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Volume Editor

Dr. Gary B. Schuster

Georgia Institute of Technology
School of Chemistry and Biochemistry
Atlanta GA 30332-0400
USA

E-mail: gary.schuster@cos.gatech.edu

Editorial Board

Prof. Dr. Armin de Meijere

Institut für Organische Chemie
der Georg-August-Universität
Tammannstraße 2
37077 Göttingen, Germany
E-mail: ameijer1@uni-goettingen.de

Prof. Dr. Horst Kessler

Institut für Organische Chemie
TU München
Lichtenbergstraße 4
85747 Garching, Germany
E-mail: kessler@ch.tum.de

Prof. Steven V. Ley

University Chemical Laboratory
Lensfield Road
Cambridge CB2 1EW, Great Britain
E-mail: svl1000@cus.cam.ac.uk

Prof. Dr. Joachim Thiem

Institut für Organische Chemie
Universität Hamburg
Martin-Luther-King-Platz 6
20146 Hamburg, Germany
E-mail: thiem@chemie.uni-hamburg.de

Prof. Dr. Fritz Vögtle

Kekulé-Institut für Organische Chemie
und Biochemie der Universität Bonn
Gerhard-Domagk-Straße 1
53121 Bonn, Germany
E-mail: voegtle@uni-bonn.de

Prof. K.N. Houk

Department of Chemistry and
Biochemistry
University of California
405 Hilgard Avenue
Los Angeles, CA 90024-1589, USA
E-mail: houk@chem.ucla.edu

Prof. Jean-Marie Lehn

Institut de Chimie
Université de Strasbourg
1 rue Blaise Pascal, B.P.Z 296/R8
67008 Strasbourg Cedex, France
E-mail: lehn@chimie.u-strasbg.fr

Prof. Stuart L. Schreiber

Chemical Laboratories
Harvard University
12 Oxford Street
Cambridge, MA 02138-2902, USA
E-mail: sls@slsiris.harvard.edu

Prof. Barry M. Trost

Department of Chemistry
Stanford University
Stanford, CA 94305-5080, USA
E-mail: bmtrost@leland.stanford.edu

Prof. Hisashi Yamamoto

School of Engineering
Nagoya University
Chikusa, Nagoya 464-01, Japan
E-mail: j45988a@nucc.cc.nagoya-u.ac.jp

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Preface

The central role played by DNA in cellular life guarantees a place of importance for the study of its chemical and physical properties. It did not take long after Watson and Crick described the now iconic double helix structure for a question to arise about the ability of DNA to transport electrical charge. It seemed apparent to the trained eye of the chemist or physicist that the array of neatly stacked aromatic bases might facilitate the movement of an electron (or hole) along the length of the polymer. It is now more than 40 years since the first experimental results were reported, and that question has been answered with certainty.

As you will learn by reading these volumes, Long-Range Charge Transfer in DNA I and II, today no one disputes the fact that charge introduced at one location in DNA can migrate and cause a reaction at a remote location. In the most thoroughly studied example, it is clear that a radical cation injected at a terminus of the DNA polymer can cause a reaction at a $(GG)_n$ sequence located hundreds of Ångströms away.

In the last decade, an intense and successful investigation of this phenomenon has focused on its mechanism. The experimental facts discovered and the debate of their interpretation form large portions of these volumes. The views expressed come both from experimentalists, who have devised clever tests of each new hypothesis, and from theorists, who have applied these findings and refined the powerful theories of electron transfer reactions. Indeed, from a purely scientific view, the cooperative marriage of theory and experiment in this pursuit is a powerful outcome likely to outlast the recent intense interest in this field.

Is the quest over? No, not nearly so. The general agreement that charge can migrate in DNA is merely the conclusion of the first chapter. This hard-won understanding raises many important new questions. Some pertain to oxidative damage of DNA and mutations in the genome. Others are related to the possible use of the charge transfer ability of DNA in the emerging field of molecular-scale electronic devices. Still others are focused on the application of this phenomenon to the development of clinical assays.

It is my hope that these volumes will serve as a springboard for the next phase of this investigation. The foundation knowledge of this field contained within these pages should serve as a defining point of reference for all who explore its boundaries. For this, I must thank all of my coauthors for their effort, insight and cooperation.

Atlanta, January 2004

Gary B. Schuster

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