

Draft excerpt from the forthcoming book, *Insight Improvisation: Integrating Meditation with Theater and Drama Therapy* by Joel Gluck.

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## The Role Stream

By Joel Gluck, Autumn 2005

The idea for the Role Stream emerged from some of my own experiences doing psolodrama. I discovered that very often I began my psolodramas not only with authentic movement, but also with a period of simply embodying whatever roles were arising, letting go of the need to make sense of them. Often this would lead me through very interesting energetic, physical, and emotional states, until finally I found myself moved or opened in some way. Then the real work of the psolodrama would begin.

One could compare the Role Stream phase of the psolodramatic journey to traveling down a stream or river: I consciously let myself be carried by currents I do not understand or control. Sometimes the roles that emerge in the Role Stream will make their way into the psolodrama proper, sometimes not. In some ways, the Role Stream serves as a psychic or emotional palette cleansing, a way to slough off the surface tensions and issues of the day and drop into a deeper level of work. In another sense, the Role Stream is a shamanic journey—we trust that if we follow the path and go down the hole into dark places, we will eventually meet a guide who has an important message for us. I also compare the Role Stream to traveling through the layers of a hurricane—after

moving through cloud, being buffeted about this way and that, I eventually reach the eye of the storm, a calm, open place where I can see clearly and in a new way.

A Role Stream is much like a *vipassana* meditation—the meditator notices what is arising without being attached to it, and then lets it go. In order to practice Role Stream we must exercise the “What” skill of choiceless awareness, allowing the next role to choose us, rather than us choosing it (or attempting to steer or control what is unfolding). As a form of “Who” Awareness, Role Stream is focused almost exclusively on role/character, using that awareness as a lens through which to perceive everything else: sensations, emotions, story, meaning, etc. Role Stream is much like authentic movement, but with an emphasis entirely on role—one could call it “authentic role-play.”

### **Guidelines for Role Stream**

**Beginning.** Enter empty. With eyes closed, take a moment in stillness to become aware of the body. Then open to authentic movement and/or sound.

**Taking on a role.** Notice as a role arises and embody it. Roles may be suggested by sense perceptions (e.g, position of the body, facial expression, feeling of contact with the floor, hearing/feeling the voice), by the mind (e.g., inner imagery, emotion, etc.), or often by a combination of several of these elements at once.

**Vocalizing.** Some roles may make sound. Others may speak, or sing, recognizable words. Others may babble word-like gibberish. Some roles may be silent. As in psolodrama, when entering a role it is OK to describe the role while speaking as that role (e.g., “I am a fish, with long, translucent fins. I am glowing.”), but this is not necessary. What is primary is to fully embody the role.

**Allowing ambiguity.** Note that a role may be unclear. For example, you may find yourself making a certain sound while shaking or vibrating your body. This is completely OK, and part of the process—we do not need to understand or name every role that is arising. Sometimes, if we stay with a certain physical/vocal pattern or feeling, a more clear role emerges; other times we simply move on to what's next. What is important is to trust the organic process that is unfolding, rather than to try to force it to be something it is not.

**Dropping/changing roles.** At any time another role may arise, or you can drop the current role, returning to stillness, movement, sound, etc. From this place, a new role may arise.

### **Major Differences from Psolodrama**

Although Role Stream can be an ideal warm-up or prelude to psolodrama, it has some distinct differences from that form:

In Role Stream there is no dialogue between roles, or looping back to previous roles. Role Stream is simply a string of roles, like a string of pearls. (One can loop back if that is what is truly authentically happening—however, this is not typical for Role Stream.)

In Role Stream we are not concerned with the psychodramatic roles. Most of what emerges in Role Stream could be considered auxiliary ego, but other roles, such as the protagonist, may emerge.

Role Stream:	role A→ role B→ role C→ role D, etc.
Psolodrama:	auxiliary ego A→ protagonist→ auxiliary ego A→ protagonist→ director→ protagonist→ auxiliary ego B→ protagonist→ double, etc.

In Role Stream we do not bring the psychodramatic/psolodramatic intentions of insight or catharsis, or exploring an issue, theme, or problem that is arising. The intention in Role Stream is simply to embody each new role as it arises, fully and mindfully.

### **Keys to the Process**

In approaching Role Stream, it helps a great deal to **slow down**. Do not rush the process—take your time to discover the next role or find your way into it.

Also, try to **let go**—do not feel a need to perform, entertain your witness, make something happen, or be “good.” Don’t push. In the course of five minutes, you may have only one role arise, or you may have 20—it does not matter.

As much as possible, **be true to what is arising**—let the body lead. Don’t add anything (your “good ideas”) or turn a role into something more recognizable, acceptable, dramatic, or funny. Let go of logic, stop making sense. A role can be subtle, mysterious, half-baked. It’s OK to feel surprised and/or lost during a Role Stream.

Finally, when appropriate, **cook the role**. Once a role emerges, work with it. Move as the role. Sound or speak as it. Find out what it has to say. Get into it. And then feel free to drop it at any time.

## **Ways of Using Role Stream**

The primary way of using Role Stream is as a preparatory stage leading to psolodrama. For example, if the psoloist is given 25 minutes for their process, the time may be broken into five minutes of authentic movement, followed by five minutes of Role Stream, followed by 15 minutes of psolodrama. The witness can time and ring a bell—or say “ding”—at the end of each stage.

Role Stream can also be used as its own exercise, one-to-one or in a workshop setting. It helps to prepare with some authentic movement, and to follow the activity with a short debrief—the witness or audience can reflect back what roles they saw.