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## Method for determining the polymer content in non soluble polydiacetylene films – application to pentacosadiynoic acid

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4 Method for determining the polymer content in non  
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8 soluble polydiacetylene films – application to  
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12 pentacosadiynoic acid.  
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38 KEYWORDS: Polydiacetylenes, Nuclear Reaction Analysis, Polymer content, incomplete  
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40 photopolymerization.  
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44 ABSTRACT: The absorptivities of polydiacetylenes (PDA) used in Langmuir films or vesicles for the  
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46 development of PDA sensors films or other applications such as in non linear optics or for field-effect  
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48 transistors are not known, so polymer contents cannot be deduced from experimental spectra. Here we  
49  
50 introduce a novel method, using Nuclear Reaction Analysis (NRA) that allows quantitative  
51  
52 determination of the polymer content X proportion of monomers that have been incorporated into PDA  
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54 chains. We apply it to pentacosadiynoic acid (PCDA) evaporated microcrystalline films. A calibration  
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56 curve giving X as a function of the area under an absorption spectrum normalized to the monomer areal  
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1 density is obtained for blue and red PCDA. The method is applicable to all kinds of films, and to other  
2 PDA, provided films with known molecular areal density are available. An example of application to a  
3 PCDA Langmuir film is given.  
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## 8 MAIN\_TEXT

9 1 Introduction: motivation for this study.

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11 The development of this method was initially motivated by the extensive current work on  
12 possible biological or environmental sensors based on the color transition of polydiacetylenes  
13 (PDA) in Langmuir films or vesicles, as discussed in several recent reviews [1-4]. Its application  
14 to Langmuir films will be illustrated in § 3-4. But it should be stressed that the method is general,  
15 applicable in principle to other types of films used in other types of studies or applications. For  
16 instance, PDA films and in particular films of PCDA or similar molecules, have been used in  
17 Field-Effect Transistors using Langmuir Blodgett (LB) films [5], or evaporated films [6] and  
18 even monomolecular films [5]. The present results can be used to determine the actual polymer  
19 content in such devices.  
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35 PDA chains, of monomer general formula  $R'C\equiv C-C\equiv CR$  where R and R' are side groups  
36 which may have widely different molecular formulas, can exist in at least two different  
37 electronic structures conventionally named the Blue (B) and Red (R) forms. B-type chains have a  
38 maximum absorption near  $\lambda_{\max} \approx 640$  nm and are not fluorescent (with a quantum yield at room  
39 temperature of the order of  $10^{-5}$  [7]), while R-type chains have a  $\lambda_{\max}$  often near 540 nm, but it  
40 may be as high as 580 nm [10] or as low as 520 nm [11], and they are fluorescent, albeit weakly  
41 (quoted yield [10] 0.02), at room temperature [11-13].  
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52 A first order transition between B and R forms is observed in many crystalline DA and in  
53 Langmuirs films or vesicles. This transition is called "color transition" and it is the basis of  
54 sensor operation. This transition is often, but not always, irreversible. It can be triggered by  
55 various means, such as temperature or pressure. It also sometimes occurs during polymerization.  
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3 In the case of sensor applications, it is triggered by the binding of the species to be detected  
4 (molecule, ion, or a biological macromolecule) onto a selective group bound at the end of some  
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6 of the DA molecules forming the film. For instance, in the paper which, as far as we know,  
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8 initiated this type of research, an influenza virus was detected [14]. Note that the microscopic  
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10 mechanism by which the transition is produced remains under debate. It was initially thought  
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12 that the color change which results from a geometrical change of the PDA chain, was an order-  
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14 disorder transition. However, perfectly ordered red chains are now known [15] with a room  
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16 temperature absorption spectrum identical to that of red Langmuir films. So it seems more likely  
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18 that red chains are ordered but not planar, having a twist similar to that known in several red  
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20 PDA single crystals such as poly-THD [16, 17]. This is discussed in [18] following previous  
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22 similar proposals [19, 20], but the question is not completely settled.  
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29 The sensor can be used to simply verify the presence of an analyte or for quantitative  
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31 measurements. In film form, they are generally prepared as monolayer Langmuir films of the  
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33 monomer which are then transferred onto a suitable solid substrate by various methods [21, 22].  
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35 Photopolymerization can be carried out either in the Langmuir trough or after transfer, and can  
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37 easily be monitored spectroscopically, as can the color transition, since PDA of both B and R  
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39 forms strongly absorb in the visible (examples of spectra are given Figure 1). It is often observed  
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41 that the B-R transition occurs spontaneously at some stage during photopolymerization [23-25]  
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43 while for sensor use it is obviously required that the film still be in the blue phase, so for use as a  
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45 sensor irradiation must be stopped before onset of the color transition, at partial polymerization.  
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47 Moreover the question of the polymer content is usually not mentioned, and when it is, the  
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49 polymerization is assumed to stop at completion [26, 27]. Unfortunately, we have shown  
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3 previously that, at least in the case of poly4BCMU, the reaction practically stops around 50%  
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5 [28].  
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8 It would be useful to be able to deduce a film's polymer content at any stage of the  
9 polymerization, for any polymer color, from an experimental absorption spectrum.  
10 Unfortunately, the absorptivity of the PDA used in these applications is generally unknown (this  
11 is so for the most used materials in sensors, pentacosadiynoic acid or tricosadiynoic acid and  
12 their derivatives), so absorption spectra do not allow calculation of the polymer content  $X$  of the  
13 film.  $X$  is the fraction of the total mass which is polymerized. This is also the ratio of number of  
14 monomers that have been incorporated in a chain to the initial total number of monomer, since  
15 the reaction occurs with no loss of atoms. Indeed, these PDAs are generally totally insoluble, so  
16 the method that has been used to determine the absorptivities of the few soluble PDAs and which  
17 requires calibration via a solution [28,29], cannot be used.  
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31 The motivation of the present work is therefore to develop a method, applicable to any PDA,  
32 for determination of absolute absorptivity, so as to provide a simple method for deducing  $X$  in  
33 any type of film from quantities easily read on an absorption spectrum, both in the B and R  
34 forms. This method uses NRA (Nuclear Reaction Analysis see Supporting information F) in a  
35 way that has never been used before. This method allows a quantitative measurement of the areal  
36 density of one type of atoms (in our case Carbon) in a film. It is generally used for determination  
37 of areal densities of other types of atoms such as oxygen in inorganic films for instance in  
38 microelectronics.  
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50 The paper is organized as follows: in §2 the sample preparation and the different techniques  
51 used are described. In §3.1 the principle of the NRA method and its implementation are  
52 presented. In order to validate the method, it is applied in §3.2 to a soluble PDA, poly-4BCMU,  
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3 for which absorptivity has been determined previously [28, 29], showing that the method indeed  
4 yields the correct absorptivities. Blue and red pentacosadiynoic acid (referred to below as PCDA,  
5 an often used acronym in the literature) is then studied in §3.3, and in §3.4 means are given to  
6 deduce a polymer content X from quantities read on an experimental absorption spectrum  
7 obtained in the case of PCDA Langmuir films.  
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## 10 11 12 13 14 15 2 Materials and methods

### 16 17 18 2.1 Materials

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20 4BCMU monomer was synthesized in the laboratory by the standard method [30] and purified  
21 by column chromatography. 10-12 pentacosadiynoic acid was purchased from Aldrich and used  
22 without further purification except removal of residual polymer by filtration of solutions used for  
23 Langmuir films preparation. The molecular structure and the polymerization scheme are given in  
24 Supporting Information A and B.  
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### 30 31 32 2.2 Sample preparation.

