen describes othering as:

> discursive processes by which powerful groups, who may or may not make up a numerical majority, define and subordinate groups into existence in a reductionist way which ascribe problematic and/or inferior characteristics to these subordinate groups. Such discursive processes affirm the legitimacy and superiority of the powerful and condition identity formation among the subordinate.  

Although the concept of othering captures an undeniable and violent history of oppression, thinking in the same binary terms in which othering was produced will never deconstruct this dehumanizing mode of identity formation. Therefore, using rhizomatically connected texts, such as *Madness and Civilization* and *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, both of which evade dualism and dichotomy, might open up new possibilities for identity formation that do not reproduce systems of oppression. We must consider what it would mean to have no single identity, as I discussed earlier, or so many different identities that it becomes impossible to “reduce” ourselves, so that the self comes to be a continual threshold between multiplicities.

A consciousness of language (a system of signs) and discourse (the complete use of language in social context) can help us avoid reducing ourselves to categories and enable us to think rhizomatically about identity. The binary relationship between self and Other is symbolized through binary signs. Because these binary relations between signs are unstable, language and discourse can be used as tools to destabilize the meaning of difference communicated by the construction of the Other. Below, I will explore ways of destabilizing meaning in language and identity formation in order to break binaries that reinforce the neoliberal, hegemonic systems of social control, punishment, exclusion, and othering.

---

39 Ibid.
II. A History of Binaries

A History of Racialized Nationhood

Although nationality and race have been conflated in mainstream immigration discussions, citizenship in America has gradually expanded in scope to include all races and ethnicities. The original Naturalization Law (1790) arose on the heels of the U.S. Constitution, limiting citizenship to “free white persons of good character” (white females were citizens with limited rights) and excluded all others from full citizenship.40 The Civil War led to the 14th Amendment (1868), which granted citizenship to black people, and most others, born in the U.S. In 1898, the Supreme Court clarified the 14th Amendment when it granted citizenship to the first Asian person, a child born on U.S. soil to Chinese parents.41 The effect of the decision was to grant citizenship to nearly all children born on American soil, regardless of their race, ethnicity, or parents’ nationality.42

This is not to say that all citizens of the U.S. are equal or that the nominal designation of citizenship stilled myriad forms of exploitation and oppression. It only serves to illustrate that citizenship law does not simply rely on national borders and racialized notions of identity as the only signifiers of difference that matter as to citizenship. Family relations, skill sets, service in the U.S. Armed Forces, years of residence, age, and English speaking ability all affect a migrant’s chances of naturalizing or receiving a work visa. The U.S.-Mexico Border, as a signifier of citizenship, “is not simply a line between two monoliths but a complex concept that seeks to define, among

41 cf. ibid.
42 Snow, “Citizenship Law.”
others, State sovereignty.”

Although the concept of political sovereignty is a highly artificial construction which declares grounds for “differences that matter” as to national allegiance, nationhood requires that there must be some structure for determining which individuals deserve State investment, rights, and responsibilities.

Citizenship law, however, is not without its own shortfalls. Following the Hart-Celler Immigration Act (1965), which established the basic structure of today’s immigration law and abolished the national origins quota system, the Amendments to the Immigration and Nationality Act (1976) “extended a version of the seven-category preference system previously applied to Eastern Hemisphere countries to all Western Hemisphere countries” imposing an annual ceiling of 20,000 immigrants from any one country in the Western Hemisphere. In 1978, the two hemispheric ceilings were combined into a worldwide quota of 290,000 and U.S. policy applied uniformly to people of all countries. Since the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services’ per-country limit applies the same maximum on the number of visas to all countries regardless of their population, it has had the effect of severely restricting the legal immigration of persons born in Mexico, India, China, and the Philippines—currently the countries with the highest rates of migration to America. This means that virtually all undocumented immigrants are left without an avenue for legal entry into America due to the restrictive legal limits on green cards, and a lack of visas for low-skilled workers. Citizenship law and worker visa programs are therefore poorly aligned with the push and pull factors affecting migrants ensnared in the neoliberal economic market. Latino migrants, in

---

43 Ibid.
44 cf. ibid.
46 cf. ibid.
particular, have been caught in the space between citizenship law and market labor demands. Displaced by various free-trade agreements and privatization efforts on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico Border, Latino migrants are forced to cross into America illegally to survive and support their families.

Setting critiques of citizenship aside, mainstream immigration discussions, founded on binary constructions of nationality and race, have become disconnected from the complex nature of citizenship, immigration law, and State sovereignty. Despite arguably less exclusive legal national membership, immigration policies and mainstream immigration rhetoric have become visibly more exclusive in the last twenty years. Although citizenship law is more inclusive than it has ever been, immigration policy and mainstream, racialized notions of belonging are generally producing and reinforcing an increasingly hostile, anti-immigrant environment. Thus, even if migrant pathways to citizenship were streamlined to increase migrant quotas and reduce the lengthy process of naturalization, public sentiment and anti-immigration bills, ballot measures, and statewide policies would remain violent and discriminatory due to polarized notions of nationality and race that are not directly correlated with citizenship law.

Binary constructions of nationality and race affecting Latino migrants are tied to mainstream conceptions of the U.S.-Mexico Border. Generally, the geographical Border between America and Mexico is considered to be a mappable representation of another conceptual border, which relates to nationality—in the sense of national membership, or belonging—as it is recognized in law. The geographical Border between America and Mexico functions as a kind of signifier of the form of identity we refer to as “national citizenship.” However, citizenship is distinct from identity. For one could be an

---

American citizen, but identify with, or live in, another geographical area. In addition, one could be undocumented, but identify as American and live in the geographical area known as the United States of America. While the geographical Border space can function as a signifier of belonging, it is misused to signify racialized notions of nationality, which conflict with the actual diversity and international heritage of American and Mexican citizens. The problem with current Border policies and mainstream immigration discussions is that these strict, inaccurate binaries of race and nationality are impeding our ability to recognize the deceptive and contradictory function of the Border. As I will discuss in more detail later, the Border must remain porous for the passage of migrant labor and capital, yet the State purports to block all entry and offer protection against Others.

One common, problematic binary present in mainstream liberal and conservative immigration discussions alike is that America is associated with whiteness and Mexico is associated with brown-ness, despite overwhelming transborder racial and ethnic diversity. This is not to say that the terms Mexico and America should be thrown out altogether, nor does it mean that there is such a degree of diversity overlapping the Border that the term Mexican loses all meaning. For the name Mexico carries distinct and conflicting origins that date back to fourteenth century Mesoamerica. A Nahuatl word, Mexico is said to mean place of the Mexica, or of the Mexica Empire—also known as the Aztec Empire.\(^48\) However, the Aztec Empire\(^49\) was extensive and encapsulated indigenous communities with a wide range of traditions, languages, and phenotypic expressions.

Spanish invasion and colonization further complicated the ethnic and linguistic makeup

\(^{48}\) cf. “Nahuatl Dictionary.”
\(^{49}\) The term “Aztec Empire” is problematic in nature as well, although it is not within the scope of this thesis to discuss the Aztec problematic.
of the Aztec Empire. And today, modern Mexico has seen an influx of foreign immigration and increasing out-migrations of indigenous and mestizo citizens.\(^{50}\) Therefore, Mexico, although at a different rate than America, is also seeing drastic demographic changes and the mixing of international ethnicities. While the ties between Mexican national identity and indigenous roots are arguably closer than the ties between American national identity and ethnic roots, the increasingly permeable Border is rendering the correlation between national identity and ethnicity negligible on both sides of the Border.\(^{51}\)

Disregarding the complex and diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds of Mexicans and Americans, mainstream conceptions of race obfuscate the multiplicity of meaning each nationality has accrued over time. Daily experiences of racism and discrimination related to the U.S.-Mexico Border space, a signifier of nationality and race, have grown out of centuries of colonial relationships and racial ideologies imposed on diverse ethnic populations in both Mexico and America. Even prior to the redrawing of the Border following the Mexican-American War, constructed notions and legal practices conflated nationality with race, or more specifically, citizenship with whiteness. The association between race and nation was compounded by a significant shift that occurred when the Border was redrawn following the Mexican-American War and the Treaty of Guadalupe

\(^{50}\) cf. “Migration to Mexico,” 1.

\(^{51}\) Nationalists would argue that white men of European decent are the true American family and that America is tied to ethnicity. However, given that Native American tribes populated the geographical area long before white men and migrants constructed the nation as regular influxes of multi-ethnic and multiracial migrants continued to build the country, I would argue that America cannot be tied to any ethnic or racial roots. A case could be made, however, that although there were many different indigenous tribes constituting the Aztec Empire, their lineage was close enough, especially in combat against the Spanish, as to form the foundation for Mexican national identity today. However, this is arguably problematic given that the majority of Mexican citizens are mestizo—a person of mixed ancestry (although the meaning of the term differs from country to country).
Hidalgo in 1848.\textsuperscript{52} This is all to say that deep-seated racial binaries have changed in physical and linguistic expression—as evidenced by increased Border securitization and reference to Latino migrants as \textit{illegals}—but the binary, exclusive nature of discrimination has remained largely unaltered. Changes in citizenship law have failed to address mainstream racialized notions of national identity.

Although the Border is currently considered to be a strict, natural national and racial division, it was a largely arbitrary decision. Burying a long history prior to American invasion and expansion, the drawing of the Border concretized the oversimplified division between white and black/brown races. The physical border we see today began on June 16, 1846, when the Bear Flag Revolt prompted the beginning of the Mexican-American War. A crowd of trigger-happy Yankees started shooting in Sonoma, California.\textsuperscript{53} Meanwhile, further southeast, the U.S., led by president James Polk, anxious to grab Mexican territory, had jumped the gun, declaring war on Mexico. The two-forked war merged with a third front opened in Veracruz when the U.S. Army invaded Mexico City. In 1848, with U.S. soldiers hanging out in Mexico City, “a group of Mexican and American diplomats redrew the map of North America.”\textsuperscript{54} The eastern part of the border followed the Rio Grande, dividing communities, while the western section was arbitrarily drawn without reference to geographic features.\textsuperscript{55} The arbitrariness involved in two men drawing a line across a paper map highlights the degree to which the referent line drawn in the sand is disconnected from its function as a signifier of race and nationality.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{52} Overmyer-Velazquez, “Good Neighbors and White Mexicans: Constructing Race and Nation on the Mexico-U.S. Border,” 14.
\textsuperscript{53} Solnit, \textit{Storming the Gates of Paradise}, 165.
\textsuperscript{54} St. John, \textit{Line in the Sand}, 3.
\textsuperscript{55} Solnit, \textit{Storming the Gates of Paradise}, 170.
\end{flushright}
Following the establishment of the new Border, the Borderlands became a site of political and economic expansion, attracting immigration. As a signifier, the Border was adding to its function as a line of separation by adopting new meaning as a place of crossing and a place of joining, attracting migrants rather than deterring them. As Rachel St. John writes in her history of the border, “Rather than repelling people, the boundary line would draw people to it.”

Shaped by the forces of capitalism and the expansion of state power, the “sterile waste” would become at different times “a marker of military sovereignty” and “a divide between political and legal regimes,” coming to signify various contradictory functions. Ironically, attempts to solidify sovereignty through territorial expansion increased immigration, revealing that borders rarely function to only exclude. However, the diverse functions of the Border and the arbitrariness of its location and construction were overlooked by the mainstream public. Despite changes in the physical location, appearance, and function of the Border that we see thinking rhizomatically, simplistic racial binaries imposed on identity and space by the public remained, becoming further normalized over time.

More recently, the American public, and conservative and liberal politicians, have favored murderous policies, such as Operation Gatekeeper. Pervasive xenophobia, evident in Operation Gatekeeper and Border securitization, arises from racialized concepts of citizenship and belonging rooted in deeply internalized notions of the Other. In Deportation Nation, Kanstroom’s analysis of deportation history and the rise of plenary power reveals that migrants have been historically pegged as threats to the nation.

