Supplementary information

Diazonium electroreduction: Evidence for a stepwise mechanism

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Experimental details

Products and electrode treatment

4-nitrobenzenediazonium tetrafluoroborate (4-NBD) and N-terbutyl-alpha-phenylnitrone (PBN) were used as received from Aldrich. Glassy carbon (GC) electrode was obtained from Bioanalytical Systems Inc. (Model MF-2012; diameter 3 mm). For electrolysis, a 1 cm² glassy carbon plate, obtained from GoodFellow, was used. All potentials were reported versus $Ag/AgNO₃$ (10 mM) reference electrode. CG electrode and plate surfaces were cleaned by polishing with Buehler 1 and 0.04 µm alumina slurry. After each polishing step the electrode was washed with nanopure water (18.2 M Ω cm) under sonication. Prior and after each electrochemical derivatization, the electrode was sonicated in acetonitrile for 1 minute.

Ultrafast cyclic voltammetry

For ultrafast cyclic voltammetry (UFCV), gold ball ultramicroelectrodes (UME) were prepared by inserting a gold wire (diameter 25 µm) into a pipet. The gold wire was then sealed into the glass with a heating coil, but a small part remained exposed so that it could be melted with a butane flame. By this method, electrodes presenting a reproducible surface state were thus obtained.¹ UFCV measurements were performed on a home-made potentiostat allowing ohmic drop compensation.² For improving the conductivity of the solution, all ultrafast experiments were performed in NBD (5mM) dissolved in $CH_3CN + 0.30 M$ NEt4BF4.

Spectroelectrochemistry

Real-time spectroelectrochemistry measurements were performed by using an alreadydescribed home-made cell. 3 Electrochemical measurements were carried out by using a platinum wire counter electrode and a $Ag/AgNO_3$ (10 mM) reference electrode with a Biologic SP-150 potentiostat driven by EC-Lab software. Experiments were recorded in $HPLC\text{-grade}$ acetonitrile with tetrabutylammonium hexafluorophosphate (Bu₄NPF₆, electrochemical grade, Aldrich) as the supporting electrolyte using the following potential program: 30 s at +0.5 V, followed with time by a 15 min electroreduction step at -0.9 V, and a 5 min final step at +0.5 V. Spectrophotometric measurements were carried out in direct reflexing mode on glassy carbon electrode with a home-made bench composed of different Princeton Instruments modules (light sources, fibers, monochromators, spectroscopy camera, and software). The connection between the light source, the cell, and the spectrophotometer is ensured through a "Y-shaped" optical fiber bundle: 18 fibers guide the light to the cell and 19 fibers collect the reflected light from the cell to visible (400–900 nm/maximum acquisition frequency 2 MHz) CCD detector. The sensitivity of the spectroscopic measurement \langle <3 electrons at 100 kHz and <13 electrons at 2 MHz between 400 and 900 nm) allows a spectroelectrochemistry experiment to be performed under the usual conditions of electrochemistry. For each data set, the reference intensity (I_{ref}) was obtained by averaging the intensity of the first 10 measured frames. Consequently, absorbance variations $(\Delta Abs =$ $log_{10} (I/I_{ref})$ and not absorbance values were monitored.

DFT calculations

For all calculations, the Gaussian 09 software (revision D.01) has been used.⁴ All ground states in gas phase have been optimized by a DFT approach with the PBE1PBE hybrid functional and the $6-311+G(2d,2p)$ basis set.⁵ A Time Dependent DFT method has been employed to compute the first 15 excited singlet states with the same level of theory. The simulated UV-visible absorption spectra have been obtained by Gaussian broadening of the calculated transition energies (FWHM of 3000 cm^{-1}). Atomic charge mapping has been obtained by Hirshfeld population analysis taking into account interatomic electrostatic interactions. The full molecular reports, molecular orbitals, electron density differences pictures and calculated spectra have been automatically generated by a homemade Python program, quchemreport, based on cclib. $5,6$

Radical scavengering

Electrolysis of 10 mL of 2 mM of 4-NBD and 10 mM of PBN was carried out in a 20 mL 3 electrodes cell during 20 min. The working electrode was a 1 cm² classy carbon electrode, the

counter electrode was a Pt grid and the reference electrode was an $Ag/AgNO₃$ (10 mM). After electrolysis, The purification was carried out on silica gel with an acetone/petroleum ether (2:8) eluent to avoid migration nBu_4NPF_6 which migrates from (3:8) into acetone/petroleum ether. Another column on silica gel was necessary with (1:9) then (2:8) acetone/petroleum ether to correctly obtain compounds 1 and 2.

