

## Article

# Controlled catalyst transfer polymerization in graphene nanoribbon synthesis

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## SUMMARY

Exercising direct control over the unusual electronic structures arising from quantum confinement effects in graphene nanoribbons (GNRs) is intimately linked to geometric boundary conditions imposed by the structure of the ribbon. Besides composition and position of substitutional dopant atoms, the symmetry of the unit cell, width, length, and termination of a GNR govern its electronic structure. Here we present a rational design that integrates each of these interdependent variables within a modular bottom-up synthesis. Our hybrid chemical approach relies on a catalyst transfer polymerization (CTP) that establishes excellent control over length, width, and end-groups. Complemented by a surface-assisted cyclodehydrogenation step, uniquely enabled by matrix-assisted direct (MAD) transfer protocols, geometry and functional handles encoded in a polymer template are faithfully mapped onto the structure of the corresponding GNR. Bond-resolved scanning tunnelling microscopy (BRSTM) and spectroscopy (STS) validate the robust correlation between polymer template design and GNR electronic structure.

graphene nanoribbons (GNRs), Suzuki chain transfer polymerization (SCTP), matrix assisted direct (MAD) transfer, on-surface synthesis (OSS), scanning tunneling microscopy (STM), scanning tunneling spectroscopy (STS)

## INTRODUCTION

The chemical bottom-up synthesis of atomically defined GNRs from molecular building blocks, either in solution or on surfaces, has dominated attempts to control integral structural parameters such as crystallographic symmetry, width, density, and position of dopant atoms. While step-growth polymerizations<sup>1</sup> based on *Diels-Alder* cycloaddition<sup>2-4</sup> or transition metal catalysed *Suzuki-Miyaura*<sup>5-9</sup> and *Yamamoto*<sup>10,11</sup> cross-coupling reactions have advanced solution-based approaches, the on-surface synthesis (OSS) of GNRs has largely relied on radical step-growth mechanisms.<sup>12-15</sup> Neither of these techniques have been able to demonstrate uncompromising coextensive control over polymer sequence, length, and termination underpinning structural parameters that define the electronic structure of GNRs. While iterative cross-coupling deprotection sequences have been used to access uniform samples of oligomeric GNRs,<sup>9</sup> a stepwise linear synthesis approach cannot be scaled beyond modest ribbon lengths. While the design of the molecular building block used in solution- and surface-based polymerizations has customarily served to establish symmetry, width, and substitutional dopant levels, precise control over the length and functional termination of

GNRs remains a veritable challenge and represents an indispensable stepping stone towards the successful integration of functional GNRs with advanced electronic circuit architectures and sensing nanotechnology.

Our strategy to exercise unprecedented length control and chemical functionalization of solution-synthesized GNR precursors builds on recent advancements in *Suzuki* catalyst transfer polymerization (SCTP) reactions.<sup>16-26</sup> Herein, a bifunctional monomer (**M**), e.g., the *o*-terphenylenes **1a,b** (Fig. 1A) featuring orthogonal functional groups, a halide (Br) and a boronic ester (Bpin) placed at the *para* positions of a central phenyl ring defining the axis of polymerization, is linearly extended into a one-dimensional (1D) polymer chain under the action of a palladium cross-coupling catalyst. A distinguishing feature of this class of polymerizations is that the Pd-catalyst, following the reductive elimination step, does not dissociate from the growing polymer chain. Instead, it remains coordinated to the  $\pi$ -system and migrates across the last aromatic ring in the polymer chain before reinserting into the C–Br bond priming the propagating catalyst for successive transmetalation with an arylboronate ester.<sup>27,28</sup> We envisioned that a preformed aryl-halide Pd-complex (e.g., **2** in Fig. 1A) could serve as a competent initiator (**I**) and catalyst for SCTP of *o*-terphenylenes **1a,b**. The initiation step reliably transfers a functional end-group (e.g., the biphenyl highlighted in blue) to the inactive end of the growing polymer chain. In the absence of competing chain transfer ( $k_{ct}$ ) and chain termination ( $k_t$ ) steps, a fast initiation ( $k_i$ ) and a near constant rate of propagation ( $k_p$ ) ensures that the degree of polymerization ( $DP$ ), and consequently the final length of the resulting polymers, can be controlled by the  $[M]_0/[I]_0$  loading if  $k_i > k_p \gg k_{ct} \sim k_t$ . Once all monomer has been consumed the reactive chain ends can be terminated by coupling to a monofunctional terminator (**T**) (e.g., the phenylboronic acid **3** highlighted in orange) that caps the polymer chain and irreversibly dissociates the Pd catalyst. The resultant 1D polymers not only feature narrowly defined length distributions but two chemically distinct and individually addressable functional handles at either end of the polymer chain that map directly onto the structure of the corresponding  $N = 9$  armchair GNRs (9-AGNRs,  $N$  is the number of C-atoms counted across the width of the ribbon).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Controlled living *Suzuki* catalyst transfer polymerization