---

56 St. John, Line in the Sand, 3.
57 Ibid.
58 Operation Gatekeeper was a Clinton-era measure implemented in 1994 by the U.S. Border Patrol, aimed at halting illegal immigration at the U.S.-Mexico Border near San Diego, California. The goal was to restore integrity and safety to the Border by increasing the INS budget, the number of Border Patrol agents, and the amount of fencing and underground censors. To learn more about Operation Gatekeeper read Joseph Nevins’ Operation Gatekeeper.
as a result of their race and citizenship status. The U.S. has established a legal precedent for excluding threatening groups from legal protection, meaning that the racialization of the Other has been institutionalized. The State expression of plenary power manifested in regards to Chinese migrants. In the late nineteenth century, Chinese migrants entering America were seen as morally inept and a threat to the State. Following these attitudes, *Fong Yue Ting v. United States* (1892) maintained that the government had absolute power to both deport and exclude migrants. Kanstroom suggests that this ruling meant that “aliens, legally resident or not, have no constitutional rights at all in deportation proceedings.” While the court likely did not intend to wholly abolish constitutional rights for migrants, U.S. plenary power over migrants was codified regardless, allowing immigration legislation to be enacted without concern for pre-existing laws. Thus, the U.S. has a history of enacting legislation that permits the State to operate towards certain racially defined migrant groups extraconstitutionally and extra-legally. These State methods of legalized social control have legitimated the deportation of enormous numbers of people defined by common race or nationality.

*A History of Confinement*

Immigration and madness have very distinct historical processes and I want to avoid exoticizing the Border. However, Foucault’s *Madness and Civilization* illustrates that conceptions of madness, like conceptions of migrants, were produced within the same binary structure of thought. These binaries were reinforced by physical confinement and language, which shrouded the complex and often contradictory meaning

---

59 In United States constitutional law, plenary power is a power that has been granted to a body in absolute terms, with no review of, or limitations upon, the exercise of the power.
60 Kanstroom, *Deportation Nation*, 119.
overburdening madness. My intention is not to equate madmen with migrants, but rather to demonstrate how the identity of Others are ensnared in socially constructed binaries that distract from their complex and particular meaning.⁶¹

Thinking about the history of madness rhizomatically reveals that signified “madness” multiplied and was decoupled from the referent experience of madmen. Over the centuries, the mad moved from the lazar house to ships of fools, then madhouses, asylums, mental institutions, homeless shelters, and finally, back to the streets in a fairly linear progression. The human experience of madness transformed with each change in physical confinement and over time, the madman was given new categorical signifiers: *idiot, insane, fool, lunatic, and schizophrenic*. Conflicting social interpretations of madness stimulated the need for these new signs. However, these signs were distinct from the referent, personal experience of madness. Thus, while the signs and types of confinement did change, the othering of the madman and the exclusion of madness endured.

*Lazar House: (400-1400 Middle Ages: (5th - 15th century)*

In the Middle Ages, lazar houses, synonymous with leprosaria and leper colonies, were constructed to house diseased individuals contaminated by leprosy apart from society. As the number of lepers declined in the sixteenth century, madmen took the place of lepers and were confined in lazar houses that set them apart as the Other.⁶² The mad, the poor, and the criminal replaced lepers as the subject of public fear, and above all else,

---

⁶¹ Throughout I will use mad, madness, and madmen, historically used in reference to individuals who have been categorized as mentally abnormal. There are no terms in reference to mental abnormality that have positive connotations (as evidenced by my use of “mental abnormality”). Mentally ill, fool, lunatic, cuckoo, and nuts, among others, all have negative connotations. That there are no positive words that refer to madness suggests that while the terms associated with madness have changed, the negative connotation of Other has remained unquestioned.

exclusion. As Foucault writes, “the social importance of that insistent and fearful figure,”
the leper, was “not driven off without first being inscribed within a sacred circle.” In
other words, although the physical form and meaning of exclusion changed, the negative
values associated with the Other remained. The inscription and confinement of spaces
involved labeling a person as worthy of, or necessitating, separation from society. Thus,
the physical building of confinement carried the metaphorical weight of othering in the
same way that the physical U.S.-Mexico Border signifies othering.

*Ship of Fools: 1300-1600 Renaissance (14- 17th century)*

The voyage of madness on the ship of fools, in particular, demonstrates how the
meaning of madness exploded, decoupling the sign of madness from referent madmen.
During the Renaissance, the idea of madness was arbitrarily constructed as being
associated with art, death, truth, knowledge, animals, disease, and folly. However, all of
these complex meanings maintained the same distance between self and the Other.

By shipping madmen off to sea, society was alleviated from fear of and contact
with madmen. Because referent madness was being physically held at a distance, signs
conceptualizing madness became further detached from the referent at sea. The space
created between the ship and the streets of society helped alleviate fear of madness,
allowing for the infiltration of fascination that enabled the production of new meaning.
When madmen briefly docked in cities before returning to sea, they were perceived as
much more of a rarity, or spectacle, than before. Although, the spectacle, stimulated by
the momentary return of madmen, was not unique to the ship, because some hospitals and
prisons did make use of confined madness as a spectacle, most hospitals and prisons used

---

63 cf. Ibid., 6–7.
64 Ibid., 6.
walls to hide madness from view in an attempt to diminish the spectacle.\textsuperscript{65} The spectacle of madness on the ship of fools did not represent an acceptance or integration of the Other. Rather, it maintained the same distance for a different purpose—theatrics. The pleasure of seeing the Other for a moment, and the security of knowing the object of fear was still confined and would soon leave again, disguised the ever present exclusion and linguistic distancing that were taking place.

Although one might assume that sending madness to sea was merely a means of exile and exclusion, there were already lazar houses, hospitals, and detention centers reserved for madmen; therefore, there were additional reasons for shipping them off.\textsuperscript{66} Exclusion was wrapped up in the ritual of religious deliverance to reason.\textsuperscript{67} The goal was to cure madness rather than to accept difference. Madmen were at once turned over to sailors to stop them prowling the streets, but they were also turned over to water to be metaphorically purified and altered. Confinement was thus justified by the religious intention of cure.\textsuperscript{68} In a similar fashion, migrants are often pressured to assimilate for the purpose of curing them of their difference—molding them into the image of mainstream, English-speaking, American society. The goal of assimilation is to cure migrants of their otherness, not to acknowledge and accept difference. All manner of violence against

\textsuperscript{65} During the Great Confinement (16\textsuperscript{th}-18\textsuperscript{th} centuries), although most hospitals and houses of correction were meant to hide populations of delinquent Others from view, there were also cases in which the objectification of the Other took on the form of spectacle. For instance, “In certain of the Narrtürmer in Germany, barred windows had been installed which permitted those outside to observe the madmen chained within.”\textsuperscript{65} This sort of confinement tourism, although not the norm, illustrates the intrigue involved in setting Others apart and objectifying and humiliating them through confinement. Still, in 1815, the hospital of Bethlehem in England “exhibited lunatics for a penny, every Sunday,” producing revenue of almost “four hundred pounds.”\textsuperscript{65} Thus, not only did exclusion of madness produce profit, but the spectacle of madness also enabled the theatrics of confinement tourism to harness curiosity. Turning the confinement of madness into a theater production thoroughly distracted from the harsh reality of incarceration and madness.

\textsuperscript{67} cf. Ibid., 10.
\textsuperscript{68} cf. Ibid. 11.
migrants has been justified by the ultimate goal of “public health.”

In addition to being associated with religious impurity and derangement, the meaning of madness expanded, and the image of the ship of fools began to inspire literature and art. The allegory of the ship of fools depicts a vessel populated by deranged beings, frivolous and oblivious passengers, aboard a ship without a pilot, seemingly ignorant of their own direction. This allegory made up the framework for German theologian Sebastian Brant’s satirical book, *Ship of Fools* (1494). In the book, filled with woodcut illustrations, Brant satirizes the Church, illustrating the patron saint as a fool, vulgar and coarse. Brant decouples the signifier *fool* from the signified concept of the diseased madman, connecting the signifier *fool* to the signified Church. His extension of the meaning of *fool* to signified people usually not associated with madness expands the conceptual reach of the sign *madness*. Acknowledging the arbitrariness of the sign *fool*, Brant’s satire complicates the linguistic meaning attached to madness.

However, he does not challenge the distinct position of the referent madman who has been othered. Homogenizing the experience of madness to include the Church, Brant masks the very real distinction between the referent experiences of madmen and the referent experiences of religious figures. In addition, because court fools were allowed to push the limits of acceptability for the sake of humor, Brant wrote his work in the voice

---

69 A different form of spectacle can be seen along the Border today in which the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) and Mexican Border Patrol developed a ritual of detainee head-shaving meant to socially subordinate and humiliate Latino migrants. In an attempt to subordinate, punish, and discipline migrants, patrol inspectors who got fed up with migrant “chronic offenders” began shaving, or “peeling” the heads of migrants. When Mexican newspapers began to expose and condemn the practice, the Mexican Border Patrol “agreed to pick up the practice of head-shaving until the civil rights issues it presented in the United States could be worked out.” In order to avoid allegations of civil rights offenses, the humiliating spectacle of head shaving was disguised by the INS under the guise of a “hygienic ritual” as part of a public health initiative. The spectacle of head shaving was transformed into a necessity for public health, disguising the violent othering involved in State immigration enforcement.

70 cf. Schmidt, “Sebastian Brant’s Ship of Fools and Its Woodcuts.”
of the fool, legitimating his criticism of the church. He therefore adopted the façade of foolishness, using madness as a front. This masquerade further demonstrates that Brant deconstructed meaning on the level of the signifier by homogenizing experiences of madness and using language for his own ends, rather than recognizing the particular differences of referent Others.

As other works of literature and art conceptualizing madness proliferated, the signs representing madness diversified, leading to a further decoupling of meaning from referent madness. The concept of madness was further expanded through art and literature constructing madness as a substitution for death, the animality of humanity, the source of dark wisdom, and knowledge of human nature. Significant themes arising in theater, wood, canvas, and paper were no longer related to death, but to madness.

Madness was also constructed as containing some wisdom at this time because madmen were perceived as being capable of anticipating death because of their supposedly liminal position on the threshold of life and death. However, the substitution of madness for death and wisdom did not change the negative connotations and anxiety associated with madness, but rather marked an adjustment in the same binary between reason and madness.

The arbitrary attachments of the signified death and wisdom to the signifier madness further decoupled the meaning of the signs from the subjective experience of madness. The madman was assigned different names and the perception of him changed, but his reality did not. In sum, all of the different social constructions of madness—as fool, as knower of death, as animal, as humanity—reinforced the same dichotomy between madness and reason or disguised difference through homogenization. These

---

71 cf. ibid.
signifiers served the interests of society, but failed to address the exclusion and categorization of identity experienced by the madman.

Eventually, madness became so burdened with allusions and signs, forced to express constructed meaning, that it lost any complexity of form. This is the danger of overburdening identity with meaning: it runs the risk of collapsing into over-simplicity. If the arbitrary, socially constructed relationship between signs and the referent is not acknowledged, the meaning of signs is mistaken as fixed truth. The referent must be acknowledged as different from the sign, although they can influence one another. Along the Border, the signs of race and nationality are mistakenly conflated with the referent Border and migrant experiences. By failing to acknowledge the social construction of concepts and language that endow the Border with meaning, the signs of race and nationality are mistaken for the referent. As a result, language and meaning continue to serve as tools of oppression that hold more weight than the referent Borderlands and migrants themselves. In other words, signs can gloss over the subjective, referent experience of oppression if they are not recognized as symbols.

Around the 1500s, following a collapse of meaning, madness stepped off the ship of fools and ended its journey at sea. The forces of moral reason pulled it towards land, mooring it not on the docks, but in private madhouses, industrial workhouses, and State hospitals/prisons.\(^72\) Leaving the Renaissance ship behind, madness entered the classical experience of the Great Confinement. Madness took on a new form and the voices of fools at sea were silenced behind walls of confinement in order to prevent the escape and contagion of scandal. The moral universe took reign over madness, which it constituted as a fault or flaw, and destroyed the artful fascination with folly. In general, although

there were exceptions, madness was thrust into secrecy because of the shame associated with the moral indignity of lunacy.

