We all have patterns that have made our own lives harder, and may have even hurt people around us.

These patterns are both deeply influenced by the systems we live in and influence our ability to participate in transforming those systems.

This zine is about the belief that if we could all respond more intentionally to discomfort, drama, conflict and harm, the left might finally be able to stop destroying itself and be a true force in the battle against fascism, bigotry, capitalism and imperialism.

And it's about the idea that being more attuned and at choice in our bodies can make us better comrades, able to commit to solidarity and transformative change.

RO CHAMBO

www.becomingcomrades.com

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POLITICIZED SOMATICS

FOR ANTICAPITALIST TRAUMA NERDS

“Embodied healing means we can make choices based on what we care about, rather than react from survival strategies."

Staci K. Haines
The Politics of Trauma

“I wish I could separate trauma from politics, but as long as we continue to live in denial and treat only trauma while ignoring its origins, we are bound to fail.”

Bessel Van Der Kolk
The Body Keeps The Score

“Transformation, from a somatic view, means that the way we are, relate and act become aligned with our visions and values, even under pressure.”

Staci K. Haines
The Politics of Trauma

RESOURCES

ORGANIZATIONS

- Generative Somatics
- The Embodiment Institute
- The Embody Lab
- Healing Justice London
- Lumos Transforms
- Strozzi Institute
- Somatic Experiencing

TEACHERS

- Staci K. Haines
- Prentis Hemphill
- Kai Cheng Thom
- Nkem Ndefo
- Resmaa Menakem
- Rae Johnson
- Deb Dana
- Jennifer Mullan
- Adrienne Marie Brown
- Richard Strozzi
- Irene Lyon & Seth Lyon
- Peter Levine
- Stephen Porges
- Dr. Roger Kuhn
- Marika Hendricks

RELATED TOPICS

- The Polyvagal Theory
- Nervous System Theory
- Trauma Theory
- Neuroscience
- Decolonized Psychology
- Prison Abolition
- Somatic Abolitionism
- Transformative Justice
- Restorative Justice

BOOKS

“The Politics Of Trauma” by Staci K. Haines
“What It Takes To Heal” by Prentis Hemphill
“My Grandmother’s Hands” by Resmaa Menakem
“The Quaking of America” by Resmaa Menakem
“Decolonizing Therapy” by Jennifer Mullan
“Embodied Activism” by Dr. Rae Johnson
“Anchored” by Deb Dana
“Pleasure Activism” by Adrienne Marie Brown
“The Art Of Somatic Coaching” by Richard Strozzi
“Waking The Tiger” by Peter Levine
“When The Body Says No” by Gabor Mate

I BELIEVE IN PEOPLE.

Let’s just get that out of the way up front.

And even though we ***just can’t understand*** how some people act the way they do, and hold this blanket belief that “most people on the planet are trash”, we actually do know the formula to make a pretty well-rounded human being.

It’s really not complicated.

Give people what they need to **stay alive.**
Healthy food, clean water, shelter and clothing.

Then give people what they need to **thrive**.
Make sure they’re safe, physically and emotionally.

Raise them with care and **emotional attunement**.
Instill in them a sense of dignity, self love, and self trust. Encourage empathy, honesty, curiosity, clear communication, and boundaries. Help them learn to tap into their emotions and physical sensations without shame.

Give them what they need to **stay healthy**.
Mental and physical health care and a healthy planet.

Give them what they need to **grow**. Education, inspiration, and stimulation. And finally, give them a sense of **purpose and opportunities** to contribute to the wellbeing of all.

It’s shockingly fucking simple.

One of the reasons this is hard is because we have so many evolutionary instincts that work against us, unless we’re guided and practiced in other ways of being.

But I believe the biggest obstacle to nourishing the best in humanity is living in a world that's **designed to maximize profit for an already wealthy minority**, which ***requires*** chronic stress, competition, hopelessness and human division to remain functional. Because if we were all okay, we wouldn't put up with this shit for a fucking second.

This is why I'm a socialist / communist / anticapitalist.

I believe society can and should be designed to **minimize suffering** and **maximize health, wellbeing, potential and sustainability.**

I believe we are both **smart enough and capable enough** to build that society. I believe we have the skills and resources, the passion and the compassion to build that society.

