

## 247. Towards the Construction of a Complete Cyclic Water Decomposition System, Design and Operation of an Oxygen Producing Half Cell

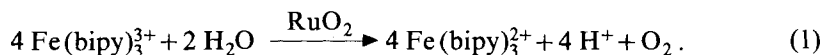
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### Summary

Oxygen is generated when aqueous solution of iron(III) tris(2,2'-bipyridyl),  $\text{Fe}(\text{bipy})_3^{3+}$ , are brought in contact with catalytic amounts of powdered or colloidal  $\text{RuO}_2$ . The oxygen yield depends strongly on the pH, reaching a maximum between pH 7 and 8 where it corresponds to the stoichiometry of the reaction:



The rate of the reaction is so fast that it occurs practically upon dissolution of  $\text{Fe}(\text{bipy})_3^{3+}$  in the aqueous phase. In acidic media (pH 4), no  $\text{O}_2$  evolution is observed. Instead,  $\text{Fe}(\text{bipy})_3^{3+}$  is converted to an intermediate which in the presence of  $\text{RuO}_2$  yields  $\text{O}_2$  upon neutralization.

The pH profile of the  $\text{O}_2$  evolution occurring upon illumination of  $\text{Ru}(\text{bipy})_3^{2+}$  in the presence of the cobalt complex  $[\text{Co}(\text{NH}_3)_5\text{Cl}]^{2+}$  was also investigated.

The surprisingly low energy losses (160 mV) in reaction (1) makes the construction of four quanta water splitting systems feasible.

**Introduction.** - The photolytic generation of hydrogen and oxygen from water by visible light is of fundamental importance in the field of solar energy conversion [1]. Earlier investigators have developed sacrificial systems which produce either hydrogen [2] or oxygen [3-5] from water under visible light illumination. Our efforts were initially directed towards exploring redox catalysts that could efficiently mediate the water reduction [6] and oxidation [7] step. Later, through combination of two types of catalyst, cyclic water cleavage was achieved [5]. The advantage of the system employed is its simplicity: Apart from the sensitizer and the two catalysts, the solution contains only one further component acting as an electron relay for  $\text{H}_2$  production. However, there are also disadvantages resulting from the simultaneous production of the two gases. This promotes undesirable cross reactions reducing the quantum efficiency of the device. While the latter processes may be avoided through judicious design of molecular organizes it is nevertheless desirable to develop alternative systems in which  $\text{H}_2$  and  $\text{O}_2$  are evolved separately.

A device which should fulfil this purpose is depicted schematically in *Figure 1*. In the right half-cell,  $H_2$  is generated through a light driven redox process under oxidation of a donor (D) to the cation ( $D^+$ ). A reductant R, present in the left cell, provides electrons to reduce  $D^+$  back to D. The coupling occurs electrochemically. In a subsequent thermal reaction mediated by a redox catalyst,  $R^+$  is reconverted into R under simultaneous oxygen evolution. It should be noted that this scheme is different from the one proposed by *Bolton* [1d] in that four instead of eight quanta are consumed in the production of one  $O_2$  molecule. Such a process can be achieved only if the catalytic oxygen evolution occurs with minimal loss of energy, *i.e.* close to the equilibrium potential of 0.82 at neutral pH. In the present paper, the performance of a half-cell is investigated which satisfies this requirement.

**Experimental. - Materials.** The two types of  $RuO_2 \cdot xH_2O$ , a powder supplied from *Alfa Inorganics*, and a  $RuO_2$ -sol, stabilized by a co-polymer of styrene and maleic anhydride, obtained from *Unilever Corp.*, Port Sunlight, G.B. The preparation of the colloidal solution was carried out by slowly mixing a neutral solution of  $RuO_4$  in water (244 mg/50 ml) with an equivalent amount of aqueous solution (0.2%) of the co-polymer. The pH is adjusted to 8 and the solution stirred for 1 h. Under these conditions  $RuO_4$  decomposes spontaneously to give  $RuO_2$  which is prevented from aggregation by the protective colloid. The  $RuO_2$  content is 2 mg/ml and the mean particle radius 300 Å, as determined by quasielastic light scattering technique.

