The Ever-Changing Brain

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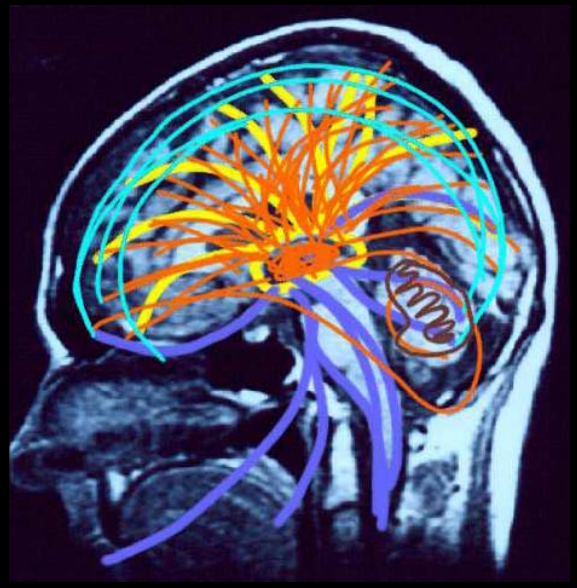
Biological Sciences

Outline

1) Synapses: excitatory, inhibitory, and gap-junctional
2) Synaptic plasticity, and Hebb’s postulate
3) Sensory maps and plasticity
4) Brain plasticity

Synapses

- The human brain has ~10 billion neurons.
- Each neuron receives ~10,000 inputs from other neurons at specialized contacts known as synapses.
- The brain is organized into areas – and pathways.

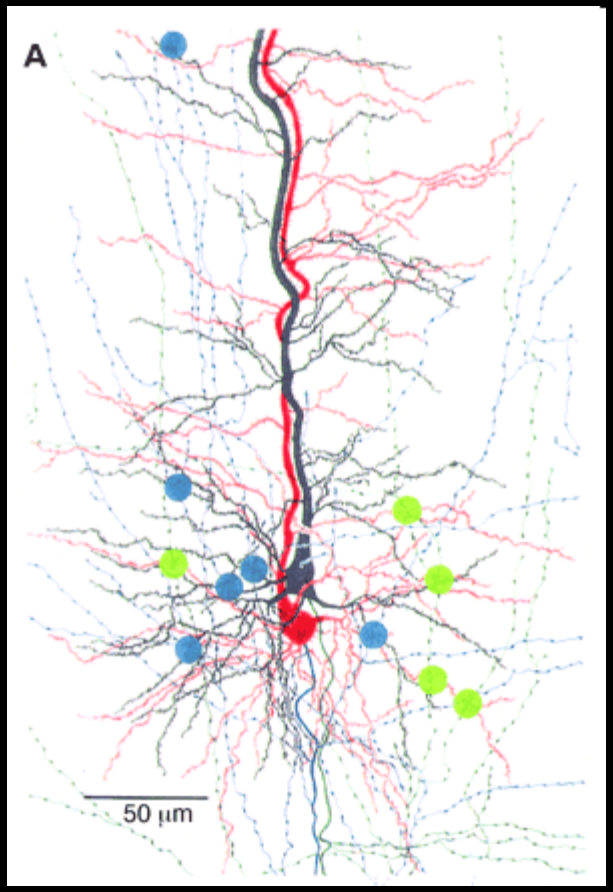


Gary Osborn, “The Gate of God”

What is a synapse?

Sir Charles Sherrington

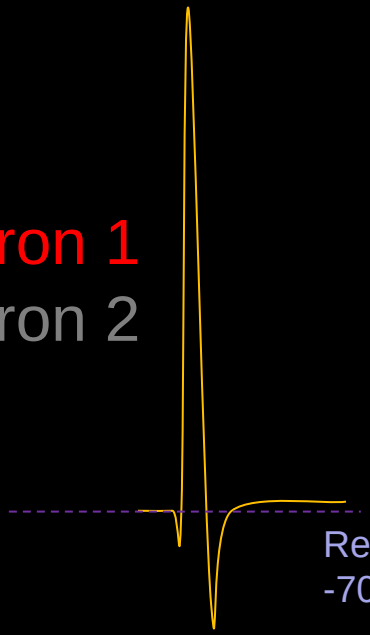
Derived from the Greek word meaning “to clasp”, a synapse is considered *any specialized relation between two neurons in which one affects another*.



