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PROGRESS REVIEW

From bits to biometrics: sustainable hacking of optical storage technologies for atomic force microscopy and medical applications

Hsien-Shun Liao[1*], Jen-Hung Wang[2], Ing-Shouh Hwang[3], Hans Ulrich Danzebrink[4], Takayuki Uchihashi[5], Kuang-Yuh Huang[1], and Edwin En-Te Hwu[2*]

[1]*Department of Mechanical Engineering, National Taiwan University 106319 Taipei, Taiwan*
[2]*MIDAS Research Group, Department of Health Technology, Technical University of Denmark, 2800 Lyngby, Denmark*
[3]*Institute of Physics, Academia Sinica, Nangang 115201, Taiwan*
[4]*Physikalisch-Technische Bundesanstalt (PTB), Bundesallee 100, 38116 Braunschweig, Germany*
[5]*Department of Physics, Graduate School of Science, Nagoya University 464-8602, Aichi, Japan*

*E-mail: liaohs@ntu.edu.tw; etehw@dtu.dk

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This article showcases how optical pickup units, a type of optical data storage technology, can be sustainably hacked for advanced applications in atomic force microscopy (AFM) and medical diagnostics. The evolution of these technologies from compact discs to Blu-ray is discussed, and their creative applications in high-precision, cost-effective scientific tools are detailed. The transition from data storage to nanoscale imaging has implications for skin nanotexture biometrics, as demonstrated by the example of high-speed dermal AFM for dermatological analysis. Although several technical challenges arise, this approach can have considerable economic and educational benefits and future possibilities, including integration with internet of things and artificial intelligence for stronger functionality. Innovation grounded in hacking can democratize scientific exploration, promote sustainable research, and advance precision medicine, thereby creating a new paradigm for the development of scientific instrumentation.

1. Introduction

The evolution of optical storage technology[1,2] has been driven by considerable infrastructural investment and continual innovation. Initially designed for data storage, optical storage technology has achieved remarkable precision and durability through billions of USD in development investment. From the simple yet revolutionary compact disks (CDs) that emerged in the 1980s[3] to the more recent creation of high-capacity, high-resolution Blu-ray disks,[4] technological innovation has not only transformed data archiving but also laid a foundation for unexpected scientific applications.

Scientific fields, particularly health care, require tools that offer high precision without high cost or operational complexity. Challenges persist in ensuring that such tools are accessible to a broad audience, including researchers in developing countries or smaller educational institutions, where budget constraints are major barriers.

Traditional atomic force microscopy (AFM) systems,[5,6] known for their nanoscale imaging capabilities, are often prohibitively expensive and operating and maintaining them requires specialized knowledge. These characteristics restrict the use of AFM systems to well-funded labs, leaving a gap in the market for more accessible, yet equally effective, imaging solutions.

In this review, we explore how optical storage technologies, specifically optical pickup units (OPUs), can be sustainably upcycled (hacked) for innovative uses in various fields. We evaluate how the gap between cost, accessibility, and performance in nanoscale imaging can be bridged by hacking these mass-produced, precision-engineered components. Our research illustrates how this sustainable approach can democratize access to advanced microscopy, further medical diagnostics, and foster innovation in an environmentally and economically responsible manner.

2. Evolution of optical storage technology

The development of optical storage began with the introduction of CDs in the 1980s, which revolutionized data storage methods through their storage capacity of approximately 700 MB.[7] This capacity was doubled with the leap to digital video disks (DVDs) in the late 1990s, which are read using red lasers (a shorter wavelength than used for reading a CD) for enhanced precision.[8] Blu-ray technology, developed in the 2000s and using blue-violet lasers (for a further wavelength reduction), had storage density of up to 25 GB per layer.[9] These advancements not only increased data capacity but also improved reading precision and media durability, with Blu-ray disks designed to last up to 100 years.[10] The shift to higher-precision lasers also facilitated better error correction, improving overall data integrity and system reliability.

The optical storage industry has received billions of USD in investment, resulting in robust manufacturing and research infrastructure, including sophisticated production lines, extensive research and development in the fields of materials science and laser technology, and global distribution networks. This infrastructure has facilitated the mass production of high-quality components and created a vast reservoir of technology that can be upcycled. For instance, the OPUs from optical storage systems, designed for precise data reading, have been innovatively adapted for use in scientific instruments,[11] specifically AFM,[12–22] providing a cost-effective alternative to custom components. The longevity and maintenance networks of optical storage technologies further enable the use of these technologies in such applications, making this a model for sustainable technology use in science.

