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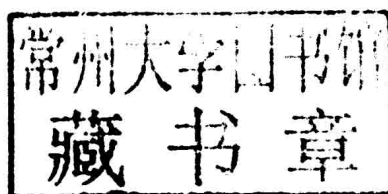
GRADUATE

Luigia Sabbatini (Ed.)

POLYMER SURFACE CHARACTERIZATION

Polymer Surface Characterization

Edited by Luigia Sabbatini



DE GRUYTER

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ISBN 978-3-11-027508-7
e-ISBN 978-3-11-028811-7

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication data

A CIP catalog record for this book has been applied for at the Library of Congress.

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at <http://www.dnb.de>.

© 2014 Walter de Gruyter GmbH, Berlin/Boston

Typesetting: Compuscript Ltd.

Printing and Binding: Hubert & Co. GmbH & Co. KG, Göttingen

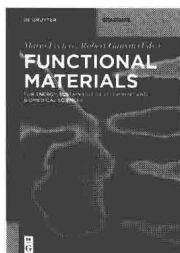
Cover image: "Green with Envy" by Waiken Wong. Permission granted by Materials Research Science and Engineering Center, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA, visual program supported by National Science Foundation.

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Printed in Germany
www.degruyter.com



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Sabbatini • Polymer Surface Characterization

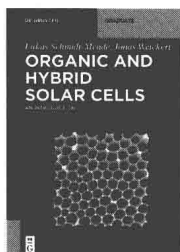
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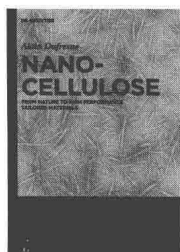
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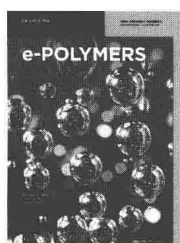


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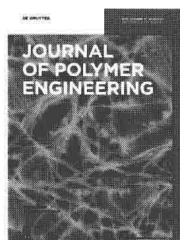
Set-ISBN 978-3-11-219133-0



e-Polymers

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Journal of Polymer Engineering

Ica Manas-Zloczower (Editor-in-Chief)

ISSN 2191-0340

Preface

Polymers permeate our everyday life more than any other materials. It is difficult to think of another material as versatile and irreplaceable as polymers in terms of applications both in consolidated and in emerging technological areas. Their use spans from the most trivial consumer goods to the most advanced microelectronics packaging, miniaturized pieces for artificial organs, high-performance coating in aerospace industry, etc.

Technological demand, moreover, requires materials not only with peculiar bulk properties but also with specific surface chemistry and structure, both generally different from the bulk one. The combination of these two requisites makes a polymeric material suitable and unique for the job it is called to do.

In this respect, surfaces in polymers, more than any other class of materials, can be quite easily handled and engineered to a high level of sophistication by fully exploiting their chemical reactivity. Furthermore, apart from the changes intentionally promoted on polymer surfaces to tailor new application-oriented properties, the importance of polymer dynamics occurring on surfaces whenever they are exposed to the environment (real world) or put in contact with another material (interface) is self-evident: dramatic changes of structural and thermodynamic properties in the confinement area can occur, and these dramatically reflect on properties such as bonding, friction, adsorption, wettability, inertness, etc. Moreover, aging modifies the surface chemistry of polymers (as well as of any other material), thus provoking a remarkable deterioration of their properties.

In all the above cases, knowledge of both the surface chemistry and the structure is mandatory to understand the behavior of polymeric materials, monitor the surface processing, and tailor and develop new surface modification strategies. A wealth of analytical techniques is available for the purpose; they are surface specific, and the analyst/researcher needs a basic knowledge of their principles and procedures in order to choose the most appropriate way to solve the specific problem. In this book, techniques have been selected that are well suited for characterization of surfaces/interfaces of thin polymer-based films but also of more general applicability in materials science. Basic principles, operative conditions, applications, performance, and limiting features are supplied, together with current advances in instrumental apparatus. Each chapter is devoted to one technique and is self-consistent; the end-of-chapter references would allow the reader a quick access to more detailed information.

