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**Origines microscopiques de la séparation xénon/krypton
dans les matériaux nanoporeux**

Microscopic origins of the xenon/krypton separation in
nanoporous materials

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En premier lieu, je voudrais adresser ici mes plus vifs remerciements

TABLE OF CONTENTS

General introduction	1
1 High-throughput Computational Screening of Nanoporous Materials	5
1.1 Nanoporous Materials	5
1.1.1 Introduction and Concepts	5
1.1.2 Computational Databases	8
1.1.3 Exploring the Chemical and Structural Space	10
1.2 Review of Screening Methodologies	10
1.2.1 Non-adsorption Properties	10
1.2.2 Transport Adsorption Properties	15
1.2.3 Thermodynamic Adsorption Properties	19
1.2.4 Gas Separation	21
1.3 Separation of Xenon from Krypton	25
1.3.1 Industrial applications	25
1.3.2 Promising Materials for the Separation	26
1.3.3 From the Computer to the Test Tube	27
1.3.4 The Future of Screening	29
2 Thermodynamic Exploration of Xenon/Krypton Separation	33
2.1 Simulation of Adsorption Equilibrium Properties.	33
2.1.1 Geometrical descriptors.	33
2.1.2 Mixture adsorption simulations: Grand Canonical Monte Carlo	35
2.1.3 Infinite dilution adsorption: Widom insertion	37
2.1.4 The thermodynamics behind adsorption-based separation . .	40
2.2 Preliminary analyses	41
2.2.1 Structure–selectivity relationships	42
2.2.2 Thermodynamic quantities correlations	47
2.3 Selectivity drop	51
2.3.1 Thermodynamic origins	51
2.3.2 Detailed investigation	57
2.3.3 Conclusion and introduction to the follow-up studies.	63
3 Adsorption Energies Sampling	67
3.1 Voronoi sampling	67
3.1.1 Theoretical considerations	67
3.1.2 Implementation in a Screening	70
3.1.3 Comparative study of the Voronoi sampling	71
3.1.4 Efficiency of the method	74

3.2	Rapid Adsorption Enthalpy Surface Sampling (RAESS)	75
3.2.1	Initial implementation	75
3.2.2	Performance improvement of the algorithm	77
3.2.3	Final surface sampling implementation	80
3.2.4	Conclusions and perspectives	82
3.2.5	Other databases	84
3.3	Grid Adsorption Energies Descriptors (GrAED)	84
3.3.1	Concepts	84
3.3.2	Implementation	84
3.3.3	Energy-based descriptors	85
4	Adsorption properties prediction	87
4.1	Machine learning	87
4.1.1	What is machine learning	87
4.1.2	How to learn accurately	87
4.1.3	Tree-based models	87
4.2	Prediction of the selectivity	87
4.2.1	From infinite dilution to ambient pressure	87
4.3	Interpretation of the ML model	87
5	Xenon and krypton transport properties	89
5.1	Current state of the art	89
5.1.1	Molecular dynamics	89
5.1.2	Transition state theory	89
5.2	ML modeling	89
5.3	Transport properties of xenon/krypton separation	90
5.3.1	Why studying diffusion for xenon krypton	90
5.3.2	Correlations	90
5.4	Fast diffusion calculation algorithm	90
5.4.1	Implementation in C++	90
5.4.2	Preliminary results	90
5.4.3	Visualization tool	90
5.4.4	ML model training	90
6	Towards the next generation of screenings	93
6.1	Flexibility	93
6.1.1	Problem, literature	93
6.1.2	Snapshot	93
6.2	Noble gas polarisability	93
6.2.1	Problem, literature	93
6.2.2	Perpectives	93
General conclusions		95

List of Publications	97
Peer-reviewed papers	97
Preprint	97
Bibliography	99
Résumé en français	117
Introduction	117

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Nanoporous materials are material

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Gas separation and purification are essential processes since they provide key reactants and inert gases for the chemical industry, as well as medical or food grade gases. Among them, we can find easily extractable or synthesizable molecules such as nitrogen, oxygen, carbon dioxide, noble gases, hydrogen, methane, or nitrous oxide. Moreover, gas separation is crucial in mitigating negative environmental impact at the end of industrial processes, such as facilities emitting green house gases (e.g. concrete or steel plants) or treating volatile radioactive wastes like ^{85}Kr . Cryogenic liquefaction or distillation is currently the mainstream technique to achieve industrial gas separation, while adsorbent beds made of nanoporous materials (activated alumina or zeolites) are mostly used as a less energy-intensive pre-purification system.^[1]

A wider use of nanoporous materials could reduce the energy consumption of current separation processes since adsorption is way less energy intensive than liquefaction.^[2] For instance, some prototypes involving beds of nanoporous materials have been developed for xenon/krypton separation to avoid employing cryogenic distillation.^[3] For the process to be viable, materials need to perform even better and many studies focus on synthesizing ever more selective materials by leveraging all chemical intuitions around noble gas adsorption properties.^[4–6] In order to speed the discovery process of novel materials with key properties, computational screening can identify factors explaining the performance and pre-select candidates for further experimental studies. As recently conceptualized by Lyu et al., a synergistic workflow combining computational discovery and experimental validation can push material discovery to the next stage.^[7, 8] But to efficiently guide experimental discoveries, computational chemists are facing two major challenges: generating reliably more structures and evaluating them with fast and accurate models.

The number of nanoporous materials is potentially unlimited; for the metal–organic frameworks (MOFs) alone, over 90,000 structures have been synthesized ^[9] and 500,000 computationally constructed ^[10–12]. To deal with this ever-increasing amount of structures, we need to design more efficient screening procedures as well as faster performance evaluation tools. To go beyond the time-consuming calculations over the whole dataset, computational chemists developed funnel-like screening procedures to reduce the need for expensive simulations and introduced machine learning (ML) models to replace them with faster evaluation tools.^[13] To

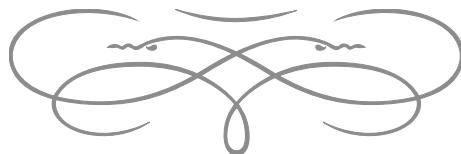
further improve the selectivity screening for Xe/Kr separation, we will need to design better performing structural and energy-based descriptors.