3. Theoretical foundation: hacking optical pickup units (OPUs)

In this paper, "hacking" is defined as the innovative upcycling of existing technologies for novel applications

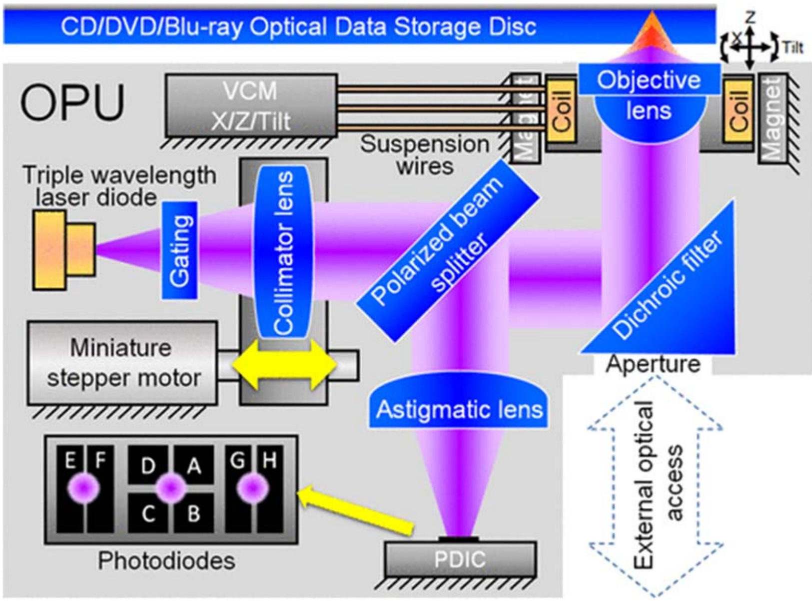


Fig. 1. Detailed schematic of CD/DVD/Blu-ray OPU. A triple-wavelength laser diode emits light at 780, 650, and 405 nm, providing versatility for different optical storage technologies. The laser beam first passes through a gating mechanism for modulation and then through a collimator lens to ensure the beam is parallel. The beam then reaches the voice coil motor (VCM) for precise X, Z, and tilt adjustments. An objective lens, supported by a coil and magnet system, focuses this beam onto an optical data storage disc. A polarized beam splitter and a dichroic filter manage the beam's polarization and wavelength selection. The astigmatic lens introduces a deliberate distortion to detect cantilever displacement with high sensitivity. Suspension wires provide mechanical support and electrical signal for the coils, and a miniature stepper motor aids positioning. The reflected light is detected by an array of photodiodes (labeled A–H), the signals of which are processed for analysis by a photodiode integrated circuit. An external optical access point allows for additional integration to ensure adaptability.[11]

not included in their original design intent. This approach involves taking advantage of the precision, reliability, and cost-effectiveness of mass-produced components such as OPUs, originally developed for reading CD, DVD, and Blu-ray data. A schematic of a CD/DVD/Blu-ray OPU is illustrated in Fig. 1. Researchers can adapt these units to create high-precision tools at a fraction of the usual cost (5–10 USD per OPU), thereby increasing the accessibility of AFM and other sophisticated technologies and fostering innovation through sustainability and resourcefulness.

OPUs focus a laser beam onto a disc to read the data encoded on its surface. The core of this technology is the astigmatic detection method,[23] which is pivotal for AFM applications. OPU technologies can be upcycled as follows (Fig. 2):

- Laser emission: A laser diode within the OPU emits a coherent beam of light, which can then be collimated to ensure the beam remains parallel before it is focused through an objective lens onto the cantilever of an AFM probe.
- Astigmatism: The light reflected off the cantilever passes through a beam splitter and an astigmatic lens. This lens introduces astigmatism to the beam, changing the shape of the laser spot on the basis of the position of the cantilever relative to the focal point of the lens. This interaction is crucial for detecting minute deflections of the cantilever.
- Detection: The altered laser beam falls onto a quadrant photodetector. The distribution of light across the quadrants changes with the movement of the cantilever, providing a signal proportional to the displacement.
- Signal processing: Signals from the photodetector quadrants are processed to generate a focus error signal (FES), which is defined as $(S_A + S_C) - (S_B + S_D)$, where $S_A - S_D$ are the preamplifier output voltages of photo elements A–D, respectively. This signal is used to measure the deflection of the cantilever with subnanometer precision, which is essential for nanoscale imaging in AFM. The difference in the signals from the quadrants provides an FES,[24] which indicates the position of the cantilever with subnanometer sensitivity.

The hacking of OPUs began with pioneering work on the use of CD/DVD pickup heads in AFM cantilever displacement measurement,[23,24,26,27] optical profilometry,[28–30] and ultra-wide-range force sensing[31] and has since expanded to biomedical applications, such as nanomechanical biomarker recognition[32–38] and molecular scale analysis.[39,40]

Leveraging the high precision of OPUs enables researchers to obtain a cost-effective, accessible alternative to traditional AFM systems, demonstrating the potential applications of hacking in scientific instrumentation.

