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# Emissions de N<sub>2</sub>O par nitrification et dénitrification à l'échelle de la motte de sol: effet de la structure du sol, de l'aération et des activités microbiennes

Karima Khalil

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## **THESE DE DOCTORAT DE L'UNIVERSITE PARIS 6**

Spécialité  
**Sciences de la Terre**

présentée par  
**Karima KHALIL**

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**Emissions de N<sub>2</sub>O par nitrification et dénitrification  
à l'échelle de la motte de sol: effet de la structure du sol,  
de l'aération et des activités microbiennes**

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soutenue le 31 janvier 2003

devant le jury composé de :

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## RESUME

La production de  $N_2O$  par les sols résulte des transformations microbiennes de l'azote: dénitrification et nitrification. L'objectif de ce travail était de caractériser les émissions de  $N_2O$  par dénitrification et nitrification dans un sol de limon en fonction de la structure du sol, à l'échelle de la motte. Nous avons étudié la dénitrification en combinant des mesures faites sur des boues de sol incubées en anaérobiose et un modèle de simulation des populations microbiennes réductrices de  $NO_3^-$  et  $N_2O$ . Les simulations démontrent que la capacité réductrice de  $N_2O$  est inductible, de sorte que la production nette de  $N_2O$  diminue fortement au cours du temps malgré une dénitrification active. Nous avons mis en évidence que la respiration et l'émission de  $N_2O$  par dénitrification par des mottes de sol incubées en aérobiose étaient fortement stimulées par une pré-incubation anaérobie. Ces résultats peuvent être expliqués à l'aide d'un modèle simplifié prenant en compte la structure des mottes caractérisée par analyse morphologique. La vitesse de nitrification et sa contribution à la production de  $N_2O$  ont été caractérisées sur des agrégats de sol en fonction de la pression partielle en  $O_2$ , en utilisant le traçage  $^{15}N$ . Une réduction de la pression  $O_2$  diminue la vitesse de nitrification et augmente fortement la production de  $N_2O$  par nitrification.

## AVANT-PROPOS

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## TABLE DES MATIERES

<b>INTRODUCTION GENERALE .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>CHAPITRE 1 : SYNTHESE BIBLIOGRAPHIQUE .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>I. Problématiques environnementales et agronomiques.....</b>	<b>19</b>
I.1. Effet de serre et forçage radiatif .....	19
I.2. Effets sur l'ozone de la haute troposphère et de la basse stratosphère .....	20
I.3. Pertes de fertilisants azotés en agriculture .....	21
<b>II. Processus impliqués dans la production et la consommation de N<sub>2</sub>O dans les sols ...</b>	<b>21</b>
II.1. La dénitrification .....	21
II.2. La nitrification .....	24
<b>III. La régulation des émissions de N<sub>2</sub>O dans les sols .....</b>	<b>26</b>
III.1. La teneur en eau .....	30
III.2. L'aération du sol .....	31
III.3. La disponibilité en azote minéral .....	32
III.4. La disponibilité en carbone et matière organique .....	34
III.5. La texture et la structure du sol .....	34
III.6. La température .....	35
III.7. Le pH .....	36
<b>IV. Modélisation des émissions de N<sub>2</sub>O dans les sols .....</b>	<b>37</b>
IV.1. Les modèles stochastiques .....	37
IV.2. Les modèles empiriques .....	38
IV.3. Les modèles mécanistes.....	39
<b>V- Conclusion .....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>REFERENCES BIBLIOGRAPHIQUES .....</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>CHAPITRE 2 : SIMULATION DE LA DENITRIFICATION, DE LA DYNAMIQUE DES DENITRIFIANTS ET LEUR CAPACITE PROGRESSIVE A REDUIRE N<sub>2</sub>O : COMPARAISON MODELE - EXPERIENCE .....</b>	<b>51</b>

<b>Summary .....</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>Materials &amp; Methods .....</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>Results .....</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>Discussion .....</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>References .....</b>	<b>90</b>

**CHAPITRE 3 : INFLUENCE D'UNE PRE-INCUBATION ANAEROBIE SUR LA  
RESPIRATION ET LES EMISSIONS DE N<sub>2</sub>O PAR DES MOTTES DE  
SOL EN INCUBATION AEROBIE .....97**

<b>Summary .....</b>	<b>98</b>
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>99</b>
<b>Materials &amp; Methods .....</b>	<b>101</b>
<b>Results .....</b>	<b>108</b>
<b>Discussion .....</b>	<b>119</b>
<b>References .....</b>	<b>124</b>

**CHAPITRE 4 : MODELE SIMPLIFIE DES EMISSIONS DE N<sub>2</sub>O PAR  
DENITRIFICATION PRENANT EN COMPTE LA STRUCTURE DES  
MOTTES ET LA PREINCUBATION ANAEROBIE .....128**

<b>Summary .....</b>	<b>120</b>
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>129</b>
<b>Materials &amp; Methods .....</b>	<b>130</b>
<b>Results &amp; discussion .....</b>	<b>142</b>
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>154</b>
<b>References .....</b>	<b>156</b>

**CHAPITRE 5 : INFLUENCE DE LA PRESSION EN O<sub>2</sub> SUR LA  
PRODUCTION DE N<sub>2</sub>O PAR NITRIFICATION ET  
DENITRIFICATION PAR DES AGREGATS DE SOL .....160**

<b>Summary .....</b>	<b>161</b>
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>162</b>
<b>Materials &amp; Methods .....</b>	<b>164</b>
<b>Results .....</b>	<b>168</b>
<b>Discussion .....</b>	<b>186</b>
<b>References .....</b>	<b>193</b>
<b>SYNTHESE DES RESULTATS .....</b>	<b>197</b>
<b>I. Synthèse des principaux acquis .....</b>	<b>198</b>
I.1.Fonctionnement dénitrifiant en condition anaérobie .....	198
I.2. Anoxie, respiration et dénitrification.....	199
I.3. Emissions de N <sub>2</sub> O par nitrification .....	201
I.4. Données complémentaires .....	201
<b>II. Comparaison avec le comportement du sol <i>in situ</i> .....</b>	<b>202</b>
<b>III. Perspectives de ce travail .....</b>	<b>203</b>
III.1.Aspect méthodologique .....	203
III.2.Aspect d’analyse des mécanismes .....	204
III.3.Extrapolation à des échelles d’espace et de temps plus larges .....	205
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHIE .....</b>	<b>207</b>



## LISTE DES FIGURES

### CHAPITRE 1

<b>Figure 1:</b> Contribution relative (%) a) à l'effet de serre naturel et b) forçage radiatif d'après Mac Kay et Khalil (1991).....	20
<b>Figure 2:</b> Les étapes de la dénitrification (Hénault, 1995).....	22
<b>Figure 3:</b> Schéma conceptuel « hole in the pipe » (Firestone et Davidson, 1989).....	26
<b>Figure 4:</b> Les facteurs de contrôle de la dénitrification dans les sols (Robertson, 1989).....	28
<b>Figure 5:</b> Les facteurs de contrôle de la nitrification dans les sols (Robertson, 1989).....	29
<b>Figure 6:</b> Influence de WFPS sur le devenir de N (Linn et Doran, 1984).....	30
<b>Figure 7:</b> Effets de la concentration en $O_2$ sur les étapes de la dénitrification (Tiedje, 1988). .....	32

### CHAPITRE 2

<b>Figure 1:</b> Comparaison entre les valeurs expérimentales et simulées de $[N_2O]$ pour la condition 1 (i.e. avec $C_2H_2$ , sans $N_2O$ initialement) pour un rendement énergétique de 1.25 mole ATP par mole de $N_2O$ produit : a/ $[NO_3^-]_{initial} = 0.17 \text{ mol.m}^{-3}$ solution; b/ $[NO_3^-]_{initial} = 0.93 \text{ mol.m}^{-3}$ solution; c/ $[NO_3^-]_{initial} = 7.90 \text{ mol.m}^{-3}$ solution.....	64
<b>Figure 2:</b> Effet des valeurs choisies du rendement énergétique pour la production de $N_2O$ et de l'énergie de maintenance microbienne sur les estimations de la biomasse dénitrifiante $bm$ et de l'activité spécifique dénitrifiante maximale $v_{Dmax}$ : a/ effet du rendement énergétique $Y_D^{max}$ pour un coefficient de maintenance $m_E = 10^{-6} \text{ s}^{-1}$ ; b/ effet du coefficient de maintenance $m_E$ pour un rendement énergétique $Y_D^{max}$ de 1.25 mole ATP par mol de $N_2O$ produit.....	65
<b>Figure 3:</b> Comparaison entre les valeurs expérimentales et simulées de $[N_2O]$ en fonction du temps nécessaire pour atteindre l'équilibre de $N_2O$ , pour 6 flacons avec de faibles concentrations de $NO_3^-$ , et la consommation de $NO_3^-$ exprimée comme un défaut équivalent dans la production de $N_2O$ pour une sous-estimation de $f_N$ par 0.04. ....	66
<b>Figure 4:</b> Données expérimentales et simulées par le modèle A, en utilisant les paramètres estimés:	

- a/ condition 2,  $[NO_3^-]_{initial} = 0.23 \text{ mol.m}^{-3}$  solution;
- b/ condition 2,  $[NO_3^-]_{initial} = 7.90 \text{ mol.m}^{-3}$  solution;
- c/ condition 3,  $[NO_3^-]_{initial} = 0.23 \text{ mol.m}^{-3}$  solution;
- d/ condition 3,  $[NO_3^-]_{initial} = 7.90 \text{ mol.m}^{-3}$  solution. ....68

**Figure 5:** Données expérimentales et simulées par le modèle B, en utilisant les paramètres estimés:

- a/ condition 2,  $[NO_3^-]_{initial} = 0.23 \text{ mol.m}^{-3}$  solution;
- b/ condition 2,  $[NO_3^-]_{initial} = 7.90 \text{ mol.m}^{-3}$  solution;
- c/ condition 3,  $[NO_3^-]_{initial} = 0.23 \text{ mol.m}^{-3}$  solution;
- d/ condition 3,  $[NO_3^-]_{initial} = 7.90 \text{ mol.m}^{-3}$  solution. ....69

**Figure 6:** Données expérimentales et simulées par le modèle C, en utilisant les paramètres estimés (les simulations 1, 2 et 3 correspondent à  $Y_R^{max}$  égal à 2.5, 3.33 et 4.17 mol ATP.mol  $N_2O$ , respectivement):

- a/ condition 2,  $[NO_3^-]_{initial} = 0.23 \text{ mol.m}^{-3}$  solution;
- b/ condition 2,  $[NO_3^-]_{initial} = 7.90 \text{ mol.m}^{-3}$  solution;
- c/ condition 3,  $[NO_3^-]_{initial} = 0.23 \text{ mol.m}^{-3}$  solution;
- d/ condition 3,  $[NO_3^-]_{initial} = 7.90 \text{ mol.m}^{-3}$  solution. ....72

**Figure 7:** a/ Biomasse totale dénitrifiante estimée par confrontation des données simulées aux données expérimentales pour les conditions 1 et 2 en utilisant les modèles A, B et C. Le modèle C pour, (a) un rendement énergétique  $Y_R^{max}$  pour la réduction de  $N_2O$  de 2.5 mol ATP.mol<sup>-1</sup>  $N_2O$  et (b) un rendement énergétique  $Y_R^{max}$  pour la réduction de  $N_2O$  de 3.33 mol ATP.mol<sup>-1</sup>  $N_2O$ , respectivement, b/ un zoom dans la représentation de la figure 7a. ....75

**Figure 8:** a/ Biomasse totale dénitrifiante estimée par confrontation des données simulées aux

données expérimentales pour les conditions 1 et 3 en utilisant les modèles A, B et C. Le modèle C pour, (a) un rendement énergétique  $Y_R^{max}$  pour la réduction de  $N_2O$  de 2.5 mol ATP.mol<sup>-1</sup>  $N_2O$  et (b) un rendement énergétique  $Y_R^{max}$  pour la réduction de  $N_2O$  de 3.33 mol ATP.mol<sup>-1</sup>  $N_2O$ , respectivement.

b/ un zoom dans la représentation de la figure 8a. ....76

### CHAPITRE 3

**Figure 1.** Taux de production de  $CO_2$  ( $10^{-9} \text{ mol kg}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-1}$ ) mesuré et simulé dans des mottes de sol (type  $\Delta$  ou  $\Gamma$ ) pendant une incubation aérobie suivie soit de non pré-incubation ou de 6 jours de pré-incubation anaérobie. Chaque point est la moyenne de 8

répétitions réalisées sur 4 mottes de sol. Les barres représentent les écarts types. .....	109
<b>Figure 2.</b> Relation entre le taux de production de $\text{CO}_2$ ( $10^{-9} \text{ mol kg}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-1}$ ) mesuré pendant différentes périodes de 24 heures et le C organique soluble ( $\text{mg C kg}^{-1}$ ) mesuré en même temps, dans les 2 types de mottes. Les périodes sont: après humectation sur la table de succion (jour -6), après la pré-incubation anaérobie (jour 0) et à la fin de l'incubation aérobie (jour 4). .....	111
<b>Figure 3:</b> Emissions Nettes de $\text{N}_2\text{O}$ ( $10^{-12} \text{ mol kg}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-1}$ ) en fonction de la masse des mottes : a) Dans des mottes de sol humectées avec une solution de nitrate et incubées dans des conditions aérobies avec $\text{C}_2\text{H}_2$ ( $\Delta^*$ , $\Gamma^*$ ) ou sans $\text{C}_2\text{H}_2$ ( $\Delta$ , $\Gamma$ ); b) Dans des mottes de sol humectées avec de l'eau désionisée et incubées dans des conditions aérobies sans $\text{C}_2\text{H}_2$ soit après une pré-incubation anaérobie ( $\Delta+$ , $\Gamma+$ ) ou sans pré-incubation ( $\Delta$ , $\Gamma$ ). .....	118

#### CHAPITRE 4

<b>Figure 1:</b> Histogramme de l'intensité lumineuse pour une motte $\Gamma$ correspondante aux Photos 1a-b. ....	136
<b>Figure 2:</b> Exemple des opérations morphologiques réalisées pour une caractérisation d'image d'une motte $\Gamma$ dans les Photos 1a-b: a/ et b/ binarisation des photos visible et UV, respectivement; c/ somme logique des sections binaires; d/ simulation de la saturation à 5 cm d'eau de succion. ....	137
<b>Figure 3:</b> Emissions de $\text{N}_2\text{O}$ en fonction de la masse des mottes pour le traitement A (i.e. avec pré-incubation anaérobie) et le traitement (B) (i.e. sans pré-incubation anaérobie). Pour le traitement (B), les émissions sont mesurées sans et avec $\text{C}_2\text{H}_2$ . ....	143
<b>Figure 4:</b> Caractérisation morphologique des sections centrées des mottes $\Delta$ et $\Gamma$ après simulation de leur saturation partielle à 5 cm d'eau de succion: a/ nombre de trous libres à l'air par motte, en fonction de la masse de motte; b/ distance maximale $r_m$ d'un point de la motte au pore libre à l'air le plus proche dans la section, en fonction de la masse de motte. .....	144
<b>Figure 5:</b> Caractérisation morphologique des sections centrées des mottes $\Delta$ et $\Gamma$ après simulation de leur saturation partielle à 5 cm d'eau de succion: a/ double du rapport entre surface et périmètre ( $r_a$ ), en fonction de la masse de motte; b/ comparaison entre $r_a$ réels et	

$\hat{r}_a$ estimés, et le nombre de trous libres à l'air dans une section. ( $\hat{r}_a$ sont obtenus par simulation d'une régression cubique aux $r_a$ expérimentaux). .....	145
<b>Figure 6:</b> Masse de motte estimée en fonction de la masse expérimentale, pour 10 mottes $\Delta$ et 10 mottes $\Gamma$ utilisées pour les caractérisations morphologiques. La masse de motte estimée est une fonction du rapport entre surface et périmètre et le nombre de trous libres à l'air sur une section centrée d'une motte. ....	147
<b>Figures 7:</b> Comparaison entre les émissions de $N_2O$ simulées et expérimentales sur des mottes pour les traitements (A) et (B), dans le cas de non ajout de $C_2H_2$ a/ simulations pour des mottes fictives ayant 4.8 trous dans une section centrée; b/ simulations pour seulement le traitement (A) individuellement pour des mottes utilisées pour les analyses morphologiques prenant en compte les nombres de trous observés et les rapports entre surface et périmètre. ....	149
<b>Figure 8:</b> Emissions de $N_2O$ simulées pour des mottes dans le traitement (A), en utilisant soit le taux de consommation d' $O_2$ $M$ et le nombre d'agrégats par motte $n_a$ , soit ces valeurs diminuent ou augmentent par un 1/3. Quelques simulations sont réalisées avec seulement modification de $M$ , alors que d'autres simulations sont réalisées avec soit l'augmentation de $M$ et la réduction de $n_a$ , soit la réduction de $M$ et l'augmentation de $n_a$ . Toutes les simulations sont réalisées pour des mottes fictives ayant 4.8 trous dans une section centrée. ....	151

## CHAPITRE 5

<b>Figure 1.</b> Variation de N minéral ( $mg\ N\ kg^{-1}$ ) avec le temps dans le sol pour différentes concentrations initiales de $NH_4^+$ . A0: témoin (sans addition), A80: 80 $mg\ N\ kg^{-1}$ , A116: 116 $mg\ N\ kg^{-1}$ ; A170: 170 $mg\ N\ kg^{-1}$ . <b>a)</b> concentration de $NH_4^+$ ; <b>b)</b> concentration de $NO_3^-$ ; <b>c)</b> concentration de $NO_2^-$ . Barres Verticales sont les écarts types des moyennes. ....	169
<b>Figure 2.</b> Variation de N minéral ( $mg\ N\ kg^{-1}$ ) avec le temps dans le sol incubé à différentes concentrations d' $O_2$ : 0, 0.3, 0.7, 1.4, 4.0 et 20.5%: <b>a)</b> concentration de $NH_4^+$ ; <b>b)</b> concentration de $NO_3^-$ ; <b>c)</b> concentration de $NO_2^-$ . Barres Verticales sont les écarts types des moyennes. ....	171
<b>Figure 3.</b> Cinétiques des émissions de $N_2O$ et $N_2$ ( $mg\ N\ kg^{-1}$ ) à partir du sol incubé à différentes concentrations d' $O_2$ : 0, 0.3, 0.7, 1.4, 4.0 et 20.5%: <b>a)</b> $N_2O$ cumulé; <b>b)</b> rapport cumulé $N_2O : N_2$ (égal au rapport $^{15}N_2O : ^{15}N_2$ ). ....	175
<b>Figure 4.</b> Emissions de $N_2O$ ( $mg\ N\ kg^{-1}\ j^{-1}$ ) par nitrification et dénitrification à différents	

intervalles de temps dans le sol incubé à différentes concentrations d'O<sub>2</sub>: 0, 0.3, 0.7, 1.4, 4.0 et 20.5%. .....177

**Figure 5.** Cinétiques de la nitrification et la consommation d'O<sub>2</sub> dans le sol incubé à différentes concentrations d'O<sub>2</sub>: 0, 0.3, 0.7, 1.4, 4.0 et 20.5%. **a)** nitrification cumulée (mg N kg<sup>-1</sup>) calculée avec le modèle FLUAZ; **b)** consommation d'O<sub>2</sub> cumulée (mmol O<sub>2</sub> kg<sup>-1</sup>) mesurée. Le taux de nitrification est défini comme  $\frac{(3n_i + n_a)}{4}$ , où n<sub>i</sub> est le taux d'oxydation de NH<sub>4</sub><sup>+</sup> et n<sub>a</sub> est le taux d'oxydation de NO<sub>2</sub><sup>-</sup>. Les barres verticales sont les écarts types. ....178

**Figure 6.** Relation entre la consommation d'O<sub>2</sub> (mmol kg<sup>-1</sup> j<sup>-1</sup>) et la nitrification (mmol kg<sup>-1</sup> j<sup>-1</sup>) pour différents intervalles de temps et différents traitements d'O<sub>2</sub>. Le taux de nitrification est défini comme  $\frac{(3n_i + n_a)}{4}$ , où n<sub>i</sub> est le taux d'oxydation de NH<sub>4</sub><sup>+</sup> et n<sub>a</sub> est le taux d'oxydation de NO<sub>2</sub><sup>-</sup>. ....180

**Figure 7.** Relations entre émissions de N<sub>2</sub>O cumulées (mg N kg<sup>-1</sup>) et la dénitrification cumulée ou la nitrification cumulée (mg N kg<sup>-1</sup>) dans le sol incubé à différentes concentrations d'O<sub>2</sub>: **a)** N<sub>2</sub>O émis par dénitrification en fonction de la dénitrification à des concentrations d'O<sub>2</sub> égales à 0 et 0.3%; **b)** N<sub>2</sub>O émis par nitrification en fonction de la nitrification à des concentrations d'O<sub>2</sub> égales à 0.7, 1.4, 4.0 et 20.5%. La nitrification est définie comme la production de NO<sub>2</sub><sup>-</sup>, i.e. oxydation cumulée de NH<sub>4</sub><sup>+</sup>. Les équations de régression sont données dans le tableau 3. ....181

**Figure 8.** Relation entre les taux des émissions totales de N<sub>2</sub>O (mg N kg<sup>-1</sup> j<sup>-1</sup>) et les concentrations de NO<sub>2</sub><sup>-</sup> (mg N kg<sup>-1</sup>) mesuré dans le sol à la fin de chaque intervalle de temps, à différentes concentrations d'O<sub>2</sub>: 0.3, 0.7, 1.4, 4.0 et 20.5%. ....184

**Figure 9:** pH mesuré au début (t = 0) et à la fin de l'incubation (t = 14 jours) dans des sols incubés à différentes concentrations d'O<sub>2</sub>: 0, 0.3, 0.7, 1.4, 4.0 et 20.5%. ....185

## LISTE DES TABLEAUX

### CHAPITRE 2

**Table 1:** paramètres estimés par confrontation des données simulées et expérimentales pour un rendement énergétique  $Y_D^{max}$  et un coefficient de maintenance  $m_E$  de  $1.25 \text{ mol ATP.mol N}_2\text{O produit et } 10^{-6} \text{ s}^{-1}$ , respectivement.

.....73

### CHAPITRE 3

**Table 1.** Paramètres obtenus par confrontation du taux de production de  $\text{CO}_2$  simulé et mesuré pendant 4 jours d'incubation aérobie avec ou sans incubation préliminaire anaérobie.

.....110

**Table 2.** Taux des émissions nettes de  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  ( $10^{-12} \text{ mol kg}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-1}$ ) mesurés sur des mottes de sol pendant l'incubation aérobie, pour différentes conditions d'humectation et pré-traitements. Les valeurs entre parenthèses représentent des intervalles de confiance ( $p < 0.05$ ).

.....112

**Table 3.** Concentrations de N minéral (in  $\text{mol m}^{-3}$  solution ou  $\text{mg kg}^{-1}$  sol) mesurées au début et à la fin d'une journée d'incubation aérobie suivie soit d'une humectation avec de l'eau et une pré-incubation anaérobie (6 jours) soit d'une humectation avec du nitrate et sans pré-incubation. Les valeurs entre parenthèses représentent des écarts types. ....114

**Table 4:** Taux apparent et réel de production de  $\text{CO}_2$  ( $10^{-9} \text{ mol CO}_2 \text{ kg}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-1}$ ) pendant 6 heures d'incubation aérobie des mottes  $\Delta$  et  $\Gamma$ . Taux apparent est le taux d'accumulation mesuré dans des échantillons; taux réel est calculé en utilisant équation 8 pour 3 valeurs de  $k_3$ :  $k_3 = 2, 3$  et  $4\%$ , correspondant à  $0.83, 1.25$  et  $1.66 \text{ mol m}^{-3}$ . Les mottes  $\Delta+$  et  $\Gamma+$  ont été incubées avec un pré-traitement (incubation anaérobie pendant 6 jours avec  $\text{C}_2\text{H}_2$ ), alors que les mottes  $\Delta$  et  $\Gamma$  sont incubées sans pré-traitement.

Les valeurs entre parenthèses représentent des intervalles de confiance ( $p < 0.05$ ).

.....115

**Table 5:** Taux des émissions de  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$ , concentrations de N minéral et compositions isotopiques de  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  et N minéral mesurées sur des mottes  $\Delta$ , pendant une période d'incubation aérobie (7 jours) suivie de 6.6 jours d'incubation anaérobie avec  $\text{C}_2\text{H}_2$ . Le pool et la composition isotopique de N minéral sont la moyenne des valeurs mesurées à  $t = 0$  et  $t =$

7 heures. Le marquage  $^{15}\text{N}$  a été réalisé en utilisant  $^{15}\text{NO}_3^-$  ou  $^{15}\text{N}$ -urée avant la pré-incubation anaérobie. Les valeurs entre parenthèses sont les écarts types (3 répétitions).  
 .....117

#### CHAPITRE 4

**Table 1:** Paramètres retenus dans le modèle d'émission de  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  sur motte par dénitrification.  
 .....139

#### CHAPITRE 5

**Table 1 :** Taux d'oxydation de  $\text{NH}_4^+$  ( $n_i$ ,  $\text{mg N kg}^{-1} \text{ j}^{-1}$ ) et Taux d'oxydation de  $\text{NO}_2^-$  ( $n_a$ ,  $\text{mg N kg}^{-1} \text{ j}^{-1}$ ) dans le sol incubé à la concentration  $\text{O}_2$  atmosphérique pour différents intervalles de temps et concentrations initiales d'ammonium (0, 80, 116 et 170  $\text{mg N kg}^{-1}$ ).  
 $n_a$  est calculée comme l'accumulation de  $\text{NO}_3^-$  et  $n_i$  comme la disparition de  $\text{NH}_4^+$  et la production de  $\text{NO}_2^-$ . .....170

**Table 2 :** Excès atom% de  $\text{NH}_4^+$ ,  $\text{NO}_3^-$  et  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  (moyennes et écarts types) mesurés dans le sol à différentes dates d'incubation et différentes concentrations d' $\text{O}_2$  (0, 0.3, 0.7, 1.4, 4.0 et 20.5%). .....172

**Table 3 :** Taux de nitrification (taux d'oxydation de  $\text{NH}_4^+$   $n_i$ ) et taux de dénitrification ( $d$ ) ( $\text{mg kg}^{-1} \text{ j}^{-1}$ ), calculés en utilisant les pools mesurés de  $\text{N}$  et  $^{15}\text{N}$  et le modèle de FLUAZ ; dans des échantillons de sol incubés sous différentes concentrations d' $\text{O}_2$  (0; 0.3; 0.7; 1.4; 4.0 et 20.5%) pendant 14 jours.  
 .....174

**Table 4 :** Paramètres des régressions linéaires de la production cumulée de  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  ( $\text{mg N kg}^{-1}$ ) en fonction de la nitrification cumulée ( $\text{mg N kg}^{-1}$ ).  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  total est le  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  mesuré alors que  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  'par nitrification' est calculé (en utilisant les coefficients  $\alpha$  et  $\beta$ , voir le texte). La nitrification est définie comme la production de  $\text{NO}_2^-$ , i.e. oxydation cumulée de  $\text{NH}_4^+$ .  
 .....183

# INTRODUCTION GENERALE

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L'oxyde nitreux est un gaz à effet de serre impliqué dans la chimie de l'ozone, dans la haute troposphère et la basse stratosphère. Les estimations récentes font état d'émissions annuelles de  $N_2O$  vers l'atmosphère d'environ 14.7 Tg de N- $N_2O$ , dont 9.5 Tg proviendraient des sols. La contribution des sols agricoles reste encore estimée de manière très imprécise. La production de  $N_2O$  dans les sols résulte des transformations microbiennes de l'azote, plus particulièrement de la dénitrification. La nitrification contribue aussi à ces émissions et pourrait en être une source importante.

Plusieurs motivations justifient notre travail. Les sources et puits des émissions de ce gaz sont mal évalués. Chacune des 2 étapes de la dénitrification (production et consommation) possède sa propre régulation. La production nette de  $N_2O$  dans les sols représente une part variable des produits de la dénitrification ( $N_2O$  et  $N_2$ ) selon les conditions du milieu. Les émissions de  $N_2O$  varient donc aussi bien avec la vitesse de dénitrification qu'avec la vitesse de réduction du  $N_2O$  en  $N_2$ . Les facteurs qui contrôlent le ratio  $N_2O/(N_2O+N_2)$  sont mal connus et peuvent différer de ceux qui régulent la dénitrification. Plusieurs modèles ont été proposés pour décrire la dénitrification. Ils prennent en compte plusieurs facteurs tels que la respiration, l'anaérobiose, ... Néanmoins, les variations temporelles de ces facteurs ne sont pas considérées dans ces modèles. Par ailleurs, la structure du sol est un facteur important puisqu'elle conditionne l'anoxie et donc la dénitrification. Toutefois, ce paramètre n'est pas souvent pris en compte dans les modèles de prévision du  $N_2O$ . Enfin, la contribution de la nitrification aux émissions de  $N_2O$  reste encore mal estimée. Plusieurs facteurs pouvant influencer ces émissions ont été étudiés; toutefois, peu d'études ont analysé l'effet direct de la pression partielle en  $O_2$  dans les sols.

Il est nécessaire de choisir une échelle expérimentale adéquate et compatible avec nos motivations environnementale et agronomique. Nous avons choisi une échelle millimétrique: boues, agrégats (2-3 mm) et mottes (2 à 3 cm de diamètre). Cette échelle d'étude se justifie par le fait que les conditions physiques (en particulier les teneurs en  $O_2$ ) de la couche labourée sont en fait très variables à l'intérieur des mottes constituant cette couche, de telle sorte que la valeur moyenne ne suffit pas à prévoir l'activité des micro-organismes, en particulier la nitrification et la dénitrification.

Ce mémoire présente l'ensemble des résultats obtenus lors de cette étude et il est structuré en 6 parties.

Dans une première partie, nous avons commencé par une synthèse bibliographique décrivant l'état des connaissances actuelles sur les émissions de  $N_2O$  ainsi que les problématiques environnementales et agronomiques qui justifient notre travail (*Chapitre 1*).

Dans une seconde partie, nous avons décrit le fonctionnement de la production de  $N_2O$  en compétition avec sa réduction en  $N_2$  sur des boues de sol avec différentes concentrations initiales en nitrate. A cette occasion, nous avons utilisé des modèles qui prennent en compte la dynamique microbienne ainsi que l'adaptation des microorganismes à réduire  $N_2O$  en  $N_2$  (*Chapitre 2*).

Dans une troisième partie, nous avons étudié l'influence d'une pré-incubation anaérobie sur la respiration aérobie ainsi que sur les émissions de  $N_2O$  par dénitrification, sur deux populations de mottes de structure différente (*Chapitre 3*).

Au cours d'une quatrième partie, nous avons utilisé un modèle qui prend en compte l'activité dénitrifiante et l'aération en relation avec la structure des mottes décrite par des descripteurs synthétiques obtenus par analyse morphologique (*Chapitre 4*).

Dans une cinquième partie, nous avons étudié l'effet de la pression partielle en  $O_2$  sur la nitrification et les émissions de  $N_2O$  par nitrification après un apport d'ammonium sur des agrégats de sol (*Chapitre 5*).

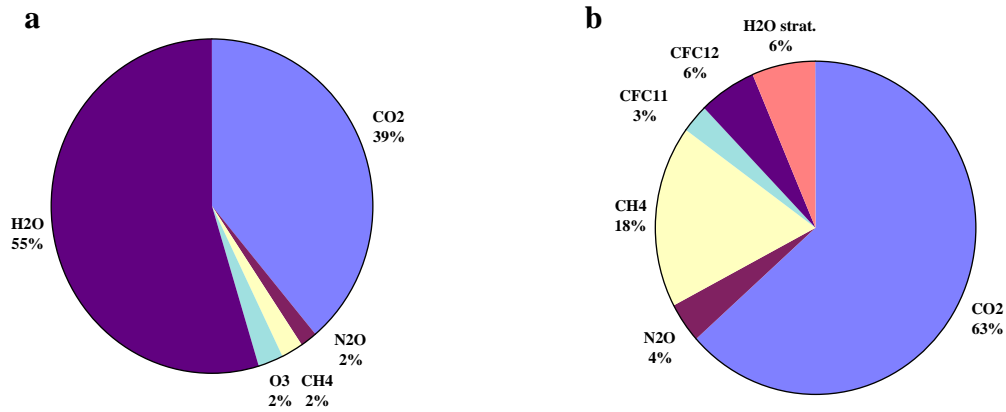
L'ensemble de ce travail de thèse est discuté dans une sixième partie dans laquelle nous avons positionné nos résultats dans un contexte d'étude plus large. Nous faisons quelques propositions de recherches ultérieures et d'application de ces résultats à la problématique environnementale.

## SYNTHESE BIBLIOGRAPHIQUE

## I. Problématiques environnementales et agronomiques

### I.1. Effet de serre et forçage radiatif

Une part importante du rayonnement infrarouge émis par le sol est absorbée par certains constituants atmosphériques mineurs (les gaz dits à effet de serre). Le rayonnement ainsi piégé réchauffe la basse atmosphère qui émet elle-même un rayonnement infrarouge. Une fraction de ce dernier rayonnement réchauffe la surface de la terre : c'est l'effet de serre. On parle d'effet de serre "naturel" pour caractériser le réchauffement de la planète dû à la présence de gaz absorbant dans l'infrarouge aux teneurs qu'ils avaient avant le début de l'ère industrielle, i.e. avant que l'homme ne commence à modifier significativement la composition de l'atmosphère. Cet effet de serre naturel a été estimé à 33°C : en absence de nuages et des gaz traces, la température moyenne de la terre serait ainsi d'environ -18°C, au lieu des 15°C environ vers 1800-1850. L'essentiel de l'effet de serre naturel est lié à la présence d'eau dans l'atmosphère (vapeur, nuages ...) et à la présence de dioxyde de carbone (Figure 1a). Un changement dans l'intensité du rayonnement du soleil ou des capacités de l'atmosphère à absorber le rayonnement infrarouge constituent un forçage radiatif. Le forçage radiatif actuel serait à l'origine d'un accroissement de température d'environ 0.5-0.8°C depuis l'ère préindustrielle. Selon le rapport de l'IPCC (1996), entre 50 et 60 % du forçage radiatif résulte de l'accroissement de la concentration atmosphérique en dioxyde de carbone (Figure 1b). Le reste du forçage radiatif résulte de l'accroissement de concentrations d'autres gaz : méthane, CFC, ozone, protoxyde d'azote et vapeur d'eau stratosphérique. D'après l'évolution de la composition atmosphérique, l'accumulation atmosphérique du protoxyde d'azote (N<sub>2</sub>O) s'élève à environ 4 Tg N an<sup>-1</sup> (IPCC, 1995). Sa durée de vie est estimée entre 110 et 166 ans, avec un temps de résidence de 25 ans dans la troposphère (Jambert, 1995). Le N<sub>2</sub>O possède un effet radiatif 200 à 300 fois supérieur à celui du CO<sub>2</sub>. Les estimations actuelles indiquent que près de 65 % des émissions (soit 9.5 Tg N an<sup>-1</sup>) sont issus du sol, dont 1/3 (3.5 Tg N an<sup>-1</sup>) proviendrait des sols cultivés. Environ 20 % (3 Tg N an<sup>-1</sup>) des émissions totales de N<sub>2</sub>O proviennent des océans, 3 % (0.4 Tg N an<sup>-1</sup>) serait produits par les animaux et l'élevage, 3 % (0.5 Tg N an<sup>-1</sup>) seraient émis au cours du brûlage de la biomasse et environ 9 % (1.3 Tg N an<sup>-1</sup>) proviendraient des rejets industriels lors de la fabrication de produits chimiques tels que l'acide nitrique ou les engrais.



**Figure 1:** Contribution relative (%) des gaz de l'atmosphère a) à l'effet de serre naturel et b) au forçage radiatif, d'après Mac Kay et Khalil (1991)

## I.2. Effets sur l'ozone de la haute troposphère et de la basse stratosphère

L'ozone (O<sub>3</sub>) est le composant le plus paradoxal de l'atmosphère terrestre. Ce gaz est à la fois indispensable et néfaste pour le maintien de la vie sur terre. Situé dans la haute troposphère et la basse stratosphère, il filtre les rayonnements ultraviolets de longueur d'onde inférieure à 290 nm mortels pour la plupart des formes de vie, alors que l'ozone situé dans la troposphère est néfaste pour les espèces vivantes. Différents composés interviennent dans le devenir de l'ozone avec l'implication de réactions chimiques et photochimiques. Dans la basse troposphère, le N<sub>2</sub>O est un composé très stable. Par contre, quand il atteint la haute troposphère et la basse stratosphère, il peut donner naissance à des radicaux libres NO• grâce à la présence d'atomes d'oxygène excités. Le monoxyde d'azote (NO) a alors un double rôle vis-à-vis de l'ozone :

- il est l'un des catalyseurs de la destruction de l'ozone ;
- il peut se combiner (sous la forme NO<sub>2</sub>•) à d'autres radicaux libres qui sont plus nocifs pour l'ozone (notamment les radicaux libres chlore Cl•) et aboutit à inactiver temporairement ces différents catalyseurs. Ainsi en terme de bilan, le N<sub>2</sub>O a probablement eu ces dernières années un effet plus protecteur que destructeur; ainsi au-dessus de l'Antarctique, le trou d'ozone se reforme chaque année au début du printemps austral lorsque les radicaux libres NO• sont piégés sous forme d'acide nitrique dans des nuages de glace et que les radicaux libres Cl• se reforment par photodissociation de la molécule Cl<sub>2</sub>. Toutefois, dans certaines situations, les radicaux

libres NO• sont plus nocifs pour l'ozone : c'est notamment le cas lorsqu'ils se forment en très grande quantité suite à des bombardements solaires de protons mais, ils ne proviennent alors plus de l'oxyde nitreux. (Graedel et Crutzen, 1992). Les autres sources de NO dans la haute troposphère et la basse stratosphère sont les rejets directs à partir d'avions, d'explosions nucléaires, ...

### I.3. Pertes de fertilisants azotés en agriculture

L'augmentation de la teneur de l'atmosphère en protoxyde d'azote (N<sub>2</sub>O) est à mettre en relation avec l'intensification de l'agriculture et l'utilisation de fertilisants azotés (Eichner, 1990; Beauchamp, 1997). Le N<sub>2</sub>O émis par les sols constitue ainsi une perte d'azote pour les cultures, mais la perte totale d'azote est généralement beaucoup plus conséquente que la seule perte en N<sub>2</sub>O. D'une part, le rapport N<sub>2</sub>O/(N<sub>2</sub>O+N<sub>2</sub>) des produits terminaux de la dénitrification peut prendre des valeurs très variables comprises entre 0 et 1 (Granli et Bockman, 1994) ; d'autre part, il semble que lorsque N<sub>2</sub>O est émis par nitrification, du NO• est émis dans les mêmes proportions, voire en quantité plus importante (Williams *et al.*, 1992 et Garrido, 2001). L'estimation moyenne actuellement retenue des émissions de N<sub>2</sub>O à partir des sols est  $Y = 1 + 0.0125X$ , où X représente la quantité d'azote apporté par les produits fertilisants (X et Y en kg N/ha; Bouwman, 1996). La contribution directe ou indirecte des pratiques agricoles est estimée entre 1.8 et 5.3 Tg N<sub>2</sub>O an<sup>-1</sup>, et la production totale à 9.5 Tg N<sub>2</sub>O an<sup>-1</sup> (IPCC, 1995).

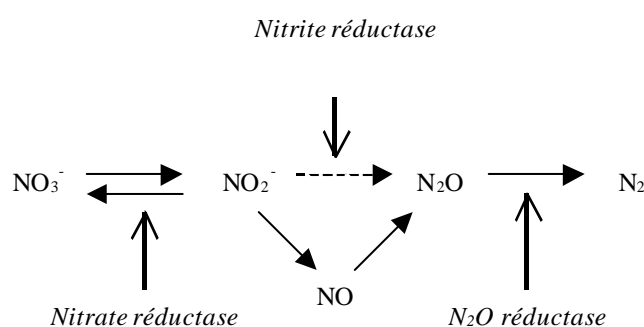
## II. Processus impliqués dans la production et la consommation de N<sub>2</sub>O dans les sols

Les émissions de N<sub>2</sub>O sont principalement dues à l'activité des micro-organismes (dénitrification, nitrification, réduction de NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> en NH<sub>4</sub><sup>+</sup>), et parfois à la dénitrification chimique. Les émissions de N<sub>2</sub>O par réduction microbienne dissimilative de NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> en NH<sub>4</sub><sup>+</sup> semblent négligeables (Knowles, 1982). La dénitrification et la nitrification sont les principaux processus biologiques impliqués et sont réalisés chacun par des groupes fonctionnels spécifiques de la microflore du sol.

### II.1. La dénitrification

### II.1.1. Le processus

La dénitrification est un processus respiratoire microbien au cours duquel des micro-organismes sont capables de substituer à l'oxygène des formes oxydées de l'azote comme accepteur terminal d'électrons dans leur chaîne respiratoire. Les oxydes d'azote solubles, nitrates ( $\text{NO}_3^-$ ) ou nitrites ( $\text{NO}_2^-$ ), sont transformés en composés gazeux : oxyde nitrique (NO), protoxyde d'azote ( $\text{N}_2\text{O}$ ) et/ou diazote ( $\text{N}_2$ ) selon la chaîne de réactions suivante:



**Figure 2:** Les étapes de la dénitrification (Hénault, 1995)

Une chaîne respiratoire est un complexe membranaire associant transporteurs d'électrons, enzymes et transporteurs de protons. Elle permet notamment l'oxydation de composés réduits ( $\text{NADH}+\text{H}^+$  en  $\text{NAD}^+$  par exemple) avec la réduction concomitante d'accepteurs terminaux d'électrons ( $\text{NO}_3^-$  en  $\text{NO}_2^-$  par exemple) en combinant à certaines étapes du transfert des électrons le transport de protons de l'intérieur vers l'extérieur de la cellule. Le retour des protons dans la cellule peut être associé à la création d'énergie cellulaire sous forme d'ATP. Il faut distinguer respiration aérobie et respiration anaérobie. L'accepteur final d'électrons est l'oxygène pour la respiration aérobie. Différents accepteurs d'électrons peuvent être utilisés pour la respiration anaérobie, tels que  $\text{NO}_3^-$ , Mn, Fe,  $\text{SO}_4^{2-}$ ,  $\text{CO}_2$  (Paccard, 1995). Dans le cas des micro-organismes dénitrifiants, ces accepteurs sont :  $\text{NO}_3^-$ ,  $\text{NO}_2^-$ , NO et  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$ .

### II.1.2. Les micro-organismes dénitrifiants

Les bactéries dénitrifiantes au sens strict sont des bactéries capables de réduire  $\text{NO}_3^-$  ou  $\text{NO}_2^-$  en  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  et/ou  $\text{N}_2$  et qui peuvent utiliser l'énergie libérée au cours de cette réduction pour se développer (Mahne et Tiedje, 1995). Parmi les micro-organismes hétérotrophes

présents dans les sols cultivés, 1 à 5 % d'entre eux sont des dénitrifiants (Tiedje et al., 1982). Selon Lensi (1995), les organismes dénitrifiants représentent 10 % des bactéries totales en sol cultivé et 5 % en pâturage permanent. D'après une étude de Gamble *et al.* (1977) réalisée sur 19 sols provenant d'écosystèmes variés, les genres majoritaires sont représentés par *Pseudomonas* et *Alcaligenes*. Les bactéries dénitrifiantes sont en majorité hétérotrophes, elles tirent leur énergie de l'oxydation des matières organiques (organotrophes). Elles peuvent aussi être autotrophes et oxyder des composés minéraux comme  $\text{Fe}^{2+}$  et  $\text{HS}^-$  (chimolithotrophes). Toutes les étapes de la dénitrification sont productrices d'énergie sous forme d'ATP. Toutes les bactéries dénitrifiantes sont des bactéries aérobies pouvant s'adapter à une respiration sur  $\text{NO}_3^-$ ,  $\text{NO}_2^-$  ou sur  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  quand le milieu devient pauvre en  $\text{O}_2$  (on parle de bactéries aérobies facultatives). Les 2/3 de la microflore réduisent les  $\text{NO}_3^-$  en  $\text{NO}_2^-$ , mais seulement un faible pourcentage semble capable de réaliser toute la chaîne de réactions (Germon et Hénault, 1994). Si le nombre de bactéries dénitrifiantes ne reflète pas l'activité dénitrifiante (Parson *et al.*, 1991), la dynamique de ces populations constitue sans doute un élément essentiel pour expliquer les émissions de  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  par les sols (Granli et Bockman, 1994). Les micro-organismes du sol s'adaptent aux conditions environnementales et les individus d'une même espèce qui se développent dans différents environnements peuvent différer en phénotype (ensemble des caractères morphologiques et physiologiques visibles), dû aux différences génétiques ou aux effets environnementaux sur les phénotypes (Bergwall, 1999). On parle alors de plasticité phénotypique, c'est-à-dire de capacité d'un organisme à produire différents phénotypes en conditions environnementales variables (Pigliucci, 1996). On peut citer l'adaptation à une concentration variable en  $\text{NO}_3^-$  du sol ; pour des concentrations élevées, la plasticité phénotypique est telle qu'elle élargit la capacité compétitive des dénitrifiants au-delà des conditions d'habitat rencontrées (Bergwall, 1999). L'adaptation à un milieu plus ou moins riche en  $\text{NO}_3^-$  se fait après un temps de latence plus ou moins long .

### *II.1.3. Les enzymes de la dénitrification*

Chacune des étapes de la chaîne de dénitrification est catalysée par une enzyme spécifique. Certaines bactéries ne possèdent pas la totalité des enzymes et par conséquent, elles ne peuvent réaliser qu'une seule partie de la chaîne de dénitrification.

Deux principaux types de nitrate réductase ont été distingués : la nitrate réductase assimilatrice et dissimilatrice. Plusieurs nitrate réductases dissimilatrices ont été mises en évidence: deux sont des enzymes membranaires et sont inhibées par l'oxygène, une autre est



périplasmique et peut fonctionner en présence d'oxygène dès qu'il y a du  $\text{NO}_3^-$ . La synthèse de  $\text{NO}_3^-$  réductase est régulée par des protéines qui ont pour rôle de réguler certaines fonctions bactériennes en fonction de la pression partielle en oxygène. Elles sont responsables en anaérobiose de répressions et d'inductions selon leur état d'oxydation (Unden et Schirawski, 1997).

La  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  réductase ( $\text{N}_2\text{OR}$ ) est une enzyme périplasmique soluble; sa complexité peut être due à la possibilité d'une compétition entre  $\text{NO}_3^-$  et  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  comme accepteurs d'électrons (Cho et Sakdianan, 1978). Le Cu est nécessaire pour la  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  réductase (Zumft, 1997) et le Fe pour les autres porteurs d'électrons. Les  $\text{N}_2\text{OR}$  sont inhibées par le dithionite, le CO et le  $\text{C}_2\text{H}_2$  (Paccard, 1995). Otte *et al.* (1996) ont directement observé une soudaine et considérable augmentation de la concentration de  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  réductase après environ 25h. Les  $\text{NO}_3^-$  et  $\text{NO}_2^-$  réductases sont synthétisées en conditions aérobies (Patureau *et al.*, 1996), alors que la synthèse de la  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  réductase commence seulement 16 à 33 h après disparition du  $\text{O}_2$  (Firestone et Tiedje, 1979; MacConnaughey *et al.*, 1985; Dendooven et Anderson, 1994).

## II.2. La nitrification

### II.2.1. Le processus

La nitrification est due à des bactéries oxydant  $\text{NH}_4^+$  en  $\text{NO}_2^-$  (nitritation) puis en  $\text{NO}_3^-$  (nitratisation) en conditions aérobies. La nitrification peut être autotrophe ou hétérotrophe.

- a. La nitrification hétérotrophe est réalisée par une microflore qui se développe sur des substrats carbonés organiques. Elle se limite principalement aux sols forestiers et aux milieux à faible pH et à température élevée. Elle est moins active que la nitrification autotrophe.
- b. La nitrification autotrophe est le processus dominant en sol cultivé. En présence d'une source minérale de carbone,  $\text{CO}_2$  ou bicarbonate, l'ammonium est oxydé successivement en hydroxylamine ( $\text{NH}_2\text{OH}$ ), nitrite et nitrate. Ce processus fait intervenir des transporteurs d'électrons tels que NAD et FAD. Chaque étape est catalysée par un système enzymatique différent.

### II.1.2. Les micro-organismes nitrifiants

Les nitrifiants hétérotrophes, largement représentés chez les champignons (ex: *Aspergillus flavus*, les bactéries et les actinomycètes, sont capables de réaliser la nitrification en culture pure à partir de sources d'azote organique ou ammoniacal (Killham, 1986). Toutefois, d'autres travaux sont nécessaires pour estimer l'importance de la nitrification hétérotrophe dans les sols.

Les nitrifiants autotrophes sont des bactéries nitrifiantes classées dans la famille des *Nitrobacteraceae* (Watson, 1971 ; Bock *et al.*, 1986). Les bactéries oxydant l'ammonium en nitrite s'organisent en 5 genres : *Nitrosomonas*, *Nitrosospira*, *Nitrosococcus*, *Nitrosolobus* et *Nitrosovibrio*. Les bactéries oxydant les nitrites en nitrates s'organisent en 4 genres : *Nitrobacter*, *Nitrococcus*, *Nitrospira* et *Nitrospina*.

L'ammoniac mono-oxygénase (AMO) est une enzyme membranaire dont la structure n'est pas encore clairement identifiée. Des études ont montré une analogie de structure entre l'AMO de *N. europaea* et de *Paracoccus dénitrificans* (nitrifiant hétérotrophe). L'AMO présente la capacité d'hydroxyler une large gamme de substrats hydrocarbonés; elle est irréversiblement inhibée par l'acétylène (Hommes *et al.*, 1998).

#### II.1.5. Les hypothèses de formation de $N_2O$ liées à la nitrification

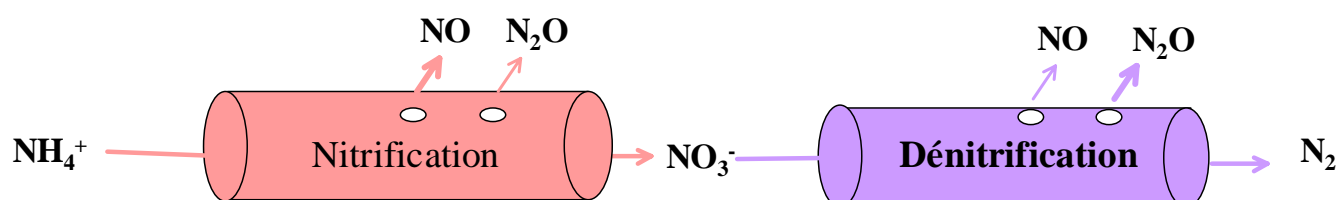
Plusieurs travaux ont mis en évidence la production de  $N_2O$  par nitrification (Blackmer *et al.*, 1980 ; Stevens et Laughlin, 1998). Plusieurs hypothèses ont été émises pour expliquer l'origine de ces émissions :

H1) Une fraction du  $NH_4^+$  oxydé est déviée vers la production de  $N_2O$  durant la nitrification, avec plusieurs réactions intermédiaires. Selon Conrad (1990) cette formation serait la conséquence de la transformation d'un composé intermédiaire formé au cours de l'oxydation de l'hydroxylamine en nitrite, identifié comme étant le nitroxyl (HNO). Selon Parton *et al.* (1996), l'oxydation du nitroxyl pourrait également conduire à la formation d'un autre composé inconnu qui serait ensuite oxydé en nitrite. Cette hypothèse est prise en compte dans le modèle NGAS de Parton *et al.* (1996) et des autres modèles (Linn et Doran, 1984; Davidson, 1993).

H2) La présence d'un système enzymatique sur *Nitrosomonas europaea* réduit  $NO_2^-$  en  $N_2O$  durant l'oxydation de carbone en anaérobiose (Ritchie et Nicholas, 1972). L'effet de la pression partielle de  $O_2$  a été mis en évidence soit directement en faisant varier la

pression partielle en  $O_2$  (Bollmann et Conrad, 1998), soit indirectement en faisant varier l'humidité du sol (Zanner et Bloom, 1995); il est pris en compte dans le modèle de Grant (1995).

H3) L'oxydation partielle de  $NH_4^+$  en  $NO_2^-$  en aérobiose est suivie d'une diffusion du  $NO_2^-$  vers les sites anoxiques, puis d'une réduction en  $N_2O$  par dénitrification. Poth et Focht (1985) ont conclu que le processus de réduction de  $NO_2^-$  en  $N_2O$  par *N. europaea* correspond à la définition de la dénitrification. La production de  $N_2O$  par nitrification est non corrélée avec l'addition de nitrate mais corrélée avec l'addition d'ammonium, cela peut s'expliquer par l'utilisation de l'ammonium comme source d'électrons et par l'absence de l'activité du nitrate réductase dans *N. europaea*. Cette hypothèse est prise en compte dans quelques modèles (Poth et Focht, 1985).



