

Psolodrama is a therapeutic practice that combines meditative awareness, authentic movement, theatrical improvisation, and psychodrama. It is the culminating form in Insight Improvisation, and a powerful vehicle for self-discovery. As in authentic movement, psolodrama usually requires two people: the soloist (the person whose psolodrama it is) and the witness.

Warming up. When meeting to do psolodrama, it is important to check in and warm up, to help create a safe, supportive container for the work, as well as to ready and open the body, mind, senses, and emotions for what's to come:

1. **Check-in.** Any kind of check-in in which emotions are shared is helpful at the start. **Clearing** is particularly useful: it's a form of check-in in which the speaker says whatever they need to say in order to be fully present.
2. **Meditation.** This can be any one of a number of forms of meditation, including silent, sitting meditations such as *samadhi* (concentration meditation, typically focused on the breath), *vipassana* (a Buddhist meditation opening the awareness to all the senses, thoughts, and feelings), and *metta* (lovingkindness) meditation. Active meditations with a partner can include **eye-contact meditation**, **shared vipassana dialogue**, and **metta dialogue**.
3. **Authentic Movement.** The mover, observed by a supportive witness, moves with her eyes closed, following bodily impulse (rather than planning or controlling the movement), and also notices the feelings, images, memories, etc., that arise. Afterward, mover and witness each share their experience. When doing authentic movement as a warm-up with a partner, it is also possible to move simultaneously in the space with no witness—in this way, the movement simply becomes the natural extension of the meditation, a mindful exploration in motion and in stillness.
4. **Improvisation.** If energy is low, it can be helpful to do some interactive improvisation with your partner before doing psolodrama. Warm-ups can include **impulse dialogue** (using sound and movement), **role dialogue** (playing characters), and **“yes!” improvisation** (creating scenes together).

Structure and timing of a psolodrama progression. Before each person practices psolodrama, it is useful to agree on a progression to help the soloist enter smoothly into the work. A typical sequence includes silent authentic movement (e.g., for 2 or more minutes), shared *vipassana* (2), role stream (2), and scene stream (2)—described below—and then psolodrama (12 or more). (Experienced practitioners may choose to do this organically/untimed, perhaps skipping some stages entirely.) This can be followed, optionally, by a period of writing/drawing (5) and, finally, sharing with the witness (10-15). Note that each of the following practices can also be used by itself (e.g., devoting 20 minutes just to exploring role stream is a rich experience):

1. **Authentic Movement.** The soloist enters empty, without a preconception of what will happen. She finds a comfortable place and position to start in, and closes her eyes. Tuning into breath and body sensations, she begins to follow her body and how it wants to move. As she moves, letting her body lead, she becomes aware of feelings and inner imagery, allowing herself to explore them through the movement.
2. **Shared Vipassana.** As the soloist continues her authentic movement, she begins to speak aloud whatever she is noticing, including bodily sensations (“left hand tingling”), other senses (“sound of bird song”), inner imagery (“I’m lying in a forest, smelling soil”), and thoughts and feelings. She can use sound as well as changes in voice to express the quality of whatever is arising.
3. **Role Stream.** As she continues her moving/sounding/speaking, the soloist notices how her sensations, feelings, body position, movement, sound, or words may suggest a particular character. As each role arises, she moves, sounds, and then speaks as that role. She embodies each new role fully, explores the role for as long as she likes, and then lets it go, returning to authentic movement until a new role emerges from the body/movement. Roles can be people, animals, objects, parts of the body, imaginary creatures, forces of nature, archetypes, etc.
4. **Scene Stream.** Building on role stream, the soloist begins to allow the roles arising to interact with one another, creating scenes between them, dialogues that are physical as well as vocal. She can explore an interaction as much as she likes, or let the roles go at any time, returning to authentic movement and then opening to new roles that arise spontaneously.
5. **Psolodrama.** In the transition from scene stream to psolodrama, the soloist can use whatever role or scene she finds herself in as her starting point, adding her awareness of the five psychodramatic roles (described below), employing any of them as needed to more deeply explore whatever feeling, conflict, story, issue, or theme is arising. The solo improvisation that develops is a series of spontaneous monologues and dialogues featuring these roles, all embodied by the soloist.

The witness provides a supportive, nonjudgmental container for the work. He observes and keeps time, and if the soloist requests it, can signal each stage with a word or a bell. The witness maintains the container by practicing mindfulness (with the soloist as the “object” of his meditation), as well as opening to his own feelings and experience. When time is up, the witness says “slowly, in your own time, bring your psolodrama to a close,” and then asks the soloist whether she would like to speak first. The soloist can share anything she wishes about her experience. The witness reflects back what he saw and heard during the psolodrama as accurately as possible (authentic movement witnessing), shares what personally resonates with his own life (psychodramatic sharing), and, if the soloist is open to it, offers his take on how the different roles or scenes might relate to one another or to the soloist’s life (interpretation). Anything the witness says comes from an intention of *metta*—kind, supportive, nonjudgmental; completely in service to the soloist.

