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Deposition of NCD films using hot filament CVD and Ar/CH₄/H₂ gas mixtures

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Abstract

Ar/CH₄/H₂ gas mixtures have been used in an attempt to deposit nanocrystalline (NCD) diamond and ultra-nanocrystalline (UNCD) diamond films using hot filament (HF) chemical vapour deposition (CVD). A detailed composition map has been developed for the type of films deposited in the Ar/CH₄/H₂ system. It was found that the standard gas mixtures of 1%CH₄/Ar (+1–2%H₂) that are used successfully to grow UNCD films in microwave plasmas produce only graphitic film growth in a HF system. A 2-dimensional computer model was used to calculate the gas phase composition for these conditions. The non-uniform temperature distribution arising from the hot filament produces a substantial decrease in gas phase H atoms near to the substrate surface, whilst [CH₃] remains almost constant. We find that the [H]:[CH₃] ratio near the surface decreases from ~5:1 for 1%CH₄/H₂ gas mixtures to 1:36 for 1%CH₄/Ar mixtures, and that this can explain the decrease in growth rate and the reduction in film quality toward nanocrystalline or graphitic films. Increasing the H₂ content in the gas mixture improves the situation, but NCD growth was confined to a limited composition window at the boundary of the microcrystalline diamond growth region and ‘no growth’ region. A 2D model of a microwave CVD system has also been developed which gives the gas phase composition for the various Ar-rich gas mixtures. We find that due to the higher temperatures within the plasma ball, plus the fact that the gas temperature close to the substrate surface is in excess of 2000 K ensures that the [H]:[CH₃] ratio remains $\gg 1$, and thus permits growth of diamond, NCD or UNCD. Furthermore, since the model shows that [CH₃] and [C₂H] are always much greater than [C₂], this suggests that CH₃ and C₂H species may be more important growth precursors than C₂ under typical UNCD deposition conditions.

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Keywords: Nanocrystalline diamond; Hot filament CVD; Ar/CH₄/H₂ gas mixtures

1. Introduction

Diamond films can be deposited using a chemical vapour deposition (CVD) process involving the gas phase decomposition of a gas mixture containing a small quantity of a hydrocarbon in excess hydrogen [1]. A typical gas mixture uses 1%CH₄ in H₂, and this produces polycrystalline films with grain sizes in the micron or tens of micron range, depending upon growth conditions, substrate properties and growth time. The gas mixture can be activated in a number

of ways, such as microwave (MW) plasma, combustion torch, or a hot metal filament. The appearance and properties of the microcrystalline diamond (MCD) films produced by each method are very similar, since with all these methods the gas phase chemistry is very similar. This is because the initial reactant gases are converted to approximately the same steady-state mixture of hydrocarbon fragments and hydrogen atoms above the growing surface [2,3]. The Bachmann diagram [4] indicates that, due to this similarity in steady-state chemistry, MCD deposition only depends upon the ratios of C:H:O in the input gases, and not on their specific chemical identities.

A high concentration of hydrogen atoms close to the substrate surface is crucial in the deposition process, since H

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performs a number of important functions. First, H atoms can etch surface graphitic (sp^2) carbon many times faster than diamondlike (sp^3 -bonded) carbon. Second, the H atoms help to terminate the ‘dangling bonds’ on the diamond surface, thus stabilising the surface while growth takes place. Also, the H atoms react with large gas phase hydrocarbon fragments, splitting them into small pieces thus preventing polymer build-up. Finally, atomic H creates radical sites on the surface by undergoing H-abstraction reactions, removing some of the terminal hydrogens. It is generally believed [5,6] that the main growth species in standard CVD diamond growth is the CH_3 radical, which adds to the diamond surface stepwise following successive hydrogen abstraction by H atoms. Thus, a high concentration of atomic H at the surface is a prerequisite for successful MCD deposition.

By increasing the ratio of methane in the standard CH_4/H_2 gas mixture from 1% to ~5%, the grain size of the films decreases, and eventually becomes of the order of hundreds down to tens of nanometres. Such nanocrystalline diamond (NCD) films (often termed ‘cauliflower’ or ‘ballas’ diamond) are smoother than the microcrystalline ones, but have larger numbers of grain boundaries that contain substantial graphitic impurities. With further addition of CH_4 , the films become graphitic.

