Electrochemical Nanoarchitectonics through Polyaminobenzylamine-Dodecyl Phosphate Complexes: Redox Activity and Mesoscopic Organization in Self-Assembled Nanofilms

Agustín Lorenzo, a Waldemar A. Marmisollé, a Eliana M. Maza, a,b Marcelo Ceolín a and Omar Azzaroni a

Molecular design and preparation of redox active films displaying mesoscopic levels of organization represents one of the most actively pursued research areas in nanochemistry. These mesostructured materials not only are of great interest at the fundamental level because of their unique properties but they can also be employed for a wide range of applications such as electrocatalysts, electronic devices, and electrochemical energy conversion and storage. Herein, we introduce a simple and straightforward strategy to chemically modify electrode surfaces with self-assembled electroactive polyelectrolyte-surfactant complexes. These assemblies are constituted of amino-appended polyaniline and monododecyl phosphate. The complexes were deposited by spin-coating and the films were characterized by spectroscopic and X-ray-based techniques: XRR, GISAXS, WAXS, and XPS. The films presented a well-defined lamellar structure, directed by the strong interaction between the phosphate groups and the positive charged amine groups in the polyelectrolyte. These films also displayed intrinsic electroactivity in both acidic and neutral solutions, showing that the polymer remains electroactive and ionic transport is still possible through the stratified and hydrophobic coatings. The stability and enhanced electroactivity in neutral solution make these assembled films promising building blocks for the construction of nanostructured electrochemical platforms.

Introduction

The use of ionic self-assembled polyelectrolyte-surfactant complexes in the solid state is a systematic and flexible strategy to prepare composites having interesting properties emerging from the combination of functionalities of individual blocks. 1,2 These systems are known to be good examples of bottom-up synthetic routes for the construction of complex hybrid interfaces and constitute emblematic examples of the emerging field of nanoarchitectonics. 3-6 Inside these architectures, the polyelectrolytes provide mechanical stability whereas the surfactants provide their capacity to form highly ordered mesophases. The modular formation of polyelectrolyte-surfactant complexes is versatile because of the myriad of commercially available building blocks. Among many kinds of different polyelectrolytes that can be used to form the complexes organic conducting polymers emerge as specially interesting combining structural and electrical properties. 7-9 The casting of thin films formed by conducting polyelectrolytes and surfactants offers the opportunity of producing a variety of new electroactive materials with interesting properties such as self-order and non-wetting characteristics, 10 becoming a versatile material system that contributes to the development of the thriving field of electrochemical nanoarchitectonics. 11,12 Among others, polyaniline (PANI) has been one of the most popular conducting polyelectrolytes because of its low cost and the easiness of synthesis, 13,14 making the PANI-based materials promising building blocks in the construction of electroactive complex interfaces for applications from biosensing to energy storage. 15 Although some intrinsic mesoscopic ordering has been reported for the deposition of PANI on solid substrates under specific conditions, 16,17 a systematic way to produce meso-organization is to employ surfactants as structure-directors with some examples of surfactant-induced PANI mesostructures. 18,19

The usual strategy to form mesostructured films from polyelectrolytes and surfactants consists on dissolving each component separately (usually in aqueous solutions), then co-precipitating the electrostatic complex by mixing, re-dissolving the hydrophobic precipitate in a suitable organic solvent and finally depositing the surfactant-polyelectrolyte complex on...
solid surfaces by spin-coating or drop-casting. Although chemical synthesis of PANI is simple and well-known, its subsequent processability in aqueous dispersions poses complex challenges.\textsuperscript{20} For this reason, PANI oligomers have been proposed as an alternative material due to their higher solubility. The self-assembly of PANI oligomers with bulky surfactants has been reported.\textsuperscript{21,22} Moreover, depending on casting conditions, films with different well-defined structures can be achieved.\textsuperscript{21,22} However, we have recently reported the chemical synthesis of polyaniline having pendant additional amino groups from the oxidative polymerization of 3-aminobenzylamine (PABA).\textsuperscript{23} This electroactive polymer presents higher solubility in acidic solutions making possible to use its dispersions for layer-by-layer assembly with polyanions. Additionally, PABA also displays enhanced electroactivity in neutral solutions compared with PANI.\textsuperscript{23,24} Owing to its improved processability in aqueous solution, PABA seems to be a better candidate than PANI for the preparation of electrostatically-driven complexes with surfactants.