X-ray structure determination

Data collection was performed on a Rigaku Oxford Diffraction SuperNova diffractometer equipped with an Atlas CCD detector and micro-focus Cu-K_α radiation ($\lambda = 1.54184$ Å). The structure was solved by dual-space algorithm and refined on F^2 by full matrix least-squares techniques with SHELX programs (SHELXT 2018/2 and SHELXL 2018/3)^{7,8} using the WinGX graphical user interface.⁹ All non-H atoms were refined anisotropically and multiscan empirical absorption was corrected using CrysAlisPro program (CrysAlisPro 1.171.40.45a, Rigaku Oxford Diffraction, 2019). The H atoms were placed at calculated positions and refined using a riding model. Crystallographic data for the structure have been deposited with the Cambridge Crystallographic Data Centre with the deposition number CCDC 2151044. These data can be obtained free of charge from CCDC, 12 Union road, Cambridge CB2 1EZ, UK (e-mail: deposit@ccdc.cam.ac.uk or [http://www.ccdc.cam.ac.uk\)](http://www.ccdc.cam.ac.uk/).

Crystallographic data for LP701: $C_{10}H_{14}N_4O_3$, M = 238.25, orange prism, 0.239 x 0.064 x 0.046 mm, monoclinic, space group $P2_1/n$, a = 6.1119(2) Å, b = 21.6165(8) Å, c = 8.9488(3) Å, β = 96.703(3)°, V = 1174.21(7) Å³, Z = 4, pcalc = 1.348 g/cm³, μ = 0.856 mm⁻¹, F(000) = 504, θ min = 4.090°, θ max = 76.229°, 5181 reflections collected, 2409 unique (R_{int} = 0.0131), parameters / restraints = $157 / 0$, R1 = 0.0379 and wR2 = 0.1060 using 2179 reflections with I $>$ 2 σ (I), R1 = 0.0.0418 and wR2 = 0.1101 using all data, GOF = 1.046, -0.219 < $\Delta \rho$ < 0.306 $e.\AA^{-3}$.

Molecular structure of **LP701** with atomic and bond labels (H atoms omitted for clarity)

Cyclic voltammetry simulations

All the simulations were performed in 1D simulation using the Comsol multiphysics software (edition 5.5). The cyclic voltammetry was simulated as a simple 1-electron process following the classical Butler-Volmer kinetics and following the equation E1.

 $Diazo + 1e^- \rightleftharpoons Diazenyl \bullet$ k_{sd} (E1)

 $Diazenyl \rightarrow R$ k_d (E2)

The instability of the diazenyl was simulated considering a first order decomposition reaction Equation (E2) with kd, the decomposition rate constant of the diazenyl.

All the parameters used in the simulation are listed in table S1. Noteworthy the real surface of the gold ball UME has not been considered because the absolute current value is not necessary, arbitrary units are used in all the simulated voltamograms.

Table S1. Parameters used for the Simulations of CVs.

Parameter	Value	Definition
\mathbf{a}	0.5	
Diazo ⁰	10^{-3} mol. L^{-1}	Diazonium Concentration
$\mathbf{E}_{\text{app},\text{diazo/Diazenyl}}$	0.1 V	Apparent redox potential of diazonium
k_{sd}	$3x10^{-2}$ cm.s ⁻¹	Heterogeneous ET of the diazonium
$D_{\text{diazo}} = D_{\text{diazenyl}}$	$8.14x10^{-6}$ cm ² .s ⁻¹	Diffusion coefficient of the diazonium and the diazenyl radical
\mathbf{v}	$8080 V.s^{-1}$	Scan rate

The heterogeneous electron transfer rate constant k_{sd} on gold was extracted by comparing the peak to peak separation potential of the experimental voltammogram in Figure 1b to the simulated ones $(k_{sd} = 0.03 \times 10^{-2} \pm 0.02 \times 10^{-2}$ cm.s⁻¹) as shown in Figure S1. This value is one order of magnitude higher than the one previously reported on carbon electrode material.¹⁰

Figure S1. (a) Simulated cyclic voltammograms performed using various heterogeneous electron transfer rate constants, k_{sd} corresponding to the reduction of the diazonium at the electrode. (b) Determination of k_{sd} from the peak to peak separation, ΔEp. The black square corresponds to the experimental ΔEp of Figure 1b and colored ones are determined from ΔEp obtain in (a).

Using those parameters, from the comparison of the intensity ratio i_{ox}/i_{red} obtained experimentally in Figure 1b and the simulated ones (inset Figure 1b and Figure S2a, the dissociation rate constant of Diazenyl \cdot k_d reported in the main text was estimated from Figure S2b.

Figure S2. (a) Simulated cyclic voltammograms performed considering various dissociation rate constant of the diazenyl radical, k_d . (b) Determination of k_d from the peak intensity ratio i_{ox}/i_{red} . The black square corresponds to the experimental i_{ox}/i_{red} value extracted from Figure 1b and colored ones are determined from i_{ox}/i_{red} in (a).

