

Multiple Metal–Carbon Bonds for Catalytic Metathesis Reactions (Nobel Lecture)**

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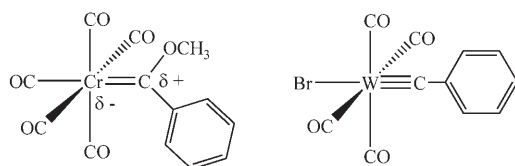
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homogeneous catalysis · metathesis · molybdenum · Nobel lecture · tungsten

It's my great privilege to be here today, in a position I never thought possible. The story I will tell you I hope will give you some idea what I have contributed to the area for which the Nobel prize in chemistry was awarded this year.



The story begins 32 years ago in 1973, the year the Nobel prize was shared by G. Wilkinson and E. O. Fischer. Wilkinson's Nobel lecture^[1] concerned the nature of a single bond between a transition metal and a carbon atom in an alkyl group, and emphasized the fact that the metal–carbon bond is not inherently weak. E. O. Fischer in his Nobel Lecture^[2] summarized the extensive chemistry of transition-metal “carbene” complexes^[3,4] that contain a metal–carbon double bond discovered by him and his group in 1964 (Scheme 1).^[5] He also reported new “carbyne” complexes

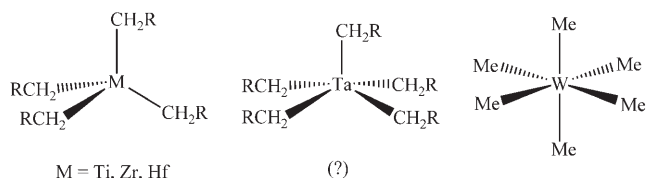


Scheme 1. “Low-oxidation-state” carbene (left) and carbyne complexes (right).

that contain a metal–carbon triple bond.^[6] It was clear that metal–carbon single bonds were of great importance in the emerging area of homogeneous catalysis. However, no catalytic reactions involving species that contain metal–carbon double or triple bonds were known. When I went to the Central Research Department of E. I. DuPont de Nemours and Company in 1972, transition-metal organometallic

chemistry and homogeneous catalysis were of great interest as a consequence of their huge potential in organic chemistry and therefore in industry.

In the early 1970s inorganic chemists knew that many transition metal species containing a metal–carbon bond are subject to various modes of decomposition that are much more rapid than in a non-transition-metal species such as $\text{Zn}(\text{CH}_2\text{CH}_3)_2$ or $\text{Al}(\text{CH}_2\text{CH}_3)_3$. The most common of these decomposition reactions involves transfer of a β hydrogen atom, from a metal-bound ethyl group ($\text{M}-\text{CH}_2\text{CH}_3$) for example, to the metal center (M) to yield a metal hydride and an alkene. The relative stabilities of high-oxidation-state “homoleptic” or “peralkyl” compounds such as $[\text{M}\{\text{CH}_2\text{Si}(\text{CH}_3)_3\}_4]$, $[\text{M}(\text{CH}_2\text{C}_6\text{H}_5)_4]$, and $[\text{M}\{\text{CH}_2\text{C}(\text{CH}_3)_3\}_4]$ ($\text{M} = \text{Ti}, \text{Zr}, \text{or Hf}$; Scheme 2), were rationalized on the basis of the



Scheme 2. “Peralkyl” complexes of Group 4, 5, and 6; metals are in their highest possible oxidation states.

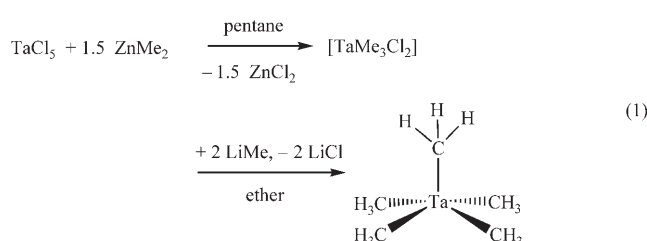
fact that unlike a compound having an ethyl ligand, the alkyl ligands in these species lack β hydrogen atoms and so of course cannot undergo decomposition processes that involve β hydrogen atoms.^[7] In 1973 Wilkinson published the synthesis of $[\text{W}(\text{CH}_3)_6]$.^[8] Unlike $[\text{M}(\text{CH}_3)_4]$ species (where $\text{M} = \text{Ti}, \text{Zr}, \text{or Hf}$) $[\text{W}(\text{CH}_3)_6]$ is stable at 22 °C. The methyl carbon is α with respect to the metal center; there is no β carbon atom and so no β hydrogens. However, methyl species are not

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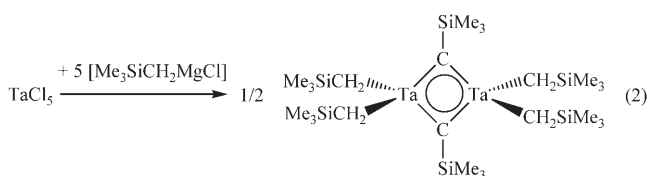
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sterically protected against bimolecular reactions that involve α hydrogens. As you can see from the note added in the proof of Wilkinson's Nobel address,^[9] I was intrigued by high oxidation state peralkyl complexes and had chosen to explore the organometallic chemistry of tantalum soon after my arrival at DuPont. Little alkyl chemistry was known of the metals in Group 5 (V, Nb, Ta) at that time; I chose tantalum because it is next to tungsten in Group 6 (Cr, Mo, W), and like tungsten, tantalum is relatively stable in its highest possible oxidation state (+v). Peralkyl tantalum complexes therefore must be pentaalkyls.

My starting point for tantalum alkyl chemistry was a paper by Gordon Jvinall^[10] in which he described the low-yield synthesis of niobium and tantalum trimethyl dichloride species through addition of dimethylzinc to the metal pentachlorides. I found that crystalline $[\text{TaMe}_3\text{Cl}_2]$ not only could be prepared quantitatively in pentane on a large scale [Eq. (1)], but it could be stored for long periods at -40°C

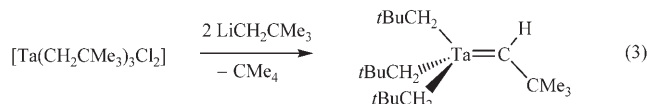


in the solid state. Moreover, it reacted with two equivalents of LiMe to generate volatile, yellow, crystalline $[\text{Ta}(\text{CH}_3)_5]$.^[11] This species is much less stable than $[\text{W}(\text{CH}_3)_6]$, but much more stable than $[\text{Hf}(\text{CH}_3)_4]$. Pentamethyltantalum decomposes above 0°C to yield approximately 3.7 equivalents of methane, and it does so in a bimolecular fashion. Pentamethyltantalum has 15 sterically unprotected α C–H bonds and the metal is highly electron-deficient (10 electrons, eight shy of the preferred 18 electron count). Interactions between one metal center and C–H bonds in another metal complex thereby are encouraged, and are easier in $[\text{Ta}(\text{CH}_3)_5]$ than in $[\text{W}(\text{CH}_3)_6]$ for simple steric reasons. Wilkinson had just published a reaction that yielded an unusual dimeric species containing what he called a “carbene bridge,” $\mu\text{-CSiMe}_3$ [actually a carbyne bridge; Eq. (2)]. With respect to $[\text{Ta}$

