

A red, winding path made of stone tiles on a teal background. The path starts from the bottom left and curves upwards and to the right, disappearing into the distance. The tiles are irregular in shape, resembling cobblestones or flagstones.

**we are
complete**

**a closing zine
from generative
somatics**

Dec 2025

our sunset message

In the past five years, gs has entered a deep phase of **transformation —focusing on power-sharing, accessibility, and cultural change.** We began to ask different questions, exploring what it means to be responsive to our movements in a time of shifting terrain. As the political and cultural landscape evolved, so did we.

Our recent work has centered on free, accessible, and practitioner-led spaces. After more than 16 years of work rooted in politicized somatics, collective care, and transformative justice, we have determined that gs's work as a stand-alone project is formally sunsetting.

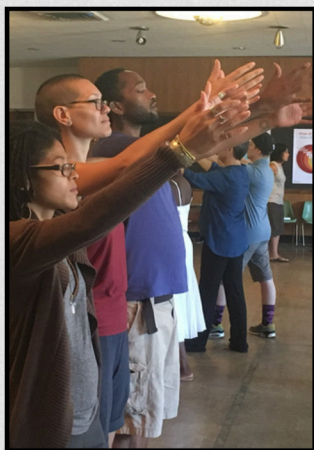
But the methodology and the vision of a politicized approach to embodied leadership and trauma healing for powerful, vibrant, durable, and visionary movements for social and climate justice will live on.



a living legacy

This offering of tools, training, embodied practice, and deep experimentation was never meant to exist forever within a single institution. It was meant to seed something broader, bolder, and more aligned with the future our movements are building.

And it has.



What we've witnessed across the field is the rise of politicized somatics practitioners, the depth of experimentation in community care, the flourishing of peer-led spaces as a living testament to what gs helped initiate and nurture.

gs was never about permanence. It was about possibility. Today, we continue to see that possibility unfold in beautiful, unexpected ways.



a bold experiment in practice and possibility

gs began as a bold experiment: to bring politicized somatics – a practice-able theory of change that supports individual, community, and collective liberation – to movement leaders and organizations. At our core, we've always held the belief that personal, collective, and systemic transformation are interdependent, that engaging in intentional transformative practice builds our capacity for effective, values-aligned political action.

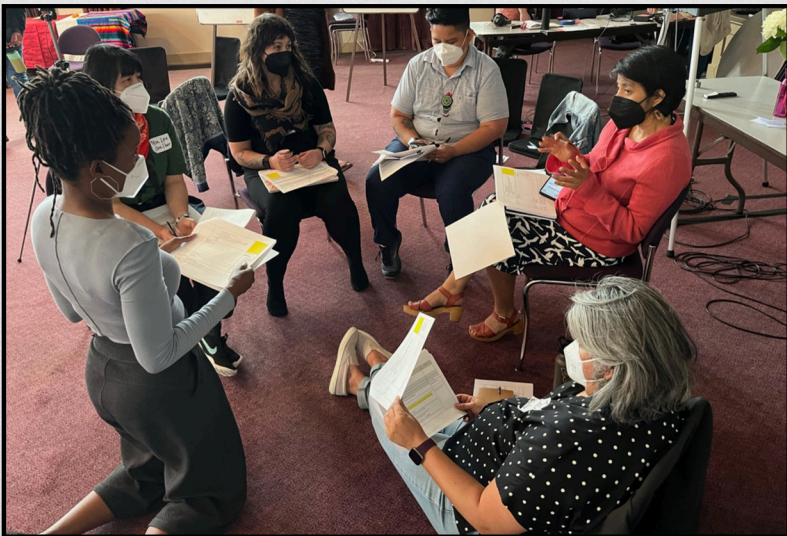
Over nearly two decades, gs offered relevant and useful interventions into movement building, in particular, deepening people's understandings of transformative organizing with depthful offerings that skilled people up in somatics, organizing, and trauma healing. **We reached thousands of leaders throughout the country, through rigorous training programs, one-on-one leadership support, partnerships with organizations, and public offerings.**

a transition, a celebration, and what comes next

In 2025, we mark this transition for the formal gs project with full hearts as an ending and as a celebration. A moment to honor what has been, release what is no longer needed, and make room for what is emerging.

