

Quantifying the Donor–Acceptor Properties of Carbon Monoxide and Its *Carbo-mer* Using ELF Analysis

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Received June 23, 2008

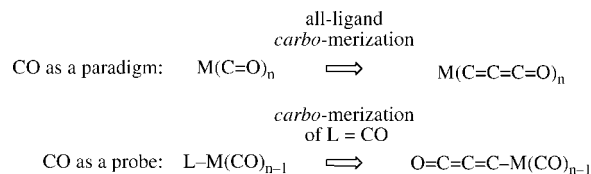
The coordinating properties to nickel of CO and its *carbo-mer* C₃O are compared on the basis of computational studies of Ni(CO)₄ and Ni(C₃O)(CO)₃. The Ni–C₃O bond is predicted to be stronger than the corresponding Ni–CO bond. Electron localization function (ELF) and atoms-in-molecules (AIM) analyses are used to estimate the donation and back-donation contributions to the net charge transfer involved in the corresponding nickel complexes of CO and C₃O. The σ -donating and π -accepting properties for C₃O toward Ni(CO)₃ are slightly stronger than for its CO parent. In both cases, however, π -back-donation is the major electron transfer process.

Introduction

Since its matrix isolation (and determination of its IR band at 2244 cm⁻¹) in 1971¹ and its synthesis in the gas phase in 1983,² tricarbon monoxide (C₃O) has been extensively studied in argon matrices³ and for its involvement in the chemistry of interstellar and circumstellar gas clouds.⁴

The heterocumulene C₃O may also be considered as the *carbo-mer* of carbon monoxide,⁵ and consequently, it is the first member of the recently investigated family of *carbo-[n]oxo-carbons*.⁶ However, in contrast to its parent, the coordination chemistry of *carbo*-CO remains to be explored. On the basis of IR and ¹³C NMR spectroscopy, C₃O was indeed reported to be a stable ligand of chromium pentacarbonyl (Scheme 1: $n = 6$, L = CO).^{7a} To the best of our knowledge, this is the only report on transition-metal coordination of C₃O. It can also be mentioned that the isostructural complex Cr(CO)₅(CNCN) of the isocyanogen ligand CNCN has also been studied.^{7b} In the spirit of the *carbo-meric* comparison, the influence of *carbo-meriza-*

Scheme 1. Synoptic View of the Two Comparative Studies of the CO Ligand versus Its *Carbo-mer*



tion on the coordinating properties of CO is hereafter addressed (Scheme 1). The possibility and strength of coordination to nickel will be examined from computational studies, and the donor–acceptor properties of *carbo*-CO will be compared to those of its parent within the Dewar–Chatt–Duncanson (DCD) model.⁸

According to the DCD analysis, coordination of carbon monoxide to transition metals involves two synergistic interactions contributing to the metal–CO bonds. The σ HOMO of CO donates electron density to the empty dsp-hybrid (σ) LUMO of the transition-metal fragment (σ -donation). The metal simultaneously donates electron density from its d(π) HOMOs into the empty π^* LUMO of CO (π -back-donation). This “adaptative two-way communication” makes the CO ligand a versatile probe for the electronic properties of other co-ligands, such as phosphanes (Tolman’s electronic parameter with respect to the Ni(CO)₃ fragment),⁹ N-heterocyclic carbenes, and ylides (with respect to the Ni(CO)₃ or the Rh(CO)₂ fragment).¹⁰ Variations of the CO ligand properties (IR stretching frequencies, ¹³C NMR chemical shifts) thus serve to quantify the overall donor–acceptor properties of the studied co-ligand. Theoretical methods are however often required for the separation of donation and back-donation effects. Indeed, computational methods proved to be reliable for reproducing/predicting the experimental observables,

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but also meaningful for analyzing the orbital/electronic origin of their values. Such computational investigations were mostly based on interaction-energy partition schemes such as energy decomposition analysis (EDA)¹¹ or constrained space orbital variation (CSOV).¹² Schemes based on valence bond¹³ or on the natural orbitals for chemical valence (NOCV)¹⁴ were also recently reported.

The selected approach for the quantification of donor–acceptor properties of CO and its *carbo*-mer is inspired from a recently disclosed method, based on ELF and AIM partitions, that provided a relevant donation/back-donation scheme in metal monocarbonyls.¹⁵

Computational Details

Geometries were fully optimized under symmetry constraint (when possible) at the DFT level of calculation (B3LYP) using the Gaussian94¹⁶ or Gaussian03¹⁷ code and various basis sets.¹⁸ Vibrational analysis was performed at the same level of calculation as the geometry optimization.

Fragment analyses were performed with the ADF2007.01 code and the TZP basis set.¹⁹

Frontier orbital contours were drawn with the Molekel visualization package.²⁰

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ELF and AIM (atoms in molecules)²¹ analyses were performed with the TopMod program.²²

Results and Discussion

1. Comparison of the CO and Carbo-CO Calculated Structures. The linear equilibrium geometry of the singlet ground state of C₃O has been previously reported at various calculation levels. The bond lengths (1.270, 1.295, 1.150 Å, for the :C=C, C=CO, C=O bonds, respectively) calculated at the B3LYP/6-311+G* level in this work are in good agreement with high-level CCSD(T)/cc-pVQZ calculations (1.275, 1.300, 1.153 Å)²³ and with experimental values deduced from microwave spectroscopy (1.254, 1.306, 1.150 Å).^{3,24} Botschwina and Reisenauer²⁵ combined experimental ground-state rotational constants and theoretical vibration–rotation coupling constants in order to suggest a more accurate geometry of C₃O (1.2717, 1.2965, 1.1473 Å), which is in excellent agreement with CCSD(T)/augcc-pVTZ calculations.²⁶ At the same level, the rather shallow bending potential of C₃O was also underlined.²⁷ BLYP and MP2 calculations are less satisfactory, as they yield longer C–C and C–O termini, while the bond length of the central C₂ unit is suitable.²⁸

1.a. Dipole Moment. The first theoretical study of C₃O, performed at the SCF and MP3 levels by Brown et al., yielded acceptable geometries but an underestimated dipole moment.²⁹

The experimental dipole moment of C₃O (2.391 D) was deduced from Stark effects on microwave absorption transitions.² It is unsurprisingly larger than the experimental dipole moment of CO (0.112 D deduced from Stark effect measurements,³⁰ 0.1098 D measured by molecular beam electric resonance spectroscopy³¹), but as in the case of CO, it was roughly reproduced by low-level calculations (1.85 D at the SCF/6-31G* level).²⁹ Accurate values are obtained at the B3LYP/6-311+G* level ($\mu(\text{C}_3\text{O}) = 2.210$ D, $\mu(\text{CO}) = 0.07$ D), approaching the performance of higher levels ($\mu(\text{C}_3\text{O}) = 2.535$ D at the CEPA-1 level,²⁷ $\mu(\text{CO}) = 0.094$ D at the QCISD level³²).

It is however noticeable that the dipole moments of both CO and C₃O are oriented in the same direction, with the centroid of the positive charges located near the oxygen end of the molecules (Figure 1): as in the case of CO, this could be a driving force for the C-complexation of C₃O to transition metals.

