



Tishman Environment
and Design Center



TISHMAN CENTER · JUNE 2, 2021

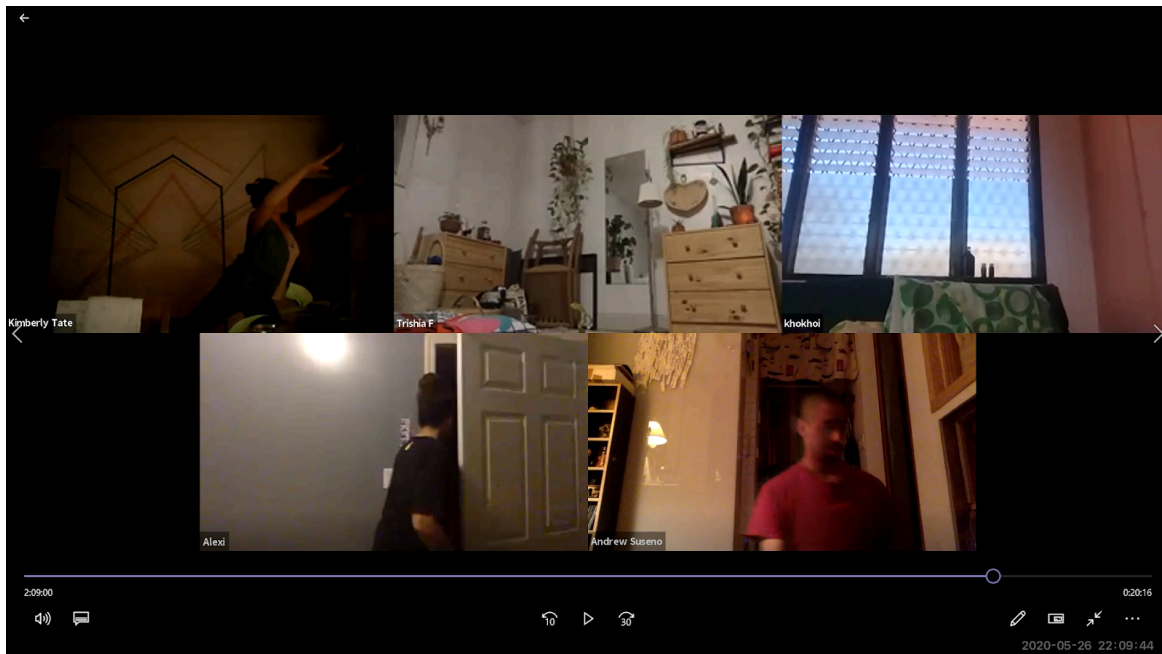
Faculty Grant: “Ecological Heritage as Embodied Resilience” by Kimberly Tate

(Written while on native lands of
Sioux, Osage and Kickapoo people,
presently known as St. Louis,
Missouri)

*How does adapting ancestral
wisdom through our creative*

*practices root us in times of
disruption? What models of
resilience do we already embody?
What ecological impact could
gestures of self- and community-
care for Black, Indigenous and People
of Color (BIPOC) have?*

*What does it feel like to make art
and move my body through these
questions with peers of my racial
affinity during a sabbatical year of
pandemic, social uprising and
postpartum healing?*



Late March 2020, I was two months into motherhood. New York City was a week and a half into COVID-19 lockdown and two months away from erupting into Black Lives Matter demonstrations. This was not the context I had imagined for this

project, but it turned out to be immediately appropriate.

I am developing learning materials using body-based and creative practices that center **BIPOC** folx, our **ecological heritage, intergenerational wisdom and resilience**. "Ecological Heritage" is a term I use to refer to the bioregional living world and nested cultural practices passed down generations.

This project builds on an assignment I have given first year Parsons School of Design students in my "Sustainable Systems" class. They collect reported climate data of their hometowns and have conversations with living elders about how people from the region have adapted to the environment over time. The idea is to **personalize the climate crisis and connect with strategies of past generations** which we might carry with us into the unknown future of the climate crisis. Throughout the semester, students are asked to reflect on their roots and consider what seeds they plant with the legacy of their creative work.