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34 *Polycrystalline thin films:* (thickness from 30 to 250 nm) were prepared by vacuum  
35 evaporation of the monomer from a quartz crucible on 15mm x15mm precleaned glass  
36 substrates using a home-made evaporation chamber at a base pressure of  $1.0 \pm 0.2 \cdot 10^{-7}$  Torr.  
37 Glass was cleaned using the previously described protocol [28]. Deposited mass was measured  
38 by a quartz microbalance (Maxtek, model TM-350). Since the quartz is not positioned exactly at  
39 the same place as the substrates, the ratio of the deposition rates (tooling factor) was calculated  
40 geometrically.  
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50 In each evaporation 4 films were simultaneously prepared. To make sure that they would be  
51 identical, the sample holder was rotated around a central vertical axis (period  $\approx 2$ s). Similar  
52 deposition rates of  $14 \pm 2$  Å/s and substrate temperatures of 20°C were chosen in all cases. This  
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3 ensures the same balance between nucleation and growth of the crystallites, leading to the same  
4 crystallite size range. An AFM image is shown in Supporting Information C. After preparation  
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6 the samples were kept at -20°C in the dark until use.  
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10 In each set of 4 films, one was kept unirradiated to serve as a reference for film thickness as  
11 measured by Nuclear Reaction Analysis NRA (see below) and the others were  
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13 photopolymerized.  
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17 *Langmuir films:* Concentration of spreading solutions is typically  $2 \times 10^{-3}$  mol/L in  
18 chloroform. A few microliters of the solution were deposited onto the air/liquid interface of a  
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20 Langmuir trough equipped with a double movable barrier for film compression. The surface  
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22 pressure was measured according to the Wilhelmy plate method. The plate was made of filter  
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24 paper and the measurement device was a microbalance from Riegler&Kirstein GmbH  
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26 (Germany). The subphase consisted of Milli-Q Millipore ultrapure water (18.2 M $\Omega$ ·cm). The  
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28 temperature was regulated at  $\pm 0.5^\circ\text{C}$  using a circulating water bath. All isotherms were  
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30 performed at a constant compression speed of 9  $\text{\AA}^2/\text{mol}/\text{min}$ . The typical duration of a  
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32 compression is about 40 min.  
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39 *Polymerization:* For evaporated films, photopolymerization was carried out either at 254 nm  
40 (bandwidth 5 nm) in a Cary 5000 spectrometer for small polymer content, or in a home-made  
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42 irradiator using a high pressure Xe lamp (Oriel), a water filter to absorb unwanted IR light and a  
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44 45° dielectric mirror for unpolarized light (Melles Griot type KRF-2037-45-UNP) to  
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46 preferentially select the range 230-270 nm. The measured ratio of the polymerization efficiencies  
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48 of the two methods is about 60, with 1 hour in the Cary is approximately equivalent to 1 minute  
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50 in front of the Xe lamp. A low pressure Hg lamp (100W – Ulice optronique) essentially emitting  
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52 the 254 nm line was used for in situ polymerization of Langmuir films. The used wavelengths  
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3 are exclusively absorbed by the DA group, other parts of the molecules only absorb at  
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5 significantly shorter wavelengths.  
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8 *Removal of residual monomer:* At the end of the irradiation, films still contain between 30 and  
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10 90 % monomer, which has to be removed before the NRA experiment, without removing any  
11  
12 polymer. Two methods were tested: high temperature evaporation under vacuum or selective  
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14 dissolution at room temperature in an appropriate solvent. They gave identical results, but there  
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16 is a risk of incipient degradation of the polymer at high temperature which would affect the use  
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18 of red spectra for determination of polymer as described below. So all data presented here used  
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20 the dissolution method. Note that dissolution of residual monomer has been a standard method  
21  
22 for determining the polymer concentration in a partially polymerized samples (crystal, powdered  
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24 film) [31-35], and therefore the polymerization kinetics. Nevertheless, since the method has not  
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26 been specifically validated for PCDA, its validity was checked as detailed in Supporting  
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28 Information D.  
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35 Removal of some polymer (for instance relatively short oligomers if any are formed) could be  
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37 a problem with the dissolution method. But comparison with the results of removal by  
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39 evaporation, where no polymer is evaporated, showed this not to be the case. Also, the solvents  
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41 used for dissolution remained colorless.  
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45 For dissolution, a glass slide covered with a film was put in a Petri dish and solvent was  
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47 carefully added until the slide was covered under several millimeters of solvent. To determine  
48  
49 the optimum procedure leading to total dissolution of the monomer several groups of identical  
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51 samples were tested varying one parameter at a time: time of contact with the solvent and choice  
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53 of the solvent. Acetone is a good solvent of both monomers, but it does not wet 4BCMU well, so  
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55 capillary forces might degrade the film; therefore the following procedure was used. The slide is  
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3 first immersed in n-Hexane, a solvent of both monomers chosen for its low surface energy; about  
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5 twice as much acetone is then carefully added and the dish is repeatedly gently agitated for 1  
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8 hour at room temperature. It was checked that the same results were found after 10 minutes of  
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10 contact and this was taken as indicating that at 1 hour complete monomer dissolution is achieved.  
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12 More details are given in Supporting Information D.

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15 Before dissolution of residual monomer all polymer chains were in the blue phase, whatever  
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17 the polymer content. After, they were all red (see Figure 1), in the process the polymer chains  
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19 undergo the blue to red phase transition. In fact in 4BCMU and PCDA the blue polymer phase is  
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21 a metastable one which transforms into the stable red one thanks to the free volume generated by  
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23 dissolution of the monomer. As we will see in §2.3 this conformational transition has no  
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25 influence on the NRA experiment, only the number of carbon atoms is determined and this  
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27 transition does not change this number. The aim of the method is to create a calibration curve  
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29 giving the polymer content versus an easy to read parameter on an absorption spectrum. Thanks  
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31 to this color transition occurring when the monomer is removed, with the same NRA experiment  
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33 two calibration curves can be obtained, one for the B conformation, the other for the R  
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35 conformation as described below in §3.1.

### 40 41 2.3 Techniques

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43 *Absorption spectra:* All spectra of evaporated films were taken using a double beam Cary  
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45 5000 spectrometer, typically between 350 and 800 nm: polymer films are transparent beyond 800  
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47 nm, and glass would begin to absorb below 320 nm. Blue polymer absorption is very small  
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49 below 350 nm, and red polymers only show a weak residual absorption there. Since spectra are  
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51 broad a 2 nm resolution was chosen, but it was checked that higher resolution leads to identical  
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3 spectra (but with more noise). The final spectrum corresponds to the polymer content to be  
4 measured by NRA.  
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8 For Langmuir films, absorption spectra are obtained in-situ using a bifurcated fiber made of 6  
9 illumination fibers connected to a halogen light source (HL2000 Ocean Optics) around a read  
10 fiber connected to a UV-Vis spectrometer (Avantes avaspec-2048x64). A mirror is placed in the  
11 Langmuir trough prior to deposition. The transmitted light is collected, after reflection on the  
12 mirror, via the same optical fiber and analyzed by the spectrometer (see scheme in Supporting  
13 Information E). The reference spectrum is taken on the compressed monomer just before  
14 irradiation.  
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24 *Nuclear Reaction Analysis (NRA)*: A general introduction to the method is provided in  
25 Supporting Information F. Measurements were performed in a home-made dedicated vacuum  
26 chamber, using dry pumping to avoid carbon contamination during the experiments, installed at  
27 the Tandem van de Graaff accelerator ALTAIS of the Laboratoire d'Analyses par Réactions  
28 Nucléaires at the University of Namur, Belgium. It delivered stable deuteron beams in the energy  
29 range 850-970 keV used in the experiments. Films were mounted with their surface  
30 perpendicular to the deuteron beam direction, on a sample holder containing typically 20 to 25  
31 samples which could be studied in the same run. NRA is a method for counting carbon atoms,  
32 irrespective of their chemical state. It is also insensitive to the organization and structure of the  
33 studied material. In this way one obtains an areal density of carbon atoms  $N_C(\text{cm}^{-2})$  and  
34 molecules  $N_m(\text{cm}^{-2})$  in a film. Once this is known, the absorption spectrum of the film can be  
35 used to compute absolute absorptivities, or the area of the absorption spectrum, which is related  
36 to the oscillator strength of the electronic transition corresponding to the absorption.  
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3 Here we use the  $^{12}\text{C}(\text{d},\text{p}_0)^{13}\text{C}$  nuclear reaction, meaning that the reaction of a deuteron with a  
4  $^{12}\text{C}$  nucleus generates a high energy proton which is counted by a suitable detector, and a stable  
5  $^{13}\text{C}$  nucleus. Practically, absolute numbers are obtained by comparing the number of detected  
6 events for a given deuteron fluence to that of a suitable reference containing a known areal  
7 density of atoms, for the same fluence and in the same geometry. But carbon references are not  
8 stable enough (they can lose carbon by radiation damage or gain carbon via contamination), so a  
9 very stable  $^{16}\text{O}$  reference is chosen, using the  $^{16}\text{O}(\text{d},\text{p}_1)^{17}\text{O}$  reaction.

