

## Critical Fluctuations in Strongly Type-II Quasi-Two-Dimensional Superconductors

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The critical fluctuations near  $H_{c2}(T)$  in the mixed phase of layered type-II superconductors are related to an equivalent system of classical particles with many-body "gauge" interactions. The scale invariance of this dense vortex plasma leads to a universal character of the vortex solid-liquid melting line where the transition to the superconducting state occurs. The relation to experimental situation in high- $T_c$  and other layered superconductors and superconducting thin films is discussed.

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Thermal fluctuations in the mixed phase of high-temperature superconductors (HTS) have been of considerable interest recently [1-5]. HTS are examples of strongly type-II ( $\kappa \gg 1$ ) layered systems, with the interlayer coupling ranging from moderate (in Y-Ba-Cu-O) to very weak (in Bi or Tl compounds) [6]. Because  $\kappa \gg 1$ , the regime in which the average separation between vortices,  $r_s$ , is larger than the penetration depth  $\lambda(T)$  is confined to the vicinity of  $H_{c1}(T)$  [7] (region of hatching in Fig. 1): The remaining portions of the phase diagram are region A, near  $H_{c2}(T)$ , where vortices are "dense" with  $r_s$  being of the order of the core size, and region B, far from  $H_{c2}(T)$  and near  $H_{c1}(T)$ , where vortices are dilute and  $r_s$  is much larger than the core size, with mag-

netic induction  $\mathbf{B}(\mathbf{r})$  being essentially uniform. This division can be made more precise by expanding the order parameter  $\Psi(\mathbf{r})$  as  $\Psi(\mathbf{r}) = (2\pi l^2)^{1/2} \sum_{j,m} b_{jm} \varphi_{jm}(z, z^*)$ , where  $l = (c/e^*B)^{1/2}$  is the magnetic length,  $z = (x + iy)/l$ , and  $\varphi_{jm}(z, z^*)$  are the Landau eigenfunctions for charge  $e^* = 2e$  in a suitable gauge. In region A the dominant contribution comes from the lowest Landau level (LLL),  $j=0$  [8]. The fluctuations from higher Landau levels  $\{b_{j \neq 0, m}\}$  have a gap and are not dynamically important near  $H_{c2}(T)$ . In region B contributions from all Landau levels are required to maintain the constant amplitude of  $\Psi(\mathbf{r})$  over large distances. The crossover from A to B starts at some  $H_{\text{cross}} \sim \frac{1}{7} H_{c2}(T)$  [9] (Fig. 1).

We start from the Ginzburg-Landau (GL) partition function [10]:

$$Z = \int \mathcal{D}\Psi_n(\mathbf{r}) \mathcal{D}\Psi_n^*(\mathbf{r}) \int \mathcal{D}\mathbf{a}(\mathbf{R}) \exp(-\{F_s[\Psi_n(\mathbf{r}), \mathbf{a}(\mathbf{R})] + F_m[\mathbf{a}(\mathbf{R})]\}/k_B T), \quad (1)$$

where  $n$  is the layer index,

$$F_s = \sum_{n,\sigma} \int d^2r \left[ \alpha(T) |\Psi_n|^2 + \frac{\beta}{2} |\Psi_n|^4 + \frac{n_e}{2m^*} \left| \left( \nabla + \frac{2ei}{c} (\mathbf{A} + \mathbf{a}_n) \right) \Psi_n \right|^2 + \frac{\eta}{2} \left| \Psi_{n+\sigma} - \Psi_n \exp \left( -\frac{2ei}{c} d a_{zn} \right) \right|^2 \right]$$

$\mathbf{r} = (x, y)$ ,  $\mathbf{R} = (r, \zeta)$ ,  $n_e$  is the electron density,  $d$  is the interlayer separation,  $\sigma = \pm 1$ ,  $\nabla \times \mathbf{A} = \mathbf{H}$ , and  $F_m$  is the magnetic free energy. Here we only consider the case  $\mathbf{H} \parallel \hat{c}$ . We neglect fluctuations in  $\mathbf{a}$ , which is justified for  $\kappa \gg 1$  [11].

