

1 Coherently switching the focusing 2 characteristics of all-dielectric metalenses

3 FEI HE,^{1,2} YU FENG,¹ HAILONG PI,¹ JIZE YAN,¹ KEVIN F. MACDONALD,³ AND
4 XU FANG^{1,4}

5 ¹*School of Electronics and Computer Science, University of Southampton, SO17 1BJ, UK*

6 ²*Optics and Photonics Group, University of Nottingham, NG7 2RD, UK*

7 ³*Optoelectronics Research Centre and Centre for Photonic Metamaterials, University of Southampton,
8 SO17 1BJ, UK*

9 ⁴*x.fang@soton.ac.uk*

10 **Abstract:** Flat, gradient index, metasurface optics – in particular all-dielectric metalenses –
11 have emerged and evolved over recent years as compact, lightweight alternative to their
12 conventional bulk glass/crystal counterparts. Here we show that the focal properties of all-
13 dielectric metalenses can be switched via coherent control, which is to say by changing the
14 local electromagnetic field in the metalens plane rather than any physical or geometric property
15 of the nanostructure or surrounding medium. The selective excitation of predominantly electric
16 or magnetic resonant modes in the constituent cells of the metalens provides for switching, by
17 design, of its phase profile enabling binary switching of focal length for a given lens type and,
18 uniquely, switching between different (spherical and axicon) lens types.

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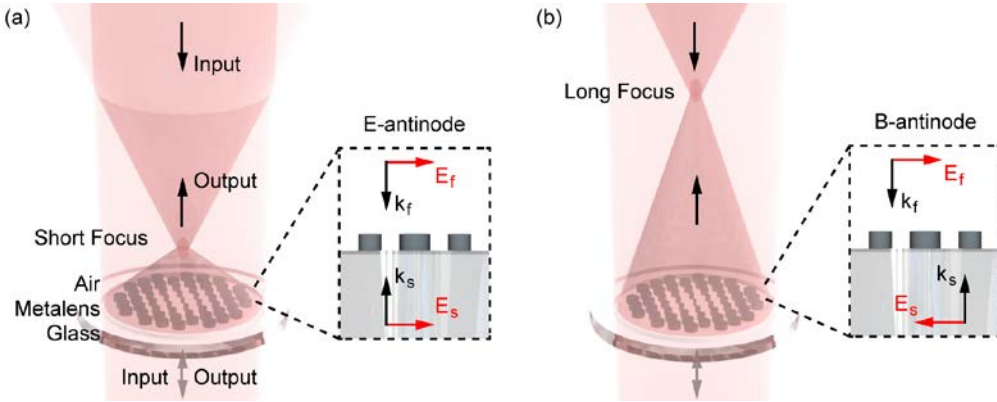
20 1. Introduction

21 Coherent control has emerged in recent years as an effective and highly flexible approach for
22 all-optical modulation – high-contrast, high-speed, low-energy switching and tuning – of
23 electromagnetic response in planar metamaterials and ultra-thin media [1]. The technique
24 employs two coherent, counter-propagating light beams to create a standing wave, containing
25 a periodic pattern of electric (E) and magnetic (B) field intensity and/or polarization nodes and
26 antinodes [2-4]. Within such standing waves, (meta)materials of substantially subwavelength
27 thickness can be selectively exposed to different *local* excitation fields, and their response can
28 accordingly change dramatically. The phenomenon was first demonstrated in the modulation
29 of plasmonic metasurface absorption: at the electric field antinode (magnetic field node) of a
30 standing wave formed by counter-propagating collinearly polarized incident beams, a suitably
31 nanostructured thin gold film can exhibit perfect absorption, while becoming perfectly
32 transparent at the electric field node (magnetic antinode) [3, 5]. It has subsequently been
33 engaged to control a range of transmission, reflection, refraction, absorption and polarization
34 phenomena, with THz bandwidth and in single- or entangled few-photon regimes [2, 3, 6-8],
35 for applications including analogue logical data processing, pattern recognition, beam steering,
36 and excitation-selective spectroscopy [4, 9-14].