Although the Church, satirists, writers, and artists all developed their own interpretations of madness, none challenged the otherness of madmen. Social constructions of madness were arbitrary, revealing how linguistic signifiers and society’s concept of the Other disconnects meaning from the referent madmen. One reason I use Foucault’s perspective in *Madness* as a lens for understanding the Border is because the history of madness illustrates the way in which binary societal thought, which influences and is affected by physical spaces and language, endures. The relationship between the self and Other was maintained through physical confinement, language, and discourse. Along the Border, social and political structures use language to categorize Others through normalization of nation-State territories and racialized concepts of migrants. Spatial and linguistic signifiers are used to simplify complex migrant experiences and identities into stereotypes until they can be excluded and marginalized when it is productive for the State, economy, and national “security.” Foucault’s interpretation of the history of madness reveals that the arbitrarily constructed system of institutionalized confinement is not limited to the U.S.-Mexico Border wall, but is in fact a way to solidify otherness as a political and economic tool of oppression.
III. Economies of Othering

Migrant Labor and the Economy of Othering

Between 1917 and 1921 (and again in 1942), over fifty thousand Mexican farm workers entered America under a Department of Labor Bracero Program. The Bracero Program was stimulated largely by wartime needs, establishing a legal model and cultural mindset that endured for many decades. Patterns of racial supremacy, established before the drawing of the Border, continued to feed subsequent stereotypes about Mexicans, fueling an instrumentalist view of Mexican migrants as a pure source of labor. At the time, Mexican migrants, unlike other migrants, evaded numerical quotas and had unrestricted immigration. The 1920s Quota Laws created a large, new category of people known as “illegal aliens.” Although Mexicans were not called “illegals” at the same time as other groups were, because they had no quota restrictions, they would later be included and criminalized by the same language. In addition to the Quota Laws and de facto exclusion, the deportation system used against migrants of other origins evolved into a legal framework used to regulate the movement of people. This framework would eventually be applied to Mexican migrants as well.

In response to the Bracero Program and the Quota Laws, the Mexican population boomed in the borderlands in the 1920s. Rather than maintaining distinct ethnic and cultural characteristics, however, the ethnic qualities of Mexicans “became reified and naturalized as immutable racial ones.” To many Americans in the early twentieth century, all migrants from south of the Border, even if they were citizens of the U.S. or

---

74 cf. ibid., 157.
from other parts of Latin America, were designated as “Mexicans,” which conflated race with nationality. The racial hierarchy of the eugenics movement saw a reinforcement of racial ideologies, anxiety, and xenophobia related to migrants. In this context, the 1930 United States federal census listed Mexicans as a separate, non-white race for the first time, the Border Patrol was formed, and the Great Depression fueled the mass deportation of Mexicans whether they were U.S. citizens or not.\textsuperscript{76} When jobs grew scarce, migrants, due to their vulnerability as Others, were blamed for the difficulty of finding employment and used as scapegoats for structural, economic problems.

This process of scapegoating and deportation has recurred time and time again, especially in response to economic recessions or as a strategy for presidential campaigns attempting to garner political support. Clinton, Bush, and Obama alike have supported immigration reform while trying to increase securitization and Border Patrol enforcement. Following 9/11, and in conjunction with the economic recession, the Obama administration has deported a total of approximately 2,000,000 people from America.\textsuperscript{77} Although large numbers of Latino migrants had been deported previously in response to public anxiety and xenophobia, the current deportation regime is unprecedented. Thus, the treatment of Others depends entirely on the economic and political climate.

\textit{Madness and the Economy of Confinement}

During the Great Confinement, between the sixteenth and eighteenth century, physical spaces reinforced and produced new divisions and categories of people. In \textit{Madness and Civilization}, Foucault writes that the rational response to madmen, who

\textsuperscript{76} cf. ibid., 15.
\textsuperscript{77} “Democracy Now.”
until then had been consigned to the margins of civilization or set adrift, was to physically confine them along with vagrants, prostitutes, paupers, and blasphemers. The division between reason and madness was conflated with the divisions between rich and poor, madman and gentleman, primitive and civilized, and black and white, adding to an ever more striated and fixed social hierarchy. This process of social fixation and classification was wrapped up in the larger project of European colonialism, which depended on physically organizing space to reinforce colonial power and economies. The creation of a planetary consciousness united one planetary system of knowledge to include people, nature, and geography. Fixing social relations by putting them down on a map and drawing lines gave States the power to control people’s bodies, individuals’ ideological frameworks, and resources.

Throughout the Great Confinement, madness simultaneously served as a scapegoat for larger socioeconomic inequalities and was exploited/confined as a resource for the capitalist machine. Madness, constructed as disordered and diseased lunacy, served as a scapegoat for larger economic and social inequalities produced by capitalism and colonialism. The exclusion of madness helped construct a separation between the poor, the lunatics, the vagrants, and the rest of society, which consolidated abnormality and hardship. This made the remainder of society appear secure and orderly in relation to the disorder of madness. Of course, a significant incentive behind the social production of these confining categories was economic. The confinement of madness in prison-like institutions rendered madmen into rights-less tools for the consolidation of capitalist power. The period that Foucault calls *The Great Confinement* was in part a response to a severe drop in wages caused by cheap, industrial labor in workhouses and rising
unemployment. Foucault writes: “The classical age used confinement in an equivocal manner, making it play a double role: to reabsorb unemployment or at least eliminate its most visible social effects, and to control costs when they seemed likely to become too high; to act alternately on the manpower market and on the cost of production.”

The State’s desire to regulate unemployment and wages brought about the need for extrajudicial mechanisms of exclusion that would imprison and hide the unemployed. The exploitation and confinement of madmen was justified by the charge of moral error. The guilty were viewed as having freely chosen prostitution, vagrancy, blasphemy, and unreason. And the regimes of these new rational institutions of confinement were “meticulous programs of punishment and reward,” aimed at condemning idleness and causing madmen to reverse their choices. In this way, madness was perceived as having a role in the rise of poverty, justifying the use of labor to abolish amoral vagrancy. The State began to administer morality as it did trade and economy, making the laws of the State and the laws of morality align. Foucault says that State confinement began to enclose the negative through “force without appeal,” making sovereignty positive as the regulator of good in contrast to the negatively othered madness and poverty. Intimidation, violence, and social control were constructed as necessary for the good and the moral to prevail.

Notice that a similar pattern of exploitation and moral justification has developed with regard to immigration in America. Migrants have been criminalized as illegals, which essentially means they have been charged with moral error. Despite the relentless

---

79 It is important to note that today, migrants are also being criminalized and pathologized, accused of moral error.
81 cf. ibid., 61.
82 Ibid.
economic forces of neoliberalism, privatization, and violence that have actually forced migrants to seek a living elsewhere, their crossing of the Border is seen by many as trespassing—a moral and legal crime or “invasion.” The current U.S. State has developed a complex system of migrant detention centers that function as programs of punishment aimed at causing migrants to return to their countries of origin and reverse their choices. The current confinement and deportation of migrants has, like the confinement of madness, been brought about by a need for extrajudicial mechanisms of exclusion and the desire to regulate labor and capital. Migrants, similar to impoverished and mad laborers during the Great Confinement, control costs by providing cheap labor. Today, the State has also administered morality in equal proportion to economic regulation by criminalizing migrants and using them as an economic balancer. Yet again, intimidation, violence, and social control have been constructed as necessary for the good and moral State to prevail.

Ironically, during the Age of Reason, the construction of cages to contain madness was carried out on a grander scale than ever before, incentivized in large part by capitalist interests. The good price for wool in 16th century England helped jump-start the consolidation of smaller tracts of land into large swaths of private property on which sheep could pasture. Feudal lords interested in making money began what would later be called the enclosure movement, pushing the peasantry off their land and away from their subsistence lifestyles towards the city. The usurpation of the commons produced an excess of poor laborers in need of livelihood. Thus, the process of enclosing land to benefit industry mirrored the mass confinement and enclosure of poverty and madness as a form of capital. Expropriated from their land, peasants were becoming poorer during

---

the Great Confinement and could no longer afford to keep their mad family members in their house.

Despite all the measures taken throughout Europe to avoid unemployment and poverty, economic crisis ravaged Europe. The problems of poverty and unemployment were blamed on vagrants, beggars, and madmen, illustrating a moralizing of wealth and a pathologizing of poverty. It became immoral to be poor or mad and so those who were poor or mad were punished. The Great Confinement and the exploitation of the lowest ranked groups in the class system constituted the answer to fundamentally economic and political problems. And for the first time, at the expense of individual liberty, confinement of madness was integrated into the State apparatus. As a result, three classes of physical spaces in which deviants could be confined arose and proliferated: there were private spaces of confinement (madhouses and poor houses); industrial spaces of confinement (including workhouses); and public spaces of confinement (hospitals and houses of correction funded by the State). Although all three spaces of confinement involved different practices, all were founded on the general consensus that strict confinement of madness was necessary; all were wrapped up in the capitalist profit-making machine.

First, there were madhouses, which were private homes whose proprietors were paid to detain their residents with little to no medical involvement. Second, there were workhouses or Zuchthäuser, as they were called in Germany, which expanded the institutional marketplace by organizing lunatic wards to capture the overcrowding of other mental institutions, such as hospitals, prisons, and madhouses. In addition, workhouses helped relieve the pressure from other areas of the welfare provision machine.

---

84 For additional discussion of workhouses read Cox, Negotiating Insanity in the Southeast of Ireland, 1820-1900.
by taking in paupers, lunatics, and those who simply couldn’t pay their debts.\textsuperscript{85} However, outside of periods of crisis, the workhouse no longer served to confine those out of work, but exploited the free manpower of those incarcerated, forcing them to contribute to the prosperity of all, much like slaves.\textsuperscript{86} Third, there were public State, administrative “Hospitals” or Houses of Correction. These were not normal hospitals, but rather administrative prisons with police power that lay beyond the courts in which the State, the police, royal power, the Church and the bourgeoisie confined and punished the impoverished.\textsuperscript{87}

These three categories of confinement—private homes, industrial workhouses, and public administrative prisons—are mirrored, although in a slightly different form, by migrant domestic work, migrant industrial/agricultural labor, and migrant detention centers. Latina migrant women, in particular, often work long hours doing domestic work in the private homes of American families. Often paid very little, although that depends on the family, Latina migrant women take over parental roles and maintain the house, enabling their employers to work full time and make more money. The migrant labor industry also resembles workhouses or Zuchthäuser, as migrants (particularly undocumented individuals) are exploited for their labor and often forced to live in poor living conditions that cut into their already meager incomes. Because undocumented Latino migrants have as few rights as criminals in America, and have limited employment options, they are forced to work within certain industries despite exploitation and maltreatment. Yet, they continue to contribute to the prosperity of all, much like slaves. Although the forms of exploitation that migrants live and that madmen

\textsuperscript{85} cf. ibid.  
\textsuperscript{86} cf. Foucault, \textit{Madness and Civilization}, 51.  
\textsuperscript{87} cf. ibid., 39.
experienced are drastically different, the same social instinct towards morally justified confinement for economic profit persists.

Similar to the public administrative prisons madmen were confined in, migrants are now being held in migrant detention centers before being deported. These sometimes public, but more often private, centers of confinement are generally a function of partnerships between the federal government and private prison companies. The federal government contracts businesses like Corrections Corporation of America (CCA), paying private companies an average of $122 a day per detainee, enabling companies to make a significant profit. Critics argue that CCA and other private companies cut corners on detention contracts in order to increase revenue at the expense of human conditions. Furthermore, political connections and lobby spending have enabled CCA to dominate the industry of immigrant detention and expand the number of detainees and beds their facilities accept in anticipation of continued demand.

Today, however, detention centers are not the only form of confinement imprisoning migrants. Through new technology, surveillance is potentially everywhere and nowhere. According to geography professor Lauren Martin, “Biometric identity technologies, databanking, digital surveillance, and risk analysis reveal not a blockaded boundary but a border that follows transboundary migrants as they move within and between national territories.” Essentially, this means that inclusion and exclusion is being respatialized. In addition, American Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has the authority to detain noncitizens under post 9/11 domestic counter-terrorism strategies, interior immigration enforcement, and Border securitization. Therefore,

---

89 Martin, “‘Catch and Remove,’” 1.
migrants are forced to feel vulnerable, threatened, and fearful at all times and in all places because their exclusion is reinforced by technologized, fear-producing systems of policing.

