

Social communicative crisis

Oleksandr Tokarchuk, Yaroslava Bondar

The problem of social interactions, in our opinion, is the effort to simplify and schematize encounters between strangers in various circumstances of life to divert the flow of communication into a familiar, safe channel. We believe it happened that, in our society and European culture in general, communication with a strangers a vast majority of the time is not an open and joyful experience. Generally speaking, these interactions are determined by social roles—statuses that the participants of the conversation try or carried on by themselves with complete acceptance. We think everywhere in Europe there is, if not fear, an aversion to communication at the status level. The risk of having ‘status’ communication is the reason for reluctance to casual or random interactions between people in public. There is even a sense of uncertainty as to whether to enter into any kind of communication.

The schematization of socializing, which facilitates status-driven interactions self-evident consequence, of a ‘socially conditioned’ society. Socially stratified societies clearly define who is who and what place each one society member occupies. Therefore, communication in such societies features automatism, modeling, even ‘cyberneticity’. People cease to be humans and become acquirers of certain statuses. Such communication turns people away from each other. The problem is developing.

For clarity, we can consider two interactions between strangers:

- 1) strangers with undefined statuses (social positions).
- 2) strangers with predefined statuses: for example, client and service provider; employer and employee; professor and student; driver

and policeman; concierge and resident; husband and wife; friend and friend—no matter from which side we consider this situation, preferably from both.

The first case, according to our observations, raises the stakes of the participants and requires greater energetic inclusion in the initial moment of contact to find the starting territory wherein it can develop. For the second case, additional effort is not required. There are clearer options for developing these interactions further, but it is a priori schematic, functional, and potentially has a predetermined 'correct' (known) path. As a rule, an algorithm of communication of people with determined social positions is already compiled and put into effect.

As soon as the people of the first situation determine their statuses (social positions) or perhaps try on the status (role) offered by their partner and accept it by their own free will, they immediately begin to search in their memory for known scenarios of the development of a similar situation and begin to perform this social "ritual". We have seen this both in life and, especially, in classes at our acting school when students receive a sketch game assignment. A universal unified solution to a 'behavioral task' becomes typical, recognizable and accepted by students.

A behavioral task is usually formulated as follows: "How should I behave in certain circumstances of the place or time in relation to this person?" or "what line of behavior should I choose? An acquaintance or a stranger?"

The second situation is characterized by a conflict between a person and a social position. A priori there cannot be complete identification of the status and the person. Therefore, potentially, this seemingly built-in backlash can lead to an imbalance of the entire communication system and, eventually, to its collapse, leading to isolation, alienation and marginalization. When a person steps out of line in this system, eventually disorders and other unhealthy psychological conditions arise.

In our society, the status of the people is very often identified by special clothes, uniforms marked by insignia. Since ancient times, the theater has used masks to define the character of the personage. It is important for us that overalls, masks, insignia(s)—indicate a social role, status

or position, thereby highlighting an important option: it is easier to communicate at the level of statuses!

We also can look into typical cases of communication between familiar people. For example, in the literature, we often come across described situations of meeting old acquaintances who have not seen each other for a long time and did not know about each other's fate. In the beginning their conversation is a human connection—it takes place with the memory of the past relationship they had, but later, over time, when they learn the current 'position' of each other, the style of communication and even relations is transformed into a 'status' one.

Even communication between colleagues and friends can have two distinctly different levels: the level of working relations and human, friendly interactions. There is nothing inherently wrong with having various levels of communication. The problem we see refers to such a strong and deep self-identification with social status/position that any interaction transforms in to an interaction between statuses.

We see the aggravation of this crisis, by increasing requests from various call-center businesses to improve the communication of their employees-operators with clients in the direction of prioritizing humans and moving away from automation. In addition, we observe the growth of a vacuum in communication in unregulated interactions where there are no prepared scenarios and roles. Most people get lost in the absence of instructions and do not want to take risks in the face of the unknown. That is why the problem of human interaction is taking on the scale of a crisis.

Have we forgotten how communication with each other should look like—communication that is free from the imposed stencil of statuses? The complete absence or ignoring of social positions probably makes it impossible to have a functional and rational interaction due to contemporary needs. Positional interactions make it impossible to make an irrational, a sensual connection or, at least, make it accidental, even wondrous. Therefore, a person can get to know another person mainly outside the boundaries of exclusively status communications.

