

# The Physics and Technology of Amorphous $\text{SiO}_2$

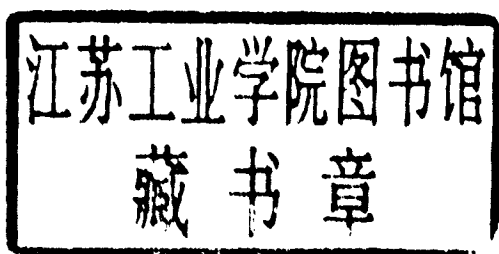
Edited by  
Roderick A. B. Devine

# The Physics and Technology of Amorphous SiO<sub>2</sub>

Edited by

**Roderick A. B. Devine**

National Center for Telecommunications Studies  
Meyland, France



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# **The Physics and Technology of Amorphous SiO<sub>2</sub>**

## FOREWORD

The contents of this volume represent most of the papers presented either orally or as posters at the international conference held in Les Arcs, Savoie, from June 29<sup>th</sup> to July 3<sup>rd</sup> 1987. The declared objective of the conference was to bring together specialists working in various fields, both academic and applied, to examine the state of our understanding of the physics of amorphous  $\text{SiO}_2$  from the point of view of its structure, defects (both intrinsic and extrinsic), its ability to transport current and to trap charges, its sensitivity to irradiation, etc. For this reason, the proceedings is divided, as was the conference schedule, into a number of sections starting from a rather academic viewpoint of the internal structure of idealized  $\text{SiO}_2$  and progressing towards subjects of increasing technological importance such as charge transport and trapping and breakdown in thin films. The proceedings terminates with a section on novel applications of amorphous  $\text{SiO}_2$  and in particular, buried oxide layers formed by ion implantation. Although every effort was made at the conference to ensure that each presentation occurred in its most obvious session, in editing the proceedings we have taken the liberty of changing the order where it seems that a paper was in fact more appropriate to an alternative section. In any event, because of the natural overlap of subjects, many papers could have been suitably placed in several different sections.

The successful operation of any conference is always the result of a group effort and Les Arcs was no exception. The groundwork for the conference resulted from discussions with Jörg Arndt, Akos Revesz, Guy Ghibaudo and Jean-Jacques Niez whilst the on-site smooth running was assured by Julia, Bob and Neil Devine and Bernadette Bonnefond - sincere thanks go to all of these people for their unflagging help. A special word of thanks goes also to the session chairmen who, without recourse to buzzers, bells or flashing lights, steered the sessions to a timely end so that coffee breaks were not delayed and nobody suffered from malnutrition.

Finally, the conference could not have been held were it not for the kind support, both financial and moral, obtained from the following organisations to whom we are sincerely grateful:

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## CONTENTS

### STRUCTURE: THEORY AND EXPERIMENT

Current Models for Amorphous SiO <sub>2</sub> . . . . .	1
F. L. Galeener	
Structural Similarities and Dissimilarities Between SiO <sub>2</sub> and H <sub>2</sub> O . .	15
F. Liebau	
Geometrical Methods in the Theory of Glasses . . . . .	37
R. Kerner	
Low Lying Excitations in Silica . . . . .	47
U. Buchenau	
New Methods of IR Spectroscopic Investigation of Amorphous Insulating Films . . . . .	55
K. Hübner and U. Teschner	
Vibrational Studies of Amorphous SiO <sub>2</sub> . . . . .	63
P. McMillan	
Raman Spectra of SiO <sub>2</sub> Fibers at High Tensile Strain . . . . .	71
H. Kobayashi and K. Ema	
A Comparison of the Structure of $\alpha$ -SiO <sub>2</sub> Prepared by Different Routes .	77
R. Aujla, R. Dupree, I. Farnan and D. Holland	
NMR Studies of Neutron-Irradiated Crystalline and Vitreous SiO <sub>2</sub> . .	83
S. L. Chan, L. F. Gladden and S. R. Elliott	

