



Thin-film organic semiconductor devices: from flexibility to ultraflexibility

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ABSTRACT Flexible thin-film organic semiconductor devices have received wide attention due to favorable properties such as light-weight, flexibility, reproducible semiconductor resources, easy tuning of functional properties via molecular tailoring, and low cost large-area solution-procession. Among them, ultraflexible electronics, usually with minimum bending radius of less than 1 mm, are essential for the development of epidermal and bio-implanted electronics, wearable electronics, collapsible and portable electronics, three dimensional (3D) surface compliant electronics, and bionics. This review firstly gives a brief introduction of development from flexible to ultraflexible organic semiconductor electronics, and design of ultraflexible devices, then summarizes the recent advances in ultraflexible thin-film organic semiconductor devices, focusing on organic field effect transistors, organic light-emitting diodes, organic solar cells and organic memory devices.

Keywords: flexible electronics, organic field effect transistors, organic light-emitting diodes, organic solar cells, organic memory devices

INTRODUCTION

Organic electronics have received increasing attention due to favorable properties such as light-weight, flexibility, reproducible semiconductor resources, easy tuning of properties via molecular modification, and, most importantly, low cost, high throughput and large-area solution-processable fabrication techniques which are compatible with screen printing, ink jet printing and roll-to-roll coating techniques. Organic functional electronic devices, employing organic small molecule or polymer-based active semiconductors, mainly include

organic field effect transistors (OFETs), organic light-emitting diodes (OLEDs), organic solar cells (OSCs), organic memory devices (OMDs), and so on. The active semiconductors can be organic channel materials for OFETs, organic light-emitting materials for OLEDs, organic photoactive materials for OSCs, organic memory materials for OMDs. To date, great improvements have been made for achieving high performance that is comparable to their inorganic counterparts [1–18].

However, most of these flexible devices exhibit minimum bending radius (R_b) of more than 1 mm, which easily causes bending-induced damages unless carefully protected. This significantly limits their practical applications for requirements of high durability and robustness such as intensely packed collapsible and portable electronics, wearable electronics, epidermal and bio-implanted electronics, and mechanically three dimensional (3D) surface compliant in-door and out-door devices, and bionics [19–27]. For such applications, ultraflexibility ($R_b \leq 1$ mm), for intimate conformabilities with the surfaces of arbitrary complex-shaped static and moving objects, is required so that the devices can survive repeated crumpling, creasing, sharp folding, or even stretching.

In this review, the development from flexible to ultraflexible organic semiconductor electronics, and design of ultraflexible devices were firstly introduced briefly. Then, the recent advances of ultraflexible functional electronic devices based on organic semiconductors were summarized, focusing on OFETs, OSCs, OLEDs and OMDs. Some of the significant developments were depicted in Fig. 1. Other ultraflexible electronic devices, utilizing one or more organic

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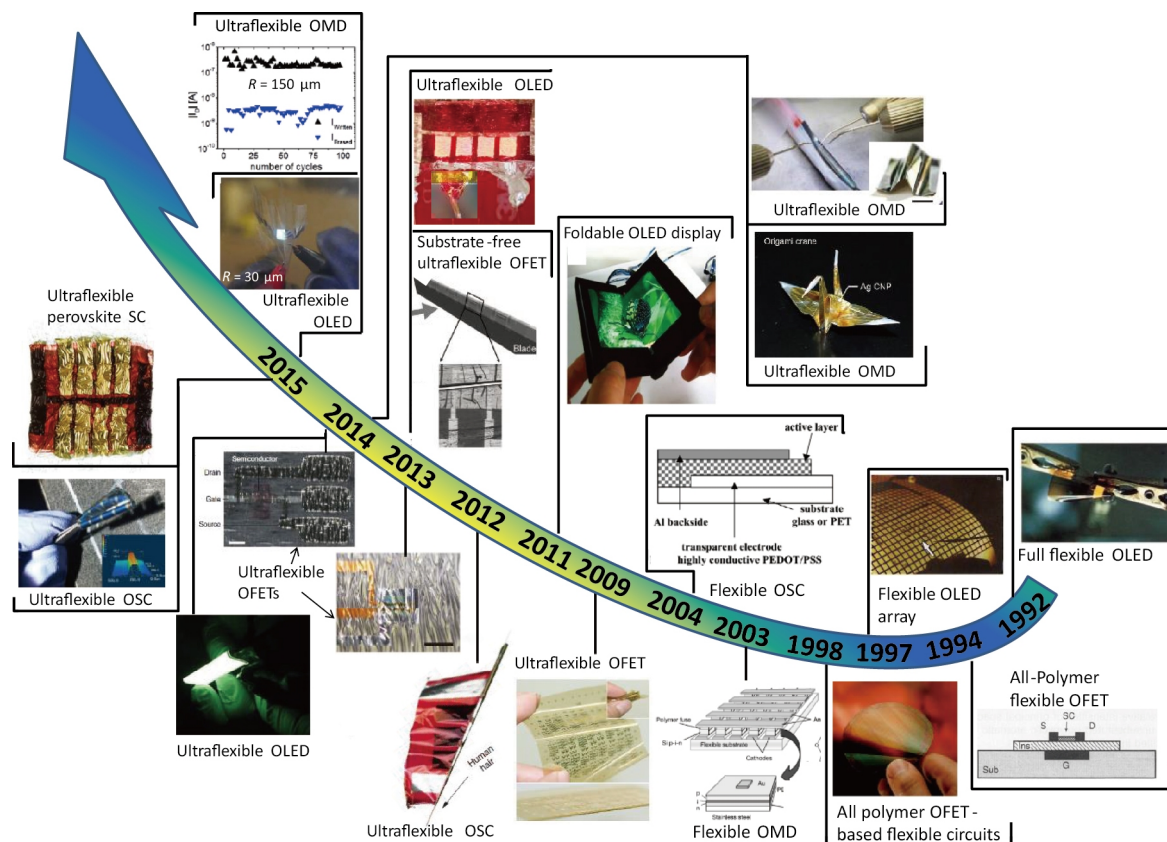


Figure 1 The development from flexible to ultraflexible organic semiconductor devices (OLED: organic light-emitting diode, OFET: organic field effect transistor; OSC: organic solar cell; OMD: organic memory device).

elements, such as sensors [28,29] and organic electrochemical transistor [30], are not included here, and interested readers are directed to other excellent articles on these subjects.

DEVELOPMENT FROM FLEXIBLE TO ULTRAFLEXIBLE ORGANIC SEMICONDUCTOR ELECTRONICS

Brief history of flexible organic semiconductor devices

Since Heeger's group [31] developed the first full flexible polymer-based OLED on polyethylene terephthalate (PET) substrate in 1992, flexible organic semiconductor electronics have widely received great attentions in scientific communities. In 1994, the first all polymer flexible OFET was developed by Garnier and coworkers [32] using printing techniques. Based on this, flexible OLED array [33] and circuit matrix [34] have been reported, respectively. In 2003, the first organic write-once read-many-times memory device was demonstrated by Forrest's group [35]. In 2004, Aernouts and coworkers [36] used highly conductive

poly(3, 4-ethylenedioxythiophene)/poly(4-styrenesulfonate) (PEDOT:PSS) as a flexible transparent anode to fabricate flexible organic solar cell modules. In the last decades, high-performance flexible organic semiconductor devices have been continually pursued by scientific communities [16,37–48]. For example, OLEDs with external quantum efficiency (EQE) of >30% for blue [1–4] and green [5–9] emitting devices, and >20% for red [49] emitting devices, OSCs [10,11] and organic-inorganic hybrid perovskite solar cells [12] with power current efficiency (PCE) of >10% and 20%, respectively, OFETs with mobility of several tens $\text{cm}^2 \text{V}^{-1} \text{s}^{-1}$ [13,14] and OMDs with high densities, high on/off ratios, fast response and long durability [15–18] have been reported.

Design of flexible organic semiconductor devices

Flexible device configurations

To fabricate flexible devices, utilization of the thin-film flexible substrates and/or electrodes is commonly adopted [50]. The flexible substrates usually are plastic platforms such as PET, polyimide (PI), polyethylene naphthalate

(PEN) and polycarbonate (PC). Other flexible substrates include textile [51,52], silk [53,54], paper [55–58], metal-foil [59,60], shape-memory polymer [61–63] and so on. Besides, weavable and fiber-like electrode [17,64]/device configurations [65–69], or even substrate-free free-standing configurations [70] are also demonstrated as effective ways for obtaining flexible devices. This review will focus on the thin-film organic semiconductor devices.

