

# In Situ Transmission Electron Microscopy

P.J. Ferreira, K. Mitsuishi, and E.A. Stach,  
Guest Editors

## Abstract

The articles in this issue of *MRS Bulletin* provide a sample of what is novel and unique in the field of *in situ* transmission electron microscopy (TEM). The advent of improved cameras and continued developments in electron optics and stage designs have enabled scientists and engineers to enhance the capabilities of previous TEM analyses. Currently, novel *in situ* experiments observe and record the behavior of materials in various heating, cooling, straining, or growth environments. *In situ* TEM techniques are invaluable for understanding and characterizing dynamic microstructural changes. They can validate static TEM experiments and inspire new experimental approaches and new theories.

The technique of *in situ* transmission electron microscopy (TEM) refers to a broad class of experiments whereby the dynamic response of a material to an externally applied stimulus is observed as it happens inside the microscope. Whereas *in situ* TEM may be one of the most novel but best kept secrets of materials science, the key to its importance lies in something we encounter on a daily basis. The following thought experiment may help make this clear:

Imagine looking at two different pictures of a billiard table, taken within five seconds of each other. The first picture shows a white ball and two colored balls on the billiard table. The second picture shows the white ball alone on the table, in a different location than first pictured. If asked to figure out what happened between shots, we might first ask 1) what happened to the colored balls and 2) why is the white ball in a new spot? We might assume a play was made, and the colored balls are in the pockets. However, from the snapshots taken, we see only the outcome and know nothing about the process that led up to it. To know more about the trajectories, the rebounding or angles of play, we would need to observe, *in situ* (i.e., as the process is happening in real time), the events that took place in the five-second gap between one picture and the next.

The ability to observe, film, and record events as they occur in real time is what *in situ* TEM offers to the world of materi-

als science research. As illustrated in Figure 1, *in situ* TEM enables real-time observations of structure-property-

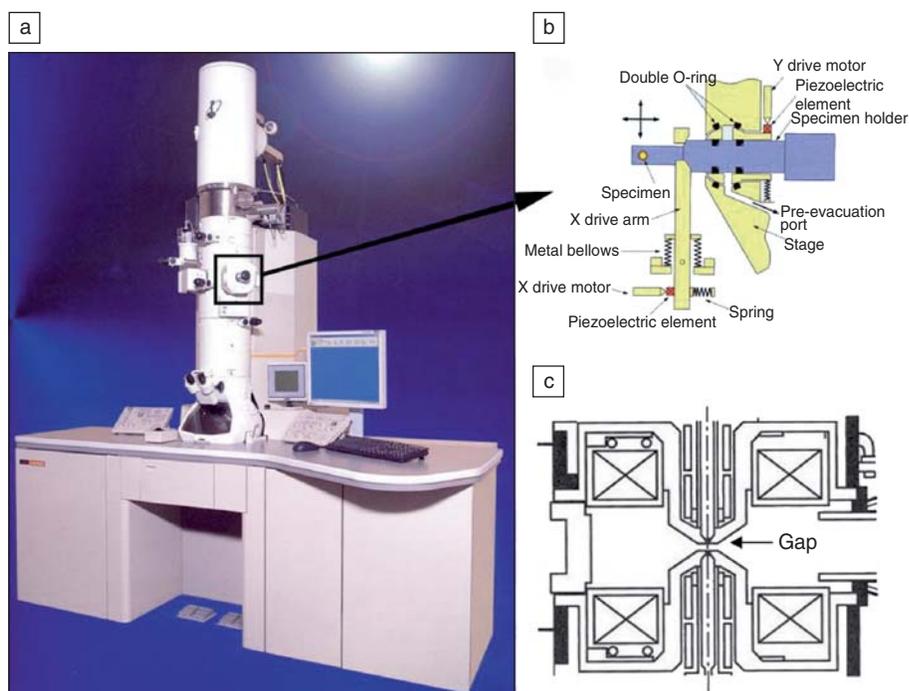


Figure 1. Conventional transmission electron microscope showing the capability for performing *in situ* experiments. (a) The area around the black square depicts the location in the microscope where the specimen holder is inserted into the column for *in situ* observation. (b) A more detailed side view of the specimen holder can be seen. (c) A front view of the pole piece and the narrow pole-piece gap within which the specimen holder shown in (b) needs to be inserted. In the case of aberration-free microscopes, the pole-piece gap can be significantly increased while keeping the resolution high.

processing relationships, at high magnifications, by employing *in situ* TEM sample holders, which are essentially no more than small laboratories placed in the column of the microscope. These holders, available commercially or in specific research groups, enable environmental changes to the sample, such as heating, cooling, gas and liquid exposure, straining and indentation, and electrical and magnetic biasing (Table 1). In each of these circumstances, the sample environment is controlled from outside the microscope while the sample is observed and its responses are recorded in real time.