Our acting school School of Imagery offers society a different model of human interaction than the one we observed and described

above, perhaps somewhat thickening the colors. This model differs in the Imagery format of communication. In order not to get lost in the depths of the Theory of Imagery, let's consider only one of its manifestations, which is tangential to the topic raised, namely, "Compositional Imagery".

The Compositional Method

The compositional method of solving communication problems in society is based on the concept of "Compositional Imagery", which was developed at our school. Let's expand this concept. The central element is the 'Compositional behavioral Image' (CI). CI, in our understanding, is such an interaction of a group of people that creates a coherent impression of a cohesive team, one in which each member is busy with his own work and occupies a certain place in the structure of these relationships. A CI cannot be divided into parts without losing the quality of the team. Should this happen, the divided parts will not factor into the primary CI, but the best case, a new CI. The CI is perceived by the observer as a holistic state of a heterogeneous group of people, which has an internal hierarchy and structure.

CI performed by a group of actors is a living functional structure that maintains its unique momentary state exactly as long as it is necessary to obtain a complete impression from CI.

In our social life, the CI can be observed randomly and episodically. They can be analyzed precisely as images of a group of people in a certain structural interaction. But whether such an analysis will help to get a certain holistic impression is an open question. In any case, understanding and feeling the phenomenon of CI in society will activate the initiative of the participants of such communication, to expand their arsenal of interaction, and, ultimately, to improve quality of life.

CI, as we said, has an internal hierarchy and structure. We distinguish the centers of the composition and the periphery that creates these centers. The centers are connected to each other only conventionally, and they only interact indirectly due to migration of the periphery. The com-

positions are determined only by the structure of the centers and their mutual location. Each center has its own territory. Without the periphery, centers do not exist. Each center must be supported by peripheral actions in relation to it. Without such support, the center is not the center of the composition, but only a context, background, conventionally the garbage. It should be noted that an absolutely clean composition without garbage is a product of high-level acting creativity. In acting compositions, we distinguish three main types of centers:

- a) A person
- b) A status (place)
- c) An act/action/deed

The first type of center refers to the creative resume of a specific person, a resume of his/her creative solutions. Knowledge of such 'baggage' determines the actions of the periphery in relation to centers of this type.

The second type of center, Status—or (social) role, refers to a position in a certain hierarchy. We understand this type of center as a place in both the narrow and broad senses of the word. In the narrow—this is a certain place on the site. Broadly speaking, it is a position, a place in hierarchy, a rank.

The last type of center, an act/action/deed, is that can be recognized by anyone on the site.

Let's note that all three centers can be gathered when a certain person occupies a certain position—has a status and, moreover, is engaged in certain activities (for example: sings a song, dances, campaigns, expresses dissatisfaction out loud etc.). This means that the actions of the periphery may differ depending on which center they are implemented in relation to. If the type of the center is not defined in advance, then such definition is assumed by the actor who chooses a peripheral function for himself

If the center is a person, then it acts either in relation to the person (his/her creative resume), regardless of what exactly this person is busy doing at that time, and what position (status, social position) this person occupies.

If a 'peripheral' actor chooses a center—Status, then he acts in relation to it, regardless of who exactly occupies this position and what exactly this center is occupied with. If the center is an act/action/deed, then the actor acts in relation to it, regardless to the person who performs this action and what position or status this person occupies.

What is the periphery and what are the 'actions of the periphery' in relation to the centers?

First of all, it should be noted that any Composition is created by those participants (actors) who have assumed the functions of the periphery. It means that the periphery is more important than the centers although the composition is determined by the presence and structure (mutual arrangement) of the centers. Such a paradox!

Centers exist regardless of the actions of the periphery and do not react on any actions of periphery. The compositional connection is detected when there is a center and a periphery—it is a key factor in the presence of a Compositional Image.

The actors (members of the group) involved in the actions of a periphery determine such a course of action for themselves, in relation to the center, so that the result is in favor of the periphery for the peripheral actor himself. It means that, in such a relationship, the peripheral actor must be more lively and alive than the center. The center does not pay attention to the periphery and lives its own life. The periphery has an ambition to lead a center-periphery pair. With such a course of actions, there appears something what we call a "compositional connection". This is a key element of the composition. A compositional relationship created by the periphery that rests at the center. Without the ambition of the periphery to lead the center-periphery pair, communication does not happen. Instead, there is either copying, replication of the center or an extension-like adaptation (NLP). There is no compositional connection in any of the two options.

A single compositional connection can be a unique composition created by two participants. But this is an exceptional thing, although it is useful for understanding and feeling what a real CI is.