37 In parallel, metalenses (i.e. metasurface-based or gradient index “flat lenses”) have been
38 established and intensively studied [15-17] as next-generation optical components with wide-
39 ranging applications potential in imaging, microscopy, spectroscopy, lighting and display
40 systems [18] - leveraging a compact and lightweight planar form factor and advanced
41 lithographic nanofabrication techniques. The planar geometry also presents opportunity and
42 advantage over conventional bulk (e.g. glass) refractive lenses in potential approaches to
43 reversible tuning of focal properties via external stimuli: For singlet metalenses (i.e. devices
44 that do not utilize multiple, cascaded functional layers [19-22]), mechanical and electrically-
45 driven deformations [23-27] have been demonstrated as effective methodologies for dynamic
46 focal tuning. Other approaches have been based on modulation of the intrinsic properties of

47 constituent or surrounding media, including liquid crystals thermo-optic polymers,
 48 chalcogenides, and 2D materials [28-40].

49 Establishing coherent control as a new tuning strategy for metalenses may combine the best
 50 of both technologies. Most noticeably, Ref [10] achieved dynamic focal tuning on a plasmonic
 51 metasurface. Because the plasmonic metasurface functions as an ultrathin beam-splitter, the
 52 tuning requires the incident light to be structured, as opposed to plane waves that are adopted
 53 in a typical coherent control configuration. In this work, we establish design principles for
 54 coherently controlled focal characteristic switching in all-dielectric metalenses. As examples,
 55 we introduce and computationally analyze designs for silicon spherical and axicon lenses with
 56 coherently-controlled focal lengths and Bessel-beam widths/depths that change by up to a
 57 factor of 2 in the transition between local E and B field antinode illumination regimes, and a
 58 lens that can be switched between spherical and axicon configurations.



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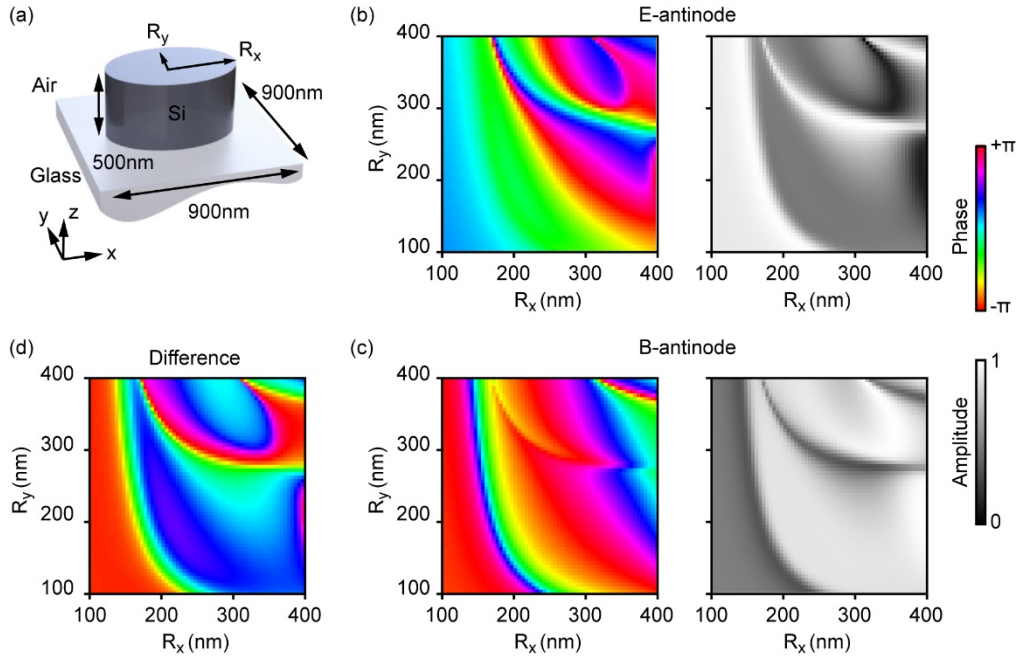
60 **Fig. 1.** Coherent switching of metalens focus. The metalens, comprised of an array of Si
 61 nanopillars on a glass substrate, is illuminated by counter-propagating coherent light beams at
 62 normal incidence, one from free-space (with electric field and wave vector E_f and k_f ,
 63 respectively) and the other through the substrate (E_s and k_s). Changing the relative phase and
 64 amplitude of E_f and E_s can position the metalens at either (a) the electric antinode [E-antinode]
 65 or (b) the magnetic antinode [B-antinode] of the standing wave formed by the two input beams.
 66 The focusing properties of the metalenses, manifested in the output beams, change accordingly.

