

phoretically labeled cells are mature (innervated) receptor cells. Furthermore, the incidence of bitter-responsive dye-labeled cells (18%) is remarkably close to the incidence of cells expressing candidate bitter receptors [15 to 20% (7)], suggesting that dye-labeled cells are representative taste receptor cells.

11. Ca^{2+} signals presumably indicate physiological activation and presage neurotransmitter release. However, the absence of Ca^{2+} signals does not necessarily indicate that the cell has not been affected (for example, if a stimulus inhibits the taste cell).
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Modulation of Oscillatory Neuronal Synchronization by Selective Visual Attention

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In crowded visual scenes, attention is needed to select relevant stimuli. To study the underlying mechanisms, we recorded neurons in cortical area V4 while macaque monkeys attended to behaviorally relevant stimuli and ignored distracters. Neurons activated by the attended stimulus showed increased gamma-frequency (35 to 90 hertz) synchronization but reduced low-frequency (<17 hertz) synchronization compared with neurons at nearby V4 sites activated by distracters. Because postsynaptic integration times are short, these localized changes in synchronization may serve to amplify behaviorally relevant signals in the cortex.

Visual scenes typically contain multiple stimuli competing for control over behavior, and attention biases this competition in favor of the most relevant stimulus (1). Correspondingly, if two competing stimuli are contained within the receptive field (RF) of an extrastriate neuron, and one of them is attended, the neuron responds as though only the attended stimulus is present (2–6). Thus, inputs from attended stimuli must have an advantage over inputs from unattended stimuli (6). This is apparently not always achieved by a simple increase in firing rates to an attended stimulus, however, because firing rates to a single, high-contrast stimulus in the RF are often not increased with attention (2, 5,

7). As an alternative to increases in firing rate, one potential “amplifier” of selected neural signals is gamma-frequency synchronization (8–17). Small changes in gamma-frequency synchronization with attention might lead to pronounced firing-rate changes at subsequent stages (10, 18). Indeed, it was recently reported that neurons in monkey somatosensory cortex showed stronger synchronization during a tactile task than during a visual task, which was presumably caused by increased attention to the tactile stimulus in the tactile task (19). However, it is not clear whether the enhanced synchronization was present throughout the somatosensory system or whether it was restricted to those neurons processing the relevant tactile stimuli. To be useful in selective visual attention, enhanced synchronization would need to be confined to neurons activated by the features of attended stimuli, sparing neurons activated by distracters.

We recorded both spikes from small clusters of neurons (multi-unit activity) and local field potentials (LFPs) simultaneously from

multiple V4 sites with overlapping receptive fields (RFs) (20). The monkey fixated a central spot, and after a short delay, two stimuli were presented at equal eccentricity, one inside and one outside the RFs (Fig. 1C). On separate trials, the monkey’s attention was directed to either stimulus location (21), and we compared neuronal activity between the two attention conditions. We refer to the condition with attention into the RF as “with attention,” always implicitly comparing with identical sensory conditions but with attention outside the RF.

One example pair of recording sites is shown in Fig. 1. The response histograms (Fig. 1D) show stimulus-evoked responses but no clear effect of attention, either during the pre-stimulus delay or during the stimulus period. To examine the effect of attention on synchronization, we calculated spike-triggered averages (STAs) of the LFP (11, 14, 22). The STAs revealed oscillatory synchronization between spikes and LFP from two separate electrodes, both during the delay (Fig. 1, E and F) and the stimulus period (Fig. 1, H and I). During the delay, the power spectra of the STAs (Fig. 1G) were dominated by frequencies below 17 Hz. With attention, this low-frequency synchronization was reduced (23). During the stimulus period, there were two distinct bands in the power spectrum of the STAs (Fig. 1J), one below 10 Hz and another at 35 to 60 Hz. With attention, the reduction in low-frequency synchronization was maintained and, conversely, gamma-frequency synchronization was increased.

