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# Tunable and Reconfigurable High-index Semiconductor Meta-optics

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## Abstract

Metasurfaces manipulate light through engineering the amplitude, phase and polarization across arrays of meta-atom antenna resonators. Adding tunability and active functionality to metasurface components would boost their potential and unlock a vast array of new application possibilities such as dynamic beam steering, LIDAR, tunable metalenses, reconfigurable meta-holograms and many more. We present here high-index reconfigurable meta-atoms, resonators and metasurfaces that can dynamically and continuously tune their frequency, amplitude and phase, across the infrared spectral ranges. We utilize narrow linewidth resonances along with peak performance of tunable mechanisms for efficient and practical reconfigurable devices.

**Keywords:** Dielectric Mie resonators, nanoparticles, tunable metasurfaces, reconfigurable metasurfaces, phase change materials

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Metasurfaces are two-dimensional structures designed to manipulate light through arbitrary wavefront shaping<sup>1 2 3 4</sup>. Recently a lot of attention in the field has shifted to the realization of all-dielectric metasurfaces and has led to tremendous progress, giving rise to several demonstrations including achromatic and broadband metalenses<sup>5 6 7</sup>, axicon lenses<sup>8</sup>, sub-diffraction focusing<sup>9</sup>, nonlinear generation<sup>10 11 12</sup> beam deflectors<sup>8,13 14</sup>, wave plates and beam converters<sup>15 16 17 18</sup>, holograms<sup>19 20 21</sup>, antireflection coatings<sup>22</sup> and magnetic mirrors<sup>23</sup>, to name a few. However, most metasurfaces are still implemented for static operation and optimized for limited bandwidth of operation. The next frontier lies in dynamic and active control over light, which will drastically increase metasurface capabilities and potential applications.

The fundamental challenge for achieving reconfigurable operation is to obtain large and continuous modulation of optical properties within subwavelength meta-atoms and meta-molecules which are inherently low-Q resonators<sup>24,25</sup>. Desirable tuning mechanisms continuously shift the resonance frequency of the metastructure with at least one linewidth of the resonance, thus allowing to maximize the modulation of both amplitude and phase. These challenges have motivated several studies exploring different approaches, designs, and materials that provide extreme tunability. Previous investigations of active tuning in dielectric metasurfaces and meta-atoms have focused on ultrafast free-carrier injection<sup>26,27</sup>, coupling to liquid crystals<sup>28,29</sup>, to atomic vapor<sup>30</sup> or to ENZ materials<sup>31,32</sup>, phase change materials<sup>33,34</sup> and MEMS<sup>35 36 37</sup>. However, most of these approaches do not provide a viable solution for a fully reconfigurable metadvice where at each subwavelength meta-atom the phase and amplitude can be individually and continuously tuned to provide an arbitrary phase profile. Recent studies have showed that the thermo-optic effect (TOE), i.e. refractive index variation with temperature  $dn/dT$  can be used to induce large and continuous index shifts in materials having extraordinary

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thermal dependence<sup>38, 39, 40, 41</sup>. The TOE was also recently used to actively tune Si metasurfaces, but only at a limited temperature range (273-573K)<sup>42</sup>. Here we present free carrier and thermal tunability in several groups of high-index semiconductor resonators over large MIR spectral ranges. We demonstrate doping dependent tuning of Mie resonances in Si due to modulation of carrier densities. Next we study thermal and TO tunability in group IV semiconductors (Si and Ge) due to the normal positive TOE ( $dn/dT > 0$ ) and in the lead chalcogenide family of group IV-VI semiconductors (PbTe) due to the anomalous  $dn/dT < 0$ . We demonstrate the tuning of high order mid-infrared (MIR) Mie resonances by several linewidths with temperature swings as small as  $\Delta T < 10K$ . Lastly, we discuss reconfigurable and switchable devices driven by metal-insulator transitions in vanadium-oxide ( $VO_2$ ). We demonstrate independent and continuous tuning of both amplitude and phase in a single electrically controlled nanophotonic device based on Ge on  $VO_2$ .