Securitization of a Porous Border

In the same way that the confinement of madness grew increasingly restrictive, the Border has become ever more militarized, physically oppressive, and theatrical. Notwithstanding the strikingly ominous and unyielding appearance of the Border we see in the media, politicians, media, and various other interests groups use the new walls themselves and images of the walls to theatrically to project power and efficaciousness that the walls do not and cannot actually exercise.\footnote{I use the plural “walls” because there are many different sections of Border rather than one coherent, singular wall along territorial divide between the America and Mexico.} The Border serves as a stage whereupon actors can produce plays about nationality, invaders, and unemployment in which characters and social roles are constructed. This theatricality enables interest groups to construct the U.S. walling project as a response to a “state of emergency” and a state of exception. Furthermore, it allows political actors to use historical connections between race and nationality to produce a convincing plotline that the public audience will believe and support.

Throughout the twentieth century, as race became increasingly tied to nationality, the Border began to harden into a “clearly marked boundary that appeared on most national maps.”\footnote{Truett and Young, Continental Crossroads, 19–20.} Towards the end of the twentieth century, walls were built as Border control was heightened with high-intensity, militarized policing by the U.S. Border Patrol, the Mexican Border Patrol, and special Mexican police units. At the same time as the
Border was being built to supposedly stop Border crossing, the U.S. and Mexican States became trade partners, emphasizing cooperation and trade to set the groundwork for neoliberal conditions of expansion. Paradoxically, the enclosure of space by the Border was carried out in tandem with the development of a transnational economy that infiltrated the Border, requiring its porosity and the breakdown of nation-state sovereignty. Later, building on the political and economic relations between the U.S. and Mexico, neoliberalism and free trade would benefit from this structure of “increasingly liberalized borders, on the one hand, and the [State’s] devotion of unprecedented funds, energies, and technologies to border fortification, on the other.”

Now, in an increasingly globalized world, a series of tensions arises in relation to the Border between neoliberal networks and nation-state sovereignty, between territorialization and deterritorialization, and between security of individuals and the movement of capital. The Border simultaneously functions as a divider and a connector. It separates nation-states physically and pretends to offer security, but also symbolizes the connected economies of America and Mexico. Neoliberalism uses the State to create “security measures responding to the economically generated forces that themselves break down the legal spaces conventionally organized by political sovereignty and represented by nation-states.” Thus, the Law is used to set up a continual state of exception in which the Border is highly regulated, but not impermeable. As was the case with the imprisonment of madness during the Great Confinement, the intersection

92 Brown, Walled States, Waning Sovereignty., 8.
93 Although the intentions behind neoliberal trade agreements were arguably good, the results have been catastrophic, largely due to imbalances caused by State funded subsidies and poorly regulated free trade agreements. Therefore, while both the U.S. and Mexican States had comparable interest in neoliberal agreements and a securitized border, and Mexico was a player rather than a victim, the U.S. has benefited more than Mexico from liberalized markets.
94 Brown, Walled States, Waning Sovereignty., 97.
between law and exception at the site of the Border generates a body of labor outside of
the law that is neither organized nor protected. Undocumented migrants are thus rendered
exploitable and disposable in order to make them useful to the State and economy.

The State, through its regulation of the Border and influence on public opinion,
helps produce the unrestricted flow of labor and goods that capital can then exploit. Even
the security measures carried out by the State want not just the containment of people, but
the flexibility to “channel, transfer, relocate, or simply drive out populations. The
checkpoint rather than the windowless cell, video surveillance rather than the guarded
door.”95 Although security is purported to be one of the principal reasons for the Border
and the confinement of migrants, the State generates violence against non-state actors
instead of promoting peace. This violence and porosity is disguised by Border theatrics.

As a symbol, the Border—its physical location on maps and metaphorical
presence in our minds—helps to resurrect the imagined space and people of an America
that has order, security, identity, and purity. Although the Border wall varies greatly
along its 2,000-mile-long expanse—comprised of three-wire cattle fence, vertical railroad
rail, concrete-filled wall, corrugated steel plate, square tubing, crushed cars, climb-proof
expanded metal fence, climb-proof chain link fence, concrete column, and nothing in
other places—the popular image of the Border wall seems impenetrable and
impermeable.96 Thus, the Border’s psychological function as a signifier of security is
disconnected from the physically porous, referent Border wall. It is important to
understand that the Border performs a psychological function for citizens and their
identities, offering protection, containment, and innocence, because this imagined order

95 Ibid., 100.
disguises the reality of violence caused by Border theatrics. As was the case in the history of madness, confinement and oppression is justified as a security measure necessary for public health and safety.

The image of security produced by the sovereign State is meant to assuage popular anxiety arising from the citizen, whose individual and nationality identity—dependent upon perceivable horizons and the containment offered by walls—are threatened. As Wendy Brown notes in *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*, “walls generate what Heidegger termed a ‘reassuring world picture’ in a time increasingly lacking horizons, containment, and security that humans have historically required for social and psychic integration and for political membership.”\(^97\) However, the security of identity produced by the image of a seamless, steel Border wall, running from Texas to the California coast, cannot be delivered materially, because that is not its function. The Border is necessarily porous because the U.S. economy requires cheap, exploitable labor and influxes of capital.

The figure of the racialized Other is merely a distraction from global problems of inequality. As Wendy Brown writes, the Border is “mobilized to depict discursively what it blocks as lawless invaders, walling literally screens out a confrontation with global inequality or local colonial domination. It facilitates denial of the dependency of the privileged on the exploited.”\(^98\) The Border also psychologically screens out the presence of a multiplicity of spaces and identities by constructing one, very visible, hierarchical symbol of racial, national, economic, and cultural division. Because the association of racialized outsiders with threatening difference and danger is a fiction, it must be

---


\(^{98}\) Ibid., 122.
deconstructed in order for us to face white privilege and the actual economic and political effects of globalization.

We must imagine the nation as a site with many overlapping cognitive maps in which the nation-state is not congruent with identity. This would require visualizing transborder maps that depict migration patterns of various ethnic, religious, and linguistic groups; maps that illustrate the historical movement of the Border over time; maps of detention centers, and maps of industrial labor sites on both sides of the Border. A good cognitive map might include visualizations of the movement of capital, migratory birds, gangs, sex and drug trafficking, and biomes. An exceptional map might even include overlapping bloodlines intersecting and flowing across boundaries. Seeing this multiplicity of different patterns and their intersections is essential to problematizing binary difference and simplified categories of nationality and race. Only by challenging the State’s goal of arboreal, unified rationality, which we have been inculcated to replicate, can we break down the striation and exploitation of Others.

*Where Am I?*

Lewis Carrol’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* helps us imagine the various ways in which overlapping, dynamic spaces can be recognized in their multiplicity of difference without rendering identities connected to spatial signifiers meaningless. In Wonderland, the absence of a static, secure place that Alice can identify with causes her to adapt to ever-changing spaces that lack security and deny isolated categorization. Once Alice falls down the rabbit hole, she no longer spends enough time in each space for it to become a place. She does not know the spaces she briefly inhabits, has not begun to identify with the spaces through memory and repetition, and therefore does not endow
them with much value. Instead she wishes to leave the spaces entirely to return to some semblance of normalcy. Because Alice’s movement through spaces is marked by insecurity and is always threatened by change, she never experiences place, which is marked by security. The dynamism and uncertainty of space in Alice’s experience challenges her to recognize a reality in which the meaning of her identity becomes decoupled from a static signifier or idea of place. This pushes her to recognize space and her own identity as assemblages that can connect beyond themselves, are overburdened with meaning, but are impossible to simplify. Although Alice never comes to terms with the multiplicity of her identity, she does recognize space as an assemblage. Thus, she opens up the possibility, rather than the reality, of thinking rhizomatically instead of arboreally.

The perceived order of space in Alice’s Adventures, and Alice’s breakdown of order through her movement, symbolizes her mental deconstruction of arboreal logic. The order of space often momentarily arises and then is broken down through Alice’s perception of its arbitrariness, never to remain orderly for long. Once through the rabbit-hole, the first transitional threshold of space, Alice encounters

*a long low hall, which was lit up by a row of lamps hanging from the roof. There were doors all around the hall, but they were all locked; and when Alice had been all the way down one side and up the other, trying every door, she walked sadly down the middle, wondering how she was ever to get out again.*

Feeling stagnant and confined, Alice reaches the physical threshold of the passage, but is unable at first to move fluidly through. Alice is isolated in a liminal position by the

---

100 Ibid., 3.
closed doors and one-way passage, unsure whether she will ever leave. She must acknowledge the order of the space—the break, or pause in her passage—before adjusting her relationship with that space of confinement to flow through the threshold. Defined in part by liminality, Latino migrants must also acknowledge breaks or barriers in their crossing of the Border and in their daily lives in order to move forward. Similar to the liminal position of transborder migrant lives and identities, Alice’s identity, although she is not aware, is decentered—without a singular conception of self and without attachment to a singular spatial signifier—by her liminal position between the rabbit hole and the space beyond the door.

Space actively forces Alice to acknowledge differences around her before she can proceed. After contemplating her options, she finds a tiny golden key on a glass table:

and Alice’s first idea was that this might belong to one of the doors of the hall; but alas! either the locks were too large, or the key was too small, but at any rate it would not open any of them. However, on the second time round, she came upon a low curtain she had not noticed before, and behind it was a little door about fifteen inches high: she tried the little golden key in the lock and to her great delight it fitted! 

In this passage, Alice is defined by the transition from a closed space of order to an opening, or a breakdown of order. Her capacity to recognize limits and challenge them is tested by the physical space itself, which confines her, but by recognizing differences in her surroundings her imagination opens up new avenues of movement through the physical space. While the physical space informs her response, her imagination changes her perception of space, enabling her to discover the little door she was unable to see before. Alice begins to adapt to this shifting process of opening and closing that arises from her perceived relationship to space. The more attention she pays to differences in the

---

102 Ibid., 9-10.
space—or the more her perception of space aligns with the actual space—the more she recognizes how arbitrary her perceptions of space are. This recognition of flexible perception changes the way she interacts with space and facilitates her deconstruction of perceived order.

However, the barriers to entry and shifting requirements also reflect frustration with impossible, arbitrary criteria that we can liken to citizenship and the Border barriers migrants must face and suffer through. I use Alice’s Adventures not to exoticize or romanticize the migrant experience, but to illustrate the problematic disconnection between referent, complex space itself, and our public perception and categorization of space. While the mainstream public conceives of the Border and surrounding requirements for entry as concrete and impenetrable, the Border is filled with holes and thousands of migrants sidestep entry requirements annually. This suggests that the meaning of the Border as a signifier of security and order has been decoupled from the actual porous and often disordered reality that enables and invites migrants to pass through. If the public were to acknowledge the arbitrary and porous nature of the Border, as Alice and migrants are forced to, they might begin to question the State’s motives for maintaining a penetrable Border. This recognition would inevitably challenge the public to acknowledge its dependence on the exploitation of migrants and rupture the false sense of security constructed by the State and accepted by the mainstream public.

As Alice is forced to acknowledge arbitrary and flexible conceptions of space, she serves as an example as to how we might deconstruct binary, ordered visions of the Border space that we mistakenly conflate with referent Border reality. However, Alice’s deconstruction of space is not proactive, but reactive. Given that Alice did not choose to
be trapped in each space, her response is contextual and more a function of immediate need. Similarly, migrants are often forced to contend with Border binaries, which forces them to acknowledge and adapt to systems of oppression. However, many are privileged enough to ignore the violence and continue thinking arboreally because it benefits us. Therefore, despite lack of need, we must proactively engage with hegemonic systems and think rhizomatically about conceptions of space and identity.