This decision was made collectively, grounded in our values of transparency, shared power, and deep accountability to our movements.

We honor every staff member, board member, practitioner, teacher and supporter who brought this work to life. We hold deep gratitude for all who journeyed with us and especially our beloved staff and practitioners, past and present, whose care and vision made this offering possible.



the work continues

Today, gs continues as a practitioner-led community holding the legacy and values of the work as we transition.

We celebrate 16+ years of bold experimentation, mistakes and learnings, love and rigor. Thank you to every practitioner, organizer, donor, healer, cultural worker, and community member who helped make this experiment possible.

We are proud to have helped shape a field where politicized somatics and movement work continue to flourish.

With gratitude and love,
the generative somatics board



lessons learned

A winding path made of reddish-brown stones on an orange background. The path starts from the bottom left and curves towards the top right, disappearing into the distance. The stones are irregular in shape and size, creating a textured, organic feel. The background is a solid, warm orange color.

Usa Lee Prompongsatorn
Saima Husain
Che Johnson-Long
2024

A Decade of
Embodied
Learning and
Organizational
Transformation

We humbly reflect upon a decade of embodied learning, organizational transformation, dedicated practice, trial and error, and well intentioned mistakes. We write with love and care for generative somatics (gs) of the past, gs of the future, and guidance to aspire for an even more values aligned future.

Our learnings are offered to movement leaders, workers, executives, management, staff of nonprofit organizations and entities organizing for social change.

guiding questions for readers

As you read our reflections and learnings, we invite you to take a moment to think about your personal social location, relationships, and identifications -- including proximity to both power and impact.



What do these learnings bring up for you?

Does this experience resonate with me, if not, what needs to be discussed for increased learning?



How can I approach this in a way that supports my own transformation and furthers movements for justice and collective liberation?

How can these lessons further support the larger left movement community?



leadership and organizational culture change

A Leadership Fracture

In 2019-2020, gs experienced a major fracture in leadership with the exit of many senior and BIPOC teachers and staff. People exited the organization due to the organizational culture and interpersonal conflicts. With leadership transitions and ruptures happening in conjunction with a global pandemic, gs has been in a place of understanding, changing, and rebuilding.

Innovation Amidst Change

Throughout gs' history, innovation, exploration, and transformation for individuals and movement have been the foundation of our work. The opportunity that emerged through a collapse, as painful and disruptive as it was, is the widening of leadership, fully valuing labor, and building a culture of belonging and care, to name a few.



themes of learnings

gs was founded to bring somatic transformation and embodied leadership to movements to help leaders and organizations align their actions with their values and vision, and heal from the impacts of trauma and oppression.

Some of the overarching themes the staff and board identified in 2020-2024 include, but are not limited to:

1. Trauma-shaping and trauma healing in organizations
2. Practice of sharing power and decision making
3. Impacts of a culture of control
4. Learnings about accountability
5. Class and class shaping
6. Anti-Black racism
7. White supremacy culture

trauma-shaping & trauma healing in organizations

The “How” Matters

Developing collective organizational values to encompass the impact on left movement leaders and HOW to make that impact is key.

Overcoming oppressive tendencies requires regular regrouping in a commitment for a liberatory work environment.

Creating spaces for transparent communications such as monthly community calls maintains a culture of feedback to build org muscle memory.

Living with Contradictions

Contradiction and paradox remain even with interventions such as trauma analysis.

Personal healing, transformative programmatic leadership, and an understanding of dysfunction in relationships supported gs.

Persistently interrupting the proliferation of oppressive dynamics, cultures, and systems because social justice organizations are also prone to replicating the structures.

Unintended Impacts

The ethic of confidentiality in a trauma-healing context can be misused as a practice of secrecy that undermines transparency.

Revealing trauma-healing information when not careful can be used against a person in their organizational leadership role.

