

Title: Theatrical Psychology: Vygotsky, the Stage, and a Theory of Communication
Author: Alisa Lin, The Ohio State University

Abstract:

Many Russian theater practitioners of the early-20th century—including Stanislavsky, Evreinov, and Meyerhold—relied on findings from the rapidly developing field of psychology to support their theories of how actors and spectators experience a theatrical performance. This paper reverses the question, to ask how the Russian modernist theater, so invested in questions of perception and consciousness, influenced the development of early-Soviet psychology, specifically through the work of cultural-historical psychologist Lev Vygotsky. In so doing, the paper engages in questions of how the theater, famously considered a *theatrum mundi*, or model of the world, has served as a scientific model and foundation for crucial theories of 20th-century psychology.

Vygotsky's under-studied writings on *Hamlet* and his reviews of local performances in Moscow and Gomel, dating to the 1910s-20s, reveal not merely his insightful intellectual eye, but his attention to precisely the concerns at the heart of his later psychological studies on communication and cognitive development. This paper will focus specifically, first, on Vygotsky's conceptualization of the actor's relationship to her role and will show that Vygotsky's phenomenological understanding of this relationship is fundamental to his later theories. Second, the paper will consider how Stanislavsky's acting methodology influenced Vygotsky's approach to the theater, and therefore to human psychology. Broader concerns of the field of medical humanities as applied to the theater, including questions raised by the relationship between "false" actorly bodies and the "real" bodies they represent, will frame the paper.

The paper will draw on recent scholarship on these texts, in particular by V. S. Sobkin ("L. S. Vygotskii i teatr," 2015).