



### Resonant scattering from silver nanoparticles enhances transparent display performance

Embedding silver nanoparticles in a thin polymer sheet can produce transparent displays based on narrow-band resonance scattering phenomena, according to research reported in the January 21 issue of *Nature Communications* (DOI: 10.1038/ncomms4152) by scientists at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and the US Army Edgewood Chemical Biological Center. The frequency-selective properties of these displays, which can be tuned to scatter light of a desired, single wavelength, and their wide viewing angle, make them attractive possible alternatives to currently available transparent displays. Eventually, they might be manufactured inexpensively on a large scale using roll-to-roll polymer processing, which would give them a cost advantage over other display types.

As an example, the head-up display in aircraft that projects flight data on the cockpit window for easy viewing by the pilot works by specular reflection of the images off the glass. This reflection limits the angle of viewing and the images can be seen only from the pilot's seat; they are not visible to someone standing behind the pilot or off to one side. In contrast, the scattering of an image from the new

silver-nanoparticle-embedded plastic film can be seen over a wide range of viewing angles. "This makes it useful for viewing by multiple audience members," said Chia Wei Hsu of MIT and Harvard University, the lead author of the article.

The proof-of-concept display developed by Hsu and his colleagues is also more transparent to ambient light than most other types of transparent displays because of its frequency selectivity. By changing the diameter and volume fraction of the silver nanoparticles, it is possible to tune the frequency of light that is scattered. Most head-up displays are not frequency-selective, so basically all of the light is either reflected or transmitted, Hsu said; to reflect more light, it has to be made less transparent. "In our case we can make the display scatter this one particular color but keep the transparency at other colors," he said, "so we won't have to decrease the transparency as much." The research team's display was measured at 60% transparency in the visible range, compared to 20–40% for liquid-crystal displays or organic light-emitting diodes.

The research team chose silver nanoparticles for this initial trial because silver provided the best performance among the materials they had at hand. They mixed hydrolyzed polyvinyl alcohol with an aqueous solution of approximately 64-nm-diameter silver nanoparticles (concentration 0.01 mg/

ml), and allowed the solution to dry on a square glass plate over 40 hours. The resulting polymer film had a thickness of 0.46 nm, with nanoparticle density of  $7 \mu\text{g Ag/cm}^2$ . Such a display scatters blue light of 458 nm wavelength.

Hsu and his colleagues see this material as simply a plastic foil that can be placed on glass surfaces, transforming an existing window into a transparent display. For example, an office window with a layer of this foil could be used as a data projection surface while retaining the ability to see through it. Shop windows could be enhanced by projecting product data or branding information on the window's surface to complement the products that are clearly visible behind the screen. Because the scattered light retains the polarization of the incident light, three-dimensional viewing might be achieved by simultaneously projecting two images with different circular polarities and viewing the image through polarized lenses.

Plans for future research include making the resonance band narrower to render the screen more transparent, and to enable the production of three-color displays, instead of the monochromatic display demonstrated in this early work. "In order to enable three-color displays," Hsu said, "we need each of the three resonances [red-green-blue] to be narrow enough so that the three resonances don't overlap each other."

**Tim Palucka**

### Bio Focus

#### Turkey skin inspires biomimetic sensor

In the United States, turkeys usually only make the press around Thanksgiving, when they play the star role in this annual feast. In Korea and Japan, said Seung-Wuk Lee of the University of California–Berkeley, "they call the turkey the seven-faced bird because it can show seven different colors on its face." For example, when a turkey is excited, the red skin on its face changes to white or blue. Now, the color-changing properties of their skin are inspiring biomimetic sensors that can de-

tect the presence of environmental toxins or explosives.

In the January 21 issue of *Nature Communications* (DOI: 10.1038/ncomms4043), Lee and colleagues from UC–Berkeley, Pusan National University, Sungkyunkwan University, and Korea University have demonstrated that the turkey's structural coloration mechanism can be mimicked using bioengineered phage viruses to create nanostructured surfaces that alter their color in the presence of specific molecules.

The turkey's skin contains nanostructured bundles of collagen protein that interact with the incident light to provide structural coloration. Stimulation triggers

swelling of the blood vessels in the turkey's skin, stretching the collagen layer and altering its optical properties and perceived color.

Because of the difficulties associated with synthesizing ordered nanostructures out of unstable collagen bundles, Lee and his team instead used the M13 phage, a bacterial virus that behaves similarly to the turkey's collagen bundles but which can be engineered to display functional peptides. "Tunability is quite challenging in the collagen, but it's very easy to do in the phage," said Lee.

The researchers genetically engineered the M13 phage to recognize target molecules and allowed it to self-replicate. By