4. High-resolution on budget: comparing traditional and OPU based AFM systems

In 2006, researchers first demonstrated that CD/DVD OPUs could be used in AFM to measure cantilever displacement with sub-nanoscale precision.[41] This pioneering research included the first proof-of-concept demonstrating that CD/DVD pickups could resolve single atomic steps on graphite surfaces with a rms noise level of 0.064 nm. Subsequent studies replicated similar noise levels ranging (0.04–0.06 nm) in topographic images using varied setups and control electronics,[12,27] showcasing the potential of these OPUs for nanoscale imaging. However, OPU-based AFMs face challenges analogous to those encountered in commercial AFM systems, particularly thermal drift arising from ambient

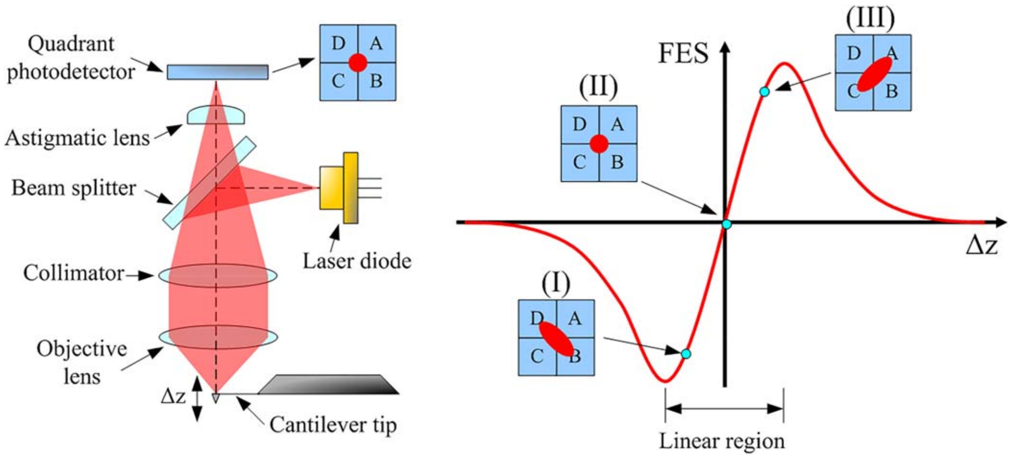


Fig. 2. Schematic of and experimental data on the optical setup and detection system used in DVD-OPU-based AFM. The left side illustrates the optical path, in which the laser diode emits light that passes through a beam splitter, collimator, and objective lens before being focused on the cantilever. The light reflected by the cantilever passes through an astigmatic lens and is then directed toward a quadrant photodetector. The right side presents the S-curve for the relationship of the FES versus the cantilever displacement Δz. Three key regions are marked: (I), where the laser spot is misaligned; (II), the optimal linear region for AFM operation; and (III), another misaligned region. The corresponding positions of the laser spot in the quadrants (A, B, C, D) are shown for each region to demonstrate how the system detects cantilever displacement with high precision.[25] Previous studies have quantified the noise performance of DVD-based OPUs,[26,27] demonstrating root-mean-square (rms) noise levels in the FES spanning 0.047 nm (with a 10 kHz low-pass filter) to 0.53 nm (unfiltered). Notably, the noise floor of OPU systems is inherently modulated by the low-pass filter of the OPU amplifier, reflecting a fundamental tradeoff between measurement bandwidth and noise suppression.

temperature fluctuations and internal heat generation within the OPU. The FES, which measures the displacement of the AFM cantilever tip, exhibits pronounced sensitivity to thermal variations. To address this issue, an anti-drift mechanism was implemented by utilizing the VCM of the OPU to actively compensate for signal drift.[21] This approach can effectively stabilize the FES and eliminate the need for a prolonged warm-up period. These proof-of-concept studies opened new avenues for affordable AFM solutions that leverage the widespread availability and low cost of CD/DVD OPUs.

Hacking OPUs for AFM applications enables the creative upcycling of mass-produced technology for unintended but highly beneficial uses in research and education. To illustrate this concept, we present a comparative analysis of two AFM systems (Fig. 3): the Bruker Icon AFM[19] and the Strømlinet Nano DIY AFM, which uses a DVD OPU.[42]

The Bruker Icon AFM is a standard, high-end system designed for advanced research needs. This AFM features a large, enclosed structure to minimize environmental interference and is equipped with vibration isolation systems, dedicated control units, and monitors. This setup reflects those used in traditional AFM systems, which are typically stationary, requiring a stable laboratory environment. Specialized training is necessary to operate the Bruker Icon AFM due to its complex, comprehensive software suite offering multiple scanning modes and high levels of automation. The precision and resolution of this system are optimized for cutting-edge research in materials science, biology, and physics. Maintenance is typically performed through professional service contracts.