After an introductory chapter, techniques that can interrogate the very shallow depth of a polymer surface, spanning from the top few angstroms in secondary ions mass spectrometry to 2–10 nm in X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy are discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, respectively. Their potential in the definition of surface chemical composition of polymers is highlighted and documented by selected application

examples. Chapter 4 is dedicated to attenuated total reflection Fourier transform infrared spectroscopy, which provides information on polymer chemical structure with varying surface thicknesses, of the order of tenths of a micrometer. Chapter 5 deals with atomic force microscopy, a technique endowed with high-resolution capability to map a variety of material properties on the nanoscale. Evidence is supplied of how probing mechanical properties leads to the identification of important polymer surface processes such as phase segregation, continuity of phases, and dispersion, which play a major role in determining macroscopic properties. Characterization of surface morphology is also addressed in Chapter 6, which is focused on electron microscopy. Scanning electron microscopy is described in detail, and some general information on transmission electron microscopy is given. The point of strength of electron microscopy characterization, well highlighted in this chapter, is that the surface morphology of a polymer system is always closely connected with its chemical composition and processing conditions. Chapter 7 addresses the issue of wettability and its measurements; contact angle measurements and its relationships with surface energy and wetting behavior are clearly described as well as advanced technological processes to develop polymer surfaces with tunable hydrophobic/hydrophilic character. Chapter 8 ends the book with an insight on spectroscopic ellipsometry: after the description of the basics of the method, an investigation of optical, structural, and thermodynamic properties of polymers in the whole spectral range (UV-VIS-IR) is discussed. Some interesting industrial applications such as those in the quality control of roll-to-roll fabrication process or heterogeneity control of micropatterned films are also reported.

The editor gratefully acknowledges the invaluable contributions of the authors and, as it is behind every edited book, the kind invitation and precious support of the publisher, in particular, the enthusiasm of Karin Sora, Senior Editorial Director, Science and Technology, and the continuous, qualified, and friendly cooperation of Julia Lauterbach, Project Editor, Science, Technology & Medicine (STM), at De Gruyter.

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Contents

Preface — x

Contributing authors — xiii

Stefania Cometa and Luigia Sabbatini

1 Introductory remarks on polymers and polymer surfaces — 1

- 1.1 Why polymers? — 1
 - 1.1.1 Generality — 1
 - 1.1.2 Synthesis — 1
 - 1.1.3 Classification and nomenclature — 3
 - 1.1.4 Morphology and properties — 4
- 1.2 Why to investigate a polymer surface? — 8
 - 1.2.1 Nature and dynamics of polymer surfaces — 9
 - 1.2.1.1 Vibrational dynamics of macromolecules — 9
 - 1.2.1.2 Changes in thermodynamic properties on the surface — 10
 - 1.2.1.3 Rotation of functional groups on polymer backbones in response to different environmental conditions — 13
 - 1.2.1.4 Surface interdiffusion or segregation of copolymers or polymer blends — 17
 - 1.2.2 Surface modification of polymers — 18
 - 1.2.2.1 Improvement of wettability — 18
 - 1.2.2.2 Improvement of porosity or roughening — 19
 - 1.2.2.3 Improvement of adhesion — 23
 - 1.2.2.4 Interaction of polymer with biological environment: Biocompatibility — 25
 - 1.2.2.5 Improvement of conductivity — 26
 - 1.2.3 Possibility of predicting polymer performances by surface characterization techniques — 28
 - References — 30