**Figure 3:** Schéma conceptuel « hole in the pipe » (Firestone et Davidson, 1989)

## II. La régulation des émissions de $N_2O$ dans les sols

La compréhension et la description des émissions de  $N_2O$  passe par la prise en compte des facteurs intervenant sur la nitrification et la dénitrification. Deux types de difficultés doivent être surmontées dans ce cadre :

- la prise en compte des interactions entre facteurs du milieu qui font que l'effet d'un facteur ne peut pas être décrit indépendamment de l'effet d'autres facteurs: citons les interactions entre les effets de la teneur en eau et de la température, ou entre la structure et la teneur en eau (Renault et Sierra, 1994) ;

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- la contribution en proportion variable des deux processus et la consommation de  $N_2O$  par l'un des processus (dénitrification); celle-ci peut être du même ordre de grandeur que la production brute de  $N_2O$ .

L'échelle millimétrique adoptée par certains auteurs pour étudier et décrire les émissions de  $N_2O$  peut se justifier par le fait que les conditions expérimentées par les organismes du sol peuvent être très différentes des mesures globales faites sur des blocs de sol (Parkin, 1987). Ainsi la concentration en  $O_2$  peut passer de la teneur atmosphérique à une valeur nulle sur une distance de quelques millimètres dans la motte de sol (Sextone *et al.*, 1985; Sierra *et al.*, 1995), et même sur une distance inférieure à 1 mm au voisinage de la matière organique particulaire (Parkin, 1987; Parry *et al.*, 2000) ou dans la rhizosphère (Bidel *et al.*, 2000). Ce type d'échelle peut faciliter la prise en compte explicite des interactions entre facteurs du milieu.

*Figure 4: Les facteurs de contrôle de la dénitrification dans les sols (Robertson, 1989)*

*Figure 5: Les facteurs de contrôle de la nitrification dans les sols (Robertson, 1989)*

### III.1. La teneur en eau

La teneur en eau affecte différemment la nitrification et la dénitrification, surtout au voisinage de la saturation en eau. De fortes corrélations ont été observées entre le taux de dénitrification et la teneur en eau du sol (Parson, 1991; Mosier *et al.*, 1986; Rolston *et al.*, 1984; Grundman et Rolston, 1987). Les auteurs qui ont tenté de décrire les effets de l'humidité indépendamment des effets d'autres facteurs ont établi un seuil minimum de taux de saturation en eau de la porosité (WFPS = water filled pore space) au delà duquel la dénitrification peut se produire. Ce seuil est égal à 0.6 selon Grundman et Rolston (1987) et Terry *et al.* (1981) ou 0.8 pour Rolston *et al.* (1984). La dénitrification croît exponentiellement au delà de ce seuil jusqu'à la saturation du sol (Terry *et al.*, 1981).

D'autres auteurs ayant une approche plus mécaniste des processus montrent que le WFPS minimum et la relation WFPS - dénitrification varient en fonction de plusieurs facteurs, tels que la structure du sol (densité apparente et granulométrie de motte) et la température (Renault et Sierra, 1994). Le rapport  $N_2O/(N_2O+N_2)$  des produits terminaux de la dénitrification diminue avec une augmentation de la teneur en eau du sol (Terry *et al.*, 1981; Weir *et al.*, 1993). Linn et Doran (1984) supposent que la nitrification est active pour WFPS compris entre 10 et 80% avec un maximum d'activité à 60%. Ces auteurs représentent leurs résultats par la figure suivante :

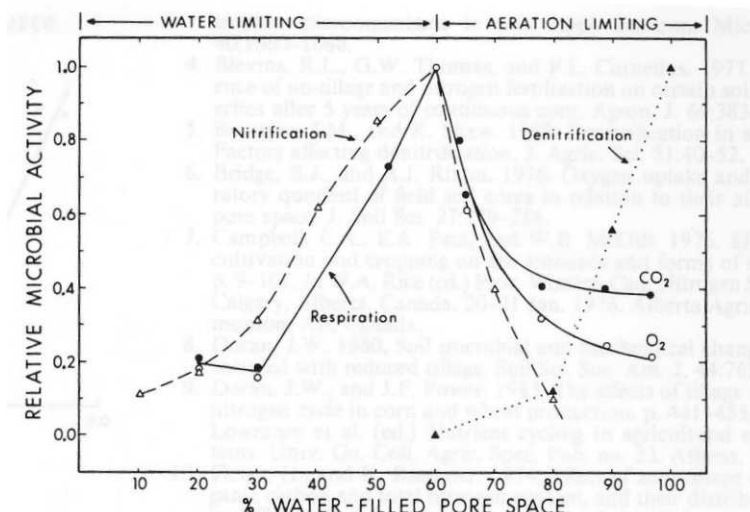


Figure 6 : Effet du taux de saturation sur l'intensité relative des processus (Linn et Doran, 1984)

La teneur en eau du sol influence les émissions de  $N_2O$  par son action sur l'activité des microflores impliquées, sur la dissolution des substrats des réactions et sur la diffusion des gaz dans les sols, en particulier sur la transport d'oxygène. Les événements pluvieux importants ou l'irrigation peuvent induire des pics de  $N_2O$  très importants (Sextone *et al.*, 1985).

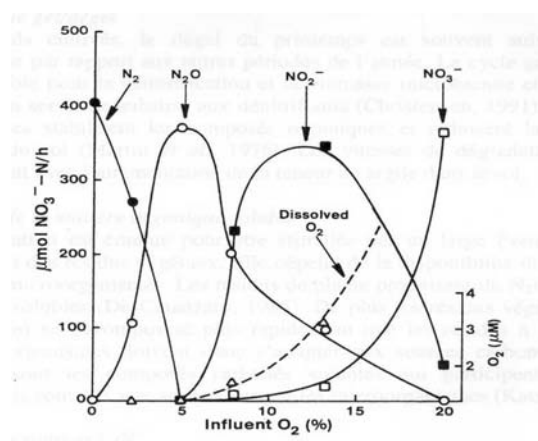
### III.2. L'aération du sol

Le sol est un milieu hétérogène où peuvent exister des zones aérobies et anaérobies. La dénitrification apparaît à de faibles teneurs en  $O_2$  (Jambert, 1995; Granli et Bockman, 1994). Le rapport  $N_2O/(N_2O+N_2)$  tend à augmenter lorsque la concentration en  $O_2$  diminue. La  $N_2O$ -réductase semble plus sensible à la teneur en  $O_2$  que d'autres enzymes de la dénitrification (Betlach et Tiedje, 1981). Des sites anoxiques peuvent exister dans un sol présentant de bonnes conditions d'aération. Ils apparaissent au cœur des agrégats (Sextone *et al.*, 1985, Sierra *et al.*, 1995), au voisinage des matières organiques particulières en décomposition (Parkin, 1987 ; Parry *et al.*, 2000) et dans la rhizosphère (Bidel *et al.*, 2000). La taille de ces sites joue sur l'importance de la dénitrification et sur le rapport  $N_2O/(N_2O+N_2)$  : plus le site est petit, plus le  $N_2O$  pourra atteindre rapidement les zones aérées sans être réduit (Lafolie *et al.*, 2001).

La dénitrification a longtemps été considérée comme exclusivement anaérobie, en supposant que les enzymes de la dénitrification sont inhibées par les environnements oxygènes. Il semble maintenant qu'elle puisse apparaître aussi en aérobiose. Cette activité est attribuée à l'existence d'une  $NO_3^-$  réductase distincte (appelée Nap), localisée dans l'espace périplasmique des dénitrifiants gram -, alors que le site actif de la membrane liée à la  $NO_3^-$  réductase (Nar) est située dans le cytoplasme (Bell, 1990).

Tiedje (1988) a établi un schéma représentant les effets de la concentration en  $O_2$  sur les étapes de la dénitrification:





**Figure 7 :** Effets de la concentration en O<sub>2</sub> sur les étapes de la dénitrification (Tiedje, 1988)

Contrairement à la dénitrification, la nitrification est un processus aérobie qui requiert de l'oxygène pour l'activation de l'ammonium oxygénase (Wood, 1987). La vitesse de nitrification dépend de la pression partielle en O<sub>2</sub> (Bollmann et Conrad, 1998). Une diminution de l'aération du sol s'accompagne d'une augmentation de la pression partielle de CO<sub>2</sub>, ce qui affecte directement ou indirectement (via les variations de pH) les nitrifiants autotrophes (Grant, 1993; Pennington et Ellis, 1993). Les émissions de N<sub>2</sub>O par nitrification augmentent lorsque la pression partielle en O<sub>2</sub> diminue (Goreau *et al.*, 1980). Le rendement de production en N<sub>2</sub>O (rapport entre la production de N<sub>2</sub>O et la quantité de N nitrifié) varie beaucoup selon les auteurs: 0.09 à 0.28% (Breitenbeck *et al.*, 1980), 0.5 à 2% (Bolle, 1986), 0.02% (Tortoso et Hutchinson, 1990), 0.03 à 1% (Garrido, 2001).

### III.3. La disponibilité en azote minéral

La teneur et la forme de l'azote minéral contenu dans le sol exercent un effet important sur la nature et l'intensité des émissions de N<sub>2</sub>O. Les bactéries dénitrifiantes ont la capacité d'utiliser NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup>, NO<sub>2</sub><sup>-</sup> et/ou N<sub>2</sub>O comme accepteurs d'électrons en absence de O<sub>2</sub>. La dénitrification est généralement décrite par une cinétique de Michaelis-Menten, qui se caractérise par une dépendance de la vitesse aux faibles concentrations en NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> et une indépendance aux plus fortes teneurs (Betlach et Tiedje, 1981; Myrold et Tiedje, 1985 ; Maag *et al.*, 1997). Des constantes de Michaelis de dénitrification ont ainsi été déterminées sur

différents sols. Les principales incertitudes qui restent sur le processus de réduction du  $\text{NO}_3^-$  en  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  sont les suivantes:

- i) l'existence ou non d'un effet inhibiteur par les fortes concentrations en  $\text{NO}_3^-$  (Blackmer et Bremner 1978, Nakajima *et al.*, 1984; Lalisce-Grundmann *et al.*, 1988),
- ii) la valeur de la constante de Michaelis décrivant l'affinité microbienne pour  $\text{NO}_3^-$ ,
- iii) l'existence ou non d'une compétition entre  $\text{NO}_3^-$  and  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  pour les dénitrifiants pouvant réduire ces 2 formes.

Blackmer et Bremner (1979) considèrent que les faibles concentrations en  $\text{NO}_3^-$  augmentent la réduction de  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$ . Les fortes concentrations en  $\text{NO}_3^-$  ou  $\text{NO}_2^-$  diminuent généralement la réduction de  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  et augmentent le rapport  $\text{N}_2\text{O}/(\text{N}_2\text{O}+\text{N}_2)$  (Guthrie et Duxbury, 1978; Firestone *et al.*, 1979; Terry et Tate, 1980; Letey *et al.*, 1980; Gaskell *et al.*, 1981; Nömmik *et al.*, 1984; Weir *et al.*, 1993; Luo *et al.*, 1996). Plusieurs hypothèses sont proposées pour expliquer ces observations:

- i) l'induction de la  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$ -réductase par le  $\text{NO}_3^-$  à faible concentration (Soohoo et Hollocher, 1990),
- ii) l'inhibition par  $\text{NO}_2^-$  qui s'accumule durant la réduction de  $\text{NO}_3^-$  (Shimuzu *et al.*, 1978; Firestone *et al.*, 1979; McKenney *et al.*, 1982),
- iii) l'inhibition directe par  $\text{NO}_3^-$  (Gaskell *et al.*, 1981),
- iv) la compétition entre  $\text{NO}_3^-$  et  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  comme accepteurs d'électrons (Cho et Sakdinan, 1978).

La compétition entre  $\text{NO}_3^-$  et  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  comme accepteurs d'électrons pourrait varier dans le temps si les  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  réducteurs s'adaptent aux fortes concentrations en  $\text{NO}_3^-$  (hypothèse suggérée par Terry et Tate, 1980; Guthrie et Duxbury, 1978). Il est donc important de prendre en compte la variation temporelle de la concentration en oxyde d'azote réductase et les dynamiques microbiennes, en particulier les populations dénitrifiantes et  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  réductrices (Baumann *et al.*, 1996; Otte *et al.*, 1996).

L'apport d'engrais ammoniacaux peut induire une production de  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  par nitrification. Peu d'études ont été publiées sur l'effet de la concentration en  $\text{NH}_4^+$  sur la nitrification et sur les émissions associées de  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$ . Aux faibles concentrations, le taux de nitrification est proportionnel au taux de minéralisation (Bremner et Blackmer, 1981 ; Lensi *et al.*, 1992), alors qu'il dépend de  $\text{NH}_4^+$  aux fortes concentrations (Stevens *et al.*, 1997). Aulakh *et al.* (1984) ont estimé que les pertes de fertilisants sous forme  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  représentaient 0.1 à 0.5 % de l'apport de  $\text{N-NH}_4^+$ . Les émissions de  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  par nitrification représentent souvent moins de 1%

du  $\text{NH}_4^+$  nitrifié dans les sols (Bremner et Blackmer, 1978, Aulakh *et al.*, 1984; Klemmedtsson *et al.*, 1988). Parton *et al.* (1996) ont suggéré que ces émissions ne sont influencées que par des fortes concentrations en  $\text{NH}_4^+$ , supérieures à  $3 \mu\text{g N g}^{-1}$ .

#### III.4. La disponibilité en carbone et matière organique

Le métabolisme des bactéries hétérotrophes du sol est souvent limité par le carbone biodisponible dans le sol (Starr, 1993). La disponibilité en carbone dans le sol agit très différemment sur la dénitrification et la nitrification.

En ce qui concerne la dénitrification, le carbone organique joue un double rôle: un rôle indirect en stimulant la dégradation de la matière organique, donc la respiration microbienne et la création de sites anaérobies (Parkin, 1987); un rôle direct, en tant que donneur d'électrons pour les bactéries dénitrifiantes. La dénitrification peut être fortement corrélée à la quantité de carbone organique total ou soluble et surtout au carbone facilement minéralisable (Burford et Bremner, 1975; DeCatanzaro, 1985; Weier *et al.*, 1993). Le rapport  $\text{N}_2\text{O}/(\text{N}_2\text{O}+\text{N}_2)$  diminue avec l'accroissement de la source carbonée. Dans les sols, Parkin (1987) décrit la présence de sites à fort potentiel de dénitrification, qui correspondent à des zones de forte décomposition de la matière organique (hot spots). La matière organique rapidement décomposable présente sans doute une distribution spatiale très hétérogène; ceci expliquerait la variabilité spatiale de la dénitrification.

En ce qui concerne la nitrification, le carbone assimilable exerce un effet indirect en jouant sur la consommation en  $\text{O}_2$  et sur la concentration en  $\text{NH}_4^+$  du sol par le biais des processus d'organisation ou de minéralisation d'azote. En effet, un apport de matière organique avec un rapport C/N élevé (type pailles de céréales) stimule l'organisation des ions  $\text{NH}_4^+$  ce qui réduit la vitesse de nitrification, par compétition pour le substrat. Inversement, la minéralisation de la matière organique humifiée, à C/N faible, libère de l'ammonium et stimule la nitrification. Bremner et Blackmer (1981) ont montré, dans le cas d'un sol "aéré", que la vitesse de nitrification, le ratio  $\text{N}_2\text{O}/\text{NO}_3^-$  et l'intensité des émissions de  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  augmentent lorsque le ratio C/N de la matière organique du sol diminue.

#### III.5. La texture et la structure du sol

La texture du sol influence aussi les activités microbiennes régulant le devenir de C et N dans le sol. La consommation de C et N par la biomasse microbienne est plus rapide dans les sols à texture grossière dont la capacité de protection physique de la matière organique est faible (Hassink, 1994; Sørensen, 1995). Les sols de texture grossière montrent des émissions de  $N_2O$  plus importantes que les sols à texture fine (Bouwman, 1996). En fait, il existe des différences de configuration enzymatique ou d'accessibilité du substrat sur les sites actifs entre les fractions du sol (Rojo, 1990). Si la biomasse microbienne globale est influencée par la texture du sol, il est probable que les micro-organismes dénitrifiants le soient également. C'est ce qu'a montré Lensi (1995) en caractérisant l'activité de différentes fractions granulométriques du sol: la capacité dénitrifiante varie selon la fraction granulométrique.

La structure du sol est également un facteur très important, et elle est fortement modifiée par le travail du sol. Le travail du sol agit sur la structure qui régule le fonctionnement hydrique et le degré d'aération du sol et affecte la vitesse de dégradation de la matière organique (Aulakh *et al.*, 1992). En modifiant la taille des agrégats et des mottes (Cambardella, 1993; Alvarez, 1998a), il modifie les conditions de transfert de l'oxygène. Le volume anoxique augmente avec la taille des mottes car l'oxygène a plus de difficulté à diffuser et donc à répondre à une demande respiratoire au sein d'un agrégat volumineux. Un gros agrégat a plus de chance d'avoir un centre anoxique important qu'un petit agrégat. Pour les mêmes raisons, le  $N_2O$  produit dans le cœur anoxique aura quant à lui, plus de probabilité d'être réduit en  $N_2$  avant d'atteindre les régions oxygénées de l'agrégat. Plus le sol est compacté, plus la taille de ses agrégats augmente, plus sa porosité est faible, ce qui favorise la dénitrification (Bakken *et al.*, 1987).

### III.5. La température

Lorsque la température augmente, les émissions globales de  $N_2O$  augmentent (Smith et Arah, 1990), tandis que le rapport  $N_2O/(N_2O+N_2)$  tend à diminuer (Granli et Bockman, 1994). L'augmentation de température stimule la croissance bactérienne et son activité (Smith et Arah, 1990), d'où une respiration accrue pouvant entraîner la formation de zones anoxiques. Elle provoque aussi un accroissement de la diffusion et une diminution de la solubilité des gaz. La dénitrification se produit dans une gamme de température allant de 10 à 75-85°C,

avec un optimum situé entre 30 et 67°C (Smith et Arah, 1990; Granli et Bockman, 1994). Les températures optimales pour la nitrification se situent entre 25 et 35°C (Haynes, 1986). Le N<sub>2</sub>O produit par nitrification augmente avec la température (Yoshida et Alexander, 1970 ; Bremner et Blackmer, 1981).

### III.6. Le pH

Le pH du sol varie sous l'effet de plusieurs processus. La baisse de pH est en partie due à la production de CO<sub>2</sub> et d'acides gras volatils (Stumm et Morgan, 1996, Dassonville et Renault, 2002). Le pH peut augmenter sous l'effet de certains processus biologiques consommateurs de H<sup>+</sup> tels que la dénitrification (Mc Inerney, 1988). L'accroissement de pH observé ultérieurement résulte partiellement de la consommation des acides gras volatils et de la disparition du CO<sub>2</sub> avec la méthanogénèse (Stams, 1994). L'acidification du milieu peut modifier les équilibres chimiques en solution concernant les hydroxydes, les carbonates, les sulfures, les phosphates et les silicates et ainsi aboutir à la dissolution ou la précipitation des espèces solides et à la sorption ou la désorption des composés comme l'aluminium, le fer, le manganèse, et la calcite (Stumm et Morgan, 1996). Ces mêmes phénomènes sont impliqués dans le pouvoir tampon du sol concernant les variations de pH. Dans le cas des milieux calcaires, l'accroissement de la concentration en CO<sub>2</sub> aboutit à la solubilisation de calcite avec la formation de bicarbonate (Stumm et Morgan, 1996).

Les apports d'engrais peuvent modifier le pH; ainsi les fertilisants à base de NH<sub>4</sub><sup>+</sup> acidifient le sol. Le pH du sol peut s'acidifier sous l'effet des eaux de pluie qui se chargent sur leur trajet en divers gaz de l'atmosphère (CO<sub>2</sub>, acide sulfurique, acide nitrique et acides organiques, notamment acide formique et acide acétique).

Un pH neutre ou supérieur à 7 semble favorable aux activités microbiennes nitrifiantes et dénitrifiantes. Le pH optimal d'une culture bactérienne dénitrifiante se situe à la neutralité. La N<sub>2</sub>O réductase semble particulièrement sensible aux faibles pH. Elle est inhibée pour un pH inférieur à 5 (Knowles, 1982). Cela conduit à une augmentation des émissions de N<sub>2</sub>O par dénitrification aux faibles pH, même si l'activité dénitrifiante est ralentie. En règle générale, les vitesses de dénitrification diminuent dans les sols acides et le rapport N<sub>2</sub>O/(N<sub>2</sub>O+N<sub>2</sub>) augmente simultanément avec la diminution du pH (Koskinen et Keeney, 1982).

La vitesse de nitrification est optimale à un pH de 7.5 à 8 (Bock *et al.*, 1986). Toutefois, la nitrification peut se produire dans les milieux plus acides. Les émissions de N<sub>2</sub>O par les sols en conditions aérées augmentent lorsque le pH passe de 5.9 à 8.3 (Bremner et Blackmer, 1981).

Peu d'études ont été réalisées expliquant le mécanisme d'action du pH sur les émissions de N<sub>2</sub>O mais beaucoup d'hypothèses ont été émises. La diminution de l'activité dénitrifiante serait due à un effet direct des ions H<sup>+</sup> ou à un effet indirect de l'acidité provoquant des carences en nutriments (Koskinen et Keeney, 1982; Aulakh et al, 1992) ou des toxicités Al, Mn, NO<sub>2</sub><sup>-</sup> (Firestone *et al.*, 1982).

### III. Modélisation des émissions de N<sub>2</sub>O dans les sols

Différents modèles de simulation des émissions de N<sub>2</sub>O ont été proposés. Ces modèles permettent notamment :

- de tester des hypothèses sur les processus, en analysant les écarts entre données expérimentales et données simulées ;
- de disposer d'outils d'interpolation plus élaborés que des outils purement statistiques pour passer de données acquises ponctuellement à des données distribuées dans l'espace et le temps;
- de réaliser des études de scénarios pour évaluer le poids de variables ou de leurs interactions dans les émissions de N<sub>2</sub>O.

Les modèles de simulation de la dénitrification et des émissions de N<sub>2</sub>O peuvent se classer en différents types : stochastiques, empiriques et mécanistes.

#### IV.1. Les modèles stochastiques

Un modèle stochastique tient compte de la variabilité spatiale des processus étudiés. Ainsi Parkin (1987) considère l'hétérogénéité spatiale de la matière organique pour simuler la variabilité spatiale de la dénitrification et notamment le phénomène de "hot spots". Son modèle suppose une loi de distribution log-normale pour l'activité dénitrifiante. Il obtient une bonne corrélation entre expérience et modèle. Par ailleurs, Parkin *et al.* (1987) ont étudié l'influence de la taille de l'échantillon sur la variabilité du taux de dénitrification. Récemment,

Parry *et al.* (2000) ont utilisé un modèle stochastique pour simuler la variabilité de la contribution des MOP au taux de dénitrification; cette contribution dépend en effet des activités dénitrifiantes et respiratoires et de la structure des mottes.

## IV.2. Les modèles empiriques

Ces modèles utilisent des fonctions empiriques établies à de grandes échelles d'espace et de temps (parcelle agricole, année culturale), dans des conditions d'expérimentation forcément restreintes (compte tenu de la lourdeur des expérimentations au champ). Ces modèles ne cherchent pas à décrire les processus élémentaires de la dénitrification mais à rendre compte de cette dernière en considérant les principaux facteurs (directs ou indirects) qui l'affectent. La dénitrification effective est supposée être le produit de  $n$  fonctions décrivant l'effet individuel de chacun des  $n$  facteurs (teneur en eau,  $\text{NO}_3^-$ , matière organique, température, pH, ...). Ces modèles prennent en compte les effets moyens de ces paramètres mais négligent de ce fait leurs distributions spatiales. Ils peuvent être appliqués à de grandes échelles d'espace et de temps (parcelle agricole, année culturale), mais risquent de ne pas être généralisables à d'autres situations que celles sur lesquelles ils ont été calibrés. Le modèle de Rolston *et al.* (1984) décrit le taux de dénitrification comme une multiplication d'une fonction teneur en eau, d'une fonction température et d'une fonction concentration en  $\text{NO}_3^-$ . Cette dernière est représentée par une cinétique d'ordre 0 ou 1. Hénault et Germon (2000) ont amélioré ce modèle en y ajoutant une fonction liée à la vitesse de dénitrification décrite par une cinétique de Michaelis-Menten. Cette fonction prend en compte la disponibilité du carbone. Parton *et al.* (1988, 1996) ont développé un modèle prédictif des émissions de  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  par les sols (NGAS). Ce modèle tient compte de la texture du sol, de la température, de la teneur en eau du sol, de la disponibilité en azote et de la respiration du sol. Un autre modèle (CASA) a été conçu pour simuler la distribution mondiale des émissions de  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  (Potter *et al.*, 1996). Il associe un modèle de production végétale à un modèle de fonctionnement du sol (physique et biologique) et tient compte des conditions climatiques. Concernant les émissions de  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$ , le modèle ne fait pas la distinction entre nitrification et dénitrification. Il suppose que la somme des composés azotés gazeux produits ( $\text{N}_2 + \text{N}_2\text{O} + \text{NO}$ ) correspond à 2 % de l'azote minéralisé, quelles que soient les conditions du milieu. Le modèle NLEAP- $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  (Xu *et al.*, 1998) a été conçu pour étudier l'effet des pratiques agricoles (travail du sol, irrigation et fertilisation) sur les émissions de  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$ . Il est basé sur une description empirique des effets des

facteurs du milieu. Les émissions sont la somme des émissions associées à la nitrification et des émissions associées à la dénitrification. Les émissions de  $N_2O$  par nitrification sont supposées dépendre de l'importance de la nitrification et des conditions du milieu incluant les effets de la température et la teneur en eau.

### IV.3. Les modèles mécanistes

Les modèles mécanistes reposent sur une description fine dans l'espace et le temps de tous les phénomènes impliqués directement ou indirectement dans les émissions de  $N_2O$ . Un modèle ne pouvant être qu'une représentation simplifiée de la réalité, plusieurs hypothèses caractérisant le milieu et les mécanismes physiques, chimiques et biologiques sont posées. Ces modèles mécanistes donnent des résultats pertinents sur des échantillons de sol de faible taille mais nécessitent un travail très important d'acquisition des paramètres. Plusieurs hypothèses caractérisant le milieu physique du sol ont été proposées. Les premiers modèles supposaient le sol comme un milieu homogène pour les transferts. Le transport de gaz était simulé sur la seule dimension verticale (Van Bavel, 1951). Plus récemment, le milieu a été considéré comme agrégé et hétérogène pour les transferts de  $O_2$  (Currie, 1961; Leffelaar, 1979; Arah et Smith, 1989; Renault et Sierra, 1994; Renault et Stengel, 1994). Ce type de milieu permet de décrire 2 modes de transferts : un transfert rapide dans la porosité inter-agrégats et un transfert lent au sein des agrégats. Dans l'espace poral inter-agrégats, l'eau apparaît d'abord en ménisques autour des agrégats, ce qui réduit la surface où les transferts de  $O_2$  sont possibles. Les autres modèles se différencient par des hypothèses sur la forme des agrégats: type parallélépipède (Mc Connaughey et Bouldin, 1985) ou cylindrique (Leffelaar et Wessel, 1988). Il existe un effet de la structure du sol qui s'exerce principalement par l'intermédiaire de la distribution granulométrique des agrégats (Renault et Stengel, 1994). Un milieu agrégé pose des problèmes pour expliquer l'anoxie en raison de la distribution des pores. C'est pourquoi quelques modèles considèrent le sol comme un milieu mal structuré et hétérogène pour les transferts de  $O_2$  à l'aide d'une distribution aléatoire de pores (Arah, 1988). La loi de Fick est généralement utilisée pour caractériser les transferts par diffusion, la convection n'étant généralement pas prise en compte. La respiration est décrite par une cinétique de Michaelis Menten (Greenwood et Berry, 1962; Leffelaar et Wessel, 1988; Grant, 1991). Sierra et Renault (1995) a essayé de caractériser l'effet inhibiteur de  $CO_2$  sur la respiration. Il trouve une inhibition de type compétitive sur des agrégats de sol remaniés. Sur



le même sol non remanié, il trouve une activation aux faibles teneurs en  $\text{CO}_2$  et une inhibition aux fortes teneurs. La dénitrification peut également être décrite par une loi de Michaelis-Menten faisant intervenir une constante traduisant l'affinité du milieu pour  $\text{NO}_3^-$  (Maag *et al.*, 1997). Cette constante tend à croître avec l'échelle d'observation, ce qui indique qu'on passe d'une concentration réelle au niveau des micro-organismes dénitrifiants à une concentration moyenne généralement supérieure au niveau d'un volume de sol (Murray *et al.*, 1989). Leffelaar et Wessel (1988) prennent en considération la croissance bactérienne et la dépendance à la concentration en substrat disponible. Arah et Smith (1989) ont utilisé une fonction log-normale pour décrire la respiration maximale des agrégats pour tenir compte de la variabilité de la respiration entre agrégats. Li *et al.* (1996) ont proposé le modèle DNDC pour simuler la distribution régionale des émissions de  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  et pour étudier les rôles respectifs de différents facteurs du milieu sur ces émissions. Dans ce modèle, un module d'estimation des émissions de  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  par nitrification est couplé à la fois à un module prédictif de la décomposition de la matière organique du sol et à un module d'estimation des émissions de  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  par dénitrification. Le modèle DNDC et le modèle ECOSYS (Grant, 1991, 1993a, 1995), décrivent très finement les processus microbiens du sol. Chaque transformation associée à la dénitrification dépend (i) des disponibilités en accepteurs et en donneurs d'électrons, (ii) de la taille des communautés microbiennes réalisant les différentes transformations et (iii) des conditions du milieu (température, pH, ...). La taille des communautés microbiennes ( $\text{NO}_3^-$  réducteurs,  $\text{NO}_2^-$  réducteurs et  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  réducteurs) résulte des processus simultanés de croissance, de maintenance et de mortalité. La mortalité est supposée proportionnelle à la taille de la population. La croissance microbienne tient compte de la disponibilité en  $\text{NO}_3^-$ ,  $\text{NO}_2^-$  ou  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$ , et de la matière organique soluble.

## V- Conclusion

Au travers de cette synthèse bibliographique, nous avons rappelé les enjeux agronomiques et environnementaux associés aux émissions de  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$ . Jusqu'à présent, les études sur les émissions de  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  se sont surtout concentrées sur le processus de dénitrification considéré comme le principal responsable de ces émissions. Nous avons vu que peu de travaux relatifs à la dénitrification décrivaient simultanément les processus de production et de réduction de  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$ , alors que ces processus risquent de répondre différemment aux conditions du milieu. L'objectif de la première partie de notre travail sera de caractériser et de

modéliser la production de  $N_2O$ , sa consommation et leurs interactions. D'autre part, plusieurs modèles ont été proposés pour décrire la respiration, l'anaérobiose et la dénitrification. Toutefois, aucun de ces modèles ne prend en compte les variations des activités respiratoire et dénitrifiante, alors que l'on sait que ces activités puissent varier au cours du temps, en conséquence des dynamiques microbiennes, des inductions et activations des enzymes. La prise en compte de ces variations sera au cœur de la deuxième et la troisième parties de notre travail. Enfin des travaux récents ont montré que la nitrification peut être une source importante des émissions de  $N_2O$ . Plusieurs facteurs pouvant influencer ces émissions ont été étudiés, mais peu d'études ont caractérisé l'effet direct de l'oxygène. Ceci a motivé le travail de la quatrième partie qui traite de l'effet de la pression partielle en  $O_2$  sur la nitrification et les émissions de  $N_2O$  associées.

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## **SIMULATION DE LA DENITRIFICATION, DE LA DYNAMIQUE DES DENITRIFIANTS ET LEUR CAPACITE PROGRESSIVE A REDUIRE N<sub>2</sub>O : COMPARAISON MODELE - EXPERIENCE**

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**Modelling Denitrification including the Dynamics of Denitrifiers and their Progressing Ability to Reduce Nitrous Oxide: Comparison with Batch Experiments.**

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## SUMMARY

Nitrous oxide is involved in the global greenhouse effect and the chemistry of  $O_3$  in the upper troposphere and lower stratosphere. In order to define a relevant model for microbial  $NO_3^-$  and  $N_2O$  reductions in the soil and estimate the involved parameters, we propose a method combining measurements of anaerobic soil slurry and simulations performed for Michaelis Menten kinetics of  $NO_3^-$  and  $N_2O$  reductions, including non enzymatic competition between  $NO_3^-$  and  $N_2O$  as electron acceptors and the microbial dynamics of two denitrifier groups that are able and unable to reduce  $N_2O$ , respectively. Three models, varying in terms of their ability to reduce  $N_2O$  through denitrification, were alternately assessed. The procedure was applied on an arable soil known for its low  $N_2O$  emissions *in situ* during wet events. The first model, i.e. accounting for microbial growth without any increase in  $N_2O$  reduction ability, was not able to reproduce experimental data. It was necessary to consider that some denitrifiers initially unable to reduce  $N_2O$  into  $N_2$  became able to undertake this process. Models 2 and 3 account for the induction of  $N_2O$  reductase, with either the progressive synthesis of this reductase simultaneously for all  $N_2O$  reducers or the sudden synthesis of this reductase distributed over a range of times for  $N_2O$  reducers. These models were able to approximately describe experimental kinetics, although some biases remained. In addition, denitrifier biomass estimated by fitting simulated data to experimental data was consistent with biomass estimated from fumigation extraction and microbial enumeration.

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## INTRODUCTION

Nitrous oxide is involved in the global greenhouse effect (Smith, 1990; IPCC, 1996) and affects the chemistry of O<sub>3</sub> in the upper troposphere and lower stratosphere (Graedel and Crutzen, 1992). Its emission from soils results from nitrification (Groffman, 1991) and denitrification (Hénault and Germon, 1995; Conrad, 1996). The N<sub>2</sub>O/(N<sub>2</sub>O+N<sub>2</sub>) ratio of the terminal denitrification products varies greatly (Granli and Bockman, 1994): low values correspond to situations in which N<sub>2</sub>O consumption nearly equals N<sub>2</sub>O production. A small bias in the estimate of one of these two terms can therefore result in large errors in N<sub>2</sub>O emission calculations.

It is generally admitted that the reduction of NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> and NO<sub>2</sub><sup>-</sup> into N<sub>2</sub>O may be described by Michaelis Menten equations (Betlach and Tiedje, 1981; Myrold and Tiedje, 1985; Maag et al., 1997), leading to simplified descriptions, via either zero-order reactions at high NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> contents (Broadbent, 1951; Wijler and Delwiche, 1954; Nömmik, 1956; Bremner and Shaw, 1958; Cooper and Smith, 1963; Kaspar, 1985) or first-order reactions at low NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> contents (Bowman and Focht, 1974; Standford et al., 1975; Reddy et al., 1982). Uncertainties concerning the description of the microbial reduction of NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> into N<sub>2</sub>O include (i) the existence of an inhibitory effect of high NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> levels (Renner and Becker, 1970; Avnimelech, 1971; Blackmer and Bremner 1978, Nakajima et al., 1984; Lalissee-Grundmann et al., 1988), (ii) the value of the Michaelis constant describing the microbial affinity for NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> for which varied estimates have been reported (in mol m<sup>-3</sup>): 6 for intact cores (Hénault, 1993), 11.4-31.4 (Malhi et al., 1990), approximately 0.22 (Klemmedtsson et al., 1977) or 0.0018–0.0166 for soil and sediment slurries (Murray et al., 1989), 0.016 (Fewson et al. 1961) or 0.3-3.8 (Zumft, 1997) for purified NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> reductase, and (iii) competition between NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> and N<sub>2</sub>O for the denitrifiers that can perform NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> and N<sub>2</sub>O reductions.

On the one hand, Blackmer and Bremner (1979) considered that low NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> concentrations increased N<sub>2</sub>O reduction (i.e. < 5mg N-NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup>.kg<sup>-1</sup> DW soil). On the other hand, it is generally accepted that high NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> concentrations and/or high NO<sub>2</sub><sup>-</sup> concentrations decrease N<sub>2</sub>O reduction and lead to an increase in the N<sub>2</sub>O/(N<sub>2</sub>O+N<sub>2</sub>) ratio of the final denitrification products (Blackmer and Bremner, 1979; Guthrie and Duxbury, 1978; Firestone et al., 1979; Terry and Tate, 1980; Letey et al., 1980; Gaskell et al., 1981; Nömmik et al., 1984; Weir et al., 1993; Luo et al., 1996). Several hypotheses have been proposed to explain these observations, including (i) the induction of N<sub>2</sub>O reductase by low NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> concentrations rather

than by  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  itself (Soohoo and Hollocher, 1990), (ii) inhibition by  $\text{NO}_2^-$  which could accumulate during the preliminary reduction of  $\text{NO}_3^-$  (Renner and Becker, 1970; Shimuzu *et al.*, 1978; Firestone *et al.*, 1979; McKenney *et al.*, 1982), (iii) direct inhibition by  $\text{NO}_3^-$  (Gaskell *et al.*, 1981), and (iv) competition between  $\text{NO}_3^-$  and  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  as electron acceptors (Cho and Sakdinan, 1978). In contrast to  $\text{NO}_3^-$  reduction, estimates of the Michaelis constant for  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  reduction were higher for purified  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  reductase (i.e. about 2-26  $\text{mmol m}^{-3}$ ; Zumft, 1997) than for soil slurries (e.g. 0.1-0.4  $\text{mmol m}^{-3}$ ; Holtan-Hartwig *et al.*, 2000). It is often assumed that limited transfer reduces  $[\text{NO}_3^-]$  at the microorganism level, and explains the increase in the apparent Michaelis constant for  $\text{NO}_3^-$  reduction (Reddy *et al.*, 1978; Myrold and Tiedje, 1985); in the case of  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  reduction, the trend probably differs, because this gas is currently produced and reduced at the same sites. Moreover,  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  reduction is not a simple enzymatic reaction: it depends both on the affinity of the enzyme for  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  and on the rate of electron exchange between periplasmic  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  reductase and the membrane respiratory chain (Spanning *et al.*, 1995; Zumft, 1997).

Competition between  $\text{NO}_3^-$  and  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  as electron acceptors seems to vary with time, suggesting soil  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  reducers adapt to high levels of  $\text{NO}_3^-$  (Terry and Tate, 1980; Guthrie and Duxbury, 1978). It may then be necessary to account for temporal variations in the concentration of N oxide reductases (Baumann *et al.*, 1996; Otte *et al.*, 1996) and microbial dynamics (especially the denitrifier – to –  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  reducer ratio). To our knowledge, no publication deals with any advantage conferred to denitrifiers by the ability to reduce  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  when  $\text{NO}_3^-$  is not limiting. The energy yield of each denitrification step varies with the electron donor and other media characteristics (Stouthamer, 1988), but the translocated ' $\text{H}^+$  : transferred  $e^-$ ' ratio appears to be similar or equal during the respiratory reduction of  $\text{NO}_3^-$  into  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  and the reduction of  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  into  $\text{N}_2$ , respectively (Van Spanning *et al.*, 1995). Genes involved in  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  reduction are sometimes located on megaplasmids (Dröge *et al.*, 1999). The transfer of self-transmissible plasmids over 1-3 day periods has already been observed for other functional properties (Richaume *et al.*, 1992; Sudarshana and Knudsen, 1995); however, recipient cells generally represent only a small proportion of all present micro-organisms (Dröge *et al.*, 1999).

The aims of this work were to (i) propose a new denitrification model that accounts for microbial activities and microbial dynamics, including the progressing ability of denitrifiers to reduce  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$ , (ii) propose a method to estimate the parameters of the model, and (iii) check the model and the method with a set of experimental data obtained from an arable soil known for its low  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  emissions during wet events.

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## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### SOIL AND EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURES

#### Soil Sampling and Treatments

Experiments were performed on an Orthic Luvisol (FAO classification) sampled in Picardie (France), 15 km from Péronne, 49°80' N and 3°60' E. The soil had been cultivated with corn in 2000. The properties of the soil were as follows: clay, 194 g.kg<sup>-1</sup>; silt, 706 g.kg<sup>-1</sup>; sand, 68 g.kg<sup>-1</sup>; pH<sub>water</sub>, 8.2; total CaCO<sub>3</sub>, 32 g.kg<sup>-1</sup>; organic C, 8.52 g.kg<sup>-1</sup>; total N 1.00 g.kg<sup>-1</sup>; and NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup>-N, 4.70 mg.kg<sup>-1</sup>. Clods were sampled between 10 and 30 cm on the 12<sup>th</sup> September 2000 and sieved between 2.5 and 3 cm at field moisture (18.35% dry weight basis). They were then gently dried in air for 3 days to obtain residual moisture of around 10%, sieved again at 2mm and stored at 4°C in plastic bags until the beginning of the experiments. Before experiments began, soil aggregates were placed on a suction table. They were first equilibrated at 1 m water suction for 1 day, then at 0.5 m for 1 day, then at 0.1 m for 1 day, and finally at 0.05 m for 4 days.

#### Batch Incubations

In order to assess the influence of [NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup>] and [N<sub>2</sub>O] on NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> and N<sub>2</sub>O reductions, 25g fw (fresh weight) of soil preliminarily equilibrated at 0.05 m water suction were placed in closed 250 ml flasks and maintained at 20°C for 14 hours. Then 25 ml of KNO<sub>3</sub> solution were added and slurries were then incubated under anaerobic conditions at 20°C. Nitrate concentrations of the added solutions were 0, 0.02, 0.04, 0.1, 0.2, 0.4, 0.6, 1, 2, 3, 5, 7 and 10 mol NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup>.m<sup>-3</sup> solution. Because of the initial [NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup>] in the soil, these applications corresponded to initial NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> concentrations in the slurry solutions of 0.151, 0.166, 0.182, 0.229, 0.306, 0.462, 0.617, 0.928, 1.66, 2.44, 3.99, 5.59 and 7.92 mol NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup>.m<sup>-3</sup>. The slurries were placed under anaerobic conditions by alternating 3 successive cycles of 10 min vacuum and 10 min N<sub>2</sub> filling of the flasks.

After the final equilibration at atmospheric pressure, three types of initial conditions were obtained:



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- condition 1: 31.5 ml of N<sub>2</sub> were replaced with 38.6 ml of C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>2</sub> (i.e. approximately 28.4 ml in air and 10.2 ml in solution) and 2.9 ml of Kr in order to characterise total denitrification and check for the existence of gas leakage, respectively;
  - condition 2: 2.9 ml of N<sub>2</sub> were replaced with 2.9 ml of Kr in order to characterise the net production of N<sub>2</sub>O under low N<sub>2</sub>O conditions, i.e. under conditions where N<sub>2</sub>O production and consumption are *a priori* of the same order of magnitude;
  - condition 3: 3.6 ml of N<sub>2</sub> were replaced with 0.7 ml of N<sub>2</sub>O and 2.9 ml of Kr in order to characterise the net production of N<sub>2</sub>O under N<sub>2</sub>O enriched conditions.

One replicate was incubated at 20°C for each initial NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> concentrations and initial gaseous condition (i.e. conditions 1, 2 and 3). Stirring the suspensions at 150 rpm prevented the occurrence of micro-gradients of [NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup>], [NO<sub>2</sub><sup>-</sup>], [N<sub>2</sub>O] within the soil slurries.

The initial and final '[NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup>]+[NO<sub>2</sub><sup>-</sup>]' and [NH<sub>4</sub><sup>+</sup>] concentrations in the slurries were extracted with a molar KCl solution (soil / solution ratio of 1/5). Measurements were made with a colorimeter analyzer enabling continuous flux measurements (Sampler 1000, Skalar). Nitrous oxide concentrations were measured at the beginning of incubation and (i) after 5, 12, 24, 36, 48, 60, 72, 96 and 120 hours for condition 1, and (ii) after 12, 24, 48, 72, 96, 120, 168, 240, and 312 hours for conditions 2 and 3. In practice, 3.5 ml of gas were sampled from the flasks with Venoject® vacuum tubes and replaced by 3.5 ml N<sub>2</sub>. Venoject® air was vacuum analysed by EC gas chromatography with a HP5890 Series II fitted with a Porapak Q column (80-100 mesh, 2 m) coupled to an automatic sampler (HSS 1000, SRA-Instruments) and to integration software on a PC Workstation. Measured [N<sub>2</sub>O] values were corrected to account for progressive dilution resulting from the periodic substitution of 3.5 ml of gas mixture with the same volume of N<sub>2</sub>. Nitrogen, CO<sub>2</sub>, O<sub>2</sub>, Kr, C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>2</sub>, and high N<sub>2</sub>O concentrations were measured 3 and 4 times for condition 1 and for conditions 2 and 3, respectively, with a TCD gas chromatograph HP5890 Series II fitted with Porapak Q (80-100mesh, 1.8 m) and sieve molecular (1-5 Å, 1.8 m) columns coupled to the same integration software. Measurements were made after 0, 72, 120 and 312 hours. In practice, 0.3 ml of gas was sampled with a syringe and injected into the gas chromatograph. The carrier gas was Ar-CH<sub>4</sub> (95/5) for EC-GC and He for TCD-GC. Relative uncertainties in the gas measurements were about 1%.

### **Microbial Biomass Measurement; Enumeration of Heterotrophs and Denitrifiers**

Three replicates of microbial biomass measurements were performed by fumigation-extraction (Chaussod *et al.*, 1988). Portions of 25 g of soil were placed into 250 ml vials and fumigated for 16 h with chloroform vapors. The fumigated samples and corresponding unfumigated samples were extracted by 100 ml of K<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub> (soil/solution: 1/5). Soil suspensions were then pelleted by centrifugation in disposable plastic vials and soluble organic C was measured in the supernatant by persulfate-UV oxidation (Wu *et al.*, 1990). The microbial extractable carbon (EC) is given by the difference between fumigated and unfumigated samples. Microbial C biomass *C-BM* can be calculated using a microbial organic C biomass to microbial extractable organic C ratio of 1/0.38.

Triplicate microbial enumeration was performed. Ten grams of soil (equivalent dry weight) were homogenised in 50 ml of NaCl (0.8%) for 1.5 min with a Waring blender. Soil suspension (10 g dw were homogenised in 50 ml of NaCl (8 mg.l<sup>-1</sup> solution)) was serially diluted 5-fold. One Hundred microliters of dilutions were aliquoted in 8×12 wells of microliter plates containing 100 µl of Nutrient Broth (NB, Difco, Detroit, USA) concentrated twice. For denitrifier enumeration, the medium was amended with KNO<sub>3</sub> (10 mM). The plates were incubated at 28°C for 5 days and 10 days for heterotroph and denitrifier enumerations, respectively. For denitrifier enumeration, anaerobic conditions were obtained using the BBL GasPack Pouch System (Becton Dickinson, Sparks, USA). The presence of heterotrophs was revealed by turbidity in positive wells. The presence of denitrifiers was considered positive if neither NO<sub>2</sub><sup>-</sup> nor NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> was detected using Griess-Ilosway's reagent and Morgan's reagent, respectively. The most probable number of heterotrophic or denitrifying micro-organisms was estimated by Cochran's method (Cochran, 1950).

The denitrifier biomass *bm* was then estimated using the following equation:

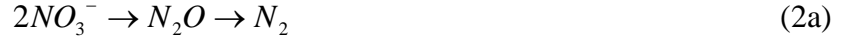
$$bm = BM \times r \times \left( \frac{MPN_D}{MPN_H} \right) \quad (1)$$

where *BM* is total microbial biomass (g.kg<sup>-1</sup> soil), *r* the microbial organic C biomass – to – microbial extractable organic C ratio, *MPN<sub>D</sub>* and *MPN<sub>H</sub>* the number of denitrifiers and heterotrophs, respectively (cfu.g<sup>-1</sup> soil).

## THEORY

### Microbial Processes

Two groups of denitrifying bacteria have been considered and reduce  $\text{NO}_3^-$  into  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  concomitantly to the reduction of  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  into  $\text{N}_2$  (Eq. (2a)), and only the reduction of  $\text{NO}_3^-$  into  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  (Eq. (2b)), respectively:



Both of the denitrification steps  $D$  and  $R$  (i.e.  $\text{NO}_3^- \rightarrow \text{N}_2\text{O}$  and  $\text{N}_2\text{O} \rightarrow \text{N}_2$ ) are affected by the biomass of the microbial communities that perform this transformation:

$$V_D = (bm_1 \times v_{D1}) + (bm_2 \times v_{D2}) \quad (3a)$$

$$V_R = bm_1 \times v_{R1} \quad (3b)$$

where  $V_D$  and  $V_R$  are the actual rates of the first and second denitrification steps ( $\text{mol N}_2\text{O.kg}^{-1} \text{ soil.s}^{-1}$ ),  $v_{D1}$ ,  $v_{D2}$  and  $v_{R1}$  the specific rates of reactions  $D$  and  $R$  for groups  $1$  and  $2$  ( $\text{mol N}_2\text{O.g}^{-1} \text{ biomass.s}^{-1}$ ),  $bm_1$  and  $bm_2$  the microbial biomass that reduces  $\text{NO}_3^-$  into  $\text{N}_2$  and  $\text{NO}_3^-$  into  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$ , respectively ( $\text{g biomass.kg}^{-1} \text{ soil}$ ). The specific rates  $v_{D1}$ ,  $v_{D2}$  and  $v_{R1}$  depend on the microbial group through the existence or non-existence of competition between  $\text{NO}_3^-$  and  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  reductions. The model assumes that neither the maximum specific rate  $v_{Dmax}$  ( $\text{mol N}_2\text{O.g}^{-1} \text{ biomass.s}^{-1}$ ) nor the Michaelis constant  $Km_D$  ( $\text{mol NO}_3^-.m^{-3} \text{ solution}$ ) depends on the microbial groups. For microbial group  $1$ , we assume (non enzymatic) competition between  $\text{NO}_3^-$  and  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  as terminal electron acceptors:

$$v_{D1} = v_{Dmax} \times \left( \frac{[\text{NO}_3^-]}{[\text{NO}_3^-] + Km_D} \right) \times f([\text{NO}_3^-], [\text{N}_2\text{O}]) \quad (4a)$$

$$v_{R1} = v_{Rmax} \times \left( \frac{[\text{N}_2\text{O}]}{[\text{N}_2\text{O}] + Km_R} \right) \times f([\text{NO}_3^-], [\text{N}_2\text{O}]) \quad (4b)$$

where  $v_{Dmax}$  and  $v_{Rmax}$  are the maximum specific rates of reactions  $D$  and  $R$  for groups  $1$  and  $2$  ( $\text{mol N}_2\text{O.g}^{-1} \text{ biomass.s}^{-1}$ ),  $[\text{NO}_3^-]$  the concentration of  $\text{NO}_3^-$  in the solution ( $\text{mol.m}^{-3} \text{ solution}$ ),  $[\text{N}_2\text{O}]$  the concentration of  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  in the air ( $\text{mol.m}^{-3} \text{ air}$ ), and  $f$  a function that indirectly accounts for competition between  $\text{NO}_3^-$  and  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$ . The specific denitrification rate  $v_{D2}$  for microbial group  $2$  is described by a Michaelis Menten equation:

$$v_{D2} = v_{Dmax} \times \left( \frac{[NO_3^-]}{[NO_3^-] + Km_D} \right) \quad (5)$$

Assuming that the flux of electrons is below a maximum value  $F_e$  (mol  $e^- \cdot g^{-1}$  biomass.  $s^{-1}$ ) depending on the consumable organic matter, we then have:

$$f([NO_3^-], [N_2O]) = Min \left( 1. ; \frac{F_e}{((8 \times v_{D1}) + (2 \times v_{R1}))} \right) \quad (6)$$

Where *Min* is for the lower value, 8 and 2 the numbers of electrons transferred through the respiratory chain during the reduction of 2  $NO_3^-$  into  $N_2O$ , and  $N_2O$  into  $N_2$ , respectively. As soon as there are sufficient N oxide reductases,  $v_{Dmax}$  and  $v_{Rmax}$  can be related to  $F_e$ :

$$F_e = 8 \times v_{Dmax} = 2 \times v_{Rmax} \quad (7)$$

We assume that  $v_{Dmax}$  and  $Km_D$  do not vary with time, or that variations occur initially over a period short enough to neglect transient changes at the enzyme level and related respiratory chain level (Otte *et al.*, 1996; Baumann *et al.*, 1996). In contrast, three models were alternately used to account for an increase in the ability to reduce  $N_2O$  with time:

*Model A:* there is no induction of  $N_2O$  reductase already present, i.e. there is no change in  $v_{Rmax}$  and  $Km_R$  constants. Changes in bacteria groups 1 and 2 result only from the respective growth of these groups;

*Model B:*  $N_2O$  reductase that was initially absent is induced for each bacteria over a period short enough to consider that the relevant bacteria move suddenly from group 2 to group 1, this last group being characterised by one  $v_{Rmax}$  value and one  $Km_R$  value only. The flux rate of bacteria from group 2 to group 1 is described by the derivation of a rational empirical function:

$$\left( \frac{\partial bm_2}{\partial t} \right)_m = - \frac{(e/\alpha) \times (t/\alpha)^{e-1}}{(1 + (t/\alpha)^e)^2} \times (bm_{21}) \quad (8a)$$

$$\left( \frac{\partial bm_1}{\partial t} \right)_m = - \left( \frac{\partial bm_2}{\partial t} \right)_m \quad (8b)$$

where  $m$  index is for movement,  $t$  is time (s),  $bm_{21}$  the biomass of bacteria initially belonging to group 2 that progressively move to group 1 (g biomass.kg<sup>-1</sup> soil),  $\alpha$  the time at which 50% of these bacteria reduce  $N_2O$  (s),

$e$  an exponent of which the value is as much as high as the transition is sudden at time  $\alpha$ ;

*Model C*: changes in the N<sub>2</sub>O reductase concentration and other components in the respiratory chain are progressive and identical for all bacteria belonging to group 1. Some calculations show that an increase in the N<sub>2</sub>O reductase concentration may induce a decrease in  $Km_R$  concomitantly to an increase in  $v_{Rmax}$  at low reductase concentrations, or only a decrease in the apparent  $Km_R$  value at higher concentrations (see Appendix 1). We consider here only a decrease in  $Km_R$  described empirically by a rational function:

$$Km_R = Km_{R0} + \left\{ (Km_{R\infty} - Km_{R0}) \times \left( \frac{(t/\alpha)^e}{1 + (t/\alpha)^e} \right) \right\} \quad (9)$$

where  $Km_{R0}$  and  $Km_{R\infty}$  are the initial and final Michaelis constants for N<sub>2</sub>O reduction (mol N<sub>2</sub>O.m<sup>-3</sup> air).

