

KULEUVEN, DEPARTMENT OF PHYSICS AND ASTRONOMY

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# Bachelor Thesis

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## 1 EMAILS

### 1.1 NERF

Hi Davide

How are you? (I hope you still remember me, physics student with an internship at your lab two years ago. We met again I think last year? Yes, I'm still very sure about becoming a researcher in neuroscience. I finished the second year of physics successfully; another step closer to what I want.

Third year of Bachelor means Bachelor thesis and it is in groups of two. I convinced my colleague (Hannelore Verhoeven) to pick the topic about neuroscience *Light distribution and thermal effects in the rat brain under optogenetic stimulation*.

Our host is Barbara Gysbrechts. Perhaps you know her? I saw on the website of Nerf that she participates/participated in the lab of Francesco Battaglia. Hannelore and I are now both reading publications and papers about optogenetics to get to know the field. Our work will be purely theoretical though; modelling the properties of light in different tissues (on the computer).

So here's my question for you. Do you think it would be possible to show me and especially Hannelore around in the lab to see some of the practical aspects of neuroscience? It helps to get the whole picture of the experiment. But more importantly, concerning our bachelor thesis, do you think somebody from the lab, who's working with optogenetics, would be willing to show us some of those experiments and explain his techniques?

And if it's possible, could that happen next week or the week after? I know it's soon, but we got our topic yesterday and our first evaluation is (already) 4 November.

Thanks a lot and see you soon (hopefully)!

Lies Deceuninck

Hello Lies

Of course I remember you. Nice to hear from you! I'm glad your interest for neuroscience hasn't subsided and that you are spreading your interest to your co-students. If you bring Hannelore to Nerf, I can show her the lab and explain a bit of what we do.

I saw Barbara around the lab, but I don't know her personally. Anyway you chose a very interesting topic: congrats!

At the moment we have only one person actively working with optogenetics in our lab. That's JJ, our post-doctoral researcher (in CC). Unfortunately, he's not going to perform optogenetics experiments until the 2nd half of November, but he can answer some of your questions regarding the practical use of this technique in freely behaving animals, together with the scientific aspects of its use (which questions about brain physiology he's addressing with it).

Hope to see you soon too, and let me know if I can be of any other help.

Cheers,  
Davide

Davide

Hannelore and I are always available on Wednesday and Friday

Perhaps you could introduce us to the lab and your techniques first and JJ could continue in the afternoon?

Let me know what suits you best.

Thank you for doing this!

Lies

Hello Lies

Shall we do it on 21st October then?

JJ will be available in the morning, as in the afternoon he's busy with experiments. You can come in the middle morning, we talk a bit, I'll show you the lab, you talk with him and then we have lunch together.

If there's chance (but I don't promise as it doesn't depend on me) in the afternoon you can attend some of the experiments going on in the lab.

Let me know.

Cheers,  
Davide

## 2 NOTES

### 2.1 ON LIGHT DISTRIBUTION AND THERMAL EFFECTS IN THE RAT BRAIN UNDER OPTOGENETIC STIMULATION

*Optogenetics refers to the integration of optics and genetics to achieve gain- or loss-of-function of well-defined events within specific cells of living tissue[?]*

There are different ways to record and study brain signals. Electrical with electrodes and with photons->Optogenetics (*Optical brain stimulation*). That is what we will do.

Different organisms have beautifully evolved to obtain mechanisms that can harvest light, using it to maintain their membrane potentials or identify suitable life environments. [?]

## ~~2.1 On Light distribution and thermal effects in the brain under photogenetic stimulation~~

An important class of these light-sensitive proteins (microbial opsins) are transmembrane *rhodopsins*. These proteins are useful

- activity control by light
- encoded by only one gene
- fast kinetics

Mostly they are ion channels used to regulate the membrane potential. Over the years, many research has been done to genetically modify mammalian neurons to have these light-sensitive proteins expressed in the cell. Consequently, we have the ability to control cell activity of neurons and record action potentials in the brains of mammals.

The Opsins are also modified to have a specific functionality and to be sensitive for a specific wavelength.

why photogenetics?

- superior cell-type specificity
- no electrical artifact
- minimized tissue damage

Therefor, it is important to know the propagation of light in the different areas of the brain; what kind of influence has light on the neurons.<sup>[?]</sup> To target a region in the brain, they use optical fibers. The influence on the brain depends on the different properties of the light beam, such as

- wavelength
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In order to do experiment correctly and safely, we need an stimulation protocol; *What is the ideal intensity to optimize stimulation and minimize damage?*

### 3 VOCABULARY

This section contains a list of domain specific vocabulary [?]

Attenuation	The gradual loss in intensity of any kind of fluctuation through a medium	Attenuation can be caused by the quality of the glass in the optical fiber or by micro/macro bending
Optical fiber	flexible thin fiber used for data transmittance	An Optical fiber consists of a core and cladding both existing out of glass. It works on the principle of total internal reflection.
Single mode fiber	Optical fiber with only one lightsignal	Thin core that allows only one light beam
Multimode fiber	Optical fiber with more lightsignals at once	Bigger core
Cutoff wavelength	the wavelength above which the wire will only support single mode signals	properties of a single mode optical fibers
Mode field diameter	the diameter of the optical distribution in the fiber	properties of a single mode fiber, some of the light (almost 30 %) propagates in the cladding layer. This is a measure of how much propagation happens
Numerical aperture	the measure of the angular range in which the fiber accepts light	it depends on the refractive indices of the core and cladding glass
Core size	design properties of the fiber	the larger the core, the more moving light can propagate through the fiber (more modes)