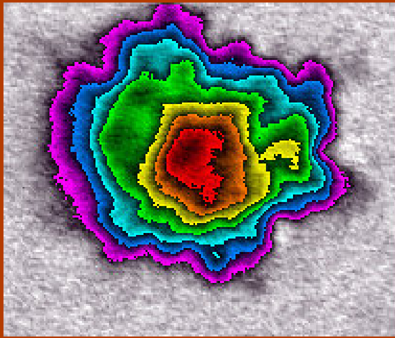
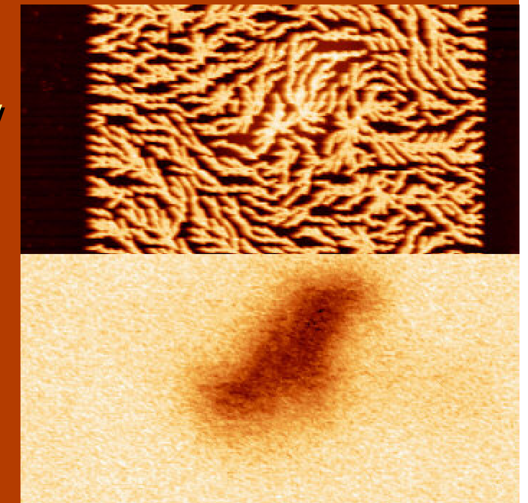
Raphaëlle Dianoux



Charge injection and detection in semiconducting nanostructures studied by Atomic Force Microscopy



CEA Grenoble / DRFMC / SP2M / SiNaPS
ESRF / Surface Science Laboratory

Outline

Electrostatic Force Microscopy in dry atmosphere

- Principles of charge injection and detection
- Minimum detectable force gradient in a Brownian motion
- Electrostatic tip-sample interaction: the plane-plane approximation
- Method of charge estimation
- Limits of this model: numerical evidence of a repulsive force

Non-linear dynamic force curves

- Coupling with the higher oscillating modes of the cantilever
- Analytical treatment of the cantilever motion
- Adding of the electrostatic interaction

Charging experiments on semiconducting nanostructures

- Charging the oxide layer
- Si nanocrystals embedded in SiO_2
- Si nanostructures made by e-beam lithography

EFM
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Min. force gradient
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Charge estimation
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Lithography Si- nanostruc.

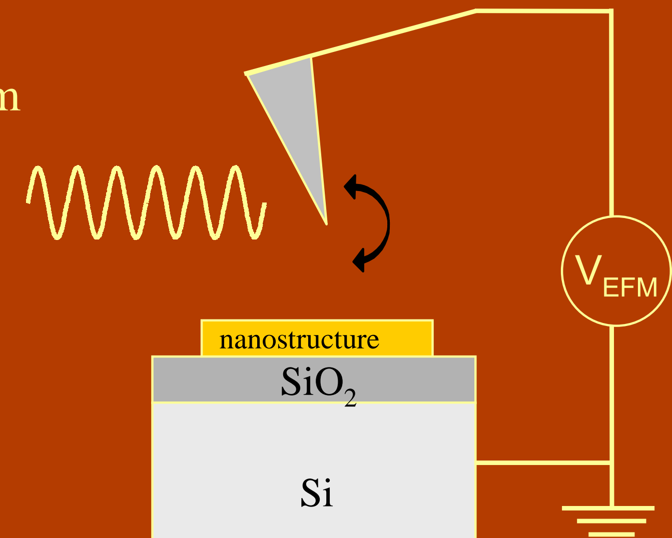
What is Electrostatic Force Microscopy?

The idea: use the AFM probe to:

Inject charges locally AND **Detect charges**

Conditions:

- the tip must be metal-coated: W_2C, PtIr
  → Radius of curvature of the tip: ~35 nm
- the system must be electrically connected
- the tip must not touch the surface after injection
  → oscillating mode



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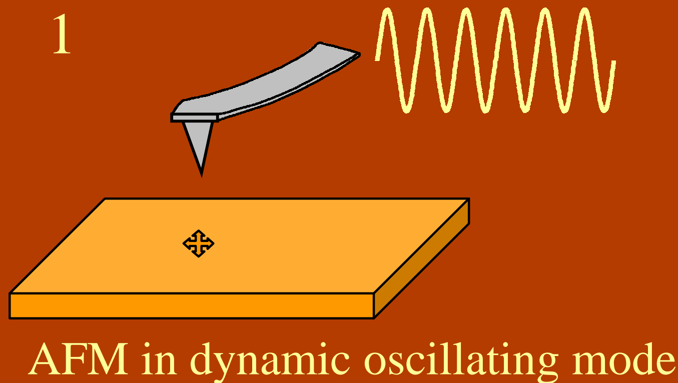
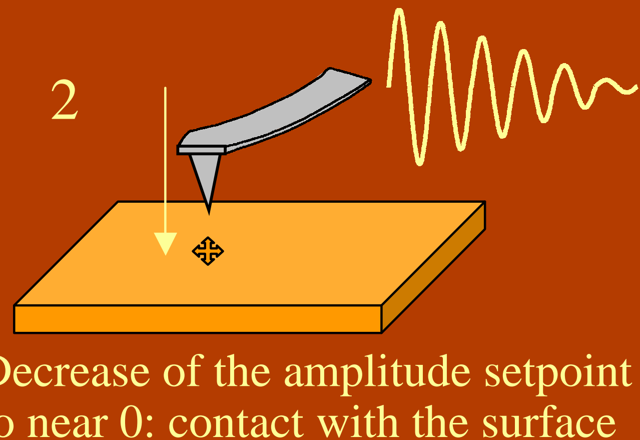
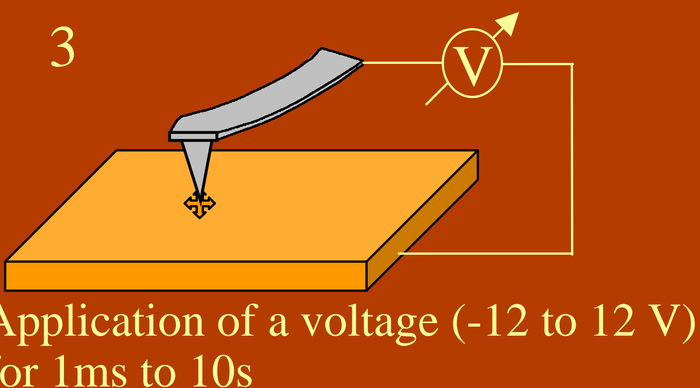
Charge injection with the tip



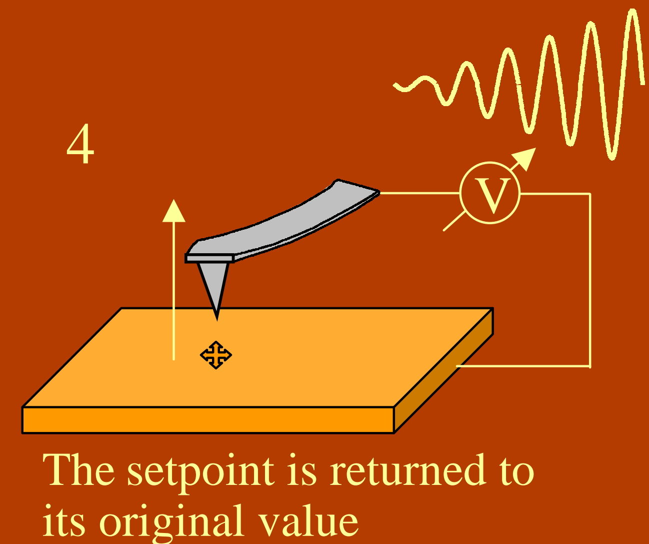
AFM in dynamic oscillating mode



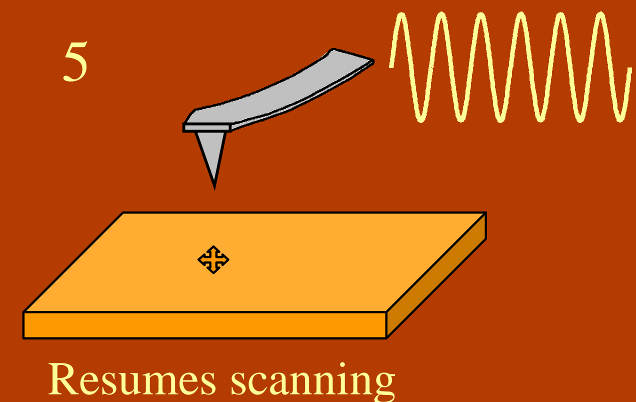
Decrease of the amplitude setpoint to near 0: contact with the surface



Application of a voltage (-12 to 12 V) for 1ms to 10s



The setpoint is returned to its original value



Resumes scanning

> Permanent N_2 flux

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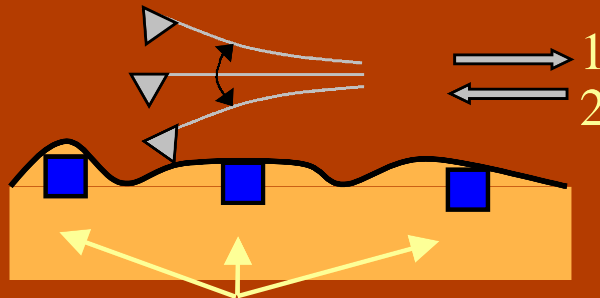
Detection of the injected charges

The double-pass method

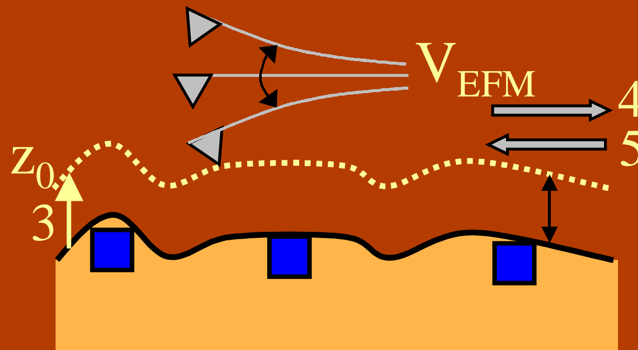
1st pass: topography



Localized electric charges

1&2: Topography scan.
Feedback on the amplitude of oscillation.

2nd pass: EFM signal



3: Raising of the AFM probe at a lift height z_0 of 30 to 100 nm. The feedback is cut off.

4&5: EFM scan: recording of the phase of oscillation. The tip is brought to potential V_{EFM}

EFM signal

The EFM signal is sensitive to electrostatic force gradients.

EFM

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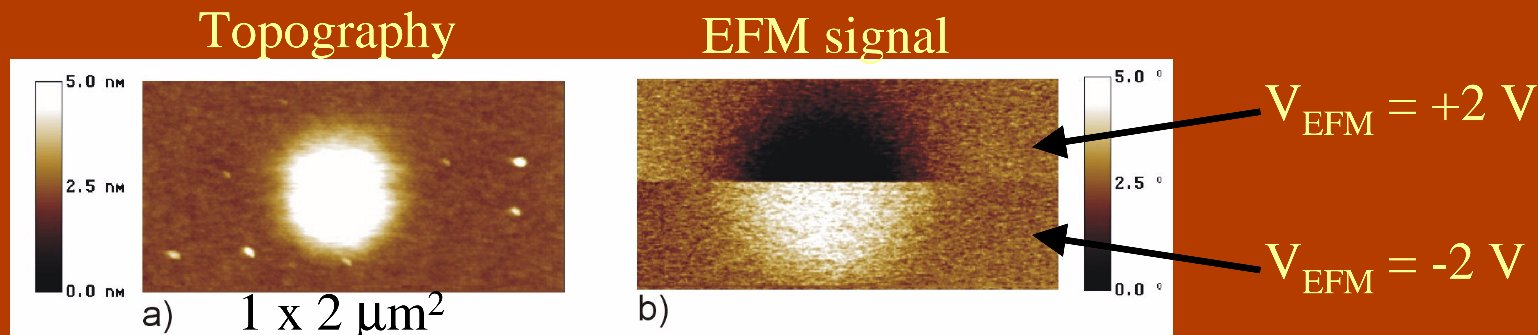
Injection and detection of charges

Example of charge injection on 7 nm of SiO_2 on Si

Conditions: -10V/ 10s



EFM can distinguish the sign of the deposited charges

BUT the tip-sample force is always attractive!

EFM signal $\propto$ - (potential difference)^2

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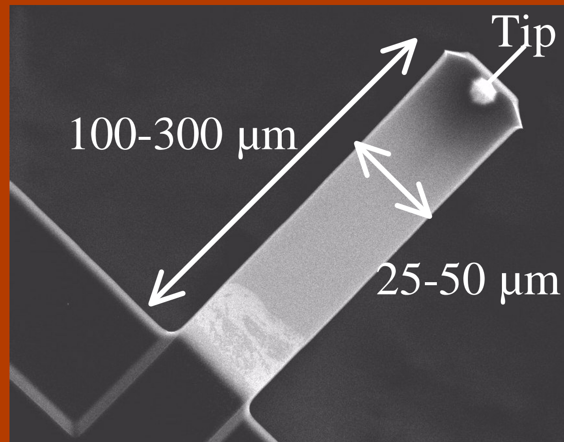
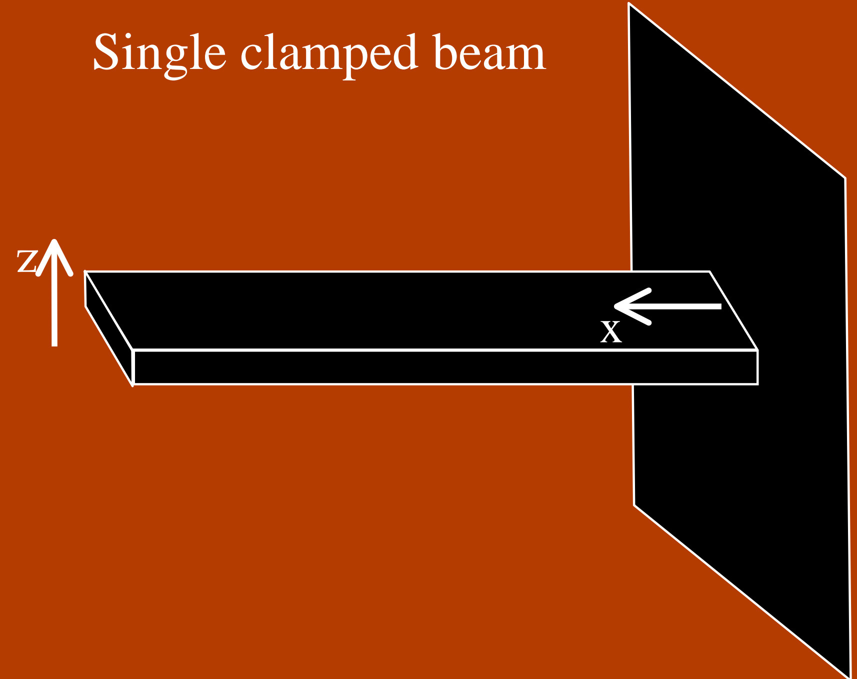
Mechanics of the cantilever



Single clamped beam

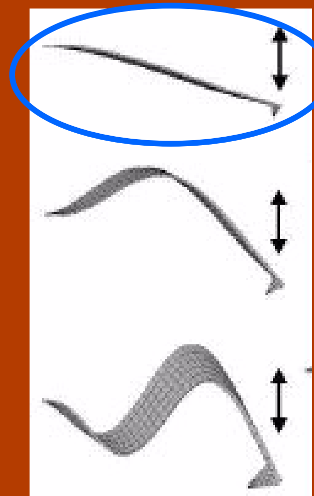


Euler-Bernouilly equation of movement:

$$EI\frac{\partial^4 z}{\partial x^4}(x,t)+\rho A\frac{\partial^2 z}{\partial t^2}(x,t)=0$$