Microbial growth first results from the balance between the energy supplied by catabolic activities and the energy required for microbial maintenance (Decker et al., 1970; Stouthamer, 1973). Assuming that the N supply does not limit microbial growth as long as the N<sub>2</sub>O concentration evolves, and ignoring variations in organic-C really available for microorganisms, this balance is written as so:

$$\left( \frac{\partial bm_1}{\partial t} \right)_g = bm_1 \times \left( \left\{ (v_{D1} \times Y_D^{max}) + (v_{R1} \times Y_R^{max}) \right\} - m_E \right) \quad (10a)$$

$$\left( \frac{\partial bm_2}{\partial t} \right)_g = bm_2 \times \left( \left\{ v_{D2} \times Y_D^{max} \right\} - m_E \right) \quad (10b)$$

where  $t$  is the time (s),  $g$  index is for "growth",  $Y_D^{max}$  and  $Y_R^{max}$  are the maximum yields of NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> and N<sub>2</sub>O reductions (g biomass produced per mol of N<sub>2</sub>O produced and reduced, respectively), and  $m_E$  is the energy required for microbial maintenance expressed as an equivalent default in the biomass built per unit of biomass (s<sup>-1</sup>). Denitrifiers initially unable to reduce N<sub>2</sub>O into N<sub>2</sub> can progressively acquire this ability (MacConnaughey et al., 1985; Holtan-Hartwig et al., 2000). The actual evolution of microbial groups 1 and 2 combines growth and fluxes between groups 1 and 2 for *Model B*:

$$\left(\frac{\partial bm_1}{\partial t}\right) = \left(\frac{\partial bm_1}{\partial t}\right)_g - \left(\frac{\partial bm_2}{\partial t}\right)_m \quad (11a)$$

$$\left(\frac{\partial bm_2}{\partial t}\right) = \left(\frac{\partial bm_2}{\partial t}\right)_g + \left(\frac{\partial bm_2}{\partial t}\right)_m \quad (11b)$$

Assuming that the microbial biomass is composed of 15% carbohydrates ( $C_6H_{12}O_6$ ), 10% lipids ( $C_{47}H_{96}O_9$ ) and 75% protides ( $C_{16}H_3O_8N_4$ ) (Vavilin et al., 1994), a fraction  $f_N$  (0.1036) of its weight corresponds to N. The model assumes that N originated from  $NO_3^-$ . The actual evolution of  $[NO_3^-]$  and  $[N_2O]$  over time can therefore be written as so:

$$\omega \times \frac{\partial [NO_3^-]}{\partial t} = - \left( V_D + f_N \left\{ \frac{\partial (bm_1 + bm_2)}{\partial t} \right\} \right) \quad (12a)$$

$$\left( \left( v_a / m_s \right) + \left( \left( \frac{\omega}{\rho_w} \right) \times s_{N_2O} \right) \right) \times \frac{\partial [N_2O]}{\partial t} = V_D - V_R \quad (12b)$$

where  $\omega$  is the soil water content ( $g \cdot g^{-1}$  dry soil),  $v_a$  the volume of air over the slurry in the flask ( $m^3$ ),  $m_s$  the mass of dry soil in the flask (kg),  $\rho_w$  the bulk density of water ( $kg \cdot m^{-3}$ ) and  $s_{N_2O}$  the solubility of  $N_2O$  ( $mol N_2O \cdot m^{-3}$  solution /  $mol N_2O \cdot m^{-3}$  air).

Temporal variations in  $[N_2O]$  and  $[NO_3^-]$  therefore depend on 5 to 7 parameters: initial  $bm_1$  and  $bm_2$  values, specific  $NO_3^-$  reduction activity  $\nu_D$ , the Michaelis constant  $Km_D$ , either the Michaelis constant  $Km_R$  or the initial and final values of this constant ( $Km_{R0}$  and  $Km_{R\infty}$ , respectively), perhaps the biomass  $bm_{21}$  of bacteria initially belonging to group 1 that become able to reduce  $N_2O$ , and parameters  $\alpha$  and  $e$  that characterise the induction of  $N_2O$  reductase. Total denitrifier biomass  $bm$  and the proportion  $p_R$  of denitrifiers that can reduce  $N_2O$  have been substituted by  $bm_1$  and  $bm_2$  in the "Results" and "Discussion and Conclusion" sections.

### Numerical Simulations and Parameter Estimations

Temporal variations in  $[NO_3^-]$ ,  $[N_2O]$ ,  $bm_1$  and  $bm_2$  were calculated using Euler first order approximation (Nougier, 1983). The parameters to be estimated were obtained by fitting simulated data to experimental data. This was performed by minimizing the following expression, using the Marquardt-Levenberg algorithm (Marquardt, 1963):

$$\chi^2 = \sum_{i=1}^n \sum_{j=1}^n \left( [\text{N}_2\text{O}]_{\text{exp},i,j} - [\text{N}_2\text{O}]_{\text{sim},i,j} \right)^2 \quad (15)$$

where  $[\text{N}_2\text{O}]_{\text{exp},i,j}$  and  $[\text{N}_2\text{O}]_{\text{sim},i,j}$  were the experimental and simulated  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  concentrations at time  $i$  for flask  $j$ , and  $n$  the total number of experimental time measurements. The following steps were performed successively:

- step 1: from the kinetics of total denitrification (condition 1), we estimated only one total denitrifier biomass value  $bm$ , one specific denitrifying activity value  $v_{Dmax}$  and one Michaelis constant  $Km_D$  for  $\text{NO}_3^-$  reduction ( $\text{mol NO}_3^- \cdot \text{m}^{-3}$  solution) for all the flasks; this operation was repeated for several energy yields and maintenance coefficients. In addition and for the energy yield and maintenance coefficients (arbitrarily) used for the following steps, we estimated denitrifier biomasses in each flask using  $v_D$  and  $Km_D$  estimated previously;
- step 2: from the kinetics of  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  net production with no initial  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  in the flask (condition 2), we estimated only one initial proportion  $p_R$  of denitrifiers that reduce  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  and perhaps the proportion of denitrifiers initially belonging to group 2 that become able to undertake this reduction (*Model B*), either one Michaelis constant for  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  reduction  $Km_R$  or its initial and final values ( $Km_{R0}$  and  $Km_{R\infty}$  in *Model C*), and either parameter  $\alpha$  or parameter  $e$  describing the progressing ability to reduce  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  in *Models B* and *C* for specific denitrifying activity  $v_{Dmax}$ , the Michaelis constant  $Km_D$  and the total denitrifier biomass  $bm$  estimated during step 1. Using all these estimates except mean microbial biomass  $bm$ , we then obtained a second estimate of this biomass specific to each flask;
- step 3: for the kinetics of  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  net production with  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  initially in the flasks (condition 3), we only compared experimental data with simulated data, using the parameter estimated during steps 1 and 2. Due to some systematic bias between experiments and simulations for this condition, additional tests were performed for higher energy yields for  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  reduction (by doing step 2 once more). Additional simulations were obtained by estimating the denitrifier biomass specific to each flask using all the other parameters estimated previously.

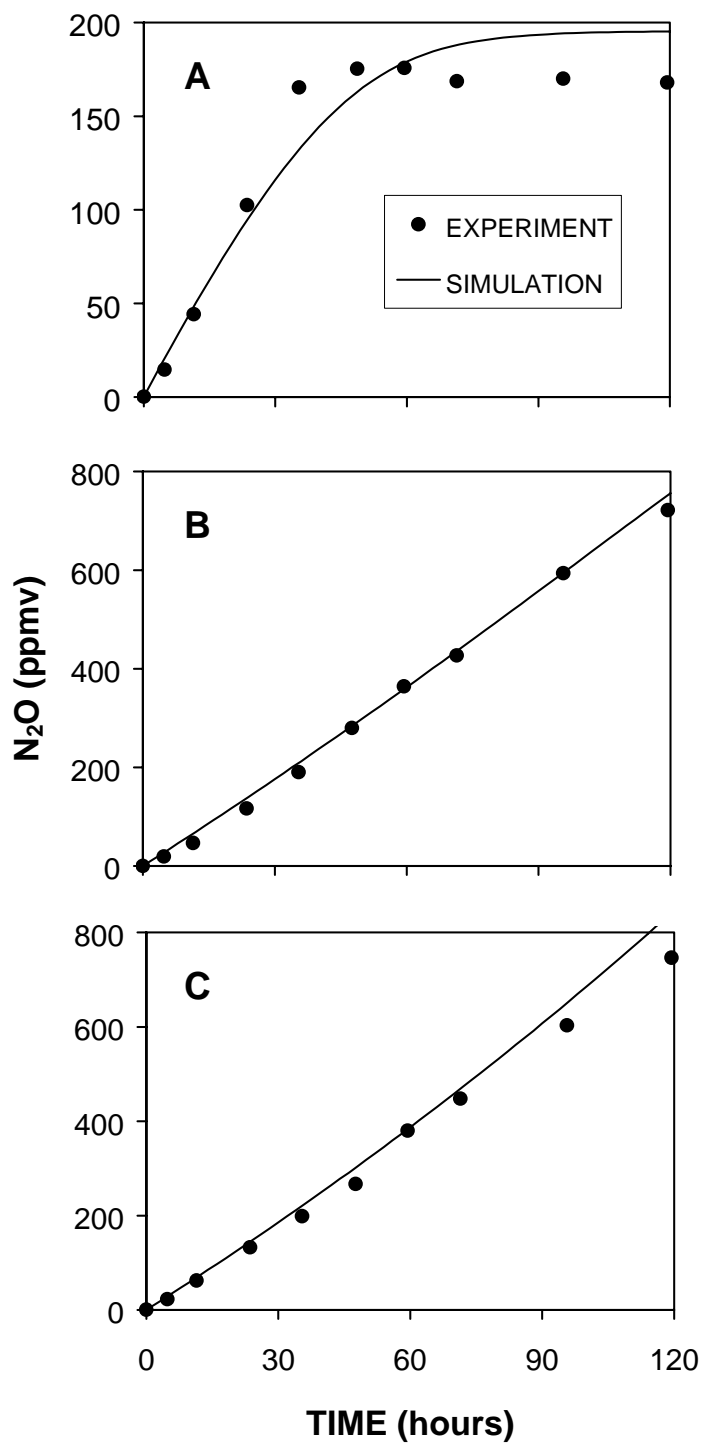
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## RESULTS

### Condition 1

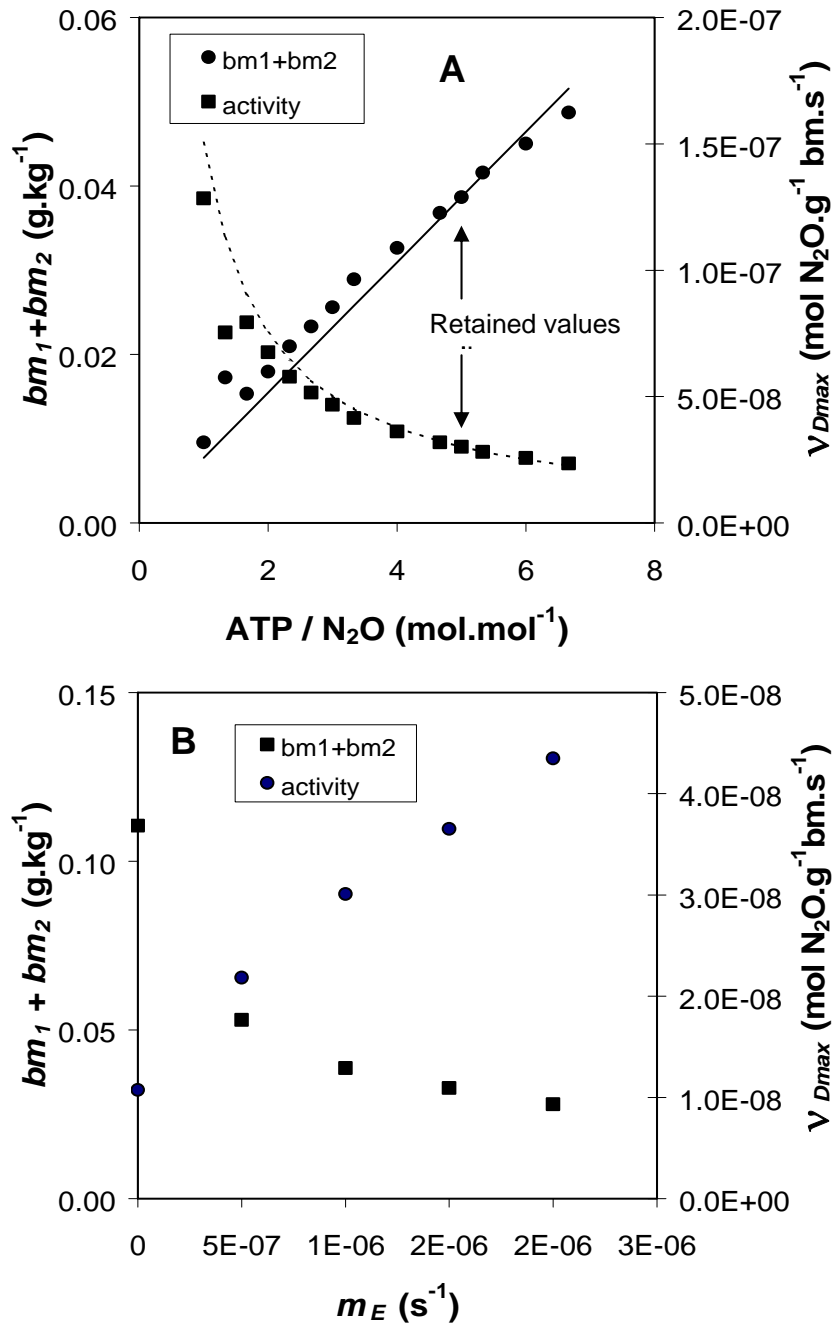
Nitrous oxide concentration increases nearly linearly with time at the beginning of incubation with a slope similar for all samples (Fig. 1a-c), except for those supplemented with a  $0.153 \text{ mol NO}_3^- \cdot \text{m}^{-3}$  solution. For the 6 flasks supplemented with solutions of low  $\text{NO}_3^-$  concentrations,  $[\text{N}_2\text{O}]$  stabilises thereafter (Fig. 1a). For these samples, at the end of incubation,  $\text{NO}_3^-$  and extractable  $\text{NH}_4^+$  concentrations were about  $0.024$  and  $0.196 \text{ mol N} \cdot \text{m}^{-3}$  solution, respectively. No trend was observed between these concentrations and the initial  $\text{NO}_3^-$  concentration. The sum of final  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  and  $\text{NO}_3^-$  concentrations – expressed as equivalent  $[\text{NO}_3^-]$  in the soil solution – is approximately 90% of the initial  $\text{NO}_3^-$  concentration, the deviation between the sum of final  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  and  $\text{NO}_3^-$  concentrations and the initial  $\text{NO}_3^-$  concentration increasing from  $0.005$  to  $0.6 \text{ mol} \cdot \text{m}^{-3}$  with the initial  $\text{NO}_3^-$  concentrations of the soil solution. For samples supplemented with solutions of high  $\text{NO}_3^-$  concentrations,  $[\text{N}_2\text{O}]$  increases all the time (Fig. 1b-c). For all samples, the rate of  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  emission seems to increase with time, although inflexion points could sometimes be detected.





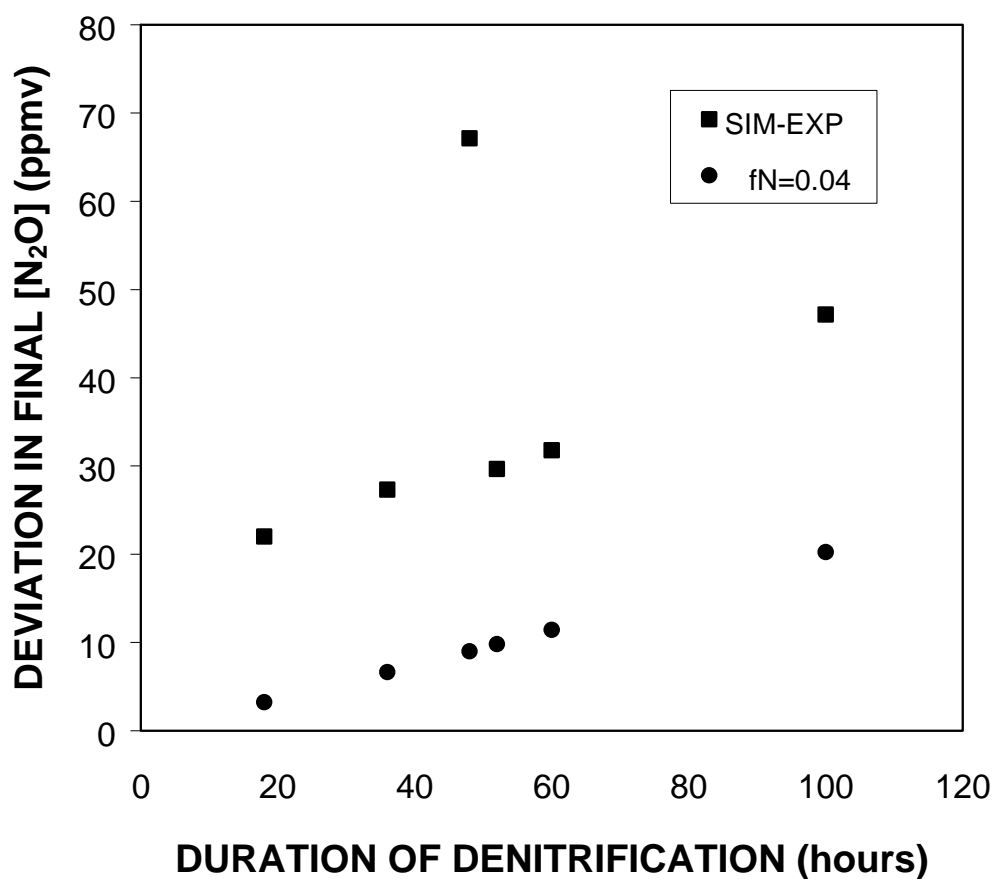
**Figure 1:** comparison between experimental and simulated  $[N_2O]$  values for condition 1 (i.e.  $C_2H_2$ , no  $N_2O$  initially) for an energy yield of 1.25 mol ATP per mol of  $N_2O$  produced:

- a/ initial  $[NO_3^-] = 0.17 \text{ mol.m}^{-3}$  solution;
- b/ initial  $[NO_3^-] = 0.93 \text{ mol.m}^{-3}$  solution;
- c/ initial  $[NO_3^-] = 7.90 \text{ mol.m}^{-3}$  solution.



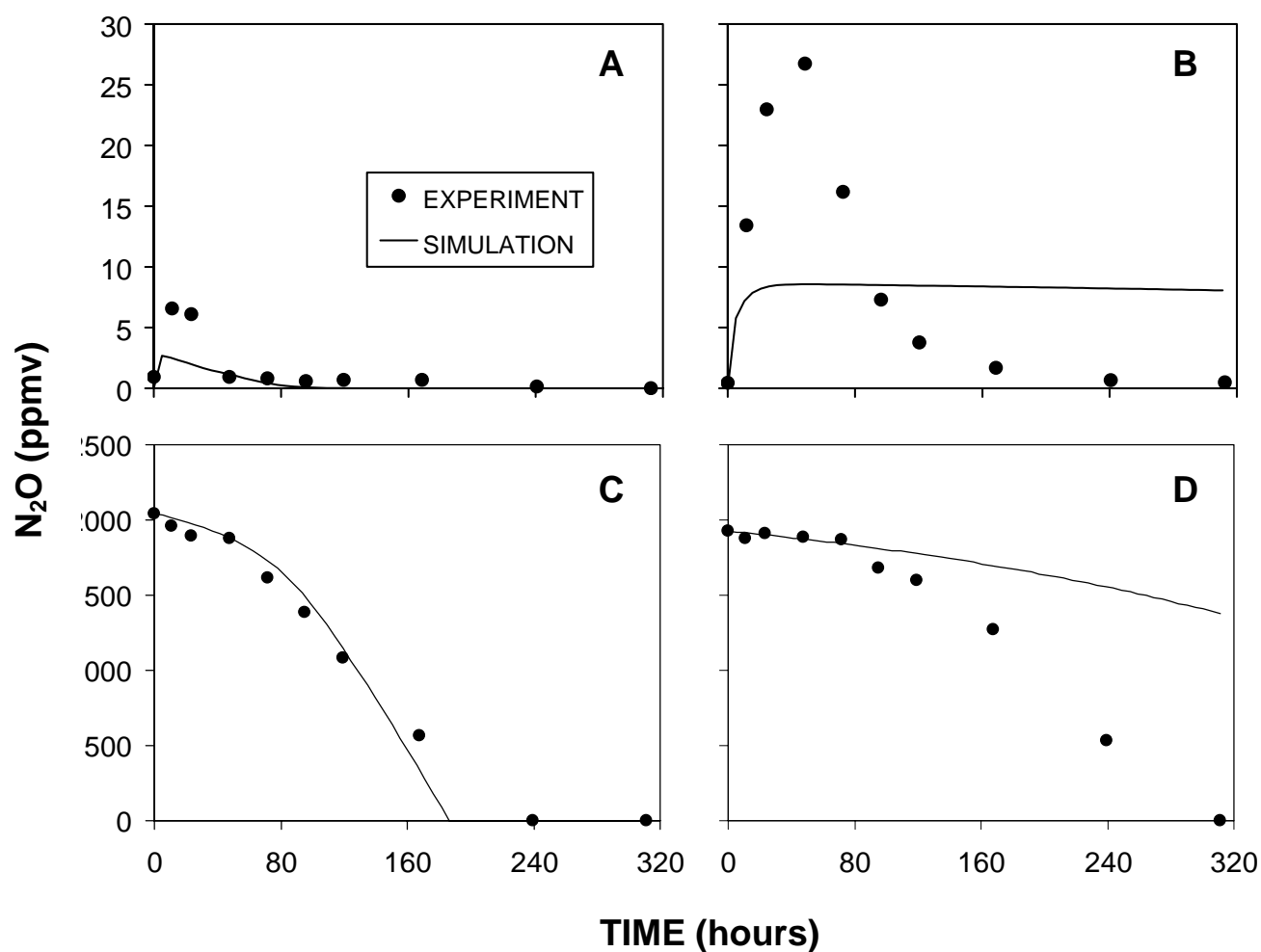
**Figure 2:** effect of the chosen energy yield for N<sub>2</sub>O production and energy required for microbial maintenance on estimations of denitrifier biomass  $bm$  and maximum specific denitrifying activity  $v_{Dmax}$ :

- a/ effect of the energy yield  $Y_D^{max}$  for a maintenance coefficient  $m_E = 10^{-6} \text{ s}^{-1}$ ;
- b/ effect of the maintenance coefficient  $m_E$  for an energy yield  $Y_D^{max}$  of 1.25 mol ATP per mol of N<sub>2</sub>O produced.



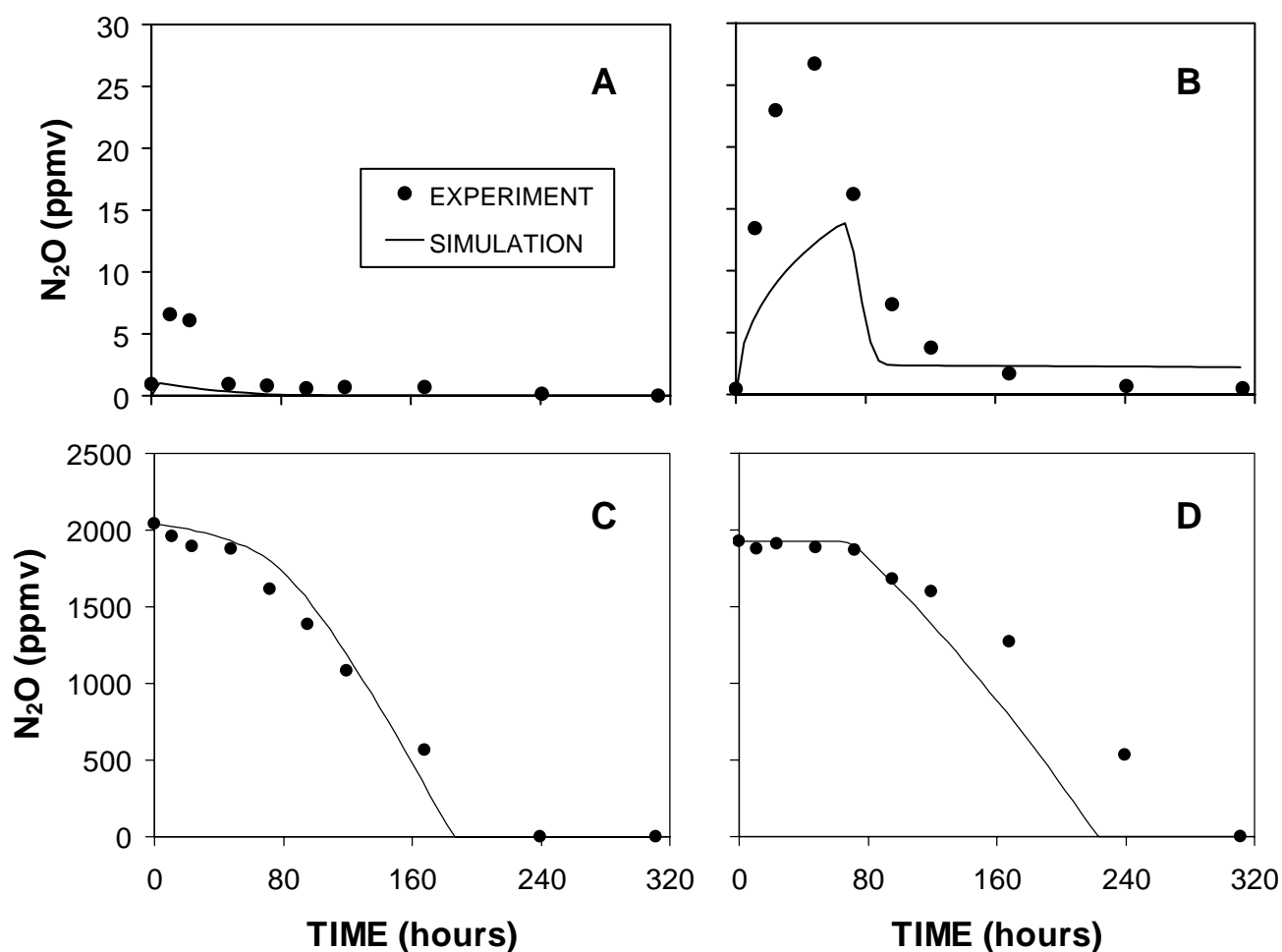
**Figure 3:** Deviations between the simulated and experimental [N<sub>2</sub>O] values as a function of the time required to reach equilibrium for [N<sub>2</sub>O], for the 6 flasks with the lowest initial NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> concentrations, and additional NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> consumption expressed in equivalent defaults in N<sub>2</sub>O production for an  $f_N$  underestimated by 0.04.

When fitting experimental data to simulated data, for the 13 incubation flasks in condition 1 for several maximum energy yield values  $Y_D^{max}$  and maintenance coefficient values  $m_E$ , the energy yield was, as a first approximation, proportional and inversely proportional to the estimates of microbial denitrifying biomass  $bm$  and specific denitrifying activity  $v_{Dmax}$ , respectively (Fig. 2a). Denitrifier biomass estimates ranged between  $9.57 \cdot 10^{-3}$  and  $4.87 \cdot 10^{-2}$  g.kg<sup>-1</sup> soil, for the considered energy yields. Moreover, a variation in the maintenance coefficient  $m_E$  induced additional variations in the estimates of biomass  $bm$  and specific denitrifying activity  $v_{Dmax}$ , as illustrated in Figure 2b. For the energy yield value used in this study (i.e. 5 mol ATP produced per mol of N<sub>2</sub>O produced), simulated [N<sub>2</sub>O] data agreed approximately with experimental data (Fig. 1a-c). Nevertheless, two types of bias were observed between experiments and simulations. On the one hand, when [N<sub>2</sub>O] stabilized before the end of the experiment, final simulated [N<sub>2</sub>O] values were higher than experimental values (see for example Fig. 1a). The deviation between final experimental and simulated [N<sub>2</sub>O] was linearly correlated with the time required to reach [N<sub>2</sub>O] stabilisation (results not shown), with an increase of approximately 0.30 ppmv N<sub>2</sub>O per additional hour (Fig. 3). On the other hand, additional deviations in the rate of N<sub>2</sub>O production between experiments and simulations suggest variations in microbial characteristics between flasks. Using the previously estimated specific denitrifying activity value  $v_{Dmax}$  and Michaelis constant  $Km_D$  for the energy yield value used in this study, we estimated the microbial biomass  $bm$  separately for each flask: its average and standard deviation values were  $4.56 \cdot 10^{-2}$  and  $2.23 \cdot 10^{-2}$  g.kg<sup>-1</sup> soil, respectively; no correlation was detected between the biomass estimate and the initial [NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup>] of the flask (Fig. 7a). Nevertheless, one flask had a biomass estimate of  $11.9 \cdot 10^{-2}$  g.kg<sup>-1</sup> soil; ignoring this value would have led to average and standard deviation values of  $3.95 \cdot 10^{-2}$  and  $0.32 \cdot 10^{-2}$  g.kg<sup>-1</sup> soil, respectively. Considering the energy yield  $Y_D^{max}$ , the specific denitrifying activity  $v_{Dmax}$  and the Michaelis constant  $Km_D$  for NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> reduction used for this study, we calculated the uncertainty in NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> incorporated into the microbial biomass (expressed as an equivalent default in N<sub>2</sub>O production) as a function of time for an increase of 0.04 in  $f_N$ : the deviation between final experimental and simulated N<sub>2</sub>O concentrations for the 6 flasks with the lowest initial NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> concentrations increases during the time required to reach equilibrium (Fig. 3) at a rate of 0.21 ppmv N<sub>2</sub>O.h<sup>-1</sup>; it is approximately 20 ppmv lower than the deviation between experimental and simulated N<sub>2</sub>O concentrations after equilibrium has been reached. This last deviation corresponds approximately to 0.016 mol NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup>.m<sup>-3</sup> solution.



**Figure 4:** Experimental and fitted data simulated by model A, using estimated parameters reported in table 1:

- a/ condition 2, initial  $[NO_3^-] = 0.23 \text{ mol.m}^{-3}$  solution;
- b/ condition 2, initial  $[NO_3^-] = 7.90 \text{ mol.m}^{-3}$  solution;
- c/ condition 3, initial  $[NO_3^-] = 0.23 \text{ mol.m}^{-3}$  solution;
- d/ condition 3, initial  $[NO_3^-] = 7.90 \text{ mol.m}^{-3}$  solution.



**Figure 5:** Experimental and simulated data simulated by model B, using estimated parameters reported in table 1:

- a/ condition 2, initial  $[NO_3^-] = 0.23 \text{ mol.m}^{-3}$  solution;
- b/ condition 2, initial  $[NO_3^-] = 7.90 \text{ mol.m}^{-3}$  solution;
- c/ condition 3, initial  $[NO_3^-] = 0.23 \text{ mol.m}^{-3}$  solution;
- d/ condition 3, initial  $[NO_3^-] = 7.90 \text{ mol.m}^{-3}$  solution.

## Condition 2

Two flasks in condition 2 (i.e. initial  $0.125$  and  $1.657 \text{ mol NO}_3^- \cdot \text{m}^{-3}$ ) were unfortunately enriched in  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  (gases were sampled in these flasks with a single syringe just after sampling condition 3), and were therefore not included in the subsequent analysis. For other flasks,  $[\text{N}_2\text{O}]$  increased with time at the beginning of incubation until 12-48 h, and then decreased (Fig. 4a-b). The time discriminating between the initial  $[\text{N}_2\text{O}]$  increase and subsequent decrease was around 12 h for low initial  $[\text{NO}_3^-]$ , then progressively increased up to 48 h for the highest initial  $[\text{NO}_3^-]$ . The increase in  $[\text{N}_2\text{O}]$  estimated over the first 12 hours varied between about 9% and 22% of the initial increase in  $[\text{N}_2\text{O}]$  of corresponding samples in condition 1, for initial  $[\text{NO}_3^-]$  of  $0.31$  and  $7.9 \text{ mol} \cdot \text{m}^{-3}$ , respectively. The rate of the subsequent decrease in  $[\text{N}_2\text{O}]$  was firstly of the same order of magnitude as the initial increase, and thereafter became small with near stabilisation of  $[\text{N}_2\text{O}]$  at about 0.5-2 vppm. At the end of the experiment,  $[\text{NO}_3^-]$  had nearly totally disappeared for samples with low initial  $\text{NO}_3^-$  concentrations, whereas it remained about 72.5% and 75.3% of the initial  $[\text{NO}_3^-]$  for samples supplemented with  $5.56$  and  $7.91 \text{ mol NO}_3^- \cdot \text{m}^{-3}$  solution, respectively.

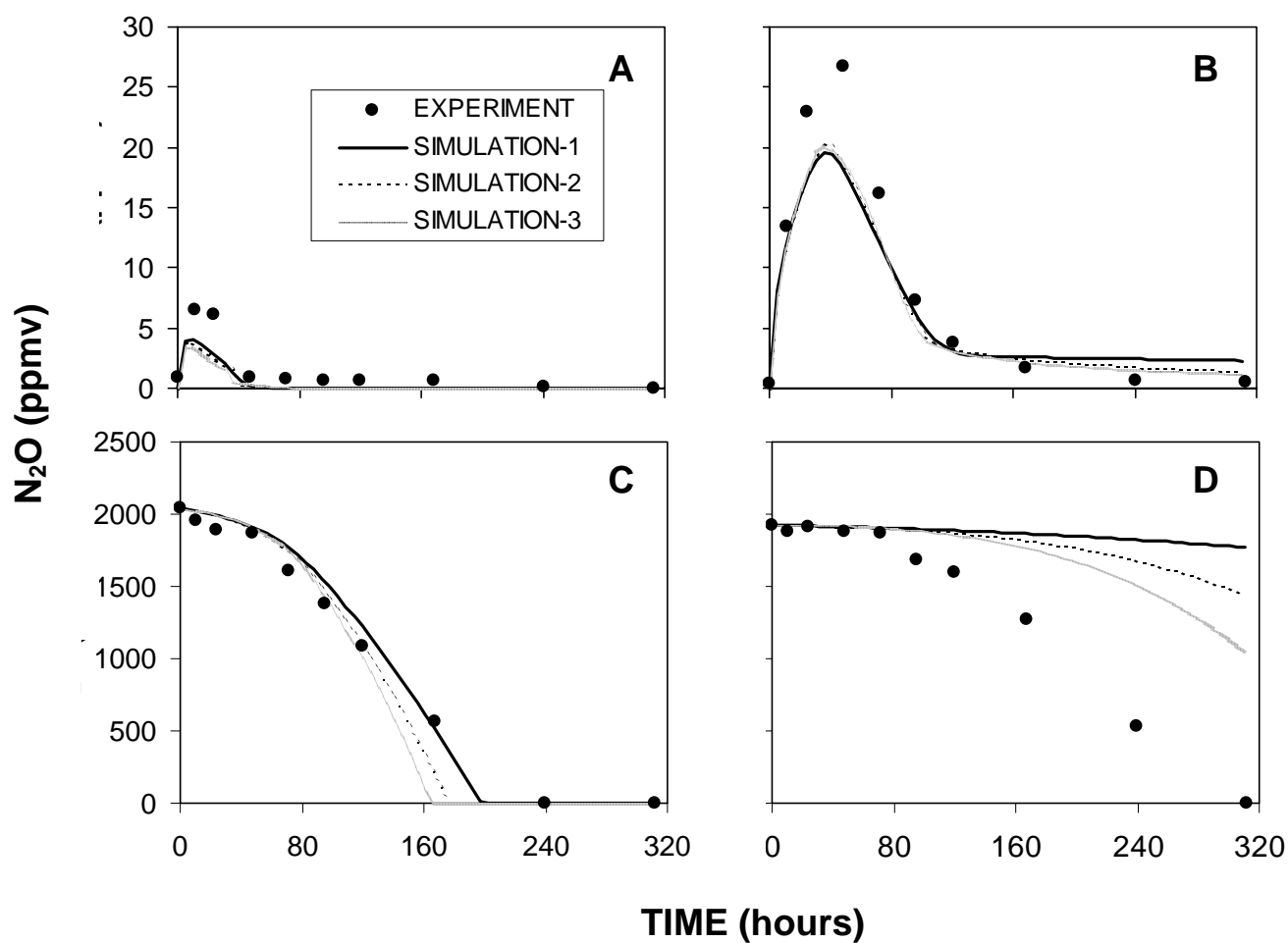
We successively assessed the capability of *Models A, B and C* to simulate experimental data and concomitantly estimate the model parameters, using values for mean denitrifier biomass  $bm$  (i.e. the sum  $bm_1+bm_2$ ), specific denitrifying activity  $v_{Dmax}$  and the Michaelis constant  $km_D$  for  $\text{NO}_3^-$  reduction estimated previously from experimental data obtained in condition 1. Parameter estimates were:

- *Model A*: the proportion  $p_R$  of denitrifiers that can reduce  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$ , and the Michaelis constant  $Km_R$  for the reduction of  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  into  $\text{N}_2$ ;
- *Model B*: the initial proportion  $p_R$  of denitrifiers that can reduce  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  and the proportion of denitrifiers that become capable of reducing  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$ ,  $\alpha$  and  $e$  coefficients that describe the rate at which the ability to reduce  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  is acquired and the Michaelis constant  $Km_R$  for the reduction of  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  into  $\text{N}_2$ ;
- *Model C*: the proportion  $p_R$  of denitrifiers that can reduce  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$ , the initial and final Michaelis constant values  $Km_{RO}$  and  $Km_{R\infty}$ , respectively, and  $\alpha$  and  $e$  coefficients that describe the rate at which the ability to reduce  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  is acquired.

This procedure was performed for an energy yield of  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  consumption equal to one quarter of the energy yield of  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  production. However, for model C, it was repeated for a higher energy yield of  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  reduction. Using *Model A*, it was not possible to correctly fit simulations

to experimental data: at low initial  $[\text{NO}_3^-]$ , the simulated maximum  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  concentrations remained lower than experimental values (Fig. 4a) and its subsequent decrease resulted from  $\text{NO}_3^-$  disappearance, whereas  $[\text{N}_2\text{O}]$  remained high (Fig. 4b) as long as  $[\text{NO}_3^-]$  was high enough for soils with high initial  $\text{NO}_3^-$  concentrations. Using all the previously estimated parameters, except "mean" denitrifier biomass  $bm$ , we estimated the  $bm$  value individually for each flask: its average and standard deviation were 0.155 and 0.197  $\text{g.kg}^{-1}$  soil, respectively. The average was thus significantly higher than the previously estimated biomass; moreover, there was a significant increase in the  $bm$  estimate with the initial  $[\text{NO}_3^-]$  of the flasks (Fig 7a). *Model B* fitted simulations to experimental data better than model A (Fig. 5a-b): especially at high initial  $\text{NO}_3^-$  concentrations, it simulated a decrease in  $[\text{N}_2\text{O}]$  although  $\text{NO}_3^-$  did not disappear (Fig. 5b). However, simulated  $[\text{N}_2\text{O}]$  remained lower than experimental values. Using all the previously estimated parameters, except "mean" denitrifier biomass  $bm$ , we estimated this last value individually for each flask: its average and standard deviation were equal to 0.088 and 0.108  $\text{g.kg}^{-1}$  soil, respectively. As for model A, the average was thus significantly higher than the previously estimated biomass, and there was a significant increase in the  $bm$  estimate with the initial  $[\text{NO}_3^-]$  of the flasks (Fig. 7a). In contrast to models A and B, model C made it possible to approximately simulate  $[\text{N}_2\text{O}]$  evolution over time for all the range of initial  $[\text{NO}_3^-]$  values, although simulated  $[\text{N}_2\text{O}]$  remained generally lower than experimental values (Fig. 6a-b). Increasing the energy yield of  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  reduction induced little change in simulated  $[\text{N}_2\text{O}]$  as well as parameter estimates (Table 1), except for the exponent  $e$  for which large variations in this range of values only slightly affected  $[\text{N}_2\text{O}]$  evolution over time. Using all the previously estimated parameters, except "mean" denitrifier biomass  $bm$ , we estimated this last value individually for each flask: its average and standard deviation were  $2.31 \cdot 10^{-2}$  and 0.019  $\text{g.kg}^{-1}$  soil, respectively. In addition, trends in individual biomass estimates were noted only for low initial N concentrations (Fig. 7b); in this range of initial  $[\text{NO}_3^-]$  values, large variations in  $bm$  did not greatly affect simulated  $[\text{N}_2\text{O}]$  (results not shown).





**Figure 6:** Experimental and simulated data simulated by model C, using estimated parameters reported in table 1 (simulations 1, 2 and 3 are for  $Y_R^{max}$  equal to 2.5, 3.33 and 4.17 mol ATP.mol  $N_2O$ , respectively):

- a/ condition 2, initial  $[NO_3^-] = 0.23 \text{ mol.m}^{-3}$  solution;
- b/ condition 2, initial  $[NO_3^-] = 7.90 \text{ mol.m}^{-3}$  solution;
- c/ condition 3, initial  $[NO_3^-] = 0.23 \text{ mol.m}^{-3}$  solution;
- d/ condition 3, initial  $[NO_3^-] = 7.90 \text{ mol.m}^{-3}$  solution.

Condition	Model	$V_{Dmax}$	$Km_D$	$bm$	$P_R$	Initial $p_R$	Final $p_R$	$Km_R$	Initial $Km_R$	Final $Km_R$	$\alpha$	$e$
		- <sup>o</sup> mol N <sub>2</sub> O.g <sup>-1</sup> .s <sup>-1</sup> -	- mol.m <sup>-3</sup> -	- g.kg <sup>-1</sup> -				- mol.m <sup>-3</sup> -	- mol.m <sup>-3</sup> -	- mol.m <sup>-3</sup> -	-- s --	
1	-	3.01 10 <sup>-8</sup>	5.82 10 <sup>-2</sup>	3.87 10 <sup>-2</sup>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2	A	-	-	-	0.468			1.29 10 <sup>-4</sup>	-	-	-	-
	B	-	-	-	-	0.401	0.626	2.99 10 <sup>-5</sup>	-	-	2.50 10 <sup>+5</sup>	58.10
	C <sup>†</sup>	-	-	-	0.415			-	1.46 10 <sup>-4</sup>	1.12 10 <sup>-5</sup>	1.36 10 <sup>+5</sup>	9.29
	C <sup>‡</sup>	-	-	-	0.404				1.27 10 <sup>-4</sup>	2.59 10 <sup>-5</sup>	1.35 10 <sup>+5</sup>	40.24
3	A	-	-	-	-			-	-	-	-	-
	B	-	-	-	-			-	-	-	-	-
	C <sup>†</sup>	-	-	-	-			-	-	-	-	-
	C <sup>‡</sup>	-	-	-	-			-	-	-	-	-

**Table 1:** parameters estimated by fitting simulations to experimental data for an energy yield  $Y_D^{max}$  and a maintenance coefficient  $m_E$  of 1.25 mol ATP.mol N<sub>2</sub>O produced and 10<sup>-6</sup> s<sup>-1</sup>, respectively.

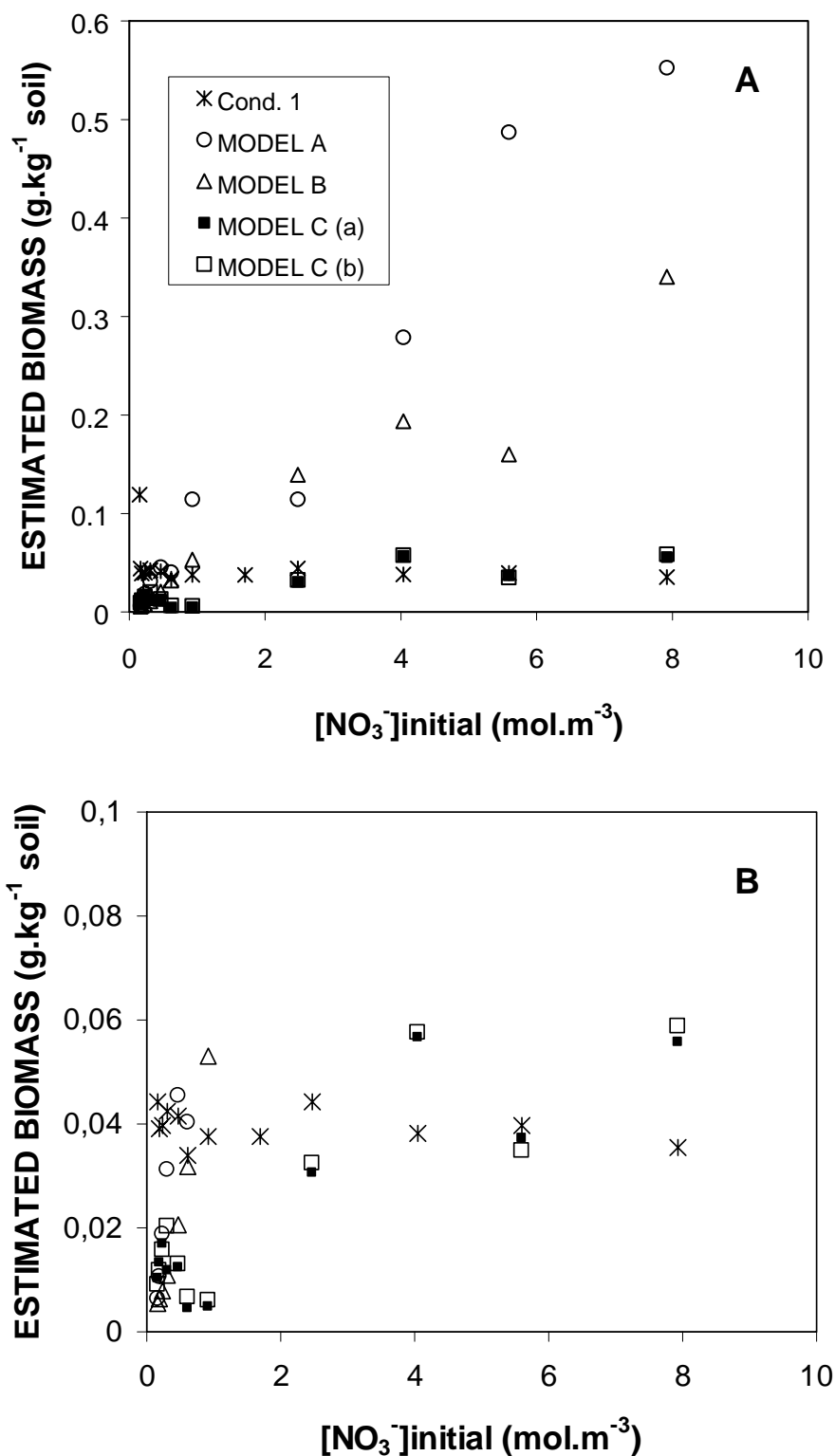
†:  $Y_R^{max}$  for N<sub>2</sub>O reduction of 2.5 mol ATP.mol<sup>-1</sup> N<sub>2</sub>O

‡:  $Y_R^{max}$  for N<sub>2</sub>O reduction of 3.33 mol ATP.mol<sup>-1</sup> N<sub>2</sub>O

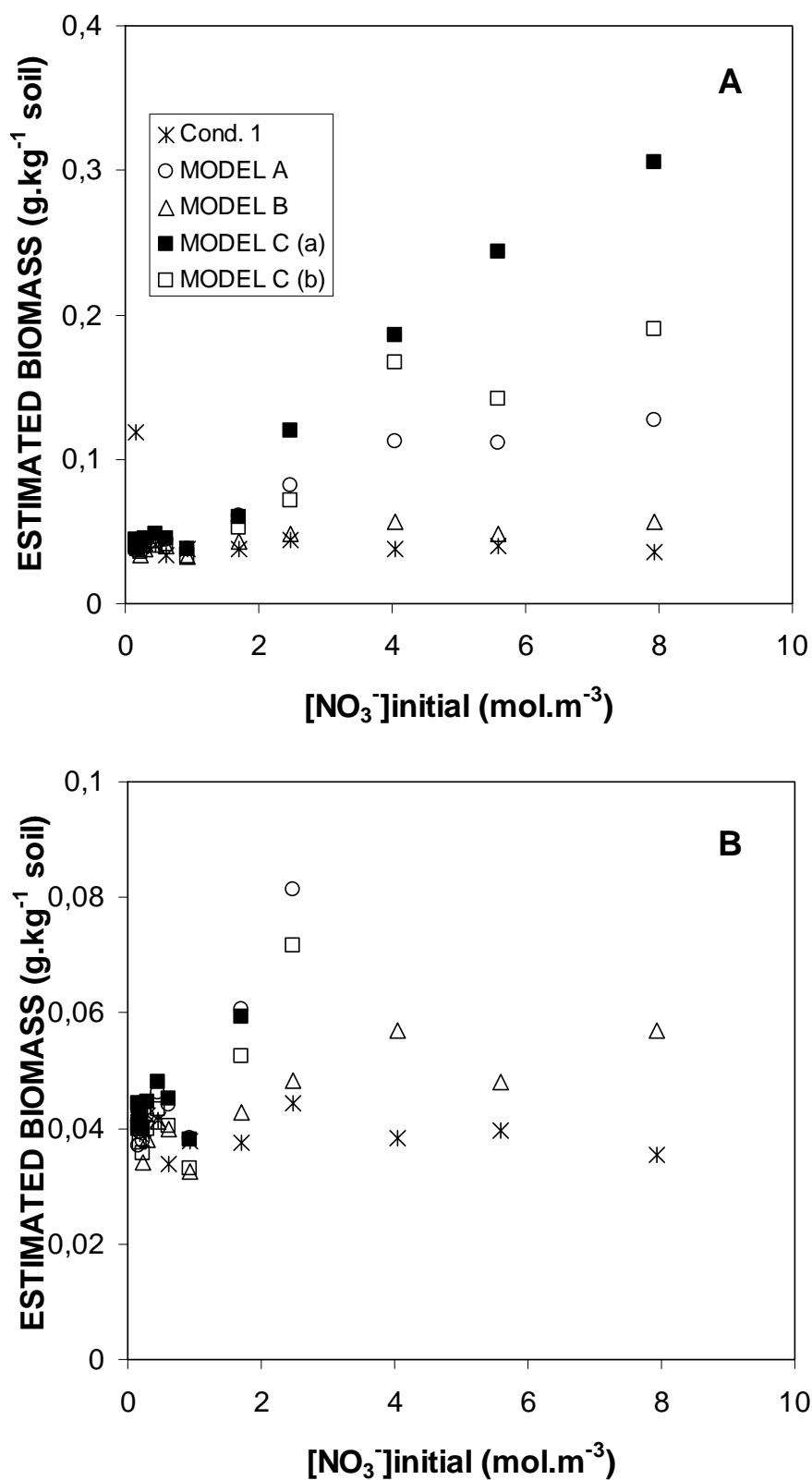
### Condition 3

Initially,  $[\text{N}_2\text{O}]$  slowly decreased with time at the beginning of incubation until 24-96 h, then decreased more drastically. For samples supplemented with solutions of low  $[\text{NO}_3^-]$ , the duration of the initial small  $[\text{N}_2\text{O}]$  decrease and the time required for almost all  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  to be consumed were positively correlated with the initial  $[\text{NO}_3^-]$ . The final  $[\text{NO}_3^-]$  was about  $0.024 \text{ mol.m}^{-3}$  soil solution for these samples. In contrast, at high  $[\text{NO}_3^-]$ , the duration of the initial small  $[\text{N}_2\text{O}]$  decreased and the time required for almost all  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  to be consumed did not seem to depend on the initial  $[\text{NO}_3^-]$ . The final  $[\text{NO}_3^-]$  was about 4.06 and  $6.00 \text{ mol.m}^{-3}$  soil solution for flasks at initially  $5.59$  and  $7.90 \text{ mol.m}^{-3}$ , respectively.

