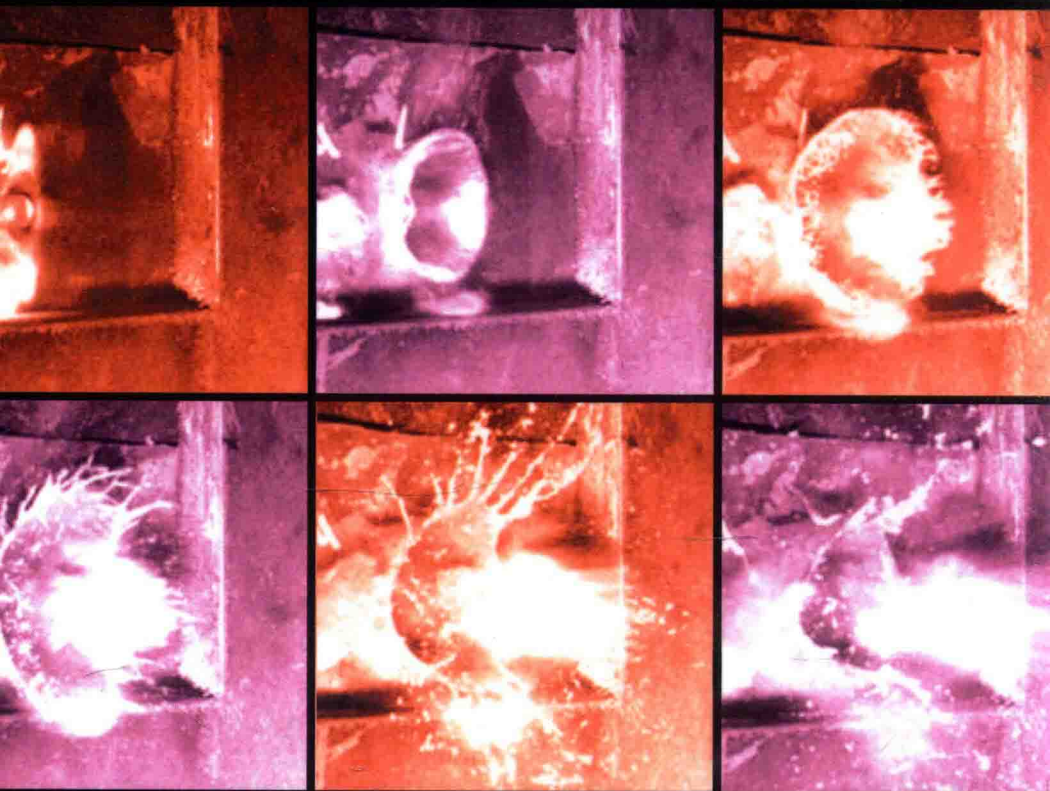


Fourth Edition

The Science and Technology of

Rubber



Edited by

**James E. Mark, Burak Erman
and C. Michael Roland**



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Burak Erman

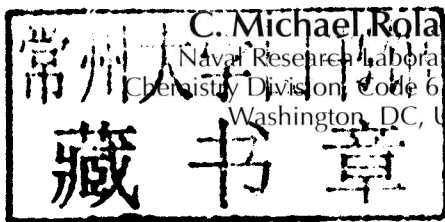
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Rubber Elasticity: Basic Concepts and Behavior

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1.1 INTRODUCTION

The single most important property of elastomers—that from which their name derives—is their ability to undergo large elastic deformations; that is, to stretch and return to their original shape in a reversible way. Theories to account for this characteristic high elasticity have passed through three distinct phases: (1) the early development of a molecular model relating experimental observations to the known molecular features of rubbery polymers; (2) generalization of this approach by means of symmetry considerations taken from continuum mechanics that are independent of the molecular structure; and (3) a critical reassessment of the basic premises on which these two quantitative theories are founded. In this chapter, the theoretical treatment is briefly outlined and shown to account quite successfully for the observed elastic behavior of rubbery materials. The special case of small elastic deformations is then discussed in some detail because of its technical importance. Finally, attention is drawn to some aspects of rubber elasticity that are still little understood.