Simon et al. published one of the first articles on an ML-assisted screening approach for the separation of a Xe/Kr mixture extracted from the atmosphere.[14] Their model's performance was highly relying on the Voronoi energy, which is basically an average of the interaction energies of a xenon atom at each Voronoi node.[15] To rationalize this increase in performance, we regarded this Voronoi energy as a faster proxy for the adsorption enthalpy. By comparing it to the standard Widom insertion, we found that although it is faster, it is less accurate; and we developed a more effective alternative, the surface sampling (RAESS) using symmetry and non-accessible volumes blocking.[16] Recently, Shi et al. used an energy grid to generate energy histograms as a descriptor for their ML model, which gives an exhaustive description of the infinitely diluted adsorption energies,[17] but can be computationally expensive.

All the approaches described above can have good accuracy in the prediction of low-pressure adsorption (i.e., in the limit of zero loading) but are not suitable for prediction of adsorption in the high-pressure regime, when the material is near saturation uptake. While this later task is routinely performed by Grand Canonical Monte Carlo (GCMC) simulations, there is a lack of methods at lower computational cost for high-throughput screening. To better frame our challenge, in this work we are essentially trying to predict the selectivity in the nanopores of a material at high pressure, where adsorbates are interacting with each other, while only having information on the interaction at infinite dilution. The comparison between the low and high pressure cases gives key information on the origin of the differences of selectivity. For instance, we previously showed that selectivity could drop between the low and ambient pressure cases in the Xe/Kr separation application, and it was mainly attributed to the presence of different pore sizes and potential reorganizations due to adsorbate–adsorbate interactions.[18]

[Xe/Kr applications in the industry]

This thesis presents my work on the



HIGH-THROUGHPUT COMPUTATIONAL SCREENING OF NANOPOROUS MATERIALS

1.1	Nanoporous Materials	5
1.1.1	Introduction and Concepts	5
1.1.2	Computational Databases	8
1.1.3	Exploring the Chemical and Structural Space	10
1.2	Review of Screening Methodologies	10
1.2.1	Non-adsorption Properties	10
1.2.2	Transport Adsorption Properties	15
1.2.3	Thermodynamic Adsorption Properties	19
1.2.4	Gas Separation	21
1.3	Separation of Xenon from Krypton	25
1.3.1	Industrial applications	25
1.3.2	Promising Materials for the Separation	26
1.3.3	From the Computer to the Test Tube	27
1.3.4	The Future of Screening	29

1.1 NANOPOROUS MATERIALS

1.1.1 Introduction and Concepts

ADSORPTION ISOTHERMS AND GEOMETRICAL DESCRIPTORS

Nanoporous materials are defined as materials with a nanoscale structure constituted by pores and cavities, which some are connected by a network of channels. These pores can be empty or filled with a variety of substances called adsorbates. By adhering molecules from a liquid or gas phase into the internal surfaces of the material, we can use it in diverse applications such as gas separation and purification,[19, 20] energy storage and conversion,[21, 22] heterogeneous catalysis[23–25] drug delivery,[26, 27] or sensing.[28] By designing the chemical nature, size, shape and distribution of the pores, we can tailor the physicochemical properties to the targeted application.[29]

The process of adhering particles or molecules on surfaces is called adsorption. Adsorption occurs due to attractive forces between adsorbates and the adsorbent surface, such as Van der Waals forces, hydrogen bonding, and electrostatic interactions. The adsorption performance depends on the chemical nature of the interface, its exposed surface area and the shape of the pores. We usually characterize adsorption properties of an adsorbate compound by measuring the numbers of adsorbed molecules as a function of its pressure at a given temperature, which is called the adsorption isotherm. These isotherms can possibly be used, among other techniques, to specify the pore size distribution, accessible surface area and pore volume.[30] By using fitting models, we can also use adsorption isotherms to characterize the maximum adsorption uptake among other adsorption descriptors.[31] Using a set of experimental isotherms at close but different temperatures, we can also retrieve information on the isosteric heat of adsorption q_{st} (the negative differential of the excess enthalpy of adsorption with respect to the excess adsorption).[32] This heat of adsorption (related to the enthalpy of adsorption) can also be directly obtained using calorimetry.[33] Furthermore measurements at infinite dilution can also lead to a linear relation between the adsorbed quantity and the pressure defined by the Henry's law; another key adsorption descriptor, the Henry adsorption constant, is defined as the slope of this linear regime.[34] All of these thermodynamic quantities are most valuable in comparing experimental data to computational modeling to compare and characterize the materials suitable for a given gas adsorption process.

Most of the materials studied in this thesis will have pores with a size around the nanometer called "nanopores". The International Union of Pure Applied Chemistry (IUPAC) classifies these pores into three categories according to their size: micropores (≤ 2 nm), mesopores (2 nm–50 nm) and macropores (>50 nm).[35] Here, we will use a single terminology (nanopore) to designate all pores of under a few nanometers. A good characterization of the nanopores of these materials is key to fine-tuning the adsorption properties.[29] The pore size distribution (PSD) can be computationally determined if we have resolved the structure of the nanoporous material (using X-ray diffraction on crystallized porous solids). This is the most accurate determination method of the PSD, but it relies on considering that the structure is perfectly rigid and crystalline so that only one structural data can characterize it. Other experimental methods rely on assumptions, model systems (e.g., cylindrical) or adsorption characteristics. For instance, stereological analyses based on plane sections cut through a porous material can evaluate the PSD.[36] The Horvath-Kawazoe (HK) method is a semi-empirical analytic model of adsorption isotherm that can extract PSD. Small angle X-ray and neutron scattering methods are non-destructive methods of pore characterization.[37] In this thesis, we will rely on computationally analyzing X-ray diffusion data to deduce pore sizes and other geometrical characteristics.

The pore volume consists in the measure of the volume of "closed" and "open" pores of nanoporous materials. Depending on the way of measuring it, different quantities are probed. Some pores could not be accessed by some adsorbate; depending on the probe size the volume calculated will not be the same. Methods that do not rely on adsorption like scattering or stereology will, however, measure the total pore volume. The porosity or void fraction would be defined as the ratio between the pore volume and the apparent framework volume. Depending on the method, we can therefore retrieve either the total porosity, the porosity opened or closed to a given probe adsorbate.