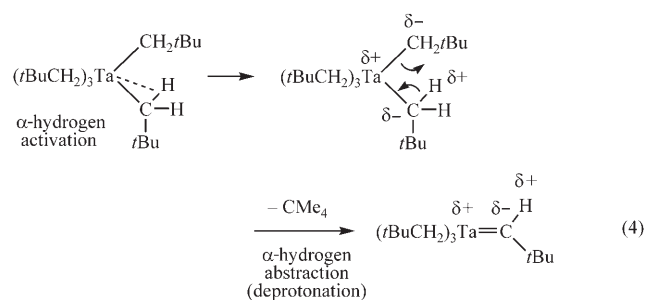


$(\text{CH}_2\text{SiMe}_3)_5]$ he said “It is assumed that a penta-alkyl complex cannot exist for steric reasons.”^[12] Therefore, I turned to experiments involving the neopentyl (CH_2CMe_3) ligand to probe the limit of steric crowding in homoleptic d^0 tantalum pentaalkyls and the nature of the decomposition pathways that might be observable in such circumstances. The crucial

experiment consisted of an attempt to prepare $[\text{Ta}(\text{CH}_2\text{CMe}_3)_5]$ through addition of two equivalents of $[\text{LiCH}_2\text{CMe}_3]$ to $[\text{Ta}(\text{CH}_2\text{CMe}_3)_3\text{Cl}_2]$. Instead of $[\text{Ta}(\text{CH}_2\text{CMe}_3)_5]$, orange, crystalline, and thermally stable $[(\text{Me}_3\text{CCH}_2)_3\text{Ta}=\text{CHCMe}_3]$ was formed in quantitative yield [Eq. (3)].^[13] The exact mechanism is still not known, but it is



likely that an α hydrogen is activated by the metal and subsequently removed as a proton by a neopentyl group, possibly in an intramolecular manner in pentaneopentyltantalum itself [Eq. (4)]. $[(\text{Me}_3\text{SiCH}_2)_3\text{Ta}=\text{CHSiMe}_3]$ may be an

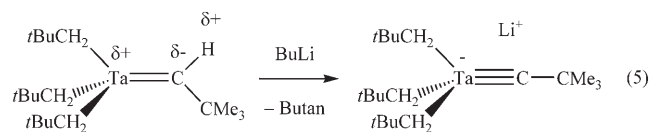


intermediate in the reaction shown in Equation (2), but it must decompose intermolecularly to give tetramethylsilane and the observed dimeric species; $[(\text{Me}_3\text{CCH}_2)_3\text{Ta}=\text{CHCMe}_3]$ does not.

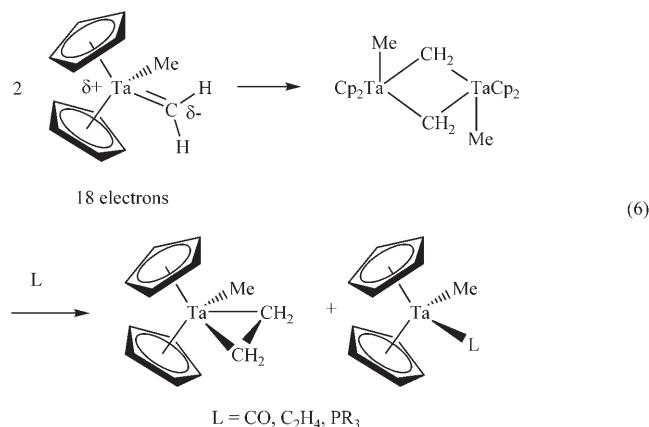
The tantalum neopentylidene complex, $[(\text{Me}_3\text{CCH}_2)_3\text{Ta}=\text{CHCMe}_3]$, was new in several respects. It was the first example of a stable transition metal $\text{M}=\text{CHR}$ species. Second, the terminal alkylidene was formed through a new type of reaction, an intramolecular α -hydrogen abstraction from an alkyl. Third, unlike “carbene” complexes discovered by Fischer and his group, $[(\text{Me}_3\text{CCH}_2)_3\text{Ta}=\text{CHCMe}_3]$ was highly electron-deficient (10 electrons in metal-based bonding orbitals). Fourth, $[(\text{Me}_3\text{CCH}_2)_3\text{Ta}=\text{CHCMe}_3]$ appeared to behave as if the metal were in its highest possible oxidation state with the $\text{Ta}=\text{C}$ bond being polarized so that the metal is relatively positive and the carbon relatively negative, opposite to what is found in Fischer-type carbene complexes. Fifth, the high thermal stability and resistance of $[(\text{Me}_3\text{CCH}_2)_3\text{Ta}=\text{CHCMe}_3]$ toward intermolecular decomposition reactions, as well as toward further intramolecular reactions, suggested that other high-oxidation-state, four-coordinate species that contain four sterically demanding covalently bound ligands might be viable. This simple but important principle pervaded much of the high oxidation state chemistry that was developed over the next 30 years in my group.

“Deprotonation” of a neopentyl ligand to give a neopentylidene ligand suggested that a neopentylidene ligand might be deprotonated further by an external base. Indeed, addition of *n*-butyllithium to $[(\text{Me}_3\text{CCH}_2)_3\text{Ta}=\text{CHCMe}_3]$ led

to formation of the related high-oxidation-state, anionic, neopentylidene species, $[(\text{Me}_3\text{CCH}_2)_3\text{Ta}\equiv\text{CCMe}_3]\text{Li}^+$ [Eq. (5)].



Finally, it was demonstrated that even a methylene ($\text{Ta}=\text{CH}_2$) species could be prepared through deprotonation of $[\text{TaCp}_2(\text{CH}_3)_2]^+$ ($\text{Cp} = \text{C}_5\text{H}_5$).^[15,16] Even though $[\text{TaCp}_2(\text{CH}_3)(\text{CH}_2)]$ contains 18 electrons in metal-based orbitals, it is unstable toward bimolecular decomposition to yield an ethylene complex in 50% yield, plus related species that are formed in the presence of some ligand L [Eq. (6)]. Bimolec-

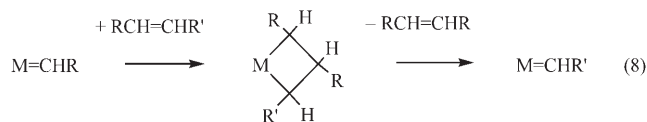


ular decomposition of alkylidenes, especially methylenes, is a battle that continues to be fought today. The main point is that between 1973 and 1975 high-oxidation-state tantalum-carbon double and triple bonds had been prepared, and they appeared to be significantly different in several important respects from the low-oxidation-state species prepared by Fischer.

At some point in the early 1970s I became aware of the “olefin-metathesis” reaction [Eq. (7)], a startling and mysterious reaction catalyzed by homogeneous Mo and W catalysts (and heterogeneous Re catalysts), the identities of which were not known.^[17–20] Physical organic experiments by Robert Grubbs,^[21–23] Thomas Katz,^[24,25] Charles Casey,^[26] and Yves Chauvin^[27] were designed to determine whether the reaction proceeded by a “pair-wise” or “non-pair-wise” mechanism.^[20]

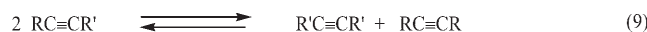


It was shown that the reaction proceeded in a “non-pair-wise” fashion, and Chauvin was the first to propose the correct “carbene/metalacyclobutane” mechanism [Eq. (8)] that

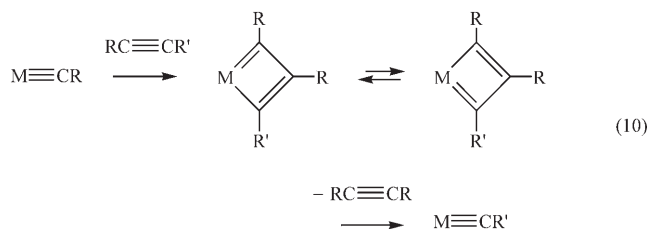


would account for all observations.^[27] However, at that time no “carbene” complexes were known that would react efficiently with ordinary olefins, as proposed by Chauvin.

