Synaptic plasticity with discrete state synapses

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(Dated: February 9, 2008)

Experimental observations on synaptic plasticity at individual glutamatergic synapses from the CA3 Shaffer collateral pathway onto CA1 pyramidal cells in the hippocampus suggest that the transitions in synaptic strength occur among discrete levels at individual synapses ([21] and S. S.-H. Wang, unpublished data used with the authors' permission). This happens for both long term potentiation (LTP) and long term depression (LTD) induction protocols. O'Connor, Wittenberg, and Wang have argued that three states would account for their observations on individual synapses in the CA3-CA1 pathway. We develop a quantitative model of this three state system with transitions among the states determined by a competition between kinases and phosphatases shown by O'Connor et al. to be determinant of LTP and LTD, respectively. Specific predictions for various plasticity protocols are given by coupling this description of discrete synaptic AMPA conductance changes to a model of postsynaptic membrane potential and associated intracellular calcium fluxes to yield the transition rates among the states. We then present various LTP and LTD induction protocols to the model system and report the resulting whole cell changes in AMPA conductance. We also examine the effect of our discrete state synaptic plasticity model on the synchronization of realistic oscillating neurons. We show that one-to-one synchronization is enhanced by the plasticity we discuss here and the presynaptic and postsynaptic oscillations are in phase. Synaptic strength saturates naturally in this model and does not require artificial upper or lower cutoffs, in contrast to earlier models of plasticity.

Keywords: synaptic plasticity, LTP, LTD, discrete state synapses

PACS numbers: Valid PACS appear here

I. INTRODUCTION

Experiments on synaptic plasticity at individual synapses in CA3 to CA1 hippocampal pathways reveal an “all-or-none” change in their synaptic strength ([21] and S. S.-H. Wang, unpublished data used with the authors’ permission). Indications of this were seen a decade ago (C. F. Stevens and Y. Wang, personal communication). The recent measurements have given substantial understanding to the notion that single synapses may operate as a discrete state system in their plastic changes associated with long-term potentiation (LTP) and long-term depression (LTD).

In this paper we first explore a general formulation of the possibility that individual synapses can express a finite number of discrete levels of conductance rather than the continuous or graded or analog picture often formulated. [1, 7, 13, 25] have commented on the positive consequences for reliability of neural memory from discrete state synapses. In addition there is computational evidence that at an individual dendritic spine the number of free Ca^{2+} ions at the peak of a Ca^{2+} transient evoked by synaptic stimulation may be small. [12] A synapse which must respond to this very small signal might well select a strategy of an “all-or-none” response in adjusting its strength as a means of achieving a mea-
true of reliability.

After a brief discussion of a general formulation of an $L$ level synapse, we focus our attention on $L = 3$, which is suggested by the recent data of O’Connor et al. (D. H. O’Connor, G. M. Wittenberg, and S. S.-H. Wang, unpublished data used with the authors’ permission). With three levels we explore the transitions among the levels using observations of O’Connor et al. With some general arguments based on the measurements, we are able to establish values for the normalized conductances of the individual $L = 3$ levels, and we suggest an experiment which will determine an interesting ratio among the transition rates.

The transition rates themselves depend on a model for how complex chemical pathways lead to the change in AMPA conductance and the number of AMPA receptors at any synapse [6, 8, 11, 17, 24, 30]. We adopt a version of our earlier model [11] of these processes to provide a basis on which to make quantitative predictions of the outcome of various LTP/LTD induction protocols on the changes in AMPA conductance of a postsynaptic cell. We explore spike time dependent protocols as well as presentation of spike bursts of various frequencies to the postsynaptic cell. These compare well to experimental results at any synapse [6, 8, 15, 17, 24, 30]. We adopt a finite number of discrete synaptic levels that the synaptic conductance strengths and that the synchronization is an in-phase firing of the two neurons.

It is an important feature of models built on a finite number of discrete synaptic levels that the synaptic strength (AMPA conductance) is always bounded above and below. This is in contrast to models developed over the years, including our own [20], which do not have this property.

### II. METHODS

#### A. Discrete State Synapses; Transition Rate Models

The data of O’Connor et al. suggest that three discrete states of AMPA conductance are found at individual synapses. There are suggestions of other numbers of discrete levels ([23]; C. F. Stevens and Y. Wang, personal communication). If the total number of levels is $L$ and is indexed by $l = 0, 1, 2, ..., L - 1$, and there are $N_S$ synapses indexed by $n = 1, 2, ..., N_S$, then we represent the occupation of synapse $n$ in state $l$ at time $t$ by $N_{l}^{n}(t)$. These occupation numbers are either zero or unity. They can change in time due to LTD/LTP induction protocols or other biological processes. The average occupation number in state $l$ is given by

$$p_{l}(t) = \frac{1}{N_S} \sum_{n=1}^{N_S} N_{l}^{n}(t).$$  (1)

These $p_{l}(t)$ will constitute the main dynamical variables of our model. They are taken to satisfy linear rate equations of the form

$$\frac{dp_{l}(t)}{dt} = \sum_{k=0}^{L-1} \left \{ W_{(k-l)}(t)p_{k}(t) - W_{(l-k)}(t)p_{l}(t) \right \}. $$  (2)

The transition rates $W_{(k-l)}(t), W_{(l-k)}(t)$ are selected to assure

$$\sum_{k=0}^{L-1} p_{k}(t) = 1. $$  (3)

As long as the number of active synapses $N_S$ is unchanged, this last equation follows from the definition of $p_{k}(t)$. In the limit of $N_S$ large, we assume that the $p_{l}(t)$ remain finite; this is a standard assumption about such a limit for the description of a large number of objects each having a discrete set of states.

One can collect the average occupation numbers into an $L$-dimensional vector $P(t) = (p_{0}(t), p_{1}(t), ... p_{L-1}(t))$ which satisfies

$$\frac{dP(t)}{dt} = M(t) \cdot P(t), $$  (4)

and the conservation rule means that $M(t)$ always has at least one zero eigenvalue [11, 28] the dynamics of $P(t)$ takes place in the $L-1$ dimensional space orthogonal to the constant $L$-dimensional vector $C = (1, 1, 1, ..., 1)$.

The effect of having this constraint may be seen in the decomposition of $P(t) = C + P_{\perp}(t)$ where $P_{\perp}(t) \cdot C = 0$. The dynamics of motion for $P_{\perp}(t)$ is

$$\frac{dP_{\perp}(t)}{dt} = M(t) \cdot P_{\perp}(t) + M(t) \cdot C, $$  (5)

which is driven motion of the vector $P_{\perp}(t)$ spanning the $L-1$ dimensional space orthogonal to $C$. $P_{\perp}(t)$ is defined up to a rotation about $C$. This dynamical description is similar to that of driven precession of a spin in a time dependent magnetic field.
Each discrete level \( l = 0, 1, ..., L - 1 \) has an AMPA conductance \( g_l \) normalized to baseline. The normalized, dimensionless AMPA conductance of the neuron with \( N_S \) synapses is

\[
G_{\text{AMPA}}(t) = \sum_{n=1}^{L-1} \sum_{l=0}^{L-1} g_l N_l^t(t) = N_S \sum_{l=0}^{L-1} g_p l(t). \tag{6}
\]

This means that the quantity

\[
\frac{G_{\text{AMPA}}(t=0)}{N_S} = g_p l(t), \tag{7}
\]

the normalized, dimensionless AMPA conductance per synapse, is independent of the number of synapses when \( N_S \) is large, depending only on the average occupation number of the synaptic levels and the conductance associated with each level. By definition, before any LTP/LTD induction protocols are presented to the postsynaptic neuron, this quantity is equal to one:

\[
\frac{G_{\text{AMPA}}(t=0)}{N_S} = 1. \tag{8}
\]

In our work below, we report the quantity \( \frac{G_{\text{AMPA}}(t)}{N_S} - 1 \) as the output from our simulation of various induction protocols.