Beat A. Keller

2 Investigation of polymer surfaces by time-of-flight secondary ion mass spectrometry — 39

- 2.1 Introduction — 39
 - 2.1.1 Analysis of surfaces — 39
 - 2.1.2 The SIMS process: A detailed approach of theory and instruments — 40
 - 2.1.2.1 Sputter process and SSIMS approach — 41
 - 2.1.2.2 Mass analyzer systems — 43
 - 2.1.2.3 Ion sources and primary ions — 43
 - 2.1.2.4 Surface ionization ion guns — 44

| | |
|---------|--|
| 2.1.2.5 | Duoplasmatron and gas ion sources — 45 |
| 2.1.2.6 | Liquid metal ion guns — 45 |
| 2.1.2.7 | Gas cluster ion sources — 46 |
| 2.1.2.8 | High-resolution ion images obtained from cluster LMIG sources — 47 |
| 2.2 | TOF-SIMS investigations of polymer materials — 49 |
| 2.2.1 | General remarks — 49 |
| 2.2.2 | Polymers — 49 |
| 2.2.2.1 | Polydimethylsiloxane — 51 |
| 2.2.2.2 | Polystyrene — 52 |
| 2.2.2.3 | Polyacrylates — 53 |
| 2.2.2.4 | Fluorinated polymers — 53 |
| 2.2.2.5 | Poly(ethyleneterephthalate) — 55 |
| 2.2.2.6 | Polyethylene glycol — 55 |
| 2.2.2.7 | Spectra libraries and G-SIMS approach — 55 |
| 2.2.2.8 | Multivariate analysis and principal component analysis — 57 |
| 2.2.3 | Polymer additives — 58 |
| 2.2.4 | Copolymers — 59 |
| 2.2.5 | Multicomponent polymers (polymer blends) — 62 |
| 2.2.6 | Plasma modification and deposition — 63 |
| 2.2.7 | Other applications — 65 |
| | References — 66 |

Elvira De Giglio, Nicoletta Ditaranto, and Luigia Sabbatini

3 Polymer surface chemistry: Characterization by XPS — 73

| | |
|---------|--|
| 3.1 | Introduction — 73 |
| 3.2 | Photoelectron spectroscopy: A brief history — 74 |
| 3.2.1 | Basic principles — 74 |
| 3.2.2 | Spectroscopic and X-ray notations — 76 |
| 3.3 | Instrumentation — 76 |
| 3.3.1 | Vacuum system — 78 |
| 3.3.2 | X-ray sources — 78 |
| 3.3.2.1 | Dual Mg/Al anode X-ray tube — 78 |
| 3.3.2.2 | Monochromatic source — 79 |
| 3.3.2.3 | Synchrotron radiation source — 79 |
| 3.3.3 | Energy analyzers — 79 |
| 3.3.4 | Detectors — 81 |
| 3.3.5 | Charge compensation — 81 |
| 3.3.6 | Small-area XPS: imaging and mapping — 82 |
| 3.3.7 | Ambient-pressure photoelectron spectroscopy — 83 |
| 3.4 | Chemical information from XPS — 83 |
| 3.5 | Chemical shift and its significance in the analysis of polymers — 87 |
| 3.6 | Chemical derivatization techniques in conjunction with XPS — 89 |
| 3.7 | Polymers surface segregation — 93 |

- 3.8 Polymers physical treatments/grafting — 98
- 3.9 Polymers aging — 104
- References — 107

Filippo Mangolini and Antonella Rossi

4 Attenuated total reflection-Fourier transform infrared spectroscopy: A powerful tool for investigating polymer surfaces and interfaces — 113

- 4.1 Principles of Fourier transform infrared spectroscopy — 113
- 4.2 Theory of attenuated total reflection FTIR spectroscopy — 114
- 4.2.1 Propagation of IR radiation through a planar interface between two isotropic media — 114
- 4.2.2 Propagation of IR radiation through stratified media — 118
- 4.2.3 Penetration depth and effective thickness — 121
- 4.2.3.1 Penetration depth in ATR/FTIR spectroscopic analysis of polymers — 125
- 4.2.4 Transmission FTIR vs ATR/FTIR spectroscopy — 126
- 4.3 Experimental methods in ATR/FTIR spectroscopy — 128
- 4.3.1 Internal reflection elements — 128
- 4.3.2 Internal reflection attachments — 129
- 4.3.3 Metal underlayer ATR/FTIR spectroscopy — 130
- 4.3.3.1 Effect of metal underlayer on penetration depth in ATR/FTIR spectroscopic analysis of polymers — 133
- 4.4 Potentials and limitations of ATR/FTIR spectroscopy — 137
- 4.5 Applications of ATR/FTIR spectroscopy — 138
- 4.5.1 ATR/FTIR spectroscopy in polymer science — 138
- 4.5.2 *In situ* ATR/FTIR spectroscopy of tribochemical phenomena — 140
- Acknowledgments — 147
- References — 147