1.b. Frontier Orbitals. The frontier orbitals of *carbo*-CO are compared to those of its parent CO in Figure 1. In both cases, the σ -type HOMO has a significant weight on the lone

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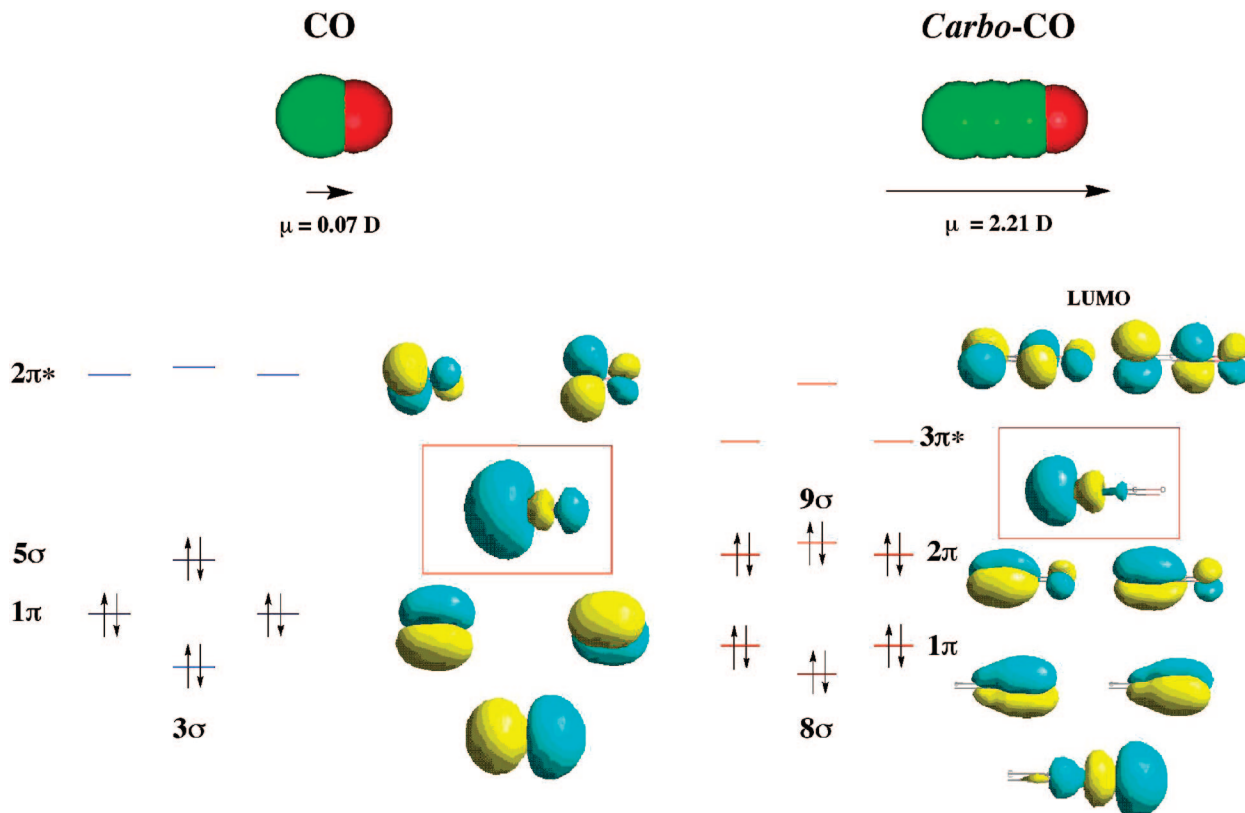


Figure 1. Near-frontier orbitals of CO (left) and C_3O (right) at the B3LYP/6-311+G* level of calculation.

pair of the carbon end. A similar terminal coordination of the carbon terminus might therefore be anticipated for both ligands. In the case of C_3O , an additional π orbital set (2π , Figure 1) localized on the $:C=C=C$ moiety is of comparable amplitude on the C terminus, as it is for the parent $\pi(C-O)$ orbital set (1π , Figure 1), but is closer in energy to the σ HOMO. C_3O is therefore *a priori* expected to exhibit better π -donating properties than its parent CO.

1.c. ELF Analysis. The ELF partition of the molecular space provides basins that correspond to classical Lewis-type electronic units such as cores, bonds, and lone pairs.³³ Their mean populations can be interpreted in terms of weighted combinations of Lewis structures.³⁴ A statistical analysis of the populations gives information about electron delocalization: large variance for a given basin is indicative of delocalization of its electrons, and pairwise covariance indicates the basins between which electrons are shared.^{34b,35} Positive (respectively negative) covariances are indicative of correlated (respectively anticorrelated) basin populations.

The ELF analyses of CO and its *carbo*-mer have been performed (Figure 2). Although C_3O exhibits two additional $V(C,C)$ valence basins as compared to CO, the populations of the disynaptic $V(C,O)$ and monosynaptic $V(C)$ and $V(O)$ basins (related to the $C=O$ bond and the $:C$ and $:O$: lone pairs, respectively) are very similar in both species. The scaled populations³⁶ and the covariance matrix $\langle cov \rangle$ of the ELF valence basins can be used to weight the Lewis structures

required to describe the electron distribution (Figure 2). The procedure was previously disclosed in the case of carbon monoxide³⁴ and dinitrogen.^{15b} In the case of CO and C_3O , the weights of the “natural” resonance forms fitting with the ELF valence basin populations and with the covariance matrix below are given in Figure 2.

$$\langle N \rangle = \begin{pmatrix} \overline{N}(V(C, O)) = 3.22 \\ \overline{N}(V(C)) = 2.65 \\ \overline{N}(V(O)) = 4.12 \end{pmatrix}$$

$$\langle cov \rangle_{CO} = \begin{pmatrix} 1.41 & -0.35 & -0.84 \\ -0.35 & 0.80 & -0.31 \\ -0.84 & -0.31 & 1.38 \end{pmatrix}$$

The low weight of the all-octet shortly zwitterionic $^-C\equiv O^+$ form might be *a priori* surprising, as it is generally considered in the textbooks as a major contribution. This ELF picture remains however consistent with Pauling’s description derived from the known physical chemistry of CO (Figure 2).³⁷ The $^-C\equiv O^+$ Lewis form was indeed invoked to account for the shortness of the $C-O$ bond (1.12 Å) and for the orientation of the dipole moment ($C \rightarrow O$ in the physics convention, Figure 1). The sum of the ELF weights of both the C^-/O^+ polarized forms (38%) is indeed almost identical with Pauling’s weight of the octet $^-C\equiv O^+$ form (40%), while the weight of the hypovalent $C=O$ and C^+-O^- forms are similar in both descriptions. The Lewis picture of CO derived from ELF analysis is also in agreement with the valence bond description of Maclagan et al., claiming that the apolar $C=O$ and zwitterionic

