

# Photoabsorption and photodissociation in molecular nitrogen

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# Declaration

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This thesis is an account of research undertaken between February 2006 and November 2010 at The Research School of Physics and Engineering, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.

Except where acknowledged in the customary manner, the material presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge, original and has not been submitted in whole or part for a degree in any university.

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# Abstract

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The photoabsorption and photodissociation of molecular nitrogen at extreme-ultraviolet wavelengths has been precisely modelled by solution of the coupled Schrödinger equation, for the purposes of elucidating the spectroscopy and predissociation dynamics of N<sub>2</sub> and for practical application to its photochemistry. The physically realistic model is capable of reliable extrapolation beyond the database of spectroscopic information necessary for its construction, to energies in the range of 100 000 to 118 000 cm<sup>-1</sup> and, with some caveats, beyond this; and for any temperature, rotational state, and isotopomer of N<sub>2</sub>. The model simulated spectra have an effectively-infinite resolution, and reproduce the rotational level energies of all electric-dipole-allowed <sup>1</sup>Π<sub>u</sub> and <sup>1</sup>Σ<sub>u</sub><sup>+</sup> states, and their absorption *f*-values, to spectroscopic accuracy over its entire range. The predissociated lineshapes of calculated transitions are accurately reproduced, as is the background continuum, even where a dissociation limit is crossed.

The highly perturbed spectrum is shown to arise from multi-channel effects which can only be reproduced by a coupled treatment which includes the effects of homogeneous and heterogeneous interactions. Unbound dissociative states are permitted in the model formulation and a complex of <sup>3</sup>Π<sub>u</sub> and <sup>3</sup>Σ<sub>u</sub><sup>+</sup> states is shown to be responsible for the predissociation of singlet levels via spin-orbit interaction. The spectroscopic parameters of triplet states, and the variation of <sup>1</sup>Π<sub>u</sub> predissociation rates over multiple orders of magnitude has been accurately modelled for all isotopomers and energies up to 111 000 cm<sup>-1</sup>. The transformation of the calculated dissociative wavefunctions into a basis of asymptotically well-defined atomic states allows for the calculation of their predissociation branching ratios. New and accurate determinations have been made of potential-energy curves for the coupled states, the off-diagonal matrix elements that mix them, and the electronic transition moments responsible for their optical excitation, including, in some cases, their dependence on internuclear distance.

New supporting laboratory measurements of rotationally-resolved absolute *f*-values and predissociation linewidths have been made for many transitions, some of which have not been previously observed. These various experiments employ synchrotron and laser radiation as well as electron-impact excitation, and make detections by means of a grating spectrometer, Fourier-transform spectrometer, and the detection of photofragments. Analysis of these studies is facilitated by the coupled-channels modelling, which is then informed by the resulting new data.

The characteristics of the coupled-channels model are an ideal match to the immediate need for N<sub>2</sub> spectra by photochemical modellers of planetary atmospheres, because of its realistic extensibility to variable real-world conditions. An application of the model to the atmosphere of Titan is presented here, which explains the unusual observed ratio of nitrogen isotopes in terms of the details of N<sub>2</sub> photoabsorption. Another use of modelled spectra is presented here, for the analysis of the terrestrial dayglow. The applicability of the coupled-channels model is quite broad and further investigations which utilise it are underway.



