Multiplexing THz Vortex Beams With a Single Diffractive 3-D Printed Lens

Federico Machado ¹⁰, Przemysław Zagrajek, Vicente Ferrando, Juan A. Monsoriu ¹⁰, and Walter D. Furlan ¹⁰

Abstract—We present a novel method for experimentally generating multiplexed THz vortex beams by using a single threedimensional printed element that combines a set of radially distributed spiral phase plates, and a binary focusing Fresnel lens. With this element, we have experimentally demonstrated that THz multiplexing can be tailored to fit within a small space on an optical bench. Results are presented beside numerical simulations, demonstrating the robust nature of the experimental method.

Index Terms—Diffraction, diffractive lenses, multiplexed vortex beams, vortex lenses.

I. INTRODUCTION

HE singular properties of terahertz radiation, such as good penetration and low scattering through various dielectric materials, nonionizing photon energy, and broad spectral bandwidth, motivated the growing of THz photonics. Research in this field was benefited from the development of more efficient emitters, detectors, and optical components such as refractive and diffractive lenses, gratings, beam splitters, polarizers, and retarders [1], [2]. Recently, it has been demonstrated that even a low-cost three-dimensional (3-D) printing technology can be employed to construct nonconventional diffractive THz lenses [3]-[7]. In this way, technological improvements regarding THz beam shaping in the form of vortex beams, are of interest because, although such beams have found a large number of applications in the visible domain (e.g., in sensing, microscopy and astronomical imaging, trapping and manipulating of matter, and communication technologies) [8]-[12], a few works have reported applications in the THz domain.

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F. Machado, V. Ferrando, and J. A. Monsoriu are with the Centro de Tecnologías Físicas, Universitat Politècnica de València, Valencia 46022, Spain (e-mail: femacol@doctor.upv.es; viferma1@upv.es; jmonsori@fis. upv.es).

P. Zagrajek is with the Institute of Optoelectronics, Military University of Technology, Warsaw 00-908, Poland (e-mail: przemyslaw.zagrajek@ wat.edu.pl).

W. D. Furlan is with the Departamento de Óptica y Optometría y Ciencias de la Visión, Universitat de València, Burjassot 46100, Spain (e-mail: walter. furlan@uv.es).

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The vortex beams have orbital angular momentum, and propagate with helical phase structure characterized by its azimuthally dependent phase $im\varphi$, in which φ is the transverse azimuthal coordinate and *m* is known as the topological charge. The fact that *m* can take any integer value motivated its use to encode and transmit information [13]. Therefore, due to its high frequency, THz beams are good candidates for information carrier of the wireless communications. Moreover, vortex beams with different *m* values can be used as different carriers for multiplexing and transmitting different data streams along the same spatial axis improving the performance of communication systems using the electromagnetic waves.

Successful methods used to obtain THz vortex beams include: off-axis holograms [14], quarter-wave plates coupled to a wire polarizer [15], arrays of wavelength-size V-shaped antennas [16], binary phase axicons with spiral configuration of zones [17]-[19], and a photopatterned birefringence liquid crystal [18]. Recently, linearly and circularly polarized vortex Bessel beams were generated by employing a quartz THz quarter wave plate, a spiral phase plate (SPP), and Teflon axicons with different opening angles [21]. A metasurface-based method to generate vortex beams using cross-shaped resonators was also proposed [22]. However, most of these methods were demonstrated for single-vortex beams. Since multiplexing several data channels has been used to significantly increase the data capacity in optical networks [23]-[25], in this paper, we examine the creation of composite THz vortex beams representing a superposition of vortices with different topological charges. A multiplexing approach, known as space-division multiplexing [26], [27], has been implemented to a multiplexed vortex THz lens (MVTL) using a 3-D printer. The analysis of the THz vortices produced by this structure was performed experimentally and numerically for a comparison.

II. DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION

Our strategy for generating multiplexed THz vortex waves using a single element, consists on the combination of two elements represented as the product of two separable functions: one, having a radial phase dependence that can be expressed in terms of a Ronchi-type periodic function with period p in the variable $(r/a)^2$ as

$$\phi(r) = \pi \operatorname{rect}[(r/a)^2 - 0.5] \operatorname{rect}\left[\frac{\operatorname{mod}[(r/a)^2 + 0.5p - 1, p]}{p}\right]$$
(1)

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Fig. 1. Design of a multiplexed THz vortex lens. (a) Base FZP using (1) with p = 1/6. (b) Multiplexed vortex SPP with topological charges inner part and outer part. (c) Composite vortex lens as the superposition of (a) and (b). Gray levels represent the lens thickness.

where a is the radius of the lens. The other element is a multiplexed spiral zone plate, which only has a phase dependence (linear) on the azimuthal angle. In this element, N nonoverlapping annular zones are arranged using the space-division multiplexing technique

$$\tau(\theta) = \left\{ \begin{array}{cc} m_1\theta, & 0 \le r < r_1 \\ & \dots \\ m_j\theta, & r_{j-1} \le r < r_j \\ & \dots \\ & m_N\theta, r_{N-1} \le r < a \end{array} \right\}.$$
 (2)

In this way, the transmittance of the lens is given by equation $T(r, \theta) = e^{i[\phi(r) + \tau(\theta)]}$.