From nanoscale observations to biological interactions, advancements in *in situ* TEM are enabling us to observe the known world on a tiny scale. Although *in situ* TEM microscopy has been used for quite some time, emerging aberration-corrected TEMs/ scanning TEMs (STEMs) and the fabrication of microelectromechanical systems-based and piezo-actuated *in situ* holders are profoundly impacting the way *in situ* experiments are performed and the types of observations we are able to make.

In the case of TEM/STEMs corrected for spherical aberration ( $C_s$ ), additional

**Table I: Variety of specimen holders for *in situ* TEM experiments and possible applications in materials science.**

Types of Holders	Possible Applications
<i>In situ</i> heating (up to 1273 K)	Thermal stresses, coarsening of nanoparticles, sintering, grain growth, strain relaxation in heterostructures and nanostructures
<i>In situ</i> nanoindentation	Indentation response of thin films, nanoparticles and nanopillars
<i>In situ</i> straining in combination with cooling (down to 5 K) or heating (to 1300K)	Ductile-to-brittle transitions, microstructural origins of mechanical response, measurements of lattice strains by convergent beam diffraction
<i>In situ</i> STM	Electrical properties of nanostructures, field emission of carbon nanotubes, electromechanical properties of nanowires.
<i>In situ</i> tomography	3D visualization of porosity, nanoparticles, virus morphology.
<i>In situ</i> liquid cell holder	Cell growth and biological interactions, wet chemistry

lenses are incorporated in the microscope column to reduce and/or eliminate the spherical aberration of the objective lenses. The aberration correctors are inserted either above or below the objective lenses to correct the illumination (STEM mode) and imaging (TEM mode) systems, respectively. In the past, the spherical aberration of the TEM lens was minimized by reducing the pole-piece gap. The pole-piece gap is the distance between the magnetic pole pieces, which comprise the magnetic electron lenses and within which the *in situ* holder is located (Figure 1c). When the pole-piece gap is too narrow, as in ultrahigh-resolution pole pieces (~2 mm), only a selected group of *in situ* TEM holders can be accommodated. Pole pieces with a larger gap in uncorrected machines will decrease the resolution significantly; for example, the point resolution in Scherzer defocus for an uncorrected 300-kV TEM decreases from 0.16 nm to 0.27 nm if the gap is widened from 2.5 mm to 20 mm, which is sufficient to eliminate the possibility of high-resolution imaging of most metals, semiconductors, and ceramics. This decrease in resolution can be attributed to the higher chromatic aberration ( $C_c$ ) coefficients of lenses with larger gap and therefore large focal length.  $C_c$ -correction as being developed by the U.S. Department of Energy TEAM project [<http://ncem.lbl.gov/TEAM-project/>] has the potential to enable sub-Angstrom resolution even for objective lenses with a gap of 20 mm.

While less obvious,  $C_s$  and  $C_c$  correction provide additional important advantages in improving the spatial coherence and the energy width of the electron beam. By

improving the spatial coherence with  $C_s$  correction, it is possible to provide higher beam current densities to the sample without converging the illumination to an extent that it limits the transfer of higher order spatial frequencies in images. This enables a higher signal-to-noise ratio and improved time resolution while still maintaining a high information limit—the inherent information conveyed in the image. Additionally, the simpler contrast-transfer function of a  $C_s$ -corrected instrument improves the interpretability of the images, an important parameter when considering the large number of images that can be produced at 30 frames per second acquisition rates. The advent of  $C_c$  correction compensates for information transfer losses due to inelastic scattering of the electrons. This will improve our ability to image thicker samples, as is desirable in understanding mechanical responses, and in environmental studies where the presence of a gaseous or liquid layer can cause scattering of the electron beam.

Although the goal of the community is to enable widespread use of  $C_s$ -corrected and perhaps even  $C_c$ -corrected TEM/STEMs, this will still take some years due to the high cost associated with the purchase, installation, operation, and maintenance of such machines. In the meantime, advances in *in situ* holders are enabling advances on non- $C_s$ -corrected machines.

Like all advanced and sophisticated technology, *in situ* TEM works with precise specifications. Whereas the  $C_s$ -corrector lenses enable wider pole-piece gaps, the use of MEMS-based and piezo-actuated

*in situ* holders permits the integration of devices with a suitable size to be accommodated within narrow pole-piece gaps. In addition, these systems enable a range of experiments to be performed where simultaneous real-time TEM observations and property measurements can be made. These include, for example, measuring electrical current as a function of strain and temperature, measuring stress and strain as a function of temperature, and measuring stress and strain as a function of a magnetic field.

