

AN INTRODUCTION

Proyecto Boston Medellín As Pedagogscape

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In an anthropological spirit, then, I propose the following definition of the nation: it is an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. The nation is imagined as *limited* because even the largest of them encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic boundaries, beyond which lie other nations. No nation imagines itself coterminous with mankind. ...Finally, it is imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings. These deaths bring us abruptly face to face with the central problem posed by nationalism: what makes the shrunken imaginings of recent history (scarcely more than two centuries) generate such colossal sacrifices? I believe that the beginnings of the answer lie in the cultural roots of nationalism.

—Benedict Anderson,

Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism

Conversations are efforts toward good relations. They are an elementary form of reciprocity. They are the exercise of our love for each other. They are the enemies of our loneliness, our doubt, our anxiety, our tendencies to abdicate. To continue to be in good conversation over our enormous and terrifying problems is to be calling out to each other in the night. If we attend with imagination and devotion to our conversations, we will find what we need; and someone among us will act...and we will survive.

--Barry Lopez

Eden is a Conversation

This is the oppressor's language // but I need it to speak to you.

—Adrienne Rich,

"The Burning of Paper Instead of Children"

Benedict Anderson's definition of nation first appeared in print in 1983 and has since become a canonical idea in the way scholars throughout the social sciences and humanities conceptualize—in agreement or in resistance to—this idea of nation. To truly understand and challenge the consequences Anderson's imagined community, as many scholars argue, we must widen our gaze that stops at a national border to examine the consequences and possibilities in our lives and our planet that are influenced by transnational economic and cultural flows within a 21st century context of globalization. Arjun Appadurai examines these cultural flows and how globalization has intensified the their unprecedented speed, volume and geographical reach. Springboarding from ideas that French poststructuralist theorists Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari developed, Appadurai argues that like a rhizome, global cultural flows take the shape of a "diasporic public sphere" and not as stemming from just one (Western) center. Instead these flows of global cultural economy emanate from multiple directions in chaotic, uneven, and unpredictable ways. To study these transnational cultural flows, Appadurai conceptualizes five overlapping "scapes": ethnoscapescapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, finanscapes and ideoscapes. I propose two ideas here. (1) Because not all storytellers and stories in the world have the same access to mobility in this "diasporic public sphere" and rhizomatic process to global cultural flows, increasing equal access must begin by intervening in the cultural flows of (imperialist, neoliberal) dominant cultural producers of a dominant global image about people, events and countries occupying less dominant positions of cultural flow. (2) For us to move from a national imagined community to a transnational imagined community we must add a sixth scape: a pedagogscape. In other words, a pedagogy that channels our study of these cultural flows into something we—as students, professors, administrators, and community members—can *do* with them. Proyecto Boston Medellín 2010 and 2011 is our ongoing experiment with putting into practice this kind of 21st century pedagogscape with faculty members and young emerging artists, architects, writers, historians, journalists, urban planners, filmmakers, literary critics, television producers, marketers, and scientists of communication in two undergraduate and graduate educational institutions in two countries: the Universidad Nacional de Colombia of Medellín in Colombia and Emerson College in the United States.

Our idea and practice of the PBM as a Colombian-U.S. pedagogscape pilot project springboarded from a research project: our transnational community literacy archive called “medellin, mi hogar / my home, medellin.” This archive attempts to create and sustain a long-term alternative narrative force that expands and complicates the global archival landscape of Colombia in general and of Medellín in particular. I co-founded and co-direct this project with my partner Jota Samper, an architect and urban planner currently finishing his Ph.D. at MIT. Jota is a native of Medellín, Colombia and graduate in the Department of Architecture of the Universidad Nacional de Colombia in Medellín. He has designed and studied the physical design and socio-economic narratives of architectural and urban planning projects over the last 12 years in 7 countries and four languages from the perspectives of architects, planners, government officials and the community members, usually impoverished and/or displaced who live in the structures and spaces. I am a U.S. native raised in the border region of the San Diego-Tijuana border, a former international journalist of human rights issues, and an historian of Latin America who has taught research writing at universities and in communities in three countries and three languages in the last 15 years. Between 2002 and 2007, Jota and I regularly traveled between the United States and Medellín to be with family. We began to see these transnational journeys as a form of privileged mobility for us as academic storytellers to regularly cross borders and to do so with our stories.

Our stories differed radically from the dominant global narrative that dominant cultural producers circulate about Medellín. Each time we returned to the United States from Colombia, this difference between what we experienced and what people knew and were willing to believe about Colombia began to chafe in our consciousness, then blister and finally bleed. As we moved through our professional spaces of university archives, libraries, faculty meetings and classrooms we noticed a stark absence of study about Colombia. As we moved through our community spaces of global and local media the headlines screamed Violence! Narcotrafic! Poverty! As we moved through our private life spaces of family emails, phone calls, and holidays together, we became less able to politely shrug off the fears and jokes our family members and friends told us (kept in cultural circulation) about how relieved they were we were not “kidnapped” in Medellín or had returned drug addicts. In the last hundred years, the majority of academic, media and cinematic production in Hollywood and in Colombia have focused on violence. It is not that there is not truth to narcotrafic or violence in Medellín and in Colombia. Due to a 60-year undeclared civil war ranging countrywide, Colombia has the highest number of internally displaced people than any country in the world. In 1991, Medellín was deemed the most dangerous city in the world, based on the number of homicides per month and year. This was the same year that the United States was bombing Baghdad. It is absurd to us, however, that in 2004-2007, when the City of Medellín implemented a massive physical transformation of the city building with more than 200 state-of-the-art design health clinics, schools, cultural centers, public parks and internationally award-winning libraries and affordable transportation connecting all city residents to these spaces, the dominant global representation about Medellín barely registered a blip in the dominant cultural flow. Even when Medellín’s homicide rate in the early 2000s had plummeted to the point that it was lower than that of U.S. city Baltimore, Maryland, people in the United States instead watched popular television re-enacting the life and times of Colombian druglords in shows like “Entourage” and Hollywood films like “Blow.” These images can even have power over life and death: many people we encounter in our daily lives in the United States think that Colombian druglord Pablo Escobar is still alive and in their minds picture not the actual Pablo, but instead Hollywood actor Johnny Depp, the actor who in the movie “Blow” played not Pablo but the *United States* druglord George Jung.

