



# LUND UNIVERSITY

## Understanding the Acts of Another: Edith Stein and Konstantin Stanislavski

Rynell, Erik

2017

[Link to publication](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Rynell, E. (2017). *Understanding the Acts of Another: Edith Stein and Konstantin Stanislavski*. Paper presented at Phenomenology and Aesthetics, Riga, Latvia.

*Total number of authors:*

1

*Creative Commons License:*

GNU LGPL

### General rights

Unless other specific re-use rights are stated the following general rights apply:

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal

Read more about Creative commons licenses: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/>

### Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

LUND UNIVERSITY

PO Box 117  
221 00 Lund  
+46 46-222 00 00

## Understanding the acts of another: Edith Stein and Konstantin Stanislavski

2017 marks the centenary of the publication of Edith Stein's *On the Problem of Empathy* (*Zum Problem der Einfühlung*). The book was written as a dissertation under Edmund Husserl's supervision and it remains still today an oft-cited classic within literature on intersubjectivity.

In the same year as Stein defended her thesis, but obviously independently from the activities in Freiburg, the prominent Russian director, actor and writer on the actor's art Konstantin Stanislavski preoccupied himself with the essay *Griboyedov's "Woe from Wit"*, which was an early comprehensive outline of what was to become his "system" for acting. In the essay, Stanislavski advances his idea of the actor's work as first of all based on embodied, first person understanding of an other individual's situation, constrained by the question "what if I found myself in the circumstances given for this person?" which also became a formula for making sense of the role's actions. Stanislavski adapted his methodological findings to the aesthetics he embraced, scenic realism. But from very early on these proved applicable to widely different aesthetic programs, as testified by the works of prominent artists such as Vakhtangov, Grotowski, Barba, and Boal, and, today, by the Russian director Anatoly Vasiliev and the British director and performance artist Katie Mitchell, among others.

In their respective fields, both Stein and Stanislavski treat conditions for our understanding of other individuals. In my talk, I am going to compare basic points in the two writers' approaches. Stanislavski's discussion takes place within the field of art and aesthetics, which was also where Stein's discussion once originated, and in her dissertation she recurrently cites theorists within this field (Lipps 1905, 1903-06, Cohn 1901, Volkelt 1905, Dohrn 1906, Roetecken 1902, Geiger 1913). She states that: "A creature of free imagination can also be an intelligible person" (Stein 1917, 1989). On Stein's view, empathy is a distinct form of other-directed intentionality. In contrast, Gurwitsch (1979) advanced a theory that foregrounded situational aspects of other's behaviour as a key to understanding others, in a way that bears resemblances with Stanislavski. A middle way between Stein and Gurwitsch was presented by Schütz (1967). In my talk I will use Stein's theory, and side-glances to those of the other two, as a framework for a reading of one of Stanislavski's seminal works on the actor's work as an embodied way to understand another individual. I will argue that the applicability of Stein's, Gurwitsch' and Schütz' theories to Stanislavski's writings on acting once again points to the close bonds between empathic understanding as a condition for sense-making in art activities and empathy as a technical term within philosophical analysis, something that is also mirrored in the historical relationship between the two.