### INTRINSIC AND EXTRINSIC DEFECTS: THEORY

Electronic Structure of Defects in Amorphous SiO <sub>2</sub> . . . . .	91
J. Robertson	
Electron and Hole Traps Related to $\pi$ Bonded Oxygen Vacancy Centers in SiO <sub>2</sub> . . . . .	103
I. Strzalkowski	
Theory of Oxygen-Vacancy Defects in Silicon Dioxide . . . . .	107
W. Beall Fowler, J. K. Rudra, A. H. Edwards and F. J. Feigl	

Total Energy Calculations for Intrinsic Defects in Amorphous SiO <sub>2</sub> . . . . .	113
J. Robertson	
Boron Impurity Centers in SiO <sub>2</sub> : a Tight Binding Consideration . . . . .	119
M. Marczewski, I. Strzalkowski and J. Baranowski	
INTRINSIC AND EXTRINSIC DEFECTS: EXPERIMENT	
Intrinsic and Extrinsic Point Defects in a-SiO <sub>2</sub> . . . . .	125
D. L. Griscom	
Self-Trapped Excitons in Amorphous and Crystalline SiO <sub>2</sub> . . . . .	135
N. Itoh, K. Tanimura and C. Itoh	
Identification of Native Defects in a-SiO <sub>2</sub> . . . . .	141
J. H. Stathis	
UV and VUV Optical Absorption due to Intrinsic and Laser Induced Defects in Synthetic Silica Fibers . . . . .	153
H. Imai, K. Arai, T. Saito, S. Ichimura, H. Nonaka, J. P. Vigouroux, H. Imagawa, H. Hosono and Y. Abe	
Incommensurate Phase of Quartz: Microscopic Origin and Interaction with Defects . . . . .	161
G. Dolino	
Gamma Ray Induced 2 eV Optical Absorption Band in Pure Silica Core Fibers . . . . .	165
K. Nagasawa, Y. Ohki and Y. Hama	
On the Decay of X-Ray Induced Luminescence of SiO <sub>2</sub> . . . . .	171
I. Godmanis and W. Hohenau	
On the Role of O <sub>2</sub> <sup>-</sup> in the Luminescence of Amorphous and Crystalline SiO <sub>2</sub> . . . . .	175
M. Guzzi, M. Martini, F. Pio, G. Spinola and A. Vedda	
Transformation of Radiation Induced Defect Centers as a Probe of Molecular Diffusion in a-SiO <sub>2</sub> . . . . .	181
R. Pfeffer	
Observation of the Neutral Oxygen Vacancy in Silicon Dioxide . . . . .	187
M. E. Zvanut, F. J. Feigl, W. B. Fowler and J. K. Rudra	
New Insight Into the Structure of SiO <sub>2</sub> Glass from a Point Defect Study . . . . .	193
K. Nagasawa, H. Mizuno, Y. Yamasaka, R. Tohman, Y. Ohki and Y. Hama	
Hydrogen Bonds Between Peroxy Radicals and Hydrogen Molecules in SiO <sub>2</sub> Glass . . . . .	199
K. Nagasawa, Y. Yokomachi, R. Tohman, Y. Ohki and Y. Hama	



ESR Studies of Paramagnetic Defects Formed in Amorphous SiO <sub>2</sub> by High Energy Heavy Ions . . . . .	205
E. Dooryhee, Y. Langevin, J. Borg, J. P. Duraud and E. Balanzat	
On the Radiation Induced Coloration of SiO <sub>2</sub> . . . . .	211
W. Hohenau and I. Godmanis	
Effects of Processing on Radiation Damage Thresholds in Silica Glass	215
R. F. Haglund, Jr., D. L. Kinser, H. Mogul, N. H. Tolk, P. W. Wang and R. A. Weeks	
The Structure of Defects in Dopes SiO <sub>2</sub> . . . . .	223
M. Offenberger, P. J. Grunthaner, D. D. Krut and P. Balk	
Electrical and Optical Characteristics of Vanadium Doped Amorphous Silicon Dioxide Prepared by CVD . . . . .	231
K. V. Krishna, J. J. Delima, A. J. Snell and A. E. Owen	

