From Projecting to Radiating: Reimagine Energy in Solo Acting

Marian Poom-on

Abstract

This article reflects on a discovery that emerged during the rehearsal and live performance of *Grounded* by George Brant, approached through the author's own experience as a solo performer. The initial aim was to cultivate a state of psychophysical readiness by integrating Qigong with the psychophysical techniques of Michael Chekhov and Rudolf von Laban, seeking to harmonize body and mind so that neither would lead nor lag. During the performance process, an unexpected question arose: must a solo actor always project energy outward, or can energy also radiate naturally without force? The longstanding principle of "sending energy to the back row" was reconsidered when the author noticed that pushing energy outward sometimes felt less effective than staying present and allowing energy to expand from within. A turning point came during stage rehearsals when director Jarunun Phantachat introduced the distinction between projecting and radiating energy, prompting exploration of a quieter, more grounded mode of presence. In the author's experience, Qigong supported energy flow through breath and internal stillness, while Chekhov's and Laban's methods offered ways to explore force and spatial dynamics. This reflective account suggests that "still but alive" energy may, in certain contexts, resonate more than "pushed but dry" intensity. Rather than presenting generalizable conclusions, the article positions itself as an autoethnographic reflection, offering a perspective on how radiating rather than projecting might provide an integrated and sustainable way of engaging body, mind, space, and audience, inviting deeper connection and recognition across distance and silence.

Keywords: performance energy, solo performance, psychophysical acting, Qigong, radiating presence

Introduction

In solo performance, the actor stands alone on stage without a partner to exchange energy with, without a scene to rest within, and without another voice to interrupt or support. What remains is the actor's body, mind, and the open space ahead. For the author, who performed as the female fighter pilot in *Grounded*, a one hour and forty-five minute monologue play, solo acting was not simply a matter of "memorizing lines" or "feeling the emotion." It became, in her experience, a challenge of sustaining an energy that could inhabit the stage fully, scene after scene, without being consumed by the emptiness or shrinking until she disappeared from the audience's gaze.

The process began with a clear intention to cultivate a state of psychophysical readiness through a combination of Qigong and psychophysical acting techniques, drawing specifically on the methods of Michael Chekhov and Rudolf von Laban. The author anticipated that such training might allow her to unify body and mind, and to respond to stimuli in the present moment with vitality and coherence. The training was systematically planned: it began with Qigong to regulate internal energy and bring the actor's "instrument" into centered alignment. This was followed by Laban's Eight Efforts to explore the energetic dynamics of the character, Chekhov's Psychological Gesture to access complex emotional states, and image-based work to reach feelings beyond her own lived experience.

Yet, despite the structured preparation, something essential still seemed missing. In early rehearsals, the body could not fully "inhabit" the stage. It felt as if part of the energy

remained suspended, not grounded leaving the author with the sense that the stage had to be "conquered" rather than entered in mutual collaboration. This appeared less about technical skill and more about a deeper imbalance: a disconnect between body, mind, and presence within the space. Unexpected questions arose from lived moments on stage: "Why does the harder I try to project energy, the more I feel disconnected from myself?" "Why does a voice pushed outward feel weaker than one rooted in stillness?" "Why does energy that radiates unintentionally sometimes register more strongly with the audience than energy sent with effort?" These were not part of the original inquiry. They emerged organically from experience and from the physical and mental strain of "pushing" forward. They seeded a desire to turn inward to "listen" to energy rather than drive it and, surprisingly, in doing so, energy began to radiate outward more fully.

This shift led the author to reduce effort, release the need to control, and begin tuning into the rhythms of energy arising each day from the body, the breath, the surrounding space, and the evolving relationship between self and role. The effect, in her experience, was profound: not only did she feel more anchored and at ease onstage, but it also began to seem as though "the space itself was working with me" rather than something to be overcome.

This article does not begin with a fixed hypothesis or aim to produce generalizable findings. Instead, it is positioned as an autoethnographic reflection following a journey of embodied discovery, grounded in lived practice and informed by what unfolded along the way. It offers, from the author's perspective, one possible way of inhabiting the stage with presence and power: a shift from "projecting" to "radiating" that may allow a solo performer to engage with audience and space without forcing themselves beyond what is needed.