To fully specify the model of synaptic plasticity associated with the presence of discrete levels, we must identify the conductances \( g_l \) of each level, and, through some form of dynamics of the postsynaptic neuron, determine the transition rates. In the next section we do this for the suggested three state model of O’Connor et al. However, if observations indicate that there are \( L \neq 3 \) levels operating at some synapses, then the general formulation presented here will cover that situation as well.

### B. Three State Model

If there are three states \( l = 0, 1, 2 \) then we need to identify three discrete level conductances \( g_0, g_1, g_2 \) and the transition rates among the levels. O’Connor et al. call their three levels “low” (state 0 here), high (state 1 here), and “high locked-in” (state 2 here). They suggest that transitions associated with LTD protocols connect state 1 to state 0, and transitions associated with higher frequency protocols, typically leading to LTP, connect state 0 to state 1 and state 1 to state 2. They also note that when an LTD protocol is applied following a saturating LTP protocol to a population of synapses, the synapses cannot be depressed as fully as when the LTD protocol is applied to a naive population of synapses. The amount of depotentiation possible decreases over the 10 minutes following LTP induction. This led them to suggest the presence of a “high locked-in” state, called \( \text{H}^* \) by them; we call this state 2. They do not require transitions between state 2 and state 0 to account for their data, and we assume none as well.

Using these observations we associate an “LTD transition rate” \( g(t) \) with the transition between state 1 and state 0. Similarly we associate an “LTP transition rate” \( f(t) \) with transitions between state 0 and state 1. Loosely speaking we think of \( g(t) \) as an aggregated action of phosphatases leading to the dephosphorylation or removal of synaptic AMPA receptors and \( f(t) \) as the aggregated action of kinases operating in the opposite fashion [15, 30]. In the next section we will specify how one evaluates these transition rates from a dynamical model of the postsynaptic neuron, but for the moment we note that \( f \) and \( g \) will depend on the elevation of intracellular postsynaptic calcium concentrations above the equilibrium level \( C_0 \approx 100 \text{ nM} \). Denoting the time course of postsynaptic intracellular calcium concentration as \( C_a(t) \), we define

\[
\Delta C_a(t) = \frac{C_a(t) - C_0}{C_0}, \tag{9}
\]

and the transition rates \( f(t), g(t) \) are determined by \( \Delta C_a(t) \) in a manner specified in the next section.

The transition between state 1 and the “high locked-in” state called 2 is taken to be proportional to the \( 0 \to 1 \) transition rate \( f(t) \). If one had more detailed information on the biophysical kinase and phosphatase pathways, one could replace this simple assumption by a more complex quantity. We take this transition rate as \( bf(t) \) with \( b \) a constant to be determined.

The picture outlined by O’Connor et al. does not suggest a transition from state 2 to state 1, but we find it is necessary. For the moment we call this transition rate \( h(t) \), and we will argue that it is proportional to \( f(t) \). \( h(t) \) cannot be zero, if the transition rate framework is to be consistent with observations.

This discussion leads us to the transition rate (or “master”) equations associated with the scheme depicted in Figure 1:

\[
\begin{align*}
\frac{dp_0(t)}{dt} &= -f(t)p_0(t) + g(t)p_1(t) \\
\frac{dp_1(t)}{dt} &= f(t)p_0(t) + h(t)p_2(t) - g(t)p_1(t) - bf(t)p_1(t) \\
\frac{dp_2(t)}{dt} &= bf(t)p_1(t) - h(t)p_2(t). \tag{10}
\end{align*}
\]
By construction
\[
\frac{d(p_0(t) + p_1(t) + p_2(t))}{dt} = 0. \quad (11)
\]

Under prolonged stimulation the postsynaptic intracellular calcium levels reach approximately constant values, and we can ask what is the behavior of \( P(t) = [p_0(t), p_1(t), p_2(t)] \) under such circumstances. This means the functions \( f(t) \) and \( g(t) \) are thought of now as constant in time with magnitude determined by the saturated level of \( \text{Ca}^{2+} \). We associate this value of \( P \), after long constant \( \text{Ca}^{2+} \) elevation, with the fixed point of the equations (10) for \( P(t) \). If the induction protocol lasts a time \( T_f \), then the state long after \( T_f \) starting with an initial state \( P(0) \) will be the fixed point
\[
P_{\text{fixed point}} = \frac{(gh, fh, bf^2)}{h(f + g) + bf^2}. \quad (12)
\]

In our models, low values of saturated intracellular calcium elevation \( \Delta \text{Ca} \) are connected with LTD and higher values, with a competition between LTD and LTP [3]. The specific form of the connection between \( \Delta \text{Ca} \) and \( f \) and \( g \) will be given shortly, but their general dependence is shown in Figure 2 [3]. In an LTD protocol \( g \neq 0 \) but \( f \approx 0 \). In an LTP protocol both \( f \) and \( g \) may be nonzero.

If we take \( h = ag \), then a saturating LTD protocol, with \( g \neq 0, f \approx 0 \), will deplete both states 1 and 2, leading to a final state \( P = (1, 0, 0) \).

If, however, we apply a saturating LTD protocol where neither \( f \) nor \( g \) is zero, thus arriving at (12), and then apply a saturating LTD protocol, the choice \( h = ag \) will lead us back to the state \( P = (1, 0, 0) \), which is not what is observed. Indeed, O’Connor et al. note that the state reached by a saturating LTD protocol depopulates to a state intermediate between all synapses in state 0 and the fully saturated state; namely, our fixed point (12).

If we choose \( h = af \), then this saturating LTD protocol following the saturating LTD protocol leads to us
\[
P = \frac{(af + g, 0, bf)}{a(f + g) + bf}, \quad (13)
\]
namely we depopulate state 1 due to the action of \( g \). This is the kind of depopulated, but not baseline, state seen by O’Connor et al.

We conclude that the choice \( h = af \) is consistent with the observations, and we cannot have \( a = 0 \). If \( a = 0 \), the high locked state would be totally populated by a strong LTD protocol and the synapse would not leave that state. Indeed, O’Connor et al. indicate that after such a strong LTD protocol (two rounds of theta-burst stimulation), most but not all synapses, about 80%, are in state 2.

This completes the general formulation of the three level transition rate model. We now turn to the determination of the AMPA conductances \( g_l \) in each level \( l = 0, 1, ..., L - 1 \) from the data presented by O’Connor et al. Then we discuss a conductance based neural model for the postsynaptic cell which permits us to translate electrophysiological activity into transition rates useful in the equations of \( P(t) \).

C. Numerical Method

All the simulations for the model presented in this work were written in C and used a 4th order Runge-Kutta algorithm with a fixed time step of 0.01 ms. They were run under Linux on a computer with an Athlon 2400 MHz processor.

III. RESULTS

We first establish, using the measurements of O’Connor et al., the values of the normalized, dimensionless AMPA conductances of the three levels at an individual synapse. Our arguments show that they are determined independently of the specific model for the transition rates. Then we develop a model for the transition rates which will allow us to make predictions about the response of the cells to various LTP/LTD protocols.

A. Determination of the Discrete Level Conductances

At \( t = 0 \) the observed average occupation of levels is observed to be \( P(0) = (\frac{4}{3}, \frac{1}{3}, 0) \). This means the normalized AMPA conductance is
\[
\frac{G_{\text{AMPA}}(0)}{N_S} = 1 = \frac{3g_0}{4} + g_1. \quad (14)
\]

If a strong, saturating LTD protocol is applied to this state, we reach \( P = (1, 0, 0) \), where the normalized AMPA conductance is \( g_0 \). It has been observed (O’Connor et al.) that after the induction \( G_{\text{AMPA}} N_S = 0.65 \pm 0.03 \). We take this to be \( G_{\text{AMPA}} N_S = \frac{2}{3} = g_0 \) which implies \( g_1 = 2 \).