E : Young modulus
I : moment of inertia
ρ : density
A : section

Fundamental mode



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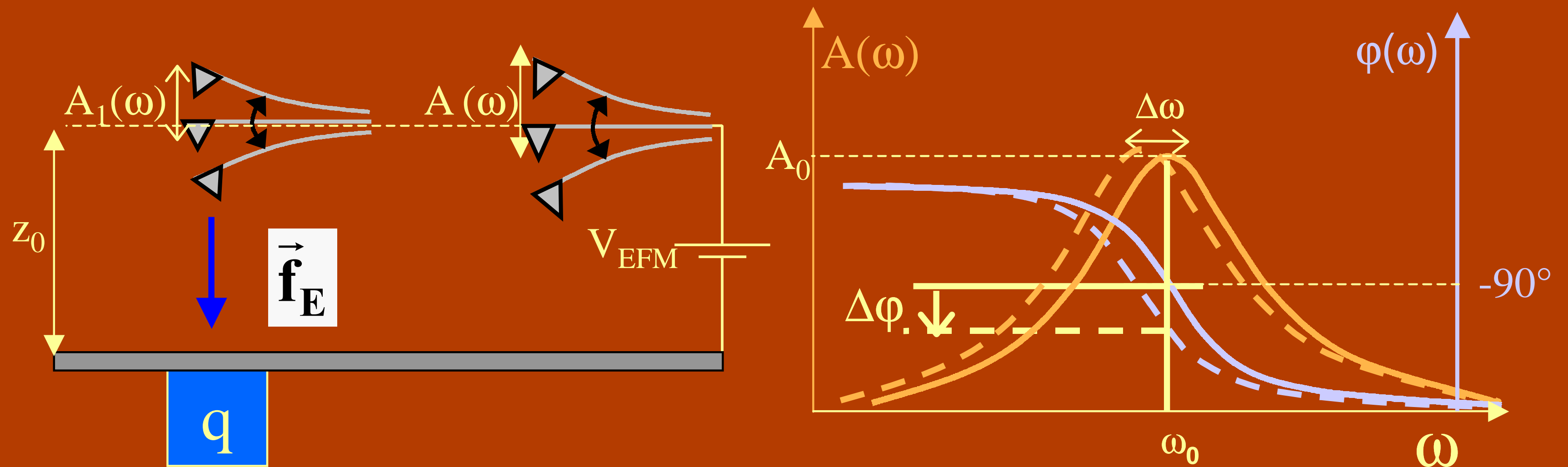
Detection of a force gradient



Point-mass model:

$$\ddot{z}(t) + 2\beta_0 \dot{z}(t) + \omega_0^2 z(t) = \frac{F_{exc}}{m}\cos(\omega t) + \frac{f(z_0 + z)}{m}$$

$$f(z_0 + z) \approx f(z_0) + f'(z_0) \cdot z(t)$$

$$\omega_0^2 = \frac{k}{m}$$

ω_0: angular resonance frequency
k: spring constant of the cantilever
m: effective mass
β_0: friction coefficient /m

Static def

Shift of the resonance frequency

Attractive force = phase lag

$$\Delta\omega = \omega_0 - \omega_1 \approx \omega_0 \left(\frac{1}{2k} \frac{\partial f}{\partial z}(z_0) \right)$$

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Functioning point in amplitude feedback:

$$\frac{d^2A}{d\omega^2} = 0$$

$$\omega_{s\pm} = \omega_0\left(1 \pm \frac{1}{\sqrt{8Q}}\right)$$

Q: quality factor of the oscillator = 100-300

$\omega_{s\pm} \approx \omega_0$!

$$\frac{dA}{d\omega}(\omega_{s\pm}) = \pm A_m \frac{4Q}{3\sqrt{3}\omega_0}$$

A_m: maximum amplitude of oscillation

$$\Delta A = \frac{dA}{d\omega}(\omega_s)\cdot\Delta\omega = A_m \frac{2Q}{3\sqrt{3}k}\frac{\partial f}{\partial z}(z_0)$$

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Minimum detectable force gradient in a brownian motion

Thermal noise = white-spectrum noise $\hat{R}(\omega)$
Langevin equation in Fourier space:

$$\left(-\omega^2 - i\beta_0\omega + \omega_0^2\right)\hat{Z} = \frac{\hat{R}}{m}$$

The generalized susceptibility is defined as (Landau-Lifschitz):

$$\alpha(\omega) = \frac{\hat{Z}}{\hat{R}} = \alpha'(\omega) + i\alpha''(\omega)$$

The dissipation-fluctuation theorem provides:

Spectral density of the fluctuations

$$\left\langle \left|\hat{Z}(\omega)\right|^2 \right\rangle = \frac{k_B T}{\pi\omega}\alpha''(\omega) = \frac{k_B T Q}{\pi k \omega_0} \cdot \frac{1}{Q^2\left(1 - \frac{\omega^2}{\omega_0^2}\right)^2 + \frac{\omega^2}{\omega_0^2}}$$

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Minimum detectable force gradient in a brownian motion

The standard deviation of movement N is:

$$N = \sqrt{4\pi B \left\langle \left| \hat{Z}(\omega) \right|^2 \right\rangle}$$

where B is the bandwidth of the system (in Hz)

Simplifications:

Near the resonance

$$N \approx \sqrt{\frac{4k_B TQB}{k\omega_0}}$$

Away from resonance

$$N \approx \sqrt{\frac{4k_B TB}{k\omega_0 Q}}$$

The minimum detectable force gradient is given when:
amplitude variation = standard deviation of movement

$$\Delta A = N$$

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Minimum detectable force gradient in a Brownian motion

One-dimensional, simple harmonic oscillator

Dissipation-fluctuation theorem:
Finite Q^{-1} = dissipative system = source of noise

White spectral density of the noise force *f* :

$$S_f(\omega) = \frac{4k_B T k}{Q\omega_0}$$

Units: N^2/Hz

Standard deviation of the force:

$$N \propto \sqrt{B S_f(\omega)}$$

B= bandwidth of system

where:

$$N = \sqrt{\left\langle \left(k_{eff} z\right)^2 \right\rangle} \propto \left.\frac{\partial f}{\partial z}\right|_{thermal} \cdot A_m$$

$$\left.\frac{\partial f}{\partial z}\right|_{thermal} \propto \frac{1}{A_m}\sqrt{\frac{4k_B T k B}{Q\omega_0}}$$

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Minimum detectable force gradient in a Brownian motion

At the resonance:

$$\left.\frac{\partial f}{\partial z}\right|_{\min} = \frac{1}{A_m}\sqrt{\frac{27 k_B T B k}{\omega_0 Q}}$$

In our conditions:

- A_m = 10-20 nm
- $k_B T$ = 26 meV ambient temperature
- Q =100-300 ambient pressure
- k = 0.1-1 N/m
- ω_0 = 20 -100 kHz
- B = 500 Hz

$$\left.\frac{\partial f}{\partial z}\right|_{\min} = 3 \cdot 10^{-5}\, N.m^{-1}$$

Relation to min. detectable charge?

Plane-plane approximation

Modelling of the electrostatic tip-sample interaction

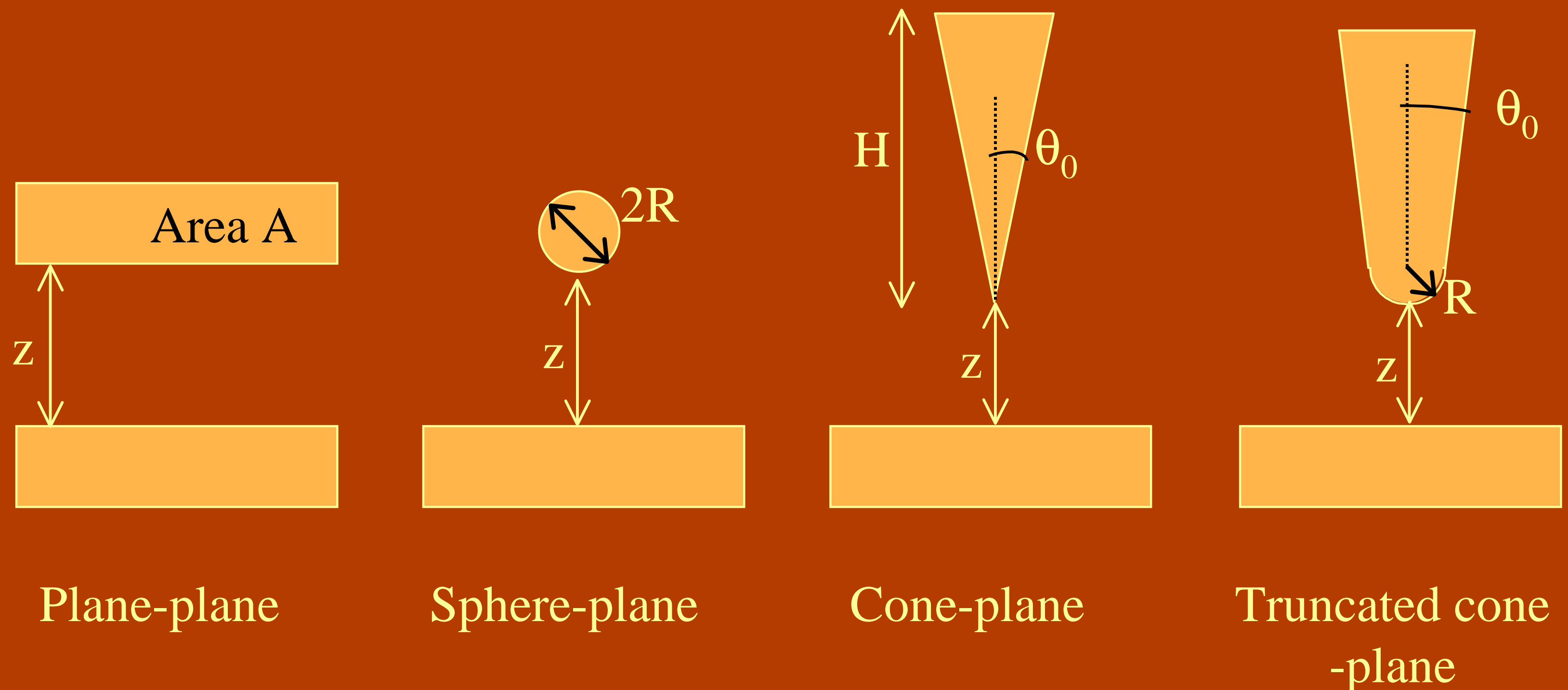
The electrostatic force is **capacitive**:

$$f(z) = \frac{1}{2}\frac{\partial C}{\partial z}(z)V^2$$

Capacitance C, C”=??

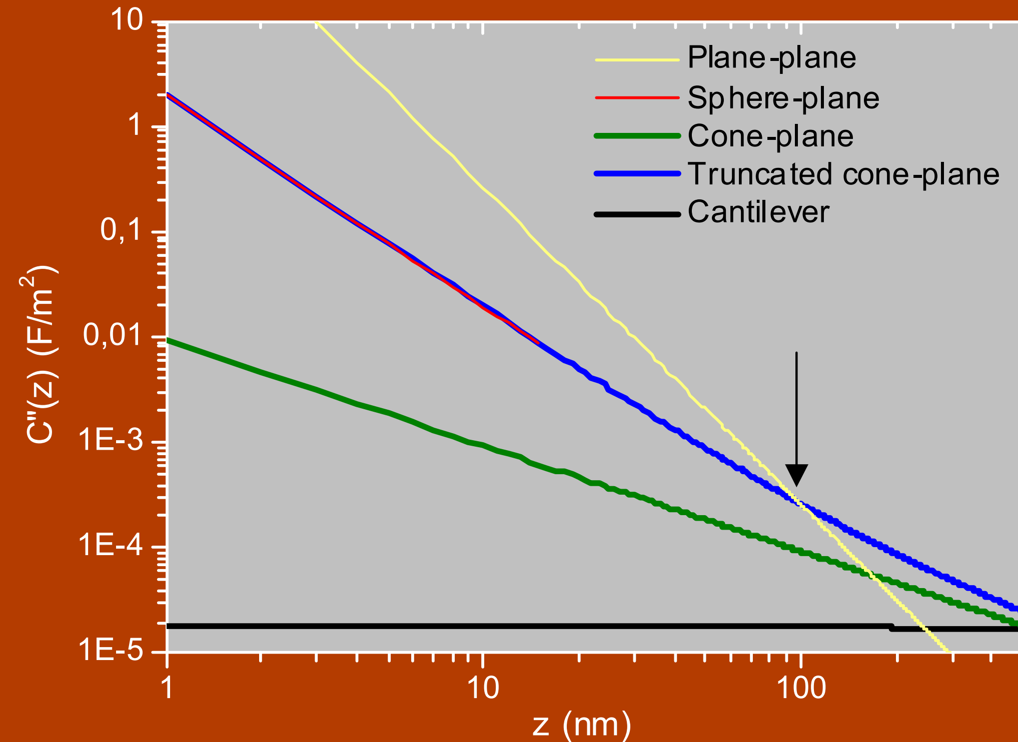
$$\frac{\partial f}{\partial z}(z) = \frac{1}{2}\frac{\partial^2 C}{\partial z^2}(z)V^2$$

Different capacitor geometries:



Modelling of the electrostatic tip-sample interaction

Plot of the 2nd derivative of capacitance vs. tip-sample distance



- Contribution of cantilever is negligible.
- Area of plane capacitor is adapted to fit C''(z) of truncated cone-plane at a lift height of 100 nm.

⇨ The simplest geometry is chosen: plane-plane capacitor

$$C''(z) = 2\varepsilon_0\varepsilon_r \frac{A}{z^3}$$

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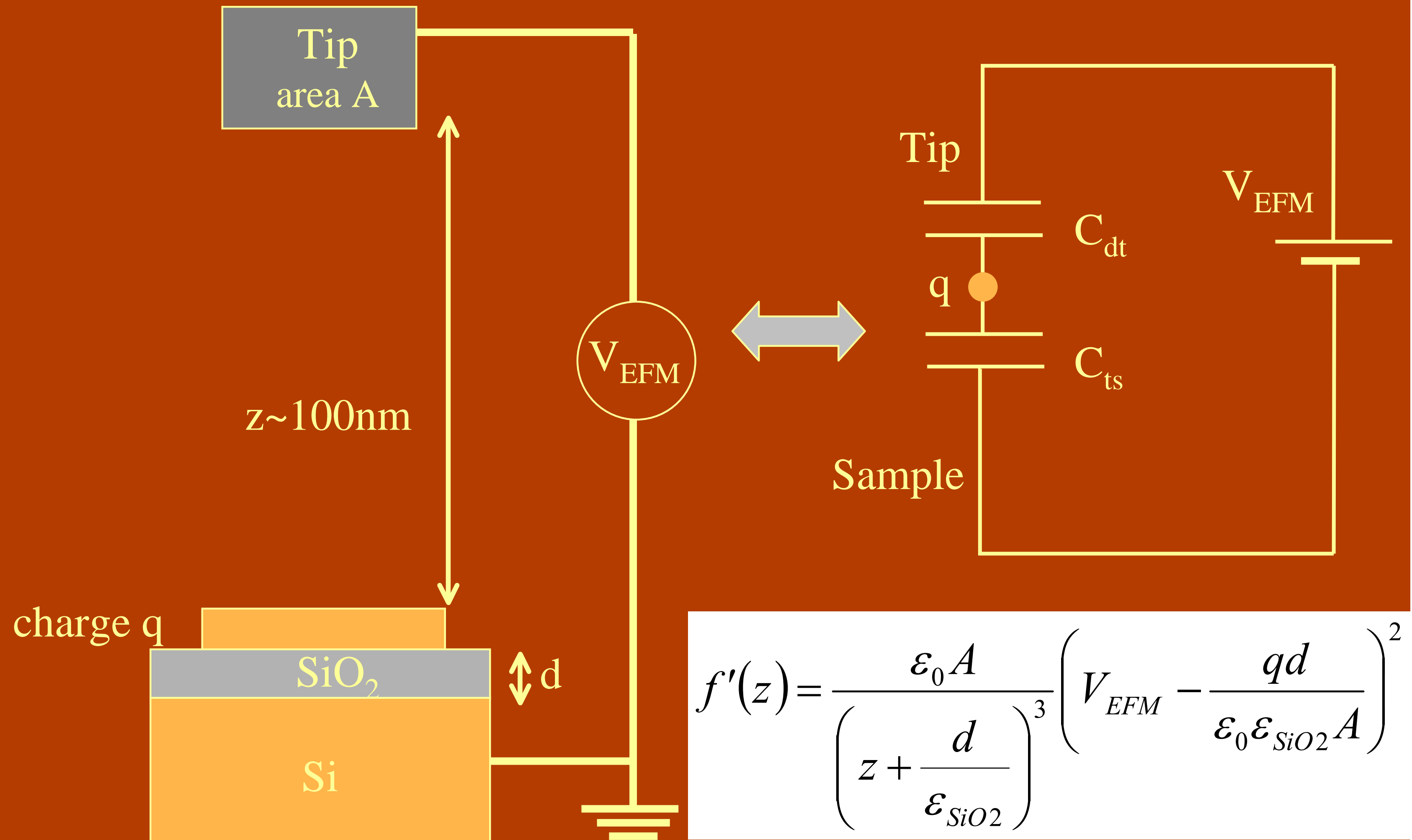
Modelling of the electrostatic tip-sample interaction

The system is modelled as 2 plane capacitors in series



$$f'(z) = \frac{\varepsilon_0 A}{\left(z + \frac{d}{\varepsilon_{SiO2}}\right)^3}\left(V_{EFM} - \frac{qd}{\varepsilon_0 \varepsilon_{SiO2} A}\right)^2$$