On the other hand, the particular interaction between protonated amines and phosphate anions has been extensively recognized. The association of amines and phosphate anions plays a key role in the self-assembly of multiple biological supramolecular structures, such as the aggregates of proteins in biofilms,\textsuperscript{25,26} and the nuclear aggregates of polynucleins is many replicating cells.\textsuperscript{27,28} Recently, it has been demonstrated that the aggregation of polyallylamine hydrochloride (PAH) and phosphates from solution can be used for the reversible modification different substrates.\textsuperscript{29} NMR studies indicate that electrostatic interactions between PAH and phosphates are present in the whole pH range in which amines are protonated. Moreover, phosphates produce aggregates more efficiently than other polyvalent anions and even it has been suggested that protonated amines induces an additional dissociation of phosphate anions.\textsuperscript{30} Recently, we have shown that phosphates anions interact much more strongly with charged amines than similar divalent anions, due to the effectiveness of hydrogen bonding interactions, and this association induces both higher protonation degree of amines and dissociation degree of phosphates.\textsuperscript{31}

In this work, we present a simple method to obtain self-assembled electroactive nanofilms formed by polyaminoazobenzylamines (PABA) and sodium monododecyl phosphate (DP) by combining the specific amine-phosphate supramolecular interaction with the structuring driving force of the polyelectrolyte-surfactant complexation. By a particular interplay of interactions, it is possible to obtain both well-defined lamellar structure and good electroactivity in neutral solutions, which make these nanofilms promissory platforms for the construction of functional bioelectrochemical devices.

**Experimental**

**Chemicals**

Ammonium persulfate (APS, 98%), 3-aminobenzylamine (ABA, 99%), and sodium monododecyl phosphate (DP, 98%) were purchased from Sigma Aldrich. HCl, KCl and sulfuric acid were purchased from Andra. All chemicals were of analytical or reagent grade and they were employed without further purification. All solutions were prepared with Milli-Q water (18.2 MΩ cm).

**PABA Synthesis**

Poly[3-aminobenzylamine](PABA) was synthesized by chemical oxidation of ABA with APS.\textsuperscript{23} Briefly, a 10 mM ABA solution was prepared in water. Then, solid APS was added to form a 10 mM solution. After 1 hour of continuous stirring, the pH was shifted to 10 by adding 10% KOH. Then, the solution was centrifuged and the precipitate was re-dispersed in 0.5 M HCl up to the same initial volume.

**Preparation of the Assembled Films**

A 20 mM solution of DP was prepared in 0.5 HCl. The complexes PABA-DP were prepared by mixing the PABA and DP solutions in different proportions. The ratios PABA:DP chosen were 1:2, 1:5 and 1:10, where the surfactant was always in excess. The dispersions formed a precipitate and were centrifuged at 7000 rpm and the supernatant discarded. The precipitates were kept overnight under vacuum at 45°C. The dry-solid product was dissolved again in 400 µL of DMF and spin-coated onto Au or Si (100) substrates for thin film assembly. All the films, independently of the amount of sample and the substrate used, were prepared under the same spin-coating program. The entire film preparation procedure is depicted in Scheme 1.

**Film Characterization**

Fourier transform Infrared Spectroscopy in the attenuated total reflection mode (ATR-FTIR) was performed using a Varian 600 FTIR spectrometer equipped with a ZnSe ATR crystal with a resolution of 4 cm\textsuperscript{-1}.