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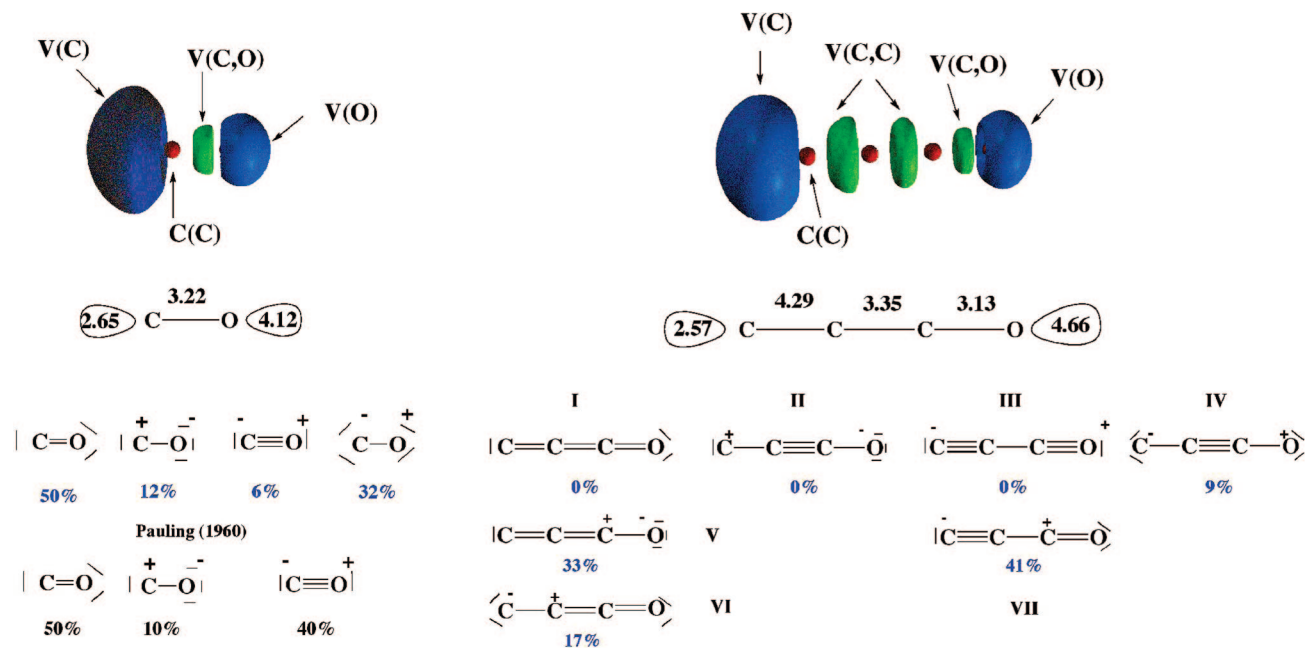


Figure 2. ELF analyses of CO and C₃O (B3LYP/6-311+G*). (Top) Localization domains (ELF = 0.8). (Middle) Scaled populations of ELF valence basins. (Bottom) Weights of Lewis structures of CO (left) and C₃O (right), derived from the scaled ELF populations.

ronic C⁻-O⁺ Lewis structures are prevailing.³⁸ Although the weight of ionic structures are expected to be both intrinsically and indirectly overestimated (because the ELF function is here obtained from a DFT monodeterminantal evaluation of the electron density),^{34b} the ELF-derived description is fully consistent with alternative analyses.

Tricarbon monoxide may be *a priori* described using the *carbo*-meric forms I-IV of the Lewis structures of the parent CO molecule (Figure 2). On the basis of a bond length analysis, Brown et al.²⁹ suggested a description of C₃O from the three Lewis structures I-III (Figure 2). This picture is however not compatible with the ELF population vector and covariance matrix of C₃O given below:

$$\langle N \rangle = \begin{pmatrix} \bar{N}(V(C_1)) = 2.57 \\ \bar{N}(V(C_1, C_2)) = 4.29 \\ \bar{N}(V(C_2, C_3)) = 3.35 \\ \bar{N}(V(C_3, O)) = 3.13 \\ \bar{N}(V(O)) = 4.66 \end{pmatrix}$$

$$\langle \text{cov} \rangle_{C_3O} = \begin{pmatrix} 0.78 & -0.47 & -0.12 & -0.01 & -0.04 \\ -0.47 & 1.53 & -0.65 & -0.06 & -0.08 \\ -0.12 & -0.65 & 1.42 & -0.28 & -0.14 \\ -0.01 & -0.06 & -0.28 & 1.46 & -0.91 \\ -0.04 & -0.08 & -0.14 & -0.91 & 1.43 \end{pmatrix}$$

The Lewis structure I has to be replaced by polarized structures V and VI, and structure III by structure VII. The least-squares solution of the system of linear equations linking the ELF valence scaled populations to the weights of the Lewis structures is shown in Figure 2. It is consistent with the covariance matrix elements. The large overall contribution of the Lewis structures IV, VI, and VII (67%) is in agreement with the large dipole moment of C₃O. Due to the low population of the C-O bond, there is no contribution of structure III:

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Table 1. Comparative Typology of Lewis Structures of CO and C₃O Based on the Lewis VSEPR Character of Their Terminal Carbon Atom As Derived from ELF Analysis (B3LYP/6-311+G*)

class of Lewis structures	CO	C ₃ O
AXE C-terminus	68%	74%
AXE ₂ C-terminus	32%	26%
anionic C-terminus	38%	67%

the :C- terminus has a sizable triple-bond character in structure VII only. The analogy between CO and C₃O is also illustrated by the total weights of forms involving a terminal carbon atom of given VSEPR type, which are almost identical in both species (ca. 70% AXE and 30% AXE₂; see Table 1). The total weight of forms involving an anionic terminal carbon C⁻ (of either VSEPR type) is however almost twice as large as that for C₃O, as it could be predicted from its larger dipole moment.

2. Coordination of C₃O to Nickel. 2.a. Geometries and Bond Strengths. The structure of the homoleptic complexes Ni(CO)₄ and Ni(C₃O)₄ have been first calculated at the B3LYP/6-31G*/DZVP(Ni) level (Table 2). Both complexes are of *T_d* symmetry, and the calculated Ni(CO)₄ geometry is in excellent agreement with the one obtained by gas phase electron diffraction (Table 2).³⁹ However, the good performance of this hybrid all-electron 6-31G*/DZVP(Ni) basis set may be fortuitous since it results from a compromise between the performance of the Pople 6-31G* basis set (which yields a too long Ni-C bond and too short intraligand bonds) and the performance of the DZVP basis set, which shows the reverse tendency.⁴⁰

The B3LYP/6-311+G*/SDD(Ni) level of calculation was previously used by Silvi et al. for the monocarbonyl nickel