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# Contents

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|  |          |
|--|----------|
| Declaration  | iii      |
| Abstract   | v        |
| Acknowledgements   | vii      |
| <b>1 Introduction</b>  | <b>1</b> |
| <b>2 Spectroscopy of diatomic molecules</b>                                | <b>5</b> |
| 2.1 Basic symmetry properties . . . . .                                    | 5        |
| 2.2 Born-Oppenheimer solution of the Schrödinger equation . . . . .        | 7        |
| 2.3 Particle spin . . . . .  | 12       |
| 2.4 Nonadiabatic and electronic perturbations . . . . .                    | 13       |
| 2.5 Rotational perturbations . . . . .                                     | 15       |
| 2.5.1 $L$ -uncoupling . . . . .  | 17       |
| 2.5.2 $S$ -uncoupling . . . . .  | 17       |
| 2.5.3 Spin-electronic perturbations . . . . .                              | 18       |
| 2.6 Spin-orbit perturbations . . . . .                                     | 18       |
| 2.7 Parameterised energy levels . . . . .                                  | 20       |
| 2.7.1 $\Lambda$ -doubling . . . . .  | 21       |
| 2.8 Electric dipole transitions . . . . .                                  | 22       |
| 2.8.1 Definitions . . . . .  | 22       |
| 2.8.2 Electric dipole selection rules . . . . .                            | 24       |
| 2.8.3 Factorisation of the transition probability . . . . .                | 25       |
| 2.8.4 Intensity interference effects . . . . .                             | 27       |
| 2.8.5 Experimental $f$ -values . . . . .                                   | 29       |
| 2.8.6 Instrument function and pressure dependence of $f$ -values . . . . . | 31       |
| 2.9 Electron excitation . . . . .  | 32       |
| 2.9.1 Generalised oscillator strengths . . . . .                           | 33       |
| 2.10 Dissociation . . . . .  | 35       |
| 2.10.1 Fano lineshapes . . . . .   | 36       |
| 2.11 Solving the coupled Schrödinger equation . . . . .                    | 38       |
| 2.11.1 Basic formulation . . . . .   | 38       |
| 2.11.2 The renormalised Numerov method . . . . .                           | 40       |
| 2.11.3 All closed channels . . . . .                                       | 41       |
| 2.11.4 Boundary conditions for open channel wavefunctions . . . . .        | 42       |
| 2.11.5 Calculation of the open-channel wavefunctions . . . . .             | 46       |
| 2.12 Coupled channels cross sections . . . . .                             | 47       |
| 2.12.1 Band models . . . . .   | 48       |
| 2.13 Rydberg states . . . . .  | 49       |

---

|          |   |            |
|----------|---|------------|
| <b>3</b> | <b>Spectroscopy of N<sub>2</sub></b>  | <b>53</b>  |
| 3.1      | Overview of experimental techniques . . . . .   | 53         |
| 3.2      | The ground state . . . . .  | 56         |
| 3.3      | $^1\Sigma_u^+$ and $^1\Pi_u$ states . . . . .   | 56         |
| 3.3.1    | Line assignments . . . . .  | 60         |
| 3.3.2    | Oscillator strengths . . . . .  | 62         |
| 3.3.3    | Linewidths and lifetimes . . . . .  | 63         |
| 3.4      | $^3\Pi_u$ states . . . . .  | 65         |
| 3.5      | Some previous quantitative models of N <sub>2</sub> . . . . .                           | 68         |
| 3.5.1    | Local perturbation models . . . . .   | 68         |
| 3.5.2    | Lefebvre-Brion . . . . .  | 68         |
| 3.5.3    | Stahel <i>et al.</i> . . . . .  | 68         |
| 3.5.4    | Spelsberg and Meyer . . . . .   | 69         |
| 3.5.5    | Heterogeneous models . . . . .  | 70         |
| 3.5.6    | Australian National University models . . . . .   | 71         |
| <b>4</b> | <b>KEK absorption measurements</b>  | <b>73</b>  |
| 4.1      | Experimental design and procedure . . . . .   | 73         |
| 4.2      | Analysis of the spectra . . . . .   | 75         |
| 4.3      | Results . . . . .   | 77         |
| <b>5</b> | <b>SOLEIL absorption measurements</b>   | <b>85</b>  |
| 5.1      | Fourier-transform spectroscopy . . . . .  | 85         |
| 5.2      | Experimental design and procedure . . . . .   | 89         |
| 5.3      | Analysis of the spectra . . . . .   | 93         |
| 5.4      | Column density calibration . . . . .  | 96         |
| 5.5      | Temperature calibration . . . . .   | 99         |
| 5.6      | Results . . . . .   | 100        |
| <b>6</b> | <b>Coupled-channels model of N<sub>2</sub></b>  | <b>111</b> |
| 6.1      | Model parameters . . . . .  | 111        |
| 6.1.1    | The ground state . . . . .  | 111        |
| 6.1.2    | Excited state potential-energy curves . . . . .   | 112        |
| 6.1.3    | State interactions and electronic transition moments . . . . .                          | 113        |
| 6.2      | Optimisation procedure . . . . .  | 114        |
| 6.2.1    | Optimisation of energy levels . . . . .   | 115        |
| 6.2.2    | Optimisation of $f$ -values and linewidths . . . . .                                    | 118        |
| 6.3      | Validation of the coupled-channels technique . . . . .                                  | 119        |
| 6.4      | $f$ -parity $^1\Pi_u$ model . . . . .   | 122        |
| 6.4.1    | $^1\Pi_u \sim ^1\Pi_u$ electronic perturbations . . . . .                               | 123        |
| 6.4.2    | Inclusion of $c_4$ $^1\Pi_u$ . . . . .  | 125        |
| 6.4.3    | Optimisation of energy levels . . . . .   | 127        |
| 6.4.4    | Optimisation of $f$ -values . . . . .   | 129        |
| 6.5      | $e$ -parity $^1\Pi_u + ^1\Sigma_u^+$ model . . . . .                                    | 131        |
| 6.5.1    | $^1\Sigma_u^+ \sim ^1\Sigma_u^+$ electronic interactions . . . . .                      | 133        |
| 6.5.2    | $^1\Sigma_u^+ \sim ^1\Pi_u$ rotational interactions . . . . .                           | 133        |
| 6.5.3    | A perturbation between $o_3$ $^1\Pi_u(v = 6)$ and $b'$ $^1\Sigma_u^+(v = 20)$ . . . . . | 134        |
| 6.5.4    | Optimisation of energy levels . . . . .   | 136        |