Recently, so-called ultra-nanocrystalline diamond (UNCD) films have become a topic of great interest, since they offer the possibility of making smooth, hard coatings at relatively low deposition temperatures, which can be patterned to nanometre resolution [7]. These differ from NCD films, since they have much smaller grain sizes (~2–5 nm), and have little or no graphitic impurities at the grain boundaries. Most reports of the deposition of these films describe using a microwave plasma CVD reactor and gas mixture of 1% CH_4 in Ar, usually with addition of 1–5% H_2 . Addition of nitrogen to the plasma during CVD has been found to give the films characteristics that are similar to n-type semiconductors, suggesting possible applications in electronic devices. However, the fundamental growth mechanism of these UNCD films is still unclear. Originally it was suggested [8] that the C_2 radical played an important role in the growth mechanism. However, recent work by ourselves [9] and others [10] have cast doubt on the veracity of this C_2 mechanism. It now seems more likely that it is a delicate balance between the concentrations of CH_3 and C_2 (and/or C_2H) radicals close to the substrate surface that determines the growth morphology and hence the properties of the resulting film.

To date, there has only been one report of the use of similar Ar/ CH_4/H_2 gas mixtures to deposit NCD (or UNCD) in a hot filament (HF) reactor [11]. In that report, the compositional diagram for mixtures of Ar, CH_4 and H_2 was mapped out corresponding to the type of film grown. It was found that for CH_4/H_2 concentrations below 1% (in the presence of Ar) no growth was observed, whereas MCD was deposited for CH_4/H_2 concentrations between 1% and

5% and Ar/ H_2 concentrations between 0% and 95%. Higher concentrations of methane generally led to non-diamond growth. NCD deposition occurred only in a very narrow gas composition window, $CH_4/H_2=2-5\%$ and Ar/ $H_2=95.5-98\%$, and this gave diamond films with grain size ~50 nm and high phase purity. However, these gas mixtures are still relatively hydrogen-rich compared to the 1% CH_4/Ar (+1–2% H_2) mixtures that are used to deposit UNCD films in MW reactors.

In this paper we report attempts to deposit NCD and UNCD films in a hot filament reactor using Ar/ CH_4/H_2 gas mixtures, both in hydrogen-rich and hydrogen-poor environments. We also use 2-dimensional modelling of the gas chemistry in both hot filament and microwave reactors to attempt to understand the observations, and finally to show how the experimental and theoretical data may help to shed some light on the (U)NCD growth mechanism.

2. Experimental

Films were deposited using a standard hot filament reactor operating at a pressure of 100 Torr using high purity Ar, CH_4 and H_2 as source gases. Mass flow controllers were used to vary the ratios of the 3 gases: $[CH_4]/([CH_4]+[H_2])$ between 1% and 100% and $[Ar]/([Ar]+[H_2])$ between 0% and 100%, with the flow of CH_4 being constant at 1 sccm throughout (i.e. the flows of the other gases, and the total gas flow were changed accordingly). This was in order to keep the number of carbon atoms entering the chamber constant, so as to compare growth rates and film properties reliably. The filament was made from a 0.25 mm-diameter Ta metal, wound around a 3 mm-diameter core to produce a 2 cm-long coil that was positioned 5 mm from the substrate surface. Due to the higher thermal conductivity of H_2 compared to Ar, for H_2 -rich gas mixtures a higher filament current (~6.5 A) was required, as compared to Ar-rich gas mixtures (4–5 A), to achieve the same filament temperature of 2400 °C (monitored using a 2-colour optical pyrometer). The substrate was single crystal Si (100) which had been manually abraded prior to deposition using 1–3 μm diamond grit, and then ultrasonically cleaned with propan-2-ol. The substrate sat on a separate heater to give additional uniform heating and to maintain it at a temperature of ~850–900 °C (also measured using the optical pyrometer). Typical deposition times were 8 h, although some runs at higher methane concentrations were abandoned early due to premature filament breakage. For methane concentrations above 5% it was found that the filament would become covered with a thick, smooth, rounded coating after a period of 1 or 2 h (see Fig. 1(a)). This coating reduced the efficiency of the filament, and along with an increase in resistance, this meant that a higher current was needed to maintain the same temperature. Eventually the current required became so large that the filament failed. Laser Raman analysis of this coating gave a spectrum character-