## INTERFACES

Theory of Dangling Orbital Defects at the <111> Si/SiO <sub>2</sub> Interface .	237
A. H. Edwards	
Structure and Hyperfine Interaction of Si ≡ Si• Defect Clusters. .	249
M. Cook and C. T. White	
On the Relationship Between Thermal Growth and Thickness Inhomogeneities in Very Thin SiO <sub>2</sub> Films . . . . .	255
X. Aymerich, J. Suñé, F. Campabadal and Y. Placencia	
The Pb Center at the Si-SiO <sub>2</sub> Precipitate Interfaces in Buried Oxide Materials: <sup>29</sup> Si Hyperfine Interactions and Linewidths. .	259
W. E. Carlos	
Metastable and Multiply-Charged Individual Defects at the Si:SiO <sub>2</sub> Interface . . . . .	267
M. J. Kirton, M. J. Uren and S. Collins	
The Influence of Disorder on the Si <sub>2p</sub> XPS Lineshape at the Si-SiO <sub>2</sub> Interface . . . . .	273
R. A. B. Devine and J. Arndt	
Si-SiO <sub>2</sub> Interfaces - a HRTEM Study . . . . .	279
N. M. Ravindra, D. Fathy, O. W. Holland and J. Narayan	
Electrical and Interface Properties of MOS Structures of Getter Treated Silicon . . . . .	285
N. M. Ravindra, P. Smith and J. Narayan	
Influence of Different Preparation Methods on Interfacial (Si/SiO <sub>2</sub> ) Parameters of Very Thin Layers . . . . .	291
G. Pananakakis, P. Morfouli and G. Kamarinos	

## OXIDATION, OXYNITRIDES AND DEPOSITED FILMS

Thermal Oxidation of Silicon . . . . .	297
A. G. Revesz, B. J. Mrstik and H. L. Hughes	
A Framework for Incorporating Memory Effects of Structural Relaxation in Models for Thermal Oxidation of Silicon . . . . .	307
R. W. Rendell and K. L. Ngai	
Analysis of Stress Relaxation and Growth Kinetics for Two-Step Thermal Oxidation of Silicon . . . . .	315
G. Ghibaudo	
Photo-Induced Oxidation Processes in Silicon . . . . .	321
E. Fogarassy	
Growth and Structure of Argon Laser Grown SiO <sub>2</sub> . . . . .	331
F. Micheli and I. W. Boyd	
Transport Properties of Plasma Enhanced CVD Silicon Oxynitride Films	337
Y. Cros and J. C. Rostaing	
Characteristics of SiO <sub>2</sub> and SiO <sub>x</sub> N <sub>y</sub> Obtained by Rapid Thermal Processes . . . . .	345
N. Chan Tung, Y. Caratini, R. Pantel and J. L. Buevoz	
Evidence for Oxygen Bubbles in Fluorine Doped Amorphous Silicon Dioxide Thin Films . . . . .	353
A. G. Dias, E. Bustarret and R. C. da Silva	
Low Temperature PECVD Silicon Rich Silicon Dioxide Films Doped With Fluorine . . . . .	359
A. G. Dias, L. Guimarães and M. Brunel	

## TRANSPORT, TRAPPING AND BREAKDOWN

High Field Transport in SiO <sub>2</sub> . . . . .	365
D. K. Ferry	
Hot Electrons in SiO <sub>2</sub> : Ballistic and Steady State Transport . . .	375
M. V. Fischetti and D. J. DiMaria	
Electronic Charge Transport in Thin SiO <sub>2</sub> Films . . . . .	391
D. R. Wolters and A. T. A. Zegers-van Duynhoven	
The Role of Hole Traps in the Degradation of Thermally Grown SiO <sub>2</sub> Layers . . . . .	411
M. M. Heyns and R. F. DeKeersmaecker	
The Influence of Temperature Nitrogen Annealing on the Electrical Properties of Plasma Nitrided Oxides . . . . .	421
J. Camargo da Costa and M. El-Sayed	