Minimum detectable charge at V_{EFM} =0

$$q_{\min} = \sqrt{\frac{f'_{\min}\left(z + \frac{d}{\varepsilon_{SiO2}}\right)^3 \varepsilon_0 \varepsilon_{SiO2}^2 A}{d^2}}$$

q_{min} dependent on:
z : lift height
d : oxide thickness
A : effective plane area

f'_{min} = 3 x 10^{-5} $N.m^{-1}$

z= 100 nm, A= 14700 nm^2 (disc of 140 nm in diameter)

d (nm)	7	10	25	100	400
q min (e-)	185	162	69	22	11

z= 50 nm, A= 6260 nm^2 (disc of 90 nm in diameter)

d (nm)	7	10	25	100	400
q min (e-)	54	39	18	7	5

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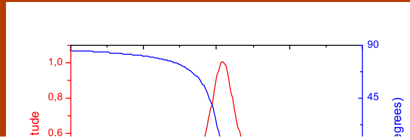
Method of charge estimation

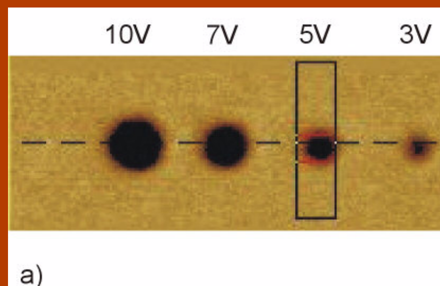
Imaging and relating the recorded phase to a charge

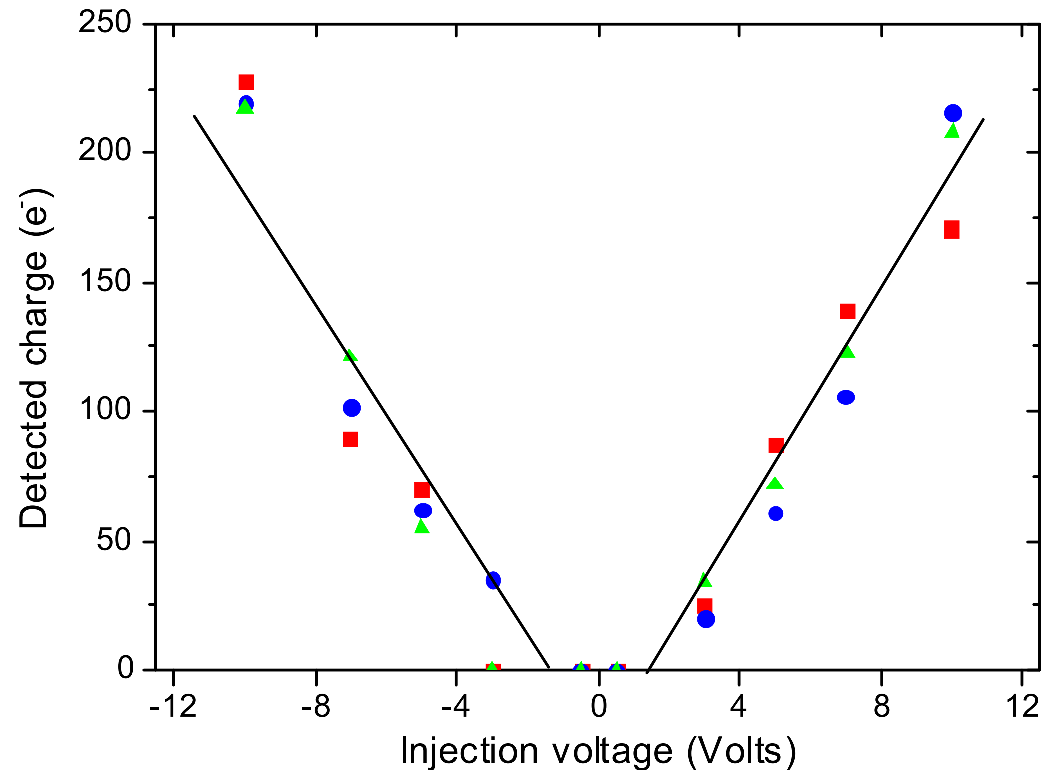
We established: $\Delta\omega = \frac{\omega_0}{2k}\frac{\partial f}{\partial z}(z_0)$



Moreover:

$q = \sqrt{\frac{\delta\phi \cdot k\left(z + \right.}{}}$





Charging experi...
(injection time: 10 s)

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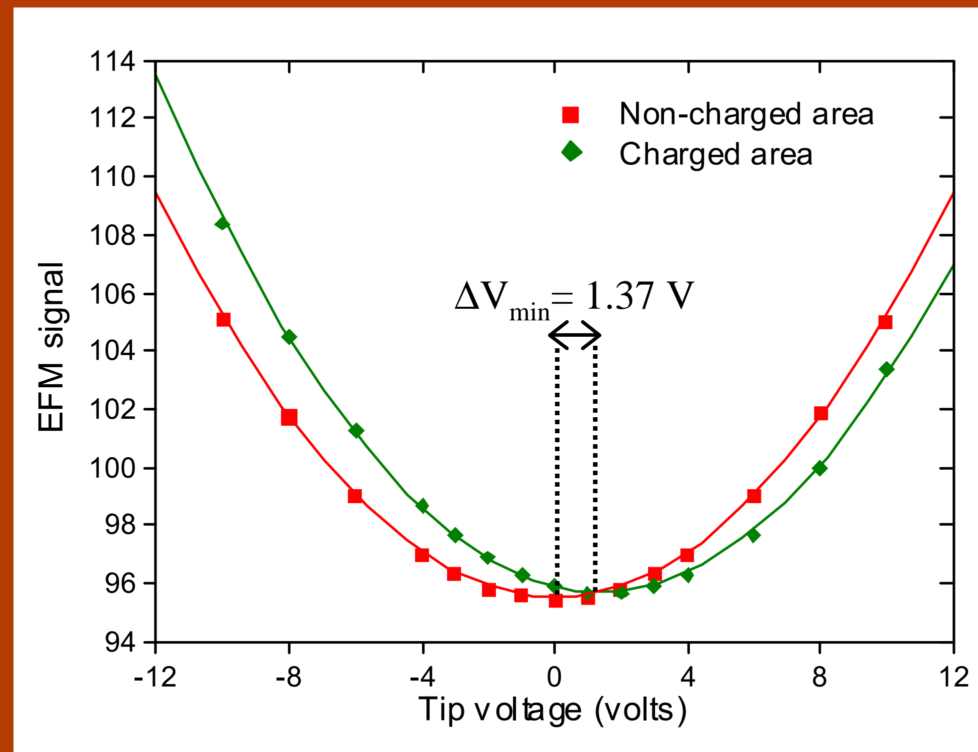
Method of charge estimation

Relate the minimum of EFM signal vs. voltage to a charge

Before and after injection, voltage V_{EFM} applied on tip is scanned

→ Minimum corresponds to $V_{EFM} = V_{surface}$



Conditions:
Injection -10V/10s
d = 25 nm
Lift height: 300 nm
A= 13 x 10^{-14} m^2
(disc 400 nm in diam.)

$$\Delta V_{\min} = \frac{qd}{\varepsilon_0 \varepsilon_{SiO2} A}$$

Here q = 1500 charges

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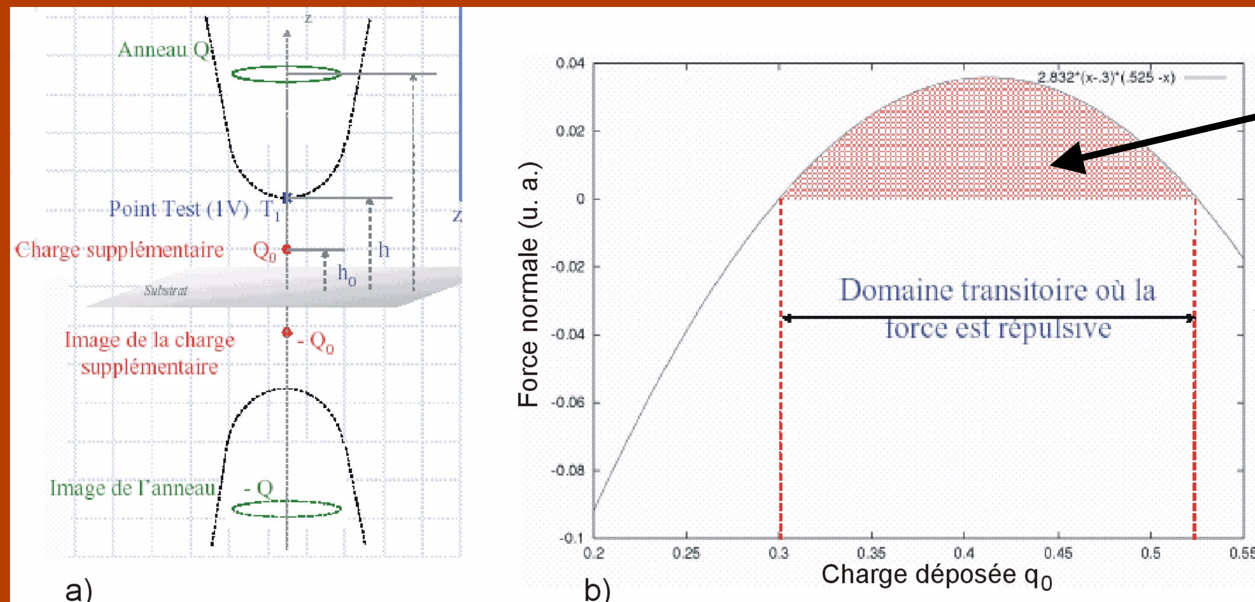
Limits of the capacitor model

Capacitive force: always attractive

⇨ Numerical evidence of a **repulsive** interaction (J.P. Julien, CNRS)

- Distribution of equivalent charge **q** on the tip in rings
- Trapped charge $\mathbf{q_0}$ is modelled above the symmetry plane
- Charges are adjusted to have a constant potential on the tip's surface
- Screening charges are taken into account



Domain of repulsive force!

16 electrons!
=barely measurable

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Non-linear dynamic force curves

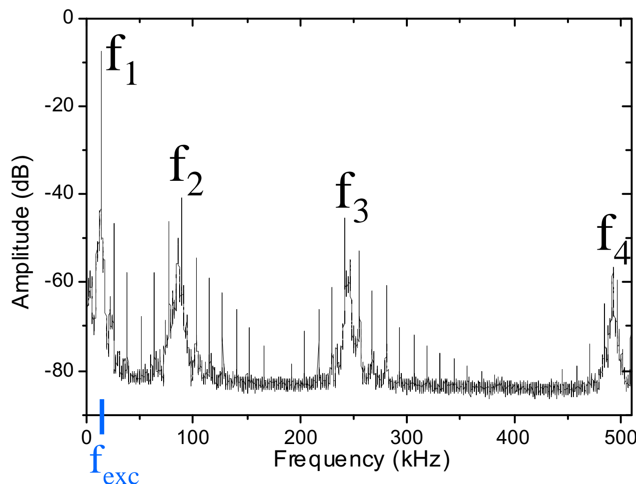
What is a force curve:

- Scanning is stopped
- Feedback on amplitude is cut off
- Cantilever is mechanically excited near resonance frequency
- Tip is approached then retracted from the surface (height ~ 200 nm)
- Amplitude and phase of oscillation are recorded

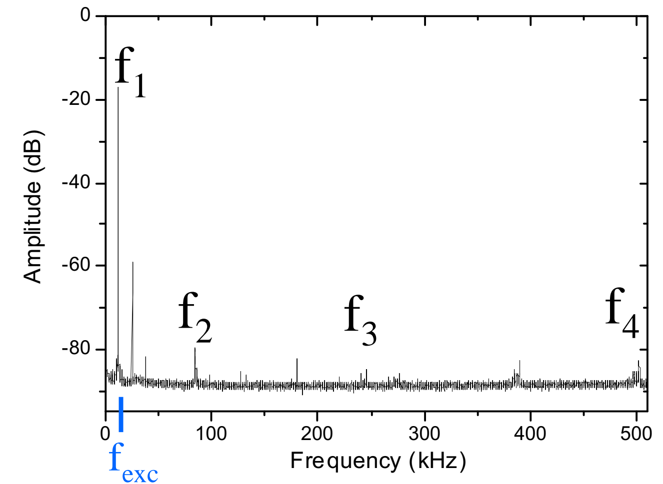
Coupling to higher oscillating modes of the cantilever

Is the movement of the cantilever still that of a harmonic oscillator?

NO! Strong excitation



YES! Normal excitation



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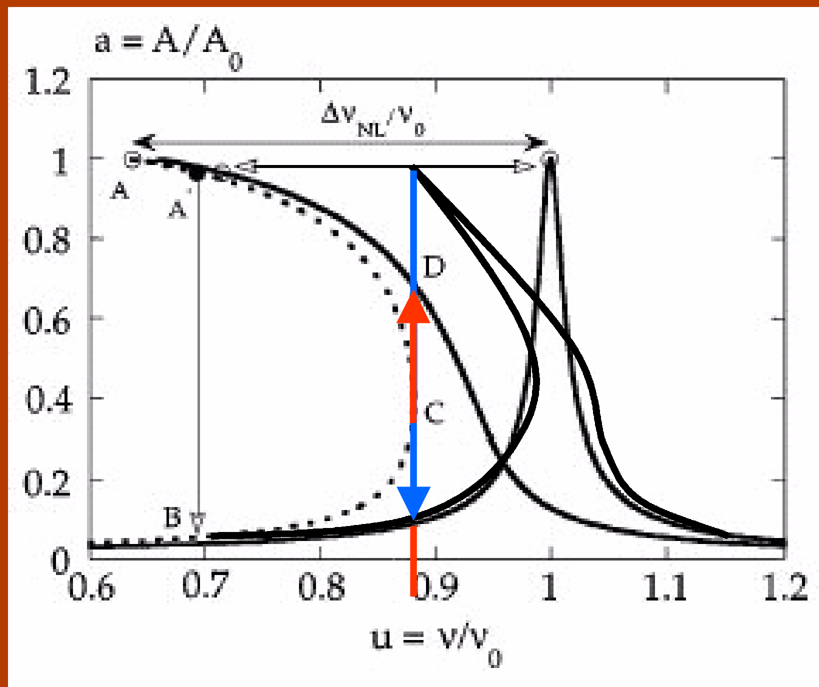
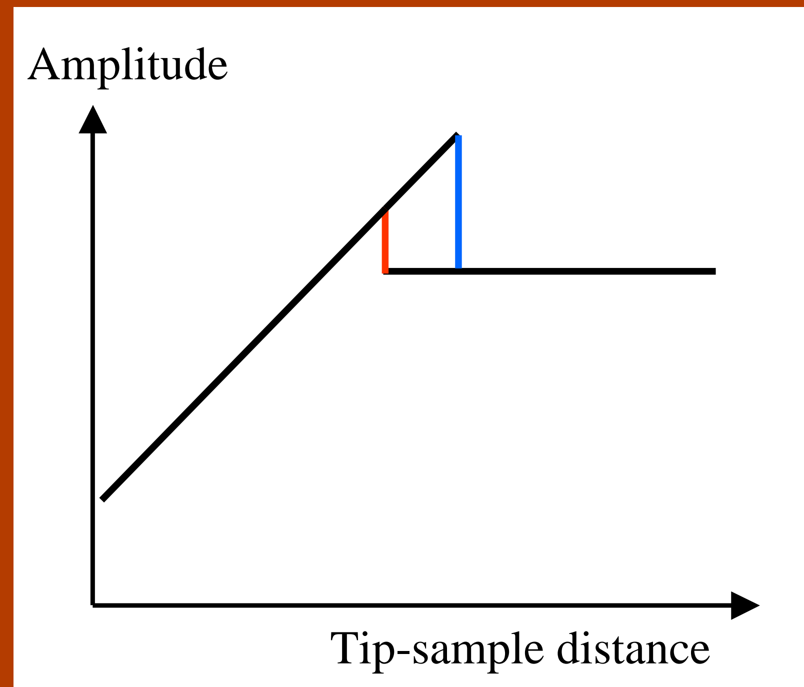
Non-linear tip-sample interaction