The Strømlinet Nano DIY AFM represents an innovative application of DVD OPU technology to create an AFM system. The compact setup with a minimalist design primarily consists of an AFM core and printed circuit board based structure/wiring, which ensures that the system is portable and adaptable to various environments. The cost of this system is considerably lower than that of traditional AFM systems, making it an attractive option for educational institutions, small laboratories, and citizen science projects.

The OPU-based AFM demonstrates significant potential for high-speed imaging due to its inherent advantages of small laser spot size and high bandwidth. Previous studies have shown that the DVD OPU-based AFM can utilize small cantilevers with resonant frequencies up to 5.5 MHz,[15,44] enabling dynamic imaging of nanobubble formation using a cantilever with a resonant frequency of 1.05 MHz in water.[45]

Recent developments in Blu-ray technology have brought considerable improvements in optical data storage. Wavelength lasers are shorter in Blu-ray OPUs (405 nm) than in DVD OPUs (655 nm), resulting in a smaller spot size, which corresponds to higher resolution (Fig. 4). The advance from DVD to Blu-ray has facilitated high-speed AFM (HS-AFM) scanning that retains or even improves image quality. These improvements have expanded applications of OPU-based systems even further[11] including to micro/nanoscale 3D printing,[46,47] solar cell characterization,[48,49] microelectromechanical system monitoring,[50] and high-throughput biosensing.[51–54] The adaptation of Blu-ray OPUs for HS-AFM represents a major leap in the field of nanoscale imaging.

The architecture of the HS-AFM system incorporating a Blu-ray OPU [Fig. 5(a)] includes a high-speed scanner, Blu-ray OPU(SF-BC620L, SANYO), and optical microscope used for alignment. This design ensures that the system can achieve a high resonance frequency of 500 kHz and a low spring constant of 0.1–0.2 N m^{-1} with small cantilever dimensions (7–10 μm in length, 2 μm in width), enabling ideal biomolecule imaging. Figure 5(b) displays the precise focus of the Blu-ray laser through the objective lens onto the AFM probe, highlighting the submicrometer precision achievable with this technology. The alignment of the laser spot with the AFM probe, illustrated in Fig. 5(c), is critical for system operation because it enables the high-bandwidth detection necessary for capturing rapid dynamic processes.

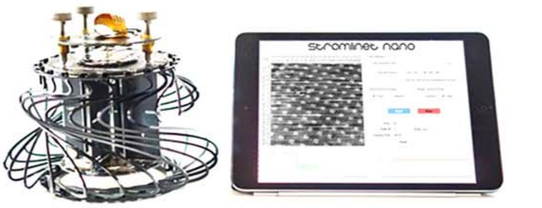
Feature/AFM systems	 **Bruker Icon AFM**	 **Strømlinet Nano DIY AFM using DVD OPU**
Setup	Large, enclosed structure with superior acoustic, airflow and vibration isolation	Compact, open framework design with embedded vibration isolation
Size and Portability	Bulky, stationary, requires lab environment	Small, portable, adaptable to various environments
Mechanical Framework	Low thermal expansion metal framework	Epoxy resin reinforced with woven glass fibre-based circuit board
Control Interface	Specialized software on integrated computer	Basic scanning operation, minimum adjustment parameters.
Operation Complexity	High; requires training, offers complex operations and multiple scanning modes	Low; more intuitive, fewer advanced features
Cost	300,000 to 500,000 USD	3,000 to 4,000 USD
Resolution	Z: Better than 0.1 nm; X-Y: Better than 1 nm.	Z: Better than 0.5 nm; X-Y: Better than 39 nm. (Original controller) [43] Z: Better than 0.2 nm; X-Y: Better than 12 nm. (External controller) [60]
Noise Floor	0.03 nm (RMS)	0.064 nm[41], 0.06 nm [12], and 0.047 nm[27] (RMS)
Mechanical Thermal Drift	X and Y direction, Less than 0.2 nm (metal framework)	N/A
Automation	High level for tip-sample approach, scanning modes, etc.	Manual tip-sample approach control
User Training	Specialized training due to functionality and complexity	Online YouTube tutorial videos
Applications	Advanced research in materials science, biology, physics	Education, small labs, citizen science
Data analysis	Advanced analysis tools for own format data	Third party opensource software (such as Gwyddion, PyFMLab, nanoAFMr, SpectraFox)
Maintenance	Professional maintenance required, with service contracts	User-maintained, requires basic knowledge of circuits

Fig. 3. Comparison of a standard AFM setup and one incorporating an OPU. The table outlines key differences. The Bruker Icon AFM[19] is a traditional, high-end AFM system with a large, enclosed structure, equipping environmental isolation and dedicated control units. By contrast, the Strømlinet Nano DIY AFM[43] is a compact, cost-effective solution with a minimalist setup. This comparison highlights how optical storage technology can be upcycled for scientific applications to achieve a tradeoff between performance, accessibility, and sustainability.