The complex  $[Co(NH_3)_5Cl]Cl_2$  was prepared according to a procedure described elsewhere [8]. The complexes  $Fe(bipy)_3^{3+}$  and  $Fe(bipy)_3^{2+}$  were synthesized as perchlorate salts according to literature procedures [9].  $Ru(bipy)_3^{3+}$  was purchased as the perchlorate salt from *Strem, Inc.*, deionized water was distilled from alkaline permanganate and subsequently twice from a quartz still.

**Apparatus.** The experimental arrangement is shown in *Figure 2*. The solution is contained in a flask which is connected to a  $N_2$  cylinder and through a trap to the *End-O-Mess* Oxygen Meter. The trap is necessary to freeze out water from the gas stream which interferes at high concentrations with the  $O_2$  determination in the *End-O-Mess* meter. The quantitative analysis of the oxygen content of the gas by this instrument is based on the EMF of a  $Pt/ZrO_2/Pt$ (air) galvanic cell. The calibration of the system was performed by injecting varying amounts of oxygen in the solution and subsequent transfer by  $N_2$  carrier gas to the  $O_2$  meter.

In the photolysis experiments for light induced  $O_2$  evolution, the powdered catalyst was initially contained in the side arm of the flask. Prior to irradiation, the whole system was carefully deaerated by flushing with  $N_2$ . The flask was then closed by means of the two stopcocks and illuminated by a 150 Watt slide projector lamp. At the same time the catalyst was added by turning the side arm in the upward direction. Alternatively, 2 ml stock solutions of colloidal  $RuO_2$  ( $RuO_2$  content 2 mg/ml) was

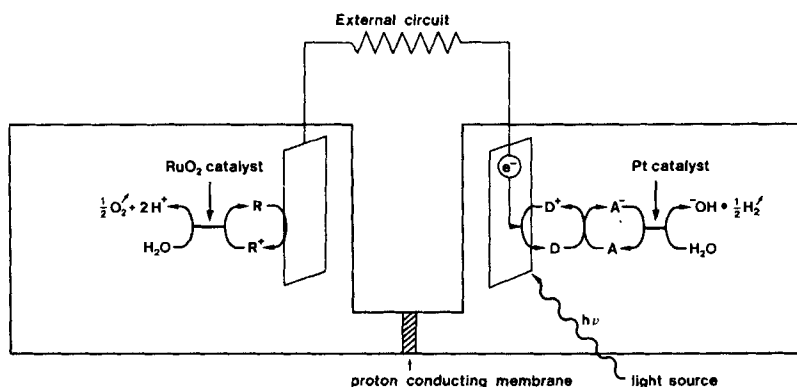


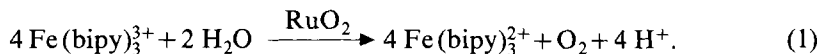
Fig. 1. Cell device for cyclic water decomposition by visible light (see text for explanation)

injected through the septum. The septum allowed also for removal of gas samples for gas chromatographic analysis.

In the thermal O<sub>2</sub> generation experiments, the solution contained initially only the buffer (0.1 M) and the RuO<sub>2</sub> catalyst (30 mg/100 ml when in powdered form or 4 mg/100 ml when colloidal). Here, the solid Fe(bipy)<sub>3</sub><sup>3+</sup> was stored in the side arm of the flask. After deaeration, the Fe(bipy)<sub>3</sub><sup>3+</sup> (ca. 250 mg) was dissolved in solution stirred for a period of ca. 30 min. After this time or after termination of the photolysis, the gas evolved in the solution was flushed out and transferred to the O<sub>2</sub> meter by a stream of N<sub>2</sub>, where the O<sub>2</sub> produced was analyzed quantitatively.

A test run was first made with an 8 × 10<sup>-3</sup> M Ce<sup>4+</sup> solution in 1 N H<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub> which, when brought into contact with *Alfa*-hydrated RuO<sub>2</sub> powder or a similar powder from *Merck*, gave oxygen in the dark under simultaneous reduction of Ce<sup>4+</sup> to Ce<sup>3+</sup>. This reaction is completed within 30 min and produces O<sub>2</sub> with an efficiency > 80%. Nonhydrated RuO<sub>2</sub>, though reducing Ce<sup>4+</sup> to Ce<sup>3+</sup>, failed to give oxygen and hence was not employed in the further experiments.