Part 1 : From Control to Flow

In preparing for the solo performance *Grounded*, the author chose to incorporate Qigong alongside psychophysical methods drawn from Rudolf von Laban and Michael Chekhov. The primary aim was to develop what she understood as *psychophysical readiness* a state in which the body and mind are not only aligned but responsive to internal and external stimuli without relying heavily on mental premeditation or top-down control. Qigong was not initially introduced as a method for projecting or radiating energy, nor for managing the performance space directly. Rather, it served as a foundational practice to integrate body and mind, to cultivate presence in the here and now, and to build the capacity to respond organically across a range of performance conditions.

Early stage training emphasized bodily awareness, breath, and inner centering. The author practiced the "18 Forms of Qigong" daily for about an hour per session. These sequences functioned, in her experience, as a recalibration of the body-as-instrument grounding it at its core, neither scattered nor overexerted. Post-practice, she often noticed that the body felt not only physically awakened but also energetically balanced. There was a distinct sense of energy flow: quiet yet vital. Stillness no longer felt static, and movement did not seem to require force. This training focused on precision in form and the quality of presence. Although the author could not yet clearly define what this energy was, differences were perceptible from day to day. For example, her hands would become warm for reasons unrelated to external temperature, or she would sense the space around her without actively moving. These experiences marked her first awareness of what she would later describe as a *radiant* quality of energy.

Despite this subtle awareness, the idea of radiating energy was not yet consciously integrated into rehearsals with the script. In the medium-sized rehearsal spaces, projected energy still appeared to work well. The author relied on familiar methods directed movement, vocal intensity, and the deliberate use of force to respond to cues and direction. These strategies felt effective in terms of communication, performance intensity, and spatial

coverage. There seemed no immediate reason to adjust her energetic approach at that stage, nor did the gentle qualities noticed during Qigong feel directly relevant to the more urgent demands of theatrical rehearsal.

However, moments of what she would later call *radiation* became noticeably present during warm-ups and recovery days, particularly when rehearsal was unhurried or when her body felt centered enough to listen more sensitively. Energy arising from sustained stillness, slow movement, and steady breath brought about a sense of internal fullness and quiet power. The body did not move much, yet it seemed to hold space in a way that felt energetically complete. These sensations quietly crystallized in the background of the author's awareness like a deeper layer beginning to take shape beneath the surface of technical training.

At the time, these qualities were not considered necessary for performance, but they existed nonetheless. They seeded a subtle question: if the day comes when projection alone is not enough, could this other kind of energy this quiet, steady radiance offer something essential? That question would not find a clear answer until much later, during technical rehearsals in the theatre space itself. It was only then when the scale of the space exceeded what projected energy could effectively contain that radiation revealed itself as not only useful, but vital for her work.

Part 2 : A Turning Point in the Theatre

Roughly a week before the actual performance, the rehearsal process moved into the theatre space for the first time. Almost immediately, the author noticed something unexpected: the energy that had felt so reliable in rehearsal no longer seemed to suffice. She continued to apply the same strategies projecting the voice, articulating movement clearly, and directing energy outward to "fill" the space but in this noticeably larger venue, those familiar techniques now felt less effective. Energy that had once filled the rehearsal room appeared to evaporate mid-air. Even when the voice was pushed to full force, it lacked the impact she anticipated. Energy projected from the body's center no longer felt received or reflected by the space. Fatigue set in earlier than expected, and she experienced her body as if pushing against something invisible yet resistant. Although it was clear to her that "what had worked before no longer worked," the precise nature of the problem and its solution remained unclear.

This did not appear to be an issue of physical stamina. The author had consistently conditioned her body in preparation for the performance. Then came a sharp observation from the director, Jarunun Phantachat, that would reshape her approach: "Right now, your energy is trying to shoot out to the audience. But when it pushes like that, it doesn't reach. It can't fight the size of the space." She followed with a suggestion that reframed the entire challenge: "What if you shift from projecting to radiating?" This was the first time the author had heard the words *project* and *radiate* used so distinctly in a rehearsal context not as poetic metaphors, but as conceptual tools for altering how an actor channels energy.

Up until that point, she had been aware of the radiant quality of energy from her Qigong practice, but had never considered it as something to be consciously applied in live performance. Projection had still felt sufficient reliable, controllable. The director's insight did more than identify the problem; it gave permission to explore a different kind of energy, one that was already latent in her body but had never been fully accessed in performance.

Following this advice, the author began to shift her approach. Instead of striking outward with energy, she anchored herself more deeply in presence grounding through breath, finding stability in her stance, moving from a clear center, and allowing the space to enter her awareness rather than resist it. The effects, in her experience, were unexpectedly clear: the body felt less strained, the voice carried greater weight without added effort, and most strikingly the energy began to radiate outward without being pushed.