To determine whether these changes in synchronization were precisely localized within V4, we made additional recordings with the stimulus outside the RF very close to the RF border (Fig. 2). Even with closely spaced stimuli, we found the same attentional modulation of synchronization as with the second stimulus far away (Fig. 2, C to E). In

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addition to these changes in synchronization, firing rates to the RF stimulus were also moderately suppressed when attention was directed to the surround stimulus (Fig. 2B), consistent with previous studies of competitive interactions between stimuli in V4 RFs (2, 5, 6). Large firing-rate changes with attention occurred only with a competing stimulus very near to the RF border.

Across the set of recordings, attentional modulations of oscillatory synchronization were similar to the presented examples. We quantified the STA modulation by calculating the spike-field coherence (SFC) (14), which measures phase synchronization between spikes and LFP oscillations as a function of frequency. The SFC is normalized for spike rate and spectral power of the LFP and is

therefore immune to changes in these parameters. The SFC ranges from 0 (complete lack of synchronization) to 1 (perfect phase synchronization). Computing the coherence between a point process (spikes) and an analog signal (LFP) is a special case, and therefore detailed information is given as supplementary material (24). We pooled data for the stimulus configurations in which the distracters were near to and far from the RF.

For the delay period (Fig. 3, A and B), low-frequency SFC was reduced by a median of 51% with attention (160 decreases, 23 increases; $P < 10^{-6}$) (25). The delay-period STAs did not show clear gamma-frequency modulations (Fig. 1, E to G). However, statistically, the gamma-band SFC (35 to 60 Hz) increased by a median of 10% with attention (106 increases, 77 decreases; $P < 0.02$). Delay-period firing rates were not significantly increased by a median of 5% with attention (35 increases, 26 decreases; $P = 0.13$). During the stimulus period (Fig. 3, C and D), low-frequency SFC was reduced by a median of 23% with attention (142 decreases, 65 increases; $P < 10^{-6}$), whereas gamma-frequency SFC increased by a median of 19% (167 increases, 40 decreases; $P < 10^{-6}$). Firing rates were enhanced by a median of 16% with attention (68 increases, one decrease; $P < 10^{-6}$). Attention affected the normalized power spectrum of the raw LFP essentially in the same way as the SFC.