**Results.** - When Fe(bipy)<sub>3</sub><sup>3+</sup> is dissolved in aqueous solutions of neutral pH containing RuO<sub>2</sub> catalyst, oxygen is generated. This finding may be attributed to the oxidation of water by the iron complex according to the equation



This process manifests itself by a decrease in the pH, a change in the absorption spectrum of the solution and the appearance of oxygen.

The optical effects are illustrated in *Figure 3* where the lower curve with a maximum around 610 nm, ( $\epsilon = 380 \text{ M}^{-1} \text{ cm}^{-1}$ ) was obtained from a 5 × 10<sup>-4</sup> M solution of Fe(bipy)<sub>3</sub><sup>3+</sup> at pH=0 [9] [10]. The quantity of 8.5 × 10<sup>-4</sup> M Fe(bipy)<sub>3</sub><sup>3+</sup> when stirred for several minutes in a neutral, buffered solution containing RuO<sub>2</sub> powder as a redox catalyst yields the upper absorption curve shown in *Figure 3*. The features of this spectrum are identical with that of Fe(bipy)<sub>3</sub><sup>2+</sup> indicating that the latter is the reaction product [9] [10]. A quantitative analysis showed that the reduction is complete after 5 to 10 minutes of stirring. The rate of reaction is so fast that it occurs almost concomitantly with the dissolution of the solid Fe(bipy)<sub>3</sub><sup>3+</sup> complex in the aqueous medium. The yield of oxygen produced from the reduction of Fe(bipy)<sub>3</sub><sup>3+</sup>

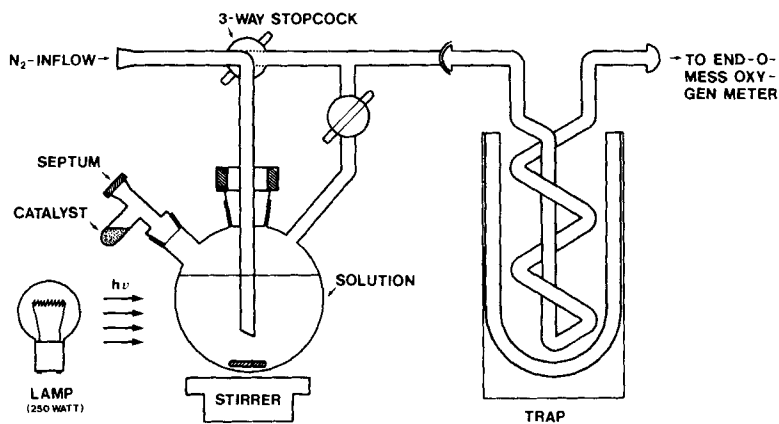


Fig.2. Scheme of the experimental arrangement used in the thermal and photo-induced oxygen evolution experiments

is strongly dependent on the pH of the solution. Results are shown in *Figure 4*. In these experiments sufficient amount of buffer was added to the solution to avoid any changes in pH during the redox process. The yield is stoichiometric only within a relatively narrow pH region between 7 and 7.5 and decreases towards the acid and basic side. The decrease is particularly sharp towards smaller pH values.  $O_2$  generation ceases to occur at  $pH \leq 4$ . It was noted however that acidic solutions of  $Fe(bipy)_3^{3+}$  still underwent spectral changes when brought into contact with  $RuO_2$ . *Figure 5* shows the absorption spectrum of the product obtained at pH 4 after stirring with the catalyst. The absorption differs significantly from that of  $Fe(bipy)_3^{2+}$  in that a strong peak appears in the wavelength region between 300 and 400 nm. Interestingly, if such a solution is neutralized to a pH of 7.5 and stirred with  $RuO_2$  the spectrum converts to that of  $Fe(bipy)_3^{2+}$  (*Fig. 5* upper curve). Simultaneously stoichiometric amounts of oxygen are produced.

