



# **Neural Responses to Moving Natural Scenes**

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Discipline of Physiology

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A thesis submitted for the degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy**

**December 2003**

# Table of Contents

List of Figures.....	4
List of Tables .....	5
Abstract .....	6
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction .....</b>	<b>8</b>
1.1 <i>Visual illusions &amp; neuroethology based approach .....</i>	8
1.1.1 The basics of visual motion .....	8
1.1.2 General questions on motion vision .....	9
1.1.3 The optomotor response and the correlator model.....	9
1.1.4 Description of the correlator model.....	10
1.2 <i>Motion processing in the fly vision system.....</i>	12
1.2.1 Correlator responses to natural scenes .....	13
1.2.2 Motion adaptation .....	13
1.2.3 Other visual-motor responses & velocity estimation.....	14
1.2.4 Estimation of self motion—optic flow analysis through matched filters.....	15
<b>Chapter 2: Vision Egg.....</b>	<b>17</b>
2.1 <i>Introduction .....</i>	17
2.2 <i>Methods.....</i>	19
2.2.1 Programming environment .....	19
2.2.2 Computer hardware.....	20
2.2.3 Realtime stimulus generation.....	20
2.2.4 Trigger output.....	21
2.2.5 Trigger input.....	21
2.2.6 Precise control of color and luminance .....	21
2.2.7 Display of stimuli .....	22
2.2.8 User interaction and alternative sources of input.....	22
2.3 <i>Results .....</i>	23
2.3.1 Timing precision.....	23
2.3.2 Precise control of color .....	23
2.4 <i>Discussion.....</i>	24
<b>Chapter 3: Ghosting in the Machine.....</b>	<b>25</b>
3.1 <i>Introduction .....</i>	25
3.2 <i>Model of moving scene production and early neural processing .....</i>	26
3.2.1 Smooth motion .....	27
3.2.2 Apparent motion.....	28
3.2.3 Apparent motion with temporal anti-aliasing - motion blur.....	31
3.2.4 Predictions of the model .....	31
3.3 <i>Methods.....</i>	32
3.3.1 Apparatus, stimuli and subjects .....	32
3.3.2 Moving object discrimination experiment .....	33
3.3.3 Motion detection experiment.....	33
3.3.4 Electrophysiology.....	33
3.4 <i>Results .....</i>	34
3.4.1 Moving object discrimination.....	34
3.4.2 Motion detection.....	35
3.4.3 Electrophysiology.....	37
3.5 <i>Discussion.....</i>	38
3.5.1 Ghosting, its effects and its elimination.....	38
3.5.2 Eye movements and frame rates .....	39
3.6 <i>Appendix 1: Mathematical details of model for apparent motion perception .....</i>	40
3.6.1 Model of smooth motion.....	40
3.6.2 Discrete time sampling and display of apparent motion.....	40
3.6.3 Optimal sampling and display of continuous moving scenes.....	41
<b>Chapter 4: Fly Motion Detector Responses to Natural Scenes .....</b>	<b>44</b>