67 We consider metalenses comprising arrays of elliptical Si nanopillars on a semi-infinite
 68 glass substrate, illuminated by two coherent, counter-propagating, collinearly polarized light
 69 beams at normal incidence – one from the substrate side with incident electric field E_s , and one
 70 from free space with field E_f . The surface of the substrate can be selectively located at an E-
 71 antinode [Fig. 1(a)] or a B-antinode [Fig. 1(b)] of a standing wave, depending upon the relative
 72 phase and amplitude of the two incident fields [4]: The E-antinode condition is achieved when
 73 E_f and E_s are parallel and of equal magnitude ($E_f/E_s = 1$) at the surface [Fig. 1(a), inset]; while
 74 the B-antinode condition requires E_f and E_s to be anti-parallel with relative amplitudes
 75 dependent upon the ratio of incident media refractive indices ($E_f/E_s = -n_s/n_f$) [Fig. 1(b),
 76 inset]. Silicon is employed for the nanopillar resonators, as a high-refractive index, low optical
 77 absorption dielectric for the near-infrared wavelengths of interest, with established capacity to
 78 support Mie-type resonances with scattered field phase shifts covering the necessary 2π range,
 79 in structures with readily achievable dimensions [41, 42].

80 2. Phase of light scattered by individual nanopillars

81 To enable the development of coherently controllable metalens designs, we first evaluate the
 82 scattering characteristics of individual nanopillars as a function of size under regimes of E- and
 83 B-antinode illumination (Fig. 2) at a free-space wavelength of 1550 nm, with the light
 84 polarization along the x direction in all cases. Simulations are performed using a full-wave
 85 finite element electromagnetic solver (COMSOL Multiphysics) using purely real refractive

86 index values for silicon and glass of 3.48 and 1.50, respectively. We assume a fixed pillar height
 87 (z) of 500 nm and elliptical xy plane cross sections with principal semi-axis dimensions R_x and
 88 R_y each ranging from 100 to 400 nm in 5 nm steps – a library of $61 \times 61 = 3721$ nanopillar
 89 geometries. The simulations employ periodic boundary conditions in the xy plane, with a 900
 90 nm center-to-center spacing between pillars that is smaller than the wavelength (to exclude
 91 diffraction) but large enough to negate coupling among neighboring pillars [43], i.e. such that
 92 the collective scattering characteristics can be taken as those of singular pillars.



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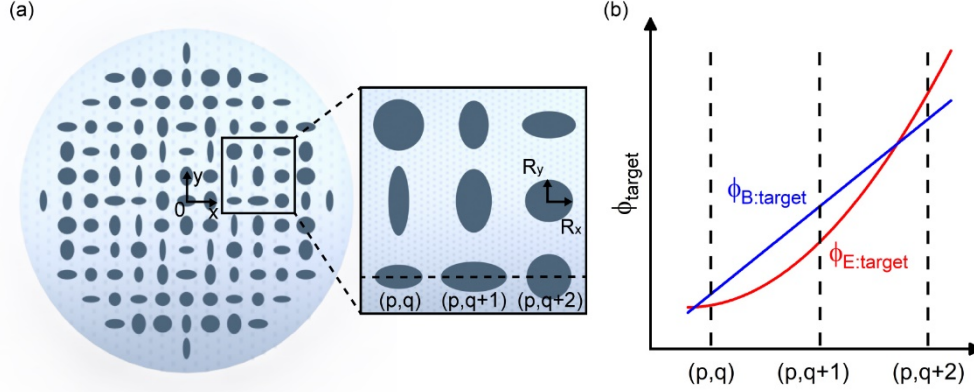
Fig. 2. Nanopillar scattering phase. (a) Dimensional schematic of a single Si nanopillar unit cell. Elliptical pillars with semi-axial dimensions R_x and R_y are centered within each 900 nm \times 900 nm unit cell in an infinitely large, bi-periodic array. (b, c) Scattering phase and amplitude as functions of R_x and R_y [values ranging from 100 to 400 nm in 5 nm steps; x -polarized incident light] for (b) E-antinode and (c) B-antinode coherent illumination conditions. (d) Phase difference between (c) and (b). All the phase values are relative to that of the free-space incident beam, which remains unchanged between the two illumination conditions.

