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Loucas Tsakalacos
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Contents

vii	Conference Committee
ix	Introduction

NANOPHOTONICS FOR SOLAR ENERGY CONVERSION I

7772 02	Luminescence imaging: a powerful characterization tool for photovoltaic applications (Invited Paper) [7772-01] T. Trupke, J. W. Weber, BT Imaging Pty Ltd. (Australia)
7772 05	Design of photonic metamaterial multi-junction solar cells using rigorous coupled wave analysis [7772-04] E. Lansey, D. T. Crouse, The City College of New York (United States)

NANOPHOTONICS FOR SOLAR ENERGY CONVERSION II

7772 06	Nanoparticles for solar spectrum conversion (Invited Paper) [7772-05] W. G. J. H. M. van Sark, A. Meijerink, R. E. I. Schropp, Utrecht Univ. (Netherlands)
7772 07	Molecular approaches to third generation photovoltaics: photochemical up-conversion (Invited Paper) [7772-06] Y. Y. Cheng, B. Fückel, D. A. Roberts, T. Khoury, R. G. C. R. Clady, M. J. Y. Tayebjee, The Univ. of Sydney (Australia); R. Piper, N. J. Ekins-Daukes, Imperial College London (United Kingdom); M. J. Crossley, T. W. Schmidt, The Univ. of Sydney (Australia)
7772 08	Periodic arrays of ridge apertures as a high efficiency coupler for photovoltaic applications [7772-07] E. C. Kinzel, P. Srisungsitthisunti, X. Xu, Purdue Univ. (United States)
7772 09	Toward high-efficiency quantum dot solar cells: optimized gratings for ultrathin waveguide devices [7772-08] C. O. McPheeters, The Univ. of Texas at Austin (United States); C. J. Hill, Jet Propulsion Lab. (United States); D. Hu, Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (Germany); S. H. Lim, Arizona State Univ. (United States); D. Derkacs, Solar Junction Inc. (United States); D. Z. Ting, Jet Propulsion Lab. (United States); D. M. Schaad, Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (Germany); S. D. Gunapala, Jet Propulsion Lab. (United States); E. T. Yu, Univ. of Texas at Austin (United States)

- 7772 0A **Advances in up- and down-converted fluorescence for high efficiency solar cells using rare-earth doped fluorozirconate-based glasses and glass ceramics** [7772-09]
C. Paßlick, Martin-Luther-Univ. Halle-Wittenberg (Germany); B. Henke, Martin-Luther-Univ. Halle-Wittenberg (Germany) and Fraunhofer Ctr. for Silicon Photovoltaics (Germany); I. Császár, Martin-Luther-Univ. Halle-Wittenberg (Germany); B. Ahrens, Fraunhofer Ctr. for Silicon Photovoltaics (Germany); P.-T. Miclea, Fraunhofer Ctr. for Silicon Photovoltaics (Germany) and Martin-Luther-Univ. Halle-Wittenberg (Germany); J. A. Johnson, The Univ. of Tennessee Space Institute (United States); S. Schweizer, Martin-Luther-Univ. Halle-Wittenberg (Germany) and Fraunhofer Ctr. for Silicon Photovoltaics (Germany)
- 7772 0B **Silicon solar cells with nano-crystalline silicon down shifter: experiment and modeling** [7772-10]
Y. Jestin, G. Pucker, M. Ghulinyan, L. Ferrario, P. Bellutti, A. Picciotto, A. Collini, Bruno Kessler Foundation (Italy); A. Marconi, A. Anopchenko, Z. Yuan, L. Pavesi, Univ. of Trento (Italy)

