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Preface

The theory of electric current flow in excitable cells has developed extensively since Lord Kelvin first presented the equations for cable transmission a century ago. This development has been particularly rapid during the last 30 years or so, following the first detailed experimental applications of Kelvin's equations to nerve and muscle fibres. As a result, cable theory now plays a central role in many areas of electrophysiology, so that biologists find themselves using mathematical methods of analysis involving techniques considerably more advanced than those with which they are familiar from their undergraduate training. The first aim of this book, therefore, is to give a systematic and explanatory account of the basic mathematical theory that we hope will be of use to research workers in the field as well as in university courses in electrophysiology and in biological mathematics.

When we started writing several years ago this was the sole aim of our work. However, in attempting to write such an account, we encountered a number of areas in which the relevant theory required further development, not only to enable a reasonably systematic account to be given but also to allow us to use the explanatory device of looking at particular problems from different aspects. Where possible, we have attempted the development ourselves, and this second aim has grown as the book was written. As a result, much of the material of the book is new, as a glance at our illustrations will show. If we need to apologize for writing a rather longer and more advanced book than our original aim required, our justification is simply that, in our view, the subject requires such a book. The mathematics of excitation and conduction theory is much more complex, and the experimental work on which it is based is considerably more extensive, than when Bernard Katz wrote his classic review of excitation (*Electric excitation of nerve*) in 1939. Our subject is essentially the same as his, but its content has been greatly transformed and expanded, and we have found it impossible to restrict ourselves to the 100 or so pages that sufficed 35 years ago.

The year 1939 saw the first results of the intracellular recording techniques that were to completely revolutionize the subject after World War II. Katz's book therefore appeared at an ideal moment of time. He was able to review the development of excitation theory (including some of the valuable insights developed during the 1930s) before he and others became so successfully involved in using the new techniques. A watershed had been passed, and for two decades the insights of the 1930s must have paled before the immense power of being able to directly record the events about which the physiologists of the 1930s could only theorize.

We have now reached a somewhat analogous stage of development, although the events about which we now theorize (but wish we could directly record) are molecular rather than cellular. Furthermore, as the new intracellular methods have been applied to progressively more intractable problems in nerve and muscle physiology, so the need to use fairly elaborate, and more highly theoretical, models has returned. Moreover, it is not surprising that some of the insights of the 1930s (for example, Rushton's work on initiation and propagation of the impulse) are proving more useful again. The same problem has returned: even with the new techniques we cannot always record directly all the events we may wish to, and the need to use simplified models of the excitation process itself (not unlike those used in the 1930s) becomes greater when more complex physiological systems are studied. To some extent then the wheel has turned fully round. As a result, we have felt the need to relate some of the older insights to the modern theory of excitation.

We are keenly aware of the fact that the aims of introduction and development co-exist uneasily in the writing of a book. The result is a hybrid. Nonetheless, we have ensured that the introductory and explanatory core is still present as a substantial and identifiable body, although its parts are necessarily interspersed with more advanced development. For the guidance of students interested in our first aim we have indicated in Chapter 1 where the introductory parts are to be found. So far as our second aim is concerned, we cannot say that we are fully satisfied. The developments we have attempted are primarily analytical, largely because we expect the insights gained to be more general than those to be obtained from numerical computer models. However, we have not succeeded in obtaining useful analytical solutions for more than a fraction of the problems that interest electrophysiologists. We present our work as a stimulus to others as much as a record of our own explorations.

*Oxford and Yale,
September 1974*

J. J. B. J.
D. N.
R. W. T.

Acknowledgements

THIS work originated in the form of circulated notes for graduate lectures and seminars given at Oxford, Homburg (Saar), and Monash. We have also used some of the more introductory material in lectures and tutorials for final-year undergraduates studying Physiological Sciences at Oxford. We have, therefore, benefited from innumerable discussions with colleagues and students. To acknowledge all of these sources of criticism personally is impossible but we should like to acknowledge valuable discussions with Dr. R. H. Adrian, Mr. D. Attwell, Dr. W. K. Chandler, Dr. I. Cohen, Dr. L. L. Costantin, Dr. J. Daut, Dr. R. S. Eisenberg, Professor A. L. Hodgkin, Dr. D. Kernell, Professor D. G. Lampard, Professor K. Morztyn, Dr. K. G. Pearson, Dr. D. Perkel, Dr. W. Rall, Dr. S. J. Redman, Mr. H. Sackin, Dr. M. Schneider, Dr. P. G. Sokolove, and Dr. R. B. Stein. We are also grateful to some of our colleagues for allowing us to see unpublished work and, in some cases, for kindly reading various chapters. Needless to say, the responsibility for remaining errors is ours.