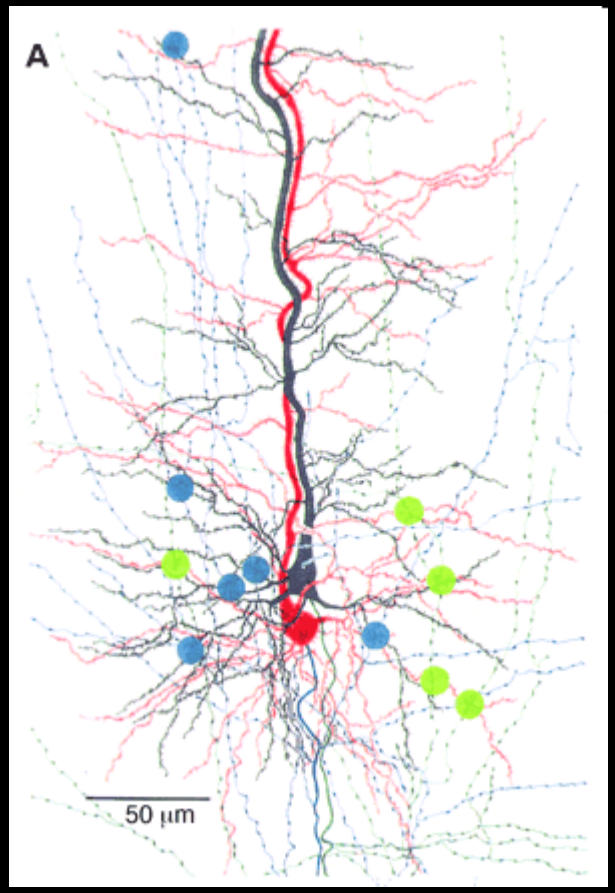
Markram et al. (1997)

Neuron 1

Neuron 2



Resting membrane voltage
-70 mV



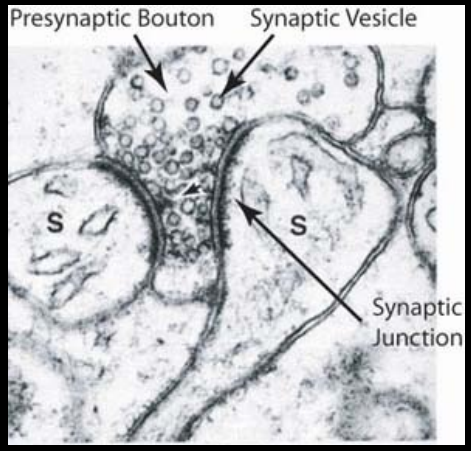
Markram et al. (1997)