Trauma can become an excuse for bad behavior undermining accountability for one’s actions.

practicing sharing power and decision-making

Concentrated Power In Small Number of Leaders

For the first ten years of gs, a small number of core leaders held most of the institutional power for the org, programs, and the methodology.


Opportunities were created through leadership bodies, but offered very little decision making power.

Midway in gs's history a teacher-led committee was created to decide participants for teacher training and disrupt overly staff-driven structures.

Use of gs methodology to inform decision-making

Rather than conclude that hierarchy and small groups of leaders are "bad" and open process is "good", using politicized somatics methodology to inform decision making is more effective.

Relying on one primary model of decision making for all situations may have limited gs from diversifying the type of leadership and processes needed for programming, methodology innovation, teacher training and organizational development.



How might you balance having high standards and a wide bench of leaders?

The Tricky Balance of Widening Leadership

gs cultivated an open structure for many people to be committed and accountable. gs believes maintaining high standards is most effective when many people are engaged.

Expanding decision making power can slow processes if a lot of time is spent catching people up from meeting to meeting. Creating collective agreements to inform how decisions move forward helped conversations from looping and untimely action.

impacts of a culture of control

part 1

Consequences of Prioritizing Programmatic Growth

Centralized power and a lack of shared power with deep leadership hierarchy showed up as a prioritization of programmatic growth.

gs grew at a rapid pace and the organization struggled to build mutually across all relationships.

Empowering people to bring their full selves to the strategy and functioning of the org would have combated the exclusive culture that left people feeling a lack of belonging.

Insider/ Outsider Dynamics and Pressure to Conform

Teacher training nurtured relationships and there was a component of being on the “inside” vs. “outside” and a palpable feeling of being “in” or “out”.

Decisions on who could be in or out was held tightly, centralized, and not transparent.

A tendency to push people to choose teacher training over personal life events impacted if someone was “in” or “out”.

Lack of Transparency and Clear Decision-Making

There was a lack of transparency about operations, finances, program planning, teacher & practitioner development, and how decisions were made.

People were involved in many processes, but ultimately, why or how the final decisions were made was not openly discussed.

Accountability in the org was not understood by a collective body perpetuating the “insiders” feeling.

impacts of a culture of control

part 2

Building of Strong and Grounded Reputation in Movements



What indicators of self and community trust that make rigor and innovation possible?

Responsibly offering a depthful path for embodiment and trauma-healing was a core priority for gs in its early years during a time when somatics was being introduced to movement.

A sense of legacy and ownership over the methodology had been practiced.

To build a strong and grounded reputation in movements, measures were taken to prevent a watered-down and un-supportive version of gs methodology being shared.

Overextension of Control Reduces Innovation and Accessibility

The prioritization of holding the methodology in a particular way continued well after gs had a sound reputation. A culture of control dictated how gs methodology was shared and who it was shared with limiting innovation and accessibility.

“Rigor” was used to describe a commitment to high standards while a misuse of authority in decision making resulted in dictating who was deemed to teach and the way the methodology evolved.

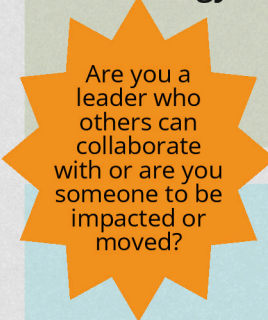
White Founder Executive Director Leadership & Transition

As with many nonprofits, gs experienced instability in the transition process from a founding Executive Director. Not unique or rare, gs grappled with unlearning the embodiment of white supremacy culture which played out through leadership styles reinforced by the founding Executive Director and through the organizational culture. As is the case with the majority of founding EDs, letting go of power was a struggle.

impacts of a culture of control

part 3

Culture of Control in Org Development and Strategy



Are you a leader who others can collaborate with or are you someone to be impacted or moved?

There were two ways to take leadership in gs: 1) align with the founding Executive Director or 2) Influence the Executive Director to change their direction. This evoked a sense that the ED was someone to be impacted and did not allow for mutual collaboration.