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Table 2. Carbo-meric Comparison of Bond Lengths (in Å) and First Dissociation Energies D_e (in kcal mol⁻¹) of Nickel Carbonyl Complexes at Various Levels of Calculation

complex	basis set	Ni–C ₁	C ₁ –C ₂	C ₂ –C ₃	C ₃ –O	D_e^c	$D_e(\text{corr})^{d,f}$
Ni(CO) ₄	exptl ^a	1.838			1.141	22–27 ^b	
	6-31G*/LANL2DZ(Ni)	1.851			1.145	18.4	16.6
	6-31G*/DZVP(Ni)	1.836			1.146	23.0	21.0
	6-311+G*	1.845			1.137	20.2	18.3
	6-311+G*/SDD(Ni)	1.841			1.137	20.2	18.2
Ni(C ₃ O) ₄	6-31G*/DZVP(Ni)	1.801	1.274	1.291	1.168	29.9	
	6-311+G*	1.813	1.270	1.286	1.158	29.9	27.8
	6-311+G*/SDD(Ni)	1.808	1.269	1.286	1.158	29.3	27.4
Ni(C ₃ O)(CO) ₃	6-31G*/DZVP(Ni)	1.802	1.274	1.292	1.167	37.0	35.3
	6-311+G*	1.813	1.269	1.288	1.157	35.7	33.4
	6-311+G*/SDD(Ni)	1.805	1.269	1.287	1.157	35.9	33.5
free CO	exptl ^e				1.128		
	6-311+G*				1.128		
free C ₃ O	exptl ^f		1.254	1.306	1.153		
	6-311+G*		1.270	1.295	1.150		

^a Structural data from ref 39. ^b From ref 41. ^c Crude first dissociation energy of the largest ligand. ^d First dissociation energy of the largest ligand including vibrational zero-point energy corrections. ^e From ref 7b. ^f From ref 3.

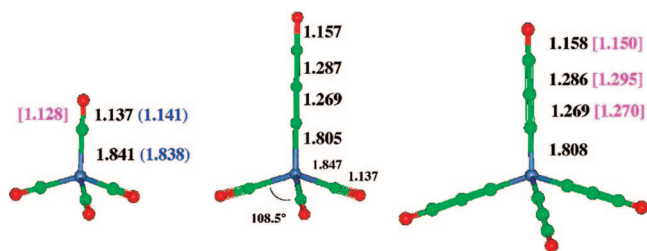


Figure 3. Comparison of calculated structures of Ni(CO)₄ (T_d), Ni(C₃O)(CO)₃ (C_{3v}), and Ni(C₃O)₄ (T_d) complexes (B3LYP/6-311+G*/SDD(Ni)). Bond lengths are given in Å. Experimental bond distances are in parentheses and calculated bond lengths of the free ligands are in square brackets.

complex,¹⁵ as it allows for a reliable description of the two lowest electronic configurations of nickel atom. It was therefore selected for this work. The Ni(CO)₄ geometry calculated at this level is indeed in excellent agreement with the experimental one (Table 2), while calculations performed with the all-electrons 6-311+G** basis set or the LANL2DZ pseudopotential are less satisfactory (Table 2).

The structure of the heteroleptic complex Ni(C₃O)(CO)₃ of C_{3v} symmetry has also been calculated. The geometry of the C₃O ligand is similar in Ni(C₃O)₄ and in Ni(C₃O)(CO)₃ (Table 2). In particular, the η^1 -C-coordination of C₃O remains the most favorable. Among the three possible isomers of Ni(C₃O)(CO)₃ exhibiting a dihapto coordination of C₃O, only Ni(η^2 -C≡CCO)(CO)₃ is stable but is 27.9 kcal/mol higher in energy than Ni(CO)₃(η^1 -C₃O) at the B3LYP/6-311+G*/SDD(Ni) level. The O-coordination of C₃O is unstable. C₃O and CO exhibit therefore the same terminal η^1 -C-coordination mode.

The Ni–C bond length in Ni(C₃O)₄ and in Ni(C₃O)(CO)₃ is shorter than in Ni(CO)₄ (Figure 3). This suggests that C₃O is more strongly bound to nickel than its parent CO. In contrast, the C–O bond length in Ni(C₃O)₄ is longer than in Ni(CO)₄. The variation of the C–O bond length upon nickel coordination is however the same, about 0.008 Å (Figure 3), suggesting a comparable π -back-bonding in both case. The terminal C–C bond length of C₃O is little affected by the bonding to nickel. π -Donation is thus expected to be weak.

The Ni–C bond strengths were also estimated from the first dissociation energies. Crude dissociation energies without zero-point and basis set superposition error (BSSE) corrections are given in Table 2. The B3LYP/6-31G*/DZVP(Ni) level of calculation yields again a good agreement with the reported

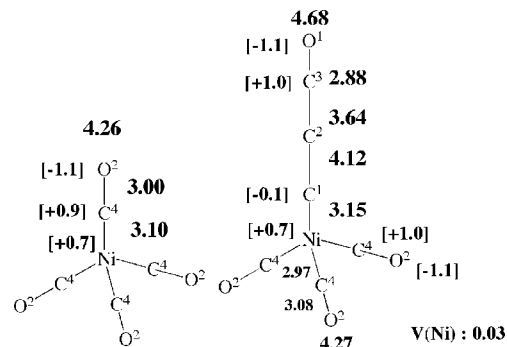


Figure 4. Average populations of ELF basins in Ni(CO)₄ and Ni(C₃O)(CO)₃. AIM charges in square brackets. BLYP/6-311G* values given here are comparable to the B3LYP/6-311G* ones (Table 3).

experimental dissociation energy of Ni(CO)₄⁴¹ and with CCSD(T)//MP2 calculations.⁴² The 6-311+G*/SDD(Ni) and 6-311+G* basis sets remain more satisfactory than the 6-31G*/LANL2DZ(Ni) basis set. At the three different levels used here however, the calculated first dissociation energy of C₃O from Ni(C₃O)₄ and from Ni(C₃O)(CO)₃ is larger than the one of CO from Ni(CO)₄ by ca. 10 and 15 kcal mol⁻¹, respectively (Table 2). This indicates that C₃O is definitely more strongly bound to nickel than its parent CO.

2.b. Comparison of Donor–Acceptor Properties of CO and its Carbo-mer. The donor–acceptor properties of CO and its carbo-mer are hereafter compared with respect to the same Ni(CO)₃ fragment. By comparison to the homoleptic complex Ni(C₃O)₄ (that would afford less comparative analyses), the C_{3v} symmetry of the selected Ni(C₃O)(CO)₃ complex is expected to allow for an easier separation of σ and π interactions.