101 Figures 2(b) and 2(c) show the phase and amplitude of scattered light as a function of R_x
 102 and R_y for the two (E- and B-antinode) illumination regimes. The first thing to note is that in
 103 both cases, the selected range of pillar dimensions provides full coverage of a 2π range. This
 104 can represent a challenge in the design of any gradient metasurface optical elements [44, 45]
 105 but under standing wave illumination conditions, one can selectively excite electric or magnetic
 106 type modes while almost entirely suppressing the other, thereby gaining access to a wider range
 107 of scattering phases for a given set of pillar dimensions than is possible under single beam
 108 illumination. (The finite, nonzero height of the pillars precludes total suppression of any
 109 magnetic, B , contribution under the E -antinode illumination regime, and vice versa.) The
 110 second, which is of fundamental importance to coherent modulation of metalens functionality,
 111 is the difference between Figs. 2(b) and 2(c) [Fig. 2(d)] – i.e. the fact that under E/B-antinode
 112 standing wave illumination a given nanopillar offers two (generally) different values of
 113 scattering phase, as compared to a single value under single beam illumination.

114 3. Design process for coherently switchable metalenses

115 Metalenses are subsequently designed as square arrays of nanopillars with center-to-center
 116 spacing of 900 nm, filling a circular area of radius 36 μm – a total of 4777 lattice sites, each

117 occupied by a pillar selected from the above library to provide the best possible simultaneous
 118 fit to the two (different) radial phase gradient profiles required for the lens to focus light
 119 (differently) under both E- and B-antinode illumination conditions. The semi-axes (R_x and R_y)
 120 of the pillars are oriented along the translation directions of the metalens lattice sites [the x and
 121 y axes respectively, with coordinates defined relative to the center of the metalens, as illustrated
 122 in Fig. 3(a)].



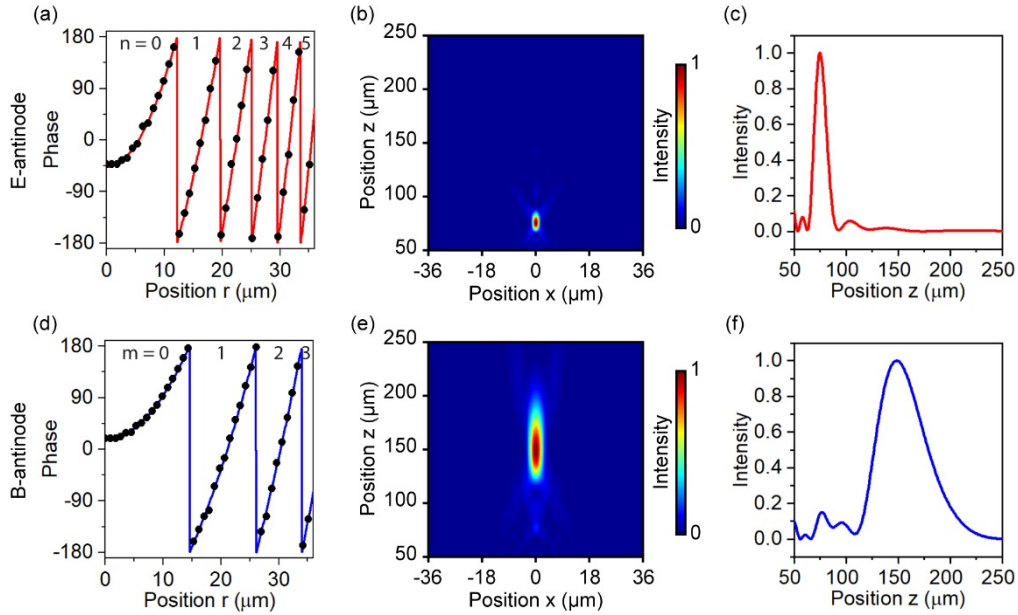
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 124 **Fig. 3.** Metalens design principle. (a) Lenses are assembled as a square lattice of cells with
 125 center-to-center spacing of 900 nm, filling a circular area of radius 36 μm [far fewer cells being
 126 shown in this schematic]. Each cell contains an elliptical Si nanopillar from the library of Fig.
 127 2, with semi-axes (R_x and R_y) aligned to the x , y coordinate frame of the array. (b) The nanopillar
 128 at each location, with coordinates (p, q) , is selected to fit a pair of target phase profiles $\phi_{E:target}$
 129 and $\phi_{B:target}$ for E- and B-antinode illumination conditions, respectively.