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J. J. B. J.
D. N.
R. W. T.

List of notation and definitions

E_m	transmembrane potential expressed as potential of intracellular fluid with respect to that of extracellular fluid (mV).
E_r	resting value of E_m (mV).
V	transmembrane potential expressed as deviation of intracellular potential from resting potential, $V = E_m - E_r$ (mV).
R_i	intracellular resistivity ($k\Omega \text{ cm}$).
R_m	membrane resistance ($k\Omega \text{ cm}^2$).
C_m	membrane capacitance ($\mu\text{F cm}^{-2}$).
Z_m	membrane impedance ($k\Omega \text{ cm}^2$).
X_m	membrane reactance ($k\Omega \text{ cm}^2$).
f	frequency (Hz).
ω	radial frequency = $2\pi f$ (rad).
I_i	membrane ionic (resistance) current ($\mu\text{A cm}^{-2}$).
I_c	membrane capacity current ($\mu\text{A cm}^{-2}$).
I_m	total membrane current, usually $I_i + I_c$ ($\mu\text{A cm}^{-2}$).
I	applied current (μA).
a	fibre radius (one-dimensional theory) (cm).
b	preparation thickness (two-dimensional theory) (cm).
i_i	membrane ionic current per unit length of fibre ($= 2\pi a I_i$) ($\mu\text{A cm}^{-1}$).
i_c	membrane capacity current per unit length fibre ($= 2\pi a I_c$) ($\mu\text{A cm}^{-1}$).
i_m	membrane current per unit length fibre ($= 2\pi a I_m$) ($\mu\text{A cm}^{-1}$).
r_m	membrane resistance per unit length fibre ($= R_m/2\pi a$) ($k\Omega \text{ cm}$).
r_a	intracellular resistance to axial flow of current along fibre ($= R_i/\pi a^2$) ($k\Omega \text{ cm}^{-1}$).
c_m	membrane capacitance per unit length fibre ($= 2\pi a C_m$) ($\mu\text{F cm}^{-1}$).
τ_m	membrane time constant ($= R_m C_m$) (ms).
λ	fibre space constant ($= \sqrt{(R_m a/2R_i)} = \sqrt{(r_m/r_a)}$) (cm).
x	distance along fibre (unidimensional theory) (cm).
X	$= x/\lambda$.
r	distance from point electrode (two-dimensional theory) (cm).
λ_2	two-dimensional space constant (see Chapter 5).
R	$= r/\lambda_2$.
t	time (ms).
T	$= t/\tau_m$.
i_a	intracellular axial current (μA).
R_{in}	input resistance (recorded potential/applied current) (Ω).
Q	charge (nC).

xvi Notation and definitions

G_m	membrane chord conductance (ms cm^{-2}).
g_m	membrane chord conductance in unit length of fibre (ms cm^{-1}).
θ	conduction velocity (ms^{-1}).
K	$= 2R_i\theta^2C_m/a$ (ms^{-1} or s^{-1}).
\bar{V}, I , etc.	Laplace transforms of V, I , etc.
s	Laplace transform variable.
l	length of fibre.
L	l/λ .

Other symbols are defined as they are introduced.