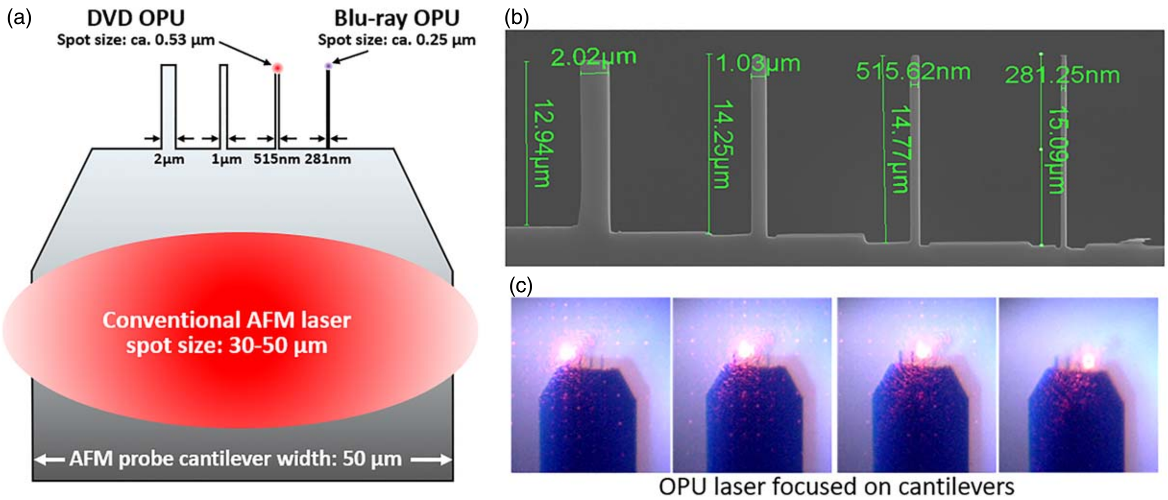


Fig. 4. Laser spot sizes for different AFM systems. (a) Diagram of relative laser spot sizes in DVD (~0.53 µm), Blu-ray (~0.25 µm), and commercial AFM (30–50 µm) lasers, all compared with an AFM probe cantilever width of 50 µm. (b) Top view of micro-and nanoscale cantilevers cut by focus ion beam. (c) Series of optical images displaying the precise focusing of OPU lasers on cantilevers, demonstrating the practical applications of these technologies for high-speed imaging in AFM.[55] Technical specifications indicate that DVD/Blu-ray OPUs theoretically achieve bandwidths exceeding 100 MHz.[11] However, it is important to clarify that the practical, usable bandwidth is primarily constrained by the low-pass filter in the OPU amplifier circuit. This limitation represents a deliberate design choice that balances bandwidth against noise level.

Figure 5(d) demonstrates the system's high-speed imaging capability. An image of the molecular chaperon GroEL protein adsorbed on a mica substrate in buffer solution was captured at resolution of $500 \times 500\ \mathrm{nm}^2$ with 250×250 pixels and a speed of 2 frames s^{-1}. The ability to capture images at high speed and resolution indicates the potential of Blu-ray OPU technology for advancing HS-AFM applications, particularly for imaging in environments that traditional AFM systems might find challenging due to larger laser spots. The integration of Blu-ray technology into HS-AFM systems not only reduces costs but also increases accessibility for various applications.

In addition to HS-AFM applications, the following detailed cases illustrate the effective implementation of OPU-based AFM technology:

