

# MECHANICS ANALYSIS OF TWO-DIMENSIONALLY PRESTRAINED ELASTOMERIC THIN FILM FOR STRETCHABLE ELECTRONICS\*\*\*

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Received 12 November 2010, revision received 24 November 2010

**ABSTRACT** Various methods have been developed to fabricate highly stretchable electronics. Recent studies show that over 100% two dimensional stretchability can be achieved by mesh structure of brittle functioning devices interconnected with serpentine bridges. Kim et al show that pressing down an inflated elastomeric thin film during transfer printing introduces two dimensional prestrain, and therefore further improves the system stretchability. This paper gives a theoretical study of this process, through both analytical and numerical approaches. Simple analytical solutions are obtained for meridional and circumferential strains in the thin film, as well as the maximum strain in device islands, which all agree reasonably well with finite element analysis.

**KEY WORDS** stretchable electronics, shell, soft materials

## I. INTRODUCTION

Stretchable and flexible electronics and optoelectronics<sup>[1-3]</sup> have shown potential applications in bio-medicine<sup>[4,5]</sup>, robotics<sup>[6-9]</sup>, flexible displays<sup>[10-14]</sup>, electronic eyeball cameras<sup>[15-21]</sup>, and flexible solar cells<sup>[22,23]</sup> (See the review papers [24, 25]). These accomplishments use systems that offer high stretchability with active materials of Si, GaAs, carbon nanotubes or silicon nanowires<sup>[26-50]</sup>, transfer printed from hard, rigid growth substrates (e.g., semiconductor wafers) to soft, elastic elastomeric substrates<sup>[51-59]</sup>. An effective approach is to place functional but fragile devices on isolated islands, connected by robust, wavy bridges serving as electrical interconnection<sup>[60,61]</sup>. This strategy gives very large, two-dimensional stretchability (>100%) because mechanical deformations are mostly absorbed by the bridges, such that the strain in functional devices remain very small. Applying two-dimensional prestrain during the fabrication of systems with this type of stretchable design can further enhance the stretchability, and enable

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\*\*\* Project supported by the NSF (Nos. DMI-0328162 and ECCS-0824129). Yonggang Huang also acknowledges the support from NSFC and Ming Li acknowledges the support from China Scholarship Council.

application to extreme conditions<sup>[13,25]</sup>. Thermal manipulation of the elastomeric substrate represents one means to apply uniform two dimensional prestrain<sup>[39,62]</sup>, but the magnitudes are only typically a few percent or less.

As recently reported by Kim et al.<sup>[9]</sup>, transfer printing optoelectronics onto a pneumatically inflated elastomeric thin film can induce very high two dimensional prestrain, thereby greatly enhancing the stretchability. Demonstration experiments with inorganic light emitting diodes illustrated the effectiveness of this procedure. Figure 1 schematically describes the fabrication process. A thin polydimethylsiloxane (PDMS) film is mounted onto a chamber. Injecting air into the chamber inflates the PDMS film to a balloon shape (Fig.1(b)). Transfer begins by pushing a PDMS stamp with an array of prefabricated and transferred devices against the inflated film until the entire contact area of the film becomes flat (Fig.1(c)). Removing the PDMS stamp leaves the device array on the PDMS balloon. Deflating the balloon results in an array of electronic devices on a two dimensionally prestrained PDMS thin film. Such an approach gives very large prestrain ( $> 30\%$ ), and therefore significantly increases the system stretchability.