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11 The cross sections of the two reactions have been determined; they depend on the incident  
12 deuteron energy and the geometry used for detection [36]. Here we used the following  
13 conditions: energy of the incident deuterons 854 keV for the  $^{16}\text{O}$  reaction used for reference, and  
14 968 keV for the  $^{12}\text{C}$  reaction used for studying the film. These energies were chosen so that the  
15 corresponding reaction cross section is only slowly varying in the vicinity of the chosen values,  
16 so that small calibration errors of the accelerator energies are irrelevant. The ratio of cross  
17 section of these carbon and oxygen nuclear reactions is in these conditions 5.56 [37].

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Emitted protons (which have high energies) were detected at a  $150^\circ$  scattering angle. Other  
particles are also emitted in that direction, for instance elastically backscattered deuterons, but  
their energy is lower. All such particles, but not the protons, were stopped in a 13 microns Mylar  
film placed in front of the detector. For each measurement, a complete energy spectrum of the  
detected protons was recorded, and the peak corresponding to the reaction of interest was  
selected and integrated. In all cases, background counts at the peak positions were negligible.

*Application to the present study:* to avoid heating the films, the deuteron beam current was  
limited to 2-4 nA in a rectangular beam of cross section 2 mm x 2 mm. Usually, the total  
deuteron fluence ranging from less than 1 to about 2  $\mu\text{C}$ , was given in fractions of 0.2 or 0.5  $\mu\text{C}$

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3 with a short waiting time in between. There are two reasons for fractionating the fluence: to limit  
4 heating, and to allow evaluation of possible degradation, which may be corrected for it where  
5 necessary by a linear regression of the data to zero dose. Note that, since the chemical nature of  
6 the carbon atom is irrelevant in NRA, only degradation processes leading to evaporation of a  
7 carbon-containing fragment are detected here. Other degradation processes, which indeed occur,  
8 are unimportant. These precautions were unnecessary for the oxygen reference, for which a  
9 fluence of 10  $\mu\text{C}$  was usually chosen in a single step.  
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20 However, carbon contamination being omnipresent, it has to be taken into account.  
21 Contamination was measured in two ways. First, carbon atoms were counted on a part of the  
22 slide not covered with the material during evaporation. Second, counts on monomer films of  
23 different thicknesses were compared. The mass measurement by the quartz balance is very  
24 accurate, so since the raw counts are not exactly in the ratio of the thicknesses, it was assumed  
25 that the difference came from contamination. Both methods gave reproducible and consistent  
26 results, leading to a contribution from contamination to the measured NRA signal of  $\approx 150$   
27 counts per  $\mu\text{C}$ . This was subtracted from all experimental counts.  
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39 *Uncertainties:* the nuclear reaction being a statistical process, there is a statistical uncertainty  
40 on the count values recorded. In our experimental conditions, these were 1 to 2 %, except for  
41 films of small thickness and low polymer content where it could reach 3 %. Since X is simply  
42 the ratio of two counts obtained in identical conditions, the uncertainty on it has no other source.  
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48 However, other factors enter in the determination of  $N_{\text{C}}$ . There is a 1.5 % statistical uncertainty  
49 on the areal density of  $^{16}\text{O}$  atoms in the reference. There are also a number of non statistical  
50 uncertainties which identically affect these two quantities. The factor 5.56 is only known to  $\pm 3$   
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% . The number of molecules per unit area (the so-called areal density)  $N$  is calculated as follow equation 1:

$$N = \frac{N_{c\_cor}}{N_0} \cdot \frac{\sigma_0}{5.56} \cdot \frac{1}{n_c} N \quad (1)$$

$N_{C\_cor}$  is  $N_C$  corrected by removing the carbon contamination (150 counts/ $\mu\text{C}$ ) and multiplying by 1.011 to take into account the natural abundance of the  $^{13}\text{C}$  isotope, since only  $^{12}\text{C}$  is determined in the NRA measurements.  $N_O$  is the number density of oxygen atoms per unit area counted by NRA,  $\sigma_O$  the areal density of  $^{16}\text{O}$  reference and  $n_C$  the number of C atoms in the molecule of interest.

### 3 Results and discussion

#### 3.1 NRA method to determine the polymer content-calibration curve

The polymer content obtained by NRA  $X_{\text{NRA}}$  is the ratio  $N_p/N_m$ , where  $N_m$  and  $N_p$  are the molecular areal densities (number of molecules per unit area in the total thickness of the film) in a film before and after removal of the monomer. In the polymer we mean by "molecule" a repeat unit of the polymer chain which has the same molecular formula and therefore the same number of carbon atoms as the monomer molecule. Rather than performing the two NRA measurements on the same film (with the risk of unwanted degradation on handling, particularly during the dissolution step) we chose to proceed as follows: as mentioned before, four films are simultaneously prepared. They should be identical, and this was indeed checked in two ways: they give the same NRA results, and after UV irradiation for the same duration their absorption spectra are identical. Therefore, in each series of 4 films one was kept intact and its NRA result gives the areal density  $N_m$  valid for the four films. The three others were irradiated and their spectra recorded just after irradiation and before removal of residual monomer (a blue spectrum is obtained). The residual monomer was then removed leaving a red, pure polymer film and the

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3 corresponding red spectrum was recorded. This film was then studied by NRA giving a  
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5 molecular (repeat unit) areal density  $N_p(\text{cm}^{-2})$ .  
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9 The next step is to determine a quantity, related to the polymer content, easily measurable on  
10 such absorption spectra. The maximum of absorption or the second lower peak corresponding to  
11 the vibron associated to the double bond stretch vibration could be chosen. However these  
12 quantities may be affected by changes in absorption lineshape. Indeed, it is observed that the  
13 halfwidth of the longer wavelength band increases with polymer content, so its height becomes  
14 correspondingly smaller. So we shall consider a more global quantity: the area  $\Sigma$  under the  
15 spectrum plotted in wavenumbers. This area is proportional to the oscillator strength, a quantity  
16 characteristic of the electronic transition (it is well established that all the absorption in the  
17 visible and near UV of blue as well as red PDA corresponds to a single excitonic transition [38-  
18 39]), so it is a physically meaningful quantity independent of variations in spectral shape. This  
19 would not be the case for a spectrum plotted in wavelengths. Considering that the majority of  
20 published spectra are given between 400 and 800 nm this spectral interval was chosen here for  
21 the determination of  $\Sigma$ . Finally the calibration curve is obtained plotting  $X_{\text{NRA}}$  as a function of  
22  $\Sigma/N_m$ , where  $\Sigma$  is normalized to the molecular areal density which is directly related to the  
23 thickness of the sample.  
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### 45 3.2 Validation of the NRA method on 4BCMU

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47 The diacetylene (DA) chosen to test the NRA method is known as 4BCMU (of side group  
48 formula  $-(\text{CH}_2)_4\text{-OCONH-CH}_2\text{-COOC}_4\text{H}_9$  see Supporting Information A). The corresponding  
49 PDA has been much studied (for reviews see [38-39]), partly because it is among the few soluble  
50 PDAs [29]. Thanks to this property a method to determine the polymer content  $X_{\text{abs}}$ , knowing an  
51 absorption spectrum has already been described in [28], where the peak absorptivity of blue  
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3 poly-4BCMU crystalline films has been determined:  $\alpha_B = 2.62 \pm 0.13 \cdot 10^5 \text{ cm}^{-1}$  at room  
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6 temperature.