Alkyne metathesis [Eq. (9)], both heterogeneous^[28,29] and homogeneous,^[30] catalyzed by Mo and W compounds of



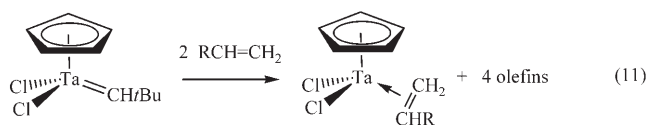
unknown type, also had been discovered. Katz^[24] proposed a mechanism of alkyne metathesis analogous to that for olefin metathesis [Eq. (10)], that is, one that involves formation of



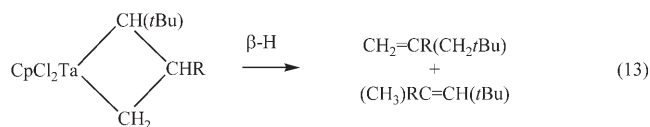
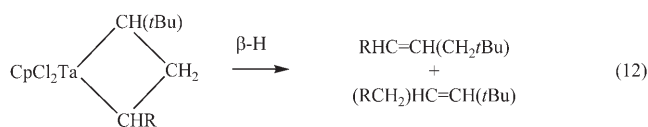
metalacyclobutadiene intermediates. Yet no “carbyne” complexes were known that would catalyze alkyne metathesis.

I asked myself whether the new types of tantalum “alkylidene” and “alkylidyne” complexes might not be at least the type of species that metathesize olefins and acetylenes, respectively, even though tantalum was not known to be a catalyst for either of these reactions at that time.

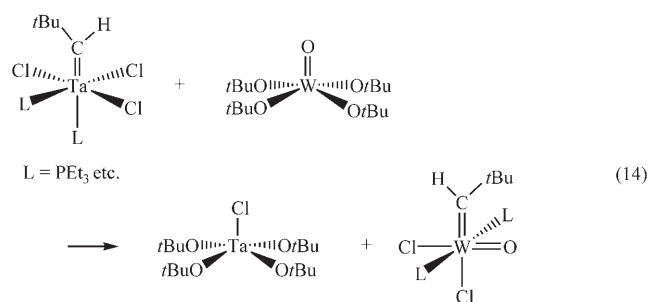
After my move to MIT in 1975, I began to explore reactions between various tantalum alkylidene complexes and olefins in some detail. It became clear that electron-deficient tantalum and niobium alkylidenes would react with olefins readily to give metalacyclobutane intermediates [Eq. (11)], but these species would rearrange via a β -hydride



process to give as many as four of the possible rearrangement products instead of losing an olefin to reform a new alkylidene [Eq. (12) and (13)]; the alkylidene chain reaction never started and no metathesis products therefore were observed.^[31] At an international symposium on olefin metathesis (ISOM III) in 1979 in Lyon, I reported that niobium and tantalum complexes that contain *tert*-butoxide ligands in

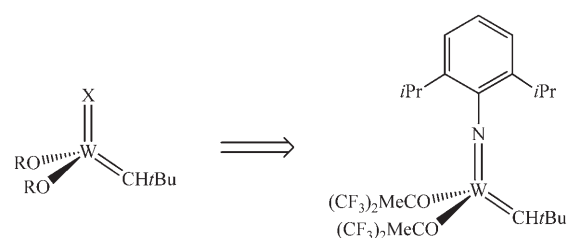


place of chloride ligands, such as $[\text{M}(\text{CH}t\text{Bu})(\text{O}t\text{Bu})_2\text{Cl}(\text{PMe}_3)]$, could be coaxed into metathesizing olefins. Several dozen catalytic metathesis cycles could be observed for an olefin such as *cis*-2-pentene.^[32] It was proposed that the *tert*-butoxide ligands “prevent reduction” of the metal and “promote metathesis.” At that same conference I reported that an attempt to carry out a “Wittig-like” reaction between a tantalum alkylidene and a tungsten oxo complex to yield $[\text{W}(\text{CH}t\text{Bu})(\text{O}t\text{Bu})_4]$ and $[\text{Ta}(\text{O})\text{L}_2\text{Cl}_3]$, instead produced an unanticipated 18-electron oxo neopentylidene complex of tungsten [Eq. (14)].^[33] This oxo neopentylidene complex



reacted with olefins to yield the metathesis products and new alkylidenes that would be expected from the metathesis reaction, including a methylene complex, and especially rapidly in the presence of a trace of AlCl₃. This was a convincing demonstration that the oxo alkylidene species react with olefins readily and reform an alkylidene complex of the same type from half an olefin that was present. The role of AlCl₃, it was proposed, was to remove either chloride or phosphine (reversibly) and thereby create an empty coordination site at the electronically saturated metal center.

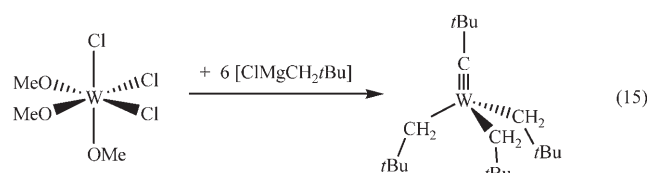
A four-coordinate neopentylidene species containing large, covalently bound ligands was believed to be the most likely isolable, but reactive, electron-deficient species. A neopentylidene ligand clearly was required. We also knew that alkoxides were desirable, but what should the fourth, and necessarily dianionic, ligand X (Scheme 3) be? An oxo ligand was unsuitable because it almost certainly would encourage bimolecular decomposition reactions. We focused on an imido ($[\text{NR}]^{2-}$) ligand, an isoelectronic analogue of an oxo ligand, since the imido ligand could be sterically protected by a large R group. After considering the likely synthetic difficulties associated with R being a 2,6-di-*tert*-butylphenyl



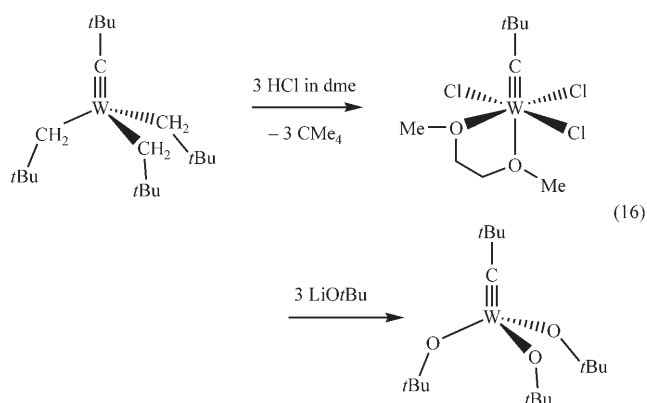
Scheme 3. Design of a stable tungsten imido alkylidene bisalkoxide complex.

group, we settled on the 2,6-diisopropylphenyl group, a choice that in part was in response to a comment by Barry Sharpless concerning the value of isopropyl groups in general versus *tert*-butyl groups. (The 2,6-diisopropylphenyl group is found in many nitrogen-based ligands in a large variety of catalysts today.) Several large and sterically demanding tertiary alcohols and phenols were available, including fluorinated *tert*-butanols such as $(\text{CF}_3)_2\text{MeCOH}$ whose pK_a in water (≈ 9) is significantly less than that of *tert*-butanol itself (≈ 19). We felt that the electron withdrawing ability of the hexafluoro-*tert*-butoxide ligand should increase the electrophilicity of the metal dramatically and therefore also increase the rate of the reaction of an alkylidene complex with an olefin. Therefore, we aimed to prepare $[\text{W}(\text{NAr})(\text{CHCMe}_3)\{\text{OCMe}(\text{CF}_3)_2\}_2]$ (Scheme 3) with the expectation that this 14-electron species not only could be isolated, but that it would metathesize olefins readily.