When Colombians’ stories do become published and cross the border, another kind of displacement often happens. The storytellers are stopped at the border that their stories are crossing. Colombians are among the most denied VISA applicants in the world. Colombians need visas to travel to nearly every country in the world. In a competition of who gets to tell the stories of the City of Medellín, Colombians lack the socio-political and economic resources to compete with dominant international and especially English language media and academic outlets. In this way then, Colombians’ stories about Colombia, about themselves, are displaced to the periphery of the rhizomatic cultural flow that represents themselves and their own country. The scholarly, community and sometimes media stories about violence is very important and in many cases fundamental to more profoundly understand violence and to address the hopes and multiple perspectives regarding human rights. In the international arena, however, there is a consequence of this voluminous production about Colombia as *only* violence: it reduces the global image of Colombian culture, the Colombian people and Colombian past, present and future to nothing more than violence.

The idea of radically complicating the direction and narrative content of this massive cultural flow of a global cultural imaginary about Colombia seemed overwhelming daunting. Where would we begin? Our archive began with a question in Medellín, Colombia: What happens when the official, academic and popular stories about your

hometown do not match what you archived in your family album? Our response has been to build, over the course of the last four years, an ongoing transnational community literacy archive. In particular, community members not only choose to talk about truth commissions and their trauma of displacement—they also want to talk about resilience, the way they built their homes, their communities, the city of Medellín. This ongoing archive, which now includes 1,500 hours of stories with 450 displaced families in Medellín, is multi-institutional and multi-lingual.

We began working on this archive in 2007 as part of a civic engagement project, DukeEngage Colombia, which we also founded when I was a Mellon Faculty Fellow teaching in the First Year Writing Program at Duke University. Our Colombia program is a small part of Duke University's massive DukeEngage program, "which provides funding for Duke undergraduates who wish to pursue an immersive (minimum of eight weeks) service experience by meeting a community need locally, domestically or internationally."¹ With distinct programs in more than 20 countries, DukeEngage seeks to live up to its motto: "Challenge yourself. Change your world." In 5 DukeEngage Colombia programs between 2008 and 2012, we will have brought 33 students from Duke University and 4 students and teachers from Emerson College to work on our alternative archive in Medellín. As a core part of this program we created "Programa Compañera/o," in which university students from the Universidad Nacional de Colombia in Medellín applied to be friends who educate our Duke students about their city, mostly by socializing with them.

We have found over the past five years that this youth-to-youth program has been among the most pedagogically successful dimension of DukeEngage Colombia. Many of these youth remain friends for years. Eventually, Colombian university youth began working on our archive project too. By word of mouth among Duke and Universidad Nacional students and via flourishing blogs, Facebook sites and thesis and art projects in which the Duke and the Colombian youth write in multi-media ways about their experiences together in Colombia and beyond, our DukeEngage Colombia program has received 50% more student applications every year. During every application season, we receive worried phone calls from parents when they learn their daughter or son has applied to our Colombia program. *Is what we see on the news true?* Often they then add, *Well, Duke University would not have a program there if everything we see on the news is the only truth.* This parental conceptualization and eventual acquiescence to their child's participation in our program in Medellín reveals the dominant power that parents and students in the United States are granting to an elite university (Duke) to represent an image of another city (Medellín) and country (Colombia). In a global sense, the number of U.S. and Colombian students moving across the U.S.-Colombia border is small; but in a transnational university context it is a significant pedagogscapeal move.

We decided that if this kind of informal transnational, bilingual youth exchange has steadily gained public momentum through student writing that youth themselves are circulating through their own circulation networks, why not engage this kind of transnational pedagogy in our already existing formal institutional curriculum? This would also allow us to engage with a problem that has always haunted us. We could bring students from the U.S. to Colombia with relative ease because U.S. citizens do not need a visa to travel and Duke University paid their entire 8 weeks of travel and living expenses and Colombian families, teachers and youth open their homes and lives to our U.S. students. In stark contrast, it had been nearly impossible to bring Colombian youth to the United States, largely because of the expense and time involved in the travel visa process the U.S. requires of all Colombians. There is a gross difference between what a U.S. dollar and a Colombian peso—in the value system of global capitalism intertwined with neoliberal politic—can buy. This way that cultural capital directly affects economic capital in turn impacts the mobility of stories and storytellers. It also highlights the way that most U.S. international study abroad and civic engagement programs, including ours, are dedicated to a one-way cultural flow from and back to a U.S. university center. The long-term outcomes of these programs then occur within a framework of a national imaginary not a transnational one. We decided that the student texts and our increasingly successful archive provided us with enough proof that it would be worth, in the name of reciprocal pedagogy, reversing the cultural flow of who gets to represent the image of Colombia. This time we intended to channel our official academic resources to move Colombian university youth storytellers and their stories across the border to the United States. Representing Emerson College, Duke University and MIT at a meeting in July 2009 at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia in Medellín, we presented pedagogical possibilities we saw in themes emerging from these student social media and academic texts at a meeting with the Universidad Nacional's deans, administrators and faculty members. Everyone around the table spoke of this project in terms of academic research, pedagogy and relationship building between our two universities and curricular goals and practices. Everyone around the table agreed that we should begin this