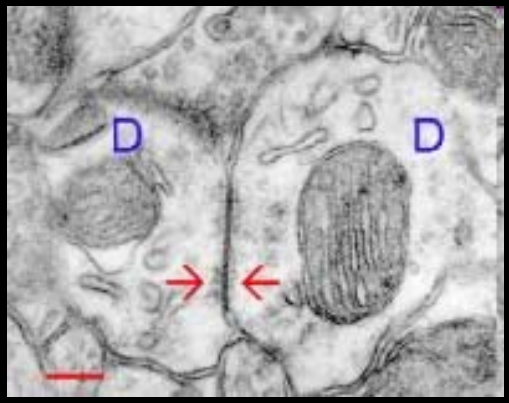
Neuron 1

Neuron 2

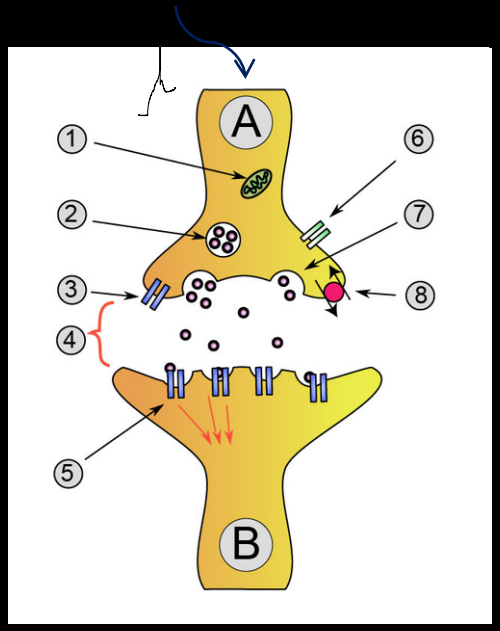
Synapses from neuron 1 to neuron 2

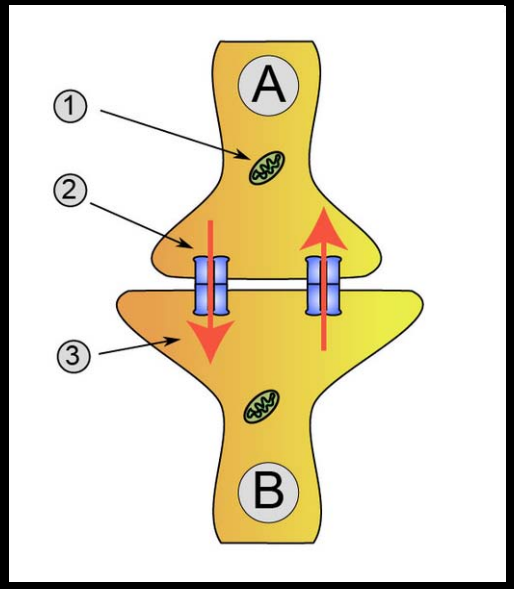
Synapses from neuron 2 to neuron 1



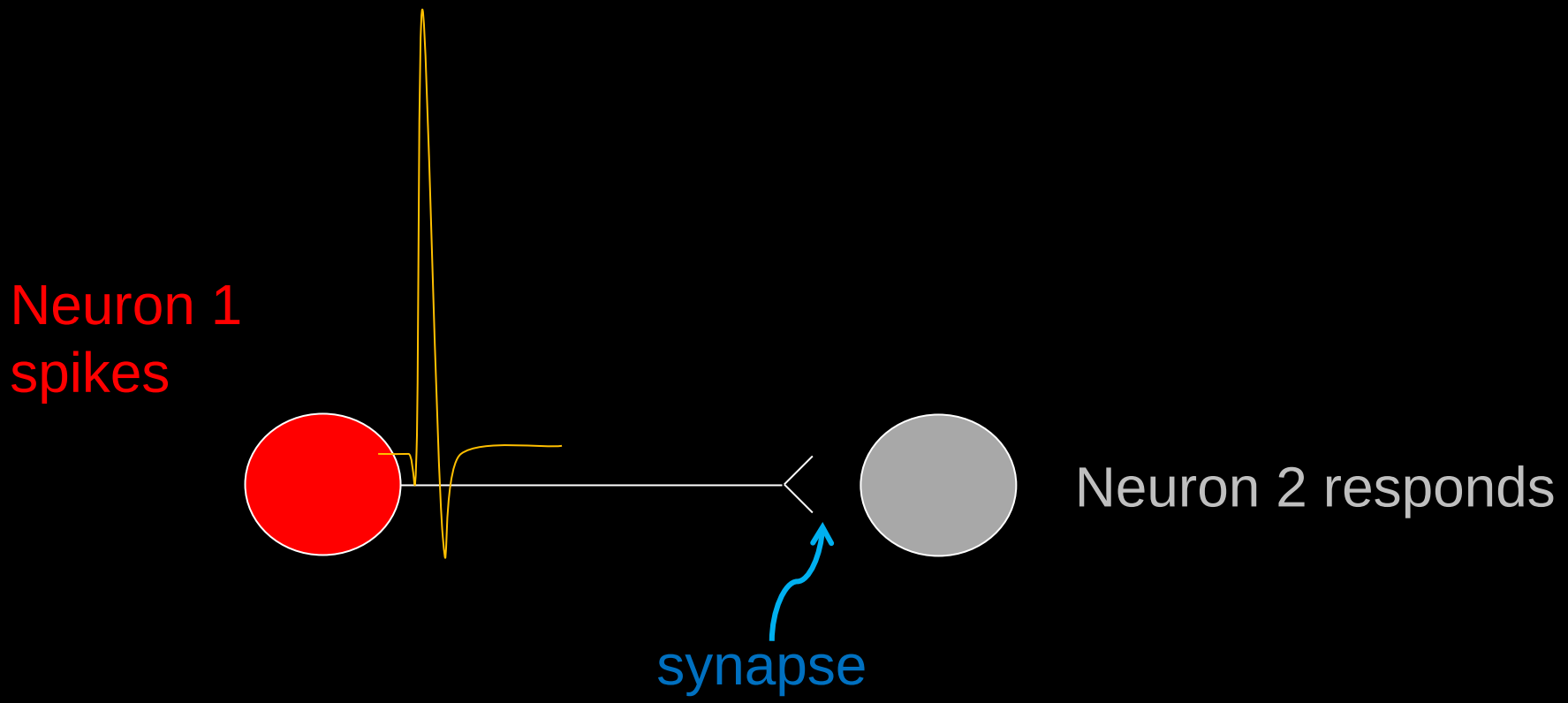


Synapses use neurotransmitter …. or not!



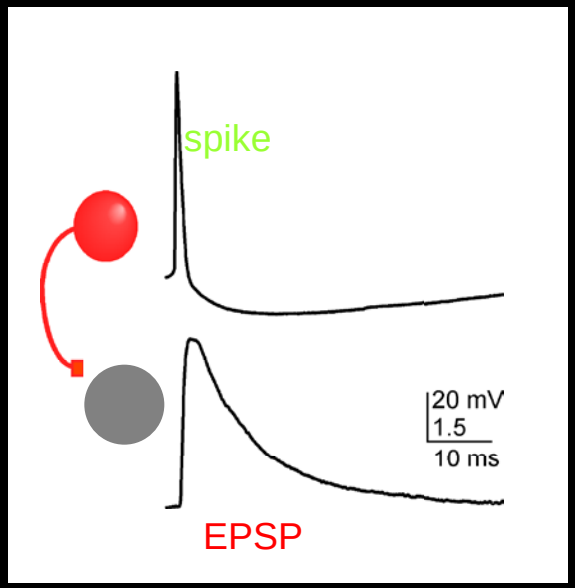


Neurons communicate at synapses:



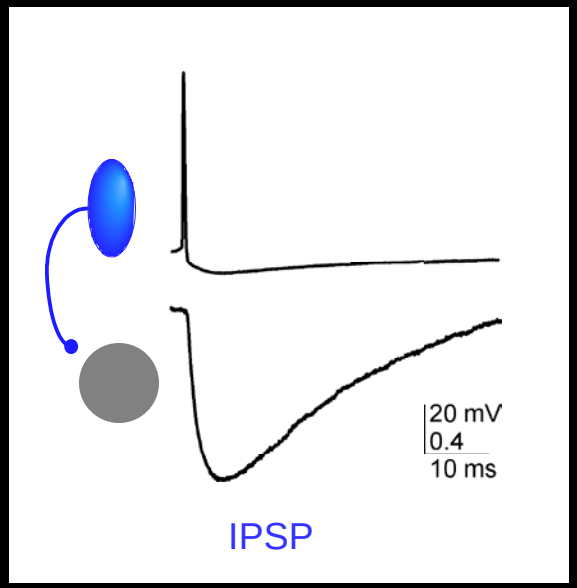
Synaptic Transmission

Excitatory

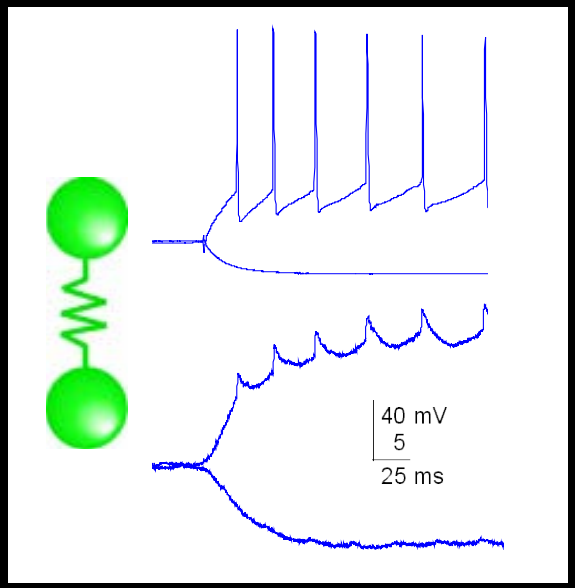


- Directional, with pre- and post-synaptic sides
- Stereotyped timecourses
- Metabolically expensive

Inhibitory



Electrical

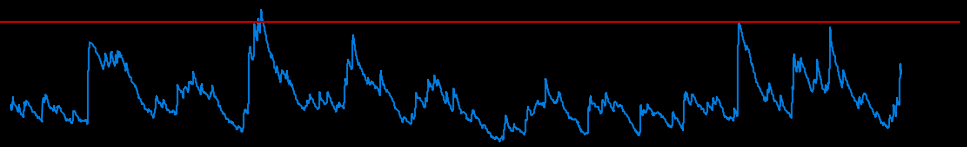


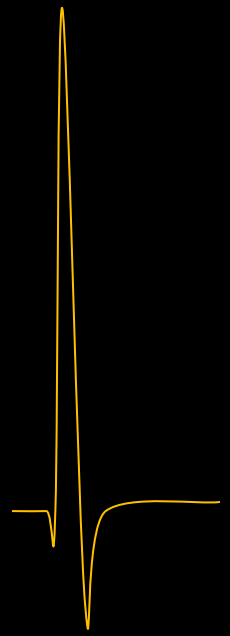
- Bidirectional flow
- Sign-preserving response
- A “cheap date”

Do the synaptic responses in neuron 2 make it spike?

Spike threshold voltage
-40 mV

Resting membrane voltage
-70 mV





Outline

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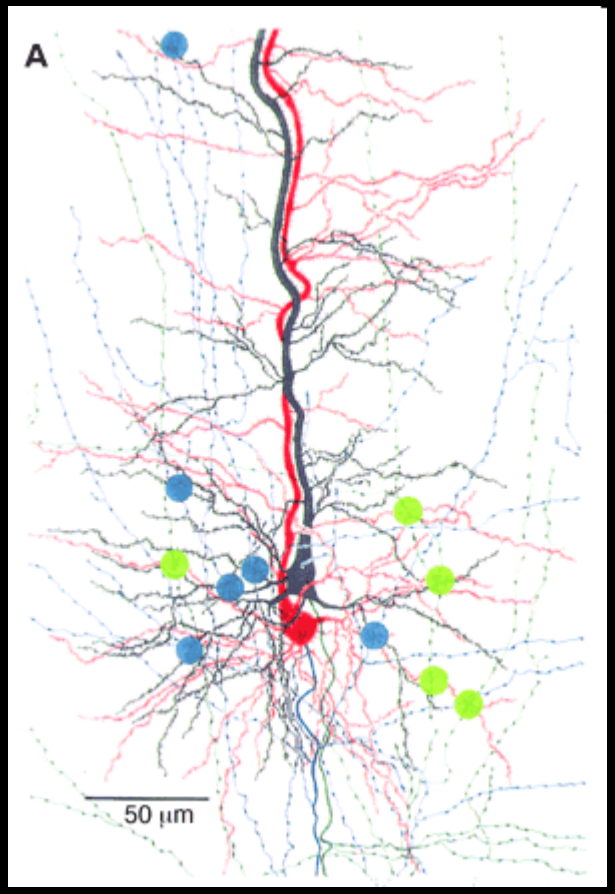
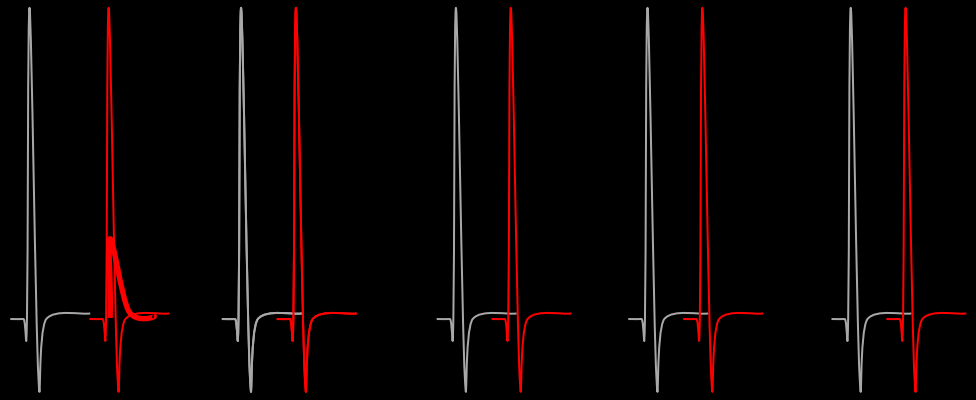
2) Synaptic plasticity, and Hebb’s postulate
3) Sensory maps and plasticity
4) Brain plasticity