Next apply a phosphatase blocker (okadaic acid was used by O’Connor et al.) so \( g = 0 \) and, as they did, present a saturating LTD signal to arrive at the state \( P = \frac{(0, a(bf) - (0, a(bf))}{(a+b)} = \frac{(0, ab)}{a+b} \), which is independent of the transition rate \( f \). This is precisely the fixed point noted above with \( g = 0 \) and \( h = af \). After this protocol,
the normalized AMPA conductance is approximately 2, leading to
\[
\frac{ag_1 + bg_2}{a + b} = 2,
\]
and thus \(g_2 = 2\). Our model corresponds to the set of normalized individual level conductances \((g_0 = \frac{2}{3}, g_1 = 2, g_2 = 2)\).

The constants \(a\) and \(b\) are not determined by the observations so far. Presumably they can be determined by applying various induction protocols once we have a model for the transition rates. The actual time series of
\[
\frac{G_{AMPA}(t)}{N_S} = \frac{2}{3}p_0(t) + 2p_1(t) + 2p_2(t)
\]
will depend on \(a\) and \(b\). O’Connor et al. provide some evidence that the ratio \(\frac{a}{b}\) could be about \(\frac{1}{4}\), but it is not clear saturating protocols were used in these experiments.

This ratio \(\frac{a}{b}\) can be determined by another experiment not yet conducted. Start with the naive synapse \(P(0) = (\frac{1}{4}, \frac{1}{2}, 0)\), apply okadaic acid, so \(g = 0\), (as in O’Connor et al.) which blocks phosphatases, and present a saturating LTP protocol. This leads to the state \(P = (0, a, b)\). Now wash out the okadaic acid and apply the kinase blocker k252a, setting \(f = 0\), and present a saturating LTD protocol. This leads one to the state \((a, 0, b)\). The normalized AMPA conductance in this state is
\[
\frac{G_{AMPA}}{N_S} = \frac{ag_0 + bg_1}{a + b} = \frac{2}{3} + \frac{2}{a + b}. \tag{17}
\]
Measuring \(\frac{G_{AMPA}}{N_S}\) after this protocol sequence would give us a value for \(\frac{a}{b}\). If \(\frac{a}{b}\) were 0.25, as suggested above, then this normalized conductance would be \(\frac{2}{15} \approx 1.33\).

**B. Transition Rates in a Model for Voltage and Calcium Dynamics**

Evaluation of the transition rates \(f\) and \(g\) requires a specific model describing how the postsynaptic cell responds to various induction protocols presented either presynaptically or as paired presynaptic and postsynaptic actions. It also requires a model for the dynamics of Ca\(^{2+}\) in the postsynaptic cell. We proceed using the idea that changes in AMPA conductance are induced by the time course of elevation of intracellular Ca\(^{2+}\) \([2, 11, 12, 20, 27]\). The details of the pathways which follow elevation of Ca\(^{2+}\) are not specified in the phenomenological approach we use.

In this regard we have explored both one and two compartment models of the voltage and intracellular calcium dynamics of a cell with AMPA receptors whose strength is changed as a result of biochemical pathways activated by the induction protocols. The two compartment model, which we utilize here, separates the cellular dynamics into a somatic compartment where action potentials are generated by the familiar sodium and potassium currents and a dendritic spine compartment where AMPA and NMDA receptors are located and intracellular calcium dynamics occurs. The details of this model are located in the Appendix to this paper. As one improves this model or replaces it with further experimental insights into the processes involved in LTP/LTD induction, one can use those improvements to provide evaluations for the transitions rates needed in the discrete state synapse model.

The output from the biophysical model of the neuron which we require in this section is focused on the time course of elevation of intracellular calcium concentration relative to the equilibrium concentration \(C_0 \approx 100\, \text{nM}\). We call this time course \(Ca(t) = [\text{Ca}^{2+}]_\text{t}(t)\) and seek the way in which
\[
\Delta Ca(t) = \frac{Ca(t) - C_0}{C_0} \tag{18}
\]
adopts the transition rates \(f(t), g(t)\).

Our model involves two auxiliary variables, \(P(t)\) and \(D(t)\), which satisfy first order kinetics driven by Hill functions dependent on \(\Delta Ca(t)\). These variables satisfy
\[
\frac{dP(t)}{dt} = F_P(\Delta Ca(t))(1 - P(t)) - \frac{P(t)}{\tau_P}, \tag{19}
\]
with driving terms
\[
F_P(x) = \frac{x^L}{\xi_P^L + x^L}; \quad F_D(x) = \frac{ax^M}{\xi_D^M + x^M}. \tag{20}
\]
We used the constants \(\tau_P = 10\, \text{ms}, \tau_D = 30\, \text{ms}, a = 1.5, L = 8, M = 4.75, \xi_P = 5.5, \text{and} \xi_D = 10.5\) in our calculations for this work. These equations are discussed in our earlier work \[1\].

These kinetic quantities are driven by elevation in Ca\(^{2+}\), \(\Delta Ca(t) > 0\), from their resting value of zero. They are taken to be related to the transition rates as
\[
\begin{align*}
  f(t, \Delta Ca(t)) &= P(t)D(t)^\eta \\
  g(t, \Delta Ca(t)) &= P(t)^\eta D(t), \tag{21}
\end{align*}
\]
and \(\eta = 4\) as used in our earlier work. The quantities \(f(t)\) and \(g(t)\) have dimensions of frequency. Our arguments do not establish their magnitude but only provide
a connection to their dependence on elevation of intracellular Ca\(^{2+}\) levels. Multiplying the relations here between \(f(t)\) and \(g(t)\) and \(P(t)\) and \(D(t)\) by a constant rescales the time while not affecting the final states which lead to specific statements of AMPA conductance changes after an induction protocol.

The model for voltage dynamics and Ca\(^{2+}\) dynamics is now established. To proceed we specify an electro-physiological protocol. For example we present a burst of spikes to the presynaptic terminal with an average interspike interval (ISI) of our choice. Our presynaptic terminal represents the population of terminals from presynaptic neurons onto a postsynaptic neuron. This induces a voltage and Ca\(^{2+}\) response in the postsynaptic cell, and from the time course of \(\Delta Ca(t)\) we evaluate the transition rates \(f(t)\) and \(g(t)\). These enter the ‘master’ equation for the average occupations across the population of \(N_S\) synapses. Solving the equations for the \(p_1(t)\) leads to our evaluation of

\[
\frac{G_{\text{AMPA}}(t)}{N_S} = g_0p_0(t) + g_1p_1(t) + g_2p_2(t). \tag{22}
\]

C. LTP and LTD Induction Protocols

1. Presynaptic Bursts

The first protocol we used presented a burst of ten spikes to the presynaptic terminal and evaluated \(\frac{G_{\text{AMPA}}(t)}{N_S}\) over and at the end of the induction period. The interspike interval (ISI) was constant in the burst, and we show in Figure 3 the value of \(\frac{G_{\text{AMPA}}(t)}{N_S} - 1\) after the burst as a function of frequency equal to \(\frac{1}{\text{ISI}}\). Three calculations are presented. The first, shown with filled circles, involves the action of both the LTP inducing transition rate \(f(t)\) and the LTD inducing transition rate \(g(t)\). As in the experimental data there is a region of no change in AMPA conductance per synapse for very low frequencies, then a region of LTD until this crosses into a region of persistent LTP. The second calculation, shown with upright triangles, removes the LTD inducing transition rate, so \(g(t) = 0\), which is achieved by O’Connor et al. by the use of okadaic acid. In this calculation we see that LTD alone is induced at all frequencies where there is a measurable effect. The maximum AMPA conductance in the present model is \(\frac{G_{\text{AMPA}}(t)}{N_S} = 2\) occurring when the lowest state is totally depleted. The value of unity for \(\frac{G_{\text{AMPA}}(t)}{N_S} - 1\) is expected when a saturating LTP protocol is applied. Finally, a third result shown in Figure 3 is the set of points with inverted triangles which occur when one blocks kinase action, again following the experimental procedures of O’Connor et al., which means \(f(t) = 0\) in our language. Here we see a persistent LTD dropping to \(\frac{G_{\text{AMPA}}(t)}{N_S} - 1 \approx -\frac{1}{3}\) above frequencies of 10 Hz. This is the smallest possible value in the present model, as with this induction protocol and \(f(t) = 0\) the lowest state is fully populated, and the AMPA conductance, in dimensionless, normalized units is \(\frac{2}{3}\).