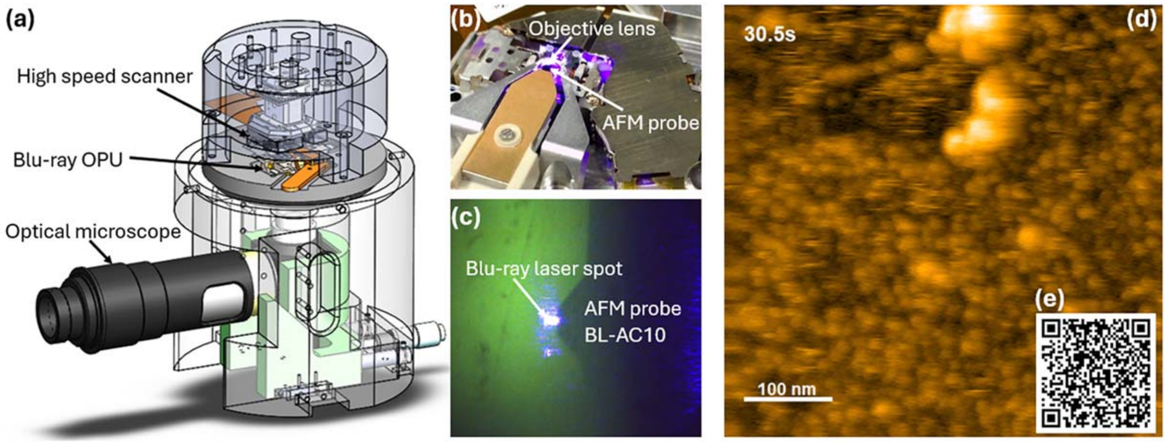


Fig. 5. Overview of HS-AFM system integrating a Blu-ray OPU. (a) Schematic of an HS-AFM setup, illustrating the integration of a high-speed scanner, Blu-ray OPU, and optical microscope for precise alignment and operation. (b) Close-up view of the objective lens focusing the Blu-ray laser onto the AFM probe to achieve high-resolution imaging. (c) Alignment of the Blu-ray laser spot and AFM probe (BL-AC10), ensuring accurate displacement detection. (d) HS-AFM image of proteins on a mica substrate, acquired at an imaging rate of 2 frames s^{-1}, demonstrating the capability of the system for rapid and detailed nanoscale imaging in a liquid environment. (e) QR code that can be scanned to view a video demonstration of the HS-AFM based on Blu-ray OPU in operation, showing real-time imaging capabilities and the dynamic interaction between the AFM probe and sample surface.[56]

- Educational applications: Schools and universities have implemented OPU-based AFM for educational purposes, enabling students to explore nanotechnology concepts at a considerably reduced cost.[57]
- DIY science: Crowdsourced air pollution monitoring and other citizen science projects using DIY AFM setups with OPUs have demonstrated how this technology can be scaled for environmental science.[20]
- Skin nanotexture biometrics analysis: High-speed dermal AFM (HS-DAFM) for noninvasive skin analysis is a cost-effective solution for large-scale medical nanoscopy and has notable implications for personalized medicine. This system has detailed topographical mapping capabilities and substantially lower operational costs compared with other systems.

5. Skin nanotexture biometrics

Regarding skin health diagnostics, HS-DAFM (Fig. 6) enables detailed nanotexture analysis of the stratum corneum (SC).[58,59] An OPU-based system can rapidly produce images of skin surface nanoscale morphology to assess dermatological conditions. Through analysis of nanoscale SC textures, HS-DAFM provides insights into the skin's barrier function and hydration level and indicators of disease progression or treatment efficacy. This approach can enable practitioners to better understand and manage skin conditions such as atopic dermatitis.

The technology underlying HS-DAFM enables noninvasive sample collection that can be performed by patients at home by using simple tape strips.[58] This approach eliminates the necessity of clinical visits for routine monitoring, allowing longitudinal studies on skin health to be conducted remotely. Patients can post mail their samples for analysis, which represents a scalable method for monitoring chronic conditions or assessing the effects of environmental factors on skin health over time. This feature increases convenience for patients, reduces health-care costs, and alleviates the burden on medical facilities.

The precision of HS-DAFM in analyzing skin at the nanoscale level paves the way for advancements in personalized medicine, as illustrated in Fig. 7. Greater understanding of specific nanotexture patterns and surface characteristics in SC samples can enable the tailoring of treatments to individual biological profiles.[61] For instance, unique nanotexture patterns can provide insights into a patient's response to certain topical treatments or indicate the necessity for a personalized skincare formulation. This understanding can enable clinicians to design therapies aligned with a patient's unique skin characteristics, thereby improving treatment efficacy and minimizing potential side effects.

6. Sustainable research and development

Sustainable technology used in scientific research involves leveraging existing infrastructure to minimize resource expenditure while maximizing scientific output. Hacking OPUs or other components from optical storage devices for AFM applications can considerably reduce resource use (encompassing energy, materials, effort, and time) for high-precision instruments. This approach increases both the financial viability and environmental sustainability of scientific research by reducing the necessity for newly manufactured items, thus also lowering the carbon footprint associated with the production of specialized equipment. Educational institutions can use readily available, mass-produced components to engage in teaching and cutting-edge research without prohibitive natural resource requirements.

Hacking approaches that incorporate the hacking of commercial technology for scientific applications democratize science by broadening access to high-tech instruments.[47,63–67] Globally, such initiative enables researchers in less affluent regions or in academic settings with limited resources to engage in high-quality nanoscale research. Traditional AFM systems, given their high price and complexity, are typically only available to well-funded laboratories. OPUs give a wider array of researchers access to these capabilities, fostering inclusivity (more diverse groups can contribute to scientific discovery) and innovation (creative problem-solving and new technological adaptations).