Design of flexible electrodes

As fundamental components of organic electronic devices, thin-film electrodes firstly need to be endowed with flexibility for fabrication of ultraflexible organic electronic devices. The flexible electrodes should exhibit little or even no change in conductivity at bending or folding states. The non-transparent flexible electrodes are mainly based on ductile metals such as Au and Al [37,39,40], and other conductors which are either dispersed in polymer matrix [31] or deposited onto flexible substrates [71]. However, for organic optoelectronic devices such as OSCs and OLEDs, in addition to high conductivity, high transparency is also demanded for efficient light transmittance. The most commonly used transparent electrode is indium tin oxide (ITO), due to its high conductivity for ensuring high performance as well as high transparency for efficient light penetration [72–74]. Although, flexible ITO-based devices such as OSCs [74,75], OLEDs [76,77] and OLECs [78,79] are reported, the intrinsic brittleness of ITO limits the further improvement of their flexibility for various applications. Therefore, it is essential to develop transparent, flexible, and conductive (TFC) electrodes to fabricate the ultraflexible organic optoelectronic devices.

For thin conducting films, sheet resistance (R_s) and transmittance (T) are linked through Equation (1) [80]:

$$T(\lambda) = \left(1 + \frac{188.5}{R_s} \frac{\sigma_{OP}(\lambda)}{\sigma_{DC}} \right)^{-2}. \quad (1)$$

To meet minimum industry standards, a conductive electrode with $\sigma_{OP}/\sigma_{DC} \geq 35$, corresponding to $T = 90\%$ and $R_s = 100 \Omega/\text{sq}$, is generally demanded [80,81]. For the same electrode material, when R_s decreases, T simultaneously decreases. Therefore, the compromise between these two parameters should be reached to optimize the conductive films.

To date, the TFC electrodes are mostly based on PEDOT [36,70,74,82–98], graphene (GF) [73,75,99–112], carbon nanotubes (CNTs) [73,101,102,106–109,113], Ag-based nanowires/grids/films [72,114–125], copper nanowires [126] and ionic hydrogels [127], some

of which exhibit good performances comparable to ITO electrodes (see Fig. 2). Correspondingly, some of optoelectronic devices using these TFC electrodes exhibit comparable performances to their ITO-based counterparts on rigid glass or flexible plastic substrates [45,70,72,74,75,83,87,88,101,103,118–120,128,129]. To further enhance the light extraction or light trapping in the devices, nanostructures or nanoparticles are introduced into these TFC electrodes for improving the device performances [47,130–140]. Besides these thin-film electrodes, fiber-/mesh-shaped electrodes also demonstrated good flexibility [17,51,64,67,68].

Fabrication of ultraflexible devices

It is known that a bending strain is defined by a function of $\varepsilon = h_s/(2R_b)$, where h_s is the substrate thickness and R_b is the bending radius [141]. Therefore, to reduce the bending strain at extreme bending states (corresponding to a very small R_b), ultra-thin substrate [60,96,97,123,124,139,142–148] or even substrate-free configurations [149–151] which reduce the total thickness of the devices and achieve ultraflexibility or extreme conformability, are generally employed.

Another consideration is to place a device at the neutral strain or neutral-plane position, i.e., the exact center along the film thickness direction where no strain is induced when the film is bent [26,27]. However, precise control of the thickness of the neighboring layers is difficult. In addition, because the actual thickness of a device is greater than zero, some parts of the device layers slip slightly from

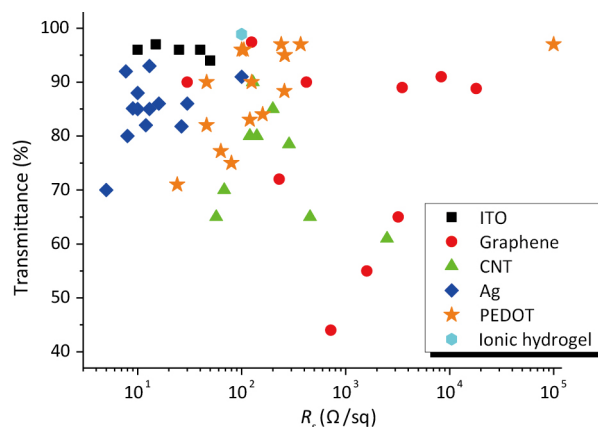


Figure 2 Transmittance at 550 nm (T_{550}) is plotted against sheet resistance (R_s) for ITO [72–75], PEDOT [70,74,82–89,96,97], Ag-based NWs/grid/film [72,114–120,123,124], CNTs [73,101,102,106–109], graphene [73,75,101–109] and ionic hydrogels [127].

the neutral-strain position, inevitably causing performance changes under strain. Therefore, this neutral-plane method is generally used as a complement to the design of the ultrathin device configuration [142,152].

ULTRAFLEXIBLE ORGANIC SEMICONDUCTOR DEVICES

Ultraflexible organic field effect transistors

OFETs are basic building blocks for organic logic circuits and are essential for the development of printable and flexible electronic technologies [153,154]. For flexible OFETs, high performance includes high mobility, high on/off ratio, low operating voltage, fast response time and high yield in matrix arrays [37,40,155–158]. However, ultraflexible OFETs with minimum R_b less than 1 mm are rarely reported. To achieve ultraflexible OFETs, ultrathin substrates or dielectric layers are generally used. In 2005, Someya's group [142,152] fabricated an ultraflexible pentacene-based OFET with a mobility of $0.5 \text{ cm}^2 \text{ V}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-1}$ and an on/off ratio of 10^5 , which remains functional at R_b of 0.5 mm. The key to realize the ultra-flexibility is to utilize the ultrathin substrate and encapsulation layers (both of 13 μm -thickness), with the transistors embedded at a neutral position. The sandwiched structure can drastically suppress strain-induced changes in transistor characteristics. No significant change was observed after 60,000 bending inward and outward cycles with $R_b = 2 \text{ mm}$. When R_b decreases up to 0.5 mm, the mobility increases by 20% on inward bending stress, and decreases by 30% on outward bending stress.

Further efforts were put in developing bending-resistant OFETs at extreme bending states [159]. Someya [143] further improved the device structure to avoid this bending-induced damage in device performance. By using a 500-nm-thick atomically smooth planarization coating on ultrathin PI substrate, the surface root-mean-square (RMS) roughness decreases from 2.5 nm to 0.3 nm. Correspondingly, the resulting device can operate without degradation even being folded into a very small radius of 100 μm (Fig. 3). They developed imperceptible and ultraflexible OFETs with an ultra-dense oxide gate dielectric a few nanometers thick, which was fabricated directly on ultrathin (1.2 μm) PEN polymer foils (Fig. 4) [160]. These OFETs formed at room temperature enable sophisticated large-area electronic foils with unprecedented mechanical and environmental stability. They can withstand repeated R_b of 5 μm and less, can be crumpled like paper, accommodate stretching up to 230% on pre-strained elastomers, and

can be operated at high temperatures and in aqueous environments. Based on OFET matrixes, applications include tactile sensor, thin-film heaters, temperature and infrared sensors and amplifiers have been demonstrated [160–162]. Another extremely flexible short-channel (channel length of 2 μm) OFET in a bottom-contact architecture has also been reported, which demonstrated excellent mechanical stability under systematic bending cycles at a R_b as small as 600 μm , and was durable against severe device crumpling [144]. Our group developed low voltage, air-stable, and ultraflexible pentacene-based OFETs using two layers of cross-linked PVP as the dielectric layer on a plastic PI substrate [163]. During a severe mechanical bending test (10^4 bending cycles with $R_b = 0.75 \text{ mm}$) under ambient conditions, the OFETs still show excellent device performance at a low operational voltage. The variations of the electrical characteristics during the mechanical bending process were closely related to the distance effect of the spacing between stretched pentacene molecules as well as the doping effect of H_2O and O_2 induced by the mechanical bending strains.