4.1	<i>Introduction</i> .....	44
4.1.1	Estimating velocity.....	44
4.1.2	Correlator models and biological processing, including motion adaptation.....	45
4.1.3	Naturalistic scenes.....	46
4.1.4	Experimental approach.....	47
4.2	<i>Methods</i> .....	47
4.2.1	Electrophysiology, data acquisition and analysis.....	47
4.2.2	Stimulus presentation.....	48
4.2.3	Panoramic natural images and their contrast.....	50
4.3	<i>Results</i> .....	54
4.3.1	Basic properties of responses to natural images.....	54
4.3.2	Pattern noise.....	56
4.3.3	Velocity tuning in naturalistic, adapted conditions.....	60
4.3.4	Response time course and latency.....	62
4.3.5	Responses to natural images.....	64
4.3.6	Effect of contrast and motion adaptation.....	65
4.3.7	Effect of contrast scaling on shape of velocity-response function.....	68
4.3.8	Effect of motion adaptation on velocity tuning and gain.....	69
4.3.9	Effect of adapting velocity.....	71
4.4	<i>Discussion</i> .....	72
4.4.1	Responses to natural images and contrast gain control.....	72
4.4.2	Differences between <i>Eristalis</i> dCH and HS cells.....	74
4.4.3	Functional role of motion adaptation in naturalistic context.....	74
4.4.4	General characteristics of response to natural scenes.....	75
<b>Chapter 5:</b>	<b>Local Properties of Fly Wide-Field Motion Detecting Neurons.....</b>	<b>77</b>
5.1	<i>Introduction</i> .....	77
5.1.1	Local properties of fly eyes.....	77
5.1.2	Local properties of fly motion detection and the ‘matched filter hypothesis’.....	80
5.2	<i>Methods</i> .....	82
5.2.1	Electrophysiology.....	82
5.2.2	Stimulus.....	82
5.2.3	Calculating local preferred directions and local motion sensitivity.....	83
5.2.4	Estimating contrast-response and contrast sensitivity.....	84
5.2.5	Estimating contributions from Type 1 and Type 2 EMDs.....	85
5.3	<i>Results</i> .....	86
5.3.1	Local preferred directions in <i>Eristalis</i> .....	86
5.3.2	Response as a function of contrast.....	89
5.3.3	Spatio-temporal surfaces.....	93
5.3.4	Regional variation in spatio-temporal properties.....	99
5.3.5	Sex-specific differences in local properties.....	108
5.4	<i>Discussion</i> .....	112
5.4.1	Summary.....	112
5.4.2	Matched filter hypothesis.....	112
5.4.3	The bright zone: sex-specific specialization for target detection?.....	112
<b>Chapter 6:</b>	<b>Concluding remarks.....</b>	<b>114</b>
	<b>Bibliography.....</b>	<b>115</b>
	<b>List of Appendices: Published and submitted papers arising from this work.....</b>	<b>128</b>
	<b>Appendix A: Implementation of visual motion detection with contrast adaptation</b>	
	<b>Appendix B: Adaptive motion detectors inspired by insect vision</b>	
	<b>Appendix C: Context-dependent stimulus presentation to freely moving animals in 3D</b>	
	<b>Appendix D: Effect of spatial sampling on pattern noise in insect-based motion detection</b>	

## Abstract

Visual movement is important to most animals that move quickly, and even some that do not. What *neural computations* do animals use to see visual motion in their natural environment?

The visual stimulus used to perform experiments on such questions is critical, and has historically limited the ability to perform experiments asking critical questions about responses to naturalistic moving scenes. The ability to display, at high frame rates, moving natural panoramas and other stimuli distorted to compensate for projection onto a flat screen was important to the experiments described here. I therefore created a software library called the 'Vision Egg' that allows creation of motion stimuli with recent, inexpensive computer hardware, and was used for the experiments described here.

Additionally, I developed a mathematical model to determine the quality of motion simulation possible with computer displays. This model was applied to reach an understanding of the 'ghosting' artifact sometimes perceived on such apparent motion displays. Psychophysical experiments on human observers confirmed model predictions and allowed testing of synthetic motion blur for simulation of smooth motion and elimination of the ghosting artifact. I show this synthetic motion blur is optimal in the sense of creating the closest perception possible to that of smooth motion experienced in natural settings. Experiments on humans and flies show that such synthetic 'motion blur' has no effect on motion detection *per se*. However, ghosting in sampled displays results in information not present in smooth motion at high velocities, permitting inappropriate discrimination of rapidly moving features.

I performed experiments measuring the responses of hoverfly wide-field motion detecting neurons (HS cells) in adapted and unadapted states to the velocity of natural scenes. Responses to natural images of varied intrinsic contrast depend little on the choice of image. Artificially reducing contrast, however, does reduce response magnitudes. Finally, the greatest component of response variation to natural scenes is directly related to local structure in the scenes, and could thus be called 'pattern noise.'

The large receptive field of HS cells arises from a (non-linear) spatial summation of numerous elementary motion detectors. I measured spatial and temporal contrast sensitivity of small patches in the large receptive field. As predicted from the presence of a frontal optical acute zone, spatial tuning is highest frontally. A sexually dimorphic 'bright zone' in the fronto-dorsal eye is correlated with enhanced contrast sensitivity and faster temporal tuning in HS cells with receptive fields in this region of male flies.