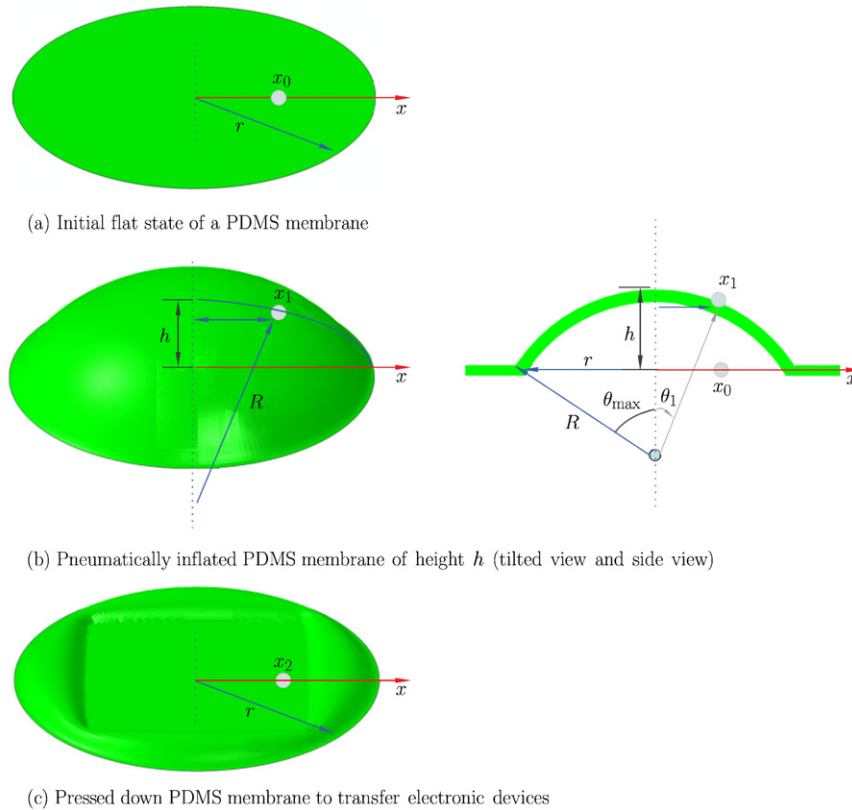


Fig. 1. Schematic illustration of introducing two dimensional prestrain to stretchable electronics.

A simple, analytical model is established in §II to determine the distribution of prestrain induced by transfer printing of electronic or optoelectronic devices onto an inflated thin film. The analytical model is validated by finite element method (FEM) in §II, and can be used in a unit cell model to determine the maximum strain in serpentine interconnects. The maximum strain in devices is obtained analytically in §III.

## II. ANALYTIC MODEL AND NUMERICAL RESULTS

Figure 1(a) shows a circular, flat PDMS thin film of radius  $r$  fixed at its outer boundary. Inflation of air deforms the thin film to a spherical cap of height  $h$ , as shown in Fig.1(b). For the height  $h$  comparable to radius  $r$  as in experiments, the thin film is mainly stretched, and bending becomes negligible except

near the fixed boundary. The radius and polar angle of the spherical cap are approximately given by

$$R = \frac{h^2 + r^2}{2h}, \quad \theta_{\max} = \sin^{-1} \left( \frac{2hr}{r^2 + h^2} \right) \quad (1)$$

As to be confirmed by FEM results in §III, the strain in the meridional direction is approximately uniform away from the fixed boundary, and is obtained as

$$\varepsilon_{\text{meridional}}^{(1)} = \frac{R\theta_{\max}}{r} - 1 = \frac{h^2 + r^2}{2hr} \sin^{-1} \left( \frac{2hr}{r^2 + h^2} \right) - 1 \quad (2)$$

For a point of distance  $x_0$  to the film axis at the initially flat state, it moves to the position of distance  $x_1$  to the axis and of polar angle  $\theta_1$  at the inflated state, as shown in Fig.1(b). The uniform meridional strain gives  $\theta_1 = (x_0/r)\theta_{\max}$  and  $x_1 = R \sin \theta_1$ . The circumferential strain is then obtained as

$$\varepsilon_{\text{circumferential}}^{(1)} = \frac{h^2 + r^2}{2hx_0} \sin \left[ \frac{x_0}{r} \sin^{-1} \left( \frac{2hr}{h^2 + r^2} \right) \right] - 1 \quad (3)$$

The PDMS thin film is pressed downward after inflation by a thick PDMS stamp to transfer electronic devices. The point  $x_1$  on the inflated film moves to the position of distance  $x_2$  to the axis. Due to the strong adhesion between PDMS stamp and thin film, the area on PDMS thin film having contact with the stamp moves vertically downward, which gives  $x_2 = x_1$  and the circumferential strain

$$\varepsilon_{\text{circumferential}}^{(2)} = \varepsilon_{\text{circumferential}}^{(1)} = \frac{h^2 + r^2}{2hx_0} \sin \left[ \frac{x_0}{r} \sin^{-1} \left( \frac{2hr}{h^2 + r^2} \right) \right] - 1 \quad (4)$$

The meridional strain equals  $dx_2/dx_0 - 1$ , and is obtained as

$$\varepsilon_{\text{meridional}}^{(2)} = \frac{h^2 + r^2}{2hr} \sin^{-1} \frac{2hr}{r^2 + h^2} \cos \left[ \frac{x_0}{r} \sin^{-1} \left( \frac{2hr}{h^2 + r^2} \right) \right] - 1 \quad (5)$$

The simple analytical expressions for strains in Eqs.(4) and (5), once validated, are useful to determine the maximum strain in devices and their positions in §III after the devices are transfer printed on the inflated PDMS thin film.