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8 In §3.1 an alternative and independent method giving the polymer content  $X_{\text{NRA}}$  has been  
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10 described. This method is not based on the solubility of the PDA. In the present work twelve  
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12 4BCMU films, of thicknesses 100 to 250 nm, were prepared (plus 4 pure monomer reference  
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14 films) and photopolymerized. Irradiation durations were from 1.4 to 60 minutes, corresponding  
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16 to polymer contents  $X_{\text{abs}}$  from 0.08 to 0.42; as shown previously, 4BCMU photopolymerization  
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18 practically stops near  $X_{\text{abs}} \approx 0.5$ . Spectra up to the end of irradiation are typical blue ones (Figure  
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21 1).

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24 The residual monomer was extracted as described above. The absorption spectra recorded after  
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26 extraction are typical red ones (Figure 1). We have prepared and polymerized, but not studied by  
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28 NRA, several films with thicknesses between 2.7 nm (one monolayer) [40] and 350 nm. For all  
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30 thicknesses absorption spectra are very similar so the conclusions drawn from the NRA will be  
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32 valid for films of all thicknesses.  
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37 Figure 1 shows that the maximum absorbance of the same film is much smaller in the red  
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39 phase than in the blue one. The ratio of red to blue absorbance is 1.8 so the maximum  
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41 absorptivity of red poly-4BCMU is  $\alpha_R = 1.45 \cdot 10^5 \text{ cm}^{-1}$  at room temperature. However, the areas  
42  
43  $\Sigma$  under the two spectra, calculated between 12500 and 25000  $\text{cm}^{-1}$ , are almost equal, meaning  
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45 that the oscillator strengths of the two transitions are almost equal, but this does not imply that  
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47 the peak absorptivity will be the same, since the spectra have different shapes.  
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52 From the NRA results,  $X_{\text{NRA}}$  values for all samples could be calculated as the ratio of the  
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54 counting rate on the film to that on the corresponding reference monomer film. The statistical  
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56 uncertainties are from about 1 % at high polymer content to about 3.5 % for the smallest one.  
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3 The values of  $X_{\text{NRA}}$  obtained in this way are compared on Figure 2 to those calculated from the  
4 absorption spectra using the value of  $\alpha_{\text{B}}$  known with  $\pm 5\%$  uncertainty and the carbon atom areal  
5 densities measured by NRA with uncertainty  $\pm 1\%$ . They are equal within the experimental  
6 uncertainties: as shown on Figure 2, the results are well fitted by a straight line of slope  $1.01 \pm$   
7  $0.02$  with intercept at zero. This validates the NRA method for determining polymer content.  
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11 A calibration curve can thus be obtained for 4BCMUs. Figure 3 shows  $\Sigma/N_{\text{m}}$ ,  $\Sigma$  is normalized  
12 by the surface density  $N_{\text{m}}$ , to obtain a curve useful whatever the thickness of the samples, versus  
13 the polymer content.  $N_{\text{m}}$  varies from 14 to 32  $10^{15}$  molecules/cm<sup>2</sup>. Data have been fitted by a  
14 straight line of slope  $228 \pm 7 \cdot 10^{-15}$  cm/molecule with intercept at zero. Such a curve is not  
15 necessary in the case of 4BCMUs because it is easier to use the peak absorptivity  $\alpha$ , but in many  
16 PDA  $\alpha$  is not known because the polymer is not soluble [28]. A similar data treatment can be  
17 done on red chains. The red and blue slopes are equal when the same frequencies range is used  
18 [12500-25000 cm<sup>-1</sup>]. Since the red spectrum doesn't decrease to zero at 12500 cm<sup>-1</sup>, the slope is  
19 slightly underestimated. If a larger range [12500-28500 cm<sup>-1</sup>] is used, the new slope becomes:  
20  $250 \pm 20 \cdot 10^{-15}$  cm/molecule. The NRA method can be used on insoluble PDA, and we shall use it  
21 on one of the most studied PDA, 10-12 pentacosadiynoic acid (PCDA) in the next section.  
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### 42 3.3 Polymer content in PCDA thin films: calibration curve

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44 The same procedure as described on 4BCMUs is performed on PCDA films. The blue and red  
45 spectra of evaporated PCDA film are shown in Figure 1. Again, the value of  $\Sigma$  is obtained by  
46 integration from 800 nm (12500 cm<sup>-1</sup>) to 400 nm (25000 cm<sup>-1</sup>). The values of the molecular areal  
47 density of the samples vary between 5 and 16  $10^{15}$  molecules/cm<sup>2</sup>. The result  $\Sigma/N_{\text{m}}$  function of  
48  $X_{\text{NRA}}$  for blue chains is given Figure 4, the data are fitted by a line of slope  $197 \pm 3 \cdot 10^{-15}$   
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3 cm/molecule and zero intercept. The slope is a little bit smaller than that obtained for 4BCMU  
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5 suggesting that the oscillator strength of the transition is slightly smaller.  
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8 It is now possible to determine the polymer content of B type chains for a given absorption  
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10 spectrum and obtain polymerization kinetics. Figure 5a shows a series of absorption spectra  
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12 recorded during photopolymerization of a 150 nm thick film in the same conditions as in [28],  
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14 and Figure 5b shows the time variation of the deduced polymer content, compared to the peak  
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16 absorption variation. An integration extending further in the UV would slightly increase the  
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18 difference.  
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22 Often one wants to know the polymer content at the end of an experiment where all chains are  
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24 in the red phase. The method described for the blue chains can be used exactly in the same way.  
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26 However, the red absorption spectrum does not fall to zero at 400 nm. To draw a calibration  
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28 curve for red chains we have chosen to calculate  $\Sigma$  between 12500 and 25000  $\text{cm}^{-1}$  as for the  
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30 blue chains, since this is the range almost always used in the literature, so the calculated values  
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32 slightly underestimate the total area and oscillator strength. The result is given Figure 6. The  
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34 slope of the line obtained is  $216 \pm 4 \cdot 10^{-15}$  cm/molecule, a little bit higher than that obtained in the  
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36 blue case. When the experimental absorption is the sum of both blue and red chain spectra an  
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38 approximate value of the total polymer content can be deduced using the average of the slopes of  
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40 the two calibration curves.  
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#### 45 3.4 An example of application to PCDA Langmuir films.

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47 The calibration curves have been obtained using evaporated thin films; these curves can be  
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49 used on other kind of PCDA samples provided that the absorption spectra have the same shape.  
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51 The photopolymerization of a trilayer of PCDA at 25mN/m corresponding to an area of 0.08  
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53  $\text{nm}^2/\text{molecule}$  and so an areal density  $N_m = 1.25 \cdot 10^{15}$  molecules/ $\text{cm}^2$ , on pure water subphase has  
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3 been studied by absorption. These conditions are identical to those used by Lifshitz et al. [41] in  
4 their determination of the crystal structure of a PCDA trilayer. Experimental details of our  
5 experiment are given in Supporting Information E. An example is given Figure 5a, added in bold  
6 for comparison to a series of PCDA microcrystalline film absorption spectra. From this spectrum  
7 an X of 30% is deduced using the calibration obtained above. We note in passing that the  
8 reactivity for photopolymerization is very similar on microcrystalline and Langmuir films (see  
9 supporting information E Figure E3). From these two data points, the use of the color ratio and  
10 the problem of the apparent concentration can be discussed.

11  
12 To quantify the color transition, a quantity called the color ratio (CR) is generally used. It was  
13 initially introduced by Charych [14,42] as equation 2:

$$14 \quad CR = \frac{B_0 - B_V}{B_0} \times 100 \quad (2)$$

15 where  $B_0 = \frac{I_0(blue)}{I_0(blue) + I_0(red)}$  and  $B_V = \frac{I_V(blue)}{I_V(blue) + I_V(red)}$ , where  $I_0(blue)$  and  $I_V(blue)$  are the  
16 absorbances at the absorption maximum of blue type polymer chains before and after a color  
17 transition, with  $I_0(red)$  and  $I_V(red)$  for the red type polymer chains. It is an empirical quantity  
18 introduced for its large dynamic range between 0 and 100%. This quantity has to be  
19 experimentally calibrated (and it was in these papers). However it has sometimes been equated  
20 by others to the relative concentration of red chains, which is not generally true except that it is  
21 indeed 0 for a pure blue film and 1 for a pure red one. This is because the maximal absorbance of  
22 the two types of chains may not be equal, and in fact they are not in PCDA (and 4BCMU) as  
23 may be seen in Figure 1 and the blue absorbance at the wavelength of maximal red absorption is  
24 not negligible; in fact it amounts to  $\approx 40\%$  of the maximal blue absorption in the same spectrum.