130 Optimal nanopillar dimensions (R_x and R_y) are identified for each lattice site by minimizing
 131 a summation over the lens of the following quantity, evaluated at each lattice site – the
 132 combined deviation from the ideal pair of scattered phase values at that point:

$$133 \quad \left| \phi_E^{p,q} - \phi_{E:target}^{p,q} - \phi_{E:base} - n^{p,q} 2\pi \right| + \left| \phi_B^{p,q} - \phi_{B:target}^{p,q} - \phi_{B:base} - m^{p,q} 2\pi \right| \quad (1)$$

134 Here, $\phi_E^{p,q}$ and $\phi_B^{p,q}$ are the two antinodal scattered phase values of the nanopillar geometry
 135 under consideration [i.e. from matching R_x and R_y coordinates in Figs. 2(b) and 2(c)], and
 136 $\phi_{E:target}^{p,q}$ and $\phi_{B:target}^{p,q}$ are the corresponding target phase values for the lattice point; p and q
 137 being the positional coordinates of the lattice point. $\phi_{E:base}$ and $\phi_{B:base}$ are arbitrary offsets,
 138 which can independently take values between $-\pi$ and $+\pi$ (in steps of $\pi/500$ for the purposes of
 139 the numerical optimization procedure) but must be constant across the whole lens (adding or
 140 subtracting a constant phase at all points has no net effect on the collective phase profile). They
 141 account for the fact that it is only necessary to constrain relative phase as a function of lattice
 142 coordinate relative to the center of the lens, rather than absolute phase. n and m are arbitrary
 143 (independent) integers, which account for equivalence of $\pm\pi$ values (and multiples thereof). As
 144 a final step, the focusing performance of the full metalens design is evaluated using a finite
 145 difference time domain numerical solver (Lumerical FDTD Solutions; with incident light
 146 polarized along x as in singular pillar library simulations above) - this being more
 147 computationally efficient for large assemblies of non-identical unit cells than the finite element
 148 method employed above in generating the nanopillar library.

149 **4. Coherently switchable metalens functionalities**



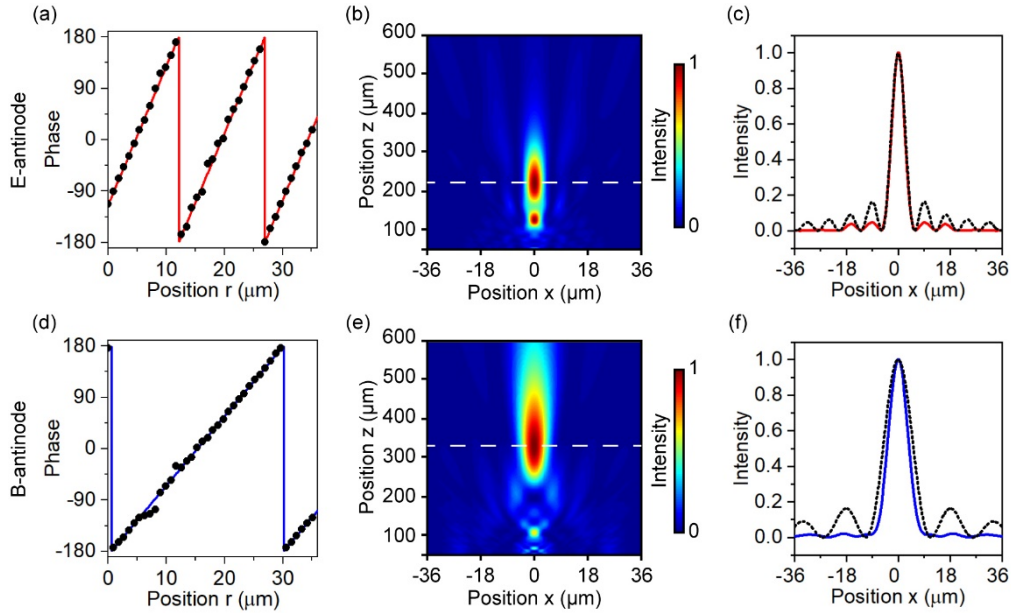
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Fig. 4. Coherent switching of a spherical metalens. (a and d) Target phase profiles (lines) for (a) E-antinode and (d) B-antinode illumination, as functions of radial distance from the center of the metalens, overlaid with points corresponding to the co-optimally selected Si nanopillars along the x axis of the lens. (b and e) Corresponding output electric field intensities - i.e. of light propagating in the $+z$ direction away from the lens - in the xz plane from 50 to 250 μm above the metalens surface. The intensity is normalized against the maximal value in the map. (c and f) Intensity as a function of distance from the metalens surface along the output beam axes [the lines $x = 0$ in panels (b) and (e)].