Because of the dynamic capabilities of *in situ* TEM observations, imaging and recording equipment are instrumental parts of the observation process. As needs vary, some experiments profit from a wide field of view, others require high magnification. To accommodate both requirements, *in situ* TEM digital media is continually improving to monitor and record dynamic experiments via video camera, yet retain the ability to record high-quality still images when needed. Wide-angle cameras in the 35-mm port along with a high-resolution charge-coupled device (CCD) camera and an intensified video system below the film camera of the TEM can meet dynamic and still requirements. For dynamic *in situ* events, wide-angle cameras are most often lens-coupled CCD cameras with a fast read out. On the other hand, high-resolution fiber-coupled CCD cameras have relatively slow read outs and narrow areas of view, making them fit for high magnification and slower dynamic experiments. New cameras are now becoming available that combine the high resolution of CCD with reasonable read-out speeds and are expected to greatly improve both the signal-to-noise ratio and the general ease of data collection and manipulation.

Ask any trained TEM student and you will hear that sample preparation is one area where more creative problem solving is always welcome. For the typical 200-keV and 300-keV TEMs, the sample thickness is normally around 50–100 nm to permit electron transparency. Conventional methods, such as jet polishing, microtoming, or ion milling, are still widely used but require highly experienced users and are not well suited for samples thicker than 3  $\mu$ m. In this regard, the focused ion beam (FIB) is a major advancement for TEM sample preparation. Whereas advanced training is still essential, the FIB permits a high level of flexibility for sample preparation because of its ability to prepare samples from specific locations and with controllable and reproducible geometries, even for the fabrication of MEMS samples.

In recent years, developments in nanoscience and nanotechnology have brought about an exciting resurgence of interest in *in situ* TEM. This technique plays a crucial role in nanomaterials research, where high resolutions are needed to observe atomic/nanostructures and their properties. Additionally, the fields of TEM and nanomaterials are particularly well suited because the crystal size of nanomaterials is typically comparable or below the thickness of electron transparent samples required by TEM.

Focusing on these and other exciting topics, we have included five articles in this issue of *MRS Bulletin* to illustrate how a variety of *in situ* TEM techniques can be used to solve materials science problems. As the range of materials and applications is extremely broad, this issue provides several different material examples using different *in situ* TEM techniques rather than attempting to cover specific areas of materials research. The articles focus on particular *in situ* TEM techniques and their application to materials. In most of the cases, each technique requires specific *in situ* TEM holders and configurations, whereas dedicated TEM/STEMs are necessary in a few situations, as, for example, for environmental cell studies.

In the first article, H. Saka et al. review the area of *in situ* TEM heating experiments to illustrate the important effect of temperature on the behavior of materials. In fact, many materials phenomena of both fundamental interest and commercial importance occur at elevated temperatures, such as solid–solid and solid–liquid transformations, nucleation and growth processes, sintering, and thermal-induced stresses. In particular, this article discusses the fabrication of specimen-heating holders for successful *in situ* heating in the TEM, the high-resolution observation of solid–state reactions at high temperatures and solid–liquid interfaces. In addition, the authors describe the size dependence of melting temperatures in one-, two-, and three-dimensionally reduced systems, as well as the size dependence of the contact angle of fine liquid metals. The article then turns to a discussion of solid–gas and liquid–gas reactions at high temperatures and the transformation of specific dislocation core reconstructions in silicon at high temperatures.

The second article, written by J. Cumings et al., describes *in situ* TEM capabilities for uncovering information about electric and magnetic properties of materials for operational devices. Magnetic materials encompass a variety of materials that are used in

a diverse range of applications, such as media storage, sensors, and actuators. In parallel, many materials are currently required to transport electrical current, such as interconnect structures and various transducers, sensors, and actuators. In order for these materials to be considered for specific applications, it is crucial to understand and monitor their response to an electric and/or magnetic field. Often, these electrical and magnetic properties are determined by nanoscale features that can be most effectively understood through electron microscopy studies, particularly when devices are operated during *in situ* TEM observations, for which a wealth of information is available about dynamics, including metastable and transitional states. Additionally, because the imaging beam is electrically charged, it can directly capture information about the nanoscale electric and magnetic fields in and around devices of interest. This is perhaps most relevant to the growing areas of nanomaterials and nanodevice research. The article describes various methods of obtaining electrical and magnetic information, the dynamics of magnetic domains, and the fabrication of *in situ* devices. Several specific examples of materials systems that have been investigated with these techniques are presented.

The third article, written by P. L. Gai et al., reviews the development of time-resolved, high-resolution environmental scanning/TEM and related methods for directly probing dynamic gas–solid, liquid–solid, and gas–liquid–solid interactions at the atomic level. The unique information available from such experiments has allowed the dynamic nature of nanostructures to be visualized during reactions. This has enabled the development of advanced nanomaterials and processes, including the design of novel green routes to polymers, and the identification of the important processes during catalysis, chemical vapor deposition, and electrochemical deposition.

