

Qigong Flow

By Alex Hwang



Talia Kirsh, Water Field, 2021

A couple of weeks ago, I found myself in the CCA nave, rubbing my hands along my lower back, warming up my kidneys in a circle of four people doing the same. Talia Kirsh, a fellow grad student, led us through a Qigong routine. She helped us feel our breath, growl like tigers, and move like water. The Fluid Mutualism Symposium put on by the CCA community, which this event was a part of, aimed to foster deeper community ties and reconsider how we support each other. It was cool to have people come together, not for an 'academic' discussion or lecture, but to move our bodies through space.

As a method of coordinating and aligning your body's energy (the Qi), Qigong is a meditative and physical exercise. I felt myself tune in with my body's movements during the event: my chest rising and falling, my feet moving over the floor, and my limbs folding in and stretching out. Talia had us close our eyes to notice our bodies and our breath at one point. It was great to notice the small functions constantly happening in our bodies. I have also been practicing some breathing exercises recently to help me with my anxiety and have found it to be a relatively good remedy to help me out if I start to spiral. When I dissociate from myself, breathing helps me return to my body.

As a writer, I appreciate writing and reading and theorizing about the world around us. But, as someone who can easily get lost in their head, it was refreshing to attend an event centered around our embodied experience of ourselves and the world around us. Maybe because I am a Visual and Critical Studies student, I was expecting a lecture or a talk on the history of Qigong. Yet, what better way to learn about a bodily practice than actually doing it.

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I have been thinking a lot about community spaces and coming together recently. After graduating from college and moving back home to the Bay Area from Washington State, I found myself yearning for friends and community. It was nice to run into people on campus in my college years and know that all my friends were always near. But, the post-grad life, along with the pandemic, left me isolated and feeling like I was out of touch. Chance encounters almost completely disappeared. However, events like the Fluid Mutualism Symposium have helped me recover my sense of place and community.

During the early months of 2021, I started to skate again, going to the Rockridge BART station parking lot every day. Since the pandemic began and BART usage plummeted, the parking lot became a wide-open skate spot. Though it took a little time, I have met a lot of special people whom I now consider very close friends and a big part of my life. What is it about skating at Rockridge or Qigong that fosters such deep connections and growth? Obviously, there are many ways to form bonds and relationships outside of skating or Qigong. But moving through space with others is one of them. It creates infectious energy. Like water, the essence of the human body, moving through space requires coordination of our energy flows, creating wakes that reverberate throughout the social body. But, skating also helps me become more attuned to my own body and movement. As a physical act, there is a level of mindfulness of your body you need to reach so you don't completely eat it, though it still happens to the best of us. You also need to be mindful of others and the flow of the spot. And it isn't a constant and predictable flow; it is constantly changing and moving depending on what tricks or sequences people are trying. Whether practicing Qigong or skating with one another, moving our

bodies in community requires an accommodative fluidity. We can shape and be shaped by those we surround ourselves with and constantly learn from and teach each other.

When Talia introduced mouth sounds into the routine, I was self-conscious at first. I am pretty quiet most of the time so expressing myself through voice sounds was unusual to me. But hearing my peers' sounds and the sounds of their breathing put me at ease and helped me find my own sounds. I enunciated my breathing sounds and growled with my peers. In synchronized movement and sounds, we were in our bodies together.

After the event, I interviewed Talia about her work and practice of Qigong. She mentioned that Qigong is a language of body movement. As someone who loves to read and write, I am a fan of written and spoken communication, but Qigong reminded me that we all have amazing and wonderful ways of moving our bodies. It showed me how learning can always be a mutual exchange and come from anybody. "Qigong teaches you how to be a good student and a good teacher," Talia said. It allows people to create a group space that enables us to understand and see in a whole new way while also being in tune with each other.

As an aspiring writer, **Alex Hwang** thinks about writing every day and sometimes achieves this goal. He loves hanging out in the east bay, where he grew up, skating around, reading, and listening to podcasts about mental health. His cat, Bianco, inspires him to keep pushing through it all.