The proliferation of sustainable, democratized practices can increase participation in citizen science and community-

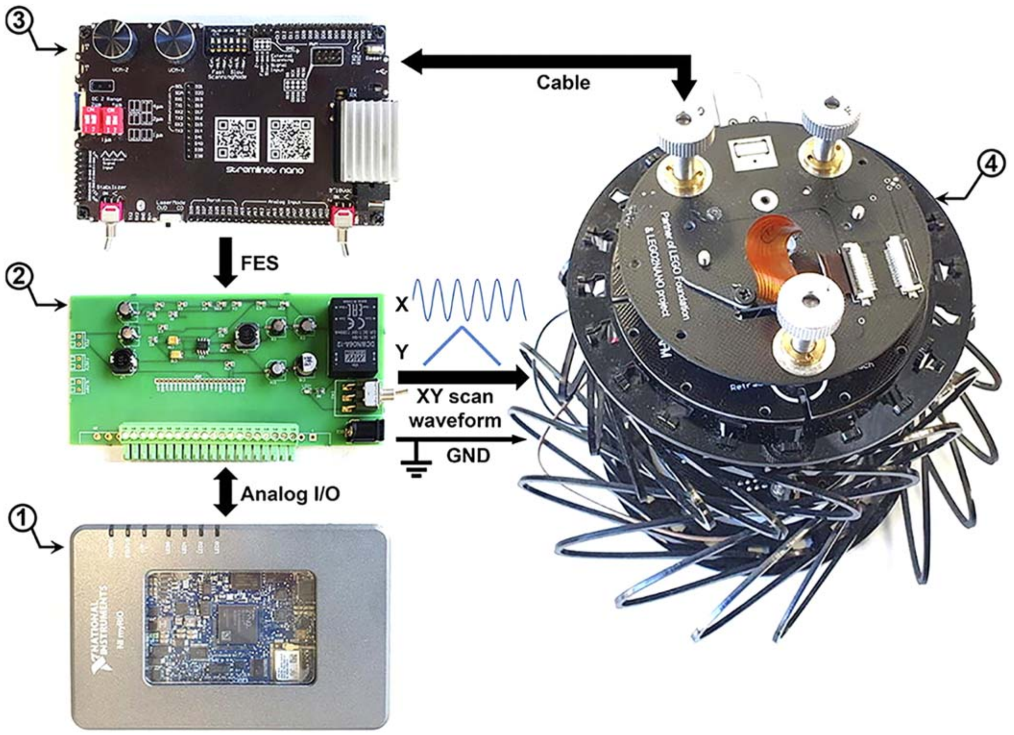


Fig. 6. Overview of HS-DAFM setup for skin corneocyte nanotexture imaging: (1) Open-source controller (myRIO-1900, NI), which generates XY scan waveforms and manages analog input–output for high-speed scanning. (2) Open-source buffer circuit, which amplifies scanning signals to ensure the delivery of sufficient power to the AFM scanner. (3) Simplified AFM controller, which interfaces with the AFM head to provide the FES for precise tip–sample interaction monitoring. (4) Simplified AFM device, including the head and supporting structure, which monitors cantilever deflection through an OPU, enabling detailed nanotexture analysis of human skin corneocytes with high speed and resolution.[60]

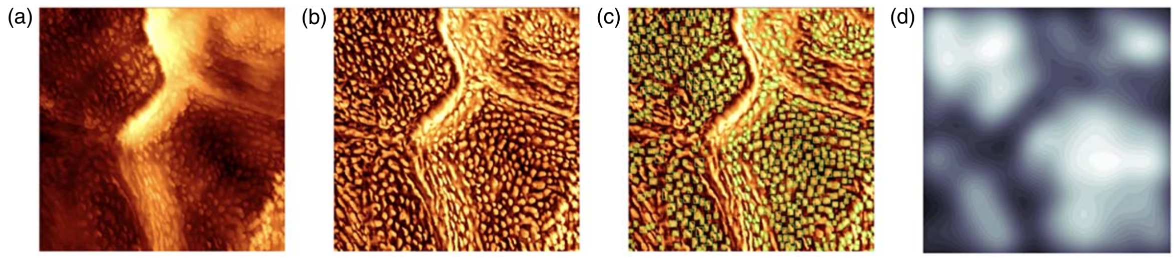


Fig. 7. Application of deep learning and spatial analysis as a noninvasive tool for detection of SC nanotexture features in the skin barrier. (a) Raw SC image captured using HS-DAFM. (b) Enhanced SC image with greater visibility of nanoscale features. (c) Detection of nanoscale features through an object detection framework based on deep learning. (d) Calculation of the effective corneocyte topographical index by using a spatial analysis algorithm.[62]

based research, where individuals outside traditional academic circles engage in scientific inquiry, enriching the global scientific community with diverse perspectives and solutions.