Contents

LIST OF NOTATION AND DEFINITIONS

xv

1. Introductory remarks	1
2. Linear electrical properties of excitable cells	
Forms of excitation used in studying living cells	5
Very brief current pulse (delta function)	5
Step current waveform	6
Voltage step (voltage clamp)	7
Sinusoidal current	8
Intracellular impedance	8
Nerve axons	9
Muscle fibres	10
Membrane impedance	11
Step current analysis	12
Sinusoidal current (a.c.) analysis	14
Equations for impedance locus diagrams	15
Muscle impedance	18
Inductive properties of cell membranes	21
Validity of assumptions used in current flow theory: summary	23
3. Linear cable theory	
Part I: Derivation of general differential equation	25
Part II: Maintained changes	29
Response of infinite cable to step current change	29
Steady state	31
Transient response at $X = 0$	32
Responses at various distances	33
Conduction velocity of decremental wave	34
Influence of fibre size on propagation speed	37
Time course of total membrane charge	38
Response of infinite cable to prolonged step voltage change applied at $X = 0$	39
Response to non-instantaneous voltage change	43
Part III: Brief changes	46
Response of infinite cable to charge applied instantaneously at $X = 0$	46
Applications to junctional mechanisms	53
Time course of the voltage transient	54
Amplitude of the voltage transient	58
Relation between amplitude and time course	58
Part IV: Response of infinite cable to step change in membrane conductance	59
4. Properties of finite cables	
Semi-infinite cable	67
Cables terminated at both ends: method using 'reflections'	69

x Contents

Cables terminated at both ends: Laplace-transform method	71
Response of long cable at relatively short times	73
Response of short cable at relatively long times: steady state in short cables	73
Decrement of peak response to brief current	76
Time course of response to brief current	77
Response to long-lasting current pulse	79
Response of cable terminated in short-circuit	81
Response of short cable to step voltage change	82
Summary of applications of finite-cable theory	82
 5. Current flow in multi-dimensional systems	
Current flow in infinite plane cell	83
Distribution of voltage and current in steady state	86
Transient response to current step at $r = 0$	87
Time course of total membrane charge in multi-dimensional systems	90
Input resistance	91
Response to short current pulse	91
Current flow in three-dimensional systems	92
Summary of applications of multi-dimensional theory	96
 6. Spread of excitation in muscle	
Part I: Subthreshold excitation	101
Step current analysis	101
The components of the total muscle capacitance	102
Series resistance of intracellular structures	103
Early response to step currents	105
Use of models representing radial spread and of generalized admittance models	106
A.c. impedance analysis of distributed structures	106
Note on relation between cable and uniform properties	108
X - R plots for muscle	109
Phase angle-frequency plots	111
Interpretation of impedance measurements in terms of muscle structure	113
Part II: Propagation of muscle action potential	115
Part III: Radial spread of excitation	118
Methods for studying properties of tubular system	119
Equations for radial spread of current	121
Spatial decrement of voltage in steady state	122
Response to step voltage change at fibre surface	123
Velocity of radial spread of excitation	127
Response to brief surface voltage change and to surface action potential	128
Conclusion	130
 7. Mathematical models of the nerve cell	
Part I: Spread of current in a spherical cell	132
Part II: Spread of current in a branching structure	134
Steady state in a structure with cylindrical elements	135

Formulation of the equations	135
Peripheral spread of current in a dendritic tree	140
Example of the distribution of voltage with distance	140
Reduction of a dendritic tree to an equivalent cylinder	142
Calculation of the input conductance of a dendritic tree	144
Calculation of R_m from the input conductance of a nerve cell or dendritic tree	144
Central spread of current in a dendritic tree	146
Transient solutions for a structure with cylindrical elements	147
Structures with tapering as well as branching	149
Formulation of the equations	149
Condition for reduction to an equivalent cylinder	152
Conditions for reduction to other solutions	157
Part III: Rall model of the motoneurone	160
Description and formal solutions	160
Lumped soma semi-infinite cable model	161
Lumped soma short-cable model	163
Methods for determining the parameters τ_m , ρ , and L	167
Measurement of τ_m	168
Measurement of ρ	171
Estimation of L	172
Modifications and extensions to the Rall model	172
Part IV: Applications to junctional mechanisms	173
Determination of the location of synaptic action	173
Analysis of the time course of a synaptic potential	174
Measurement of the reversal potential	179
Sensitivity to the injection of ions	182
Detection of impedance or conductance change	184
Effect of location on the magnitude of a synaptic potential	185
Voltage at the soma in response to current injection at different locations	185
Calculation of the voltage at the site of current injection	190
Interaction between synaptic potentials	192
Addition of functionally similar synaptic actions	193
Interaction between excitation and postsynaptic inhibition	197
Action potential mechanisms in dendrites	213
Types of synaptic action	218
Synapses on dendritic spines	218
Reciprocal synapses	223
Electrical synapses	224