Being aware of the almost magical properties of the neopentyl ligand (as well as neopentylidene and neopentylidyne ligands), we also were curious about simple reactions between W^{VI} compounds (initially WCl₆) and neopentyl-lithium or neopentylmagnesium chloride, and had begun exploring such reactions in 1977. We discovered that a volatile, yellow, crystalline alkylidyne complex could be isolated from such reactions,^[34] and that the reaction between $[\text{W}(\text{OMe})_3\text{Cl}_3]$ and six equivalents of $[\text{Me}_3\text{CCH}_2\text{MgCl}]$ in diethyl ether produced that species in a yield of approximately 50% [Eq. (15)].^[35] $[(\text{Me}_3\text{CCH}_2)_3\text{W}\equiv\text{CCMe}_3]$ is closely

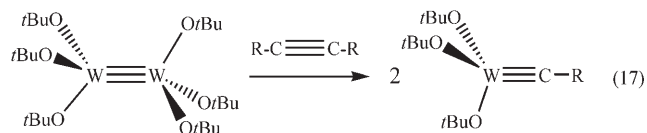


related to $[(\text{Me}_3\text{CCH}_2)_3\text{Ta}=\text{CHCMe}_3]$ in having four neopentyl or neopentyl-derived ligands around the metal. As we became aware of the benefits of alkoxides for efficient olefin metathesis, we became curious whether a trialkoxide species such as $[(\text{Me}_3\text{CO})_3\text{W}\equiv\text{CCMe}_3]$ could be prepared and whether it would be an efficient alkyne metathesis initiator. We were pleased to find that $[(\text{Me}_3\text{CO})_3\text{W}\equiv\text{CCMe}_3]$ in fact could be prepared readily [Eq. (16)], and especially pleased to find that alkynes are metathesized at room temperature with $[(\text{Me}_3\text{CO})_3\text{W}\equiv\text{CCMe}_3]$ as the initiator^[36] at rates thou-



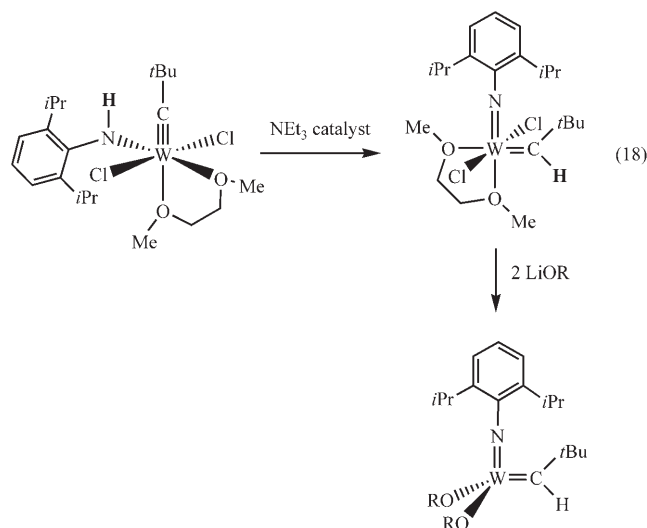
sands of times faster than “black box” catalysts known in the literature at that time. This finding proved to us that sterically bulky alkoxides were indeed highly beneficial for metathesis activity. In contrast to $[(\text{Me}_3\text{CO})_3\text{W}\equiv\text{CCMe}_3]$, $[(\text{dme})\text{Cl}_3\text{W}\equiv\text{CCMe}_3]$ does not metathesize alkynes, even though a tungstenacyclobutadiene intermediate necessary for that transformation, for example $[\text{Cl}_3\text{W}\{\text{C}(\text{tBu})\text{C}(\text{CH}_3)\text{C}(\text{CH}_3)\}]$, could be isolated and crystallographically characterized.^[37] Other reactions took precedence.^[38–40] $[(\text{Me}_3\text{CCH}_2)_3\text{W}\equiv\text{CCMe}_3]$ also did not metathesize internal alkynes; it was simply too unreactive. When the OR group in $[(\text{RO})_3\text{W}\equiv\text{CCMe}_3]$ was a more electron-withdrawing alkoxide or phenoxide, we could isolate and crystallographically characterize intermediate tungstenacyclobutadiene complexes in alkyne metathesis reactions and study them in detail.^[41,42]

A large variety of species that contain tungsten–tungsten or molybdenum–molybdenum triple bonds, $\text{X}_3\text{M}\equiv\text{MX}_3$ species, were known at that time,^[43,44] and in particular hexa(*tert*-butoxide) ditungsten, $[(\text{Me}_3\text{CO})_3\text{W}\equiv\text{W}(\text{OCMe}_3)_3]$. An interesting question, therefore, was whether $[(\text{Me}_3\text{CO})_3\text{W}\equiv\text{W}(\text{OCMe}_3)_3]$ would react with internal alkynes to yield $[(\text{Me}_3\text{CO})_3\text{W}\equiv\text{CR}]$ complexes [Eq. (17)], which is effectively a metathesis-like reaction? The answer turned out to be yes,



and it did so amazingly readily.^[45] Although this is not a general reaction for all $\text{X}_3\text{M}\equiv\text{MX}_3$ species ($\text{M} = \text{Mo}$ or W), the fact that it is facile only when X is a relatively sterically bulky alkoxide, had to be more than a coincidence. This discovery opened up a route to $[(\text{Me}_3\text{CO})_3\text{W}\equiv\text{CR}]$ species that did not rely on α -hydrogen abstraction reactions,^[46] and cemented the relationship between, and interconvertibility of, strong triple bonds between metal centers, between carbon atoms (in alkynes), and between a metal center and a carbon atom in an alkylidyne complex. It is interesting to note that the $\text{C}\equiv\text{N}$ bond in nitriles is also cleaved readily, although the $\text{N}\equiv\text{N}$ bond in dinitrogen is not. That spectacular reaction, which requires a (three-coordinate) triamido species, would not be reported until 1995.^[47]

But tungsten alkylidynes were important for an additional reason. If a neopentylidyne species could be prepared by removing an α proton from a neopentylidene ligand, could not that reaction be run in the reverse direction, that is, could not a proton be added to a neopentylidyne species to yield a neopentylidene species? Moreover, could that not be accomplished in a manner that would produce the other desired metal–ligand multiple bond, namely the imido ligand, at the same time? An amido alkylidyne complex could in fact be prepared readily and the proton then moved from nitrogen to carbon by a base [Eq. (18)]. A large variety of $[\text{W}(\text{NAr})(\text{CHtBu})(\text{OR})_2]$ complexes then could be prepared readily



from the dichloride species, as long as the OR group was large enough to prevent complications that resulted from bimolecular reactions. X-ray structures, such as that in Figure 1,

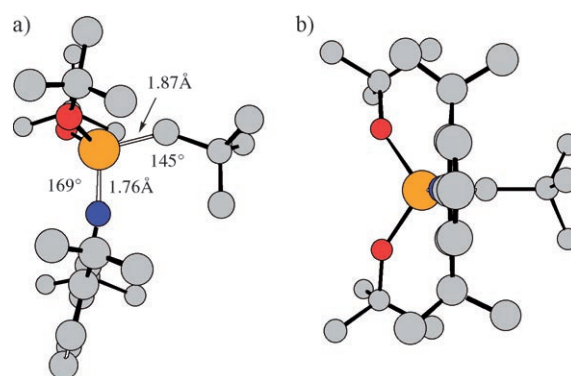
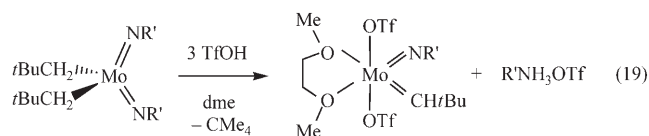


Figure 1. The structure of $[\text{W}(\text{NAr})(\text{CHtBu})(\text{OtBu})_2]$; a) top view; b) side view.

showed how the *tert*-butyl group of the neopentylidene ligand points toward the imido ligand (a *syn* orientation), and how the diisopropylphenyl group on nitrogen protects the imido nitrogen and the alkylidyne carbon atom against bimolecular reactions.