Solution-processed suspended gate OFETs with minimum R_b of 250 μm which can be applied for ultra-sensitive pressure detection, has been reported by Zang *et al.* [164]. Fukuda's group [145] further developed a fully solution-processed highly flexible (with minimum $R_b = 140 \mu\text{m}$), extremely lightweight (2 g m^{-2}) and high performance OFET on 1- μm -ultrathick parylene-C films with high mobility ($1.0 \text{ cm}^2 \text{ V}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-1}$), high on/off ratio (10^6), and fast operating speeds ($\sim 1 \text{ ms}$) at low operating voltages (10 V). The devices remained operational without significant changes in their performance, when tightly wrapped around a copper wire with R_b of 140 μm or even under 50% compressive strain. Without using substrates, a free-standing solution-processed OFETs, with 2 μm -thick Mylar layer serving as substrate-like insulation/dielectric layer, can tolerate multiple bending cycles without obvious degradation at a small R_b of 200 μm [150]. Moreover, highly crystalline solution-processed organic semiconductor films on thin plastic sheets result in high-performance with mobility up to $0.1\text{--}0.4 \text{ cm}^2 \text{ V}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-1}$. This free-standing dielectric layer strategy was also used to fabricate substrate-free OFETs via modified water-floatation method by Liu's group [165], which can be wrapped in close contact with the blade with the R_b of only 5 μm [151]. Moreover, sacrificial layers can be used to obtain ultraflexible OFETs [166]. The performance of these ultraflexible OFETs is summarized in Table 1.

By constructing the device on planar shape-memory sub-

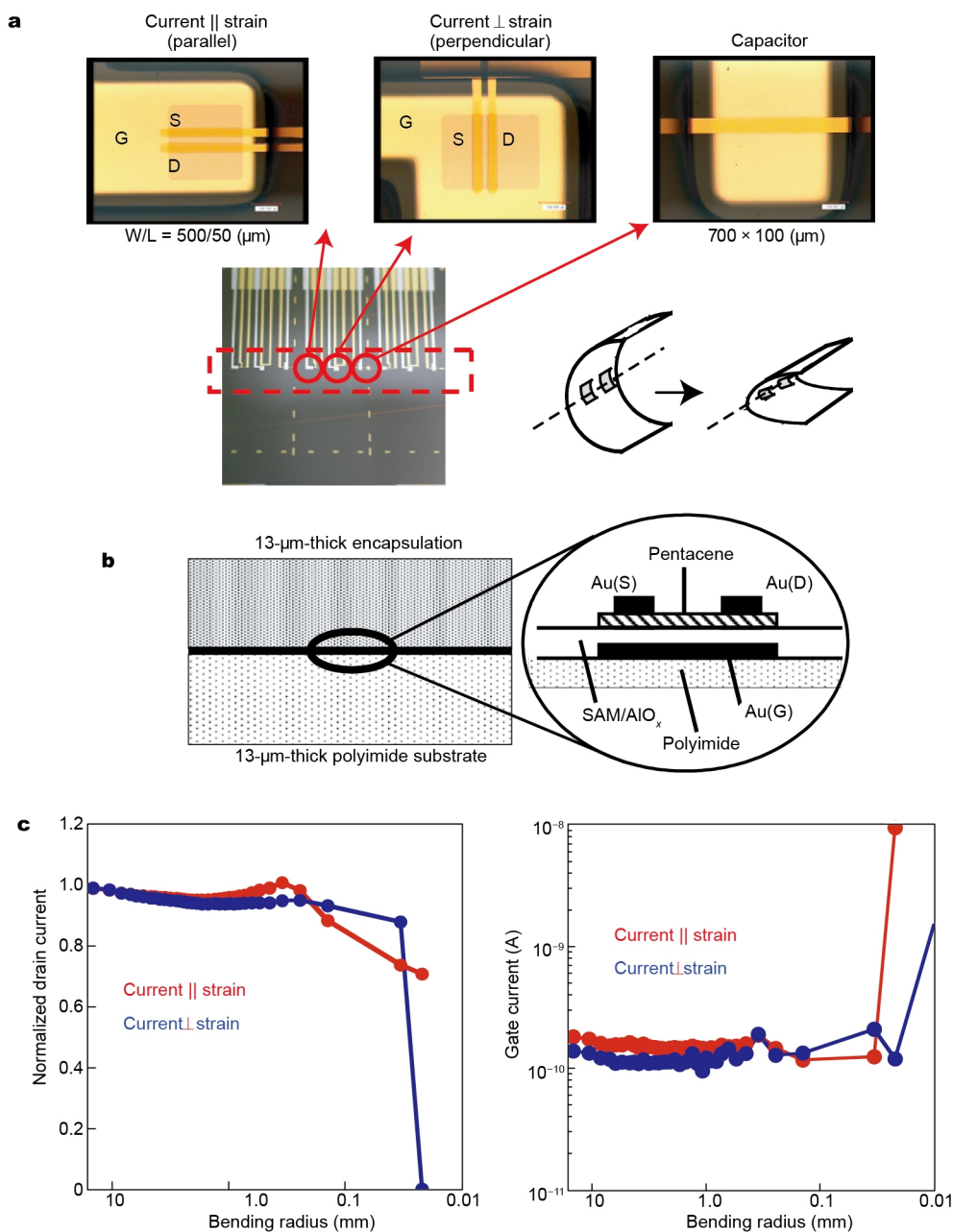


Figure 3 Bending tests on ultraflexible OFETs. (a) Photographs of an OFET in which the drain current flows parallel to the bending-induced strain, an OFET in which the current flows perpendicularly to the strain and an Al=AlO_x=SAM=Au capacitor that allows measurement of the gate dielectric capacitance during bending. The thin film transistors (TFTs) have a channel length of 50 μm and a channel width of 500 μm. The capacitor has an area of 700×100 μm². Bending was carried out using a custom-built precision bending apparatus. (b) Schematic illustration of the OFET configuration. (c) Left: measured drain currents of two pentacene OFETs (red: strain parallel to the drain current; blue: strain perpendicular to the drain current) as a function of R_b during inward bending, normalized to the initial drain current measured in the flat state. Right: gate currents of the same TFTs measured during inward bending. Drain-source voltage: -2 V; gate-source voltage: -2.5 V. Reprinted with permission from Ref. [143], Copyright 2010, Nature Publishing Group.

strates, a mechanically adaptive OFET can softly conform or deploy into 3D shapes after exposure to a stimulus with a small temperature change, which may find applications in implanted electronics [62]. Highly bendable OFET matrix

was demonstrated on ultrathin parylene-C substrates using printed silver (Ag) nanoparticle interconnectors [145], on paper substrates assisted by a lithographic method [38,57], on mesh-like substrates [167] and even by substrate-free

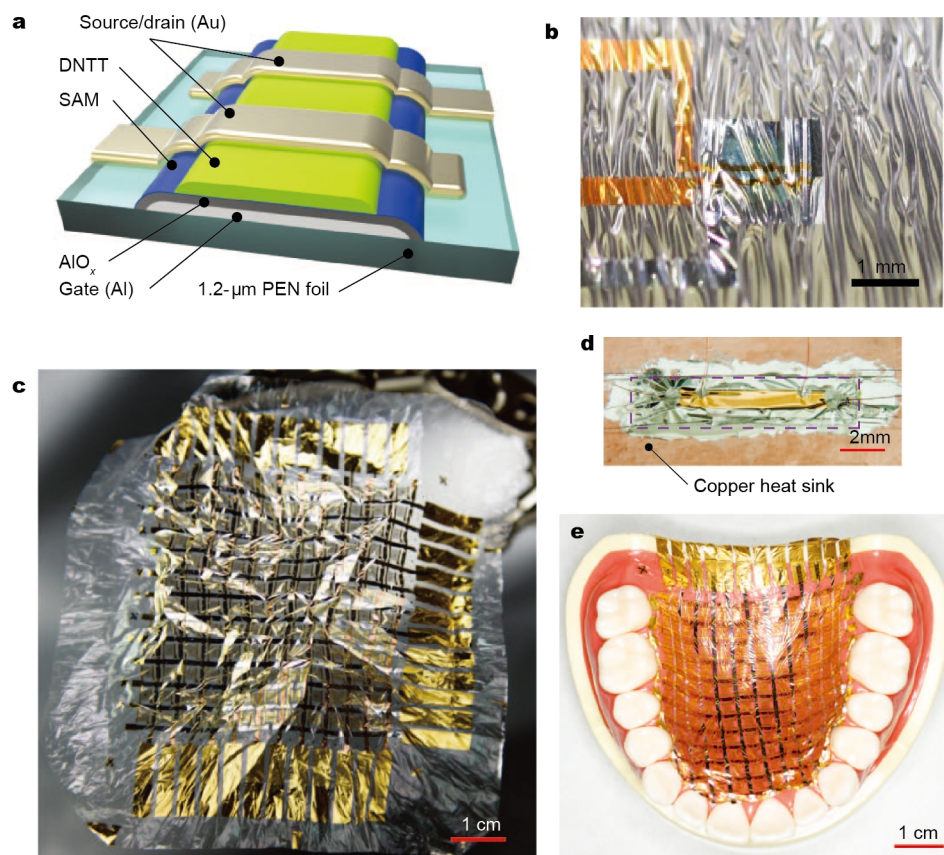


Figure 4 (a) Schematic ultrathin OFET on 1.2 μm PEN foils; (b) image of the stretch-compatible ultraflexible transistors; (c) imperceptible electronic foil of a thin large-area active-matrix sensor with 12×12 tactile pixels. (d) Thin-film infrared sensor with heat management-metallic conductors (100 nm Au) on a 1.2 μm PEN foil is placed on a Teflon support with low thermal conductivity which is then put on a copper block serving as heat sink. (e). Active-matrix tactile sensing foil sheet tightly conforming to a model of the human upper jaw. Reprinted with permission from Ref. [160], Copyright 2013, Nature Publishing Group.