---

|          |  |            |
|----------|--|------------|
| 6.5.5    | Optimisation of $f$ -values . . . . .  | 140        |
| 6.6      | ${}^3\Pi_u + {}^3\Sigma_u^+$ model . . . . .   | 143        |
| 6.6.1    | ${}^3\Pi_{u,\Omega=1}$ states . . . . .  | 143        |
| 6.6.2    | ${}^3\Pi_{u,\Omega=1} + {}^3\Sigma_{u,1}^+ + {}^1\Pi_u$ . . . . .                      | 148        |
| 6.6.3    | ${}^3\Pi_{u,\Omega=0,1,2} + {}^3\Sigma_{u,1}^+ + {}^1\Pi_u + {}^1\Sigma_u^+$ . . . . . | 152        |
| 6.6.4    | Predissociation of $D {}^3\Sigma_u^+$ . . . . .  | 165        |
| 6.7      | Closer analysis of some model results . . . . .  | 169        |
| <b>7</b> | <b>Applications of the <math>N_2</math> model</b> . . . . .                            | <b>177</b> |
| 7.1      | Source of nitrogen isotope anomaly in HCN in the atmosphere of Titan . . . . .         | 177        |
| 7.2      | Radiative properties of $N_2 c'_4 {}^1\Sigma_u^+ - X {}^1\Sigma_g^+$ . . . . .         | 181        |
| 7.3      | Analysis of terrestrial $N_2$ dayglow . . . . .  | 185        |
| 7.4      | Electron energy-loss spectra . . . . .   | 189        |
| 7.4.1    | Experimental generalised oscillator-strengths . . . . .                                | 190        |
| 7.4.2    | Coupled-channels generalised oscillator-strengths . . . . .                            | 192        |
| 7.4.3    | Optimised generalised transition moments . . . . .                                     | 193        |
| <b>8</b> | <b>Conclusions</b> . . . . .   | <b>195</b> |
| <b>A</b> | <b>Appendices</b> . . . . .  | <b>199</b> |
| A.1      | Abstracts of publications . . . . .  | 199        |
| A.2      | Results of analysis of the SOLEIL spectra . . . . .                                    | 205        |
| A.3      | Results of the coupled-channels model . . . . .  | 213        |