All of this is consistent with the observations and the expectation of saturating LTP/LTD protocols in the discrete state plasticity model we have developed. It is important to note that the bounded nature of the AMPA conductance is quite important as in many other models, including our own [1, 13, 27], there is no guarantee that \(\frac{G_{\text{AMPA}}(t)}{N_S}\) is bounded above or below.

2. Spike Timing Plasticity

The exploration of spike timing dependent plasticity at hippocampal synapses has resulted from the investigations of the phenomenon since the work of [2, 15] and Poo and his colleagues [4, 5, 19] over the past few years. We explored this in the present model by first presenting a spike presynaptically at a time \(t_{\text{pre}}\) and evoking a postsynaptic spike at \(t_{\text{post}}\). The change \(\frac{G_{\text{AMPA}}(t)}{N_S} - 1\) is a function only of \(\tau = t_{\text{post}} - t_{\text{pre}}\) and for our model is shown in Figure 4. This reproduces the characteristic window of LTP centered near \(\tau = 0\) and of width \(\approx 10\) ms around this point. Also shown in Figure 4 are the LTD regions on both sides of this window. The one for \(\tau\) negative is seen in many experiments. The LTD region for \(\tau\) positive has been seen in experiments reported by [19], and it is common in models, including ours, which focus on postsynaptic intracellular Ca\(^{2+}\) as inducing the chain of events leading to AMPA plasticity. [19] used cesium instead of potassium in the intracellular pipette solution, and this has been argued to depolarize the postsynaptic cell and broaden the action potential artificially [20]. To address this, [21] has performed experiments in which this additional depolarizing effect is mimicked by presenting a spike timing protocol with one presynaptic spike at time \(t_{\text{pre}}\) and two postsynaptic spikes with a time difference \(\Delta t\). [21] uses \(\Delta t = 10\) ms, and the outcome of this protocol for our model is plotted in Figure 5 with the experimental data ([24]; used with permission). The change in normalized synaptic strength resulting from this protocol (\(G_{\text{AMPA}}/N_S - 1\) for the model) is shown as a function of the time of the second postsynaptic spike \(t_{\text{post}(2)} - t_{\text{pre}}\). For the experiments, normalized synaptic strength is the average peak excitatory postsynaptic current (EPSC) height measured 10-20 minutes after
the end of the pairing protocol, normalized by the mean baseline peak EPSC height. It is clear that the LTP window is substantially larger than when we evoke just one postsynaptic spike and resembles the experimental data. We can regard this as a prediction of our discrete state plasticity model. Further predictions of this protocol are shown in Figures 6 and 7 where $\Delta t = 15$ ms and $\Delta t = 20$ ms respectively. In each case there is a distinct LTD window for positive $t_{\text{post}}(2) - t_{\text{pre}}$ and a distinctive dip between the LTP peaks whose separation is dictated by $\Delta t$.

D. Synchronization of Two Periodic Neural Oscillators with Discrete State Synapses

The final consequence we have investigated of our discrete state plasticity model is for the synchronization of oscillating neurons. We take as given that synchronization among populations of neurons can play an important role in their performing important functional activity in biological neural networks. We have abstracted the synchronous activity of populations of neurons to the simplest setup: two periodically oscillating Hodgkin-Huxley (HH) neurons coupled by a synaptic current which we explore with and without plastic synapses.

We have selected the postsynaptic neuron to be our two compartment model as described in the Appendix and set it into autonomous oscillations with a period $T_2$. This period is a function of the injected DC current into the somatic compartment. We hold this fixed while we inject a synaptic AMPA current

$$I_{\text{synapse}}(t) = g_{\text{AMPA}}(t) S_A(t)(E_{\text{rev}} - V_{\text{post}}(t)), \quad (23)$$

into the postsynaptic somatic compartment. $V_{\text{post}}(t)$ is the membrane voltage of this postsynaptic compartment. $g_{\text{AMPA}}(t)$ is our time dependent maximal AMPA conductance, and $S_A(t)$ satisfies

$$\frac{dS_A(t)}{dt} = \frac{1}{\tau_A} S_0(V_{\text{pre}}(t)) - S_A(t)$$

as described in detail in the Appendix. $V_{\text{pre}}(t)$ is the periodic presynaptic voltage which we adjust by selecting the injected DC current into the presynaptic HH neuron. We call the period of this oscillation $T_1$.

When $g_{\text{AMPA}} = 0$ the neurons are disconnected and oscillate autonomously. When $g_{\text{AMPA}}(t) \neq 0$ the synaptic current into the postsynaptic neuron changes its period of oscillation from the autonomous $T_2^0$ to $T_2$, which we evaluate for various choices of $T_1$. We expect from general arguments \[10] that there will be regimes of synchronization where $\frac{T_1}{T_2}$ equal integers and half-integers over the range of frequencies $\frac{1}{T_1}$ presented presynaptically. This will be true both for fixed $g_{\text{AMPA}}$ and when $g_{\text{AMPA}}$ varies as dictated by our model.

In Figure 8 we present $\frac{dS_A}{dt}$ as function of the frequency $\frac{1000}{T_1}$ ($T_1$ is given in milliseconds, so this is in units of Hz) for fixed $g_{\text{AMPA}} = 0.1 \text{ mS cm}^{-2}$ and for $g_{\text{AMPA}}(t) = g_{\text{AMPA}} \frac{G_{\text{AMPA}}(t)}{N_S}$ determined from our model. This value is what we used in our earlier calculations with the two compartment model. It amounts to a choice for the baseline value of the AMPA conductance. The fixed $g_{\text{AMPA}}$ results are in filled upright triangles and, as expected, show a regime of one-to-one synchronization over a range of frequencies. One also sees regions of two-to-one and hints of five-to-two and three-to-one synchronization. These are expected from general arguments on the parametric driving of a nonlinear oscillator by periodic forces.

When we allow $g_{\text{AMPA}}$ to change in time according to the model we have discussed above, we see (unfilled inverted triangles) a substantial increase in the regime of one-to-one synchronization, the appearance of some instances of three-to-two synchronization, and a much smaller regime with two-to-one synchronization. This suggests that the one-to-one synchronization of oscillating neurons, which is what one usually means by neural synchrony, is substantially enhanced when the synaptic coupling between neurons is allowed to vary by the rules we have described.

We show the same results in Figure 9 for $g_{\text{AMPA}} = 0.2 \text{ mS cm}^{-2}$. The fixed coupling is larger leading to stronger synchronization of the two neurons in a one-to-one manner even for fixed coupling. Here too (inverted, unfilled triangles) we see that allowing $g_{\text{AMPA}}$ to vary in time enlarges the regime of one-to-one synchronization.