Table 1 The device performance of ultraflexible OFETs; μ : field-effect mobility; on/off: on/off ratio; V_{on} : Operating voltage; $R_{\text{b,m}}$: minimum R_{b}

Active material/substrate (thickness)	μ ($\text{cm}^2 \text{V}^{-1} \text{s}^{-1}$)	on/off	V_{on} (V)	$R_{\text{b,m}}$ (μm)	Ref.
Pentacene/PI (70 μm)	0.46	10^5	-4	750	[163]
Pentacene/PI (13 μm)	0.5	10^5	40	500	[142]
PDPP3T ^a /PET (25 μm)	0.34	10^4	- ^b	250	[164]
TIPS-pentacene/Mylar (2.5 μm) ^c	0.1-0.4	- ^b	- ^b	200	[150]
Fluoropolymer ^c /parylene-C (1 μm)	1.0	10^6	10	140	[145]
Pentacene/PI (12.5 μm)	0.5	- ^b	2	100	[143]
PDI-C8/PAN&PS (320 nm) ^c	0.23	- ^b	8.5	5	[151]
DNTT/parylene (60 nm) ^d	0.34	10^5	-1.72	2	[166]
DNTT/PEN (1.2 μm)	1.6	10^8	3	5~crumpling	[160]
DNTT/parylenediX-SR (1 μm)	0.2	10^6	1	crumpling	[144]

a) Solution-processable; b) not available; c) with a freestanding gate insulator/dielectric layer; d) with an encapsulation layer

freestanding method [70]. Foldable OFET arrays applicable on both plastics and glass can be realized by using engineered substrates with nonuniform thickness, with thin areas for easy folding and thick areas for easy handling [168].

Ultraflexible organic solar cells

With fast development of renewable energy sources, the power efficiencies of OSCs have achieved as high as $>10\%$ [10,11]. With TFC electrodes, flexible OSCs can be ob-

tained by fabricating the devices on plastic substrates. Introducing nanostructures or nanoscattered particles into the devices may further enhance the light scattering and/or light trapping, and eventually improve the OSC efficiencies [136–140]. Based on the printed single wall carbon nanotube (SWCNT) film electrode on 125 μm -thick PET substrate with a T_{550} of 85% and a R_s of 200 Ω/sq , Rowell *et al.* [101] fabricated efficient, flexible polymer-fullerene bulk-heterojunction solar cells with comparable PCE $\sim 2.5\%$ with the ITO/glass-based counterparts (PCE = 3%). These devices could be bended to radius of 1 mm with a 20% \sim 25% loss in efficiency, and radius of 5 mm with no degradation in PCE.

By further reducing the thickness of the plastic substrate, devices with higher flexibility but reduced efficiency at bending state can be obtained. An ultraflexible polymer-based OSC on a very thin (1.4 μm -thick) and buckled plastic PET foil substrate was first demonstrated by Kaltenbrunner *et al.* [96]. The total thickness of the device is only 1.9 μm , which is even thinner than a typical thread of spider silk, resulting in an unprecedented lightweight (4 g m^{-2}). In addition to good stretchability due to buckled device configuration, the device can withstand extreme mechanical deformation, which can be demonstrated by wrapping around a human hair with a radius of 35 μm and deforming the cell on an elastomeric substrate with a plastic tube of 1.5 mm tip diameter (Fig. 5). More im-

portantly, the device exhibits nearly identical PCE (4.2%) to their glass-based counterparts. Further by employing the organolead halide perovskites as the photoactive layer, they improved the PCE up to 12% [97].

Jung *et al.* [124] reported a flexible OSC exhibiting almost no degradation in device performance even after being folded with a radius of 200 μm , applying extremely bendable TFC electrode consisting of a Ag-grid-embedded ultrathin plastic substrate coated with ultrathin transparent ITO ($T_{550} = 93\%$, $R_s = 13 \Omega/\text{sq}$, $R_b = 200 \mu\text{m}$). The device showed a very small decrease of PCE ($< 2.7\%$) at $R_b = 200 \mu\text{m}$, and excellent durability under repeated bending, exhibiting almost no change in its J - V characteristics even after 1000 bending cycles with R_b of 1.0 mm (Fig. 6). Based on consecutively stacked layers of conductive polymer (CP)-silver nanowires (AgNWs) composite belts fully embedded in a 20 μm -thick colorless PI (cPI) matrix, Kim *et al.* [123] fabricated a highly conductive ($R_s = 7.7 \Omega/\text{sq}$) and transparent ($T > 92\%$ at wavelengths of 450–700 nm) electrode demonstrating a high flexibility and good mechanical durability with change of R_s less than 5% at outward bending and 10% at inward bending with R_b of 40 μm . Using this electrode, ultraflexible OSC that exhibits small PCE reduction of 5% when extremely bent at $R_b = 40 \mu\text{m}$ can be fabricated. Moreover, the OSC achieves a much higher PCE (7.42%) than those based on electrodes simply embedding AgNWs without CP in cPI, possibly due to a

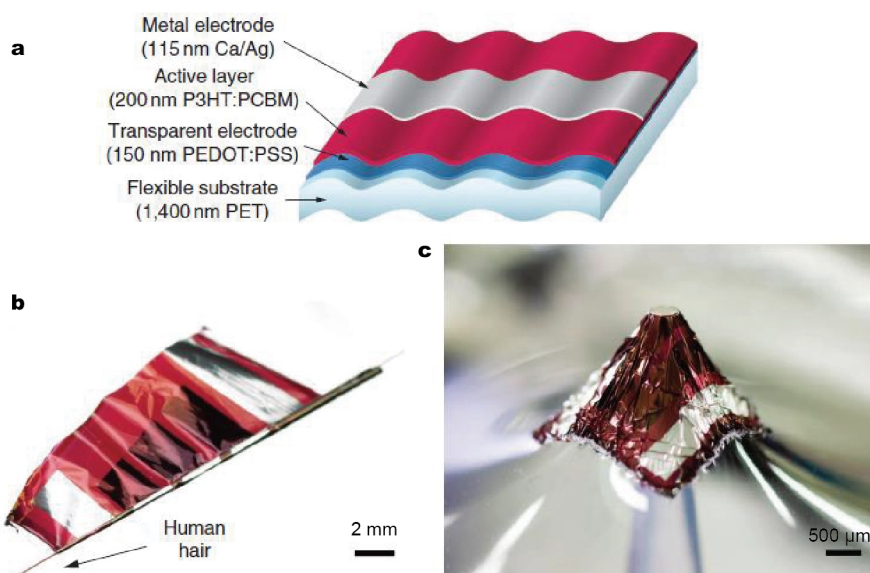


Figure 5 Stretchable and compressible 2 μm -thick OSC on ultrathin PET substrate: (a) scheme of the ultra-light and flexible organic solar cell; (b) extreme bending flexibility demonstrated by wrapping a solar cell around a 35 μm -radius human hair; (c) the device attached to the elastomeric support, under three-dimensional deformation by pressure from a 1.5 mm-diameter plastic tube. Reprinted with permission from Ref. [96], Copyright 2012, Nature Publishing Group.