A broad catalyst screening established the optimal conditions for a controlled living SCTP. The *o*-terphenylene monomer **1a** ( $R^1 = H$ ) polymerizes readily under the action of a preformed Pd(RuPhos) aryl bromide catalyst **2**, in the presence of an aqueous base ( $K_3PO_4$ ) in tetrahydrofuran (THF) at 24 °C to give the characteristic *p*-phenylene backbone of *poly-1a* (Fig. 1A). Size exclusion chromatography (SEC) calibrated to polystyrene (PS) standards reveals monomodal distributions with low dispersity ( $D = 1.19$ ) at low  $[M]_0/[I]_0 < 20$  that broaden at higher loadings as the solubility of the growing polymer chains decreases abruptly (Supplemental Information Fig. S1). Polymers resulting from the reaction of *o*-terphenylene monomer **1b** ( $R^1 = C_{12}H_{25}$ ) with **2** instead remain soluble in the reaction mixture at  $[M]_0/[I]_0$  loadings of up to 100. Even after the consumption of all monomer the propagating catalyst species attached to the end of the growing polymer chain remains active and readily reacts with phenylboronic acid **3**, used here as a monofunctional chain-terminating agent. The resulting number-average molecular weight ( $M_n$ ), dispersity ( $D = M_w/M_n$ ;  $M_w$  is the weight average molecular weight), degree of polymerization ( $DP$ ), average polymer length ( $\bar{l}$ ), termination efficiency, and isolated polymer yield at various  $[M]_0/[I]_0$  loadings are summarized in Fig. 1B. SEC traces of crude *poly-1b* samples prepared by SCTP show monomodal distributions (Fig. 1C). The  $M_n$  increases linearly with the  $[M]_0/[I]_0$  loading from  $M_n = 7.8 \times 10^3$  g mol<sup>-1</sup> ( $[M]_0/[I]_0 = 20$ ) to  $M_n = 52.9 \times 10^3$  g mol<sup>-1</sup> ( $[M]_0/[I]_0 = 100$ ) while the dispersity remains low ( $D \leq 1.2$ ) (Fig. 1D). SEC samples of *poly-1b* taken at different timepoints from a SCTP reaction ( $[M]_0/[I]_0 = 25$ ) reveal a linear correlation between  $M_n$  and the monomer conversion indicative of a living chain-growth mechanism (Fig. 1E). MALDI-TOF mass spectrometry of *poly-1b* samples shows a characteristic family of peaks separated by the monomer repeat unit  $\Delta m/z = 564.8 \pm 2.8$  (Fig. 1F). The mass of detected molecular ions  $[M]^+$  =  $[poly-1b-CHO]$ , correspond to the terminated polymers and spans from  $5 < DP < 24$  for  $[M]_0/[I]_0 = 20$ . Despite the loss of the labile aldehyde group during ionization, MALDI-TOF supports the formation of telechelic polymers featuring both chemically unique end-groups transferred as part of initiation and termination steps. <sup>1</sup>H NMR spectrum of *poly-1b* show two

characteristic resonance peaks at  $\delta = 3.27$  ppm and  $\delta = 9.88$  ppm corresponding to the dimethyl acetal and the aldehyde group, respectively (Fig. 1G). Acid catalysed deprotection of the acetal in *poly-1b* (Fig. 1A) leads to the loss of signal at  $\delta = 3.27$  ppm along with the emergence of a new resonance at  $\delta = 9.95$  ppm corresponding to the second free aldehyde in *poly-4b* transferred as part of the initiation step. Integration of the corresponding  $^1\text{H}$  NMR resonances for *poly-1b* samples prepared from  $[\mathbf{M}]_0/[\mathbf{I}]_0$  loadings of  $20 < [\mathbf{M}]_0/[\mathbf{I}]_0 < 100$  suggest termination efficiencies in excess of 90% (Fig. 1B).