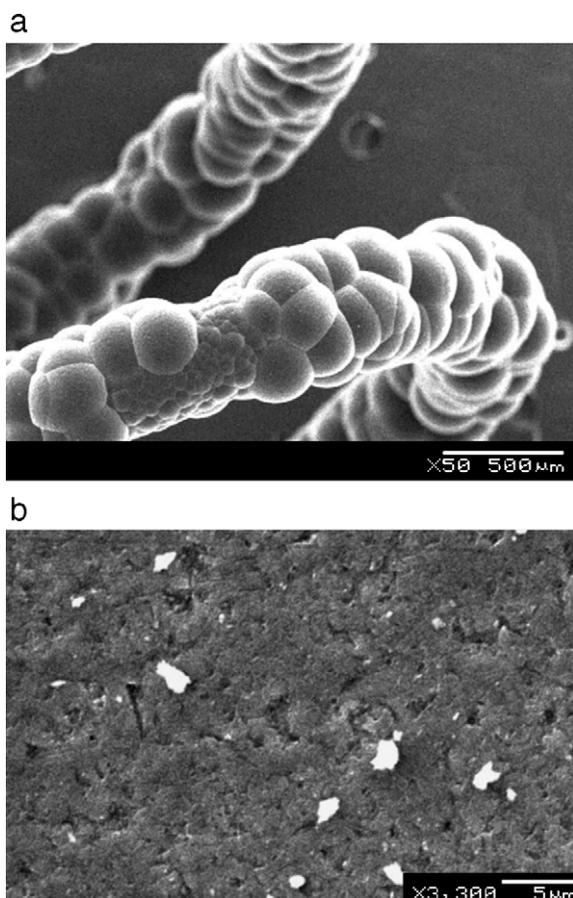


Fig. 1. (a) A SEM micrograph of the graphitic coating seen on the Ta filament after a 3 h growth in a 1%CH₄/Ar gas mixture. (b). A SEM micrograph of the isolated nanoparticles seen on the Si surface after an 8 h growth in a 20%CH₄/(CH₄+H₂), 99.4%Ar/(Ar+H₂) gas mixture.

161 istic of crystalline graphite. After deposition the films were
162 analysed by UV (325 nm) laser Raman spectroscopy and
163 scanning electron microscopy (SEM).

3. Modelling

In order to understand the gas phase chemistry occurring in the CVD chamber, the composition of the gas mixture was calculated using an existing 2D and 3D model that has been specifically tailored to a reactor of this geometry [12]. The models comprise three blocks, which describe (i) activation of the reactive mixture (i.e. gas heating and catalytic H atom production at the filament surface), (ii) gas phase processes (heat and mass transfer and chemical kinetics), and (iii) gas-surface processes at the substrate. The gas phase chemistry and thermochemical input is taken from the GRI-Mech 3.0 detailed reaction mechanism for C/H/Ar gas mixtures [13]. As in previous studies [14–16] the conservation equations for mass, momentum, energy, and species concentrations, together with appropriate initial and boundary conditions, thermal, and caloric equations of state, are each integrated numerically until steady-state conditions are attained. This yields spatial distributions of the gas temperature, T_{gas} , the flow field, and the various species number densities and mole fractions.

We have also developed a model of plasma-chemical kinetics and heat and mass transfer to allow a full 2D simulation of the same gas mixtures in a MW reactor. Parameters for the model are taken from experimental observations of the shape and size of the plasma ball in our Astex-style microwave reactor operating at 800 W, with different Ar/CH₄/H₂ gas mixtures. For example, an 800 W 1%CH₄/2%H₂/97%Ar plasma at 100 Torr produced a plasma ball that is roughly hemispherical (radius ~ 2.5 cm) and positioned ~ 1 mm above the substrate. A full description of the model and its comparison with experimental MW plasmas will be given in a later paper [17] but, briefly, the set of non-stationary conservation equations for mass, momentum, energy and species concentrations were solved numerically in cylindrical (r, z) coordinates. Electro-

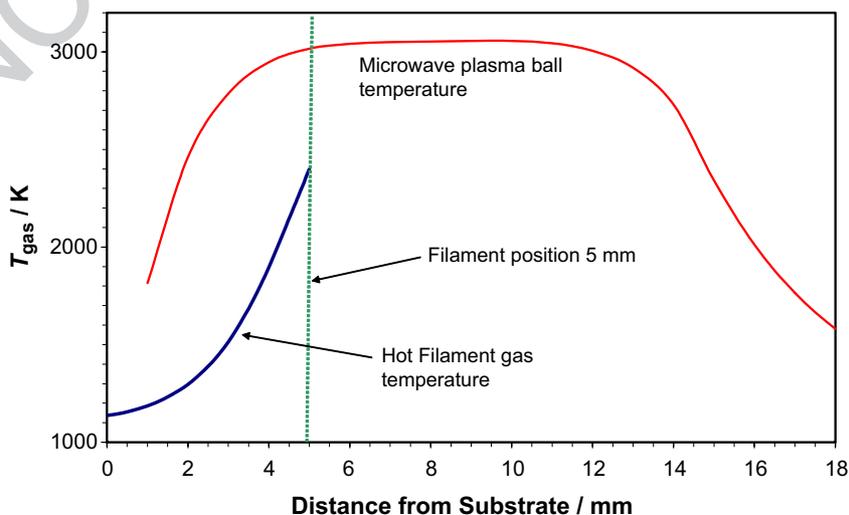


Fig. 2. Gas temperatures for the hot filament system ($T_{\text{sub}}=1130$ K and substrate–filament distance=5 mm) and MW plasma system (800 W, 100 Torr), calculated by solving the 2D energy conservation equations in the model for the gas mixture in both our reactors, and for 1%CH₄/2%H₂/Ar gas mixture.

