Monte Carlo Solution to Excess Noise and Spatial Blur in Amorphous Selenium Thin-films

Dragica Vasileska*, Atreyo Mukherjee†, and Amir H. Goldan‡
*School of Electrical, Computer and Energy Engineering, Arizona State University, AZ, US
†Department of Electrical Engineering, Stony Brook University, NY, US
‡Department of Radiology, Weill Cornell Medical College, Cornell University, New York, NY, USA
e-mail: vasileska@asu.edu

Amorphous selenium (a-Se) is emerging as a viable solid-state imager with avalanche gain for low-light and low-dose radiation detection applications. [1] At high electric fields, hole transport in a-Se can be shifted entirely from localized to extended states, resulting in deterministic and non-Markovian impact ionization avalanche (excees noise factor, $ENF \sim 1$) ∼Fig. 1. To understand this behavior, a comprehensive study of the history dependent and non-Markovian nature of the hot hole transport in a-Se was performed using a Monte Carlo (MC) random walk of single hole free flights, interrupted by instantaneous phonon, disorder, hole-dipole, and impact-ionization scattering processes.

Our multi-scale simulation approach combines molecular dynamics (MD) simulations with density functional theory (DFT) and MC simulations (using a non-parabolic band model). The energy and phonon band structure ∼Fig. 2, along with the valence band density of states (VB-DOS), for trigonal selenium (t-Se), was calculated using density functional theory (DFT). Fig. 3 shows the DFT calculated acoustic (first order) and optical (zeroth order) deformation potentials along the perpendicular and parallel directions to the c-axis in t-Se. According to our knowledge, this work for the first time uses comprehensive quantum mechanical formulation to calculate energy depended phonon scattering (acoustic, polar emission/absorption and non-polar emission/absorption), hole-dipole disorder scattering (caused by valence alternate pair type defects as scattering centers), and impact ionization scattering rates in a-Se.[2], [3]

Fig. 4 shows the simulated ENF in 0.1-15 μm a-Se thin-films. The non-Markovian nature of hot hole branching dominates for thinner thin films where the dead space distance (min distance traveled to attain impact ionization) is a multiple of the device length. In ∼Fig. 5 (a) and (b) we simulated the threshold distance and gain distributions. The history dependent nature of branching of *Hot* holes is explained using a Gaussian distribution of the avalanche threshold distribution distance which increases determinism in the stochastic impact ionization process. An almost ideal non-Markovian hole ENF of ~ 1 was observed in the case of 100 nm a-Se thin-films and avalanche gains of 1000. An inherent limitation to spatial resolution is the laterial blur caused due to the hole drifting process in a-Se, and, we calculate and predict the spatial blur and the full width at half max (FWHM) spread of the avalanching charge cloud in 0.5-200 μm a-Se films ∼Fig. 6. Future detector designs can utilize the non-local/non-Markovian nature of hole avalanche in a-Se, to enable a true solid-state photomultiplier with noiseless gain and enhanced signal to noise ratios.

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References

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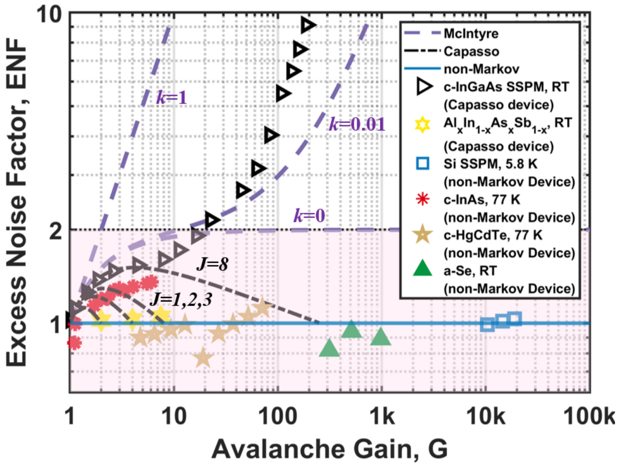

Fig. 1. Excess noise factor in a-Se compared with Markov, non-Markov and Capasso type devices.