Beyond these physical shifts, a subtler transformation occurred internally. Where there had once been a constant sense of urgency a need to stay hyper-alert and "manage" everything

on stage there was now a calmer state. It felt as if a weight had lifted: the pressure to "reach," "be clear," or "be enough" had softened. A small change in attitude reframed the space from adversary to ally.

This transition from projecting to radiating did not emerge from solitary analysis, but through attentive listening to the body, to the space, and to the thoughtful observations of collaborators. The director's words named something the author had long felt but never fully articulated. From that moment onward, the idea of *radiating* became a central focus something to observe, explore, and develop in refining her relationship to stage energy.

Part 3 : Exploring the Quality of Radiating

After beginning to experiment with radiating energy instead of projecting it, as suggested by the director, the author noticed a marked shift not only in how she related to the stage space, but also in her own internal state. This shift was deeper than she had anticipated. Importantly, it did not occur in a single moment or from one piece of advice. Rather, it emerged gradually through a rehearsal process in which the director and creative team had, perhaps unintentionally, placed consistent emphasis on spatial scale.

Throughout the rehearsal period, the author was moved between rooms of varying sizes some narrow, some deep, others vast and open. At the time, she did not consciously recognize this as training for radiating energy. In hindsight, however, she came to see how the variety of spatial environments had helped her body become accustomed to adjusting its energy scale intuitively to the space. By the time she stepped into the theatre which was larger than any rehearsal space she had worked in her energy may still have fallen short of fully reaching the back, but she had developed inner tools that allowed her to adapt more readily. She was not starting from nothing.

Radiating energy, as she came to understand it, was not simply a matter of applying less force or moving less. It required a different shift in focus. Whereas projection placed her attention on external targets the audience, a distant point, or a vocal destination radiation redirected her focus inward, anchoring her to her own body, breath, and present emotional state. Instead of straining to reach outward, she needed to inhabit herself fully first. From that fullness, the energy could radiate without being pushed.

This inner state, for her, depended on honest acceptance of her current condition. If she felt tired, she would acknowledge the fatigue; if uncertain, she would acknowledge the vulnerability. Attempts to suppress or override these states were replaced by groundedness and attunement to the body's natural rhythm.

When this inner state felt elusive, the author turned to imagery. She often visualized light flowing from her body, or color expanding into the surrounding air. Instead of trying to "send red energy out," she focused on *becoming* red. Only when that state of being felt solid would the color radiate on its own. It was not about sending a message, but becoming the message so fully that the space itself absorbed it. Another image she frequently used was that of water to inhabit herself fully was to become water, completely filling a vessel: neither rushing nor halting, neither pushing nor resisting, but gently seeping outward. When the imagery resonated with her internal state, her body responded naturally and with power, without the need for mental control.

As this approach deepened, the space itself seemed to respond differently. Where projection had once framed the stage as something to conquer or dominate, radiating redefined it as a collaborator a conduit through which energy could travel and return. The performer began to feel connected not only to the audience, but also to the walls, the floor, and the air. This connection arose not through force, but through co-presence.

Before each performance, she warmed up by exploring two contrasting qualities of radiation: *weighty* and *light*. For example, she might spread a grounded, stone-like presence across the stage floor, or allow a mist-like softness to float gently through the air. In both cases,

the key was to arrive at a stable internal condition from which energy could flow organically from the center. This did not require stillness she continued to move and to express fully but the movement was no longer an attempt to "push" outward. It became less about reaching someone and more about being with herself fully, allowing the energy to travel in its own way. Over time, these states evolved from techniques to recall into qualities to *embody*. Even in small or still moments, she could now radiate without collapse, fragmentation, or excess. The energy remained present, responsive, and alive.

Part 4 : When Silence Responds: Audience Perception of Radiated Energy

Although the energy radiated from an actor cannot be seen with the naked eye or measured by any precise instrument, the author, as a solo performer, repeatedly encountered moments in the performance space that, for her, suggested the energy was indeed reaching the audience. On many occasions, this return was felt in the form of stillness, utter silence, or even quiet tears in the dark. The author had long believed that silence could be a powerful tool in stage communication. However, through the experience of this particular solo performance, she encountered a kind of silence that felt louder and more charged than ever before a silence emerging from a body and mind fully awake and present in the moment.