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26 As already shown [28] a strong slowing down of the photopolymerization rate (Figure 5b)  
27 occurs, so that an apparent saturation of the reaction may not correspond to a complete  
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3 polymerization. It is indeed the case for PCDA crystal or Langmuir film (see Supporting  
4 Information E). The discussions on the blue to red transition in sensors have to take into account  
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6 the fact that polymer films are potentially constituted of up to 40-50% of monomer.  
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#### 9 10 4 Conclusion

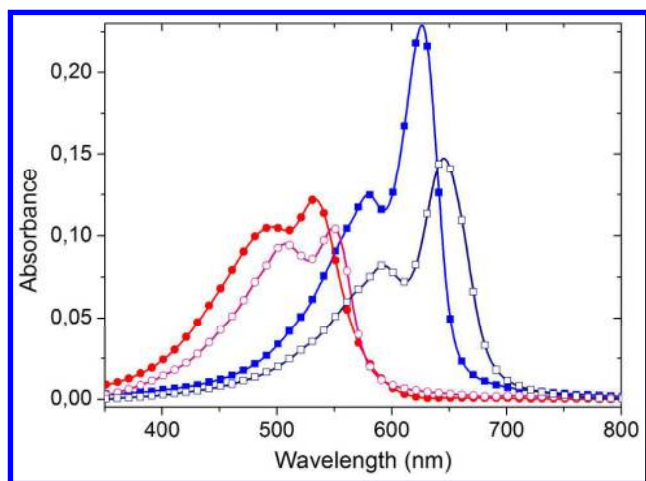
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12 This paper introduces a new method for quantifying the polymer content  $X$  in a PDA  
13 film, using numbers directly given by its absorption spectrum (it should be noted that the peak  
14 absorbance of a spectrum does not give a good quantitative measure of  $X$ , except possibly at  
15 small  $X$ . In view of the current activity in PDA sensor development, we have therefore applied  
16 the method to obtain a calibration curve for PCDA, a much studied material in the sensor  
17 context, however the method is more general.  
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21 The method makes it possible to determine  $X$  at any stage of the polymerization. It has  
22 often been reported in the literature that a spontaneous, unwanted (in fact detrimental), blue to  
23 red color transition occurs [23, 27] during photopolymerization. The question of the polymer  
24 content at which this transition occurs is never mentioned. The PCDA calibration ( $\Sigma/N_m$  as a  
25 function of  $X$ ) obtained with the novel method presented here our method allows determination  
26 of  $X$  at the stage where this transition occurs. Such a calibration curve can be obtained for other  
27 polydiacetylenes using NRA and used for other types of films. Calibration was obtained for both  
28 blue and red PDA films. For each of the two materials studied here, 4BCMU and PCDA, the  
29 blue and red results are very close despite the large difference in spectral shapes, indicating very  
30 similar values of the total oscillator strengths of the excitonic transitions.  
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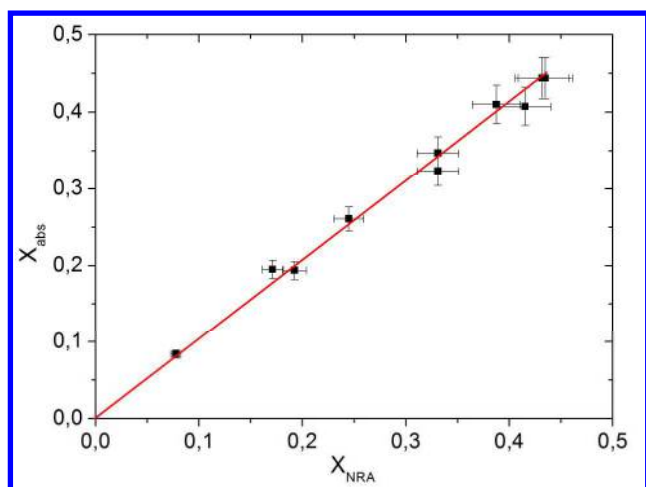
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34 It had already been shown [28] that in evaporated films of 4BCMU, photopolymerization  
35 does not go to completion. This had been explained by efficient quenching of a photoexcited  
36 monomer via energy transfer to a neighboring existing chain. In the present work it is observed  
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3 that photopolymerization remains also incomplete in PCDA evaporated films, as shown in  
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5 Figure E3 in Supporting Information E. These photopolymerisation kinetics were obtained from  
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7 the polymer contents calculated using the calibration for PCDA obtained in the present work  
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9 (Figure 4). Since the quenching mechanism present in 4BCMU is in principle a general process,  
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11 we suggest that it also applies to explain the incomplete polymerization of PCDA. Moreover, a  
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13 similarly obtained polymerization kinetics of a Langmuir trilayer film is also shown in Figure E3  
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15 with the same saturation as for evaporated films, presumably due to the same mechanism.  
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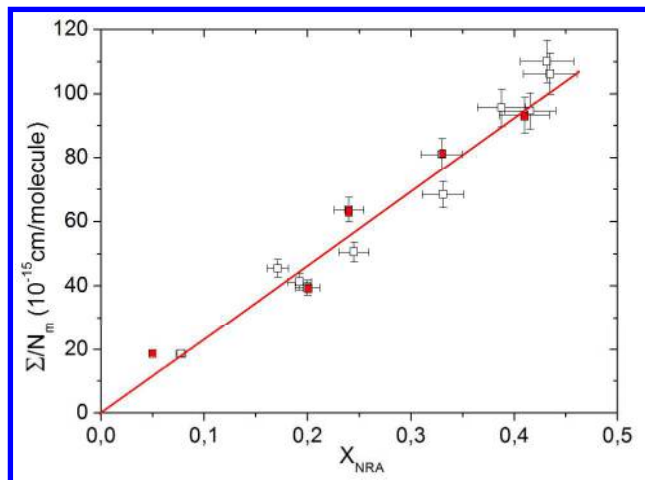
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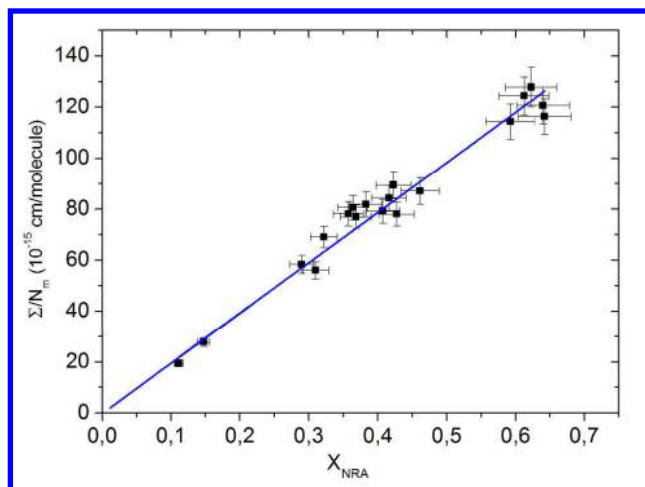
**Figure 1:** Absorption spectra for evaporated polycrystalline films of 4BCMUs and PCDA of the blue and red polymer chain type, with  $N_m(4BCMUs)=14.10^{15}$  molecules/cm<sup>2</sup> (~100nm) and  $N_m(PCDA)=5.3 \cdot 10^{15}$  molecules/cm<sup>2</sup> (~35nm). Solid and open squares: blue 4BCMUs and PCDA respectively; solid and open circles: red 4BCMUs and PCDA respectively.