The above analysis of the sustained re-

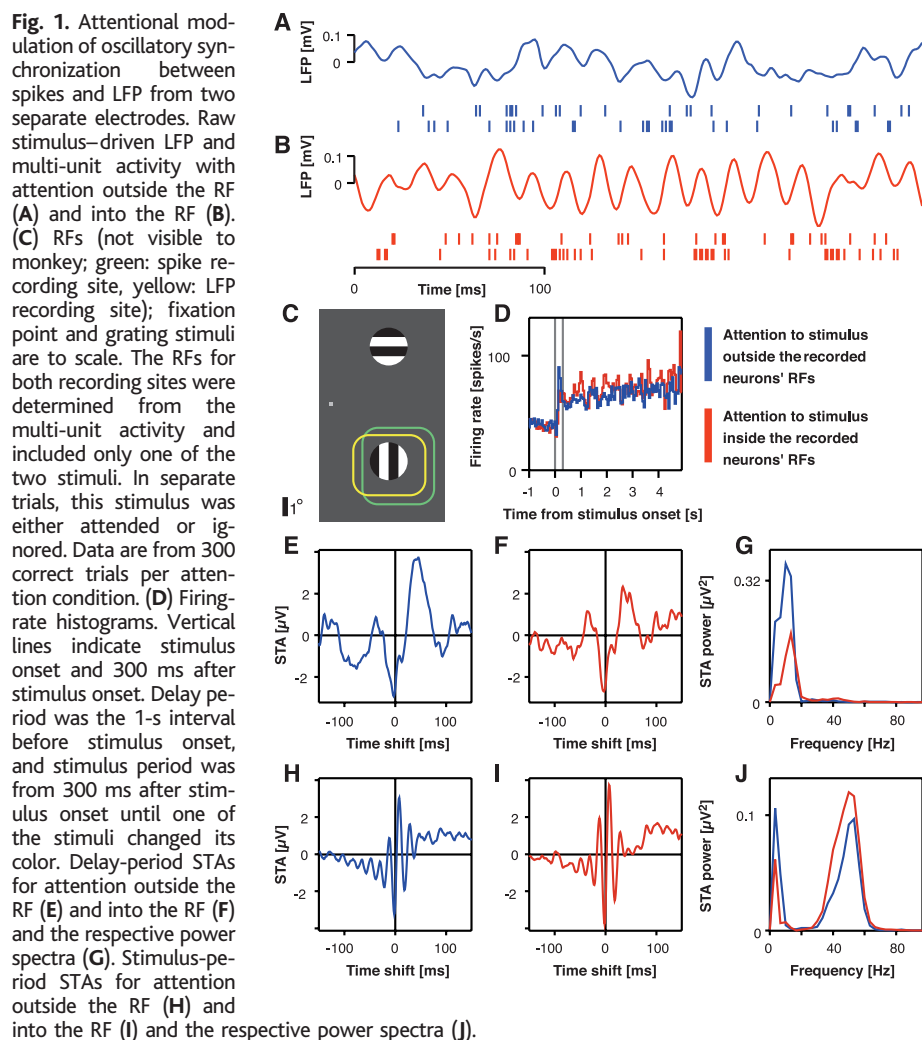


Fig. 2. Attentional modulation of synchronization has high spatial resolution in the cortex. Conventions are as for Fig. 1 except that the stimulus outside the RF is only 1.5° from the RF border. Spikes and LFP are from two separate electrodes. Data are from 125 correct trials per attention condition. (A) Rf, fixation point, and grating stimuli. (B) Firing-rate histograms. (C and D) STAs for stimulus period and (E) the respective power spectra.

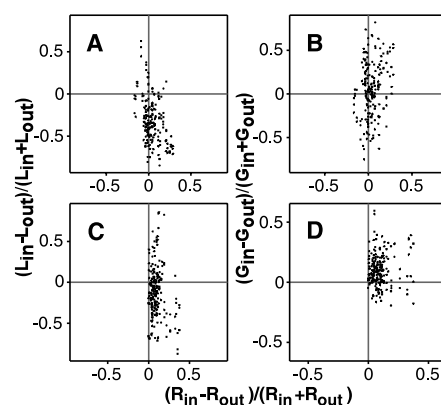
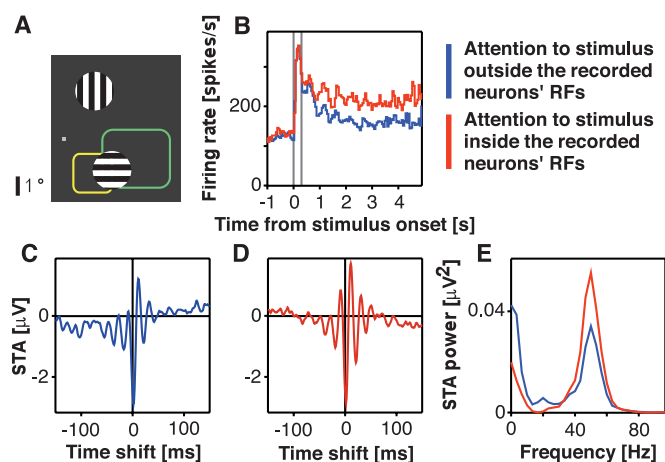


Fig. 3. Population measures of attentional effects on the SFC. Scatter plots compare attentional effects on low- and gamma-frequency SFC and on firing rates. Each dot represents one pair of recording sites. The x- and y-axis values are attentional indices defined as $AI(P) = [P(in) - P(out)] / [P(in) + P(out)]$, with P being one of the three parameters under study: low-frequency synchronization (L), gamma-frequency synchronization (G), and firing rates (R). $P(in)$ is the value of the parameter with attention directed into the RF, and $P(out)$, with attention directed outside the RF. (A and B) Activity from the 1-s delay period before stimulus onset. (C and D) Activity from the stimulus period.

