Quiet Mind, Maximum Mind
Enhancing Place and Embrace Through Qigong Meditation

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unrest

consciousness

If in our design process is embodied the premises of Qigong, then we will be more aware of the essential postulates of its approach.

Bachelor of Architectural Design
Undergraduate Thesis Report

Department of Architecture
Ball State University

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2001
I would like to thank all of my exceptional colleagues and devoted professors for their commitment to our education. Thanks also to my family, friends and loved ones who supported me even when I couldn't be reached for weeks at a time. I would be remiss to not give special thanks to several exemplary colleagues for whom my design style and personal habits have been honed over the last five years.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01.</td>
<td>cover page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02.</td>
<td>acknowledgements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03.</td>
<td>contents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04.</td>
<td>background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05.</td>
<td>abstract</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06.</td>
<td>experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07.</td>
<td>hierarchy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08.</td>
<td>method</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09.</td>
<td>challenges/solutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>light study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>QL cycle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>context_01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>context_01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>context_01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>context_01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>spatial diagrams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>spatial diagrams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>context_02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>context_02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>serial progression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>light</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>movement index</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>movement index</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.</td>
<td>facility design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td>facility design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26.</td>
<td>new elevations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.</td>
<td>existing elevations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.</td>
<td>site plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.</td>
<td>floor plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.</td>
<td>[preparation] zoning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.</td>
<td>[personality] zoning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32.</td>
<td>meditation space configuration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33.</td>
<td>meditation space configuration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34.</td>
<td>bibliographies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35.</td>
<td>conclusion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Places that inspire do so by making us more aware of ourselves, forcing us to transcend states of consciousness. They cause us to forget what we ate for lunch just moments prior, reiterate our tranquil interrelationship with nature and invigorate us with creative thought and expression. They incubate our need for self-cultivation and help us to recognize the inevitability of our influence on—and delicate relationship within—nature. It is my belief that humankind is an integral part of an established, cyclical, and repetitive system of nature. As individuals, we often fail to realize our special place within this natural environment.

Rather, I believe that our society operates by wasteful efficiency. This paradoxical premise infers that we, a Contemporary American Society, strive for and are driven by productive ultra-efficiency while simultaneously streamlining our awareness of and interaction with nature and self. The wasteful approach towards productive efficiency, unfortunately, doesn’t integrate what is generically referred to as “harmony with nature.” Heidegger referred to this as “debased techne.” We go about our careers and bury stress, never knowing who we are, often not pursuing a meaningful life course (perhaps due to apathy for technocentrism), or giving merit to introspection. That is where Qigong meditation emerges as a successful means of self-awareness and reckoning: reduced stress among lifestyles, satisfaction in understanding one’s innate energy cycles as they pattern and interface with nature’s cycles, (physical, mental, spiritual, ecological) and wellness as a holistic balance (exercise, psychology, nutrition-based healing, sacred ritual and etc). Ideally, society would lay more emphasis on individual harmony as a measure of social commodity and efficiency.

During field study in China (Beijing, Xi’an, Louyang, Suzhou, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Hong Kong) I became enamored with the open, routine displays of Qigong and Tai Chi Chuan. These exercises, and the breath of their implementation in parks and along trails, demonstrate a collective awareness of “internal sensing” employed throughout Chinese culture. The physiognomic contentment of the chinese layperson executing his or her 5:00am meditation bespeaks not only personal discipline honed by wisdom traditions such as Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism, but also reverence for internal dialogue.
How can Qigong meditative practices inform our design approach and phenomenology? If in our design process is embodied the premises of Qigong, then will we be more aware of the essential postulates of its approach? Qigong is a practice (exercise) that promotes well-being and simultaneously makes the participant(s) aware of themselves and their environment through the cultivation of Qi, or the life force medium. The need to organize vast deposits of information becomes the central preoccupation in our lives as we grow and evolve. Inevitably, mankind will need to economize his/her knowledge base. Qigong is a practice that, utilizing positive theory, seeks to understand man’s interactivity within nature. This understanding may facilitate architects to make optimal predictions and design decisions as such. I believe that if carefully articulated, Qigong will prove worthwhile for its role in informing design.

I have been studying and practicing a form of Qigong meditative practice in my daily routine for health purposes. I am impressed with the results and think it may be valuable architecturally—possibly as an architectonic devise, discourse, metaphor, or design methodology. Qigong is an appropriate impetus for architectural design because it is an integrated science whose primary intent or essence is inward reckoning and personal balance.