The five psychodramatic roles are a useful set of distinctions or tools that enable the psoloist to more fully explore the feelings, conflicts, issues or themes arising. Employing these roles can help the psoloist “cook” the present scene so that it reveals the deeper feelings or insights that lie beneath. They can also help the psoloist get unstuck if the path forward is unclear.

Protagonist	Oneself in the scene. This can be the psoloist in the present, but can also be oneself in the past or future, e.g., as a child, a teen, an old woman or man, etc. It can also be oneself in an imaginary state—e.g., before birth, after death, transformed into a monster, a different gender, etc.
Auxiliary Ego	Other characters who may appear in the scene, real or imagined. These can be people; talking animals, plants, or objects; gods, forces of nature, or other archetypes; ideas or emotions; parts of the body or self; etc. Auxiliaries can be antagonistic (monsters, villains, abusers), supportive (mentors, ideal parents), ambiguous, or changing.
Director	One’s own inner guide, wise mind, or therapist. Whereas in psychodrama, the director is the psychodramatist leading the session, in psolodrama the director is oneself. The psoloist is encouraged to embody and speak as the director role, particularly when feeling lost or confused. The director can dialogue with and ask questions of the protagonist, such as “How do you feel right now?” or “What do you need?” and can also suggest or confirm what the next step might be—in order to return the protagonist to action.
Double	The double gives voice to inner thoughts and feelings the protagonist does not yet feel able to speak. For example, in a psolodrama scene between the protagonist as a little girl and an auxiliary ego role of “Wicked Witch,” the girl might be too afraid to yell at the witch. By becoming the double, the psoloist can access and speak all of what the girl feels inside, or what the present-day adult mind of the protagonist wants to say.
Audience	Whereas in psychodrama the audience is comprised of other group members who are observing the action, in psolodrama the psoloist can take on the role of audience herself, speaking what observers might say if they were watching the scene at hand. The audience may be an inner critic, a chorus of support, a bored theatergoer, etc.

Additional guidelines for psolodrama:

- **The Purpose of Psolodrama** is to experience a full expression of, transformation of, and/or new insight into, the core emotion, conflict, issue, or theme arising. In the process, psolodrama can often evoke a profound sense of catharsis, opening, or resolution. Like a good psychodrama, a good psolodrama is usually not “comfortable”—it is a powerful way to explore one’s growing edges, and calls for vulnerability, honesty, and courage.
- **Go for the Heart.** The psoloist aims for the heart of the matter—she does not avoid, delay, or dance around the issue, but instead dives in and completely embodies the images, feelings, and roles arising, fully and authentically. If she encounters an inner critic, hesitancy, or other form of resistance, she can reverse roles with it, embodying and giving it voice, and work with it through dialogue with other roles.
- **Follow Intuition.** At any time, the psoloist can return to stillness, silence, and authentic movement—or any stage of the progression, including shared *vipassana*, role stream, or scene stream—or simply shift roles or scenes at will. The psoloist consciously avoids doing her “good ideas” but instead draws inspiration from what her body is experiencing in each moment, as well as from inner imagery and “gut” feel or intuition.
- **Let Go of Logic.** No distinction is made between fact, fantasy, past, present, or future—psolodrama can mingle them all. There is no need to be consistent or logical; e.g., what began as a monster or villain may turn out later to be the protagonist.
- **Not a Performance.** Psolodrama is not a performance, but a personal process—the psoloist is focused on what is emerging moment by moment, and is not concerned with how this is looking or sounding. The witness will get what he gets—he may need to move closer to hear better. The psoloist’s eyes can be closed throughout, which often helps.
- **Ask the Director.** If the psoloist feels lost or confused, she can always enter the role of director, and provide supportive coaching to herself, e.g. by asking “how do you feel right now?” or “what do you need?” Another option is to return to stillness and awareness of breath, or sound and movement, to help reconnect with the body.
- **Coaching.** If the psoloist feels a need for additional support, she can ask her witness, either before or during the psolodrama, to be her coach. When providing coaching, the witness, remaining seated, can offer supportive questions or comments to help guide the psoloist. Any guidance given should remain succinct and spare, with the goal of returning the psoloist to action, e.g.: “reverse roles,” “ask the director,” “speak aloud” (for a psoloist doing only movement/sound), “return to movement” (for a psoloist who is talking/intellectualizing and not connecting with her body).

Insight Improvisation (of which psolodrama and other activities mentioned above are a part) is an integration of meditation, theater, and therapy. To learn more, and read chapters of the new *Insight Improv* book, please visit www.insightimprov.org. Questions, comments, or feedback can be directed to me at joelgluck@yahoo.com, or call 617-484-2982. With metta, Joel