The cavities of the nanoporous material lay out an incredibly large adsorbable surface area, which is extremely useful in increasing the number of molecules in a given volume or mass of material, several thousands of square meters can be found in a gram of some nanoporous materials.[38] The higher the surface area, the more molecules can be adsorbed for storage, separation or reaction purposes; it is therefore crucial to measure this surface area using experimental and computational methods. The most extensively used method to experimentally measure surface areas from adsorption isotherms is based on the Brunauer–Emmett–Teller (BET) theory.[39] Most BET areas are calculated on N₂ isotherm at its boiling temperature (77 K); although different probe adsorbates can be considered, they are not standard.[40] However, the definition of the surface area depends highly on the condition of measurement but also on the fitting methodology; a dozen isotherms were given to 61 labs for BET area calculation, and the statistical experiment yielded to a high level of disparities in the calculation.[41]

Beyond the experimental techniques, some software like Zeo++ or PoreBlazer focus on computing pore size distributions, surface areas and void fractions using well-defined structure files.[42, 43] The definition of these values also depends on the probe size chosen to model a given adsorbate, the size of the framework atoms and the quality of the input structure. The computational values do not rely on adsorption models or on isotherm data as in the BET area, they are now relying on more comprehensive structural data. They, however, very much rely on a well-designed definition of the volume, the surface and the pore size we want to evaluate. Moreover, these values also highly depend on the radii of the framework atoms and the adsorbate we consider.[44]. In this thesis, we will rely on these computational methods to define these geometrical descriptors of nanoporous materials.

CLASSES OF NANOPOROUS MATERIALS

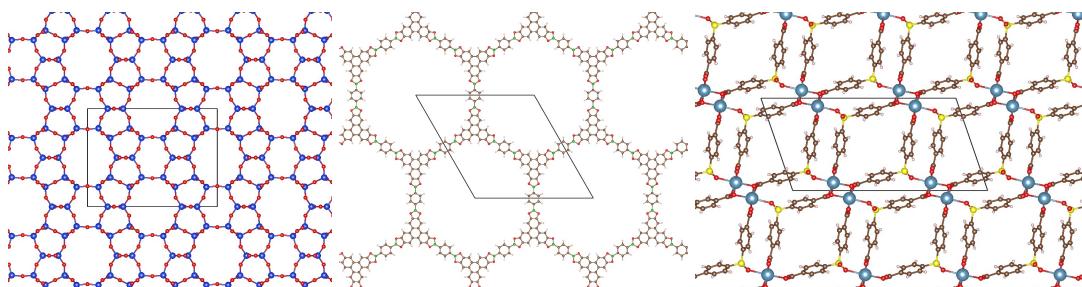


Figure 1.1 – Illustration of a zeolite FER[45], a COF[46] and a MOF[47]. Color code: brown for C, white for H, red for O, blue for Si, cyan for Ca, yellow for S and green for B.

Nanoporous materials can have different degrees of crystallinity from perfectly crystalline to completely amorphous. Most of the computational work is focused on crystalline structures, since the atoms are well described within a periodic framework, which enables faster simulations. The presence of defects is also usually neglected, which could explain some discrepancies between simulations and experiments. And amorphous materials are described by thousands of atomic positions in order to grasp their intrinsic non-periodicity.[48] Activated carbons, a famous class of amorphous material, are extensively used in the industry for gas purification, but cannot be rationally studied to characterize their adsorption properties. One can distinguish roughly three main classes of crystalline nanoporous materials: the inorganic materials like zeolites (aluminosilicates or aluminophosphates), the organic materials like the porous polymer networks (PPNs) or the covalent organic frameworks (COFs) and the metal–organic frameworks (MOFs).

Zeolites are naturally occurring nanoporous aluminosilicate materials that are commonly synthesized to be used in the industry as a commercial adsorbent and heterogeneous catalyst. [49, 50] It is considered as one of the most mature nanoporous material technology at our disposal. This class of material also leaves a wide room for innovation since different Al/Si ratios of a same zeolite type pan out a wide range of structures. Furthermore, zeolite materials inspired the synthesis of zeolitic frameworks harboring different atoms such as the aluminophosphates or the zeolitic imidazolate frameworks.[51, 52]

Porous polymer networks (PPNs) are porous materials based on the already very developed polymer material technology.[31, 53, 54] However, one of the major drawback of this type of material is the formation of irreversible covalent bonds, which make the synthesis kinetically controlled leading to difficulties in crystallizing PPNs.[55] In order to create crystalline porous materials, Cote et al. figured out a way of using boron-based organic compounds to form reversible bounds, which formed thermodynamically stable materials COF-1 and COF-5.[46] This initiative was led by the group of Yaghi who was at the initiative of another very promising and well-known class of materials. A decade earlier, they pioneered a hydrothermal synthesis of a metal–organic framework presenting broad rectangular channels.[56]

Metal–organic frameworks (MOFs) are a class of nanoporous materials formed by metallic centers connected with organic linkers to form a stable crystalline solid. Even if the first synthesis of such a material was done since the early 90s,[57] and brought about a sparking interest in the scientific community a couple of decades later.[58, 59] Because plenty of combinations of linkers and metals are imaginable, an infinite amount of MOFs could theoretically be designed. Their structure can be tuned to our needs to enhance their performance in the targeted application.[60] This diversity of nanoporous materials offer a wide range of potential candidates that could be evaluated for any targeted applications.

1.1.2 Computational Databases

All the previously described materials have been either synthesized and resolved using X-ray crystallography or computationally constructed. By combining almost all possible nanoporous materials, almost a million structures have been considered for separation or storage applications.[14, 61, 62] This extended database can be broken down into the synthesized materials and hypothetical ones for all the above-mentioned classes of material.

The International Zeolite Association (IZA) gave a standardized set of 244 zeolites (in their idealized all-silica form) that can be used for screening purposes. To generate a dataset of structures, existing experimental databases like the Cambridge Structural Database can be exploited. However, the raw structures determined experimentally by X-ray cannot be used directly as is. To obtain a computation-ready dataset, Chung et al. used algorithmic cleaning procedures to build the publicly available Computation-Ready Experimental MOF (CoRE MOF) database.[63, 64] CoRE MOF 2019 contains about 14,000 MOF structures, which is the biggest experimental database. Similar approach applied to organic frameworks led to the construction of a set of 187 COFs with disorder-free and solvent-free structures.[65, 66]