Let us assume that the persistence or repetition of a reverberatory activity (or "trace") tends to induce lasting cellular changes that add to its stability.... When an axon of cell A is near enough to excite a cell B and repeatedly or persistently takes part in firing it, some growth process or metabolic change takes place in one or both cells such that A's efficiency, as one of the cells firing B, is increased.

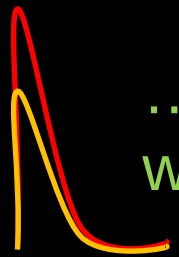
Donald Hebb, 1949



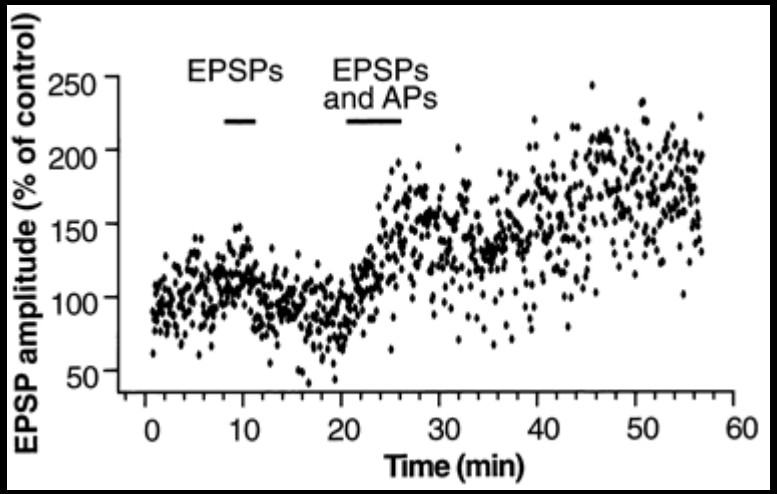
Markram et al. (1997)

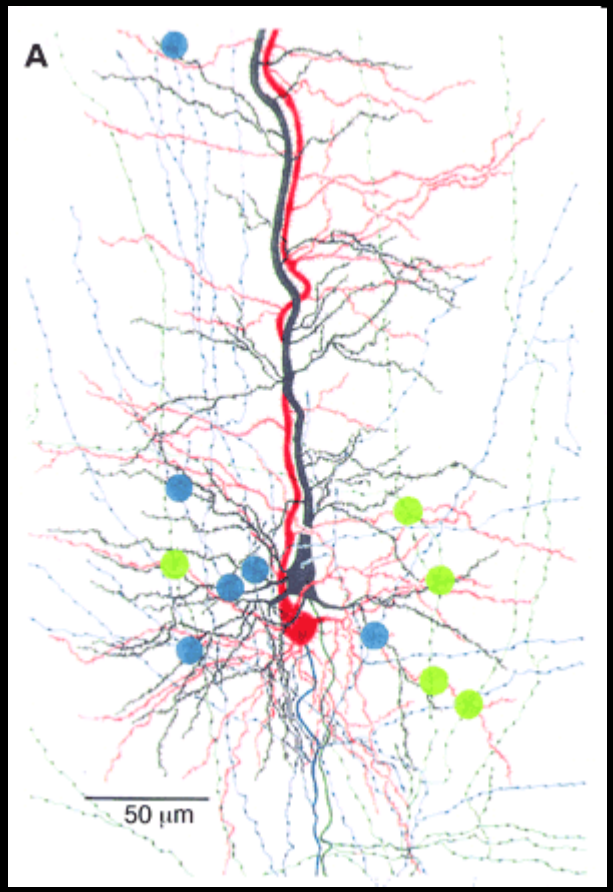


firing together ….