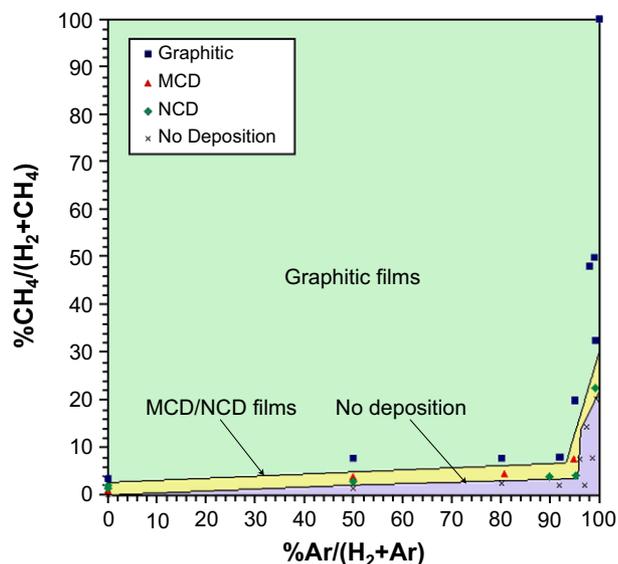


Fig. 3. An experimental composition map of the Ar/CH₄/H₂ gas mixture for a hot filament reactor. The plotted points are from growth experiments, and the positions of the boundary lines between the 3 regions have been estimated from these. Key: ‘Graphitic’ means either that the films were predominantly sp² carbon in character (as determined by Raman spectroscopy) or that the filament became coated in a graphitic layer preventing film deposition. ‘MCD’ means microcrystalline diamond, giving a well resolved 1332 cm⁻¹ Raman line and faceted crystallite sizes >0.1 μm. ‘NCD’ means nanocrystalline diamond, and were films that appeared amorphous or had crystallite sizes <0.1 μm, but which also exhibited the 1150–1190 cm⁻¹ Raman line (see Fig. 5). ‘No Deposition’ is where no obvious films were deposited after 8 h of growth, although in some cases isolated crystallites were observed lying on top of the substrate.

199 magnetic fields are not calculated in this approach. Instead,
200 a uniform electron temperature, T_e , and absorbed power
201 density are applied to a hemisphere approximately corre-
202 sponding to the observed experimental plasma region. T_e

values in the range of 1.3–1.5 eV for 1%CH₄/H₂ and 2.4–
2.7 eV for 1%CH₄/2%H₂/97%Ar were chosen using an
electron and plasma kinetic 0D model to be consistent with
experimental input powers of ~800 W. In the 0D model, the
balance equations for charged and neutral species are solved
for given reduced electric fields. Simultaneously, the
electron energy distribution function for the chosen gas
mixture composition is calculated by solving the Boltzmann
equation with a two-term approximation and local field
approach, using a set of known electron-particle collision
cross-sections [18]. As a result, the steady-state species
number density distributions, T_e , and rate coefficients of
electron reactions as a function of T_e are obtained.
Established plasma-chemical mechanisms (~35 species
and ~300 reactions for H/C/Ar mixtures [19,20]) together
with the electron temperature dependence of the electron
collision processes are used in the 2D model of the
microwave reactor.

Two tests show that this model gives what appears to be a
realistic description of the plasma processes. First, the
calculated number density for the C₂ radical in the centre of
the plasma ball for a 1%CH₄/2%H₂/97%Ar gas mixture
(100 Torr, 800 W) is ~10¹² cm⁻³, which agrees closely
with experimental measurements from similar plasmas [10].
Second, the calculated gas temperature in the centre of the
plasma is 3000 K, dropping to <1800 K close to the
substrate (see Fig. 2). This is consistent with measurements
of the gas temperature (usually taken from rotational
temperatures of C₂) in similar Ar/CH₄/H₂ plasmas [9,10,21].

4. Results

Fig. 3 shows a composition map for the Ar/CH₄/H₂
system in our HF reactor. This broadly resembles the results

