THE BRAIN FORUM

Act like you mean it - The oldest love story of the world meets neuroscience

After Beijing, Brussels, San Francisco, Sao Paulo, Shanghai and Vienna, Prof. Thomas Grunwald, a neurologist and epileptologist at the Swiss Epilepsy Centre in Zurich, and Prof. Anton Rey, a dramaturge and artistic researcher from Zurich University of the Arts, will conduct their lecture-performance "Act like you mean it" on 26 May at The Brain Forum 2016.

Dedicated to Entrepreneurship and Innovation, the first day of The Brain Forum 2016 will be closed by "Act like you mean it": a reworking of Romeo and Juliet celebrating neuroscience in the 400th year since Shakespeare's death. During this lecture-performance, the authenticity of actor's emotions will be investigated from a theatrical and neuroscientific perspective.

Each and every one of us has been touched by our favourite actors' performances. But how do actors convey such complex feelings? Do they really "love" or "hate" their stage partners? "Act like you mean it" will reveal both neuroscientific and artistic answers to these questions.

Using artistic expertise and results from modern techniques to examine brain activity, Prof. Thomas Grunwald, Medical Director at the Swiss Epilepsy Centre in Zurich and Prof. Anton Rey, Head of the Institute for Performing Arts and Film (IPF) at Zurich University of the Arts, will quarrel over the veracity of actors' emotions during a performance of the Romeo and Juliet balcony scene. At the same time, two young Swiss professional actors – Ms Annina Euling and Mr Jan Beller, both from Zurich University of the Arts – will fall in love (or pretend to do so?).

"Act like you mean it" originates from the joint research programme "Authenticity of Emotion" by the IPF and the Swiss Epilepsy Centre. The study addressed the question of whether experienced actors can control their emotions and elicit genuine feelings on stage instead of faking them. The lecture-performance will reveal whether, during emotional performances, actors can activate parts of their brains that normally subserve mnemonic and emotional processes but usually cannot be accessed deliberately – or whether they cannot.

Prof. Rey states "the main objective is to participate in a 250 year old question on the differences between so called "hot" or "cold" acting. We consider the collaboration as a perfect cooperation where for once the artists are not taken as entertainers but as experts in what they have specialised in over decades of training."

From a scientific point of view, Prof. Grunwald explains that this kind of research allows us to learn about brain structure and function, and this knowledge is particularly useful for example in epilepsy patients where parts of the brain sometimes have to be removed to cure patients from otherwise intractable focal epilepsies. Prof. Grunwald comments: "This knowledge can help to make surgical procedures safer and to better adjudicate the question of whether an operation should be performed or not in individual patients".

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About The Brain Forum – thebrainforum.org

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The Brain Forum, first launched in 2013, brings together novel thinkers and pioneers in brain research, technology, healthcare and the economy. Researchers, engineers, healthcare professionals, entrepreneurs, industrialists, investors, funding agencies and policy makers will meet at The Brain Forum 2016, to advance our understanding of how the brain works and to accelerate the application and value of this knowledge in society and the economy.