Thermo-optic (TO) effects provide an ideal test bed for demonstrating and elucidating reconfigurable metasurface properties. TO tuning can provide large index shifts with no added losses and be integrated into electrically-controlled architectures. Thus, TO tunability forms the basis for many reconfigurable integrated photonic devices. However, the TOC of most materials is small for subwavelength applications, hence typical TO applications exploit small index changes acting over distances much larger than a wavelength to achieve useful modulation. For efficient modulation of subwavelength resonators, the maximally induced index shift  $\Delta n$  should tune the resonance wavelength by more than its linewidth ( $\Delta\lambda/FWHM > 1$ , where  $\Delta\lambda$  is the resonance wavelength shift and FWHM is the full width at half max of the linewidth). The route for achieving this tunability is by maximizing the TOE using extraordinary materials<sup>24, 38, 39, 41, 43, 44</sup> and/or narrowing the resonance linewidth using high-Q modes<sup>38</sup> such as supported by asymmetric<sup>28</sup> or fano-resonant<sup>10</sup> metasurfaces.

## 2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study of resonator and metasurface tunability is mainly focused for the MIR spectral range which has tremendous scientific and technological interest including nanospectroscopy<sup>45</sup>, thermal imaging<sup>46</sup>, chemical and biological sensing<sup>47-50</sup>, medical applications<sup>51</sup>, laser countermeasures<sup>52</sup> and spectro-interferometry for astro-photonics<sup>53-60</sup>, to name a few. Importantly, thermal tunability can be extended to the NIR and visible ranges where the performance of e.g. Si and Ge, can be improved due to the expected increase of  $dn/dT$  at shorter wavelengths.

### Group IV semiconductors

Here we first study the free carrier effects of Si spherical resonators. Varying the carrier concentration in the resonators through doping, we demonstrate blue shifting of Mie resonances for increasing the carrier density<sup>24</sup>. Figure 1 presents the spectral characteristics of Si spheres with a constant radius of  $d=1 \mu m$  with increasing doping concentrations, from undoped Si (blue) and up to highly doped Si of  $n=1 \times 10^{20} cm^{-3}$ , demonstrating blue-shifts and broadening of the Mie resonances with increased carrier density. For doping of  $3.8 \times 10^{19} cm^{-3}$  the material behaves like a low index dielectric with overlapping ED and MD modes. For the highest doped sample (pink), the permittivity is negative at long wavelengths, leading to the emergence of an ED plasmonic mode. Nevertheless, resonances are shifted by more than a linewidth with carrier densities  $> 1 \times 10^{19}$ .

Next we move to study thermal effects leading to large normalized tunability (more than a linewidth). We start with TO tuning capabilities of Ge – one of the most commonly used materials for dielectric metasurfaces and nanophotonics. The TOC of Ge is amongst the highest of natural materials<sup>61</sup> which, along with its high refractive indices and CMOS compatibility, makes it very attractive materials for reconfigurable metasurfaces. However, the typical TOC value ( $\sim 5 \times 10^{-4} K^{-1}$ ) requires large temperature modulation which may cause problems if the TOC is strongly temperature dependent<sup>38, 39</sup>. In the mid-infrared (MIR) range, for instance, working at high temperatures can generate FC densities in semiconductors that dramatically alter the optical constants due to Drude-like dispersion<sup>62</sup>.

To investigate thermal tunability and assess its capabilities, we start by studying Ge single spherical meta-atom resonators fabricated by laser ablation<sup>24, 63</sup>. Figure 2 presents a typical spectral response of a Ge spherical Mie resonator with  $r=1.75 \mu m$ . Experimental spectra (black) show good agreement with the calculated Mie scattering (red) cross-sections  $\sigma_{sca}$  normalized to the geometric cross-section  $\sigma_{geo}$ . A series of multipolar resonance peaks are visible in the spectra and correspond to magnetic dipole (MD), electric dipole (ED) and magnetic (MQ) and electric quadrupole (EQ), respectively. In Figure 3 we focus on the TO tunability of the EQ mode since its Q-factor is relatively high  $Q \sim 50$ . Temperature dependent spectra of the EQ resonance are illustrated in Figure 3a. Significant red shifts of resonances are observed which provide tuning by more than one resonance linewidth across the 80-573K temperature range.

