

A Survey and Theory of the Effects of Various Hamlet Videos on Viewers' Brains

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Abstract : How do ideas, images, and emotions in stage-plays and videos affect us? Do they evoke a greater awareness (or cognitive reappraisal of emotions) through possible shifts between left-cortical, right-cortical, and subcortical networks? To address these questions, this presentation summarizes the research of various neuroscientists, especially Bernard Baars and others involved in Global Workspace Theory, Matthew Lieberman in social neuroscience, Iain McGilchrist on left and right cortical functions, and Jaak Panksepp on the subcortical circuits of primal emotions. Through such research, this presentation offers an 'inner theatre' model of the brain, regarding major hubs of neural networks and our animal ancestry. It also considers recent experiments, by Mario Beauregard, on the cognitive reappraisal of sad, erotic, and aversive film clips. Finally, it applies the inner-theatre model and related research to survey results of theatre students who read and then watched the 'To be or not to be' speech in 8 different video versions (from stage and screen productions) of William Shakespeare's Hamlet. Findings show that students become aware of left-cortical, right-cortical, and subcortical brain functions—and shifts between them—through staging and movie-making choices in each of the different videos.

Keywords : cognitive reappraisal, Hamlet, neuroscience, Shakespeare, theatre

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