So now, the biggest obstacles to *building* that world are **the ruling class themselves** (who will stubbornly cling to their obscene levels of wealth and the abusive power they wield in order to protect and grow it) and **our collective ability to agree on our values and work together.**

The frustrating thing is that **we also know how to have a revolution, overthrow a government, and install a new economic system**. Tons of societies have done it. It takes collective riling up, organization, mass solidarity, general strikes and ultimately, storming the castle (gently would be nice, but we know Teh Empire™ won't let go without a fight).

EXERCISES

Somatics is all about listening to your body, so my first piece of advice is to **listen to your body!**

This is NOT a practice of tolerating distress, pushing yourself super hard, or trying to overcome your automatic reactions through brute force. Nervous system work is SUBTLE, and can take a lot of repetition over time. If we try to push too hard too soon, we risk our system tightening it's grip.

Remember: ***THERE ARE NO HACKS.***
Buckle in for the long term, and I'm talking years.
Better to start now than keep delaying the benefits.

Orienting + Grounding
Orienting is a building block exercise that can help us develop the language to speak to and listen to our bodies. It's basically just noticing where you are. Slowly observing and feeling into yourself in your physical space. Grounding is something we can practice in response to activation, a way to tell the body, "okay you can stop screaming - I'm here and I'm listening."

Check out Irene Lyon + Seth Lyon (Smart Body Smart Mind) on YouTube.

Somatic Centering
This is an empowering practice I picked up from Staci K. Haines and her team. It is a guided or solo practice where we "center in length, width, and depth" which allow us to tune into aspects of our physical body we tend to ignore AND connect them to really moving metaphors. I love this practice.

Check out Staci K. Haines Centering Practices on YouTube.

Somatic Release
This can be a therapeutic or bodywork practice, but I do it on my own - I explore, experiment and improvise. If I'm feeling activated or haven't paid attention to myself in days, I'll sit down, tune in, and intuitively move, shake, vocalize, touch, express, yawn, cry, listen, repeat.

I still haven't found a great resource for this, but a therapist could help!

MAKING COMMITMENTS

I was introduced to the concept of commitments through **Staci K. Haines and Generative Somatics.** This can be a way to set an intention for your ongoing practice and to remember to connect it to the world around you. For me, memorizing and reciting my commitment every morning or before a somatic practice can really shift the entire energy of the day. Even if I woke up feeling kinda sad or maybe got thrown into a heavy emotion midday, returning to my commitment can put the bullshit and mess of regular life into a much more powerful and empowered context.

Like, yeah I feel kinda un-cute today and I'm real stressed out, but **I'm here for a reason.** I'm figuring out how to have an impact. I have a vision for a better future, and I'm not alone.

Your commitment can be written however you like, but one format is:

"I am a commitment to _____ so that _____."

This can focus on something personal, on the collective, or both. Some of mine have been:

"I am a commitment to tolerating and embracing more of my aliveness so that I can fully live in and act from my purpose."

"I am a commitment to transforming myself, so that I can help transform my community, so that we can transform the world together.

What or who matters most to you right now? What mantra would help you feel powerful, hopeful, intentional, and focused each day?

So. We know what kind of society makes great people. We know how to change society. We know who has to back down to make it happen, and we know how we have to step up.

That kind of leaves the challenge of the actual stepping up, which is what this zine is about. Even for people committed to change, going from **freaked out to active** isn't easy.

It takes a lot of courage, focus, and discipline to choose **reading revolutionary lit** over watching Netflix, to speak up when your friends might think you're **"too much"**, to have uncommon conversations, **figure out your role,** find the existing orgs, skill up, and stay consistent.

And once you get involved in something, you still need to work with others, listen patiently, **practice seeing conflict as generative,** and to start, manage, and maintain groups without freaking out and eating each other along the way.

All of this is hard emotional, psychological, sociological (and somatic) work.

Though many post-agricultural societies have succeeded to a degree WITHOUT the benefits of what we have now: tens of thousands of science and history books, the internet, scientific knowledge of trauma, neuroscience, attachment and so on. We have many legs up here... like a SPIDAH.

