

Neuroscience 2000 Abstract

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Abstract Title:	High spatial and temporal resolution estimates of calcium dynamics in dendritic spines using MCell simulations.
Authors:	Franks, K. M.*^{1,2} ; Bartol, T. M. ¹ ; Poo, M. M. ² ; Sejnowski, T. J. ^{1,3} ¹ CNL, Salk Inst, La Jolla, CA ² Biology, UCSD, La Jolla, CA ³ HHMI, La Jolla, CA
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Calcium plays a critical signaling role in many biological systems. For example, in the postsynaptic neuron, increases in Ca^{2+} concentration are believed to be essential for the induction of long-term potentiation and long-term depression, changes in synaptic efficacy thought to be the cellular mechanisms underlying learning and memory. Measurements of intracellular Ca^{2+} have typically relied on the use of fluorescent imaging where the sensors used buffer the Ca^{2+} , obscuring concentration measurements, and have limited spatial and temporal resolution. In postsynaptic spines, the spatial localization of Ca^{2+} -dependent effectors such as calmodulin, CaMKII and calcineurin make the measurement of Ca^{2+} concentration in the entire spine less than ideal. Using MCell, a Monte Carlo simulator, to monitor both the influx of Ca^{2+} into a spine and dendrite and its reactions with intracellular molecules, we have reproduced fluorescent transients measured in neocortical and hippocampal neurons. This has allowed determination of the unperturbed Ca^{2+} dynamics and suggests kinetics and concentrations of endogenous Ca^{2+} binding proteins. We have measured Ca^{2+} concentrations in microdomains throughout the spine showing highly heterogeneous concentrations of free intracellular Ca^{2+} . Furthermore, we show the spatial and temporal activation of different Ca^{2+} -dependent effectors resulting from asynchronous pairing of pre- and postsynaptic action potentials. To complement experimental studies, we show how computer simulations can offer an alternate and complementary method of assaying intracellular Ca^{2+} dynamics and reactions.