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# List of Figures

---

|      |  |     |
|------|--|-----|
| 2.1  | Diabatic and adiabatic potential-energy curves . . . . .   | 14  |
| 2.2  | Discrete and dissociative excitation . . . . .   | 35  |
| 2.3  | Direct and accidental predissociation . . . . .  | 36  |
| 2.4  | Fano lineshapes . . . . .  | 37  |
| 2.5  | A coupled-channels absorption cross section . . . . .  | 48  |
| 3.1  | Electron energy-loss spectrum showing N <sub>2</sub> electronic excitation . . . . .   | 54  |
| 3.2  | Photoabsorption cross section of $b\ ^1\Pi_u(v'=5) \leftarrow X\ ^1\Sigma_g^+(v''=0)$ . . . . .  | 55  |
| 3.3  | Potential-energy curve of the N <sub>2</sub> ground-state . . . . .  | 57  |
| 3.4  | Potential-energy curves of many excited states of N <sub>2</sub> . . . . .   | 58  |
| 3.5  | Deperturbed vibrational term energies of $b'\ ^1\Sigma_u^+$ and $c'_4\ ^1\Sigma_u^+$ . . . . .   | 60  |
| 3.6  | Relative dipole strengths of $b, c_3, o_3\ ^1\Pi_u - X\ ^1\Sigma_g^+$ and oscillator strengths of $c_3\ ^1\Pi_u(v'=0) \leftarrow X\ ^1\Sigma_g^+(v''=0)$ . . . . . | 62  |
| 3.7  | Predissociation linewidths of the lowest $\ ^1\Pi_u$ states of N <sub>2</sub> . . . . .  | 63  |
| 3.8  | Potential-energy curves of $\ ^3\Pi_u$ states . . . . .  | 66  |
| 3.9  | Reduced term values of $\ ^{15}\text{N}_2\ c_3\ ^1\Pi_u(v=1)$ . . . . .  | 67  |
| 4.1  | Schematic of the extreme-ultraviolet spectrometer at KEK . . . . .   | 74  |
| 4.2  | Absorption spectrum of $o_3\ ^1\Pi_u(v'=4) \leftarrow X\ ^1\Sigma_g^+(v''=0)$ . . . . .  | 75  |
| 4.3  | Reduced term values of $o_3\ ^1\Pi_u(v=4)$ and $f$ -values of $o_3\ ^1\Pi_u(v=4)$ and $b'\ ^1\Sigma_u^+(v'=14) \leftarrow X\ ^1\Sigma_g^+(v''=0)$ . . . . .        | 78  |
| 4.4  | Predissociation linewidths of $o_3\ ^1\Pi_u(v=2)$ and $b'\ ^1\Sigma_u^+(v=17)$ . . . . .   | 79  |
| 5.1  | Schematic of a Fabry-Perot interferometer . . . . .  | 86  |
| 5.2  | Schematic of a Michelson interferometer . . . . .  | 86  |
| 5.3  | Schematic of a Fresnel interferometer . . . . .  | 90  |
| 5.4  | Instrumental broadening of SOLEIL spectra . . . . .  | 90  |
| 5.5  | Transmission spectrum of $o_3\ ^1\Pi_u(v'=4) \leftarrow X\ ^1\Sigma_g^+(v''=0)$ . . . . .  | 91  |
| 5.6  | An example transmission spectrum showing $\ ^{15}\text{N}_2$ absorption . . . . .  | 92  |
| 5.7  | Term values of $\ ^{14}\text{N}_2\ c'_5\ ^1\Sigma_u^+(v=0)$ . . . . .  | 94  |
| 5.8  | SOLEIL transmission scan showing the bandhead of $b'\ ^1\Sigma_u^+(v'=21) \leftarrow X\ ^1\Sigma_g^+(v''=0)$ . . . . .   | 95  |
| 5.9  | Standard deviation of fitted line parameters . . . . .   | 96  |
| 5.10 | Transmission spectra of $c'_5(0) \leftarrow X(0)$ . . . . .  | 97  |
| 5.11 | Band $f$ -values of $c'_5(0) \leftarrow X(0)$ . . . . .  | 98  |
| 5.12 | Natural linewidths, $\Gamma$ , of $b'(17) \leftarrow X(0)$ . . . . .   | 102 |
| 5.13 | Term energies of $b'19$ and band $f$ -values of $b'(19) \leftarrow X(0)$ . . . . .   | 103 |
| 5.14 | Term energies of $c'_4(6)$ , $f$ -values and linewidths of $c'_4(6) \leftarrow X(0)$ . . . . .   | 104 |
| 5.15 | Term energies of $b'(20)$ , $f$ -values and linewidths of $b'(20) \leftarrow X(0)$ . . . . .   | 105 |
| 5.16 | Term energies and linewidths of $b'(21)$ . . . . .   | 106 |
| 5.17 | $\Lambda$ -doubling of $c_3(1)$ term values and $f$ -values of $c_3(1) \leftarrow X(0)$ . . . . .  | 107 |

