

Pedagogy and curriculum in development

Kimberly Tate, M.Arch, 500RYT

Part Time Assistant Professor

Parsons School of Design : Art, Design, History and Theory; School of Constructed
Environments

kimberlytate@newschool.edu

Embodied Design

Key themes: whole-body thinking, contemplative engagement, movement, somatics, experience-led, decolonial, trauma-informed, resiliency building, mental health and wellness, emergent justice, possibility, experimentation, BIPOC self-determination, empathy, intersectionality, relational ecologies, embodied teaching, embodied learning, haptic, immersive, project-based, first-hand, social-emotional development, design process, design research, self-awareness

Description

What is embodiment? What is embodied? How can attunement to sensing and perceiving with our whole relational being strengthen specificity of voice and cultivate empathy across difference? How can embodied exploration expand possibilities for innovation, build resiliency and creative, responsive engagement in the world?

The body is not neutral. Design is not neutral. Bodies and the cities, systems, customs, products and organizations they have built store our transhistorical traumas as well as our adaptive resiliency strategies. We largely overlook our bodies as possible sources of meaning that can ground our research, process, perspective and agency in design work.

Embodied Design is an experience-led and project based approach to design and social practice. As methodology and pedagogy, it emphasizes first-hand experience and anchors our bodies as primary instruments of research, insight and praxis in the world.

Embodied Design is approachable across creative disciplines to explore thinking, sensing and designing with our whole being. Concepts and modes of inquiry draw from somatics, movement, restorative justice, performance and contemplative practices to center embodied social-emotional awareness. This way of working can radically transform the whole design process from project goals to research methods, needs analyses, and testing of artifacts produced.

The work emerges to heal and decolonize us from philosophical underpinning that has taught us that our minds are separate from their bodies and that our bodies are not sources of wisdom. Descartes saying "I think therefore I am," and John Locke's 'tabula rasa' theory that at birth the (human) mind is a "blank slate" have had catastrophic impacts on planet Earth and the fate of humanity, which is perpetuated in modern education. Building upon an eco-feminist teaching legacy, may we remember that "traditional" knowledge is body-based and Earth-based and that the mind and body are in fact connected neurologically¹.

This approach centers the healing of transhistorical traumas, decolonizing ourselves, design and academia. Students and communities are not empty cups to be filled or fixed by teachers or designers. By leveraging and uplifting the value of lived experience, learning is decentralized. Teaching, learning and designing are embodied processes.

¹ The Vagus Nerve connects three brains. <https://www.changemanagementreview.com/change-and-the-three-brains/>

Full-being engagement in addressing life's demands expands possibilities for innovation, collaborative problem solving, integrated well-being, human connection, metabolizing stress and increasing joy in the face of difficulty. Deep listening to our felt understandings builds connection and creative, responsive engagement in the world. This is increasingly important for resiliency building in the face of the climate crisis, cultural erasure, systemic racism, economic collapse, etc. To survive, we need to face each day trusting in our capacity to respond to unpredictable circumstances.

Trauma-informed,² Embodied Design also emerges to acknowledge often overlooked experiences and care for our systemically marginalized identities. It may also invite us to connect to wisdom traditions that can help realignment and resiliency in the face of modern challenges.

Embodied Design is restorative, relational, anti-racist, Earth-based and socially-engaged future-building by design.

These methods have been informed by insights from a breadth of my first-hand research and experiences: architectural design-build projects³, somatic and contemplative movement studies⁴, public installation and performance art⁵ and community organizing. They have been developed in my teaching at Parsons School of Design within interior design studios, sustainability seminars and foundation year making/3D design studios. My work⁶ has also received support from the Tischman Design Center via [faculty grant \(2019-2020\)](#).

² https://www.cdc.gov/cpr/infographics/6_principles_trauma_info.htm

³ Such as those at Parsons: M.Arch Design Workshop (2010) and Solar Decathlon "Empowerhouse DC" (2011)

⁴ [Parcon Resilience](#), [Body Mind Centering](#), contemplative dance, [urban experimental dance with Akim Funk Buddha](#), Yoga 500RYT

⁵ [DANCITECTURE](#)

⁶ ["Re-embodying Cultural Heritage for Climate Resilience"](#)

Researcher Background

Kimberly Tate (she/they/we) is a multidisciplinary embodied truth seeker, teacher, healing arts practitioner, organizer and mother based in Flatbush, Brooklyn (unceded Canarsie Lenape land). She is the granddaughter of Alfred & Josefina Pacho Tate and Felipe & Rosario Alibadbad Serrano from the Eastern Visayas of the Philippines.