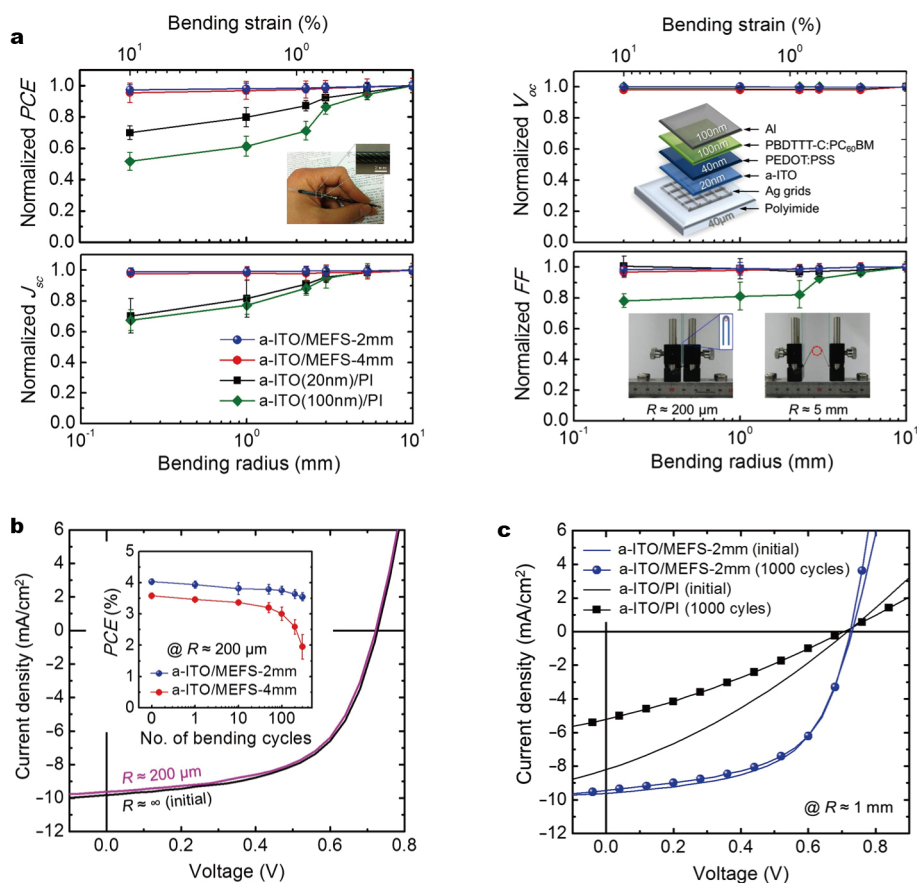


Figure 6 (a) Normalized PCE, V_{oc} , J_{sc} , and FF values of the flexible OSCs as a function of the R_b during compressive bending. The top left inset shows a photograph of a flexible OSC wrapped around a cylinder with a radius of $\approx 1 \text{ mm}$. The top right and bottom right insets show the device structure and the bending process of OSCs, respectively. (b) The current density-voltage characteristics measured in the flat and bend (with R_b of $\approx 200 \mu\text{m}$) state, respectively. The measured PCE values as a function of the folding cycles at $R_b \approx 200 \mu\text{m}$ are shown in the inset. (c) The current density-voltage characteristics of the OSCs after being bent 1000 times with a R_b of $\approx 1 \text{ mm}$. Reprinted with permission from Ref. [124], Copyright 2014, WILEY-VCH.

Table 2 The electrode and device performance of ultraflexible and/or stretchable OSCs. R_s : sheet resistance; T_{550} : transmittance at 550 nm; R_b (ΔR_s): minimum bending radius (change of R_s at this R_b); PCE: power conversion efficiency; CP: conductive polymer, CPI: colorless polyimide; a-ITO: amorphous ITO

Electrode/substrate ^a	Electrode			OSC			Ref
	R_s (Ω/sq)	T_{550} (%)	R_b (μm) / ΔR_s	Active layer	PCE (%)	R_b (μm) / ΔPCE	
SWCNTs/PET(125 μm)	200	85	1000/<25%	P3HT:PCBM	2.5	1000/20–25%	[101]
a-ITO(20 nm)/Ag-grid in PI (40 μm)	13	93	200/<10%	PBDTTTC:PCBM	4	200/<2.7%	[124]
CP-AgNWs in cPI (20 μm)	7.7	92	40/<5% ^{out} , <10% ⁱⁿ	P2:PC ₇₁ BM	7.42	40/5%	[123]
PEDOT ^b (150 nm)/PET(1.4 μm)	100	96 ^c	35/- ^d	P3HT:PCBM	4.2	35/- ^d	[96]
PEDOT ^b (130 nm)/PET(1.4 μm)	105	96 ^c	10/- ^d	Perovskite MADI	12	10/- ^d	[97]

a) Thickness, if available, is indicated in the brackets; b) PEDOT:PSS electrodes:PH1000:5v.% DMSO:0.5. v.% Zonyl; c) from Ref [86]; d) not available

reduction in bimolecular recombination and an increased charge collection efficiency. In addition, using organic acceptors instead of the traditional but brittle PCBM has been demonstrated as an effective way to enhance the mechanical robustness [169]. Kim's group demonstrated the me-

chanically robust all-polymer solar cells that were based on the PBDTTTPD:P(NDI2HD-T) donor-acceptor polymer system, with high PCE of 6.64%. The performances concerning the electrodes (T_{550} , R_s , R_b) and devices (PCE and R_b) are summarized in Table 2.

Ultraflexible organic light-emitting diodes

Ultraflexible OLEDs

Since Heeger and Forrest reported the first polymer- [31] and small molecule- [170] based flexible organic light-emitting OLED, respectively, high efficiency is always pursued in this field [135,171]. Based on this, flexible displays of OLED arrays are demonstrated [33,172]. To fabricate ultraflexible OLEDs, transparent TFC electrodes are required. The reported electrodes utilized in flexible OLEDs are mainly based on PEDOT [173], CNT [44,174], Ag NWs/grids [175–179], graphene [45,180], ITO [76], and metal oxide [181]. For achieving higher efficiency, top-emitting architectures [182–185] and nanostructured/scattered electrodes or substrates [47,130–135] can be adopted, to enhance output coupling or light extraction of the devices.

However, to achieve high flexibility, extremely bendable TFC electrodes firstly need to be developed [88,120,124,146,147,177,186]. Yu *et al.* [120] developed an AgNWs/shape-memory-polymer composite electrode deposited on PET substrate on which a flexible yellow OLED with minimum R_b of 2.5 mm has been constructed. The R_s of the electrode is almost the same under inward bending with compressive strain of 16%, but exhibits a significant increase of 290% under outward bending with tensile strain of 16%. For the OLED device, a slight change in the I - V - L responses was observed after 10 bending cycles with inward and outward R_b of 2.5 mm, and the maximum current efficiency (CE) remains constant at around 14 cd A^{-1} . Using such electrodes, they further fabricated a flexible blue bis(3,5-difluoro-2-(2-pyridyl)-phenyl)-(2-carboxypyridyl) iridium(III) (FIrpic) based phosphorescent OLED reaching a maximum CE of 25 cd A^{-1} , which decreases to 18.3 cd A^{-1} after 100 bending-recovery cycles with $R_b = 1.5 \text{ mm}$ [187]. However, the use of shape memory polymers requires heat treatment for deformation, which limits their practical applications. Further, with no requirement of thermal treatment, they applied a composite electrode based on a thin AgNW network inlaid in the surface layer of a rubbery poly(urethane acrylate) (PUA) matrix, and fabricated a bendable and collapsible polymer light-emitting diode (PLED) [147]. The device emitted light brightly and uniformly even, when wrapped around the edge of $400 \mu\text{m}$ thick cardboard. Bending or folding causes no mechanical or electrical damage to the device because of the high flexibility and conductivity of the AgNW-PUA composite electrodes.