159 We first consider metalenses that produce a spherical wavefront in free space. These require a
160 hyperbolic phase profile:

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$$\phi(f, r) = 2\pi(\sqrt{r^2 + f^2} - f)/\lambda \quad (2)$$

162 where λ is the free space wavelength of 1550 nm, r is radial distance from the center of the lens,
163 and f is the focal length. We select values of f differing by a factor of two: 75 μm at the E-
164 antinode and 150 μm the B-antinode. Figures 4(a) and 4(d) show the corresponding $\phi_{E:target}$
165 and $\phi_{B:target}$ radial phase profiles as solid lines, overlaid with points relating to the set of forty
166 nanopillars that provides a best fit to both [according to Eq.(1)] along the $y = 0$ direction.
167 Optimal $\phi_{E:base}$ and $\phi_{B:base}$ values for this lens are found to be -47.2° and 16.6° . The
168 nanopillar library defined above enables equally good phase matching to the required profiles
169 over the entire lens area, with average phase deviation from ideal values of 3.1° at the E-
170 antinode and 2.6° at the B-antinode, over all 4777 lattice points. In consequence, the lens
171 generates well-defined, singular foci under both E- and B-antinode illumination conditions
172 [Figs. 4(b, c) and 4(e, f)]: at the E-antinode, $f = 74.7 \mu\text{m}$ (vs. a target value of 75.0 μm), the
173 full-width half-maximum (FWHM) spot diameter is 1.2λ , and the FWHM focal depth is 8.5λ ;
174 at the B-antinode, $f = 148.3 \mu\text{m}$ (vs. a target value of 150 μm), the FWHM spot diameter is
175 2.4λ , and the FWHM focal depth is 33.7λ . The focusing efficiency, defined as the power ratio
176 of the focal spot and the total input, is 12.9% at the E-antinode and 31.1% at the B-antinode.



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Fig. 5. Coherent switching of an axicon metalens. (a and d) Target phase profiles (lines) for (a) E-antinode and (d) B-antinode illumination, as functions of radial distance from the center of the metalens, overlaid with points corresponding to the co-optimally selected Si nanopillars along the x axis of the lens. (b and e) Corresponding output electric field intensities in the xz plane from 50 to 600 μm above the metalens surface. (c and f) Cross sectional intensity profiles (solid lines) of the output field at (c) $z = 219.0 \mu\text{m}$ in panel (b), and (f) $z = 331.9 \mu\text{m}$ in panel (e) [as indicated by the dashed white lines in said panels] overlaid with zeroth-order Bessel functions of the first kind (black dotted lines).