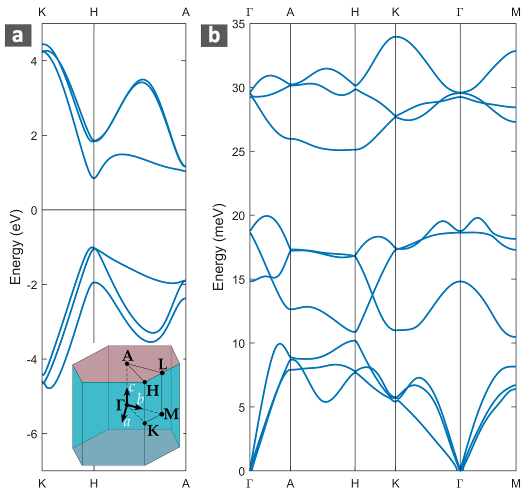

Fig. 2. **(a)** DFT calculated electronic bandstructure for t-Se showing a direct bandgap of 1.9 eV at the H point and **(b)** phonon dispersion. Inset shows the brilloiun zone for t-Se.

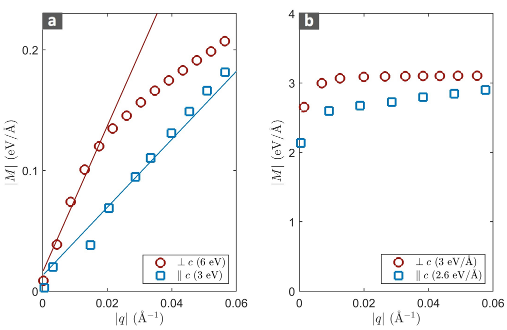

Fig. 3. **(a)** Acoustic (first order) deformation potentials represented by the slope of solid lines and **(b)** optical (zeroth order) deformation potential measured via DFT calculations of hole-phonon coupling using a 225-atom supercell of t-Se along directions perpendicular and parallel to the c-axis.

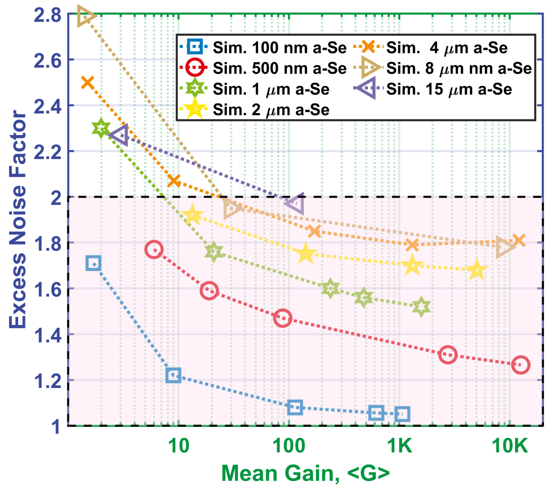

Fig. 4. Plot of ENF from single hole MC simulations for 0.1-15 μm a-Se bulk drift length as a function of mean gain.

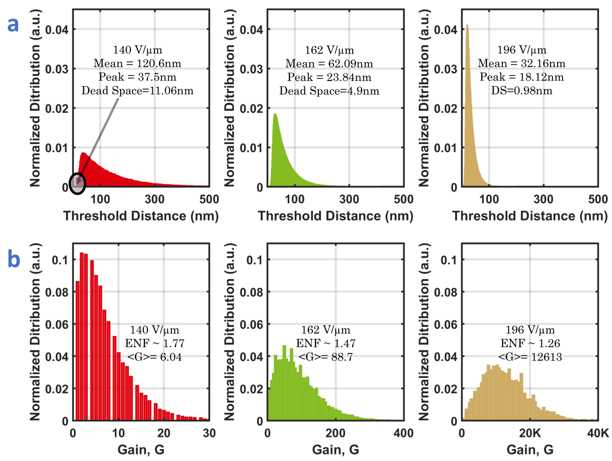

Fig. 5. **(a)** Threshold distance distributions and **(b)** avalanche gain distribution for 500 nm a-Se bulk drift lengths for electric field strengths of 140, 162 and 196 V/μm, respectively.

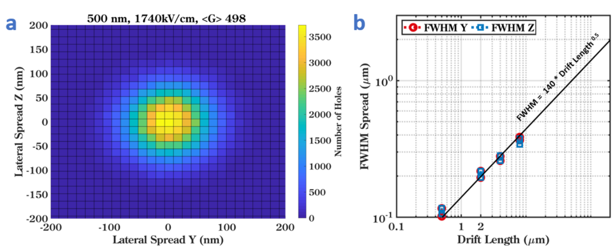

Fig. 6. **(a)** Increase in the spatial spread of a charge cloud of 500 holes injected at $x = 0$. The lateral spread as a function of electric field at the end of 500 nm of travel in a-Se is simulated for 174 V/μm. **(b)** The FWHM simulated for a-Se drift lengths of 500 nm, 2μm, 4μm and 8 μm.