This perception was echoed in audience feedback gathered through written surveys and online comments. One respondent remarked, "From the very first line, I could feel the performer's energy and she carried that energy throughout the entire piece." Several others noted that even without any visible onstage events, they could still "see the scenes vividly and feel excited by the events" through the performer's physicality, vocal tone, and rhythm of storytelling.

One especially memorable comment described a brief mid-performance moment when the female character was reprimanded by her commanding officer: "I felt the emotional impact and pressure quite strongly," wrote the audience member even though the scene involved no dialogue exchange or physical confrontation. For the author, such responses suggested that emotional vibrations could be generated without forcibly projecting toward the audience, but instead by fully inhabiting the moment and allowing the energy to radiate outward of its own accord.

Another frequently mentioned scene involved the character driving home while listening to a mixtape prepared by her husband. The song playing had the simplicity of a lullaby. The performer said nothing and remained motionless on a chair. Yet, many viewers reported sensing "fragility, emotional unraveling, and the sense of being held once again." For the author, this feedback indicated that even in the absence of text, climactic beats, or significant action, a performer's internal state could still be felt by an audience in a resonant way.

In an audience survey completed by 272 individuals representing 64.2% of the 424 attendees across all three performances one question asked about the perception of energetic transmission: "Although there was only one performer, the actor was able to continuously project energy across the entire performance space." Seventy-nine percent answered "most strongly felt," and 17% answered "strongly felt." While the wording of the question referred to "projecting," the author interprets these responses as reflecting the audience's experience of sustained stage presence, even if the technical approach used was more about radiating.

Another question explored a more specific phenomenon: "The audience could clearly perceive energy in motion, even when the performer was completely still." Here, 74.3% answered "most strongly felt," and 29.3% answered "strongly felt." For the author, this was a striking result not as objective proof, but as an alignment between her internal experience of radiating energy and the audience's reported perception.

Some respondents described the energy in ways that extended beyond intensity. One commented, "The energy reached all the way to the back rows," while another wrote, "She

radiated energy both softly and powerfully without ever running out." Others referred to the character's "steadiness and groundedness" not tied to specific lines or plot points, but to a sense that "she fully owned the stage body, mind, and voice." Such remarks suggest that, at least in this context, radiated energy may be less about volume or overt projection and more about a depth of presence a beingness sensed even without explicit cues or spoken explanation.

This kind of feedback led the author to frame solo performance not merely as sending energy outward from performer to audience, but as engaging in a shared resonance within the moment. When she felt internally full and anchored, energy seemed to flow naturally without being pushed, and audiences appeared able to tune into that current. In her view, radiating energy is not a matter of magic or mysticism, but the outcome of consistent and honest psychophysical alignment one in which the performer no longer tries to transmit, but simply allows herself to be, and in doing so, becomes perceptible.

Part 5 : A Conceptual Proposition

Through the process of rehearsing and performing *Grounded*, the author gradually came to see, in her own case, that a solo performance in a large theatre space could not rely solely on the kind of "projected" energy that had served her well in smaller rehearsal rooms. When such projection stemmed from an effort to "reach" the audience by pushing vocal force or extending physical energy outward, it often created, for her, the illusion of intensity without the desired impact. This familiar approach quietly depleted her physical stamina, which in turn unsettled the steadiness of her inner state. Even when she believed she was expressing power, she found herself silently burning out fatigued in ways that went beyond the body and affected the psyche.

By contrast, a shift in mindset from "projecting" to "radiating" allowed her to stop chasing the space. Instead of working to fill the stage through force, she began centering herself in the present moment, with awareness of breath, alignment, and inner readiness. From that place of centeredness, energy seemed to radiate on its own, requiring no push. For the author, radiating did not mean being still or silent; rather, it was a new attitude toward energy use one that trusted that when the actor feels internally full, that fullness can be perceived by the audience without theatrical strain. In several scenes where she intentionally reduced vocal intensity or avoided overly "controlled" movement, she found that a quieter voice carried greater resonance, and the simplest gestures conveyed a wider presence. What once felt like mere projection began to feel like a shared atmosphere.

This transition did not lead her to reject projection altogether. Rather, she came to view the real skill as knowing when to project and when to radiate. Certain moments in the play called for sharp, forceful energy especially when the character was under pressure or emotionally volatile. In such instances, a clear, directed push felt appropriate. In other scenes those with emotional restraint or an inward heaviness the radiating quality proved more effective. For her, the heart of this shift was not simply about changing how energy was used, but about changing its point of origin: from control to receptivity, from outward expression to inner dwelling, from claiming the stage to allowing it to become a partner, a mirror, and a co-creator of presence.