I hope to manifest an architectural solution derivative of the process of Qigong meditation. I want to distill the phenomenon that accompanies the exercise and reformulate it, composing a space appropriate for several activities. I hope to design a space that not only resonates with the experiential qualities of meditation, but also to overlap the meditative consciousness with other aspects of life, imbuing otherwise isolated habits and activities with meaning.
Generically speaking, Qigong lends itself to architectural exploration because it is an integrated science whose primary intent or essence is inward reckoning through unity with Qi, the life force medium. Qi can be felt, but not seen. Therefore, any activity that seeks to engage Qi, as in the 'Eight Pieces of Brocade', emphasizes the lesser-utilized (or non-visual) senses.

My design investigation will explore and accommodate the progression of consciousness and its associated (kinesthetic) physical and sensory event. As one progresses through the exercises, their consciousness is transformed, advanced in cadence with movement. Every Qigong movement has its special meaning and purpose. Adherence to the set, including transition pieces, is necessary for optimizing practice. The detail involved in the pieces testifies to the precision necessary to reap a more harmonious consciousness. In piece 3 of 8, for example, the 'Jade Pillow' is drummed repeatedly (beneath the lower occipital potuberance in the back of the head). Unless the region is struck precisely with consistent intensity and finger positioning, the pinkies and ring fingers will muffle the clarity of resonance, jeopardizing mental traction.

Despite the movements entailed by the 'Eight Pieces of Brocade', overall physical and mental activity is reduced to the bare minimum. Unless the body and mind are "quieted", they will irrevocably disrupt the process of serial progression and enlivening consciousness. In that way, these exercises are best represented by an object exploration that expresses sequential movement or is itself dynamic, as Qigong requires careful, clearly delineated posture and form.

Slow, graceful movement is essential for unlocking the potential of Qi, our awareness of which seems to enhance our senses. The slower the physical activity, the more effective it becomes because the resistance between material (space) and immaterial (time) is minimized. In that sense, successful Qigong should be a nearly timeless journey. After completing movement 3, I find that the initial mental reluctance, even apprehensiveness, wears away. Finally, when movement 3 is complete, I remove my palms from my ears and it's as though I've awakened.

In addition to physical movements, breathing becomes a unifying element and transcendental aid. Inhalations and exhalations should mutually correspond with the mind. When synchronized with the movements of the head, one's inhalation may be used to align the spine and encourage posture, incrementally bolstering the spinal vertebrae against the pressure of the inflated lung.
energy found in everything, from heaven to earth and all sentient beings.

any study or training that requires a lot of energy and time to learn or to accomplish.

any study or training dealing with Qi which takes a long time and a lot of rigor.

health maintenance, longevity, Buddhahood

martial arts

healing, acupuncture, massage

Human (Ren)

< sentient

Earth (Di)

Heaven (Tian)
Graphically organized, my areas of investigation look like this:

The Eight Pieces of Brocade:

- personal development
- Qigong movement mechanics
- Qigong movement characteristics
- Qigong theory
- meditation
- research
- suburban site
- urban site
- personality characteristics
One challenge has been assigning materiality to a process whose essence and intent denies materiality.

Another challenge has been appropriating a spatial environment for an exercise that, depending upon the predilection of the meditator, is typically less vision-centric than in a common mode of consciousness.

Interfacing the public with the private, the communal space with the personal space, has been particularly challenging. On the one hand, it is critical that personal space, particularly the meditative sanctum, remains private at the individual's discretion. On the other hand, the meditative space must "speak to", didactically perhaps, the public at large and function as shared space.

I established an informal matrix, the categories of which can be found in my design method. In the following pages, I'll explore these aspects in greater detail. Generally, if one experimental ordering principle is applicable for three or more categories, I chose to keep it. Accepted ordering principles are maintained assuming they compliment the (then) solidifying contextual criteria.

Discerning the perception of the senses is difficult during meditation. Due to "sensory swap", one perception is better suited to acknowledge an environmental stimulus than another. For instance, a sound may be "felt" more intensely than it is "heard" and vice versa. Therefore, I tried to exploit the multiplicity of spatial qualities. Light can be felt and seen. Water can be heard and touched. Material selections can allow for translucency while helping to guide our movements. Tactility was particularly intriguing. As one progresses through meditation, an externalized tactility transforms into an internalized tactility. The inner tactility is not a material embrace, but rather, the recognition of immaterial flux (as Qi is exercised).