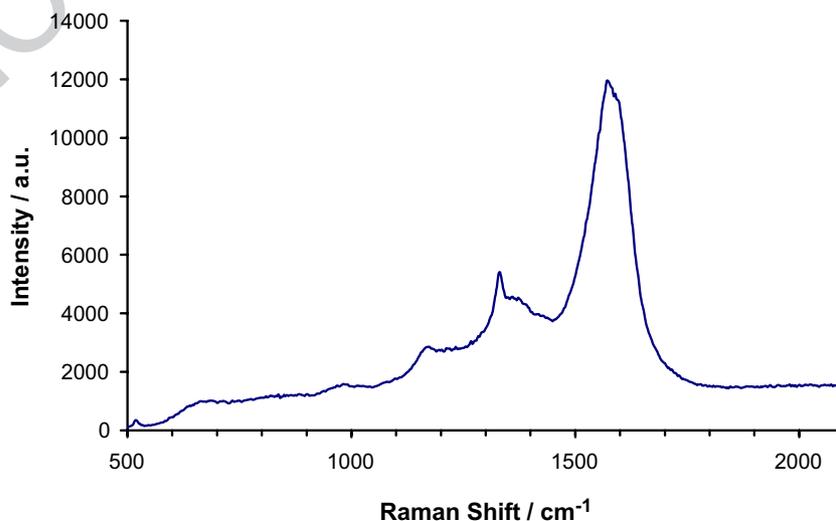


Fig. 4. Laser Raman (325 nm) spectrum from a film deposited with [CH₄]/([CH₄]+[H₂])=4% and [Ar]/([Ar]+[H₂])=90% at 100 Torr pressure, showing the presence of the 1150–90 cm⁻¹ peak associated with NCD, plus a discernible diamond peak at 1332 cm⁻¹ and broad G and D bands.

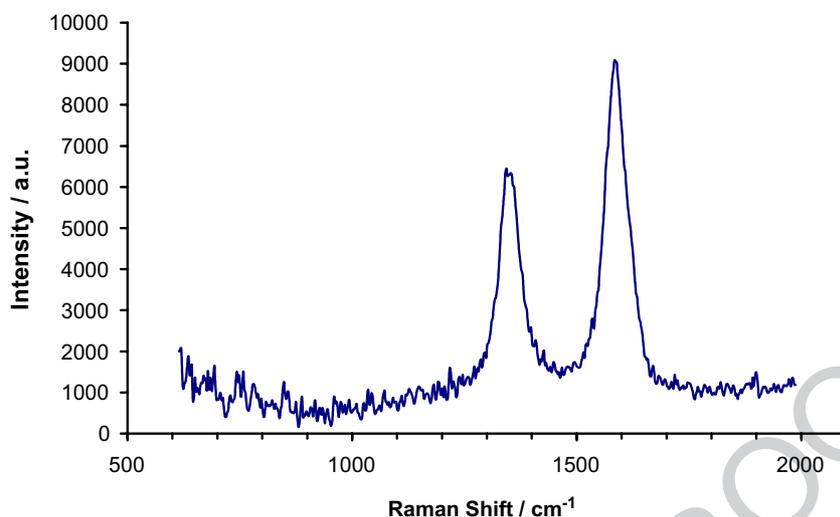


Fig. 5. Laser Raman (514 nm) spectrum from a film deposited with 1%CH₄/Ar at 100 Torr pressure, characteristic of crystalline graphite.

235 of Lin et al. [11], in that there is only a narrow composition
 236 range in which MCD or NCD is deposited. Generally, if the
 237 methane concentration becomes too high the filament
 238 becomes coated in a graphitic layer inhibiting gas activation
 239 and thus stopping subsequent film growth. Any films that
 240 are deposited consist of graphitic or non-diamond carbon.
 241 With low concentrations of methane, no film growth is seen
 242 (or the growth rate is too low to discern growth in a
 243 deposition time of 8 h). Diamond films are deposited only in
 244 a very narrow region around $[\text{CH}_4]/([\text{CH}_4]+[\text{H}_2]) \sim 1\text{--}6\%$.
 245 The top boundary of this region is poorly defined, with the
 246 film quality gradually becoming more nanocrystalline with
 247 increasing CH₄ concentration until either the filament
 248 becomes covered in soot ending film growth, or graphitic
 249 films are deposited. The lower boundary appears to be much
 250 sharper, with the film quality changing from MCD to ‘no
 251 growth’ within less than 1% change in CH₄ concentration.
 252 Very close to the boundary between MCD and ‘no growth’,
 253 we observe some NCD film deposition. The evidence for
 254 NCD was taken as the presence of the 1150–1190 cm⁻¹
 255 Raman line (see Figs. 4 and 5). The growth rate of NCD
 256 films in this boundary region was low, around 0.1 μm h⁻¹.
 257 Immediately below the boundary, i.e. just inside the ‘no
 258 growth’ region, we often observed isolated nanoparticles
 259 lying on the surface, but which appeared not to be bonded to
 260 the surface (see Fig. 1(b)).

261 5. Discussion

262 Some questions arise from these findings. Why is it that
 263 gas compositions such as 1%CH₄/Ar (with or without 1–
 264 2% added H₂) grow UNCD films in a MW reactor, but the
 265 same gas composition in a hot filament reactor produces
 266 only graphitic films? In other words, why does the idea
 267 behind the Bachmann diagram, which works for the H-rich

gas mixtures, fail for these Ar-rich/H-poor gas mixtures? Is
 there some difference between the gas phase chemistry in
 the two reactors in the Ar/CH₄/H₂ system?