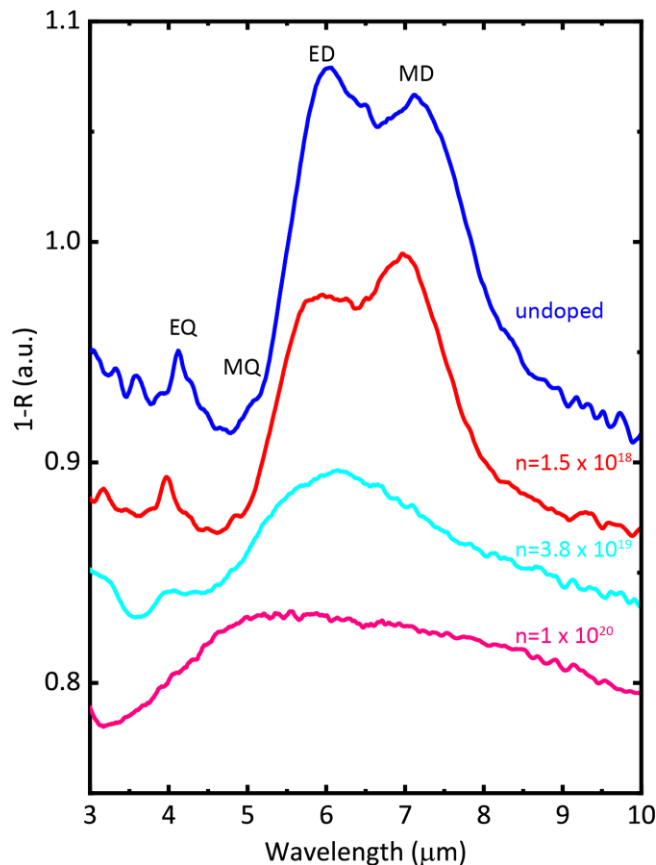


Figure 1: Spectral characteristics of doped Mie resonators and free carrier based tuning effects. The Spectra of 2  $\mu\text{m}$  diameter Si spheres with different doping concentrations, demonstrating blue-shifts and broadening of the Mie resonances with increased doping. For doping of  $3.8 \times 10^{19} \text{ cm}^{-3}$  the material behaves like a low index dielectric with overlapping ED and MD modes. For the highest doped sample (pink), the permittivity is negative at long wavelengths, leading to the emergence of an ED plasmonic mode.

Figure 3b presents a zoom in view on the spectral shifts between 293K and 473K depicting a normalized tunability of  $\Delta\lambda/\text{FWHM}=1.2$  with a temperature gradient of  $\Delta T=180\text{K}$ . Such tunability with a practical temperature difference of  $\Delta T=180\text{K}$ , would be useful for implementing reconfigurable high-Q Ge metasurfaces.

### **Group IV-VI semiconductors**

Although TOCs of group-IV such as Si and Ge are amongst the highest of natural materials<sup>61</sup>, achieving the desired tunability ( $\Delta\lambda/\text{FWHM}>1$ ) in Si and Ge metasurface requires large temperature gradients. Meeting the desired linewidth tunability with relaxed temperature modulation, requires materials with higher TOCs and/or narrowing the resonance linewidth. Remarkably, the lead chalcogenide family  $\text{PbX}$  ( $X=\text{S, Se, Te}$ ) possesses both very large refractive indices with highest reported values of TOCs<sup>64</sup>.