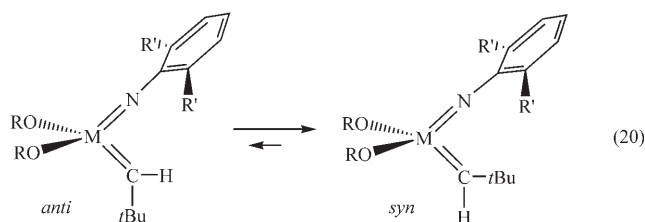
It soon became clear that $[W(NAr)(CH-tBu)(OR)_2]$ species would metathesize olefins in the expected manner with an activity that correlated roughly with the electron-withdrawing power of the OR ligand. Catalysts that contain hexafluoro-*tert*-butoxide ligands appeared to have the highest activities. We found that tungstenacyclobutane intermediates, the very intermediates proposed by Chauvin in the metathesis reaction, actually could be isolated and crystallographically characterized.^[48] However, tungstenacyclobutane stabilities proved to be a problem in some circumstances; loss of an olefin from an unsubstituted tungstenacyclobutane intermediate, in particular, could be relatively slow. The metal therefore would remain sequestered in the form of a tungstenacyclobutane. Since molybdenum–ligand bonds are generally weaker than tungsten–ligand bonds, we felt that a molybdacyclobutane complex might lose an olefin more readily. Therefore, we aimed to synthesize analogous $[Mo(NAr)(CH-tBu)(OR)_2]$ catalysts. A synthesis of bisalkoxides was devised, the key feature of which is the use of an imido “protecting group” that is then removed upon addition of triflic acid [Eq. (19)], thereby forming in the process a



neopentylidene ligand from two neopentyl ligands through an α -hydrogen abstraction reaction in a hypothetical $[Mo(NR')(CH_2-tBu)_2(triflate)_2]$ intermediate.^[49] The imido (NR') and alkoxide groups could be varied widely and a large number of molybdenum catalysts therefore became accessible.

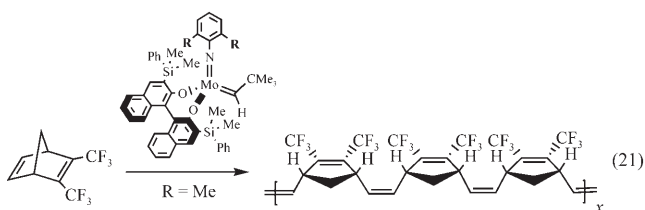
The molybdenum bisalkoxide catalysts are also remarkably active for a wide range of metathesis reactions, again especially when the alkoxide is the highly electron-withdrawing $OCMe(CF_3)_2$ group. In addition molybdacyclobutane intermediates are less stable than tungstacyclobutane intermediates toward loss of olefin. The steric bulk of the $OCMe(CF_3)_2$ and Ar (2,6-diisopropylphenyl) groups are also of considerable importance in preventing bimolecular reactions between the intermediate $[Mo(NAr)(CHR')(OR)_2]$ species in any given reaction. We slowly began to understand the extent to which the metathesis reaction could be controlled through systematic variation of the size and the electronic characteristics of the alkoxide and imido groups.

We also discovered that two isomers of any $M=CHR$ catalyst are possible [Eq. (20)]. In the isomer that is usually observed, the alkylidene's substituent points toward the imido group (*syn*), while in the other isomer it points away from the imido group (*anti*). *Syn* and *anti* species can be formed during the course of a metathesis reaction, but *syn* and *anti* isomers of any given alkylidene also can interconvert simply through rotation about the $Mo=C$ bond. The rate of rotation of a neopentylidene or neophylidene was found to vary by a factor of at least 10^6 , and to depend (largely) on the nature of the alkoxide,^[50,51] with rotation being relatively fast in the



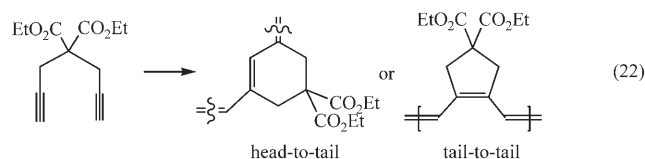
presence of alkoxide ligands such as *tert*-butoxide and relatively slow in the presence of hexafluoro-*tert*-butoxide ligands. In ring-opening metathesis polymerization (ROMP) studies, one of many variations of the basic olefin-metathesis reaction, we demonstrated (for one type of polymerizable monomer) that the *anti* isomer was the more reactive by a factor of approximately 10^4 . Therefore one, or the other, or both *syn* and *anti* intermediates in a catalytic reaction might be involved, with the outcome depending upon the nature of the imido and alkoxide groups, and the reactivity of the olefin involved in the reaction with *syn* and *anti* intermediates, and also the temperature and other variables. This circumstance complicates to a considerable degree a detailed understanding of the metathesis reaction by such catalysts, but at the same time dramatically increases the flexibility of the catalysts and offers the possibility that for a given metathesis reaction a catalyst can be found with which the reaction will proceed efficiently.

Ring-opening metathesis polymerization of cyclic olefins had been studied for many years before well-defined catalysts were developed.^[17,18] We naturally asked whether well-defined catalysts behaved as polymerization catalysts for cyclic olefins, and if so, what advantages did they offer? In our only publication together, one that resulted from my sabbatical at Caltech as a Fairchild scholar in 1986, Robert Grubbs and I showed that these new well-defined catalysts did behave in the expected manner, and that the process could be “living” in the right circumstances, that is, intermediate alkylidenes that contain the growing polymer chain would not decompose.^[52] In my laboratory we went on to show that the polymerization process could be controlled in a dramatic fashion to yield polymers with a highly regular repeating structure. Generally polymers with highly regular structures have the most interesting properties and therefore are the most desirable. In many cases we found that the entire polymer structure can be controlled through minute, but critical, changes in the catalyst structure. For example, a highly regular *cis, isotactic* polymer [Eq. (21)] is formed if the catalyst contains a specific binaphtholate ligand and a dimethylphenylimido group ($R = CH_3$ in the 2,6-disubstituted phenyl group).^[53,54] In contrast, if the R group in the imido



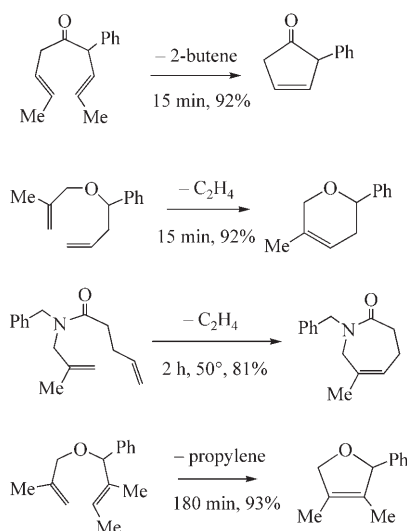
ligand is isopropyl, then the polymer has a relatively random structure. The smaller dimethylphenylimido group is believed to allow polymerization to proceed solely via *syn* isomers to give *cis* linkages. Control of the “tacticity,” that is, the way the five-membered rings point in this polymer, is greatest in the presence of a chiral (racemic) binaphtholate ligand. This control is a consequence of “enantiomorphic site control” over the polymerization process. In a series of experiments with related monomers that contain two esters made from enantiomerically pure alcohols, we could distinguish between *isotactic* and *syndiotactic* polymers, and therefore could demonstrate the *cis, isotactic* structure, which is formed through enantiomorphic site control, and the *trans, syndiotactic* structure, which is formed through chain-end control, for the first time in ROMP polymers.^[55] The degree to which the polymer structure can be controlled through systematic, tiny variations of the catalyst is of great importance for many ROMP polymers that are made today with high-oxidation-state alkylidene catalyst initiators.