Spectroelectrochemistry current-time curves

Figure S3. Current-time curves recorded during the A-SEC experiments on glassy carbon in the presence of 1 mM 4-NBD under atmospheric conditions. Potential program: 30 s at +0.5 V, 15 min at -0.9 V and 5 min at +0.5 V.

Spectroelectrochemistry simulations for the diazenyl radical detection

Table S2. Parameters used for the Simulations of the redox inhibitor process.

As shown in Figure S4a, that plots every 0.1s the concentration profil of the diazenyl radical $(C_{diazenyl_{\bullet}})$ with the distance from the electrode (d), at each time, Diazenyl• exists only in a narrow space (~4µm thickness) within the electrode diffusion layer. Since the light cross the diffusion layer of the electrode perpendicularly, the spectroelectrochemical signal recorded will be proportional to the area corresponding of the presence of Diazenyl• (Γ_{Diazenyl}) at each time determined by the simulation. The chronoabsorptogram of Figure 2c presents an increase of Δ abs with time followed by a plateau, whereas Γ_{Diazeny} , progressively decreases shown in Figure S4b.

Figure S4: (a) Simulations of the concentration profiles of Diazenyl[•] plotted with the distance from the electrode at 0.1s time interval for R and b) the corresponding integration of the concentration profile over time Γ_{Diazenyl} .

DFT simulated spectra

Figure S5. Simulated UV-Vis spectra for expected species obtained after reduction of the 4-nitrophenylbenzene diazonium.

Spectroelectrochemistry control experiments

Figure S6. Absorption spectra recorded during spectroelectrochemical measurements of the mediated reduction of 4-NBD by O_2 ⁺ a) in CH₃CN and b) in DMSO containing 1 mM of 4-NBD and 0.1M nBu₄PF₆. b) Recording of the chemical reduction of 1 mM 4-NDB by injection of 1 mM of ferrocene (Fc) in CH3CN. d) Recording of the chemical oxidation of 1mM Fc by injection of 1 mM of NOBF₄ in CH₃CN.

Spectroelectrochemistry simulations for the secondary product coming from the diazenyl radical evolution

If the concentration of the product issued from the diazenyl decomposition (R) is considered in the simulation, a gradual accumulation of R within the diffusion layer of the electrode can be observed (Figure S7a). From those simulations one can observe an increase of Γ_R with time (Figure S7b). However, the simulation shows a continuous increase of R with time whereas experimentally maximum value of Δabs at each time, Δabs_{max} , a plateau is rapidely reached as shown in Figure 2c.

Figure S7. a) Simulations of the concentration profiles of R plotted with the distance from the electrode at 0.1s time interval and b) the corresponding integration of the concentration profile over time Γ_R also reported in Figure 2c.

This mechanism considered being insufficient to explain the experimental evolution of Δabs_{max} vs time, R was itself considered as an instable species in the model following a first order decomposition rate to give a secondary product with a decomposition rate constant $k_{d,R}$. The concentration profile of R with the distance from the electrode for various $k_{d,R}$ values are shown in Figure S8a and their corresponding Γ_R reported in Figure 2c are shown in Figure S8b.

Figure S8. a) Simulations of the concentration profiles of R plotted with the distance from the electrode at 0.1s time interval and b) their corresponding Γ_R over time for the various $k_{d,R}$ values reported in Figure 2c.

Laser desorption ionisation (LDI) mass spectra

Figure S9. Mass spectrum of a purified fraction after electrolysis (see the radical scavengering part for details), recorded in Laser Desorption Ionisation (LDI) mode on a spiral-TOF JEOL JMS3000.

Computational details for UV-vis spectra simulation

UV-Vis calculation reports generated by quchemreport Software Gaussian (2009+D.01) Computational method DFT Functional PBE1PBE Basis set name $6-311+G(2d,2p)$ Job type: Frequency and thermochemical analysis Temperature 298.15 K Job type: Time-dependent calculation Number of calculated excited states and spin state 15

STRUCTURE: NO2Ph-radical

RESULTS

Total molecular energy -435.70748 hartrees

Converged nuclear repulsion energy 403.96183 Hartrees

Frequency and Thermochemistry specific results

Enthalpy at 298.15 K -435.60913 Hartrees

Gibbs free energy at 298.15 K -435.64928 Hartrees

Entropy at 298.15 K 0.00013 Hartrees

Representation of the HOMO of spin alpha (left) and spin beta (right).

Representation of the LUMO of spin alpha (left) and spin beta (right).

Results concerning the calculated mono-electronic excitations.

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Calculated UV visible Absorption spectrum with a gaussian broadening (FWHM = 3000 cm-1)

Representation of the Electron Density Difference (ES1-GS) from two points of view.