#### Solution-based cyclodehydrogenation of *poly-4b*

We next sought to explore the conversion of solubilized, end-functionalized, and length-controlled samples of *poly-4b* into the corresponding 9-AGNRs (Fig. 2A). *Scholl*-type<sup>29–31</sup> cyclodehydrogenation reactions mediated by either  $\text{FeCl}_3$  or 2,3-dichloro-5,6-dicyano-1,4-benzoquinone (DDQ)/trifluoromethanesulfonic acid (TfOH) as oxidants yielded amorphous precipitates that have commonly been associated with the formation of GNRs (Fig. 2A, Path A). It is important to highlight here that a structural assignment of cyclodehydrogenation products emerging from *Scholl*-type reactions in macromolecular systems remains controversial and has largely relied on an assembly of circumstantial evidence based on discrete small-molecule model systems, or ensemble characterization techniques. This realization will be relevant as we proceed in our analysis of the products emerging from *poly-4b*. UV-Vis spectroscopy of the sparingly soluble precipitate obtained from in-solution cyclodehydrogenation of *poly-4b* ( $M_n = 7.8 \times 10^3 \text{ g mol}^{-1}$ ) shows a bathochromic shift and broadening of the absorption spectrum suggestive of the transition from a *poly-(p-phenylene)* chromophore ( $\lambda_{\text{max}} = 292 \text{ nm}$ ) to the expected extended polycyclic aromatic backbone ( $\lambda_{\text{max}} = 293, 342, 482, 530, 768 \text{ nm}$ ) (Fig. 2B).<sup>32</sup> Vibrational (IR) spectroscopy (Fig. 2C) recorded on both *poly-4b* precursors and the corresponding *Scholl*-type reaction products shows the characteristic alkyl and aryl C–H stretching and bending modes ( $2918 \text{ cm}^{-1}$ ,  $2848 \text{ cm}^{-1}$ , and  $1456 \text{ cm}^{-1}$ , respectively) along with the aldehyde C=O stretching mode at  $1714 \text{ cm}^{-1}$ . An increase in the aromatic C=C stretching mode at  $1557 \text{ cm}^{-1}$  can be attributed to the expansion of the polycyclic aromatic backbone. Raman spectroscopy reveals the characteristic signature of D and G peaks,  $1320 \text{ cm}^{-1}$  and  $1598 \text{ cm}^{-1}$  respectively, along with 2D, D+G and 2G overtones (Fig. 2D) commonly observed for extended nanographenes. Curiously, the radial breathing-like mode (RBLM), a distinctive feature observed in samples of on-surface grown 9-AGNRs (RBLM  $\sim 310$ – $320 \text{ cm}^{-1}$ ) is absent from the spectrum.<sup>32</sup> This controversy raises renewed concerns regarding the reliance on ensemble characterization tools used in the structural assignment of products emerging from solution-based *Scholl*-type reactions in bottom-up GNR synthesis.

In an attempt to resolve this paradox, we herein set out to characterize the sparingly soluble products of a *Scholl*-type oxidation of *poly-4b* using cryogenic (4 K) scanning tunnelling microscopy (STM) in ultra-high vacuum (UHV). Samples of cyclodehydrogenated *poly-4b* dispersed in an inert matrix of pyrene were deposited on Au(111) surfaces using matrix assisted direct (MAD) transfer techniques.<sup>33</sup> Topographic STM images (Fig. 2E–H) recorded on samples annealed at 353 K for 12 h to induce lateral diffusion and traceless sublimation of the pyrene matrix, show irregular graphitic networks (apparent height  $0.20 \text{ nm} \pm 0.05 \text{ nm}$ ) that cannot be mapped onto the molecular structure of the 9-AGNR backbone. The discrepancies between ensemble-based characterization, i.e., UV/Vis, IR, Raman, and single molecule resolved STM imaging uniquely enabled by MAD transfer techniques echoes the structural complexity emerging from radical cation rearrangements and fragmentation reactions intrinsic to a given PAH scaffold when subjected to *Scholl*-type reaction conditions. The obvious dissonance between traditional ensemble-based tools and the amorphous graphitic networks emerging from *Scholl*-type reactions revealed by STM, has considerably raised the burden of evidence required to support a claim of in-solution cyclodehydrogenated GNRs.