Figure 4 presents the TO tuning of a high order high-Q ( $Q\sim 100$ ) Mie resonance in a spherical  $r=0.9 \mu\text{m}$  resonator. The high figure of merit of normalized tunability arises due to the high refractive index of the material ( $n_{\text{PbTe}}\sim 6$ ) and large TOC. Interestingly, the sign of the TOC in PbTe is negative ( $dn/dT<0$ ) due to anomalous temperature-dependent bandgap dispersion<sup>61,65,66</sup>. Combining the large low-temperature TOE with high-Q resonances enables complete tuning (i.e. by more than one linewidth) of resonances with significantly reduced temperature swings ( $\Delta T$ ). This sharp resonance can be tuned by more than one linewidth (normalized tunability=1.02) with a temperature swing as small as  $\Delta T=80\text{K}$ . This large tunability is enabled by the combination of the narrow linewidth and large TOE.

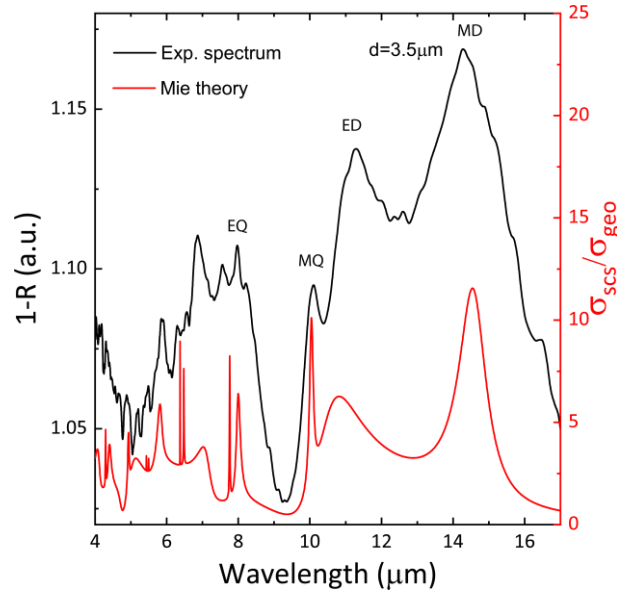


Figure 2: Ge spherical Mie resonator with  $r=1.75\ \mu\text{m}$ . Experimental spectra (black) show good agreement with the calculated Mie scattering (cyan, dashed) and FDTD (solid cyan) cross-sections  $\sigma_{\text{scs}}$  normalized to the geometric cross-section  $\sigma_{\text{geo}}$ . A series of multipolar resonance peaks are visible in the spectra and correspond to magnetic dipole (MD), electric dipole (ED) magnetic quadrupole (MQ) and electric quadrupole (EQ), respectively.