Representation of the Electron Density Difference (ES2-GS) from two points of view.

STRUCTURE: NO2Ph-anion

Chemical structure diagram with atomic numbering from two points of view.

Formula C6H4NO2- Charge -1 Spin multiplicity 1

RESULTS

Geometry optimization specific results

Converged nuclear repulsion energy 401.03888 Hartrees

Frequency and Thermochemistry specific results

Enthalpy at 298.15 K -435.67403 Hartrees

Gibbs free energy at 298.15 K -435.71358 Hartrees

Entropy at 298.15 K 0.00013 Hartrees

Representation of the HOMO from two points of view.

Representation of the LUMO from two points of view.

Results concerning the calculated mono-electronic excitations.

Calculated UV visible Absorption spectrum with a gaussian broadening (FWHM = 3000 cm-1)

Representation of the Electron Density Difference (S1-S0) from two points of view.

STRUCTURE: paraNO2PhN2_radical

Chemical structure diagram with atomic numbering from two points of view.

Formula C6H4N3O2

Charge 0

Spin multiplicity 2

RESULTS

Geometry optimization specific results

Converged nuclear repulsion energy 548.73245 Hartrees

Frequency and Thermochemistry specific results

Enthalpy at 298.15 K -545.02476 Hartrees

Gibbs free energy at 298.15 K -545.07029 Hartrees

Entropy at 298.15 K 0.00015 Hartrees

Representation of the HOMO of spin alpha (left) and spin beta (right).

Representation of the LUMO of spin alpha (left) and spin beta (right).

Results concerning the calculated mono-electronic excitations.

Calculated UV visible Absorption spectrum with a gaussian broadening (FWHM = 3000 cm-1)

Representation of the Electron Density Difference (ES1-GS) from two points of view.

Representation of the Electron Density Difference (ES2-GS) from two points of view.

STRUCTURE: 4Me-2-4NO2Ph-NO2benzene_radical

Chemical structure diagram with atomic numbering from two points of view.

Formula C13H11N2O4

Charge 0

Spin multiplicity 2

RESULTS

Total molecular energy -911.42760 hartrees

Unrestricted calculationAlpha spin MO Beta spin MO

Geometry optimization specific results

Converged nuclear repulsion energy 1371.58960 Hartrees

Frequency and Thermochemistry specific results

Enthalpy at 298.15 K -911.18601 Hartrees

Gibbs free energy at 298.15 K -911.24994 Hartrees

Entropy at 298.15 K 0.00021 Hartrees

Representation of the HOMO of spin alpha (left) and spin beta (right).

Representation of the LUMO of spin alpha (left) and spin beta (right).

Results concerning the calculated mono-electronic excitations.

Calculated UV visible Absorption spectrum with a gaussian broadening (FWHM = 3000 cm-1)

Representation of the Electron Density Difference (ES1-GS) from two points of view.

Representation of the Electron Density Difference (ES2-GS) from two points of view.

STRUCTURE: diNO2Ph_tetrazadiene

H₁₄

Chemical structure diagram with atomic numbering from two points of view.

Formula C12H8N6O4

Charge 0

Spin multiplicity 1

RESULTS

Geometry optimization specific results

Converged nuclear repulsion energy 1513.71786 Hartrees

Frequency and Thermochemistry specific results

Enthalpy at 298.15 K -1090.09352 Hartrees

Gibbs free energy at 298.15 K -1090.16352 Hartrees

Entropy at 298.15 K 0.00023 Hartrees

Representation of the HOMO from two points of view.

Representation of the LUMO from two points of view.

Most intense (> 50 km/mol) molecular vibrations in wavenumbers

Results concerning the calculated mono-electronic excitations.

O -7.6687 0.7694 -0.0005

Calculated UV visible Absorption spectrum with a gaussian broadening (FWHM = 3000 cm-1)

Representation of the Electron Density Difference (S1-S0) from two points of view.

Representation of the Electron Density Difference (S2-S0) from two points of view.

STRUCTURE: ortho-coupling radical cation

Chemical structure diagram with atomic numbering from two points of view.

Formula $C_{12}H_8N_6O_4^+$ Charge 1 Spin multiplicity 2

RESULTS

Representation of the HOMO of spin alpha (left) and spin beta (right).

Representation of the LUMO of spin alpha (left) and spin beta (right).

E.S. Symmetry nm $cm⁻¹$ f R *A* d_{*CT*} q_{*CT*} description : initial OM ending OM (% if $>$ 5%)

Representation of the Electron Density Diff erence (ES1-GS) from two points of view.

Calculated UV visible Absorption spectrum with a gaussian broadening (FWHM = 3000 cm⁻¹)

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