Experiments were also carried out with a colloidal form of  $RuO_2$  and the data obtained are included in *Figure 4*. This catalyst also efficiently mediates oxygen generation from water. In fact, the amount of colloidal  $RuO_2$  employed in the experiments is about ten times smaller than in the case of the powder. Significantly, the maximum  $O_2$  production is here observed at pH 9 where the yield reaches almost stoichiometric proportions.

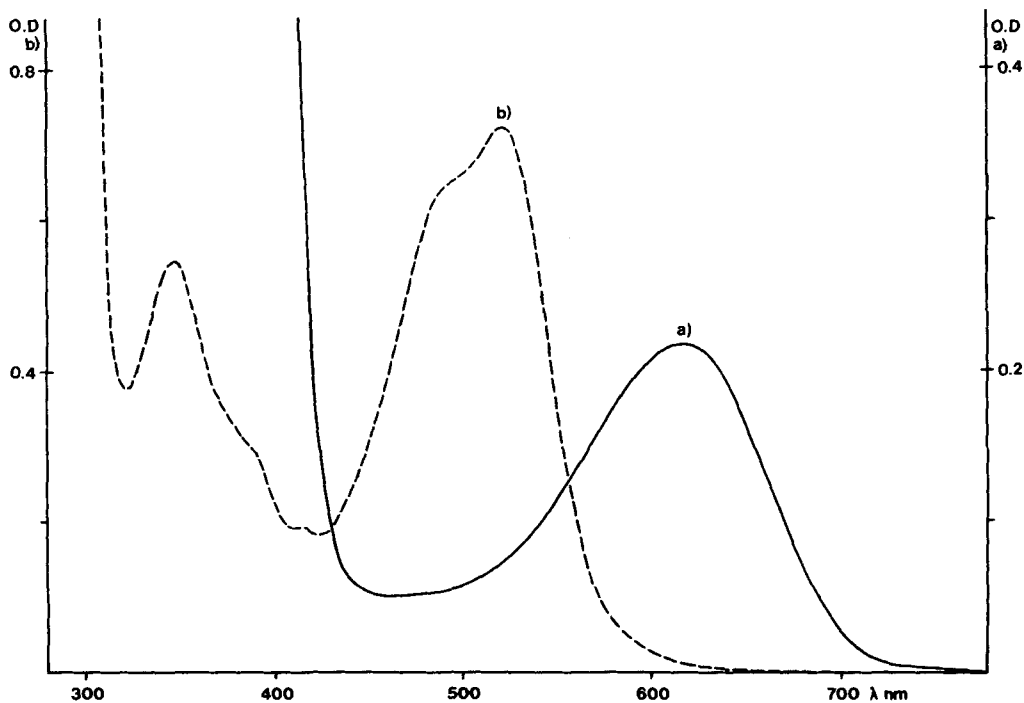


Fig. 3. a) Absorption spectrum of a  $5 \times 10^{-4} M$   $Fe(bipy)_3^{3+}$  solution ( $pH=0$ ) ( $\epsilon_{610} = 380 M^{-1} cm^{-1}$ ) (1 cm cell); b) Absorption spectrum of the product obtained after mixing  $8.5 \times 10^{-4} M$   $Fe(bipy)_3^{3+}$  with aqueous solution of a buffer ( $pH 7$ ) containing 30 mg  $RuO_2$  powder ( $\epsilon_{522} = 8650 M^{-1} cm^{-1}$ ) (0.1 cm cell).