The results of ELF and AIM analyses for Ni(CO)₄ and Ni(C₃O)(CO)₃ are detailed in Figure 4 and Figure 5. The average populations of selected ELF basins are given in Table 3 at various calculation levels. Within the errors bars, these populations are barely sensitive to the DFT level. The less reliable HF level yields a population of the Ni–C bond lower than that obtained at the DFT level. The reverse holds for the C–O bond. This effect is a consequence of the electron correlation: the monosynaptic basin population calculated with correlated wave functions are usually larger than the HF ones, whereas disynaptic basins are less populated. In the present system, the V(Ni,C)

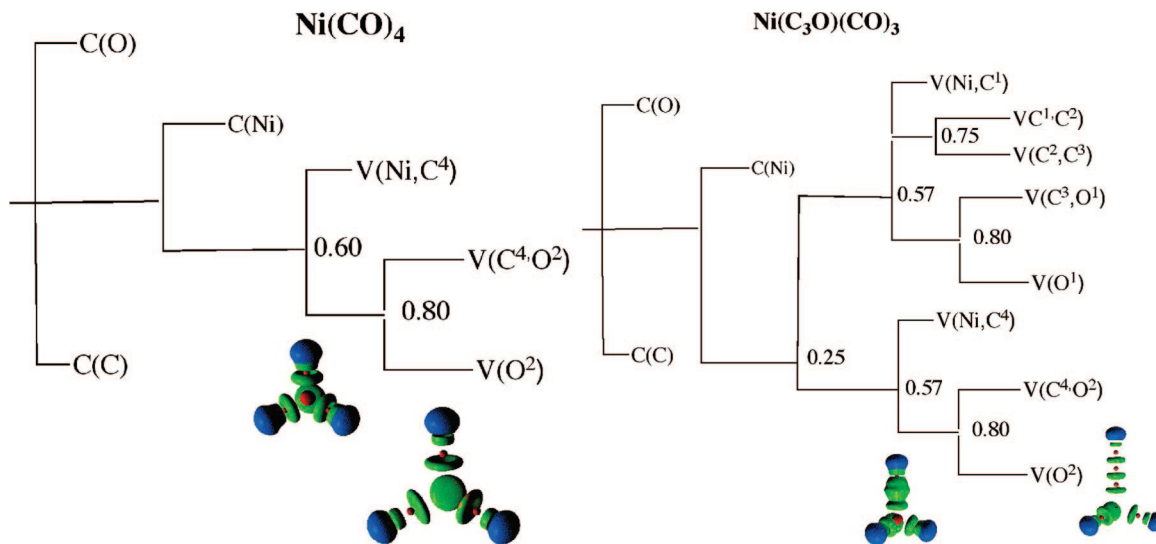


Figure 5. Localization reduction diagram of $\text{Ni}(\text{CO})_4$ (left) and $\text{Ni}(\text{C}_3\text{O})(\text{CO})_3$ (right).

Table 3. Average Populations of Selected ELF Basins in $\text{Ni}(\text{C}_3\text{O})(\text{CO})_3$ and $\text{Ni}(\text{CO})_4$ Calculated at Various Levels with the 6-311G* Basis Set^a

complex/calc level	V(Ni, C ¹)	V(C ¹ , C ²)	V(C ² , C ³)	V(C ³ , O ¹)	V(O ¹)	V(Ni, C ⁴)	V(C ⁴ , O ²)	V(O ²)	V(Ni) ^c	C(Ni)	δq^b
$\text{Ni}(\text{C}_3\text{O})(\text{CO})_3$											
B3LYP	3.12	4.17	3.53	2.94	4.68	2.99	3.04	4.26	0.05	25.65	2.30
BLYP	3.15	4.12	3.64	2.88	4.68	3.08	2.97	4.27	0.03	25.54	2.43
PBE	3.15	4.11	3.19	2.90	4.66	3.08	2.99	4.26	0.05	25.49	2.46
HF	2.85	4.41	3.24	3.01	4.72	2.72	3.22	4.23	0.09	25.48	2.43
$\text{Ni}(\text{CO})_4$											
B3LYP						3.02	3.06	4.25		25.89	2.11
BLYP						3.10	3.00	4.26		25.74	2.26
PBE						3.11	3.00	4.26		25.68	2.32
HF						2.74	3.23	4.23		26.43	1.57

^a Geometries calculated at the B3LYP/6-311+G*/SDD(Ni) level. Atom numbering in C_{3v} symmetry: $\text{Ni}(\text{C}^1=\text{C}^2=\text{C}^3=\text{O}^1)(\text{C}^4=\text{O}^2)_3$ and $\text{Ni}(\text{C}^4=\text{O}^2)_4$.

^b Net electron density transfer toward ligands $\delta q = 28 - \text{C}(\text{Ni}) - \text{V}(\text{Ni})$. See ref 15a. ^c The presence of monosynaptic valence basins V(Ni) of very low population may be ascribed to the use of diffuse basis functions that may indirectly induce oscillations in the regions of low ELF values.

basin corresponds to the V(C) basin of the uncomplexed moieties. This result is consistent with the calculations of Matito et al.⁴³

The ELF populations of the Ni–C and C–O bonds are quite similar in both complexes and are indicative of a sizable double-bond character of the Ni–C bond, which is slightly larger in $\text{Ni}(\text{C}_3\text{O})(\text{CO})_3$. This is in line with the stronger Ni–C₃O bond indicated by the dissociation energy values (see section 2a).

The C₂–C₃ bond is slightly shortened upon coordination of C₃O to nickel (Table 2 and Figure 3), while the ELF population of the disynaptic basin V(C², C³) increases upon attachment of C₃O to the Ni(CO)₃ moiety (Figure 2 and Table 3). This may be related to the π -back-donation from the d orbitals of nickel to the 3 π^* LUMO of C₃O (Figure 1). Similar geometrical trends were found upon coordination of CNCN to chromium in the Cr(CO)₅(CNCN) complex.^{7b} The 3 π^* LUMO of the isoelectronic C₃O and CNCN ligands is indeed similar and exhibits an antibonding character in the C₁–C₂ and C–CNCN bonds and a bonding character in the C₂–C₃ and CN–CN bonds.

In the localization reduction diagram (Figure 5),^{35,44} it is noticeable that, in contrast to what was observed in carboheterocycles, the oxygen atom of C₃O preserves its valence structure at a higher ELF value than the inserted C₂ unit does.⁴⁵

The net electron transfer from nickel toward ligands may be estimated by $\delta q = Z - \text{C}(\text{Ni}) - \text{V}(\text{Ni})$ and is reported in Table 3.^{15a} The large positive δq values are little sensitive to the calculation level (Table 3). They are larger in the presence of a C₃O ligand and are indicative of an average electron transfer from nickel to each ligand larger than 0.5 e.

Within the DCD scheme, the σ -donation (respectively π -donation) is defined as a ligand-to-metal charge transfer (so-called LMCT) that involves the canonical orbitals of σ symmetry (respectively π symmetry). The back-donation is the contribution of the π canonical orbitals in the opposite MLCT direction. As the ELF and AIM partitions allow to distinguish between the metal and ligand moieties, it is possible to quantify the donation and back-donation from the contributions of the orbitals of the desired symmetry to the basins of one of the moieties.^{15a} The results are detailed below.