High-Field Positive-Charge Generation and Its Relation to Breakdown in a-SiO <sub>2</sub> . . . . .	427
Z. A. Weinberg	
Breakdown Mechanisms of Thermally Grown Silicon Dioxide at High Electric Fields . . . . .	443
N. Klein	
Field Dependence of Time to Breakdown Distribution of Thin Oxides .	449
P. Olivo, T. N. Nguyen and B. Ricco	
RADIATION EFFECTS	
Radiation Effects in MOS VLSI Structures . . . . .	455
H. L. Hughes	
Relationship Between Hole Trapping and Interface State Generation in the Si/SiO <sub>2</sub> System . . . . .	465
S. J. Wang, J. M. Sung and S. A. Lyon	
Radiation Induced Conductivity of Thin Silicon Dioxide Films on Silicon . . . . .	473
V. A. Gurtov and A. I. Nazarov	
Interface Degradation in Short Channel MOSFETs: Comparison Between the Effects of Radiation and Hot Carrier Injection . .	481
H. Haddara, S. Cristaloveanu, B. Boukriss, A. Chovet and P. Jarron	
BURIED DIELECTRIC LAYERS AND NOVEL APPLICATIONS	
Synthesis of Buried Dielectric Layers in Silica by Ion Implantation	487
I. H. Wilson	
Electrical Properties of SIMOX Material and Devices . . . . .	517
S. Cristaloveanu	
Formation Mechanisms and Structures of Thin Buried Layers of SiO <sub>2</sub> Fabricated Using Ion Beam Synthesis . . . . .	531
K. J. Reeson, P. L. F. Hemment, R. J. Chater, J. A. Kilner, C. D. Marsh, G. R. Booker, J. R. Davis and G. K. Celler	
Low Temperature ESR Study of SIMOX Structures . . . . .	539
A. Stesmans and G. Van Gorp	
Defects in Silicon-on-Insulator Structures Formed by O <sup>+</sup> Implantation: Their Dependence on Implantation Temperature . . . .	547
T. J. Ennis, R. C. Barklie, K. Reeson and P. L. F. Hemment	
Interface Properties and Recombination Mechanisms in SIMOX Structures . . . . .	553
T. Elewa, H. Haddara and S. Cristaloveanu	

Porous Silica Sol-Gel Coatings for Nd: Glass High Power Pulsed Laser  
Laser Uses . . . . . 561  
H. Floch, J-J. Priotton and I. M. Thomas

Vacuum Re-Emission of Positrons from a-SiO<sub>2</sub> Layers . . . . . 569  
R. I. Simpson, C. D. Beling and M. Charlton

AUTHOR INDEX . . . . . 575

SUBJECT INDEX . . . . . 577

## CURRENT MODELS FOR AMORPHOUS $\text{SiO}_2$

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### ABSTRACT

I discuss central questions of glass structure and define four ranges of order in an amorphous solid : short, intermediate, long and global. These concepts are used to catalog all of the elements of order in the Zachariasen-Warren model for  $\text{a-SiO}_2$ , in preparation for a later deduction of the logically possible improvements in that model. Six existing approximate forms of the ZW model are discussed using the language developed in the paper. This provides a fundamental background regarding structure for the rest of the papers in this volume.

### INTRODUCTION

The description and determination of the structure of amorphous materials is a ubiquitous and fundamental problem for those who wish to understand and predict their properties. In this paper I will discuss conceptual aspects of the problem, using  $\text{a-SiO}_2$  as a vehicle for the presentation. The content will build on ideas recently reported elsewhere<sup>1</sup>.