We successively assessed the capability of models A, B and C to simulate experimental data, using all the parameters previously estimated from batch experiments in conditions 1 and 2, or using all these parameters except denitrifier biomass  $bm$  that was then estimated once more individually for each flask. At low initial  $\text{NO}_3^-$  concentrations,  $[\text{N}_2\text{O}]$  simulated by models A, B and C were approximately in agreement with the experimental  $[\text{N}_2\text{O}]$  value and nearly identical to each other (Fig. 4c, 5c and 6c). At the end of incubation, there was nearly no more  $\text{NO}_3^-$  in these flasks. In contrast, at high initial  $[\text{NO}_3^-]$ , simulated  $[\text{N}_2\text{O}]$  values varied between models: in particular, model B can simulate the decrease in  $[\text{N}_2\text{O}]$ , although  $[\text{NO}_3^-]$  remains high (Fig. 5d), whereas models A and C seemed to be unable to correctly reflect this decrease (Fig. 4d, 5d and 6d). Using model C with a higher energy yield for  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  reduction made it possible to decrease  $[\text{N}_2\text{O}]$  more rapidly (Fig. 6d). Additional simulations with higher energy yield values for  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  reduction made it possible to accentuate this behaviour. Unfortunately, it was not possible to correctly reflect these experimental data with an acceptable value for the energy yield of  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  reduction. Using all the previously estimated parameters in conditions 1 and 2, except "mean" denitrifier biomass  $bm$ , we estimated this last value individually for each flask: its average and standard deviation were  $6.30 \cdot 10^{-2}$  and  $0.033 \text{ g.kg}^{-1}$  soil respectively for model A,  $4.34 \cdot 10^{-2}$  and  $0.007 \text{ g.kg}^{-1}$  soil respectively for model B and  $9.67 \cdot 10^{-2}$  and  $0.091 \text{ g.kg}^{-1}$  soil respectively for model C. In addition, there was a significant increase in the  $bm$  estimate with the initial  $\text{NO}_3^-$  concentration of the flasks for models A and C (Fig. 8a). In contrast, no correlation was detected between the biomass estimate and the initial  $[\text{NO}_3^-]$  of the flask for model B (Fig. 8a).



**Figure 7:** a/ total denitrifier biomass estimated by fitting simulations to experimental data for conditions 1 and 2 using models A, B and C. For model C, (a) for an energy yield  $Y_R^{max}$  for  $N_2O$  reduction of  $2.5 \text{ mol ATP.mol}^{-1} N_2O$  and (b) an energy yield  $Y_R^{max}$  for  $N_2O$  reduction of  $3.33 \text{ mol ATP.mol}^{-1} N_2O$ , respectively. b/ a zoomed-in representation of figure 7a.



**Figure 8:** a/ total denitrifier biomass estimated by fitting simulations to experimental data for conditions 1 and 3 using models A, B and C. For model C, (a) for an energy yield  $Y_R^{max}$  for  $N_2O$  reduction of  $2.5 \text{ mol ATP} \cdot \text{mol}^{-1} N_2O$  and (b) an energy yield  $Y_R^{max}$  for  $N_2O$  reduction of  $3.33 \text{ mol ATP} \cdot \text{mol}^{-1} N_2O$ , respectively. b/ a zoomed-in representation of figure 8a

**Direct Estimate of Denitrifier Biomass**

The measured organic-C in the microbial biomass was 154 ( $\pm 6$ ) mg C. kg<sup>-1</sup> soil, corresponding approximately to 300 mg total biomass per kg of dry soil. Microbial enumeration gave an indirect estimate of 4.32% of denitrifiers; this is the ratio of 6.56 10<sup>6</sup> denitrifier cfu.g<sup>-1</sup> soil (standard deviation: 2.78 10<sup>6</sup>) to 1.52 10<sup>8</sup> heterotroph cfu.g<sup>-1</sup> soil (standard deviation: 3.08 10<sup>7</sup>). Combining total microbial biomass with the number fraction of denitrifier in this biomass gave a denitrifier biomass value of about 13.7 mg.kg<sup>-1</sup> soil.

## DISCUSSION

The aims of this study were to (i) propose a denitrification model that accounts for microbial activities and microbial dynamics, including the progressing ability of denitrifiers to reduce  $N_2O$ , (ii) propose a method to estimate its parameters, and (iii) check the model and the method with a set of experimental data. Several conclusions from this study result from experimental data, whereas others result from the assessment of model relevancy.

### Experimental Data

Although only 25 g fw soil were placed in each flask, we did not observe any irregular trends of  $N_2O$  emissions with initial  $[NO_3^-]$ , except for a small number of flasks, suggesting that the experimental procedure made it possible to minimize variability between flasks. During batch incubation, denitrification explained all evolved  $NO_3^-$ , since no trend was observed between final extractable  $[NH_4^+]$  and initial slurry  $[NO_3^-]$ . Therefore,  $NH_4^+$  production resulted probably only from mineralization, and  $[NH_4^+]$  had not to be accounted for in order to balance evolved  $NO_3^-$ . Due to the imperfect characterisation of final  $[NO_3^-]$  and  $[NH_4^+]$  for conditions 2 and 3, the balance was calculated only for condition 1: the deviation between the sum of final  $N_2O$  and  $NO_3^-$  concentrations and the initial  $NO_3^-$  concentration increased from 0.005 to 0.6 mol.m<sup>-3</sup> with the initial  $NO_3^-$  concentration of the soil solution. This probably resulted from N-immobilisation due to the increase in denitrifier biomass. Assuming 10% N within the dry biomass, it would correspond to a biomass increase of between 1.2 and 149 mg biomass.kg<sup>-1</sup> soil during batch incubation. This could explain an increase in the rate of  $N_2O$  emission with time, and suggests that microbial dynamics should be accounted for in models over periods greater than about 100 h. It seems that soil can reduce  $N_2O$  from the beginning, since the increase in  $[N_2O]$  estimated from the first 2 measurements in condition 2 was approximately only 9-22% of the initial increase in  $[N_2O]$  for corresponding dates and samples in condition 1. For incubation in condition 2 with the two highest initial  $NO_3^-$  concentrations, the final  $NO_3^-$  concentrations were approximately 72.5% and 75.3% of initial  $[NO_3^-]$ , respectively: assuming that these final  $NO_3^-$  concentrations did not limit the first denitrification step (i.e.  $NO_3^- \rightarrow N_2O$ ) due to their high values with regard to literature estimates of  $Km_D$  (Malhi *et al.*, 1990, Zumft *et al.*, 1997) and did not

significantly affect possible competition between  $\text{NO}_3^-$  and  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  as terminal electron acceptors for respiratory chains. It is not possible to explain why  $[\text{N}_2\text{O}]$  suddenly fell after approximately 12 to 48 h, without accounting for induced additional  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  reductase synthesis, as has already been evidenced by direct measurements (Otte *et al.*, 1996). Such an interpretation seemed to be confirmed by similar observations in condition 3 for the two highest initial  $\text{NO}_3^-$  concentrations: after approximately 72 h, there was a great increase in  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  net consumption, although  $[\text{NO}_3^-]$  remained high at the end of incubation for the two highest initial  $[\text{NO}_3^-]$  values. Although an increase in enzyme concentration is often accounted for by an increasing maximum rate of reaction, the actual situation for  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  reductase may be more complex due to (i) possible competition between  $\text{NO}_3^-$  and  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  as terminal electron acceptors for respiratory chains (Cho and Sakdinan, 1978), and (ii)  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  reduction that not only involves periplasmic  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  reductase but also membrane-bound electron carriers that reduce the enzyme. As an indication of the complex reality, Michaelis constant values  $K_{mR}$  estimated experimentally from soil slurries (Holtan-Hartwig *et al.*, 2000) were lower than  $K_{mR}$  values estimated from purified enzymes (Zumft, 1997).

## Modeling Denitrification Processes

### *Model Hypotheses*

Some model assumptions were made in order to describe the effect of  $\text{NO}_3^-$  on  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  reduction (Blackmer and Bremner, 1979; Terry and Tate, 1980; Gaskell *et al.*, 1981; Nömmik *et al.*, 1984; Weir *et al.*, 1993; Luo *et al.*, 1996) and the possible effect of  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  on  $\text{NO}_3^-$  reduction (Guérin, 1999): (i) respiration through denitrification is bound by a maximum flux of  $e^-$  through the respiratory chain, which is distributed to all  $e^-$  acceptors, and (ii) competition between  $\text{NO}_3^-$  and  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  reductions exists when the  $e^-$  flux calculated without accounting for this competition exceeds its maximum value. In this situation, both  $\text{NO}_3^-$  reduction and  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  reduction is proportionally reduced. In addition, the model was simplified with regard to actual processes in order to facilitate parameter estimation. Nitrite was ignored as the intermediate product in the reduction of  $\text{NO}_3^-$  into  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$ ;  $\text{NO}_3^-$  reducers that only undertake  $\text{NO}_3^-$  reduction were therefore ignored. Nitrate reducers are often more abundant than denitrifiers (Vinther *et al.*, 1999). We can assume that  $\text{NO}_3^-$  reducer activity can increase the  $\text{NO}_2^-$  reduction activity of actual denitrifiers and thus lead to biased estimates in  $bm$  and/or  $v_{Dmax}$ , see to have  $v_{Dmax}$  values specific to groups 1 and 2. It is possible to ignore  $\text{NO}_2^-$  as the



intermediary product if either  $[\text{NO}_2^-]$  is negligible (i.e.  $\text{NO}_3^-$  reduction into  $\text{NO}_2^-$  limits  $\text{NO}_3^-$  reduction into  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$ ) (Mariotti *et al.*, 1981; Dendooven and Anderson, 1994) or  $\text{NO}_3^-$  reduction into  $\text{NO}_2^-$  is fast enough to consider equilibrium between  $[\text{NO}_3^-]$  and  $[\text{NO}_2^-]$  (Stevens *et al.*, 1998). However, it has been observed that  $\text{NO}_2^-$  temporarily accumulates in soils, particularly at high levels of ammonium and high pH (Burns *et al.*, 1996; Van Cleemput and Samater, 1996; Smith *et al.*, 1997 and Ellis *et al.*, 1998); Nakajima *et al.* (1984) and Almeida *et al.* (1995) observed, both in pure and in mixed culture, that the  $\text{NO}_3^-$  reduction rate was twice as fast to the  $\text{NO}_2^-$  reduction rate independently of  $\text{NO}_3^-$  or  $\text{NO}_2^-$  concentration. In addition, we simultaneously neglected micro-organisms that only reduce  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$ , as they seem to be really insignificant (Firestone and Tiedje, 1979). We ignored the induction time required for  $\text{NO}_3^-$  and  $\text{NO}_2^-$  reductions, see the lag phase for  $\text{NO}_3^-$  reduction into  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$ , whereas we explicitly described this process for  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  reduction. Indeed,  $\text{NO}_3^-$  and  $\text{NO}_2^-$  reductases are synthesized under aerobic conditions (Patureau *et al.*, 1996); in contrast, *de novo* synthesis of  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  reductase only starts 16-33 h after depletion of  $\text{O}_2$  (Firestone and Tiedje, 1979; MacConnaughey *et al.*, 1985; Dendooven and Anderson, 1994). In addition, it has often been observed that initial  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  production is minor in the first 2-5 h, whereas the  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  production rate stabilises thereafter at a higher rate (Dendooven and Anderson, 1994). The duration of this pseudo lag phase was short with regard to the total duration of our batch incubation and can a priori be neglected as a first approximation. As already discussed in the "*Conclusions from Experimental Data*" section and in Appendix 1, we assume that the effective Michaelis constant  $Km_R$  decreases with an increasing  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  reductase concentration, whereas we neglect effects on the maximum  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  reduction rate  $v_{Rmax}$ .

### *Impacts of Preliminarily Fixed Parameters*

Values of some of the model parameters were preliminarily fixed, including energy yield values  $Y_D^{max}$  and  $Y_R^{max}$  (i.e. 5 and 1.25 mol ATP.mol<sup>-1</sup>  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$ , respectively) and the maintenance coefficient  $m_E$  (10<sup>-6</sup> s<sup>-1</sup>). The maximum energy yield  $Y_D^{max}$  varied with the type of C substrate (among other factors): the lowest values (about 2.7 mol ATP.mol<sup>-1</sup>  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$ ) corresponded to the use of substrates such as succinate, whereas the highest ones (about 5.3-6.7 mol ATP.mol<sup>-1</sup>  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$ ) corresponded to substrates such as glucose or malate (Stouthamer, 1988). With regard to the present knowledge on respiratory chains involved in denitrification (Stouthamer, 1988), there is no justification for the  $Y_D^{max}$  – to –  $Y_R^{max}$  ratio to differ from 4 (i.e. the ratio of the numbers of  $e^-$  transferred during the two denitrification steps): only the location of physical

binding with the respiratory chain differing between  $e^-$  donors (e.g.  $\text{NADH}+\text{H}^+$ ,  $\text{H}_2$ , succinate, etc.) can affect this ratio, and it remains unproved that the reduction of  $\text{NO}$  into  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  is linked to ATP production (Stouthamer, 1988; Van spanning et al., 1995, Zumft, 1997 and Richardson, 2000). The range of maintenance coefficient values (i.e. between 4.72 and 5 of  $10^{-6}$  g-moles ATP/g dry weight of organisms/s) has often been suggested for heterotrophs (Stouthamer, 1973). This is why additional  $bm$  and  $v_{Dmax}$  estimates were made for various  $Y_D^{max}$  values between 0.25 and  $1.67 \text{ mol ATP}\cdot\text{mol}^{-1} \text{ N}_2\text{O}$ . As a first approximation, it was proportional and inversely proportional to  $bm$  and  $v_{Dmax}$  estimates, respectively (Fig. 2a). This can be easily understood considering that each time, (i) on the one hand, the increase in  $[\text{N}_2\text{O}]$  directly depends on the  $bm \times v_D$  product, (ii) on the other hand, the relative increase in  $bm$  (i.e.  $\partial bm/bm \partial t$ ) is a function of the  $Y_D^{max} \times v_D$  product (see Eq. 10b). Therefore, from a theoretical point of view, it is possible to simulate nearly the same  $[\text{N}_2\text{O}]$  evolution over time by multiplying  $Y_D^{max}$  and  $bm$  by a single constant, and concomitantly dividing  $v_{Dmax}$  by the same constant. The effect of the maintenance coefficient  $m_E$  first results from the need for the model to correctly reflect the relative increase in microbial biomass  $bm$  (i.e.  $\partial bm/bm \partial t$ ), which explains the non linear increase in  $[\text{N}_2\text{O}]$ , as long as  $[\text{NO}_3^-]$  is not a limiting factor: an increase in this maintenance coefficient thus induces an increase in maximum specific denitrifying activity  $v_{Dmax}$  and, as a consequence, a decrease in the denitrifier biomass estimate. It was not possible to sufficiently increase  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  reduction with regard to  $\text{NO}_3^-$  reduction by decreasing the  $Y_D^{max}$  – to –  $Y_R^{max}$  ratio in *Model C* to correctly simulate experimental data for condition 3 and high initial  $\text{NO}_3^-$  concentrations. Changes in  $Y_D^{max}$ ,  $Y_R^{max}$  or  $m_E$  did not improve the fit of simulated data to experimental ones. However, the energy yield of  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  reduction slightly affected parameter estimates (Table 1) and simulations (Fig. 6a-d).

#### *Ability of the Models to simulate Experimental Data*

The capability of *Models A, B and C* to reflect experimental data were assessed for each condition. With respect to condition 1, the model is unique. We noted two types of bias between experiments and simulations. On the one hand, the simulated  $[\text{N}_2\text{O}]$  equilibriums were higher than the actual ones. This could probably not be explained by the dissimilatory reduction of  $\text{NO}_3^-$  into  $\text{NH}_4^+$ , since there was no correlation between final  $[\text{NH}_4^+]$  and initial  $[\text{NO}_3^-]$ : thus,  $[\text{NH}_4^+]$  probably results from the anaerobic mineralization of organic-N. In

contrast, the increase in the deviation between measured and simulated final  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  concentrations was directly related to the time required to reach equilibrium, and such an increase could be explained if the weight proportion  $f_N$  of N in microbial biomass was underestimated by approximately 0.04 for the energy yield  $Y_D^{max}$  used (see Fig. 3). Such an underestimation of  $f_N$  is possible: in this study, we used 0.1036 of  $f_N$  as suggested by Vavilin et al. (1994), whereas estimates of around 0.14 have been proposed in other studies (Stouthamer, 1988). Nevertheless, a deviation of approximately 20 ppmv between measured and simulated  $[\text{N}_2\text{O}]$  equilibrium values remain unexplained by accounting for a bias in  $f_N$  estimation. This value may result from the  $[\text{NO}_3^-]$  not consumed during batch incubation, which cannot be simulated by Michaelis approximation of real microbial activities. On the other hand, simulations reflected experimental data imperfectly, due to the probable variability in microbial characteristics between flasks. With respect to condition 2, *Model A* would have been the natural candidate to easily describe  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  emissions if there was no increase in the ability to reduce  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$ , whereas such an increase was noted from experimental data. This increase was confirmed by the incapability of *Model A* to simulate the rapid drop in  $[\text{N}_2\text{O}]$  falling down after an initial increase for all samples, including those in which  $[\text{NO}_3^-]$  remained much higher than the Michaelis constant  $Km_D$  (e.g. in Fig. 5b). *Models B* and *C* are 2 different alternatives with which to account for this increase that could result from  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  reductase induction. The comparison between these 2 models (Fig. 6a-b, 7a-b, and 8a-b) clearly indicated that *Model C* was more appropriate for reflecting experimental data. Firstly, it better simulates  $[\text{N}_2\text{O}]$  evolution over time. Secondly, biomass values estimated separately for each flask using this model were less variable and exhibited a less pronounced trend with initial  $[\text{NO}_3^-]$ . However, we still noted an increase in these estimates with the low initial  $[\text{NO}_3^-]$ . These low estimates at low initial  $[\text{NO}_3^-]$  have to be considered carefully: in this range of initial  $[\text{NO}_3^-]$  values, simulated  $[\text{N}_2\text{O}]$  evolution over time varied only slightly with initial denitrifier biomass (results not shown). With respect to condition 3, *Models A, B and C* can approximately reflect experimental  $[\text{N}_2\text{O}]$  at low initial  $[\text{NO}_3^-]$ : the decrease in  $[\text{N}_2\text{O}]$  with time results from the disappearance of  $\text{NO}_3^-$  (Fig. 5c, 6c and 7c). In contrast, at high initial  $\text{NO}_3^-$  concentrations, *Model B* was more appropriate for reflecting experimental data. Firstly, it better simulates  $[\text{N}_2\text{O}]$  evolution over time (Fig. 5d, 6d, and 7d); secondly, biomass values estimated separately for each flask using this model were less variable and exhibited a less pronounced trend with initial  $[\text{NO}_3^-]$  (Fig. 8a-b). Using model C with a higher energy yield made it possible to decrease  $[\text{N}_2\text{O}]$  more rapidly (Fig. 7d).

Estimation of each parameter by fitting simulations to experimental data was compared to

other estimations taken from this work or from the literature. The range of  $bm$  values obtained (9.57-48.7 mg.kg<sup>-1</sup>soil) for various energy yields  $Y_D^{max}$  was in agreement with its estimate resulting from fumigation-extraction and enumeration (13.7 mg.kg<sup>-1</sup>soil), in the knowledge that there were considerable uncertainties for this last estimate (Cochran, 1949; Wu et al., 1990). Numerous authors have measured total biomass for soils, including Lensi et al. (1995) in continuous cultivation (0.885 g.kg<sup>-1</sup>) and in permanent pasture (2.24 g.kg<sup>-1</sup>), Kieft et al. (1987) in grassland soil (2.07 g.kg<sup>-1</sup>), Ross et al. (1992) in forest soil (1.03 g.kg<sup>-1</sup>), and Lovel et al. (1998) in permanent pasture (1.72 g.kg<sup>-1</sup>). Some have also proposed estimates of the proportion of denitrifiers among heterotrophs of about some percent. Denitrifying activity has been preferentially referred to soil amounts rather than denitrifier amounts. It then corresponds to the product  $v_D \times bm$ , for which the estimate of the maximum  $v_{Dmax} \times bm$  was  $11.7 \cdot 10^{-10}$  mol N<sub>2</sub>O.kg<sup>-1</sup>.s<sup>-1</sup> in this work. This value was lower than values obtained in the literature:  $4.56 \cdot 10^{-8}$  (Klemedtsson *et al.*, 1977),  $1.52 \cdot 10^{-8}$  -  $2.99 \cdot 10^{-8}$  mol.N<sub>2</sub>O kg<sup>-1</sup>.s<sup>-1</sup> (Malhi *et al.*, 1990),  $1.39 \cdot 10^{-8}$  -  $8.23 \cdot 10^{-8}$  (Holtan-Hartwig *et al.*, 2000) and  $42.5 \cdot 10^{-10}$  -  $8.17 \cdot 10^{-8}$  (Murray *et al.*, 1989). The Michaelis constant  $Km_D$  (0.058 mM) was (i) lower than several estimates, including some obtained with purified enzymes (e.g. 0.016 mM from Fewson et al. (1961), and 0.3-3.8 mM from Zumft (1997)), and soil slurries (about 0.22 mM from Klemedtsson *et al.* (1977), and between 11.4-31.4 mM from Malhi *et al.* (1990)), and (ii) higher than other estimates, including those of Murray *et al.* (1989) for soil and sediment slurries (0.0018-0.0166 mM). The estimates of the Michaelis constant  $Km_R$  obtained from *Model A* (0.129 μM) and *model B* (0.03 μM), as well as the range of  $Km_R$  values for *Model C* (0.146 and 0.0112 μM for the initial and final values, respectively), were much lower than values for the purified enzyme (2-26 μM after Zumft (1997)), but closest to values obtained by Holtan-Hartwig *et al.* (2000) for soil slurries (0.1-0.4 μM). This suggests that the induction of the N<sub>2</sub>O reductase decreases its Michaelis constant as a consequence of either limitation in the  $e^-$  flux through respiratory chains or actual mechanisms that cannot be modelled by a simple enzymatic scheme (see for example the 3 schemes proposed in Appendix 1). In *Models B* and *C*, the estimated  $e$  exponent takes a high value (Table 1), indicating that the capability to reduce N<sub>2</sub>O suddenly increases at time  $\alpha$ . The  $\alpha$  values (i.e. approximately 70 h and 37 h after the beginning of incubation for *Model B* and *Model C*, respectively) were respectively higher and lower than the 50 h corresponding to the highest N<sub>2</sub>O concentration for condition 2. With regard to the literature, Otte *et al.* (1996) directly observed a considerable and sudden increase in the N<sub>2</sub>O reductase concentration after about 25h. In their work, they did not

initially detect N<sub>2</sub>O reductase, whereas Holtan-Hartwig *et al.* (2000) noted that there was already a low concentration of N<sub>2</sub>O reductase initially. Around time  $\alpha$  for *Model B*,  $Km_R$  decreased by about one order of magnitude (Table 1). The initial  $Km_R$  values ( $1.46 \cdot 10^{-4}$  mol.m<sup>-3</sup>) were slightly lower than values obtained with purified enzymes (i.e. from 0.002 to 0.026 mol.m<sup>-3</sup>, after Zumft (1997)).

Some information on the actual microbial processes can be deduced from a comparison between experimental and simulated data. With respect to the first denitrification step (i.e. NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> → N<sub>2</sub>O), the modelling approach that has already been used by several other authors seems to be acceptable, since it enables us to reflect experimental trends as well as obtain relevant parameters. With respect to the second denitrification step, we noted an increase in the ability to reduce N<sub>2</sub>O, which probably results from the induction of N<sub>2</sub>O reductase (Firestone and Tiedje, 1979). In addition, accounting for this induction through a decrease in the Michaelis constant  $Km_R$  with respect to its actual value seems relevant, although we cannot simultaneously exclude an effect on the maximum N<sub>2</sub>O reduction rate  $v_{Rmax}$ . Lastly, competition between NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> and N<sub>2</sub>O as terminal electron acceptors in the respiratory chain was used as a basic hypothesis for the model using previous results; neither the competition itself nor its mathematical description have been proved by this study. None of the three models used in this study were capable of perfectly reflecting all the experimental trends. Deviations remaining between experimental and simulated data may be due to reasons already stated, as well as the fact that other microbial and physicochemical processes were neglected, including for example (i) horizontal gene transfer that proceeds either through conjugation (Dröge *et al.*, 1999), since nos genes – i.e. genes involved in N<sub>2</sub>O reduction – are sometimes located on conjugative megaplastids, e.g. pHG1 in *Alcaligenes Eutrophus* (Siedow *et al.*, 1999), and (ii) geochemical changes that can affect the expression of the ability to reduce N<sub>2</sub>O into N<sub>2</sub>, including the bioavailability of Cu necessary for N<sub>2</sub>O reductase to run (Zumft, 1997) and of Fe for other electron carriers such as cytochrome synthesised de novo upon the shift to anaerobiosis and expression of the denitrification system (Zumft, 1997).

**Appendix 1:** hypothetical kinetic schemes for N<sub>2</sub>O reduction

**Scheme 1**

In this scheme, N<sub>2</sub>O combines reversibly with N<sub>2</sub>O reductase  $E$ , and the resulting complex  $E(N_2O)$  can then dissociate and produce N<sub>2</sub> and H<sub>2</sub>O with the concomitant consumption of 2 H<sup>+</sup> and 2 e<sup>-</sup>.



Results are well known. Ignoring that the maximum flux of e<sup>-</sup> can limit the N<sub>2</sub>O reduction rate, we have:

$$v_R = k_3 \times [E_T] \times \frac{[N_2O]}{Km_R + [N_2O]} \quad (\text{A.1c})$$

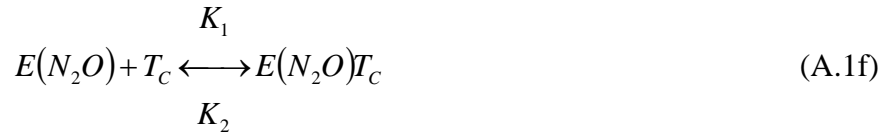
where  $Km_R$  is the actual Michaelis constant for N<sub>2</sub>O reductase (mol.m<sup>-3</sup>) that equals the  $k_2/k_1$  ratio. As long as  $k_3 \times [E_T]$  is lower than  $F_e/2$ , the e<sup>-</sup> flux through the respiratory chain does not limit  $v_R$ , and an increase in  $[E_T]$  then only affects  $v_{Rmax}$  that equals  $k_3 \times [E_T]$ ; the actual Michaelis constant is also the effective one. In contrast, for  $[E_T]$  higher than  $F_e/(2 \times k_3)$ , the e<sup>-</sup> flux through the respiratory chain  $F_e$  can limit  $v_R$  at high N<sub>2</sub>O concentrations.  $v_R$  then cannot strictly be described with the Michaelis Menten equation; an approximation of the effective Michaelis constant  $Km_{R-e}$  is the [N<sub>2</sub>O] value at which  $v_R$  equals  $F_e/4$ , i.e. half the maximum  $v_R$ :

$$Km_{R-e} = Km_R \times \left( \frac{F_e/4}{(k_3 \times E_T) - (F_e/4)} \right) \quad (\text{A.1d})$$

In this range of  $[E_T]$  values, the maximum N<sub>2</sub>O reduction rate  $v_{Rmax}$  does not vary with  $[E_T]$ .

**Scheme 2**

In this scheme,  $N_2O$  first combines reversibly with  $N_2O$  reductase  $E$ , and the resulting complex  $E(N_2O)$  then also reversibly combines with a terminal electron carrier bound to the microbial membrane ( $T_c$ ). The resulting complex  $E(N_2O)T_c$  can then dissociate and produce  $N_2$  and  $H_2O$  with the concomitant consumption of  $2 H^+$  and  $2 e^-$ .



Assuming that  $[E] + [E(N_2O)]$  nearly equals the total  $N_2O$  reductase concentration  $[E_T]$ , it is possible to estimate  $[E(N_2O)]$ :

$$[E(N_2O)] = [E_T] \times \frac{[N_2O]}{K_m + [N_2O]} \quad (A.1h)$$

Similarly, it is possible to estimate  $[E(N_2O)T_c]$ :

$$[E(N_2O)T_c] = [T_{cT}] \times \frac{[E(N_2O)]}{K_2/K_1 + [E(N_2O)]} \quad (A.1i)$$

where  $[T_{cT}]$  is the total concentration of terminal membrane-bounded electron carriers. Replacing  $[E(N_2O)]$  in Eq. (A.1i) by its value in Eq. (A.1h) gives the final equation for  $N_2O$  reduction in Eq. (A.1c), as long as the  $e^-$  flux through the respiratory chain does not limit  $v_R$ :

$$v_R = K_3 \times [T_{cT}] \times \left( \frac{[E_T]}{[E_T] + (K_2/K_1)} \right) \times \left\{ \frac{[N_2O]}{[N_2O] + \left( Km_R \times \left( \frac{(K_2/K_1)}{[E_T] + (K_2/K_1)} \right) \right)} \right\} \quad (\text{A.1j})$$

As long as  $[E_T]$  and/or  $[T_{cT}]$  are low enough to prevent the  $e^-$  flux through the respiratory chain from limiting  $v_R$ , an increase in  $[E_T]$  simultaneously increases and decreases  $v_{Rmax}$  and  $Km_{R-e}$ , respectively. In addition,  $Km_{R-e}$  is always lower than the actual Michaelis constant  $Km_R$ . On the one hand, at low  $[E_T]$  values,  $v_{Rmax}$  greatly depends on  $[E_T]$ , whereas  $Km_{R-e}$  nearly equals  $Km_R$ . On the other hand, at high  $[E_T]$  values,  $v_{Rmax}$  does not vary greatly with  $[E_T]$ , whereas  $Km_{R-e}$  significantly decreases with an increase in  $[E_T]$ . When the  $e^-$  flux through the respiratory chain limits  $v_R$  at high  $[N_2O]$  values,  $v_{Rmax}$  cannot vary with  $[E_T]$  and equals  $F_e/2$ , whereas the effective Michaelis constant  $Km_{R-e}$  is reduced with respect to Eq. (A.1j), for the same reason as in scheme 1.

### Scheme 3

This last scheme is probably the nearest to the actual mechanisms (Zumft, 1997). Unfortunately, it was difficult to obtain simple results as before. We present this scheme to show that it may lead to various trends that can be similar or different to those for the two schemes described previously. In the latter,  $N_2O$  reductase  $E$  is first reduced by contact with a terminal electron carrier of the respiratory chain bound to the microbial membrane. The reduced enzyme then combines with  $N_2O$ , and the resulting complex  $E(N_2O)$  can then dissociate and produce  $N_2$  and  $H_2O$ , with the concomitant consumption of  $2 H^+$  and enzyme oxidation.







As long as the  $e^-$  flux through the respiratory chain does not limit  $v_R$ , the  $N_2O$  reduction rate is limited by the rates of reactions in Equations (A.1m) and (A.1n) when  $E^+ + ET_c \ll E^- + E(N_2O)$ , whereas this rate can be limited by the rates of reactions in Equations (A.1k) and (A.1l), when  $E^+ + ET_c \gg E^- + E(N_2O)$ . The first condition is fulfilled when:

$$\frac{k_3}{K_3} \left( \frac{(K_2/K_1)}{[T_c]} + 1 \right) - 1 \ll \frac{(k_2/k_1)}{[N_2O]} \quad (\text{A.1o})$$

When the left term is negative this condition is always verified whereas, in other situations, it is verified only at low  $N_2O$  concentrations. The Nitrous oxide reduction rate can then be described with a standard Michaelis Menten equation, using the actual  $Km_R$  and  $v_{Rmax}$  values. When the left term is positive and at high  $N_2O$  concentrations, it can be demonstrated that the  $N_2O$  reduction rate does not depend on  $N_2O$  but only on the total  $T_c$  and  $E$  contents. A priori, the resulting effective Michaelis constant may be higher or lower than the actual  $Km_R [N_2O]$ , depending on the extent of the  $[N_2O]$  domain where the inequality (A.1o) is valid.

If the  $e^-$  flux through the respiratory chain limits  $v_R$ , at high  $[N_2O]$  values, it will indirectly induce a decrease in the effective Michaelis constant, as noted for scheme 1.

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## **INFLUENCE D'UNE PRE-INCUBATION ANAEROBIE SUR LA RESPIRATION ET LES EMISSIONS DE N<sub>2</sub>O PAR DES MOTTES DE SOL EN INCUBATION AEROBIE**

**Ce chapitre 3 correspond à un article « en cours de soumission » pour la revue *Soil Biology and Biochemistry* : K. Khalil, P. Renault, B. Mary (2003)  
Effect of transient anaerobic conditions on subsequent aerobic respiration and N<sub>2</sub>O emission by soil clods**

## SUMMARY

The objective of this study was to assess the effect of an anaerobic pre-incubation on subsequent aerobic respiration and N<sub>2</sub>O emission at the scale of soil clods. Nitrous oxide production was measured in intact soil clods Δ (compacted clods without visible porosity) and Γ (clods with visible porosity) incubated under oxic conditions, with or without a 6 day anaerobic pre-incubation. N<sub>2</sub>O emissions were much higher in clods that had been submitted to anaerobic pre-incubation than in clods that did not experience this pre-incubation, although very little nitrate remained in soil after the anaerobic period. <sup>15</sup>N isotope tracing technique was used to check whether N<sub>2</sub>O came from nitrification or denitrification. The results showed that denitrification was the major process responsible for N<sub>2</sub>O emissions. The aerobic CO<sub>2</sub> production rate was also measured in intact soil clods. It was greater in clods submitted to anaerobic pre-incubation than in clods that did not undergo pre-incubation, suggesting that the anaerobic pre-incubation lead to an accumulation of small compounds including fatty acids which are readily available for microbial decomposition in aerobic conditions. This process increases the aerobic CO<sub>2</sub> production and favours the N<sub>2</sub>O emissions through denitrification.

**Key-words:** denitrification, anaerobiosis, nitrous oxide, aerobic respiration, soil clod.

## INTRODUCTION

Nitrous oxide is trace gas involved in atmospheric pollution, it contributes to the greenhouse effect (Smith, 1990; IPCC, 1996), and affects the chemistry of  $O_3$  in the upper troposphere and lower stratosphere (Graedel and Crutzen, 1992).  $N_2O$  is mainly produced in soils during biological denitrification and nitrification (Groffman, 1991; Tortoso *et al.*, 1990; Conrad, 1996).

Various models, more or less complex, have been proposed to estimate  $N_2O$  emissions through nitrification and denitrification. Most of them account for the variations with time in environmental variables such as soil water, temperature and  $NO_3^-$  content. Simplified models (e.g. Parton *et al.*, 1988; Hénault and Germon, 1995; Parton *et al.*, 1996) represent N cycling without simulating microbial dynamics and assume that the different N processes can be represented as a function of the soil water, temperature and pH controls on microbial activity without representing the microbial dynamics. The more complex models (e.g. Grant, 1995; Khalil *et al.*, 2003a) explicitly consider microbial dynamics but do not consider variations in potential microbial activities, particularly the variations in respiration, denitrification and  $N_2O$  reduction activities. The importance of these variations is questionable.

It has been shown that potential denitrification may be correlated with soluble organic matter and easily mineralisable carbon (Burford and Bremner, 1975). Anaerobic conditions may lead to the accumulation of organic compounds that may be thereafter easily consumed in aerobic conditions and that temporarily decrease the pH of the soil solution (Förstner, 1987). Acetate is the main volatile fatty acid produced by anaerobic metabolism (Tsusuki *et al.*, 1987). It may be consumed under conditions that enhance  $H_2$  consumption, i.e. conditions promoting sulphate reduction (Pelmont, 1993), homoacetogenesis (Chin and Conrad, 1995) and methanogenesis (Conrad, 1999). An initial pH decrease has been observed in alkaline soils, which results from an increase in  $CO_2$  concentration and a transient production of volatile fatty acids (Tsusuki *et al.*, 1987). This pH decrease may be minimized by the consumption of protons during the reduction of  $NO_2^-$  into  $N_2O$  (Stams, 1994). The consumption of volatile fatty acids, the dissolution of metal oxides and oxyhydroxides and the partial consumption of  $CO_2$  during homoacetogenesis and methanogenesis tend to lead to a late increase in soil pH.

Such changes in pH and in easily mineralisable C compounds, which could occur during

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the transition of anaerobic to aerobic conditions, might lead to important changes in potential respiration or denitrification activities.

The micro-scale approach to study denitrification is motivated by the fact that, in many cases, the conditions experienced by soil organisms at the microscale are not reflected by measurements on bulk soil samples (Parkin, 1987). For example, O<sub>2</sub> concentrations may decrease from values nearly equal to the atmospheric concentration to zero values within a few millimeters in soil clods (Sextone *et al.*, 1985; Sierra *et al.*, 1995). Other examples of anoxic sites close to air-filled pores when organic residues were present (Rappoldt, 1992) with a thin layer of covering water (i.e. thickness of about 160 µm) are sufficient for anaerobiosis to occur (Parkin, 1987).

The aim of this work was to assess the consequence of a prolonged anaerobic period (6 days) on subsequent aerobic respiration and net N<sub>2</sub>O emission through denitrification. Experiments were performed at the soil clod level. We used C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>2</sub> to inhibit N<sub>2</sub>O reduction and <sup>15</sup>N tracing technique to assess the origin of N<sub>2</sub>O emission.

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## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Soil clod sampling and conservation

Experiments were performed on an Orthic Luvisol (FAO classification) sampled in Mons-en-Chaussée in Northern France (49°80' N, 3°60' E). The soil was cultivated with maize in 2000. The properties of the soil were as follows: clay, 194 g kg<sup>-1</sup>; silt, 706 g kg<sup>-1</sup>; sand, 68 g kg<sup>-1</sup>; pH (water), 8.2; total CaCO<sub>3</sub>, 32 g kg<sup>-1</sup>; organic C, 8.52 g kg<sup>-1</sup>; total N 1.00 g kg<sup>-1</sup>. At sampling time, it contained 4.70 mg NO<sub>3</sub>-N kg<sup>-1</sup>. Clods were sampled in the ploughed layer (10-30 cm depth) on September 12, 2000. Two sets of clods were separated: clods Δ, with a massive structure and no visible porosity (resulting from compaction due to traffic) and clods Γ, with a fragmentary structure and visible porosity (Richard *et al.*, 1999). The larger clods were gently broken down immediately after sampling and then calibrated : we kept clods between 2.5 and 3 cm size. In order to reduce microbial activity during storage, the clods were air-dried during 3 days to obtain a residual moisture close to 0.10 g g<sup>-1</sup> soil. They were stored at 2°C until the beginning of the experiments, i.e. until November 2000, January 2002 and May 2002, for experiments 2, 3 and 1, respectively. Water evaporation occurred during storage, so that the soil moisture content at the beginning of experiments was 0.11, 0.07 and 0.06 g.g<sup>-1</sup>, for experiments 2, 3 and 1, respectively.

### Batch incubations and measurements

#### *Experiment 1*

In order to check the effect of anaerobic condition of the subsequent aerobic respiration, we measured CO<sub>2</sub> production for clods Δ and Γ that had either experimented or not a 6.6 day period of preliminary anaerobic incubation.

Aerobic CO<sub>2</sub> production was measured using the following procedure. Δ and Γ clods were first rewetted with water at 20°C on suction tables successively at -10 kPa suction during 1 day, -5 kPa during 1 day, -1 kPa during 1 day, and -0.5 kPa during 4 days. This procedure ensured a slow rewetting process which prevented crack formation. The soil moisture content thus obtained was 0.20 g.g<sup>-1</sup> and 0.23 g.g<sup>-1</sup> for Δ and Γ clods, respectively. A set of 32 clods

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of each type was then incubated in anaerobic conditions using 500 mL flasks: each flask containing 4 clods received 3 successive cycles of 3 minutes vacuum and 3 minutes of pure N<sub>2</sub> gas addition. A 10 mL volume of N<sub>2</sub> was removed and replaced by the same volume of C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>2</sub> in order to create the same conditions as in experiments 2 and 3. All the flasks were incubated at 20°C in the dark during 6.6 days. After this anaerobic period, the flasks were flushed with air; the clods were transferred 3 hours later in a 1 L airtight jar with a beaker containing 10 mL NaOH 0.1 N in order to trap CO<sub>2</sub>. Eight replicate jars (each containing 4 clods that had followed the anaerobic pre-incubation) were thus incubated at 20°C in aerobic condition during 4 days. The same procedure was applied to a similar number of clods that did not experience the anaerobic preincubation, i.e. that were transferred directly from the suction table to the 1 L jars. The jars were opened every 24 h during 4 days, aerated for 5 minutes and the NaOH beaker was replaced. Trapped CO<sub>2</sub> was precipitated as barium carbonate by adding excess of BaCl<sub>2</sub> solution. The remaining NaOH was then titrated with HCl 0.1 N at pH 8.62.

Soluble organic C was measured in the clods at the end of the aerobic incubation. It was also measured in additional clods that experienced anaerobic conditions, at the end of the rewetting phase, and at the end of the anaerobic pre-incubation, always with 8 replicates. Organic C was extracted with a solution of K<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub> 0.03 M and measured with a 1010 organic carbon analyzer (O.I. Analytical, College Station, Texas, USA) using the method of persulfate oxidation at 100 °C (Barcelona, 1984). At the end of incubation, one third of the 4 clods contained in each jar was air-dried and finely ground; the total C and N were measured with an automatic CHN analyzer (Carlo Erba, NA1500, Milan, Italy). The last third of the 4 clods contained in each jar was used to measure the pH of the soil solution for both clods that experimented or not experimented anaerobic conditions. pH was also measured after the rewetting phase for clods that didn't experiment anaerobic conditions, and after the anaerobic pre-incubation for clods that experimented anaerobic conditions. For each flask sample, we added a mass of ultra pure water equal to the double of soil mass. The flask was closed and shaken for 10 minutes, then transferred to a beaker and left for 2 minutes. The electrode (Calomel electrode K401, Glass electrode G202B, Copenhagen, Denmark) was plunged into the beaker and the pH was recorded every minute during 5 minutes.

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*Experiment 2*

In order to check the effect of anaerobic condition of the subsequent N<sub>2</sub>O emissions, we measured N<sub>2</sub>O net emissions from clods Δ and Γ in air that had either or not experienced a 6.6 day period of anaerobic pre-incubation. Net N<sub>2</sub>O emissions were measured using the following procedure.

Δ and Γ clods were first rewetted with either deionized water or a KNO<sub>3</sub> solution (4 g L<sup>-1</sup>) at 20°C on suction tables during 7 days as previously described. The final moisture obtained was 0.22 and 0.24 g g<sup>-1</sup> for Δ and Γ clods, respectively. Clods rewetted with deionized water were then pre-incubated in anaerobic conditions at 20°C during 6.6 days, whereas clods rewetted with KNO<sub>3</sub> were not pre-incubated. The pre-incubation of water rewetted clods concerned 16 Δ and 16 Γ clods, each of them being inserted in a 150 mL flask. Anaerobiosis was realised by injecting N<sub>2</sub> as described before; a volume of 8 mL of N<sub>2</sub> was removed and replaced by 7 mL of C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>2</sub> and 1 mL of krypton. During the pre-incubation, gas samples were withdrawn at 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 days and analysed for N<sub>2</sub>O, N<sub>2</sub>, CO<sub>2</sub>, O<sub>2</sub>, Kr and C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>2</sub> concentrations. The mineral N (NH<sub>4</sub><sup>+</sup>, NO<sub>2</sub><sup>-</sup> and NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup>) content of the soil was measured at day 0 and 6, with 6 replicates. At day 6.6, the atmosphere of the flasks was replaced with air as indicated before; the procedure was repeated 1 hour later in order to ensure that C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>2</sub> has been totally removed. Water or KNO<sub>3</sub> rewetted clods were then incubated aerobically for 7 hours, in airtight 150 mL flasks filled with air at 20°C, 1 mL of air being replaced with Kr at the beginning of the incubation, with 10 replicates. Gas samples were taken with a syringe 14, 16, 18 and 20 hours after the addition of Kr for clods rewetted with KNO<sub>3</sub> solution; 1, 3, 5 and 7 hours after the addition of Kr for clods rewetted with water. The samples were analysed for N<sub>2</sub>O, N<sub>2</sub>, CO<sub>2</sub>, O<sub>2</sub> and Kr concentrations. The final mineral N (NH<sub>4</sub><sup>+</sup>, NO<sub>2</sub><sup>-</sup> and NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup>) content of the soil was determined on each of the 10 replicates.

The flasks samples, rewetted with KNO<sub>3</sub> solution, were thereafter opened for a few minutes in order to release the trapped gases. After closing the flasks, 7 and 1 ml of gas were replaced by C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>2</sub> and Kr, respectively. The 10 Δ and 10 Γ replicates were incubated at 20°C one time more. Gas samples were withdrawn with a syringe 14, 16, 18 and 20 h after the addition of C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>2</sub> and analysed for N<sub>2</sub>O, N<sub>2</sub>, CO<sub>2</sub>, O<sub>2</sub>, Kr and C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>2</sub> concentrations. The final '[NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup>]+[NO<sub>2</sub><sup>-</sup>]' and [NH<sub>4</sub><sup>+</sup>] were measured on all the Δ and Γ replicates.

Nitrous oxide concentration was determined by gas chromatography equipped with an electron capture detector (HP 5890 Series II, USA) fitted with a Porapak Q column (80-100



mesh, 2 m) coupled to an integration software on a PC Workstation. The carrier gas was Ar-CH<sub>4</sub> (95/5); the oven and detector temperatures were set at 50 and 300°C, respectively. N<sub>2</sub>, CO<sub>2</sub>, O<sub>2</sub>, Kr and C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>2</sub> concentrations were measured on a TCD gas chromatograph (HP 5890 Series II, USA) fitted with Porapak Q (80-100mesh, 1.8 m) and molecular sieve (1-5 Å, 1.8 m) columns coupled to the same integration software. The carrier gas was He; the oven and detector temperatures were fixed at 50 and 120 °C, respectively. The relative precision of each chromatograph was 0.5-1%. The mineral N content of clods were extracted with a 1 M KCl solution (soil:solution ratio = 1:5). Measurements were performed with a continuous flow colorimeter (Skalar Analytical, Breda, The Netherlands) using the method proposed by Henriksen and Selmer-Olsen (1970).

### *Experiment 3*

This experiment aimed at determining the origin of N<sub>2</sub>O emissions, from nitrification or denitrification, using <sup>15</sup>N isotope tracing technique. <sup>15</sup>N isotope was applied either as KNO<sub>3</sub> or urea, both having a 50% atom enrichment. Urea was chosen instead of NH<sub>4</sub><sup>+</sup> due to its higher diffusion rate in soil and its rapid hydrolysis into NH<sub>4</sub><sup>+</sup> already observed in this soil (Recous *et al.*, 1988). Small amounts of N were applied in order to change little the amounts of mineral N in soil: i. e. 0.5 mg N kg<sup>-1</sup> soil as urea-N and 2.0 mg N kg<sup>-1</sup> soil as NO<sub>3</sub>-N.

Clods were first rewetted with water using the procedure for *Experiment 2*. We then added 0.3 mL of labelled urea or KNO<sub>3</sub> solution to each clod, and submitted them to anaerobiosis in presence of C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>2</sub> as described for Experiment 2. For each of the two added solutions, 6 clods were thus pre-incubated at 20°C during 144 h. At the end of this pre-incubation period, 3 clods were used to measure the initial concentrations of NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup>, NO<sub>2</sub><sup>-</sup>, NH<sub>4</sub><sup>+</sup>, and the <sup>15</sup>N atom% excess of NH<sub>4</sub><sup>+</sup> and (NO<sub>2</sub><sup>-</sup>+NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup>). The N<sub>2</sub> atmosphere of the flasks containing the 3 other clods was replaced with air after 14 additional hours by alternating 3 successive cycles of 3 minutes vacuum and 3 minutes air filling, this procedure being repeated 1 hour later. The clods were then incubated in aerobic condition at 20°C. Gas of the flasks was sampled after 8 h with 10 mL Venoject® vacuum tubes and dual-ended sampling flasks of 250 mL. 0.2 mL of the Venoject® tubes was later withdrawn with a syringe and analysed for N-(N<sub>2</sub>+N<sub>2</sub>O) measurement and <sup>15</sup>N isotopic composition. The 250 mL sampling was used for N<sub>2</sub>O and <sup>15</sup>N<sub>2</sub>O measurement. 3 clods were used to extract and measure the final soil mineral N content and <sup>15</sup>N enrichment.

N-(N<sub>2</sub>+N<sub>2</sub>O) concentrations and their <sup>15</sup>N composition were determined by an automatic CHN analyzer (Carlo Erba, NA 1500, Milan, Italy) coupled to a mass spectrometer (Fisons, Isochrom, Manchester, England). N<sub>2</sub>O and <sup>15</sup>N<sub>2</sub>O were analysed after automatic pre-concentration on a trace gas - mass spectrometer equipment (Micromass, Manchester, England). The soil mineral N of the clods was extracted with a 1 M KCl solution (soil:solution ratio = 1:5). Measurements of ammonium, nitrite and nitrate concentrations were performed with a TRAACS 2000 analyzer (Bran & Luebbe, Norderstedt, Germany) using the methods proposed by Kamphake *et al.* (1970) for NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> and NO<sub>2</sub><sup>-</sup> analysis and Krom (1980) for NH<sub>4</sub><sup>+</sup> analysis. The <sup>15</sup>N enrichments of NH<sub>4</sub><sup>+</sup> and (NO<sub>2</sub><sup>-</sup>+NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup>) were obtained after separation by micro-diffusion towards a solid support (Brooks *et al.*, 1989) which was thereafter dried and placed in a tin capsule for combustion in the CHN analyzer coupled to the mass spectrometer.

## Data treatment

### *Model of aerobic CO<sub>2</sub> production with time*

We assume that C decomposition rate by microbes during the aerobic condition was proportional to the amount of substrates, i.e. decomposable organic pools. For clods without anaerobic pre-incubation, only one substrate pool  $S_1$  (mol C kg<sup>-1</sup> soil) was taken into account. It disappears at the following rate:

$$\frac{dS_1}{dt} = -k_1 S_1 \quad (1)$$

where  $k_1$  (h<sup>-1</sup>) is a rate constant, and  $t$  the time (h). Variation of this pool with time is then:

$$S_1 = S_{10} \exp(-k_1 t) \quad (2)$$

The rate of CO<sub>2</sub> production can be written:

$$v_1 = -(1 - Y_1) \frac{dS_1}{dt} = k_1 (1 - Y_1) S_{10} \exp(-k_1 t) \quad (3)$$

where  $Y_1$  is the assimilation yield of substrate 1 by microbes.

In the case of clods previously submitted to anaerobic conditions, our results suggest that this pretreatment lead to the creation of an additional decomposable pool  $S_2$  (mol C kg<sup>-1</sup> soil) decomposing with a rate constant  $k_2$  (h<sup>-1</sup>): The CO<sub>2</sub> production rate in this treatment is then:

$$v_2 = -(1-Y_1) \frac{dS_1}{dt} - (1-Y_2) \frac{dS_2}{dt} = k_1(1-Y_1) \exp(-k_1 t) + k_2(1-Y_2) \exp(-k_2 t) \quad (4)$$

where  $Y_2$  is the assimilation yield of substrate 2 by microbes.

We first estimated the parameters  $k_1$  and the product  $(1-Y_1) S_{10}$  by fitting simulated  $\text{CO}_2$  production rates (Eq. 3) to values measured in clods  $\Delta$  and  $\Gamma$  which had not been submitted to anaerobic pre-incubation. The optimisation was run simultaneously in the two types of clods, assuming that the decomposition rate  $k_1$  was the same in both soils. The procedure was applied to the mean of the 8 replicates. Using these last values, we then estimated the other two parameters ( $k_2$  and  $(1-Y_2) S_{20}$ ) by fitting simulated  $\text{CO}_2$  production rates (Eq. 4) to values measured in clods  $\Delta$  and  $\Gamma$  which had been submitted to anaerobic pre-incubation. Again we assumed that the decomposition rate  $k_2$  was the same in both types of clods.

#### *Relationship between aerobic $\text{CO}_2$ production and soluble organic C*

In order to check whether there was a relationship between the aerobic  $\text{CO}_2$  production and the soluble organic C, we presented variation of the mean aerobic  $\text{CO}_2$  production rate ( $\text{mol kg}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-1}$ ) with soluble organic C ( $\text{mg kg}^{-1}$ ). Soluble organic C was measured in clods submitted to anaerobic pre-incubation: (i) after rewetting on suction table; (ii) after anaerobic pre-incubation; and (iii) at the end of the measurement periods. Soluble organic C was measured only at the last date in clods which had not been submitted to anaerobiosis. They were linked with aerobic  $\text{CO}_2$  production rates during 24 h (i) just after rewetting, (ii) just after anaerobic pre-incubation, and (iii) corresponding to the last periods of measurements, respectively. The linear regression was applied to aerobic  $\text{CO}_2$  production rate for clods  $\Delta$  and  $\Gamma$ .

#### *Estimating actual $\text{CO}_2$ production from its accumulation in Experiment 2*

Since  $\text{CO}_2$  is soluble and dissociated in water, gaseous  $\text{CO}_2$  is only a part of total  $\text{CO}_2$  present in the flask when the gas is not trapped as in Experiment 2. In this case, we have to account for its solubilisation in water, and its first dissociation (Stumm and Morgan, 1996):



with a solubility ratio  $S = \text{H}_2\text{CO}_3^*/\text{CO}_2$  equal to 0.87 at  $20^\circ\text{C}$ .



with a  $pK_a$  equal to 6.35 at 20°C.

At the end of the experiment, the total amount of  $CO_2$  (mol) in the flask is equal to:

$$Q = C_f (V_g + V_w S (1 + 10^{pH_f - pK_a})) \quad (7)$$

where  $C_f$  is the  $CO_2$  concentration in the flask atmosphere ( $mol\ m^{-3}$ ),  $V_g$  and  $V_w$  are the gas and soil solution volumes ( $m^3$ ), respectively; the subscript  $f$  refers to final values.