In Figures 10 and 11 we explore aspects of the internal dynamics of plasticity and Ca$^{2+}$ time courses for these results. In Figure 10 we show $Ca(t) = [Ca^{2+}](t)$ (scaled by a factor of 15 to fit on this graphic) and $\frac{G_{\text{AMPA}}(t)}{N_S} - 1$ in response to a presentation of periodic presynaptic oscillations beginning at a time 300. As noted earlier, the timescales for the intracellular Ca$^{2+}$ processes and the timing in changes in $G_{\text{AMPA}}(t)$ are not determined by our model. An arbitrary constant can multiply the definitions of the transitions rates $f(t)$ and $g(t)$. Both quantities rapidly rise, after a small transient of LTD, to positive but oscillating levels. The maximum $\frac{G_{\text{AMPA}}(t)}{N_S} - 1$ is 1 in our model, and we see that this saturating level is not reached in this protocol.

Finally, in Figure 11 we examine how the synchronization manifests itself in the postsynaptic somatic and dendritic compartment membrane potentials. We plot these potentials along with $V_{\text{pre}}(t)$. It is clear that the
IV. DISCUSSION

The observations, recent and over the years, of discrete levels for synaptic strength at individual synapses in the CA3-CA1 hippocampal pathways represents a fundamental property important for the ways we learn and remember. There is a very interesting and important biophysical question about the mechanisms which lead to the expression of a few discrete levels of AMPA conductance at which individual synapses may be found. We do not address this fundamental question in this paper, but we have used the observation to construct a model based on discrete levels with transition rates among the levels determined by biophysical dynamics.

We have formulated a discrete level synaptic system in a general way with \( L \) levels allowed to the AMPA conductance, and then, following the observations of O’Connor et al., we specialized to \( L = 3 \). The dynamical variables in our model when \( L = 3 \) are the average occupation numbers of each level \( \mathbf{P}(t) = \{p_0(t), p_1(t), p_2(t)\} \). These are averages over a collection of \( N_S \) synapses which contribute to the overall AMPA determined response of the neuron. While each individual synapse resides in one of three discrete states, so the individual occupation numbers at any given synapse are either zero or one, the average occupation numbers are smoothly varying, subject only to \( p_0(t) + p_1(t) + p_2(t) = 1 \), by definition.

We developed differential equations for \( \mathbf{P}(t) \) which are linear in the \( p_l(t) \), \( l = 0, 1, 2 \)

\[
\frac{dp_l(t)}{dt} = \sum_{l' = 0}^{2} M_{l'l} p_{l'}(t), \tag{25}
\]

and where the transition rates \( M_{l'l} \) are determined by nonlinear membrane voltage and intracellular \( \text{Ca}^{2+} \) dynamics.

From the observations of O’Connor et al. we argued that the transition rates shown in Figure 1 sufficed to explain their measurements, and using their reported results we were able to determine that the conductances of the three individual levels in normalized, dimensionless units were \( g_0 = \frac{2}{3}, g_1 = 2, g_2 = 2 \). The time dependence of the normalized, dimensionless AMPA conductance per synapse is then

\[
\frac{G_{\text{AMPA}}(t)}{N_S} = \sum_{l=0}^{2} p_l(t) g_l. \tag{26}
\]

Using our values for the \( g_l \) and a dynamical model of the transition rates \( f(t), g(t) \) as shown in Figure 1, we reproduced the observed plasticity in response to a burst of presynaptic spikes with interspike intervals (ISIs) over the observed range. Further we made predictions for the response of this model to spike timing plasticity both for one presynaptic and one postsynaptic spike and for the case of two postsynaptic spikes evoked \( \Delta t \) apart accompanied by one presynaptic spike. We presented our results for \( \Delta t = 10, 15, ..., 20 \) ms.

Finally we examined the dynamical role played by this discrete state plasticity model in the synchronization of two periodically oscillating Hodgkin-Huxley neurons. One such neuron oscillating with period \( T_2 \) was driven by another such neuron with period \( T_1 \). The final period \( T_2 \) of the driven neuron, relative to \( T_1 \), was plotted against \( \frac{T_2}{T_1} \) and showed familiar regions of synchronization. For fixed AMPA coupling \( g_{\text{AMPA}} = \frac{G_{\text{AMPA}}}{N_S} \) we found synchronization over some range of \( \frac{T_2}{T_1} \) and then demonstrated that allowing \( g_{\text{AMPA}} \) to vary according to the plasticity model resulted in a much larger regime of one-to-one synchronization with the two neurons oscillating in-phase. The results for synchronization have not been tested experimentally, though some experiments using dynamic clamp based synapses have been performed.

One striking aspect of the discrete state model, certainly not limited to our own work, is that the AMPA conductance has natural upper and lower bounds. Many other models of plasticity, including our own, do not share this important feature.

Some of our results, in particular the strengths of the normalized, dimensionless conductances of the synaptic levels are dependent primarily on the data of O’Connor et al. All of the transition rates are determined by our two compartment model for the neuron, as presented in the text and in the Appendix.

Our model exhibits a number of features of LTP and LTD observed experimentally at CA3-CA1 synapses, including trapping of synapses in a high-strength state, separability of potentiation and depression by simulated inhibition of kinase or phosphatase activity, and spike timing-dependent plasticity (O’Connor et al.; [24]). However, there are a number of ways in which the model can be developed further. For example, using the protocols of O’Connor et al., population LTP at CA3-CA1
synapses rises gradually to a peak level over a few minutes; LTD takes a few minutes longer than this to develop fully. Our model does not yet include such a long timescale, but could be modified phenomenologically to do so. O’Connor et al. have also found that the high locked-in state in populations of synapses builds up over several minutes. To model this phenomenon, we would again need to include a longer timescale.

While the spike timing-dependent plasticity induced in our model by 1 presynaptic and 2 postsynaptic spikes is similar to that observed by [29], our result for 1 presynaptic and 1 postsynaptic spike appears to differ from experimental observations (G. M. Wittenberg and S. S.-H. Wang, unpublished data used with the authors’ permission). In particular, they observed little LTP but significant LTD near $t_{post} - t_{pre} = 0$. At other values of $t_{post} - t_{pre}$, they observed only LTD. This suggests that such a protocol provides insufficient postsynaptic Ca\(^{2+}\) influx to induce LTP reliably. In contrast, our model shows a narrow but clear window of LTP centered near $t_{post} - t_{pre} = 0$. At these values of $t_{post} - t_{pre}$, the Ca\(^{2+}\) influx in our model is sufficient to give a relatively large value and thus induce LTP. If the data of Wittenberg and Wang are correct, then our model will need to be adjusted so that this Ca\(^{2+}\) influx is not sufficient to induce LTP.

In addition, the model can be refined to match the results of various LTP and LTD induction protocols that we have not simulated here but that are used by O’Connor et al. and others in their experiments, like theta burst stimulation and pairing protocols. In the long term, a model that more accurately describes the postsynaptic signaling pathways will eventually account for all of these various features of the data in a biologically satisfying manner.

While our model is based on the idea of discrete state synapses, by design it describes only populations of such synapses. In future work we plan to address this discreteness at the level of single synapses and small numbers of synapses. In a single-synapse model, transition probability functions would likely replace the transition rate functions we have described in the present model, but many other features of the model could be retained.

This model will change over time and be improved by further understanding of the biophysical processes leading to the discrete states and their transitions among themselves. The general framework we have presented describing how the three observed states are connected and several general results about that system will remain as the representation of the transition rates is improved.

**Acknowledgments** This work was partially funded by the U.S. Department of Energy, Office of Basic Energy Sciences, Division of Engineering and Geosciences, under Grants No. DE-FG03-90ER14138 and No. DE-FG03-96ER14592; by a grant from the National Science Foundation, NSF PHY0097134, and by a grant from the National Institutes of Health, NIH R01 NS40110-01A2. We have had many productive conversations with S. S.-H. Wang about the data from his laboratory, and we appreciate the comments he has made on the model presented here as well as the ability to see his results before publication.
V. APPENDIX

In this Appendix we give the details of the two compartment model of the postsynaptic neuron used in our calculations. The somatic compartment is the site of spike generation by the familiar Hodgkin-Huxley (HH) Na+, K+, and leak currents. The dendritic spine compartment has these currents as well as a voltage gated calcium current and glutamate driven NMDA and AMPA channels. The Ca\textsuperscript{2+} dynamics in the dendritic compartment drives the synaptic plasticity, namely changes in the AMPA conductance.