As a demonstration, we propose an MVTL that consists on the combination of two spiral phase functions with different topological charges m_1 and m_2 , designed to work at 0.625 THz, and made of PA6 polyamide (absorption coefficient = 3.9 cm^{-1} and refractive index n = 1.6). Other 3-D printed materials were studied in [4].

The MVTL composition from its components is shown in Fig. 1. On the one hand, the MVTL [see Fig. 1(a)] was designed with alternate zones of thickness $t_1 = 0.8$ mm and $t_2 = 1.2$ mm, which have been calculated to provide a phase shift π between the zones for the design wavelength of $\lambda = 480 \ \mu$ m, and using the following expression: $\Delta t = t_2 - t_1 = \lambda/2(n-1)$. On the other hand, the spatially multiplexed THz SPP [see Fig. 1(b)] has two parts. The inner part, with topological charge $m_1 = -1$ is a circle of radius 14.67 mm that covers the four inner rings of the FZP. The outer part, with topological charge $m_2 = 7$ has an annular shape with an outer radius 25.4 mm and covers from the fifth to the 12th of the FZP. In each part, the thickness of the SPP depends on the azimuthal angle around the center of the SPP, as

$$h(\theta) = \text{mod}(m\theta, 2\pi) \frac{\lambda}{2\pi(n-1)}.$$
(3)

Thus, a total phase shift of $|2\pi m|$ will be imprinted on the electromagnetic wave by each part of the SPP. Taking into an account that this approach requires extreme precision in the pitch of helical surface, in order to reduce the fabrication errors, we incremented the thickness in each point of the SPP by a constant factor k = 4 providing an effective topological charge of km.



Fig. 2. Experimental setup for obtaining multiplexed THz vortex beams. The inset shows a CAD design of the MVTL experimental model.

In this way for the plate in Fig. 1(b), $0 \le h \le 3.2$ mm. Thus, the final THz design, shown in Fig. 1(c), results as the superposition of the plates in Fig. 1(a) and (b).

III. EXPERIMENTAL SETUP

The experimental setup for obtaining multiplexed THz vortex beams is shown in Fig. 2. A frequency multiplier based on the Schottky diode (Virginia Diodes, Inc., Charlottesville, VA, USA) was used as a source of radiation. The source was equipped with a waveguide, which ends in a horn antenna producing a linearly polarized Gaussian beam at 0.625 THz. In our case, the electric field was perpendicular to the ground. The beam was focused on a pinhole (2-mm diameter) by a highdensity polyethylene (HDPE) refractive lens. Then, the radiation was collimated, by a second HDPE lens, and directed onto the MVTL. The intensity distribution after the MVTL was scanned with a Schottky diode detector VDI (Virginia Diodes, Inc.) also equipped with a horn antenna (WR-1.5), having a 2.4-mm aperture diameter. As each component of our experimental setup was a passive element that do not change the polarization of the input beam, the detector was aligned to have the same orientation of the source. The detector was mounted on a 3-D motorized stage, which allows a high-precision movement. To measure the signal from the detector, a lock-in system (Stanford Research Systems, Sunnyvale, CA, USA, SR830), based on modulation at 187 Hz and a mechanical chopper, was used.

The inset in Fig. 2 shows the experimental model, which was designed using a CAD software (blender.org, Amsterdam the Netherlands) and constructed with a 0.3-mm spatial resolution by an online 3-D printing service (i.materialise, Leuven, Belgium). The MVTL was made from a polyamide granular powder by a selective laser sintering technique. The diameter of the constructed lens was 50.8 mm, and the FZP has the main focal distance (first diffraction order) of 112 mm.

IV. RESULTS

Beam transverse irradiance profiles provided by the composite helical beam were recorded after the MVTL, along the optical axis in 1 mm intervals with an accuracy of 2 μ m. Experimental



Fig. 3. Experimental results (upper row) and the numerical simulations (lower row) computed using the Fresnel–Kirchhoff nonparaxial scalar diffraction theory at different transverse planes around the MVTL focal plane (z = 112 mm).

results at five different planes are shown in Fig. 3 in comparison with numerical results computed using the Fresnel–Kirchhoff nonparaxial scalar diffraction theory [6].

As expected the two main vortices are in focus at the MVTL focal distance, the inner vortex corresponds to the topological charge $m_1 = -1$, while the outer vortex corresponds to the topological charge $m_2 = 7$. The last one also exhibits a complex structure with a cosenoidal azimuthal variation. In fact, $k(m_2 - m_1) = 32$ lobes appear, as it was expected by the theoretical analysis [28].