#### MAD transfer and surface-assisted cyclodehydrogenation of *poly-4b*

To overcome the technical challenge associated with suppressing undesired side-reactions during the *Scholl*-type oxidation of *poly-4a* we adopted a hybrid GNR growth process. While SCTP provides us with a high degree of control over the end-functionalization of the 9-AGNR polymer precursor and ready access to low dispersities, MAD transfer followed by surface-assisted cyclodehydrogenation ensures the formation of only the desired C–C bonds that map

onto the crystallographic unit cell of the fused GNR backbone. Guided by this idea we prepared high-dilution samples of low dispersity **poly-4a** ( $[M]_0/[I]_0 = 20$ ) in a pyrene matrix for MAD transfer onto a clean Au(111) surface held at 297 K (see detailed procedure in Methods section). Molecule-decorated surfaces were annealed in UHV for 12 h at 353 K to induce the sublimation of the bulk pyrene matrix and diffusion of **poly-4a** across the surface. Further annealing at 648 K for 30 min induces a thermal cyclodehydrogenation that leads to the fully fused 9-AGNR backbone. Figure 2I shows a constant-current STM image of a sub-monolayer coverage of 9-AGNR-**4a** on Au(111) at  $T = 4$  K. Large-area topographic scans reveal 9-AGNR-**4a** featuring narrow length distributions ( $\bar{l} = 6.42 \pm 0.98$  nm, inset in Fig. 2I) commensurate with the average  $DP$  of **poly-4a** derived from SEC (Fig. 1B). 9-AGNRs assemble into long range ordered domains that align with the elbows of the herringbone reconstruction of the Au(111) surface. The average lateral spacing between GNRs is  $> 3$  nm precluding any direct interaction between individual ribbons. Higher resolution constant-current STM images (Fig. 2J, Supplemental Information Fig. S2) reveal GNRs featuring an apparent height and width of  $0.19$  nm  $\pm 0.01$  nm and  $1.00$  nm  $\pm 0.01$  nm, respectively, consistent with the formation of the fully conjugated 9-AGNR backbone. A majority of ribbons feature at least one ( $> 90\%$ ) or both ( $> 70\%$ ) distinctive end-groups, i.e. the 2-bromo-1,1'-biphenyl and the phenylboronic acid (blue and orange phenyl rings in Fig. 1A and 2A), transferred as part of the SCTP initiation and termination steps (we will herein use these groups to refer to the initiator-end and the terminator-end of the 9-AGNR, respectively). Singular indentations along the armchair edges of 9-AGNRs result from a commonly observed phenyl cleavage attributed to the occasional cleavage of C–C bonds during the cyclodehydrogenation step (Supplemental Information Fig. S3B).<sup>34–36</sup> Tip functionalized bond-resolved STM (BRSTM) images recorded on a representative fully cyclized 9-AGNR-**4a** ( $DP = 15$ ) (Fig. 2L) and a shorter ribbon ( $DP = 11$ ) (Fig. 2K) show atomically smooth armchair edges along with both end-groups transferred during the initiation and termination step. While BRSTM images reveal the characteristic pattern of four laterally fused benzene rings (i.e., a tetracene core) spanning the width of the 9-AGNR backbone, closer inspection reveals that the thermally labile aldehyde groups lining the ends of **poly-4a**, used as diagnostic  $^1\text{H}$  NMR markers during the SCTP (Fig. 1G) are cleaved during the cyclodehydrogenation step. This observation is consistent with MALDI-TOF experiments that only show the mass of the molecular ions  $[M]^+ = [\text{poly-1b-CHO}]$  (Fig. 1F). The robust correlation between solution-based SCTP polymer characterization and the length distribution derived from STM of 9-AGNRs resulting from on-surface cyclodehydrogenation highlights the unrivalled structural control innate to our hybrid SCTP/MAD transfer bottom-up approach.