A. The Somatic Compartment

The dynamical equation for the somatic compartment takes the general form,

\[
C_M \frac{dV_S(t)}{dt} = I_{Na}(V_S(t),t) + I_K(V_S(t),t) + I_L(t) + I_{Sdc} + I_S(t) + G_{S-D}(V_D(t) - V_S(t))
\]

The currents \(I_{Na}, I_K, I_L\), are the familiar HH Na+, K+, and leak currents. \(I_{Sdc}\) is a DC current used to set the resting potential of the cell. \(I_S(t)\) is an externally managed time dependent current injected into the somatic compartment. It allows us to evoke an action potential at a specific time in the somatic compartment. This propagates back to the dendritic compartment to induce a depolarizing effect. \(G_{S-D}(V_D(t) - V_S(t))\) represents the current flowing into the somatic compartment from the dendritic compartment. It couples the voltages of the somatic and dendritic compartments. \(C_M\) is the membrane capacitance.

The value of the currents \(I_{Na}, I_K, I_L\) are determined as usual with

\[
I_L(t) = g_L(E_L - V_S(t)),
\]

where \(g_L\) is the conductance of the leak current and \(E_L\) is the reversal potential. The voltage gated currents are described by

\[
I(V,t) = \bar{g}g(t,V)(E_{eq} - V),
\]

where \(E_{eq}\) is the reversal potential and \(\bar{g}\) is the maximal conductance. Both these values are fixed. The value of \(g(t,V)\), the fraction of open channels, on the other hand depends on the membrane potential and time.

In the case of channels in which \(g(t,V)\) changes, the value of \(g(t,V)\) depends on the state of ‘gating particles’ \(m(t,V)\) and \(h(t,V)\), where \(m(t,V)\) is the activation gate and \(h(t,V)\) represents the inactivation gate. If \(N\) is the number of activation gates, and \(M\), the number of inactivation gates then

\[
g(t,V) = m(t,V)^N h(t,V)^M
\]

The state of the gating particles, given by \(m(t,V)\) or \(h(t,V)\), is a function of the membrane potential as well as time.

These gating variables, denoted by \(X(t)\), are taken to satisfy first order kinetics.

\[
\frac{dX(t)}{dt} = \frac{X_0(V(t)) - X(t)}{\tau_X(V(t))} = \alpha_X(V(t))(1 - X(t)) - \beta_X(V(t))X(t)
\]

From the standard HH model, we have the following relations for the conductances of the \(Na^+\) and \(K^+\) currents.

\[
g_{Na}(V(t)) = m(V,t)^3 h(V,t)
g_K(V,t) = n(V,t)^4
\]

where \(m(V,t), n(V,t)\) are activation gating particles and \(h(V,t)\) represents the inactivation gating particle. At the end of this appendix we give the functions \(X_0, \tau_X, \alpha_X(V), \beta_X(V)\) for each of the voltage gated ionic currents, in addition to listing all the model parameters used in the simulations.

B. The Dendritic Compartment

The dynamics of the dendritic compartment membrane potential is given by

\[
C_M \frac{dV_D(t)}{dt} = I_{Na}(V_D(t),t) + I_K(V_D(t),t) + I_L(V_D(t)) + I_{A}(V_D(t),t) + I_{M}(V_D(t),t) + I_{Ddc} + I_{AMP}(t) + I_{NMDA}(t) + I_{VGCC}(t) + G_{D-S}(V_S(t) - V_D(t))
\]

\(I_{Ddc}\) is a DC current used to set the resting potential of the cell. \(I_{Na}, I_K, I_L\) represent the standard HH ionic and leak currents used in the somatic compartment as described above. In addition to these ionic currents we have considered two additional \(K^+\) currents, \(I_A\) and \(I_M\). \(I_A\) currents have been reported to modulate the width of action potentials and influence the excitability of the cell. In our model, \(I_A\) attenuates the dendritic action potential, which is evoked by backpropagation of the somatic action potential.

The gating equations for \(I_A\) and \(I_M\) are,

\[
g_M(t,V) = u(t,V)^2
\]
where \( u(t, V) \) and \( a(t, V) \) are activation gating particles and \( b(t, V) \) represents an inactivation gating particle.

As mentioned above all ionic currents in the dendritic compartment are also given in terms of Ohm’s law.\(^{24}\) Again \( G_{\text{D}}(V_S(t) - V_D(t)) \) represents current flowing into the dendritic compartment through the somatic compartment.

In addition to the currents mentioned above we have three other currents critical to the synaptic plasticity discussed here. There is a current associated with the ligand gated NMDA receptors (NMDARs). The form for this is

\[
I_{\text{NMDA}}(t) = g_{\text{NMDA}}S_N(t)B(V_D(t))(V_{\text{NMDA-eq}} - V_D(t))\] \(^{32}\)

where \( g_{\text{NMDA}} \) is the maximal conductance associated with the channel. \( S_N(t) \) ranges between zero and unity, representing the percentage of open channels at any time. To achieve the time course of this process in NMDARs, we use a two component form for \( S_N \),

\[
S_N(t) = w_fS_{N1}(t) + (1 - w_f)S_{N2}(t),
\]

where \( 0 \leq w_f \leq 1 \), and where \( S_{N1}(t), l = 1, 2 \) satisfies

\[
\frac{dS_{Nl}(t)}{dt} = \frac{1}{\tau_{Nl}} \frac{S_0(V_{\text{pre}}(t)) - S_{Nl}(t)}{S_{Nl}(t) - S_0(V_{\text{pre}}(t))} \] \(^{33}\)

\( V_{\text{pre}} \) is scaled to lie between 0 and 1 as it represents the arrival of an action potential at the presynaptic terminal. Its function is in turn to release neurotransmitter.

\( S_0(V_{\text{pre}}(t)) \) is a step function which rises sharply from 0 to 1 when neurotransmitter is released as a result of the presynaptic action potential. When this occurs \( S_{N1}(t) \) rises from zero towards unity with a time constant \( \tau_{N1}(S_{N1} - 1) \). When the effect of presynaptic action is completed, \( S_{Nl}(t) \) relaxes towards zero with a time constant \( \tau_{Nl}S_{1Nl} \). \( w_f \) represents the fraction of fast NMDA component contribution to NMDA current. In our model we have chosen \( w_f = .81, \tau_{N1} = 67.5, \tau_{N2} = 245, S_{1N1} = 70/67.5, S_{1N2} = 250/245. \) In addition the conductance of the NMDA current depends on postsynaptic voltage via the term \( B(V) \) whose form is given as,

\[
B(V) = \frac{1}{1 + 288|Mg^{2+}|e^{-0.062V}}, \] \(^{35}\)

where the concentration of magnesium is in mM and the voltage is in mV. For simulation purposes we have taken the physiologically reasonable value of \( [Mg^{2+}] = 1 \) mM.

This voltage dependent conductance depends on the extracellular magnesium concentration. The voltage dependence of the current is mediated by the magnesium ion which, under normal conditions, blocks the channel. The cell must therefore be sufficiently depolarized to remove the magnesium block. Finally for this excitatory channel \( V_{\text{NMDA-eq}} \approx 0 \) mV.