QUANTUM STRUCTURES FOR SOLAR ENERGY CONVERSION I

- 7772 0C **III-V quantum dot enhanced photovoltaic devices (Invited Paper)** [7772-11]
D. V. Forbes, S. M. Hubbard, C. Bailey, S. Polly, J. Andersen, Rochester Institute of Technology (United States); R. Raffaele, National Renewable Energy Lab. (United States)
- 7772 0G **Efficiency improvement by near infrared quantum dots for luminescent solar concentrators** [7772-15]
C. Wang, G. Shcherbatyuk, R. Inman, Univ. of California, Merced (United States); D. Pelka, Pelka & Associates Inc. (United States); W. Zhang, Univ. of California, Merced (United States); Y. Rodriguez, S. Carter, Univ. of California, Santa Cruz (United States); R. Winston, S. Ghosh, Univ. of California, Merced (United States)

QUANTUM STRUCTURES FOR SOLAR ENERGY CONVERSION II

- 7772 0J **Fabrication and characterisation of silicon quantum dots in SiO₂/Si₃N₄ hybrid matrix** [7772-18]
D. Di, I. Perez-Wurfl, G. Conibeer, M. A. Green, ARC Photovoltaics Ctr. of Excellence, Univ. of New South Wales (Australia)

NANO/MICRO WIRES & TUBES FOR SOLAR ENERGY CONVERSION I

- 7772 0M **Mimicking moth's eyes for photovoltaic applications with tapered GaP nanorods (Invited Paper)** [7772-28]
S. L. Diedenhofen, FOM Institute for Atomic and Molecular Physics (Netherlands); R. E. Algra, E. P. A. M. Bakkers, Philips Research Nederland B.V. (Netherlands); J. Gómez Rivas, FOM Institute for Atomic and Molecular Physics (Netherlands)

NANOSTRUCTURED ORGANIC SOLAR CELLS: JOINT SESSION WITH CONFERENCE 7777

- 7772 0P **Improving the photovoltaic properties of organic solar cells by structuring the P3HT:PCBM photoactive layer with functionalized SWCNTs** [7772-25]
H. Derbal-Habak, Univ. d'Angers (France) and Institut Matériaux Microélectronique Nanosciences de Provence, CNRS, Univ. Aix-Marseille (France); C. Bergeret, J. Cousseau, Lab. Moltech Anjou, CNRS, Univ. d'Angers (France); J. M. Nunzi, Queen's Univ. (Canada)

NANOPHOTONICS FOR SOLAR ENERGY CONVERSION III

- 7772 0Z **Fundamental limit of nanophotonic light-trapping in solar cells** [7772-33]
Z. Yu, A. Raman, S. Fan, Stanford Univ. (United States)
- 7772 11 **Quantifying intrinsic loss mechanisms in solar cells: Why is power efficiency fundamentally limited?** [7772-35]
L. C. Hirst, N. J. Ekins-Daukes, Imperial College London (United Kingdom)

ADVANCED PHOTOVOLTAIC TECHNOLOGIES

- 7772 12 **SLiM-cut thin silicon wafering with enhanced crack and stress control** [7772-36]
J. Vaes, A. Masolin, A. Pesquera, F. Dross, IMEC (Belgium)
- 7772 14 **Optical surface technologies: boosting efficiency from already present light** [7772-38]
M. A. Raymond, H. Lange, S. Weiss, M. A. Grossman, Genie Lens Technologies, LLC (United States)
- 7772 15 **Plasmonic field and efficiency enhancement in crystalline thin film photovoltaics** [7772-39]
D. Zhao, The Univ. of Texas at Arlington (United States); Z. Ma, Univ. of Wisconsin-Madison (United States); W. Zhou, The Univ. of Texas at Arlington (United States)