The results from the computer modelling of the gas phase
 composition may help to answer these questions. There are
 three major differences between MW plasma activation and
 hot filament activation of these types of gas mixtures at
 these pressures. The first is that the MW system has much
 more input power than a HF system, 800 W compared to
 ~120 W, respectively. Thus gas mixture activation is liable
 to be far more extensive in a MW system, as well as it
 having a higher overall gas temperature.

Second, a HF system relies only upon thermal energy
 and catalytic H₂ dissociation on the filament surface to
 initiate the gas phase chemistry, whereas for a MW system,
 in addition to thermal activation, there are plasma activation
 processes e.g. direct electron impact excitation and ionisa-
 tion, and reactions between molecules, ions and excited
 atoms. For example, previous calculations [22] for MW and
 DC discharges used to grow CVD diamond showed that
 electron impact on H₂ was the dominating mechanism for
 dissociation at low temperature. Thermal dissociation
 became comparable with electron impact dissociation only
 at much higher temperatures, $T_{\text{gas}} > 2800\text{--}3000$ K. Thus
 MW plasmas will be considerably more efficient at
 producing radicals and ions than hot filament reactors,
 especially at lower gas temperatures.

The third major difference between the two reactor
 systems is in the gas temperature distribution. The hot
 filament system has a localised source of heat (the
 filament), and the gas temperature drops off rapidly with
 distance away from this. The rate of drop-off depends
 upon the thermal conductivities of the components of the
 gas mixture, as well as the position and temperature of the
 substrate. Fig. 2 shows the calculated temperature distri-
 bution for a 1%CH₄/Ar gas mixture, with the filament

304 temperature at 2400 K and a substrate at a distance of 5
 305 mm maintained at a temperature of 1130 K. The figure
 306 also shows the corresponding curve for the same gas
 307 mixture in a 800 W MW system. The plot shows that, for
 308 conditions closely resembling those in our HF reactor, the
 309 gas temperature drops off rapidly at distances away from
 310 the filament, reaching <1200 K for gas 1 mm above the
 311 growing surface. It is known from previous experimental
 312 [2,20] and theoretical [9,23] studies of 1%CH₄/H₂ mix-
 313 tures that a gas temperature of >1400 K is needed for
 314 efficient thermal dissociation of H₂ which can then
 315 subsequently react with gas phase hydrocarbons to release
 316 the diamond growth precursor, CH₃. The calculations show
 317 that temperatures in excess of this only occur within 2.5
 318 mm of the filament. Thus, it is clear that a HF system is
 319 very inefficient at producing H atoms near to the substrate
 320 surface. Therefore, for growth to occur, the H atoms that
 321 are created within the 2.5 mm ‘hot region’ close to the
 322 filament need to diffuse through the colder background gas
 323 to the surface. Some of them inevitably will be lost via
 324 reactions with background gas molecules during this
 325 journey. Conversely, the MW plasma is seen to be much

326 hotter (3000 K) in the centre of the plasma ball, and even
 327 with the temperature drop-off toward the substrate, we still
 328 calculate a gas temperature of 2000 K within 1 mm of the
 329 substrate surface. Thus, the MW system produces gas
 330 temperatures at or close to the substrate surface which are
 331 significantly hotter than those in a HF system, and thus the
 332 important reactions that generate H atoms can occur much
 333 closer to the growing surface.

334 But if there is such a large apparent difference in gas
 335 activation in the two reactor types, why then is the growth of
 336 MCD films from a standard 1%CH₄/H₂ gas mixture
 337 seemingly independent of reactor type, as the Bachman
 338 diagram shows? If the background gas is mostly hydrogen
 339 (as in a 1%CH₄/H₂ gas mixture) then (a) the initial
 340 concentration of H atoms created near the filament will be
 341 large, and (b) the small collision cross-section for H and H₂
 342 means that the diffusion coefficients of the H atoms will be
 343 large. Thus, a high concentration of H atoms will survive the
 344 journey from the filament to the substrate surface. There-
 345 fore, the rapid temperature drop-off will not significantly
 346 affect the H atom concentration near the substrate, and so
 347 diamond growth can still occur readily.