### SOME CENTRAL QUESTIONS OF GLASS STRUCTURE

It is clear that glasses contain sufficient disorder that their structure must ultimately be defined statistically. There are too many slightly different structural units for a complete enumeration, so an approximate and statistical description of structure is needed, just as one is needed for treating the properties of gases. How completely can one specify the structure of a real glass ? What is the best "language" for doing this ? How precise must be the description - for adequate understanding of each of various physical properties ? What are useful simplifications of these structural models, for purposes of facilitating calculations or conceptual reasoning ? How does structure vary with the conditions and mode of preparation<sup>2</sup> of the amorphous solid ? Previous reports<sup>3</sup> and several papers at this conference show that numerous properties of  $\text{a-SiO}_2$  vary importantly with preparation conditions ; the statistical description of structure must be sensitive enough to account

for these changes. Most of the questions just raised are not yet well-answered.

### THREE KINDS OF STRUCTURAL MODELS

Occasionally an author will present evidence against a particular model and then infer erroneously that the parent class of models has been disproven. Thus, a specific inadequacy of the Bell and Dean model<sup>4</sup> for  $\alpha$ -SiO<sub>2</sub> does not<sup>5</sup> necessarily invalidate<sup>6</sup> the parent continuous random network hypothesis. To help avoid this logical error, I will classify models as conceptual, specific or approximate.

A conceptual model consists of conceptual statements only, is very general in nature, typically stating the topology, connectivity or order with no quantitative detail. It is insufficiently specified for quantitative comparison with experiment. Examples are models that simply assert that an amorphous solid is "not crystalline", is a "continuous random network" or is an "array of microcrystals".

A specific model is characterized by conceptual statements plus sufficient quantitative specifications to be compared quantitatively with one or more experiments. To the extent that there is disagreement, the model may be wrong only in the quantitative specifications, or it may also be wrong conceptually if the conceptual aspects require quantitative specifications in the range tested<sup>7</sup> : this is, of course, simple logic, but it is all too frequently violated.

An approximate model is a specific model which is simplified from its pristine form in order to enable physical or mathematical construction of the model or to enable or facilitate mathematical calculations of properties that will be compared with experiment. A Bethe lattice<sup>8</sup> may be viewed as an approximate form of some specific continuous random network, and is used to calculate properties like the vibrational spectra of  $\alpha$ -SiO<sub>2</sub><sup>9</sup> ; if those predictions cannot be made to agree with experiment the fault may lie in the Bethe lattice approximation, not in the specific structure it is used to model, or in the conceptual model that lies underneath. In more subtle situations this distinction is also too often overlooked. In fact, most structural models used to compare with experiment are approximate in the present sense : the Bell and Dean models are highly approximate because of the small size and large surface area of the clusters actually built and used for calculations.

### SOME IMPORTANT FACTS ABOUT STRUCTURAL STUDIES

It is important to note some general facts about experimental studies of the structure of amorphous solids.

While the diffraction of x-rays, neutrons or electrons gives definite information about the structure of crystalline solids, such measurements give much less information about the structure of amorphous solids<sup>10</sup>. The diffraction pattern of an  $\alpha$ -solid consists of diffuse rings whose radial variation of intensity provides a merely 1-dimensional representation of the 3-dimensional glass structure. Clearly some information about the structure is "averaged out" in the experiment, and the structure is surely not 1-1 with the diffraction data. In practice, then, one imagines a likely  $\alpha$ -structure, predicts experiment and compares with observation. If comparison is poor, the specific model is rejected ; however, good comparison merely qualifies the model as an acceptable candidate and leaves

open the possibility that some other model would do as well, or better.

This illustrates the fact that statistical structural models are almost impossible to prove uniquely. All probes will involve averages over statistical structural models. A poor fit to data with one probe implies rejection of the specific model used for calculation, but the conceptual form of the specific model may still be correct. A good fit is encouraging, but may in principle be had with other models not yet considered.