POSTER SESSION

- 7772 16 **Silicon nanowire/poly(3,4-ethylenedioxythiophene): poly(styrenesulfonate) heterojunction solar cells** [7772-40]
S.-C. Shiu, J.-J. Chao, S.-C. Hung, C.-L. Yeh, C.-F. Lin, National Taiwan Univ. (Taiwan)
- 7772 17 **Photovoltaic conversion enhancement of TiO₂ nanoparticles decorated with Au nanocrystals and sensitized with CdSe quantum dots and P3OT polymer** [7772-41]
I. Zarazúa, E. De la Rosa, T. López-Luke, Ctr. de Investigaciones en Óptica, A.P. (Mexico); J. Reyes, Univ. de Colima (Mexico); S. Ruiz, Ctr. de Investigaciones en Óptica, A.P. (Mexico)
- 7772 19 **Plasmonic structures integrated in organic solar cells** [7772-43]
S. Vedraïne, Ph. Torchio, H. Derbal-Habak, Institut Matériaux Microélectronique Nanosciences de Provence, CNRS, Univ. Aix-Marseille (France); F. Flory, Ecole Centrale Marseille, CNRS (France); V. Brissonneau, D. Duché, J. J. Simon, L. Escoubas, Institut Matériaux Microélectronique Nanosciences de Provence, CNRS, Univ. Aix-Marseille (France)

- 7772 1B **Photonic metamaterial absorber designs for infrared solar cell applications** [7772-45]
K. B. Alici, E. Ozbay, Bilkent Univ. (Turkey)
- 7772 1C **Optical properties of silicon nanowires array fabricated by metal-assisted electroless etching** [7772-46]
Z. Guo, J.-Y. Jung, K. Zhou, Y. Xiao, S. Jee, S. A. Moiz, J.-H. Lee, Hanyang Univ. (Korea, Republic of)
- 7772 1G **Optical absorption enhancement in silicon nanowire and nanohole arrays for photovoltaic applications** [7772-50]
C. Lin, M. L. Povinelli, The Univ. of Southern California (United States)
- 7772 1J **Optical properties of vertical silicon nanowire arrays with random position, diameter, or length** [7772-53]
H. Bao, X. Ruan, Purdue Univ. (United States)
- 7772 1K **Hybrid nanostructured solar cells based on the incorporation of inorganic nanoparticles in polymer-fullerene mixtures** [7772-54]
J. N. de Freitas, A. F. Nogueira, Univ. Estadual de Campinas (Brazil)
- 7772 1L **Nanophase semiconductors embedded within transparent conductive oxides matrices as optical sensitizers for photovoltaic applications** [7772-55]
C. G. Allen, G. H. Shih, R. J. Beal, B. G. Potter, Jr., The Univ. of Arizona (United States)

Author Index

Conference Committee

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Edward T. Yu, The University of Texas at Austin (United States)

Session Chairs

- 1 Nanophotonics for Solar Energy Conversion I
Xianfan Xu, Purdue University (United States)
- 2 Nanophotonics for Solar Energy Conversion II
Gavin Conibeer, ARC Photovoltaics Center of Excellence, University of
New South Wales (Australia)
- 3 Quantum Structures for Solar Energy Conversion I
Wilfried G. J. H. M. van Sark, Utrecht Universiteit (Netherlands)
- 4 Quantum Structures for Solar Energy Conversion II
Alberto Salleo, Stanford University (United States)
- 5 Nano/Micro Wires & Tubes for Solar Energy Conversion I
Loucas Tsakalakos, GE Global Research (United States)
- 6 Nanostructured Organic Solar Cells: Joint Session with
Conference 7777
Sean E. Shaheen, University of Denver (United States)

- 7 Nano/Micro Wires & Tubes for Solar Energy Conversion II
Deli Wang, University of California, San Diego (United States)
- 8 Nanophotonics for Solar Energy Conversion III
Gavin Conibeer, ARC Photovoltaics Center of Excellence, University of
New South Wales (Australia)
- 9 Advanced Photovoltaic Technologies
Joseph Luther, National Renewable Energy Laboratory (United States)

Introduction

The solar energy industry has seen strong growth in the last decade. While the recent Great Recession has certainly had an impact on the photovoltaics (PV) industry, this has not been as severe as feared and the industry is seeing promising growth levels. Conventional silicon and thin film PV technologies are well developed and capable of meeting the clean energy demands of many markets. They will have even more impact as cost reduction and manufacturing technologies improve. Nevertheless, there continues to be interest within the research community in developing technologies that can simultaneously reduce cost yet also provide breakthrough performance.