The finite element method (FEM) is also used to study the deformation of PDMS thin film due to inflation via the commercial FEM software ABAQUS. PDMS thin film, of Young's modulus 2 MPa and Poisson's ratio 0.48, is modeled by shell elements S4R since its thickness (0.4 mm) is much smaller than radius (10 mm). The outer boundary of PDMS thin film is fixed, and uniform pressure is applied to the bottom surface of PDMS thin film. For an inflation height  $h=4$  mm, the contours for meridional and circumferential strains in the inflated thin film are shown in Figs.2(a) and 2(b), respectively. They agree reasonably well with the simple analytical solutions in Eqs.(2) and (3), as shown in Fig.2(c). The inflated profile of the thin film obtained by FEM is shown in Fig.2(d), which agrees well with the simple, analytical solution in Eq.(1).

The meridional and circumferential strain contours in the pressed thin film are shown in Figs.3(a) and 3(b), respectively. As shown in Fig.3(c), they agree reasonably well with the simple analytical solutions in Eqs.(4) and (5), which can be used to determine buckling of interconnects between device islands. For interconnect linking two device islands, the elongation equals the product of device spacing and the strain in Eq.(4) (for two device islands along the circumferential direction) or Eq.(5) (for meridional direction). The lateral buckling pattern of serpentine interconnect can then be determined by a unit cell model of a single interconnect subject to this elongation. The strain in interconnect can also be obtained.

### III. MAXIMUM STRAIN IN DEVICES

The maximum strain in devices is critical to their reliability. After pressing the devices down against the PDMS substrate, the pressure is released, causing the PDMS to return back to the original hemispherical shape, with devices on top. The strain in devices results from three sources:

- (i) stretching of PDMS substrate during inflation (after the stamp is removed);

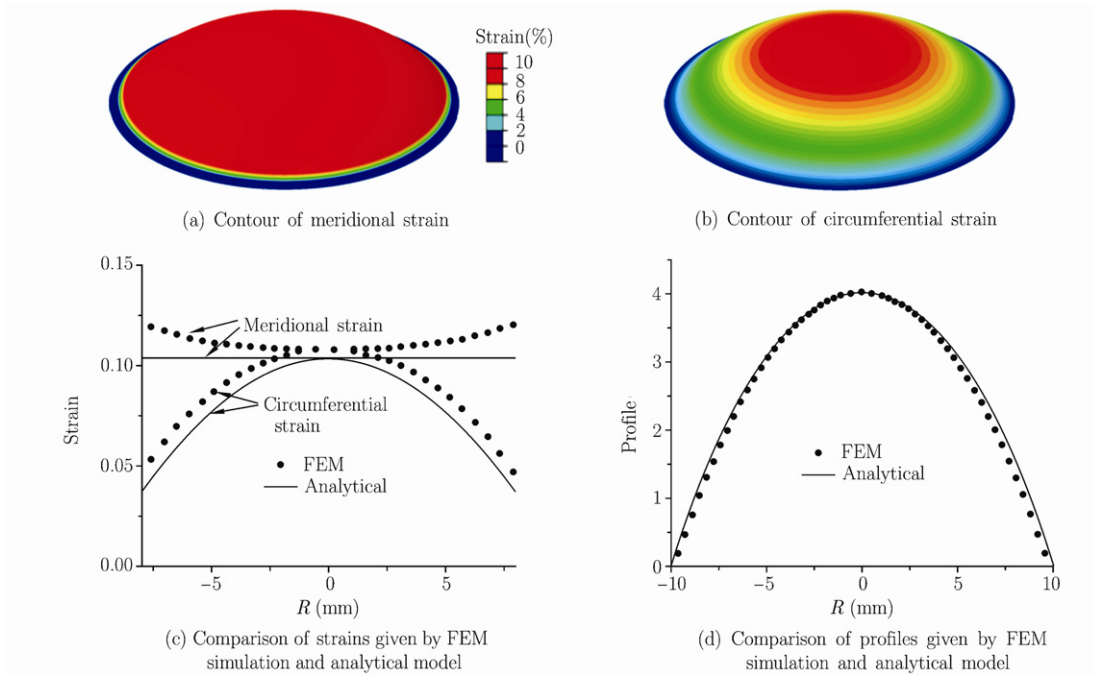


Fig. 2. Strain distribution and profile of inflated PDMS embrane.