Atomic Force Microscopy (AFM) was performed with a Veeco Multimode AFM connected to a Nanoscope V controller was used to image the substrate. AFM measurements were performed in tapping mode in air using a TESP-V2 (Bruker, K = 42 N m\textsuperscript{-1}) cantilever.

Contact angles were measured using a Ramé-Hart contact angle system (Model 290). The average contact angle value was obtained by dispensing 1 µL-droplets of Milli-Q water at five different positions on the film-modified substrates.

Cyclic voltammetry (CV) was performed using a Gamry REF600 potentiostat. Gold electrodes were prepared by sputtering on glass substrates employing a thin layer of Ti to improve the adhesion. The electrochemical cell was a three electrodes Teflon cell with 2 ml volume capacity. The Au working electrodes sealed with an o-ring defining an electroactive area of 0.145 cm\textsuperscript{2}. The counter electrode was a Pt wire and a Ag/AgCl (3 M NaCl) electrode was employed as reference.

**X-Ray Characterization**

X-ray Photoelectron Spectroscopy (XPS) was performed using a SPECS SAGE HR 100 system spectrometer. A Mg Ka (1253.6 eV) X-ray source was employed operating at 12.5kV and 10mA. The take-off angle was 90° and operating pressure was 8 \times 10\textsuperscript{-8}.
Results and discussion

XPS

Chemical characterization of the self-assembled films was performed by XPS. The spectra in the N1s core region were determined for PABA (drop-casted from acidic aqueous solution) and the assembled films with DP onto Au. The N1s core spectrum level of PABA can be deconvoluted into 5 peaks as previously reported. The backbone N atoms are considered to contribute with 4 bands corresponding to the uncharged N species and positive N species from oxidized secondary amines and protonated imine (Fig. 1). The N1s core spectra of the films presented similar characteristics. Detailed assignments and proportion of the different N species are presented as Supplementary Information (ESI). For the three films studied the proportion of positive charged quinone-like moieties increases if compared with PABA (Fig. 1), suggesting that the interaction with DP stabilizes this oxidized form. As it was reported for the LbL assembly of PABA with polyanions, the increment in the proportion of oxidized forms of N (polaron and imine structures, BE > 400 eV) when interacting with the surfactant in the films suggests that the DP could also act as dopant improving its electroactivity.

Quantitative composition analysis was performed studying the P2p core region of the XPS spectra (Fig. 1). The XPS spectrum of diammonium hydrogen phosphate was used as reference to obtain the correct relative cross sections of nitrogen and phosphorus. No significant differences were obtained in the composition of the films assembled from solutions with different initial proportions of DP (Table 1). Furthermore, when considering just the positive nitrogen forms (BE > 400 eV, see ESI), the values of the ratio of positive N to phosphate result 1.0, 0.9 and 1.1 for 1:10, 1:5 and 1:2 PABA-DP films respectively. This is consistent with an intrinsic charge compensation mechanism within the films; i.e. the positive charges on PABA chains are compensated and stabilized by interaction with the negatively charged phosphate groups of the surfactant (assumed to be singly charged due to the acidic pH of the assembling conditions for the preparation of the PABA-DP complexes).

| Sample  | Thicknessa | νCH2 asym | νCH2 sym | N/P Ratiob | Contact Angle |
|---------|------------|-----------|----------|------------|---------------|
| DP      | -          | 2916 cm⁻¹ | -        | 1.5        | -             |
| PABA-DP 1:10 | 34 nm | 2922 cm⁻¹ | 2.7      | 1.5        | 107°          |
| PABA-DP 1:5 | 22 nm | 2924 cm⁻¹ | 3.1      | 1.4        | 102°          |
| PABA-DP 1:2 | 10 nm | 2927 cm⁻¹ | 3.6      | 1.3        | 85°           |

a Determined by ellipsometry (ESI). bFrom the FTIR spectra. cFrom XPS analysis.

Fig. 1. N1s XPS spectra of PABA (top) and PABA-DP 1:10 (bottom) films deposited on Au. Grey lines are experimental spectra; red lines mean the global fittings. Chemical assignments for each component are presented in the plot. Inset: P2p XPS signal for the assembled film.