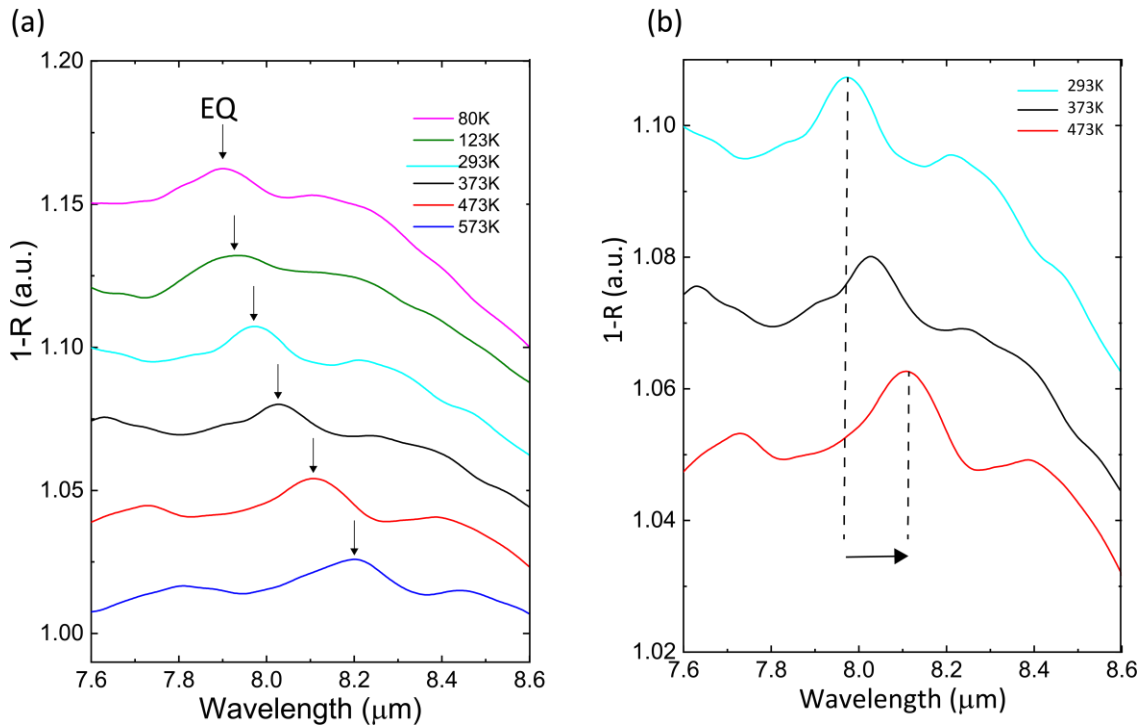


Figure 3: Thermal tuning of a high order EQ in a  $r=1.75\ \mu\text{m}$  Ge spherical resonator (a) Temperature dependent spectra in the 80-573K range (b) Tuning by more than one resonance linewidth ( $\Delta\lambda/\text{FWHM}=1.2$ ) with a  $\Delta T=180\text{K}$  temperature gradient demonstrated between 293K and 473K.

Furthermore, at lower temperatures of  $\sim 170\text{K}$  the observed  $dn/dT$  was shown to be an order of magnitude larger than the  $dn/dT$  at RT temperatures<sup>38</sup>. These results clearly demonstrate the strong, negative TO effect in PbTe nanoparticles

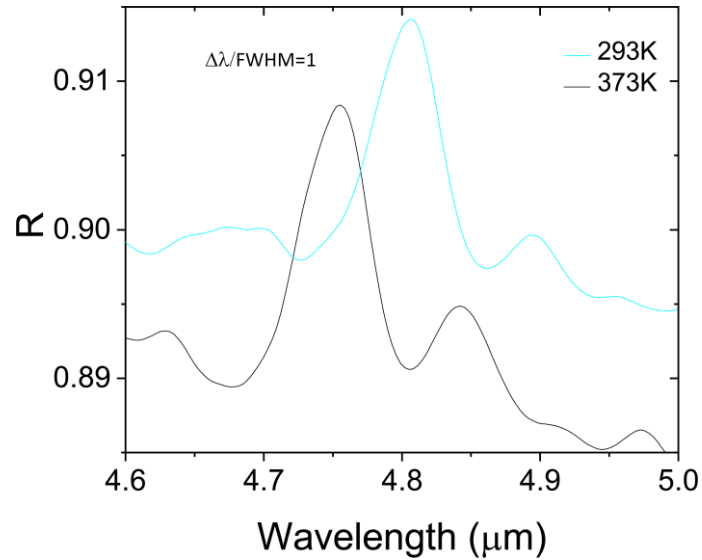


Figure 4: Tunable PbTe meta-atoms. Tuning of high order resonance by more than a linewidth in PbTe spherical resonators with  $\Delta T=80K$ . At  $T=173K$  normalized tunability  $\Delta\lambda/FWHM=1.6$  is achieved with  $\Delta T=10K$  thanks to peak TO coefficient.