8. Nonlinear properties of excitable membranes

Membrane conductance	225
Linear membrane	225
Nonlinear membrane: I_i a function of V only	225
Nonlinear membrane: I_i a function of V and t	227
Ionic conductances	228
Membrane rectification	229
Models of ion permeation	229
Single energy-barrier model	229
Multiple barrier models	232

Constant-field model	234
Fixed charge models	237
Carrier models	238
Pore models	240
Voltage-dependent 'gate' models (Hodgkin-Huxley model)	240
Descriptions of excitable membranes	245
Squid nerve	245
Myelinated nerve	246
Lobster nerve	246
Skeletal muscle	246
Cardiac muscle	246
Simplified current-voltage relations	249
Non-propagating action potentials	252
Ionic selectivity	253
Selectivity sequences	254
Free energy of binding	255
Cyclic ligands: effect of co-ordination number	260
9. Nonlinear cable theory: excitation	
The conditions for excitation	261
The Cole theorem	261
Voltage threshold	263
Charge threshold	267
The strength-duration curve	270
Effects due to membrane nonlinearities	271
Effects due to membrane accommodation	272
Effects due to cable properties	273
Influence of fibre size on excitation threshold	276
Threshold for current applied intracellularly	276
Threshold for current applied extracellularly	276
10. Nonlinear cable theory: conduction	
The direction of membrane current and its relation to potential changes	278
Current flows during propagated action potential	281
Equations for constant conduction velocity	283
Semi-analytical methods for estimating conduction velocity	284
Variation of conduction velocity with temperature	289
Other determinants of conduction velocity	292
Conduction in myelinated axons	296
Subthreshold responses in nonlinear systems	301
Oscillatory responses to subthreshold currents	303
11. Repetitive activity in excitable cells	
Simplified models of repetitive firing	306
Voltage-threshold model	306
Voltage-threshold model with a time-dependent conductance	311
Oscillator theory	315
Qualitative analysis of repetitive activity	317
The steady state current-voltage relation	319
Conditions for instability: quantitative analysis	320
Applications of linearization theory	323
van der Pol's equation	325

Applications of van der Pol's equation and related models to excitable cells	327
Numerical computations of repetitive activity	331
Current-frequency relation	331
Axons of squid and crab	331
Frog myelinated axon	342
Gastropod nerve cell	344
Voltage-frequency relation	347
Influence of 'surface charge' on repetitive activity	348
Action of low calcium concentration on nerve	348
Action of adrenaline on a cardiac pacemaker	349
Adaptation	352
Early adaptation	352
Late adaptation	355
Changes in conductance with a slow time course	356
Changes in ionic concentration	357
Activity of an electrogenic pump	358
Response to a time-varying input	367
Continuous input	368
Discrete inputs	369

12. Nonlinear cable theory: analytical approaches using polynomial models

Part I: Current-voltage relations	379
Cole's theorem and related equations	379
Infinite cable, $l \rightarrow \infty$	381
Terminated cables	386
Part II: The use of polynomials to represent membrane current-voltage relations	393
Part III: Spatial distribution of charge	394
Membrane showing outward-rectification only	396
Infinite cable	396
Terminated cable	397
Membranes showing inward-rectification but no excitation thresholds	399
Solution for infinite cable ($C = 0$)	399
Solutions for terminated cable ($C \neq 0$)	400
Current-voltage relations with excitation threshold	401
Infinite-cable solution	401
Terminated-cable solution: Influence of cable length on spatial distribution of charge and on current-voltage relations	403
Short-circuit termination	413
Multi-dimensional systems	413
Part IV: Applications to excitation and conduction	413
The liminal length for excitation	413
Relation of liminal length to strength-duration curve	416
Conduction velocity in polynomial cable models	422
Influence of activation time and accommodation (recovery) on conduction	429
Dependence of conduction velocity on magnitude of excitatory membrane conductance	431
Note on numerical methods	433
Example of use of elliptic integral table	433
Numerical integration of cable differential equation	435