Exercises on creating compositional connections expand the participants' understanding of methods of compositional communication. We

are not talking about pair imagery here, although in the interaction of two personalities, this is the most complete way of interaction—the creation and transformation of a pair image. Compositions are the interaction of several people without establishing a strong mutual (pair) connection.

There are certain psychological methods of studying human behavior in society, for example, the method of placements (for example, according to Hellinger). But the ‘arrangement’ method does not determine the possibility of working in a hierarchy, nor does it have the goal of creating a recognizable compositional connection. The game in ‘arrangements’ is always linear, not picky about the actor’s immersion in the image.

Working on compositional exercises in a group is always more productive than working in a pair or even with three people. The dynamics of rotations of the periphery with a constant structure of the centers opens an understanding and feeling of the possibilities of ‘coloring’ such communication with an awareness of the positional game.

Changing centers is a special technique, although it has a manipulative flavor, but the result—the creation of an unexpected CI—justifies the moral ‘flaws’ of such a change. Compositional Images and their transformations make participants more flexible in communication, optimistic and cheerful at the same time.

Among the most interesting in our context are compositional exercises for creating a connection with one center and transforming it into a connection with another. For example, the ‘periphery’ chooses a Status Center for its actions, or simply the status of a certain person. It acts in relation to such a center, discovers a compositional connection, maintains it, and over time, transforms its actions in relation to another center: to the activities with which the partner (center) is busy, or to the partner’s personality, to the Person.

Laboratory of social transformation

Our school contributes to the development of performative arts by trying to focus the community’s attention on the fact that the real acting, activ-

ity, work and profession of an actor is first of all an art. It is not a craft, not a skill. An actor is not a performer in the sense of one, for example, who performs written music. Distinguishable from other forms of art, an actor is a creator of a unique Imagery, completely Imagery, authorial art.

It is customary to call the art of acting performative art, but if there is no clearly defined 'score' of the acting, but a creative task that involves a great deal of unregulated freedom, then an actor's performance always includes a great deal of improvisation! In the traditional director's theater, the ambition of the directors to prescribe the actors a detailed score of internal states and behavior is widespread. The only thing that remains for the actors is to follow along the laid 'rails', without turning to the 'margins'—a freedom beyond the 'rails'.

We offer a different concept of actor's art, where the actor is a full-fledged artist, a creator of a play or a movie, similar to the director who solves his own tasks, inherent in his profession, without entering the 'territory' of the actor's creation. To realize these ambitions, we clearly distinguish the performance of a role as a certain imitative work (of a 'hot' or 'cold' variety) on the one hand, and as the solution of creative tasks by an actor who is an independent creative unit—creator, on the other. In this essay, we invite others to consider social interactions in a compositional (by definition of the SoI) perspective. Since the educational practice of our school is based on research principles, we also consider the possibilities of transformations as a laboratory.

Based on our school's experience in creating and transforming Compositional Images, we suggest using our methodology. More specifically, we propose the study of possibilities regarding the identifying of statuses as a certain quality of relations, and further, its transformation into purely human relations. In these laboratories, it is important to understand what a composition is built on, namely such a thing as a compositional connection. This is a key question in understanding what a Compositional Image is. Social relationships from a compositional point of view suffer from the uncertainty and rawness of human relationships, in contrast to very carefully worked out status relations. The laboratory of

social transformation can offer both performative and social-play work in separate working groups and classes.

The laboratory of social transformation can be deployed anywhere—in a university, college, gymnasium or in a public(gathering) area at the place of the residence of the participants. The work is possible in the project format with either the involvement of specialists in Compositional Imagery or in the open format with the association of the citizens under the guidance of competent curators.

To develop a curriculum for such a laboratory, we have to use certain dramaturgical material such as real-life situations, complex or specific interactions-relations, poorly understood relationships within teams of colleagues etc., or any specifics of the social life that the participants would be able to present in a metaphorical, magical or other fictional, fairy-tale form. For the primary dispersal of the group, we can use typical or problematic from the point of view of communication that already appears in literature or journalism. Through compositional games, the laboratory will explore both familiar and understandable crisis communicative situations, as well as unique, intimate and private ones presented in metaphor.

Imagery, and in our case the Compositional Imagery, precisely because of its ability to impress, will sow the seeds of new creative solutions in the hearts of the participants and give a powerful impulse to the transformation of social communication to its rise to a new level. This is the level of Imagery that we promote in our acting school, and to which we strive in social life.