Table 1. Summary of some features for the PABA-DP self-assembled films.

Scheme 1. Representation of the preparation procedure and structure of the films.
Summing up, our XPS results confirm that the self-assembled films are stabilized by electrostatic interactions between the positive charged amine groups of PABA and the negative charged groups of DP.

**ATR-FTIR**

The self-assembled films were further characterized by ATR-FTIR. The ATR-FTIR spectra of PABA, DP and self-assembled films on gold substrates are shown in Fig. 2. Spectra of the films were not rescaled, so the different intensities are due to the dissimilar film thicknesses. The values of the film thickness determined by spectroscopic ellipsometry are presented in Table 1 (see ESI).

In the case of PABA, the band at 1135 cm$^{-1}$ has been assigned to both the aromatic C-H in-plane bending \cite{34,35} and a N=Q=N stretching mode.\cite{34,36} This band is related to other band at 1612 cm$^{-1}$, which has been assigned to other N=Q=N stretching.\cite{34-37} There are also other less important bands at 1455 cm$^{-1}$, assigned to aromatic C=C\cite{35} or C-N stretching, and at 1500 cm$^{-1}$, which has been assigned to N-B-N stretching.\cite{36} or Q=N-B stretching.\cite{37} The characteristics of the IR of PABA suggest that it presents a high degree of oxidized quinone-imine-like units, in accordance with XPS results.

Some characteristic bands of organic phosphate also appear in the region 800 to 1500 cm$^{-1}$ (Fig. 2 right). The bands at 1030-1090 cm$^{-1}$ has been assigned to P-O stretching modes in POC moieties\cite{38} whereas the bands at about 950 cm$^{-1}$ are due to P-OH stretching modes.\cite{38} Bands at about 1150-1250 cm$^{-1}$ are assigned to P=O stretching.\cite{39}

Other bands at 1100-1190 cm$^{-1}$ could be assigned to C-C and C-O stretching and the intense band at 1470 cm$^{-1}$ would be due to HCH scissoring modes.\cite{40} However, the interesting information comes from the 3000 cm$^{-1}$ region arising from C-H stretching (Fig. 2 left). The bands at about 2850 and 2920 cm$^{-1}$ correspond to symmetric and asymmetric stretching modes of methylene groups whereas the band at 2950 cm$^{-1}$ is due to C-H stretching modes of methyl groups.\cite{41} These methylene bands have been extensively employed as markers for the degree of disorder of packed aliphatic chains.\cite{42,43} As the chains become more disordered, the methylene bands shift to higher wavenumbers and get wider as a consequence of the increase of gauche conformations.\cite{42-44} This is the trend found for the PABA-DP assembled films as the proportion of DP in the starting solution decreases (Table 1). Furthermore, the relative intensity of the bands of methylene has been also employed as
a measure of order.\textsuperscript{45} As the proportion of DP in the spin-coating solution decreases, the relative intensity (asym/sym) increases (reaching a minimum in the case of the solid DP, Table 1), reinforcing the idea of a higher degree of aliphatic disorder in the PADA-DP assembled films formed by complexes obtained from dispersions with a lower proportion of surfactant.

Contact Angle

The films were also analyzed by contact angle measurements. The measurements with pure water on PABA-DP 1:2, 1:5 and 1:10 films are reported in Table 1. All systems present a hydrophobic behavior, which increases with the molar ratio of the surfactant in the spin-coating solution. The values of the contact angles for these films suggest that the interaction between the surfactant and the polymer promotes a mesostructural organization where the hydrophobic domains are exposed to the aqueous phase.