Entering each new space on her journey, Alice meets a barrier, or threshold, and passes through, but she unintentionally brings what she has learned from previous thresholds with her. And in some sense, Alice unconsciously becomes the threshold, both a concrete point of departure and an endless process, because her identity fluctuates in response to changes in space. Thus, she continually comes into contact with external and internal challenges that she must acknowledge. Opening the door, she finds a small passage leading to a garden, although she can’t move through it because she is physically unable to fit. The construction of the space causes a tension between her physical size limitation and her open imagination. At first, she cannot fit through the doorway because her head is too large. But after passing through the rabbit-hole and the last doorway, Alice has opened up to the possibility that very few things are really impossible, indicating that her mindset has changed since her last passage and she no longer perceives or relates with each space in isolation.\textsuperscript{103} Although she reaches thresholds, she never entirely leaves the past spaces behind because they become part of her network of spatial relations. Because she can now conceive of the transition between spaces, she perceives the confinement of space to be more of an assemblage.

\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., 10.
That is not to say that the physical limitations of space dissolve, but that Alice finds ways to engage with the limitations of space and transforms herself to approach them differently. She acknowledges, to a certain degree, the arbitrariness of perceived space in an attempt to transcend her liminal position. Her movement through space reveals that categorical perceptions of space can be broken down through recognition. This teaches us that the barriers we face and perceive must not be overlooked, but acknowledged and contemplated before deconstruction can occur. However, transitional, liminal spaces are painful because they require relinquishing attachments and relationships upon which identity is grounded. In the case of migrants, these sites of transition along the Border and elsewhere are the cause of great suffering and loss. If the mainstream public were to acknowledge the arbitrary and malleable nature of social projections on space, it would require a painful and continual mourning process that arises from loss of security and loss of a structured self. Ordered constructions of space and identity would have to be released, and this experience of deconstruction is difficult and never ending. Although we may not be migrants or Alice, we still cross physical and metaphorical borders of different degrees on a regular basis. Recognizing ourselves as assemblages in relation to the assemblages of space will enable us to practice breaking down arboreal logic that leads to the binary categorization of Others.

Acknowledging the degree to which space is arbitrarily constructed down the rabbit hole and aboveground, in relation to the Border, reveals the ways in which signified meaning is decoupled from referent reality. Even if the spaces Alice encounters and the physical, referent Border remain relatively static, the arbitrary, shifting signifiers and perceptions that are attached to the spaces can be altered. The agency of the
characters in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and the impact of space on their being are captured in a moment in the Queen’s garden:

“Get to your places!” shouted the Queen in a voice of thunder, and people began running about in all directions, tumbling up against each other: however, they got settled down in a minute or two, and the game began. Alice thought she had never seen such a curious croquet ground in her life: it was all ridges and furrows: the croquet balls were live hedgehogs, and the mallets live flamingoes, and the soldiers had to double themselves up and stand on their hands and feet, to make the arches.  

Although the ridges and furrows of the croquet game may remain fairly static, the Queen’s directions and rules are dynamic, entirely altering the spatial interactions on the landscape. The rules of the game have no particular order or structure, the croquet balls are hedgehogs that move without intention, and the mallets are live flamingoes that relax their long necks and introduce even further arbitrariness into the game. In addition, the Queen directs people to their “places,” without indicating where those places are. Without categorical directions to their places, the soldiers stumble around aimlessly, disconnected from their places and distracted by the arbitrary nature of the game and its components. While the ridges and furrows impact the direction of the game and are active participants, they are not sufficient to control the way the game is played. In other words, the space influences the way the game is played but doesn’t define the rules. The Queen, the soldiers, and the animals orchestrate the game in conjunction with the more static place. The ridges and furrows resemble the Border wall while the Queen’s game and arbitrary rules resemble the State and public conception of the Border. The State, the media, and the public all project images onto the physical Border, attaching arbitrarily constructed rules and meaning to the referent Border space. Although the Border has a

---

104 Ibid., 66.
very real impact on migrant crossings, it is not the only factor influencing migrant experiences and their identities.

Thinking rhizomatically and metaphorically about the ways in which space is an assemblage is necessary. When thinking rhizomatically is a choice it helps us see the possibility that comes from thinking and being in liminal spaces. We learn to recognize the arbitrariness of categories and signs, never concluding or arriving, but finding refuge in transitions and movement, pauses, and multiplicity. Once liminality becomes the constant, it opens up new ways of imagining identity. However, when we examine the Border and Wonderland we see how challenging thinking and living rhizomatically truly is when liminality is externally imposed. The imposition of multiple physical and metaphorical borders on migrant movement and identity is extremely disruptive. Although Alice learns to adapt to changing spaces and liminality, it is truly disturbing. Therefore, the process of recognizing change and difference for the purpose of self-definition is in many ways less disruptive than being oppressed by externally imposed metaphorical and literal borders. However, this sometimes painful process of recognizing difference and multiplicity through rhizomatic thinking, whether by choice or by external imposition, is necessary to deconstructing systems of oppression.
IV. Negative Identification

*The Formation of the Other*

In the neoliberal age, sovereignty is characterized by violence against “Others”—that is, racialized, gendered subjects who embody the antithesis of white citizen. The securitization and extension of the Border has pushed many migrants to cross into America by walking through expanses of desert. They are vulnerable to extreme hot and cold temperatures, hypothermia, dehydration, U.S. drones, U.S. and Mexican border patrol, and border gangs like “La Migra.” According to Mexico’s independent National Human Rights Commission, “as many as 20,000 migrants, mostly from Central America, are kidnapped—some tortured, raped or even murdered—by organized crime each year” on their journey north.105 Thousands have died on their voyage. This daily violence functions to initiate these subjects into the classed and racialized American hierarchy. Gilberto Rosas explains in *Barrio Libre* that in the context of neoliberal globalization, “violence and other death-producing technologies become key techniques of rule and governance.”106 He elaborates: “militarized policing and other irregular forms of warfare have become central both to the daily production of sovereignty and in their very incompleteness to the daily governance of Others.”107 Because the violent policing of immigrants is never wholly successful, migrants pass through or are employed. These “fissures of militarized border policing,” played up by the media, compel American citizens to fear invasion of the country by immigrant Others and “accept the punishment and violence against the nightmarish figure of the undocumented and support pernicious

---

105 js and 09/20/2012, “Migrants Face Higher Risks Illegally Crossing the Border.”
107 Ibid.
Thus, U.S. sovereignty must always be incomplete in order to allow the State to maintain the oppressive hierarchies and exploitable labor force that neoliberal economies depend upon. By enacting exceptional violence at the U.S.-Mexico border, the State produces a subject, or illegal body, who is wholly subject to the mechanisms of State power, used as an exploitable labor force, and sacrificed for citizen security.

While the rhetoric surrounding unauthorized immigration has changed substantially over the years, increasingly emphasizing the illegality of immigrants, their othering has remained unchanged since the birth of nationalism, an outgrowth of capitalism. In Operation Gatekeeper, Joseph Nevins writes that during the 1930s, unauthorized immigrants were referred to as legitimate and illegitimate, and illegitimate evolved into wetbacks or undesirables. After the 1950s, unauthorized immigrants were referred to as illegals, revealing the more recent criminalization of the Other.

Nevertheless, the essential distinction between the insider and the outsider, a function of nationalism, has remained untouched, enabling capitalist enterprises, including the State, to use the constructed division between the Other and the citizen to maximize profits from transnational flows.

The Other, as Nevins notes, was originally installed by the capitalist machine to differentiate the identity of people within nation-state property boundaries from people

---

108 Ibid., 113.
109 Nation-state sovereignty is incomplete and has begun to erode internationally because of the growth of international economic and governance institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and World Trade Organization, among others. And nation-state sovereignty has been challenged since the 1980s by international assertions of law, rights, and authority that sometimes openly aim to subvert and supersede States. Not to mention that nation-state sovereignty is also challenged by global movements of capital and the increasing power of transnational legal, economic, and political institutions. As all of these forces combine to challenge nation-state sovereignty, the more backward looking forces of nationalism and imperialism work to protect or shore up nation-state sovereignty. cf. Brown, Walled States, Waning Sovereignty, 22–23.
110 Nevins, Operation Gatekeeper and beyond, 95.
111 Ibid., 96.
without. When capitalism began to take off and interstate trade began, there developed a
need to distinguish between those who could cross into the nation-state and those who
could not. Thus, through negative identification—I am *me* because I am not *them*—the
State reinforces property relations and the distribution of power inherent in land
ownership. Here originated inequality between the *insider* and the *outsider* as a result of
property boundaries. Economic and political power, defined largely by the amount of
land an individual owned and the capital within his possession, determined who was
more likely to cross over freely and evade otherization. Shockingly, the U.S. government
is currently offering EB-5 green cards for permanent residence to “Entrepreneurs (and
their spouses and unmarried children under 21) who make an investment in a commercial
enterprise in the United States and who plan to create or preserve ten permanent full time
jobs for qualified United States workers.”¹¹² Migrants are eligible if they invest
“$1,000,000, or at least $500,000 in a targeted employment area (high unemployment or
rural area).”¹¹³ Thus, those with money cross Borders freely and avoid being othered
while the movement of Others are restricted.

Not unlike today, in the emerging capitalist order new opportunities and
increasing competition encouraged entrepreneurs with money to cross boundaries freely.
This promoted transboundary trade between private owners for profit. As Nevins says,
territorial states “provided opportunities for profit-seeking entrepreneurs who could avoid
customs duties by smuggling goods across state boundaries,” while at the same time
states “responded by establishing customs houses and the like and implementing

¹¹² “Green Card Through Investment,” 1.
¹¹³ Ibid.
boundary policing.”

However, those who were unable to cross freely, with little capital or poor labor skills, were prevented from entering by State police and became the marginalized Other. Over time, the inequality between those who could cross and the Others, largely defined by their degree of capital contribution to the capitalist model for profit, grew. This is still true today as migrants with enough money can buy their way across the Border by investing the United States, while the rest are forced into manual labor and underground economies.

Astonishingly, the role of the State in the capitalist model has also remained largely unchanged. In the sixteenth century, states took over the protection of domestic capital, “resulting in a transfer of the commercial policies and practices of the trading city to the larger territorial state.” Thus, the power infused in territory-based trade restrictions “became a major component of state making.” As in the past, the modern State has the difficult job of simultaneously regulating trade by policing boundaries while trying to encourage neoliberal commerce. Yet, instead of redistributing wealth and ensuring the security of the “insiders,” stronger boundary enforcement and the reproduction of the Other serves to reinforce the State’s “success” in its protection of hierarchical notions of race, class, and gender that protect the powerful elite. Nationalist ideology and absolute boundaries, the result of capitalism, continue to cause the criminalization of, and violence against, Others. Therefore, we must deconstruct the State’s use of the Other as the scapegoat for the inequalities caused by unregulated

114 Nevins, Operation Gatekeeper and beyond, 155.
115 Ibid.
116 Ibid.
117 Broadly speaking, capitalism is an economic system in which investment in and ownership of the means of production, distribution, and exchange of wealth is made and maintained chiefly by private individuals or corporations. However, the State must regulate the market to ensure its stability, thus, the government is not wholly unattached to the economic system.
capitalism and neoliberalism. By deconstructing arboreal thinking—the foundation of othering and legitimized violence—we can challenge the State’s reproduction of hierarchical inequality.

Who am I?

In *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, Alice initially attempts to identify herself in relation to the Other in a process of negative identification—I am *me* because I am not *them*. In so doing, she not only categorizes the Other, but also categorizes herself and her relation to space. While she embodies many different spaces, physical experiences and identities, Alice is not fully conscious of herself as an assemblage. Although Alice is ultimately aware of the arbitrariness of space in Wonderland, she is unable to accept the arbitrariness of her own identity and the impact of identification by others on her self-identity. After all, identity is formed by a combination of arbitrarily imposed external identifiers (interpellation) and internally regulated identification (consciousness). As a result, Alice deconstructs her surroundings, but maintains the most basic dichotomy between self and Other, failing to deconstruct the logic of aboveground, arboreal reality.