The leadership of BIPOC and people with less years in was not fully valued and at times repressed. This had negative impacts interpersonally and limited the vision and creativity for gs programs and strategy.

Destabilization of the Organization

A substantial amount of time and resources were spent centering the needs and desires of the founding Executive Director instead of nurturing the leadership and collective needs of the community.

As gs moved towards a close, gs was more intentional about practicing and moving inclusively. gs centers the development of BIPOC leadership while learning and growing with white gs community members.


Culture of Exclusivity

A lack of transparency was both intentional (framed as confidentiality) and unintentional and was an additional factor contributing to a culture of exclusivity, feeling not-enough, and a lack of belonging.

While there were many people involved in making gs thrive, the institutional focus dedicated to meaningful engagement was entangled with dynamics of who belonged and who didn't.

class bias and class shaping

Class Bias



How does your organizational culture support poor & working class leaders?

There was a class bias to who was in at gs and who had more access. Poor and working class people had less belonging and access at gs. They also struggled disproportionately with gs's low rate of pay, long hours, and uncompensated time.

While it can be regular practice for those learning a new leadership skill to practice this skill for little or no money, this practice within gs often disallowed some poor and working class people access to apprenticeships.

Low Pay Leads to Burnout

Folks who began apprenticing and then teaching Somatics & Trauma were paid a total of \$500 a year in 2009 and \$1,000 a year in 2011.

Over time the lack of consideration for labor led to resentment and burnout due to low pay in comparison to labor invested and the expectation for a high level of contribution under very strict training conditions.

Learning How to Center Class

Many poor and working class people were not able to stay in the work. The same is true for sick and disabled people. Many people had to keep sacrificing to show that they could belong and this has class implications.

There are many places in gs programming where class was centered like knowing that any movement work had to be class facing. The methodology was also able-bodied biased and was held tightly in this way in the early years.

anti-Black racism part 1

Learn more about Black embodiment traditions through TEI's Lineage of Embodiment panel series

gs Lineage Did Not Evolve and Learn from Black Embodiment

Anti-Black racism permeated gs. The Black roots of our methodology's lineage were not honored or visibilized, echoing widespread theft and disappearance of African traditions.

In this way, gs lineage was also unable to fully evolve and learn from Black embodiment and Black radical traditions. Black participants and leaders were often fetishized, minimizing their authentic and valuable contributions.

The Leadership of Black Teachers, Practitioners and Staff

The leadership of Black teachers, practitioners, and staff was not fully valued through a diminishment of the voice, concerns, and agency of Black leaders.

Black teachers have reported that their organizing and labor was less valued. The partnership with BOLD often reflected this disrespect, and appropriation.

Investment in Black teachers

Black teachers have commented that gs did not invest in recruiting and training Black teachers for the sake of the Black movement. Instead, teachers recruited by BOLD increased gs' diversity.

This became particularly apparent, albeit painful, amidst the leadership transition and shifts at gs in 2019/2020. gs lost the majority of the Black teachers.

anti-Black racism part 2

gs' Slow Pace of Change has Permanent Consequences

Overall, gs as an organization has embodied a lack of prioritization and commitment to Black people and Black liberation.

While current leadership tried to center this priority and commitment, the slow pace of change and lack of depth in understanding and competence about anti-Black racism has resulted in many Black teachers taking space from gs permanently.

Hopes Were Lost

There were hopes and visions that through the transition gs could become an organization more aligned with its values. Several Black teachers stepped into roles in the transition committee to support the process, but due to that process dragging on - those hopes were lost.

To change shape, individual & collective somas must experience somatic opening in addition to awareness and practice.

What openings do individual and collective somas require to embody an ability to lead across difference in ways that do not replicate white supremacy?

What agreed upon timelines and goals do you set for organizational change?

What's the capacity - time, skills, emotions, financial resources - that you estimate it will take to make organizational change at the pace you seek?

white supremacy culture

part 1

Insidious Nature of White Supremacy Culture

gs was always envisioned as a multi-racial organization to mirror our multi-racial movements. There were hours and hours of attention given to race and racial dynamics, but white supremacy remained central to the organization.

gs spent two years unpacking how white supremacy culture impacted the culture through staff and the teacher body with training, discussions, and practices and yet, this was not enough.

