

PHOTOELECTROCHEMISTRY OF  
MICROSTRUCTURED SILICON MATERIALS  
FOR SOLAR ENERGY APPLICATIONS

Thesis by

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

California Institute of Technology

Pasadena, California

2009

(Defended May 12, 2009)

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## Acknowledgements

I have a great number of people to thank for a great many contributions that they have made to my life and journey. Anyone who knows me fairly well probably understands that much of who I am is made up of the people I have met and worked with and admired, and that I would certainly not have had such an interesting and full life up to this point without them. I want to start by thanking my wife, Lea. We met right about when I started grad school, and she has stuck with me through everything and has put up with a lot so that I could earn this degree. She made all the tough times easier and all the good times better. Plus, she puts up with me muttering to myself and pacing while I am thinking really hard.

My progression as a scientist has been formed and molded by my scientific mentors along the way. It has been an honor working for Nate Lewis these last few years. I honestly do not think I have met anyone so passionate about science and so brilliant. He is an intellectual rock star. I also want to thank my committee for their support. I had the interesting pleasure of having two committees—first Pat Collier and Jonas Peters with Nate, and now Harry Gray, Harry Atwater, and Mitchio Okumura with Nate. Everyone on my committees has been helpful and supportive during this process, but I want to particularly single out Harry Gray, who is just an all around great guy.

Before I came to grad school, I had the pleasure of working with Marc Ferrer and Liz Ottinger both at Swarthmore and at Merck. Their direction of my undergraduate thesis work helped me to learn about research and provided me with some great opportunities. Before working with them, I was privileged to work at the Hershey

Medical Center over a couple of summers with both Ira Ropson and Kay LaNoue, who helped me to learn about research right in my home town.

One of the best parts of being a grad student is being able to indulge your academic curiosity, and it is that curiosity that has always brought me to new and interesting subject matter. For this, I largely blame a string of excellent teachers. Probably one of the first, although not in science, was a middle school English teacher, Mrs. Templeton, who encouraged me to read and to write and to think. Also in middle school, Mrs. Fackler was a great science teacher and Science Olympiad coach. Dr. Mondschein, and her support in both AP Chemistry and an independent study, is probably the reason that I decided to go into science and to choose chemistry in particular. Finally, in college, I had some great professors who really stoked my passion for learning, particularly Tom Stephenson, who made me want to be him when I was all grown up, and Jim Rego, who made chemistry fun and real.

Throughout my career, I have had great interactions with my peers, and Caltech has been a fabulous place to study because I have always been surrounded by brilliant and interesting people. When I first started, the Lewis Group was very accepting, and I had some great mentoring from Dave Michalak and Lauren Webb at the beginning. Also, from the very start David Knapp (DK) has been probably the most helpful group member. He knows how to run everything, and he has given extremely generously of his time in helping the rest of the group. DK also did most of the hard work in the scanning confocal microscopy experiments. Pat Hurley and his expertise were also invaluable during the beginning stages of my work.

I inherited the position of safety officer from Matt Traub, who was very helpful in showing me the ropes. Several years later, I was pleased to hand off the position to Liz Santori, who is probably keeping the group safer than I did. I am also very much indebted to a number of people who helped me to get samples for my electrochemical work. Josh Spurgeon was always my go-to guy for wire arrays, and he put up with my requests quite good naturedly. Brendan Kayes and Mike Filler in the Atwater group were bringing me wire samples from the beginning, and worked hard with me to get the first wire array paper out. M. David Henry worked with me for about a year, making me pillar samples, and I thank him for his patience as well. Finally, Emily Warren helped me with doping wire array samples.

I have had the privilege to work with two great SURFs over the years—Natalie Szweda and Leon Liu—and I hope that both of them go far in life. In recent days, I have enjoyed working with Liz Santori and showing her the ropes of electrochemistry. I have had so many great interactions with people in the group that the best I can do here is to list them—Steve Maldonado, Jordan Katz, Kate Plass, David “Cinco” Gleason-Rohrer, Heather McCaig, Edgardo Garcia, Craig Wiggenhorn, Marc Woodka, Anna Folinsky, Tony Fitch, Don Walker, Greg Kimball, Leslie O’Leary, Erik Johansson, Shannon Boetcher, Joe Beardsly, Mike Walter, Kimberly Marshall, Tom Hamann, and Mike Kelzenberg. Thank you to everyone for making this a really great and fun experience. Also, special thanks to Jillian for working so hard with me on the GRS. Finally, I have tons of appreciation for all the hard work that Sherry Feick, Amy Crown, and April Neidholdt do to keep all the groups running.

## Abstract

In the face of mounting evidence that CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from the burning of fossil fuels is a key contributor to anthropogenic global climate change, the search for a carbon-neutral energy source that is scalable and economically viable has become a key research target. Orthogonalization of the directions of light absorption and charge carrier collection in solar cell absorber materials, as in arrays of wires with radial junctions, has the potential to enable the use of low-purity and low-cost materials in efficient solar cells. This work focuses on the use of structured silicon materials as the absorber in semiconductor/liquid junction photoelectrochemical cells in order to verify the potential of structured materials to enable efficient and inexpensive solar cells.

Macroporous Si was used as a physical model system for wire-array solar cells. Using high-purity starting materials, it was found that increasing the surface area by porous etching did not dramatically lower the observed energy conversion efficiency, and efficiencies in excess of 10% were observed even for the longest pores studied. The open-circuit voltage ( $V_{oc}$ ) was lowered in samples with long pores, however, verifying the principle that a reduction in  $V_{oc}$  is expected with increased junction area due to a decreased flux of minority carriers through the junction. This will be an important design principle for building structured solar cells. In addition, diffusion of Au impurities into macroporous Si was used to explore the effect of employing a structured junction in poor quality materials.

Wire array solar cells produced by chemical vapor deposition were also measured in liquid junction cells. Initial studies showed significant photocurrent and photovoltage over the control substrate. Improved arrays having longer wires showed significantly higher photocurrents, giving energy conversion efficiencies as high as 1.5% in the liquid junction cell, and it has been shown that the photoelectrochemical properties of the wire array samples are due to the CVD-grown wires rather than the silicon substrate used. These results are an important first step toward understanding and building efficient, low-cost solar cells using structured materials.

## Online Availability

Chapters 2 and 4 of this work have been previously published in American Chemical Society (ACS) Journals. Per ACS policy, those chapters cannot be made available online to the general public. However, free copies of the original papers are available by using the internet addresses shown below. Please note that a one-time, free registration is required to download the papers.

Chapter 2 - <http://pubs.acs.org/cgi-bin/download.pl?jp711340b/o498>

Chapter 4 - <http://pubs.acs.org/cgi-bin/download.pl?ja074897c/Q7Lo>



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