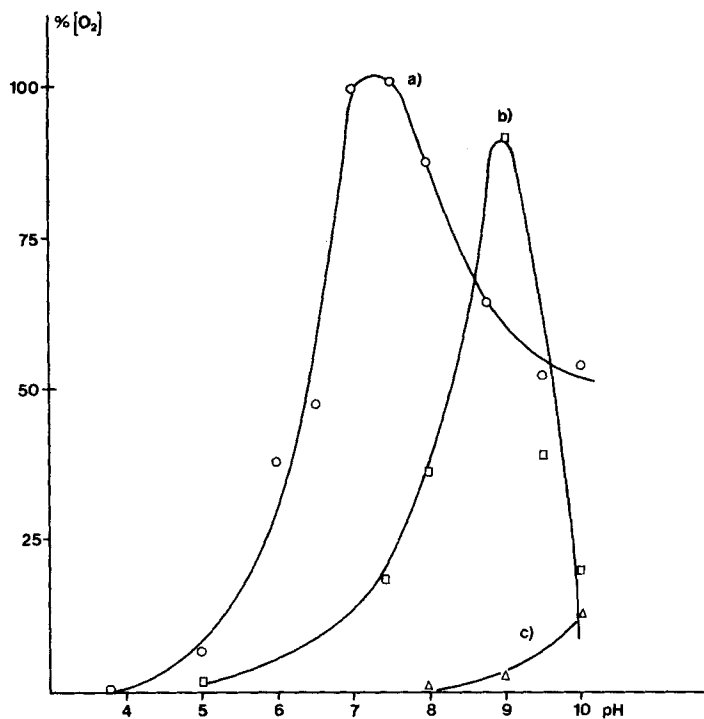


Fig.4. Oxygen yields as a function of pH from  $\text{Fe}(\text{bipy})_3^{3+}$ . a)  $\text{RuO}_2$  powder (30 mg/100 ml solution); b) Colloidal  $\text{RuO}_2$  (4 mg/100 ml solution); c) Catalyst free solution.

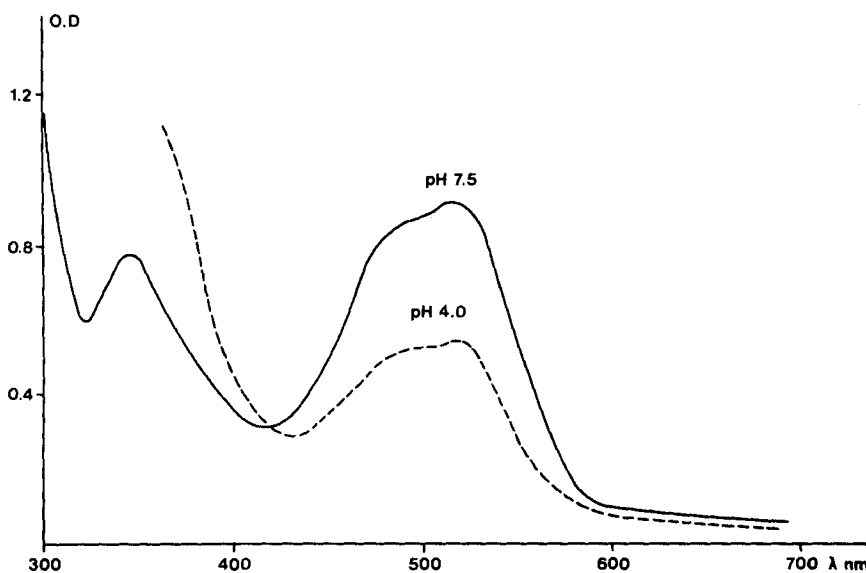
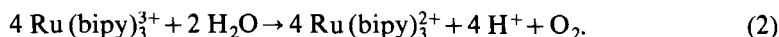
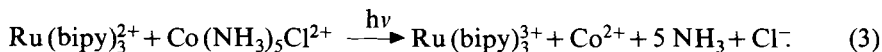


Fig.5. Absorption spectrum of the product obtained after mixing  $10^{-3}\text{M}$   $\text{Fe}(\text{bipy})_3(\text{ClO}_4)_3$  with aqueous solution of a buffer containing 30 mg  $\text{RuO}_2$  in 100 ml. a) pH=7.5; b) pH=4.0.

In the light of the results obtained with the  $\text{Fe}(\text{bipy})_3^{3+}$  system it seemed interesting to examine the pH profile for the  $\text{O}_2$  evolution from the analogous ruthenium complex  $\text{Ru}(\text{bipy})_3^{3+}$  [4] [5] [7] which follows the equation



In these experiments  $\text{Ru}(\text{bipy})_3^{3+}$  was produced in a photo-induced oxidation [4] [5] of the bivalent complex by  $\text{Co}(\text{III})(\text{NH}_3)_5\text{Cl}^{2+}$



This photo redox reaction is irreversible since the reduced cobalt complex is rapidly destroyed through ligand loss and formation of  $\text{Co}^{2+}$  aquoions [11].