Each time Alice enters a new space she develops a new relationship with not only the space, but also herself. Moreover, with each shift in precise location, Alice perceives herself to have changed. After falling down the rabbit hole and growing very large from eating cake, Alice begins talking to herself, wondering who she has become:

“Dear, dear! How queer everything is to-day! And yesterday things went on just as usual. I wonder if I’ve changed in the night? Let me think: was I the same when I got up this morning? I almost think I can remember feeling a little different. But if I’m not the same, the next question is ‘Who in the world am I?’ Ah, that’s the great puzzle!”  

Here, not only has Alice been temporally dislocated, which alters her relational space, but she is in a different space in the world. Now that time has passed, who she is in the world is altered by where in the world she is located, meaning that she is never exactly the same person. The spatial relations that define her on a moment-by-moment basis constitute a puzzle of identity in which the pieces are always moving or being moved. While her name may remain the same, in each space Alice is sure to be a different being.

In an attempt to define herself and bring categorical order to the chaos she is experiencing, Alice attempts to define herself in relations to others. Thus, in the same way that the mainstream public has negatively identified with madness, and separately, migrants, Alice is accustomed to defining herself in contrast to others. In order to feel grounded in a world of liminal spaces, she attempts to simplify herself and the characters around her. Who am I? in relation to who are they? becomes her process of securing self-definition:

> And she began thinking over all the children she knew that were of the same age as herself, to see if she could have been changed for any of them. “I’m sure I’m not Ada,” she said, “for her hair goes in such long ringlets, and mine doesn’t go in ringlets at all; and I’m sure I ca’n’t be Mabel, for I know all sorts of things.”

Because of her dislocation from place, Alice is aware she has changed, but into whom or what she cannot figure out because she is constantly moving through space. Comparing her appearance and her intellect to Ada and Mabel, Alice reorients herself through hierarchical judgment. Alice has different hair than Ada and is more knowledgeable than Mabel. A second later, Alice tests her knowledge by reciting a poem, which she recites wrong. Questioning whether she is Mabel after all, Alice returns to the question, “Who

---

119 Ibid.
am I, then?” Calling into question who she is in relation to the definition of others and her location, Alice becomes overwhelmed by the desire and need to categorize herself.  

This existential crisis arises again when Alice, after encountering the Caterpillar, eats one side of the Caterpillar’s mushroom. Her neck elongates abnormally until she is above a sea of green leaves far below her. Unclear what all the “green stuff” is, Alice practices bending her long neck, “curving it down in a graceful zigzag” like a serpent. Mistaken for an actual serpent by the Pigeon, Alice insists:

“But I’m not a serpent, I tell you!” said Alice. “I’m a—I’m a—“
“Well! What are you?” said the Pigeon. “I can see you’re trying to invent something!”
“I—I’m a little girl,” said Alice, rather doubtfully, as she remembered the number of changes she had gone through, that day.

The Pigeon places Alice in the category of the serpent and she responds by attempting to re-categorize herself as a little girl, rather than accepting her identity as an assemblage. She attempts to carry a safe, known category in order to stabilize herself amidst internal and external chaos. The Pigeon accuses Alice of trying to invent her identity, or the category of her identity, when all categorical identities are constructions in some sense. Unsure who or what she is going to be from one minute to the next, Alice decides that the “next best thing is, to get into that beautiful garden.” Responding to a crisis of identity, Alice focuses on finding a new place (the garden) to escape from her confused, decentered identity. It seems that if she cannot categorize herself while moving through spaces, she hopes a new, static place will stabilize her and enable her to re-order her self into one isolated being. Alice repetitively reverts back to the self-Other dichotomy to re-

\[120\] Ibid.
\[121\] Ibid., 43.
\[122\] Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland.*
center herself. Therefore, Alice is decentered against her will and desperately wants to return to a simplified, arboreal self.

Each different space that Alice encounters contributes to her experience, perception, and identity despite her inability to stay in place or locate herself through language. All of the spaces and all of her confused identities build on each other until they reach a climax. At the point of climax, Alice yells:

“Who cares for you?” said Alice [...] “You’re nothing but a pack of cards!” At this time the whole pack of cards rose up into the air, and came flying down upon her; she gave a little scream, half of fright and half of anger, and tried to beat them off, and found herself lying on the bank, with her head in the lap of her sister, who was gently brushing away some dead leaves that had fluttered down from the trees upon her face. 123

“A pack of cards” is an arbitrary assemblage that evades arboreal logic and oversimplification. A pack of cards contains fifty-two different layers that can be dispersed and arbitrarily organized. There is no one card that unifies the entire deck. On the one hand, Lewis Carroll’s use of “a pack of cards” refers to the Queen and the Court, who in the previous scene turned the rigid structures of the aboveground judicial system on their head, subverting the binary logic of a normal trial. In addition, the Queen and the Court are assemblages of meaning that are arbitrarily connected to the signs, “The Queen,” and “The Court.” On the other hand, Alice embodies “a pack of cards” through all of her experiences of different spaces, identities, and interactions with other characters. All the different spaces Alice passes through—the rabbit hole, pool of tears, caucus race, garden, mad tea party, croquet-ground, and the Queen’s court room, among others—and Alice’s many characteristics, or identities—intellect, appearance, and

123 Ibid., 97.
negative identification with the Other—make her “a pack of cards” and cause her deep insecurity. Her assemblage is also arbitrarily connected to the name, “Alice.”

Therefore, although Alice recognizes the Queen and the Court as a pack of cards, she fails to acknowledge herself as part of the assemblage. Unable to acknowledge the arbitrariness of her own self, Alice others what she cannot comprehend—the Queen, the Court, and Wonderland itself—in an attempt to solidify her own identity through negative identification. As Alice others the Queen and the Court, and dismisses Wonderland—which embodies the overburdening of space, identity, and language—as “a pack of cards,” she rejects full rhizomatic thinking and falls back into the reductionist binary of self and other. Naming the Queen and the Court, “a pack of cards,” she attempts to invert the fantastical and rhizomatic into the real and the arboreal, thus shattering Wonderland’s hold over her as a member of its assemblage. In so doing, she assumes that her experience in Wonderland is not real. The degree of arbitrariness that Wonderland openly displays disturbs Alice. Therefore, she ultimately denies the significant impact the spaces of, and experiences within, Wonderland have had on her identity and seeks refuge in aboveground arboreal thought. Alice’s struggle with the world of Wonderland reveals how difficult it is to consistently live and think rhizomatically although it is ultimately positive to be and recognize being an assemblage. As she begins to acknowledge more and more spaces, watching Wonderland become overburdened with meaning, it overwhelms her, leading to a complete collapse and reversion back to the binary logic of the aboveground world, which is negative if not paired with rhizomatic thinking.

Furthermore, when Alice comes up against the Queen—a symbolic authoritative State figure—it becomes evident how challenging it is to deconstruct arbitrarily drawn
lines in the sand when the authority structures are very real and extremely violent.

Although the Queen’s actions are arbitrary, her punishments do result in beheadings. Despite the danger of the Queen, however, escaping aboveground will not help Alice come into full consciousness of herself or her inhabitation of space. With regards to border politics, despite the arbitrariness of border policies, race, nationality, and the Border itself, the State punishment and incarceration of noncitizen migrants is very real. These alarming repercussions make rhizomatic thinking, and attempts to deconstruct binaries, dangerously subversive—which they are. Anything that threatens to deterritorialize the State is deadly. However, the foundation of binary, arboreal logic that tempts the mainstream public with simplicity prevents us from recognizing complex problems that result in endless suffering and the death of many migrants. Therefore, if the public continues to fall into the binary trap—as Alice does—self-conscious recognition of assemblages will never be achieved and the violence against Others will continue.

The Assemblage of Madness

Foucault, through his telling of the history of madness, successfully oversignifies the socially constructed identities and spaces associated with madness, recognizing its multiplicity and complicating the binary between reason and madness. Foucault clearly distinguishes between different spaces of confinement and the various names used throughout time to define madness. Nevertheless, the assemblage of information and meaning that he compiles constructs a new perception of madness in which all of the different meanings of madness are recognized in their arbitrariness. There are so many
different lines of exclusion separating madness physically and metaphorically that, when taken together, they make imagining one concept of the Other an impossibility.

For example, the social conception of madness as belonging in a madhouse exists because of the arbitrary linguistic and spatial signifiers attached to the signified concept of madness. These socially constructed linguistic signs are not the same as the referent madmen. The challenge is to think of *madness* and other social constructions of identity, including those of *Americans* or *Mexicans*, as derived by combining linguistically arbitrary signs of the past and present. This would enable our conceptions of individuals and groups of people to grow through successive superimpositions until their meaning becomes decoupled from referent reality.\(^{124}\) The signifiers that we use to distinguish ourselves from Others should be so complex that we begin to recognize the arbitrariness inherent in an intricate network of difference. If we recognize enough difference the arbitrariness of language will become apparent and we can break down the binary concepts of space and identity that divide us.

\(^{124}\) Calvino, *Invisible Cities*.\footnote{Calvino, *Invisible Cities*.}
V. Language

Othering Through Categorical Language

In the expansive, globalized world we live in, we are very far from knowing groups of people and large spaces in all their aspects. As Marc Augé writes in *Nonplaces*, “we live in a world we have not yet learned to look at. We have to relearn to think about space.” And we have to relearn how we think about the individual and identity in relation to that space through language. Both identity and space, as Augé points out, are defined by excess, although we tend to respond to this excess, or overabundance of information, by simplifying. Despite the reality of an already overburdened Border, all of the complex meanings and interactions that occur to inform space and identity along the Border are problematically oversimplified by two main words: Mexico and America. Language is not just an unchanging, universal system governed by unalterable rules. We must use our expansive vocabulary to capture the multiplicity of spaces and identity in relation to the Border.

In order to counterbalance the fear inspired within some citizens by incomplete sovereignty in the neoliberal era, insiders and outsiders must work to deconstruct the extreme distinction made by the State’s enforcement of the Border between America and Mexico. Because many outsiders have already been working in this capacity for years, my goal is to explore how the use of language can alter the way people, who take the Border as more than an arbitrary sign, can think about their identity in relation to the Border space and Others. As seen in the drawing of the Border, national and racial divisions are constructed by individuals’ imaginations. Our imaginations, therefore, are

---

not only limited by structures of power, but also have the capacity to conceive of new spatial, power relations and linguistic expressions of those relations.

**What Nonsense**

How we, like Alice, orient ourselves and find meaning in space is affected by an infinite number of intersecting factors, one of which is language. Through the definition of language we produce new meaning that adds to the way we perceive and interact with referent space. Geographer Yi-fu Tuan notes in *Space and Place* that although animals mark territory against threats and use spaces for food, water, rest, and procreation, humans are unique in that they “attach meaning to and organize space and place.” In other words, humans have the capacity for symbolization, which allows them to attach value and meaning to spaces through symbolic language and images. However, in *Alice’s Adventures*, language ceases to orient Alice in space. Lewis Carroll breaks down meaning by changing syntax and grammar and produces new meaning through proverbial phrases and puns. Because Alice does not understand the ways in which meaning is categorized and labeled differently down the rabbit hole, she becomes decentered by language use.

As a result, Alice’s self-identity, which as with most humans is constructed in relation to place and language, lacks the stability and security that normally enable self-definition and categorization. In other words, identity, place, and language are all simultaneously categorical and transformative. We pin them down to relate to them, to understand them, to make them useful, but by creating new categories we slightly, or drastically, alter place and language and therefore, self-identity. Ultimately, I will argue that we must always release these categories, as Alice is forced to, because they

---

126 Tuan, *Space and Place*, 5.
necessarily change inside of the rabbit hole and outside, above ground. This is not to say that we should not categorize, for that would be impossible, but it does mean that categories must be recognized as arbitrary and complicated to meet the dynamic nature of the world we attempt to categorize.

Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures* reveals that symbolic language and discourse have the capacity to not only produce, but more importantly, to defy the oversimplification of identity and space.127 The use of language and discourse in Wonderland decenters Alice, disturbing her categorical constructions of space and self-identity in relation to Others. Language informs discourse, and discourse informs language. Because the meaning of the Other is differentiated from the self on the level of language and on the level of discourse, the significance of Otherness can also be deconstructed on the level of language and on the level of discourse.