And I personally believe that **the key to unlocking our capacity for curiosity, discipline, courageous action and relational patience** lies in cleaning up our own mess, at least enough to not be sabotaging our collective efforts.

Somatic work is not the *only* important component of "cleaning up", but until recently, it's been an overlooked framework for most of us which has the potential to make everything else we do a bit easier and more effective.

OKAY CHECK THIS OUT...

So we start as innocent pure little baby meat computers who inherit some generational trauma and experience some abuse and poverty and prejudice and grow up knowing we'll die on the street if we don't hold down a job and then...





We become Malort-loving adults with painful survival patterns and depression and anxiety and we're disconnected from everything because it all sucks and we struggle with accountability and self awareness and boundaries...

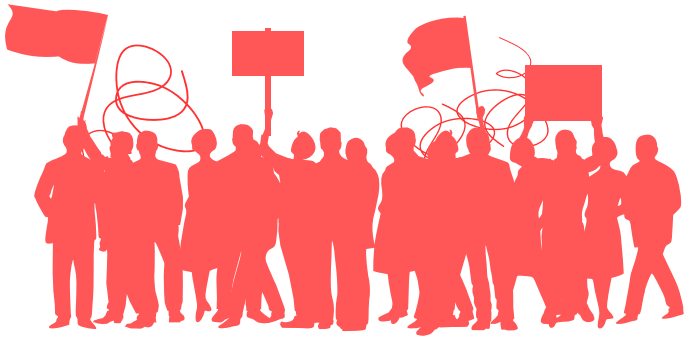
But then we try somatics and therapy and TOTALLY WOLF OUT and actually kind of clean up some of that trauma and those distorted thought patterns and shit, and we actually feel safe in our bodies for the first time in our lives...



And then we become this like, super healthy power couple (pretend they're interracial and trans) who feel like, connected and whole and relatively regulated, and like we're not perfect right, not ever but now we have the energy and drive to get involved finally...



STEP 5: ~~PROFIT~~ REVOLUTION!



Okay, obviously it's never that easy, but you get the idea.

START PRACTICING

Look into **somatic healing modalities** and find a professional to work with (there's somatic therapy, somatic coaching, somatic bodywork, and probably other integrations by now).

You can also **explore on your own**. There's always some risk of getting triggered, so use your best judgement if you think you may be at risk of a strong reaction. (Also don't sue me.)

If you have some baseline training in bodywork, therapy, or coaching, you can also **take classes on somatic work**. Check the Resources at the end for some pathways.

PRACTICE TIPS

Much of somatic work is focused around "opening" - unlocking, or untangling whatever is going on inside. There are a TON of exercises, practices, (even "hacks"...) that can potentially help us dig in and untangle whatever is stuck in here.

- **Be gentle and go slow.** If you feel too activated, stop the activity and feel for what's next.
- **Start with orienting, grounding, and centering.** Don't be afraid to make these simple practices a staple for years.
- **Let your intuition guide you.** Find some exercises to try and discard what doesn't feel effective, nourishing, or fun. If you're listening to your body, you're doing it right.
- **Your mileage may vary.** Be wary of the rising popularity of somatics as a marketing gimmick - videos and articles like "10 ways to Hack Your Vagus Nerve". Having said that, if you apply true intention, attention, and deep noticing, any practice could potentially be helpful.

PREPARING FOR ALTERNATIVE FUTURES

We have everything we need to build a society where everyone's basic needs are met - where people have healthy food, clean water, a safe and supportive home, free education, free health care, free mental health support, opportunities to contribute to society, plenty of free time and access to luxuries like travel and concerts and natural wonders.

Granted, it's 2026 as I write this and the threat of economic collapse, climate collapse, genocides we can't stop, the impending runaway crisis of AI, and authoritarianism are real.

That doesn't mean we don't have the resources. And that doesn't mean a better world isn't still possible.

So... what about **after the revolution?**

In that new world, we're going to have to actually step up and be the decision makers in society, which means we need to **get really clear on our values, our purpose, our self awareness and our skills.**

We'll have to be able to work together effectively, to listen, to collaborate, to compromise, and to make conflict and disagreement productive.

In this way, politicized somatic work is **practicing towards who we need to become** to participate in the world we all want to bring into existence.