Experimental results are shown in *Figure 6*. The conversion efficiency refers here to the initial concentration of  $\text{Co}(\text{NH}_3)_5\text{Cl}^{2+}$ . It corresponds to the amount of oxygen produced after 3 hours of irradiation divided by one fourth of the quantity of  $\text{Co}(\text{NH}_3)_5\text{Cl}^{2+}$  employed. The oxygen generation is cyclic with respect to the ruthenium complex [4] [5]. When  $\text{RuO}_2$  powder is employed as a catalyst, we find a maximum corresponding to 30% stoichiometric conversion at pH 4.8. The efficiency decreases sharply towards higher pH values, and more gradually towards lower pH values. Interestingly, the colloidal  $\text{RuO}_2$ , though present at much lower concentration than the powder, generates  $\text{O}_2$  more efficiently around pH 3, matching the performance of the  $\text{RuO}_2$  powder at the other pH values.

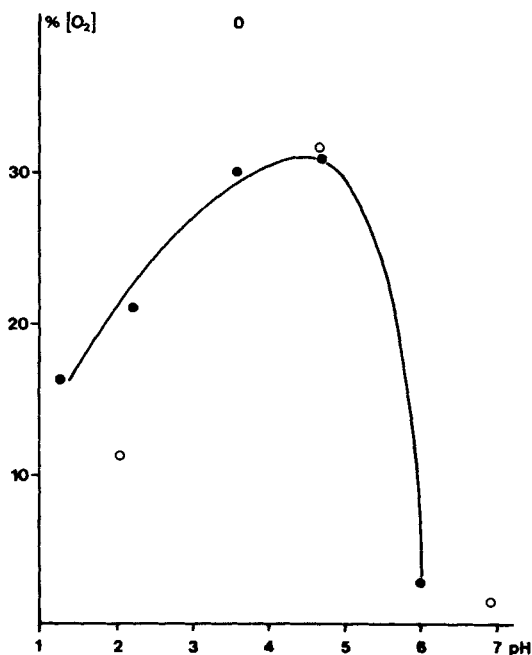


Fig. 6. Oxygen yields from the photolysis of  $10^{-4}\text{M}$   $\text{Ru}(\text{bipy})_3^{3+}$  in the presence of  $10^{-2}\text{M}$   $[\text{Co}(\text{NH}_3)_5\text{Cl}]\text{Cl}_2$  as a function of pH. ●: 30 mg/100 ml  $\text{RuO}_2$  powder, ○: 4 mg/100 ml  $\text{RuO}_2$  colloidal (3 hours photolysis with a 150 W projector lamp).

**Discussion.** - The reduction of  $ML_3^{3+}$  salts, where M stands for Fe, Ru, Os and L for phenanthroline or bipyridyl and their derivatives occurs homogeneously in alkaline solutions [12]. For  $Fe(bipy)_3^{3+}$ , detailed mechanistic investigations have been carried out by *Nord & Weinberg* [13] [14] and *Shafirovich et al.* [15]. It is agreed that the primary step involves addition of  $OH^-$  to the complex. The yield of  $O_2$  depends strongly on the pH, maximum amounts corresponding to 75% stoichiometric conversion being obtained at pH 13.

The remarkable effect introduced by the  $RuO_2$  catalyst is that it reduces the pH requirement for  $O_2$  evolution by 6 units and renders the process quantitative. Energetically, this corresponds to a lowering of the threshold energy for the reaction by 354 mV or 8 kcal/mol. In fact, from the standard potentials of the two couples involved in the redox reaction,  $E^\circ(O_2/H_2O) = 820$  mV and  $E^\circ(Fe(bipy)_3^{3+}) - (Fe(bipy)_3^{2+}) = 980$  mV [14], the driving force of the oxygen generation reaction at pH 7 is only 160 mV/electron transferred or 3.6 kcal/equiv. in energy loss through irreversibility. It is the low overvoltage characteristic for water oxidation on  $RuO_2$  [16] that minimizes the energetic losses.