Mesosstructural organization of the PABA-DP Films

XRR

X-Ray reflectivity (XRR) measurements were carried out in order to study the out-of-plane mesostructural organization of the PABA-Surfactant films on silicon (100). Fig. 3 (a) shows the X-ray reflectivity data of the 1:5 PABA-DP self-assembled film (see also ESI). The presence of well-defined equally spaced Bragg peaks in the reflectogram of PABA-DP films indicates highly oriented lamellar structures. From the Bragg peak positions of the PABA-DP 1:2, 1:5 and 1:10 a lamellar spacing of 3.58 nm, 3.55 nm and 3.59 nm can be determined respectively. The simplest model to describe a lamellar nanostructure formed by a polyelectrolyte and a surfactant is a microphase-separated structure consisting of an ionic phase containing the polyelectrolyte chains and the ionic head groups of the surfactants and a non-ionic phase containing the hydrophobic moieties such as alkyl chains. The values of the lamellar spacing are similar to others found in literature.\textsuperscript{46} The similar values of the interlamellar spacing of the different films indicate the independence of the surfactant concentration and the order of the film structure. An interesting observation is that the reflectivity diagrams also show co-peaks close to the main Bragg reflections placed at higher values of the scattering vector $q$. From the co-peak positions of the PABA-DP 1:2, 1:5 and 1:10 a lamellar spacing of 3.27 nm, 3.30 nm and 3.26 nm can be determined respectively for the partner phase. The smaller lamellar spacing and the fact that the intensity relation of the co-peak and the main peak is more important at higher surfactant concentration strongly suggests that the companion phase might be formed by the surfactant. The difference between the values of the lamellar spacing with and without polyelectrolyte gives an estimate of the width that occupies PABA in the lamella. The average value of just 0.28 nm indicates that PABA chains are placed almost perpendicular to the axis defined by the surfactant chains, parallel to the lamellar plane.

Full thickness of the films was obtained by the analysis of the Fourier transformation of the XRR reflectivity curves provided by Bridou et al.\textsuperscript{47} The Fourier Transformation curves (Fig. 3 (b)) show a series of peaks that are equidistantly separated with a decay of the intensity of the peaks. The distance between the peaks has an average of 3.26 nm corresponding to the distance obtained for the interlamellar spacing. The number of lamella stacked in each film (and hence, the thickness of the film) can be obtained as the limit when the peak intensity reaches the noise level in the Fourier Transformed Curve. For PABA-DP 1:10 film 13 peaks and a film thickness of 43 nm can be obtained, for PABA-DP 1:5, 8 peaks and a film thickness of 32 nm can be obtained whereas for PABA-DP 1:2 film only 2 not so well defined peaks and a thickness of approximately 10 nm can be deduced in reasonable agreement with thickness values determined by ellipsometry (Table 1). The increasing concentration of DP increases the thickness of the film deposited by spin-coating, allowing us to tune the thickness of the film obtained by changing the concentration of the surfactant used to precipitate it.

The films were also studied by AFM in order to obtain information of the topography. For all films, the AFM images show that surfaces are smooth with a surface roughness not higher than two stacked lamellas (Fig. 3 (d)), indicating that films are mainly homogenous.

GISAXS

GISAXS experiments were performed with an incident angle of 0.21\textdegree to maximize the signal arising from the film (Fig. 3 (c)). The GISAXS patterns obtained for PABA-DP 1:2, PABA-DP 1:5 and PABA-DP 1:10 films show the presence of intense bright spots placed along the q direction indicating that the lamellar structures of these films are mainly oriented in a direction parallel to the substrate (see ESI, Fig. S5). A halo starting from the q direction is also noticeable whose intensity increases with the amount of DP surfactant. The presence of the halo indicates that the lamellar domains, although mainly oriented parallel to the substrate, have an increasing degree of misorientation.

WAXS

The PABA-surfactant complexes dissolved in DMF were deposited on Mylar substrate to obtain information about the order at atomic length scale by WAXS (see ESI, Fig. S6). It was suggested that Bragg peaks in the region around 15 nm\textsuperscript{-1} should be representative of the lateral order of aliphatic chains.\textsuperscript{48-50} The results showed the absence of sharp reflections peaks in the region between 14 nm\textsuperscript{-1} and 18 nm\textsuperscript{-1} indicating the absence of crystalline regions within the films.