Marx believed that organizing towards revolution would force us to acknowledge our interdependence and humanity - to overcome our bigotry and bullshit in service of solidarity. Somatics is the missing piece of how we do that in our mess.

SO WTF IS SOMATICS?

Soma is a Greek word that means "the living organism in its wholeness". It refers to our bodies as more than just our shitty meat suits, but our whole ass selves - *how we think, feel, behave, and relate to each other in the world.*

The definition of **somatic** is "of, relating to, or affecting the body." (Merriam-Webster)

Somatics is a **body-oriented** field of study and growing set of practices that can be used for both for healing as well as helping us become better comrades and **stay aligned with our values and goals, even under stress.**

Somatics is science-based (though running on a lot of theory) and non-religious (but can absolutely have a spiritual bent to it, if that's your kink). Somatic practices can be done solo, guided by a professional, or inside a group or organization.

"Embodied healing means we can make choices based on what we care about, rather than react from survival strategies."

Staci K. Haines from "*The Politics of Trauma*"

All somatic work seeks some kind of **transformation through a deeper connection to our bodies**, and somatic strategies have been integrated into bodywork, therapy, coaching, and even exercise.

The basic process usually boils down to increasing body (somatic) awareness, experiencing a process of opening or change, and **practicing new behaviors / thoughts / ways of showing up** that eventually become habitual or "embodied".

THE MIND-BODY CONNECTION

Rather than seeing the brain as the puppeteer that controls our mindless meat suit, we now know that our body does a ton of it's own detecting, "remembering", and decision-making.

Over our lives, especially in childhood, our body learns from experience and writes up "scripts" or "programs" for what stimulus is safe or unsafe, and how we should respond.

Around **90% of the signals between our brain and body actually flow <u>from the body to the brain</u>,** not the other way around. Most of the time, it's our body sending signals to our brain that inform what we think, feel, and do.

Our bodies have "knowledge" that we will never have access to (such as how to fight a virus) and "remember" things (such as childhood traumas) that we have no explicit memory of.

OUR BODY IS ALWAYS SPEAKING TO US

Most of us can probably tell when our body is hungry or tired. But in a lot of ways, **we ignore our signals** - we stop our tears, we silence our anger, we deny our needs. We may completely miss physiological signals that, "this relationship is hurting us" or "this interaction isn't safe", or "I'm overwhelmed and this pace of life is too much".

Signals can come as subtle, vague feelings, anxiety, depression, anger, numbness and tingling, brain fog and fatigue, sharp and dull pains, some people like Gabor Mate even theorize that they can come as chronic illness. **The body can be loud.**

When we can develop an attuned relationship with our bodies, we can start to **trust and understand signals** and have more choices for how to take care of ourselves and meet our goals.

Obviously, there are situations in which relationships should end. But there are also many unnecessary ruptures.

The promise of politicized somatics is not perfection - it's greater tolerance for imperfection, more awareness, resilience, more capacity, more skills and ultimately: **more choices.**

> "By becoming conscious of [our conditioned tendencies], we can grow understanding around our experiences, what we need to feel met, resourced and supported.
>
> We can learn how to increase our capacities to come back to a settled state and more social engagement that offers us more clarity, curiosity, connection and creativity. Or we deepen an understanding of what structural or material justice we need to fight and build for us all to access capacity – the ability to hold – in the first place.
>
> To become skillful in connection and to feel more agency in difficult moments, we use somatic practices to navigate complexity, accountability, making requests from a centered place, grounding, and relocating resilience on our own terms.
>
> These can lead us to be curious, disarm, open up, and transform our conditioned tendencies. We can start to embody new shapes, healthier boundaries, and a more centred commitment to what we care about and more capacity to navigate the vast unknowns during these times and in visionary organising."
>
> **Healing Justice London**
> https://healingjusticeldn.org/methodology/we-are-portals-towards-liberation/

CONFLICT + SOCIAL CHANGE

Conditioned tendencies are our automatic ways of responding to situations in our lives. We learned to react in certain ways based on our life experiences. These can include, thoughts, emotions, behaviors, and even ways we hold our body.