13. Mathematical appendix

Some properties of linear systems	436
Superposition principle	436
The unit step function	437
The unit impulse function	438
The convolution integral	439
Laplace transforms	441
What is a transform?	441
Requirements of a transform for applicability to differential equations	441
Definition	442
Transforms of derivatives	443
Incorporation of boundary conditions in the transform of the solution	444
Methods for obtaining the inverse transform	445
Partial fraction expansion	446
Oscillatory solutions	447
Laplace transforms of the step function and delta function	450
Complex frequencies	451
Relation between Fourier and Laplace transforms	452
The use of Laplace transforms in solving partial differential equations	453
Bessel functions	454
Different ways of expressing the general solution	455
The $I_0(R)$ function	456
The $K_0(R)$ function	457
The Hankel function $H_0^{(1)}(R)$	458
The error function	460
Mathematical formulae	462
Summary of some basic rules of differentiation	462
Partial differentiation	463
Differentiation of composite functions: the chain rule	463
Use of the differential operator d	464
Differentiation of a definite integral	465
Integration by parts	465
Power series expansions of functions	465
Taylor and Maclaurin series	466
REFERENCES AND AUTHOR INDEX	469
SUBJECT INDEX	497

1. Introductory remarks

THE evolution of electrically excitable membranes in living systems was an essential step in the development of those forms of life which display the complex kinds of behaviour which we associate with the possession of a nervous system. The chemical basis of this excitability is still largely unknown. However, the physical aspects are now very well understood and the theory of current flow in excitable cells is well developed. Unfortunately, many of the important results are still to be found only in the original papers or in fairly specialist reviews and, although some excellent elementary textbooks now exist, there is no systematic account of the more mathematical aspects. We hope that this book will fill this gap.

Virtually all living cells maintain an electrical potential difference between their interiors and the environment, and this potential is one of the factors determining the energy barriers encountered by charged substances entering or leaving the cell. The special characteristic of excitable cells is that the potential may change in response to variations in the chemical environment or in response to current flow. These potential changes (receptor potentials, synaptic potentials, pacemaker potentials, and action potentials) underly the ability of nervous systems to process and to transmit information. They also serve as the triggers of mechanical activity in the case of effector cells such as muscles.

The transmission of information over long distances is carried out by thin projections of nerve cells called nerve axons. Moreover, for anatomical reasons, muscle cells are also often arranged in long fibres. Thus two of the most important kinds of excitable cell have a geometry resembling that of an electric cable. The theory of current flow in electric cables, initially developed for submarine cables by Lord Kelvin (1855, 1856, 1872), was first used in work related to excitable cells towards the end of the nineteenth century by Weber (1873, 1884), Cremer (1899, 1909), and Hermann (1879, 1899, 1905). One of the most important results of this early work was Hermann's suggestion that current flow of the kind described by cable theory may be adequate to maintain nerve impulse propagation. Since then, the theory has frequently been used in the study of nerve and muscle, particularly in work on the responses to electrical stimuli which are small enough to neglect the gross nonlinearities which appear in response to strong stimuli. The theory has also been successfully applied to the mechanism of impulse propagation. This work developed rapidly in the 1930s and 1940s (see Rashevsky 1931; Rushton, 1934, 1937; Monnier 1934; Cole and Curtis 1936, 1939, 1941; Rosenberg 1937*a, b*; Hodgkin 1937; Cole and Hodgkin 1939; Katz 1939; Offner, Weinberg, and

2 **Introductory remarks**

Young 1940; Weinberg, 1941; Hodgkin and Rushton 1946; Lorente de Nó 1947) so that by 1946, when Hodgkin and Rushton published their experimental and theoretical analysis of the subthreshold responses of nerve axons to locally applied currents, the nature of the purely passive ('electrotonic') flow of current in nerve axons was largely clarified and some important clues to the nature of the nonlinear properties had emerged. More recently, the most exciting developments in this field have concerned the analysis of the nonlinear properties of excitable cells using the voltage control ('voltage-clamp') technique introduced by Cole and Marmont in 1949. The theoretical interpretation of this work has been based largely on the semi-empirical equations, given by Hodgkin and Huxley in 1952, for describing the time and voltage dependence of the membrane current. However, these developments have continued to require the use of cable theory and of extensions to it that were designed to deal with nonlinear systems and with more complex geometries. The result has been a steady but considerable development of the theory, the importance of which does not depend directly on any particular theory concerning the mechanism of the membrane nonlinearities. Moreover, since Fatt and Katz's (1951) quantitative analysis of the end-plate potential, the theory has also been used in the study of synaptic mechanisms. Therefore it has become an important part of many branches of biophysics and neurophysiology, and it may be useful to graduate students and research workers in these fields to have a more comprehensive introduction to the theory than is at present available.