Electrochemical Response of PABA-DP self-assembled films

This study was carried out to explore the electrochemical response of PABA-DP complexes. The films were spin-coated over Au substrates in order to obtain PABA-DP-modified...
The voltammograms in acidic solution show a main redox couple at about 0.43 V, in excellent agreement with that reported for electrochemically synthesized PABA in this medium (Fig. 4).\textsuperscript{24} The electrochemical response was higher (higher currents) for lower content of DP in the assembling solution, but it was stable to potential cycling in all cases (Fig. S5, ESI). These results indicate that PABA remains electroactive within the assemblies with this highly hydrophobic non-electroactive counterpart. As the electron transfer across the films need not only the electron propagation but also ionic transport to keep the local electroneutrality, the structure of the assemblies must allow some kind of ionic movement. Charge neutralization could be performed by counterions or co-ions. In the case of PANI-like materials, the oxidation of the totally reduced form (leucoemeraldine to emeraldine) occurs co-ions. In the case of PANI-like materials, the oxidation of the totally reduced form (leucoemeraldine to emeraldine) occurs.

Independently of the charge transport mechanism, the higher lamellar order parallel to the electrode surface of assemblies prepared from solutions with higher proportion of surfactant evidently hinders charge movement across the film, lowering the net voltammetric current (Fig. 4), as already observed in other mesostructured electroactive systems.\textsuperscript{24} PANI shows an excellent electroactivity in highly acidic solutions, but it rapidly decreases as the pH of the solutions shifts to neutral. Contrarily to PANI, PABA has been reported to show an appreciably good electroactivity in neutral solution, both when copolymerized with a low proportion of aniline\textsuperscript{24} as well as when assembled LbL with anionic polyelectrolytes.\textsuperscript{23} The interest for the electroactivity at about pH 7 comes from the potentialities of these systems to be employed as redox platforms in bioelectronic devices, as the biochemical components (proteins, aptamers, and enzymes) are naturally designed to operate efficiently at physiological pH. So, the electroactivity of the PABA-DP-modified electrodes was also evaluated in buffer-free 0.1 M KCl (pH 6.5) by cyclic voltammetry. Fig. 5 shows the voltammograms for the 1:10 film. Similar results were obtained for the other proportions. The voltammograms obtained showed a linear relation between the peak current and the sweep rate, which correspond to the electron transfer of a surface-confined redox couple (Fig. 5).\textsuperscript{25} The main redox couple clearly shifts to about 0.2 V as previously reported for similar systems.\textsuperscript{24} Independently of the proportion of DP in the assembling solutions, all the film-modified electrodes presented similar
values of the voltammetric current, lower than in acidic solution. However, they all presented a stable redox response, which indicates that the polymer remains electroactive in the environment provided by the surfactant even at neutral pH. The electrochemical behavior in neutral solution was further studied by evaluating the ability to mediate the electron transfer to an external redox couple. Fe(CN)$_6^{3-/4-}$ was employed as a model of electrochemical partner as its electrochemical behavior is well-known and its redox potential is about that of the main couple on the PABA assemblies in 0.1 M KCl (Fig. 6). The results show that the three films prepared, independently of the amount of surfactant used, have a similar ability to transfer electrons to (and from) the redox couple. The systems have a quasi-reversible response. However, the voltammetric current is about 10% of that obtained on a clean Au electrode. The reasons for that could be that the effective area for the Fe(CN)$_6^{4-/3-}$ electron transfer is significantly lower or the electron transfer on the surface is much slower. The dependence of the voltammetric current on the sweep rate indicates that the global charge transfer process is limited by semi-infinite diffusion of the redox couple in the solution (Fig. 6). This suggest that the lower current density observed on the PABA-DP films compared with gold is due to a lower electroactive area. This is consistent with the presence of small electroactive polymer domains exposed in the surface of the films. The high contact angle values support this idea, as indicate that the surface is mainly hydrophobic; suggesting the presence of large patches in which the surfactant tails are exposed to the solution. The similarity of the voltammetric responses in neutral solution in the absence of redox couple for the different films also suggest that the effectively connected fraction of electroactive material would be involved in the charge transport to the redox probe as they all yield the same voltammetric currents in the Fe(CN)$_6^{4-/3-}$ solution (Fig. 6).