Deformation of the resonance curve
with increasing tip-surface interaction





Amplitude and phase of oscillation undergo hysteresis

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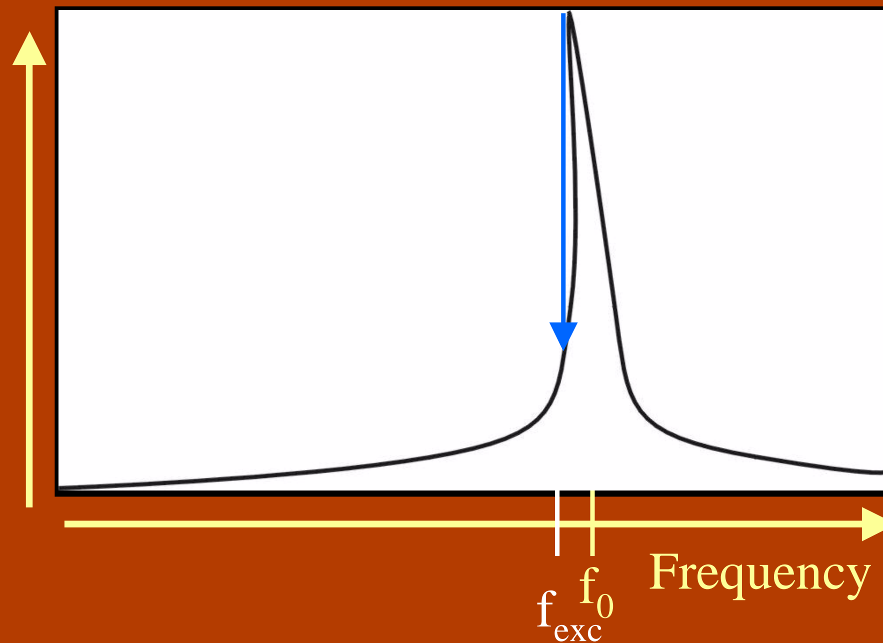

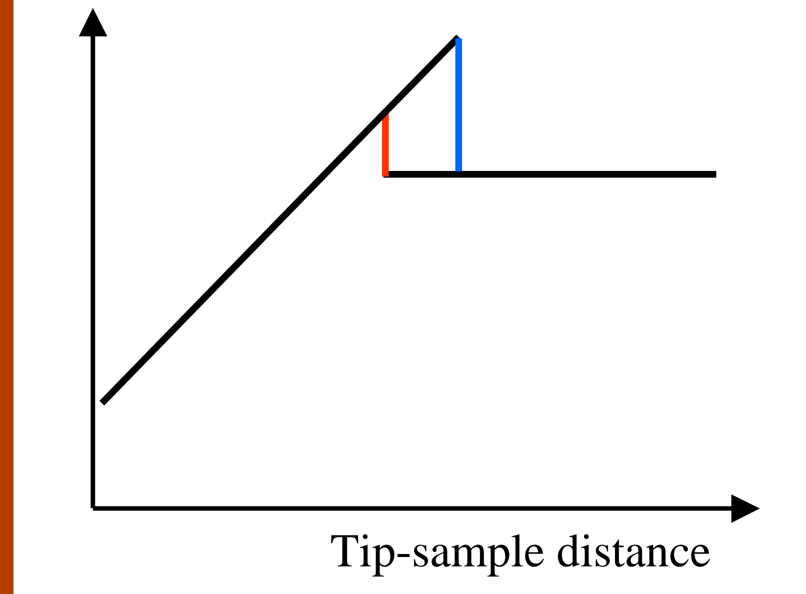

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Analytical treatment of the movement of cantilever

Non-perturbative treatment (J.P. Aimé, CPMOH Bordeaux)

- Interaction is van der Waals : $\frac{HR}{d^2}$ (attractive force)
- Amplitude and distance are normalized to free amplitude at resonance: $a=A/A_0$, $d= z/A_0$

$$d_{A\pm} = \sqrt{a^2 + \left(\frac{k_{vdW}}{\left(u^2 - 1\right) \mp \frac{1}{Q}\sqrt{\frac{1}{a^2} - u^2}} \right)^{2/3}}$$

- $u= \omega / \omega_0$
- k_{vdW}: dimensionless parameter related with strength of van der Waals forces

$$\phi_{A\pm} = \arctan\left(\frac{u^2}{Q\left(u^2 - 1\right) + Q\frac{k_{vdW}}{\left(d_{A\pm}^2 - a^2\right)^{3/2}}} \right)$$

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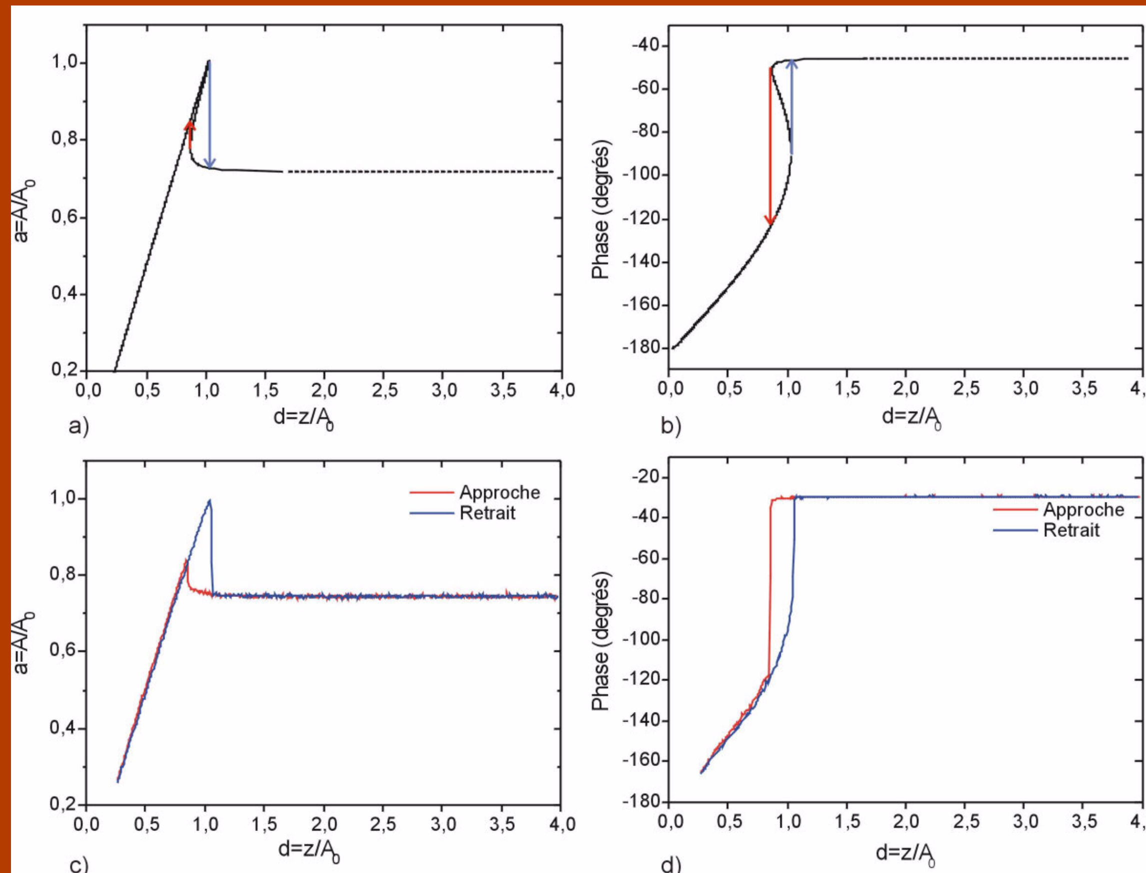
Analytical treatment of the movement of cantilever

These analytical curves explain the hysteresis observed experimentally



Analytical curves

Experimental curves

Experimental parameters used in the analytical curves:

$Q = 80$

$k = 2.3$ N/m

$\omega_0 = 57.85$ kHz

$u = 0.9939$

$A_0 = 13.5$ nm

Adding the electrostatic interaction

Capacitive tip-sample coupling taken into account

$$d_{A\pm} = \sqrt{a^2 + \left(\frac{k_{vdW} + k_{elect} V^2}{\left(u^2 - 1\right) \mp \frac{1}{Q}\sqrt{\frac{1}{a^2} - u^2}} \right)^{2/3}}$$

$$\phi_{A\pm} = \arctan\left(\frac{u^2}{Q\left(u^2 - 1\right) + Q\frac{k_{vdW} + k_{elect} V^2}{\left(d_{A\pm}^2 - a^2\right)^{3/2}}} \right)$$

where

$$k_{elec} V^2 = \frac{\varepsilon_0 A}{k A_0^3} V^2$$

We take advantage of the fact that
the capacitive force for a plane capacitor
has the same distance-dependence d^{-2}
as the van der Waals force

EFM

Injection
and detection

Min.
force gradient

Modelling

Charge
estimation

Limits

Dynamic
force curves

Coupling to
higher modes

Analytical
treatment

+ Electrostatic
interaction

Charging
experiments

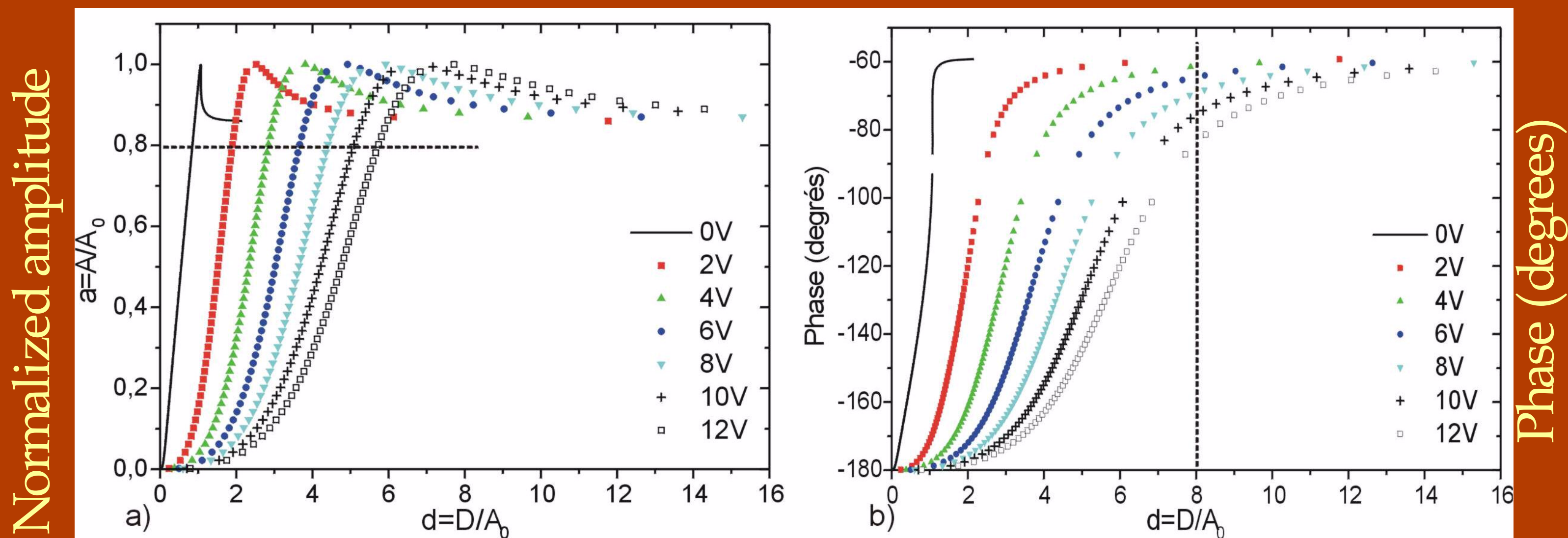
SiO_2 layer

Si-nanocrystals
in SiO_2

Lithography
Si- nanostruc.

Adding the electrostatic interaction

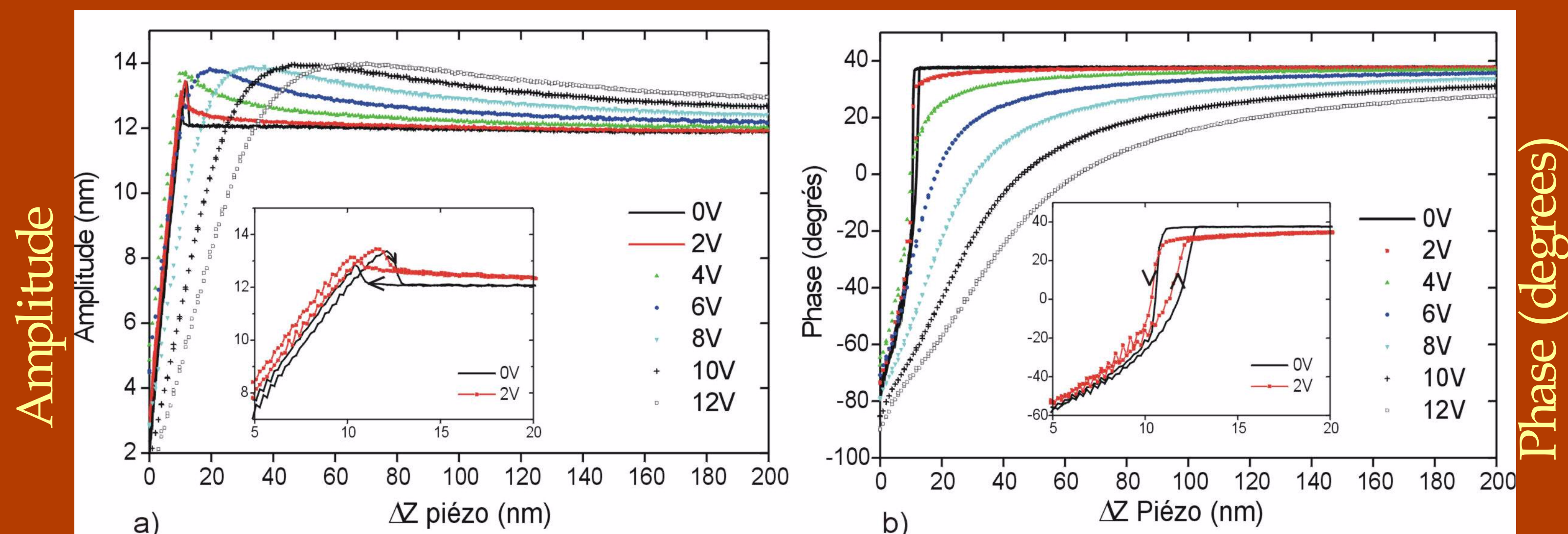
Analytical curves



Normalized distance

A_0= 14 nm

Experimental curves



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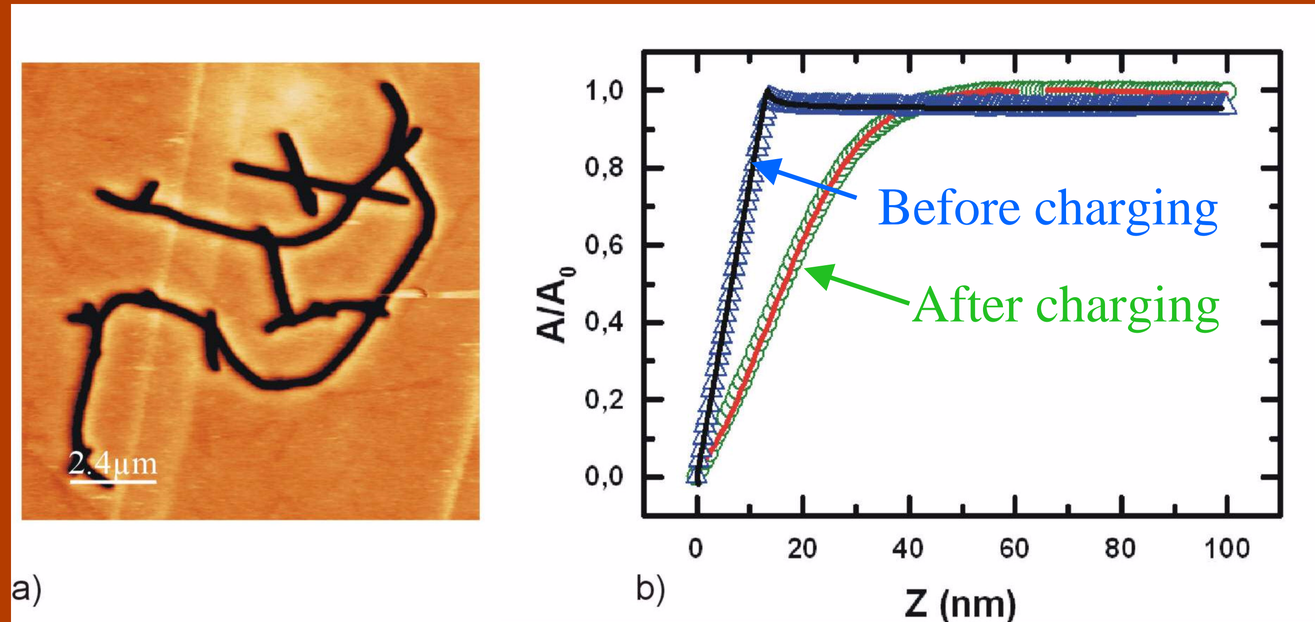
Quantitative charge measurement with force curves

Application to carbon nanotubes (M. Paillet, Uni Montpellier)