t1.1 Table 1

t1.2 Species concentration of the gas phase components present in a HF and a MW reactor at 60 Torr, calculated for different input gas mixtures at a position 1 mm
 above the substrate surface

t1.3		Hot filament reactor			MW reactor	
t1.4		1%CH ₄ /H ₂ <i>T</i> _{fil} =2700 K <i>T</i> _{gas-sub} =1160 K	1%CH ₄ /Ar <i>T</i> _{fil} =2700 K <i>T</i> _{gas-sub} =1130 K	1%CH ₄ /2%H ₂ /97%Ar <i>T</i> _{fil} =2700 K <i>T</i> _{gas-sub} =1163 K	1%CH ₄ /H ₂ <i>T</i> _{gas-sub} =1540 K, 800 W	1%CH ₄ /2%H ₂ /97%Ar <i>T</i> _{gas-sub} =1816 K, 800 W
t1.5	Species	Concentration/cm ⁻³	Concentration/cm ⁻³	Concentration/cm ⁻³	Concentration/cm ⁻³	Concentration/cm ⁻³
t1.6	H	4.00 × 10 ¹⁴	2.78 × 10 ¹²	3.98 × 10 ¹³	1.73 × 10 ¹⁵	2.68 × 10 ¹⁴
t1.7	CH ₃	7.64 × 10 ¹³	1.01 × 10 ¹⁴	1.76 × 10 ¹⁴	1.33 × 10 ¹³	1.20 × 10 ¹²
t1.8	C ₂ H ₂	2.56 × 10 ¹⁴	1.89 × 10 ¹⁴	1.97 × 10 ¹⁵	3.19 × 10 ¹⁵	1.98 × 10 ¹⁵
t1.9	CH ₂	2.37 × 10 ¹⁰	1.16 × 10 ⁹	6.11 × 10 ¹⁰	4.65 × 10 ¹⁰	4.53 × 10 ¹⁰
t1.10	CH	1.48 × 10 ⁸	3.23 × 10 ⁶	2.10 × 10 ⁹	6.47 × 10 ⁸	3.90 × 10 ⁹
t1.11	C	5.67 × 10 ¹⁰	6.49 × 10 ⁴	4.27 × 10 ⁹	4.99 × 10 ⁹	5.58 × 10 ¹⁰
t1.12	C ₂ (a)	–	5.79 × 10 ¹⁰	3.27 × 10 ¹¹	9.74 × 10 ⁷	1.76 × 10 ¹⁰
t1.13	C ₂ (X)	–	2.36 × 10 ¹⁰	1.11 × 10 ¹¹	5.69 × 10 ⁶	2.28 × 10 ⁹
t1.14	C ₂ H	1.88 × 10 ⁷	1.98 × 10 ⁹	8.75 × 10 ⁹	2.00 × 10 ¹⁰	2.22 × 10 ¹²
t1.15	C ₂ H ₆	9.52 × 10 ¹²	1.39 × 10 ¹⁴	1.18 × 10 ¹⁴	1.41 × 10 ¹⁰	2.67 × 10 ⁷
t1.16	C ₂ H ₄	4.45 × 10 ¹³	1.17 × 10 ¹⁴	1.56 × 10 ¹⁴	3.24 × 10 ¹³	2.54 × 10 ¹¹
t1.17	C ₂ H ₅	1.23 × 10 ¹¹	8.86 × 10 ¹¹	1.37 × 10 ¹²	4.31 × 10 ⁹	9.88 × 10 ⁶
t1.18	C ₂ H ₃	1.73 × 10 ¹¹	1.76 × 10 ¹¹	1.39 × 10 ¹²	6.66 × 10 ¹¹	2.15 × 10 ¹⁰
t1.19	H ₂	4.94 × 10 ¹⁷	6.55 × 10 ¹⁴	7.02 × 10 ¹⁵	5.81 × 10 ¹⁷	1.72 × 10 ¹⁶
t1.20	CH ₄	2.96 × 10 ¹⁵	4.47 × 10 ¹⁵	1.54 × 10 ¹⁵	2.06 × 10 ¹⁴	3.22 × 10 ¹²
t1.21	Ar	0	5.05 × 10 ¹⁷	4.87 × 10 ¹⁷	0	5.09 × 10 ¹⁷
t1.22	Ratios					
t1.23	[H]:[CH ₃]	5.2	0.028	0.23	130	223
t1.24	[H]:[C ₂]	–	34	91	1.7 × 10 ⁷	1.3 × 10 ⁴
t1.25	[CH ₃]:[C ₂]	–	1240	402	1.3 × 10 ⁵	60
t1.26	Film type	MCD	No growth	No growth	MCD	UNCD

t1.27 This is a subset of the full calculated species distributions as a function of distance from the substrate, which will appear in a later paper [17]. *T*_{gas-sub} is the calculated gas temperature just above the substrate surface, which is much lower than in the centre of the plasma ball or close to the filament. It is worth pointing out that although the calculated C₂ concentration at 1 mm from the substrate in the 1%CH₄/2%H₂/97%Ar plasma is only ~10¹⁰ cm⁻³, in the centre of the plasma ball it is ~10¹² cm⁻³, which is consistent with the measurements made using laser spectroscopic techniques [10]. Also given in the table are the ratios of the concentrations of atomic H, CH₃ and C₂ for the different conditions. Note that for the two gas compositions containing Ar, which do not give diamond growth in the HF reactor, the [H]:[CH₃] ratio is less than one. Also, for both reactors and all gas mixtures [CH₃]:[C₂] is very large, meaning that C₂ is a minority species near the substrate surface.