Conditioned tendencies don't just show up for us though - they show up in **every relationship we have with others.**

During conflict, we may quickly respond with anger, silence or fawning. Some people take things less personally, and some get activated at the very hint of feeling judged or abandoned. Some people tend to think everything is someone else's fault, and some always assume everything is their fault.

Even with this short list, you can imagine **how much our conditioned tendencies can create added mess on top of the core friction,** keep us from effective collaboration, working through conflict and staying in relationship when things get uncomfortable.

Most people can relate to this in their friendships, family ties or romantic relationships. And all of that is relevant to how we show up in community and in movement work as well.

It's never been more crucial for us to build collective working class power, and for the 99% to work together to overthrow the existing oppressive structures and the villionaire class and build something better together.

But to do that, **we must find ways of navigating our collective and individual mess** - to collaborate, support each other, stay flexible, and avoid behavior that fractures relationships, projects, organizations and movements.

WE ARE WHAT WE PRACTICE

The actions we repeatedly take become habitual. They become "embodied". These are unconscious, automatic patterns of thinking, feeling, and behavior.

In somatics, these are called **"conditioned tendencies",** but can also be called survival patterns or trauma patterns. These automatic reactions are strategies our nervous sytem comes up with to keep us safe, but are not always "smart" and can end up hurting us or people around us.

We call the broader picture of our conditioned tendencies our **"current shape",** and a lot of somatic work is aimed at teasing apart our current shape and build a new one through practice.

Our shape can show up a number of ways:

Patterns of thinking: If we were ridiculed a lot as a child, we may have developed a belief that we're not good enough or struggle with automatic thoughts like "you're such an idiot."

Patterns of emotions: If we experienced unpredictable patterns of love and punishment as a child, we may unconsciously respond to affection with fear and suspicion.

Patterns of behavior: If we were regularly punished as a child for expressing emotion, staying quiet and stuffing our feelings may become an embodied pattern as an adult.

Patterns of holding: If we regularly feel like the world is an unsafe place, way may unconsciously clench our jaws, tighten our shoulders, or hunch over and constrict our stomach muscles in a protective posture. This may become an embodied "shape" for us (in a very literal sense).

STRESS + TRAUMA IN THE BODY

The most recent popular theory of how trauma works* is that in response to overwhelming experiences, we shift into a state of activation (known as "fight / flight"). This is healthy and we evolved this response to keep us safe.

In order to get back to our baseline, we must complete the stress cycle by discharging that energy and returning to safety. When we can't either fight or flee as a form of discharge, our nervous system tends to assume the danger is still present.

At that point, we flip a switch into survival mode, which can run a different program depending on our life experiences so far. The Polyvagal Theory suggests we have 4 options for both temporary (healthy) and chronic activation:

1. **Stay on high alert** *(fight/flight, sympathetic, hyperarousal)*
2. **Give up and collapse** *(shutdown, dorsal vagal,* hypoarousal)
3. **A blend of the two** *(freeze)*
4. **Oscillating between the two** *(thanks, I hate it)*

When we get "stuck" in survival mode, somatics refers to this as having "stuck energy" though other people take the metaphor quite literally. Basically, our internal alert system is just stuck in the "on" position, and it could take any number of factors to get it to turn back off again. It can take a long time.

Truth is, we don't fully understand what's happening under the hood. But practitioners continually observe that that somatic exercises CAN elicit a **"release" of energy**, a relief of trauma symptoms, and a shift out of a stuck nervous system state.

* This lineage comes from Peter Levine's observations on animals under threat and Stephen Porges' Polyvagal Theory. Other people have built upon or critiqued these theories.

THE CONTROVERSIAL TAKE

There is one core value held by everyone I've encountered who is involved politicized somatics, which is still extremely controversial on the Left, as well as with liberals and conservatives, and that's this:

Every person in this world deserves access to **safety, dignity, and belonging.** Every person in this world deserves the resources they need to survive and thrive, access connection, develop a sense of purpose and opportunities to pursue their dreams.

Everyone in the world started as a baby human nervous system and has been **shaped by circumstances,** largely beyond their control or awareness.

Every person on this planet deserves the time and support to transform when they have created pain in the world. We would be far better off if we had resources devoted to this now.

The safer our world is, **the more excellent we can be** to ourselves and others.