sponse excluded the first 300 ms after stimulus onset to avoid response-onset transients (22). We separately analyzed the poststimulus time course of firing rates and LFP. For the recording site shown as an example in Fig. 4B, attention did not affect the mean firing rate until about 420 ms after stimulus onset, consistent with other recent studies in which a single high-contrast stimulus in the RF was used (26, 27). By contrast, synchronization was modulated by attention very early in the response. STAs for the 100-ms period after response onset (starting 50 ms after stimulus onset) contained large low-frequency modulations with superimposed gamma-frequency modulations (Fig. 4D). The low-frequency (10 Hz) synchronization was reduced by attention (Fig. 4E). Conversely, there was a smaller gamma-frequency peak at around 65 Hz that was enhanced by attention (Fig. 4, F and G). Both the visual evoked potential (VEP) (Fig. 4A) and the spike histogram (Fig. 4B) contained strong stimulus-locked gamma-frequency oscillations in the first 100 ms of the response (Fig. 4C). Thus, this very early gamma-frequency synchronization was at least partially locked to stimulus onset (28), whereas oscillatory synchronization during the later, sustained visual response was not stimulus locked.

Similar observations were made across the population. Attention did not modulate mean firing rates in the period from 50 to 150 ms after stimulus onset (median decrease, 0.5%; 32 decreases, 29 increases; $P = 0.35$), and significant sustained attentional effects on mean firing rate did not begin until about 450 ms (29). By contrast, low-frequency SFC in the 50- to 150-ms period was reduced by a median of 8% (108 decreases, 75 increases; $P < 0.01$) with attention, whereas gamma-frequency (40 to 90 Hz) synchronization was enhanced by a median of 16% (114 increases,

69 decreases; $P < 0.0005$). VEPs showed low-frequency power in the 50- to 150-ms period reduced by a median of 12% (45 decreases, 19 increases; $P < 0.001$) with attention, whereas gamma-frequency power was increased by a median of 19% (48 decreases, 16 increases; $P < 0.0005$). Spike histograms showed a median 15% increase in gamma-frequency power with attention (38 increases, 23 decreases; $P < 0.05$) but only a weak tendency for reduced low-frequency power (-2% ; 33 decreases, 28 increases; $P = 0.26$).

In summary, attention increased gamma frequency and reduced low-frequency synchronization of V4 neurons representing the behaviorally relevant stimulus. This held true even during the delay period and in the first few hundred milliseconds after response onset, when firing rates were not affected. Gamma-frequency synchronization has been found in visual cortex in the absence of selective attention (8, 17) and can be enhanced by brainstem stimulation (30), presumably via cholinergic pathways (31). However, the mechanisms that mediate the effects of selective visual attention presented here are not yet clear. Although attention increased gamma frequency and reduced low-frequency synchronization among the large majority of affected neurons, we did find cases with opposite effects. This raises the interesting possibility that attention actually sets a specific synchronization pattern among the affected neurons.

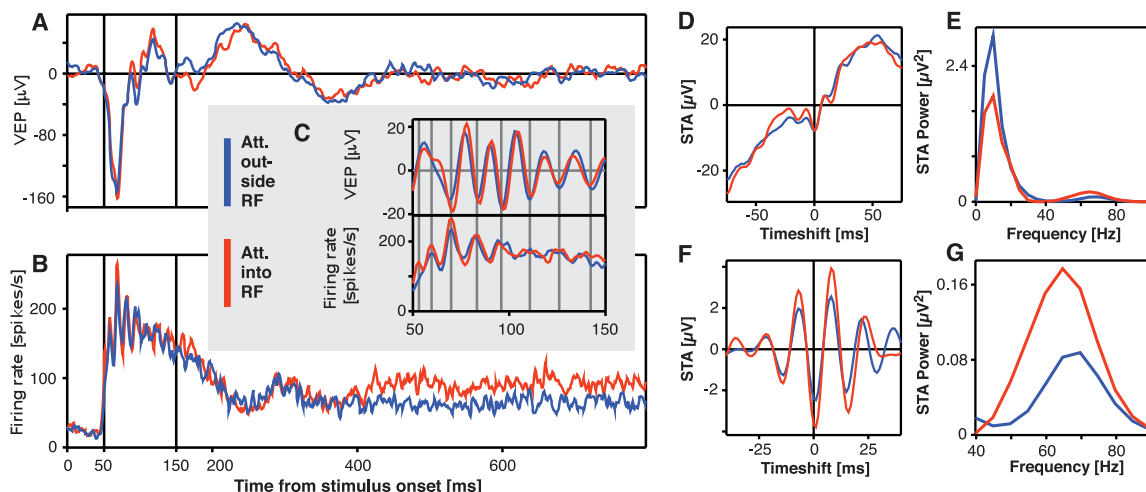
The observed changes in synchronization may enhance the impact of the affected neurons on postsynaptic targets. Gamma-frequency synchronization causes spikes to coincide within 10 ms (half the cycle length of ≈ 20 ms), enhancing their impact on postsynaptic neurons (32, 33). Low-frequency desynchronization may also enhance postsynaptic