The act of meditating is highly personal. This doesn't necessarily mean it should be private. The residents may meditate in private or in public. They may invite the public into their meditation sanctum as friendships and business relationships are established—always at the resident's discretion. Meditation is beneficial and should be mainstreamed into our daily routine, both for the enhancement of the meditator's livelihood and the embrace of his/her community.
double windlass (piece 6)

cradle with structural fins and embraceful arc

repetition

external skin configurations

repetition of panelling (refrain) with expansiveness of infrastructure (enlivening consciousness)
The Qi is concentrated within the lower Dan Tien (center region of the body several centimeters below the navel, three inches below the skin surface). During exercise, one is constantly guiding Qi to this region. From this region, the continual cycle of Qi is directed to the Yongquan (bubbling well) Cavity and Huiyin Cavity. These cavities form the nodes of the upper and lower meridian systems. When the two are merged via exercise (piece 7_08), the cycle is complete and the net effect of the upper and lower meridians can be relished during the final piece (piece 8_01).
cardinality
north
south
east
west

viewports
180 degree spectrum

Region
Context
City
Climate
My initial studies focused on circular configurations that maximized indirect sunlight, illuminating the meditator from behind. The warmth of sitting in the light is desireable, but light should not directly strike the face of the meditator. The viewport and attention of the meditator is framed by a reliquary. Water flows through a channel below the meditator, emptying into planting beds via flow form vessels.
The circle is ultimately a section cut from a sphere. The sphere has universal cosmic significance. Microbiology and macrobiology exhibit the sphere in the form of atomic structure and celestial bodies respectively. Inherent in its shape is the concept of absolute isolation. The sphere is pure and uninformed by context. In most cases, it is self-sufficient, autonomous and self-serving. The circle is a two-dimensional translation of the sphere, appropriated for the planar context. Additionally, it is relatively easy to construct in planar environments and is distinctive from orthogonal arrangements. Given the spiritual symbolism that typifies the circle, it is often selected for sanctimonious demonstrations, representations and structures. For example, the Sand Mandala is utilized in meditative purposes within Buddhism and represents the unity of all things in the universe. Likewise, traditionally, a Hindu Yogi might draw a circle around himself in the dirt prior to meditation, also demarking a sense of wholeness.

Formal Order
- contrasting geometries about same axis

South Facing
- direction of maximum Qi field
- allows for the most receptivity and manipulability of daylight

Cardinal Direction
- simple orientation
- turning radius of the head (kunlun) about the neck (skypost) coincides with cardinality during exercise
- axial viewports

Procession
- around meditation space

Arc
- emulates rowing motion or turning of a double windlass
Formal Order
- complementing geometries about same axis

South Facing
- direction of maximum Qi field
- allows for the most receptivity and manipulability of daylight

Cardinal Direction
- simple orientation
- turning radius of the head coincides with cardinality during exercise (180 degree spectrum)
- axial viewports

Procession
- linear entry tangent to meditation space

Rainwater Vessel
- water collects and drops behind meditator

Midwest
Suburban
Indianapolis
Temperate

consciousness
The elliptical shape is construed in a spatial form that closes the cycle of Qi between the meridians of the lower and upper extremities with respect to the foci. Additionally, the form provides an embraceful and protective enclosure.

The foci align the Yongquan ('bubbling well' cavity of the feet) and Hulyin (bolstered and rooted to the floor), unifying the body's kinesthetic with the basic spatial parameter.

Inherent to the ellipse is a (segmented) linearity defined by the foci. This reinforces the principles of cardinality and establishes orientation.

The foci suggest equality, providing an excellent setting for conversing intimately with friends or family.
To frame the viewports along the cardinal axis, an array of various partitions are assembled. The configuration of the partitions allows for versatility in storage and performance variability.

The repetitions become the infrastructure through which the transformation configuration (horizontally transformed) is realized. In terms of meditation, this becomes the progression toward the enlivened consciousness. Architecturally, the structural rhythm of the flooring joists corresponds directly with the protective armature, upon which various shell configurations may be implemented for privacy and embrace.

