

Bernstein Center for Computational Neuroscience

Presentation of all German BCCNs at the German Protestant Church Day ("Kirchentag") 2005, Hannover



'When your child asks, in time to come...' (Deuteronomy 6:20). This theme brought together over 100,000 people in Hannover from 25th-29th May 2005 at the 30th German Protestant 'Kirchentag'. The Kirchentag housed hundreds of presentations and events highlighting all topics that relate to human life - ranging from truly theological up to technological and scientific contents. The four German Bernstein Centers took up this opportunity to present and discuss their work with the German general public.

Actually, many visitors were surprised to see a presentation about brain research in this unexpected location. As soon as they heard about the research questions that are tackled in the 4 Bernstein centers, however, the audience got captured and many people stopped to hear more about what researchers could tell them about their research.

The immense practical dimension of brain research was impressively demonstrated by the fact that practically each and every visitor had a personal story to tell about him- or herself or a person in the family that was affected by a neurological condition.

In view of this fact, it was not surprising that many people were fascinated by the 'brain-machine-interface' projects (Freiburg/Berlin/Goettingen), in which researchers take first steps at building a 'neural prosthesis' that can use brain activity to control a prosthetic device. Our visitors could clearly see how these developments offer exciting new perspectives for large numbers of patients suffering from all kinds of motor handicaps.





Much attention was also caught by the unique 'EyeCam' developed by the Munich Center that is able to steer a camera according to the eye movements of the person that wears it - thus, allowing other people to see the world 'with another person's eyes'.

The Goettingen Center demonstrated how brain activity can be beneficially affected by transcranial magnetic stimulation (TMS).

All this information about the facts modern research has gathered about the brain made some visitors uneasy. Is there still a place for consciousness, for belief? Do we have a free will, or are our decisions dictated by the 1.5 kg of greyish-white brain tissue in our heads? Can new techniques discovered by modern brain research be used to manipulate people?



Of course, no easy or final answers can be offered to these questions. Brain research is still far from unravelling the last miracles of our human existence. For the typical church day visitor, this insight may come as a relief. On the other side, it shows that much still has to be done before we understand the brain to its full extent.

At the end of this 3-day event, the representatives of the 4 Bernstein Centers left with the happy feeling of having shared their enthusiasm about their up-to-date research projects with a large number of people that would have never come across their research labs. The positive feedback that they experienced gave them new energy to continue their research and to continue to talk about it.

Download the Kirchentag-Flyer here (in German)...

History

Action Performed by	Date and Time	Comment
Publish Dancoisne	Sep 25, 2006 10:11 PM	No comments.