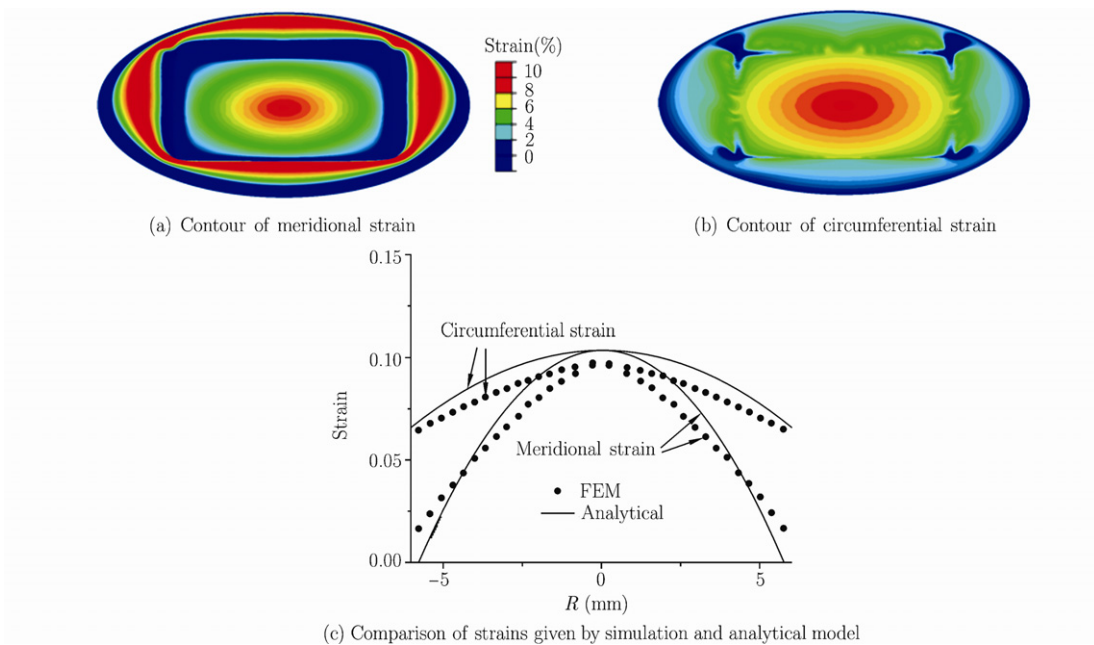


Fig. 3. Strain distribution of pressed down PDMS membrane.

- (ii) bending due to lateral buckling of interconnects;
- (iii) bending due to the spherical shape of inflated PDMS substrate.

The finite element analysis has shown that the strains resulting from (i) and (ii) are much smaller than that from (iii), and the latest is given analytically by

$$\varepsilon_{\text{device}} = \frac{y}{R} = \frac{2hy}{h^2 + r^2} \tag{6}$$

where  $y$  is the distance from the neutral mechanical plane. For a device consisting of  $n$  layers with elastic modulus  $E_i$  and thickness  $t_i$  of the  $i^{\text{th}}$  layer (1<sup>st</sup> layer at the top), the distance between the neutral mechanical plane and the top surface is

$$b = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n E_i t_i \left( \sum_{j=1}^i t_j - \frac{1}{2} t_i \right)}{\sum_{i=1}^n E_i t_i} \quad (7)$$

The device in experiments<sup>[9]</sup> has 6 layers, SU8/Au/SU8/GaAs/SU8/PI, which have elastic moduli  $E_1 = E_3 = E_5 = 4.4$  GPa,  $E_2 = 78$  GPa,  $E_4 = 77.5$  GPa and  $E_6 = 2.5$  GPa, and thickness  $h_1 = 2.5$   $\mu\text{m}$ ,  $h_2 = 300$  nm,  $h_3 = 1.0$   $\mu\text{m}$ ,  $h_4 = 2.5$   $\mu\text{m}$ ,  $h_5 = 1.2$   $\mu\text{m}$  and  $h_6 = 1.2$   $\mu\text{m}$ .

For 0.4 mm-thick PDMS thin film and the inflation height  $h=4$  mm in experiments, the finite element method gives the maximum strain 0.0172% in the Au layer, while Eq.(6) gives 0.0148%.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

Pressing an inflated elastomeric thin film during transfer printing of electronic devices is shown to be an effective way to introduce two dimensional prestrain, in a way that increase the stretchability of the electronics. An analytical model has been developed to study the strain induced in this process. Simple analytical solutions are obtained for both meridional and circumferential strains, which show good agreement with FEM simulations. These analytical solutions can give the strain in serpentine interconnects between device islands. The maximum strain in device islands is also obtained analytically. This model can be used to guide the design of two dimensional stretchable electronics.

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