Using the ultraflexible AgNW networks welded by the

sputtered transparent conductive oxide, an ultraflexible OLED which can be bent to a radius of 1 mm has been demonstrated [128]. Jung *et al.* [124] reported an ultraflexible electrode by coating 20 nm α -ITO on a metal embedding flexible substrate, with the change in R_s being small ($\approx 10\%$) even after bending with a R_b of $\sim 200 \mu\text{m}$ (corresponding to a bending strain ϵ of 10%). The phosphorescent OLED (PhOLED) fabricated with this electrode also showed excellent mechanical flexibility, with the light-emitting intensity retaining $\sim 94\%$ of the original value even after the device was bent with R_b of $\sim 200 \mu\text{m}$ (Fig. 7). Ultrathin (total thickness of $2 \mu\text{m}$) buckled red and orange PLEDs fabricated on pre-strained $1.4 \mu\text{m}$ -thick PET foil with unprecedented flexibility with radius of curvature under $10 \mu\text{m}$ have been demonstrated by White *et al.* [146]. This foil-based electronics are to reversibly undergo folding, wrinkling, crumpling and twisting deformations, without catastrophic failure, and can be applied in surface-conforming thin-film electronics (Fig. 8). In addition, these buckled PLEDs exhibit favorable stretchability and compressibility, which can tolerate 100% tensile strain and 50% compress, respectively. Nagata *et al.* [88] developed a smooth, ultraflexible, and transparent electrode with AgNWs embedded in ultrathin ($10 \mu\text{m}$ -thickness) cPI. This electrode film exhibits mechanical durability, for both outward and inward bending tests, up to a minimum R_b of $30 \mu\text{m}$, while maintaining its electrical performance after 100,000 bending cycles at $R_b = 500 \mu\text{m}$. Blue PhOLEDs using these composites as bottom anodes show only slight performance reduction of 3% even after repeated folding with R_b of $30 \mu\text{m}$. Yokota [188] recently reported an ultraflexible and conformable three-color, highly efficient PLEDs and organic photodetectors (OPDs) to realize optoelectronic skins that introduce multiple electronic functionalities such as sensing and displays. The performance of these ultraflexible electrodes and devices are summarized in Table 3.

Foldable OLED displays

Yun *et al.* [190] demonstrated a mean of providing stable and homogenous interfacial adhesion by using two-dimensional arrays of OLED posts, which tolerate the etching process and undergo cohesive fracture during transfer printing, to directly anchor the flexible substrate. Lee's group [191] reported a mechanically and optically robust folding structure composed of two individual OLED panels and a hyper elastic silicone rubber to realize a foldable and seamless active matrix OLED (AMOLED) display without a visible crease at the junction. The folding-unfolding test

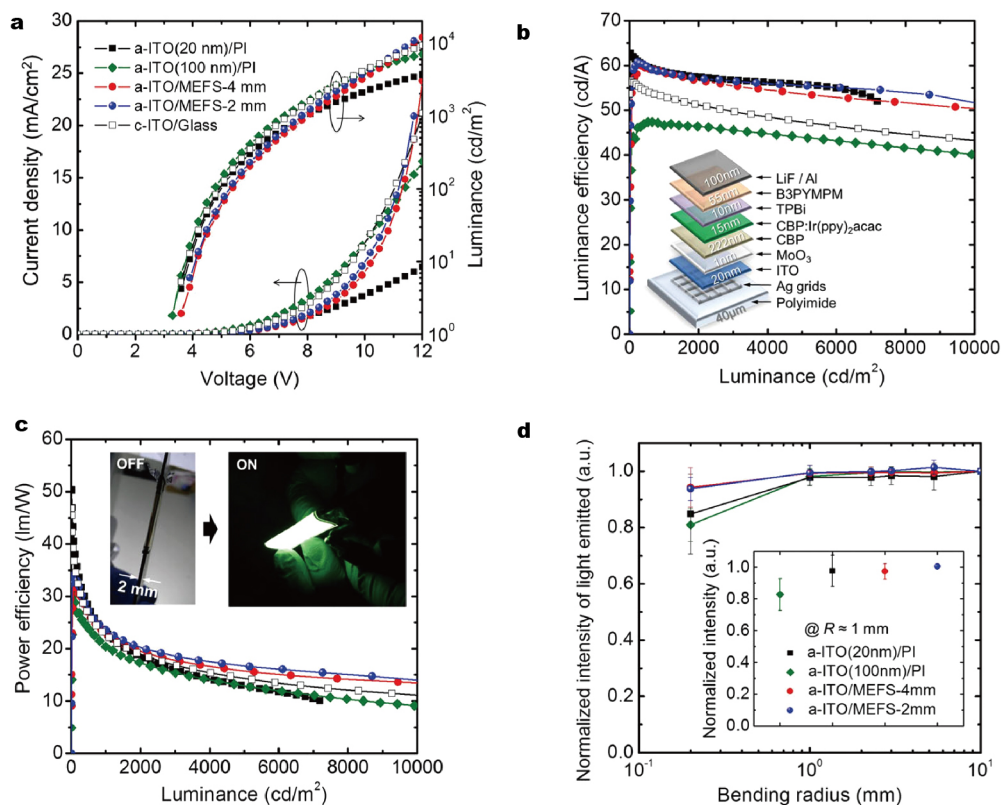


Figure 7 (a) Current density-voltage characteristics of the OLEDs fabricated using different transparent conducting electrodes. (b) Current efficiency-luminance characteristics of the OLEDs. The inset shows a schematic of the flexible OLEDs. (c) Power efficiency-luminance characteristics of the OLEDs. The inset shows photographs of the large-area bendable OLEDs (5 × 5 cm²). (d) Measured intensity of the light emitted by the flexible OLEDs as a function of the R_b during compressive bending, normalized to the initial value. The inset shows the normalized light-emitting intensities measured after 1000 times of bending the OLEDs with a R_b of ~1 mm. Reprinted with permission from Ref. [124], Copyright 2014, WILEY-VCH.

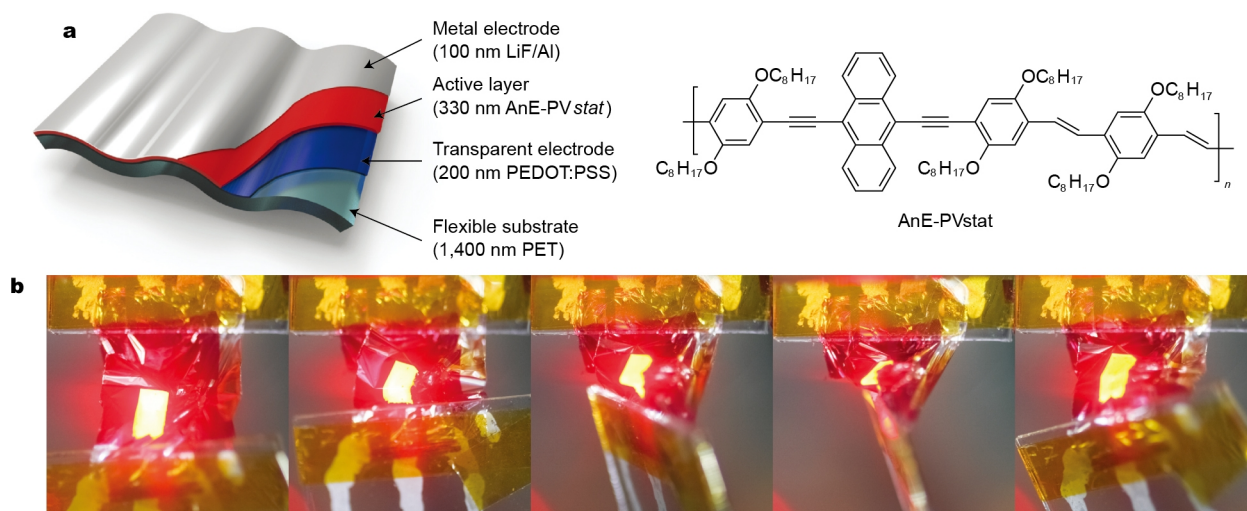


Figure 8 (a) Schematic of the ultraflexible PLEDs with each layer thickness drawn to scale. The schematic shows periodic bending with a radius of curvature of 5 μm for reference. The chemical structure of AnE-PVstat is shown at the right side. (b) Demonstrations of extreme deformation attainable with ultrathin PLEDs, with images of a free-standing ultrathin PLED operating during crumpling. The device is suspended between two pieces of glass that are moved closer together and simultaneously twisted by 90°. Each pixel is ~3 mm × 6 mm. Reprinted with permission from Ref. [146], Copyright 2013, Nature Publishing Group.