In the mean-field treatment of (1) the thermodynamic superconducting transition takes place at  $H_{c2}(T)$  below which the lattice of vortices is formed [12,13]. The critical fluctuations near  $H_{c2}(T)$  have been studied in the past by replacing  $\Psi(\mathbf{r}) = (2\pi l^2)^{1/2} \sum_m b_{0m} \varphi_{0m}(z, z^*)$  in (1) and using the perturbation theory in the quartic piece of  $F_s$ , representing the interaction among  $\{b_{0m}\}$  [8,14,15]. This approach leads to a good description of fluctuations above  $H_{c2}(T)$ . However, the essential part of the physics is missing. The perturbative expansion does not show any sign of a transition to the Abrikosov lattice, even when carried out to a large order [14]. This is in stark contrast with Abrikosov's mean-field theory and harmonic fluctuations around it [2,3] which suggest that some type of positional ordering exists below  $H_{c2}(T)$ . On the other hand, the elastic theory, which breaks the symmetry from the

outset, cannot itself be used to describe fluctuations close to and above  $H_{c2}(T)$ . Consequently, a complete description of critical behavior is not available.

In this Letter we devise a theory of fluctuations in the critical region near  $H_{c2}(T)$  which overcomes the above difficulties. Our approach provides a unified framework for both vortex "solid" and "liquid" phases within a many-body "algorithm" which contains a detailed description of the critical behavior from the perturbative regime far above  $H_{c2}(T)$  to the spontaneous formation of the Abrikosov lattice far below  $H_{c2}(T)$ . To proceed we note that, for  $\mathbf{H} = 0$ , it is useful to write  $\Psi(\mathbf{r}) = R(\mathbf{r}) \times \exp[i\chi(\mathbf{r})]$  and study fluctuations in amplitude ( $R$ ) and phase ( $\chi$ ) separately. The physics is dominated by the singular part of  $\chi$ , corresponding to the motion of vortices and antivortices interacting via familiar pairwise logarithmic interactions: We call this system a dilute vortex plasma (dVP). The dVP picture remains correct in low fields [far from  $H_{c2}(T)$ ] except now only vortices will be present. Such a dVP description of quasi-2D supercon-

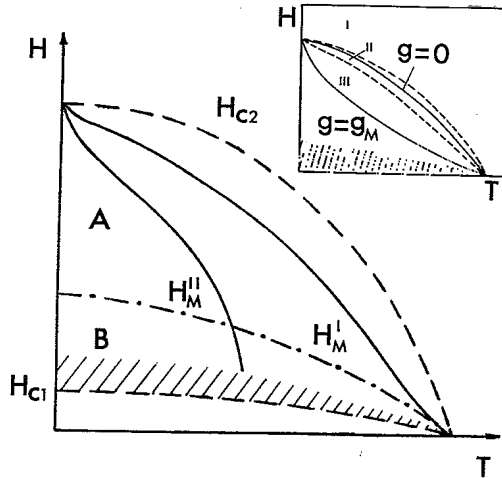


FIG. 1. A schematic  $H$ - $T$  phase diagram for layered and thin-film type-II superconductors. The dense vortex regime (A) is separated from the dilute vortex regime (B) by a dash-dotted  $H_{\text{cross}}$  line. As  $\theta_M$  increases,  $H_M(T)$  evolves from  $H_M^I(T)$  to  $H_M^{II}(T)$  (see text). In the region of hatching,  $r_s > \lambda$  and  $H_M(T)$  in layered systems turns toward  $H_{c1}(0)$  [1]. Inset: The same phase diagram in the DVP scaling form. Regions I, II, and III are defined in the text.

ductors in magnetic field has been studied in [16] and [17]. In the critical region near  $H_{c2}(T)$  there is a *qualitative* change in this picture. When the dominant part of  $\Psi(\mathbf{r})$  comes from the LLL the phase fluctuations alone

are not sufficient and the amplitude fluctuations become essential. The confinement to the LLL provides a stringent constraint which couples the fluctuations of  $R$  and  $\chi$ . This nonlinear constraint in (1) can be enforced *exactly* if we use the *symmetric* gauge:

$$\Psi(\mathbf{r}) = (2\pi l^2)^{1/2} \sum_{m=0}^N b_{0m} \varphi_{0m}(z, z^*) = \Phi \prod_{i=1}^N (z - z_i) \exp(-|z|^2/4), \quad (2)$$

where  $\varphi_{0m}(z, z^*) = z^m (2\pi l^2 m! 2^m)^{-1/2} \exp(-|z|^2/4)$  and  $N = \Omega/2\pi l^2$ ,  $\Omega$  being the area of the system. The fluctuations in  $\Phi$  and  $\{z_i\}$ , which are in highly nonlinear relation to  $\{b_{0m}\}$ , are the “natural” way of representing two distinct tendencies in  $\Psi(\mathbf{r})$  near  $H_{c2}(T)$ : The “global” superconducting correlations are embodied in  $\Phi$ , while the “local” amplitude and phase fluctuations, coupled by the confinement to the LLL, arise from the unrestricted motion of  $\{z_i\}$ .