Despite of the differences between the physical lens and the theoretical design, due to the limitations of the 3-D printer resolution (especially near the center of the plate), the agreement between a theory and an experiment can be appreciated in Fig. 3. Additional vortices, seen in the experimental results, are the consequence of noninteger step heights of the lens designed for only one spectral component. Other sources of discrepancy between experimental and theoretical results are the inhomogeneities of the index of refraction and the finite size of the lens. Multiple reflections and standing waves in the MVTL may also lead to azimuthal modulations in intensity [29].

V. CONCLUSION

We have demonstrated the feasibility of realizing THz multiplexed vortex beams, with a 3-D printing technology. PA6 phase lenses were constructed and tested using 0.625-THz beam in a simple experimental THz setup. The experimental results were in a good agreement with the simulations despite some sources of errors, demonstrating the robustness of our proposal. In this way, this work extends to the THz domain previous use of phase optical elements in the visible domain [30] that could find many applications in THz technologies. For instance, there have been recent growing interest in applying vortex beams to wireless communications [31], and through mode multiplexing, vortex beams can tremendously increase the capacity of communication systems.

These novel techniques, developed for utilizing THz spectrum can be improved to achieve very high efficiency. In this sense, it has been demonstrated that dependencies of the vortex radius and width on a topological charge can be controlled [30], and, therefore, multiplexed THz vortex rings can be produced efficiently.

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Federico Machado was born in San Salvador, El Salvador, in 1970. He received the B.S. degree in electrical engineering from the Universidad Politécnica de El Salvador, San Salvador, El Salvador, and the M.S. degree in management of renewable resources from the Universidad Don Bosco, Antiguo Cuscatlán, El Salvador, in 1993 and 2013, respectively. He is currently working toward the Ph.D. degree at the Universidad Politécnica de Valencia, Valencia, Spain.

He worked with the Universidad Don Bosco for 15

years in different positions, teaching subjects related to electrical, electronics, and renewable resources. His research interests include energy efficiency and designing electronic systems to support educational systems.



Przemysław Zagrajek was born in 1979. He received the master's degree in physics from the Faculty of Applied Physics and Mathematics, Warsaw University of Technology, Warsaw, Poland, in 2004, and the Ph.D. degree from the Institute of Physics, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw, in 2012.

Since 2012, he has been an Assistant Professor with the Laboratory of Terahertz Technology, Institute of Optoelectronics, Military University of Technology, Warsaw. His research interests include spintronics and physics of nanodevices.



Vicente Ferrando was born in Valencia, Spain, in 1986. He received the B.S. degree in physics and M.S. degree in advanced physics (photonics) from the Universitat de València, Valencia, Spain, in 2010 and 2012, respectively. He received the Ph.D. degree from the Universitat Politècnica de València, Valencia, in 2017.

Since 2011, he has been a Researcher with the Diffraction Optics Group, Universitat de València and the Universitat Politècnica de València. His current research interests include the optical properties of

aperiodic diffractive lenses and their applications.



Juan A. Monsoriu was born in Valencia, Spain, in 1975. He received the B.S. degree in physics, M.S. degree in optics, and Ph.D. degree in physics from the Universidad de Valencia (UV), Valencia, in 1998, 2000, and 2003, respectively.

In 2000, he joined the Universidad Politécnica de Valencia (UPV), Valencia, where he is currently a Full Professor of applied physics. His research has been performed at the UV, the UPV, the Universidad de Málaga, Spain, the University of Bath, U.K., and the Universidad de Buenos Aires, Buenos Aires,

Argentina. His main research interests include numerical simulations for the design of microstructured optoelectronic systems and aperiodic optical devices.



Walter D. Furlan received the M.S. and Ph.D. degrees in physics from the University of La Plata, La Plata, Argentina, in 1984 and 1988, respectively.

Until 1990, he worked with the Centro de Investigaciones Opticas, Argentina. At the end of that year, he joined the Department of Optics, University of Valencia, Valencia, Spain, where he is currently a Professor of optics. He is currently a Full Professor with the University of Valencia, and the Codirector of the Diffractive Optics Group. His research has been developed in the field of optics in two well differen-

tiated areas. On the one hand, he has investigated on the theory and applications of phase-space representations (Wigner distribution function, ambiguity function, etc.). In these topics, he has authored or co-authored more than 25 papers in refereed journals and a chapter in *Phase-Space Optics: Fundamentals and Applications* (McGraw-Hill, 2009). On the other hand, mainly in the last ten years, he has focused on the study of the properties of nonconventional diffractive optical elements. He co-authored more than 30 papers and 3 patents related to these topics.

Dr. Furlan is a member of the European Optical Society.