efficacy by reducing spike co-occurrence within 50 to 100 ms, thereby avoiding spike-frequency adaptation effects with time constants of 15 to 50 ms (34). Spike-frequency adaptation does not affect spikes correlated at gamma frequencies, because these spikes coincide in a shorter interval than the adaptation time constant.

V4 output neurons project to the inferior temporal (IT) cortex. In the RF of IT neurons, attended stimuli have an advantage over competing distracters (2, 3). Models that explain the competitive advantage of attended stimuli assume an enhanced efficacy of inputs from neurons at earlier stages activated by the attended stimulus (6, 10). One possibility is that synchronized inputs from V4 cells responding to attended stimuli activate not only excitatory IT neurons but also interneurons, which in turn inhibit IT cells that receive inputs from distracters. A similar mechanism might be at work in V4 itself, if V2 inputs to V4 are also synchronized for attended stimuli. If competitive interactions between neurons in V4 were restricted to cells with overlapping RFs, this would explain why responses to distracters in the RF are typically not suppressed in V4 when the attended stimulus is far from the RF [(2, 5, 7); see, however, (35–37)]. With attention, synchronized outputs from V2 or V4 will likely synchronize the firing of postsynaptic neurons in V4 or IT, respectively, thereby enhancing the impact of these cells on subsequent stages of processing, even when mechanisms such as response saturation minimize changes in absolute firing rates (26).

An increased impact of a neuronal population on its postsynaptic targets is equivalent to an increase in effective synaptic gain. Previous studies have proposed an increase in synaptic gain to explain a wide variety of behavioral influences (6, 38–40) on neuronal

Fig. 4. Attention effects in early response. Data are from 300 correct trials per attention condition. VEPs (A) and spike histograms (B) from two separate electrodes as a function of time after stimulus onset. Vertical lines indicate the time period for which STAs (D and F) were calculated. The modulation of firing rate by attention starts only at about 420 ms after stimulus onset. From 50 to 150 ms after stimulus onset, there are stimulus-locked gamma-frequency oscillations in firing rate synchronized with LFP fluctuations. Gamma-frequency oscillations are shown in detail (C) with the LFP filtered (40 to 90 Hz) and vertical lines indicating peaks of the rhythmic



population activity. (D) STAs for 50 to 150 ms after stimulus onset and (E) the respective power spectra. (F) The STA from (D), filtered (40 to 90 Hz), and (G) the respective part of the power spectrum.

firing rates. Increasing the effective synaptic gain by modulating synchronization at precise locations in the cortex might therefore be a fundamental neuronal mechanism for amplifying signals that represent behaviorally relevant stimuli.