- Fitting the data before injection provides all parameters (A_0, u, U_{vdW})
- After injection, the fit provides q=10 electrons

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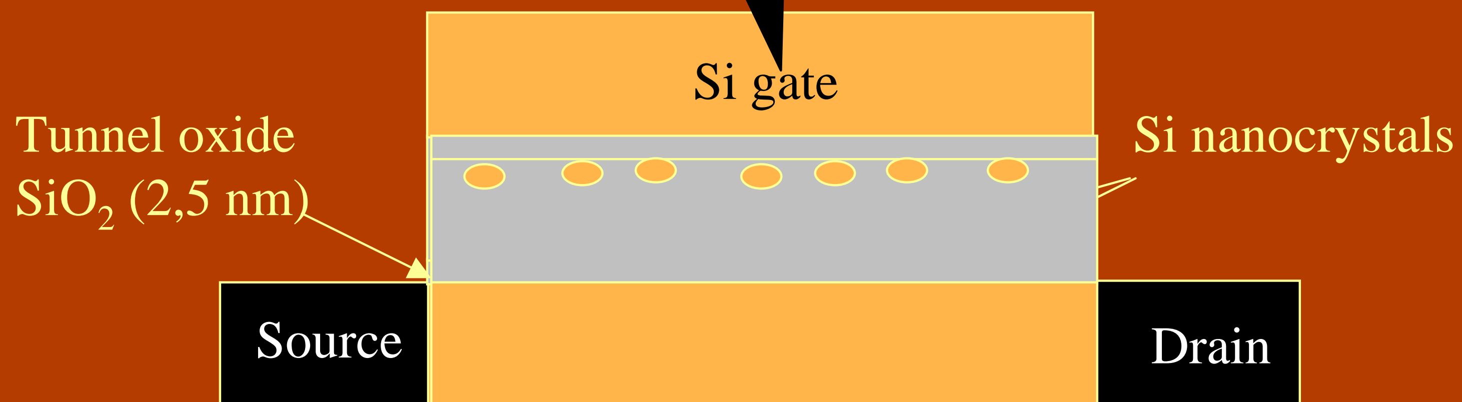
Charging experiments on semiconducting nanostructures

Objective: not quantify charges but investigate charging behaviors

- charging of in[...]vidual structures
- char[...]ection of nanostructures



Si-nc non-volatile memory

EFM
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Charging experiments
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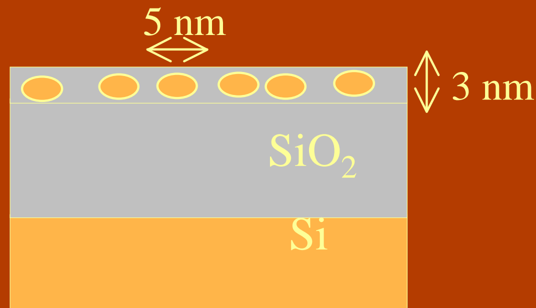
Lithography Si- nanostruc.

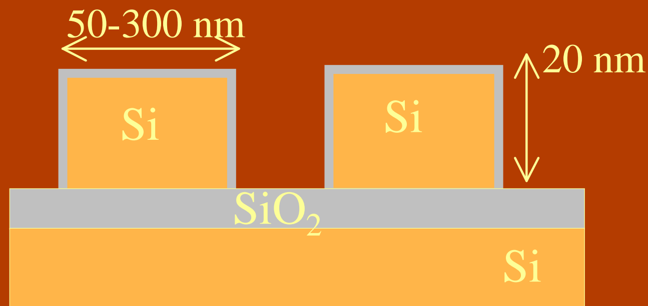
Charging experiments on semiconducting nanostructures

3 types of samples:

- Reference SiO_2 layer on Si
  - ✓charging behavior of an insulator



- Si-nanocrystals embedded in SiO_2
  - ✓very small ~5 nm in diameter
  - ✓collective behavior



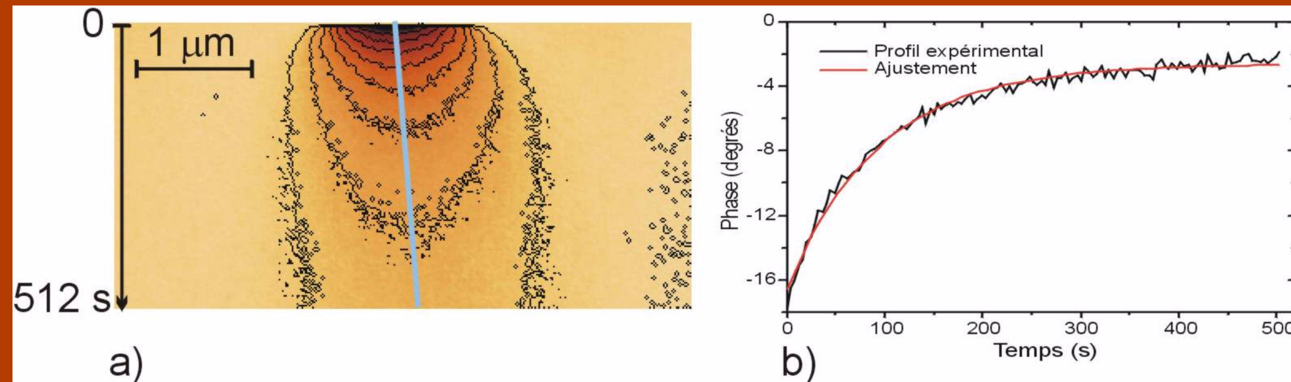
- Si-nanostructures made by e-beam lithography
  - ✓well-defined, ~100 nm in dimension
  - ✓individual behavior

Charging insulators: the case of SiO_2

Large electric field (~10^8 V.m^{-1}) necessary
to deposit only a few 100 charges

Charging of 25 nm of thermal oxide, conditions: -10 V/ 10s
Recording of the EFM signal

Time



Characteristic retention time: 94 seconds
=
Low retention time

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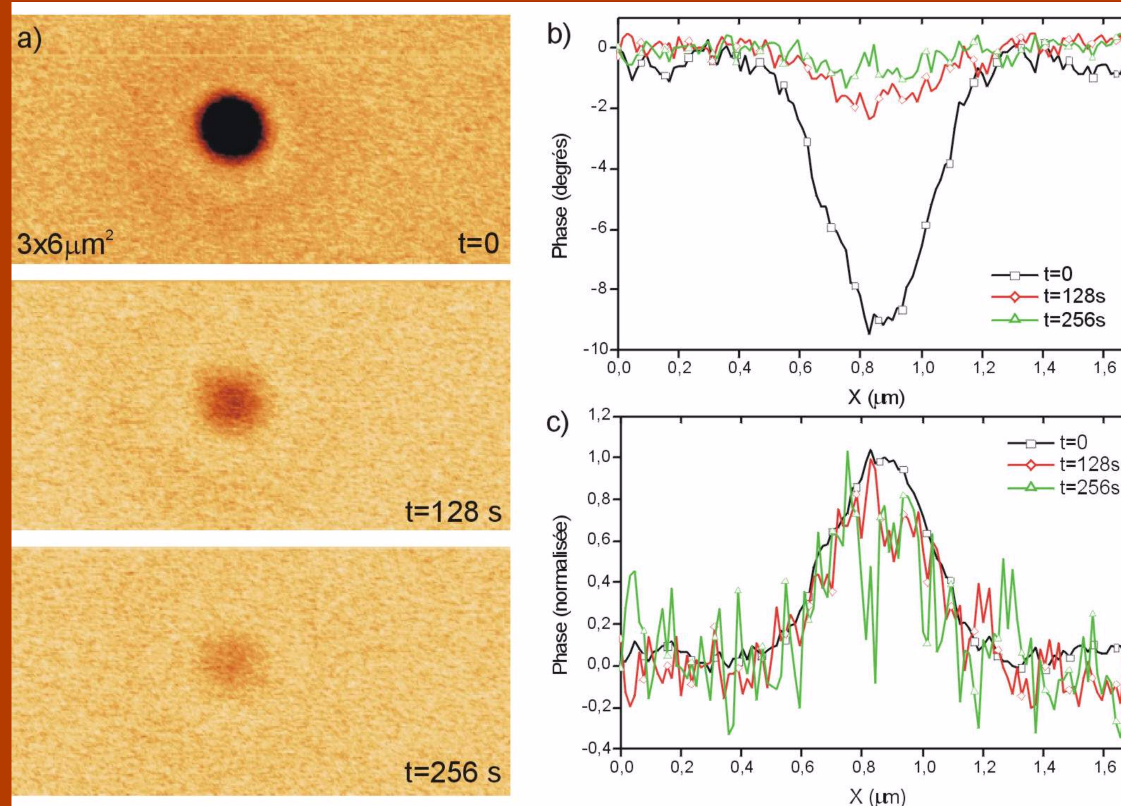

EFM signal

Normalized EFM signal

Absence of lateral spreading of the charges

EFM

Injection and detection

Min. force gradient

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SiO_2 layer

Si-nanocrystals in SiO_2

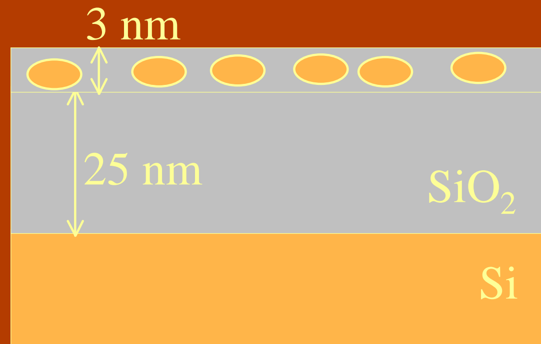
Lithography Si- nanostruc.

Silicon nanocrystals embedded in SiO_2

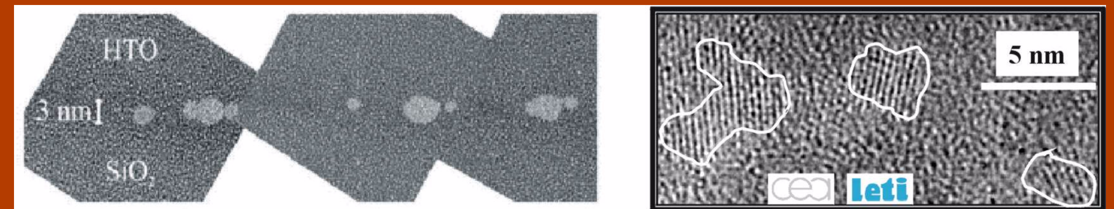
Elaboration: (CEA Grenoble/LETI)

- deposition of a SiO_x layer ($x < 2$) by LP-CVD
- annealing at 1000°C, 10 minutes

= precipitation of Si nanocrystals in SiO_2 matrix



TEM pictures



Cross-section Plane-view

Typical dimension: 3 nm

Density depends on x, varies from 3×10^{11} to 10^{12} cm^{-2}

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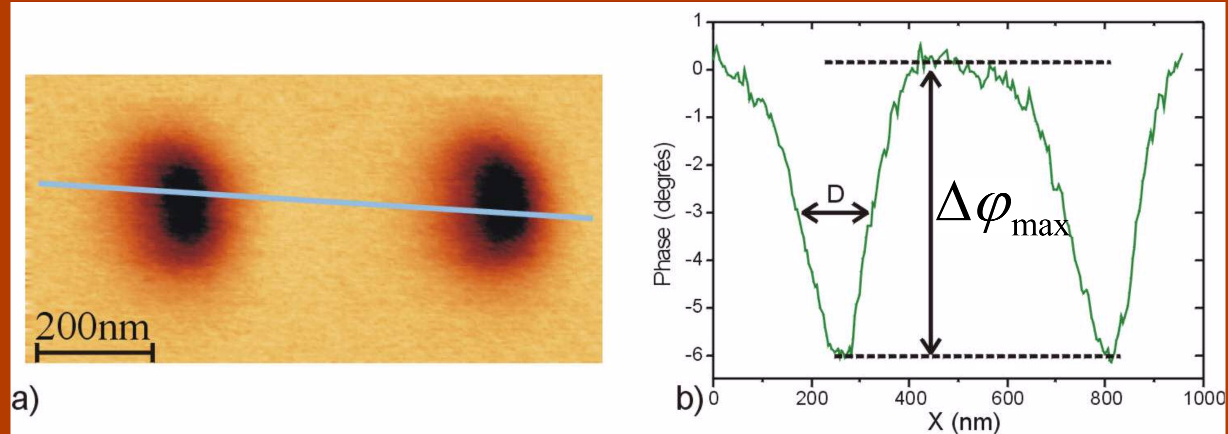
Silicon nanocrystals embedded in SiO_2

First behavior: very low Si-nc density

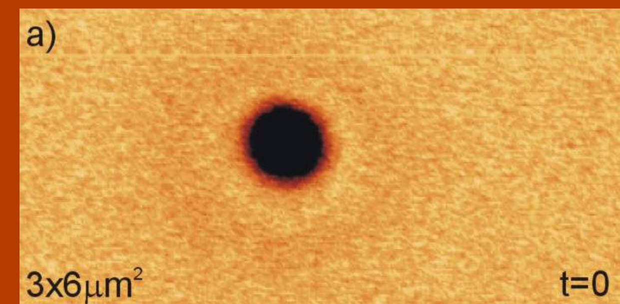


Circular shape of injected charges that does not evolve in time

Time retention: several hours

Estimation of **one electron per nanocrystal**

Any difference from reference SiO_2 sample?

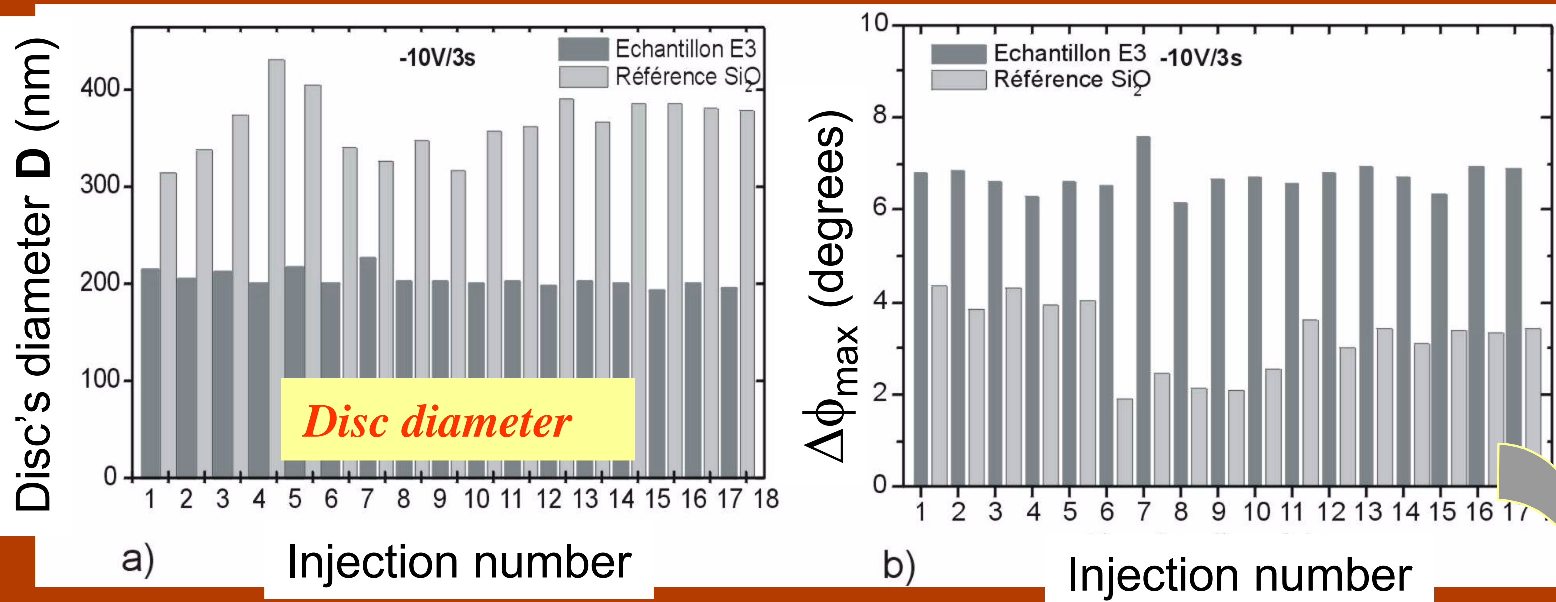


Low-density Si-nanocrystals embedded in SiO_2

Same charging conditions: -10 V / 3 s

Si-nanocrystals

SiO_2 reference sample



Si-nanocrystals:

D ~200 nm

$\Delta\phi_{max}$ ~6.5°

SiO_2 reference:

D ~350 nm

$\Delta\phi_{max}$ ~3 °

∝ e- density

Smaller electron cloud

Higher surface density of electrons

EFM

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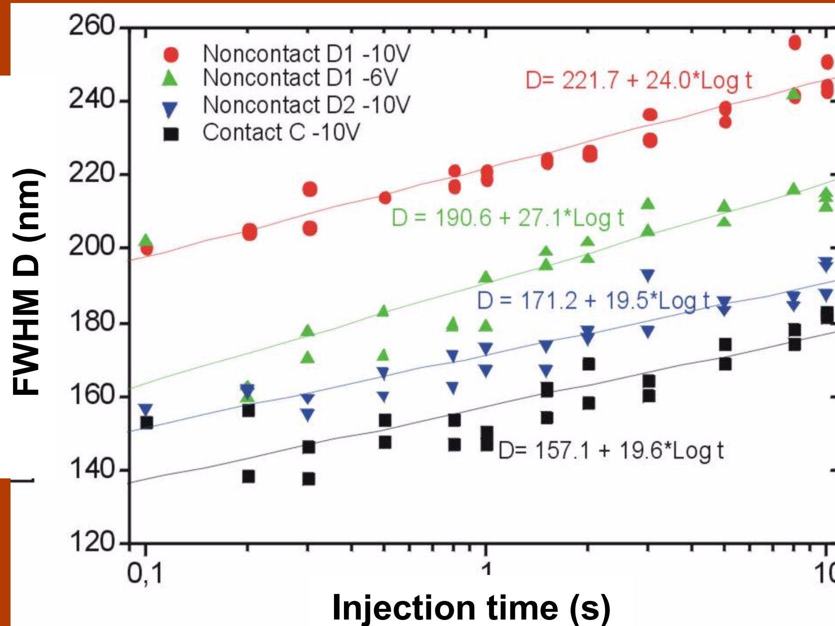
Si-nanocrystals in SiO_2

Lithography Si- nanostruc.