¹ Cite website.

journey. Proyecto Boston Medellín was born. For both years, we chose themes with a social justice theme. But we wrote the theme descriptions in the call for applications each year in what we hoped was a broad enough way to inspire each Colombian student applicant to propose and create a project that was not “writing to the test” but rather was an organic reflection of what she or he really wanted to explore or communicate. We did not want artists to develop projects according to a fantasy image they might have about a U.S. audience. We wanted each artists’ project to be an organic and authentic engagement with her or his own lived experiences, curricular approaches and private and collective imagination. The themes in 2010 and 2011 respectively were “Medellín: *violencia* is not the whole story” and “MUJERES: Medellín / WOMEN: Medellín.” In each one-paragraph project description we strategically framed these themes within the dominant representations (of Medellín as nothing more than violence or of women as nothing more than sexual objects) within the dominant global cultural flow. Our main goal: how might each artist, in the medium and topical approach of their choice, complicate this dominant global image?

Proyecto Boston Medellín 2010 & 2011: What Does Writing Have To Do With It?

Men [and women] are not built in silence, but in word, work, in action-reflection.

– Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

We developed PBM’s pedagogscape by engaging with three questions. (1) How can we merge the border crossing steps of moving storyteller with her story from Colombia to the United States with already-existing curricular goals of our respective curricular goals, (inter)disciplinary practices, and university institutional structures and resources at Emerson College in Boston and the Universidad Nacional de Colombia in Medellín? (2) Within our already existing curricular structures, how can our project reach the largest possible university and community audience? (3) How can we develop this project in a way that at its core integrates academic research, the arts and social engagement among students, faculty, administrators and community members? Because I co-directed the curricular direction of PBM from my academic experience researching and teaching first-year composition classes, I will respond here to the question people constantly ask me about my classes’ role in PBM: What does writing have to do with it?

Research Writing and Community Literacy As Art Exhibition?

The most obvious reason we decided to make this project an exhibition and not just a classroom project is to audience exposure. A class project would expose these stories and storytellers to 54 people; an exhibition opening night could expose them to 400 people and an ongoing physical and virtual exhibition would expose them to 5,000 people or more. A live in-person exhibition provided time, space and energy necessary to us to work toward a concrete and public goal. It provided a concrete time and space for community members, artists and faculty, students and administrators across a wide range of disciplines in the arts and the liberal arts to engage with our stories and storytellers. On paper, an exhibit has a relatively seamless logic with both our schools’ missions. At the Universidad Nacional de Colombia in Medellín, we worked with students in the Department of Architecture and Art. These students developed their art projects in three classes. At the Universidad Nacional de Colombia in Medellín, Professor Luis Serna, Director of the Master’s Degree in Visual and Fine Arts taught an art and theory class and Professor Fabian Adolfo Beethoven Zuleta Ruiz, historian and social anthropologist and director of Extension e Investigacion de La Facultad de Arquitectura / the program in Community Action and Research taught a class on mobility and social theory of cultural projects. In the First Year Writing Program at Emerson College in Boston and at the Universidad Nacional in Medellín Department of Languages as facilitated by the program in Community Action and Research, I taught multi-lingual research writing classes. Emerson College is the only undergraduate institution in the United States where students acquire a liberal arts degree solely through the arts. A large percentage of the Emerson faculty are themselves highly acclaimed professionals in their fields. This means that academic scholars are teaching, researching and publishing together with poets, film producers, novelists, theater directors, documentary photographers, sound and light engineers and scientists in communications disorders. The combination of the professional, artistic and academic expertise, interdisciplinary reach and interest in combining all of this with community projects of both Emerson College and the Universidad Nacional de Colombia seemed, in fact, an ideal pedagogical environment for this ambitious pilot pedagogscape.

I decided to model my PBM writing classes after community literacy projects that dedicated an entire semester to community-university collaborations that work toward a final research writing project for an audience that includes university and community. I was especially inspired by Paula Mathieu’s “Not Your Mama’s Bus Tour,” in which she held writing workshops with unhoused adults in Chicago. This group wrote scripts and choreographed a bus tour

to show residents and tourists *their* city. This city is a stark alternative to the official city Chicago bus tours which focuses on wealthy areas, monuments and gleaming architecture and parks in the image of “The American Dream”. This alternative bus tour revealed the city living in poverty, crime, racism and socio-economic and political abandonment. In one story about their personal anguished experience of going to a public dentist clinic for those without health insurance, the storytellers distribute toothbrushes to the tourists on the bus. Aside from the performative textual nature of this community literacy project, what struck me about “Not Your Mama’s Bus Tour,” was that the storytellers were not only accompanying their stories as they themselves told them to their audience; they were doing so by *moving their audience* to the spaces and contexts in which these stories happen. This reverses the cultural flow of what usually happens: the stories usually travel to the audience, abstracted from the storyteller and the story context. The audience then is reduced to reader. The story is reduced to a sanitized version of words on paper: a text (without context). Unless the readers can connect their own memories of lived experiences to their reading of the text, they only read this story with one out of their five possible senses: they never have to smell, taste, hear or feel the story. Scholars of learning in the social sciences, humanities, and sciences have long proven that the more we engage with information with all of our senses, the more we can retain what we learn, the more it can *mean* to us.