If we neglect the contribution of calcite in the production of  $HCO_3^-$  anions, it is possible to estimate the actual  $CO_2$  production rate  $P_a$  ( $mol\ kg^{-1}\ s^{-1}$ ) as a function of the apparent production  $\hat{P}$  ( $mol\ kg^{-1}\ s^{-1}$ ):

$$P_a = \hat{P} \left( 1 + \frac{V_w S}{V_g} \right) + \frac{V_w S}{m \Delta t} (C_f \cdot 10^{pH_f - pK_a} - C_i \cdot 10^{pH_i - pK_a}) \quad (8)$$

where  $m$  is the clod mass (kg),  $\Delta t$  the incubation time (s), and  $pH_i$  the initial pH.

In addition, we assume the following dependence of the pH to  $CO_2$  concentration in the gas phase:

$$pH = pH_{min} + (pH_{max} - pH_{min}) \exp\left(-\frac{C}{k_3}\right) \quad (9)$$

where  $pH_{max}$  is the maximum pH value in absence of  $CO_2$ ,  $pH_{min}$  its minimum value at high  $CO_2$  partial pressure, and  $k_3$  a constant ( $mol\ m^{-3}$ ) which characterises the dependence to  $CO_2$  concentration ( $C$ ). For the calculations, we put  $pH_{max} = 8.20$ ,  $pH_{min} = 5.75$  and we successively estimated the actual aerobic  $CO_2$  production rate for  $k_3$  equal to 0.83, 1.25 or 1.66  $mol\ m^{-3}$ , corresponding to 2 %, 3% or 4%  $CO_2$ , respectively. These values were obtained by fitting simulations of more complete geochemical models to this simple relationship for soils with traces of calcite.

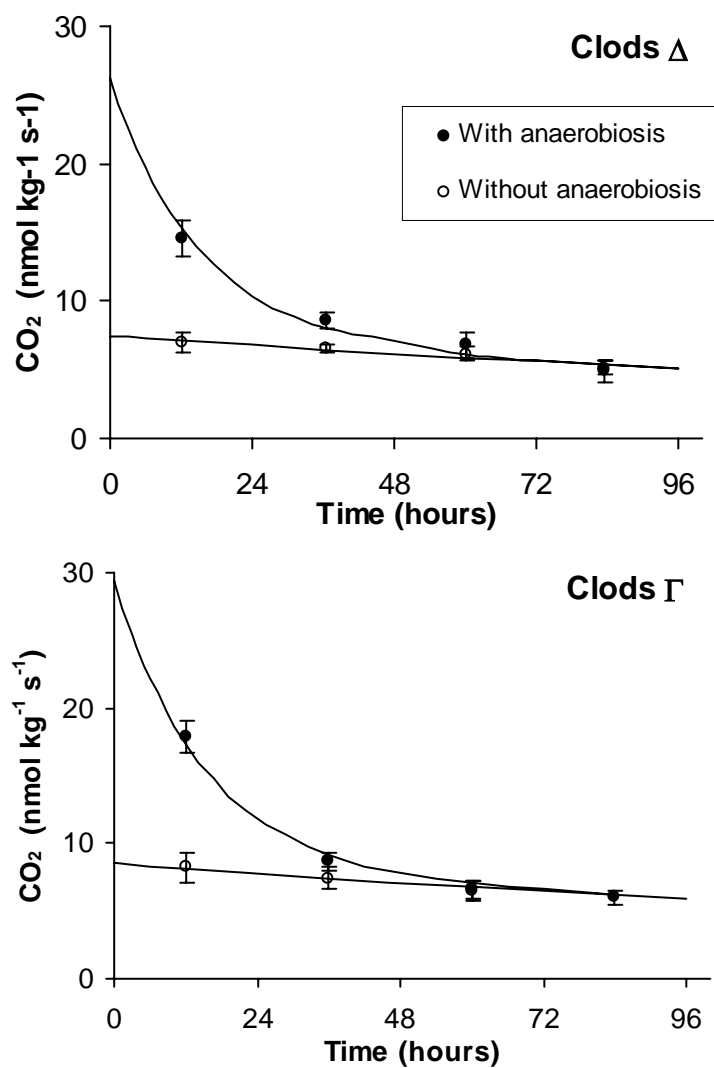
## RESULTS

### Experiment 1: aerobic CO<sub>2</sub> production with or without anaerobic pre-incubation

The CO<sub>2</sub> production rate during the aerobic incubation decreased slowly with time in clods which had not been submitted to anaerobic pre-incubation: from 7.0 to 5.2 nmol kg<sup>-1</sup> s<sup>-1</sup> in clods Δ, and from 8.2 to 6.1 nmol kg<sup>-1</sup> s<sup>-1</sup> in clods Γ, between 12 and 84 hours, respectively (Fig. 1). The rate decreased much faster in clods which had been submitted to anaerobic pre-incubation. It varied from 14.5 to 4.9 nmol kg<sup>-1</sup> s<sup>-1</sup> in clods Δ, and from 17.9 to 6.0 nmol kg<sup>-1</sup> s<sup>-1</sup> in clods Γ, between 12 and 84 hours, respectively. The model previously described (Eq. 1-4) could be satisfactorily fitted to the observed data, even with the assumption that the constant rates  $k_1$  and  $k_2$  did not differ between the two treatments (Fig. 1). The estimated parameters are reported in Table 1. They show that the anaerobic pre-incubation has resulted in the formation of a small additional decomposable pool ( $S_2$ ) which decomposes much more rapidly than the decomposable C present in the control soil ( $S_1$ ): its turnover time ( $1/k_2 = 14.5$  hours) is 18 fold smaller than that of pool 1 ( $1/k_1 = 255$  hours). Assuming a microbial assimilation  $Y = 0.60$  g C g<sup>-1</sup> C, the size of the pool 2 can be assessed at 2.45 and 2.72 mmol C kg<sup>-1</sup> in clods Δ and Γ, corresponding to 29.4 and 32.6 mg C kg<sup>-1</sup> soil, respectively. The rate of CO<sub>2</sub> production at time 0, i.e. the sum  $k_1(1-Y_1)S_{10} + k_2(1-Y_2)S_{20}$ , can also be calculated. It is equal to 26.2 and 29.4 nmol kg<sup>-1</sup> s<sup>-1</sup>, for clods Δ and Γ submitted to anaerobic pre-incubation, respectively (Table 1). These rates were 3.5 times higher than the corresponding rates in clods which had not experienced anaerobic pre-incubation.

Accounting for the CO<sub>2</sub> solubilisation in water and its first dissociation, the actual aerobic CO<sub>2</sub> production rates were also calculated using the apparent CO<sub>2</sub> values measured in experiment 2. The mean aerobic CO<sub>2</sub> production rates in *experiment 1* were largely higher than the actual aerobic CO<sub>2</sub> production rates (Table 3). These last rates were calculated for different values of  $k_3$  equal to 0.83, 1.25 and 1.66 mol m<sup>-3</sup>, corresponding to 2, 3 and 4 % CO<sub>2</sub>, respectively.

The soluble organic C contents varied between treatments from 17.9 to 24.7 mg C kg<sup>-1</sup> soil. They increased from the end of the rewetting period to the end of the anaerobic pre-incubation by 19 % and 11 % for clods Δ and Γ, respectively. We obtained nearly linear relationships between measured soluble organic C contents and the more proximal CO<sub>2</sub> production rate



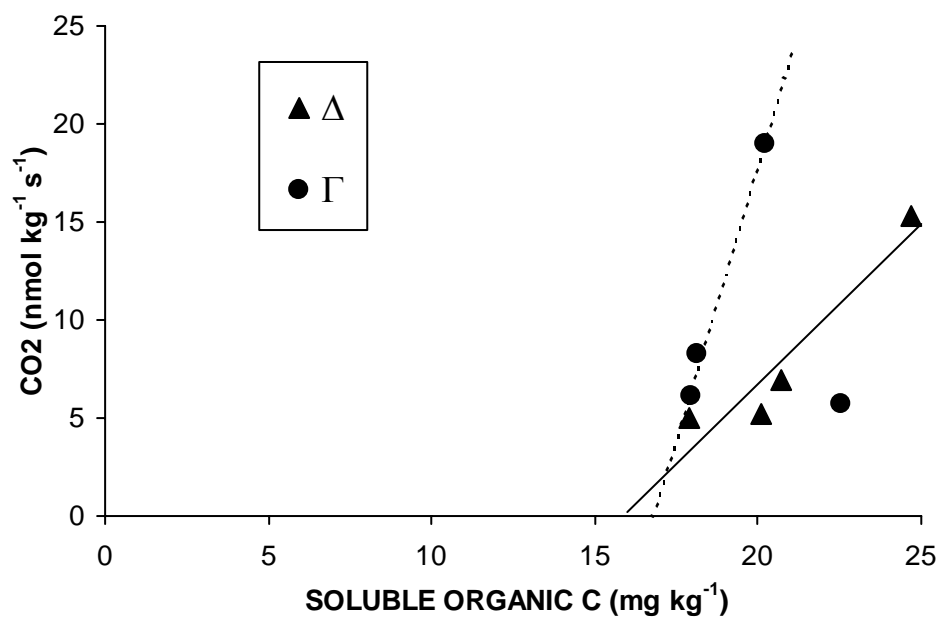
**Figure 1.** Rate of  $\text{CO}_2$  production measured (symbols) and simulated (continuous lines) during aerobic incubation following either a 6.6 day anaerobic preincubation (closed symbols), or no preincubation (open symbols), in clods  $\Delta$  or  $\Gamma$ . Each point is the mean of 8 replicates made of 4 soil clods. The bars represent the standard errors.

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		Clods $\Delta$	Clods $\Gamma$
$(1-Y_1) S_{10}$	$\text{mol kg}^{-1}$	$6.82 \cdot 10^{-3}$	$7.81 \cdot 10^{-3}$
$1/k_1$	h	254	254
$(1-Y_2) S_{20}$	$\text{mol kg}^{-1}$	$0.98 \cdot 10^{-3}$	$1.09 \cdot 10^{-3}$
$1/k_2$	h	14.5	14.5

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**Table 1.** Parameters obtained by fitting the  $\text{CO}_2$  production rate model (Equations 3-4) to the  $\text{CO}_2$  rates measured during a 4 day aerobic incubation with or without preliminary anaerobic incubation.



**Figure 2.** Relationship between the rate of CO<sub>2</sub> production ( $10^{-9}$  mol kg<sup>-1</sup> s<sup>-1</sup>) measured during various periods of 24 hours and the soluble organic C (mg C kg<sup>-1</sup>) measured at the same time, in the two types of clods. The periods are: after rewetting on suction table (day -6), after anaerobic pre-incubation (day 0), and at the end of the aerobic incubation (day 4).



Symbol	Rewetting	Pre-treatment	Incubation	n <sup>1</sup>	N <sub>2</sub> O emission rate pmol kg <sup>-1</sup> s <sup>-1</sup>			
					Clods Δ		Clods Γ	
Δ, Γ	KNO <sub>3</sub> solution	no pre-incubation	no C <sub>2</sub> H <sub>2</sub>	40	<b>-1.0</b>	(0.4)	<b>-0.3</b>	(1.2)
Δ*, Γ*	KNO <sub>3</sub> solution	no pre-incubation	with C <sub>2</sub> H <sub>2</sub>	40	<b>5.2</b>	(3.2)	<b>3.3</b>	(5.4)
Δ, Γ	KNO <sub>3</sub> solution	no pre-incubation	no C <sub>2</sub> H <sub>2</sub>	10	<b>-1.2</b>	(0.8)	<b>-0.9</b>	(0.1)
Δ+, Γ+	Deionised water	Anaerobic pre- incubation with C <sub>2</sub> H <sub>2</sub>	no C <sub>2</sub> H <sub>2</sub>	10	<b>72.1</b>	(9.4)	<b>48.3</b>	(8.3)

**Table 2.** Mean net N<sub>2</sub>O emission rates ( $10^{-12}$  mol kg<sup>-1</sup> s<sup>-1</sup>) measured in soil clods during aerobic incubation, for various rewetting conditions and pre-treatments. Values in brackets represent the confidence intervals ( $p < 0.05$ ).

<sup>1</sup> n = number of clods (replicates)

measured at the same date (Fig. 2), except for one value that seemed unrealistic (the correlation coefficients were 95.4% and 97.9% for  $\Delta$  and  $\Gamma$  clods, respectively). The linear regressions obtained suggest that there is a threshold for soluble organic C under which there is no more aerobic respiration: the difference between the initial soluble organic C and this estimation represented approximately 23 % and 9 % of the initial soluble organic C for clods  $\Delta$  and  $\Gamma$ , respectively.

For clods that did not experiment anaerobic conditions, the mean value of pH measurements, after the rewetting phase, was 8.31 ( $\pm$  0.08) and 8.24 ( $\pm$  0.03), for  $\Delta$  and  $\Gamma$  clods, respectively. After the aerobic incubation, the mean value of pH was 8.38 ( $\pm$  0.12) and 8.29 ( $\pm$  0.04), respectively. For clods that experimented anaerobic conditions, the mean value of pH, after the anaerobic pre-incubation, was 8.34 ( $\pm$  0.02) and 8.37 ( $\pm$  0.05), for  $\Delta$  and  $\Gamma$  clods, respectively. After the subsequent aerobic incubation, the mean value of pH was 8.74 ( $\pm$  0.01) and 8.47 ( $\pm$  0.03), for  $\Delta$  and  $\Gamma$  clods, respectively. The results indicated variation neither with time nor with the clod type ( $\Delta$  and  $\Gamma$ ).

### **Experiment 2: N<sub>2</sub>O production with or without anaerobic pre-incubation**

The net N<sub>2</sub>O emission rates measured in experiment 2 were very small and even slightly negative in clods that did not experience anaerobic pre-incubation: -1.2 and -0.9 pmol N<sub>2</sub>O kg<sup>-1</sup> s<sup>-1</sup> in clods  $\Delta$  and  $\Gamma$ , respectively (Table 2). They were negligible in comparison to clods that had been previously submitted to anaerobic conditions: 72.1 and 48.3 pmol N<sub>2</sub>O kg<sup>-1</sup> s<sup>-1</sup> in clods  $\Delta$  and  $\Gamma$ , respectively. These values were also much higher than those measured in experiment 2 (5.2 and 3.3 pmol N<sub>2</sub>O kg<sup>-1</sup> s<sup>-1</sup> in clods  $\Delta$  and  $\Gamma$ , respectively), although these rates were measured in favourable conditions: nitrate was supplied in large amount to promote denitrification and acetylene was added to prevent N<sub>2</sub>O reduction.

The mean N<sub>2</sub>O emission rate following anaerobic incubation was significantly higher ( $P < 0.05$ ) for clods  $\Delta$  (72.1 pmol kg<sup>-1</sup> s<sup>-1</sup>) than for clods  $\Gamma$  (48.3 pmol kg<sup>-1</sup> s<sup>-1</sup>). The mean clod weight was also significantly higher for  $\Delta$  clods (25.8 g) than for  $\Gamma$  clods (20.2 g). Figure 3 suggests that N<sub>2</sub>O emission rate does not depend directly on clod type ( $\Delta$  and  $\Gamma$ ), but would rather depend on clod mass: this relationship could be due to a larger anoxic volume in the larger clods (Renault and Stengel, 1994; Sierra et al., 1995) Measurements of mineral N content showed that the NH<sub>4</sub><sup>+</sup> and NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> contents of clods that had been rewetted with water and submitted to anaerobic pre-incubation were low and not

Clods	Rewetting	Pre-treatment	Mineral N ( $\text{mol N m}^{-3}$ )				Mineral N ( $\text{mg N kg}^{-1}$ )			
			t = 0		t = 24 hours		t = 0		t = 24 hours	
			$\text{NH}_4^+$	$\text{NO}_3^-$	$\text{NH}_4^+$	$\text{NO}_3^-$	$\text{NH}_4^+$	$\text{NO}_3^-$	$\text{NH}_4^+$	$\text{NO}_3^-$
$\Delta$	$\text{KNO}_3$ solution	No pre-incubation	<b>0.44</b>	<b>32.9</b>	<b>0.97</b>	<b>26.5</b>	<b>1.4</b>	<b>106.2</b>	<b>3.1</b>	<b>85.5</b>
			(.06)	(3.1)	(.14)	(4.3)	(.2)	(10.1)	(.5)	(13.9)
$\Gamma$	$\text{KNO}_3$ solution	No pre-incubation	<b>0.43</b>	<b>29.1</b>	<b>0.81</b>	<b>27.8</b>	<b>1.5</b>	<b>99.2</b>	<b>2.7</b>	<b>92.8</b>
			(.03)	(1.8)	(.12)	(4.2)	(.1)	(6.1)	(.4)	(15.2)
$\Delta+$	Deionised water	Anaerobic pre-incubation with $\text{C}_2\text{H}_2$	<b>0.57</b>	<b>0.38</b>	<b>0.74</b>	<b>0.35</b>	<b>1.8</b>	<b>1.2</b>	<b>2.3</b>	<b>1.1</b>
			(.03)	(.18)	(.05)	(.03)	(.1)	(.6)	(.2)	(.1)
$\Gamma+$	Deionised water	Anaerobic pre-incubation with $\text{C}_2\text{H}_2$	<b>0.71</b>	<b>0.28</b>	<b>0.73</b>	<b>0.85</b>	<b>2.3</b>	<b>0.9</b>	<b>2.4</b>	<b>2.8</b>
			(.09)	(.03)	(.05)	(.4)	(.3)	(.1)	(.2)	(1.3)

**Table 3.** Amounts of mineral N (in  $\text{mol m}^{-3}$  solution or  $\text{mg kg}^{-1}$  soil) measured at the beginning and the end of 1 day aerobic incubation following either soil water rewetting and anaerobic pre-incubation (6 days) or nitrate rewetting alone (experiment 2). Values in brackets represent the standard errors.

Clod type	Apparent CO <sub>2</sub> production	Actual CO <sub>2</sub> production		
		$k_3 = 0.83$	$k_3 = 1.25$	$k_3 = 1.66$
		nmol CO <sub>2</sub> kg <sup>-1</sup> s <sup>-1</sup>		
Δ+	5.42 (1.14)	12.5	14.3	15.3
Γ+	4.23 (0.70)	8.99	10.1	10.8
Δ	1.41 (0.31)	2.72	3.12	3.36
Γ	1.63 (0.99)	2.86	3.30	3.56

**Table 4.** Apparent and actual CO<sub>2</sub> production rates ( $10^{-9}$  mol CO<sub>2</sub> kg<sup>-1</sup> s<sup>-1</sup>) during 6 hours of aerobic incubation of clods Δ and Γ. Apparent rate is the accumulation rate measured in flasks of experiment 2; actual rate is calculated using equation 8 for three values of  $k_3$ :  $k_3 = 2, 3$  and 4%, corresponding to 0.83, 1.25 and 1.66 mol m<sup>-3</sup>. Clods Δ+ and Γ+ have been submitted to pre-treatment (anaerobiosis incubation during 6 days with C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>2</sub>), whereas clods Δ and Γ have not. Values in brackets are the confidence intervals.

different between clods or dates: the average was  $2.2 \pm 0.3$  mg  $\text{NH}_4^+$ -N  $\text{kg}^{-1}$  soil and  $1.5 \pm 0.9$  mg  $\text{NO}_3^-$ -N  $\text{kg}^{-1}$  soil (Table 3). In clods which had been rewetted with  $\text{KNO}_3$  solution and which did not experience anaerobic pre-incubation, the  $\text{NH}_4^+$  concentration was similar ( $2.2 \pm 0.3$  mg N  $\text{kg}^{-1}$  soil), but the  $\text{NO}_3^-$  concentration was much higher as expected:  $96.0 \pm 8.9$  mg N  $\text{kg}^{-1}$  soil, without significant change between the initial and final measurement ( $P < 0.05$ ).  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  emissions were low in these clods in spite of their high  $\text{NO}_3^-$  concentration.

The apparent  $\text{CO}_2$  production rate (i.e. without accounting for  $\text{CO}_2$  and carbonates in soil solution) was also much higher in clods that had been submitted to anaerobic pre-incubation than in the other: 3.8 and 2.6 times higher in clods  $\Delta$  and  $\Gamma$ , respectively (Table 4). The apparent rates were not statistically different between clods  $\Delta$  and  $\Gamma$  not submitted to anaerobic conditions, but could be distinguished in clods submitted to anaerobic pre-incubation (significant at  $P < 0.10$ ). The calculated actual  $\text{CO}_2$  production rates, corrected for carbonates present in soil solution, were 1.76 to 2.83 times greater. The factor depends both on the clod type and its pre-treatment and on the constant  $k_3$  that characterises the relationship between soil pH and partial pressure of  $\text{CO}_2$ . These values remain lower than the values obtained for the same clods in experiment 1.

### Experiment 3: origin of the $\text{N}_2\text{O}$ emissions following anaerobic preincubation

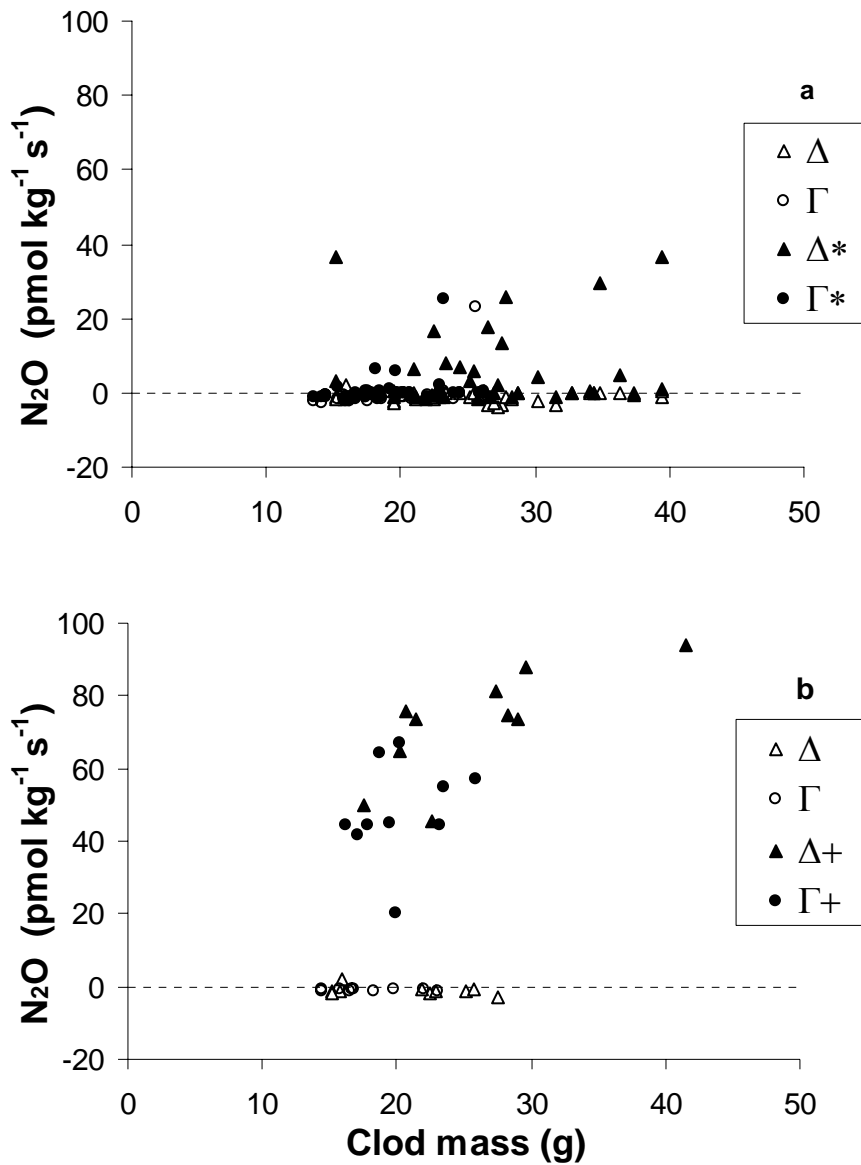
Mean  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  emission of clods supplied with  $^{15}\text{NH}_4^+$  was about twice the corresponding value for clods supplied with  $^{15}\text{NO}_3^-$ , although the difference between these 2 values was not statistically significant ( $P < 0.05$ ).

For  $\Delta$  clods submitted to anaerobic pre-incubation and thereafter enriched either in  $^{15}\text{NO}_3^-$  or  $^{15}\text{NH}_4^+$ , the isotopic excess in  $^{15}\text{N}$  of produced  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  was similar to the mean excess of  $\text{NO}_3^-$  defined as the average between the initial and final excess of  $\text{NO}_3^-$  (Table 5). Unfortunately, it was not possible to estimate the  $\text{N}_2\text{O}/(\text{N}_2\text{O} + \text{N}_2)$  ratio from  $^{15}\text{N}$  data, since, the isotopic excess of  $^{15}\text{N}_2$  did not significantly differ from that of air (results not shown). Mean  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  emission of clods supplied with  $^{15}\text{NH}_4^+$  was about twice the corresponding value for clods supplied with  $^{15}\text{NO}_3^-$ , although the difference between these 2 values was not statistically significant ( $P < 0.05$ ).

Nitrate and  $\text{NH}_4^+$  contents were about  $9 \cdot 10^{-6}$  and  $2 \cdot 10^{-4}$ , respectively before supplying the clods with either  $^{15}\text{NO}_3^-$  or  $^{15}\text{NH}_4^+$ . This supply lead to slightly increase  $\text{NH}_4^+$ ; in contrast it lead to multiply 5 times the  $\text{NO}_3^-$  content.

		N <sub>2</sub> O	N <sub>2</sub> O	NH <sub>4</sub>	NO <sub>3</sub>	N <sub>2</sub> O	NH <sub>4</sub>	NO <sub>3</sub>	<sup>15</sup> N <sub>2</sub> O/ ( <sup>15</sup> N <sub>2</sub> + <sup>15</sup> N <sub>2</sub> O)
		pmol kg <sup>-1</sup> s <sup>-1</sup>	mg kg <sup>-1</sup>	mg kg <sup>-1</sup>	mg kg <sup>-1</sup>	atom%	atom%	atom%	
Pretreatment									
<sup>15</sup> N-urea	No C <sub>2</sub> H <sub>2</sub>	<b>287</b> (283)	<b>0.10</b> (.09)	<b>3.35</b> (1.65)	<b>1.45</b> (1.29)	<b>0.33</b> (.33)	<b>2.02</b> (.92)	<b>0.36</b> (.15)	
<sup>15</sup> NO <sub>3</sub>	No C <sub>2</sub> H <sub>2</sub>	<b>173</b> (292)	<b>0.06</b> (.09)	<b>2.94</b> (1.06)	<b>1.32</b> (.69)	<b>3.15</b> (4.08)	<b>0.66</b> (.11)	<b>3.40</b> (1.14)	<b>0.04</b> (.06)
<sup>15</sup> N-urea	C <sub>2</sub> H <sub>2</sub>	<b>195</b> (122)	<b>0.07</b> (.04)	<b>3.36</b> (.22)	<b>0.12</b> (.12)	<b>0.31</b> (.14)	<b>2.81</b> (.25)	<b>0.24</b> (.09)	
<sup>15</sup> NO <sub>3</sub>	C <sub>2</sub> H <sub>2</sub>	<b>114</b> (28)	<b>0.04</b> (.01)	<b>2.97</b> (.87)	<b>0.65</b> (.14)	<b>4.48</b> (.57)	<b>0.70</b> (.28)	<b>4.61</b> (.58)	<b>0.78</b> (.39)

**Table 5.** N<sub>2</sub>O emission rate, amounts of mineral N and isotopic composition of N<sub>2</sub>O and mineral N measured in clods Δ, during a short aerobic incubation period (7 hours) following a 6.6 day anaerobic incubation with C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>2</sub>. Pool sizes and isotopic composition of mineral N are the mean of values measured at t = 0 and t = 7 hours. <sup>15</sup>N labelling was made using <sup>15</sup>NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> or <sup>15</sup>N-urea before the anaerobiosis period. Values in brackets are the standard deviations (3 replicates).



**Figure 3:** Net  $N_2O$  emission rates ( $10^{-12} \text{ mol kg}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-1}$ ) as a function of clod mass, measured:

c) in soil clods rewetted with nitrate solution and incubated aerobically with  $C_2H_2$  ( $\Delta^*$ ,  $\Gamma^*$ ) or without  $C_2H_2$  ( $\Delta$ ,  $\Gamma$ );

in soil clods rewetted with deionised water and incubated aerobically without  $C_2H_2$  either after anaerobic pre-incubation and  $C_2H_2$  ( $\Delta+$ ,  $\Gamma+$ ) or without pre-incubation ( $\Delta$ ,  $\Gamma$ ).

## DISCUSSION

### **N<sub>2</sub>O production with or without anaerobic pre-incubation**

During the aerobic incubation of soil clods, N<sub>2</sub>O emission rates were much higher in clods submitted to anaerobic pre-incubation than in clods that did not experience this anoxic period (Fig. 3). The mean N<sub>2</sub>O production rate through denitrification (using C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>2</sub> inhibition of N<sub>2</sub>O reduction and nitrification) was 60.2 pmol N<sub>2</sub>O kg<sup>-1</sup> s<sup>-1</sup> in the former and only 2.87 pmol N<sub>2</sub>O kg<sup>-1</sup> s<sup>-1</sup> in the latter case (no pre-incubation). Isotope measurements clearly demonstrated that most of these emissions resulted from denitrification; furthermore, we found that these emissions increased with the clod size, suggesting a dependence on aeration within the clod. Surprisingly, we found that denitrification was high in clods submitted to anaerobic pre-incubation and having a small NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> content (0.46 mol m<sup>-3</sup> solution) and low in clods that did not experiment anaerobic pre-incubation but which had a high NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> concentration (29.1 mol m<sup>-3</sup> solution). The lower NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> concentration is comparable or smaller than Michaelis constant values reported in the literature: 6 mol m<sup>-3</sup> for intact cores (Hénault, 1993), 11.4-31.4 mol m<sup>-3</sup> (Malhi *et al.*, 1990), approximately 0.22 mol m<sup>-3</sup> (Klemedtsson *et al.*, 1977), 0.0018–0.0166 mol m<sup>-3</sup> for soil and sediment slurries (Murray *et al.*, 1989) and 0.3-3.8 mol m<sup>-3</sup> for purified NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> reductase (Zumft, 1997). Although NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> concentration was likely to be a limiting factor of N<sub>2</sub>O emissions in clods pre-incubated anaerobically, there was no correlation between individual clod emission and its final NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> concentration (results not shown). Then the other factors affecting denitrification, particularly the aeration status of the clod and its content of microbial available carbon, were most important.

### **Why N<sub>2</sub>O emission through nitrification should be neglected ?**

Clods that experimented anaerobic pre-incubation were simultaneously submitted to C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>2</sub> (approximately 5 % of flask air), in order to check whether denitrification stopped or not at the end of this pre-incubation period. It has been recognised that both NH<sub>4</sub><sup>+</sup> oxidation and N<sub>2</sub>O production through nitrification is inhibited by C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>2</sub> until the partial pressure of this gas is higher than about 1-10 kPa (Mosier, 1980). Moreover, removing C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>2</sub> is not sufficient to stop its inhibitory effect: Berg *et al.* (1982) noted that C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>2</sub> effect did not cease until 7 days



after removal of initially only 10 Pa C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>2</sub> applied. In order to be sure that anaerobic pre-incubation with C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>2</sub> inhibited nitrification in experiments 2 and 3, additional <sup>15</sup>N measurements were realised on clods submitted to anaerobic pre-incubation without C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>2</sub>. Nitrification rates in clods submitted or not submitted to C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>2</sub> were 0.54 pmol kg<sup>-1</sup> s<sup>-1</sup> and 5.6 pmol kg<sup>-1</sup> s<sup>-1</sup>, respectively (results not shown), and confirm the effect of C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>2</sub> on nitrification.

Nitrification rates without C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>2</sub> would have been equal to 5.6 nmol kg<sup>-1</sup> s<sup>-1</sup>, and gross N mineralisation to 0.75 nmol kg<sup>-1</sup> s<sup>-1</sup> in the same conditions (results not shown). This low nitrification flux can be related to the low exchangeable [NH<sub>4</sub><sup>+</sup>] (i.e. 0.21 and 0.24 mmol N kg<sup>-1</sup> for treatments with <sup>15</sup>NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> and <sup>15</sup>NH<sub>4</sub><sup>+</sup> respectively) with regard to nitrification (Bremner and Blackmer, 1981; Lensi *et al.*, 1992). Nitrogen mineralisation was not significantly affected by C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>2</sub>, since it was estimated at 0.37 and 0.35 nmol kg<sup>-1</sup> s<sup>-1</sup> in clods submitted or not to C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>2</sub> during anaerobic pre-incubation, respectively. Other studies reported that the proportion of NH<sub>4</sub><sup>+</sup> transformed into N<sub>2</sub>O was about 0.1-0.5 % (Aulakh *et al.*, 1984) or less than 1% (Bremner and Blackmer, 1978, Klemedtsson *et al.*, 1988), the remainder being transformed into NO<sub>2</sub><sup>-</sup> and NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup>. Considering its maximum value in our situation and the actual nitrification flux in absence of C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>2</sub> would have led to N<sub>2</sub>O production rate about 0.12 nmol kg<sup>-1</sup> s<sup>-1</sup>. This value is small with regard to the actual value for N<sub>2</sub>O emission through denitrification in the same conditions equal to 2.43 nmol kg<sup>-1</sup> s<sup>-1</sup> (results not shown).

### **Required conditions to increase N<sub>2</sub>O emissions through denitrification**

Since total denitrification rate of clods that did not experiment anaerobic pre-incubation was negligible compared to the N<sub>2</sub>O production rate by clods submitted to anaerobic pre-incubation, it appears necessary that the aeration status of clods placed in air-filled flasks is affected by the anaerobic pre-incubation. Indeed, experimental measurements of aerobic CO<sub>2</sub> production showed that submitting clods to anaerobic pre-incubation lead to multiply this production by a factor of 2.2 and 1.9 (experiment 1), and 3.8 and 2.6 (experiment 2) in clods Δ and Γ, respectively. However, these 2 methods lead to different rates of aerobic CO<sub>2</sub> production. As shown in Table 3, the main difference between these two experiments lies in the method (trapping CO<sub>2</sub> in NaOH solution or accumulation in the gas phase), since when CO<sub>2</sub> accumulates in the gas phase, it also partly accumulates in the solution mainly as hydrated H<sub>2</sub>CO<sub>3</sub> and HCO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> (Stumm and Morgan, 1996). The calculation of the actual rate of CO<sub>2</sub> production from its apparent value measured in experiment 2 was performed using unproved hypotheses on (i) the relationship between pH and air CO<sub>2</sub> concentration that was

proposed from geo-chemical simulations for hypothetical calcareous and non calcareous soil using the AQUA model (Vallès and Bourgeat, 1988), and (ii) the dissolution of calcite was neglected assuming that its kinetics behaviour limits its importance for only 6 h CO<sub>2</sub> accumulation (Stumm and Morgan, 1996). Moreover, since aerobic CO<sub>2</sub> production for clods Δ was lower (versus higher) than that of clods Γ in experiment 1 (versus experiment 2), other causes are surely to be invoked, including the conservation duration of clods before measurements, and their water content during storage which differed between experiment 1 (0.06 g g<sup>-1</sup>) and experiment 2 (0.11 g g<sup>-1</sup>). In our calculations, the retained actual aerobic CO<sub>2</sub> production rates were those corresponding to  $k_3$  equal to 1.25 mol m<sup>-3</sup>. These values were the same as O<sub>2</sub> consumption rates measured in soil aggregates samples with 0% of CO<sub>2</sub> and at different O<sub>2</sub> concentrations (1, 2, 5, 10 and 20% of O<sub>2</sub>) (results not shown).

In addition to an increase in aerobic respiration, it is possible to invoke an increase in the N<sub>2</sub>O/(N<sub>2</sub>O+N<sub>2</sub>) ratio; however such possible (but unproved) increase could not have been sufficient alone to explain the difference between clods submitted or not to anaerobic pre-incubation, since total denitrification of clods that did not experiment anaerobic conditions was greatly lower to the N<sub>2</sub>O emissions of other clods. An increase in N<sub>2</sub>O/(N<sub>2</sub>O+N<sub>2</sub>) ratio could *a priori* result from a decrease in the pH of the soil solution (Knowles, 1982), an increase in [NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup>] (Blackmer and Bremner, 1979), and/or a decrease in aerobic respiration (Parkin, 1987). In our context, the last 2 hypotheses can not be retained, since [NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup>] and aerobic respiration were lower and greater, respectively, for clods submitted to anaerobic pre-incubation. Therefore, only pH decrease can be evoked and could have resulted simultaneously from the accumulation of fatty acids during anaerobic pre-incubation (Dassonville and Renault, 2002) and from an increase of CO<sub>2</sub> (in experiment 2) that can affect the pH (Tsusuki *et al.*, 1987; Stumm and Morgan, 1996). However, it is not certain that pH has significantly decreased since (i) measurements (after re-equilibration of soil solution CO<sub>2</sub> with atmospheric ones) did not change with the anaerobic pre-incubation, in agreement with unpublished simulations that show that fatty acids can decrease soil pH of only about 0.4 unit for high concentrations of acetate and butyrate (40 mol m<sup>-3</sup> solution for a calcareous soil), and (ii) maximum values of CO<sub>2</sub> at the end of the measurement period was 1.65 10<sup>-3</sup> mol m<sup>-3</sup> air, that can decrease the pH of the soil solution of less than about 0.6 unit. In addition, the presence of C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>2</sub> during anaerobic pre-incubation not only inhibit N<sub>2</sub>O reduction, but also the synthesis of N<sub>2</sub>O reductase (Klemedtsson *et al.*, 1977): this compound can have maintained the N<sub>2</sub>O/(N<sub>2</sub>O+N<sub>2</sub>) ratio at a high value, even have lead to an increase of this ratio if denitrifiers have significantly developed during the anaerobic pre-incubation.

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*Biogeochemical changes that could appear during the prolonged anaerobic period*

Anaerobic condition often lead to the incomplete degradation of organic matter and the accumulation of small compounds, including fatty acids (Tsusuki *et al.*, 1987) that can thereafter be easily mineralised in aerobic conditions (Burford and Bremner, 1975; Förstner, 1987). This accumulation of small organic compound results from the concomitant realization of the following conditions:

- the lack of electron donors such as N and metal oxides that can enable complete microbial oxidation of organic compounds (Pelmont, 1993). This was the case for N oxides in our experiment;
- the possibility of fermentative bacterial population to develop in anaerobic conditions, even if it is initially poorly represented (Dassonville and Renault, 2002);
- the lack of  $\text{SO}_4^{2-}$  reducing bacteria and methanogene archaea – especially in soils not subjected to frequent anaerobic conditions - that can consume volatile fatty acids, but develop slowly with regard to fermentative populations (Tsusuki *et al.*, 1987; Conrad, 1999).

This accumulation of small organic compounds may be indirectly reflected by the increase of soluble organic C during the anaerobic pre-incubation. It justified our choice to consider 2 organic pools in equation (4) to explain aerobic  $\text{CO}_2$  production: the first pool being for native organic C, and the second one for these small organic compounds. In agreement with this interpretation, the period constant  $1/k_1$  for mineralisation of the first pool was about 200-260 h; in contrast, the corresponding value  $1/k_2$  was only about 4-20 h, indicating that some organic compound can easily be mineralised in aerobic conditions after the anaerobic pre-incubation. Dealing with the nature of organic C, it is generally accepted that soluble compounds are better used than non-soluble ones (Moore, 1998; Kalbitz *et al.*, 2000). Although, the most abundant dissolved organic compounds (DOC) are poorly consumed (Gaffney *et al.*, 1996), whereas hydrophilic acids and simple compounds are better used: consequently, only a small fraction of DOC is really mineralised (Thurman, 1985).

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## **MODELE SIMPLIFIE DES EMISSIONS DE N<sub>2</sub>O PAR DENITRIFICATION PRENANT EN COMPTE LA STRUCTURE DES MOTTES DE SOL ET LA PREINCUBATION ANAEROBIE**

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**A simplified model of N<sub>2</sub>O emission by denitrification that accounts for soil clod structure and anaerobic pre-incubation**

## SUMMARY

Nitrous oxide emissions by soils through denitrification depend on denitrifying activity, soil respiration and the anaerobic fraction of soil. We have previously found that anaerobic pre-incubation of soil clods stimulates both microbial respiration and N<sub>2</sub>O emissions through denitrification during a subsequent aerobic incubation of these clods. In this work, we have checked whether the observed increases in aerobic respiration and denitrification activities could explain the extra N<sub>2</sub>O production by taking into account the biological activities and the actual structure of soil clods. Soil structure was characterized in 10 intact clods 'Δ' (with a massive structure) and 'T' (with visible porosity) by image analysis of thin sections. Three descriptors were calculated for each thin section: the number of air-filled holes ( $n_h$ ), the maximal distance between any point and the nearest air-filled pore and the mean radius of the clod ( $r_a$ ). Only the last descriptor was significantly correlated with the clod mass ( $p < 0.05$ ). The consistency of the estimates of  $n_h$  and  $r_a$  was checked by comparing the observed and predicted clod mass, the latter being dependent on these parameters. There was a good agreement between the simulated and experimental clod weights. We propose a simple model which accounts for clod structure and microbial activities to predict the anoxic soil volume and denitrification rate. The model was able to predict both the marked effect of anaerobic pre-incubation and the effect of clod mass on N<sub>2</sub>O emissions. The variations in aerobic respiration and maximum denitrification activities that result from an anaerobic pre-incubation could explain the stimulation in N<sub>2</sub>O emissions, accounting for the actual structure of soil clods.

**Key-words:** denitrification, structure, anaerobiosis, nitrous oxide, respiration, clod, aggregate.

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## INTRODUCTION

Nitrous oxide is trace gas which play a central role in atmospheric chemistry, it is involved in ozone decomposition in the stratosphere and exerts a significant greenhouse effect (Graedel and Crutzen, 1992; Smith, 1990; IPCC, 1996). Its emission from soils results from nitrification (Groffman, 1991) and denitrification (Hénault and Germon, 1995; Conrad, 1996).

Numerous studies have been devoted to the production of  $N_2O$  by either denitrification (Firestone *et al.* 1979; Maag *et al.*, 1997, Ambus, 1998) or nitrification (Li *et al.*, 1992; Zanner and Bloom, 1995; Stevens *et al.*, 1997, Arah, 1997). The micro-scale approach to study and describe denitrification is motivated by the fact that, in many cases, the conditions experienced by soil organisms in micro-sites are not reflected by measurements on bulk soil samples (Parkin 1987). Oxygen concentrations may decrease from atmospheric concentration to zero values within a few millimeters in soil clods (Sextone *et al.* 1985, Sierra *et al.* 1995), and less than 1 mm in the vicinity of particulate organic matter (Parkin, 1987; Parry *et al.*, 2000) and active root tips in locally saturated conditions (Bidel *et al.*, 2000).

Several models have been proposed to describe respiration, anaerobiosis, total denitrification and/or  $N_2O$  emissions through denitrification at this scale (Rappoldt, 1992; Renault and Stengel, 1994; Parry *et al.*, 1999). However, none of these model accounts for variations with time in respiration, denitrification and  $N_2O$  reduction, although it is well recognized that these activities vary, as the consequence of microbial dynamics and/or enzyme inductions and activations (MacConnaughey *et al.*, 1985; Holtan-Hartwig *et al.*, 2000). Recently, it has been shown that  $N_2O$  emissions by clods placed in aerobic atmosphere were markedly stimulated when these clods had been previously submitted to anaerobic conditions (Khalil *et al.*, 2003b). These authors showed that these emissions resulted from denitrification and that  $O_2$  consumption rate was also stimulated by the anaerobic pre-incubation. Such an increase may be explained by the accumulation of intermediate organic compounds which are not completely mineralized in anaerobic conditions and possibly by the death of strictly aerobic bacteria and fungi that cannot survive in such conditions (Förstner, 1987; Tsusuki and Ponnampereuma, 1987; Chin and Conrad, 1995; Conrad, 1999).

The aim of this work was to check whether variations in aerobic respiration and maximum denitrification activities (i.e.  $N_2O$  production and consumption) that result from an anaerobic pre-incubation are sufficient to explain the variations in  $N_2O$  emissions, accounting for the

actual structure of soil clods. The use of model is a tool to fulfill this objective. It requires an adequate description of the clods structure with regard to their aeration and denitrification behavior.

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## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Soil Clod Sampling

Experiments were performed in an Orthic Luvisol (FAO classification) sampled in Mons-en-Chaussée, in Northern France (49°80' N; 3°60' E). This arable soil has been following a wheat-maize-wheat-sugarbeet rotation for 12 years and was cropped in maize in 2000. The properties of the soil were as follows: clay, 194 g.kg<sup>-1</sup>; silt, 706 g.kg<sup>-1</sup>; sand, 68 g.kg<sup>-1</sup>; pH (water), 8.2; total CaCO<sub>3</sub>, 32 g.kg<sup>-1</sup>; organic C, 8.52 g.kg<sup>-1</sup>; total N 1.00 g.kg<sup>-1</sup>; and NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup>-N, 4.70 mg.kg<sup>-1</sup>. Clods were sampled in the ploughed layer (10-30 cm depth) on September 12, 2000. Two sets of clods were separated: clods Δ, with a massive structure and no visible porosity (resulting from compaction due to traffic) and clods Γ, with a fragmentary structure and visible porosity (Richard *et al.*, 1999). The larger clods were gently broken down immediately after sampling and then calibrated : we kept clods between 2.5 and 3 cm size. In order to reduce microbial activity during storage, the clods were air-dried during 3 days to obtain a residual moisture close to 0.10 g g<sup>-1</sup> soil. They were stored at 2°C until the beginning of the experiments, i.e. until November 2000. At this time, the soil moisture was about 0.11 g.g<sup>-1</sup>.

### Measurements of N<sub>2</sub>O Emissions

After storage, the soil clods Δ and Γ were rewetted with either water (treatment A) or KNO<sub>3</sub> solution at 4g.L<sup>-1</sup> (treatment B). Rewetting was realized at 20°C on suction tables at -10 kPa suction during 1 day, then -5 kPa during 1 day, -1 kPa during 1 day, and finally -0.5 kPa during 4 days. This procedure ensured a slow rewetting process that prevented the occurrence of additional clod cracks. The water content thus obtained was 0.22 and 0.24 g.g<sup>-1</sup> soil for clods Δ and Γ, respectively. The mineral N content (NH<sub>4</sub><sup>+</sup>, NO<sub>2</sub><sup>-</sup> and NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup>) of the clods was measured at the end of the wetting period on 6 replicates for each clod type and each treatment.

Clods rewetted with water (treatment A) were then submitted to generalized anaerobiosis: they were placed in closed 150 mL flasks under anaerobic conditions by alternating 3 successive cycles of 3 minutes vacuum and 3 minutes N<sub>2</sub> filling in the flasks. Seven mL of

gas were removed and replaced by the same volume of  $C_2H_2$  and 1 mL of gas was replaced by Kr. Thirty two flasks containing either  $\Delta$  or  $\Gamma$  clods were incubated at  $20^\circ C$  in order to follow denitrification during this first incubation period. The final mineral N content ( $NH_4^+$ ,  $NO_2^-$  and  $NO_3^-$ ) was measured on 6 replicates of clods  $\Delta$  and  $\Gamma$ . After 6 days and 14 h (day 6.6), clods were placed in aerobic condition by alternating 3 successive cycles of 3 minutes vacuum and 3 minutes of air filling in the flasks. In order to ensure that all  $C_2H_2$  has been removed, the flasks were subjected to the same procedure after 1 additional hour. 1 mL of air was then replaced by Kr. For treatment B, 10 clods  $\Delta$  and 10 clods  $\Gamma$  were placed in closed 150 mL flasks under aerobic conditions just after the wetting period on suction tables; 1 mL of air was replaced by Kr, and the clods were pre-incubated during 15 h.

Gas samples of treatments A and B were then withdrawn after 1, 3, 5 and 7 hours and analyzed for  $N_2O$ ,  $N_2$ ,  $CO_2$ ,  $O_2$ , Kr and  $C_2H_2$  concentrations. Mineral N was extracted in treatment A at 7 hours and analyzed for  $NH_4^+$ ,  $NO_2^-$  and  $NO_3^-$ .

The flasks used in treatment B were thereafter opened for a few minutes in order to release the trapped gases. After closing the flasks, 7 mL and 1 mL of gas were replaced by  $C_2H_2$  and Kr, respectively. Clods  $\Delta$  and  $\Gamma$  (10 replicates) were incubated at  $20^\circ C$  for another 6 hours. Gas samples were withdrawn 14, 16, 18 and 20 hours after the addition of  $C_2H_2$  and analyzed for  $N_2O$ ,  $N_2$ ,  $CO_2$ ,  $O_2$ , Kr and  $C_2H_2$  concentrations. Mineral N was extracted in treatment B at 20 hours and analyzed for  $NH_4^+$ ,  $NO_2^-$  and  $NO_3^-$ .

Nitrous oxide concentration was analyzed by gas chromatography equipped with an electron capture detector (HP 5890 Series II) fitted with a Porapak Q column (80-100 mesh, 2 m) coupled to an integration software on a PC Workstation. Nitrogen,  $CO_2$ ,  $O_2$ , Kr and  $C_2H_2$  concentrations were measured on another gas chromatograph with TCD (HP5890 Series II) and columns filled with Porapak Q (80-100mesh, 1.8 m) and molecular sieve (0.1-0.5 nm, 1.8 m) coupled to the same integration software. The mineral N content of clods was extracted with a 1M KCl solution (soil:solution = 1:5). Measurements were performed with a continuous flow analyzer (Skalar, Breda, The Netherlands) using the method proposed by Henriksen and Selmer-Olsen (1970).

### **Model of $N_2O$ Emission by Soil Clods**

Actual clods are assimilated to a set of  $n_a$  independent spherical aggregates having a

unique radius  $r_a$  (m). Similar hypothesis was made earlier by Rappoldt (1990) to estimate the soil anaerobic fraction, and by Parry *et al.* (2000) to estimate total denitrification within soil clods. The anaerobic fraction (v/v) of an aggregate may then be estimated, considering the diffusion of  $O_2$  and its consumption which is assumed to be constant as long as  $O_2$  is available (Renault and Stengel, 1994). A spherical aggregate has an anaerobic center when its radius  $r_a$  is greater than the critical radius  $r_c$  (m) given by the formula:

$$r_c = \sqrt{\frac{6D_{O_2} s_{O_2} [O_2]_e}{M}} \quad (1)$$

where  $D_{O_2}$  is the  $O_2$  diffusion coefficient in soil aggregates ( $m^2.s^{-1}$ ),  $s_{O_2}$  is the  $O_2$  solubility ( $mol\ O_2.m^{-3}\ water/mol\ O_2.m^{-3}\ air$ ),  $[O_2]_e$  is the external  $O_2$  concentration ( $mol\ O_2.m^{-3}\ air$ ) and  $M$  is the microbial respiration rate ( $mol\ O_2.m^{-3}\ soil.s^{-1}$ ). The larger aggregates have a spherical anaerobic center whose radius  $r_0$  is:

$$r_0 = -r_a \frac{\cos(\theta)}{2\cos(\theta/3)} \quad (2a)$$

with

$$\theta = \pi - \arcsin\left(\frac{r_c}{r_a}\right) \quad (2b)$$

The anaerobic fraction  $f_0$  of an aggregate is then:

$$f_0 = \left(\frac{r_0}{r_a}\right)^3 \quad (3)$$

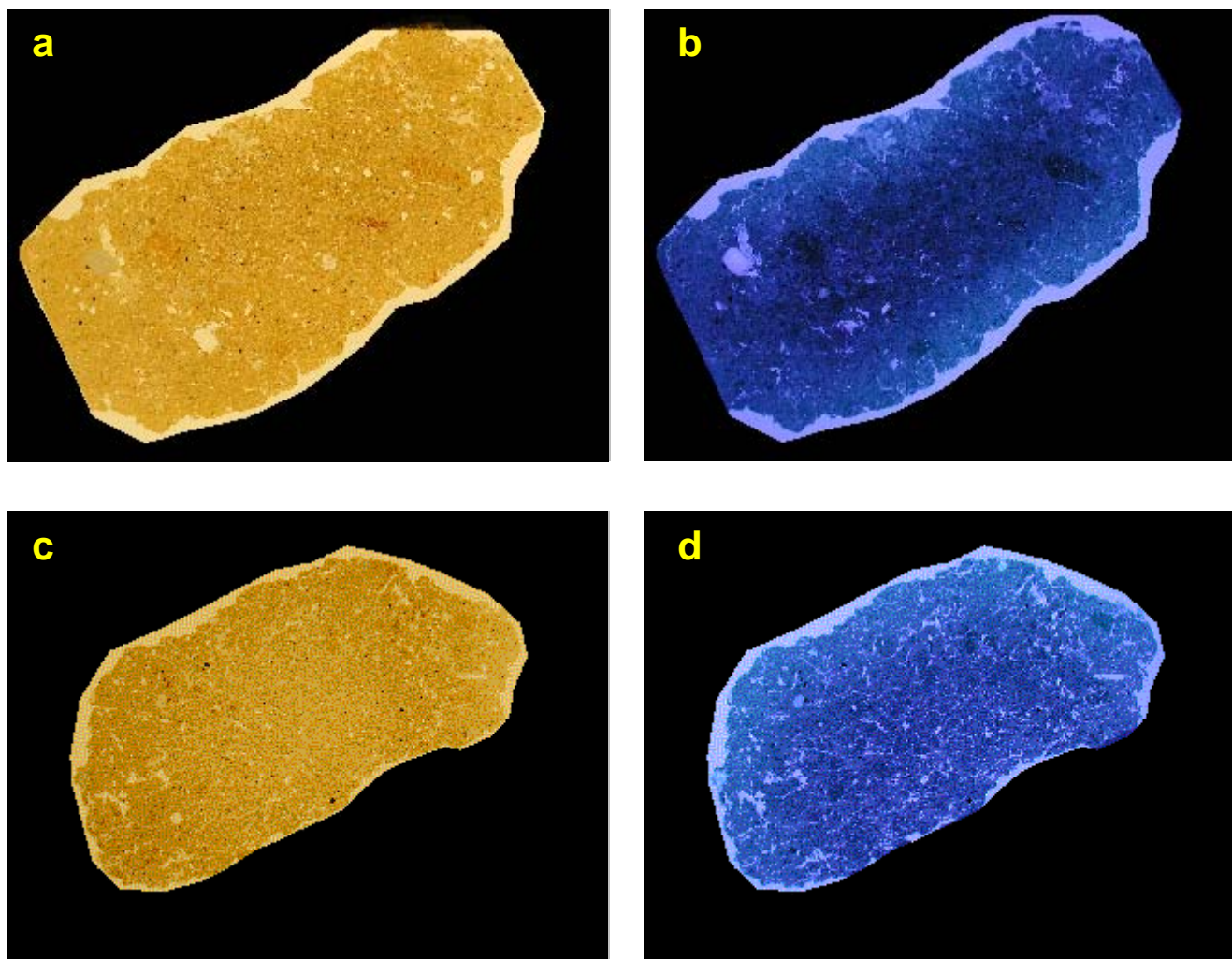
Assuming that total denitrification rate is affected neither by  $NO_3^-$  concentration nor by competition with  $N_2O$  as alternate electron acceptor in respiratory chain, total denitrification rate is then proportional to  $f_0$ :

$$E_{N_2+N_2O} = A_d f_0 \quad (4)$$

where  $E_{N_2+N_2O}$  is the emission rate of all denitrification products ( $mol\ N_2+N_2O.kg^{-1}\ soil.s^{-1}$ ), and  $A_d$  the denitrifying rate ( $mol.kg^{-1}\ soil.s^{-1}$ ) in anaerobic conditions.