My intention with this project was to integrate body-based (somatic) practices and generative creative work to bring the inquiry even closer. My teaching methods are informed by embodied process. So, I proposed to prototype the process myself. I gathered a group of **six multi-**

disciplinary artists of Southeast**Asian heritage:** artist and writer,[Rhea Endoso](#)

(@theeverydaymystic_rhea);

interdisciplinary designer and UX

artista, [Trishia Frulla](#) (@trishiafrul.la);

movement-based performance artist,

auto-ethnographic writer and media

researcher, [KK de la Vida](#)

(@kkdelavida); somatic movement

educator, organizer and creator of

[Parcon Resilience](#), [Andrew Suseno](#)

(@parconresilience); artist and

creative strategist, [Alexi Transparent](#)

(@homesoul) and myself, artist,

embodied designer, organizer and

part-time faculty at Parsons School

of Design, [Kimberly Tate](#) (@architate).

I secured a gorgeous sun-lit lecture hall for Sunday afternoons that semester. I imagined us moving and breathing together, sharing sweet and spicy food together, asking questions to the wisdom of our bodies and connecting to ancestral and experiential wisdom IRL (in real life). We would reinterpret traditional Filipino, Chinese-Indonesian and Thai practices through our creative mediums in order to build resilience for a future of more frequent climate-related disruption. We would share our work in-process with a selected audience...

Instead we shifted Zoom, like most everything else, to make due during COVID lockdown. The pandemic

became a direct case study to witness our personal stress responses to the breakdown of our modern industrialized society, such as what we might expect of oncoming global-scale climate disasters.

We met for six sessions during the first three months of lockdown. Revealing the contents of our livingrooms and bedrooms, the project could not be abstracted from our specific life circumstances. I often had a four-month-old rolling on the floor next to me or nursing in my lap. We found a time on late Tuesday nights to connect across time zones because KK had traveled to the Philippines weeks earlier and was unable to return.

Prioritizing care and connection, we opened sessions with **social check-ins**, **somatic centering practices**, **acknowledging our occupation of native lands** and each person offering themselves **gestures of self-care**. Pushing against the hopelessness of getting back to business as usual, **we slowed down and named the grief and anxiety of this major life disruption**. Our old realities needed to be mourned as they broke open into another configuration we couldn't have otherwise so rapidly redesigned.



The project started with the abstract title, “Reclaiming Cultural Practices to Embody Climate Resilience.” What did it mean for us to *embody* climate resilience? Can *climate* resilience be in fact embodied? *Wait, how are we personally defining “resilience?”*

Shedding speculative explanations to get at our embodied, situational knowledge requires time and care. So the activities attended to by this grant project mainly involved resting with this question. We looked to our ancestors, objects of intention and imagery around us. We shared stories and exploratory movements with these symbols to approach our own living interpretations of this “resilience” buzzword:

Rhea felt resilience **rooted at home in her body**, built of enduring ancestral

features, whether or not she felt attached to a physical place.

Faith healing techniques were **carried through secrets** passed to the first born of each generation in KK's family. Resilience propagated self-determinately as she dug out the rocks and restored her lola's garden while on lockdown.

Resilience persisted through multiple uprootings in past generations of Trishia's family. When her blacksmith grandfather found work in the sugarcane fields of Hawaii, he **transformed** his overseas labor in the US into self-sustaining land back home for his family in the Philippines. Trishia also **transmutes** energy and material into resilience with her "TrauMonsters" process.

Discrimination and life-reshaping events molded determination and a fighting spirit into Alexi's father, who has a soft spot for animals and transmits love through food. **Tough coupled with tender** are the roots of his resilience, illustrated also in his daughter with great distinction.

Andrew's grandfather demonstrated resilience and **devotion to community** in organizing spiritual practice for their ethnic minority group in Indonesia, a virtue Andrew carries forward into this lifetime in nurturing anti-racist movement