These experiment-based databases can already be used in computational screenings to retrieve valuable information, but unknown structures that are yet to be discovered are not represented. To overcome the limits and biases of experimental synthesis, artificial ways of generating

nанопорous material datasets can be used, which proved to be extremely efficient. The first *in silico* generated database of about 130,000 MOFs used a recursion-based assembly (or Tinkertoy-like) algorithm to combine 102 building blocks.[10] Martin and Haranczyk then proposed a topology-specific structure assembly algorithm that leverages the topological information of the structures.[67] Inspired by this algorithm, topology-based databases emerged a few years later with the set of 13,000 MOF structures generated using the Topologically Based Crystal Constructor (ToBaCCo) algorithm developed by Colon, Gómez-Gualdrón and Snurr.[12] Later, Boyd and Woo proposed another topology-based algorithm using a graph theoretical approach and generated a 300,000-structure database (BW-DB) based on 46 different network topologies.[11] Similar approaches are used for other classes of materials, Deem and co-workers proposed a dataset of nearly 2.6 million hypothetical zeolite structures.[68–70] However, one could wonder if these hypothetical structures are synthesizable and can remain stable under operational conditions (e.g. thermal, mechanical, radioactive constraints). To discuss their synthetic likelihood, Anderson and Gómez-Gualdrón computed the free energies of 8,500 hypothetical structures and compared them to experimentally observed MOF structures.[71] Later, Nandy et al. performed a meta-analysis of thousands of articles associated to the CoRE MOF 2019 database to extract their experimental solvent-removal stability and thermal decomposition temperature.[72] These data are then leveraged in the training of multiple ML models to predict stability properties. These predictions can be very useful to gauge the relative stability of each material and to only consider stable structures. Other types of materials have been explored, Turcani et al. published 60,000 organic cage structures and used machine learning to predict their stability based on the shape persistence metric.[73]

The Materials Genome Initiative, 100 million dollar effort from the White House that aims to “discover, develop, and deploy new materials twice as fast”, led to the creation of the “Materials Project”, a centralized database containing all the above-mentioned structures.[74–76] The fast development of this nanoporous materials genome motivated Boyd et al. to write a comprehensive review on all the initiatives on generating new data for computational analysis.[77]

Yet, the sole increase in size of the databases is not enough. One needs to add diversity to have more general knowledge on the maximum performance and the explanatory features of such performance. Moreover, the diversity of structures ensure the quality of the predicted best materials for a given application. To qualitatively or quantitatively assess the diversity of a database, inventive methodologies have been developed. For instance, Martin, Smit and Haranczyk proposed a Voronoi hologram representation as a way of measuring similarities between structures to generate geometrically diverse subsets of a database.[78] Moosavi et al. made a comparative study of the diversity of three well-known databases CoRE MOF 2019,[64] BW-DB[11] and ToBaCCo[12, 79] using geometrical and chemical descriptors to design a theoretical strategy for generating the most diverse set of materials.[80] Another approach consists in searching for similarities instead of differences in the materials by studying topological patterns in the data.[81] These investigations on the data structures give a solid ground to develop novel materials by objectively defining similarity, diversity and novelty. From the analysis gathered so far, one would need to radically change the approach by proposing materials with new chemistry, topology or mechanism (e.g. flexibility) in order to significantly improve the diversity of the current databases.

1.1.3 Exploring the Chemical and Structural Space

With the development of ever-increasing nanoporous material databases, computational chemists proposed more and more inventive methods to evaluate or screen thousands of structures. Other challenges arose, such as the design of more efficient methods than the brute force screening or the analysis of big data. Two research groups in Northwestern University led by R. Snurr and J. Hupp began to address those questions, they used a “funnel-like” approach to efficiently screen about 130,000 hypothetical MOF structures.[10] To do so, they performed a first screening involving fewer steps of simulation on the whole dataset, then they extracted a subset of top-performing structures to perform a second round with more simulation steps. This procedure is repeated until a few materials are selected by a final round of simulations with reasonable accuracy. Similar “funnel-like” procedures have then been used in other fields of applications as described in the Figure 1.2. This type of screening saves precious computation time by balancing the complexity of the calculation with the amount of data to be screened. The most demanding simulations or experiments are only applied to the few most promising structures. This method can rather efficiently identify top candidates, but it can't draw quantitative structure-property relationships (QSPR), beside facing scalability issues above a critical dataset size.

To overcome these new challenges, people are looking increasingly towards transferable models trained by a machine learning (ML) algorithm on a diverse and size-limited subsample. Ideally, such a model is transferable to potentially millions of structures and can provide valuable QSPR. For instance, Fernandez et al.[82] used multiple linear regression analysis, decision tree regression, and nonlinear support-vector machine models to extract QSPR and establish rules of designing well-performing MOFs for methane storage, while identifying promising structures. In this first work, they only used geometrical descriptors to describe methane storage,[82] but realizing the importance of chemical descriptors, they proposed the atomic property weighted radial distribution function as a powerful descriptor to predict CO₂ uptakes.[83] More importantly, they proved that ML can be used as a pre-screening tool to avoid running time-costly simulations by correctly identifying around 95 % of the top 1000 best performing materials. Recently, the same group used similar techniques to predict CO₂ working capacity as well as CO₂/H₂ selectivity in MOFs for pre-combustion carbon capture.[84]

1.2 REVIEW OF SCREENING METHODOLOGIES

1.2.1 Non-adsorption Properties

Due to their high internal surface area, adsorption applications were a natural outlet for nanoporous materials. However, these materials can be used in many other applications. This section is dedicated to the physical and chemical properties not directly related to the adsorption process inside nanoporous materials such as catalytic activity,[87–89] mechanical properties, [90, 91] or thermal properties.[92–94] These properties require a more refined description of the atomic interactions within the material. DFT simulations are usually performed to accurately retrieve these properties. However, the computational cost required is multiplied by several orders of magnitude compared to classical simulations. The size of the datasets screened is therefore much smaller (a few hundreds maximum), and the use of ML can potentially speed