The fourth article, written by J. M. Howe et al., addresses the use of *in situ* TEM techniques under high-resolution imaging, which is particularly important for the study and development of nanomaterials and nanotechnology. Using various examples, these authors show how *in situ* high-resolution TEM (HRTEM) can be used to understand alloy phase formation in isolated nanometer-sized particles, to understand and measure the mechanical and transport properties of carbon nanotubes and nanowires, and to determine the dynamic behavior of interphase

boundaries in nanoscale materials. The use of special holders, the role of  $C_s$  correctors, better time resolution, and image storage and processing in such studies are also discussed.

The fifth article, written by I. M. Robertson et al., discusses the capabilities of *in situ* TEM deformation experiments in providing critical and valuable real-time dynamic information for direct investigation of the link between deformation mechanisms, microstructure, and properties. Observing dislocation behavior in real time as a material is deformed provides exceptional insight into how the complex and coordinated behavior of dislocations controls the macroscopic mechanical properties of materials. The transmission electron microscope provides a unique environment in which to observe dislocation motion, which has been a common use of transmission electron microscopy since the instrument was first introduced. Since then, this technique has been used to reveal dislocation behavior and interactions in a range of materials, and it has been instrumental in providing a fundamental basis for modeling mechanical properties under different stimuli and environments. Advances in instrumentation, stage design, recording media, computational power, and image manipulation software are providing new opportunities for not only stimulating the motion of the dislocations but also measuring the macroscopic mechanical response while observing how dislocations behave. Insight gained from past studies and new capabilities are described briefly.

In summary, the articles in this issue of *MRS Bulletin* provide a sample of what is novel and unique in the field of *in situ* TEM. The advent of improved cameras and continued developments in electron optics and stage designs have enabled scientists and engineers to enhance the capabilities of previous TEM analyses. Currently, novel *in situ* experiments observe and record the behavior of materials in various heating, cooling, straining, or growth environments. *In situ* TEM techniques are invaluable for understanding and characterizing dynamic microstructural changes. They can validate static TEM experiments and inspire new experimental approaches and new theories.

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**Paulo J. Ferreira**

**Paulo J. Ferreira**, Guest Editor for this issue of *MRS Bulletin*, is an assistant professor at the University of Texas at Austin. Ferreira earned his PhD degree in materials science and engineering from the University of Illinois. He completed his post-doctoral work in materials science and engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Ferreira concentrates his scientific research on the study of the atomic structure and defect behavior of nanomaterials through *in situ* and high-resolution transmission electron microscopy techniques. He is part of the editorial board of review for *Metallurgical and Materials Transactions*. Ferreira also has acted as a special advisor to the Minister of Economics and Innovation, Portugal, on Government Strategy for Science & Technology. In addition, Ferreira is the author or co-author of more than 70 papers, conference proceedings, and book chapters. He is preparing a book entitled "*Nanomaterials, Nanotechnologies and Design: An Introduction for Engineers and Architects*" with co-authors D. Schodek (Harvard University) and M. Ashby (University of Cambridge, UK).



**Kazutaka Mitsuishi**

Ferreira can be reached at the University of Texas at Austin, Materials Science and Engineering Program, 1 University Station, MC 2200, Austin, TX 78712-0292, USA; tel. 512-471-3244, and e-mail ferreira@mail.utexas.edu.

**Kazutaka Mitsuishi**, Guest Editor for this issue of *MRS Bulletin*, is a senior scientist at Quantum Dot Research Center in the National Institute for Materials Science (NIMS), Japan. Mitsuishi also is affiliated in the high-voltage electron microscopy station at NIMS. He received his PhD degree in 1996 from Tokyo University of Science, studying dynamical simulation of a RHEED intensity oscillation during MBE growth. Mitsuishi's research interests include imaging properties and simulation techniques on scanning transmission electron microscopy, *in situ* observation of rare-gas precipitates in metals, and *in situ* fabrication of nanostructures using electron beam-induced deposition.

Mitsuishi can be reached at Quantum Dot Research Center, National Institute for Materials Science, 3-13 Sakura, Tsukuba 305-0003 Japan; tel. +81-29-863-5474, fax +81-29-863-5574, and e-mail Mitsuishi.Kazutaka@nims.go.jp.