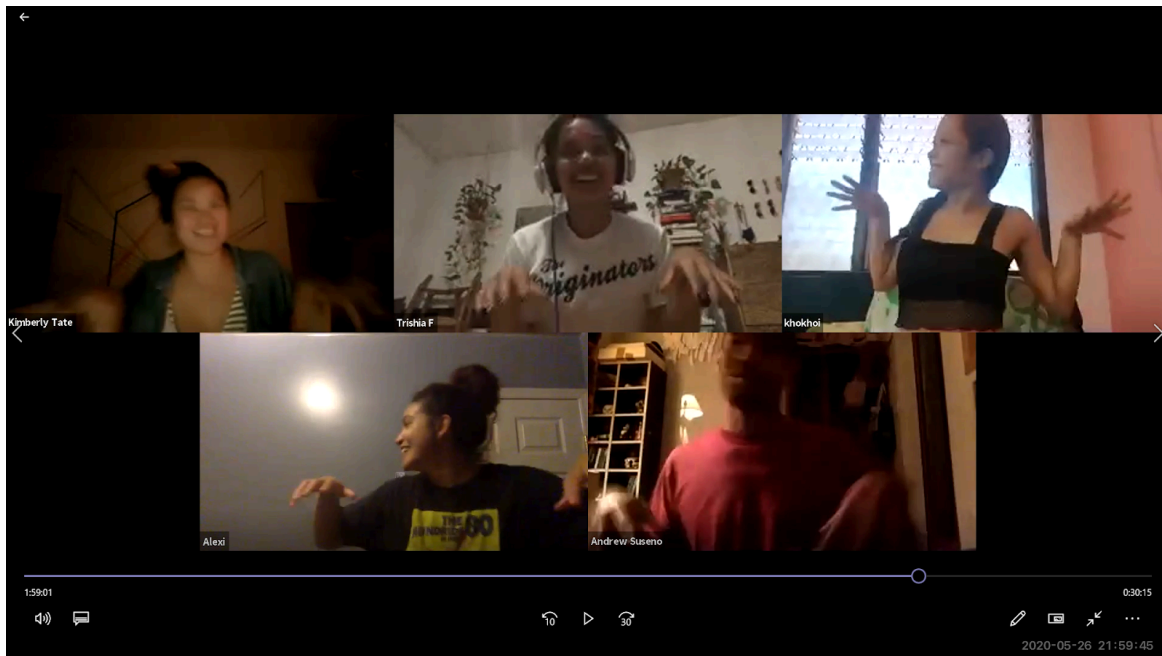
affinity spaces
through Parcon
Resilience.

Plant relatives,
such the
Longevity
Spinach in my
kitchen window,
also native to
Southeast Asia,
model resilience
by shamelessly
growing and
regenerating
year after year,
thriving through hot summers and
frozen winters and reckless cutting.
Not without support from
community, my own body and
psyche recovering from childbirth
and growing into motherhood during
a pandemic as well exemplifies
resilience!



We **traded notes and exchanged influences** just as our ancestors did.
We **affirmed resources we already had** among ourselves and **remixed our practices** like ingredients of halo halo, the Philippine version of shaved ice dessert. (My family's favorite toppings are sweet mung beans, jackfruit, coconut strings, ube ice cream, condensed milk and cornflakes). We recognized syncretism as a sweet strategy of resiliency. We further digested these awarenesses by telling stories

collaboratively, creating video
poems, writing, crafting, chanting,
dancing and collaging.



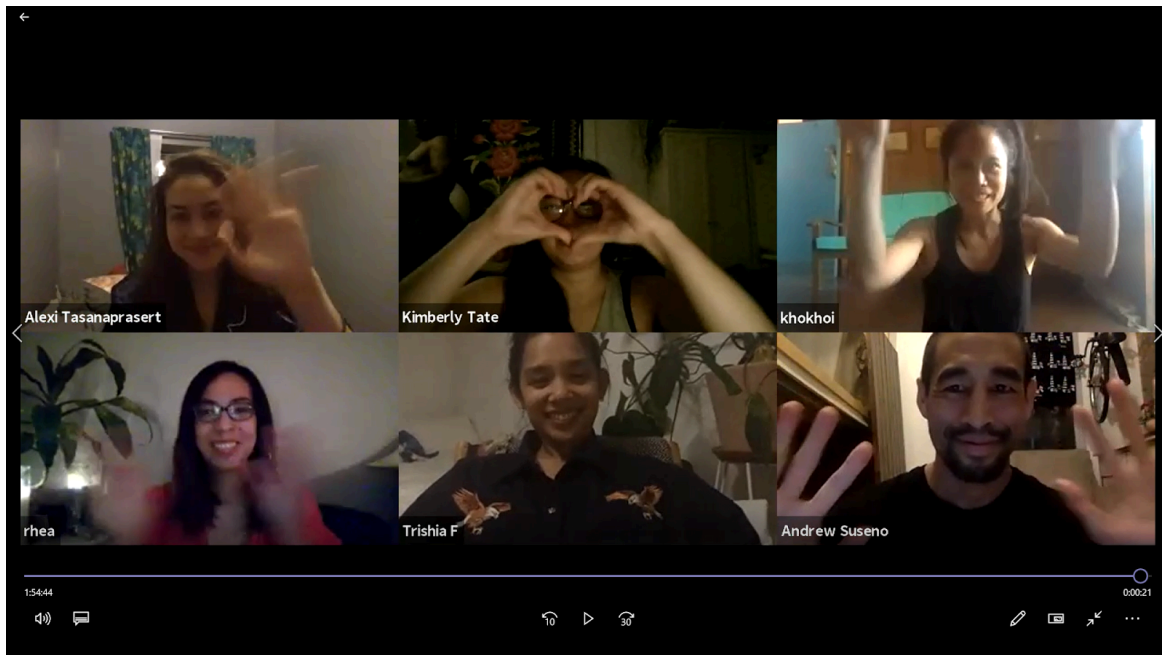
The pandemic personalized the climate crisis. Within the deep loss and struggles, this new model of reality has prompted us to **clarify what we need, who we need and witness how we will respond** to get a grip through global scale disruption. For myself, the experience of the past year has ritualized art, culture and community care as essential, therapeutic LIFE PRACTICES. Along with my hearty oatmeal champorado (made with chocolate) and vegetable hinatukan (coconut milk stews), they are the medicines that root and regulate my body, heart, identity and spirit within enormous personal and societal shifts.