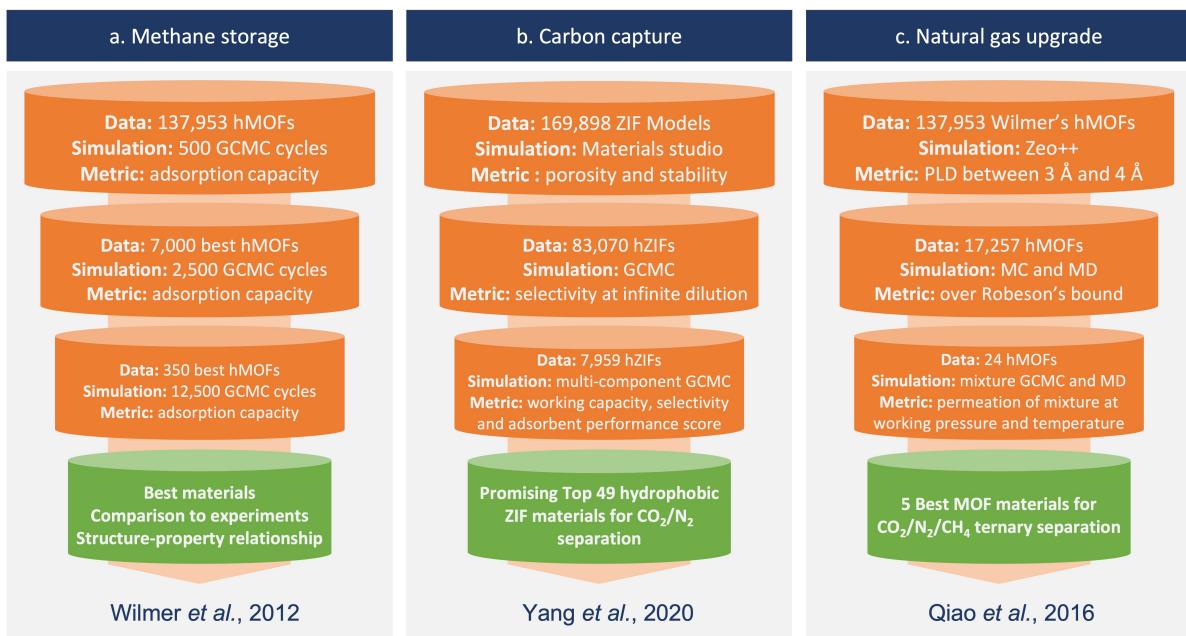


Figure 1.2 – Simplified representation of typical funnel-type screening procedures, exemplified on three different applications from the published literature. (a) Wilmer et al.[10] used a series of bi-component Grand Canonical Monte Carlo (GCMC) calculations at different levels of complexity to screen a large dataset of hypothetical MOFs for methane storage application. (b) Yang et al.[85] used simulations at infinite dilution to prescreen the dataset before using computationally demanding simulations and multiple metrics to find the most promising ZIFs for carbon capture. (c) In Qiao et al.[86], transport properties were screened along standard adsorption properties to find the best materials for the targeted CO₂/N₂/CH₄ ternary separation; similarly, cheaper calculations at infinite dilution were carried out in a first step, before using more expensive calculations at working pressure and temperature.

up the whole process. ML is based on lower-cost descriptors,[95, 96] or it can be used in ML potentials for molecular simulations[97, 98].

CATALYTIC ACTIVITY

Beyond adsorption properties, screening procedures have been applied to chemical properties such as catalytic activities. Heterogeneous catalysis is generally performed using metallic non-porous structures, the use of nanoporous materials can increase dramatically the active surface area and the catalytic activity. Consequently, MOFs have been demonstrated to show catalytic properties for several chemical reactions. Just to cite a few, one can think of hydrogenation, hydrolysis, oxidation, among others explicitly covered by McCarver et al. in their review.[99] Considering the sheer number of possible materials, computational studies are potentially more effective than experimental ones. Therefore, computational screenings evolved in the last decade aiming at studying more sizable datasets.

Although the vast majority of computational screenings have been done on small series, there are a few systematic screenings of bigger datasets. The scarcity of the latter can be explained by the high level of computational cost required. Here, we show some examples of such attempts by focusing on the example of C–H bond activation for the conversion of alkanes into alcohols in the presence of nitrous oxide.

Inspired by enzymatic catalysis of the reaction of small alkanes with N₂O into alcohols, Vogiatis et al. identified seven iron-containing MOF structures out of 5,000 structures from the CoRE MOF database.[100] They found two descriptors that govern the catalytic activity: 1) the N–O dissociation energy of N₂O on the adsorption site and 2) the energy difference between two spin states of the intermediate. Using a screening on these descriptors, three structures were identified as promising for further experimental studies. The best one has been computationally demonstrated to catalytically and selectively oxidize ethane to ethanol in presence of N₂O. Moreover, the authors found that defects played a major role in the observed catalytic activity.

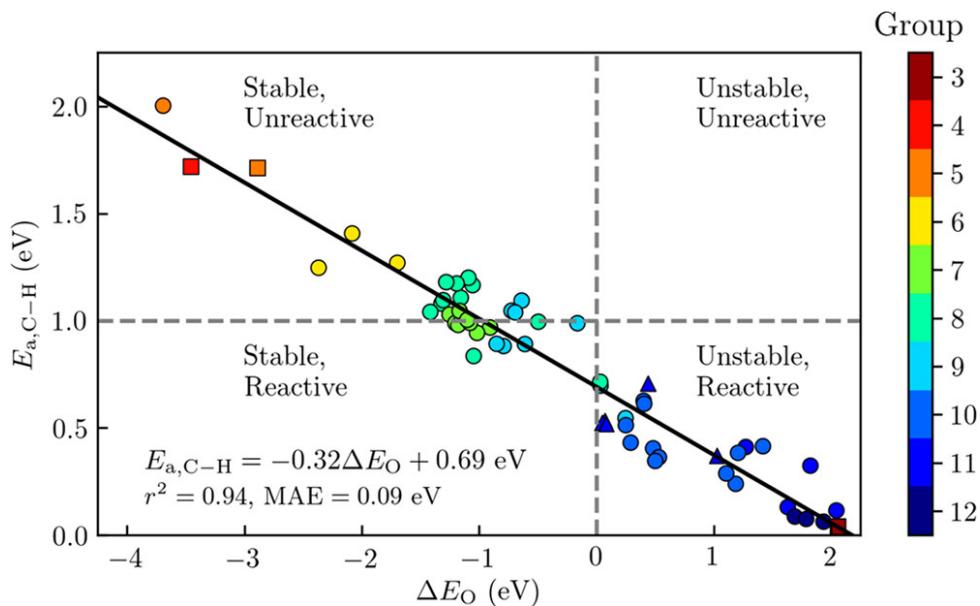


Figure 1.3 – Analysis of a diverse set of experimentally derived metal–organic frameworks (MOFs) with accessible metal sites for the oxidative activation of methane. The graph shows the predicted barrier for the C–H bond activation of methane, E_a , as a function of the metal-oxo formation energy, ΔE_O . For each material, the symbol color refers to the group number of the metal in the periodic table. The best-fit line has been plotted in black, and has a mean absolute error (MAE) of 0.09 eV. MOFs with $E_a < 1$ eV are classified as being reactive towards C–H bond activation and MOFs with $\Delta E_O < 0$ as having thermodynamically favored active sites when using O₂ as the reference state. Reprinted with permission from Ref. 101. Copyright 2019 American Chemical Society.