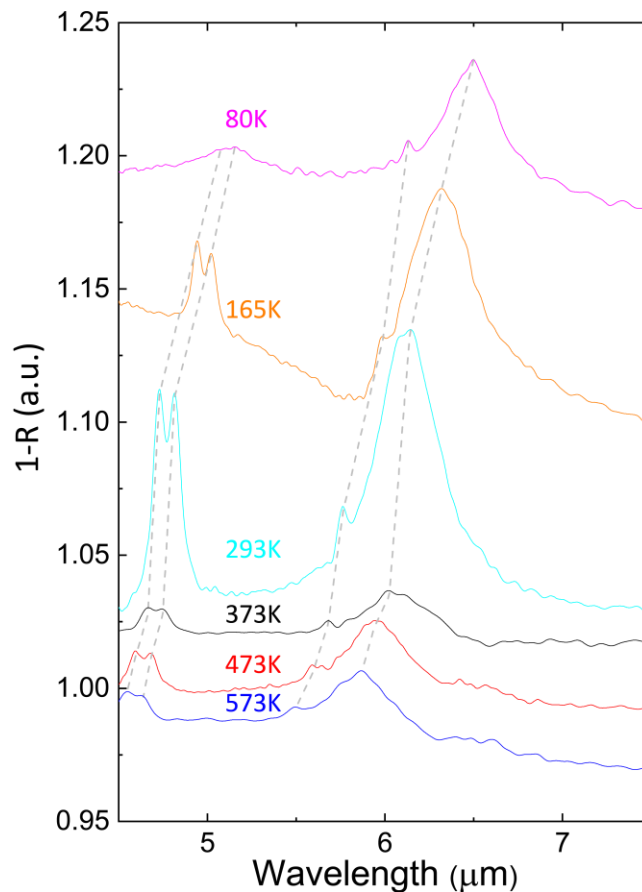


Figure 5: Dynamic tuning in PbTe cubic resonators. Temperature dependent resonance shifts of the first 4 resonance modes in a  $a = 850nm$  PbTe cube on Au, are presented. The dashed lines are a guide to the eye. Resonance shifts exhibit the large and anomalous ( $dn/dT < 0$ ) TO coefficient, and a marked increase in magnitude below room temperature.

and is the largest dynamic tuning of Mie resonators reported to date<sup>67-70</sup>. These properties make PbTe an ideal candidate material for TO-tunable nanophotonics and metasurface resonators.

Tracking the shift of all Mie resonances across a variety of temperatures provides valuable insight into the dispersion of TOE with temperature and wavelength. An example of temperature dependent spectra of a PbTe cube of side  $a=850$  nm on a gold substrate, is presented in Figure 5. The temperature dependence of the first 4 resonance wavelengths are tracked. The tunable resonances exhibit some unusual characteristics. The wavelength shifts at low temperatures (80K-293K) are much larger than the shifts above room temperature (293K-573K). These results show that the largest  $dn/dT$  occurs between 80K to RT and a more thorough examination reveals a maximum in  $dn/dT$  somewhere between 80K and 200K<sup>38</sup>. Although observed shifts are consistent with other measurements<sup>65 71 72</sup>, this significant increase in TO coefficient at low temperatures has not previously been reported. Moreover, standard TO models<sup>61</sup>, based on temperature-dependent bandgap ( $E_g$ ) dispersion,<sup>66 73</sup> are unable to explain this effect, suggesting unknown physical mechanisms may be at play. Nevertheless, by operating at cryogenic temperatures, significant increases in TO tunability can be achieved. Altogether these results reveal a great potential for practical TO switching with PbTe components.

### **Phase transition materials**

Among active materials, phase transition and phase change materials can arguably provide the largest variation in optical constants. When applying heat, electric or magnetic fields to these materials, their optical constants can undergo dramatic (and reversible) shifts. Various mechanisms have been investigated and employed to realize tunable nanophotonic and metasurface platforms. These include the transition from nematic to isotropic phases in liquid crystals<sup>28,67</sup>, amorphous to crystalline phase change in GeSbTe (GST)<sup>46,74,75</sup> and metal-insulator transitions (MIT) in prototypical strongly correlated materials such as vanadium dioxide ( $VO_2$ )<sup>63,76-80</sup> and  $V_2O_3$ <sup>81,82</sup>. We have previously demonstrated that  $VO_2$  metasurfaces support switchable dielectric-plasmonic response<sup>63</sup>: in the insulating phase, the metasurfaces exhibit dielectric Mie-type resonances, that are switched to plasmonic resonances in the metallic phase.