Of course, the presence of uncoated regions could also explain this fact. Although the films observed by AFM seem to be homogenous, the presence of pinholes cannot be discarded from the structural characterization. To evaluate the effect of the possible uncoated regions or pinholes, the under potential deposition (UPD) of Cu (II) on both clean and modified gold electrodes was carried out (ESI). The electrodes were exposed to a 0.06 mM copper sulfate solution in 0.5 M H$_2$SO$_4$ and linear sweep voltammetry was performed scanning the potential in the cathodic direction up to a limit value higher than the required for the massive deposition of Cu. Then, the scan was reversed to the initial potential value. The integrated voltammetric charge of the anodic peak due to the redissolution of the deposited Cu measured on the PABA-DP modified electrodes was compared to the value obtained for uncoated gold for estimating the fraction of metal accessible for the deposition. The results show that more than 95% of the surface is blocked for Cu deposition, so the presence of exposed metal regions could be practically discarded, reinforcing the notion that the electron transfer takes place at the surface of the self-assembled films.

The characterization obtained by the X-Ray techniques shows that the increase of the molar ratio of the surfactant allows obtaining films thicker and with a better alignment of the polyelectrolyte parallel to the substrate. Those effects should work simultaneously to inhibit the capacity of the system to transfer electrons. In the films the component responsible for transferring electrons is the conducting polymer PABA whereas the intercalated DP in the middle of the polyelectrolyte chains should restrain the capacity to transfer electrons. The lamellar structure obtained from the combination of these components should neglect the connectivity between the chains and this effect should increase with the number of layers. However as the system gets thicker and more ordered, it keeps its electroactivity. To account for this, the lamellas obtained should be visualized not as infinite layers that occupy the whole surface area of the substrate, but as if they are formed by micro lamellas. These micro-domains might have imperfections and edge effects where certain number of polymer chains can end up making connections between the different layers of PABA. These connections between different polymer layers are responsible of keeping the conducting properties of the stacked films.

**Conclusions**

In this work we have prepared polyelectrolyte-surfactant complexes with different relations of surfactant and polymer. After spin-coating, the films presented a well-defined lamellar structure, directed by the strong interaction between the phosphate groups of DP and the positive charged ammonium groups in the polyelectrolyte. The amounts of surfactant used to precipitate the electroactive polymer allowed obtaining different film thickness between 10 and 45 nm. Also, as proved by GISAXS, the proportion of surfactant works as a driving force to order the lamellas parallel to the substrate.
The films obtained displayed intrinsic electroactivity in both acidic and neutral solutions. The self-assembled films were also able to manage the electron transfer to a soluble reversible redox couple. These results suggest that although the increment of the surfactant concentration yields more ordered stratified and hydrophobic coatings, the PANI-like polymer remains electroactive and ionic transport is still possible through the film. The enhanced electroactivity in neutral solution of PABA as compared with PANI also makes these assembled films good platforms for the integration of bioelectroactive proteins, such as glucose oxidase. Furthermore, due to their high hydrophobicity, they could also provide adequate environments for membrane or membrane-associated proteins, which may pave the way to new biomanoarchitectonic devices.

The present results also open the door to further studies involving the assemblies of PABA and other surfactants in order to enhance their conducting properties for the design of highly connected films as electroactive components in sensing or energy devices.

Conflicts of interest
There are no conflicts to declare.

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Hydrophobic stratified mesostructured films of amino-appended polyaniline and alkyl-phosphates present stable intrinsic electroactivity in neutral aqueous solution.