Later, Rosen et al. enlarged the scope of materials screened to other metals.[101] From an 838 DFT-optimized MOFs subset of CoRE MOF 2014, the authors selected 168 MOFs that were likely to have open metal sites and pore-limiting diameters that allows the diffusion of the reactants. They then used a fully automated workflow to place the reactants in the adsorption site and relaxed the system using periodic DFT calculations. As shown in Figure 1.3, using the bond activation energy $E_{a,C-H}$ and the metal-oxo formation energy ΔE_O as key parameters, they classified the materials according to their relative stability and reactivity to find the best materials for the application. These energies were then analyzed using physicochemical descriptors such as the spin density on the oxygen and the metal–oxygen distance.

This type of brute force screening can be quickly cumbersome, as a result many researchers in the field are trying to find essential structure-activity relationships to accelerate future

computational screenings. Several descriptors have been developed for high-throughput screenings: Butler et al. used electron removal energies to explain photocatalytic behaviors of MOFs;[102] Rosen et al. showed that the energy required to form the metal oxide intermediate was a major descriptor of the thermal catalysis of alkane oxidation by N₂O;[103] and Fumanal et al. show a screening protocol based on two energy-based descriptors to predict photocatalytic properties of MOFs.[104] Lately, Rosen et al. screened thousands of MOF structures to compare different DFT functionals and leveraged the data calculated to train machine learning models that can rapidly predict MOF band gaps.[105]

The development of ML methods are also critical in the field,[106] but the lack of centralized database with high precision descriptors is a challenge for the future of these methods. The influence of defects, the different ways of modeling MOFs as periodic structures or clusters, the diversity of structures and the stability of such structures remain open problems. Yet, it does not threaten the major role of high-throughput screenings in the early design process of any nanoporous materials for catalysis. To conclude this brief overview, we point the readers to a more exhaustive presentation of the matter.[107]

MECHANICAL PROPERTIES

In the past decade, there has been a growing interest in the systematic study of physical properties of various classes of materials, including inorganic materials and framework materials. Among these physical properties, mechanical properties have been a topic of particular interest, as they are crucial for many applications, and at the same time can be computed by relatively standard methodologies. In particular, is it possible to calculate linear elastic constants (the second-order elastic tensor) in the zero-Kelvin limit by strain/stress or strain/energy approaches, performing a series of DFT calculations of strained structures and calculating the elastic constants. From these constants, all other mechanical properties can be evaluated by tensorial analysis,[108] including the bulk modulus, Young's modulus, shear modulus, Poisson's ratio, etc. This type of calculation can be coupled with any available quantum chemistry code,[109] and is even integrated in some packages, like CRYSTAL17.[110]

One of the first studies that investigated systematically the elastic properties of a family of materials was a 2013 study of all-silica zeolites,[111] i.e., crystalline and porous SiO₂ polymorphs. While this dealt with only 121 zeolitic frameworks out of 244 known structures, it showed that systematic studies at the DFT level were computationally tractable, and that they provided physical insight into the link between microscopic structure and macroscopic physical properties. This study demonstrated, among other things, that a few zeolites presented large negative linear compressibility (NLC), which could be linked to the wine-rack motif of their frameworks.

Outside the specific case of zeolites, other groups have applied DFT calculations of elastic constants in a high-throughput manner. de Jong et al. leveraged the structures of the Materials Project[75, 76], trying to chart the diversity of elastic properties across the whole space of inorganic crystalline compounds.[112] As shown in the Figure 1.4, they provided a database containing the full elastic information of 1,181 inorganic compounds initially, and has grown steadily since then, containing more almost 14,000 records to date.[113] This dataset has been used in two different ways by researchers in the field.

Firstly, the exploration of the database of elastic properties by tensorial analysis has allowed studying quantitatively the occurrence of certain “anomalous” or rare mechanical behavior, including negative linear compressibility, very high anisotropy, or negative Poisson’s ratio (also called *auxeticity*). Indeed, such properties are considered rare and usually sought after – the materials exhibiting these anomalous behaviors are mechanical metamaterials.[114] In addition to their fundamental interest, such materials have applications in materials engineering: for example in energy dissipation (as shock absorbers and for bulletproofing), energy storage, as well as acoustics.[115] However, it was not possible until now to quantify exactly “how rare” they are. Chibani et al. showed through a systematic exploration of available mechanical properties of crystalline materials that general mechanical trends, which hold for isotropic (noncrystalline) materials at the macroscopic scale, also apply on average for crystals. Moreover, they could quantify the presence of materials with rare anomalous mechanical properties: 3% of the crystals were found to feature negative linear compressibility, and only 0.3% to exhibit complete auxeticity (negative Poisson’s ratio in all directions of space).