**Eric A. Stach**

**Eric A. Stach**, Guest Editor for this issue of *MRS Bulletin*, is an associate professor in the Department of Materials Engineering at Purdue University and scientific director of the Electron Microscopy Facility at the Birck Nanotechnology Center. He received his PhD degree in 1998 in materials science and engineering from the University of Virginia. Prior to joining Purdue, Stach was the *in situ* staff scientist (1998-2003) and a principal investigator (2003-2004) at the National Center for Electron Microscopy. He also is chief scientist and co-founder of Hummingbird Scientific, LLC; a manufacturer of sample holders for electron and ion microscopy applications. Stach's research interests focus on the development and application of *in situ* electron microscopy techniques toward understanding crystal growth and deformation mechanisms.

**Shigeo Arai** is the chief technician of the High Voltage Electron Microscope Laboratory in the EcoTopia Science Institute at Nagoya University, Japan. Arai received his bachelor's degree in chemical engineering from Nagoya Institute of Technology. He earned his PhD degree in engineering



**Shigeo Arai**

from Nagoya University in 2005. Arai's research interests include development of the electron irradiation techniques with a high voltage electron microscope for the study of point defects, and *in situ* electron microscopy observation of solid-liquid (solid-solid) interface, and oxidation-reduction reaction in materials using high resolution TEM and EELS.

Arai can be reached at Nagoya University, EcoTopia Science Institute, High Voltage Electron Microscope Laboratory, Furo-cho, Chikusa-ku, Nagoya City, 464-8603, Japan; tel. +81-52-789-3631, fax +81-52-789-3174, and e-mail arai@esi.nagoya-u.ac.jp.

**John Cumings** is an assistant professor in the Department of Materials Science and Engineering at the University of Maryland. He received his PhD degree in physics from University of California at Berkeley in 2002, working under Alex Zettl in the study of carbon and boron nitride nanotubes. Cumings subsequently served as a postdoctoral scholar in the Department of Physics at Stanford University with David Goldhaber-Gordon. Cumings' research focuses on *in situ* electron microscopy of active



**John Cumings**

nanostructures for the purpose of exploring the new properties of materials that emerge at the nanoscale. He was the first ever to fabricate a nanoscale bearing from a multiwall carbon nanotube, and directs an active program in nanotube, nanoelectronic, and nanomagnetic materials research.

Cumings can be reached at the Department of Materials Science and Engineering, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742-2115, USA; tel. 301-405-0789, fax 301-314-8164, and e-mail cumings@umd.edu

**Gerhard Dehm** is a professor and chair of the Department Materials Physics of the Montanuniversität Leoben in Austria, and director of the Erich Schmid Institute of Materials Science of the Austrian Academy of Sciences. He studied materials science at the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg and received his PhD degree from the University of Stuttgart/Max Planck Institute for Metals Research in 1995. Dehm was a visiting scientist at the Technion-Israel Institute of Technology in Haifa with a Feodor Lynen scholarship of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. Afterward,



Gerhard Dehm

he was a senior scientist at the Max Planck Institute for Metals Research in Stuttgart. Dehm then moved to Austria in 2005. His field of research includes mechanical size-effects in thin films and nanostructured materials, interface related phenomena in metals and metal/ceramic systems, and *in situ* electron microscopy. Dehm has received several awards, including the Masing Memorial Award from the German Materials Society DGM, and the Award for Nanosciences of Styria.

Dehm can be reached by e-mail at gerhard.dehm@unileoben.ac.at.

**Pratibha L. Gai** is JEOL Professor and Yorkshire Forward Chair of Electron Microscopy and Nanotechnology, a professor in the Department of Chemistry, a professor in the Department of Physics, and co-director of the York JEOL Nanocentre, all at the University of York. Gai graduated with a PhD degree in physics from the Cavendish Laboratory, University of Cambridge. After postdoctoral work in the Inorganic Chemistry Department at the University of Oxford, Gai became a group leader of the Surface Reactions and *In Situ* Electron Microscopy



Pratibha L. Gai

Group at the Department of Materials, University of Oxford, and a fellow of Wolfson College, Oxford. She also was a research fellow in the Central Research and Development Department of DuPont in Wilmington, Delaware, and jointly served as an adjunct professor of materials science at the University of Delaware. Her research interests include structural dynamics, nanomaterials, catalysts, semiconductors, superconductors, the role of defects and *in situ* electron microscopy under controlled environments, including dynamic aberration-corrected electron microscopy. Gai is a fellow of the Institute of Physics, a fellow of the Royal Microscopical Society, a chartered engineer of the Institute of Materials, and a recipient of awards for her work on *in situ* electron microscopy of catalytic materials. She has published nine books and more than 200 scientific papers and holds numerous patents in catalysis and nanocoatings. She has served on editorial boards of scientific journals.

Gai can be reached by e-mail at pgb500@york.ac.uk.