… and wiring together,
with a stronger connection





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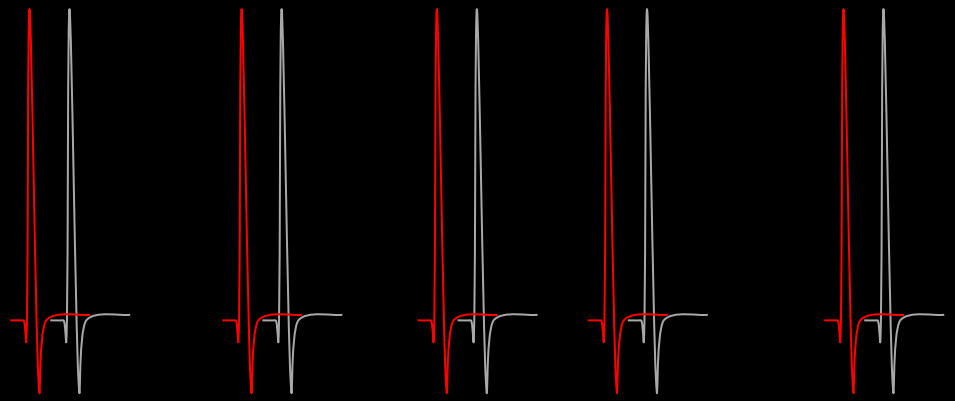
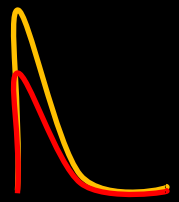
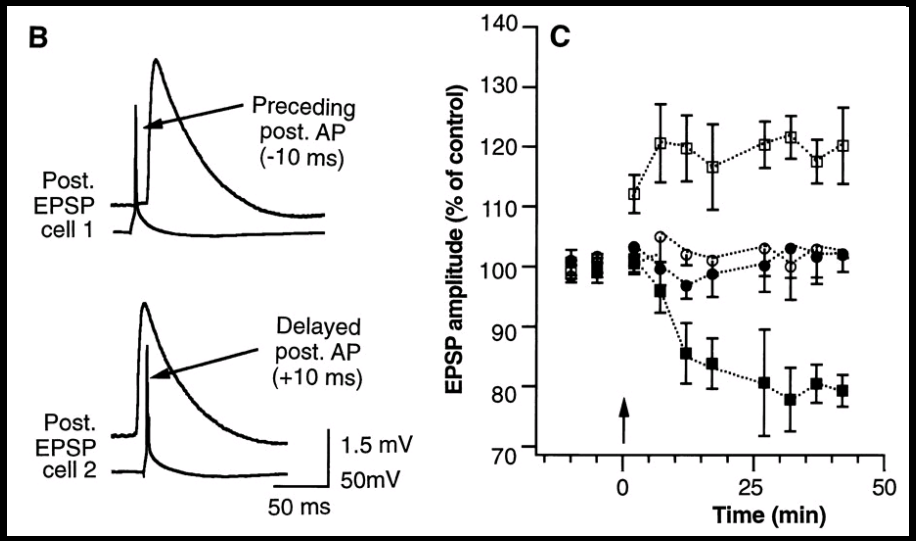