Evolution of the disc with the injection time



Si-nanocrystals

Reproducible experiment with homogeneous distribution of slopes

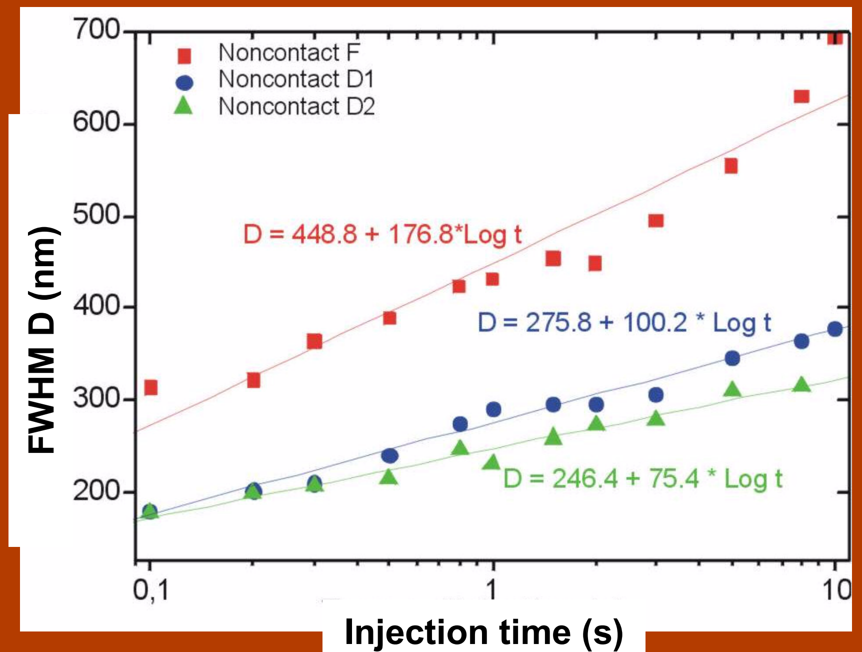
The disc's diameter evolves as log (injection time)

Infinitely slow saturation

Reference SiO_2

Larger disc's diameters= easier spreading of the charges

Inhomogeneous distribution of slopes: due to flawed tip-sample contact?



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Si-nanocrystals in SiO_2
Lithography Si- nanostruc.

Low-density Si-nanocrystals vs. SiO_2 reference sample

- Same circular shape of the electron cloud for both samples

BUT

in the same charging conditions:

- the electron cloud is **smaller** and **denser** for the Si-nanocrystal sample
- and it remains much **longer** (hours vs. minutes)

- Same logarithmic injection-time dependence

BUT

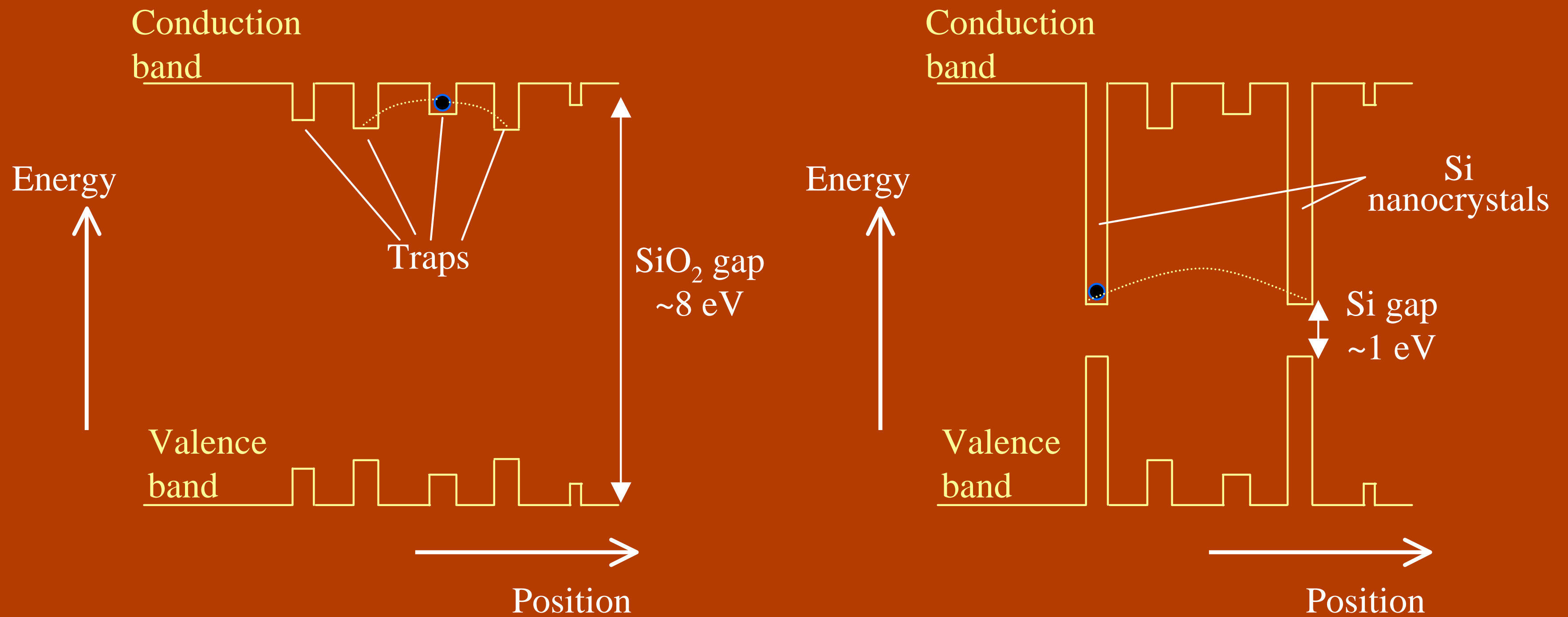
Si-nanocrystals shows **homogeneous** distribution of slopes whereas SiO_2 shows an **inhomogeneous** one

---

- Tip-sample contact resistance is dominant in SiO_2 sample
- Intercrystal-resistance is dominant in Si-nanocrystal sample

Tentative illustration of charge localization

Energetic diagrams



SiO_2 layer

Si nanocrystals in SiO_2 layer

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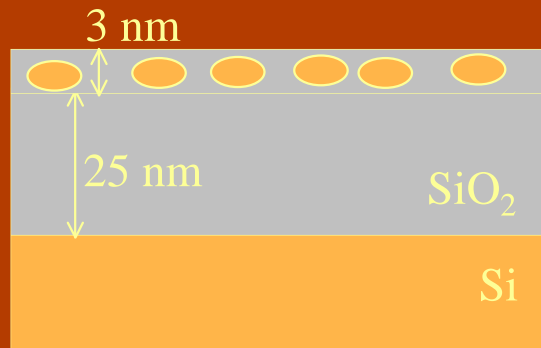
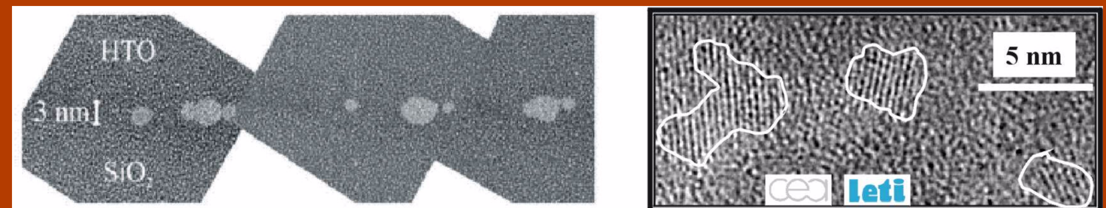
Silicon nanocrystals embedded in SiO_2



TEM pictures



Cross-section

Plane-view

Typical dimension: 3 nm

Density depends on x, varies from 3×10^{11} to 10^{12} cm^{-2}

→ 3 kinds of sample prepared, with varying densities

Fitting of the ellipsometric measurements provides:

Sample	Si(%)	SiO2(%)	Fraction x	
E1	40	60	0,81	High Si-nc density
E2	8	92	1,67	Low Si-nc density
E3	6	94	1,77	*Very low Si-nc density*

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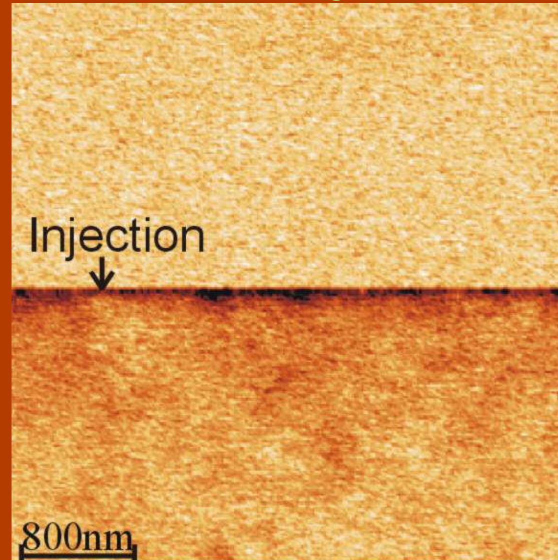
Silicon nanocrystals embedded in SiO_2

Sample E1: metallic behavior

Si = 40 %
SiO_2 = 60 %

EFM signal



- Charges spread away on a time scale of seconds

Si-nc touch one another, no confinement possible

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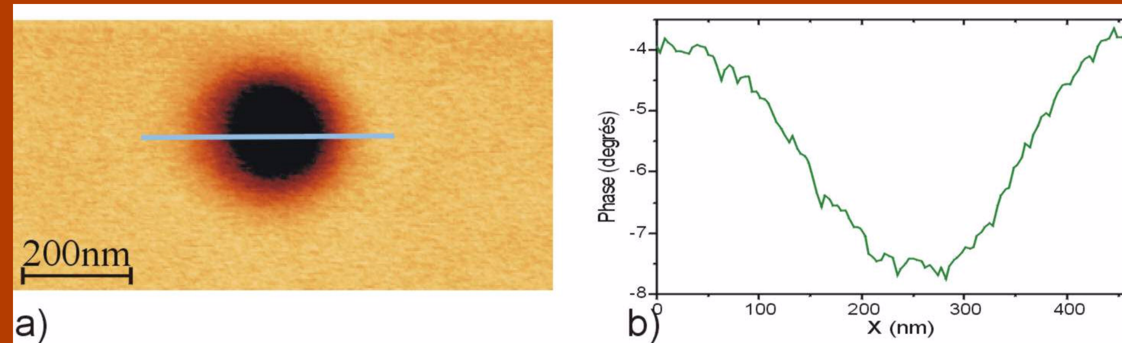
Silicon nanocrystals embedded in SiO_2

Sample E3: strongly confining behavior

Si = 6 %
SiO_2 = 94 %

Very low Si-nc density



Circular shape of injected charges that does not evolve in time
Estimation of **one electron per nanocrystal**

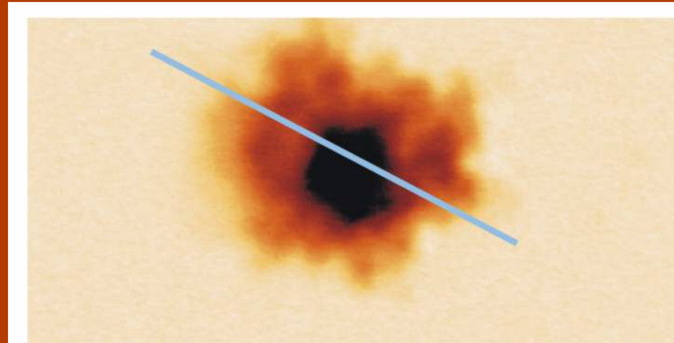
Silicon nanocrystals embedded in SiO_2

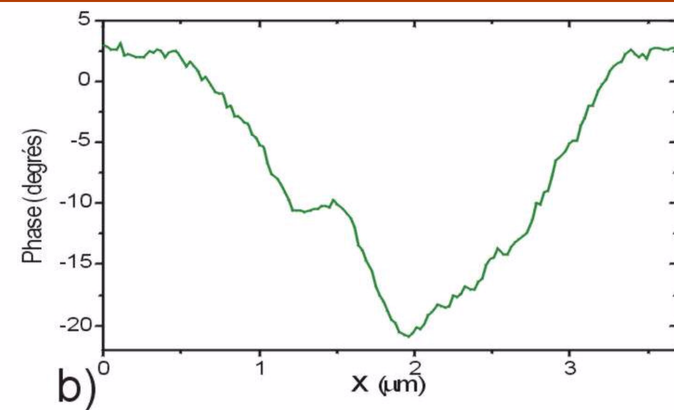
Sample E2: partially confining behavior

Si = 8 %
SiO_2 = 92 %

Low Si-nc density

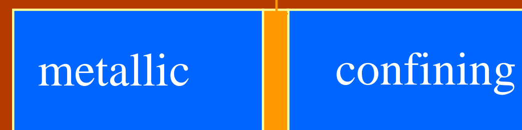
Charging conditions -10 V / 10 s





- Rough bordeline
- Inhomogeneous distribution of charges inside the electron cloud