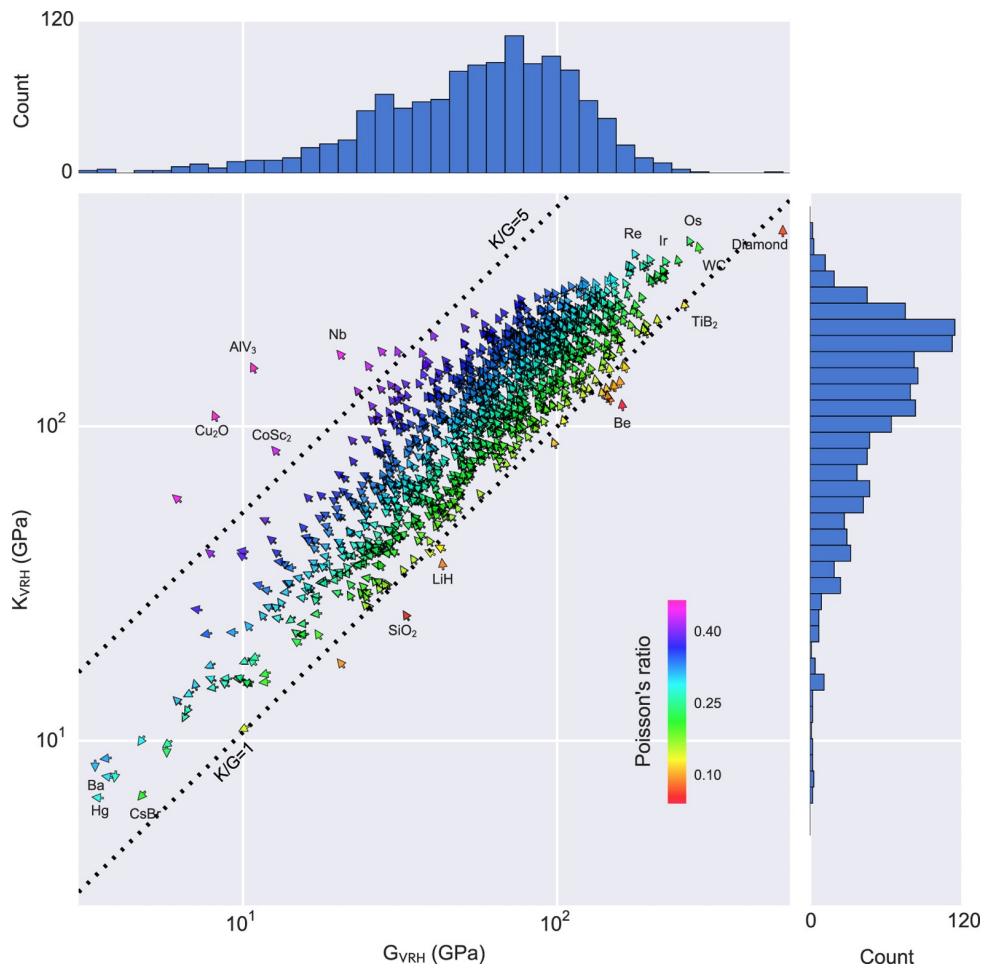


Figure 1.4 – Statistical analysis of the calculated volume per atom, Poisson’s ratio, bulk modulus K_{VRH} and shear modulus G_{VRH} of 1,181 compounds in the Materials Project database. In the vector field-plot, arrows pointing at 12 o’clock correspond to minimum volume-per-atom and move anti-clockwise in the direction of maximum volume-per-atom, which is located at 6 o’clock.

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Secondly, the datasets of mechanical properties were used as a basis to accelerate the discovery of novel materials with targeted behavior. Dagdelen et al. used search algorithms to identify 38 candidate materials exhibiting features correlating with auxetic behavior, from more than 67,000 materials in the Materials Project database.[116] Performing DFT calculations on these 38 structures, they could identify 7 new auxetic compounds. In a more complex setup, Gaillac et al. [91] have used a multiscale modeling strategy for the fast exploration and identification of novel auxetic materials. They combined classical force fields MD simulations with DFT calculations on candidate materials, and then used this reference DFT data to train an ML algorithm. They found that the accuracy of this multiscale method exceeds the current low-computational-cost approaches for screening. In a similar work, Moghadam et al. used molecular simulation to train an artificial neural network (ANN) for the prediction of the bulk modulus of metal–organic frameworks.[117] This shows the potential of such methodologies to treat very different (chemically as well as structurally) classes of materials.

Thermal Properties

While mechanical properties (in the elastic regime) have been by far the most studied physical property in nanoporous materials, others have also been occasionally screened. We can cite, in particular, the systematic study of piezoelectric tensors by de Jong et al., on almost a thousand crystalline compounds, by first-principle calculations based on density functional perturbation theory.[118] We can also cite efforts to calculate thermal properties in a high-throughput setup, using the quasi-harmonic approximation (QHA).[119] This method requires the calculation of each structure's phonon modes at various volumes, and can be coupled to any electronic structure program.[120] It is, however, quite computationally intensive, and sensitive to the parameters of the QHA methodology (range of volume, range of temperature, precision of the frequency calculation, etc.). Therefore, it has been limited so far to modest numbers of structures: a dataset of 75 inorganic structures by Toher et al.,[92] and more recently a dataset of 134 pure SiO₂ zeolites by Ducamp et al.[94] Very recent work in our group on the prediction of thermal properties through machine learning based on structural features alone indicates that thermal behavior is more difficult than mechanical behavior to predict, and might require the use of a wider set of structural descriptors or more advanced ML models.[96]

1.2.2 Transport Adsorption Properties

The thermodynamic properties, we will be presenting in the next section, only describes the state of equilibrium of the adsorption process. But sometimes the transient state can last long before reaching the equilibrium, which makes the process more time-consuming. Thus, the transport properties complete the thermodynamic description of the adsorption process inside a nanoporous material. For example, a low diffusion rate would mean for storage applications more time and energy needed to fill-up the tanks, or for separation applications a less selective process than expected. In more extreme cases of molecular sieves for fluid separation, the transport properties become predominant to assess the performance. One can leverage the difference of the molecules' diffusion coefficients to selectively filter gas mixtures through a nanoporous membrane.[121] Here, the main subject becomes the transient state and not the equilibrium. This section is thus dedicated to the kinetics of the adsorption process to better model the time required to reach the equilibrium or to study out-of-equilibrium processes such as molecular sieving by nanoporous membranes.

KINETIC PROPERTIES

In most computational screenings, the diffusion coefficient considered is the self-diffusion coefficient that describes an infinite-dilution case. Other multi-component diffusion coefficients could be considered, but for simplicity and clarity they won't be mentioned in this review. The calculation of the self-diffusion coefficient gives a first estimation of the kinetics in a storage or a separation process in the limit of low adsorption loading.

There are two approaches to estimate the diffusion inside a porous material: the first one relies on molecular dynamics (MD) and the second one on transition state theories. In the first approach, one can analyze the mean squared displacement of the adsorbed molecule moving in the material. In the second, one identifies minimum energy path along the material to identify transition states (TS) to calculate diffusion energy barriers. The MD-based method requires fewer assumptions and is therefore more reliable than the TS-based method, but the latter is computationally more efficient in the case of low diffusion rate (diffusivity lower than $10^{-11} \text{ m}^2 \text{ s}^{-1}$).

State-of-the-art MD simulations could calculate rather accurate diffusion coefficients, but the computational cost scales quickly with the number of structures. To use this method on a large dataset without spending too much computation time, Watanabe and Sholl prescreened the pore sizes of 1,163 MOFs to select only the structures within a certain range of PLD (pore limiting diameters).^[122] A restricted list of 359 MOFs was then used to carry out MD simulations to calculate diffusion coefficients. The results of this final screening are then used to extract the most promising structures for further experimental or computational investigation. Similarly, Qiao et al. used a multistage screening to find the best membrane material within about 130,000 hypothetical MOFs for a CO₂/N₂/CH₄ separation.^[86] They started to select materials based on pore geometry analysis; then they calculated Henry's coefficient and diffusion coefficients at infinite dilution; finally, they compared the binary permselectivities to extract 24 promising MOFs for ternary adsorption and diffusion calculation at the desired pressure and temperature conditions.