At the debut of each annual DVD we complete for our alternative archive project, we also attempt to bring story, storyteller and audience together in one room. In this theater debut in Medellín, a powerful but ephemeral moment, the community members (who tell their own stories in the videos) are the protagonists, critics, audience, and respondents. In a temporary inversion of power in such theater spaces, the community members have more prestige and voice than the politicians, media and university people also in the room. The community members and their stories are (literally) the biggest visual, audio, and physical presence—on the giant film screen, filling the majority of the 400 theater seats, on stage and booming through the speakers. The other audience members at least for a few hours cannot abstract the story on the giant video screen from the flesh and blood storyteller shaking their hand. My experience with this kind of literacy event in which story, storyteller and audience interact has always made it much harder for me to abstract the story and storyteller as existing outside of relationship with me. How might we develop a pedagogy that does this? How might we research whether audience members at our archive and PBM events feel the same and why this matters?

So, I decided my writing classes would work toward a semester-long series of writing projects that built toward a common project in some way related to a PBM exhibition. In the last two years, more than 120 Emerson students across 9 of my First Year Research Writing classes collaborated with PBM exhibits’ young emerging artists via Facebook and video-conference to bring the *art* and the *artists* to this exhibit. Each class semester operated in its own discrete curricular structure and did not depend on the writing class I taught in the next semester. Each class and student evaluations of it, however, were a core influence and inspiration for how I designed the next semester’s course. In retrospect, I see that each of the course designs and semester-long writing projects actually built upon the previous ones and in this way have come to form a rhizomatic course design and series of pedagogical practices.

Course 1 This class project did not yet interact with young emerging artists from Colombia. This was a semester-long project in which students made a multimedia, bilingual annotated bibliography. We focused simply on researching the ways that our Emerson College and U.S. citizen or resident status granted us access to the global cultural flow of information representing Colombia. Students were encouraged to explore themes and genres that had drawn them to study at Emerson College: music, art, the environment, theater, literature, poetry, film, photography, journalism, photography. Finally, we compiled two one-page multi-media annotated bibliographies from each of the 54 students into a book. Students examined how a genre (annotated bibliography) many of them abhorred as dry and “unartsy” actually involves design and play adhering to or resisting genre norms. We titled the published version “*violencia* is not the whole story: 108 things you might not know about medellín.” For the final reflection assignment, each student wrote questions they wanted to ask the then Medellín mayor and Colombian presidential candidate Sergio Fajardo. Students realized how their interview questions had much more depth and breadth than their first week’s questions about Colombia *because* they had done the annotated bibliography. Finally, they had to attempt to access the very same resource for each of their annotations without their Emerson College or U.S. citizen or resident status. In other words, could Colombians in Colombia access the same source of information about themselves? To the students’ surprise, less than 50% of the sources in our book were accessible to Colombians in Colombia without the kind of institutional status and geographical location we had in the United States. Thus, a cultural flow of an image of one nation (Colombia) heavily favored access to those in another nation (the United States). At the end of the semester, we exhibited this annotated bibliography to Emerson and community members.

A few students stood on stage under a spotlight. To an audience arranged in a circle around the stage, students read out loud their one-page annotated bibliography against the large screen backdrop of the way they had visually designed it in our book. Each student then ended by informing us if Colombians in Colombia and Emerson students in the United States had equal access to this source.

Course 2 The next series of research writing classes focused on a different problem: researching and writing grants to bring the Colombian student artists and architects to present a specific project at Emerson College. Here, we ran into two daunting problems. At first it was difficult for most of my students to understand why they would ever need to know how to apply for grants and why we were working “with real live people” they had never met and who “had nothing to do with them”? The responsibility also scared them. They did not want to disappoint the Colombian youth if they “failed.” In retrospect I see that this is indeed a lot of responsibility for 18-year-olds to grapple with in their first year in college. This fear nearly crippled the momentum of our class willingness to move forward with the project. The second problem we encountered we discovered at the end of our project: nearly all the U.S.-based grants committees responded to our applications informing us that they would be very interested in moving the art across the border, but not the artists. In other words, these grants would move products (stories) but not people (storytellers).

Course 3 For the second year of PBM, I was invited to teach a research writing course in English at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia in Medellín during their inter-semester month-long session. These classes take in place in July, are not required and occur during their only vacation between June and December. I was shocked to find that this class was full within 24 hours of its posting. This had nothing to do with me as a person or a teacher. The students did not know me. They did, however, understand the need for mobility of (their) stories and (themselves) as storytellers and the crucial role that writing and writing in English plays with this mobility in the world. This is what they signed up for:

For our ideas to have global social meaning, we—our ideas, our work—have to cross borders. Do you want to apply to a university or submit a grant proposal, an article for publication, a project of exhibition— in English— but do not know where to start? In this course each student will complete—in English—an application for a grant, scholarship or university of his or her choice. We will emphasize creative projects that have a social engagement component. Making art, architecture and any other creative project requires research writing. Research writing is central to collaborations, funding, exhibition and publication. The art of grant writing requires multiple research dimensions from various disciplines. Grants require a specific and engaging description of your project. Applications require you to place your project in the theoretical and thematic context of your academic discipline. You must also write about your project within the intertwining contexts of Medellín, Colombia, and U.S.-Colombia transnational relationships. You must also place all of this in the context of your personal biography. Finally, you must write about why your target audience(s) might be interested in your project. The art of this writing then requires you to connect your academic discipline and creative project theme with research-writing skills from various disciplines: history, anthropology, literature, art, architecture, political science, communication. There is no guarantee that completed applications will be awarded. The completion of the grants, however, will be a powerful dimension to a professional portfolio no matter the outcome of the grant. Students must bring to the first day of class a specific application they will research and write during this course and a description of their creative project (one paragraph). Students must possess a basic knowledge of English but do not need to be fluent in English.

