

Michael J Hawken  
Center for Neural Science  
4 Washington Place, Room 809  
New York, NY 10003  
Telephone: (212) 998-7777  
Fax: (212) 995-4860  
Email: mjh@cns.nyu.edu

## **Michael Sceniak**

Michael Sceniak is a very able and innovative scientist with numerous abilities and accomplishments. I met Michael when he entered our graduate program in the mid 1990's, and have had the pleasure of teaching him, being taught by him and, in collaborating with him in a range of experiments. Michael is very insightful, he is able to conceive of novel approaches to important problems, bringing into use his experimental and quantitative skills to find solutions to the problems. He has the singlemindedness required to finish projects and write them up in a timely way. I am certain that he has the requisite skills and intellect to develop and maintain an independent research group. He will always be on the cutting edge of research.

In the past few years Michael has worked in four groups and has made significant contributions in each of them. He was author on four full papers from work done during his graduate days and he was first author on three of these. He has continued this productivity during his postdoctoral training. His graduate work concentrated on single-unit physiology but he has always been interested in cellular processing. To this end in Marty Usrey's laboratory and more recently at Stanford he has learned techniques on single cell patch recording in cortical slices. I think that his broad training in whole animal sensory physiology and, more recently, in slice physiology will give him an almost unique range of research tools.

My closest association with Michael was during his thesis work on the characteristics of the interactions between the classical and extra-classical receptive field in neurons of the primary visual cortex of the macaque monkey, this work resulted in three papers. The first paper was in Nature Neuroscience and the other two longer papers in the Journal of Neurophysiology. He has tackled problems by a combination of first-rate experimental work and modeling. This approach is exemplified in his work on the effects of contrast on receptive field dimensions he did for his thesis, he not only carried out a set of careful experiments but he then went to modeling to get a deeper understanding of the processes involved. This gave results that were not intuitively obvious from the data alone.

Another of Michael's strengths is that he has an excellent grasp of all the experimental tools necessary to undertake a series of experiments. During his time as a graduate student he became familiar with all the procedures for acute recording and experimental control of the visual stimulus. He quickly gained the ability to do quantitative analysis where he was able to apply his engineering and quantitative skills to data analysis and modeling. He was also willing and able to instruct new students in the lab.

I am sure that he will apply his thorough approach to any new problems in the same manner that he approached his thesis work. I think he would be a real asset to any department.

Sincerely yours,

Michael J Hawken