In this book we attempt to give a systematic account of the theory and its applications. Some of the results are well known and may be found in the physiological literature or in some of the standard mathematical texts (e.g. Carslaw and Jaeger 1959; Jaeger 1951; Luikov 1968). Some of the more recent work may not be so well known. Moreover, the mathematical methods and the notation used have not always been uniform and, largely because the theory has been developed for particular applications, some results of more general importance have not always been obtained or given the attention they may deserve. In view of this situation, we give fairly complete derivations for some of the important and widely-used results, together with references to sources containing the original derivations. Where no references are given we believe the results to be new, but we apologize if we have inadvertently neglected any previous work of importance.

Wherever possible, we have tried to be simple and explanatory rather than complete and general. Some of the consequences of this policy are worth mentioning here, since we may in this way warn our more sophisticated readers where they may expect to find limitations which are largely of our own choosing. First, the derivations given are not always the most general since we believe that most biologists find particular derivations easier to follow. Second, we do not attempt to give a complete review of the physiological applications of importance, but some examples of applications are referred

to in order to illustrate the theory. Third, although most of the early development of cable theory was directed towards work with extracellular electrodes, more recent work has often used intracellular electrodes. Since, in many cases, this allows the equations to be simplified, we use this simplification wherever possible. In keeping with this approach, the theory of extracellular fields (see Lorente de Nó 1947; Plonsey 1964; Clark and Plonsey 1966, 1968; Rall and Shepherd 1968; Rosenfalck 1969; Nicholson and Llinas 1971) is omitted. We also omit the theory of three dimensional fields in the vicinity of current sources (see Eisenberg and Johnson 1970).

It may be helpful to readers to have some guidance on how the book might best be used. First, it should be emphasized that we have not written a general introduction to cellular electrophysiology. On the contrary, some familiarity with the subject is assumed, and readers who have no previous knowledge would be well advised to first read an introductory account such as Katz's *Nerve, muscle, and synapse* (1966) or Aidley's *The physiology of excitable cells* (1971). Some parts of the present work will then be found fairly easy to follow. In particular, Chapter 2, many sections of Chapter 3, and Chapters 8, 9, 10, and most of 11 are intended as introductions to the basic principles of linear and nonlinear cable and excitation theory, and some parts of each of these chapters will be found to be relatively elementary. It should be noted that the introductory sections of the book do not necessarily appear at its beginning. We have deliberately deferred some of the introductory material to later chapters dealing with nonlinear cable theory since it is in these chapters that the appropriate applications occur.

Chapters 6 and 7 are concerned with particular applications of cable theory to problems in muscle excitation and the theory of nerve cells. These chapters are written largely as reviews of the present state of the field, and they may well become out of date more quickly than other chapters. We feel, however, that these chapters will give a useful indication of the way in which the theory is used in problems of current interest, and we hope that they will also serve as introductions to these two fields for those who do not have the time to adequately study the complex, and sometimes rather inaccessible, literature. Similarly, Chapter 11 is, to a considerable extent, a survey of the analysis of repetitive firing; as such it is likely to become incomplete as new work takes the analysis further.

Chapters 4, 5, and 12 contain fairly advanced or specialist material, and we suggest that they should be omitted on a first reading. These chapters should prove more useful to those already familiar with the basic principles and to those who need equations for particular problems.

Finally, it will be obvious on perusing the book that some parts assume a fair degree of mathematical knowledge. However, we hope that this will not deter non-mathematical physiologists. In the introductory chapters mentioned above we have tried to explain the derivations in fairly easy stages and, if the reader confines himself to these chapters initially, he should find that little