---

|      |  |     |
|------|--|-----|
| 5.18 | Band $f$ -values and linewidths of $c'_5(1) \leftarrow X(0)$ . . . . .   | 108 |
| 5.19 | Band $f$ -values and linewidths of $b'(22) \leftarrow X(0)$ . . . . .  | 109 |
| 6.1  | Potential-energy curve representing $c'_4 \ ^1\Sigma_u^+$ . . . . .  | 113 |
| 6.2  | Reduced term values of $c'_4 \ ^1\Sigma_u^+(v=0)$ and $b' \ ^1\Sigma_u^+(v=1)$ . . . . .   | 116 |
| 6.3  | Reconstructing the coupled-channels model of Spelsberg and Meyer . . . . .   | 120 |
| 6.4  | Reoptimising the coupled-channels model of Spelsberg and Meyer . . . . .   | 121 |
| 6.5  | Potential-energy curves of $^1\Pi_u$ states . . . . .  | 123 |
| 6.6  | Electronic-coupling matrix elements mixing $^1\Pi_u$ states . . . . .  | 124 |
| 6.7  | Reduced term energies of $^{14}\text{N}_2$ $c_4 \ ^1\Pi_u(v=0)$ . . . . .  | 126 |
| 6.8  | Histogram of $^1\Pi_u$ $f$ -parity term value residual errors . . . . .  | 128 |
| 6.9  | Residual error of modelled $^1\Pi_{u,f}$ term origins and rotational constants . . . . .   | 128 |
| 6.10 | Band $f$ -values of $^1\Pi_{u,f}$ levels of $^{14}\text{N}_2$ . . . . .  | 130 |
| 6.11 | $^1\Pi_u - X \ ^1\Sigma_g^+$ transition moments . . . . .  | 131 |
| 6.12 | Potential-energy curves of $^1\Sigma_u^+$ states . . . . .   | 132 |
| 6.13 | $\Lambda$ doubling of $^{14}\text{N}_2$ $c_3 \ ^1\Pi_u(v=0-3)$ . . . . .   | 135 |
| 6.14 | Rotational interaction of $b \ ^1\Pi_u(v=4)$ and $b' \ ^1\Sigma_u^+(v=0)$ in $^{14}\text{N}_2$ . . . . .   | 136 |
| 6.15 | Perturbations between $o_3 \ ^1\Pi_u$ and $b' \ ^1\Sigma_u^+$ . . . . .  | 137 |
| 6.16 | Perturbation of $b' \ ^1\Sigma_u^+(v=20)$ by $o_3 \ ^1\Pi_u(v=6)$ in $^{14}\text{N}_2$ . . . . .   | 138 |
| 6.17 | Histogram of $e$ -parity term value residual errors . . . . .  | 139 |
| 6.18 | Residual errors of term origins and rotational-constants of $^1\Sigma_u^+$ levels . . . . .  | 139 |
| 6.19 | Residual errors of term origins and rotational constants of $e$ -parity $^1\Pi_u$ levels . . . . .   | 140 |
| 6.20 | Band $f$ -values of $^1\Sigma_u^+$ levels of $^{14}\text{N}_2$ . . . . .   | 141 |
| 6.21 | $^1\Sigma_u^+ - X \ ^1\Sigma_g^+$ transition moments . . . . .   | 142 |
| 6.22 | Band $f$ -values of $c'_4 \ ^1\Sigma_u^+(v'=5) \leftarrow X \ ^1\Sigma_g^+(v''=0)$ . . . . .   | 143 |
| 6.23 | Modelled and experimental coupled-channels predissociation widths of $C \ ^3\Pi_u$ ,<br>$F_3 \ ^3\Pi_u$ , $G_3 \ ^3\Pi_u$ . . . . .                  | 146 |
| 6.24 | Optimised $^1\Pi_u$ , $^3\Pi_u$ , and $^3\Sigma_u^+$ potential-energy curves in a diabatic representation . . . . .                                  | 149 |
| 6.25 | Predissociation linewidths of $^1\Pi_u$ levels . . . . .   | 151 |
| 6.26 | The effect of $2 \ ^3\Sigma_u^+$ on the predissociation linewidths of $b \ ^1\Pi_u$ . . . . .  | 152 |
| 6.27 | Spin-orbit parameters of $C \ ^3\Pi_u$ . . . . .   | 153 |
| 6.28 | Term values of $^{14}\text{N}_2$ $b \ ^1\Pi_u(v=3,4)$ . . . . .  | 155 |
| 6.29 | Predissociation linewidths and term values of $^{14}\text{N}_2$ $o_3 \ ^1\Pi_u(v=0)$ . . . . .   | 156 |
| 6.30 | Term values of $c_3 \ ^1\Pi_u(v=4)$ and $C \ ^3\Pi_u(v=14)$ for $^{15}\text{N}_2$ . . . . .  | 157 |
| 6.31 | Term residuals of $C \ ^3\Pi_u(v=16)$ in $^{14}\text{N}_2$ . . . . .   | 157 |
| 6.32 | Predissociation linewidths of $^{14}\text{N}_2$ $b' \ ^1\Sigma_u^+(v=7)$ . . . . .   | 158 |
| 6.33 | Term values of $b \ ^1\Pi_u(v=11)$ , $b' \ ^1\Sigma_u^+(v=7)$ , $c_3 \ ^1\Pi_u(v=2)$ , $c'_4 \ ^1\Sigma_u^+(v=2)$ ,<br>$C \ ^3\Pi_u(v=17)$ . . . . . | 159 |
| 6.34 | Predissociation linewidths of $c_3 \ ^1\Pi_u(v=2)$ . . . . .   | 160 |
| 6.35 | Coupled-channels photodissociation cross section showing $c_3 \ ^1\Pi_u(v=2)$ . . . . .  | 160 |
| 6.36 | Term values of $c_3 \ ^1\Pi_u(v=2)$ . . . . .  | 161 |
| 6.37 | Predissociation linewidths and reduced term values of $o_3 \ ^1\Pi_u(v=2)$ . . . . .   | 162 |
| 6.38 | Predissociation linewidths and cross section of $b \ ^1\Pi_u(v=10)$ . . . . .  | 162 |
| 6.39 | Predissociation linewidths of $c_3 \ ^1\Pi_u(v=1)$ . . . . .   | 163 |
| 6.40 | Reduced term-values of $b \ ^1\Pi_u(v=4)$ for $^{15}\text{N}_2$ . . . . .  | 164 |
| 6.41 | Predissociation linewidths for $b \ ^1\Pi_u(v=10)$ and $C \ ^3\Pi_u(v=16)$ in $^{14}\text{N}_2$ . . . . .  | 165 |
| 6.42 | Predissociation linewidths of $D \ ^3\Sigma_u^+$ . . . . .   | 166 |