The more we understand how our bodies work and the more connected we are to our own bodies, the more **tolerant and flexible** we're going to be with other people, <u>without sacrificing our self worth, our boundaries, our goals, or our wellbeing.</u>

FOR THE SAKE OF WHAT?

Politicized somatics asks not just how we transform ourselves, but how we commit to our personal transformation **for the sake of something greater** than our own healing, wellbeing or success (though those are perfectly worthy journeys).

It goes beyond asking questions like, "How can I heal my trauma?" or "How can I stop chasing unavailable people?" and asks **how we can re-shape ourselves in ways that benefit collective and systemic transformation.**

How can we be better community members? How can we be better comrades? **How can I stay level-headed during conflict, even if my body is having a fit?** How can I stay true to my values and goals, even when I feel the urge to criticize, dehumanize, or push people away? What does it mean to not just believe in solidarity, but to embody it? What practices do I need to keep me showing up for myself and my community commitments without burning out?

If we can collectively **respond more effectively and less reactively** to discomfort, drama, conflict and harm, the Left might finally be able to stop eating itself and become a true force in the battle against fascism, bigotry, colonialism, imperialism and capitalism.

(Hell, if you ask me, greater body self-awareness could impact the values, beliefs, and behaviors of people we tend to see as problematic at best and enemies at worst.)

Can we learn how to engage with the world in a way that doesn't perpetuate suffering and trauma while trying to eradicate abuse and harm? Can we finally tap into our anger and our action without burning out and abandoning our movements every few years?

THIS ALL SOUNDS VERY WOO...

I know these definitions can sound pretty floofy, so let me try a more material, if imperfect metaphor:

Life without somatic (body) awareness is like **driving a car without knowing anything about the car, or how to drive,** not having a clue what any of the controls or buttons or lights mean...

...and maybe doing everything you can to forget you're even in a car to begin with (sup whiskey and Netflix... love you).

Developing somatic awareness means we've learned about cars, and the particular car we're driving.

We pay attention when the lights go on and off, and we know what they're telling us. We know when to press the gas or the break, when to put gas in the tank or change the oil.

We notice when smoke starts floating out from under the hood, or when there's a weird smell, or when the breaks sound weird, and **we tend to it.**

Developing somatic awareness - being in conversation with our vehicle and attending to it - means we're better able to get where we're going, safely, and without running anyone over.

And hopefully, we can have a more tolerable (even enjoyable) ride getting there.

DISCONNECTION IS NORMAL

Being disconnected from our bodies is **very, very normal.** It's a common result not just of severe trauma but also just modern life under capitalism. A lot of us start our journey being fairly disconnected most of the time. Even after years of practice, I'm still not behind the wheel most of the time.

I fully believe this is part of how we're so able to dehumanize, abuse, exploit, exile, oppress and dominate others. We didn't evolve to exist in such a distracting, alienating, stressful world.

We also didn't evolve to be body-awareness gurus. We evolved to survive through teamwork and automatic decision-making. So give yourself (and others) a break while on this journey.

YOUR SOMATIC BINGO CARD

Everyone has unique life factors that impact both their somatic shaping as well as how challenging it is to open and transform the mysterious inner workings of our body.

We're all influenced by systemic, cultural, familial, geographical and personal factors that create a unique obstacle course. Trauma and mental health history, race, nationality, sex, gender, sexuality, age, physical ability, illness, addiction, chronic pain and fatigue, neurodivergence and so on will all impact ***How We Are*** in the world as well as how we transform.

And even though exploration of body awareness and a good amount of somatic knowledge is technically free to all, **professional care and professional training are still more accessible to the privileged,** making white and well off people overrepresented in the field, and leaving marginalized groups and their wisdom and experience underrepresented. The ***politicized*** somatics groups are trying to change this.