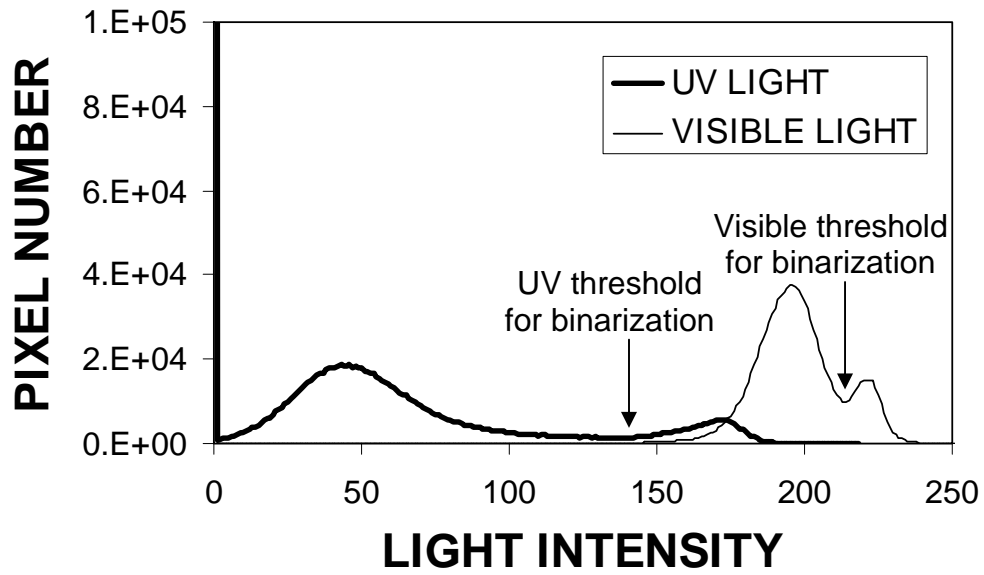
Assuming that the  $N_2O/(N_2O+N_2)$  ratio of denitrification products ( $r_N$ ) does not vary, the  $N_2O$  emission rate  $E_{N_2O}$  ( $mol\ N_2O.kg^{-1}\ soil.s^{-1}$ ) can then be written:

$$E_{N_2O} = A_d r_N f_0 \quad (5)$$

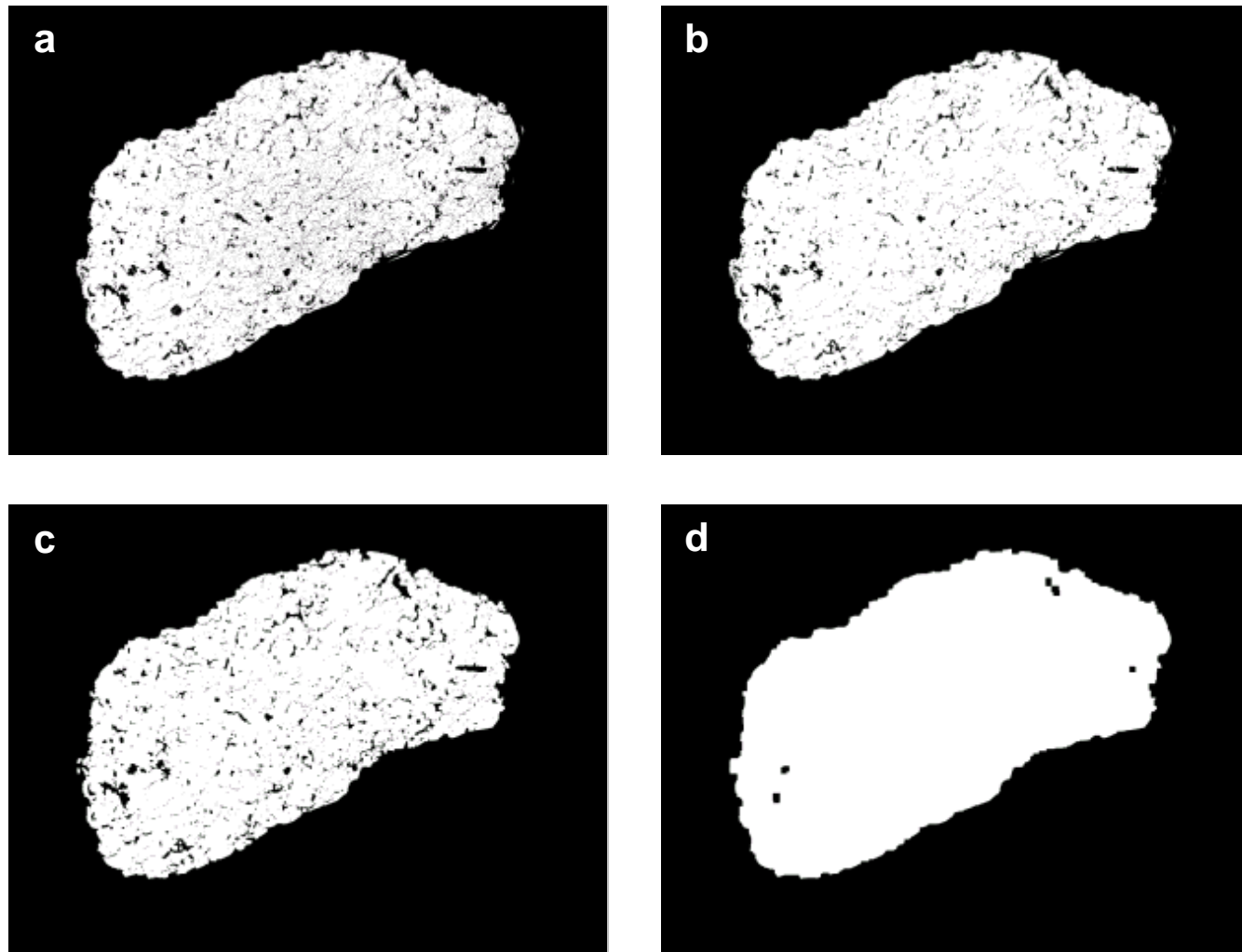


**Photo 1.** Clod sections photographs: a/ and c/ under transmitted visible light of clods  $\Delta$  and  $\Gamma$ , respectively; b/ and d/ under reflected UV light of clods  $\Delta$  and  $\Gamma$ , respectively.





*Figure 1: Histogram of light intensity for a  $\Gamma$  clod corresponding to Photos 1a-b.*



*Figures 2a-d: Example of morphological operations performed prior image characterization for a  $\Gamma$  clod corresponding to Photos 1a-b: a/ and b/ binarization of visible and UV photos, respectively; c/ logical sum of binarized sections; d/ simulation of saturation at 5 cm water suction.*

For a clod composed of  $n_a$  aggregates having the same diameter,  $N_2O$  emission rate, expressed per unit of clod mass, is also equal to  $E_{N_2O}$ .

The model includes 7 parameters: (i) physical and chemical parameters ( $D_{O_2}$  and  $s_{O_2}$ ), (ii) microbial parameters ( $M$ ,  $A_d$ , and  $r_N$ ), and (iii) structural parameters ( $n_a$  and  $r_a$ ).

## Estimating Parameters

### *Clod Structure*

Morphological characterization of clods  $\Delta$  and  $\Gamma$  clods was realized on 10 replicates in order to (i) obtain the effective radius  $r_a$  for gas diffusion and the number  $n_a$  of spherical aggregates that constitute the virtual clods assumed to be equivalent to actual ones, and (ii) assess the variations of these parameters with clod weight and morphological type.

The clods were dried, weighted and included in resin with a fluorescent dye (Bruand *et al.*, 1996). A thin section was made on each clod, care being taken to realize the section at the center of the clod. Photographs taken under transmitted-visible and reflected-UV light were scanned (1 pixel =  $29 \mu\text{m} \times 29 \mu\text{m}$ ) and analyzed with VISILOG software (Noesis, Paris, France). Both visible and UV pictures highlight macropores; furthermore, quartz particles appear with visible radiations and large particulate organic matter are revealed by UV radiations (Photos 1a-d). The scanned sections were transformed into binary ones, using minima of light intensity between peaks as thresholds to distinguish voids and solid phase (see example in Fig. 1). For each clod, the binary data resulting from UV and visible acquisitions were summed up, considering that actual voids were those which were recognized as voids in UV light and voids in visible light. At the -0.5 kPa water potential, the pores having diameters lower than  $500 \mu\text{m}$  were water saturated. These pores were 'closed' in the image analysis in order to simulate their saturation with water (Serra, 1982). An example of binarization of visible and UV images, subsequent summing up of these images, and water saturation is reported in Figure 2, for the clod  $\Gamma$  which is presented in Photo 1. The image thus obtained enables to calculate three variables characterizing clod structure:

- the number of air-filled holes ( $n_h$ ). We checked whether this number is proportional to clod mass, and the structure is independent from this weight;
- the maximal distance ( $r_m$ ) between any point of the clod section and the nearest air-filled pore. It is computed using successive morphological 'erosion' operations up to

Parameter	Unit	Treatment *	Value	Origin of the estimate
$D_{O_2}$	$m^2.s^{-1}$	A and B	$3.00 \cdot 10^{-10}$	Renault and Stengel (1994)
$s_{O_2}$	-	A and B	$3.40 \cdot 10^{-2}$	Renault and Stengel (1994)
$M$	$nmol.kg^{-1}.s^{-1}$	B	3.18	Khalil <i>et al.</i> (2003b) <sup>1</sup>
		A	12.2 (8.2-16.5) <sup>†</sup>	Khalil <i>et al.</i> (2003b) <sup>1</sup>
$A_d$	$nmol.kg^{-1}.s^{-1}$	B	1.00	Measured in this work
		A	1.60	Estimated in this work <sup>2</sup>
$r_N$	-	A and B	0.13	Khalil <i>et al.</i> (2003a)
$n_a$	$clod^{-1}$	A and B	4.65	Estimated in this work (3.10-6.20) <sup>†</sup>
$\bar{n}_h$	$Clod^{-1}$	A and B	4.80	Measured in this work
$\alpha$	$mm.g^{-1/3}$	A and B	3.0	Estimated in this work
$\beta$	$mm.hole^{-1}$	A and B	-0.29	Estimated in this work
$\rho_b$	$kg.m^{-3}$	A and B	1700	Fies and Stengel (1981) <sup>3</sup>

**Table 1:** Parameters of the  $N_2O$  emission model by soil clods through denitrification.

\* Treatments A and B are with and without anaerobic pre-incubation, respectively;

<sup>†</sup> minimum and maximum values used corresponding to mean values reduced or increased by 33%, respectively.

<sup>2</sup>: calculated from  $A_d$  value measured in treatment B and accounting for the growth of denitrifier biomass as estimated by Khalil *et al.* (2003a).

<sup>3</sup>: using the linear correlation between textural bulk density and clay content of natural soils.

- the disappearance of the image (Serra, 1982).  $r_m$  may be regarded as a first estimate of the equivalent radius of an aggregate constitutive of virtual clods in the model;
- the actual radius of the clod  $r_a$  (m). It is calculated using the perimeter  $P$  (m) and the area  $A$  (m<sup>2</sup>) of the clod section given by the image analysis, as follows:

$$r_a = \frac{2A}{P} \quad (6)$$

#### *Microbial Respiration, Denitrification and N<sub>2</sub>O/(N<sub>2</sub>O+N<sub>2</sub>) ratio of Denitrification Products*

In order to simulate N<sub>2</sub>O emission rates, we first estimated microbial parameters of clods, i.e. O<sub>2</sub> consumption rate ( $M$ ), denitrifying activity ( $A_d$ ) and N<sub>2</sub>O/(N<sub>2</sub>O+N<sub>2</sub>) ratio of denitrification products ( $r_N$ ) (Table 1). The microbial respiration rate was deduced from measurements of CO<sub>2</sub> production corrected to account for CO<sub>2</sub> solubilisation and dissociation, as explained by Khalil *et al.* (2003b), using the intermediate case of pH dependence to CO<sub>2</sub> partial pressure.

The denitrifying activity  $A_d$  (i.e. the activity in anaerobic condition without NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> limitation) was estimated from measurements made with another set of 10 clods Δ and Γ submitted to exactly the same history than in treatment B. Each clod was placed into 150 mL flasks, and supplemented with the same weight of KNO<sub>3</sub> solution (4 g.L<sup>-1</sup>). The obtained slurries were put under anaerobic conditions by alternating 3 successive cycles of 3 minutes vacuum and 3 minutes N<sub>2</sub> filling. 7 and 1 mL of gas were then replaced by C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>2</sub> and Kr, respectively. Closed flasks were incubated at 20°C for 6 hours. Gas samples were withdrawn 3, 4, 5 and 6 hours after the addition of C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>2</sub> and analyzed for N<sub>2</sub>O, N<sub>2</sub>, Kr and C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>2</sub> concentrations. These measurements were used to characterize the denitrifying activity of clods Δ and Γ in treatment B. The denitrifying activity in treatment A was obtained by multiplying this value by 1.6 in order to take into account the increase in denitrifier biomass during the 6 day anaerobic pre-incubation, as was estimated previously for this soil by Khalil *et al.* (2003a).

The N<sub>2</sub>O/(N<sub>2</sub>O+N<sub>2</sub>) ratio  $r_N$  was estimated from measurements performed by Khalil *et al.* (2003a) on slurries of the same soil with and without C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>2</sub> (Table 1).

#### *Oxygen Diffusion Coefficient and Solubility in Water*

In order to simulate N<sub>2</sub>O emission rate on Δ and Γ clods, we need to have an estimate of the O<sub>2</sub> diffusion coefficient  $D_{o_2}$  in saturated aggregates, and the O<sub>2</sub> solubility  $s_{o_2}$ . These parameters were deduced from Renault and Stengel (1994) (Table 1).

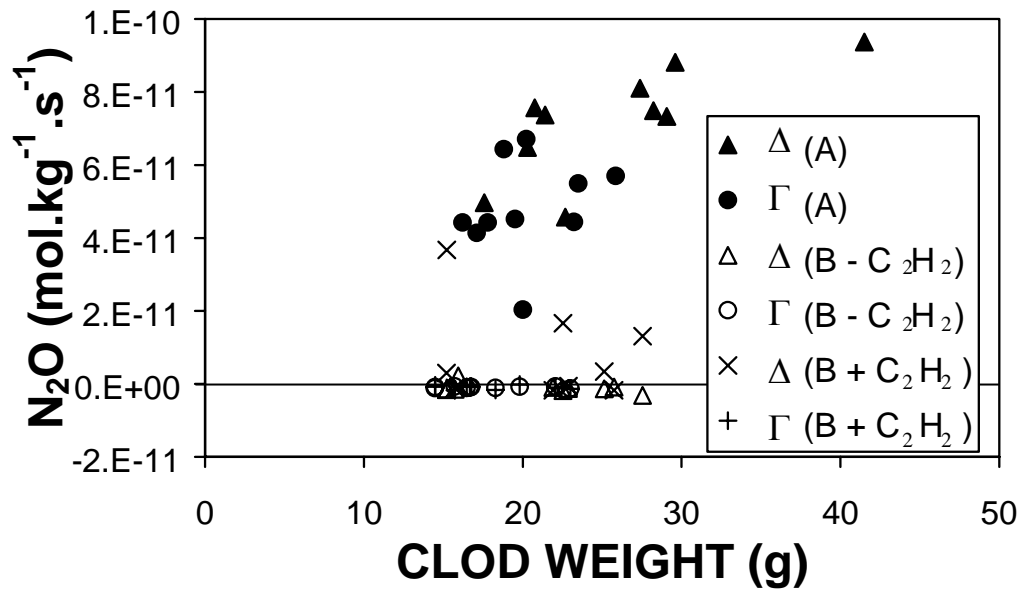
## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Experimental Nitrous Oxide Emissions

The net N<sub>2</sub>O emissions of clods that did not experiment anaerobic pre-incubation (treatment B) and did not receive C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>2</sub> were negligible and even negative (Fig. 3): the mean rate was  $-0.7 \pm 0.6$  pmol N<sub>2</sub>O.kg<sup>-1</sup>.s<sup>-1</sup> (confidence interval at p<0.05). The measurements performed on the same clods after having supplemented the flasks with C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>2</sub> confirmed that total denitrification was very small:  $4.2 \pm 3.1$  pmol.kg<sup>-1</sup>.s<sup>-1</sup>. In contrast, the mean N<sub>2</sub>O emission of clods that had experienced anaerobic pre-incubation (treatment A) was much higher:  $60.2 \pm 8.1$  pmol.kg<sup>-1</sup>.s<sup>-1</sup>. The N<sub>2</sub>O emission rate was significantly higher (P<0.05) in clods Δ ( $72.1 \pm 9.4$  pmol.kg<sup>-1</sup>.s<sup>-1</sup>) than in clods Γ ( $48.3 \pm 8.3$  pmol.kg<sup>-1</sup>.s<sup>-1</sup>). The mean clod mass was also higher for clods Δ (25.8g) than for clods Γ (20.2 g), the difference being significant at p<0.10. Considering all Δ and Γ soil clods in treatment A, the correlation coefficient between N<sub>2</sub>O emission and clod mass was equal to 0.70 (n=20, p<0.05); considering separately Δ and Γ soil clods, the correlation coefficients were equal to 0.75 (significant at P<0.05) and 0.25 (not significant at P<0.05) for clods Δ and Γ, respectively.

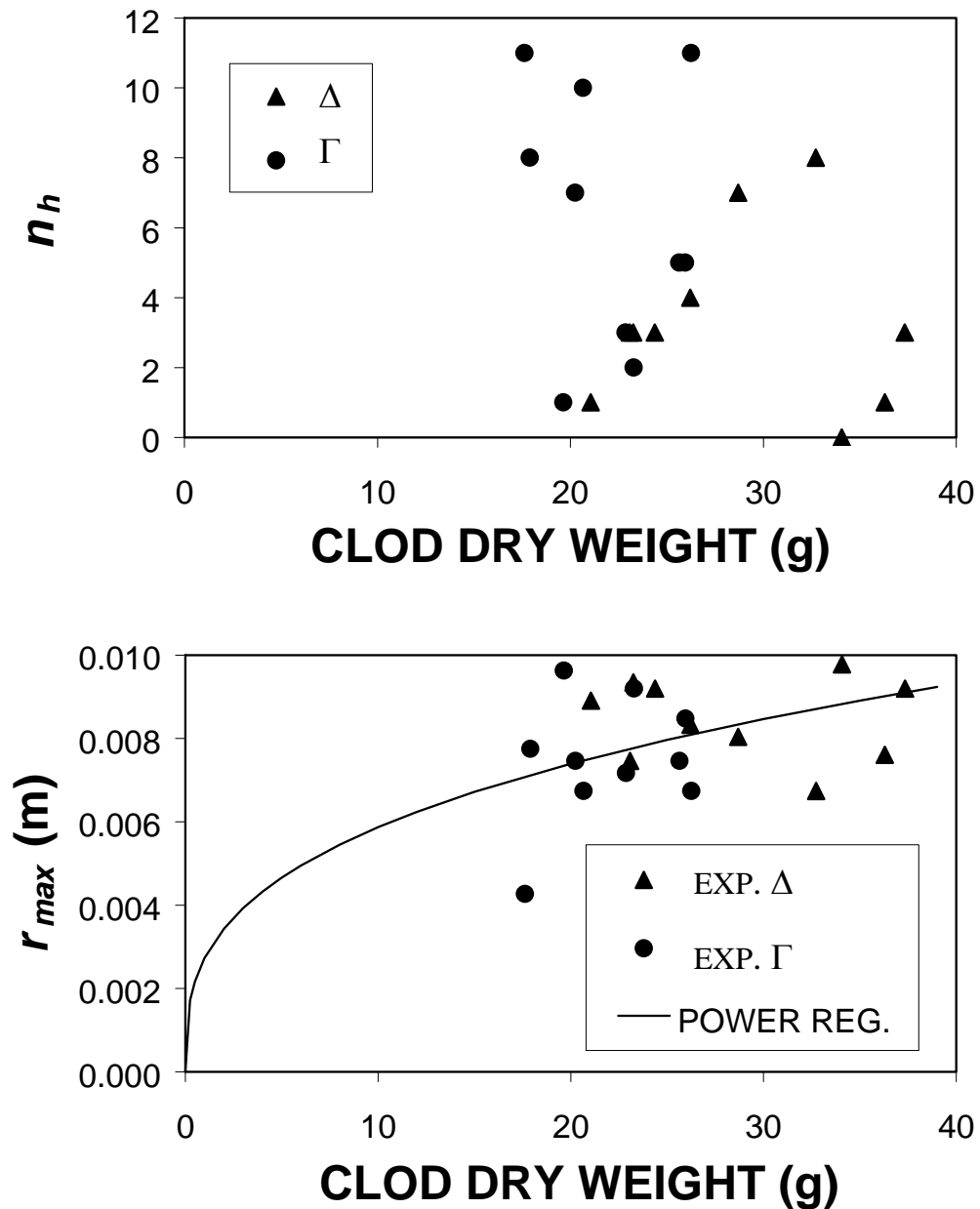
Immediately before the measurement of N<sub>2</sub>O emissions, the NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> content of clods which experienced the anaerobic pre-incubation (treatment A) was much lower than that of clods which did not (treatment B): 0.067 mmol N.kg<sup>-1</sup> and 6.4 mmol N.kg<sup>-1</sup>, respectively. This was due to the active denitrification which had occurred during the anaerobic period. In contrast, the NH<sub>4</sub><sup>+</sup> contents did not significantly differ between treatments A and B: they were 0.15 and 0.11 mmol N.kg<sup>-1</sup>, respectively.

Complementary measurements using <sup>15</sup>N tracing demonstrated that N<sub>2</sub>O emission did not come from nitrification (Khalil *et al.*, 2003b). It may be surprising that in these conditions, most of N<sub>2</sub>O emissions due to denitrification were observed in clods having the lowest initial NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> content. Moreover, the initial NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> content in clods of treatment A, equal to 28 mmol.m<sup>-3</sup> solution, was lower than the Michaelis constant for NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> in denitrification proposed in the literature e.g. 6 mol.m<sup>-3</sup> for intact cores (Hénault, 1993), 11.4-31.4 mol.m<sup>-3</sup> (Malhi *et al.*, 1990) and 0.3-3.8 mol.m<sup>-3</sup> (Zumft, 1997) for purified NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> reductase.

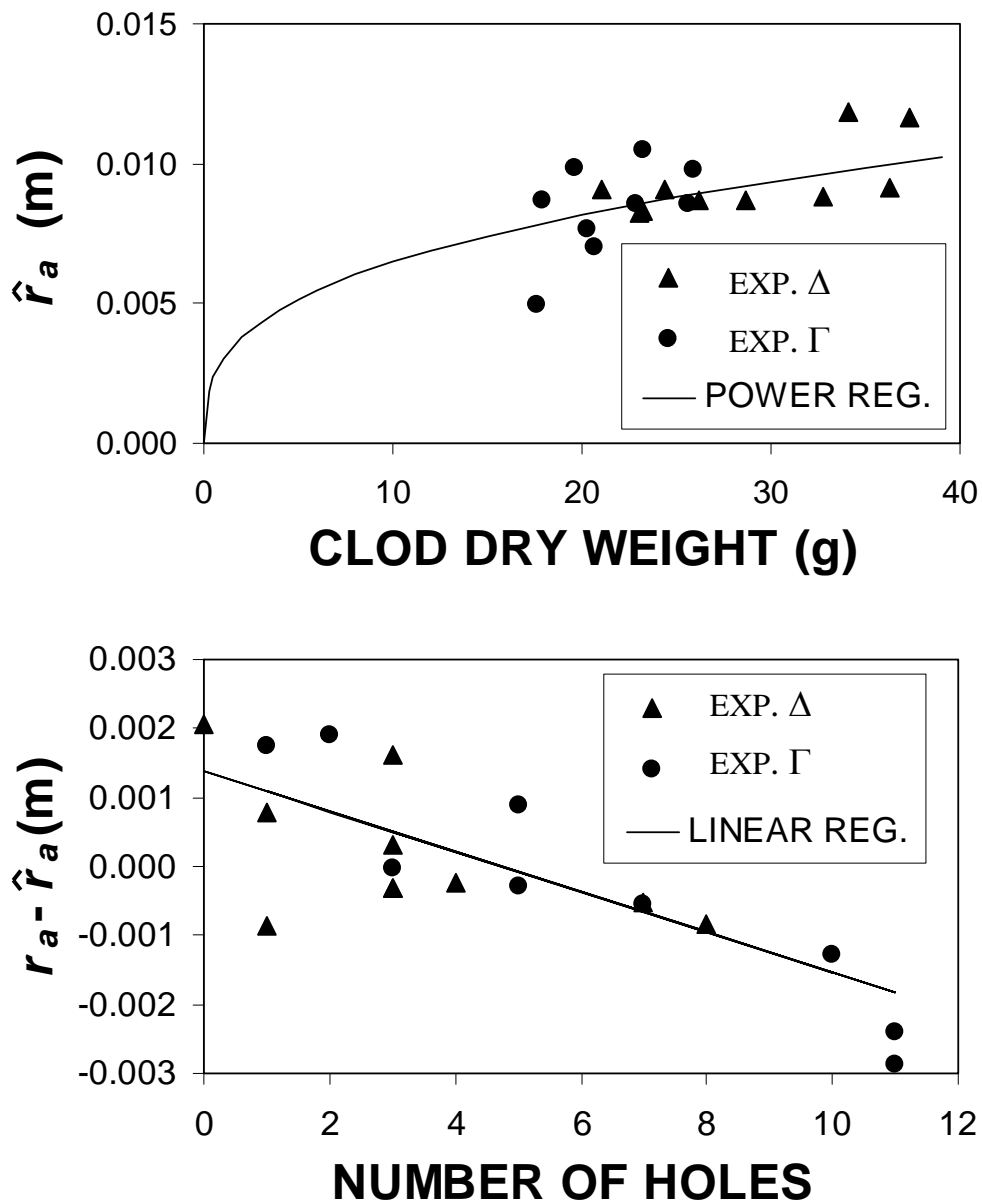


**Figure 3:** Nitrous oxide emission as a function of clod weight for treatment A (i.e. with anaerobic pre-incubation) and treatment (B) (i.e. without anaerobic pre-incubation). For treatment (B), emissions were measured without and with C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere.





**Figure 4.** Morphological characterization of centered  $\Delta$  and  $\Gamma$  clod sections after simulating their partial saturation at 5 cm water suction: a/ number of air-filled holes per clod, as a function of clod weight; b/ maximum distance of a clod point to the nearest air-filled pore in the section, as a function of clod weight.



**Figure 5.** Morphological characterization of centered  $\Delta$  and  $\Gamma$  clod sections after simulating their saturation at 5 cm water suction: a/ twice surface to perimeter ratio ( $r_a$ ), as a function of clod weight; b/ deviation between the actual  $r_a$  and the estimated  $\hat{r}_a$ , and the number of air-filled holes on a section. ( $\hat{r}_a$  were obtained by fitting a 1/3 power regression to experimental  $r_a$ ).

## Parameter Estimation

### *Relation between Clod Structure and Weight*

The mean dry weight of the clods devoted to morphological characterization were  $28.7 \pm 3.7$  and  $22.0 \pm 2.0$  g for clods  $\Delta$  and  $\Gamma$ , respectively (confidence interval at  $p < 0.05$ ). The number of air-filled holes did not significantly differ between the two types of clods:  $4.8 \pm 1.5$ , as well as the maximal distance to the nearest air-filled pore which was  $8.0 \pm 0.6$  mm. There was no significant correlation ( $p < 0.05$ ) between the number of air-filled holes and the dry weight of clods (Fig. 4a). Similarly, the correlation between the maximal distance to the nearest air-filled pore and the clod weight was not significant, although it was possible to fit a cubic power regression to morphological measurements without bias (Fig. 4b). In contrast, the linear correlation coefficient between the clod mass  $m$  (g) and the estimated aggregate radius  $\hat{r}_a$  was significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) (Fig. 5a).

A relationship with a similar coefficient of correlation was found between with the following power function (Fig. 5a):

$$\hat{r}_a = \alpha(m)^{1/3} \quad (7)$$

The optimized value of  $\alpha$  was  $3.0 \text{ mm g}^{-1/3}$ .

Assuming that each clod is a set of  $n_a$  aggregates, its weight is then equal to:

$$m = \frac{4}{3} \pi \rho_b n_a r_a^3 \quad (8)$$

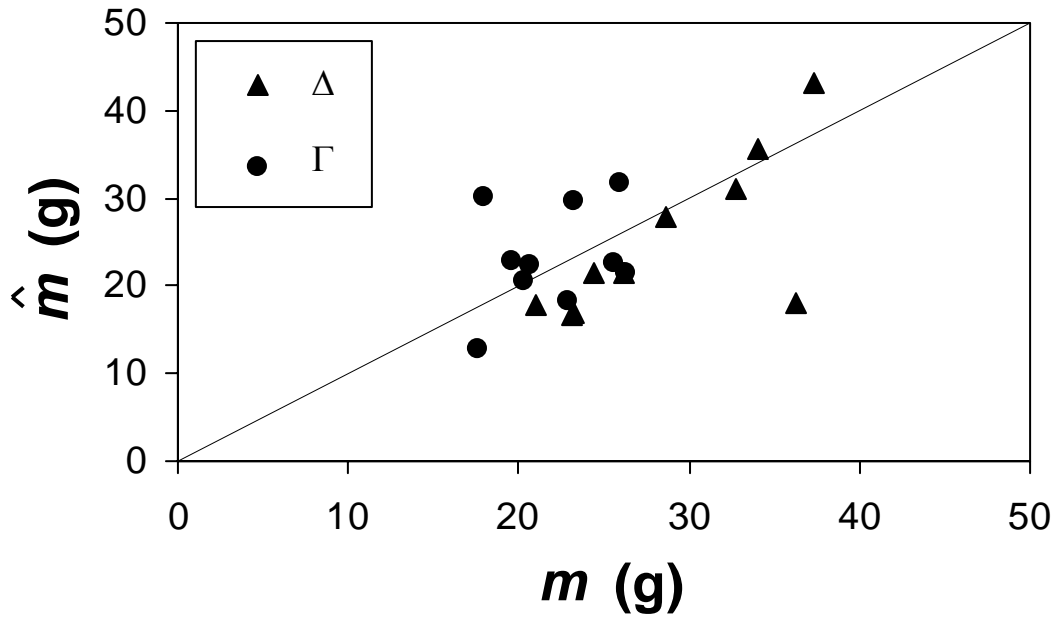
where  $\rho_b$  is the bulk textural density ( $\text{g.cm}^{-3}$ ). Equations 7 and 8 enable to calculate the number of aggregates:

$$n_a = \frac{3}{4\pi\rho_b\alpha^3} \quad (9)$$

Assuming a bulk textural density of  $1700 \text{ kg.m}^{-3}$ , we can calculate that the mean number of aggregates is  $n_a = 5.15$  per clod.

Pursuing the regression analysis, we found that the residuals (differences  $r_a - \hat{r}_a$ ) were linearly related to the number of air-filled holes per clod (Fig. 5b). The relationship can be written:

$$r_a - \hat{r}_a = \beta(n_h - \bar{n}_h) \quad (10)$$



**Figure 6:** Estimated clod weight as a function of actual ones, for 10  $\Delta$  and 10  $\Gamma$  clods devoted to morphological characterizations. The estimated clod weight is a function of the estimated surface – to – perimeter ratio and the number of air-filled holes on a centered clod section (see Eq. (5) in the text).

where  $n_h$  is the actual number of holes in the 2D clod section and  $\bar{n}_h$  is the mean number of holes of the set of clods. The slope of the regression line is  $\beta = -0.29 \text{ mm.hole}^{-1}$ . The mean number of holes was 4.80. The holes diameters measured by image analysis varied from 0.6 to 1.4 mm. The theoretical values of  $\beta$  which can be calculated using the changes in area and perimeter due to the presence of holes, were close to the measured slope since they varied from  $-0.11$  to  $-0.29 \text{ mm.hole}^{-1}$  for the 0.6 and 1.4 mm diameters, respectively. Therefore, deviations between  $r_a$  and  $\hat{r}_a$  mainly result from the presence of holes, and variations in roughness of external perimeter versus clod weight have not to be invoked.

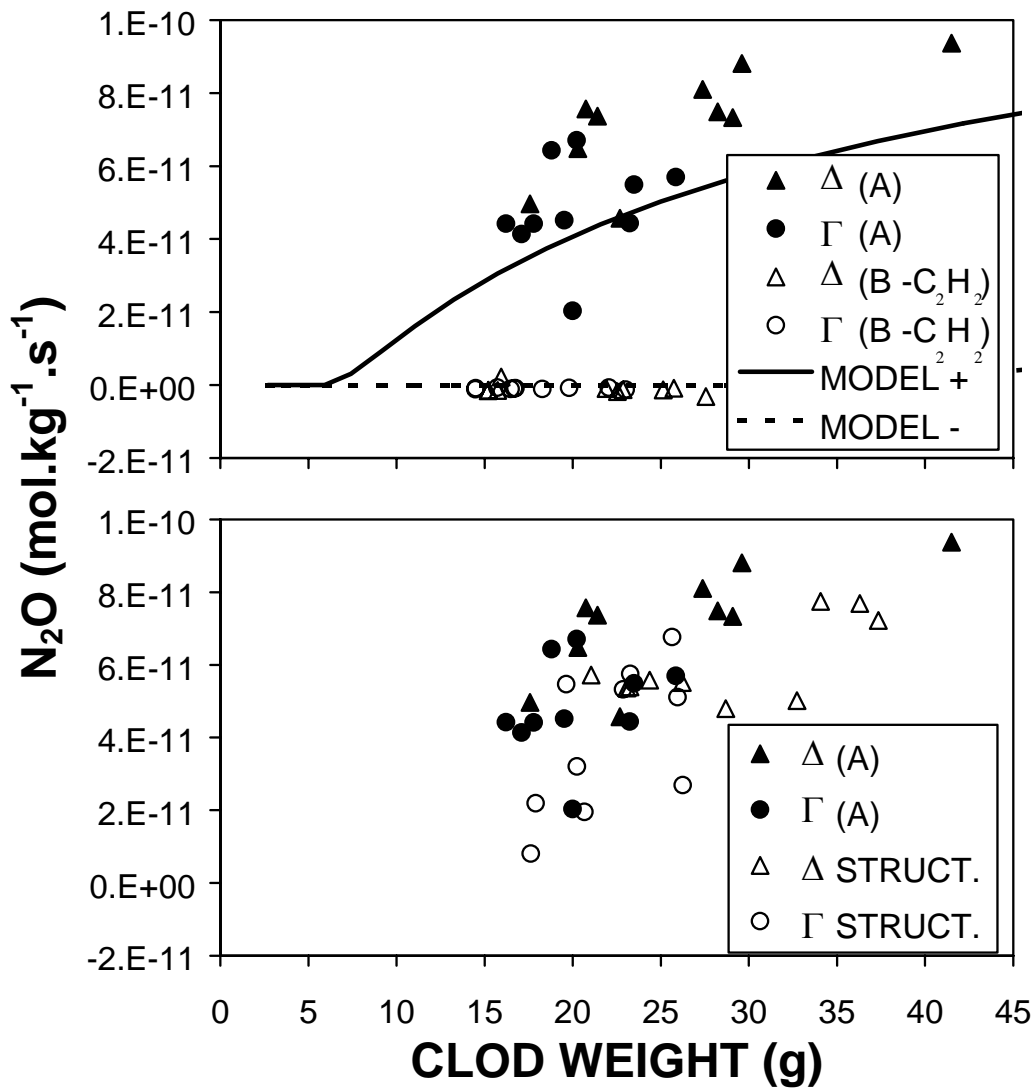
To check the consistency of the previous results, we have calculated a theoretical clod mass  $\hat{m}$  (g) as a function of the theoretical radius  $\hat{r}_a$  and compared it with the experimental value. The theoretical mass is:

$$\hat{m} = \frac{4}{3} \pi n_a \rho_b \hat{r}_a^3 \quad (11)$$

where  $n_a$  is the number of equivalent aggregates within a clod. We assume that the theoretical radius  $\hat{r}_a$  is the actual radius  $r_a$  minored or majored by the effect of holes, as indicated by equation (10). Combining equations (10) and (11) yields:

$$\hat{m} = \frac{4}{3} \pi n_a \rho_b \left( r_a \left( 1 - \frac{\beta(n_h - \bar{n}_h)}{r_a} \right) \right)^3 \quad (12)$$

When comparing observed and simulated values of clod mass, we fixed the parameters  $\beta$  and  $\bar{n}_h$  to the values previously found and we optimized the parameter  $n_a$ . We found a good agreement between  $m$  and  $\hat{m}$  (Fig. 6). The estimated value of the number of aggregates constitutive of a clod ( $n_a$ ) was 4.65. It was close to the previous estimate (5.15) made using equation (9). Then we used  $\beta$  and  $\bar{n}_h$  estimates and equation (12) in order to propose two estimates of the effective radius of an aggregate constitutive of a clod, using either the individual hole number measured on the clod (Eq. 13a) or the mean number of holes measured on the set of clods (Eq. 13b):



**Figures 7a-b:** Comparison between simulated and experimental  $N_2O$  emissions of clods for treatments (A) and (B), when there is no  $C_2H_2$  supply: a/ simulations performed for fictitious clods having 4.8 holes in a centered section; b/ simulations performed only for treatment (A) individually for clods devoted to morphological analyses, accounting for the observed hole numbers and surface to perimeter ratios.

$$\tilde{r}_a = \left( \frac{m}{\frac{4}{3}\pi n_a \rho_b} \right)^{\frac{1}{3}} + \beta(n_h - \bar{n}_h) \quad (13a)$$

$$\tilde{r}_a = \left( \frac{m}{\frac{4}{3}\pi n_a \rho_b} \right)^{\frac{1}{3}} \quad (13b)$$

where  $\bar{n}_h$  is the mean number of holes per clod section, i.e. 4.80 in this study.

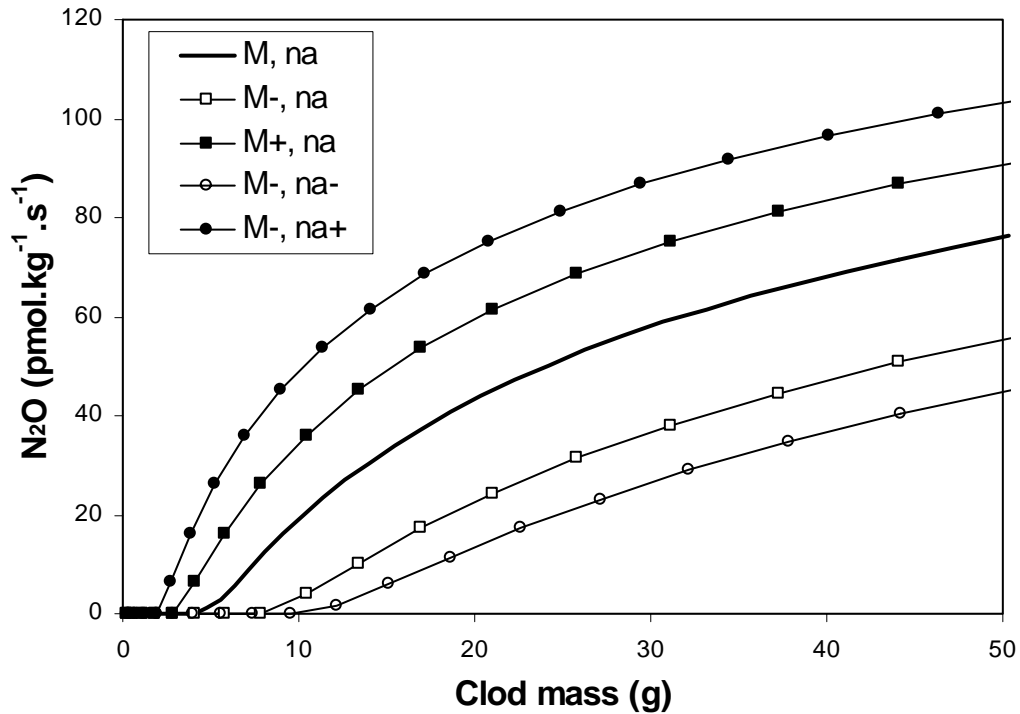
### Modeling Anaerobiosis and N<sub>2</sub>O Emissions within Clods

Using the previously estimated parameters (Table 1) and the number of holes per clod determined by image analysis on each clod, we could simulate the net N<sub>2</sub>O emission of soil clods in treatments A and B using equations 1-5 and 13. The observed and simulated values are given in Fig. 7. Two simulations were performed: one assuming a constant number of holes per clod in all clods, equal to the observed mean (Fig. 7a, Eq. 13a); the other corresponding to the measured number of holes in each individual clod (Fig. 7b, Eq. 13b). The model was able to predict the effect of treatments A and B on N<sub>2</sub>O emissions; it also predicted reasonably well the variation in N<sub>2</sub>O emission rates within each treatment. However, a bias between simulated and experimental values remains in treatment A: the model underestimated N<sub>2</sub>O emission rates, particularly for the heaviest clods. Accounting for the variability of the number of air-filled holes between clods lead to simulate denitrification rates for clods closer from experimental values in treatment A (Fig. 7b).

However, there may be uncertainties on parameter estimates; moreover, they may vary between clods. In order to assess the effect of a change in microbial activity and clod structure, we performed additional simulations, varying either on O<sub>2</sub> consumption rate  $M$  alone or simultaneously on O<sub>2</sub> consumption rate  $M$  and the number of aggregates per clod  $n_a$ . The relative variation in parameters was  $\pm 33\%$  (Table 1). Regarding clod structure, variations in the number of aggregates per clod  $n_a$  affects the clod mass for a given equivalent aggregate radius  $r_a$ , and therefore modify the relationship between the clod mass and equivalent radius







**Figure 8.** Simulated  $N_2O$  emissions of clods submitted to treatment A, using either the mean values of  $O_2$  consumption rate ( $M$ ) and the mean number of aggregates per clod ( $n_a$ ) or these values decreased or increased by 33%. Simulations  $M+$  and  $M-$  were performed with  $M$  modified only; simulations ( $M+$ ,  $n_{a-}$ ) and ( $M-$ ,  $n_{a+}$ ) were performed with either  $M$  increased and  $n_a$  reduced, or  $M$  reduced and  $n_a$  increased. All clods are assumed to have 4.80 holes in a centered section.

for clod aeration. The variations in  $M$  appear to greatly affect  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  emission rate by clods (Fig. 8): for a mean clod of 25 g dry weight, the minimum and maximum  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  emission rates correspond to a 42% reduction and a 32% increase of the mean emission rate, respectively.

If we add to this variation a variation in clod structure (i.e. either the minimum  $M$  with the maximum  $n_a$ , or the maximum  $M$  with the minimum  $n_a$ ), the range of  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  emission rates was larger (Fig. 8): for a mean clod of 25 g dry weight, the minimum and maximum  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  emission rates correspond to a 73% reduction and a 65% increase of the mean emission rate, respectively.

Dealing with clods used in this study, it was previously shown that  $\text{O}_2$  consumption rate was higher for clods  $\Delta$  than for clods  $\Gamma$  ( $14.3 \text{ nmol.kg}^{-1}.\text{s}^{-1}$  and  $10.1 \text{ nmol.kg}^{-1}.\text{s}^{-1}$ , respectively): the  $\text{O}_2$  consumption rate of clods  $\Delta$  was 17% higher than the retained mean value and 17% lower in clods  $\Gamma$ . These differences have increased the dependency of  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  emission rate to clod mass (see Fig. 7a), since the mean mass of clods  $\Gamma$  was lower than that of clods  $\Delta$ . In addition,  $\text{CO}_2$  production rates (and therefore  $\text{O}_2$  consumption rates) varied between clods: the measured coefficients of variation were 17 % and 14 % for clods  $\Delta$  and  $\Gamma$ , respectively. These variations lead to a variability in clod  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  emission rates, as well as the variability in clod structure as it has already been shown, simulating the  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  emission rates of clods that have been devoted to soil structure characterization.

The model supposed that  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  emission through nitrification was negligible. In order to check this assumption,  $^{15}\text{N}$  tracing technique was used for clods  $\Delta$  submitted to anaerobic pre-incubation (Khalil *et al.*, 2003b). Clods that experimented such conditions anaerobic pre-incubation were simultaneously submitted  $\text{C}_2\text{H}_2$  in order to check whether denitrification stopped or not at the end of this pre-incubation period. Previous studies have shown that both  $\text{NH}_4^+$  oxidation and  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  production through nitrification are inhibited by  $\text{C}_2\text{H}_2$  if its partial pressure is higher than 1-10 kPa (Mosier, 1980). Moreover, removing  $\text{C}_2\text{H}_2$  is not sufficient to stop its inhibitory effect: Berg *et al.* (1982) noted that  $\text{C}_2\text{H}_2$  effect had not ceased 7 days after removal of  $\text{C}_2\text{H}_2$ , even with a partial pressure of 10 Pa.

Many studies indicated that the  $\text{N}_2\text{O}/(\text{N}_2\text{O}+\text{N}_2)$  ratio could vary with various factors (Granli and Bockman, 1994) such as organic matter,  $\text{NO}_3^-$  content (Blackmer and Bremner, 1979) and competition between  $\text{NO}_3^-$  and  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  (Baumann *et al.*, 1996; Otte *et al.*, 1996; Khalil *et al.*, 2003a). Although the model supposed that  $\text{N}_2\text{O}/(\text{N}_2\text{O}+\text{N}_2)$  ratio was constant, the presence of  $\text{C}_2\text{H}_2$  during anaerobic pre-incubation does not only inhibit  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  reduction, but also the synthesis of  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  reductase (Klemmedtsson *et al.*, 1977): this inhibitor can have

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maintained the  $N_2O/(N_2O+N_2)$  ratio at a high value, even have lead to increase this ratio if denitrifiers have grown significantly during the anaerobic pre-incubation.

In addition, particulate organic matter was neglected in our model, although Parkin (1987) found that a small piece of organic matter constituting 1% of the total core weight could be responsible for 85% of the denitrification rate. Recently, Parry *et al.* (2000) suggested that the relative contribution of POM-C to clod denitrification rates depends on their specific respiratory and denitrifying activities and on the structure of the clod, which could favor or inhibit denitrification activity at POM level, as a consequence of their aeration status. Although we found POM contents and respiratory and denitrifying activities comparable to those of Parry *et al.* (2000), we could not find any significant correlation between POM content and denitrification rates (results not shown). The absence of correlation could result from the small POM dimension in our clods, but this hypothesis remains to be proven.

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## CONCLUSION

Khalil *et al.* (2003b) have shown that a generalized anaerobic pre-incubation period markedly stimulates the microbial respiration and the net N<sub>2</sub>O emission of soil clods during a subsequent aerobic incubation, and that N<sub>2</sub>O emission is due to denitrification. The objective of the present work was to check whether the increase in aerobic respiration and maximum denitrification activities could explain the stimulation of N<sub>2</sub>O emissions, accounting for the actual structure of soil clods. This objective was fulfilled using a model that takes into account clod structure and calculates the anaerobic volume of the clod and its denitrification behavior. The model was able to simulate experimental data, although some bias remained. It showed the importance of taking into accounting clod structure. Changing model hypotheses, for example the temporal variation of N<sub>2</sub>O/(N<sub>2</sub>O+N<sub>2</sub>) ratio of denitrification products, could modify the model outputs. The results of this work should to explain the variability of N<sub>2</sub>O emissions *in situ*. Nevertheless, some characteristic features retained in our experimental procedure have surely distinguished clod behavior from their behavior *in situ*. Firstly, the presence of C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>2</sub> during the anaerobic pre-incubation of this study inhibited the synthesis and activation of N<sub>2</sub>O reductase during this period, whereas an actual phase of anaerobiosis *in situ* would probably favor N<sub>2</sub>O reductase and therefore decrease the N<sub>2</sub>O/(N<sub>2</sub>O+N<sub>2</sub>) ratio of denitrification products. Secondly, the extent of an anaerobic event may vary with time and space, and therefore affect the microbial behavior after such periods. After an anaerobic period, microbial aerobic respiration decreases in a few days from a high value to a value nearly equal to the respiration before anaerobic pre-incubation. The results obtained in this study have to be extended to various dates after generalized anaerobic periods. In order to predict these parameter variations, it is required to know the soil history and particularly the alternations of anaerobic and aerobic periods.

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# CHAPITRE 5

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## **INFLUENCE DE LA PRESSION EN O<sub>2</sub> SUR LA PRODUCTION DE N<sub>2</sub>O PAR NITRIFICATION ET DENITRIFICATION PAR DES AGREGATS DE SOL**

**Ce chapitre 5 correspond à un article « en cours de soumission » pour la revue *Soil Biology and Biochemistry* : K. Khalil, B. Mary, P. Renault (2003)**

**Nitrous oxide production by nitrification and denitrification in soil aggregates as affected by O<sub>2</sub> concentration**



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## SUMMARY

Nitrous oxide emitted by soils can be produced either by denitrification in anoxic conditions or by nitrification in presence of oxygen. The relative importance of the two processes, particularly under varied partial pressures of O<sub>2</sub>, is not always known. This paper focuses on the influence of O<sub>2</sub> availability on N<sub>2</sub>O production by nitrification and denitrification in an arable Orthic Luvisol.

Soil aggregates (2-3 mm size), water unsaturated, received 116 mg N kg<sup>-1</sup> as ammonium sulphate labelled with <sup>15</sup>N and were incubated during 2 weeks at different O<sub>2</sub> partial pressures: 0, 0.3, 0.7, 1.4, 4 and 20.5 kPa. A <sup>15</sup>N tracing technique was used to quantify nitrification and denitrification rates. <sup>15</sup>N<sub>2</sub>O and <sup>15</sup>N<sub>2</sub> were measured.

O<sub>2</sub> availability appeared to strongly influence both nitrification and denitrification rates and also the release of N<sub>2</sub>O. Nitrification rates were reduced by a factor of 6-9 when O<sub>2</sub> decreased from 20.5 to 0.3 kPa. They were highly correlated with O<sub>2</sub> consumption rates. Denitrification mainly occurred in complete anoxic conditions. The proportion of N<sub>2</sub>O emitted by denitrification was estimated by two independent methods: one based on <sup>15</sup>N tracing using isotope composition of NH<sub>4</sub>, NO<sub>3</sub> and N<sub>2</sub>O, the other based on the measurement of the <sup>15</sup>N<sub>2</sub>O:<sup>15</sup>N<sub>2</sub> ratio. The two methods gave similar results. The highest N<sub>2</sub>O emissions were obtained under complete anoxic conditions and were due to denitrification. However emissions almost as important were obtained at day 14 with 1.4 kPa O<sub>2</sub> pressure, and they were due to nitrification. Nitrification was the main source of N<sub>2</sub>O at O<sub>2</sub> concentrations greater than 0.3 kPa. The N<sub>2</sub>O emissions due to nitrification were linearly related with the amounts of N nitrified, but the slope of the regression was highly dependent on O<sub>2</sub> concentration: it varied from 0.16% to 1.48% when O<sub>2</sub> concentration was reduced from 20.5 to 0.7 kPa. Emissions of N<sub>2</sub>O by nitrification may then be quite significant if nitrification occurs at a reduced O<sub>2</sub> concentration.