In the following, we show that hybrid dielectric- $VO_2$  structures exhibit several novel behaviors of great interest in the development of reconfigurable optics, including independent tuning of the reflection amplitude and phase, large modulation of transmission and absorption, and electronic switching. Our device is basically a tunable Fabry-Pérot (TFP) cavity, comprised of a 1  $\mu\text{m}$  thick Ge layer, atop of a 100 nm thick film of  $VO_2$ , on an R-cut sapphire substrate (Figure 6a). At the interface between a transparent material and  $VO_2$ , the reflectivity undergoes a  $\pi$  phase shift across the MIT. Here, reflection-phase switching of the MIT, modulates the complex reflectivity (i.e., amplitude and phase), transmission, and absorption of the simple Ge- $VO_2$  TFP. Unlike existing switchable  $VO_2$  photonic devices, here the mesoscopic continuous nature of the MIT in the  $VO_2$  thin film, is used to achieve continuous reflection modulation (Figure 6b), as well as independent control over the phase<sup>83</sup>, a key requirement for reconfigurable high-efficiency metasurfaces. In Figure 6b and 6c, we demonstrate an electrically controlled TFP device. The device is modulated through Joule heating by passing current directly through a 200  $\mu\text{m} \times 200 \mu\text{m}$  TFP. In the  $VO_2$  insulating state, current passes predominantly through the lightly doped Ge layer. This enables Joule heating of the device in both metallic and insulating  $VO_2$  states, without introducing additional lossy metals. The temporal characteristics of the device are investigated by exciting the TFP with a square voltage pulse (26 Vpp, 60  $\mu\text{s}$ ), and monitoring the temporal response of the device with a fast MCT detector and the FTIR in a step-scan mode. Transient reflectivity measurements in the 900-3000 $\text{cm}^{-1}$  range were also carried out, exhibiting the continuous temporal evolution of the spectrum, including the nodes and antinodes. Figure 5c traces the rise and decay time characteristics of at  $\lambda=4.7\mu\text{m}$ . Fast rise time, due to rapid Joule heating is observed, followed by a slower thermal-diffusion-limited decay. Dynamic traces exhibit an approximately 12.6  $\mu\text{s}$  rise time, as determined through an exponential fit with an approximately 285  $\mu\text{s}$  decay time, corresponding to estimated modulation rates on the order of 3.5 kHz. When applying even larger voltages, faster rise times can be achieved<sup>44</sup>. These values are an order of magnitude faster than previous large-area  $VO_2$  optical modulators<sup>79,80</sup> which have rise and relaxation times of the order of few milliseconds. The decay time is likely limited by the relatively large thermal capacitance of the device and may be improved with thermally engineered metasurface structures that reduce the Ge and  $VO_2$  volumes. Further improvements in speed can also be attained by reducing the modulation depth or by utilizing vertical contact geometries.