Table 3 The performance of the electrodes and devices for ultraflexible OLEDs (R_m : minimum bending ratio; CE: current efficiency; PE: power efficiency)

Anode/substrate ^a	Electrode			OLED				Ref.
	R_s (Ω /sq)	T_{550} (%)	R_m (μm) / ΔR_s	Active layer	CE (cd A ⁻¹)	PE (lm W ⁻¹)	R_m (μm)	
a-ITO (20 nm)/Ag-grid in PI (40 μm)	13	93	200 / <10%	Ir(ppy) ₂ (acac):CBP ^b	59	38	200	[124]
AgNW/PUA (150 μm)	15	83%	- ^c	SuperYellow:ETPTA: PEO: LiTf	1.0 ^d	- ^c	200	[147]
AgNW/cPI (10 μm)	8	80	30 / <3%	FIrpic: mcP ^b	21	7.4	30	[88]
PEDOT:PSS ^e /PET (1.4 μm)	135	95%	- ^c	AnE-PVstat MDMO-PPV	0.026 ^d 0.17 ^d	- ^c - ^c	10	[146]

a) Thickness, if available, is indicated in the brackets; b) emitter: host; c) not available; d) the device is also stretchable; e) PH1000:5 v.% DMSO: 0.5 v.% Zonyl

on the structure exhibited negligible deterioration of the relative brightness at the junction of the individual panels up to 105 cycles at a folding radius of 1 mm. They further adopted a top emission structure into the flexible OLED display device, composed of an OLED microcavity covered with thin film encapsulation, a low temperature color filter (LTCF), and an ultrathin (500 nm-thickness) PI substrate. This display demonstrates low power consumption, high outdoor readability, and resistance to moisture and oxygen in ambient atmosphere (Fig. 9) [189]. The variation of relative brightness is within 6% of the original brightness after folding 10,000 times with $R_b = 1$ mm. Moreover, even after soaking the panel in water for one hour, no variation in the OLED brightness is observed. Such ultrathin and flexible displays, by integrating with a touch sensor, may find good applications in touch screen in electronic devices [192], and visible pressure sensing in artificial skins [193,194].

Ultraflexible organic memory devices

High performance flexible OMDs, including organic resistors [195–200], OFET memories [16,39,201–208] and other complex-structured memories [209,210], are vastly investigated concerning high switching speed, high on/off ratios, long retention time, and even multi-level states or multi-functionalities [211]. They show tremendous applications in sensor arrays [212–214], braille displays [39], integrated circuits [215] and RFIDs [48]. However, the flexibility of most reported OMDs has been limited, with R_b mostly in millimeter range, due to the difficulty in maintaining memory characteristics while bending. Among various kinds of OMDs, the OFET memory is the most striking and has been widely investigated recently due to its nondestructive read-out property, single-transistor realization, and good compatibility with the complemen-

tary metaloxide semiconductor devices [216,217]. Kim *et al.* [218] demonstrated solution-processed non-volatile ferroelectric OFET memories operating in p- and n-type dual mode, which exhibit excellent mechanical flexibilities. They used ferroelectric poly(vinylidene fluoride-cotrifluoroethylene) (PVDF) as thin insulator layer and a quinoidal oligothiophene derivative (QQT(CN)₄) as organic semiconductor (Fig. 10). These dual-mode field-effect devices are highly reliable with data retention of 46,000 s and endurance of 100 cycles, respectively, even after 1,000 bending cycles with R_b of 4 mm. No significant decay in performance was observed after tens of multiple bending cycles with extreme R_b of 500 μm by hand, with sharp folding or even crumpling. The plasticity of QQT(CN)₄ and its firm interface with PVDF-TrFE plays a crucial role in resisting such extreme mechanical deformations. A highly bendable OFET memory on ultrathin PI substrate (13 μm -thickness) was reported by Cosseddu *et al.* [148,219], with negligible variation of the threshold voltage and transfer characteristics even after 200 cycles of bending at a R_b of 150 μm . Other device architectures including resistive memory diodes and some complicated structures have also been demonstrated in ultraflexible OMDs. Nagashima *et al.* [60] proposed ultraflexible resistive nonvolatile memories on ultrathin Al foil using Ag-decorated cellulose nanofiber paper as active layer, exhibiting high on/off resistance ratio of 10⁶ and small standard deviation of switching voltage distribution. The memory performance can be maintained without any degradation when being bent down to the R_b of 350 μm . A twistable 8 × 8 cross-bar array-type organic nonvolatile resistive memory device on PET substrate, which well retains the device performance under the twisted condition with a twist angle up to 30°, has been reported [220]. Jeong *et al.* [209] demonstrated

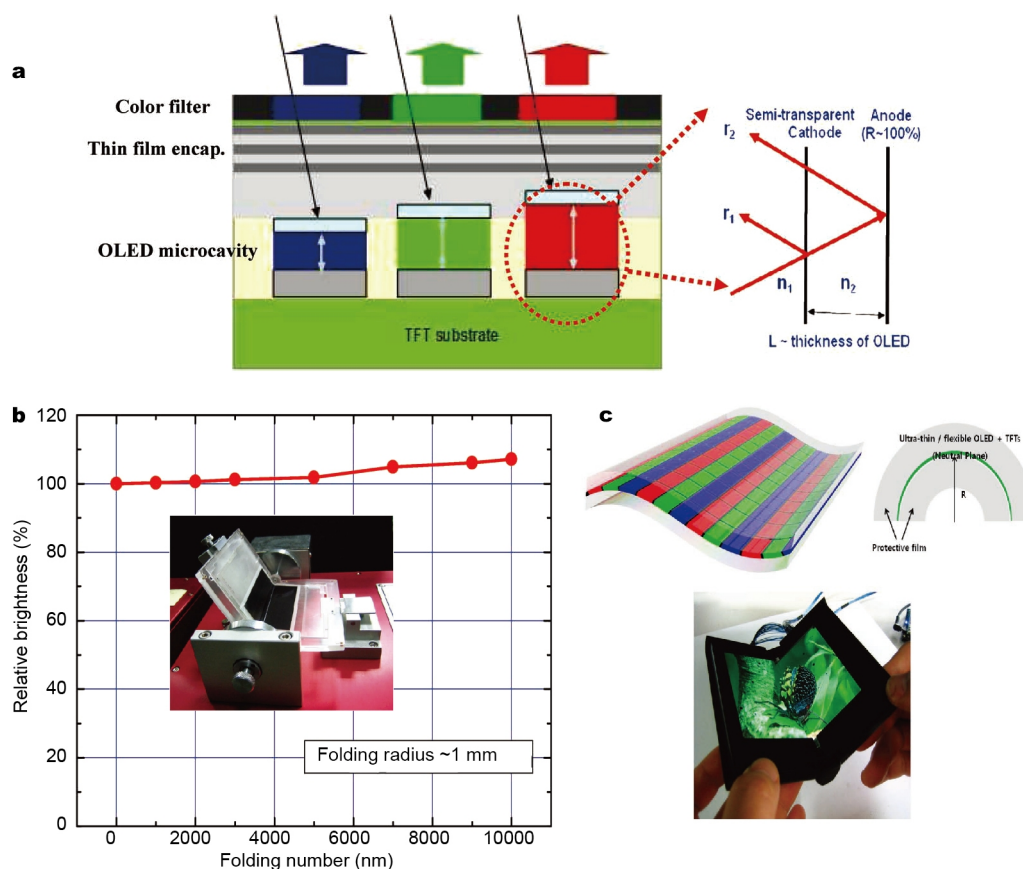


Figure 9 (a) Schematic view of a new optical system for a flexible display device composed of a LTCF, TFE, and a RGB OLED microcavity. Inset: the structure of the RGB microcavity: The different thicknesses of the RGB OLED layer are primarily designed to the optical length (L) of the RGB cavity to form a standing wave inside the optical resonator. To undergo fully destructive interference of reflective lights between the semi-transparent cathode and reflective anode, L of the OLED should be equal to an integer multiple of primary color (λ_n). (b) Optical measurement of a flexible OLED device after folding a 1 mm radius window module. Relative brightness is monitored in steps of 1000 folds for a total 10,000 folds. Inset: experimental setup for mechanical folding test. (c) Up: a schematic view of a neutral plane used to eliminate strain applied at a backplane and OLED device; bottom: a foldable and seamless OLED display fabricated by arranging two OLED panels and one transparent plane. The left OLED panel is slimmed down to 50 μm and assembled on the transparent plane. Reprinted with permission from Ref. [189], Copyright 2011, WILEY-VCH.

a flexible all-organic 64-bit memory cell array possessing one diode–one resistor architectures, which exhibits excellent rewritable switching characteristics, even during and after harsh physical stresses including bending, twisting and rolling. The write-read-erase-read output sequence of the cells perfectly corresponds to the external pulse signal regardless of substrate deformation, suggesting potentials of such device for applications in high-density flexible OMDs. The device performance, bending durability as well as device architectures are summarized in Table 4.