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20. Animal care was in accordance with NIH guidelines. Standard procedures were used to record spike and LFP activity simultaneously from four extracellular electrodes in V4 of two monkeys (electrode separations of 650 or 900 μ m; Plexon data acquisition system). The LFP (filtered at 1 to 100 Hz) reflects the average transmembrane currents of neurons in a volume of a few hundred micrometers radius around the electrode tip (41). Negative values of LFP correspond to neuronal activation. Spike waveforms were stored for offline sorting. We pooled all neurons recorded through a given electrode [$\approx$ 2 to 10 neurons; see supplementary information (24)]. The resulting multi-unit almost always showed clear oscillatory synchronization. Analysis of single units revealed that some showed much stronger oscillatory synchronization than others. Whenever there was clear oscillatory synchronization, attention effects were essentially identical, irrespective of whether the spikes were pooled or from an isolated neuron.
21. The cue directing attention was either a short (0.75°) line next to the fixation spot, pointing to the location of the target, or the fixation spot color, with red cueing the upper stimulus and green, the lower stimulus. The delay between cue and stimulus onset was 1500 to 2000 ms, and the cue remained throughout the trial. In a subset of recordings, we used a blocked trial design without any explicit cue. All paradigms gave essentially the same results. Stimuli were pure luminance gratings (100% contrast, 2° to 3° diameter, 1° to 2°/s drift rate, one to two cycles per degree of spatial frequency) with a frame rate of 120 Hz. The grating inside the RF had the optimal orientation to coactivate cells at as many of the electrodes as possible. The grating outside the RF was always in another quadrant and orthogonal to the inside RF grating, and did not activate the recorded neurons. After a random interval of 500 to 5000 ms, the white stripes of the cued (target) stimulus changed to isoluminant yellow. The color change was close to the monkey's detection threshold, ensuring that the task could be performed only when attention was focused on the target. The monkey was rewarded if it maintained fixation throughout the trial and released a bar within 650 ms of the color change. In half of the trials, the same color change occurred for the uncued (distracter) stimulus. Responses to distracter changes resulted in a time-out without reward. Performance was 83 to 87% correct. We recorded 100 to 300 correct trials per attention condition. Eye position for the two attention conditions differed by 16 arcmin (delay) to 13 arcmin (stimulus period).
22. We calculated STAs by averaging all LFP segments at $\pm$ 150 ms around all spikes recorded under one attentional condition. Only STAs of LFPs and spikes recorded from separate electrodes were used in the analyses. However, STAs of LFPs and spikes recorded on a single electrode showed essentially identical effects. For the analysis of the sustained response, the 300 ms after stimulus onset was discarded because it always contained stimulus-locked modulations in the LFP. Thereafter, stimulus-locked components were largely absent and shift-predictor STAs flat. For direct comparisons between sustained response synchronization and firing rates, only spikes used for STA compilation were used. We also calculated cycle-triggered averages (CTAs) of spike times (17) by band-pass filtering the LFP in a predefined range and triggering the spike-time averaging by troughs in the filtered LFP. After normalization for average spike rate, CTAs give changes in firing rate around cycle triggers. The CTAs showed qualitatively the same attention effects as STAs. Cross-correlation histograms (CCHs) of spike times proved much less sensitive than STAs in detecting oscillatory synchronization. STAs often revealed oscillatory synchronization where CCHs did not. See supplementary information (24) for a comparison of the different measures.
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NEUROSCIENCE:

Drums Keep Pounding a Rhythm in the Brain

Michael P. Stryker*

The rhythmic activity of neurons in the brain has fascinated neuroscientists ever since electrical potentials were first recorded from the human scalp more than 70 years ago. The rhythms of electrical activity in sensory neurons that encode visual information are known to vary markedly with attention. How does neuronal encoding differ for a visual stimulus that is the center of attention compared with one that is ignored? To answer this question, Fries et al. (1) simultaneously recorded electrical activity from several clusters of neurons in the V4 region of the visual cortex of macaque monkeys that were shown behaviorally relevant and distracter objects (see the figure). On page 1560 of this issue, they report a rapid increase in the synchronization of electrical activity in the gamma frequency range (35 to 90 Hz) in V4 neurons activated by the attended stimulus (that is, the stimulus on which attention is focused) but not in V4 neurons activated by distracter objects (1).



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The benefits of paying attention. A halo of attention surrounds one of the two physically similar stimuli (vertical and horizontal stripes) that the monkey can see while his eyes fixate on a point between them. The attended stimulus has a more powerful representation in the V4 area of the visual cortex because the neurons that respond to it tend to fire rhythmically in synchrony with one another, as illustrated by the wiggly trace to the right of the stimulus. V4 neurons that respond to the other (distracter) stimulus fire at similar rates but not in synchrony. Synchronized firing provides the attended stimulus with a more powerful representation, illustrated by the greater clarity of the mental image.