**James M. Howe** is a professor and the director of the Nanoscale Materials



James M. Howe

Characterization Facility in the Department of Materials Science and Engineering at the University of Virginia. He received his PhD degree in materials science from the University of California at Berkeley in 1985 and subsequently joined the Department of Metallurgical Engineering and Materials Science at Carnegie Mellon University. In 1991, Howe joined the Materials Science and Engineering faculty at the University of Virginia. His current research emphasizes the application of high-resolution and analytical transmission electron microscope techniques to study the mechanisms and kinetics of phase transformations in nanoparticles and the physical and mechanical properties of nanomaterials. Howe has received several prestigious awards for his research, published more than 200 technical papers, three book chapters, and three symposium proceedings on transformation interfaces and electron microscopy. He also is author of the textbook *Interfaces in Materials* (1997) and co-author with Prof. Brent Fultz of the textbook *Transmission Electron Microscopy and Diffractometry of Materials*, published as a third edition in 2007.



Robert Hull

Howe can be reached by e-mail at jh9s@virginia.edu.

**Robert Hull** is the Henry Burlage Professor and head of the Materials Science and Engineering Department at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (RPI). He received his PhD degree in materials science from Oxford University, and then spent 10 years at AT&T Bell Laboratories. Hull then joined the faculty of the Materials Department at the University of Virginia, where he served as director of an NSF MRSEC Center and of the University of Virginia Nanoscience Institute. Afterward, Hull moved to RPI. His recent research focuses upon the development of new techniques for nanoscale assembly, fabrication, and characterization using focused ion and electron beams, with particular emphases on *in situ* imaging methods, epitaxial semiconductor structures, and materials for nanoelectronics. He has published more than 200 journal and conference papers in these and related fields. Hull is a fellow of the American Physical Society, a member of the European Academy of Sciences, and has served as the



Takeo Kamino

president of the Materials Research Society.

**Takeo Kamino** is technical advisor of the Naka Application Center at Hitachi High-Technologies Corp. in Japan. He received his PhD degree in materials science and engineering at Ibaraki University in 1997. Kamino's current work focuses on the development of a technique for 3D structure observation of nanomaterials using a combination of FIB and high-resolution STEM or TEM. In addition, Kamino's research includes the developments of the TEM techniques allowing observation of atoms during sintering, reaction, and deposition at atomic. He has been a member of board of directors with the Japanese Society of Microscopy since 2005.

Kamino can be reached at Naka Application Center, Hitachi High-Technologies Corporation, 11-1, Ishikawa-cho, Hitachinaka-shi, Ibaraki-ken, 312-0057, Japan; tel. +81-29-354-2970, fax +81-29-354-1971, and e-mail Kamino-takeo@nak.hitachi-hitec.com.

**Hiroto Mori** is a professor of electron



**Hirotaro Mori**

microscopy at Osaka University and also serves as director of the Research Center for Ultra-high Voltage Electron Microscopy at Osaka University. Mori received his PhD degree in 1976 from Osaka University. His current research interests include phase equilibrium in isolated, nm-sized alloy particles.

Mori can be reached at the Research Center for Ultra-high Voltage Electron Microscopy, Osaka University, 7-1 Mihogaoka, Ibaraki, Osaka 567-0047, Japan; tel. +81-6-6879-7941, fax +81-6-6879-7942, and e-mail mori@uhvem.osaka-u.ac.jp.

**Eva Olsson** is a professor of experimental physics at Chalmers University of Technology, Gothenburg, Sweden, and director of the center for Material Analysis at Chalmers (MACH). She obtained her PhD degree in materials science from Chalmers in 1988. From 1989 to 1991, she was a postdoctoral fellow in physical sciences at IBM T.J. Watson Research Center in Yorktown Heights, New York. In 1997, Olsson was appointed professor of experimental physics at Uppsala University and established the division of Analytical Materials Physics at the Ångström



**Eva Olsson**

Laboratory in Uppsala, Sweden. In 2001, she was appointed professor of experimental physics at Chalmers University of Technology. Olsson's research is focused on the functional nanostructure of materials and, in particular, the role of interfaces. Her main experimental techniques include high resolution analytical microscopy, with emphasis on direct correlation between atomic structure of individual microstructural constituents and properties.

Olsson can be reached at Chalmers University of Technology, SE-412 96 Goteborg, Sweden; tel. +46-31-772-3247, fax +46-31-772-3224, and e-mail eva.olsson@fy.chalmers.se

**Amanda K. Petford-Long** is a senior scientist in the Materials Science Division at Argonne National Laboratory (ANL). Petford-Long earned her BSc degree in physics from University College London and her DPhil degree in materials science from the University of Oxford. She was a professor in the materials department at Oxford until joining ANL in 2005. Petford-Long's research focuses on correlating physical properties of layered thin films and nanoparticles with microstructure and



**Ian M. Robertson**

composition profile—of particular interest are materials for information storage applications. She has developed *in situ* TEM facilities for analyzing magnetization and transport behavior and has published more than 240 papers.