This discussion illustrates the need for the use of many different experimental probes of structure. Diffraction, NMR, vibrational spectroscopy and other techniques emphasize different aspects of structure, such as interatomic distances, or angles, or local symmetry, or range of order, and the like. Each technique provides an alternate view of the structure and generally averages the structure differently, thus revealing aspects that may be de-emphasized or obscured by another technique. Observation of ordered rings of bonds in a-SiO<sub>2</sub> by Raman spectroscopy is a vivid example<sup>11</sup>. Although each probe gives limited information, the results of several different probes can dramatically reduce the number of possible models, leading to a conviction of truth (if not its proof).

## RANGES OF ORDER IN AMORPHOUS SOLIDS

This logical process of elimination of possible models would also be greatly helped by the development of clearer concepts and more certain theoretical principles concerning the structure of a-solids. To this end I have tried to develop a more precise set of terms for categorizing the scales (or ranges) of order in amorphous solids<sup>1</sup>. The resultant four ranges of order are as follows.

### Short Range Order

Short range order (SRO) describes the nearest neighbor (nn) bonding environment of each atomic species. It involves bond types, distances, and angles, extends over a volume whose dimension is about twice the typical nn

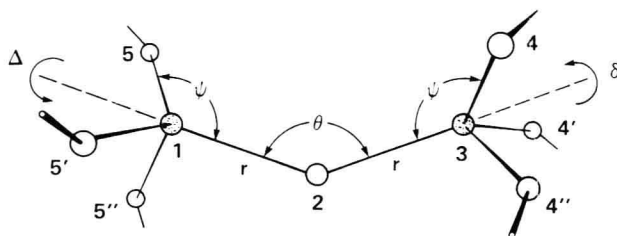


Fig. 1. The relative orientation of two corner-sharing tetrahedra in a-SiO<sub>2</sub>, showing the short range order and one aspect of the intermediate range order. Each Si atom (dark) is surrounded tetrahedrally at distance  $r$  by four O atoms and each O atom bridges between two Si atoms with an angle  $\theta$  that varies from site to site; these two molecule-like arrangements specify the SRO in its usual "simplified" form. The dihedral angles  $\delta$  and  $\Delta$ , giving the angular orientation of the tetrahedra about their bridging O-Si bonds (relative to the Si-O-Si plane) are defined in this paper as elements of IRO.

structure of  $B_2O_3$  glass<sup>17</sup>. The model is based on regular planar "boroxol" rings within which the dihedral angles of the  $BO_3$  units on either side of an O atom are equal and thus completely correlated. On the other hand the dihedral angles of  $BO_3$  units on either side of an O atom bridging between two rings are not equal, are much less correlated and are generally assumed to be random and independent in recent studies<sup>18</sup> (which are quantitatively consistent with that assumption).

Similarly, the assumption of random dihedral angles in fig. 1, used in the Zachariasen-Warren model<sup>19-26</sup> for  $\alpha\text{-SiO}_2$  is also a specification of an element of IRO.

SRO and IRO will specify the relative atomic positions over a volume whose dimension is several nearest neighbor distances, and is therefore in the range 5-10 Å, or larger.

### Long Range Order

At larger distances we must consider the possibility of crystal-like arrangements of atoms which we will call long range order (LRO). We will define two mutually exclusive kinds of order on this next larger scale of distances, namely crystalline LRO and morphological LRO.

### Crystalline Long Range Order

Crystalline LRO recognizes the possibility of periodic repetition of an IRO over several repeat lengths, and thus accounts for the possible existence of microcrystals in the structure of amorphous solids. Its existence shows clearly as sharp features in a diffraction pattern at positions related closely to those for more macroscopic crystals.

Roughly speaking, microcrystallinity over dimensions of 10 Å or more will be revealed as diffraction features that are sharper than those seen in glasses which are not microcrystalline. In  $\alpha\text{-SiO}_2$  it has been argued that microcrystals larger than about 8 Å would produce diffraction lines narrower than those seen<sup>5</sup>. Clearly, microcrystalline LRO specifies, SRO, IRO and other elements of structure - over the range of the particle size. (Note, as I have shown elsewhere<sup>1</sup>, that the surface or interface layers between such particles comprise a very large fraction of the entire sample).