Dalia Yablon

5 Scanning probe microscopy of polymers — 153

- 5.1 Introduction — 153
- 5.2 Sample preparation — 155
- 5.3 Phase imaging — 156
- 5.3.1 Background on phase imaging — 156
- 5.3.2 Applications of phase imaging to polymer materials — 156
- 5.4 Multifrequency imaging — 159
- 5.5 Nanorheological mapping — 160
- 5.6 Thermal/spectroscopic measurements — 163
- 5.7 Environmental measurements — 164
- 5.8 Conclusions — 165
- References — 166

Miroslav Šlouf, Taťana Vacková, František Lednický, and Petr Wandrol

6 Polymer surface morphology: Characterization by electron microscopies — 169

- 6.1 Introduction — 169
- 6.2 Scanning electron microscopy — 169
 - 6.2.1 SEM: Principles — 169
 - 6.2.1.1 Microscope and image formation — 169
 - 6.2.1.2 Interaction of the electron beam with the specimen — 171
 - 6.2.2 SEM: Classical modes — 173
 - 6.2.2.1 SE imaging — 174
 - 6.2.2.2 BSE imaging — 174
 - 6.2.2.3 EDX spectra — 175
 - 6.2.2.4 STEM imaging — 177
 - 6.2.3 SEM: Modern trends — 177
 - 6.2.3.1 Variable-pressure SEM — 177
 - 6.2.3.2 Variable-temperature SEM — 179
 - 6.2.3.3 Low-voltage SEM — 180
 - 6.2.3.4 Multidimensional SEM — 180
 - 6.2.4 SEM: Further possibilities — 181
 - 6.2.4.1 Spectroscopic methods — 181
 - 6.2.4.2 Methods connected with crystal structure of samples — 182
 - 6.2.4.3 Methods using sample-specific interactions with electron beam — 182
- 6.3 Transmission electron microscopy — 182
- 6.4 Sample preparation — 183
 - 6.4.1 Overview of polymer materials — 183
 - 6.4.2 Specific features of polymer materials — 183
 - 6.4.2.1 Charging and electron-beam damage — 183
 - 6.4.2.2 Skin-core effect — 184
 - 6.4.2.3 Low contrast between components — 185
 - 6.4.3 Preparation techniques for polymer materials — 185
 - 6.4.3.1 Direct observation of polymer surface — 186
 - 6.4.3.2 Fracturing — 186
 - 6.4.3.3 Etching — 187
 - 6.4.3.4 Cutting and staining — 188
 - 6.4.3.5 Special techniques — 189
- 6.5 Applications — 191
 - 6.5.1 Homopolymers — 191
 - 6.5.2 Copolymers — 193
 - 6.5.3 Polymer blends — 195
 - 6.5.4 Polymer composites — 197
 - 6.5.5 Special applications — 198
 - 6.5.5.1 Low-voltage SEM in polymer science — 198

- 6.5.5.2 Wet specimens in polymer science — 199
- 6.5.5.3 Further applications — 200
- Acknowledgments — 201
- References — 201