for the opposite order



the synaptic connection gets weaker



stronger

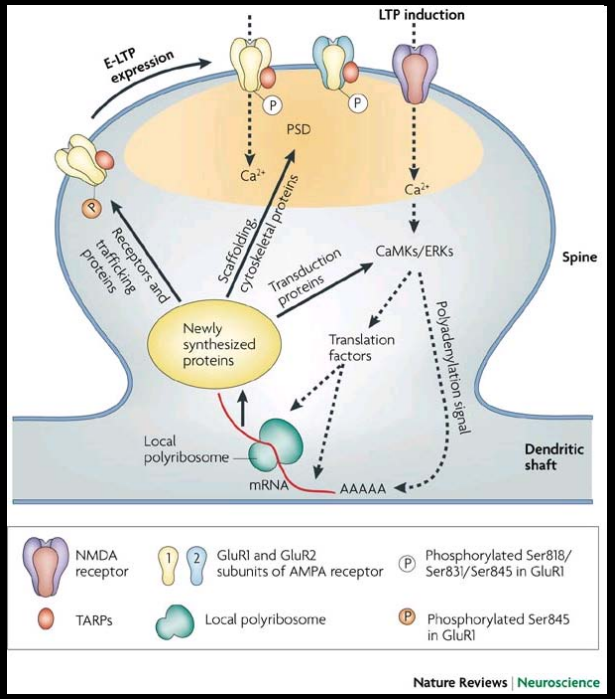
weaker

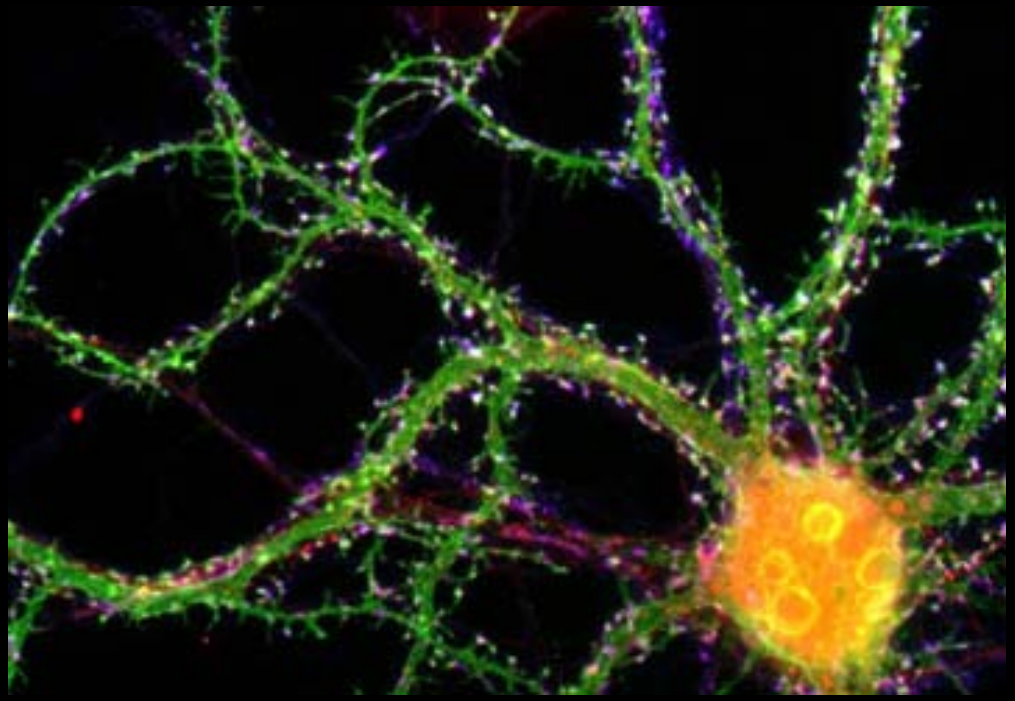
Markram et al. (1997)

Plasticity is everywhere!

- at excitatory synapses
- at inhibitory synapses
- at gap junctional synapses
- song-term depression, long-term potentiation
- short-term depression, short-term potentiation
- Metaplasticity – changes in how plasticity is expressed.
- Structural plasticity: growth and pruning of synaptic structures
- …….the list goes on!

Plasticity is complex





Mondin and Choquet, 2008

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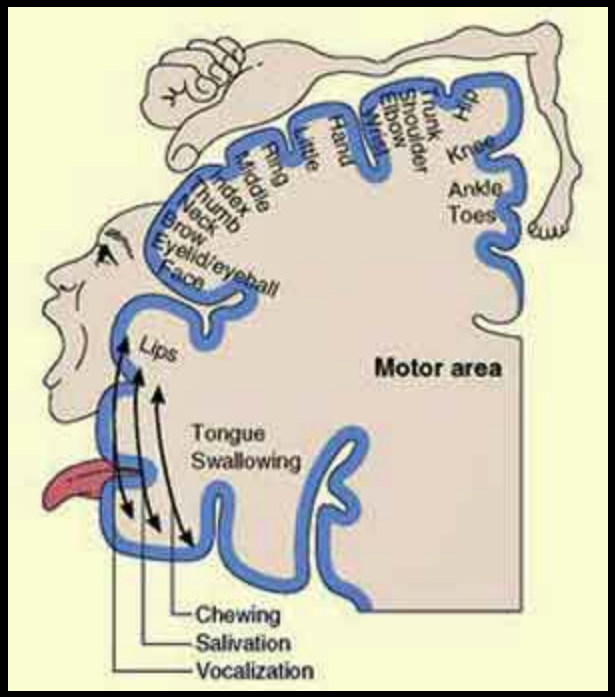
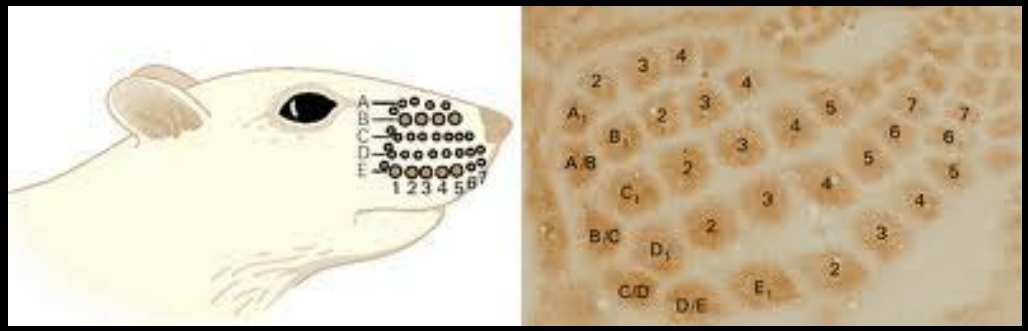