#### Scanning tunneling spectroscopy of 9-AGNRs

We herein used differential conductance spectroscopy to explore the local electronic structure of 9-AGNR-**4a** emerging from SCTP polymers. Typical  $dI/dV$  point spectra recorded along the armchair edge of a pristine 9-AGNR-**4a** (Fig. 3A, positions marked with red crosses in BRSTM image inset) show four prominent features. A broad peak centred at  $V_s = -0.25 \pm 0.05$  V (*Peak 3*) and a sharp signature at  $V_s = +1.10 \pm 0.05$  V (*Peak 4*) have previously been assigned to the valence (VB) and conduction band (CB) edge of bulk 9-AGNRs, respectively, giving rise to a band gap of  $E_g \sim 1.4$  eV on Au(111).<sup>34–36</sup> The peaks at  $V_s = -1.30 \pm 0.05$  V (*Peak 1*), and  $V_s = 1.50 \pm 0.05$  V (*Peak 5*) correspond to the VB–1, and CB+1, band edges, respectively.  $dI/dV$  point spectra recorded near either the initiator (position marked with blue cross in BRSTM image inset) or the terminator end of the ribbon (position marked with orange cross in BRSTM image inset) mirror the bulk VB states but feature one additional low-lying state at  $V_s = -0.90 \pm 0.05$  V (*Peak 2*) not observed in 9-AGNRs fabricated through on-surface polymerization and cyclodehydrogenation.<sup>34–36</sup> Differential conductance maps recorded at biases corresponding to *Peak 5* and *Peak 4* in the point spectra show the characteristic nodal patterns associated with the CB+1 and CB lining the armchair edges of the ribbon (Figs. 3B,C). At negative bias across the range of  $-0.20$  V  $> V_s > -0.30$  V (Figs. 3D,E)  $dI/dV$  maps are saturated by the Au(111) surface state. Despite the large background signal Fig. 3D shows the distinctive signature of the VB (*Peak 3*) — bright lobes lining the armchair edges contrasted by a dark featureless GNR backbone. Unique to 9-AGNRs synthesized through our hybrid SCTP/MAD transfer approach is a characteristic signature associated with the functional end-groups transferred during the initiation and termination steps of the polymerization. A differential conductance map recorded at  $V_s = -0.90$  V (*Peak 2*) shows three bright lobes lining the lower (initiator) end of the ribbon and two bright spots flanking the cove-type structure

lining the upper (terminator) end of the GNR (see arrows in Fig. 3F). Rather than invoking a localized filled end-state, these unique features are associated with a local broadening of the VB state induced by the termination of the ribbon. The correspondence between the chemical structure of initiator- and terminator-ends derived from BRSTM and the emergence of distinctive peaks and nodal patterns at discrete energies in differential conductance spectroscopy validates that the chemical design of SCTP initiator and terminator groups seamlessly translate into the functional engineering of electronic states in bottom-up synthesized GNRs. Our hybrid SCTP/MAD transfer process thus not only provides exquisite control over the length, width and end-groups of bottom-up synthesized GNRs but presents an unparalleled tool to access and fine-tune the band alignment and contact resistance at the critical metal-semiconductor interface of nanoribbon device architectures, paving the way for technological advancements in the field of carbon-based nanoelectronics sensing and computing.

## EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURES

### Resource availability

#### Lead contact

Further information and requests for resources should be directed to and will be fulfilled by the lead contact, Prof. Felix Fischer ([ffischer@berkeley.edu](mailto:ffischer@berkeley.edu)).

#### Materials availability

Subject to availability, all stable reagents generated in this study will be made available on request, but we might require a payment and/or a completed materials transfer agreement if there is potential for commercial application.

#### Data and code availability

The Cartesian coordinates for the crystallographic data reported in this article are included in Data S1. The crystallographic data for **2** reported in this article have been deposited at the Cambridge Crystallographic Data Centre (CCDC) under deposition number CCDC: 2303331. This data can be obtained free of charge from the CCDC at [http://www.ccdc.cam.ac.uk/data\\_request/cif](http://www.ccdc.cam.ac.uk/data_request/cif). Other data supporting this study are available in the article and supplemental information.