\( I_{\text{AMPA}} \) represents the ligand gated AMPA receptor current. This is taken to be of the form,

\[
I_{\text{AMPA}} = g_{\text{AMPA}}S_A(t)(V_{\text{AMPA-eq}} - V_D(t)) \] \(^{36}\)

where \( g_{\text{AMPA}} \) is the maximal conductance for this channel and \( S_A(t) \) is the percentage of open channels, satisfying

\[
\frac{dS_A(t)}{dt} = \frac{1}{\tau_A} \frac{S_0(V_{\text{pre}}(t)) - S_A(t)}{S_A(t) - S_0(V_{\text{pre}}(t))} \] \(^{37}\)

Again the rise time is less than a millisecond. In our formulation this time is \( \tau_A(S_A - 1) \), which we set to 0.1 ms. AMPA currents decay in approximately 1-3 ms. In our formulation this decay time is \( \tau_A S_A \), which we set to 1.5 ms. We also take \( V_{\text{AMPA-eq}} = 0 \) mV.

The final and very important ingredient in inducing synaptic plasticity is the voltage gated calcium channel (VGCC). We have used the low threshold current \( I_T \) for this. The current from this channel takes the form,

\[
I_{\text{VGCC}}(t) = g_CGHK(V(t))m_c(t)h_c(t) \] \(^{38}\)

where \( g_C \) is the maximal conductance of this channel, \( m_c(t) \) is the activation function, and \( h_c(t) \) is the inactivation function. GHK(V) is the Goldman-Hodgkin-Katz function,

\[
GHK(V) = \frac{-V [Ca^{2+}]_i(t) - [Ca^{2+}]_o e^{\frac{-3V}{RT}}}{C_0 1 - e^{\frac{-3V}{RT}}} \] \(^{39}\)

which is used because of the disparity in the intracellular \([Ca^{2+}]_i\) and the extracellular \([Ca^{2+}]_o\) concentrations. \( F \) is Faraday’s constant, \( R \) is the gas constant, and \( T \) the absolute temperature. Other factors of the GHK equation are absorbed in the conductance \( g_C \). \( C_0 \) is the equilibrium intracellular \([Ca^{2+}] \) concentration, which is about 100 nM.

C. Coupling between the somatic and dendritic compartments

The coupling parameters between the two compartments are determined from the cytoplasmic resistance
and the metric dimensions of each compartment. We take the specific cytoplasmic resistance of the cell to be \( r_i = 200 \Omega \text{ cm} \).

We take the somatic compartment to be an isopotential sphere of \( d_{\text{soma}} = 32.5 \mu \text{m} \) in diameter and the dendritic compartment to be an isopotential cylinder of diameter \( d_{\text{dendrite}} = 10 \mu \text{m} \) and length \( l_{\text{dendrite}} = 360 \mu \text{m} \).

In order to determine the coupling resistance value we assume the somatic compartment to be a cylinder of equivalent surface area. We then have the total cytoplasmic resistance of the somatic compartment,

\[
R_{\text{ISoma}} = \frac{r_{\text{Isoma}}}{\text{Crosssection}(A_{\text{soma}})} = 0.007839 \times 10^7 \Omega
\]

while the total cytoplasmic resistance for the dendritic compartment is

\[
R_{\text{IDendrite}} = \frac{r_{\text{Idendrite}}}{\text{Crosssection}(A_{\text{den}})} = 1.713 \times 10^7 \Omega
\]

Therefore, the average cytoplasmic coupling resistance

\[
R_I = \frac{R_{\text{ISoma}} + R_{\text{IDendrite}}}{2} \approx \frac{R_{\text{IDendrite}}}{2} = 0.861 \times 10^7 \Omega
\]

The coupling parameters in units of \( mS/cm^2 \) are calculated as

\[
G_{S-D} = \frac{1}{A_{\text{soma}}R_I} = 3.5 mS/cm^2 \quad (40)
\]

and

\[
G_{D-S} = \frac{1}{A_{\text{den}}R_I} = 1.0 mS/cm^2 \quad (41)
\]

\section*{D. Calcium Dynamics}

The dynamics of intracellular calcium \([Ca^{2+}]_o(t)\) in the dendritic compartment, which affects the efficacy of synaptic strength, is comprised of \([Ca^{2+}]_o(t)\) decaying to an equilibrium value of \( C_o \) on a timescale of \( \tau_C \approx 15 \text{ms} \), which we take to be about 30 ms in our model, plus fluxes of \([Ca^{2+}]_o(t)\) due to the three channels, AMPA, NMDA, and VGCC considered in the dendrite model above. The first order differential equation for \([Ca^{2+}]_o(t) = Ca(t)\) then is

\[
\frac{dCa(t)}{dt} = \frac{1}{\tau_C}(C_0 - Ca(t)) + Ca_{\text{NMDA}} + Ca_{\text{AMPA}} + Ca_{\text{VGCC}} \quad (42)
\]

where

\[
Ca_{\text{NMDA}} = g_{AC}S_N(t)(V_{\text{NMDA}} - eq - V_{\text{den}}(t))
\]

\[
Ca_{\text{VGCC}} = g_{GCC}GHK(V(t))m^2(t)h(t)
\]

The constants \( g_{NC}, g_{AC}, g_{GCC} \) are not the same, even dimensionally, as the conductances in the voltage equation. Their values, given at the end of this appendix, reflect among other things, that the net AMPA current is composed primarily of other ions besides \( Ca^{2+} \) and that NMDA channels are highly permeable to \( Ca^{2+} \) ions.

This completes the description of our model.

\section*{E. Parameters in the Two Compartment Model}

The various constants appearing in our two compartment model are collected here.

- **The somatic compartment**: The maximal conductances, in units of \( mS/cm^2 \), of the ionic currents are, \( g_{Na} = 215, g_{K} = 43, g_L = .813 \). The reversal potentials in units of mV are \( V_{Na-eq} = 50, V_{K-eq} = -95, \) and \( V_{L-eq} = -64 \). The DC current injected into the somatic compartment \( I_{Sdc} = -7.0 \mu A/cm^2 \), so that the cell is at -75mV at rest. The magnitude of the additional current injected into the somatic compartment is \( I_{\text{soma}} = 160.8 \mu A/cm^2 \); in using it to induce a postsynaptic spike, it is taken to have a duration of 1 ms or less.

- **The dendritic compartment**: For the standard HH ionic currents we have the same parameters as above. Maximal conductances associated with various dendritic currents, in units of \( mS/cm^2 \), are \( g_{NMDA} = 0.05, g_{AMPA} = 1.75 \) and \( g_{CC} = 1.1 \times 10^{-6} \). In the \( Mg^{2+} \) blockade function \( B(V) \), we take \( [Mg^{2+}] = 1 \text{mM} \). In the GHK function, the ratio of external \([Ca^{2+}]_o \) to equilibrium intracellular \([Ca^{2+}]_o \) is 15000. The temperature is 25°C. The conductance values for additional potassium currents used are \( g_M = 6.7 \) and \( g_A = 100 \) in units of \( mS/cm^2 \). Finally, \( I_{Ddc} = -7.0 \mu A/cm^2 \)

- **Calcium dynamics**: For calcium dynamics we have \( \tau_C = 30 \text{ms}, g_{NC} = .15, g_{AC} = 1.5 \times 10^{-5} \), and \( g_{GCC} = 3.5 \times 10^{-5} \). These are in units of \( mV^{-1} \text{ms}^{-1} \). \( C_o \), the basal calcium concentration in the cell, is normalized to 1.