We now use these new variables,  $\Phi$  and  $\{z_i\}$ , to rewrite the partition function (1). We first consider the  $\eta=0$  case and drop the layer index  $n$ . This corresponds to very anisotropic systems or thin superconducting films. The transformation in Eq. (2) involves a Jacobian  $\propto \prod_{i < j}^N |z_i - z_j|^2 (\Phi \Phi^*)^N$ . After this change of variables we note the following important fact: The integration over  $\Phi$  in the partition function can be performed *exactly* in the thermodynamic limit. This is a nontrivial point since this integral contains contributions from the nonperturbative sector of (1). This finally leads to

$$Z = \left[ \int \prod_{i=1}^N \frac{dz_i dz_i^*}{2\pi} \langle f^4 \rangle^{-(N+1)/2} \prod_{i < j}^N |z_i - z_j|^2 \right]^{-1} \int \prod_{i=1}^N \frac{dz_i dz_i^*}{2\pi} \langle f^4 \rangle^{-(N+1)/2} \prod_{i < j}^N |z_i - z_j|^2 \times \exp\left[\frac{1}{2} NV^2 - \frac{1}{2} NV(V^2 + 2)^{1/2} - N \sinh^{-1}(V/\sqrt{2})\right], \quad (3)$$

where

$$V(\{z_i\}) \equiv \frac{g \langle f^2 \rangle}{\langle f^4 \rangle^{1/2}}, \quad \langle f^p \rangle = \int \frac{dz dz^*}{2\pi N} \exp(-p|z|^2/4) \prod_i |z - z_i|^p, \quad g = \tilde{\alpha} \left[ \frac{2\pi l^2 d}{2\beta k_B T} \right]^{1/2}, \quad \tilde{\alpha} = \alpha \left[ 1 - \frac{H}{H_{c2}(T)} \right],$$

and  $d$  is either the interlayer separation or the thickness of the film. In (3),  $Z$  is normalized to its  $g=0$  form.

Equation (3) is our main result. It describes a classical incompressible many-body system of particles  $\{z_i\}$  (vortices). We call this system a dense vortex plasma (DVP). The basic dynamical interaction among  $\{z_i\}$  in DVP,  $V(\{z_i\})$ , is long ranged and contains multiple-body forces reflecting the dense vortex limit (unlike the dilute limit, the forces cannot be reduced to two-body terms only). We recognize the variance  $\langle f^2 \rangle / \langle f^4 \rangle^{1/2}$  as a square root of an inverse of Abrikosov’s  $\beta_A$  except that now the  $\{z_i\}$  do not form a lattice as in [12] but are allowed to move all over the  $x$ - $y$  plane.  $\langle f^2 \rangle / \langle f^4 \rangle^{1/2}$  varies between 0 and 0.928, for the triangular lattice. DVP provides a paradigm for the study of critical behavior in type-II systems near  $H_{c2}(T)$  where the main contribution to (1) comes

from many-body effects of the vortex core overlap and should be contrasted with a dVP description which is appropriate for low fields.

Because of the scale invariance of (3), cooperative phenomena in dense vortex systems take place at  $g(T, H) = g_X$ , where  $g_X$  is some number. There are three physical regimes of this DVP illustrated in the inset of Fig. 1. For  $g \gg \sqrt{2}$ , one is in regime I far above  $H_{c2}(T)$ , with interactions being very weak. In this regime the perturbation theory of Refs. [8], [14], and [15] should work well. As one approaches  $H_{c2}(T)$  ( $g=0$ ) one enters regime II where, for  $-\sqrt{2} \ll g \ll \sqrt{2}$ , the effective interaction goes as  $+\sqrt{2}NV + N\mathcal{O}(g^2)$ . Finally, for  $g \ll -\sqrt{2}$ , the effective interaction is  $-NV^2 - N \ln(\sqrt{2}V) + N\mathcal{O}(g^0)$ . These nonperturbative correlations are

recovered only through the integration over  $\Phi$ . Note that the leading term in the interaction becomes exactly the Abrikosov mean-field free energy if the  $\{z_i\}$  are frozen into a triangular lattice. DVP, therefore, correctly reproduces all the relevant fluctuation regions.