For some time it had been known that “classical” Mo and W catalysts that would metathesize olefins would also polymerize alkynes. This situation suggested that metal alkylidene species were responsible.^[56–58] We showed that well-defined species do indeed polymerize alkynes^[59] or cyclopolymerize 1,6-heptadiynes^[60] [Eq. (22)] to yield poly-



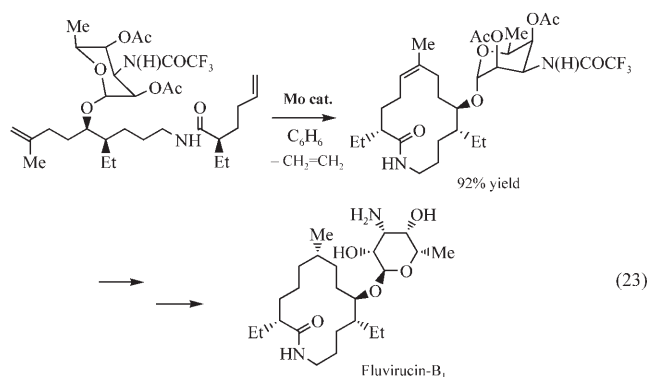
mers analogous to those described in the literature. In the case of a cyclopolymerization of 1,6-heptadiynes, such as diethyldipropargylmalonate, a six-membered or a five-membered ring can form, depending upon the regiochemistry of the addition of the first alkyne to the alkylidene. Since the optical properties of such polyenes vary with the polymer's structure and chain length,^[61] it is highly desirable to make a polymer with a single structure and to control the molecular weight of that polymer through a polymerization with a well-defined catalyst. Although work is still ongoing in this area, it now appears possible to do so.^[62,63]

In 1992 Fu and Grubbs published two papers in which they demonstrated how $[\text{Mo}(\text{NAr})(\text{CHCMe}_2\text{Ph})\{\text{OCMe}(\text{CF}_3)_2\}_2]$ could be employed to make cyclic olefins quickly and efficiently that contain functionalities other than a C=C bond,^[64,65] with the only other product being a volatile olefin such as ethylene, propylene, or butene (Scheme 4). Rings of many sizes, and even rings that contain tetrasubstituted olefinic bonds, could be prepared. These papers helped awaken organic chemists to the possibility that olefin metathesis by well-defined catalysts had significant potential in organic chemistry. The fact that the Mo and W catalysts in this general class are sensitive to air, moisture, and some functionalities did not prohibit their use in organic reactions. In 1995 Hoveyda and his group reported a synthesis of a cyclic



Scheme 4. Some ring-closing metatheses initiated by $[\text{Mo}(\text{NAr})(\text{CHCMe}_2\text{Ph})\{\text{OCMe}(\text{CF}_3)_2\}_2]$.

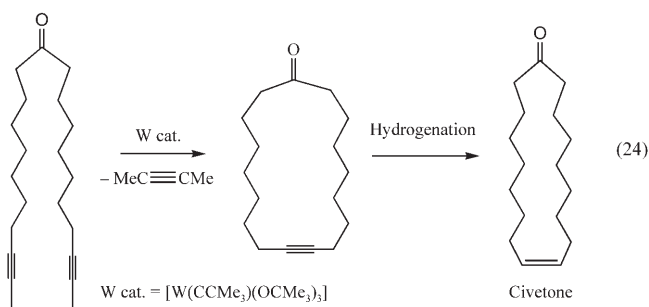
natural product, Fluvirucin-B₁, in which one of the steps consisted of a ring-closing metathesis (RCM) reaction [Eq. (23)].^[66] This paper demonstrated that relatively com-



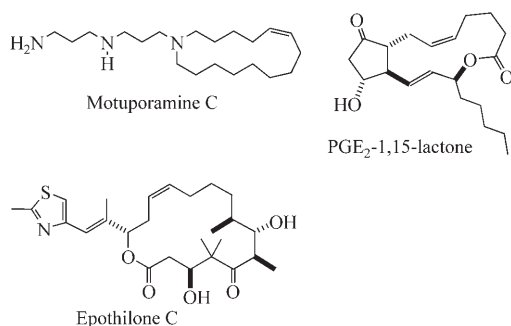
plex molecules could be prepared by metathesis. These and other applications of metathesis technology, along with the commercial availability of $[\text{Mo}(\text{NAr})(\text{CHCMe}_2\text{Ph})\{\text{OCMe}(\text{CF}_3)_2\}_2]$, helped fuel applications of Mo metathesis technology to organic chemistry.^[67] The possibility that metathesis could be employed routinely in organic chemistry I believe was a significant factor that drove Grubbs to develop ruthenium catalysts in the early 1990s.^[20,68,69]

The use of alkyne metathesis catalysts for organic chemistry also was realized in the 1990s, primarily through work by Fürstner and co-workers, who showed that large rings could be prepared through alkyne metathesis with the $[(\text{Me}_3\text{CO})_3\text{W}\equiv\text{CCMe}_3]$ initiator.^[70] A cyclic alkyne then could be hydrogenated selectively to yield a *cis* olefin (Lindlar reduction). This alternative to alkene metathesis circumvented a still unsolved problem, the formation of largely ($\approx 75\%$) the thermodynamically more favored *trans* double bonds in alkene metathesis, instead of *cis* double bonds. An

example of alkyne metathesis is the stereoselective synthesis of civetone [Eq. (24)].^[71] Many other reactions that involve formation of a carbon–carbon triple bond through alkyne

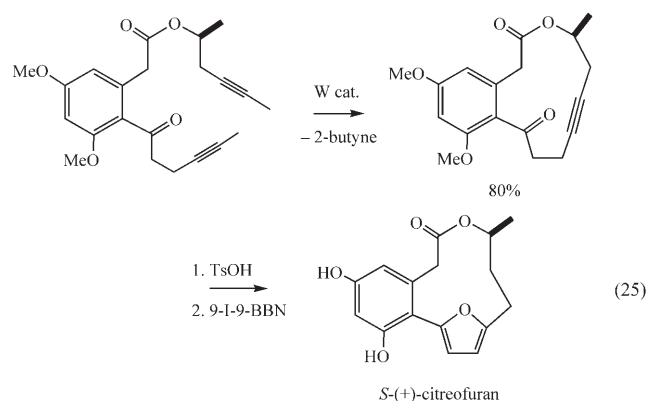


metathesis as part of a synthetic organic procedure began to appear, such as syntheses of the cytotoxic marine alkaloid motuporamine C,^[72] prostaglandin E₂-1,15-lactone,^[73] and epothilone A and C, all of which contain a *cis* olefin within a ring (Scheme 5).^[74] Alkyne metathesis can be useful in other



Scheme 5. Some molecules whose syntheses involve alkyne metathesis to create the *cis* double bond.

ways, as shown in the synthesis of *S*-(+)-Citreofofan [Eq. (25); BBN = 9-borabicyclo[3.3.1]nonane].^[75] Although molybdenum-based alkyne metathesis catalysts were known,^[76,77] work by Cummins,^[78] Fürstner,^[79] and Moore,^[80] recently have demonstrated how these relatively inaccessible



Mo catalysts can be prepared in situ from trisamidoalkylidyne precursors.