The neurophysiology of attention remains a puzzle. A simple and attractive hypothesis is that an attended stimulus behaves as though it were bigger and brighter than all of the other competing stimuli. To encode this bigger and brighter stimulus, neurons would need to somehow increase their electrical response. Although some experiments have shown the production of a greater (but still equally selective) neuronal electrical discharge in response to attention (2, 3), other studies in the same brain areas have found almost no effect of attention on electrical activity (4), and in still others the effects of attention were disappointingly small. So, it would be attractive indeed to discover a neurophysiological mechanism for attention that is consistent with all of these findings.

About 12 years ago, rhythmic oscillatory activity and neuronal synchronization were proposed as solutions to a different but related problem. In higher mammals, including monkeys and humans, there are many different visual areas in the brain that respond more or less selectively to the different qualities of a visual stimulus: its motion, color, texture, and so on. When more than one object is visible, how are the representations of the different qualities of the individual objects bound to one another so that a person does not associate the color of one object with the movement of another? The Singer (5) and Eckhorn groups (6) suggested that the widespread representations of the different visual qualities of a particular object might be unified by neurons firing together rhythmically on a time scale of 25 milliseconds or so, with representations of different objects encoded in electrical activity of different phases or frequencies. Crick and Koch (7) suggested that the same sort of synchronous oscillation might underlie consciousness or visual awareness. Extreme manipulations of visual awareness--such as presenting a viewer's two eyes with different scenes that alternately appear and disappear (a phenomenon called binocular rivalry)--have provided some support for this proposal. However, it has not yet been demonstrated with more natural stimuli that the presence of rhythmic or synchronous activity among a collection of neurons controls whether the features represented by those neurons are bound together either to represent a single object to our perceptual system or to bring an object into conscious awareness. A stringent test of this hypothesis would be to use ambiguous figures (such as the classic face-vase illusion) in which the same physical stimulus can be perceived in different ways, to determine whether the way the object is perceived depends on which clusters of neurons are firing together (8).

In a sense, the Fries et al. study brings us full circle. Their experiments show that it is the rhythmic coordination of a subpopulation of neurons, and not just the amount of nerve cell activity per se, that is associated with finding what we are looking for and missing the unexpected. Their work suggests that the rhythmic synchrony of electrical signals may not be the hallmark of perceptual unity or of conscious awareness. Instead it may be a consequence of a decision to focus attention on a relevant stimulus. A synchronous neural response makes the representation of the stimulus more prominent and thereby more likely to enter the consciousness of the viewer.

The basic biophysical properties of neurons and synapses allow rhythmic synchronization to enhance the effect of a fixed amount of neuronal activity both in sensory neurons in the periphery and in the brain's central processing stations, which

receive inputs from these neurons. The enhancing effect of synchronous activity would cause larger responses to the attended stimulus in neurons at the next stage of signal processing. At each stage of processing, responses to the attended stimulus would become stronger, whereas those to the distracter stimuli would remain weak or would fade away entirely.

Despite the attractiveness of this proposal, it is not at all clear how attention causes responses to become more oscillatory and better synchronized. Modifying the strength of particular cortical interneuronal circuits could, in principle, favor certain frequencies of electrical discharge, but it is not known whether or how such circuits receive the inputs that turn them on.

Perhaps it makes sense to regard rhythmic synchronization as only one of a number of processes that enhance responses to attended stimuli. Other processes might include increases in background or "spontaneous" discharges (9) or changes in neuronal "gain." At least for these two hypotheses, there are clear pharmacological demonstrations that different classes of synaptic receptors can have additive or multiplicative effects on neuronal activity (10).

It is also important to note that rhythmic synchronization may be important in other activities besides attention to a stimulus. For example, synchronization may be used to signal the persistence of stimuli even when the neurons responding to those stimuli with increased rates of discharge do so only transiently (11). Finally, one must remember that synchronization has its costs as well as its benefits. Pooling the outputs from many neurons adds information only if the activity of those neurons is not coordinated. Zohary et al. (12) have shown that the information provided by many thousands of neurons in a higher cortical visual area is only marginally greater than that provided by a few neurons in that area if the electrical discharges of the many are simultaneous. Thus, even minimal synchronization can drastically limit the ability of the cortex to take advantage of its vast numbers of neurons.

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