POLITICIZED SOMATICS

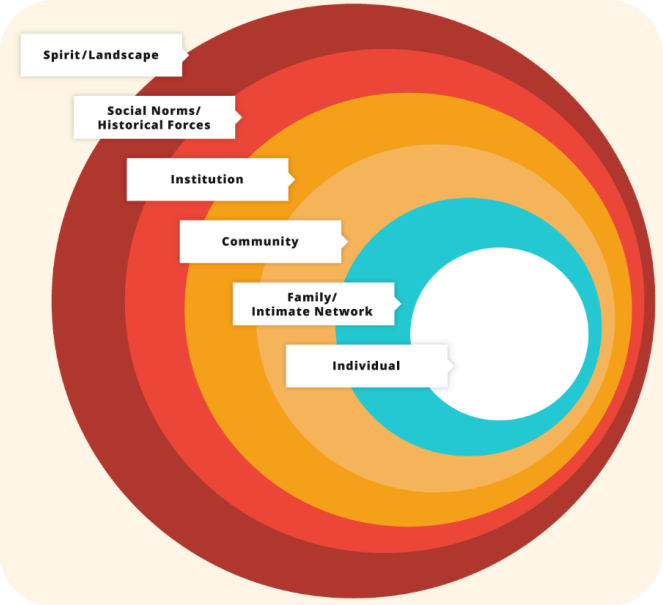
Somatics is a framework for individual transformation.

Politicized Somatics makes an intentional connection between our individual journeys and the systems we exist inside of, both acknowledging how these systems have harmed or otherwise shaped us, as well as asking **how our individual transformation can make collective and systemic transformation more possible.**

Politicized somatics acknowledges that all of us are impacted by, and some of us are particularly burdened by systemic factors like poverty, racism, sexism, and bigotry as well as capitalism, colonialism, and imperialism.

Sites Of Shaping (from Generative Somatics)

"We are shaped by all of these Sites, and also have the power to shape them. The larger the circle, the more people and power it takes to transform the Site. All these Sites are interconnected, with social norms, culture, and the economy expressing through each."



Generative Somatics just closed it's doors after 16+ years, but leaves us with wisdom and documentation of their lessons learned.

Check out:
generativesomatics.org

GS was co-founded by Staci K. Haines and others who follow in the footsteps of this org.

Also check out:
www.stacihaines.com

ERASURE OF INDIGENOUS AND CULTURAL ORIGINS

No field or framework that seeks to improve our lives is perfect, and somatics is not free from critique.

There's concern that **somatics draws from Indigenous, Black and Asian traditions of embodiment** and community without giving credit to this lineage and without any of these groups experiencing the financial benefits of the field.

This doesn't mean the frameworks and practices aren't useful or that we shouldn't dive in anyway. But it does mean that the field must continue to figure out how to set this right, and that's exactly what a lot of the politicized somatics groups have been trying to do (see Generative Somatics and The Embodiment Institute especially).

SCIENTIFIC CRITIQUES

You may have heard recently that The Polyvagal Theory (PVT) is bullshit or that *The Body Keeps The Score* is an all-bad book. The reductive social media version of some very complex scientific conversations can have an effect of throwing the baby out with the bathwater. If you're curious (and serious at all), do some looking into arguments on both sides before taking a stance. The criticisms of PVT are highly specific and do not invalidate the majority of the theory. I also personally don't agree with every criticism of The Body Keeps The Score, though some are perfectly valid. No need for it to poison the entire field, however.

HARMFUL, REDUCTIVE SOCIAL MEDIA SLOP

Somatics, trauma theory and The Polyvagal Theory have all become mainstream popular, particularly on social media and for influencers. There is a LOT of toxic shit online about vagus nerve hacks, "regulating your nervous system". My advice: READ MORE BOOKS AND BEWARE THE INTERNET.

A NOTE ON REGULATION + DYSREGULATION

The popularity of trauma discourse online has led to the oversimplification and misuse of terms like trauma, trigger, abuse, narcissism, regulation and dysregulation, so I want to offer some gentle corrections.

`Being calm and focused` ≠ `being regulated.`

`Being pissed off, freaked out, sad frustrated or lonely` ≠ `being dysregulated.`

You can be **dysregulated and act calm**.
And you can be **regulated and feel enraged.**

Having a **regulated nervous system** means our nervous system is flexible and resilient - we have the capacity to tolerate activation, and our system can become activated and return to baseline without too much trouble.

Having a **dysregulated nervous system** means we tend to get activated more easily, the activation tends to be more intense, we stay there longer, and either struggle to return to baseline or are "stuck" outside of our Window of Tolerance, which could keep us fight/flight, in shutdown, in freeze, or fluctuating.