2.b.1. Ni(CO)₄. The near-frontier occupied molecular orbitals of Ni(CO)₄ of T_d symmetry are displayed in Figure 6a. From the fragment analysis performed with the ADF code (four equivalent CO fragments on one hand and one nickel atom on the other hand), it is clear that the DCD description of the metal–CO bonding is a simplified qualitative summary of the true MO diagram.⁴⁶ The near-frontier occupied orbitals result from the primary LMCT and MLCT interactions mentioned above, but also from the interaction with other MOs of the fragments that possess the same symmetry and are close in energy. For example, the #40–42 or 9T2 MO set undergoes a

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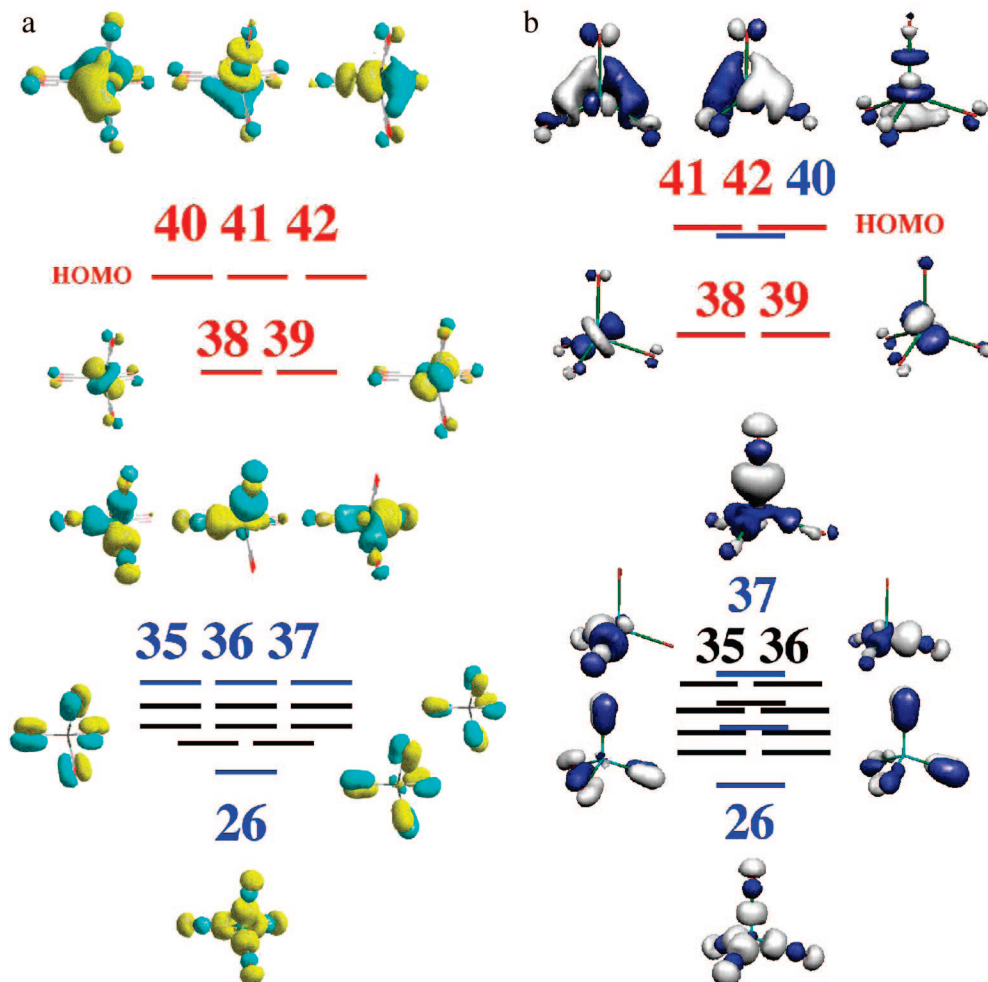


Figure 6. (a) Occupied near-frontier MOs of Ni(CO)₄ of *T_d* symmetry (B3LYP/6-311G*). (b) Occupied near-frontier MOs of Ni(CO)₄ of *C_{3v}* symmetry (B3LYP/6-311G*). MOs involved in σ -donation are highlighted in blue, while the those involved in π -back-donation are highlighted in red.

residual symmetry-allowed σ/π mixing (Figure 6a) that prevents a fair estimation of the donor–acceptor properties of the CO ligand to nickel (see Supporting Information).

Infinitesimal lowering of the symmetry of Ni(CO)₄ to *C_{3v}* allows for the clear-cut separation of σ and π interactions and for a more direct comparison with the Ni(C₃O)(CO)₃ complex. The near-frontier occupied MOs of Ni(CO)(CO)₃, where one Ni–C bond was elongated by 0.001 Å, are displayed in Figure 6b.

The ADF fragment analysis based on a Ni(CO)₃ fragment and one CO fragment pointing in the symmetry axis direction allows to easily distinguish between three sets of MOs (Table S2).

- Two sets of degenerate MOs, #38–39 and #41–42 (11E1 and 12E1), are related to π -back-donation (πb), as they result from the interaction of occupied MOs of the Ni(CO)₃ fragment with the empty $2\pi^*$ MO of the CO fragment.

- Four MOs, i.e., #26, 31, 37, and 40 (14–17 A1), are related to σ -donation (σd), because of a sizable contribution of the 5σ of CO and almost no mixing with the 4σ or 3σ MOs of CO.

- Eight MOs, #27–30, #32–33, and #35–36 (7–10E1), exhibit a contribution the 1π MO of the CO fragment and can thus be related to “ π -donation” (πd), although there is no contribution of any empty MO of the Ni(CO)₃ fragment (an offering is not always accepted but remains an offering).

Table 4. Donor–Acceptor Contributions of the CO Ligand toward the Ni(CO)₃ Fragment in the Ni(CO)(CO)₃ Complex of *C_{3v}* Symmetry, Obtained from AIM and ELF Analyses Performed at Various Calculation Levels 6-311G* Basis Set and B3LYP/6-311+G*/SDD(Ni) Level of Calculation for Geometries

calculation method	ELF			AIM		δq^a	$\delta q/4^b$
	σd	πd	πb	πb			
B3LYP	0.10	0.06	0.62	0.48	0.55	0.53	
BLYP	0.07	0.05	0.69	0.52	0.57	0.57	
PBE	0.09	0.03	0.69	0.52	0.57	0.58	
HF	0.10	0.07	0.48	0.36	0.31	0.39	

^a Net electron transfer from nickel toward each CO ligand, $\delta q' = \pi b - (\sigma d + \pi d)$. ^b δq values ($\delta q = 28 - C(\text{Ni})$) from Table 3.

In the AIM scheme, only the π -back-donation may be calculated from the contribution of the 11–12E1 sets to the carbon and oxygen atomic basins. Thus, at the B3LYP/6-311G* level of calculation, $\pi b_{\text{AIM}} = 0.48 e^-$ (Table 4).

In the ELF scheme, the σ and π contributions arising from the above three sets of orbitals to the core basins C(O) and C(C) and to the valence basins V(C,Ni), V(C,O), and V(O) of one of the CO ligands are considered (Table S3). The π -back-donation, σ -donation, and π -donation in Ni(CO)₄ can thus be estimated at the B3LYP/6-311G* level of calculation as shown:

$$\sigma d_{\text{ELF}} = 2 - (0.47 + 0.01 + 1.20 + 0.22) = 0.10 e^-$$

$$\pi d_{\text{ELF}} = 4 - (2.47 + 1.45 + 0.02) = 0.06 e^-$$

$$\pi b_{\text{ELF}} = (0.25 + 0.37) = 0.62 e^-$$

The results are little sensitive to the calculation level (Table 4) and definitely show that the major effect is a π -acceptance of the CO ligand (ca. 5 times the σd and πd effects).