In *Alice’s Adventures*, language functions as a locator, grounding Alice’s identity in space through signifiers, and a dis-locator, destabilizing our concept of identity and space. As Alice falls down, down, down the rabbit hole she wonders what the people are called on the other side of the Earth, applying the logic of schoolroom geography to her experience of inversion:

“I wonder if I shall fall right through the earth! How funny it'll seem to come out among the people that walk with their heads downwards! The antipathies, I think—” (she was rather glad there was no one listening, this time, as it didn’t sound at all the right word) “—but I shall have to ask them what the name of the country is, you now. Please Ma’am, is this New Zealand? Or Australia?” [...]

“No, It’ll never do to ask: perhaps I shall see it written up somewhere.”

Needing a linguistic signifier to categorize the space she expects to land in on the other side of the world, Alice uses the “antipathies,” “New Zealand” and “Australia,” to orient

127 Discourse refers to language use, which is influenced by social, political, and economic context.
herself in space. Here, Carroll introduces a pun on antipodes, just one of the many linguistic inversions which categorize the verbal fantasy of Wonderland. Giving a textbook definition of “antipodes,” Alice mispronounces the word as “antipathies.”

By mistakenly calling the antipodes “antipathies,” which means a strong feeling of aversion, instinctive contrariety, or opposition in feeling, with “antipodes,” a word that means the opposite side of the world, Alice replaces a word referring to geographical opposition with a word that refers to semantic or metaphorical opposition. The boundary between physical opposition and verbal opposition blurs within the fantastic narrative.

As Alice fails to track her progression into Wonderland in both geographical and semantic terms, Carroll demonstrates how language, as a map of the world, is arbitrarily attached to referents. Carroll’s fiction maps the human experience in a fashion analogous to the way in which language maps reality, creating discontinuities in wordplay and geography that create potential for inversion and confusion. Having her aboveground conceptions of language and geography confused, Alice recognizes that if she is unable to signify her location on the earth’s geographical surface, people will categorize her as ignorant, and thus she decides she must search wherever she lands for the written place name rather than ask for help. As Alice enters Wonderland, unfamiliar uses of language and unfamiliar spaces fail to orient her. In fact, they entirely disorient her. The disorientation and decentering of her identity and relation to space simultaneously challenge Alice and cause her great distress by breaking down the socially constructed identifiers she uses to categorize herself and others.

129 In geography, the antipode refers to the point or location diametrically opposed to another point on the Earth's surface. Two points are antipodal if they are connected by a straight line running through the center of the Earth.

130 The word antipathy originated in the late 16th century (in the sense 'opposition of feeling, nature, or disposition'): from French antipathie or Latin antipathia, from Greek antipatheia, from antipathēs 'opposed in feeling', from anti 'against' + pathos 'feeling'. Now, antipathy usually means aversion or a deep-seated dislike.
Language is perceived to be a stable, recognizable system, although it is made up of an elaborate grid of similarities and differences that can be deconstructed through phonetics, syntax, and semantics, which all classify groups of similar signs and differentiate one sign from another. For example, *cat* is the sign of the feline animal, the *signifier* is the combination of letters (c-a-t), and the *signified* is the concept of a cat. All of these are related to the referent, the real, live animal. In order to understand what cat is, it must be differentiated from other concepts of canine or rodent, and defined as something different from the youthfulness signified by a kitten through negative identification. To Alice, cat signifies *pet*, whereas to the mouse it signifies *enemy!* At the same time, however, *cat* can signify many different things and be defined through positive identification. *Cat* can signify a class of small, pet feline animals or large, wild lions. *Cat* can also signify qualities associated with cats, such as a person who is a cool cat, a woman given to spiteful gossip, a devotee of jazz, aloofness, and resilience. The many possible signs (signifiers/signifieds) attached to referent cat suggest how easily language produces signification to establish a network of interrelated signs that can substitute for each other. However, all of these signs, although they are fixed, are also arbitrarily constructed.

Oversignifying the common signifieds such as *American* and *Mexican* with additional, new signifiers can disrupt the use of language as a tool of oppression by revealing how arbitrarily signs are attached to referents. In border politics, the signifier *American*, much like the signifier *cat*, is the sign of a signified concept of a group of people who belong to the signified concept of a bordered nation-state known as America.

---

131 Negative identification is the process of offering evidence that you are not among a group of people already known to the system. Or, identifying as different from already recognized people or groups. “I am me because I am not them.”
In order to understand what America is, it is differentiated from other geographical areas, and in order to understand Americans, they too are differentiated from another group of people. However, like the signifier *cat*, the signifier *American* can signify many different things and be defined through positive identification, rather than negative identification. In mainstream border rhetoric, the signifier *American* stereotypically signifies white, rich, liberal, conservative, family-oriented, etc. However, like the signifier *cat*, the signifier *American* has the capacity to sign for hundreds, if not thousands, of different signified concepts.

Potentially, the signifier *American* could include so many different signifieds that it would become oversignified, or overburdened with meaning. Then, *American* might mean so many different things and thus avoid the binary trap that establishes signified *Mexican* as the Other, the inferior. Even a slight adjustment of the word America to North America or “the Americas” blurs the line between America and Mexico, if not dissolves it altogether. This indicates that Mexicans in several ways are Americans even without overburdening their signifiers. However, this all-inclusive meaning of America is problematic because it homogenizes all of North and South America if we are not careful. Thus, the arbitrariness of meaning associated with America becomes apparent since America can be an exclusive identifier or an all-inclusive identifier of the Americas. However, I would argue that neither the all-inclusive signified nor the exclusive signified capture or recognize the intricate degree of diversity that we see by thinking rhizomatically. Ideally, the multiplicity of meanings derived from the signifier *America* would connect with the multiplicity of signifieds attached to the signifier *Mexico* on a plane in which lived events, historical determinations, concepts, individuals, groups, and
social formations were laid out flat and connected through lines of flight that never end. These connecting lines map out ever changing, continuous connections that overlap on a horizontal plane of interaction.

While Borders, in some form or another, and the construction of individual and group identity, are always constructed in relation to and in negotiation with otherness, the specificity with which we understand and speak about otherness can overburden lines of exclusion and break them down. I wish to suggest that unity and less discriminatory border relations can be achieved. Not through the abolition of borders, nor through borderless homogenization of spaces and identities, but through their recognition. Language and discourse offer us the tools to express this degree of subjectivity.

Whereas language enables the production of meaning, discourse produces meaning by infusing symbols with social connotations. Language is always contextualized in plural, cultural, historical, and political discourses. For example, Lewis Carroll uses proverbial phrases in Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, demonstrating the ways in which discourse produces meaning, altering the significance of language. When Alice comes across the Cheshire Cat, seeking direction, the Cat tells her: “In that direction,” [...] waving its right paw round, “lives a Hatter: and in that direction,” waving its right paw round, “lives a March Hare. Visit either you like: they’re both mad.” A footnote in the annotated edition explains the multiple meanings of “mad as a hatter” and “mad as a March hare,” both of which are proverbial expressions (conventional sayings transmitted through oral tradition that have figurative meaning that functions as an extension of the literal reading). “Mad as a march hare” “is apparently founded on the behavior of hares in their mating season” and “mad as a hatter”

133 Ibid., 51.
is a more recent phrase, although current in the mid-nineteenth century, which may have originated on the fact that the use of mercury in preparing the felt that was made into hats did produce symptoms of insanity in hatters. The Hatter also bears characteristics of one Theophilius Carter, an eccentric Oxford furniture dealer who customarily stood in the doorway of his shop wearing a top hat on the back of his head.¹³⁴

Thus, the use of proverbial phrases as names for characters in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* would be meaningless without our social awareness of cultural relations. By contextualizing the meaning of “mad as a hatter” in cultural discourse we are able to produce meaning that defines the Mad Hatter’s identity. Thus, identity is informed by the labeling function of language as a producer of meaning. Furthermore, while signs are regulated by a system, they are produced and changed through discourse. This enables us to infuse language with however much meaning we choose.

A more radical implication of the feedback relationship between language and discourse is that language and discourse both have the capacity to disrupt and facilitate the production of meaning and both are unstable. As Steven Cohan argues in *Telling Stories: A Theoretical Analysis of Narrative Fiction*, while Saussure recognized the arbitrary and conventional features of the sign, he still treated a signifier as merely an expression of a signified.¹³⁵ He did not fully consider the extent to which a signifier like the *Border* produces signified *Mexican* and *American* that function as other signifiers of a history of imperialism, oppression, and race. Steven Cohan writes: “A sign is thus not always bound by a system, as Saussure would have it, for a signifier can transgress the system.”¹³⁶ In other words, language and discourse affect the transmission of meaning, making both facilitators and disruptors of social conceptions of identity and space.

¹³⁴ Ibid.
¹³⁶ Ibid., 19.
The Discourse of Madness

In order to remind ourselves that language and meaning are arbitrarily assigned, we must vigilantly overburden our perceptions of identity and space until we break down harmful binaries and recognize their arbitrariness. Overburdening identity becomes very difficult, however, given the categorical nature of physical space and language. For although we might like to keep spaces or groups of people distinct yet interwoven in our minds and in our memory, we have a limited number of words in our language. Thus, it is up to us to pack words with different meanings through syntax, cultural understanding, and discourse until they can better meet the complexity of what we perceive. For example, whereas the word madness was at one time associated with the leper and the madmen was housed in the leprosarium, after reading Madness and Civilization, the word madness conjures a complex assemblage of signified images, spaces, and meanings. The terminology used in Foucault’s Madness ranges from fool, idiot, and lunatic to mad, insane, and mentally ill, all of which are pejoratives. They are attached with negative connotations: neurosis, psychosis; instability, irrationality, unreasonableness; delirium, frenzy, hysteria; hallucinosis, hypomaia, paranoia, schizophrenia; senile dementia, delusion, hallucination; monomania, obsession, phobia; abnormality, dementedness, unsoundness. The negative meaning of these signifiers arises from the social and political discourse surrounding othering and the process of negative identification. Disturbed, crazy, and cuckoo add further insult to the experience of madness. Therefore, in order to complicate these pejoratives we must add positive meaning to these signifiers to counterbalance the already constructed negative connotations of madness. For madness
also has a history, as we know, of being associated with knowledge, transcendence of
death, powerful animality, and enlightening voyages on ships.

When we come into contact with someone who is mad, or what we might now
call *insane*, we might be able to recall complex and overlapping associations that are
distinct, but mingle, so that we are unable to categorize the individual with one set of
assumptions that we take to be True. When we project enough assumptions about
someone, because we are necessarily judgmental, and recognize those assumptions and
multileveled categories, there are likely to be enough contradictions to cancel out any set
idea of a person or place. This process of overburdening reminds us that the judgments
and meaning we associate with people and spaces are arbitrarily attached to referents.

*Oversignifying the Border*

For example the referent Border is a line in sand, a wall, and a physical structure.
We arbitrarily attach signs and meaning to the referent. We created the concept of a
nation and made up the names *America* and *Mexico*. The way we have commonly defined
it, a national border is a conceptual wall dividing two spaces of land. And the division of
space by the Border is understood as resulting in the production of only two spaces:
America and Mexico. However, this division creates a false binary between two spaces
and two groups of people, oversimplifying human relations through racialized national
categories. The term *Borderlands* indicates that there is a third space between America
and Mexico, around the border itself, which disrupts the spatial dichotomy created by the
Border. Another dangerous tendency we have is to conceive of these three spaces
(America, Mexico, and the Borderlands) as one cumulative space, given that the neoliberal nature of both Mexico and the U.S. enables capital to flow easily across the Border as if there were no boundary at all. However, I would argue that the Border, as a sign, should also symbolize diverse locations, from Oaxaca to Chicago, in which migrants face racial discrimination and citizenship barriers because of their relation to the Border wall. The Border should also be imagined as a metaphorical border that each migrant and non-migrant carries within his or her imagination.\textsuperscript{137} Emotions and metaphorical aspects of identities are arbitrarily attached to the Border referent and should not be disregarded. After all, the Border is a sign that is arbitrarily attached to the referent space. This means that any number of things can be arbitrarily associated with the Border without being equivalent to the referent, physical space.