Reflects disorder in the distribution of Si-nc at nanoscale



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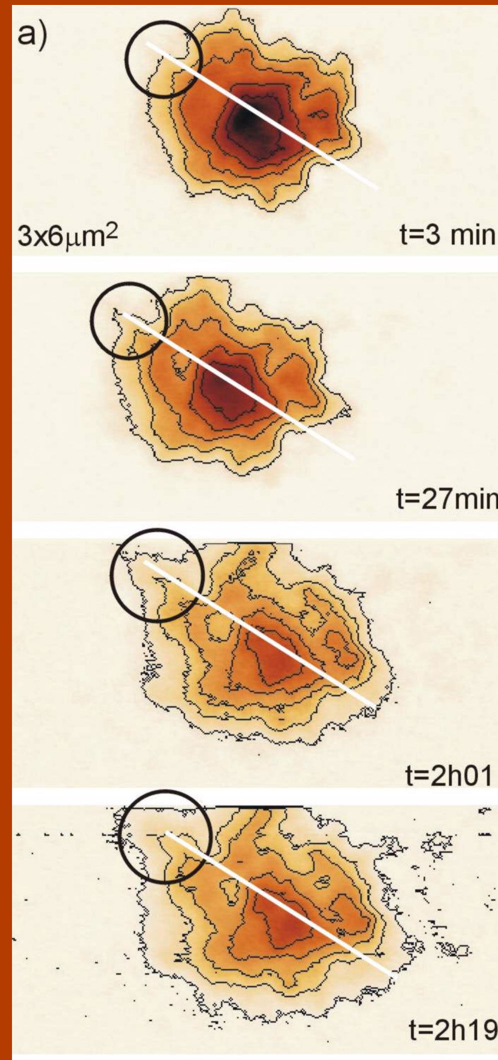
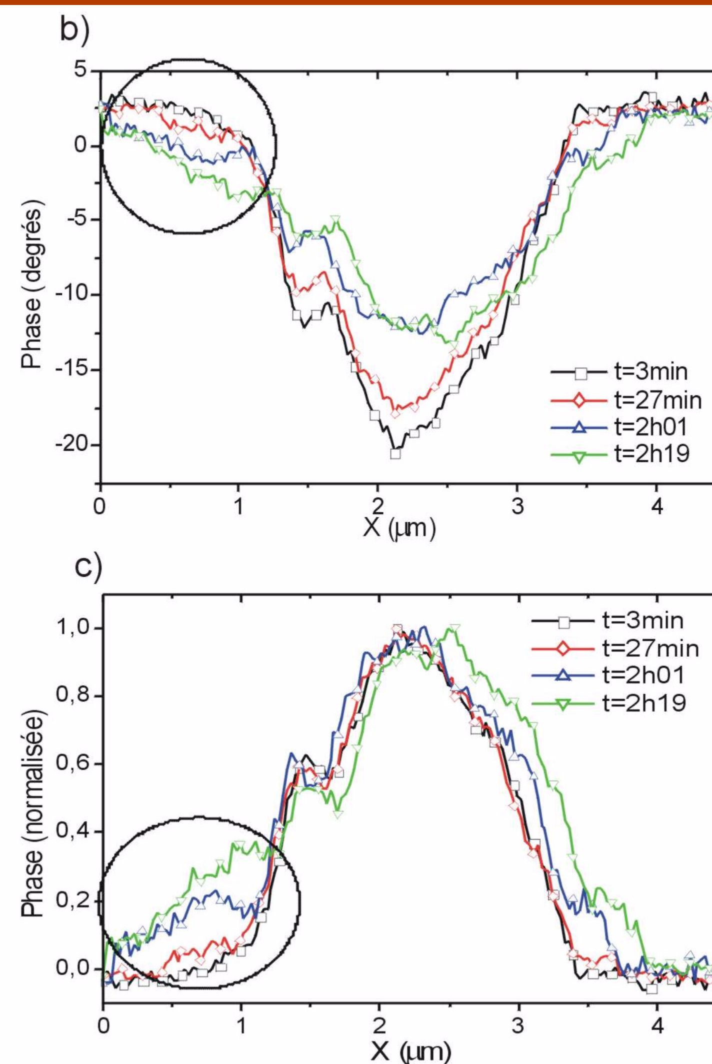
Sample E2: time evolution of the electron cloud

EFM images





Profiles of EFM signal

Normalized profiles

Irregular spreading of the charges, on a time scale of hours
= "kinetic roughening"

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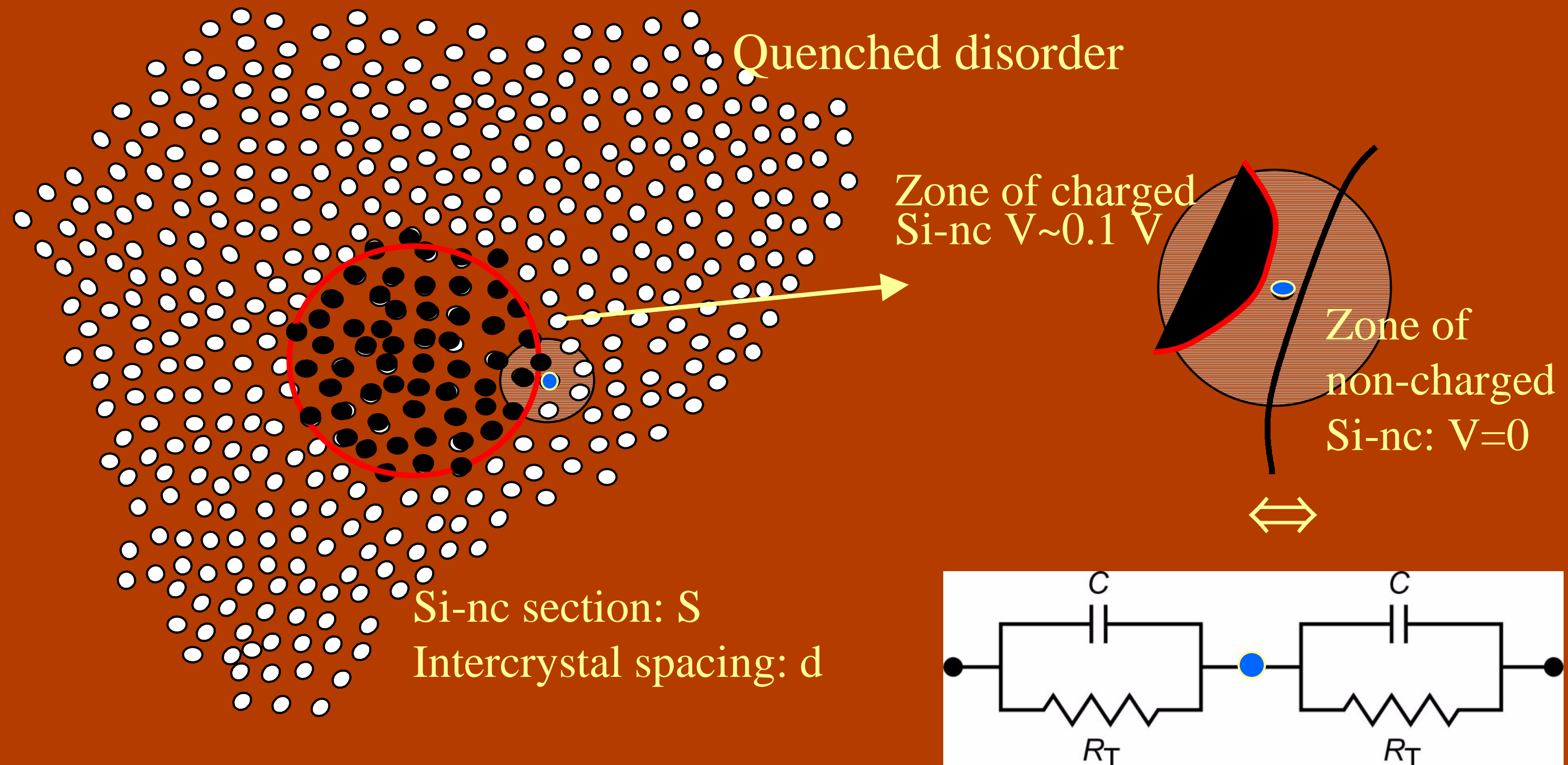
Sample E2: mechanism of charge spreading



Electron transport is explained with the orthodox model of the **Single Electron Transistor** (SET) with V_{gate}=0

Passage from one Si-nc to another occurs through **tunneling**

⇩

Percolation threshold related to intercrystal distances (=density)

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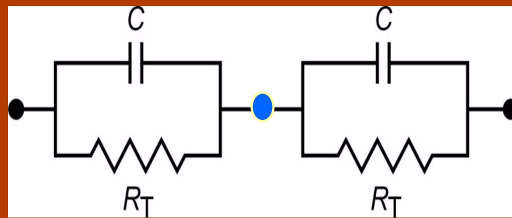
Sample E2: mechanism of charge spreading



$S = \pi r^2$ with $r \cong 3$ nm
$\rho_{SiO2} = 10^{14}$ to 10^{16} Ω cm
$d \cong 1$ nm

$C = \varepsilon_0 \varepsilon_{SiO2}\, S / d \sim 1$ aF
$R_T = \rho_{SiO2}\, d / S \sim 10^{19}$ Ω

Tunneling of the electrons in the frame of orthodox model

Transition rate $\Gamma = \tau^{-1}$ is:

$$\Gamma = \frac{1}{R_T\, e^2} \frac{-\Delta F}{1 - \exp(\frac{\Delta F}{k_B T})}$$

where:

- ΔF = f(ΔV, C) energy associated with the passage of one e^- from one Si-nc to its neighbor ~-80 meV

→ **$\Gamma = 5 \times 10^{-2}$ s^{-1} or $\tau = 20$ s**

Progression of the borderline : 1 µm/hour

1 electron tunnels through ~200 Si-nc /hour = 1Si-nc / 20s!

Paper accepted in Phys. Rev. B (Dec. 2004)

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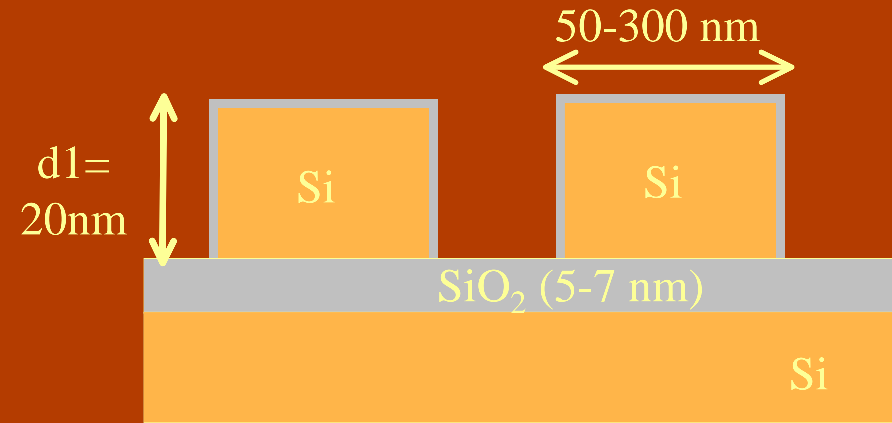
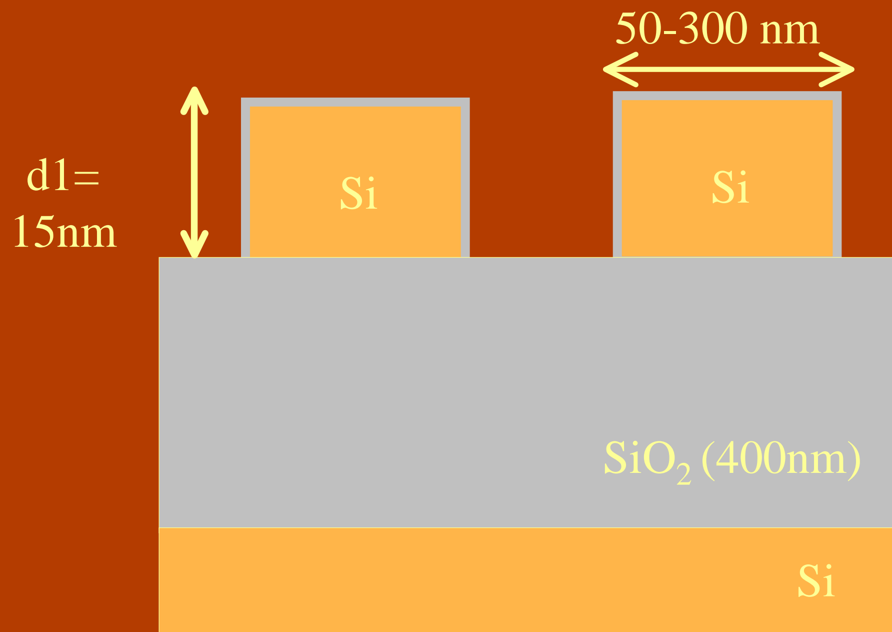
Silicon nanostructures made by e-beam lithography

- Dots are polycrystalline Si deposited by LP-CVD
- 2 nm of SiO_2 is grown on top to protect the dots





- Dots are monocrystalline Si made from SOI
- 2 nm of SiO_2 is grown on top to protect the dots

EFM

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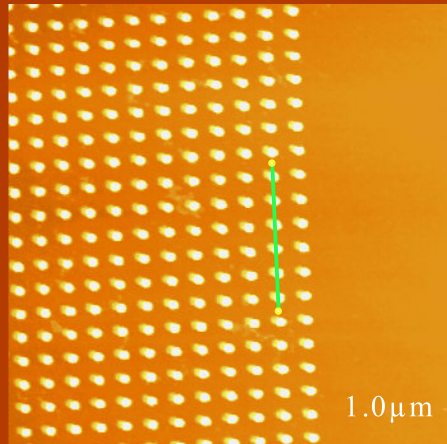
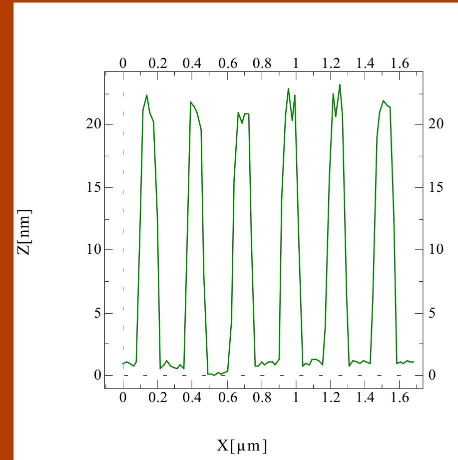
AFM characterization

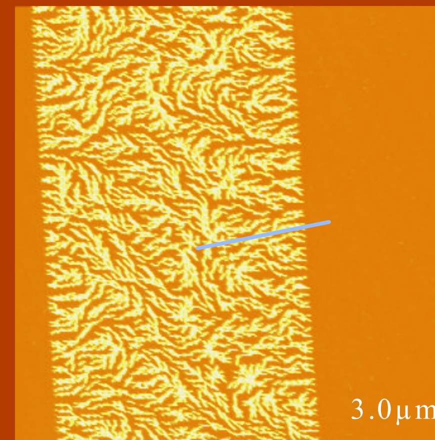


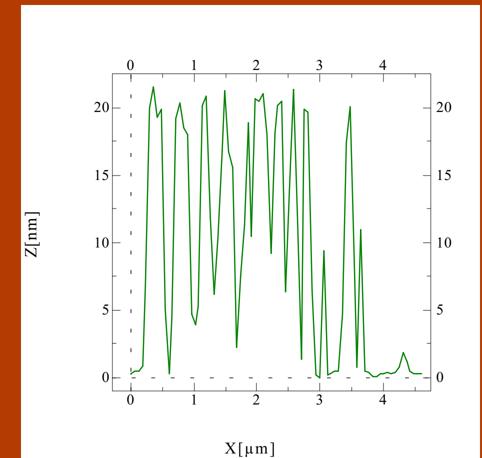


Most Si nanostructures are well-defined...

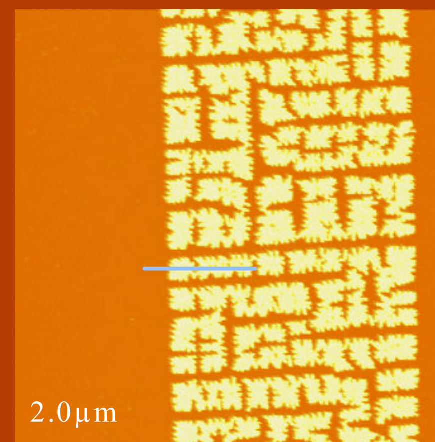
100 nm in diameter dots

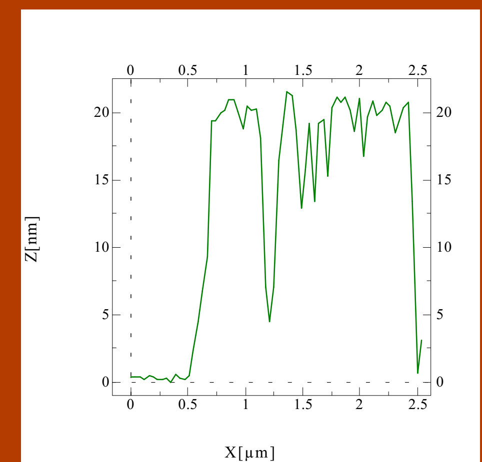
… but some are more extravagant.