## Synthesis and Characterization

### Polymer synthesis and GNR growth

Full details of the synthesis and characterization of **1a,b**, **2**, as well as polymers *poly-1a,b* and *poly-4a,b* are given in the Supplemental Information. 9-AGNRs were grown from *poly-4a* on Au(111)/mica films under UHV conditions. Atomically clean Au(111) surfaces were prepared through iterative Ar<sup>+</sup> sputter/anneal cycles. Sub-monolayer coverage of *poly-4a* on atomically clean Au(111) was obtained by MAD transfer. *poly-4a* was dispersed in molten pyrene (pyrene:*poly-4a* = 5000:1 w/w) under an inert atmosphere and flash frozen at 77 K. The glassy solid was ground to a fine powder and sprinkled onto an atomically clean Au(111) substrate in ambient air at  $T = 298$  K. The sample was transferred into UHV ( $p < 10^{-9}$  Pa) and annealed at  $T = 353$  K for  $t \sim 12$  h to induce the slow sublimation of pyrene and diffusion of polymers across the surface. The surface temperature was slowly ramped ( $\leq 2$  K min<sup>-1</sup>) to 648 K and held at this temperature for 30 min to induce the radical-step growth polymerization and on-surface cyclodehydrogenation. MAD transfer samples of 9-AGNR-**4b** and 9-AGNR-**4b** resulting from Scholl-type oxidative cyclodehydrogenation in solution were prepared following the same procedure.

### STM characterization

All STM experiments were performed using a commercial OMICRON LT-STM held at  $T = 4$  K using PtIr STM tips. STM tips were optimized for scanning tunnelling spectroscopy using an automated tip conditioning program.<sup>37</sup> d/dV measurements were recorded with CO-functionalized STM tips using a lock-in amplifier with a modulation frequency of 455 Hz and a modulation amplitude of  $V_{RMS} = 10$  mV. d/dV point spectra were recorded under open feedback loop conditions. dI/dV maps were collected under constant current conditions. BRSTM images were obtained by mapping the out-of-phase dI/dV signal collected during a constant-height dI/dV map at 10 mV. Peak positions in dI/dV point spectroscopy were determined by fitting the spectra with Lorentzian peaks. Each peak position is based on an

average of ~10 spectra collected on various GNRs with different tips, all of which were first calibrated to the Au(111) Shockley surface state.

#### SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION

Document S1. Supplemental experimental procedures and characterization, Figures S1–S34, and Tables S1–S7.

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#### AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

S.H.P., A.D., C.D., and F.R.F. initiated and conceived the research, S.H.P. and C.D. designed, synthesized, and characterized monomer, catalyst, and polymer, A.D and A.C. performed on-surface synthesis, STM characterization, and data analysis. S.H.P., C.D., A.D. and F.R.F. wrote the manuscript. All authors contributed to the scientific discussion. S.H.P., A.D., C.D. contributed equally.

#### DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

The authors declare no competing interests.

#### INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY

We support inclusive, diverse, and equitable conduct of research.

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**Figure 1. Controlled living Suzuki catalyst transfer polymerization**

(A) Schematic representation of the living SCTP of o-terphenylene monomers **1a,b** [ $M$ ] initiated by a Pd(RuPhos) aryl bromide complex **2** [ $I$ ]. The reaction is terminated by a monofunctional boronic acid **3** [ $T$ ]. Single X-ray crystal structure of **2**. Thermal ellipsoids are drawn at the 50% probability level. Colour coding: C (gray), O (red), P (purple), Br (orange), Pd (turquoise). H-atoms are omitted for clarity.

(B) Summary of SEC data, estimated length, termination efficiency, and isolated yields of poly-**1a,b** as a function of initial loading  $[M]_0/[I]_0$ .

(C) SEC traces of poly-**1b** samples obtained from various  $[M]_0/[I]_0$  loadings.

(D) Linear correlation between  $M_n$  and  $[M]_0/[I]_0$ .  $D$  remains constant for different  $[M]_0/[I]_0$ .

(E) Evolution of  $M_n$  and  $D$  as a function of monomer conversion.

(F) MALDI of poly-**1b** ( $[M]_0/[I]_0 = 20$ ) showing a family of polymers separated by the mass of the monomer unit  $\Delta m/z$ . The molecular ion peaks correspond to the mass of the polymer minus the labile aldehyde group.

(G)  $^1\text{H-NMR}$  of poly-**1b** (blue) and poly-**4b** (red). Deprotection of the dimethyl acetal ( $\delta = 3.27$  ppm) leads to the emergence of a resonance at  $\delta = 9.95$  ppm associated with the second aldehyde group.