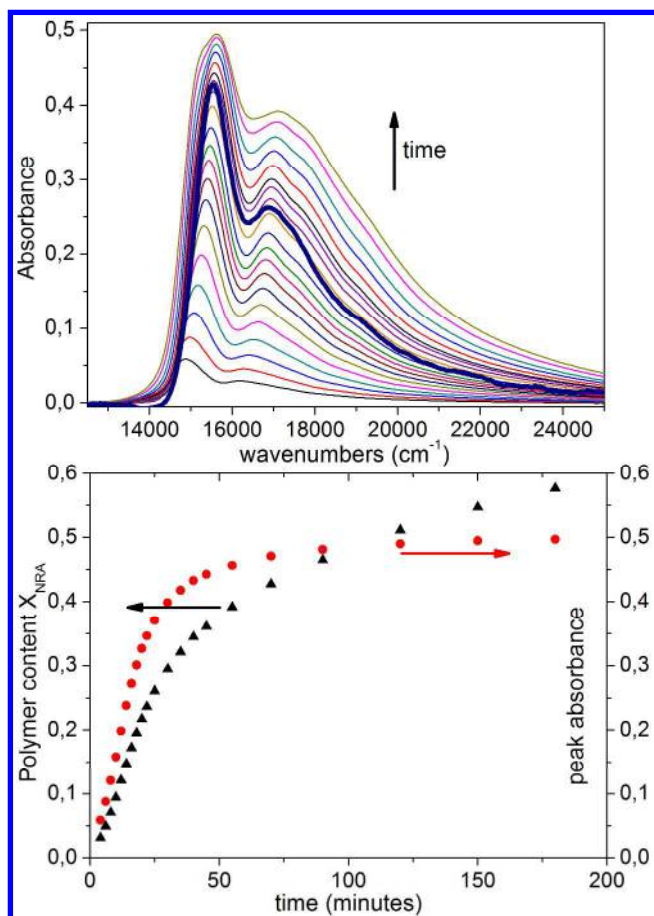
**Figure 2:** comparison of the polymer content determined using the absorption spectra:  $X_{abs}$  and using the NRA method:  $X_{NRA}$  in evaporated 4BCMUs polycrystalline films. Data are fitted with a straight line of slope  $1.01 \pm 0.02$  with intercept at zero.



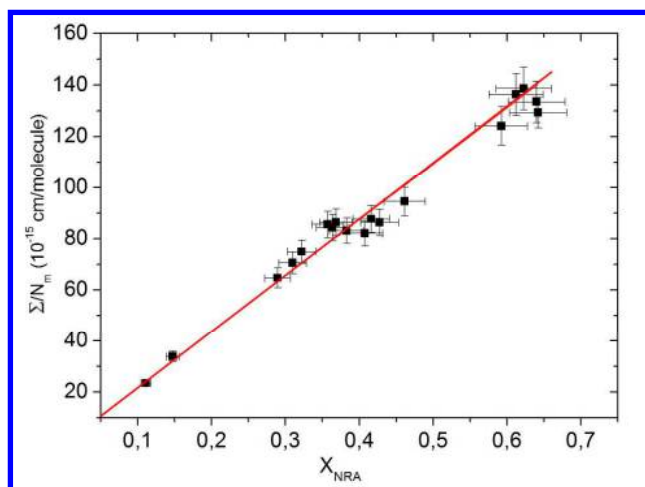
**Figure 3:** 4BCMU calibration curve using the NRA method:  $\Sigma/N_m$  as a function of  $X_{NRA}$  for the blue and red chains. When the same wavenumber range ( $12500\text{-}25000\text{ cm}^{-1}$ ) is used to calculate  $\Sigma$ , similar data are obtained for blue (open squares) and red (solid squares) chains: slope  $232 \pm 9$   $10^{-15}$  cm/molecule and intercept zero.



**Figure 4:** PCDA calibration curve using the NRA method:  $\Sigma/N_m$  function of  $X_{NRA}$  for the blue chains. Slope  $197 \pm 3$   $10^{-15}$  cm/molecule and intercept zero.



**Figure 5:** a) absorption spectra of microcrystalline PCDA film (150 nm) as a function of UV polymerization time. In bold the absorption spectrum of a trilayer Langmuir film of PCDA corresponding to a polymer content of 30% is added. This spectrum has been multiplied by a factor 20 b) PCDA microcrystalline film: polymerization kinetics using the peak absorption (closed circles) and the polymer content (closed triangles).



**Figure 6:** PCDA calibration curve using the NRA method:  $\Sigma/N_m$  as a function of  $X_{NRA}$  for the red chains. Slope  $216 \pm 4 \cdot 10^{-15}$  cm/molecule and intercept zero.

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### Author Contributions

The manuscript was written through contributions of all authors. All authors have given approval to the final version of the manuscript.

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## ASSOCIATED CONTENT

## Supporting Information

A- Molecular structure of 4BCMU and PCDA

B- Scheme of topochemical polymerization of diacetylenes

C- AFM of PCDA microcrystalline films

D- Dissolution method to remove the monomer.

E- Isotherms and in situ absorption of PCDA Langmuir film.

F- Nuclear Reaction Analysis (NRA).

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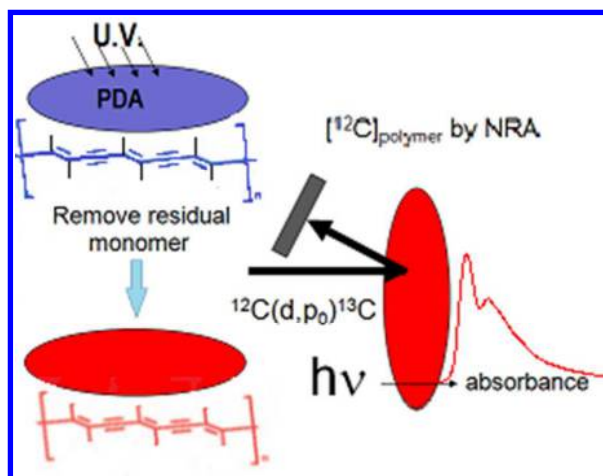
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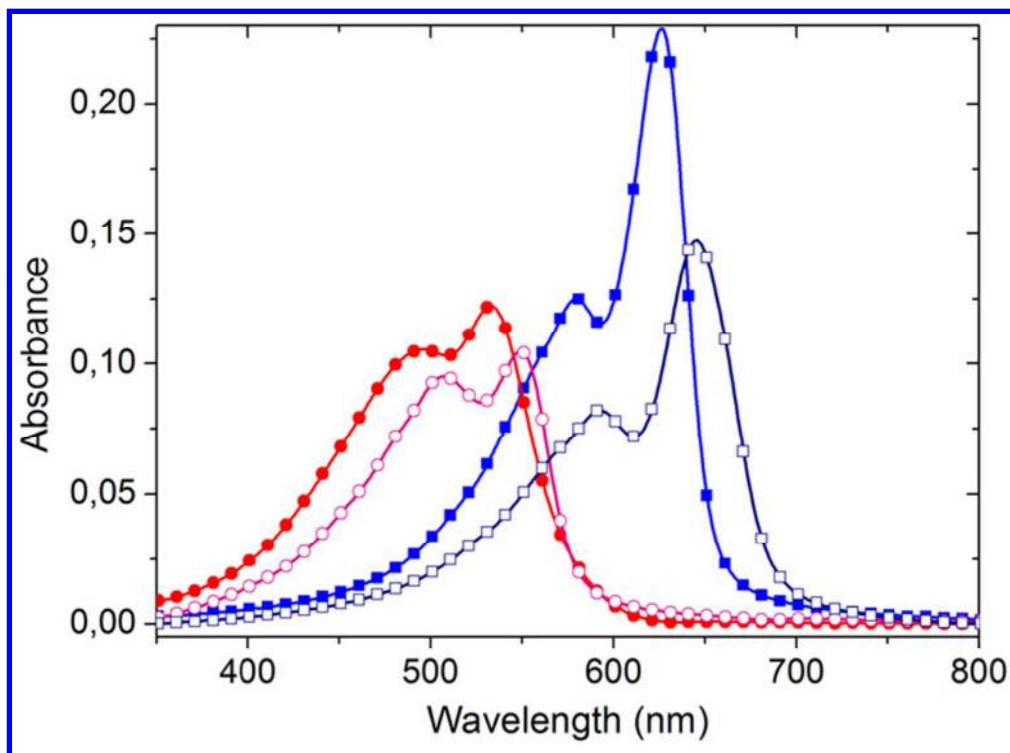


Figure 1: Absorption spectra for evaporated polycrystalline films of 4BCMU and PCDA of the blue and red polymer chain type, with  $N_m(4BCMU)=14 \cdot 10^{15}$  molecules/cm<sup>2</sup> (~100nm) and  $N_m(PCDA)=5.3 \cdot 10^{15}$  molecules/cm<sup>2</sup> (~35nm). Solid and open squares: blue 4BCMU and PCDA respectively; solid and open circles: red 4BCMU and PCDA respectively.