The important idea here is that we operationally define a distance  $d_{LRO}$ , which is the dimension of a microcrystal that would give sharp enough diffraction lines to be revealed by the narrowness of those lines. Clearly,  $d_{LRO}$  varies from material to material, and for different crystal structures of the same material.

Order on this scale or larger will be called LRO, thus defining a lower limit for the scale of LRO and an upper limit for the scale of IRO. We will use the same  $d_{LRO}$  to define a scale for LRO in amorphous materials that are not microcrystalline.

### Morphological Long Range Order

This category accounts for order in non-microcrystalline structures on a longer range scale than that of IRO, ie on a scale larger than the minimum dimension  $d_{LRO}$  just defined. This is useful in order to catalog structures that are clearly not covered by the previously defined notions of IRO. Morphological LRO includes extended voids, channels, spherulites,



distance, and is therefore in the range 3-5 Å for most materials, 3 Å for a-SiO<sub>2</sub>. It is usually well determined from the radial distribution function (rdf) obtained from x-ray or neutron diffraction.

In a-SiO<sub>2</sub>, the SRO is commonly specified by stating that each Si atom is surrounded almost tetrahedrally by four oxygen atoms at bonding distance  $r$  of 1.61 Å, while each O atom bridges between two Si atoms at the same distance. There is a small spread in the bond distance  $r$ , a small spread in the O-Si-O angles  $\phi$ , and a much larger spread in the Si-O-Si angles  $\theta$ . These elements of SRO in a-SiO<sub>2</sub> can be visualized with the help of fig. 1, where one can see schematically the SRO around the Si and that around the O atomic species.

For the present definition of SRO, all neighbors of a species are treated as if they are spherically symmetric. This allows logical separation of SRO from intermediate range order (which recognizes that the neighbors are not spherically symmetric, and have orientations associated with them).

### Intermediate Range Order

Intermediate range order (IRO) involves specification of relative atomic positions over several nn distances, given the SRO. Most fundamentally, it recognizes that nearest neighbors are not spherically symmetric. IRO may take the form of specification of the dihedral angles<sup>12</sup>  $\delta$ ,  $\Delta$  shown in fig. 1 for the two corner sharing tetrahedra, distributions of the sizes of rings of completed bonds, properties of network connectivity<sup>13</sup> or some presently unformulated measure. There can be distributions of dihedral angles<sup>12,14</sup> and correlations<sup>15</sup> among dihedral angles if there are regular structures such as rings<sup>16</sup> embedded in the a-solid.

An example of IRO involving both correlated and uncorrelated dihedral angles is illustrated in fig. 2, which shows elements of the likely

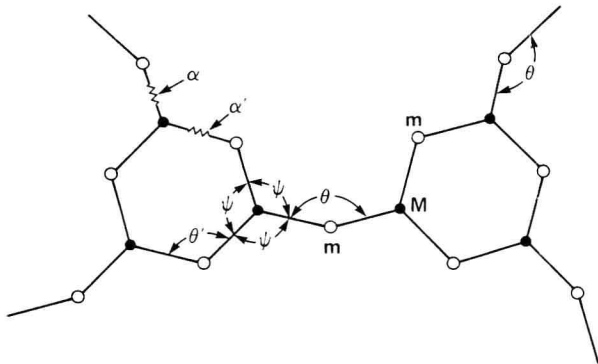


Fig. 2. Schematic (planarized) drawing of some elements of IRO in B<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> glass, where • = boron and o = oxygen. The hexagonal B<sub>3</sub>O<sub>3</sub> "boroxol"  $\theta$  varies from site to site. The dihedral angles of the B<sub>3</sub>O<sub>3</sub> units at each end of this bridging O atom are assumed random (the rings are generally not in the plane of the figure), while those within the rings all have the same value ( $\delta = 0$ ), and are thus highly correlated.