Commitment to Address Racism

gs' commitment to address racism within the organization was, at times, held solely by individual BIPOC and white ally leaders but this weight was meant to be held by the entire organization. The efforts by small groups and individuals was not enough to shift the culture.

Impacts of white supremacy culture in gs include erasure of BIPOC traditions in gs' lineage, at times invisibilizing BIPOC leadership and contributions.

White Embodiment in the Methodology

Although most of gs' practices are derived from Asian and African traditions, the methodology that gs began working with and teaching was largely seen as Eurocentric (ie the teachings were traced back to white, Europeans) and based on a white, individual change process.

Many BIPOC leaders ensured that poor and working class organizers had access to healing and transformation, but gs made no intensive effort to evolve the methodology to work for groups.

white supremacy culture

part 2

White, non-trans, non-disabled standards

The standard for teaching remained a white, non-trans, non-disabled body that all other bodies were meant to model themselves after and many teachers spoke about parroting what they were taught rather than teaching in a way that came from their authenticity.

The parroting dynamic stemmed from fear. A fear of not belonging and the fear of being kicked out if your behavior was not approved of.

gs Embodiment of White Supremacy Culture

Primary aspects of gs' embodiment of white supremacy culture include a practice of urgency, more-and-faster-is-better, perfectionism, superiority, and exceptionalism. Other core aspects include centralized power and a lack of accountability.

Impacts of white supremacy culture in gs include erasure of BIPOC traditions in gs' lineage, at times invisibilizing BIPOC leadership and contributions.

Ableism

Ableism says that human value is based on productivity. gs was founded and built through over-work by staff and teachers. This norm continued through extremely long days expected from teachers and participants. gs developed in a way that did not have room for teachers or participants who did not have stamina for long days nor produced at a rapid pace.

gs methodology was passed down in an able-bodied form limiting impacts for disabled and chronically ill bodies.

actions people can take from our lessons learned

*Synthesized by
Jess St. Louis*

Engaging in a Documentation Process

Needing to understand what was happening and why, gs invested in a documentation process with the help of senior teachers. This included **surveys, interviews and focus groups** with teachers, mostly senior teachers, and also newer generations of teachers and practitioners. This documentation process revealed themes and contradictions at gs that contributed to unhealthy dynamics perpetuated by years of labor and lost attempts in addressing conflict.

Cultivating a commitment to shared values throughout organizations facilitates generative conflict. It allows organizational leaders to have a shared - for sake of what, shared cares - as we engage in conflict.

Embodying our values around racial and class justice inside of racial capitalism requires a materialist approach.

This can look like centering specific communities in coursework and scaffolding, as well as increasing pay ranges and compensating under-acknowledged labor like prep time and more.

Accountability processes can create space for people to name and share harmful experiences, cultivate a collective analysis beyond an individual experience, learn together, and create opportunities to make amends in service of repairing harm.

However, engaging in them is difficult, complicated and despite best intentions, may not lead to the outcomes hoped for.

Creating collective spaces like community calls, as organizations work to transform organizational culture, can create space for people to feel for and process individual and collective grief and pain in community.

how to use politicized somatics in decision-making

Usa Lee Prompongsatorn

Politicized somatics practices are designed to help us get present, open, connected, and on purpose so we can make decisions by ourselves and with others that are:

- ***Grounded in real-time assessments*** instead of our protective responses
- ***Aligned with what we care about***
- ***Take care of safety, belonging, and dignity***

Example #1: Create a collective commitment.

Decision-Making Question:

How is our commitment reflected in making this decision?

Somatic Practice: Create a brief, affirmative statement about who you are committed to being and the impact you want to have, grounded in what deeply matters to you and practiced through your body over time. Clarify “conditions of satisfaction”: how you will know you are living this commitment in your body, relationships, and work.