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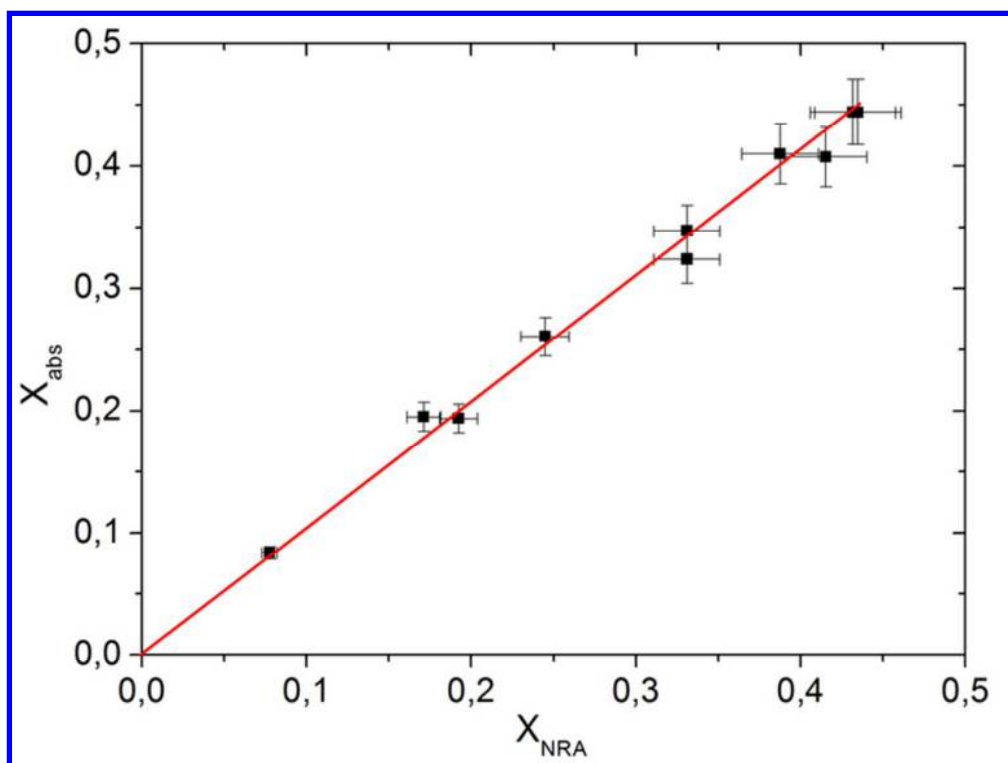


Figure 2: comparison of the polymer content determined using the absorption spectra:  $X_{abs}$  and using the NRA method:  $X_{NRA}$  in evaporated 4BCMU polycrystalline films. Data are fitted with a straight line of slope  $1.01 \pm 0.02$  with intercept at zero.

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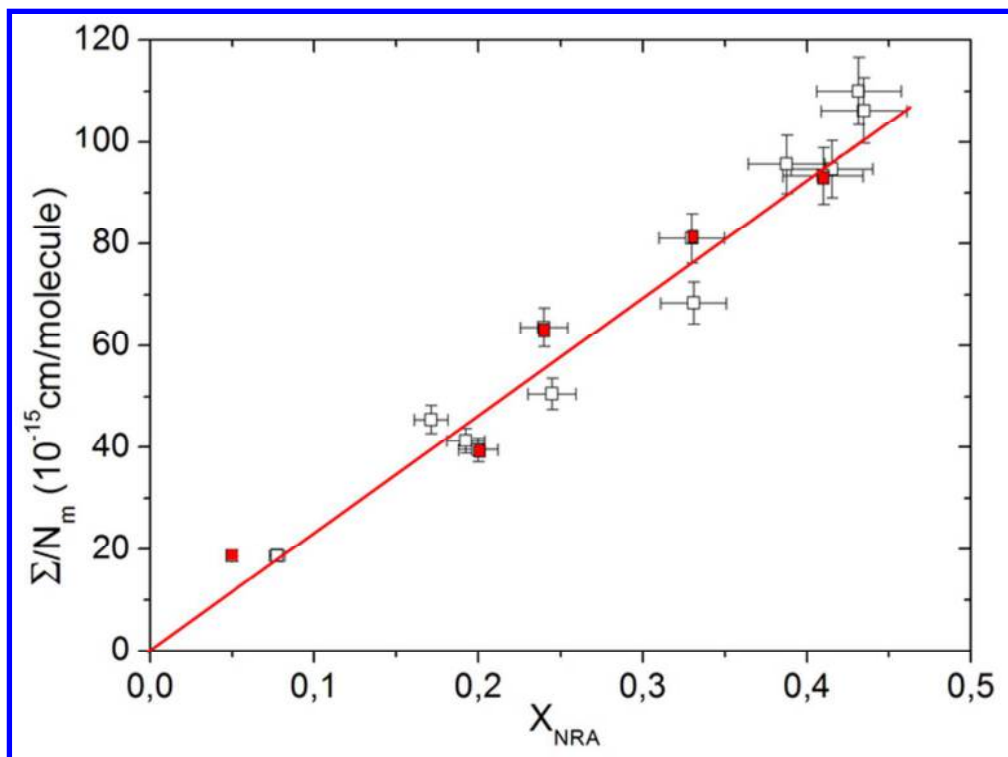


Figure 3: 4BCMU calibration curve using the NRA method:  $\Sigma/N_m$  as a function of  $X_{NRA}$  for the blue and red chains. When the same wavenumber range ( $12500\text{--}25000\text{ cm}^{-1}$ ) is used to calculate  $\Sigma$ , similar data are obtained for blue (open squares) and red (solid squares) chains: slope  $232 \pm 9\ 10^{-15}$  cm/molecule and intercept zero.

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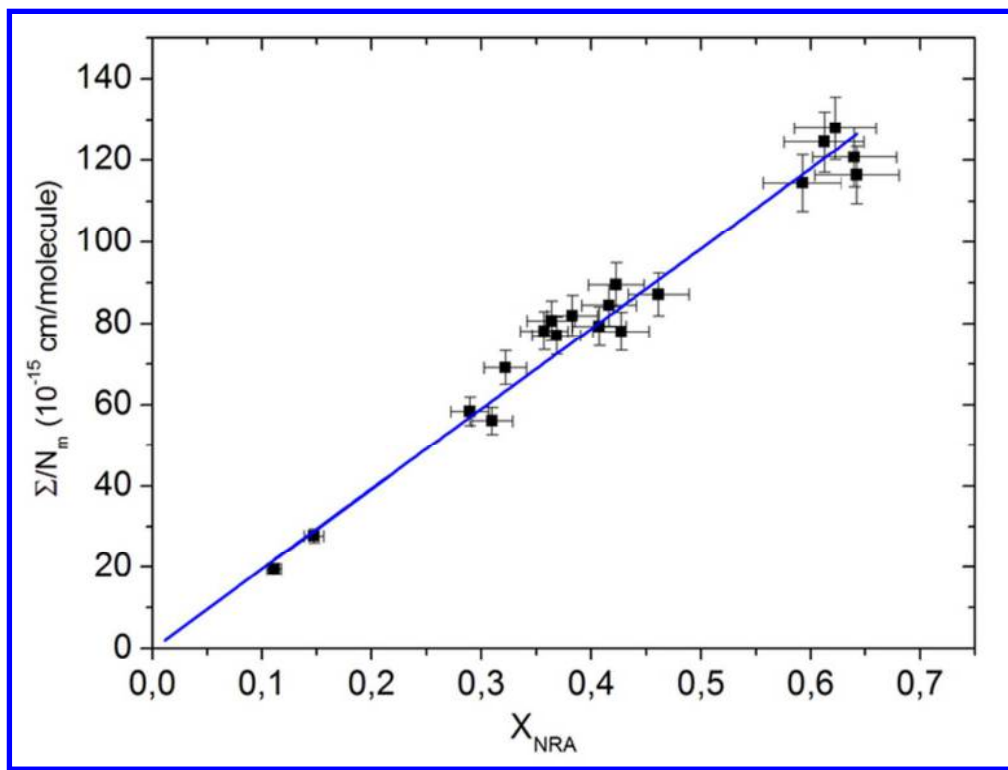