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As a second example (Fig. 5), we consider a coherently switchable axicon metalens with a conical phase profile $\phi(f, r)$:

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$$\phi(f, r) = 2\pi r \sin\beta / \lambda \quad (3)$$

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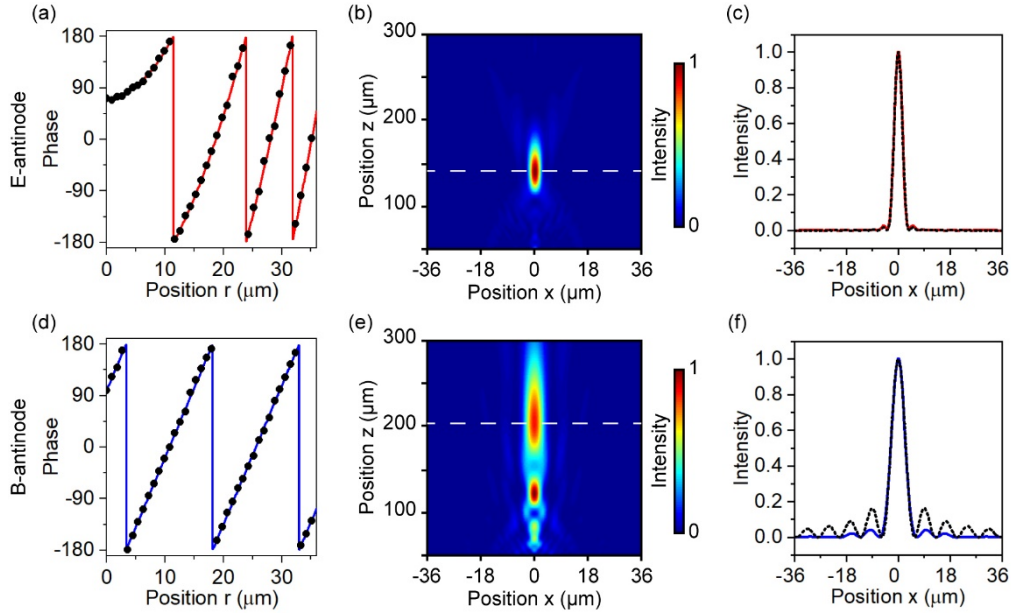
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where the coefficient β dictates the slope of the phase profile. The Bessel-like beams generated by axicons possess unique properties in that they are non-diffracting (e.g. capable of maintaining its transversal intensity profile in propagation) and self-healing (e.g. capable of recovering its original beam profile even if it is obstructed by a finite sized object), which are of value in applications such as optical coherence tomography, particle manipulation and cell sorting [11, 46-49]. We select values of β differing by a factor of two: 6° at the E-antinode and 3° at the B-antinode. As per Fig. 4 for the spherical lens, Figs 5(a) and 5(d) show the corresponding $\phi_{E:target}$ and $\phi_{B:target}$ radial phase profiles as solid lines, overlaid with points relating to the set of forty nanopillars that provides a best fit to both [according to Eq.(1)] along the $y = 0$ direction. Optimal $\phi_{E:base}$ and $\phi_{B:base}$ values for this lens are -114.1° and 173.5° . Again, good phase matching is achieved over the whole lens area, with average phase deviation of 2.6° at the E-antinode and 2.2° at the B-antinode. Figures 5(b, c) and 5(e, f) illustrate focusing performance: at the E-antinode, the axial focus has a FWHM diameter of 3.3λ , and a FWHM focal depth of 84.8λ ; at the B-antinode, it has a FWHM diameter of 5.0λ , and a FWHM focal depth of 173.8λ . The focusing efficiency is 13.0% at the E-antinode and 29.0% at the B-antinode. Compared to the foci of the spherical metalens above [Figs. 4(b) and 4(e)], the axicon foci [Figs. 5(b) and 5(e)] are extended in the z direction and have pronounced sidebands, which are key characteristics of Bessel beams generated by axicons [46]. The cross-sectional intensity distribution in the focal plane is well-matched to that of an ideal Bessel beam with minor deviations [Figs. 5(c) and 5(f)], indicative of a clear slope-angle change between the conical phase profiles at E- and B-antodes. These discrepancies, and the appearance of secondary

210 axial focal points, are attributed to the limited aperture size of the metalens, imperfect phase
 211 matching, and variations in light scattering strength among the nanopillars [50].