The net electron transfer from nickel toward each CO ligand via the selected fragment MOs, denoted as $\delta q'$ and calculated from the relative contributions of Table 4, is in very good agreement with the global transfer estimated previously from the C(Ni) population (Table 3). The coordination of one CO ligand is accompanied by a net electron transfer of about 0.57 e from the nickel center to each CO ligand. The total transfer of about 2.30 e is larger than the 1.02 e estimated from the ELF analysis in nickel monocarbonyl NiCO (the Ni–CO transfer is of course not additive).^{15a} In both complexes, these results are consistent with a large contribution of the ionic $(\text{CO})_3\text{Ni}^+(\text{CO})^-$ Lewis form. The AIM charge of +0.6 of Ni in the $\text{Ni}(\text{CO})_4$ complex is also consistent with this suggestion.

CO appears therefore to be essentially a π -accepting ligand. This large π -acceptance ability is consistent with other claims in the literature. Most of the studies devoted to the analysis of the transition metal–CO interactions, mainly based on energy partition techniques, indeed concluded that π -back-donation is more important than σ -donation.⁴⁷ It was indeed shown on the basis of energy decomposition analysis that the stabilization that comes from π -back-donation contributes 54% to the total orbital interactions, while 46% comes from σ -donation.^{47b} AIM analyses of either experimental or theoretical gas phase electron densities are also consistent with a significant π -back-donation.^{32,48} Only studies based on CDA/NBO analyses concluded a π -back-donation smaller than the σ -donation.⁴⁹ More recent reports have however underlined that this method may be misleading because it intrinsically overestimates the extent of σ -donation.⁵⁰ This could be related to previous observations that the ELF mesomeric description of a molecule generally involves more ionic Lewis structures than the corresponding NBO/NRT picture. The origin of the discrepancy might be ascribed to the nature of the NRT mesomeric structures, which are of the Coulson–Fisher type. As they are polarized, they implicitly account for ionic components. The π -back-bonding is indeed formally represented by the no-bond $\text{Ni}^+(\text{CO})^-$ resonance form suggested by ELF analysis,¹⁵ while the σ -donation is not represented by a ionic form but by a classical semipolar $\text{Ni}^-(\text{CO})^+$ resonance form.

2.b.2. $\text{Ni}(\text{C}_3\text{O})(\text{CO})_3$. The donor–acceptor properties of C_3O toward the same $\text{Ni}(\text{CO})_3$ fragment may be evaluated following a similar procedure for the $\text{Ni}(\text{C}_3\text{O})(\text{CO})_3$ complex. From the MO interaction diagram (Figure 7) and the ADF fragment analysis into one $\text{Ni}(\text{CO})_3$ and one C_3O fragments (Table S4), the MOs are now classified into three groups.

- The set of degenerate MOs #46–47 (13E1) is related to π -back-donation, because they exhibit a sizable contribution of occupied MOs of the $\text{Ni}(\text{CO})_3$ fragment and of the 3π and 4π empty MOs of the C_3O fragment (Table S4).

- Three MOs are related to σ -donation: #48 (HOMO), 41 and 30 (21–20A1 and 18A1). From the ADF fragment analysis

they indeed show a sizable contribution of the 9σ MOs of C_3O and no mixing with the 8σ or 7σ MOs of C_3O (Table S4).

- Two sets of degenerate MOs might be related to “ π -donation”—#42–43 and #44–45 (11–12E1)—although they do not involve any acceptance of empty MOs of the $\text{Ni}(\text{CO})_3$ fragment (Table S4).

Following the same procedure as above, in the AIM scheme, the π -back-donation is therefore estimated from the contribution of the 13E1 π orbitals to atomic basins of the ligand. The πb_{AIM} values of $\text{Ni}(\text{C}_3\text{O})(\text{CO})_3$ (Table 5) are larger by 0.2–0.3 e than those of $\text{Ni}(\text{CO})_4$ (Table 4).

The σ/π -donation/back-donation components derived from ELF analysis and given in Table 5 are now more sensitive to the level of calculation. DFT/GGA calculations suggest that C_3O exhibits slightly stronger σ -donating and π -accepting properties than its CO parent (Table 5), whereas HF and hybrid DFT calculations also suggest a sizable π -donation ability of C_3O . The latter is however questionable.

- (i) The terminal C_1 – C_2 bond length of C_3O is little affected by coordination to nickel, and beyond putative DFT cancellation of errors, this might naturally reflect the weakness of π -donation.

- (ii) No evidence of any interaction between the 2π MO of C_3O with an empty MO of the $\text{Ni}(\text{CO})_3$ fragment could be extracted from the ADF fragment analysis (Table S4).

In contrast to $\text{Ni}(\text{CO})_4$, the occupied 2π MO of C_3O contributes to the degenerate #46–47 or 13E1 MO set assigned to π -back-donation (Figure 7). At the HF and B3LYP levels of calculation, this contribution is sizable, namely, twice the one obtained at the pure DFT level (Table S4). This result therefore rules out the possibility of distinguishing between π -donation and π -back-donation. The DFT/GGA calculations (BLYP and PBE) are therefore reliable, as they do not suffer from this drawback. PBE calculations have been selected for the final discussion hereafter.

From the ELF and AIM analysis, the stronger Ni– C_3O bond as compared to the Ni–CO bond (Table 2) may be mostly related to the stronger π -acceptance ability of C_3O as compared to its CO parent (Table 6). Both ligands exert a negligible σ -donation. This is in line with previous reports concluding that nickel–CO bonding involves σ -repulsion and π -back-donation.^{46,51}

The coordination of C_3O results in a net electron transfer of about 0.70 e from Ni to C_3O (Table 5). It is larger by about 0.2 e than the electron transfer from Ni to the parent CO in $\text{Ni}(\text{CO})_4$ (Table 4) and is roughly equivalent to the variation of the sole π -back-donation. This is also consistent with the same 0.2 e difference between the δq values in $\text{Ni}(\text{C}_3\text{O})(\text{CO})_3$ and $\text{Ni}(\text{CO})_4$ complexes (Table 3). A sizable contribution of the ionic no-bond $(\text{CO})_3\text{Ni}^+(\text{C}_3\text{O})^-$ Lewis structure has thus to be invoked.

Conclusion

The coordinating properties to nickel of CO and *carbo*-CO have been compared. From the present calculations, the Ni– C_3O bond is predicted to be stronger than the corresponding Ni–CO bond. Coordination chemistry appears as an alternative way to stabilize this heterocumulene, mainly studied in argon matrixes and interstellar clouds hitherto.

ELF and AIM analysis have been used to estimate the donation and back-donation contributions to the net charge transfer occurring in three nickel complexes of CO and C_3O . The σ -donating and π -accepting properties of C_3O toward $\text{Ni}(\text{CO})_3$ are slightly stronger than for its CO parent. In both cases, however, π -back-donation is the prevailing electron transfer mode.