Finally in the equation for the NMDA and AMPA channel open percentages \( S_N(t) \) and \( S_A(t) \), we use the ‘step’ function

\[
S_0(V) = \frac{1}{2}(1 + \tanh(120(V - .1)))
\]
and the constants $\tau_A = 1.4\text{ms}$, $\tau_{N\text{fast}} = 67.5\text{ms}$, $\tau_{N\text{slow}} = 245.0\text{ms}$, $S_{1A} = \frac{15}{12}$, $S_{1N\text{fast}} = \frac{70}{67.5}$.

\[ S_{1N\text{slow}} = \frac{250}{245}. \]

\section*{F. Activation and deactivation parameters of various channels}

\[ \alpha_m(V) = \frac{0.32(13-(V-V_{th}))}{e^{\frac{15-(V-V_{th})}{18}}-1} \]

\[ \alpha_h(V) = 0.128 e^{\frac{17-(V-V_{th})}{18}} \]

\[ \alpha_n(V) = \frac{0.032(15-(V-V_{th}))}{e^{\frac{15-(V-V_{th})}{6}}-1} \]

\[ \beta_m(V) = \frac{0.32((V-V_{th})-40)}{e^{\frac{15-(V-V_{th})}{18}}-1} \]

\[ \beta_h(V) = \frac{4}{e^{\frac{40-(V-V_{th})}{16}}+1} \]

\[ \beta_n(V) = \frac{0.5}{e^{\frac{40-(V-V_{th})}{16}}+1} \]

\[ m_{c0}(V) = \frac{1}{e^{\frac{152.6-V}{62}}+1} \]

\[ \tau_{mc}(V) = 0.204 + \frac{0.333}{e^{\frac{151.9-V}{16.7}}+e^{\frac{111.3-V}{10}}+1} \]

\[ h_{c0}(V) = \frac{1}{e^{\frac{152.6-V}{62}}+1} \]

\[ \beta_u(V) = \frac{0.016}{e^{\frac{187.7-V}{10}}+1} \]

\[ \alpha_u(V) = \frac{0.16}{e^{\frac{187.7-V}{10}}+1} \]

\[ \beta_a(V) = \frac{0.1(V+10)}{e^{\frac{15-V}{8}}+1} \]

\[ \alpha_b(V) = \frac{0.00015}{e^{\frac{15-V}{19}}+1} \]

\[ \beta_b(V) = \frac{0.06}{e^{\frac{12-V}{12}}+1} \]

\[ \tau_{nc}(V) = 0.333 e^{\frac{V+466}{66}} \text{ if } V \leq -81 \]

\[ = 9.32 + 0.333 e^{\frac{V+21}{66}} \text{ if } V > -81 \]

where $V_{th} = -48\text{mV}$. 

\[ m_{co}(V) = \frac{1}{1+e^{\frac{152.6-V}{62}}} \]

\[ \tau_{mc}(V) = 0.333 e^{\frac{V+466}{66}} \text{ if } V \leq -81 \]

\[ = 9.32 + 0.333 e^{\frac{V+21}{66}} \text{ if } V > -81 \]
VI. FIGURES

FIG. 1: Three state model of synaptic plasticity. Individual synapses can move among the three states, marked 0 for the “low” state, 1 for the “high” state, and 2 for the “high locked-in” state. The rules for state transition depend on the transition rates, $f(t)$ and $g(t)$, governed by changes in intracellular calcium concentration. These transition rates are determined by LTP and LTD induction protocols.

FIG. 2: Steady state values for the transition rates $f$ and $g$ plotted as function of the magnitude of the change in intracellular calcium concentration. $\Delta Ca$ is in arbitrary units. For small changes in intracellular calcium concentration only $g$ is nonzero, corresponding to LTD induction, and for larger changes in intracellular calcium concentration, both $f$ and $g$ are nonzero with $f$ being greater than $g$, corresponding to an LTP induction protocol.
FIG. 3: Frequency-plasticity curve. The change in normalized AMPA conductance per synapse, $G_{\text{AMPA}}/N_s - 1$, is plotted as function of the frequency of a periodic burst of 10 presynaptic spikes presented to the presynaptic terminal. The circles represent synaptic plasticity for the full three state model. The upward-pointing triangles represent synaptic plasticity with the term $g(t)$ set to 0, corresponding to blocking phosphatase activity in the postsynaptic cell. One sees and expects LTP alone. The downward-pointing triangles represent the change in synaptic plasticity with the term $f(t)$ set to 0, corresponding to blocking kinase activity in the postsynaptic cell. We observe and expect LTD alone in this case. These results are quite similar to the observations of O’Connor et al.

FIG. 4: Spike timing dependent plasticity protocol. The change in normalized AMPA conductance per synapse, $G_{\text{AMPA}}/N_S - 1$, plotted as a function of the delay, $\tau = t_{\text{post}} - t_{\text{pre}}$ (ms), between presentation of a single presynaptic spike at $t_{\text{pre}}$ and postsynaptic spike at $t_{\text{post}}$. 
FIG. 5: Change in normalized synaptic strength as a function of the delay $\tau = t_{\text{post}(2)} - t_{\text{pre}}$ when a single presynaptic spike is paired with two postsynaptic spikes 10 ms apart. $t_{\text{post}(2)}$ is the time of the second postsynaptic spike. Model results (points connected by lines) are plotted with experimental data of G. M. Wittenberg (large filled circles with error bars; Wittenberg 2003, used with permission). Normalized synaptic strength, for the model, is the normalized AMPA conductance per synapse ($G_{\text{AMPA}}/N_S - 1$) after the pairing. For the experiments, it is the average peak excitatory postsynaptic current (EPSC) height measured 10-20 minutes after the end of the pairing protocol, normalized by the mean baseline peak EPSC height (Error bars: standard error of the mean). In the experiments, pairing was repeated 100 times at 5 Hz.

FIG. 6: The change in normalized AMPA conductance per synapse, $G_{\text{AMPA}}/N_S - 1$, plotted as a function of the delay $\tau = t_{\text{post}(2)} - t_{\text{pre}}$ (ms) when we present a single presynaptic spike and a pair of postsynaptic spikes with a fixed time difference of 15 ms. $t_{\text{post}(2)}$ represents the time of presentation of the second postsynaptic spike. A distinct dip in the potentiated AMPA conductance is observed for times when the presynaptic spike falls in the time between the 2 postsynaptic spikes.
FIG. 7: The change in normalized AMPA conductance per synapse, $G_{AMPA}/N_S - 1$, plotted as a function of the delay $\tau = t_{post(2)} - t_{pre}$ (ms) when we select a single presynaptic spike and a pair of postsynaptic spikes with a fixed time difference of 20 ms. $t_{post(2)}$ represents the time of presentation of the second postsynaptic spike. A distinct dip in the potentiated AMPA conductance is observed for times when the presynaptic spike falls in the time between the 2 postsynaptic spikes.

FIG. 8: $T_1/T_2$, the ratio of the interspike interval $T_1$ of the presynaptic neuron to the interspike interval $T_2$ of the postsynaptic neuron, is plotted as a function of the presynaptic input frequency, $1000/T_1$ Hz, for a synapse starting at a base AMPA conductance of $g_{AMPA}(t = 0) = 0.1 \text{ mS/cm}^2$. We see that the one-to-one synchronization window is broadened when the static synapse is replaced by a plastic synapse as determined by the three state model.
FIG. 9: $T_1/T_2$, the ratio of the interspike interval $T_1$ of the presynaptic neuron to the interspike interval $T_2$ ms of the postsynaptic neuron, is plotted as a function of the presynaptic input frequency, $1000/T_1$ Hz, for a synapse starting at a base AMPA conductance of $g_{AMPA}(t = 0) = 0.2$ mS/cm². We see that the one-to-one synchronization window is broadened when the static synapse is replaced by a plastic synapse as determined by the three state model.

FIG. 10: Intracellular calcium concentration, scaled by 15, and the change in normalized synaptic strength, $G_{AMPA}(t)/N_S - 1$, is plotted as a function of time in the case when a periodically spiking postsynaptic cell is driven by a periodically spiking presynaptic input.

FIG. 11: $V_{soma}(t)$, $V_{dendrite}(t)$ and $V_{pre}(t)$, plotted as functions of time, when the presynaptic and postsynaptic neurons are synchronized. Note that the presynaptic and postsynaptic neurons are synchronized in-phase with an internal, $V_{soma}(t)$ to $V_{spine}(t)$, time difference determined by the two compartments of the model neuron.
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