Petford-Long can be reached at Materials Science Division, Argonne National Laboratory, Argonne, IL 60439, USA; tel. 630-252-5480, fax 630-252-4289, and e-mail petford.long@anl.gov.

**Ian M. Robertson** is a Willett Professor of Engineering and head of the Department of Materials Science and Engineering at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC). He obtained his BSc degree in applied physics from Strathclyde University in Glasgow, Scotland, and his DPhil degree from University of Oxford, England, in 1982. Robertson then joined the Department of Metallurgy and Mining at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign as a postdoctoral assistant. He became a member of the faculty of that department in 1984. Currently, Robertson also is an affiliate faculty member of the Department of Mechanical Science and Engineering at UIUC.



**Frances M. Ross**

Robertson's research interests include application of the transmission electron microscope as an experimental laboratory for understanding the fundamental processes and mechanisms that control the macroscopic response of materials exposed to extreme environments (temperature, strain rate, gaseous and liquid environments, and irradiation), and identifying the processes limiting hydrogen uptake and release in lightweight hydrogen storage materials.

Robertson can be reached at the Department of Materials Science and Engineering, University of Illinois, 1304 West Green Street, Urbana IL 61801, USA; and e-mail ianr@uiuc.edu.

**Frances M. Ross** is a research staff member and the manager of the Nanoscale Materials Analysis Department at IBM's Thomas J. Watson Research Center in Yorktown Heights, NY. She received her BA degree in physics and her PhD in materials science from Cambridge University in 1985 and 1989, respectively. Ross then joined AT&T Bell Laboratories in 1990 as a Postdoctoral Member of Technical Staff, where she made use of *in situ* electron microscopy tech-



**Hiroyasu Saka**

niques to study Si oxidation and dislocation properties in SiGe. From 1992 to 1997, Ross worked as a staff scientist at the National Center for Electron Microscopy, Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, where she used *in situ* TEM to observe anodic etching of Si and domain wall motion in ferroelectrics, as well as coordinating users of the high resolution and *in situ* facilities. Ross joined IBM in 1997, where she uses a TEM with *in situ* chemical vapor deposition, evaporation and focused ion beam capabilities and a liquid cell to study strained layer epitaxy, silicide and nanowire formation, and electrochemical nucleation and growth. In 1999 she received the UK Institute of Physics' Charles Vernon Boys Medal; in 2000 she received the MRS Outstanding Young Investigator Award; and in 2003 she received the Burton Medal from the Microscopy Society of America and an IBM Outstanding Technical Achievement Award. Ross became an APS fellow in 2002. She is an author or co-author of 60 journal articles and 4 patents, and has been active in organizing meetings and symposia for MRS, MSA, and the American Association for



**Katsuhiko Sasaki**

Crystal Growth. In addition, Ross has served on panels for the NSF, DOE and the National Academy of Sciences.

Ross can be reached at IBM Research Division, T.J. Watson Research Center, 1101 Kitchawan Road, Yorktown Heights NY 10598, USA; tel. 914-945-1022, and e-mail [fmross@us.ibm.com](mailto:fmross@us.ibm.com).

**Hiroyasu Saka** is the designated professor for the program "Promotion of Nano/Bioscience Using High Performance Electron Microscopes," which was launched in April 2007 by the High Voltage Electron Laboratory at the EcoTopia Science Institute, Nagoya University, under auspice of The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology. Saka received his bachelor's (1964), master's (1966), and PhD (1972) degrees in engineering from Nagoya University. After earning his degrees, Saka was a research associate for the Department of Metallurgy at Nagoya University (1970–1979), a British Council Scholar for the Department of Science of Materials at the University of Oxford (1977–1979), an associate professor in the Department of Metallurgy at Nagoya University (1979–1987),



**Renu Sharma**

and a professor in the Department of Materials Science and Engineering at Nagoya University (1988–1994). From 1994 through March 2005, Saka was a professor in the Department of Quantum Engineering at Nagoya University. His research interests include electron microscopy (conventional and *in situ*) of defects in crystalline materials and phase transformation (solid/solid, solid/liquid, solid/gas, liquid/gas), specimen preparation techniques using a focused ion beam, and toughening of brittle materials by means of dislocations. Saka has authored or co-authored more than 350 publications in various scientific journals and proceedings.

Saka can be reached by e-mail at [saka@nagoya-u.jp](mailto:saka@nagoya-u.jp).