**Key-words:** denitrification, nitrification, nitrous oxide, oxygen, <sup>15</sup>N.

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## INTRODUCTION

Nitrous oxide is involved in the global greenhouse effect (Smith, 1990; IPCC, 1996). Its emission from soils results mainly from biological denitrification and nitrification (Groffman, 1991; Hénault and Germon, 1995; Conrad, 1996). A better knowledge of the contribution of each process could help to predict and mitigate N<sub>2</sub>O emissions by cultivated soils.

Nitrification and denitrification in soil often occur in close vicinity so that a substantial part of the NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> formed by nitrification diffuses to the anaerobic denitrification zone where it is reduced to N<sub>2</sub> (Nielsen *et al.*, 1996). The simultaneous occurrence of nitrification and denitrification in soil associated with N fertilisation has been suggested recently (Zanner and Bloom, 1995; Nielsen *et al.*, 1996; Abbasi *et al.*, 1997). Bremner and Blackmer (1981) observed nitrous oxide emissions from “well-aerated soils” which were not correlated with NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> but were significantly correlated with NH<sub>4</sub><sup>+</sup> concentrations. Parton *et al.* (1996) found that N<sub>2</sub>O fluxes through nitrification could be proportional to soil N turnover and that only high levels of soil NH<sub>4</sub> (>3 mg N kg<sup>-1</sup>soil) affected N<sub>2</sub>O emissions.

The sources of N<sub>2</sub>O can be identified by using selective inhibitors, sterilisation or by adding substrates. The disadvantage of nitrification inhibitors is that prevention of NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> production may affect the rate of denitrification. Sterilisation can be used to separate abiotic from biotic sources. Adding NH<sub>4</sub><sup>+</sup> or NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> as substrates cannot provide definitive identification of the sources of N<sub>2</sub>O unless the substrates are <sup>15</sup>N labelled. The relative importance of nitrification and denitrification can be assessed by measuring and comparing the isotope enrichments of the N<sub>2</sub>O, NH<sub>4</sub><sup>+</sup> and NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> pools (Stevens *et al.*, 1997).

The availability of O<sub>2</sub> in soil is one of the main factors regulating nitrification, denitrification and the release of N<sub>2</sub>O. Oxygen pressure is the main factor controlling denitrification through the activity and synthesis of denitrifying enzymes in soil (Tiedje, 1988). Denitrification has been considered as a strictly anaerobic process, but it is now well established that it can also occur in apparently aerobic environments. Many soil denitrifying micro-organisms have been found to be able to produce N<sub>2</sub>O over a wide range of oxygen pressures.

Conversely, nitrification is a strictly aerobic process since the NH<sub>4</sub><sup>+</sup> oxidation enzyme of nitrifying organisms requires O<sub>2</sub> for activation (Wood, 1987). The effect of O<sub>2</sub> on nitrification and associated N<sub>2</sub>O emissions has been studied more in continuous cultures than in soils.

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Bollmann and Conrad (1998) showed that N<sub>2</sub>O emitted by nitrification in soils was important at partial pressures higher than 0.1-0.5 kPa O<sub>2</sub>. Goreau *et al.* (1980), using sediment slurries, demonstrated that production of N<sub>2</sub>O by nitrification reached its maximum at 0.2 kPa O<sub>2</sub> pressure.

The mechanism of N<sub>2</sub>O production by nitrification is not completely elucidated (Blackmer *et al.*, 1980; Stevens and Laughlin, 1998). Three main hypotheses have been proposed:

1) a constant proportion of NH<sub>4</sub><sup>+</sup> can be converted to N<sub>2</sub>O during nitrification, resulting from various reactions of intermediates. Conrad (1990) proposed that N<sub>2</sub>O production could be the consequence of intermediate (HNO) formation during oxidation of NH<sub>2</sub>OH to NO<sub>2</sub><sup>-</sup>. HNO oxidation could also lead to the formation of another unknown compound which would be then oxidised to NO<sub>2</sub><sup>-</sup>. This hypothesis was retained in several models (Linn and Doran, 1984; Davidson, 1993; Parton *et al.*, 1996).

2) the use of NO<sub>2</sub><sup>-</sup> as an alternative electron acceptor during NH<sub>4</sub><sup>+</sup> oxidation for growth of nitrifiers when O<sub>2</sub> pressure is not high enough to supply these microbes all the required O<sub>2</sub> (Ritchie and Nicholas, 1972; Goreau *et al.*, 1980). The effect of O<sub>2</sub> pressure has been shown experimentally either directly by varying O<sub>2</sub> partial pressure (Bollmann and Conrad, 1998) or indirectly by varying soil moisture (Zanner and Bloom, 1995) and is accounted for in some models (Grant, 1995);

3) the partial oxidation of NH<sub>4</sub><sup>+</sup> into NO<sub>2</sub><sup>-</sup> in aerobic conditions, followed by NO<sub>2</sub><sup>-</sup> diffusion to anaerobic regions and its subsequent reduction into N<sub>2</sub>O by denitrification. Poth and Focht (1985) concluded that nitrite reduction to nitrous oxide by *N. europaea* is in accordance with the definition of denitrification: nitrous oxide production by nitrifiers is not correlated with nitrate additions but is correlated with ammonium additions, which can be explained by the requirement for ammonium as an electron source for nitrifier denitrification and by the lack of nitrate reductase activity in *N. europaea*.

The aim of this work was to quantify nitrification and denitrification and their specific contribution to N<sub>2</sub>O emissions in response to the O<sub>2</sub> concentration above the soil. The study was then conducted on small soil aggregates, water unsaturated, using <sup>15</sup>N isotope technique to quantify nitrification and denitrification rates and N<sub>2</sub> production.

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## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Soil sampling and conservation until measurements

Experiments were performed on an Orthic Luvisol (FAO classification) sampled at Mons-en-Chaussée in Northern France (49°80' N; 3°60' E). The soil was cultivated with maize in 2000. Its properties were as follows: clay, 194 g kg<sup>-1</sup>; silt, 706 g kg<sup>-1</sup>; sand, 68 g kg<sup>-1</sup>; pH<sub>water</sub>, 8.20; total CaCO<sub>3</sub>, 32 g kg<sup>-1</sup>; organic C, 8.52 g kg<sup>-1</sup>; total N 1.00 g kg<sup>-1</sup>. Soil clods were sampled in the ploughed layer (10-30 cm depth) after digging a trench, on September 2000. Two sets of clods were separated: clods Δ, with a massive structure and no visible porosity (resulting from compaction due to traffic) and clods Γ, with a fragmentary structure and visible porosity (Richard *et al.*, 1999). The clods were gently broken down immediately after sampling and then calibrated at field moisture condition (0.184 g water g<sup>-1</sup> dry soil): we kept clods between 2.5 and 3 cm size. In order to reduce microbial activity during storage, the clods were air-dried during 3 days to obtain a residual moisture close to 0.10 g g<sup>-1</sup> soil (corresponding to a water suction of -2 MPa). At the beginning of the present experiment (June 2002), the clods were sieved to obtain aggregates between 2 and 3.15 mm. The soil then still contained 0.07 g water g<sup>-1</sup> soil; its NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> content was 10.7 mgN kg<sup>-1</sup> and its NH<sub>4</sub><sup>+</sup> content was 0.1 mgN kg<sup>-1</sup>. The aggregates were rewetted by spraying deionised water to obtain a residual moisture close to 0.18 g g<sup>-1</sup>, and were pre-incubated at 20°C in airtight jars during 7 days.

### Experiment 1

The objective was to assess the influence of NH<sub>4</sub><sup>+</sup> concentration on N<sub>2</sub>O production. Twenty five g fw (fresh weight) of soil aggregates were put into 125 mL flasks, and various amounts of NH<sub>4</sub><sup>+</sup> were added as (NH<sub>4</sub>)<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub> solution to obtain 0, 80, 116 or 170 mg NH<sub>4</sub><sup>+</sup>-N kg<sup>-1</sup> soil. The addition of this solution rose the soil water content at 0.19 g g<sup>-1</sup>. Eighteen flasks were closed and incubated at 20°C for 14 days: 6 flasks were used for gas measurements (including 3 flasks without soil used as blanks), 3 flasks were used for final soil pH measurement and 12 flasks for mineral nitrogen measurements. N<sub>2</sub>O and mineral N were

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analysed at day 2, 4, 7, 10 and 14 (3 replicates at each date). Initial soil pH and mineral N were also measured at day 0 on additional samples. At each date, the atmosphere of flasks was renewed by opening the flasks for a few minutes. The same procedure and measurements were applied for each  $\text{NH}_4^+$  concentration.

## Experiment 2

Its objective was to assess the influence of  $\text{O}_2$  concentration on  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  production, at a given soil  $\text{NH}_4^+$  concentration (chosen as  $116 \text{ mg N kg}^{-1}$  soil according to results of experiment 1). Twenty five g f.w. (fresh weight) of soil aggregates were put in 125 mL flasks. A  $^{15}\text{N}$  labelled  $(\text{NH}_4)_2\text{SO}_4$  solution (50% atom enrichment) was added to each soil sample to obtain the  $116 \text{ mg NH}_4^+\text{-N kg}^{-1}$  concentration and a residual moisture of  $0.21 \text{ g water g}^{-1}$  soil. The flasks were closed and placed under 6 different  $\text{O}_2$  concentrations (nominally 0, 0.5, 1, 2, 4.8 and 21%  $\text{O}_2$  mixed with  $\text{N}_2$ ). Each flask received 3 successive cycles of 3 minutes vacuum and 3 minutes filling with a given mixture of  $\text{O}_2/\text{N}_2$  at atmospheric pressure. 18 flasks were incubated at  $20^\circ\text{C}$  for 14 days. The procedure was the same than in experiment 1, except that at each measurement date the atmosphere of flask was renewed with the corresponding  $\text{O}_2/\text{N}_2$  gas mixture by the same procedure (3 minutes vacuum and 3 minutes gas filling, repeated three times). The same measurements were performed as in experiment 1. Additional measurements consisted in  $\text{O}_2$  concentration,  $^{15}\text{N}_2$ ,  $^{15}\text{N}_2\text{O}$  in atmosphere and  $^{15}\text{N}$  mineral in soil. Oxygen consumption occurred during each measurement interval, so that the mean  $\text{O}_2$  pressure in each treatment was in fact: 0, 0.3, 0.7, 1.4, 4.0 and 20.5 kPa. These values will be used as effective  $\text{O}_2$  concentrations in the following.

## Gas measurements

For both experiments, gas samples were sampled at each date from the flasks: 1 mL of gas was sampled with a syringe for  $\text{O}_2$  and injected into an automatic CN analyzer (Carlo Erba, ANA 1500, Milan, Italy) that was adapted to measure  $\text{O}_2$  concentrations after replacing the previous Porapak QS column by a molecular sieve column (60-80 mesh, 1.8 m,  $50^\circ\text{C}$ ), which separates  $\text{O}_2$  and  $\text{N}_2$  gas. The CN analyzer was coupled to an integrator (Shimadzu, C-R6A, Chromatopac). 0.2 mL of gas was sampled with a syringe for  $^{15}\text{N}_2$  analysis, using a modified



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CN analyzer. Prior to the separation of N<sub>2</sub> and O<sub>2</sub>, the gas sample successively passed through a water absorbent, a CO<sub>2</sub> trap and a N<sub>2</sub>O cryogenic trap and finally an oven filled with reduced copper before entering an isotope ratio mass spectrometer (Fisons, Isochrom-EA, Manchester, England).

Two hundred fifty mL gas was sampled with dual-ended flasks previously vacuumed, for N<sub>2</sub>O and <sup>15</sup>N<sub>2</sub>O analysis. The analysis was made with the mass spectrometer after pre-concentration using the 'trace gas' system (Micromass, Trace gas, Manchester, England).

### **Mineral N measurements**

The mineral N content of clods was extracted with a KCl M solution (soil:solution ratio = 1:5). Measurements were performed with a TRAACS 2000 analyzer (Bran & Luebbe, Germany) using the methods proposed by Kamphake *et al.* (1970) for NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> and NO<sub>2</sub><sup>-</sup> analysis and Krom (1980) for NH<sub>4</sub><sup>+</sup> analysis. The <sup>15</sup>N-NH<sub>4</sub><sup>+</sup> and <sup>15</sup>N-(NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup>+NO<sub>2</sub><sup>-</sup>) were separated successively by micro-diffusion and collected on a glass fibre disc (6 mm diameter) impregnated with 10 µL of 1M H<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub> solution (Brooks *et al.*, 1989). The discs are then placed in tin capsules and analysed in the elementary analyzer - mass spectrometer equipment.

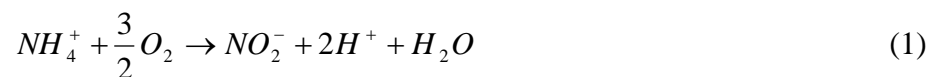
### **pH measurement**

For pH measurement, we added a mass of ultra pure water equal to the double of soil mass in each flask. The flask was closed and shaken for 10 minutes. The mixture was poured in a beaker and left for 2 minutes. The pH was then recorded each minute during 5 minutes using calomel/glass and pH-meter. Measurements were done at the beginning of incubation on 10 replicates and at the end of incubation in each treatment on 3 replicates.

### **Nitrogen rates calculations**

N rates were calculated using measurements of mineral -N and -<sup>15</sup>N and FLUAZ model (Mary *et al.*, 1998). This model combines a numerical method for solving the differential system given by the N and <sup>15</sup>N mass equations and a non linear fitting program for optimising

the N rates parameters by minimizing the difference between observed and simulated N and  $^{15}\text{N}$  data (amounts and isotopic excess of  $\text{NH}_4^+$  and  $\text{NO}_3^-$ ). Nitrification rate could be estimated from  $\text{NO}_3^-$  experimental accumulation, but this estimate would not be as accurate as using the model. The model was used in experiment 2 to calculate mineralisation (m), nitrification (n) and denitrification (d) for the different  $\text{O}_2$  concentrations. We assumed that immobilisation was negligible, since no readily decomposable organic nitrogen was added.  $\text{NH}_3$  volatilisation was also neglected, on the basis of previous measurements (results not shown). These assumptions were confirmed by the measured  $^{15}\text{N}$  balance ( $^{15}\text{NH}_4^+ + ^{15}\text{NO}_2^- + ^{15}\text{NO}_3^- + ^{15}\text{N}_2\text{O} + ^{15}\text{N}_2$ ) that did not differ significantly from 100% in any of the treatments. We also assumed that mineralisation rate was the same in all treatments at a given time interval. This assumption allowed to calculate more precisely nitrification and denitrification rates. Nitrification rates were supposed to follow first order kinetics, whereas mineralisation and denitrification zero order kinetics during each time interval. The two stages of nitrification are the following:



FLUAZ model does not directly accounts for  $\text{NO}_2^-$  compartment. It considers the sum ( $\text{NO}_2^- + \text{NO}_3^-$ ) and therefore calculates the ammonium oxidation rate (rate  $n_i$ ), i.e. oxidation into  $\text{NO}_2^-$ . The oxidation rate into  $\text{NO}_3^-$  (rate  $n_a$ ) was calculated afterwards using measurements of  $\text{NO}_2^-$  pool ( $N_i$ ), as follows:

$$n_a = n_i - \frac{\Delta N_i}{\Delta t} \quad (3)$$

Furthermore, we have compared  $\text{O}_2$  consumption rate with nitrification rate. Regarding the stoichiometry of the previous equations relative to  $\text{O}_2$  consumption, we calculated the following nitrification rate:

$$n = \frac{3n_i + n_a}{4} \quad (4)$$

## RESULTS

### Effect of $\text{NH}_4^+$ concentration

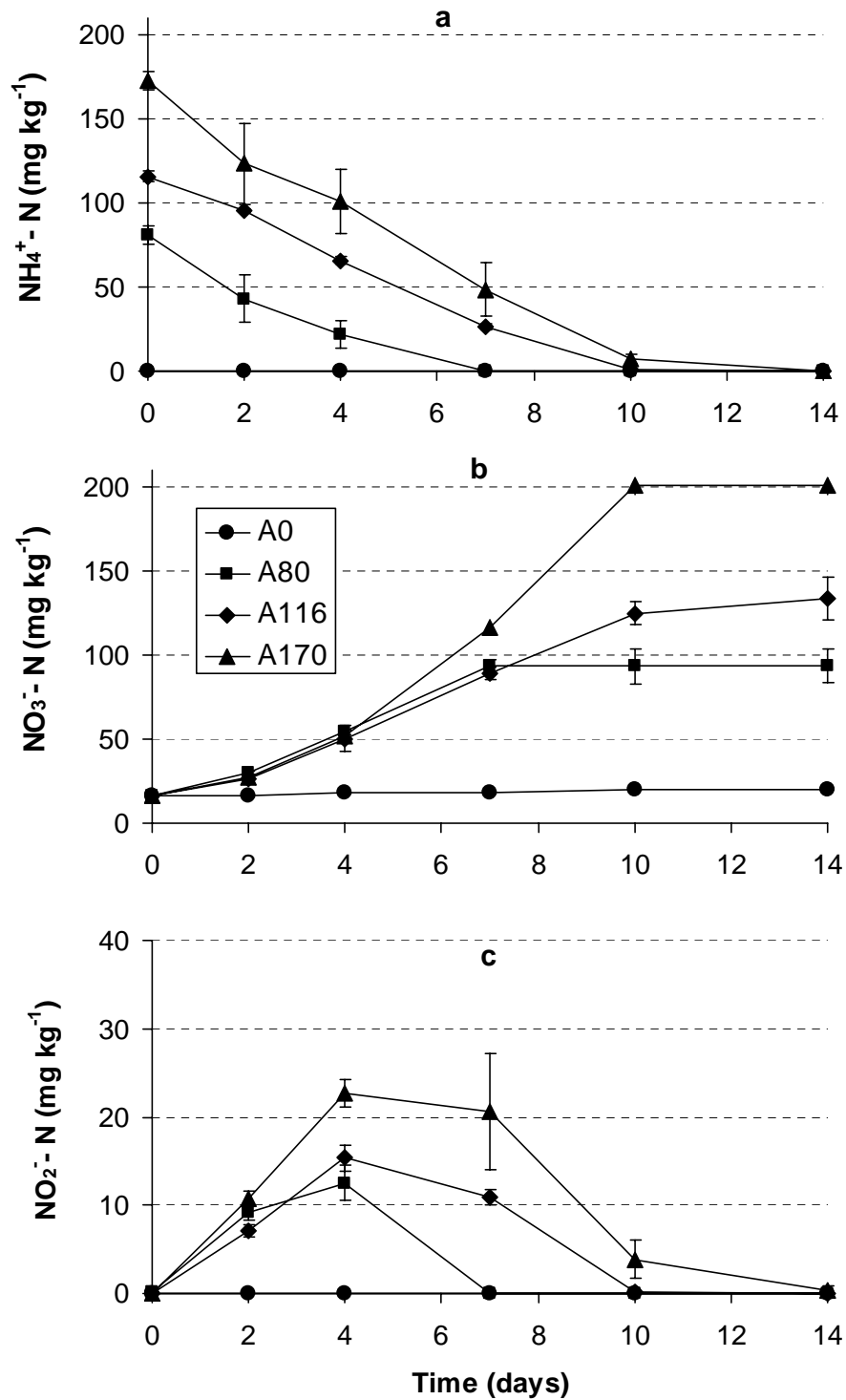
The evolution of soil mineral N pools during the 14 days incubation at atmospheric  $\text{O}_2$  concentration (experiment 1) is given in Figure 1. Ammonium and  $\text{NO}_3^-$  concentrations remained almost stable in the control (i.e. without addition of  $\text{NH}_4^+$ ), whereas they decreased and increased, respectively, for the 3  $\text{NH}_4^+$  treatments (addition of 80, 116 and 170 mg N  $\text{kg}^{-1}$ , Fig. 1a,b). Nitrite concentration increased then decreased with time, except for the control. The higher the initial concentration of  $\text{NH}_4^+$ , the higher was the peak of  $\text{NO}_2^-$ . The maximal value was 22.7 mg N  $\text{kg}^{-1}$  for the addition of 170 mg N  $\text{kg}^{-1}$  (Fig. 1c).

The nitrification kinetics were calculated using changes in mineral N contents (Table 1). They appear to depend on the initial  $\text{NH}_4^+$  concentrations. Without  $\text{NH}_4^+$  addition, the nitrification was low, in average 0.27 mg N  $\text{kg}^{-1} \text{day}^{-1}$  (and equal to net mineralisation). The highest  $\text{NH}_4^+$  and  $\text{NO}_2^-$  oxidation rates were observed with the highest  $\text{NH}_4^+$  concentration (A170): 19.1 and 23.7 mg N  $\text{kg}^{-1} \text{day}^{-1}$ , respectively. The initial rates of  $\text{NH}_4^+$  oxidation were greater than the initial rates of  $\text{NO}_2^-$  oxidation. Then the  $\text{NO}_2^-$  oxidation rates ( $n_a$ ) increased more with time than the  $\text{NH}_4^+$  oxidation rates ( $n_i$ ).

### Effect of $\text{O}_2$ concentration

#### *Mineral N and $^{15}\text{N}$*

The evolution of soil mineral N pools during the 14 days of incubation at various  $\text{O}_2$  concentrations (experiment 2) is given in Figure 2, for a fixed initial  $\text{NH}_4^+$  concentration (116 mg N  $\text{kg}^{-1}$ ). Ammonium concentration decreased and  $\text{NO}_3^-$  concentration increased in all treatments, except at 0 %  $\text{O}_2$  concentration: in this case,  $\text{NH}_4^+$  concentration remained more or less constant and  $\text{NO}_3^-$  concentration fell from 10.7 to 0.1 mg N  $\text{kg}^{-1}$  within 7 days.  $\text{NO}_2^-$  concentration increased then decreased with time, except for the lowest  $\text{O}_2$  concentrations (0 and 0.3 kPa); in these treatments, nitrite concentration remained negligible during the whole incubation period. The mineral N content responded markedly to  $\text{O}_2$  concentration. The higher the  $\text{O}_2$  concentration, the faster was the disappearance of  $\text{NH}_4^+$  and the increase of

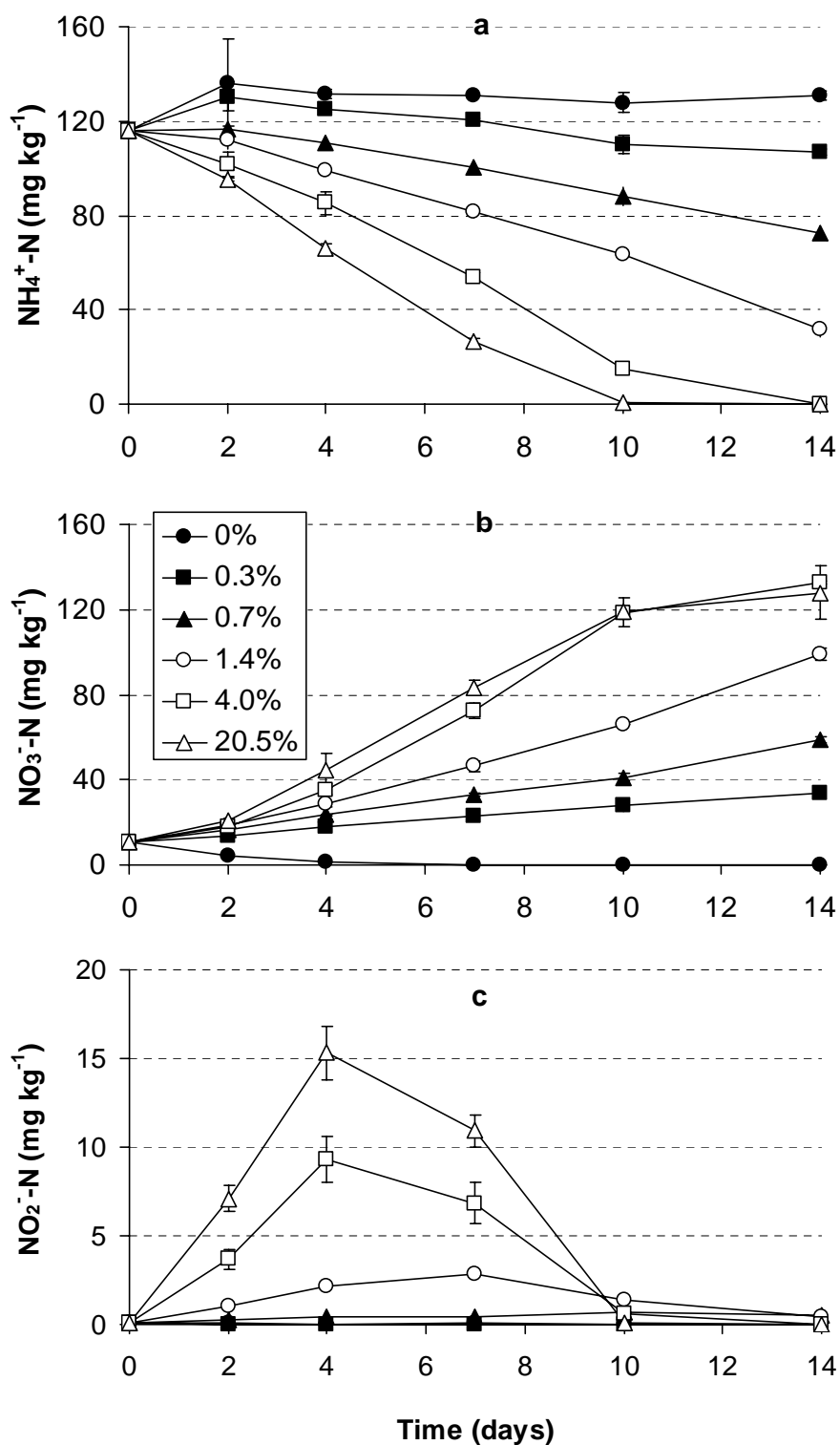


**Figure 1.** Variation of mineral N ( $\text{mg N kg}^{-1}$ ) with time in soil with various amounts of  $\text{NH}_4^+$  added at time 0. A0: control (no addition), A80:  $80 \text{ mg N kg}^{-1}$ , A116:  $116 \text{ mg N kg}^{-1}$ ; A170:  $170 \text{ mg N kg}^{-1}$ . **a)**  $\text{NH}_4^+$  concentration; **b)**  $\text{NO}_3^-$  concentration; **c)**  $\text{NO}_2^-$  concentration. Vertical bars are the standard deviations of means

Period (days)	A0		A80		A116		A170	
	$n_i$	$n_a$	$n_i$	$n_a$	$n_i$	$n_a$	$n_i$	$n_a$
<b>0-2</b>	0.0	0.0	15.1	10.6	9.4	5.9	17.8	12.4
<b>2-4</b>	0.6	0.6	12.2	10.5	15.3	11.2	14.8	8.8
<b>4-7</b>	0.2	0.2	8.0	12.2	12.3	13.7	19.1	19.8
<b>7-10</b>	0.5	0.5	0.0	0.0	8.5	12.1	18.1	23.7
<b>10-14</b>	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	1.2	1.2	0.5	1.4

**Table 1.**  $\text{NH}_4^+$  oxidation rates ( $n_i$ ,  $\text{mg N kg}^{-1} \text{ d}^{-1}$ ) and  $\text{NO}_2^-$  oxidation rates ( $n_a$ ,  $\text{mg N kg}^{-1} \text{ d}^{-1}$ ) in soil incubated at atmospheric  $\text{O}_2$  concentration, for different time intervals and initial ammonium concentrations (0, 80, 116 and 170  $\text{mg N kg}^{-1}$ ).

$n_a$  was calculated on the basis of  $\text{NO}_3^-$  accumulation and  $n_i$  on the basis of  $\text{NH}_4^+$  disappearance and  $\text{NO}_2^-$  variation.



**Figure 2.** Variation of mineral N ( $\text{mg N kg}^{-1}$ ) with time in soil incubated at different  $\text{O}_2$  concentrations: 0, 0.3, 0.7, 1.4, 4.0 and 20.5%: **a)**  $\text{NH}_4^+$  concentration; **b)**  $\text{NO}_3^-$  concentration; **c)**  $\text{NO}_2^-$  concentration. Vertical bars are the standard deviations of means

Period (days)	0%			0.3%			0.7%			1.4%			4.0%			20.5%		
	NH <sub>4</sub> <sup>+</sup>	NO <sub>3</sub> <sup>-</sup>	N <sub>2</sub> O	NH <sub>4</sub> <sup>+</sup>	NO <sub>3</sub> <sup>-</sup>	N <sub>2</sub> O	NH <sub>4</sub> <sup>+</sup>	NO <sub>3</sub> <sup>-</sup>	N <sub>2</sub> O	NH <sub>4</sub> <sup>+</sup>	NO <sub>3</sub> <sup>-</sup>	N <sub>2</sub> O	NH <sub>4</sub> <sup>+</sup>	NO <sub>3</sub> <sup>-</sup>	N <sub>2</sub> O	NH <sub>4</sub> <sup>+</sup>	NO <sub>3</sub> <sup>-</sup>	N <sub>2</sub> O
0 - 2	41.24 (1.5)	0.00 (.01)	0.31 (.05)	40.69 (2.07)	4.85 (.5)	4.07 (3.43)	41.25 (1.26)	7.08 (3.24)	17.58 (2.02)	40.65 (1.97)	8.01 (.78)	20.70 (2.12)	39.73 (2.72)	9.97 (.4)	11.64 (2.92)	41.22 (1.29)	9.94 (.01)	4.07 (3.49)
2 - 4	41.43 (.69)	0.00 (.01)	0.87 (.42)	39.82 (2.86)	12.66 (.44)	10.14 (3.8)	41.66 (.57)	17.21 (1.76)	27.64 (.4)	38.65 (2.07)	20.83 (.66)	37.30 (6.83)	38.43 (1.8)	24.34 (1.43)	30.98 (2.02)	40.75 (.84)	28.91 (4.29)	24.56 (4.84)
4 - 7	38.45 (1.02)	0.01 (.01)	0.01 (.01)	38.81 (3.27)	18.04 (.3)	3.70 (2.1)	40.28 (1.6)	23.55 (.25)	24.80 (.55)	38.12 (2.29)	28.35 (1.37)	26.08 (2.41)	38.60 (1.22)	32.34 (1.53)	32.92 (4.56)	39.66 (1.03)	37.62 (4.46)	31.91 (3.13)
7 - 10	38.51 (.72)	0.01 (.01)	0.18 (.04)	38.76 (2.27)	23.20 (.6)	2.00 (1.45)	40.15 (1.26)	28.49 (.15)	31.56 (1.36)	40.19 (1.09)	32.95 (1.17)	29.53 (5.14)	38.25 (2.82)	36.84 (.47)	19.55 (6.52)	26.75 (.26)	37.61 (.31)	8.39 (5.67)
10 - 14	39.65 (.61)	0.01 (.01)	0.03 (.04)	40.09 (1.37)	27.05 (.69)	26.18 (4.75)	40.80 (.38)	33.69 (.11)	33.25 (1.05)	39.94 (.26)	35.76 (.15)	35.87 (1.06)	18.63 (1.85)	37.82 (.24)	11.77 (2.5)	7.06 (.01)	38.03 (.24)	2.57 (.71)

*Table 2. Atom% excess of NH<sub>4</sub><sup>+</sup>, NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> and N<sub>2</sub>O (mean and standard deviations values) measured in soil or gas samples at different incubation dates and different O<sub>2</sub> concentrations (0, 0.3; 0.7, 1.4, 4.0 and 20.5%)*

$\text{NO}_3^-$ , and the greater was the  $\text{NO}_2^-$  accumulation. The maximal  $\text{NO}_2^-$  concentration at atmospheric pressure was  $15.3 \text{ mg N kg}^{-1}$  (Fig. 2c).

The nitrification and denitrification rates, calculated using measurements of mineral N and  $^{15}\text{N}$  (Table 2) and FLUAZ model, are given at Table 3. Significant denitrification rates (i.e. greater than  $0.2 \text{ mg N kg}^{-1} \text{ d}^{-1}$  corresponding to the accuracy of FLUAZ calculations) were only observed in the 0 and 0.3 kPa  $\text{O}_2$  pressure treatments. Nitrification rates (both  $\text{NH}_4^+$  and  $\text{NO}_2^-$  oxidation rates) were markedly reduced when  $\text{O}_2$  concentration decreased: they decreased by a factor of 4-10 when  $\text{O}_2$  pressure fell from 20.5 to 0.3 kPa. Nitrification rates increased versus time in all treatments, except for the 20.5 kPa pressure in which it reached a maximum at day 4 and then decreased although the soil still contained exchangeable  $\text{NH}_4^+$ . For the highest values of  $\text{O}_2$  concentration, i.e. 4.0 and 20.5 kPa, the first step of nitrification ( $\text{NO}_2^-$  oxidation) was slightly slower at the beginning but increased faster than the first step ( $\text{NH}_4^+$  oxidation), as shown previously (experiment 1). For the lowest  $\text{O}_2$  pressures, 0.3 and 0.7 kPa, the two steps proceeded at the same rate, so that there was no  $\text{NO}_2^-$  accumulation. The reduction in  $\text{O}_2$  concentration then affected primarily the  $\text{NH}_4^+$  oxidation step.

#### *$\text{N}_2\text{O}$ and $^{15}\text{N}_2$ gas*

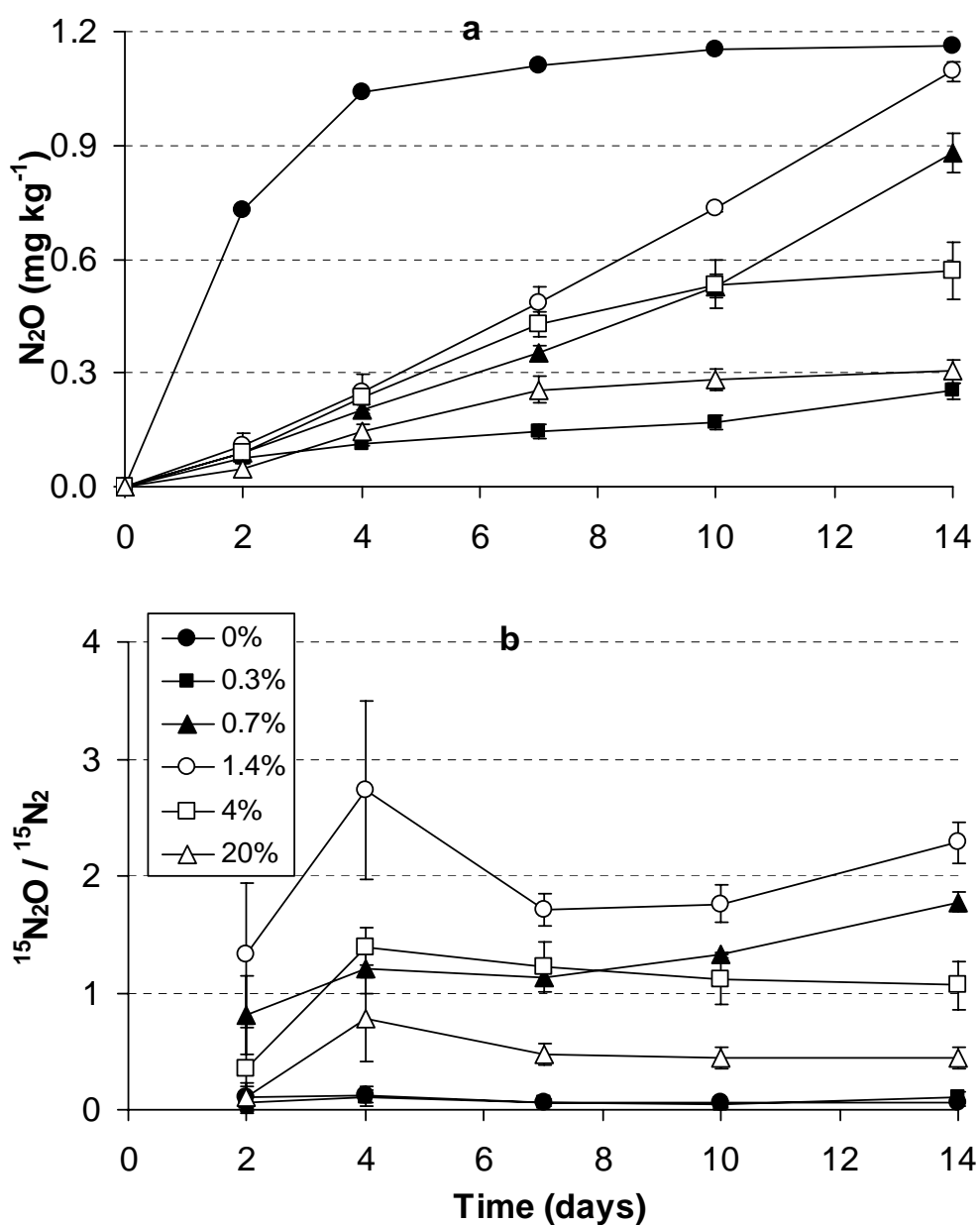
The cumulative  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  emissions by the soil submitted to different  $\text{O}_2$  concentrations are presented in Figure 3a. Nitrous oxide emissions increased with time during incubation and were highly dependent on  $\text{O}_2$  concentration in the flask atmosphere. The anaerobic situation (0%  $\text{O}_2$ ) resulted in the highest production of  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$ . The emission took place rapidly, since the amount of  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  produced at day 2 was  $0.73 \text{ mg N kg}^{-1}$ , corresponding to a rate of  $30 \text{ nmol N}_2\text{O kg}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-1}$ . It levelled off after day 7, when  $\text{NO}_3^-$  concentration was very small. At day 14, the amount of  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  evolved was  $1.16 \text{ mg N kg}^{-1}$ . The emission rate also decreased with time with the 0.3 kPa  $\text{O}_2$  pressure but the intensity was much smaller than in the anaerobic treatment. The kinetics of emission were very different in the treatments with 0.7 and 1.4 kPa  $\text{O}_2$  pressure: the emission rate increased with time. The amount of  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  produced at day 14 at 1.4 kPa  $\text{O}_2$  pressure was almost equivalent at the amount produced in anaerobic conditions:  $1.09 \text{ mg N kg}^{-1}$ . The productions of  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  in treatments with 4.0 and 20.5 kPa  $\text{O}_2$  were intermediate. It levelled off towards the end of the incubation, simultaneously to the nitrification process.

The corresponding measurements of the ratio  $^{15}\text{N}_2\text{O}:^{15}\text{N}_2$  are given in Figure 3b. Knowing that  $\text{N}_2$  emitted by the soil is exclusively derived from  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$ , we can assume that both gas have



Period (days)	0%			0.3%			0.7%			1.4%			4.0%			20.5%		
	$n_i$	$n_a$	$d$	$n_i$	$n_a$	$d$	$n_i$	$n_a$	$d$	$n_i$	$n_a$	$d$	$n_i$	$n_a$	$d$	$n_i$	$n_a$	$d$
<b>0 - 2</b>	0.0	0.0	3.2	1.7	1.7	0.2	2.8	2.7	0.0	4.1	3.6	0.0	7.3	5.5	0.0	10.2	6.7	0.0
<b>2 - 4</b>	0.0	0.0	1.4	1.7	1.7	0.0	3.2	3.1	0.0	6.1	5.5	0.0	9.8	7.0	0.0	16.0	11.9	0.0
<b>4 - 7</b>	0.0	0.0	0.5	1.5	1.5	0.0	3.5	3.5	0.0	6.2	6.0	0.0	11.0	11.8	0.0	13.8	15.2	0.0
<b>7 - 10</b>	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.6	1.6	0.4	3.3	3.2	0.0	6.5	7.0	0.0	13.3	15.4	0.0	9.2	12.8	0.0
<b>10 - 14</b>	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.3	1.2	0.0	4.2	4.2	0.0	8.2	8.4	0.0	4.2	4.3	0.0	0.6	0.7	0.0

**Table 3.** Nitrification rate ( $\text{NH}_4^+$  oxidation rate  $n_i$ ) and denitrification rate ( $d$ ) ( $\text{mg kg}^{-1} \text{d}^{-1}$ ), calculated using measured N and  $^{15}\text{N}$  pools and FLUAZ model in soil samples incubated under various  $\text{O}_2$  concentrations (0; 0.3; 0.7; 1.4; 4.0 and 20.5%) during 14 days.



**Figure 3.** Kinetics of N<sub>2</sub>O and N<sub>2</sub> emissions (mg N kg<sup>-1</sup>) from soil incubated at different O<sub>2</sub> concentrations: 0, 0.3, 0.7, 1.4, 4.0 and 20.5%: **a**) cumulative N<sub>2</sub>O; **b**) cumulative N<sub>2</sub> (calculated using <sup>15</sup>N<sub>2</sub> measurements); **c**) cumulative N<sub>2</sub>O : N<sub>2</sub> ratio (equal to the <sup>15</sup>N<sub>2</sub>O : <sup>15</sup>N<sub>2</sub> ratio).

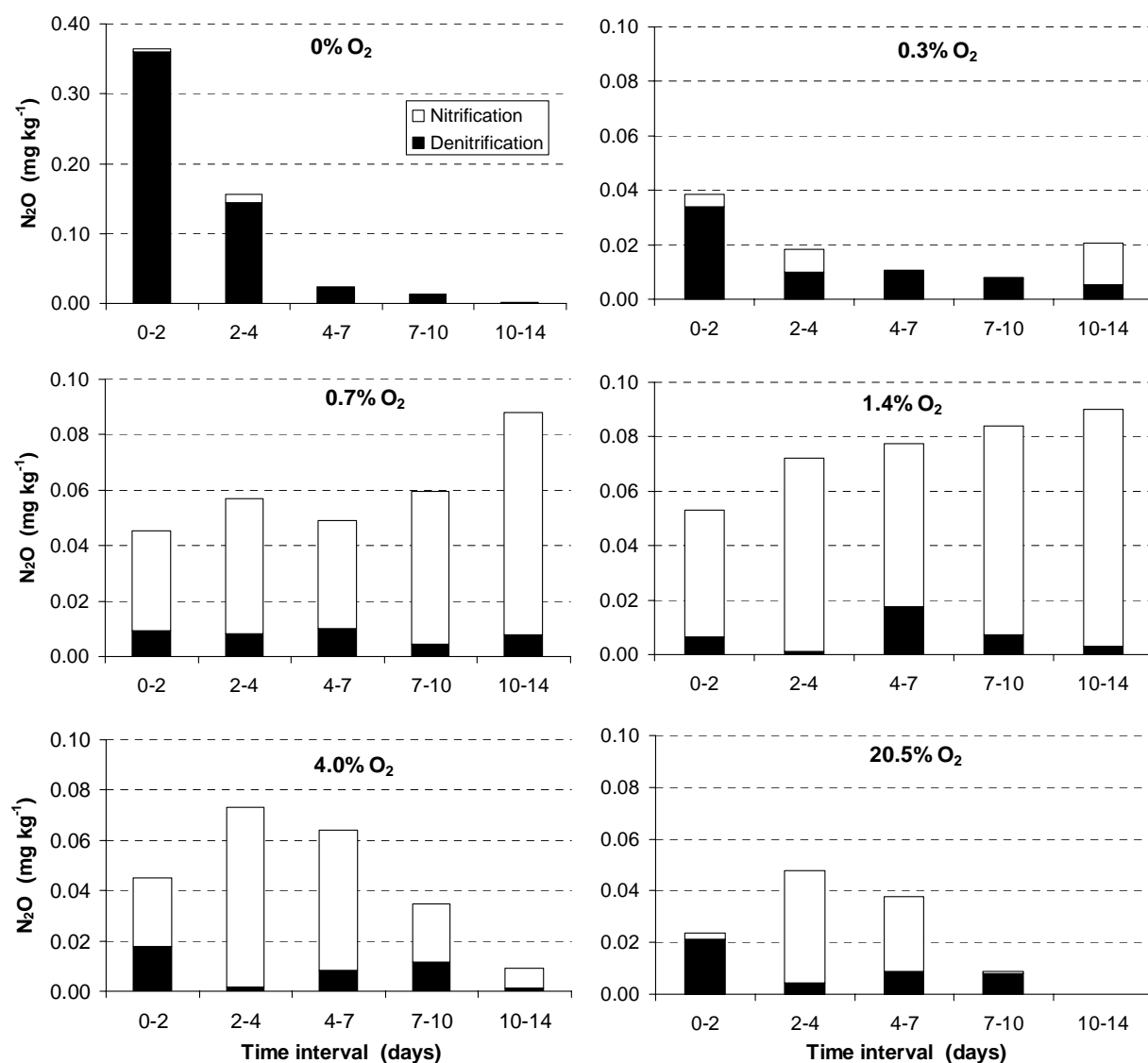
the same isotopic composition. Therefore the ratio  $N_2O:N_2$  is equal to the measured ratio  $^{15}N_2O:^{15}N_2$ . This ratio was small in the treatments with 0 and 0.3 kPa  $O_2$ , between 0.06 and 0.13. At day 14, the ratio was equal to 0.11 in the anaerobic treatment, so that the amount of  $N_2$  evolved was estimated at  $11.1 \text{ mg N kg}^{-1}$ . The ratio was much higher in all the other treatments. The maximum  $N_2O:N_2$  ratio was found for a 1.4 kPa  $O_2$  pressure. These results suggest that  $N_2O$  production by denitrification (up to  $N_2$  production) was the dominant process at 0 and 0.3 kPa  $O_2$  pressure, whereas  $N_2O$  production mainly derived from nitrification in the other treatments (little  $N_2$  was produced).

#### *Proportion of $N_2O$ derived from nitrification and denitrification*

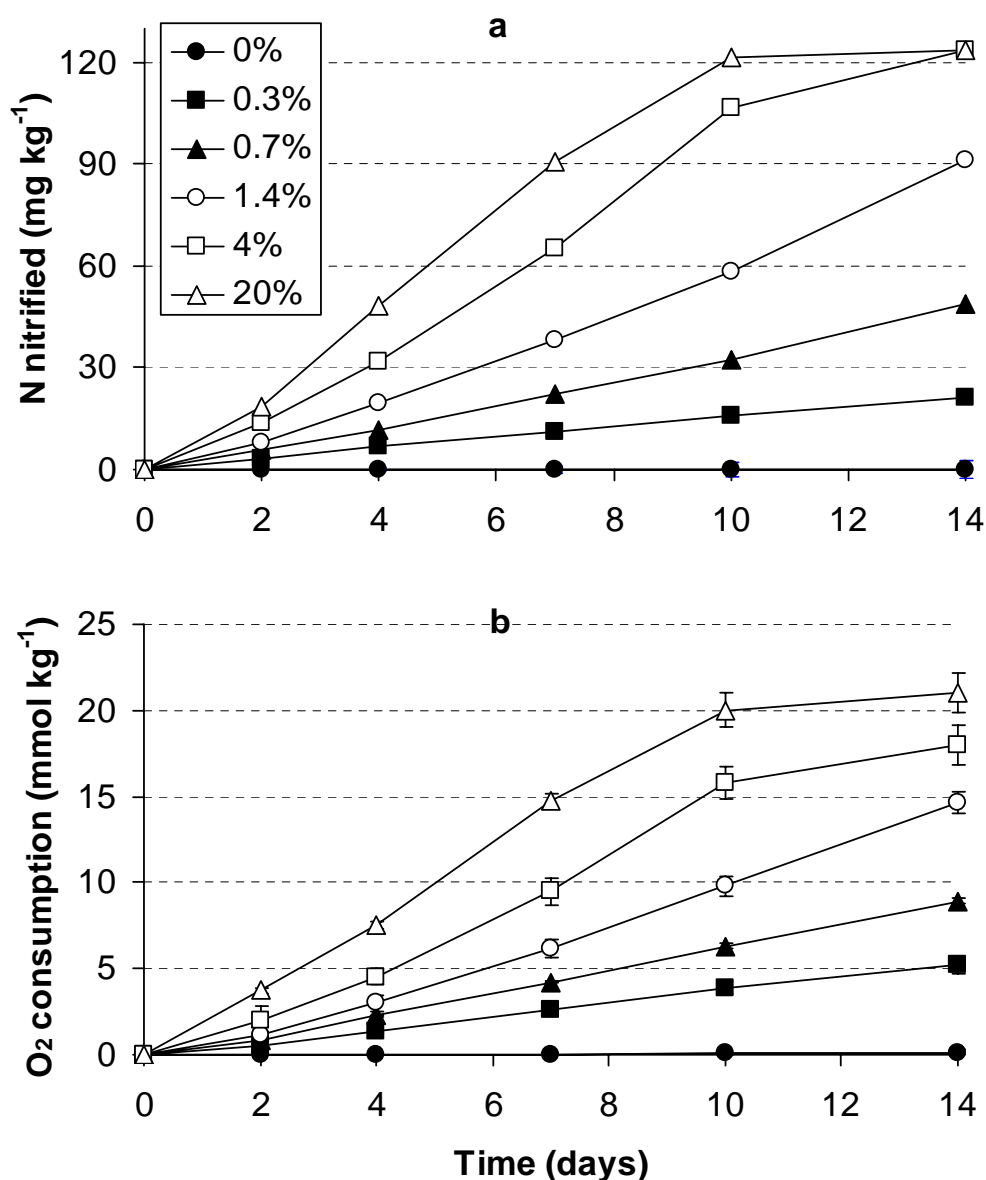
The use of  $^{15}N$  tracing should provide another means of determining the origin of  $N_2O$  emissions. Table 2 shows the respective isotopic compositions of  $N_2O$  in atmosphere,  $NH_4^+$  and  $NO_3^-$  in soil during the five time intervals studied. The atom% excess of mineral N forms given in this table are the average of the values measured at the beginning and the end of each time interval. The atom% excess of  $NH_4^+$  decreased slowly with time except for the higher  $O_2$  concentrations for which it fell at the end of the incubation due to the disappearance of  $NH_4^+$  ions. Simultaneously, the atom% excess of  $NO_3^-$  increased due to nitrification of the labelled  $NH_4^+$ , except in the 0% treatment. In this case, the  $NO_3^-$  remained unlabelled during the whole incubation period, which confirms that there was no nitrification. The isotopic excess of  $N_2O$  was also close to 0 in this treatment, which indicates that the  $N_2O$  produced came from the unlabelled  $NO_3^-$  initially present in soil.

In the 0.3 kPa  $O_2$  treatment, the isotopic composition of  $N_2O$  was much closer from that of  $NO_3^-$  than that of  $NH_4^+$ , which confirms that denitrification was the dominating process. However, it is noticeable in this treatment and in others (particularly at 4.0 and 20.5 kPa  $O_2$ ) that the atom% excess of  $N_2O$  can be lower than the atom% excess of both  $NH_4^+$  and  $NO_3^-$ . Such a result indicates that at least one of the two pools is not uniformly labelled. This is attributed to an incomplete diffusion of the added  $^{15}NH_4^+$  within soil aggregate before being nitrified due to its adsorption on solid phase. The non uniformity was much more important for  $NO_3^-$  than for  $NH_4^+$ , since the soil contained much more  $NO_3^-$  than  $NH_4^+$  ( $10.7$  versus  $0.1 \text{ mg N kg}^{-1}$ ).

Two methods were used to calculate the proportion of  $N_2O$  from nitrification or denitrification. The first method relies on the measurements of  $^{15}N_2$ . It assumes that  $N_2$  emitted by the soil has the same composition than  $N_2O$ , and that the ratio  $N_2O:N_2$  due to



**Figure 4.** N<sub>2</sub>O emission rate (mg N kg<sup>-1</sup> d<sup>-1</sup>) coming from nitrification and denitrification at different time intervals in soil incubated at different O<sub>2</sub> concentrations: 0, 0.3, 0.7, 1.4, 4.0 and 20.5%.