In combination with the previous ordering principles, this plan diagram suggests ways in which the space may be approached, meditated within, ambulated through, and departed from. The entry procession is angled, sharing in viewport with the cardinal node of the seated meditator.
I compressed the space more than in previous studies, appropriate to the more dense context. The materiality of the existing building begins to emerge as the brick forms the hub for this meditation space. Vertical circulation is examined as well as adjacencies and potential entry sequences.
The light will gain your attention. As one proceeds through the movements, the light becomes increasingly significant, kinesthetically drawing one’s head from side to side. The light emanates from a pointed source along the cardinal axis, reinforcing the sense of nodal order and general ‘rootedness’ of the meditator. Just as the seriality, or structured sequence of movements, is intended to fuse the kinetic body with the subtle body (mind), the structural rhythm of the spatial enclosure gives expression to the transforming state of consciousness. The closed-trombe wall system frames the view of the meditator and allows for localized climate control. The ventilation plate is adjustable through the canopy infrastructure from overhead, within the meditation space.

Arctects should not be so vain as to think their space is going to be used exactly as they have envisioned, and in some cases, fashioned. I understand that the meditation space (based around a set of parameters derived from Qigong meditation) could be used for say...a personal gym or jacuzzi tub. Nevertheless, I hope that the qualities I’ve endeavored to instill in my design, such as penetrating light and trickling, multi-channeled water are enough to “spatially demand” meditation, contemplation, quietude and rejuvenation.
Shading panels within a vertical track system can be adjusted to optimize the level of indirect light.

The viewports frame the attention of the meditator while executing the Zhuan Tou Pin Pin (piece 4 of 8). An arc swings around the meditator, offering embrace and protection while demarcating the meditation sanctum.

The module sequence, much like the exercise, deals with enlivening the consciousness through repetition and practice. Each movement builds on the previous movement and shares in refrain. The following light study exhibits focused light that punctures the wall membrane, emulating the principle of consistent refrain.

Light + Water =

The outer roof catches a significant proportion of the overall runoff water. Water is gravity-fed through several vessels on an angled filtration wall before ending up in a catch basin to the rear of the meditator. The basin has two channels. One channel provides for exterior activities, such as gardening, cleansing, and crop cultivation. The other channel directs water alongside the meditator, gently trickling as it passes toward the south.
The Eight Pieces of Brocade, a major exercise under Qigong, differentiates itself from many meditative practices in that it involves movement. I chose the sitting set as a generative vehicle because the motions precede the standing set, forming the basis for many 'schools' of Qigong. The seriality of the eight pieces, incremental and sequential, methodically synchronizes motion with mental frameset in pursuit of enlivening consciousness. The movements, when cadenced with inhalations and exhalations, begins to establish order and hierarchy. I've attempted to diagram this hierarchy through a series of investigations. These include movement theory, movement mechanics, movement characteristics and performance observations. Ultimately, the overlap of movement and experiential investigations with contextual criteria has formed the basis for my design.

balance
<equilibrium>
fire gradually extinguished
<obstructions cleared>
1. Bi Mu Jing Zuo (close eyes and sit still)
2. Shou Bao Kun Lun (hands hold Kun Lun)
3. Kou Ji Yu Zhen (knock and beat the Jade Pillow)
4. Zhuan Tou Pin Pin (lightly swing the Skypost)
5. Tui Mo Shen Yu (hands massage the Essence Door)
6. Shou Zhuan Shuang Lun (hands turn the Double Wheel)
7. Tuo An Pan Zu (lift, press, and hold the feet)
8. Zhou Tian Man Yun (entire sky slow transportation)
The arc guides clients and patrons into the meditative realm, catching the influx of the Fountain Square Community.

atrium, vertical circulation, delivery zone

three residential units (upper level existing)
commercial establishment (lower level existing)
three meditation spaces (upper level new addition)
garden terrace (upper level new addition)
greenhouse (upper and lower level new addition)
mixed media design studio (lower level new addition)
gallery and display (lower level existing)
My intent was to preserve the storefront character, redesigning awnings that are emblematically appropriate for the mixed media gallery collection. I chose to merge the two available commercial units into one commercial unit combined with extensive gallery space.

The cladding changes from brick in the existing building to aluminum in the new addition. The canopy that hovers over the existing threshold provides for ventilation and preserves the integrity of the existing facade (programmatically critical for meditation preparation).

The archetype appropriate for the introverted space was a leaning wall. The wall leans away from the meditative space in order to remain unintimidating. Conversely, the wall sends a clear message about the significance of the resident’s personal space, leaning toward the general public. On the other end, the arc serves as a hub for the public and lies adjacent to the extroverted resident, well within his/her comfort zone.