This can lead over time to what is called "allostatic load": wear and tear on our organs and systems due to our nervous system chronically operating outside of what is most optimal for our bodies to function well.

Dysregulation is not raising our voice during an argument, crying after a breakup, grieving an active genocide, being afraid of being hate-crimed, or feeling lost in a soulless career.

We don't become dysregulated because we aren't trying hard enough or because we're overdramatic. It happens when the body is overwhelmed and moves into a stuck survival state. PTSD is a perfect example. **Dysregulation should be used like a medical diagnosis**, NOT like a judgement.

Despite what the influencers say, **we can't actually "regulate our nervous system".** Sure, we try to coax it. But our nervous system regulates itself - if the right circumstances are present, when it's ready, and sometimes that can take years.

MY LONG, SHITTY JOURNEY

I had what I believe to be a dysregulated nervous system for anywhere between 3 and 15 years, after experiencing childhood emotional abuse, multiple teenage social traumas, my own "worst thing I've ever done to someone", and the subsequent chronic stress of a string of painful, high conflict relationships that ranged from narcissistic abuse, to "abusIVE" behavior, to the self abandonment of chasing the unavailable.

For years, I had mysterious digestive issues, skin issues, breathing problems, heart problems, random sharp and dull pains, numbness and tingling (I even went to the hospital once with symptoms mimicking a stroke), chronic anxiety and depression, intrusive thoughts, brain fog and fatigue.

No doctor could ever find anything wrong with me. They just said, "You're perfectly healthy. It's probably just anxiety". Replace anxiety with survival mode and they were right.

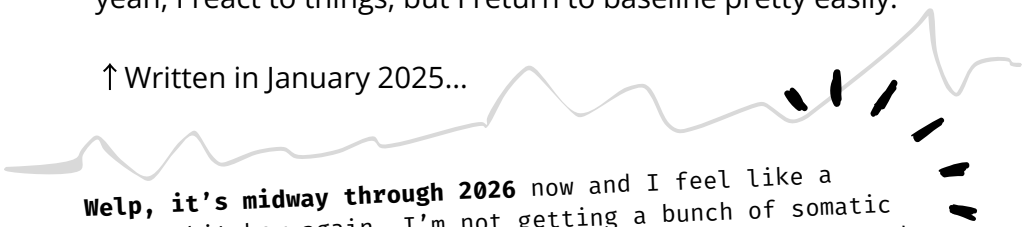
What I learned is that if you ignore your body, it will start screaming at you. You can experience a cascade of wild ass symptoms with no underlying disease and feel like you're stuck in a nightmare you can't get out of. That's dysregulation.

The GOOD NEWS is that regulation is possible.

After a lot of hard personal work - slowing down, tuning in more, mindset cleanup, building a safer environment, getting out of stressful relationships, finding more supportive friendships, expressing myself more, prioritizing and loving myself as a daily practice, expecting less, actually doing somatic practices regularly - I honestly feel better than I ever have.

I never thought I'd be okay after how truly terrifying, hard, and hopeless I felt for so long. Today, I have a reasonable tolerance for stress, fear, anger, grief. I can handle more. And yeah, I react to things, but I return to baseline pretty easily.

↑ Written in January 2025...



Welp, it's midway through 2026 now and I feel like a total shitshow again. I'm not getting a bunch of somatic symptoms like I did back then but I have been anxious and depressed for awhile.

Having said that: rising fascism! AI taking careers without a safety net! Trans folks and commies are now considered enemies of the state! And to say nothing of the climate crisis. **Shit. Is. Scary.**

On top of all that, I fell for another unavailable dude who wasn't always kind to me and it crushed my self worth and fucked with my attachment system.

Am I dysregulated again? I don't know. Thing is, I'm having **reasonable reactions** to the state of both the world and my personal life. I'm still a traumatized body and these things are still my achilles heels. It would also take a superhero to have no reaction to ALL THIS. I may very well be regulated and just STRUGGLING. What I know NOW is: this body is CAPABLE of feeling powerful, happy, and ok **under the right circumstances.**

And that's still hopeful as hell.