To this effect, research efforts in studying and applying the unique optical, electrical, and structural/architectural properties of micro and nanostructures to solar energy applications, either as novel photonic structures or as new solar cell device structures, continue to flourish. This year's third installment of the conference devoted to this topic, Next Generation (Nano) Photonic and Cell Technologies for Solar Energy Conversion, held at SPIE Optics + Photonics in 2010 as part of the Solar Energy + Technology Symposium, once again demonstrated the strong interest in this field of research. The conference's title was slightly modified this year to include a broader class of next generation concepts and other mechanisms of solar energy conversion.

The first two sessions of the conference were focused on Nanophotonics for Solar Energy Conversion, i.e., the use of novel layers and structures for light management in solar applications. After an overview of solar cell characterization using luminescent imaging, numerous presentations on up/down-conversion, plasmonics, light trapping, and photonic bandgap structures, among other topics, were given. The third and fourth sessions were devoted to Quantum Structures for Solar Energy Conversion, featuring talks on quantum dot solar cells, intermediate bands using highly mismatched alloys, and luminescent solar concentrators. A joint session (with the Organic Photovoltaics conference) on advances in Nanostructured Organic Solar Cells was held, followed by two sessions on Nano/Micro Wires & Tubes for Solar Energy Conversion. These included application of CdS/CdTe, α -Si:H, Si, and III-V wires and pillars in novel photovoltaic devices, and nanowire-based transparent conductors. Following a third session on Nanophotonics, the final session of the conference on Advanced Photovoltaic Technologies included presentations describing advanced thin silicon wafering, direct-write metallization, and other optical enhancing mechanisms for solar modules. A collection of excellent posters on various next generation PV topics further contributed to the conference.

The conference was also highlighted by the second year of a panel discussion moderated by Prof. Sean Shaheen (University of Denver) and myself on Commercialization of Emerging Photovoltaic Technologies, in which experts from academia and industry discussed the prospects and challenges in developing novel PV technologies based on organic and inorganic materials. This year's panelists were as follows:

Christoph J. Brabec, Friedrich-Alexander-Univ. Erlangen-Nürnberg (Germany)
Gavin Conibeer, ARC Photovoltaics Ctr. of Excellence, Univ. of New South Wales (Australia)
Gang Li, SOLARMER Energy, Inc. (USA)
Michael J. Naughton, Boston College (USA)
Kishore Kamath, Abound Solar, Inc. (USA)
John A. Rogers, Univ. of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, for Semprius, Inc. (USA)
Tom Tibbits, QuantaSol Ltd. (United Kingdom).

Among the many interesting points raised by the panel, some noted that cost analysis is a critical component in analyzing the impact of a technology, though the general consensus was that this may be best left to those in business while those in research should focus on developing novel technologies through science and engineering. Some panelists argued that organic materials will play an increasing role in the future, whereas others felt that high efficiency III-V-based technologies will make an impact as new processing technologies are developed for low cost. Most agreed that crystalline silicon technology will continue be a major part of the solar market, as will thin film technologies based on CdTe and CIGS. The scale-up activities of several CdTe based companies were noted, as was the low cost position of this technology. Several members of the audience highlighted the potential for concentrator PV applications in the future.

Once again, the conference provided an excellent forum for the interchange of next generation photonic and device concepts in solar energy conversion. I would like to thank the conference program committee (Drs. A. Chatten, G. Conibeer, A. Salleo, S. E. Shaheen, W. G. J. H. M. van Sark, D. Wang, X. Xu, and E. T. Yu) for their great support, as well as the session chairs, authors, and SPIE staff for their help in making this a successful conference. The strong support of Dr. M. Symko-Davies, chair of the 2010 Solar Energy + Technology symposium, is also greatly appreciated.

Loucas Tsakalacos