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Direct observation of structure controlled carbon growth by environmental TEM

Jens Kling, Thomas W. Hansen, **Jakob B. Wagner**

In order to meet the increasing demand of faster and more flexible electronics and optical devices and at the same time decrease the use of the critical metals, carbon based devices are in fast development. Furthermore, the rich resource of carbon element limits the need for recycling and the material supports the friendly environment approach.

Layered carbon structures spanning from graphene to few layered graphite are used for extremely compact devices with outstanding performance [1,2]. A relative cheap and easy way to produce layered carbon structures on the large scale is via chemical vapor deposition (CVD) growth on catalysts like copper and nickel. However, the exact growth mechanism is still under debate and is most likely dependent on precursor pressure and growth temperature.

Here, we have used environmental transmission electron microscopy (ETEM) to follow the growth of layered structures directly at the atomic level and thereby coupling growth rate and quality of the material on the local scale to the growth parameters. Acetylene and methane are exposed to the catalyst (Ni or Cu) in situ in the microscope at pressures ranging from 0.1Pa 100Pa at temperatures ranging from 500-700C. Following the subsequent appearance of carbon layers allows for determination of instant growth rates under controlled conditions.

Single walled carbon nanotube (SWCNT) based electronics is another way of addressing the environment friendly approach of faster and better electronics. In order to exploit the potential of SWCNTs in the electronic industry fully, selective growth of either conducting or semiconducting tubes is of high importance. Growing the tubes in situ in the ETEM under relevant growth conditions gives fundamental insight in the parameters controlling the chirality and thereby the electronic properties of the SWCNTs.

References:

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