mybrainnotes.com

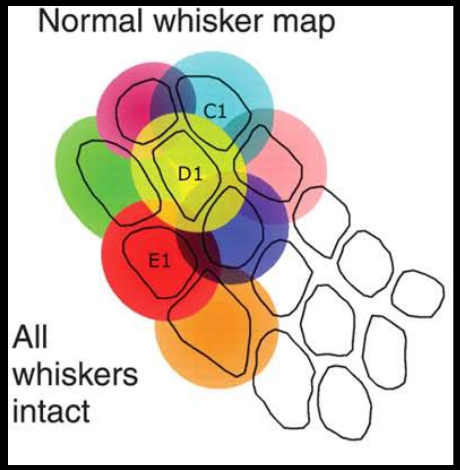
The sensory homonculus:

Rats and the barrel cortex – a type of sensory map

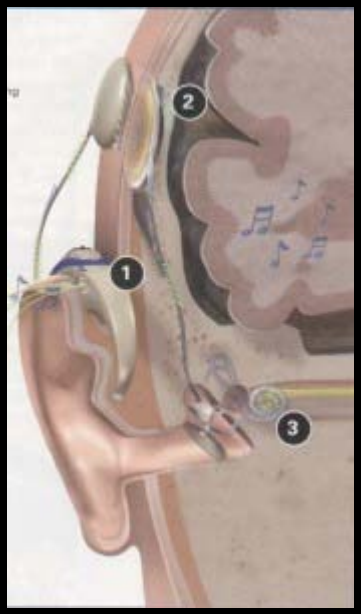


www.neurobiology.info

Sensory map can be changed by experience: Map plasticity



D. Feldman and M. Brecht, Science 2005



Cochlear implants: a form of map plasticity?

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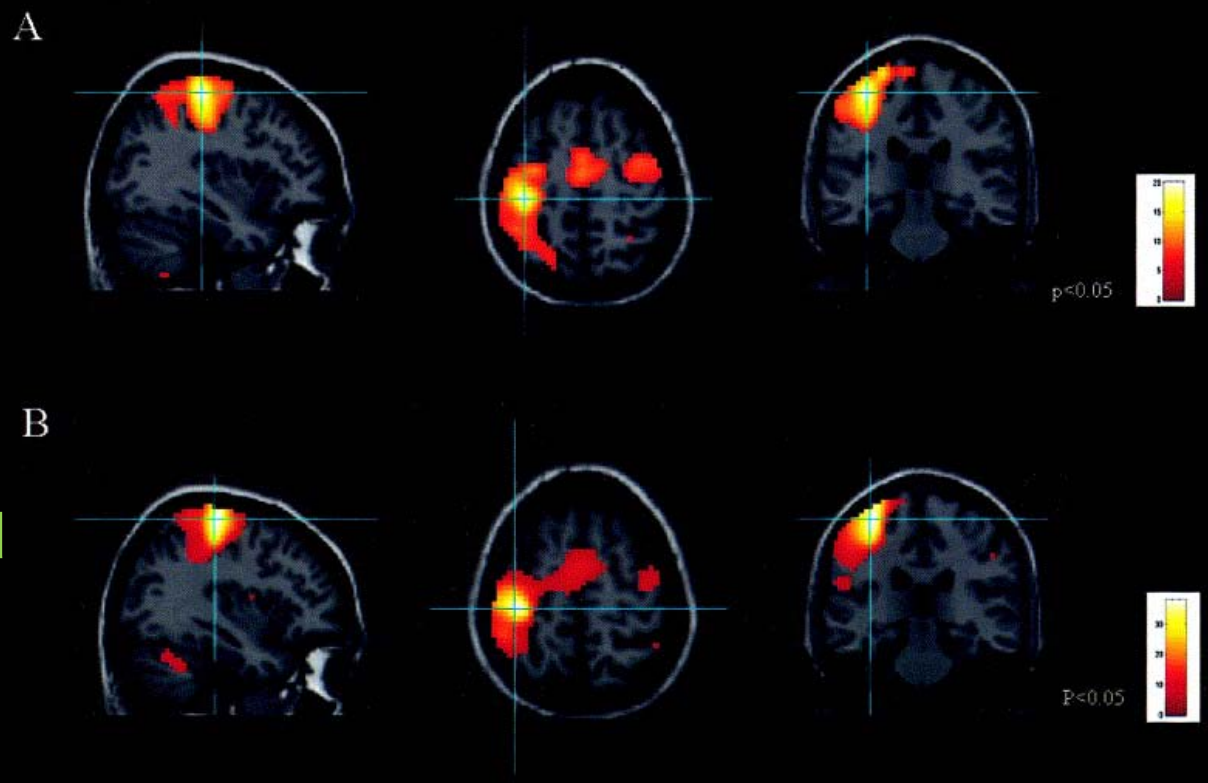
A finger tapping task

blind

sighted



Braille – a language task

blind

sighted