**Figure 5.** Kinetics of nitrification and  $O_2$  consumption in soil incubated at different  $O_2$  concentrations: 0, 0.3, 0.7, 1.4, 4.0 and 20.5%. **a)** cumulative nitrification ( $\text{mg N kg}^{-1}$ ) calculated with FLUAZ model; **b)** cumulative  $O_2$  consumption ( $\text{mmol } O_2 \text{ kg}^{-1}$ ) measured. Nitrification rate is defined as  $\frac{(3n_i + n_a)}{4}$ , where  $n_i$  is the  $\text{NH}_4^+$  oxidation rate and  $n_a$  is the

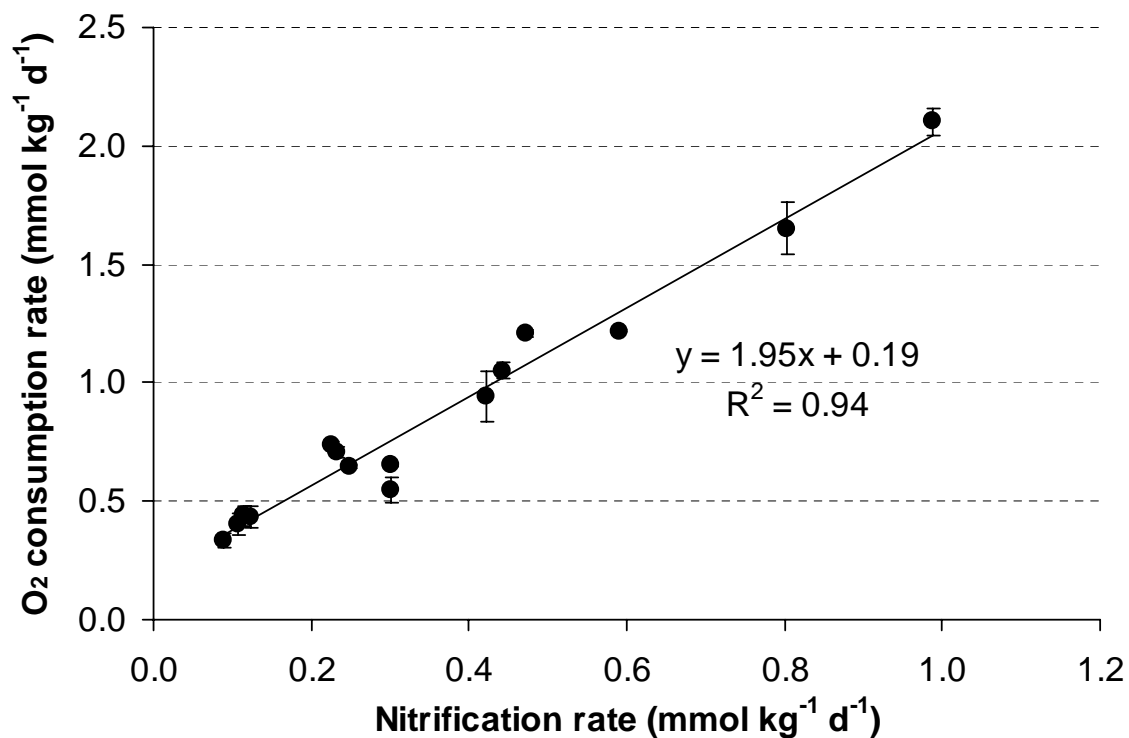
$\text{NO}_2^-$  oxidation rate (see text). Vertical bars are the standard deviations.

denitrification is constant. We estimated its value in the treatment 0% O<sub>2</sub> at 0.12 (see Fig. 7a). The second method relies on measurements of isotopic excess of N<sub>2</sub>O, NH<sub>4</sub><sup>+</sup> and NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup>. It assumes that N<sub>2</sub>O is derived from 2 pools, one being labelled (with the composition of NH<sub>4</sub><sup>+</sup>), the other pool being unlabelled. It calculates the N<sub>2</sub>O isotopic abundance versus the abundance of each pool and their respective contribution to N<sub>2</sub>O production. The comparison between this calculated value and the measured N<sub>2</sub>O isotopic excess enables to estimate the proportion of N<sub>2</sub>O emitted from the labelled pool, i.e. by nitrification. The detail of both methods is given in the appendix.

Although method 1 was based on more questionable assumptions than method 2, the two methods gave similar estimates of the proportion of N<sub>2</sub>O emitted from nitrification, since the regression equation between the two estimates was  $y = 0.99x$  and the coefficient of determination was  $r^2 = 0.85$  (n=30). We then took the average of the two estimates. Using these values, the amounts of N<sub>2</sub>O emitted by nitrification and denitrification were calculated for each treatment (Fig.4). As expected, denitrification was the unique process responsible for N<sub>2</sub>O production in anoxic conditions (0% O<sub>2</sub>), it ceased towards the end of the incubation due to the absence of NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup>. At 0.3 kPa O<sub>2</sub>, denitrification remained the major process producing N<sub>2</sub>O, except at the end of experiment when emissions by nitrification increased. For samples with 0.7 and 1.4 kPa O<sub>2</sub>, the proportion of N<sub>2</sub>O by nitrification was more important than denitrification at all measurement intervals. Maximum N<sub>2</sub>O production by nitrification was obtained for the 1.4 kPa O<sub>2</sub> pressure. The emissions by nitrification decreased when O<sub>2</sub> concentration increased from 4.0 to 20.5 kPa O<sub>2</sub>, particularly after day 7, corresponding to the end of the nitrification process. However, emissions by denitrification took place during the first two days, even with the higher O<sub>2</sub> concentrations (4.0 and 20.5 kPa).

#### *Relationship between O<sub>2</sub> consumption and nitrification rate*

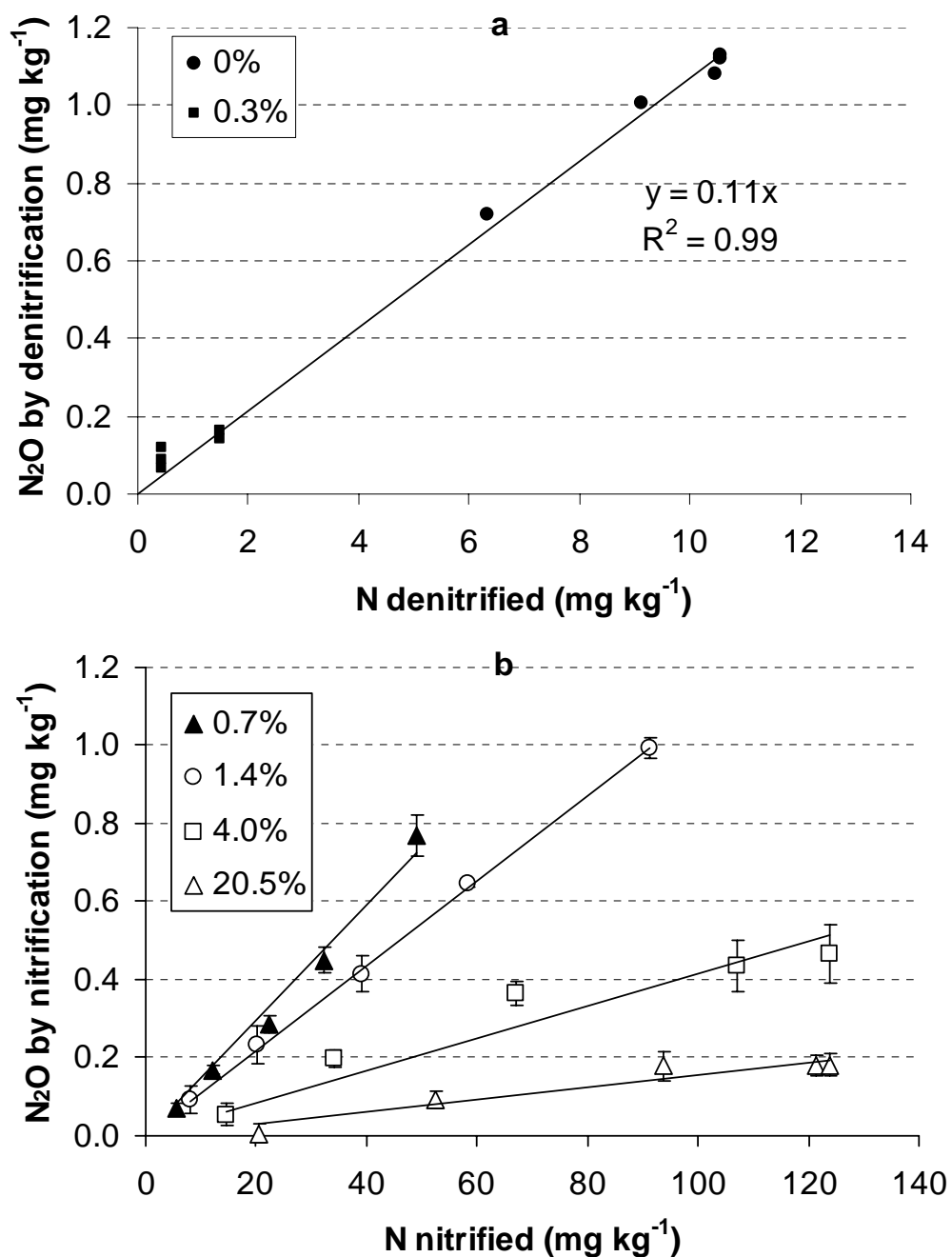
The cumulative nitrification and O<sub>2</sub> consumption rates are shown in Fig. 5. The oxygen consumption and nitrification rates were favoured by O<sub>2</sub> availability during the whole incubation period; the pattern of curves for both variables was very similar. Indeed we found a very good correlation between O<sub>2</sub> consumption rates and nitrification rates in the 5 treatments with oxygen (0.3, 0.7, 1.4, 4.0 and 20.5 kPa O<sub>2</sub>):  $r^2 = 0.94$ , n = 25 (Fig. 6). The slope of the regression is  $1.95 \pm 0.11$ . It is not significantly different from 2, which is the theoretical value for O<sub>2</sub> consumption due to nitrification (see eq. 1-2), nitrification being calculated according to eq. (4). The O<sub>2</sub> consumption was the sum of the O<sub>2</sub> consumption by



**Figure 6.** Relationship between O<sub>2</sub> consumption rates (mmol kg<sup>-1</sup> d<sup>-1</sup>) and nitrification rates (mmol kg<sup>-1</sup> d<sup>-1</sup>) measured for the different time intervals and different O<sub>2</sub> treatments.

Nitrification rate is defined as  $\frac{(3n_i + n_a)}{4}$ , where  $n_i$  is the NH<sub>4</sub><sup>+</sup> oxidation rate and  $n_a$  is the

NO<sub>2</sub><sup>-</sup> oxidation rate (see text).



**Figure 7.** Relationships between cumulative N<sub>2</sub>O emissions (mg N kg<sup>-1</sup>) and cumulative N denitrified or nitrified (mg N kg<sup>-1</sup>) in soil incubated at different O<sub>2</sub> concentrations: **a**) N<sub>2</sub>O emitted by denitrification versus N denitrified at O<sub>2</sub> concentrations equal to 0 and 0.3%; **b**) N<sub>2</sub>O emitted by nitrification versus N nitrified at O<sub>2</sub> concentrations equal to 0.7, 1.4, 4.0 and 20.5%. Nitrification is defined as NO<sub>2</sub><sup>-</sup> production, i.e. cumulative NH<sub>4</sub><sup>+</sup> oxidation rates.

Regression equations are given at table 3.



nitrification and respiration. The intercept of the regression line was  $0.19 \pm 0.06 \text{ mmol kg}^{-1} \text{ d}^{-1}$ . This value represents the  $\text{O}_2$  consumption in absence of nitrification, due to respiration. We can assume that the respiration of treatments with nitrification is the same. The consumption of oxygen was then mainly due to nitrification, even in the 0.3 kPa  $\text{O}_2$  treatment with a low nitrification rate.

#### *Relationship between $\text{N}_2\text{O}$ emissions and nitrification/denitrification rates*

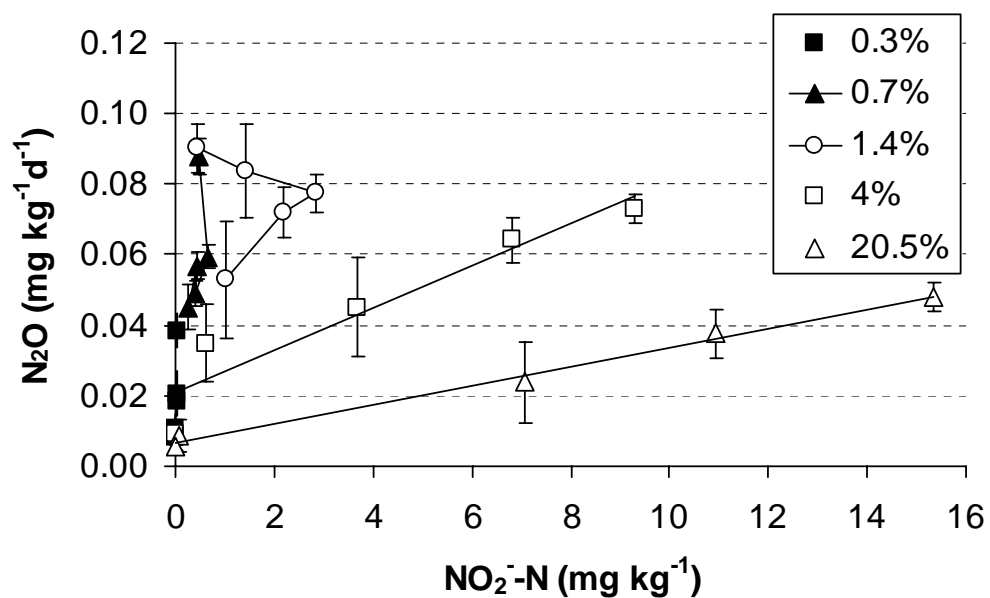
The amounts of  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  produced were then compared to the amounts of N nitrified or denitrified, previously calculated with FLUAZ (Table 3). In the 0 and 0.3 kPa  $\text{O}_2$  treatments, the amounts of  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  emitted by denitrification were highly correlated with N denitrified (Fig. 7a). The coefficient of determination was equal to 0.99 and the slope equal to 0.11. This slope, which represents the ratio  $\text{N}_2\text{O}:(\text{N}_2\text{O}+\text{N}_2)$ , was in good agreement both with the estimate previously made with  $^{15}\text{N}_2$  measurements ( $\text{N}_2\text{O}:\text{N}_2 = 0.11$ ) and with other estimates made with  $\text{C}_2\text{H}_2$  inhibition in the same soil:  $\text{N}_2\text{O}:(\text{N}_2\text{O}+\text{N}_2) = 0.13$  (Khalil *et al.*, 2003a).

In the 0.7, 1.4, 4.0 and 20.5 kPa  $\text{O}_2$  treatments, the amounts of  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  emitted by nitrification were highly correlated with N nitrified (Fig. 7b). We obtained specific regression lines for each  $\text{O}_2$  concentration. The slopes, intercepts and correlation coefficients are given at Table 4. Results show that the intercept was not significantly different from 0, when we consider the  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  emitted by nitrification alone. The slope markedly increased when  $\text{O}_2$  availability decreased: the proportion of nitrified N evolved as  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  varied from 0.16% to 1.48% when  $\text{O}_2$  pressure fell from 20.5 to 0.7 kPa. If we consider the total  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  emission, the proportion varied from 0.24% to 1.80%.

The total  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  emissions measured during each time interval were also compared with the  $\text{NO}_2^-$  concentrations found in soil at the end of each interval. The relationship was highly dependent on  $\text{O}_2$  concentration (Fig.8). Linear relationships were found at 20.5 and 4.0 kPa  $\text{O}_2$  pressure, but not at lower  $\text{O}_2$  pressures. No significant correlation was found when we considered  $\text{NO}_2^-$  concentrations present in soil at the beginning of each time interval. This indicates that  $\text{NO}_2^-$  was not a single determinant of  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  emissions by nitrification.

O <sub>2</sub> concentration	Total N <sub>2</sub> O			N <sub>2</sub> O by nitrification		
	Slope %	Intercept mg kg <sup>-1</sup>	r <sup>2</sup>	Slope %	Intercept mg kg <sup>-1</sup>	r <sup>2</sup>
<b>0.7%</b>	1.80	-0.02	0.994	1.48	0.00	0.983
<b>1.4%</b>	1.20	0.01	0.999	1.09	0.00	0.999
<b>4.0%</b>	0.43	0.07	0.951	0.42	0.00	0.892
<b>20.5%</b>	0.24	0.01	0.979	0.16	0.00	0.915

**Table 4.** Linear regression parameters of cumulative N<sub>2</sub>O production (mg N kg<sup>-1</sup>) versus cumulative nitrification (mg N kg<sup>-1</sup>). Total N<sub>2</sub>O is the measured N<sub>2</sub>O emission whereas N<sub>2</sub>O 'by nitrification' is calculated (using coefficients  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$ , see text). Nitrification is defined as NO<sub>2</sub><sup>-</sup> production, i.e. cumulative NH<sub>4</sub><sup>+</sup> oxidation rates.

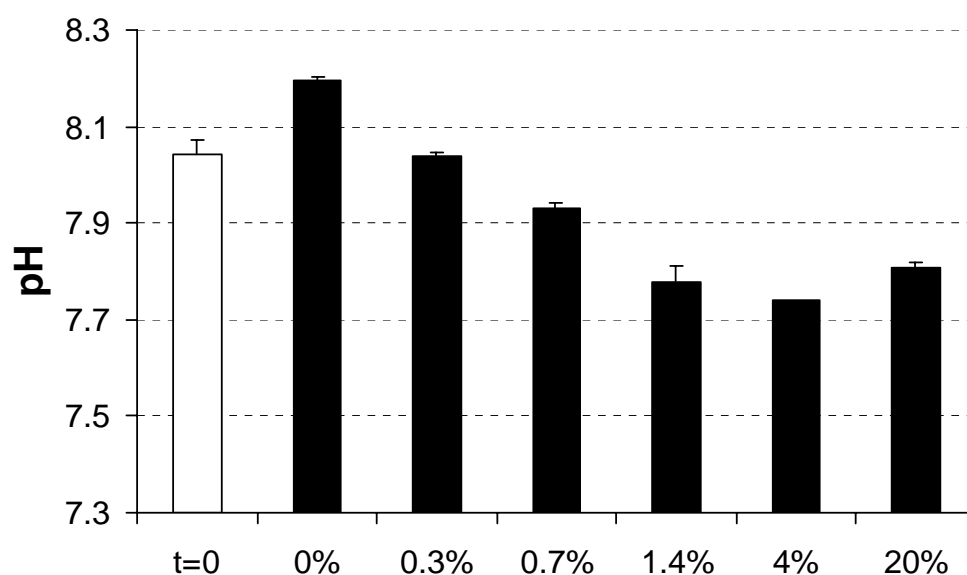


**Figure 8.** Relationship between total  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  emissions rates ( $\text{mg N kg}^{-1} \text{d}^{-1}$ ) and  $\text{NO}_2^-$  concentrations ( $\text{mg N kg}^{-1}$ ) measured in soil at the end of each time interval, at different  $\text{O}_2$  concentrations: 0.3, 0.7, 1.4, 4.0 and 20.5%.

*pH evolution*

The mean pH value at the beginning of incubation was  $8.04 \pm 0.03$ . At day 14, the pH had increased in soil incubated at 0% O<sub>2</sub>, but had decreased at other O<sub>2</sub> concentrations. The pH decrease was greater for the highest O<sub>2</sub> pressure, except for the 20.5 kPa. The aerobic conditions favoured nitrification and consequently pH decrease, whereas at 0% O<sub>2</sub>, pH had increased because there was only denitrification.

In the 20.5 kPa O<sub>2</sub> treatment, the nitrification was over at day 14 and the higher pH is attributed to a pH re-equilibration in soil (due to the carbonates equilibrium).



**Figure 9:** Soil pH measured at the beginning ( $t = 0$ ) and at the end of the incubation ( $t = 14$  days) in soils incubated at various O<sub>2</sub> concentrations: 0, 0.3, 0.7, 1.4, 4.0 and 20.5%.

## DISCUSSION

### Methodology of quantification and calculation

One important condition required for a successful application of isotope methods to quantify N transformations is that the added inorganic  $^{15}\text{N}$  becomes homogeneously mixed with the native, unlabelled inorganic N in soil (Davidson *et al.*, 1991). The comparison of the isotope composition of  $\text{NH}_4^+$ ,  $\text{NO}_3^-$  and  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  (Table 3) suggests that this condition was not fulfilled in our experiment. The reason for that explanation is that the added  $^{15}\text{NH}_4^+$  did not diffuse rapidly within soil aggregates due to its high adsorption capacity. The  $^{15}\text{NO}_3^-$  produced by nitrification was then unevenly distributed soon after its production. Stevens *et al.* (1997), using a similar  $^{15}\text{N}$  application procedure, found that the  $\text{NO}_3^-$  pool was rather uniform, enough to perform calculations of the contribution of nitrification and denitrification to  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  emission, using an isotope dilution equation. The difference with our experiment is that these authors used urea instead of  $\text{NH}_4^+$  which probably diffused within soil aggregates before being hydrolysed into  $\text{NH}_4^+$ . The lack of uniformity in our experiment has different consequences: a) it should not affect the validity of nitrification estimates (using FLUAZ), because nitrification must have occurred in the soil zone where all the added  $^{15}\text{NH}_4^+$  was present. In this zone, the  $\text{NH}_4^+$  and  $\text{NO}_3^-$  can be considered as uniformly labelled. Davidson *et al.* (1991) have shown that an heterogeneous distribution of tracer in soil may have little effect on the rate estimates. The validity of our estimates of nitrification rates is also confirmed by the linear relationship with the  $\text{O}_2$  consumption rate, the slope of which is equal to the theoretical value (Fig. 6).

b) it affected the calculation of the proportion of  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  derived from nitrification, since the application of the isotope dilution equation was not possible. We proposed another method of calculation which accounts for two origins of  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$ , one being derived from labelled  $\text{NH}_4^+$  and the other from unlabelled  $\text{NO}_3^-$ . The first origin is attributed to nitrification and the second one to denitrification. Although this assumption may be discussed, this calculation provided results which were in good agreement with a second independent method, based on the measured ratio  $^{15}\text{N}_2\text{O}:^{15}\text{N}_2$ . This agreement gives confidence in our conclusions.

### Denitrification in well aerated aggregates

Both methods also indicated that denitrification occurred even at atmospheric O<sub>2</sub> pressure. This result is surprising since the moisture content was chosen (at 0.21 g g<sup>-1</sup> soil) to obtain unsaturated aggregates, considering the shrinking-swelling curve previously established on that soil (Sillon, 1999). The explanation may come from the technique of adding solution to soil aggregates using pipette which does not deliver the same volume of solution to each aggregate. Some of the aggregates must have been saturated after this addition. Anoxic conditions can occur if their radius is greater than a critical value (Renault and Stengel, 1994). The critical radius was calculated using O<sub>2</sub> consumption rate and O<sub>2</sub> concentration in the atmosphere; it varied from 1.0 mm in the treatment 0.3 kPa O<sub>2</sub> to 3.5 mm in the treatment 20.5 kPa O<sub>2</sub>. Therefore denitrification was possible in some of the 3 mm size aggregates.

### Effect of O<sub>2</sub> availability on nitrification and N<sub>2</sub>O production

Our results show that O<sub>2</sub> availability had a large influence on the nitrification. Nitrification rates were reduced by a factor of 6-9 when O<sub>2</sub> pressure decreased from 20.5 to 0.3 kPa. Only few results on O<sub>2</sub> effect have been reported in soils. Our results are close to those obtained by Goreau *et al.* (1980) for pure cultures of *Nitrosomonas europaea*. These authors found that nitrification rate was reduced by a 7 fold factor when O<sub>2</sub> was reduced from 20 to 0.5 kPa. Our results also allow to estimate the Michaelis constant of NH<sub>4</sub><sup>+</sup> oxidation relative to O<sub>2</sub> pressure. At the beginning of the experiment, NH<sub>4</sub><sup>+</sup> concentrations were much higher than the Michaelis constant for NH<sub>4</sub><sup>+</sup> which is about 1 mol m<sup>-3</sup> (Laanbroek and Gerards, 1993), corresponding to 3.0 mg N kg<sup>-1</sup>. The nitrification rates versus O<sub>2</sub> concentration were fitted to Michaelis-Menten kinetics to obtain  $V_{max}$  and  $K_m$  at 3 time intervals (0-2, 2-4 and 4-7 days). We obtain  $K_m = 2.5 \pm 0.6$  kPa O<sub>2</sub>, or  $1.1 \pm 0.3$  mol O<sub>2</sub> m<sup>-3</sup> air. This value is much greater than those reported by Laanbroek and Gerards (1993) for *Nitrosomonas europaea* grown in continuous cultures : 1.3-15 mmol m<sup>-3</sup>. The value of  $V_{max}$  increased with time, from 0.8 to 1.3 mmol kg<sup>-1</sup> d<sup>-1</sup> at 20°C, due to the growth of nitrifiers in soil.

Oxygen concentration exerted also a marked effect on N<sub>2</sub>O production. We found that the yield of N<sub>2</sub>O emission by nitrification, i.e. the amount of N<sub>2</sub>O-N emitted per unit of NH<sub>4</sub> oxidised, increased rapidly when O<sub>2</sub> pressure decreased. The yield varied from 0.16% to 1.48% when O<sub>2</sub> pressure fell from 20.5 to 0.7 kPa. The maximum yield was obtained at 0.7

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kPa but we had not enough accuracy to make calculations at 0.3 kPa O<sub>2</sub> pressure. Anderson *et al.* (1993) found that the optimum O<sub>2</sub> pressure for N<sub>2</sub>O production in pure culture was 0.3 kPa O<sub>2</sub> for *Nitrosomonas europaea* and 2-4 kPa for the heterotrophic nitrifier *Alcaligenes faecalis*. They obtained a yield of 1% at 5 kPa O<sub>2</sub> (in our study 0.42% at 4.0 kPa). Goreau *et al.* (1980) reported that N<sub>2</sub>O production by *Nitrosomonas europaea* in pure culture increased by 3-4 times when O<sub>2</sub> pressure fell from 20 to 1 kPa. They measured higher yields than ours: 0.3%, 0.9%, 3% and 8% at 20, 5, 1 and 0.5 kPa O<sub>2</sub> pressure, respectively. However they measured yields in isolates of *Nitrosomonas*, *Nitrosolobus* and *Nitrospira* from soils which were similar to ours at 21 kPa O<sub>2</sub>: 0.47%, 0.09% and 0.11%, respectively. Bollmann and Conrad (1998), working on soils, found that the maximum N<sub>2</sub>O emission by nitrification occurred at 0.5 kPa pO<sub>2</sub>. Using the results published by Stevens *et al.* (1997), we could calculate a yield similar to ours at atmospheric pressure:  $0.18 \pm 0.01\%$ , independent of the water content (40, 50 and 60% WHC). A large variability in yield has been reported at 20 kPa O<sub>2</sub>: 0.03-1% (Garrido *et al.*, 2001), 0.5-2% (Bolle, 1986), 0.09-0.28% (Breitenbeck *et al.*, 1980) and 0.02% (Tortoso and Hutchinson, 1990).

The origin of N<sub>2</sub>O emitted by nitrification is still on debate. Ritchie and Nicholas (1972) suggested that NH<sub>4</sub><sup>+</sup> oxidisers reduced NO<sub>2</sub><sup>-</sup> to N<sub>2</sub>O to minimize intracellular accumulation of NO<sub>2</sub><sup>-</sup> which is toxic. Remde and Conrad (1990) showed that N<sub>2</sub>O could derive from nitrite produced inside the cells. Poth and Focht (1985) confirmed this hypothesis for *N. europaea* cultivated in pure culture at various O<sub>2</sub> pressures and called it denitrification of nitrite, the nitrite being the terminal electron acceptor. They indicated that O<sub>2</sub> was required in NH<sub>4</sub><sup>+</sup> oxidising bacteria only for the first oxidation step: oxidation of NH<sub>4</sub><sup>+</sup> into hydroxylamine by mono-oxygenase.

## Appendix

Let  $\alpha$  be the proportion of  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  derived from nitrification and  $(1-\alpha)$  the proportion derived from denitrification. Two methods can be used to calculate this proportion:

### Method 1: use of the ratio $^{15}\text{N}_2\text{O}:^{15}\text{N}_2$

Three hypotheses are made:

- H1) the ratio  $\text{N}_2\text{O}:\text{N}_2$  due to denitrification process remains constant with time and treatments;
- H2)  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  and  $\text{N}_2$  emitted by denitrification have the same origin and isotope composition, so that the ratio  $\text{N}_2\text{O}:\text{N}_2$  is equal to the ratio  $^{15}\text{N}_2\text{O}:^{15}\text{N}_2$ ;
- H3) no  $\text{N}_2$  is produced during nitrification.

Let  $Q$  be the total amount of  $^{15}\text{N}_2\text{O}$  produced ( $\text{mg N kg}^{-1}$ )

Let  $D$  be the total amount of  $^{15}\text{N}_2$  produced ( $\text{mg N kg}^{-1}$ )

Let  $Q_D$  be the amount of  $^{15}\text{N}_2\text{O}$  produced by denitrification ( $\text{mg N kg}^{-1}$ )

Let  $R_D$  be the ratio  $^{15}\text{N}_2\text{O}:^{15}\text{N}_2$  associated to denitrification

Let  $R$  be the overall ratio  $^{15}\text{N}_2\text{O}:^{15}\text{N}_2$  measured

$$R_D = \frac{Q_D}{D} \quad (\text{hypothesis H3}) \quad \text{A1.1}$$

$$R_D = \frac{Q(1-\alpha)}{D} \quad (\text{hypothesis H2}) \quad \text{A1.2}$$

$$R = \frac{Q}{D} \quad \text{A1.3}$$

$$R_D = R(1-\alpha) \quad (\text{hypothesis H1}) \quad \text{A1.4}$$

so that:

$$\alpha = 1 - \frac{R_D}{R} \quad \text{A1.5}$$



Method 2: use of the isotope composition of  $^{15}\text{N}_2\text{O}$ 

This method assumes that the  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  produced has two origins: it is derived from two populations, each having a specific isotopic composition.  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  signal is measured at mass 44 ( $^{14}\text{N}^{14}\text{N}^{16}\text{O}$ ) and mass 45 ( $^{14}\text{N}^{15}\text{N}^{16}\text{O}$ ).

Population	Proportion	Atom% abundance	$^{14}\text{N}$ isotope frequency	$^{15}\text{N}$ isotope frequency	Isotope ratio
P1	$\alpha$	$A_1$	$a_1$	$b_1=1-a_1$	$R_1$
P2	$1-\alpha$	$A_2$	$a_2$	$b_2=1-a_2$	$R_2$
P1+P2	1	A			R

Isotope ratio of population 1:

$$R_1 = \frac{2b_1}{a_1} \quad \text{A2.1}$$

Isotope ratio of population 2:

$$R_2 = \frac{2b_2}{a_2} \quad \text{A2.2}$$

Mass 44 of the mixture:

$$M_{44} = a_1^2\alpha + a_2^2(1-\alpha) \quad \text{A2.3}$$

Mass 45 of the mixture:

$$M_{45} = 2a_1b_1\alpha + 2a_2b_2(1-\alpha) \quad \text{A2.4}$$

Isotope ratio of the mixture:

$$R = \frac{M_{45}}{M_{44}} = \frac{2a_1b_1\alpha + 2a_2b_2(1-\alpha)}{a_1^2\alpha + a_2^2(1-\alpha)} \quad \text{A2.5}$$

Equations A2.1 and A2.2 yield:

$$a_1 = \frac{2}{2 + R_1} \quad \text{A2.6}$$

$$a_2 = \frac{2}{2 + R_2} \quad \text{A2.7}$$

$$b_1 = \frac{R_1}{2 + R_1} \quad \text{A2.8}$$

$$b_2 = \frac{R_2}{2 + R_2} \quad \text{A2.9}$$

Replacing  $a_1$ ,  $b_1$ ,  $a_2$  and  $b_2$  in equation A2.5 gives:

$$R = \frac{\alpha R_1 (2 + R_2)^2 + (1 - \alpha) R_2 (2 + R_1)^2}{\alpha (2 + R_2)^2 + (1 - \alpha) (2 + R_1)^2} \quad \text{A2.10}$$

Since :

$$A = \frac{R}{2 + R} \quad \text{A2.11}$$

it comes:

$$A = \frac{\alpha A_1 (1 - A_1) + (1 - \alpha) A_2 (1 - A_2)}{\alpha (1 - A_1) + (1 - \alpha) (1 - A_2)} \quad \text{A2.12}$$

so that:

$$\alpha = \frac{(1 - A_2)(A_2 - A)}{(1 - A_2)(A_2 - A) - (1 - A_1)(A_1 - A)} \quad \text{A2.13}$$

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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# SYNTHESE DES RESULTATS

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L'objectif de notre travail était d'étudier les émissions de  $N_2O$  par nitrification et dénitrification en relation avec la structure du sol (à l'échelle centimétrique), l'aération et les activités microbiennes. Nous avons choisi de travailler sur un seul type de sol, mais dont la structure était fortement différenciée en raison des opérations de travail du sol (Richard *et al.*, 1999). Cette différenciation a conduit à des proportions différentes de mottes compactes sans porosité visible à l'œil (mottes  $\Delta$ ) et de mottes fragmentaires à porosité visible (mottes  $\Gamma$ ) sur lesquelles nous avons travaillé. Nous avons:

- 1) caractérisé les processus microbiens à l'origine de la production et de la consommation de  $N_2O$  par dénitrification,
- 2) évalué les émissions de  $N_2O$  par dénitrification sur des mottes soumises à 2 niveaux d'activités microbiennes (respiratoire aérobie et dénitrifiante) obtenus par une pré-incubation ou non des mottes en anaérobiose,
- 3) caractérisé la structure des mottes et modélisé son effet sur le volume anoxique et sur les émissions de  $N_2O$  par dénitrification, avec ou sans pré-incubation anaérobie,
- 4) décrit les effets de la concentration en  $NH_4^+$  et en  $O_2$  sur les vitesses de nitrification et d'émission de  $N_2O$  par nitrification.

## I. Synthèse des principaux acquis

### I.1. Fonctionnement dénitrifiant en condition anaérobie

Une majorité de travaux sur les émissions de  $N_2O$  ont porté sur la dénitrification considérée comme la principale source de ce gaz. En fait, la production nette de  $N_2O$  est le bilan entre la production brute et la consommation de  $N_2O$ . Certains travaux ne considèrent que la production nette de  $N_2O$  et ne prennent pas en compte les interactions possibles entre production et consommation qui ont été mises en évidence. D'autres études quantifient simultanément production brute et production nette (notamment en présence ou absence de  $C_2H_2$ ), mais peu d'entre elles ont permis de caractériser finement les 2 processus. Dans ce travail, nous avons développé une méthode combinant des mesures sur des boues de sol incubées en anaérobiose à un modèle de simulation des réductions microbiennes de  $NO_3^-$  et  $N_2O$  dans le sol (chapitre 2). Le modèle simule la réduction de  $NO_3^-$  en  $N_2O$  et de  $N_2O$  en  $N_2$  par des cinétiques Michaelis Menten, avec prise en compte d'une compétition non

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enzymatique entre  $\text{NO}_3^-$  et  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  comme accepteurs d'électrons terminaux, et simule la dynamique de 2 groupes microbiens l'un étant capable de réduire  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  en  $\text{N}_2$ , l'autre non. Trois hypothèses ont été évaluées alternativement :

- *hypothèse 1* : les deux populations microbiennes ( $\text{NO}_3$  réductase et  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  réductase) se développent indépendamment, sans accroissement de la capacité à réduire  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$ . Avec cette hypothèse, le modèle s'avère incapable de reproduire les données expérimentales. Ceci suggère que certains dénitrifiants initialement incapables de réduire  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  en  $\text{N}_2$  deviennent capables de réaliser cette réduction ;
- *hypothèse 2 ou 3* : elle simule cette adaptation, en considérant soit une synthèse progressive et simultanée pour tous les dénitrifiants de la  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  réductase (hypothèse 2), soit une synthèse brutale de l'enzyme pour certains dénitrifiants, ces derniers n'acquérant pas tous ensemble la capacité à réduire  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  (hypothèse 3). Ces deux hypothèses permettent de beaucoup mieux décrire les données expérimentales, bien que des biais subsistent. La biomasse microbienne estimée en ajustant les données simulées aux données expérimentales est en bon accord avec la biomasse mesurée.

L'acquisition de la capacité à réduire  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  en  $\text{N}_2$  sur des durées de 2 à 5 jours (à  $20^\circ\text{C}$ ) est un résultat cohérent avec d'autres résultats publiés sur la synthèse de la  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  réductase. Ce processus entraîne donc une diminution du rapport  $\text{N}_2\text{O}/(\text{N}_2\text{O}+\text{N}_2)$  au cours du temps. Cependant, le rapport peut être considéré comme stable avant la période d'induction. Nous l'avons estimé à 12% dans nos conditions expérimentales (anaérobiose totale).

L'une des causes possibles des écarts entre modèle et expérience est la validité de l'hypothèse faite dans le modèle, à savoir que le flux d'électrons traversant les chaînes respiratoires microbiennes est constant tant que les accepteurs terminaux d'électrons ( $\text{NO}_3^-$  et/ou  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$ ) ne sont pas limitants et qu'il est indépendant de la nature de ces accepteurs. Il faudrait évaluer la validité de cette hypothèse, ou tester une hypothèse alternative avec le modèle.

## **I.2. Anoxie, respiration et dénitrification**

L'anoxie dans le sol dépend simultanément de la consommation en  $\text{O}_2$  des micro-organismes et des possibilités de transfert d' $\text{O}_2$ , celles-ci étant affectées par la structure du sol, par sa teneur en eau et les propriétés de diffusion de l'oxygène au sein des zones saturées et des pores libres à l'air du sol. Afin de caractériser la consommation en  $\text{O}_2$  du sol et sa

dépendance aux concentrations en O<sub>2</sub> et en CO<sub>2</sub>, nous avons repris la méthode proposée par Renault et Stengel (1994).

Nous avons analysé les émissions de N<sub>2</sub>O produites au cours d'une incubation aérobie par des mottes de sol ayant 2 niveaux d'activités microbiennes (respiratoire aérobie et dénitrifiante), obtenus par incubation préalable ou non de mottes en anaérobiose (6 jours). La pré-incubation anaérobie a été conduite en présence d'acétylène qui inhibe de façon irréversible la nitrification (Berg *et al.*, 1982) ainsi que la synthèse et l'activation de la N<sub>2</sub>O réductase, ce qui minimise la variation dans le temps du rapport N<sub>2</sub>O/(N<sub>2</sub>O+N<sub>2</sub>) des produits de la dénitrification. Nous avons observé que l'émission nette de N<sub>2</sub>O par les mottes de sol en incubation aérobie était très fortement accrue par la pré-incubation anaérobie, alors que ces mottes avaient été très fortement appauvries en NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> durant la période d'anoxie (contrairement à celles qui n'avaient pas subi la pré-incubation). Le marquage isotopique a prouvé que l'essentiel des émissions provenait de la dénitrification. Les mesures de teneur en CO<sub>2</sub> ont confirmé que la pré-incubation stimulait fortement la respiration aérobie sur 24 heures et que l'effet disparaissait après 4 jours (à 20°C). Compte tenu de la vitesse de respiration mesurée sans ou avec pré-incubation (respectivement 3.2 et 12.2 nmol O<sub>2</sub> kg<sup>-1</sup> s<sup>-1</sup>), le calcul montre qu'une motte totalement saturée doit avoir un rayon respectif de 1.0 et 0.5 cm pour qu'elle ait un cœur anaérobie. Ceci est cohérent avec nos observations, à savoir qu'une activité dénitrifiante a été détectée sur 44% des mottes (d'environ 3 cm de diamètre) n'ayant pas subi de pré-incubation et sur 100% des mottes ayant subi cette pré-incubation anaérobie.

L'effet très marqué de la pré-incubation anaérobie sur les émissions de N<sub>2</sub>O peut avoir 2 explications:

- un fort accroissement de la vitesse de respiration aérobie suite à la période d'anaérobiose, sans doute en raison de la dégradation de petites molécules organiques accumulées en phase anaérobie (de type AGV) et facilement dégradables en conditions aérobies;
- le fait que la présence de C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>2</sub> en anaérobiose inhibe la synthèse de la N<sub>2</sub>O-réductase et qu'elle permet de maintenir le rapport N<sub>2</sub>O/(N<sub>2</sub>O+N<sub>2</sub>) à un niveau élevé.

A l'aide d'un modèle mécaniste, nous avons alors vérifié:

1) que l'accroissement de respiration et d'activité dénitrifiante permettait d'expliquer les écarts d'émission de N<sub>2</sub>O entre mottes ayant subi ou n'ayant pas subi de pré-incubation anaérobie,

2) que ces résultats étaient cohérents avec les différences d'émissions de  $N_2O$  entre mottes de structures  $\Delta$  et  $\Gamma$  (relation entre niveau d'émission et masse des mottes, corrélée à leur structure  $\Delta$  ou  $\Gamma$ ).

Le modèle prend en compte explicitement la structure du sol et la consommation d' $O_2$  par le sol dans le calcul de la fraction anoxique des mottes ; il simule la dénitrification, incluant la réduction de  $N_2O$  en  $N_2$ , au sein des zones anoxiques. L'analyse d'image s'est avérée être un outil pertinent pour décrire la structure des mottes de sol à partir des lames minces.

### **I.3. Emissions de $N_2O$ par nitrification**

Des travaux récents ont montré que la nitrification peut contribuer fortement aux émissions de  $N_2O$ . Plusieurs facteurs pouvant influencer ces émissions ont été étudiés. Toutefois, peu d'études sur l'effet direct de  $O_2$  sur ces émissions existent. Une série d'expérimentations permettant d'étudier l'effet de  $NH_4^+$  et  $O_2$  sur la nitrification et les émissions de  $N_2O$  par nitrification a été réalisée. Nos résultats ont mis en évidence et quantifié l'effet de la concentration en ammonium sur l'activité nitrifiante et sur l'accumulation du nitrite. Ils ont montré que la pression partielle en  $O_2$  influence fortement les cinétiques de nitrification. Nous avons obtenu une bonne corrélation entre nitrification et consommation de  $O_2$ , correspondant à la stœchiométrie des équations de nitrification. Ces résultats soulignent l'importance de la consommation en  $O_2$  par nitrification en comparaison avec la consommation par respiration; cette forte consommation est souvent négligée dans l'étude des émissions de  $N_2O$  alors qu'elle peut favoriser la création des sites anoxiques et en conséquence favoriser la dénitrification. Les émissions de  $N_2O$  par nitrification sont bien corrélées avec les quantités d'azote nitrifié; les pentes des droites de régression étant très variables selon la pression partielle en  $O_2$ . La structure du sol affectant la distribution de l'oxygène dans le sol peut donc modifier la nitrification et les émissions de  $N_2O$  par nitrification, et dans une gamme de teneurs plus large que pour la dénitrification: ainsi le passage d'une concentration de 20% à 4%  $O_2$  diminue la vitesse de nitrification d'environ 50% et augmente la perte de  $N_2O$  d'un facteur 2.5. Ces résultats montrent la nécessité de prendre en compte l'effet de  $O_2$  pour mieux prévoir les émissions de  $N_2O$  et mieux expliquer leur variabilité.

### **I.4. Données complémentaires**

Nous avons acquis d'autres données relatives au fonctionnement respiratoire et dénitrifiant des mottes en séparant les matières organiques particulaires (MOP) et le reste du sol (appelé matrice). Ces données restent à traiter complètement, mais il apparaît dès à présent que les teneurs en MOP sont similaires à celles obtenues dans d'autres expérimentations et que les activités respiratoire et dénitrifiante sont similaires en ordre de grandeur à celles obtenues dans des contextes cultivés (Parry *et al.*, 2000). Toutefois et contrairement aux résultats de Parry *et al.* (2000), il semble que l'activité dénitrifiante puisse être négligée au niveau de ces matières organiques particulaires dans notre sol. Parmi les hypothèses permettant d'expliquer cette contradiction, nous proposons l'hypothèse "taille": la taille moyenne des MOP de notre sol pourrait être plus faible que celle des mottes étudiées par Parry *et al.* (2000) et minimiser leur caractère "hot-spot" si elle est trop faible.

## II. Comparaison avec le comportement du sol *in situ*

Les résultats que nous avons obtenus sur des mottes isolées, au laboratoire, peuvent être comparés aux résultats de terrain acquis sur le même sol par les équipes INRA de Laon et Avignon (site d'Estrées-Mons, projet GESSOL). Deux périodes d'expérimentation de terrain ont été réalisées, dans des conditions agricoles classiques, l'une en automne après une culture de blé, l'autre au printemps avant une culture de maïs. Les résultats ont fait apparaître :

- 1) des émissions de  $N_2O$  égales en moyenne à  $1.2 \text{ g N-N}_2O \text{ ha}^{-1} \text{ j}^{-1}$  à l'automne, au cours d'un suivi continu sur 2 mois (13/09/1999-12/11/1999), qui ont décliné parallèlement à la température;
- 2) des émissions de  $N_2O$  égales en moyenne à  $2.6 \text{ g N-N}_2O \text{ ha}^{-1} \text{ j}^{-1}$  au printemps, au cours d'un suivi semi-continu de 2 mois (07/04/2000-09/06/2000), qui ont atteint un maximum après l'apport d'engrais et ont diminué ensuite;
- 3) l'absence d'effet significatif de la structure du sol sur les émissions de  $N_2O$ , alors que les parcelles étaient très différenciées sur le plan structural, notamment par leur proportion de mottes  $\Delta$  (mottes sans porosité visible à l'œil);
- 4) un rapport  $N_2O/(N_2O+N_2)$  des produits de la dénitrification faible, estimé à  $13 \pm 4 \%$  (estimation réalisée grâce au marquage  $^{15}NO_3$ ), ce qui indique que ce sol est actif pour réduire le  $N_2O$  en  $N_2$ .

Les émissions *in situ* peuvent être comparées aux émissions mesurées au labo, en supposant une densité apparente de  $1.5 \text{ g cm}^{-3}$ , une profondeur de zone émettrice de  $N_2O$  de 30 cm (correspondant à la couche labourée) et une loi de température exponentielle (avec un

$Q_{10} = 2$ ). Les vitesses d'émission de  $N_2O$  moyennes mesurées au champ de 1.2 et 2.6 g N ha<sup>-1</sup> jour<sup>-1</sup> correspondent à des vitesses de 0.37 et 0.70 pmol kg<sup>-1</sup> s<sup>-1</sup> à 20°C.

Pour un rapport  $N_2O/(N_2O+N_2)$  égal à 0.13, on en déduit que les vitesses de dénitrification seraient de 2.9 et 5.4 pmol kg<sup>-1</sup> s<sup>-1</sup> à 20°C. Ces valeurs sont tout à fait en accord avec les vitesses de dénitrification totale (avec  $C_2H_2$ ) mesurées sur mottes au laboratoire :  $4.2 \pm 3.7$  pmol kg<sup>-1</sup> s<sup>-1</sup> à 20°C.

Nos travaux suggèrent que pour passer de la modélisation des processus microbiens étudiés au laboratoire à une modélisation opérationnelle des émissions *in situ*, il faut tenir compte des variations des paramètres décrivant les cinétiques microbiennes en fonction de "l'histoire" du sol, en particulier des alternances de périodes d'aérobiose et d'anaérobiose.

- 1) d'abord l'induction de la  $N_2O$  réductase pendant une période d'anaérobiose qui apparaît 1 à 2 jours après le début d'anoxie selon la concentration en  $NO_3^-$
- 2) éventuellement pour des périodes d'anaérobiose de plusieurs jours, l'accumulation de substrats carbonés supplémentaires (acides organiques, acides gras volatils) au cours de la phase d'anoxie, qui deviennent métabolisables après rétablissement de l'aérobiose. La décomposition de ces substrats carbonés augmente alors la vitesse de consommation d' $O_2$  et donc le volume anoxique, favorisant à nouveau les émissions de  $N_2O$ .

Nos travaux montrent aussi qu'une forte activité nitrifiante (induite par un apport d'engrais sous forme ammoniacale) peut fortement accroître la consommation de  $O_2$  pendant quelques jours et ainsi augmenter le risque d'anaérobiose et d'émission de  $N_2O$  par dénitrification, en plus des émissions de  $N_2O$  par nitrification. Les conséquences de ces 2 processus sur les émissions de  $N_2O$  *in situ* restent à évaluer. Cependant, ils remettent en cause une modélisation basée sur des paramètres invariants, estimés à partir d'incubations de courte durée et faites uniquement dans le sens aérobie → anaérobie.

### III. Perspectives de ce travail

Les perspectives de recherche ouvertes par notre travail concernent 3 aspects:

#### III.1. Aspect méthodologique

Afin de distinguer nitrification et dénitrification biologiques à l'origine de la production de  $N_2O$ , nous avons utilisé la technique isotopique par un apport d'une solution ammoniacale  $^{15}N$ . Toutefois, lors de l'apport de la solution, des zones anoxiques ont pu être créées, favorisant ainsi la dénitrification. Une autre difficulté de cette méthode est d'obtenir un mélange  $^{15}N$  et  $^{14}N$  aussi homogène que possible pour toutes les formes minérales azotées du sol.

Pour étudier la nitrification, nous avons cherché à obtenir des conditions expérimentales défavorables à la dénitrification et limitant les problèmes d'hétérogénéité spatiale. Pour cela, les incubations ont été réalisées sur des échantillons de sol tamisés entre 2 et 3 mm, fortement enrichis en  $NH_4^+$ . La petite taille des agrégats favorise l'aération du sol et limite les risques de présence de microsites anaérobies au cœur des agrégats (Sextone *et al.*, 1985 ; Renault et Stengel, 1994). Toutefois, aux plus faibles teneurs en  $O_2$  testées (0.3%  $O_2$ ), nous ne pouvons plus considérer que la dénitrification est absente de ces petits agrégats.

Dans tout le travail sur la dénitrification, le potentiel hydrique des mottes a été maintenu à une valeur constante. Cette condition est nécessaire car des variations de ce facteur pourraient masquer l'influence de la structure sur les émissions de  $N_2O$  par dénitrification notamment. Le potentiel choisi, -0.5 kPa, correspond à des conditions très humides, proches de la saturation que l'on rencontre au champ surtout en automne/hiver, en particulier après des opérations de travail du sol "dégradantes" (du type récolte de betterave ou de maïs). Un potentiel hydrique plus faible permettrait peut-être de mieux extérioriser les différences de structure des mottes en saturant plus ou moins de pores.

### **III.2 Aspect d'analyse des mécanismes**

#### *a) Concernant la dénitrification:*

Nous avons constaté le très fort effet d'une pré-incubation anaérobie de 6 jours sur les émissions de  $N_2O$  par les mottes de sol. Qu'en serait-il si cette période d'anaérobiose était accrue ou réduite ? Une durée aussi longue est sans doute très exceptionnelle au champ, sauf en sol hydromorphe. L'effet d'une courte pré-incubation anaérobie mériterait d'être étudié.

Par ailleurs, la présence de  $C_2H_2$  pendant cette pré-incubation inhibe la synthèse de la  $N_2O$ -réductase et permet de maintenir le rapport  $N_2O/(N_2O+N_2)$  à un niveau élevé. L'absence de  $C_2H_2$  pourrait favoriser la réduction de  $N_2O$  en  $N_2$  et par conséquent minimiser la production de  $N_2O$  pendant la phase aérobie après la pré-incubation anaérobie. Il faudrait le confirmer.

b) *Concernant la nitrification:*

Nous avons mis en évidence un fort effet de la pression en O<sub>2</sub> sur l'activité nitrifiante ainsi que sur les émissions de N<sub>2</sub>O par nitrification. Néanmoins, les mécanismes des émissions de N<sub>2</sub>O par nitrification dans les sols restent encore mal définis. Nous pouvons envisager une meilleure description de la nitrification elle-même en tenant en compte des 2 réactions : la production de NO<sub>2</sub><sup>-</sup> et la production de NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> ainsi que l'effet de O<sub>2</sub> sur chacune des 2 réactions. Une bonne compréhension de ces processus facilitera l'étude des mécanismes d'émissions de N<sub>2</sub>O par nitrification ainsi que l'effet de O<sub>2</sub> sur ces émissions. Elle devrait permettre d'améliorer les modèles de prévision des émissions de N<sub>2</sub>O. Parallèlement, il est nécessaire de passer d'un modèle d'aération des sols utilisant le critère volume anoxique à un modèle prenant en compte les gradients de concentration en O<sub>2</sub> dans la motte ou le profil de sol

### **III.3. Extrapolation à des échelles d'espace et de temps plus larges**

Nous nous intéressons aux perspectives d'adaptation et d'utilisation du modèle à des problématiques agronomiques et environnementales. A l'échelle de notre travail, peut se poser le problème de la non prise en compte de certains processus ou de leurs conséquences comme la distribution verticale des concentrations gazeuses et des concentrations en NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup>. Ces aspects pourraient requérir la nécessité de couplages entre des modèles établis à l'échelle de la motte et des modèles de fonctionnement à l'échelle du profil. Un premier modèle d'émission de N<sub>2</sub>O par dénitrification a été proposé par Lafolie *et al.* (2000) à l'échelle du profil : ce modèle doit être complété par les acquis de notre travail et étendu à la prise en compte des émissions de N<sub>2</sub>O par nitrification.

Les descripteurs de la structure tels que les distances d'un point d'une motte au pore libre à l'air le plus proche pourraient être utilisés pour caractériser les possibilités d'oxygénation locales. Toutefois, si de tels critères sont utiles pour les études de mécanismes à l'échelle locale, ils sont inadaptés à l'approche régionale des émissions de N<sub>2</sub>O de par leur mesure délicate et de par l'absence de méthodes fiables d'extrapolation spatiale et temporelle. A ce



type de critères, il semble possible (tout au moins à l'échelle de la parcelle) de substituer des critères simples tels que la taille des éléments structuraux du sol, la nature morphologique des éléments constitutifs du sol ainsi que les travaux visant à analyser la proportion des différents types de mottes et leur localisation au sein du profil.

A l'heure actuelle, les modèles sont généralement des produits de fonctions décrivant l'action individuelle des différents facteurs (teneur en eau,  $\text{NO}_3^-$ , matière organique, température, pH, ...) sur les émissions de  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$ . Ces modèles prennent en compte les effets moyens de ces paramètres et ne cherchent pas à décrire les processus élémentaires liés à ces émissions. Ces modèles sont fonctionnels à de grandes échelles (parcelle), mais souvent ils ne sont pas généralisables à d'autres sites. Lors de notre travail, nous avons montré que la réduction de  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$ , la nitrification et les émissions de  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  par nitrification ainsi que la structure des mottes, ne sont pas négligeables dans les prévisions des émissions de  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$ . La prise en compte de ces facteurs dans les modèles pourrait être une base à l'élaboration de nouveaux modèles simplifiés.

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