The mode of intervention of  $RuO_2$  in the oxygen generation process may be best understood in terms of electrochemical concepts. The two coupled redox reactions occurring on the  $RuO_2$  particle are depicted schematically in *Figure 7*. The particle serves as a microelectrode for which the theory of local elements [17] may be applied. The cathodic branch indicates the reduction of  $Fe(bipy)_3^{3+}$  (or  $Ru(bipy)_3^{3+}$ ) while the anodic branch corresponds to water oxidation. Two heterogeneous electron transfer reactions across the  $RuO_2$ /water interface are involved in the overall reaction described by equ. (1) or (2). A decrease in the particle potential results in an increase of the rate of the cathodic electron transfer process, while

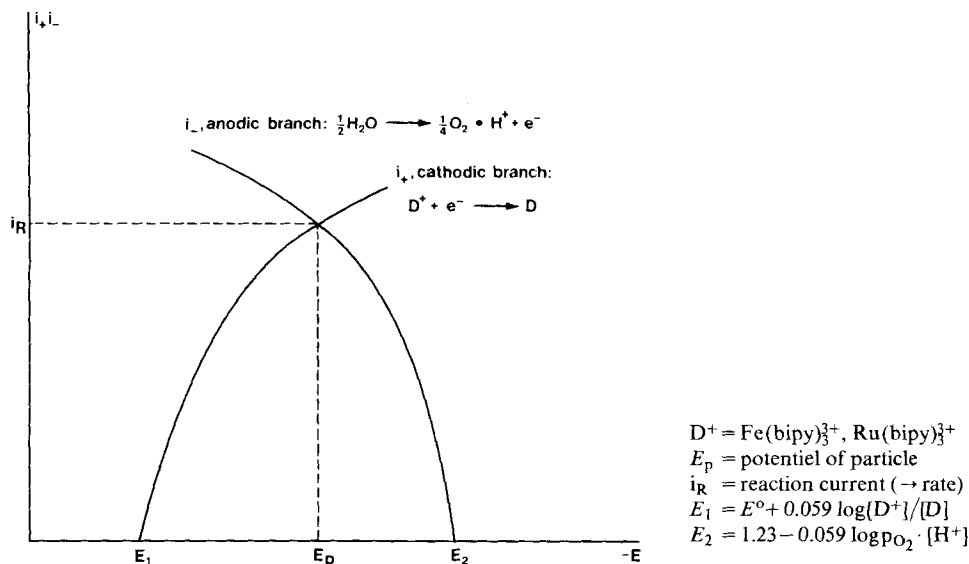
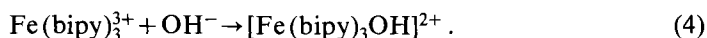


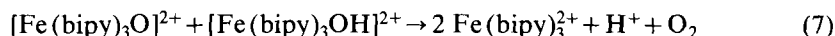
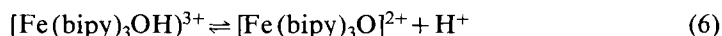
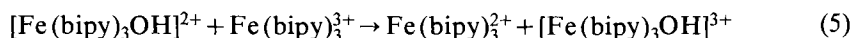
Fig. 7. Current-voltage diagram for coupled redox-processes occurring on the  $RuO_2$  particle

that of the anodic reaction is retarded. Under steady state conditions, the  $\text{RuO}_2$  will assume a potential  $E_p$  which is given by the intersection of the two current-voltage curves. At this potential a current  $i_R$  will flow which defines the overall reaction rate. It appears that in the case of  $\text{Fe}(\text{bipy})_3^{3+}$  the driving force of 160 mV suffices to make reaction (1) occur rapidly and quantitatively. The lack of oxygen formation noted in acidic solution is expected for electrokinetic and thermodynamic reasons: The potential  $E_2$  approaches  $E_1$  or passes even to its anodic side, retarding or precluding  $\text{O}_2$  evolution reaction (1).