What the practice can produce: A well-formed commitment guides deeper purpose and values to reflect if steps being taken move toward or away from a decision that has been made.

Example #2: Face into “what is”.

Decision- Making Question:

What is the reality of what we are setting out to do?

Somatic Practice: Take a few deep breaths. Consider the conditions of the situation, relationships, and context. Acknowledge what is actually happening (emotionally, within the body, and structurally) so that decisions and commitments are based in reality, not in denial or fantasy.

What the practice can produce: Brings the decision into reality, interrupts automatic responses, aligns choices with commitments.

how to use politicized somatics in decision-making

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Example #3: I, We, All practice to explore ways of knowing to support decision making.

Decision-Making Question: How do different perspectives inform this decision?

Somatic Practice: Visualize three rings of knowing. Begin closest to the center in space 1: consider how the decision informs me. Move back into space 2: consider how the decision informs the group. Move furthest back into space 3: consider how the decision informs collective values in the world.

What the practice can produce: Stepping through each space assists in reducing overthinking or autopilot into a fuller, values-based alignment of decision making considering multiple perspectives.

Example #4: Feeling into the future.

Decision- Making Question: How will things look and feel after making our decision?

Somatic Practice: Imagine and visualize the future through the senses. Imagine how things look, feel, sound, and the mood. Reflect on how this makes you feel. Notice what is arising.

What the practice can produce: Shows where a decision flourishes or demands support. Helps in designing practices and structures that make the chosen future more likely to succeed.

Example #5: Moving into action to make a decision.

Decision-Making Question: What step can I confidently take toward this decision?

Somatic Practice: Start from a centered, stable position. Silently or aloud state your commitment. Ask the decision making question. Take two steps or move forward in your chair and center.

What the practice can produce: Increased awareness of how it feels to move into action. Offers a space to adjust or realign when making a decision.

how to use politicized somatics in decision-making

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Example #6: Gratitude Practice

Decision-Making Question: What do I feel grateful for that I want this decision to serve?

Somatic Practice: Stand or sit with an elongated spine. Extend the arms out, palms up, finger tips pointing past the belly button. Offer a statement of gratitude for the land. Raise the arms toward the sky. Offer a statement of gratitude for the larger whole. Move the extended arms to the side to the chest level. Offer a statement of gratitude for others. Move one hand to your center and the other to your heart. Offer a statement of gratitude to yourself.

What the practice can produce: Shifting the body and attention to center connection, dignity, and care rather than fear, shame, or scarcity. This practice can change the quality of choices made.

Example #7 Completion Practice

Decision-Making Question: What do I need to let go of so I can feel satisfied with this decision?

Somatic Practice: Facing one another, state what you are collectively letting go of. Silently look at one another and turn around. If possible, take a few steps away with your back to everyone. Pause with your back to everyone and notice what arises. Turn back to the group.

What the practice can produce: A physical way to acknowledge what happened, feeling what's still present, and marking an embodied ending.

Example #8 : Closing Practice

Decision-Making Question: How am I now, and what do I need as we close this meeting?

Somatic Practice: Take a breath, elongate the spine, visually scan the body from head to toe. Notice sensations and emotions. Consider how the body is feeling now versus the start of a decision making session.

What the practice can produce: Closing practices deepen wellness and resilience by creating reliable containers for clear transitions.

a final note

*Usa Lee Prompongsatorn
Jess St. Louis*

The title of this zine is a nod to the practice of a centered goodbye. This is a practice of being able to be present, open, and connect even as we come to an ending.

The gs staff has put together a legacy website where you can find a directory of gs-trained practitioners, access gs resources, and learn more about the depth and breadth of of gs' work.

The work of politicized somatics will continue and live on. gs-trained practitioners are offering coaching, leading courses, and continuing to find ways to innovate the work. A great way to stay in touch with many of those offerings would be to follow the Politicized Somatics Practitioner Collective – they have created an Instagram account as well as a newsletter.

As we complete, we can take a breath. We can center in our dignity, our boundaries and belonging, our past-present-and-future, and our commitments. We can say goodbye, and turn and face into all that's next.

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