**Figure 2. Solution based cyclodehydrogenation and hybrid surface assisted synthesis of 9-AGNRs from polymer precursors**

(A) Schematic representation of the solution-based Scholl-type reaction of poly-**4a** and poly-**4b** (Path A) and surface-assisted cyclodehydrogenation of poly-**4a** on Au(111) (Path B).

(B) UV-Vis spectra of poly-**4b** and the resulting products following solution-based oxidative cyclodehydrogenation (Scholl-type reaction).

(C) IR spectra of poly-**4b** and the resulting products following solution-based oxidative cyclodehydrogenation (Scholl-type reaction).

(D) Raman spectrum of products resulting from solution-based oxidative cyclodehydrogenation (Scholl-type reaction) of poly-**4b**. Excitation laser: 633 and 532 nm (spectra are offset for clarity).

(E,F) Large-area topographic STM images (constant current) of MAD transferred annealed samples of 9-AGNR-**4b** cyclodehydrogenated in solution using Scholl or DDQ/TfOH reaction conditions on Au(111) ( $V_s = 200$  mV,  $I_t = 20$  pA).

(G,H) Representative topographic STM images (constant current) of MAD transferred samples of solution cyclodehydrogenated 9-AGNR-**4b** on Au(111) showing a high concentration of structural defects and an internal bonding that cannot be mapped onto the structure of the 9-AGNR backbone ( $V_s = 200$  mV,  $I_t = 20$  pA).

(I) Large area topographic STM image (constant current) of a MAD transferred annealed sample of poly-**4a** ( $[M]_0/[I]_0 = 20$ ) on Au(111) ( $V_s = 100$  mV,  $I_t = 20$  pA). Inset: Statistical length distribution of 9-AGNR-**4a** grown on Au(111) from poly-**4a** ( $[M]_0/[I]_0 = 20$ ) using the hybrid SCTP/surface-assisted cyclodehydrogenation approach;  $\bar{l} = 6.42$  nm,  $\mu_{1/2} = 6$  nm,  $\sigma = 0.98$  nm.

(J) Topographic STM image (constant current) of a MAD transferred annealed sample of poly-**4a** ( $[M]_0/[I]_0 = 20$ ) on Au(111) ( $V_s = 50$  mV,  $I_t = 20$  pA).

(K,L) BRSTM images (constant height) of a pristine 9-AGNR-**4a** ( $DP = 11$  and 15) grown on Au(111) from poly-**4a** ( $[M]_0/[I]_0 = 20$ ) using the hybrid SCTP/surface-assisted cyclodehydrogenation approach ( $V_s = 10$  mV,  $V_{ac} = 10$  mV,  $f = 455$  Hz, CO-functionalized tip). All STM experiments performed at  $T = 4$  K.

**Figure 3. Electronic structure and differential conductance maps of end-functionalized 9-AGNRs**

(A)  $dI/dV$  point spectra of a 9-AGNR-**4a** on Au(111) recorded at the position marked in the BRSTM inset (Au(111) surface state, black; armchair edge, red; initiator end, blue; terminator end, orange;  $V_s = 10$  mV,  $f = 455$  Hz, CO-functionalized tip).

(B-G) Differential conductance maps ( $dI/dV$ ) recorded at the highlighted bias voltages ( $V_s$ ) on a 9-AGNR-**4a** ( $DP = 9$ ) shown in the inset of (A).

**Table S3. Atomic coordinates ( $\times 10^4$ ) and equivalent isotropic displacement parameters ( $\text{\AA}^2 \times 10^3$ ) for **2**.**  $U(\text{eq})$  is defined as one third of the trace of the orthogonalized  $U^{ij}$  tensor.

**Table S4. Bond lengths [ $\text{\AA}$ ] and angles [ $^\circ$ ] for **2**.**

**Table S5. Anisotropic displacement parameters ( $\text{\AA}^2 \times 10^3$ ) for **2**.** The anisotropic displacement factor exponent takes the form:  $-2p^2[h^2a^{*2}U^{11} + \dots + 2hka^*b^*U^{12}]$ .

**Table S6.** Hydrogen coordinates ( $\times 10^4$ ) and isotropic displacement parameters ( $\text{\AA}^2 \times 10^3$ ) for 2.

**Table S7.** Torsion angles [°] for 2.