We completed our writing in steps. (1) We read examples of successful grant applications and academic/professional portfolios of successful artists, including Teddy Cruz (architect/artist); ERRE (artist); and Kanarinka (artist). In this process we also learned about art and artists who work transnationally throughout the Americas. (2) We researched grants that were awarded by the institutions to which each student was applying. (3) We modeled our own applications after ones that had been accepted. We gave and received written and oral critiques on our writing at every class session. We wrote and revised in teams. I designed teams around project themes and paired strong English speakers with students who are less comfortable in English.

By the second week of class, I had reviewed nearly 100 pages of writing from the students. They wrote in Spanish, English, Portuguese and German. It became clear that all 14 students, contrary to what I was told usually happens in these inter-semester classes, were going to stay in the class. To my surprise, the students even requested an extra day of class to make up for the holiday (Colombian Independence Day). I regularly held class for 5 hours, instead of

3 hours, three days a week. In the fourth week, I met with some students at 6am before they began work or class to work with them on their final drafts so they could meet their August 1 application deadlines.

Pedagogical needs began to take shape, sometimes hitting us like a freight train that upon retrospect we realized we should have seen coming. The first pedagogical trainwreck? Audience. Almost immediately, it became crystal clear that although the students could name their audience (a person in the U.S. in charge of my application) and had dedication (forfeiting their vacation time and getting up at 4am to complete their writing homework), they could not imagine what they should write to their target audience. To these Colombian students, the question on an online grant form (*Tell Us About Yourself in 250 Words*) was read as coming from another planet. *Write about myself? What do they want to know? Why do they want to know it?* Colombian universities do not require a personal essay in their applications. In daily life, you do not spout off private information about yourself. In the U.S. this biographical essay is usually the assignment my students usually take to with most ease and passion. They love to write about themselves. They've been doing it their entire writing lives in school.

This and other assignments for my Colombian students were terrifying (and sometimes creatively paralyzing). We just sat there in class blinking at each other. Reeling with this challenge of a room full of students with more *ganas* / desire to learn to write than I had ever seen but coming from a writing context I, as a teacher, student or writer, had never experienced, I felt like I just might drown in failure. This seemingly simple application question that was our key to transnational mobility had forced our dissonant writing cultures to crash into each other. That day I gave them a homework writing assignment that posed a different question. *Regarding this question, what are you afraid of?* They began to write volumes, feverishly. *I am afraid of abandoning my family. I am afraid of what I don't know. I am afraid of losing myself in another culture. I am afraid of being alone, of being penniless, of being unloved. I am afraid of my rage.* Among all of their writing, a theme began to emerge. Each writer had to somehow come to terms with *the idea* of the need to *imagine* beyond the mountain valley to an unknown (English speaking) audience and to tell this stranger about *myself*?

Working within this cosmology of written fears, I designed an assignment that took another step back from writing directly to the application question. In pedagogical terms this approached the grant application more in line with Colombian culture of proper and formal introduction between strangers. In writing terms, we focused on concrete skills for *the practice* of *how to research* about this new audience. We began this by turning again to virtual communication and image: each institution's website for each student's application. In class, we turned our gaze from each other and instead to the photographs, videos and written word texts on the website glowing from the large flat screen on the wall. We then worked with the same kinds of pedagogical techniques I teach as a core part of the First Year Writing Program at Emerson College. Inspired by Joseph Harris's book *Rewriting: How To Do Things with Texts*, we began by making lists of key words and images we found on these websites and discussed what we would later *do* with them in terms of "forwarding" and "countering" and "taking an approach." I applied John Trimbur's two textbooks, *Reading Culture: Critical Contexts for Reading and Writing* and *The Call to Write* in terms of how to research cultural, political and economic *meaning* behind these key words for the foreign audience thousands of miles away from Medellín. Since nearly all the applications required it, we then turned to the genre of academic proposition statements in Kenneth Bruffee's *A Short Course in Writing: Composition, Collaborative Learning and Constructive Reading*. For example, one student applied to study at the Frei Universität Berlin in Germany. He researched the website to learn about the university's mission statement and specific program interests and then researched these in the context of German history. One of this university mission statements is "liberty." This university, the website tells us was founded in response to the WWII division that created West and East Berlin. In the 2010 context, what did "liberty" mean now? How might this student merge this mission of "liberty" with those of his program at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia in Medellín? Working with key words and personal statements are never as simple as they might seem, especially when working transnationally.