On the south face is a communal greenhouse that provides small scale food resources for the residents. The shared communal circulation path, running from north to south, empties into the source of Qi for which the three meditation spaces have been oriented.
One of the oldest continually functioning commercial districts in recent years, Fountain Square maintains a small town flavor while boasting an array of specialty shops. In recent years, the arts community has had quite a resurgence in housing restoration and commercial development. With close proximity to vintage wares, retro motifs, and art and music supplies, Fountain Square easily accommodates modern needs with unique style.

(former) Indigo [coffee] House <site>

Indianapolis Public Library

Fountain Room

Fountain Diner

Fountain Square Theatre

Shelby Home Antiques

Art Supply Store
new consciousness

existing building

I think it is important to create a zone for preparation prior to entering the meditation space. Arriving at the meditation space should be sanctified as an action inherent to the process of meditation—a union marked by contrast between sitting and walking, idleness and labor. The preparatory ritual, such as the removal of footwear and clothing, not only prepares the body but also reassures the habituated mind. Just as the ancient yogis prepare their minds for meditation, the mediator himself should prepare for meditation by enclosing himself within a circle in the dirt. The Ongong meditation attributed to the religious experience of enlightenment through the meditative space is part of the overall process through a transitional space and the threshold. The material shift, accentuated by the阂 behind the consciousness, allows for illumination of the space of the meditative area. The overhead light reminds the designer of the beneficial attributes of light in the mixed media experiment. In cohabiting, the resident engaged in design is able to witness the shift in the room changing re-
Circulation zones and programmatic spaces have been structured relative to the personality stereotype of its resident.

At the discretion of the resident, the public is invited into the private meditative sanctum. The residents have been arranged relative to one another and to the public so that their social interactivity is concurrent with their personality profile. For instance, the extroverted individual's meditative space is located above the heart of the public/commercial zone and is directly adjacent to the public's vertical circulation. Conversely, the more introverted residents are distanced further from the hub of public activity. All residents are able to share their meditative experience and personal lives at their discretion via a communal circulation zone. Additionally, each meditation zone can be reconfigured to the resident's predilection. My intent has been to establish a set of constructive parameters for an optimal meditation space. The resident may personalize their space around the infrastructure I've established, accreting themselves to the basic set of spatial guidelines.
A change in datum corresponds to the progression of consciousness. Never underestimate the ground plane.

Translucent flooring illuminates the task surface within the mixed media studios on the lower level.

Structural fins provide an armature for various shell configurations.

Shelving is utilized to demarkate the spatial boundary, facilitating books, clothing items and miscellaneous storage resources.

The entry sequence is angled relative to the threshold between "old consciousness" and "new consciousness." As the meditator sits, his/her viewport towards the left references the same door from which he/she enters the meditation space.

The trombe wall forms the frontal viewport that physiologically draws the head toward its pointed light.

The infrastructure for the translucent flooring is suspended as a floating floor for accoustical isolation.

The wall system references and subdivides the structural framework for the floor.


In general, I'm pleased with the outcome of my thesis investigation. It began very slowly, but progressively began to solidify. Qigong meditation has served as a good generative device for architectural development. I believe this is the most cohesive and complete architectural design project I've done (to date). My topic allowed me to continue in a five-year trend toward the shaping of personal space, which gives me great delight.

I wanted this project to be both realistic and in "real-time." I think it is both. As a site intervention, I've endeavored to preserve the integrity of the existing 'Indigo House' while being responsive to basic programmatic strategies for efficiency. Indeed, I've found that in the latter stages of development, programmatic concerns have absorbed my focus.

I won't reflect too extensively on the project as a whole. I'm tired of reflecting for the time being. I've reflected, meditated if you will, intensely on the rational of every conceivable component within this design. I will say with certainty that my greatest reflections are still to come, as Qigong is much greater in scope than any one of innumerable architectural derivations thereof.

On a personal note, since performing meditation regularly, I find that I am better able to cope with the daily stresses that previously diminished my capacity to work and remain motivated. In that way, I would consider this thesis to be a successful design and life process. Additionally, I've uncovered a storehouse of biophysical and spiritual realizations; I'm more receptive to the environmental stimuli that bombard my body and perception.

As far as DCM (Design Communication Media) goals, I learned to use AutoCad software for plans, site information and diagrammatic studies. I exploited Photoshop like never before, using it in conjunction with all manner of media. Prior to this academic year, I invested the bulk of my design time to freehand drawing. While I consider this method of investigation to be invaluable, I chose to appropriate more time towards physical model craft. Overall, I think I struck a successful balance.

I hope this project "resonates" with the reader.