50 nm in diameter dots





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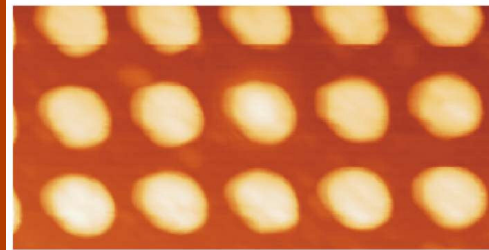
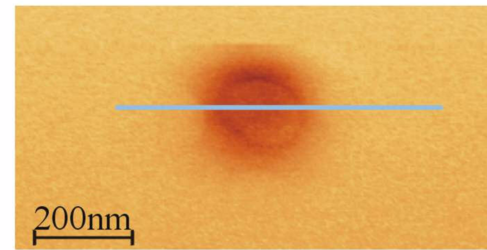
Influence of the oxide thickness

Charging conditions: -8V / 5s

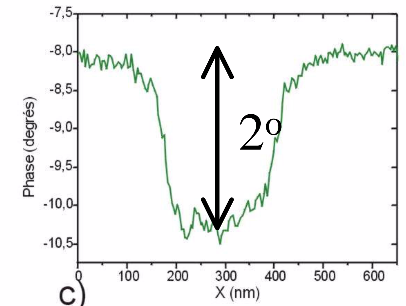
Height | EFM signal

Thin oxide (7 nm)


a)

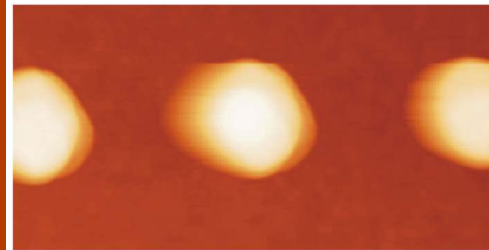


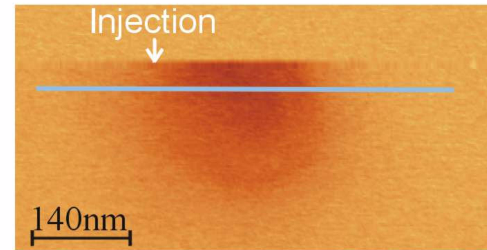
b)



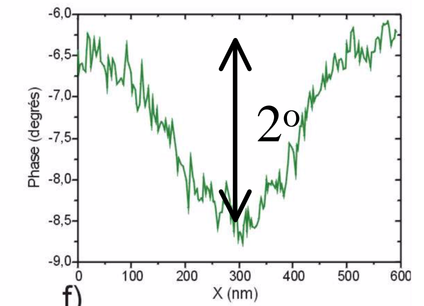
c)

Thick oxide (400 nm)


d)



e)



f)

Considering the expression of charge vs. phase shift:

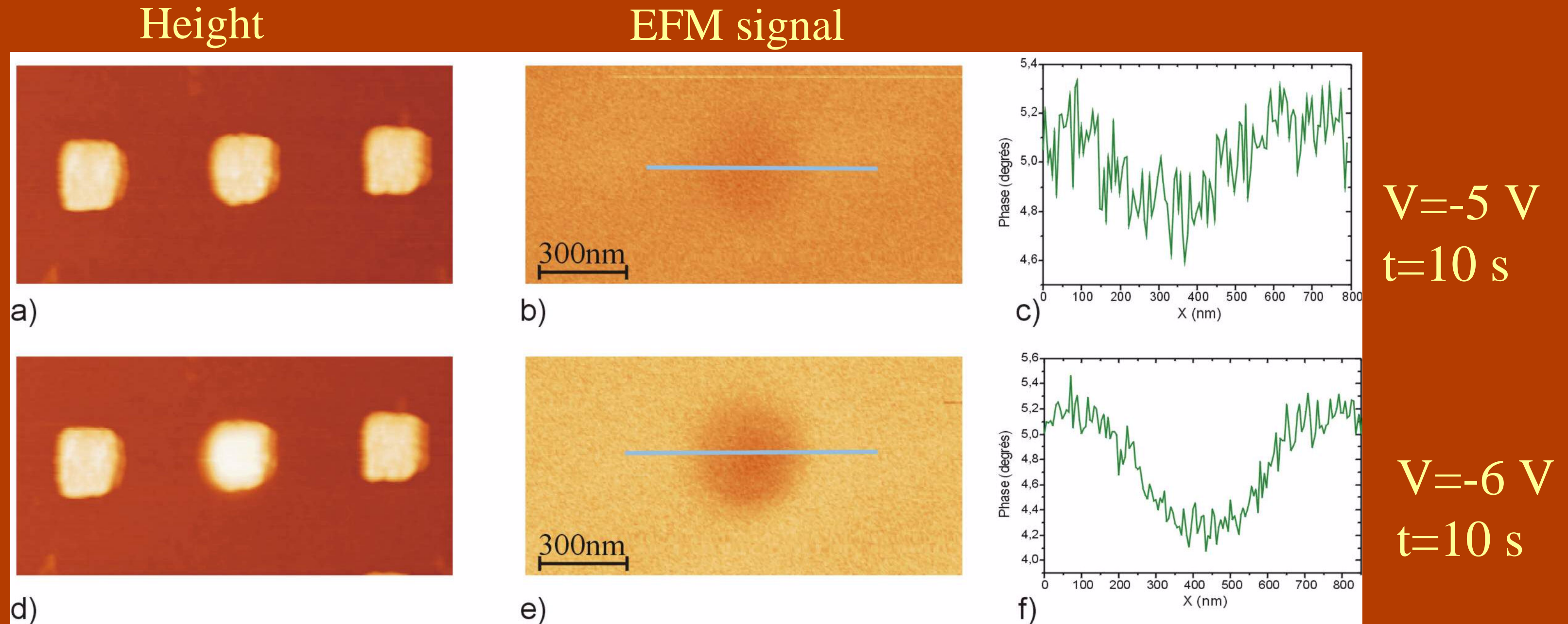
$$q = \sqrt{\frac{\delta\varphi \cdot k \left(z_0 + \frac{d}{\varepsilon_{SiO2}} + \frac{d1}{\varepsilon_{Si}} \right)^3 \varepsilon_0 A}{Q \left(\frac{d}{\varepsilon_{SiO2}} + \frac{d1}{\varepsilon_{Si}} \right)^2}}$$

For the same recorded phase shift, there are **7x** less charges on thick oxide

Existence of a voltage threshold for injection of charges

On thin-oxide sample:

Height EFM signal



V=-5 V
t=10 s

V=-6 V
t=10 s

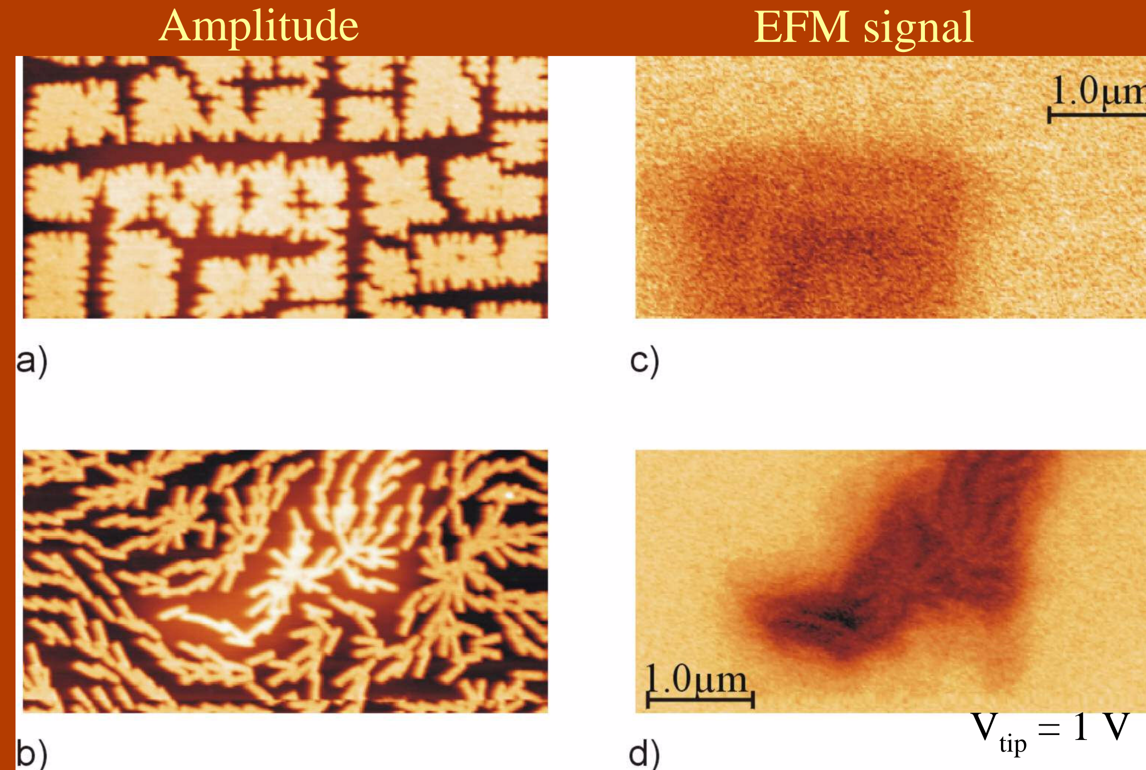
→ Minimum electric field of ~3 x 10^8 $V.m^{-1}$ is required

EFM
Injection and detection
Min. force gradient
Modelling
Charge estimation
Limits
Dynamic force curves
Coupling to higher modes
Analytical treatment
+ Electrostatic interaction
Charging experiments
SiO_2 layer
Si-nanocrystals in SiO_2
Lithography Si- nanostruc.

Propagation of the charges inside a ramified structure

Thin-oxide sample

Charging conditions: -10 V / 10 s



Injection is point-like

Charges extend immediately over several microns

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Trapping of charges in the top oxide

Charging conditions: -7 V/ 10 S

	t=0	t=256 s	t=30min
Height			
EFM signal	1 μm		

Injection point

Good quality oxide (“Rapid Thermal Oxide”)

traps charges for more than 30 minutes

EFM

Injection and detection

Min. force gradient

Modelling

Charge estimation

Limits

Dynamic force curves

Coupling to higher modes

Analytical treatment

+ Electrostatic interaction

Charging experiments

SiO_2 layer

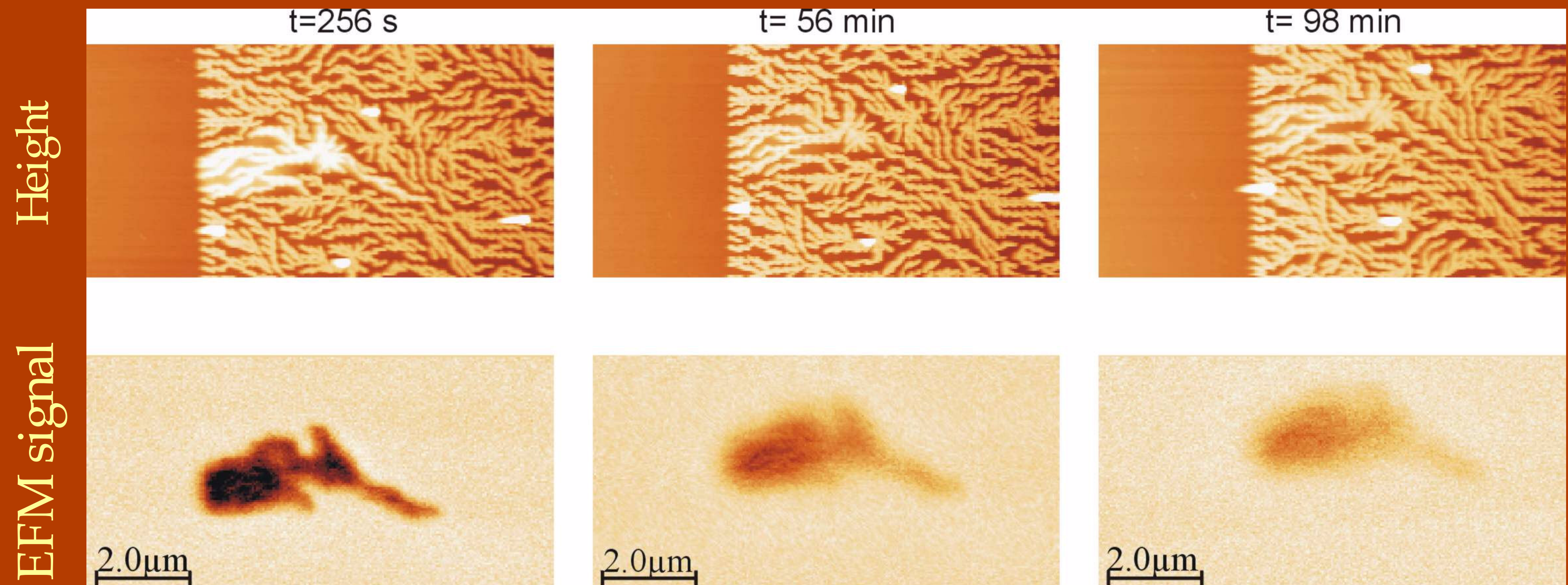
Si-nanocrystals in SiO_2

Lithography Si- nanostruc.

De-charging of the ramified structures

Thin oxide (7 nm)

Charging conditions: -10 V/ 10 s



Homogeneous de-charging of the structure, although 7 nm of oxide prevent direct tunneling ⇒ De-charging mechanisms?

Strong repulsion between the electrons
(electronic density is high: ~10^{17} cm^{-3})

Existence of a Wigner crystal
=
ordering of the electrons on a regular lattice?

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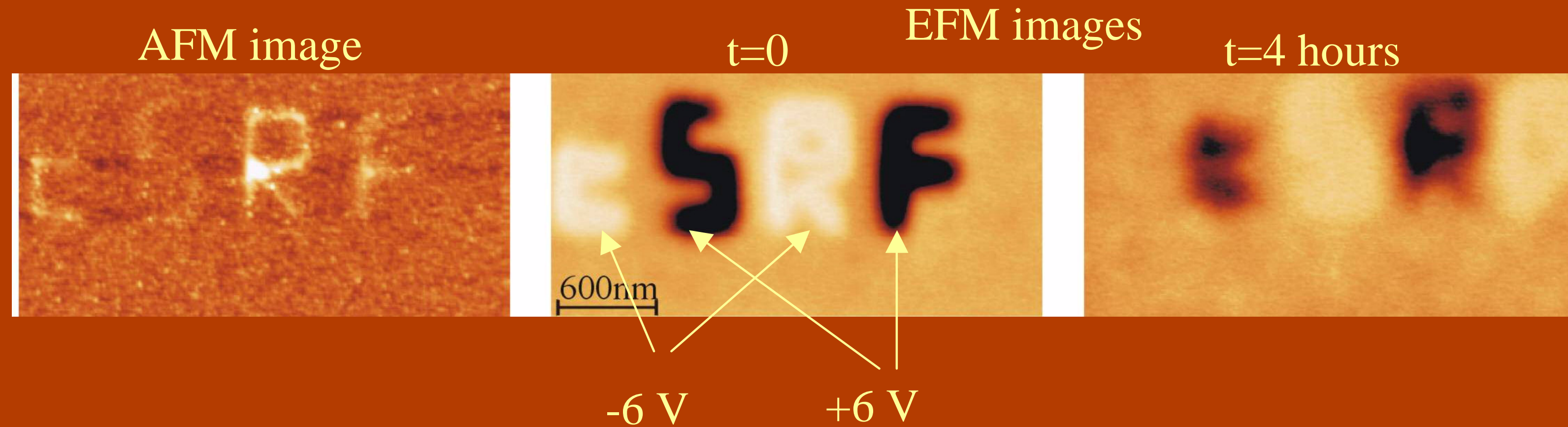
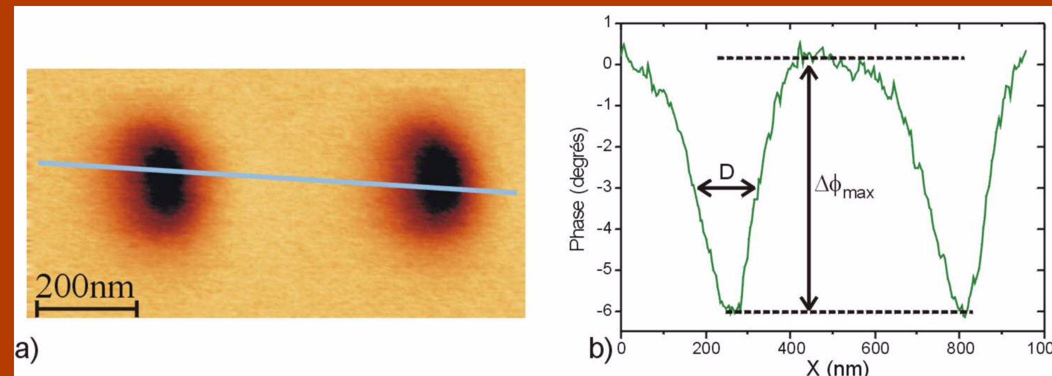
Silicon nanocrystals embedded in SiO_2

Sample E3: strongly confining behavior

Si = 6 %
SiO_2 = 94 %



→ Very long retention time



Circular shape of injected charges that does not evolve in time
Estimation of **one electron per nanocrystal**

Conclusion

Electrostastic Force Microscopy in dry atmosphere:

- ✓ Powerful method to characterize electrical properties at the nanoscale
- ✓ Charge resolution: a few tens elementary charges
- ✓ Analysis of the non-linear tip-sample interaction

Semiconducting nanostructures:

- ✓ Reference SiO_2 sample shows low charge retention and low charge density
- ✓ Collective behavior of Si-nanocrystals show 3 regimes:
  - metallic
  - intermediate: observable spreading
  - confining
- ✓ Individual behavior of Si-nanostructures

Perspectives:

Need for better resolution (charge, drift)

future experiments under vacuum, low temperatures
= single electron detection

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