**Katsuhiko Sasaki** is an associate professor in the Department of Quantum Engineering at Nagoya University, Japan. Sasaki earned his MEng degree in crystalline materials science and his DEng degree in metallurgy from Nagoya University in 1986 and 1989, respectively. Afterward, he was a postdoctoral researcher in the Department of Physics at the University of Bristol. Sasaki joined Nagoya University as a



**Zhong Lin Wang**

research assistant in 1991, and was appointed to his current position in 2005. His research interests include thermodynamics and kinematics of atomic and electrical structure of interfaces in metal, ceramics, and semiconductors. His current research focus is with *in situ* observation of electric field on and/or around the interface of semiconductors using transmission electron microscopy.

Sasaki can be reached at the Department of Quantum Engineering, Nagoya University, Nagoya, 464-8603, Japan; tel. +81-52-789-3349, fax +81-52-789-3226, and e-mail [khsasaki@hix.nagoya-u.ac.jp](mailto:khsasaki@hix.nagoya-u.ac.jp).

**Renu Sharma** is an associate research scientist and affiliated associate professor with the School of Materials at Arizona State University (ASU). Sharma earned her BS and BEd degrees in physics and chemistry from Panjab University, India. She received her PhD degree from the University of Stockholm, Sweden, in 1985. Sharma joined ASU after graduation. Her research is focused on dynamic observations of nanoscale synthesis processes and effect of ambient on the functioning of nanomaterials at atomic level. At ASU,



**Yimei Zhu**

Sharma is responsible for establishing environment cell technology (ESTEM) that combines atomic level observation with chemical analysis of gas-solid reaction.

**Zhong Lin Wang** is a Regents' Professor, COE Distinguished Professor and Director, Center for Nanostructure Characterization and Fabrication, at Georgia Institute of Technology. He has more than 15 years of research experience in nanotechnology. Wang's group discovered the nanobelt in 2001, which is considered to be a ground-breaking work. The paper on nanobelt was the second most cited paper in chemistry in 2001–2003 world-wide. His paper on piezoelectric nanosprings was one of the most cited papers in materials science in 2004 world-wide. His recent invention of world's first nanogenerator will have profound impacts to implantable biosensors and molecular machines/robotics. In 1999, Wang and his colleagues discovered the world's smallest balance, nanobalance, which was selected as the breakthrough in nanotechnology by the America Physical Society.

Wang's most recent research focuses on oxide nanobelts and nanowires, *in situ* tech-

niques for nanoscale measurements, self-assembly nanostructures, fabrication of nanodevices and nanosensors for biomedical applications, and nanogenerators for self-powered nanosystem.

He was elected a fellow of American Physical Society in 2005, has received the 2001 S.T. Li prize for Outstanding Contribution in Nanoscience and Nanotechnology, the 2000 and 2005 Georgia Tech Outstanding Faculty Research Author Awards, Sigma Xi 2005 sustain research awards, Sigma Xi 1998 and 2002 best paper awards, the 1999 Burton Medal from Microscopy Society of America, and 1998 China-NSF Oversea Outstanding Young Scientists Award. Details can be found at: <http://www.nanoscience.gatech.edu/zlwang>. He has authored and co-authored four scientific reference and textbooks and more than 500 peer reviewed journal articles, 55 review papers and book chapters, edited and co-edited 14 volumes of books on nanotechnology, and held 20 patents and provisional patents. Wang is among the world's top 25 most cited authors in nanotechnology from 1992–2002 (ISI, Science Watch). His entire publications have been cited for more than 12,000 times. The H-factor of his publications is 54.

Wang can be reached by e-mail: [zlwang@gatech.edu](mailto:zlwang@gatech.edu).

**Yimei Zhu** is director of the Institute for Advanced Electron Microscopy, and a senior scientist in the Department of Condensed Matter

Physics and Materials Science, and the Center for Functional Nanomaterials, each at Brookhaven National Laboratory. Zhu received his PhD degree from Nagoya University, Japan. In addition to his positions at Brookhaven, Zhu is an adjunct profes-

sor in the Department of Applied Physics and Mathematics at Columbia University, and the Department of Physics and the Department of Materials Science and Engineering at SUNY Stony Brook. His current research interests include

advanced electron microscopy in measuring electronic structure and electron density, and magnetic potential and field of functional materials, as well as structure-properties of strongly correlated electron systems, multiferroics, and nanomagnetism. During

his career, Zhu has served on various academic committees and received many honors, including the Distinguished Science and Technology Award from Brookhaven National Laboratory. He also is a Fellow of American Physical

Society. Zhu has published more than 280 peer-reviewed journal articles.

Zhu can be reached at Brookhaven National Lab, Bldg. 480, Upton, NY 11973 USA; tel. 631-344-3057, fax 631-344-4071, and e-mail [zhu@bnl.gov](mailto:zhu@bnl.gov). □

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