What the author offers here is not a prescription that radiating energy is the best or only approach for solo performance. Rather, it is an invitation to reconsider the performer's attitude toward energy use. Training to radiate, in her experience, is not merely technical. It is a practice of cultivating an inner state one that harmonizes with body, breath, awareness, and a relational view of space. To move from projecting to radiating is to change not only physical expression, but the very posture of being onstage. This perspective may offer solo performers a sustainable path energetically, emotionally, and even spiritually for sustaining presence throughout a demanding performance.

After the show, she spoke with several audience members who had no background in performance or theatre. Their words aligned closely with her own internal experience. One person said, "It felt like there was energy surrounding you, but I couldn't tell where it was coming from." Another commented, "It was like something was filling the entire room, even though you weren't doing anything in that moment." For the author, such reflections were a reminder that radiating energy is not only something the performer feels from within it can also be perceived externally, even without formal training or theoretical understanding.

On a stage that felt increasingly vast under brighter lights, in louder silence, with space waiting to be activated, she came to realize that the energetic state of an actor cannot, in her view, be separated from the training of body and mind. It is, in fact, the core of that training. Radiating energy may be only one among many states worth exploring, but what matters is the willingness to listen to the body, to the space, and to one's instincts when a new attitude toward communication is needed. If projecting is a movement toward others, then radiating may be an invitation for everything else to arrive at us.

Epilogue: A Reflective Passage From Technique to Transformation

Looking back on the entire training process, what stands out most to the author is not simply the discovery of the concept of "radiating," but the realization that the techniques used in performance were never just physical tools or rehearsal-room strategies. They became portals into a deeper internal shift. Practices such as Qigong, the Eight Efforts, the Psychological Gesture, and the energy-radiation work were not merely ways to manage the body; they evolved into pathways through which she came face-to-face with herself in the most honest and direct way. In particular, Qigong which might appear from the outside as a sequence of gentle, repetitive movements offered the mind a rare pause from the drive to "do well" or "reach far enough." Over time, it released internal tension without her even realizing it.

As a solo performer with nowhere to hide, no scene partner to lean on, and no cues to pause, standing on stage became not only an act of "being with the character" but also "being with oneself" in complete vulnerability. Every tremor of emotion and every weakness in the body was amplified by the lights, the stage, and the surrounding silence. The assumption that "precise memorization is enough" or "emotional access is sufficient" proved inadequate for sustaining her through the entirety of the performance. At one point during the show, despite having rehearsed thoroughly, she felt herself "shrinking" in the vastness of the stage. Her energy seemed to retract and dissolve into the air. For her, this was not a matter of lacking technique, but a sign that body and mind had yet to truly connect. It became clear that no technique could serve its full purpose without also cultivating the inner state of "being with oneself."

The process of radiating energy, then, was not simply a method of projecting force outward. It developed into an internal state that required ongoing practice not only so that the audience might feel the performer, but also so that the performer could feel herself with full presence during the act. This state, in her experience, could not arise solely from memorization or repetition. It demanded sensitivity, deep listening, and the courage to accept oneself exactly as one is even in moments of unpreparedness. Radiating did not mean trying to express everything at once; it meant choosing to stay with what was already clear within, and allowing that to move outward through silence, grounded stillness, and breath. Even when the audience was seated far from the stage, she found that if the internal energy was solid enough, it could still be felt without the need to shout. Conversely, if that inner cohesion was lacking, no amount of movement or vocal strength could compensate. It became nothing more than effort spilling into the void, rather than energy being truly transmitted.

What the author came to understand was not simply "how to use energy wisely," but how to shift her entire attitude toward herself, the character, the stage, and the audience. What

had once been seen as an act of "giving" outward became a process that began with "being" fully and allowing that state to become a gift in itself. The stage was no longer just a physical frame to be filled, but a shared space that called for listening, understanding, and allowing it to reflect back. The transition from projecting to radiating was not only about altering the direction of energy, but about adopting a new perspective on the relationship between actor and space: from control to co-presence.

She discovered that the more she tried to "make it reach," the more rigid and resistant the energy became, leading to exhaustion. But when she returned to the rhythm of her own breath, something began to flow more steadily than any push ever could. In the end, what she gained from this process was not only a renewed understanding of stage energy, but also a deeper lesson: we do not always need to push ourselves. Sometimes, simply being with silence, with breath, with the present moment or even with our own fear and vulnerability may be the most powerful performance we can ever give.

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