Trained as an architect (Parsons M.Arch 2011) her work outside the university has been invested in healing and decolonizing among her Black and Asian diaspora community through restorative, body-based contemplative and performative practices, public space installations and community gatherings. Between disciplinary boundaries, Kimberly lives and practices, teaches, mothers and performs - to dream, to heal, to make space for grief and joy, to build kinship and belonging, to honor and restore our embodied inheritance and to recover agency in spheres we inhabit and design.

She has performed and presented internationally and at The Highline, The James Gallery/Center for Humanities at the CUNY Graduate Center, Sheila Aronson Galleries at the New School, Downtown Brooklyn Arts Festival, Common Field Convening, Brooklyn Wildlife Festival, Women to the Front and Insitu Site-Specific Dance Festival. She has performed with Akim Funk Buddha, Andrew Suseno of Moving Rasa (Parcon Resilience)¹⁴@#, Walang Hiya NYC, Jill Sigman Thinkdance, among others.

In addition to teaching in the Parsons First Year and MFA Interior Design programs, she is founder of Studio Galaxxxia, a healing arts, performance and design consultancy. She is also a design educator at the AIA NY Center for Architecture and a recipient of a Tischman Environmental Design Center Faculty grant and a Create Change Fellowship with The Laundromat Project.

Curriculum

Developing skills for Embodied Design

Somatic Attunement : *What is embodiment?*

Guided contemplative and movement exercises attuning awareness of **interoception** and internal process of **sensing** and **perceiving**, situating experiences of our bodies in context. Techniques in nervous system self-regulation. Engagement in self-witnessing of reaction and response patterns to develop nuanced discernment and nurture trust in one's **felt sense** related to their **direct experience** as a powerful source of information, insight and agency.

Other explorations include:

- Interiority
- Personal space, our kinesphere
- Non-neutral view
- Connecting to Embodied Yes and No (skills: sensation and feeling-tone tracking, connecting to embodied Yes and No, deep listening)

Trauma-Informed Awareness : *What is embodied?*

Awareness of neurophysiological impacts of life experiences and transhistorical oppression to understand how social, cultural and historical narratives impact our patterns and responses to experiences. **Witnessing** self and witnessing others, we can deepen **empathic responsiveness** to the stories of power, privilege, oppression we carry and move toward structures of collective healing, understanding and increased agency.

- Embodied Land/Lands Acknowledgements

Embodied Design Tools/Techniques

[Slides presentation - Parsons FY Faculty Workshop](#)

Embodied Design Research, Development and Testing

Employing the body as the primary instrument in data collection and analysis of site and physical, relational and historical contexts that would inform subsequent design processes.

- Embodied Site and Context Analysis
- Daydreaming
- 1:1 scale physical measurement
- Body Experience Mapping
- Material Resonance
- Bodystorming
- Full scale prototyping
- Storytelling and Experience Sharing
- Body Language word bank

Projects / Exercises engaging disciplinary skills

- I. Journal: self-reflexive video or text entries weekly, may be developed through a social media account (medium, IG, youtube, etc) and on personal blog
- II. Body prop
- III. Personal Life Intervention
- IV. Social Intervention

Learning Outcomes / Shared Capacities

This course addresses several of the [Shared Capacities](#) of The New School:

- **Critical Analysis:** Developing ideas and arguments based on evidence of first-hand experience
- **Communication:** produce effective and appropriate media communication. Develop skills for empathy and deep listening across differences of experience.
- **Authorship:** Strengthen original voice and perspective to develop works.
- **Creative Making:** Generate original work that employs visual, musical, performance, or other creative practices; and Demonstrate reflection upon the iterative process of creating this work.
- **Cross-Disciplinary Thinking:** Understand concepts, theories, experiences, and/or methods at the intersection of design and embodiment; and combine these modes of inquiry to produce meaningful work.
- **Flexibility (Responsiveness) and Resiliency:** Take appropriate risks, rebound from setbacks, and persevere to complete a given course of action; and (Respond) and adapt to new situations through a process of continual development. Build their personal practices for embodied resilience and holistic well-being.
- **Working in Complex Systems:** Successfully navigate multiple projects or responsibilities (e.g., manage time, organize tasks, meet deadlines, and adhere to requirements and standards for completing); and Understand and work across institutional boundaries.
- **Ethical Reasoning:** Analyze how social, economic, and/or political systems interact with individual or group identities or experiences within particular cultural and historical contexts; and Articulate effective arguments in support of personal or collective values, judgments, or responsibilities by applying ethical concepts.