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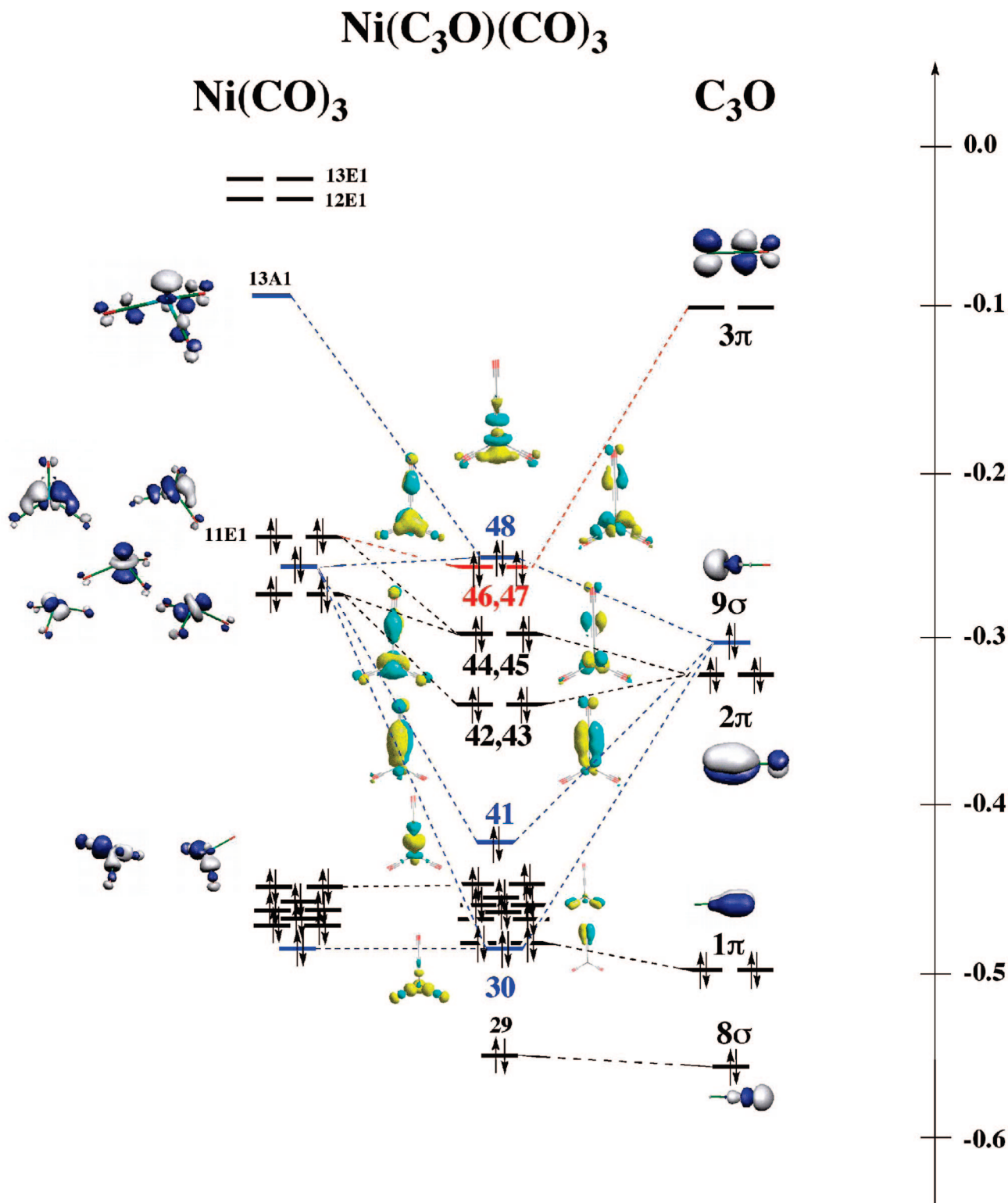


Figure 7. Molecular orbital (interaction) diagram of Ni(C₃O)(CO)₃ of C_{3v} symmetry (B3LYP/6-311G*). MOs involved in σ-donation are highlighted in blue, while the ones involved in π-back-donation are highlighted in red. Energy scale in hartrees.

An added value for this method, in the case of Ni(CO)₄, is its low sensitivity to the level of calculation, although the orbital overlap between the interacting fragments was expected to depend on it.⁵² In contrast to HF calculations that overestimate the HOMO–LUMO gap, DFT tends to shrink this gap and is

therefore expected to overestimate the electron transfer. Hybrid functionals may therefore be a good compromise. However, in the Ni(C₃O)(CO)₃ case, pure DFT was found to be the only reliable calculation level.

More generally, provided that the molecular orbitals involved in the various (back-)donation modes are easily identified and well separated by choosing a suitable symmetry, the present method based on ELF and AIM analyses allows for the clear-

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Table 5. Donor–Acceptor Contributions of the C₃O Ligand toward the Ni(CO)₃ Fragment in the Ni(C₃O)(CO)₃ Complex, Obtained from AIM and ELF Analyses Performed at Various Calculation Levels (6-311G* Basis Set and B3LYP/6-311+G*/SDD(Ni) Level of Calculation for Geometries; See Table S5 for Details)

calculation method	ELF			AIM	δq^a
	σd	πd	πb	πb	
B3LYP	0.13	0.22	0.92	0.56	0.57
BLYP	0.14	0.01	0.89	0.74	0.74
PBE	0.16	0.00	0.88	0.74	0.72
HF	0.11	0.36	0.94	0.84	0.47

^a Net electron density transfer from nickel toward the C₃O ligand: $\delta q^a = \pi b - (\sigma d + \pi d)$.

Table 6. Comparison of the Donor–Acceptor Properties of CO and C₃O toward Ni(CO)₃ (PBE/6-311G*)

complex	method	σd	πd	πb
Ni(CO) ₄	AIM			0.52
	ELF	0.09	0.03	0.69
Ni(C ₃ O)(CO) ₃	AIM			0.74
	ELF	0.16	0.00	0.88

cut quantification of electron transfers in transition metal complexes. It calls for further validation, but it stands as a

promising candidate for refining or even qualifying the conclusions of the DCD approximate description.

Acknowledgment. The authors would like to thank CALMIP (Calcul intensif en Midi-Pyr  n  es, Toulouse, France), IDRIS (Institut du D  veloppement et des Ressources en Informatique Scientifique, Orsay, France), and CINES (Centre Informatique de l'Enseignement Sup  rieur, Montpellier, France) for computing facilities and the Minist  re de l'Education Nationale de la Recherche et de la Technologie for ACI financial support. The authors would also like to thank Professor Henry Chermette for his help in ADF fragment analyses.

Supporting Information Available: ELF/DCD analysis of Ni(CO)₄ of *T_d* symmetry. Tables S1–S5: Cartesian coordinates, total energies, and ZPE-corrected values in atomic units (B3LYP/6-311+G*/SDD(Ni) level of calculation) for the Ni(C₃O)(CO)₃ complex of *C_{3v}* symmetry and Ni(C₃O)₄ complex of *T_d* symmetry. This material is available free of charge via the Internet at <http://pubs.acs.org>.

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