348 However, if the gas mixture is mostly Ar (as in a 1%CH₄/
 349 Ar gas mixture), then the converse is true: (a) the initial
 350 concentration of H atoms created near the filament will be
 351 low (since the only source of H is from CH₄ which
 352 comprises only 1% of the input gas), (b) the larger collision
 353 cross-section for Ar means that diffusion coefficients of the
 354 H atoms, CH₃ and other radicals in Ar will be ~1.5–3 times
 355 lower than in H₂, and (c) the thermal conduction coefficient
 356 in Ar is ~10 times lower than in H₂ and thus the hot region
 357 in H₂ will be larger than in Ar. All these factors mean that
 358 the H atom concentration at the growth surface is no longer
 359 sufficiently high to perform all the reactions necessary for
 360 diamond growth efficiently.

361 Further evidence for this can be obtained by comparing
 362 the concentrations of H and CH₃ for a hydrogen-rich system
 363 and for an Ar-rich system. Using the computer model
 364 outlined above, species concentrations were calculated for a
 365 HF system for the two different gas mixtures, and are shown
 366 in Table 1. This shows that for the 1%CH₄/Ar system, the
 367 CH₃ concentration at the substrate surface is almost the
 368 same (factor of 1.3) as in the 1%CH₄/H₂ system, but more
 369 importantly, that the H atom concentration is a factor of 144
 370 times smaller. In terms of the [H]:[CH₃] ratio (which plays
 371 an important role in determining the growth rate and quality
 372 of diamond deposited), this has decreased from 5:1 to 1:36.
 373 Since H atoms are believed to be essential in the standard
 374 diamond growth mechanism, the scarcity of H atoms
 375 explains the poor growth rate, whilst the relative abundance
 376 of carbon species explains the tendency to form poor quality
 377 diamond, nanodiamond or graphite. Adding extra H₂ to the
 378 gas mixture improves matters, since this affects the initial
 379 concentration of H atoms, and so we see some diamond
 380 deposition, although the growth rates remain slow, and the
 381 diamond quality is poor or nanocrystalline.

382 The situation is different for MW plasma systems
 383 because of the spatially distributed source of the radicals
 384 and the different temperature distribution. In most MW
 385 systems, the plasma ball extends to ~1 mm from the
 386 substrate surface, and in some cases the substrate is even
 387 immersed in the edges of the plasma. Thus, the hot region is
 388 much closer to the substrate in MW systems than in HF
 389 systems (see Fig. 2). Measurements of plasma temperatures
 390 in 1%CH₄/Ar plasmas have yielded values between 1600 K
 391 [21] and 3000 K [10], which is sufficient to thermally
 392 dissociate H₂. Since this occurs very close to the diamond
 393 surface, the resulting H atoms can diffuse there readily and
 394 perform the H-abstraction reactions necessary for diamond
 395 growth. This process can also be improved by addition of
 396 extra H₂, hence the observation of increased ‘quality’ of
 397 diamond and the transition from NCD to MCD with added
 398 H₂ [24].

399 Also from Table 1 we can determine the relative
 400 importance of other gas phase species. For example, in a
 401 MW reactor using the standard UNCD growth mixture of
 402 1%CH₄/2%H₂/97%Ar, the concentration of C₂ is a factor of
 403 100 times smaller than that of either CH₃ or C₂H, which

suggests that C₂ may be much less important for the growth
 of UNCD than the other two radicals.

6. Conclusions

We have extended the compositional map of Lin et al. [11] for the Ar/CH₄/H₂ system in a HF reactor to the gas mixing ratios commonly used to grow NCD and UNCD in MW reactors. We find that NCD growth is confined to a limited composition window at the boundary between the MCD growth region and the ‘no growth’ region, and the NCD growth rates are very small (<0.1 μm h⁻¹). The reason for this has been rationalised in terms of the degree of gas mixture activation combined with the gas temperature distribution within a HF reactor causing a substantial reduction in the concentration of H atoms along with a decrease in the [H]:[CH₃] ratio near to the growing substrate surface. The implications for successful (high growth rate) UNCD deposition in HF reactors are therefore not promising. In order to create the necessary concentrations of the growth species at the substrate surface, we would require a filament temperature of >3000 K, which is prohibitively high, even for high-boiling-point metals such as tungsten. Alternatively, placing the filament closer to the substrate would help, but this would be at the expense of growth area which would then be limited to only a few square millimetres.

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