---

|      |   |     |
|------|---|-----|
| 6.43 | Potential-energy curve of $D^3\Sigma_u^+$ and perturbing states . . . . .   | 169 |
| 6.44 | Term values of $c'_4(0)$ , $c_3(0)$ , $b'(1)$ , and $b(5)$ . . . . .  | 170 |
| 6.45 | Model cross section of $^{14}\text{N}_2$ and $^{15}\text{N}_2$ . . . . .  | 170 |
| 6.46 | Transmission spectra showing the $P$ branch of $c'_4^1\Sigma_u^+(v'=0) \leftarrow X^1\Sigma_g^+(v''=0)$   | 171 |
| 6.47 | Energy perturbations and diabatic wavefunctions of $c'_4(0)$ , $c_3(0)$ , $b'(1)$ , and $b(5)$ . . . . .  | 172 |
| 6.48 | $f$ -values of $c'_4(0)-$ , $c_3(0)-$ , $b'(1)-$ , and $b(5) - X(0)$ . . . . .  | 174 |
| 6.49 | Fractional electronic-character of several excited vibrational levels . . . . .   | 175 |
| 7.1  | Isotopomer-dependent photodissociation cross section of $\text{N}_2$ . . . . .  | 179 |
| 7.2  | Photodissociation rates of $^{14}\text{N}_2/^{14}\text{N}^{15}\text{N}$ and abundances of $\text{HC}^{14}\text{N}/\text{HC}^{15}\text{N}$ in Titan's atmosphere . . . . . | 180 |
| 7.3  | Emission spectra of $c'_4^1\Sigma_u^+(v=0) - X^1\Sigma_g^+(v=0-3)$ . . . . .  | 182 |
| 7.4  | High resolution measurements of $c'_4^1\Sigma_u^+(0) \rightarrow X(1,2)$ . . . . .  | 184 |
| 7.5  | Electronic transition moment of $c'_4^1\Sigma_u^+ - X^1\Sigma_g^+$ . . . . .  | 185 |
| 7.6  | Observations and coupled-channels spectra of $c'_4(0) \rightarrow X(2-5)$ . . . . .   | 187 |
| 7.7  | Observations and coupled-channels spectra of $c'_4(0) \rightarrow X(6-9)$ . . . . .   | 187 |
| 7.8  | Observations and coupled-channels spectra of $c'_4(0) \rightarrow X(0-1)$ . . . . .   | 188 |
| 7.9  | Electron energy-loss spectrum of $\text{N}_2$ . . . . .   | 190 |
| 7.10 | Experimental and coupled-channels-calculated GVOS for many bands . . . . .  | 191 |
| 7.11 | Coupled-channels-calculated generalised oscillator strengths . . . . .  | 192 |
| 7.12 | Scaling of optical transition moments . . . . .   | 194 |