Fabio Palumbo and Rosa Di Mundo

7 Wettability: Significance and measurement — 207

- 7.1 Introduction — 207
- 7.2 CA and surface energy — 210
 - 7.2.1 Surface energy evaluation — 211
 - 7.2.1.1 Critical surface energy method — 212
 - 7.2.1.2 Multicomponent approaches — 215
 - 7.2.1.3 Particular cases: High-energy surfaces and granular materials — 215
 - 7.2.2 Considerations on surface energy evaluation — 216
- 7.3 CA hysteresis — 218
- 7.4 Measurement methods for CA — 222
 - 7.4.1 Direct measurement by optical goniometry — 222
 - 7.4.2 Force tensiometry — 225
 - 7.4.3 Approach comparison — 226
- 7.5 Application of CA measurement — 227
 - 7.5.1 From hydrophobic to water- and oil-repellent materials — 227
 - 7.5.2 Hydrophilic to super-hydrophilic materials — 233
 - 7.5.3 Hydrophobic recovery of hydrophilic surfaces — 235
 - 7.5.4 CA on porous surfaces — 238
 - 7.5.5 Acid-base characterization of polymeric surfaces — 239
- References — 241

Eva Bittrich and Klaus-Jochen Eichhorn

8 Advances of spectroscopic ellipsometry in the analysis of thin polymer films-polymer interfaces — 247

- 8.1 Introduction — 247
 - 8.1.1 Basics of ellipsometry — 247
- 8.2 New ellipsometric methods, techniques, and aspects — 250
 - 8.2.1 Optical dispersion — 250
 - 8.2.2 In situ setups — 253
 - 8.2.2.1 Liquid cells for measurements in solution — 253
 - 8.2.2.2 Coupling ellipsometry with quartz crystal microbalance — 254
 - 8.2.2.3 Total internal reflection ellipsometry — 256
 - 8.2.3 In-line monitoring — 257
 - 8.2.3.1 Monitoring processes in a vacuum chamber — 258
 - 8.2.3.2 R2R fabrication processes — 258
 - 8.2.4 Micropatterned films — 259

| | | |
|---------|---|-----|
| 8.2.4.1 | VIS imaging ellipsometry — | 259 |
| 8.2.4.2 | Microfocus-mapping IR ellipsometry — | 260 |
| 8.3 | Selected architectures of polymer films, blends, and composites — | 261 |
| 8.3.1 | Polymer blends and cross-linked polymer films — | 261 |
| 8.3.2 | T _g in thin polymer films of different architectures: Confinement effects — | 262 |
| 8.3.3 | Polymer-NP composites — | 264 |
| 8.3.4 | Polymers in nanostructured surfaces — | 266 |
| 8.4 | Polymer layers absorbing in the VIS spectral range — | 267 |
| 8.4.1 | Chemical modification with dye molecules — | 267 |
| 8.4.2 | Semiconducting polymers and blends for OPV and OLED — | 268 |
| 8.5 | Swelling and adsorption processes: Proteins and stimuli-responsive polymers — | 271 |
| 8.5.1 | Swelling of stimuli-responsive polymer layers — | 271 |
| 8.5.2 | Protein adsorption at soft polymer surfaces — | 274 |
| | References — | 278 |

| | |
|----------------|------------|
| Index — | 287 |
|----------------|------------|

Stefania Cometa and Luigia Sabbatini

1 Introductory remarks on polymers and polymer surfaces

1.1 Why polymers?

1.1.1 Generality

Polymers are everywhere in our everyday life. Both synthetic and natural polymers have unique properties (chemical, mechanical, electrical, thermal), which make them irreplaceable in the particular job they are called to do. The most impressive aspect in the world of polymers is the enormous variety of applications, which span from everyday consumer goods (house wares, toys, bottles, packaging, textiles, furniture), heavily used electrical and electronic items (computer, cable insulation, household appliances), construction (housing, pipes, adhesives, coatings, insulation), transportation (tires, appliance parts, hardware, carpeting), medical and hospital furniture and goods (gloves, syringes, catheters, bandage), to high-performance, sophisticated materials for aerospace, bulletproof vests, nonflammable fabric, artificial organs, degradable device for controlled release of drugs or chemicals, high-power-density batteries, high-strength cables for oceanic platforms, etc.