With the knowledge that certain sterically protected biphenolates and binaphtholates can be attached to Mo to yield stable neopentylidene or neophylidene ROMP initiators, we turned to the development of enantiomerically pure catalysts for asymmetric metathesis reactions in the mid 1990s. Some preliminary results were obtained with an enantiomerically pure biphenolate catalyst (Figure 2) in

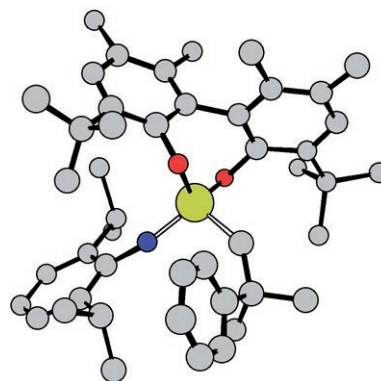
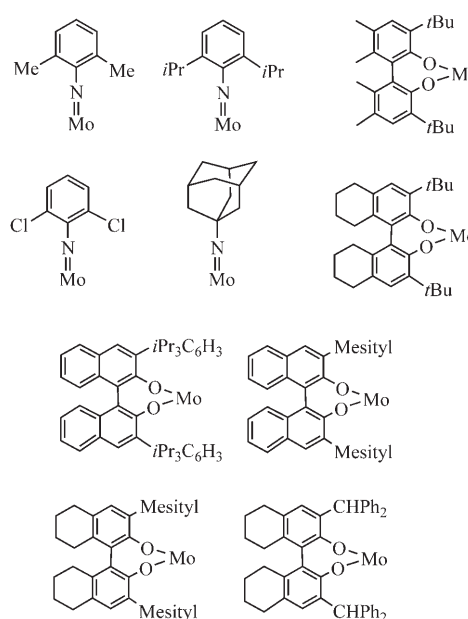


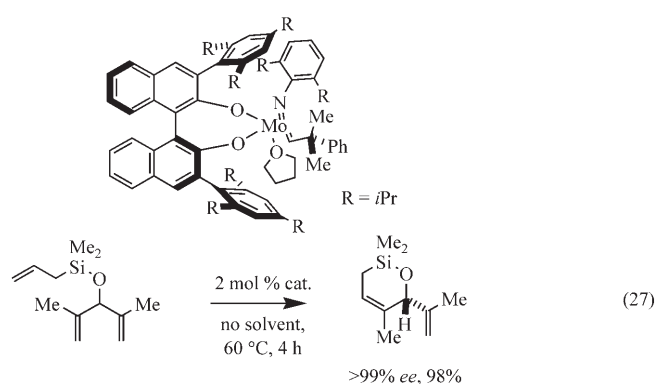
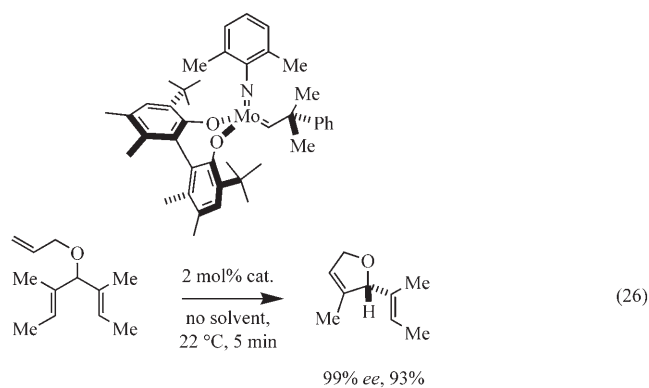
Figure 2. The structure of [Mo(NAr)(CHCMe₂Ph)(3,3'-di-*tert*-butyl-5,5',6,6'-tetramethyl-1,1'-biphenyl-2,2'-diolate)].

1997. We then began a collaboration with Amir Hoveyda that was aimed at the application of asymmetric metathesis reactions to organic synthesis.^[67,81,82] The modularity of the catalysts allowed us to prepare many enantiomerically pure variations that contain one of several different imido ligands and several different diolates (Scheme 6). It soon became apparent that with the right catalyst, asymmetric reactions could be efficient in terms of both yield and enantioselectivity,

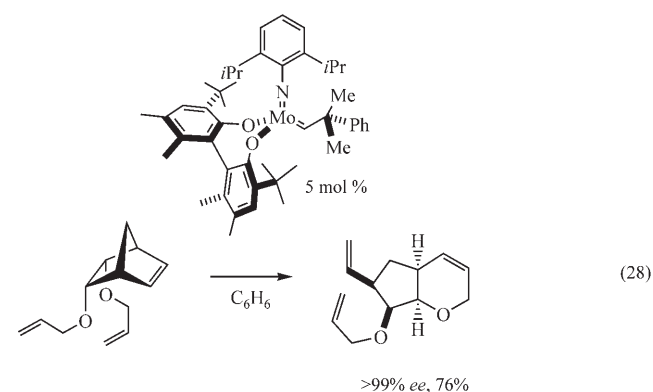


Scheme 6. Imido groups and enantiomerically pure diolates (shown in racemic form) that are employed to make asymmetric catalysts.

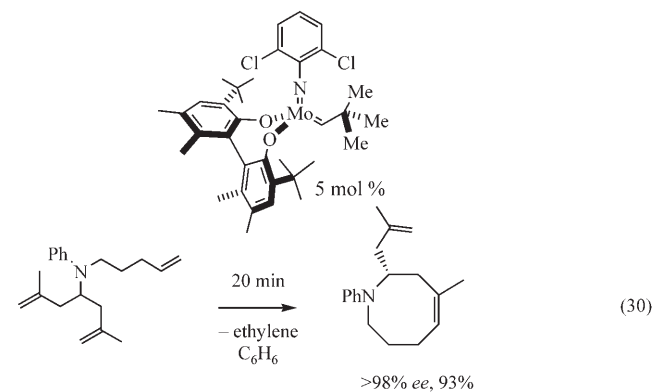
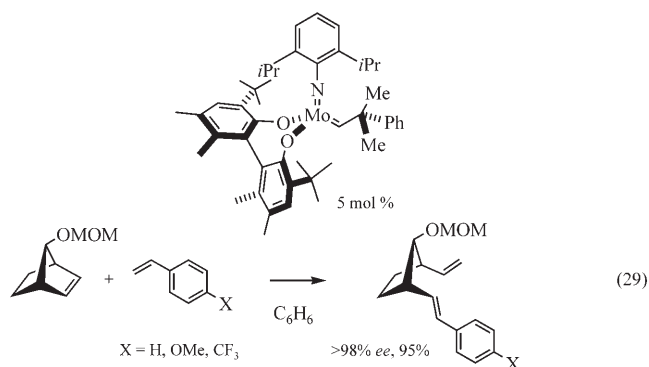
in many cases producing a single enantiomerically pure product in virtually quantitative yield relatively quickly [Eq. (26) and (27)].^[83] Again, byproducts usually consist of



simple olefins, such as ethylene, propylene, or butene. A wide variety of other asymmetric reactions were developed, among them ring-opening/ring-closing metathesis [Eq. (28)],^[84] ring-opening/cross metathesis [Eq. (29)]; MOM = methoxy-

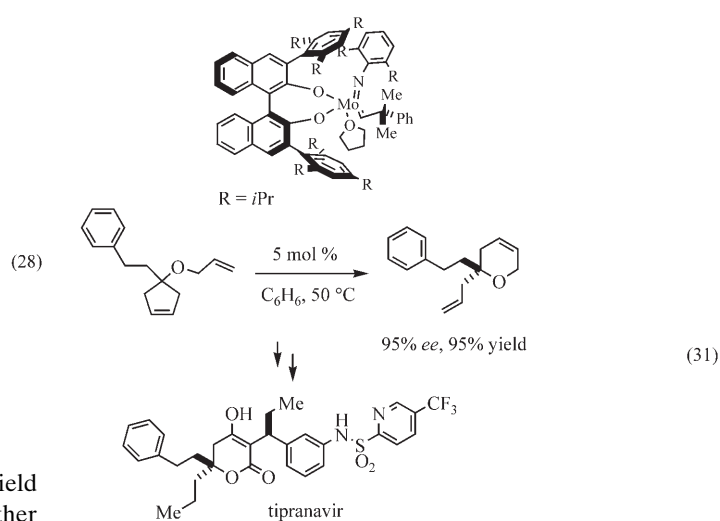


methyl],^[85] and the ring closing of tertiary amines to yield products resembling substructures of various drugs and other natural products [Eq. (30)].^[86] It also was shown that the synthesis of drugs, such as tipranavir, an HIV protease

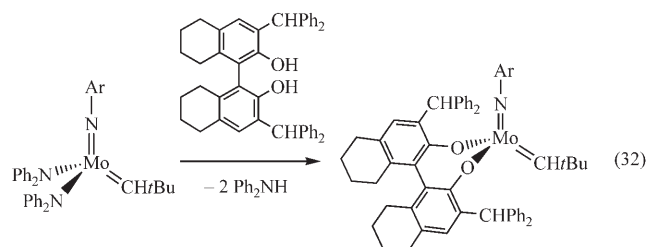


inhibitor, could be shortened dramatically through the use of an asymmetric metathesis step to synthesize the problematic enantiomerically pure tertiary ether [Eq. (31)].^[87,88] These are but a few examples of what has been accomplished in the last several years.