DVP in Eq. (3) should undergo a liquid-solid transition at some finite  $g$ . We can write down the equation for the transition line  $H_M(T)$ :

$$g(T, H_M) = g_M, \tag{4}$$

where  $g_M < 0$  is a pure number.  $H_M(T)$  derived from (4) has the qualitative form shown in Fig. 1 as  $H_M^l(T)$ . This melting transition in DVP corresponds to a true thermodynamic superconducting transition which in the mean field occurs at  $H_{c2}(T)$  ( $g_M = 0$ ). To determine the value of this "universal" number  $g_M$  we have performed a numerical Monte Carlo simulation of DVP in Eq. (3). All computations were done on a Cray Y-MP supercomputer and Stardent Titan-III mini-supercomputer and will be reported in detail elsewhere. We find  $g_M^2 = 63 \pm 12$ . The origin of the uncertainty in  $g_M^2$  is the relatively small system size (we are limited to 224 particles due to multiple-body interactions in DVP) and the softness of the potential  $V$ , requiring long equilibration times.

The large size of  $|g_M|$  indicates that the transition occurs deep in the nonperturbative region III and is *inherently very far* from the mean-field  $H_{c2}(T)$ . Such strong nonperturbative character arises from the infinite degeneracy of the LLL [18]. Within our numerics we are unable to tell whether the transition is of the Kosterlitz-Thouless-Berezinskii-Halperin-Nelson-Young (KTBNY) type or possibly weak first order due to long-range forces. The estimate of  $H_M(T)$  based on the KTBNY theory agrees with our exact numerical deter-

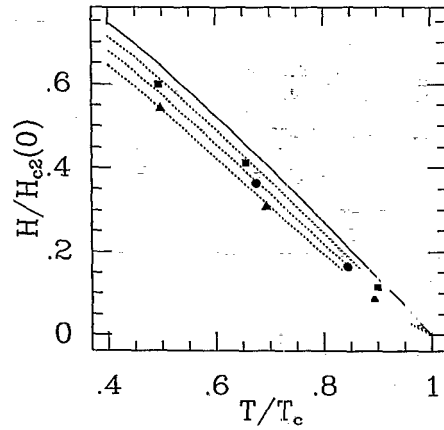


FIG. 2.  $H_M(T)$  for three different thicknesses in thin films of  $Nb_3Ge$ . The data points are from Ref. [20]. The dashed lines are obtained from (4) with  $g_M^2 = 67$ .

mination within factors of order unity [19].

The above prediction for the "universality" of  $H_M(T)$  can be tested on recent experiments with films of  $Nb_3Ge$  [20]. There are no fitting parameters here (the only uncertainty left is in our numerical determination of  $g_M$ ). The experimental data points in Fig. 2 agree very well with the theoretical result (4), using a single value  $g_M^2 = 67$ . Such apparent universality in  $H_M(T)$  has been noted by the authors of Ref. [20], who compared their results with those on thin films of other materials. Our theory provides an explanation for this empirical observation.

We now turn to the effect of Josephson coupling  $\eta \neq 0$ . The partition function in Eq. (3) is simply generalized to the case of coupled layers by including the additional Josephson interaction:

$$\sum_n \sum_{i=1}^N \left\{ -\eta \frac{2\pi l^2 d |\bar{\alpha}|}{\beta N} \left[ \frac{\langle f_n^2 \rangle \langle f_{n+\sigma}^2 \rangle}{\langle f_n^4 \rangle \langle f_{n+\sigma}^4 \rangle} \right]^{1/2} \text{Re} \langle f_n^* f_{n+\sigma} \rangle + (\sigma \rightarrow -\sigma) - \frac{2 \langle f_n^2 \rangle^2}{\langle f_n^4 \rangle} \right\}. \tag{5}$$