From a chemical point of view, polymers are high-molecular-weight compounds made up of simple repeating units called monomers. Molecular weights range from thousands to millions of atomic mass units, which makes writing a definitive molecular structure for these materials close to impossible. Polymer structures are therefore represented by enclosing the repeating unit (monomer) in brackets and placing “n” as subscript (Fig. 1.1a).

Polymers having more than one kind of repeating units are called copolymers; the units can be distributed either randomly in the chains or in an ordinate alternate sequence or in blocks. Moreover, the chains of the polymer structure may arrange in linear, branched, network, stars, ladder, or dendrimer fashion (Fig. 1.1b). Complex structures such as networks are formed when cross-linking occurs, i.e. the formation of covalent bonds between polymer chains; this process leads to a remarkable increase in molecular weight, and this in turn strongly influences chemical, physical, and mechanical properties of the material as well as its processability.

1.1.2 Synthesis

The first synthetic polymer that was produced on a commercial scale was Bakelite, a phenol-formaldehyde resin (by its inventor, the Belgian chemist Leo Baekeland [1]), at the beginning of 1900; however, it is the German chemist Hermann Staudinger who is

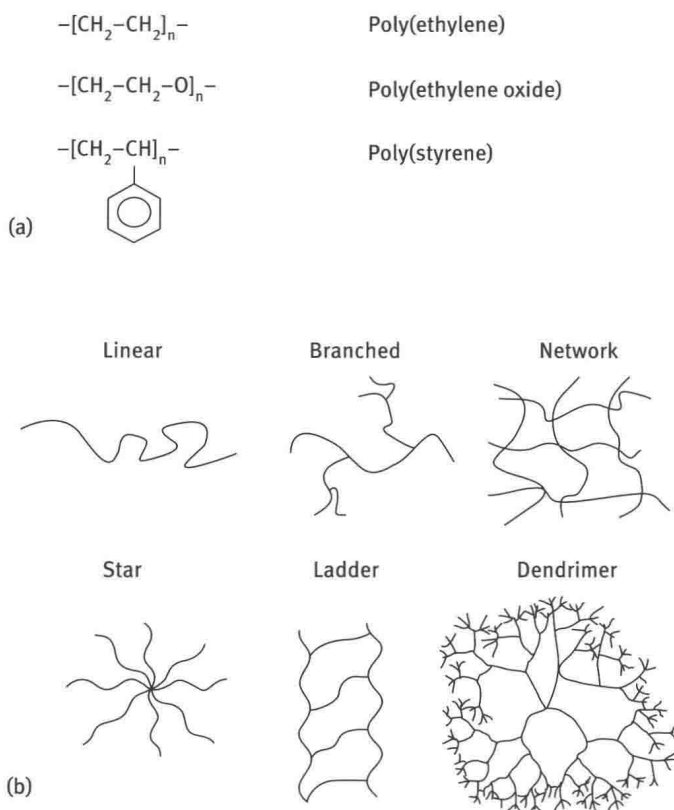


Fig. 1.1: (a) Conventional representation of polymers structures. (b) Arrangement of chains in the polymer structure.

rightly recognized as the father of the chemistry of macromolecules; for his studies on the relationship between structure of polymers and their properties, he received the Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 1953. During those years, polymer chemistry experienced the most significant advances and the beginning of a true revolution in the polymer industry, thanks to the work of Giulio Natta in Italy, who, for the first time, synthesized polymers having controlled stereochemistry [2] using the coordination catalysts developed by the German chemist Karl Ziegler [3]. The two scientists were awarded by the Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 1963. It was clearly demonstrated that polymers with similar chemical composition but exhibiting different molecular orientation have different morphology and their mechanical properties too may differ markedly. It is therefore vital, in view of commercial exploitation of polymer materials, to have full knowledge and control of the polymerization process. In brief, two reaction mechanisms are possible: step reaction (generally, a condensation reaction) and chain reaction (generally, an addition reaction). In the former, poly-functional monomers react randomly to give dimers, trimers, and oligomers, which can react with other monomers or among themselves: monomers are consumed rapidly, but polymer chains do