

# **Population Kinetics of a Repetitively-Pulsed Nanosecond Discharge**

by

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2013

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to someone else.

## A C K N O W L E D G M E N T S

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Who is this?

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## ***Preface***

This is a dissertation about something; I really hope it's good.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

**DBD** dielectric-barrier discharge

**APP** atmospheric-pressure plasma

# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Overview

Research on atmospheric plasmas has been going on for as long as research on plasmas themselves. However, it was only recently that the necessary diagnostic techniques and computational power existed to properly examine them. In the last few decades there has been a renaissance in work dedicated to atmospheric plasmas, particularly atmospheric pressure plasmas that are out of thermal equilibrium. This is because they are able to treat delicate substrates with none of the thermal damage associated with arcs.

Though several approaches exist to generating atmospheric pressure plasmas (dbd, microwave, rf), particularly interesting are those using nanosecond pulses. The duration of such pulses, as well as their amplitude can be changed to target particular atomic or molecular reactions. This flexibility is highly desirable in the world of plasma processing where selectivity, control, etc. are of utmost importance. However, we are still learning how to measure these particular plasmas. As recently as 1994 the only diagnostic with any meaningful accuracy was propagation velocity.

cite  
Vasilyak

Several research groups have focused on the development of pulsed nanosecond discharges in air. However, the complex chemistry associated with air plasmas obscures some of the more fundamental questions: how is the pulsed nanosecond plasma formed, how are the excited states of the system populated, what significance is there to reactions after the fast ionization wave, the spatial variation of system parameters, what kind of electron energy distribution can be expected? This study will emphasize spectroscopic measurements of a helium pulsed nanosecond discharge.

simplify  
for  
general  
reader

Such a system retains physical relevance given that helium is a common

stabilizing additive to atmospheric pressure plasmas. At the same time, the more simple atomic structure lends itself to a more detailed examination using global models, kinetic simulations, and active spectroscopy. This work will focus its efforts on the description of the spatial variation of the pulsed-nanosecond discharge, an approximation of its electron energy distribution function, and a description of how the neutral atoms are excited.

## **1.2 Literature Review**

### **1.2.1 History of Atmospheric-Pressure Discharges**

Like most physical phenomena, plasmas are typically only described under ideal circumstances. This means that neutral collisions, and subsequently, atmospheric plasmas, are often ignored. Neutral collisions tend to obscure the electromagnetic effects that distinguish a plasma from a gas. However, the history of observation and study of plasmas is indelibly linked to atmospheric plasmas. Lightning and static sparks are the most prevalent plasmas on earth. Indeed, the first artificial plasma was an atmospheric arc, the work of a Russian scientist named Vasilii Petrov.

The work of Petrov was the forerunner to the study of thermal plasmas. In 1802, Volta's recent invention of the voltaic pile provided the first source of constant electrical energy. Using a series of voltaic cells, Petrov was able to draw the first electrical arc between two sticks of carbon. Aside from its blinding light, these arcs were characterized by their significant ionization, and high degree of thermal equilibrium. Gas temperatures could reach thousands of kelvin.

In contrast, later work by Werner von Siemens, led to the discovery of the so-called "silent discharge." In recent years, the terminology has changed and this type of discharge is now referred to as a dielectric-barrier discharge, or DBD. The DBD was significantly different from the thermal arc. Visually, it was much dimmer, and appeared to be composed of many thousands of individual filaments. Additionally, the DBD did not significantly heat the air, unlike the thermal arc. Finally, the DBD was used in the first commercial plasma application: ozone generation and water purification. Notably, both the thermal arc and silent discharge predated the 'official' discover of plasma by Sir William Crookes in 1872.

## 1.2.2 Repetitively-Pulsed Nanosecond Discharges

Should the historic stuff be moved to the lit review?

For a substantial period of time, these two discharges represented the range of atmospheric-pressure plasmas (APP). The thermal arc, though useful, could not be used on delicate substrates. It had the additional problem of having relatively little control over its chemical kinetics. Meanwhile, the DBD was relegated to ozone production and polymer processing (relatively low-value applications). Though the DBD had attractive thermal properties, little else was known about how it operated, and how to control its properties. As recently as 2007, the National Academies noted that “the full promise of APPS will be known only if they can be understood and managed based on fundamental scientific principles at two extremes—the nanoscopic kinetic level, where selective chemistry occurs, and the global stability level, likened to aerodynamics.”

is  
this  
true?

Coincident to this work were studies of short, pulsed discharges. Initial work by J.J. Thompson and ??? was driven by an interest in how breakdown occurred. As shorter pulsers were developed, a number of researchers became interested in the characteristics of pulsed discharges themselves. Loeb noted that the discharge properties were akin to those observed in lightning leaders.

who  
was  
original?

who  
else?

## 1.2.3 Diagnostic Difficulties

Discuss the information that is lacking. No need to be specific, but be clear about challenges

## 1.2.4 Research Plan

Propose research to fill this gap Specific and cited history of PNDs and related measurements.

## 1.3 Basic Theory

Basic theory of gaseous breakdown.