Nearly everyone chose to begin their drafts by writing in Spanish. Very quickly, this revealed two more important transnational challenges to applying the teaching writing in a pedagogical context. First, the students could not find a way to conceptualize in Spanish how to imitate the structure and tone of the English-language proposition statements. After in-class discussion about why, we came to realize it is because Bruffee's proposition statements are very culturally determined and in a way that require the writer to frame her ideas into a representation of and engagement with institutional, generational, gendered and national power structures of U.S. imperialism that many of them struggle against. These proposition statements were requiring these Colombian student writers not just to translate their ideas into another genre and language; they were forcing the them to *assimilate* their cultural and

relational frame into a narrow U.S. cultural and academic approach that mirrored the U.S. academic direct, entitled, blunt style. This style their cultural upbringing and way of life in Colombia finds counterproductive to building and sustaining relationships, especially in terms of respecting elders and other authority figures. This was more than simply having a “crisis of authority.” To explain this, let me put it another way. In what we might say, just for the sake of argument here, Colombian terms. On paper, this proposition style is simply arrogant writing. In the form of a U.S. tourist in Medellín, this proposition style embodies “the ugly American.” In the form of a U.S. military general burning coca fields, a U.S. embassy official standing behind a bulletproof window of the embassy visa application line, or a U.S. politician discussing free trade agreements with Colombia, this proposition style is, in no small part, what sustains their stories and themselves as storytellers in a peripheral position within the dominant global cultural flow that (mis)represents Colombia. *Yet, a proposition statement is precisely what we needed to be able to move over the mountain and across the border to talk to you.* This general feeling of rage and helplessness and ambivalence regarding Colombian international mobility being controlled by U.S. policies and procedures was not new – to any of us. Naming it as part of our writing process was new. We decided as a class that we would forge ahead by writing out our ideas first in Spanish and then at the very end move toward not translation but translanguaging.

Naming what we were doing and the structures of power within which we were operating and against which we were resisting—at every class period—helped us keep writing. We considered the ideas in Caroline Ramazanoglu’s edited volume *Up Against Foucault: Explorations of Some Tensions Between Foucault and Feminism* as a model for our own approach to writing applications. The cover of this book depicts a male and female tango dancer, leaning into each other. It is a visual metaphor for the articles in this volume which analyze the consequences of the absence of a gendered perspective in Foucauldian theories of power, while at the same time maintaining what the feminist writers find meaningful in his theories. The Colombian students then began to focus on “I” statements and fumbled with performing how to promote themselves in writing (*I have worked as a mechanical engineer, I speak three languages, I am a first generation college student, I am an Afro-Colombian woman from Chocó*). On paper, they began to see an image of themselves, of their accomplishments and place in the world from a perspective of empowerment. Ironically, writing in the language of the oppressor, in this careful space of being *aware* that one is doing so and with a critical eye toward it’s role in socio-economics and politics of power. Part of maintaining a sense of dignity and authenticity with this power maneuver of writing up against our target audience doing so in a plurilingual way: Spanish had equal value (and often more meaning) than English in the room and on the initial drafts. We studied and applied a theory which scholar of rhetoric and linguistics A. Suresh Canagarajah identifies as “plurilingual.” This theory is now rapidly circulating throughout Composition, Rhetoric, Writing Studies, and Linguistic academic circles interested in studying World Englishes (United States, Asia, Australia, England, Europe). Plurilingual focuses on the ways that people who speak multiple languages and dialects communicate with each other. Canagarajah argues that in his native South Asia, plurilingual pre-dates colonial times and in this way is part of the ecology of the culture of the regions.

In our class, plurilingual meant that Spanish was not to be translated by exchanging one word for another, but rather was to be strategically integrated into a process of transnational meaning communication. In this process, the students were able to distinguish what part of their project was about *them* personally, what was about *their subject* (community members, issues) and what about this they were willing and/or inspired to revise to communicate to an English speaking U.S. audience. The impact of their writing moved far beyond just fulfilling the application at hand. It impacted the way they framed and reframed their entire art project and personal, academic and professional reasons for doing it.

Course 4 Back in the United States at Emerson College, I incorporated the writing produced that July regarding the PBM project as the first texts we engaged with in my bilingual (Spanish and English) research writing class. This class followed the same curricular goals as the Emerson first year writing program college-wide, with a twist: all coursework and writing assignments would be conducted in English and in Spanish and students had to apply to be in the class. This application process involved them reading the syllabus that outlined our course project and filling out a brief online form answering questions about why they were interested and what their concerns might be with such an experimental class. This ensured we had a mix of Spanish-speakers from Latin America and Latinas/os from the United States and non-Spanish speakers who had all chosen to be in our class. This allowed us to begin with what presented itself as a sometimes vague but clearly present *ganas* / desire to be in this class and an underlying understanding of a socio-cultural and economic connection between the United States and Latin America. We

switched our pedagogical focus: from direct fund raising through grants to the socio-economics involved in the public writing necessary to the transnational mobility of Colombian stories and storytellers. The Universidad Nacional de Colombia in Medellín paid for the Colombian faculty and artists' plane travel so the pressure of our "failing" to raise money for the Colombian artists was removed. Our writing was still, however, very much about an intertwining context of funding, immigration policy, academic research, and art. Eventually we realized what we were doing was creating an simultaneous theory and practice of writing studies pedagogscape: studying the role of writing in moving Colombian storytellers with their stories across the U.S.- Colombian border through the prism of Appadurai's overlapping ethnoscares, mediascapes, technoscapes, finanscapes and ideoscapes.

A team of students who wanted to stay on the PBM project after the first and second research writing classes worked with groups of students in this third class. Students read the previous writing classes' annotated bibliography. We put this text in conversation with other academic texts about immigration, art theory, and social justice. Then we built a blog to create a public image of our project that complicates the infamous dominant global image of Colombia as reduced to violence, narcotraffic and poverty. Our website included syllabi, sample grants and student reflections about what they learned from doing them in photographs and documentary videos from our previous classes. It also began to include samples of the Colombian students' art and biographies. We updated the design of our blog depending on which target audience we anticipated next. Our first audience was Emerson College, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, MIT and Duke University administrators, faculty members, students and potential funders. This, we hoped would help us begin building an audience for the final exhibit and also win funding from various departments within Emerson College to mount our exhibit.