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Fig. 6. Coherent switching between (a-c) a spherical lens and (d-f) an axicon lens. (a and d) Target phase profiles (lines) for (a) a spherical lens under E-antinode illumination and (d) an axicon lens under B-antinode illumination, as functions of radial distance from the center of the metalens, overlaid with points corresponding to the co-optimally selected Si nanopillars along the x axis of the lens. (b and e) Corresponding output electric field intensities in the xz plane from 50 to 250 μm above the metalens surface. (c and f) Cross sectional intensity profiles (solid lines) of the output field at (c) 139.5 μm in panel (b) overlaid with the analytical profile of an Airy pattern (black dashed line), and (f) $z = 204.7 \mu\text{m}$ in panel (e) overlaid with zeroth-order Bessel functions of the first kind (black dotted lines).

222 The two examples above illustrate coherent switching of focal parameters for lenses of fixed
 223 type (spherical or axicon) but the coherent control paradigm also allows for switching between
 224 lens types – a functionality that cannot be straightforwardly implemented by other tuning
 225 mechanisms, such as mechanical deformation or homogenous change of intrinsic material
 226 properties [23, 24, 26-39]. In the third example here (Fig. 6), we design a metalens with
 227 hyperbolic profile [Eq. (2)] at the E-antinode – to function as a spherical lens with $f = 140 \mu\text{m}$,
 228 and a conical profile [Eq. (3)] at the B-antinode – an axicon with $\beta = 6^\circ$. The range of achievable
 229 phase modulation (Fig. 2) facilitates excellent phase matching through this hyperbolic-conical
 230 profile transition, with average phase deviation of 3.0° at the E-antinode and 2.5° at B-
 231 antinode. Figures 6(b, c) and 6(e, f) illustrate that, at the E-antinode, $f = 139.5 \mu\text{m}$ (vs. a target value of
 232 $140 \mu\text{m}$) with a FWHM spot diameter of 2.1λ and a FWHM field depth of 29.0λ ; at the B-
 233 antinode, the main section of the focal field has a FWHM diameter of 3.4λ and a FWHM depth
 234 of 67.3λ . Once more, the significant difference in focal depth [Figs. 6(b, e)] and side band [Figs.
 235 6(c, f)] at E- and B-antinode prove a pronounced transition between parabolic and axicon
 236 lenses, indicating that the coherent control method is a promising approach for flexible
 237 wavefront shaping.

238 5. Conclusion

239 In summary, we introduce coherent control/illumination as a versatile approach to realizing
 240 binary focal switching in all-dielectric metalenses. The constituent Si nanopillars of the
 241 metalenses respond to local driving field, and under standing wave illumination the selective

242 excitation of their electric or magnetic resonant modes can provide, by design, markedly
243 different metalens phase profiles. Lenses are designed as arrays of nanopillars with elliptical
244 cross-sectional dimensions individually selected to co-optimally fit the desired pair of phase
245 profiles. In proof of principle here, we analyze designs for near-IR spherical and axicon lenses
246 with switchable focal lengths and diameters differing by a factor of two, and a lens that can be
247 switched between spherical and axicon forms. The concept though is not limited to these two
248 lens types and, with appropriate selection of resonator material and geometry, can be adapted
249 to other spectral bands to enable reversible, all-optical control of output wavefronts.

250 As in any other interferometric phenomenon or device, for a high contrast between the
251 limiting (constructive/destructive, or in this case E/B-antinode) states, coherently controlled
252 metalenses require accurate beam alignment/stability and wavefront uniformity over the lens
253 area. And like any other optically resonant metasurface element, the lenses considered here –
254 designed to function at one specific wavelength – would be subject to chromatic aberration.
255 However, approaches to the design of achromatic metalenses are well known [16, 17, 50] and
256 the spectral dispersion of scattering can be taken into account (as required according to
257 application) in nanopillar selection at the lens design stage. Likewise, manufacturing tolerances
258 and systematic imperfections can be accounted for in designs by compiling the E/B-antinode
259 nanopillar libraries on the basis of real (i.e. measured) pillar geometries including, for example,
260 rounded corners and tapered side walls. And finally, where output efficiency is of primary
261 concern, greater weight can be given to scattering amplitudes in the selection of nanopillars for
262 optimum lens performance. As such, the dual libraries-based selection offers a highly flexible
263 and adaptable approach to application-specific lens design.

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266 **Disclosures.** The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

267 **Data availability.** The data that support the findings of this study are available within the article.

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