SUMMARY AND OUTLOOK

In general, the organic devices exhibit relatively poor device performance and durability in ambient atmosphere when compared to their inorganic counterparts. However, they have many advantages over the inorganic devices such as

intrinsic flexibility, low cost of organic materials, the relaxed requirements of purity, the minute thicknesses of material required (≤ 100 nm), and relatively facile solution processability. To date, ultrathin flexible full-color AMOLED display with total thickness of 10 μm and minimum R_b of less than 1 mm has been demonstrated [221]. For further development, on the one hand, current efforts are aimed at improving the device efficiency and environmental stability to approach or even surpass their inorganic counterparts, so as to enable these organic devices to be widely adopted for practical and robust applications. On the other hand, integration of multifunctionalities in ultraflexible organic semiconductor devices is another research goal in scientific communities. This can be realized either by integrating with other individual functional devices or by integrating multiple functionalities by molecular design of organic

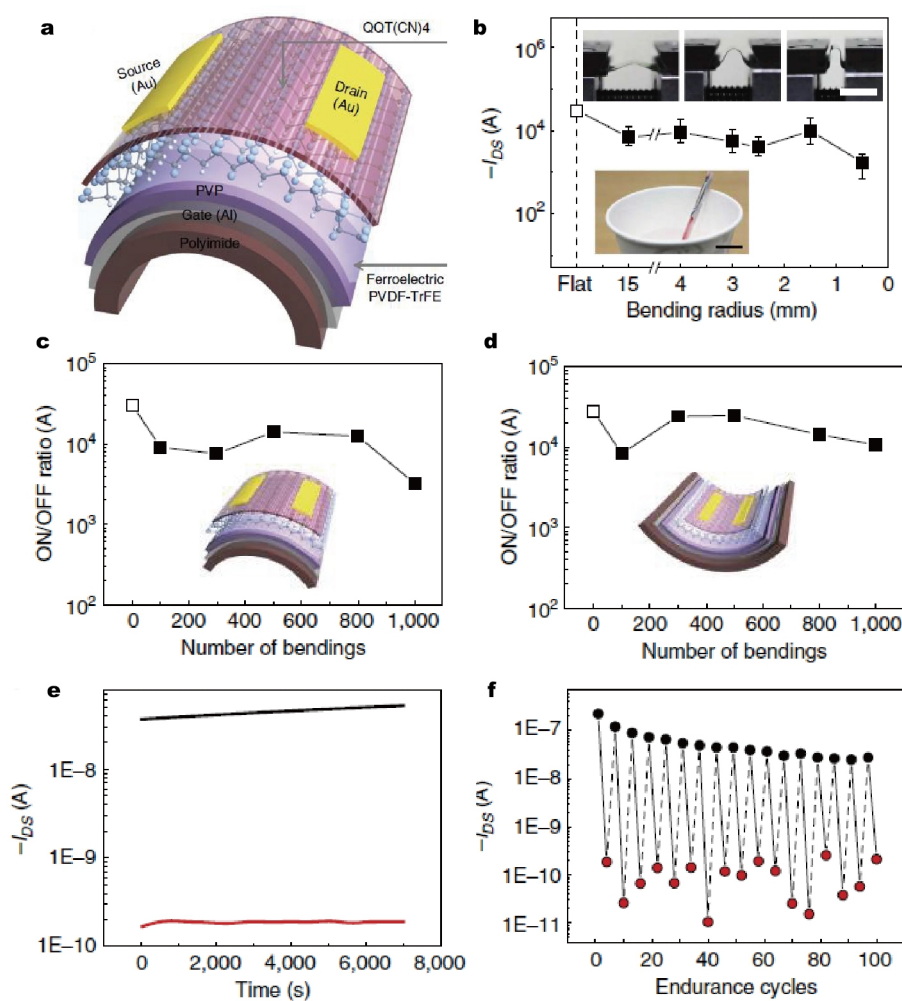


Figure 10 (a) Schematic representation of the p-type QQT(CN)₄Fe-based OFET memory devices. (b–f) Bending tests on ultraflexible organic Fe-FET memories: (b) on/off current ratio measured at $V_{DS} = -5$ V as a function of the R_b . The data were averaged with 10 devices examined for each R_b . Inset is a photograph of super-flexible devices rolled on a commercially available coffee stirrer with R_b of ~ 500 μm . (c, d) on/off current ratio measured at $V_{DS} = -5$ V as a function of the number of bending cycles in outward (c) and inward (d) directions with a R_b of 4 mm, respectively. Insets are the diagrams of inward and outward-bending devices, respectively. (e) Data retention characteristics measured after programming the device with single voltage pulses for the ON and OFF current after 1000 inward bending cycles at a R_b of 4 mm. (f) Write/erase endurance cycle test as a function of the number of programming cycles after 1000 outward bending cycles at a R_b of 4 mm. For clarity, one cycle out of every four is represented. The programming voltage pulses for switching ON and OFF states were -50 and $+50$ V, respectively. The read voltages for both ON and OFF states were $V_G = -10$ V and $V_{DS} = -5$ V. Reprinted with permission from Ref. [218], Copyright 2014, Nature Publishing Group.

Table 4 Device architectures and device performance of ultraflexible OMDs

Device architecture/substrate (thickness)	on/off	t_R (s)	$R_{b,m}$ (μm)	Ref.
1D–1R memory array ^a /PEN (125 μm)	10^3	10^4	1000 ^b	[209]
FET memory/PI (100 μm)	5×10^3	$>6 \times 10^3$	500–crumpling	[218]
FET memory/Al paper ^b (200 μm)	5×10^3	$>6 \times 10^3$	~sharp folding	[60]
Resistive memory/Al foil (12 μm)	10^6	10^5	350	[60]
FET memory/PI (13 μm)	10^2	3×10^5	150	[219]

a) 1D–1R: one diode–one resistor; b) Al coated PI substrate

semiconductors.

Received 28 June 2016; accepted 13 July 2016;
published online 26 July 2016

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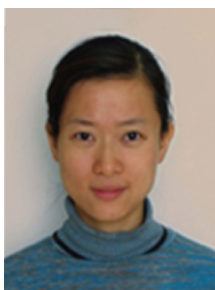
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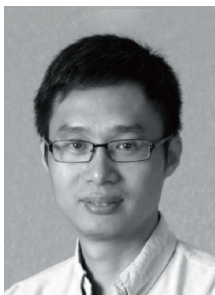
Acknowledgments This work was supported by the National Basic Research Program (2014CB648300), the National High Technology Research and Development Program of China (2011AA050526), the National Natural Science Foundation of China (21373114 and 21573111), a project funded by the Priority Academic Program Development of Jiangsu Higher Education Institutions (YX03001), Jiangsu National Synergetic Innovation Center for Advanced Materials (SICAM), Synergetic Innovation Center for Organic Electronics and Information Displays, the Natural Science Foundation of Jiangsu Province (BM2012010 and BE2011191), Excellent science and technology innovation team of Jiangsu Higher Education Institutions (2013), Qing Lan Project and NUPT 1311 project for their financial support. X Chen thanks the financial support from Singapore Ministry of Education Tier-2 (ARC26/15) and NTU-A*STAR Silicon Technologies Centre of Excellence (11235100003).

Author contributions Chen X and Huang W provided the overall concept and revised manuscript. Qian Y drafted the manuscript. Zhang X, Qi D, Xie L and Chandran BK participated in writing and critically revising the manuscript.

Conflict of interest The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.



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超柔性薄膜有机半导体器件: 从柔性到超柔性

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摘要 柔性薄膜有机半导体器件由于其轻便、柔性、有机半导体的可重复制备及易于进行功能性调节、以及低成本、大面积溶液加工等特性而受到广泛关注. 其中, 弯曲半径不超过1 mm的超柔性电子对可折叠/便携设备、可穿戴设备、表皮及植入式电子设备、三维表面贴合型器件以及仿生学等领域的发展至关重要. 本综述首先简要介绍了从柔性到超柔性电子的发展史以及超柔性有机器件的设计. 接着, 聚焦于超柔性的有机场效应管、有机发光二极管、有机太阳能电池以及有机存储器等有机半导体功能器件领域的最新进展进行了总结评述.