Our second audience? The U.S. Embassy and U.S. immigration. We revised the overall design of the blog for a series of three weeks when the Colombian students had begun their application process for their travel visa to come to the United States. For example, we (temporarily) removed some of the harsher critiques against anti-immigration law and in its place discussed how the PBM project furthered goals of international democracy. Instead of emphasizing first what we might learn from the Colombians, we emphasized first what they might learn from the U.S. We did not change the truth, but we re-designed our presentation of it to more convincingly complement the content, tone and spirit of other official writing that U.S. immigration requires (letters, online applications, proof of citizenship, bank statements). For our redesign, we analyzed academic texts about immigration policy as well as the texts from the U.S. embassy outlining the U.S. visa application process. This took unexpected pedagogical twists and turns with consequences I was not always prepared for emotionally or pedagogically in the classroom. For example at the beginning of every class I ask if anyone has any announcements? This is for them to inform us about cultural events or updates on their research. As soon as the Colombian youth began their visa application process, my students in our writing class always asked for an update on the Colombians' visa process. Both years the day the Colombians were at the embassy, I went about my workday with a knot in my stomach. The second PBM year, like the first one, a Colombian student called me on my cell phone, her voice shaking as she shivered in the high Andes air outside the U.S. embassy in Bogotá, crying. The embassy had denied her visa. The first year this visa denial happened the embassy official said it was because the student did not speak enough English. The second year this visa denial happened, the official had refused even to look at inch-high stack of documents she had compiled for the interview. The application process, which had taken 6 months and cost 6 months worth of minimum wage income, was, in 5 seconds, denied. The embassy official, the student said, did not even look her in the eye through the bulletproof interview window. When I narrated this story, my own voice trembling, during our class update session, three of my students began to cry. In the next class period, a student read her writing assignment out loud to the class. She had chosen to put Gloria Anzaldúa's article "How To Tame A Wild Tongue" and the PBM student's visa denial in conversation with another text: her own lived experience with this subject. She narrated how the U.S. embassy has denied her mother's visa application to visit her in the United States—7 times. At one point, she had to stop reading her essay because she began to sob. Again, class members were in tears. Because as one student in a previous class has put it, "it's not just about them over there and us over there." This emotional engagement between students in classrooms across two countries helped them understand in an immigration context a bit more what Adrienne Rich meant in her feminist critique of patriarchical culture when she wrote "this is the oppressor's language but I need it to speak to you."

The third kind of public writing my students did focused on peer reviewing the art of the Colombian artists. We peer reviewed photographs, videos, and written word artist biographies and project descriptions. Because we are a bilingual class, we were also able to translate from Spanish to English and from English to Spanish. The focus of our peer reviews? Helping the artists communicate their art projects to a U.S. English speaking audience who might

know little to nothing about Colombia while at the same time also reach a Latin American and Latina/o audience. We communicated in four dimensions of pedagogical space that engage with a cultural flow cross the U.S.-Colombian border. (1) Virtual (live video conference, Facebook and email); (2) In Person Academic (in-class conferences, one-on-one translation, and the exhibit); (3) In Person Social: (at cafes, parties, and clubs off campus in Boston and in Medellín); and (4) Latina/o Fourth Space. Many of the Latina/o students offered what we started calling “a fourth space” in which students who are from a Latin American family and are U.S. born or U.S. raised could understand the Colombians’ struggle with translating from Spanish to English. They could also understand ways that writing in English and having to filter the representation of oneself (travel visa application) and one’s art (project statements and grant applications) forced them in some (often painful) ways to not just translate but to assimilate. These fourth space students understood the rage Colombians felt about this and also had a lot of experience how to channel this rage in productive artistic ways. A student Pablo Calderon, Puerto Rican born and raised and now in his first year in college in the United States shared with our class his angst about representing and forming himself, simultaneously, in two worlds. He wrote about how every day in his Emerson dorm room he listens to the Puerto Rican music group Calle 13’s song “Latinoamérica.” This song’s refrain includes

Soy lo que sostiene mi bandera,	I'm what that holds my flag,
La espina dorsal de mi planeta, en mi cordillera.	the backbone of the planet is my Andes.
Soy lo que me enseñó mi padre,	I'm what that my father taught me,
El que no quiere a su patria	he who doesn't love his fatherland doesn't love his mother.
no quiere a su madre.	I'm Latin America, a people and town without legs but that can walk.
Soy América Latina un pueblo sin piernas pero que camina.	You can't buy the wind.
Tú no puedes comprar al viento,	You can't buy the sun.
Tú no puedes comprar al sol	You can't buy the rain.
Tú no puedes comprar la lluvia,	You can't buy the heat.
Tú no puedes comprar al calor.	You can't buy the clouds.
Tú no puedes comprar las nubes,	You can't buy the colors.
Tú no puedes comprar mi alegría,	You can't buy my happiness.
Tú no puedes comprar mis dolores.	You can't buy my pain.
No puedes comprar mi vida.	You can't buy my life.

During his first semester at Emerson College, this song and refrain not only became a core source in his research writing assignment; it has been and continues to be the private soundtrack of his personal and academic life.

Some Final Thoughts

[T]he idea of fantasy carries with it the inescapable connotation of thought divorced from projects and actions, and it also has a private, even individualistic sound about it. The imagination, on the other hand, has a projective sense about it, the sense of being a prelude to some sort of expression, whether aesthetic or otherwise. Fantasy can dissipate (because its logic is so often autotelic), but the imagination, especially when collective, can become the fuel for action. It is the imagination, in its collective forms, that creates ideas of neighborhood and nationhood, or moral economies and unjust rule, of higher wages and foreign labor prospects. The imagination is today a staging ground for action, and not only for escape.

--Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at large: cultural dimensions of globalization*

This process was far from utopic. Working in intense collaboration, at every step over the last two years with two academic institutions, multiple disciplines and academic departments in two countries, two languages, and two cultures complicated further by a range of personalities and styles at times stretched patience, time and money on both sides so thin that our shoulders slumped with near defeat over our desks in the wee morning hours: us in the snow of deep Boston winter and our Colombian counterparts in the torrential tropical rains relentlessly pelting the city of Medellín. Working at this inter-institutional and transnational level meant giving up, to some degree, the pedagogical, schedule and linguistic autonomy I had as a teacher over my individual classroom. It also meant taking pedagogical risks that not all students embraced. The grant writing class I taught that first engaged my students in the U.S. with students in Colombia saw my end-of-year student evaluations dip from top score “5” average to a “3” point average. This was because there were students that raved about the class and students who railed against it. One student wrote “I was as interested in this course as Hitler would be Jewish human rights.” While this evaluation

is clearly an outlier comment, it does represent a taste of the controversy this transnational class stirred among my students. To teach this class again the following semester, I had to take a deep breath, revise my curriculum based in part on these student evaluations, and risk maintaining an uneven student evaluation the following year.

The beauty of working in collaboration and cross-generationally, however, is that there was always a student, faculty member or community member with perspective, a reminder of why working on this massive project against a tide of unjust global cultural flow. Over the course of 13 total classes in two countries at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia in Medellín and at Emerson College in the disciplines of art, architecture, history, anthropology, urban planning, and writing studies. We held two exhibits in which 11 young emerging student artists and architects from the Universidad Nacional de Colombia in Medellín came to Boston to exhibit more than 25 documentary videos, 500 photos, four published multi-media books, 8 paintings, 2 blogs and a newly launched website. These young Colombian artists and architects worked directly with more than 120 students studying in various disciplines in arts and communications at Emerson College. Both year's the Director of the Iwasaki Emerson College Library, Robert Fleming, asked to collaboratively curate a second three-month exhibit of the artists' work in the library space. This is the most visible space at Emerson through which all 7,000+ students and hundreds of faculty members who are also established writers, filmmakers, journalists, theater directors and visual artists in their respective fields. The Colombian artists and architects presented their art projects in 10 classes at Emerson ranging that included Women and Media, Power and Privilege, Research Writing in the Americas, Ways of Seeing: Theories of Art, and a Practicum for teaching teachers how to teach writing. In this way, these Colombians stories became an integral curricular part of more than 250 student's classes. Four of our PBM 2010 Colombian artists helped design and produce and circulate information about the second PBM2011 exhibit. They, now graduated, talked with PBM 2011 students about the visa application process and their experience the previous year in Boston. Clara Mojica, Alex Silva, and Isabel _____ helped organize a new dimension of to our PBM 2011: the exhibit debuted in a *simultaneous live broadcast in two cities*. We did this by opening the virtual portal of skype video chat where people were assembled in Medellín and in Boston for PBM 2011 opening night exhibition. In Boston, we exhibited in the Bill Bordy Theater at Emerson College and in Medellín we exhibited at AULA, an alternative art and academic university and community space in a neighborhood near the Universidad Nacional de Colombia. Camilo and Luisa and NAME OF ASST had invited the family members, teachers, and friends of the PBM 2011 artists to attend the exhibit in the AULA. Luisa had also invited NAMES OF THE WOMEN. During the four-hour exhibit, audiences in one city saw and interacted with the audiences in the other city through images projected on the large video screen and voices amplified through stereo speakers. Our gaze routinely looked up from the PBM 11 art exhibits to *also* see each other: audience-to-audience. Both audiences in both cities simulatenously watched the debut of each artists' documentary video. Afterward, the audience in Medellín spoke to the artist and the audience in Boston. Mothers and grandmothers congratulated their daughters as artists; artists and scholars critiqued the art; and audience members on both sides asked each other questions related to the exhibition theme of women. Ryan Catalani, a student in my current research writing class at Emerson and who became a central behind-the-scenes figure in nearly every dimensions of PBM2011 in Boston, said that interacting virtually with the women artists and scholars and activists assembled at EL AULA in Medellín was for him had all the wonder, awe and creative suspension of disbelief one group might have about the other that comes from walking through the wardrobe in C.S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia*.

After returning to Medellín, several of the Colombia student artists and architects won scholarships, grants and prestige awards for their final thesis and other art projects critiques deemed the top of their class at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia. Three of the PBM student artists and architects have been invited to return to Boston to exhibit their work or further their studies. My current research writing class continues to design our course blog, google docs course website and the PBM section on our *mobility / movilidad* website. Several of my students are incorporating the artists' multi-media texts into their academic writing for my class and 15 other Emerson classes. The Colombian artists' work has begun appearing in their academic arguments, bibliographies and in-class discussions across campus, in Facebook chats, and over beer at parties.

This sixth (pedagog)scape required at its core a similar kind of trust and suspension of disbelief regarding the other at our respective institutions in Colombia and in the United States. Here, I would like to say that I am in thankful awe at the trust and labor that faculty members, administrators, community members and students placed in this PBM project. This pedagogscape was not easy, but we gradually began to see that our drops of representation are indeed surviving the firehose of stereotypical information about Colombia constantly gushing in the dominant global cultural flow. We have effectively then, on two campuses, altered the global cultural flow of information about

Colombia. We have moved, in a small pedagogical way, from a national to a transnational imaginary.

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