1.2 ELASTICITY OF A SINGLE MOLECULE

The essential requirement for a substance to be rubbery is that it consist of long flexible chainlike molecules. The molecules themselves must therefore have a “backbone” of many noncollinear single valence bonds, about which rapid rotation is possible as a result of thermal agitation. Some representative molecular subunits of rubbery polymers are shown in Figure 1.1; thousands of these units linked together into a chain constitute a typical molecule of the elastomers listed in Figure 1.1. Such molecules change their shape readily and continuously at normal temperatures by Brownian motion. They take up random conformations in a stress-free state but assume somewhat oriented

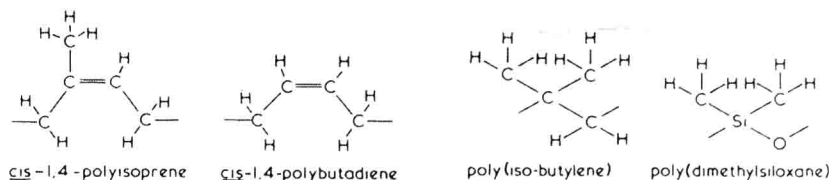


FIGURE 1.1 Repeat units for some common elastomer molecules.

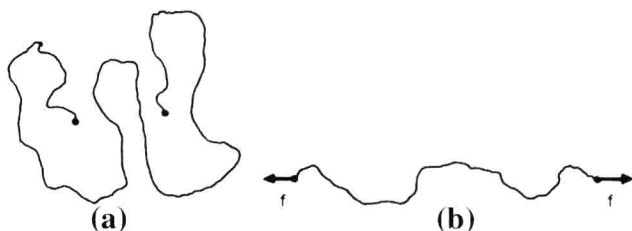


FIGURE 1.2 (a) Random chain and (b) oriented chain (from Gent, 1958).

conformations if tensile forces are applied at their ends (Figure 1.2). One of the first questions to consider, then, is the relationship between the applied tension f and the mean chain end separation r , averaged over time or over a large number of chains at one instant in time.

Chains in isolation take up a wide variety of conformations,¹ governed by three factors: the statistics of random processes; a preference for certain sequences of bond arrangements because of steric and energetic restraints within the molecule; and the exclusion of some hypothetical conformations that would require parts of the chain to occupy the same volume in space. In addition, cooperative conformations are preferred for space-filling reasons in concentrated solutions or in the bulk state.

Flory (1969) has argued that the occupied-volume exclusion (repulsion) for an isolated chain is exactly balanced in the bulk state by the external (repulsive) environment of similar chains, and that the exclusion factor can therefore be ignored in the solid state. Direct observation of single-chain dimensions in the bulk state by inelastic neutron scattering gives values fully consistent with unperturbed chain dimensions obtained for dilute solutions in theta solvents² (Cotton et al., 1972), although intramolecular effects may distort the local randomness of chain conformation.

¹ Although the terms *configuration* and *conformation* are sometimes used interchangeably, the former has acquired a special meaning in organic stereochemistry and designates specific steric structures. *Conformation* is used here to denote a configuration of the molecule, which is arrived at by rotation of single-valence bonds in the polymer backbone.

² These are (poor) solvents in which repulsion between different segments of the polymer molecule is balanced by repulsion between polymer segments and solvent molecules.

Flory has again given compelling reasons for concluding that the chain end-to-end distance r in the bulk state will be distributed in accordance with Gaussian statistics for sufficiently long chains, even if the chains are relatively stiff and inflexible over short lengths (Flory, 1969). With this restriction to long chains it follows that the tension-displacement relation becomes a simple linear one,

$$f = Ar, \quad (1.1)$$

where f is the tensile force, r is the average distance between the ends of the chain, and A is inversely related to the mean square end-to-end distance r_0^2 for unstressed chains,

$$A = 3kT/r_0^2, \quad (1.2)$$

where k is Boltzmann's constant and T is the absolute temperature.

If the real molecule is replaced by a hypothetical chain consisting of a large number n of rigid, freely jointed links, each of length l (Figure 1.3), then

$$r_0^2 = nl^2. \quad (1.3)$$

In this case r_0^2 is independent of temperature because completely random link arrangements are assumed. The tension f in Eq. (1.1) then arises solely from an entropic mechanism; that is, from the tendency of the chain to adopt conformations of maximum randomness, and not from any energetic preference for one conformation over another. The tension f is then directly proportional to the absolute temperature T .

For real chains, consisting of a large number n of primary valence bonds along the chain backbone, each of length l ,

$$r_0^2 = C_\infty nl^2, \quad (1.4)$$

where the coefficient C_∞ represents the degree to which this real molecule departs from the freely jointed model. C_∞ is found to vary from 4 to 10, depending on the chemical structure of the molecule and on temperature, because the

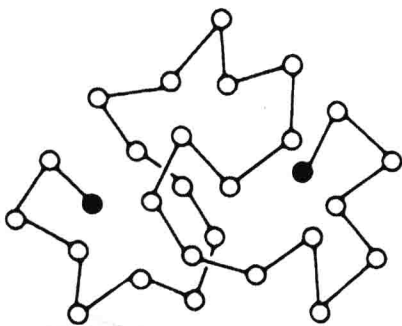


FIGURE 1.3 Model chain of freely jointed links.