If we are to oversignify our imagination of, or the body of, a Mexican migrant with signs that better represent the excess of information inherent in each identity, it might look something like this: \textit{Oaxacan, Mixtec, Oregonian, Washingtonian, Zapotec, Californian, man, woman, transgender, bilingual, trilingual, unilingual, Indigenous, Mestizo/a, Chicana/o, mother, daughter, son, father, old, young, white, nonwhite, farmworker, lawyer, landscaper, doctor, activist, citizen, noncitizen, married, unmarried, low-wage, high-wage, middle-wage, happy, unhappy}, etc. This list could go on and on and on, in excess. All of these signs are arbitrarily attached to referent individuals and are not the same as those individuals. The term \textit{Mexican} must be overburdened with these signifying adjectives because they better represent complex humans and the reality of individual and spatial overabundance of the present. After all, national membership and belonging are as much conceptual constructs as the Border itself: there is no such thing as

\footnote{\textsuperscript{137} cf. Solnit, \textit{Storming the Gates of Paradise}.}
“American by blood.” Although, as I noted earlier, this does not mean that the origin of the terms *American* and *Mexican* are entirely disconnected from any and all ethnic origins, particularly in the case of *Mexico*, as it is associated with indigenous tribes of the Aztec Empire. My point is simply that *American* and *Mexican* have been overburdened with an accumulation of connotations over time, although they are often oversimplified to represent only two races—white and brown.

Through discourse and overburdening with arbitrary signs, a degree of subjectivity can be achieved that recognizes the multiplicity of identity in relation to space. Only by concealing this process of multiplicity does the neoliberal State maintain the arbitrarily constructed dichotomies in language and thought that reify hegemonic systems. For, as long as the discursive production of subjectivity is concealed, binaries will remain seemingly beyond change or intervention. Therefore, oversignification must be used to recapture the subjectivity and multiplicity of identity and space. At the same time, all signs, regardless of how true they seem to be, must be approached as distinct from referent reality.

VI. Conclusion: On Developing Invisible Cities

I was originally inspired to write this thesis because I began to notice how, disguised within liberal and conservative thought alike, nationality and related racial notions of “family” and blood were the justifications for exclusionary Border policies. These policies, which are fundamentally based on the binary construction of the Other, are currently killing thousands of Latino migrants and encouraging their exploitation, incarceration, and dependence on underground economies on both sides of the Border. When reading about neoliberalism, I found myself thinking in binary terms. I took for granted the strict division between the U.S. and Mexican governments, indicating that I also subconsciously assumed there was an overarching difference between Mexicans and Americans. I realized that I had subconsciously accepted nationality, and thus race, as inevitable, or even axiomatic.

However, when I began studying transborder politics, there were so many other physical borders (gated communities, zoning laws, etc.) and metaphorical borders (ICE officers, police discrimination, language barriers, deportation proceedings, and labor restrictions, among others) that image of the Border and associated constructed notions of nationality and race were overburdened with signs. Yet, race and nationality did not disappear entirely and should still be recognized within this complex network of borders. If we disregard these social constructions, then we become color-blind and ignorant of a history of oppression that repeats itself, simply manifesting in new configurations. Wiping out differences, however constructed, does not complicate binaries, it simply hides them, making them more difficult to understand and deconstruct.
Furthermore, prior to my study of Border politics, my perception of the U.S. as a dominator led me to assume that the Mexican State must be the victim. Although the U.S. State is hegemonic and has substantial political and economic might (as evidenced by who has benefited the most from NAFTA and other free trade agreements), the Mexican government also had its own interest in opening neoliberal markets. Along the Border wall, U.S. and Mexican border patrols often work in conjunction with one another, passing information back and forth, demonstrating the permeability of State divisions. My goal, therefore, was to respond to these pervasive structures of binary, hierarchical ways of thinking with rhizomatic thinking. I wanted to challenge the linguistic oversimplification of what are in reality complex, relational assemblages of identity and space.

Today, when it has become possible to think in terms of the unity of terrestrial space and global networks, the particularisms of space, identity, and language must be remembered, re-learned, or at least recognized so that we do not fall into the trap of oversimplifying the excess of information and experiences that live and move on the planet. By recognizing the Border, among other dynamic metaphorical borders, the contemporary ideology of a “globality without frontiers,” that produces homogenization and hides exclusion, can be complicated to change mainstream conceptions of power relations. Borders, after all, do not necessarily signify compartmentalization, separation, and exclusion. They can also serve as connectors.

When we recognize all of the physical and metaphorical borders of identity and language that inform each of us, no one border should extinguish others. Ideally, even constitutional law, which suggests meaningful metaphorical borders as to sovereign
authority, would function as only one of a multiplicity of identifiers. While rights and responsibilities would be granted to citizens, this would not necessitate Border policies that criminalize migrants, lead to the deportation of millions, and cause the death of thousands. While Borders, in some form or another, and the construction of individual and group identity, are always constructed in relation to and in negotiation with otherness, the specificity with which we understand otherness can overburden lines of exclusion and break them down through identification. Thus, less violent borders and relations to otherness can be achieved, not through the abolition of borders, nor through overarching homogenization and the fiction of borderless spaces and identities, but through their recognition.

Paradoxically, unity requires recognizing the intersecting lines of difference that join us in an extensive, dynamic network. Even rhizomatic thinking is connected to arboreal thinking, despite their theoretical differences. So too is State control and territorialization tied to nomadic flows of migrants and humanitarian aid organizations who deterritorialize the Border. There must always be rigidity paired with fluidity. The U.S. and Mexican neoliberal States exploit this paradox and understand that Border territorialization can be paired with deterritorializing migrant flows to benefit the economy. If the U.S. did not understand this paradox, national dependence on exploitable labor would run dry. If the Mexican State did not understand this, migrants would not send as many billions of dollars in remittances, which account for a substantial proportion of the Mexican GDP and family incomes, back to Mexico.139 However, the mainstream

139 “Remittances” are funds or other assets sent to their home countries by migrants themselves or in the form of compensation for border, short-term and seasonal employees (World Bank, 2013). Most funds come directly from migrants; compensation accounts for a single-digit share of remittances in most Latin American nations (World Bank, 2011). (cf. Cuddington, “Remittances to Latin America Recover—but Not to Mexico.”)
public remains blinded by binary constructions and empty homogenization to State
dependence on porosity and deterritorialization. The point is not entirely to critique the
neoliberal State machine or to entirely deterritorialize the State to the point of anarchy—
because that is unnecessary and just as dangerous. The point is to understand how the
neoliberal State works and how it was designed to function, so that we can deconstruct
strategically to make it function nonviolently.

In other words, deconstruction is always paired with reconstruction and if we
have not understood the failings of previous State apparatuses, then we will make the
same mistakes again and again.\footnote{After all, many proponents of neoliberalism thought it would benefit transnational economies and lead to an
overthrow of State power. Their intention was arguably not to displace millions of people. Rather, they thought that
neoliberalism would enable the economy would function more efficiently for the benefit of all.}
As evidenced by the history of madness, surprisingly
little has changed since the birth of capitalism around the fourteenth century. We still
formulate identity in relation to otherness, the State still supports market functioning, and
the economy still depends on the exploitation of disenfranchised and othered groups of
labor. We continue to think about power as a hierarchical, vertical structure rather than a
horizontal network; we still homogenize and discriminate against large groups of othered
people.

Identifying in relation to otherness is necessary, but failing to recognize the
multiplicity of similarities and differences is fatal. We are trained to categorize and
logically pin down concepts until we have constructed comprehensible and coherent
structures with which to progress. Traditionally, at least in Western thought, we are
dependent on binaries and arboreal thinking, on reducing complexity down to a source or
core. But this is not the only way to think about coherence or unity. Arboreal logic must
be complemented by rhizomatic thinking, looking at dynamic, horizontal systems of
difference and interconnection. Otherwise, we will remain bystanders as Others are exploited and murdered, or we will become othered ourselves, subjected to the same discrimination and suffering.

Fictional narratives in particular, such as Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, have the capacity to break open the normal, arbitrarily constructed, hierarchies of ordered space and identity that make imagining radical multiplicity seem impossible. For example, in Italo Calvino’s Invisible Cities, the emperor Kublai Khan senses his empire coming to an end. Marco Polo diverts the emperor’s attention with tales of cities and memory, cities and desire, cities and designs, cities and the dead, cities and the sky, trading cities, and hidden cities he has seen in his travels. In the end, it becomes apparent that each of these distinct fantastic places is really part of a rhizomatic structure of interconnected places. Or rather, spaces, our perceptions, and our imaginations are made up of a multiplicity of differences represented by overlapping assemblages of cities. Recognition of these different cities leads to some semblance of unity. That is to say, there is unity in complex, specific differences and patterns of similarity.

Calvino begins to blur the lines between our univocal idea of space and identity and opens up the possibility of thinking in multiplicities and endless assemblages that deconstruct the hierarchies of empire. He writes:

\[
\text{It is the desperate moment when we discover that this empire, which had seemed to us the sum of all wonders, is an endless, formless ruin, that corruption’s gangrene has spread too far to be healed by our scepter that the triumph over enemy sovereigns has made us heirs of their long undoing. Only in Marco Polo’s accounts was Kublai Khan able to discern, through the walls and towers destined to crumble, the tracery of a pattern so subtle it could escape the termites’ gnawing.} \]

141

We live in the constructed empire that Calvino writes. The world’s empires build up

---

141 Calvino, Invisible Cities, 5–6.
borders to disguise the multiplicity of spaces and identities that would defeat the binary fiction they require to maintain corrupted power. Yet, with our imaginations and the way that we imagine and articulate spaces and identity, we can work like termites, gnawing slowly at the walls that disguise the State’s inevitable porosity.

We can work like termites in our daily lives, breaking down a variety of different borders. Some will respond to structural oppression with powerful and effective rage, others must work to deconstruct their own internalization of binary thought patterns, and still others must offer legal, political, and social support for the oppressed, whose voices must lead the process of deconstruction and reconstruction. Throughout this process, the voices of Others must rise above the rest and their suffering must be made visible. Individualized action must not be disregarded because individuals make groups and are necessarily connected to others. Each small adjustment in thought or action adds to a network of horizontal, rhizomatic power that has the capacity to crumble walls and fuel imaginations.

Now, as immigrant activists, politicians, and the public push Congress for comprehensive immigration reform, past and current binary constructions of space and identity must be recognized. Although there will undoubtedly be a compromise between Democrats and Republicans, meaning that undocumented migrants in America will likely be granted citizenship while Border securitization increases to keep out future migrants, the underlying conception of Latino migrants as Others will go unquestioned and the same binaries will live on. Therefore, as we watch this come to pass, we must think rhizomatically and continue to challenge metaphorical and physical borders within and beyond ourselves.
Acknowledgments

First, I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to my advisor, Professor Don Snow, for allowing me to write a thesis about rhizomatic thinking, madness, rabbit holes, and border walls. I am most grateful to him for his patience. His confidence in this project gave me the faith to keep on keeping on. Over the last three years Don has offered me the space and time I needed to push myself and write in tune with my rhythms.

This thesis would not have been possible without the regular support and encouragement of Professor Emily Jones. Throughout the year her clarity of mind and creativity helped pull me out of the rabbit hole more than once. She dedicated hours to this project and always gently led me in the right direction. When I wrote nonsense for a month and thought my project impossible, she was there to say, “It is possible.”

After every day and night writing this thesis I returned home to Alida and Genevieve—who, without fail, held me when I cried and laughed with me when I couldn’t speak. I thank them for not laughing at me when I proposed to write about non-linear thought patterns, othering, and Alice. I owe my mental health to them.

Last but not least, I want to thank my parents for offering me the opportunity to study and think at this liberal arts institution. They saved my entire life to give me this gift and I am more grateful than I can say. I hope that my efforts and dedication will service as evidence of my gratitude to them.
Bibliography

*Works Cited:*


http://whp.uoregon.edu/dictionaries/nahuatl/index.lasso.


“U.S.-Mexico Border Crossing Deaths Are A Humanitarian Crisis, According To Report From The ACLU And CNDH.” *American Civil Liberties Union*. Accessed April


*Background Research:*