7. Challenges and limitations

Maintaining the high level of precision required for scientific applications represents a major challenge in the upcycling of OPUs for use in AFM. Given that OPUs were originally engineered to read data with nanometer accuracy, adapting them for AFM may involve overcoming the following barriers:

- Precision in diverse environments: Some scientific or medical diagnostic applications may require additional functionalities or specific environmental controls not easily achievable using hacked components, such as operation under extreme conditions or integrated chemical sensing capabilities. Moreover, because OPUs were not originally designed to accommodate variability in scientific applications, ensuring consistent performance across various temperatures and humidity levels remains challenging. For instance, the objective lens in the OPU is mounted on a VCM with low stiffness, rendering it sensitive to ambient vibrations. The VCM can also be used to compensate for thermal drift when integrated with an anti-drift auto-alignment mechanism.[21]
- Component quality and calibration: OPU quality can substantially affect performance. Researchers must balance selection of the highest-quality units, such as OPUs for car entertainment systems, with keeping costs low. Even Blu-ray technology may not achieve the resolution of specialized, high-end AFM systems. This limitation is particularly relevant in fields requiring the highest precision, such as certain types of materials science and quantum research. Furthermore, AFM accuracy depends strongly on calibration. OPUs may require additional calibration measures to account for manufacturing variability or wear, which could introduce complexities relating to the maintenance of

accuracy. Conversely, OPUs can be used to calibrate other precision systems, such as AFM scanners, through integration with a closed-loop nanopositioner.[68]

- System integration: OPUs must be integrated carefully into AFM systems to avoid compromising the overall systems' performance. Optical path stability, feedback control systems, and mechanical robustness must be accounted for. Additionally, OPU optics have very short working distance. In particular, Blu-ray OPU objective lens has a working distance of only a few hundred micrometers. Therefore, mechanical structures, such as AFM probe holders, must be carefully designed to maintain stiffness and avoid mechanical interference. Moreover, for applications demanding operation in extreme environments (e.g. vacuum, cryogenic, or elevated temperatures), the short working distance necessitates placing the OPU within the controlled environment. This constraint introduces practical challenges compared to alternative cantilever measurement methods such as optical fiber or parallel laser beam approaches.
- Phototoxicity: Blue-violet wavelength lasers pose significant phototoxic risks to live-cell specimens during imaging, with effects contingent upon dosage and exposure duration.[11] For researchers utilizing Blu-ray OPU-based systems with biological specimens, rigorous safety protocols are essential. First, laser power should be carefully calibrated and maintained at the minimum level required for adequate signal detection. Second, exposure duration should be optimized to minimize cumulative photodamage while still achieving necessary imaging resolution. Third, researchers should conduct preliminary viability assessments with their specific biological specimens to determine appropriate exposure thresholds. It is worth noting that in certain applications, such as imaging skin nanotexture for biometrics extraction, these concerns are mitigated since the SC consists of dead cells that are not susceptible to the phototoxic effects of the 405 nm Blu-ray laser. However, for live-cell imaging or other sensitive biological applications, safety considerations become paramount.

These challenges necessitate ongoing research and development for technological refinement while ensuring affordability and accessibility. As data storage technology continues to advance, older OPU models may become obsolete, reducing the availability of replacement parts. Conversely, the global demand for cold data storage is rapidly increasing, resulting in various methods of innovative technical development and creating future opportunities for sustainable hacking.[69–73]

8. Conclusion

In this review, we explore how optical storage technology, such as OPUs from CDs, DVDs, and Blu-ray systems, can be sustainably hacked for nanoscale imaging and medical diagnostics, exemplifying eco-friendly scientific practices. By adapting these widely available consumer technologies for AFM, researchers can tackle new scientific challenges without significant financial investment, simultaneously alleviating economic pressures and minimizing environmental impact. This hacking initiative highlights the potential of precision-engineered consumer products to serve as high-precision scientific instruments, enhancing the sustainability of research efforts.

Through such innovative approaches, advanced technologies become more accessible at a reduced cost, enabling scientific exploration in resource-limited settings and encouraging creative problem-solving within the research community. This increased accessibility democratizes tools such as AFM, leveling the playing field so that a broader range of scientists can participate in cutting-edge studies. As a result, a more inclusive scientific discourse emerges, fostering unexpected collaborations across disciplines and geographic regions.

Beyond research, making nanotechnology tools more affordable and approachable opens significant opportunities for science education. Students gain hands-on experience with theoretical concepts, which could ignite interest in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) among diverse groups. In the medical field, these hacked technologies pave the way for personalized diagnostics and treatments by providing nanoscale insights, particularly in dermatology areas that rely on molecular-level tissue analysis. Additionally, they support the expansion of telemedicine by offering remote health monitoring solutions, potentially transforming health-care delivery in underserved areas.

This emerging field of technology hacking not only broadens the scientific applications of commercial tools but also aligns with global sustainability goals. By promoting inclusivity in education and equitable access to health-care innovations, the sustainable hacking initiative establishes a forward-thinking model for future scientific advancements.

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ORCID iDs

Hsien-Shun Liao https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1338-0332
Jen-Hung Wang https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9214-5837
Takayuki Uchihashi https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0263-5312

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