Resilience is also in the gratitude we feel in acknowledging the interrelated factors, relationships and circumstances we depend on for our wellbeing. I am grateful for the great privileges of having the position, support and resources I need to critically rest, heal and reflect. I am grateful for my strong and tender body and meticulous, prayerful heart which carry the lessons of my ancestors. I am grateful for the labor, kindness, esteem and inspiration from my circle of care, especially my beloved life and parenting partner Akim Funk Buddha, my parents Glenda and Dennis Tate, heART sister Sadaf Padder and mentor Jean Gardner. I am deeply, deeply grateful for the life-affirming joy and optimism I experience in the presence of my son, Apollo.

Gratitude to my cohort of embodied truth seekers, mentioned above, who show up fully for their lives and for their people. **Gratitude to our ancestors and guides. Gratitude to our Earth Mother and the indigenous peoples who continue to tend to and protect her.** May we invest in the repatriation of their lands. (A portion of the grant funds were set aside for the Lenape Center, a small gesture in support of these efforts.)

I am grateful to have been prompted by this TEDC faculty grant. I

understand the endorsement of the selection committee as a willingness to invest in generational wisdom carried by Black, Indigenous and People of Color. This adds dimension to worldviews informing critical conversations on climate change in our design classrooms.



This project is nested within my own journey of embodied cultural restoration. There is no distance or abstraction between the field and the researcher. **This is a model of activism and movement building from the inside out**, more radical than grass roots. **Its impact is hyperlocal, happening at my most intimate and often uncomfortable frontlines.**

My breath affirms the depletion of human/cultural resources is linked to environmental degradation.

Particularly for Black, Indigenous and diasporic People of Color in the US, I believe self-care is ecological care. Self-recovery is critical to ecological recovery.

This embodied prototyping of climate resiliency learning materials continues. **I welcome connection with other values-aligned individuals, particularly BIPOC faculty, artists, parents and educators. I welcome further investment in strategic resiliency-building for BIPOC designers and culture makers through body-based unlearning and self-recovery practices.** I look forward to eventually moving and breathing and sharing these processes with others IRL when it is safe again to gather. I look forward to making place-based art with others outdoors and witnessing our embodied ancestral wisdom emerge in response to our urban ecological heritage. My inquiries currently take this form:

For BIPOC folx, transgenerational wisdom, our cultural practices and circles of care indeed root us in times of disruption. How does engaging them influence our priorities in life/work?

What forms do self-care as ecological care take for us personally? And what is the

*collective impact of our intimate
gestures?*



PREVIOUS

2021 Faculty Grant Presentations: Part 1

FACULTY GRANT

NEXT

Tishman Center Proud to Announce Joel Towers and Ana Baptista's role on the NPCC

FACULTY, HIGHLIGHTS, NEWS

Tishman
Environment
and
Design
Center,
The New
School

79 5th
Avenue,
16th Floor,
New York,
NY 10003

212.229.53
21
tedc@new
school.edu

SUBSCRIBE

Sign up to receive
our monthly
newsletter which
includes updates on
our work and
upcoming events.

HOME

ABOUT

CAMPUS
ENGAGEMENT

EJ DISRUPT
DESIGN: An
Environmental
Justice Movement
Fellowship

RESEARCH &
PRACTICE

NEWS & EVENTS

BLOG

[Tishman Center](#)