---

# List of Tables

---

|      |  |     |
|------|--|-----|
| 2.1  | Some operators and quantum numbers relevant to the study of diatomic molecules . . . . .                                 | 8   |
| 2.2  | Hönl-London factors . . . . .  | 27  |
| 2.3  | Relative signs of $M$ -independent rotational line strength factors . . . . .  | 28  |
| 2.4  | Ground state degeneracy and Hönl-London factors relevant to $N_2$ . . . . .  | 31  |
| 3.1  | Configurations of some electronic states of $N_2$ . . . . .  | 57  |
| 3.2  | Known vibrational levels of $^1\Pi_u$ and $^1\Sigma_u^+$ states . . . . .  | 61  |
| 3.3  | Asymptotic energies of the lowest four $N_2$ dissociation channels . . . . .   | 64  |
| 3.4  | Excited levels of $N_2$ for which linewidths are known . . . . .   | 65  |
| 4.1  | Summary of predissociation linewidths determined from the KEK spectra . . . . .  | 80  |
| 4.2  | Summary of $f$ -values determined from the KEK spectra . . . . .   | 82  |
| 5.1  | Summary of $f$ -values determined from the SOLEIL spectra . . . . .  | 100 |
| 5.2  | Summary of predissociation linewidths determined from the SOLEIL spectra . . . . .                                       | 101 |
| 6.1  | Electronic-coupling matrix elements mixing $^1\Pi_u$ states . . . . .  | 124 |
| 6.2  | Quantum defects of the $c_n$ $^1\Pi_u$ Rydberg series . . . . .  | 126 |
| 6.3  | Electronic transition moments for $^1\Pi_u - X^1\Sigma_g^+$ transitions . . . . .  | 131 |
| 6.4  | Electronic transition moments for $^1\Sigma_u^+ - X^1\Sigma_g^+$ transitions . . . . .                                   | 142 |
| 6.5  | Spectroscopic parameters and predissociation widths of $^3\Pi_u$ levels . . . . .  | 144 |
| 6.6  | Spin-orbit and electronic interactions of the $^3\Pi_u$ states . . . . .   | 145 |
| 6.7  | Computed spectroscopic parameters for the $^3\Pi_u$ states of $^{14}N_2$ and $^{15}N_2$ . . . . .                        | 147 |
| 6.8  | Predissociation linewidths of $^1\Pi_u$ levels . . . . .   | 150 |
| 6.9  | Spin-orbit parameters of $F_3$ $^3\Pi_u$ and $G_3$ $^3\Pi_u$ . . . . .   | 154 |
| 6.10 | Molecular parameters of $D^3\Sigma_u^+$ . . . . .  | 166 |
| 7.1  | Emission intensities of $c'_4(0) \rightarrow X(0-3)$ and absorption $f$ -values of $c'_4(0-3) \leftarrow X(0)$ . . . . . | 183 |
| 7.2  | Emission brightness of $c'_4(0) \rightarrow X(0-20)$ . . . . .   | 186 |
| A.1  | Natural linewidths of $^1\Sigma_u^+$ states . . . . .  | 214 |