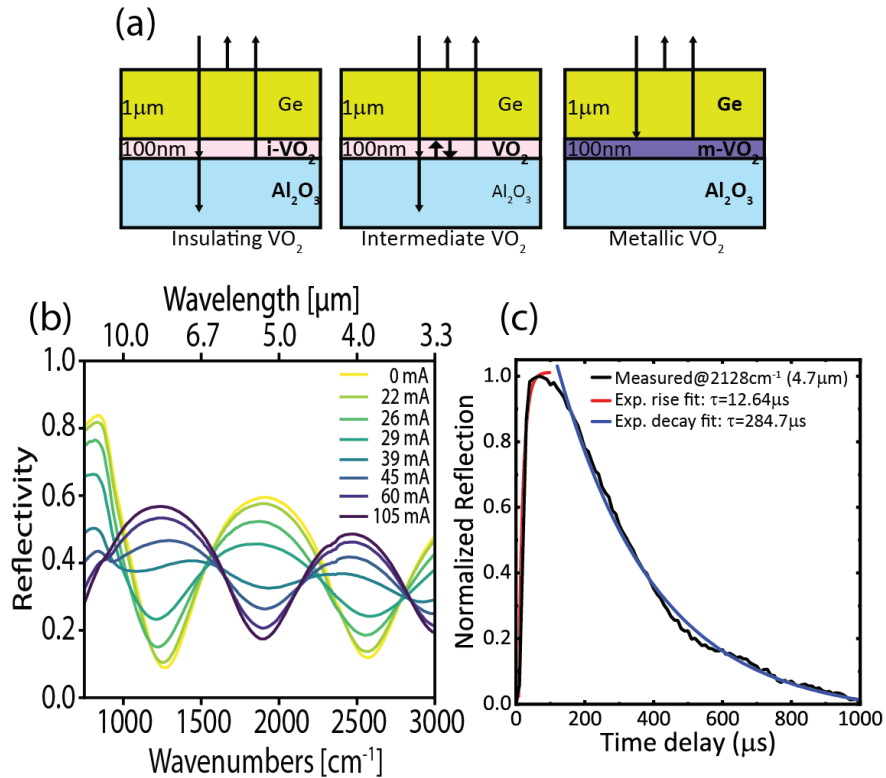


Figure 6: Electrically tunable Fabry-Pérot resonator. (a) Schematic of Ge-VO<sub>2</sub>-Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> device in the insulating, intermediate, and metallic states. The arrows represent the dominant reflection interfaces. (b) Electrically tuned device, showing continuously modulated reflection amplitude with increase current. (c) Normalized transient reflectivity at the anti-node wavelength ( $\lambda = 4.7\mu\text{m}$ ). Solid black line corresponds to the experimental raw data while the red and blue lines correspond to fitted exponential curves (red, heating; blue, cooling).

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

In summary, we studied dynamic tuning performance in resonators and metasurfaces obtained from several materials systems comprising group IV, group IV-VI semiconductors and phase transition materials. Identifying the linewidth tunability ( $\Delta\lambda/\text{FWHM} > 1$ ) as the figure of merit for efficient tuning, we pinpoint the route to achieve such tunability by combining materials with large optical effects along with high-Q resonances. We study TO tuning in Ge resonators and highlight their capabilities with a demonstration of tunable high-order resonances which are completely tuned  $\Delta T = 180\text{K}$ .

To further reduce the temperature gradients required for linewidth tunability, we investigate lead chalcogenides of group IV-VI semiconductors. We show that PbTe is an excellent candidate for infrared reconfigurable meta-optics, having both high refractive index and largest known TOC of all materials. We find that PbTe exhibits an anomalous TOE with peak performance at cryogenic temperatures, which cannot be explained with standard TOC models.

Finally, we investigate tunability in hybrid dielectric-VO<sub>2</sub> structures and show that these structures exhibit novel properties highly desirable for reconfigurable meta-optics. We utilize the metal-insulator phase transition of VO<sub>2</sub> to create electrically reconfigurable, continuously tunable nanophotonic devices across a broad spectral range. The continuous modulation is enabled by driving the underlying VO<sub>2</sub> film across the phase transition. Electronically triggered transient reflection measurements revealed switching rates of 3.5KHz, which can be further improved with thermal management and more sophisticated designs. These findings expand the potential of active metasurfaces, that take advantage of the reconfigurable properties of hybrid semiconductor-VO<sub>2</sub> architectures. Altogether, this work highlights



the opportunities and potential of thermally tunable semiconductor metasurfaces and can pave the way to efficient high-Q reconfigurable metadevices, which will ultimately be implemented in important applications for the infrared range.

**Conflicts of interest**

There are no conflicts to declare

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