

Thinking through Thomas Hanna's Reflexes as Ways to Improve Body Brilliance

Hanna, T. (1988). *Somatics: Reawakening the mind's control of movement, flexibility, and health*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press.

Hanna, T. (1987). *The myth of aging. The somatic exercise series*. Audiotape lecture series.

THE NEURAL CONNECTION: The object of soma yoga is to develop neural pathways from brain to muscle in order to re-gain voluntary control of muscles. The focus is on the capacity of the human consciousness and the central nervous system to learn and adapt. Certain specific muscular reflexes, developed over daily habits, or through traumas, develop habitual muscular contractions which we can no longer voluntarily relax. Over time, we can no longer remember how to release this stiffness and to move freely. This muscle forgetfulness is called sensory-motor-amnesia (SMA). SMA is a learned adaptive response of the body's nervous system. This means it can be unlearned. Through brainwork (allowing the brain to re-gain awareness of the muscles, through building awareness—slow, curious awareness of movement exercises), the body, through neural connection, can develop a greater range of mobility, tension release of chronic pain, and body brilliance. The key: unlearn what has been learned and remember what has been forgotten. Somatic pathology requires not treatment, but education. Somatics considers first-person felt experience as critical to self-re-training of the brain.

THE GREEN LIGHT REFLEX is one of three action responses that Thomas Hanna describes. Green Light Reflex is the "Go" reflex. The "Go" reflex is attuned to alarm clocks, calendars, and all outward, aggressive notions of moving outward (in order to attain). Connected to the Landau Reaction in babies (the first contraction infants use to arch back, thrust head forward and move), the Green Light reflex is a lumbar contraction with involves tensing of the neck, shoulder, buttocks, and thighs. This is the "pose" people put on when entering a bar for example. Green Light contracts the posterior extensor muscles which are essential for upright carriage of the body in standing and walking. For many people including the 80% of Americans with back pain, the muscles used habitually in Green Light become silent over time and hold a continued contraction, causing fatigue, soreness, and pain in the whole back body and buttocks.

THE RED LIGHT REFLEX is the opposite of the Green Light Reflex. Instead of "Go", the Red Light refers to "stop" or "danger". When in danger, the body curls up to protect itself. The body withdraws from head to legs. In a moment of worry, the brow and eyes wrinkle, the head's weight increases with a forward projection causing muscle tension at the 7th cervical vertebra, shoulders rise and round into a slump bringing shoulder blades forward, chest flattens, breathing is inhibited, rectus abdominus contracts, trunk is stooped, spine is rounded, knees bend in walk and leg motion balance and brilliance alters. The Red Light Reflex causes malfunctions, specifically, shallow breathing (implicating coronary risk), bladder pressure and constipation, and weight-bearing function of straightened knees. Working on re-gaining voluntary control of the front of the body will open the body to function better and realign joints.

THE TRAUMA REFLEX is one of three reflexes Thomas Hanna describes as an area to focus on in somatic re-retraining. The Trauma reflex is a reaction of the body's sensory-motor system intended to protect the body from pain. Trauma reflex is like a flinch. The body will involuntarily tighten around the point of injury. The reflex happens anywhere on the body from accidents or surgeries. Unless it is in the center of

the body, the contraction will be seen on one side of the body – by the change in smoothness of walking and sense of balance. Scoliosis (curving of spine) is the direct cause of alignment issues in other parts of the body. Sciatic issues as well, can be addressed with somatics. The Red, Green and Trauma Reflexes are helpful organizers to develop a well-rounded soma yoga class, to address specific issues, and to create a targeted therapy for someone wanting to improve their body brilliance.