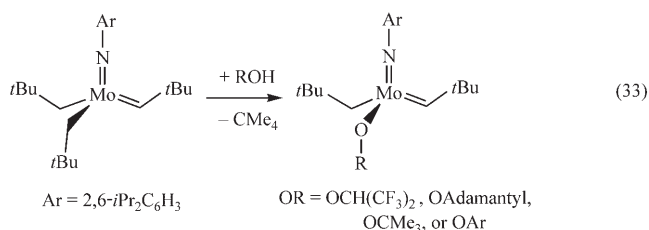
The isolation and testing of many catalyst variations side by side for one specific asymmetric reaction revealed that the efficiency of the asymmetric catalysts in terms of yield and



enantioselectivity can vary dramatically, and that in the long run one could be relatively confident of finding an efficient catalyst. However, dozens of catalysts have to be prepared, isolated, and tested. Therefore, we have begun to explore the possibility of preparing catalysts in situ that we know exist as relatively stable species, either through addition of the biphenolate or binaphtholate to the bistriflate precursor [Eq. (19)], or through addition of the parent biphenol or binaphthol to a bisamido precursor [Eq. (32)]. We have

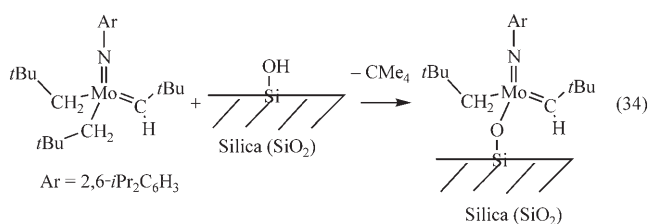


shown that catalysts prepared in situ for asymmetric metathesis reactions behave as well as catalysts that have been isolated and purified before use.^[89] Surprisingly, similar approaches using dineopentyl species led to formation of monoalkoxide species [Eq. (33)].^[90] Initially we thought these

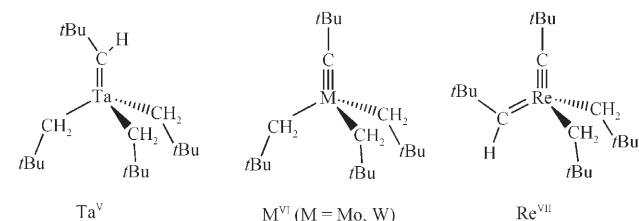


would be relatively poor metathesis catalysts, since dineopentyl species are essentially inactive for metathesis. The presence of one neopentyl and one alkoxide instead of two alkoxides therefore should be detrimental. However, preliminary results suggest that monoalkoxides are highly active catalysts. Recent theoretical calculations in related isoelectronic rhenium systems have suggested why this might be the case.^[91]

Formation of only monoalkoxides from dineopentyl species recently has allowed the synthesis of “well-defined” and highly active molybdenum-based (and tungsten-based) metathesis catalysts on silica surfaces [Eq. (34)] that are relatively long-lived because the intermediate alkylidenes



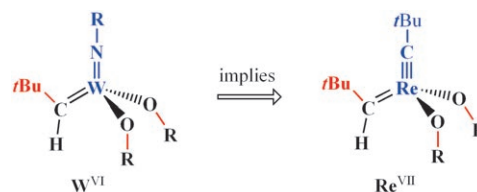
formed cannot decompose bimolecularly.^[92] A variety of relatively well-defined catalysts now can be prepared on silica surfaces using other Ta^V, Mo^{VI}, W^{VI}, and Re^{VII} neopentyl precursors (Scheme 7).^[93] In some cases entirely new reac-



Scheme 7. “Clean” sources of catalysts formed upon addition of them to silica surfaces.

tions can be observed, such as tantalum-catalyzed “alkane metathesis”.^[94] This reaction has now been shown to involve alkene metathesis steps.^[95]

Rhenium forms metathesis catalysts of the “classical” type. Therefore we felt that we should be able to prepare well-defined catalysts. To maintain the four-coordinate geometry around a neutral Re center, a sterically demanding ligand that is triply bound to the metal is required. The only logical choice is a neopentylidene ligand. In fact, well-defined Re^{VII} bisalkoxide catalysts for alkene metathesis can be prepared following the principles learned in W and Mo chemistry,^[96,97] since the neopentylidene ligand does not react with olefins readily (Scheme 8). Monoalkoxide mononeopentyl analogues

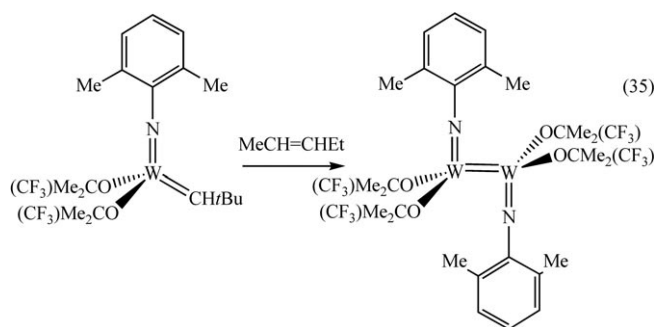


Scheme 8. Rhenium neopentylidene bisalkoxide complexes are olefin-metathesis catalysts.

are believed to be even more reactive than bisalkoxides, especially on silica surfaces.^[91]

Finally, we have found that M=M double bonds can form where M=Mo,^[98] W,^[99] or Re^[100] as a consequence of decomposition of alkylidene species [Eq. (35)]. Metal–metal double bonds are unusual, especially when the double bond is not bridged by potentially bridging ligands, such as an alkoxide or an imido. The fact that these species themselves will metathesize certain olefins (slowly)^[98] raises the possibility that alkylidenes are being reformed from M=M bonds. If this turns out to be the case, it would constitute strong evidence that interconversion of metal–metal, carbon–carbon, and metal–carbon bonds is possible for double bonds, as we know it to be for triple bonds [Eq. (17)].

We have come an enormous distance in the last 30 years, from “ill-defined” metathesis catalysts to those whose struc-



ture and reactivity in solution (and perhaps now on surfaces) we can control with pinpoint precision. Fundamental problems with known catalysts remain, the most important being how to prevent catalyst decomposition and/or how to regenerate catalysts from “clean” decomposition products. I expect these challenges to be met and hope that the consequences of the synthesis and fundamental study of new types of catalysts, and the application of them to a wide variety of problems, will continue to be felt in the coming years.

I am grateful for the freedom given to me in early years at the Central Research Department at duPont, for the opportunity to broaden my efforts and my interests at MIT, and for the support provided by various funding agencies (the National Science Foundation, the National Institutes of Health, the Office of Naval Research, the Army Research Office, and the Department of Energy) over the years for high-oxidation-state organometallic chemistry and other projects. I am forever indebted to my graduate and postdoctoral students, each of whom in his or her own way has contributed to the massive effort required to turn a few observations and new compounds into chemistry that has had a significant impact on fields outside of inorganic chemistry. Finally, I want to thank my wife and my family for their love and support.

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