Figure 4: PCDA calibration curve using the NRA method:  $\Sigma/N_m$  function of  $X_{NRA}$  for the blue chains. Slope  $197 \pm 3 \cdot 10^{-15}$  cm/molecule and intercept zero.

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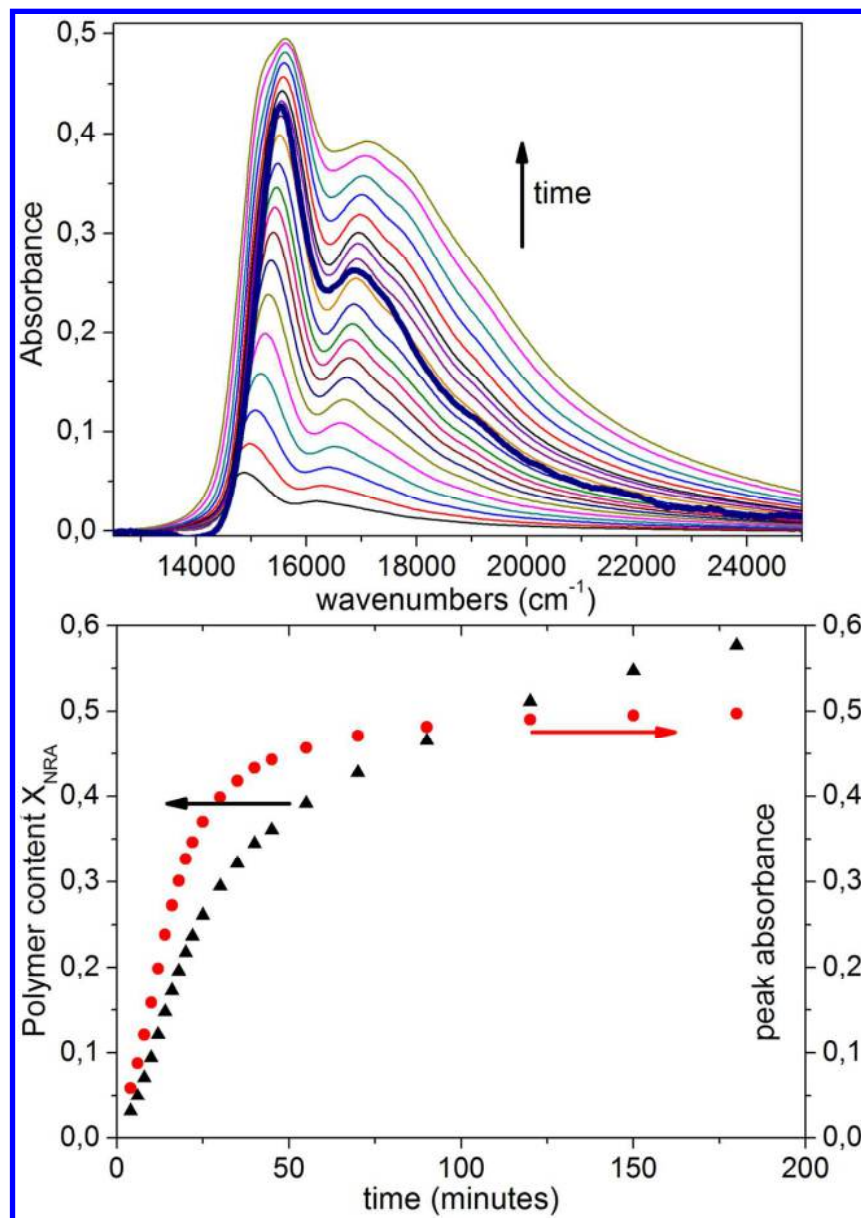


Figure 5: a) absorption spectra of microcrystalline PCDA film (150 nm) as a function of UV polymerization time. In bold the absorption spectrum of a trilayer Langmuir film of PCDA corresponding to a polymer content of 30% is added. This spectrum has been multiplied by a factor 20 b) PCDA microcrystalline film: polymerization kinetics using the peak absorption (closed circles) and the polymer content (closed triangles).

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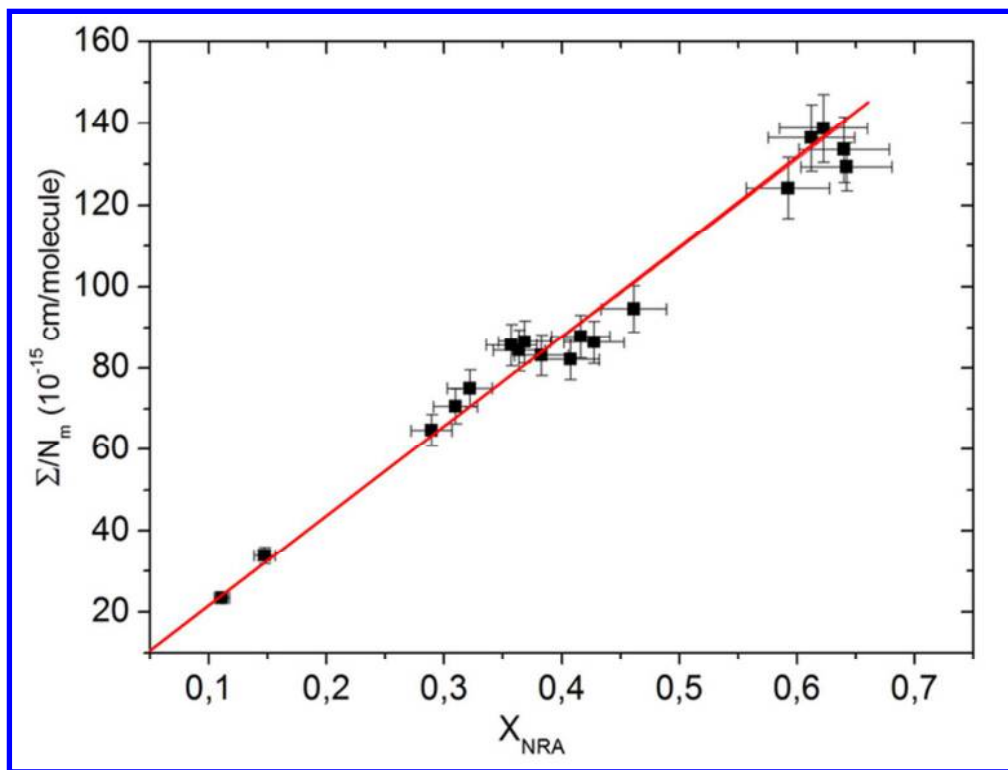


Figure 6: PCDA calibration curve using the NRA method:  $\Sigma/N_m$  as a function of  $X_{NRA}$  for the red chains. Slope  $216 \pm 4 \cdot 10^{-15}$  cm/molecule and intercept zero.

62x46mm (300 x 300 DPI)