Finite  $\eta$  will make the positional ordering three dimensional [21].  $H_M(T)$  itself should change in some continuous fashion as  $\eta$  increases and for  $\eta \ll 1$  should not be very different from a 2D case. In fact, we notice that the interaction in Eq. (5) remains scale invariant. Consequently,  $H_M(T)$  for  $\eta \neq 0$  can be obtained from

$$g(H, T) = g_M \left[ \frac{\eta}{\bar{\alpha}(T, H)} \right], \tag{6}$$

where  $g_M(\eta/\bar{\alpha}(T_M, H_M))$  is now a number different from  $g_M(0)$  appearing in Eq. (4) for a pure 2D case. Note that  $\eta/\bar{\alpha} = \xi_z^2/d^2$  and is the natural parameter describing the crossover from quasi-2D to 3D behavior. If we write

$$g_M^2 \left[ \frac{\eta}{\bar{\alpha}(T_M, H_M)} \right] = g_M^2(0) - \gamma \left[ \frac{\eta}{\bar{\alpha}(T_M, H_M)} \right],$$

where  $\gamma = 0$  for  $\eta = 0$ , and assume the KTBNY-type

correlations below  $g_M$ , we find  $\gamma(\eta/\bar{\alpha}) \approx C_1^2 / \ln^2(\bar{\alpha}/C_2^2 \eta)$ , where  $C_1$  and  $C_2$  are constants of order unity. Thus, unless  $H_M(T)$  is very close to  $H_{c2}(T)$ , the  $T$  and  $H$  dependence of  $g_M^2(\eta/\bar{\alpha}(T_M, H_M))$  is weak and  $H_M(T)$  is still approximately of the universal form (4) but with  $g_M^2$  shifted to some lower value [ $H_M(T)$  moves toward  $H_{c2}(T)$ ]. This is the situation in very anisotropic systems where the identity of a single vortex is not maintained from layer to layer and where the physical picture is that of a set of 2D DVP's moving in a random potential provided by the adjacent layers through Eq. (5) [22]. If  $H_M(T)$  gets too close to  $H_{c2}(T)$ , so that  $\eta/\bar{\alpha}(T_M, H_M) = \xi_z^2/d^2 \geq 1$ , deviations from (4) will become significant and a description in terms of the anisotropic 3D GL theory will be more appropriate, with vortices in DVP becoming continuous lines [23].

In this paper we have developed a description of critical

fluctuations near  $H_{c2}(T)$ . One should keep in mind that this DVP description holds in region *A* and cannot be extended to low fields [region *B*, near  $H_{c1}(T)$ ]. This relationship to the low-field dVP behavior can be illustrated on the example of  $H_M(T)$ . Equation (4) can be rewritten as  $f(t, h) = \theta_M t h$ , where  $t \equiv T/T_{c0}$ ,  $h \equiv H/H_{c2}(0)$ ,  $f(t, h)$  is the BCS condensation energy normalized to its value  $E_c$  at  $T=H=0$ , and  $\theta_M = g_M^2 T_{c0} / 2\pi \xi_0^2 d E_c$ . For  $\theta_M \ll 1$ ,  $H_M(T)$  is close to  $H_{c2}(T)$ . Since  $\theta_M \sim g_M^2 (k_F^2 \xi_0 d)^{-1}$ ,  $H_M$  will be near  $H_{c2}$  in most superconductors and the DVP description is appropriate. This behavior is denoted by  $H_M^I(T)$  in Fig. 1. However, for  $1-t \ll \theta_M$ ,  $H_M(T)$  always drops below  $H_{\text{cross}}$  and the low-field dVP has to be used. In dVP the transition line is largely independent of  $H$  [17]:  $T_M \cong T_{c0} / (1 + \theta_M^C)$ ,  $\theta_M^C \cong \theta_M$ . Thus, if  $\theta_M$  is small, the DVP-dVP crossover in  $H_M(T)$  will occur at rather low fields, only very close to  $T_{c0}$ . As  $\theta_M$  increases,  $H_M(T)$  in Fig. 1 evolves from  $H_M^I(T)$  to  $H_M^{II}(T)$ , where the DVP-dVP crossover occurs at moderate fields. This may take place in strongly fluctuating systems like Bi-Sr-CaCu-O or in very thin films. Finally, disorder will play a role in real superconductors [4] and can be readily incorporated in DVP.

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