The drop in  $\text{O}_2$  yield, observed when the pH is increased above 8, may be explained by  $\text{OH}^-$  adduct formation [12-15] [18]:



Although the  $\text{OH}^-$  adduct may subsequently give  $\text{O}_2$ , *i.e.* via the sequence of homogeneous reactions [13] [14] [18]



the efficiency of this process is low reaching a maximum of 75% only at pH 13 [15]. It appears that the colloidal  $\text{RuO}_2$  can intervene in these reactions more efficiently than the powder, since an  $\text{O}_2$  yield of 90% is obtained at pH 9. On the other hand, relatively low yields are observed with this catalyst in neutral solution. More experiments are required to elucidate further this interesting effect.

It was pointed out above that in acidic solution, *i.e.* pH 4, the redox catalyst is ineffective in mediating  $\text{O}_2$  generation. Instead,  $\text{Fe}(\text{bipy})_3^{3+}$  can undergo hydrolysis (equ. 4) and subsequent electron transfer (equ. 5). The dashed curve in *Figure 5* may in fact represent the absorption spectrum of the intermediate  $[\text{Fe}(\text{bipy})_3\text{OH}]^{3+}$ . The latter could play an important role in as much as it produces oxygen in the presence of  $\text{RuO}_2$  if the conditions are thermodynamically favorable, *i.e.* at pH 7. Once it is deprotonated, homogeneous pathways, equ. 7, may be favoured.

It is instructive to compare the results obtained with the  $\text{Fe}(\text{bipy})_3^{3+}$  system to the photolysis data in *Figure 6*, where  $\text{O}_2$  was evolved from the  $\text{Ru}(\text{bipy})_3^{3+}$  complex according to equ. 2. We note first that this reaction occurs also in catalyst free solution, the yield attaining a maximum (about 80%) at pH 9 [18]. At this pH, the driving force for reaction (2) calculated from  $E^\circ(\text{Ru}(\text{bipy})_3^{3+/2+}) = 1.26 \text{ V}$  [19], is *ca.* 560 mV. Interestingly, almost the same chemical potential, *i.e.* 520 mV is required to drive reaction (1) under optimum conditions (*i.e.* pH 13).

The effect of the catalyst is to decrease the energy requirement of these two reactions, hence shifting the optimum pH to smaller values. In both cases, the pH shift is 5-6 units corresponding to a decrease of the 'overvoltage' loss of 300-360



mV. With colloidal RuO<sub>2</sub> the maximum conversion efficiency in the Ru(bipy)<sub>3</sub><sup>2+</sup> system is found at pH 3, corresponding to a driving force of only 200 mV, in very close analogy to the Fe(bipy)<sub>3</sub><sup>3+</sup> system.

Such low energetic losses make the design of a complete water splitting system, that would require only four visible photons per molecule of oxygen produced, feasible.

Fe(bipy)<sub>3</sub><sup>2+</sup> is a viable candidate to be used as a reductant in the O<sub>2</sub> producing half-cell depicted in *Figure 1*, on the left side. In the other half-cell, water is reduced to hydrogen and an electron donor D oxidized to D<sup>+</sup>. The D/D<sup>+</sup> potential has to be slightly higher than 1.0 V to provide a driving force for the cell current through which Fe(bipy)<sub>3</sub><sup>2+</sup> is oxidized to Fe(bipy)<sub>3</sub><sup>3+</sup> and D<sup>+</sup> reduced to D. Redox-sensitizers such as Ru(bipy)<sub>3</sub><sup>2+</sup> and hydrophobic derivatives with higher E° values [20] or metalloporphyrins and phthalocyanines would be suitable candidates for D. The latter should preferably be associated with the electrode to avoid mass transport problems and render the D<sup>+</sup> reduction fast.

The threshold photon energy required for the operation of such a cell is composed of the following terms

$$E_{\text{thr}} = 1.23 + E_{\text{irr}}(\text{H}_2) + E_{\text{irr}}(\text{O}_2) + \Delta E_{\text{el}}.$$

Counting 200 mV each for the irreversible energy losses in the hydrogen and oxygen generation step and 300 mV for  $\Delta E_{\text{el}}$  which drives the cell current one obtains  $E_{\text{thr}} \approx 2$  V corresponding to a wavelength of 620 nm. Such an energy converter could operate with an efficiency of 20% or more [1b] on solar light.

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