Another approach replaces MD simulations with more computationally efficient TS-based methods to determine diffusion coefficients. Haldoupis et al. developed an algorithm to identify diffusion paths by exploiting an energy grid with a clustering algorithm. The diffusion paths are then analyzed to identify the pores and the channels, and to calculate key geometric (the PLD or the largest cavity diameter) and energetic (Henry's constant, diffusion activation energy) features.^[123] As illustrated in Figure 1.5, they found a clear dependence of the diffusion energy barrier to the PLD. As one of the first TS-based screenings, it is still subject to many development perspectives. For instance, the approach is limited to spherical adsorbates and rigid frameworks. Moreover, the diffusion coefficients are approximated using a simplistic hopping model for a qualitative analysis. This method is highly efficient, but the accumulation of approximations makes a quantitative systematic analysis of diffusion coefficients out of reach.

Later, Kim et al. introduced a flood fill algorithm to obtain all the points within a given energy.^[124] These points are then identified as channels or blocked regions. Along the channels, local minimums of energy are defined as lattice sites and transition states are defined perpendicular to the diffusion direction. A random walk is then computed along the lattice

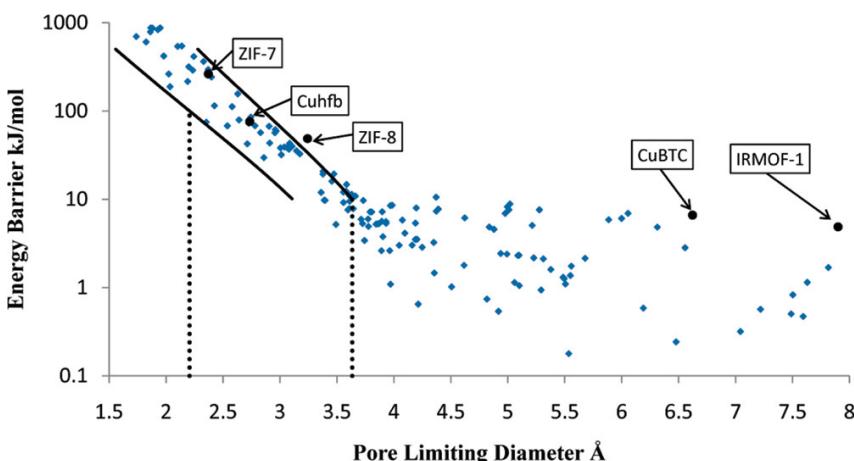


Figure 1.5 – Calculated energy barrier for the diffusion of CH₄ in 216 metal–organic frameworks (MOFs), shown as a function of the pore-limiting diameter. The solid lines represent statistical upper and lower bounds on the energy barrier, in a transition state theory approach. Reprinted with permission from Ref. 123. Copyright 2010 American Chemical Society.

sites with hopping rates defined according to the activation energy. A diffusion coefficient is then calculated in each three directions of the space and an average diffusion coefficient is finally determined. A comparison with the MD method on the IZA zeolite structures shows good agreement, but there are still some discrepancies explained by correlated hops in the case of rapid diffusion or by the presence of complicated channel profiles. Inspired by this work, Mace et al. developed a similar method that progressively fill the energy grid to detect transition states, hence removing the previous restriction to orthogonal cells only.[125] The diffusion coefficient is now computed using a kinetic Monte Carlo simulation allowing the adsorbate to jump freely in all directions instead of restricting it in a single dimension. This new method, called TuTraSt, handles very complex diffusion paths (like in the AEI zeolite). This new approach seems to be promising as it is in good agreement with MD simulations, while being 2-3 orders of magnitude faster. However, the time performance could improve tremendously by translating it from Matlab to C++ and by implementing parallelization procedures.

Very recently a massively parallel GPU-accelerated string method has been implemented and shared publicly to compute very efficiently diffusion coefficients based on the transition state theory.[126] The recent developments in the prediction of diffusion coefficients in nanoporous materials point towards a promising future for the screening of transport properties applied to even larger databases. Going further, Bukowski et al. reviewed thoroughly diffusion in nanoporous solids as an attempt to connect theory to experiments.[127]

MEMBRANE MATERIALS

In separation application, the study of the transport properties can evaluate the feasibility of the thermodynamic equilibrium, crucial for any bed separation process. If this separation is not feasible, kinetic separation or partial molecular sieving are to be considered. Some notable examples are air separation in zeolites using pressure swing adsorption,[128] N₂/O₂ separation in carbon molecular sieves,[129] or N₂ removal from natural gas.[130] In kinetic separation, the valuable metric is not the selectivity anymore, but the permselectivity, i.e. the product of the selectivity and the permeability (ratio of diffusion coefficients). Therefore, the screening of diffusion coefficients gives complementary information to the thermodynamic selectivity

screenings. Here, we give some examples of such screening and the main descriptors that partially explain the computed figures of merit.

To give an overview on the potential of computational screenings to predict transport properties, we are now going to focus on the membrane separation applied to natural gas upgrading. The separation of CH₄ from N₂ and CO₂ is a crucial step of this upgrading process. In 2016, a large-scale high-throughput screening (see Figure 1.2 for the approach) of hypothetical MOF membranes for upgrading natural gas has been performed using MD simulations.[86] Qiao et al. confirmed the existence of MOF materials beyond the upper bound for N₂/CH₄ and CO₂/CH₄ separations determined by Robeson on a large set of polymeric membranes.[131] This Robeson's upper bound is systematically crossed by MOF materials in computational screenings, see as an example the Figure 1.6. This can be explained by the fact that MOFs perform better than polymeric frameworks and the simulations at this level of theory. They also identified 24 MOFs suitable for the ternary CO₂/N₂/CH₄ separation using a multistage screening described in the previous section.

Two years later, Qiao et al. used the same approach to study this ternary separation on a database of synthesized structures.[132] Applying machine learning techniques to their data, they performed a QSPR analysis. Using a principal component analysis, they notably found that the permeability is higher when materials have high PLD and void fraction coupled with low density and percentage of pores within a characteristic range. The opposite was found to be true for high membrane selectivity for the CO₂/CH₄ separation. Using decision tree algorithms, they gave objective procedures of selecting the best separation membranes based on some key descriptors. Finally, they studied in detail some top performing materials found by a support vector machine algorithm.

Altintas and Keskin later performed a screening on the same database for CO₂/CH₄ membrane separation to identify the best performing materials and perform more computationally demanding simulations.[133] The simulations in rigid structures at infinite dilution show numerous structures above the Robeson's upper bound as shown in the figure 1.6, this crossing of the upper-bound can be explained by either a better performance of MOF membranes compared to the polymeric membranes used by Robeson, or an overestimation due to oversimplified assumptions (infinite dilution, rigidity). But when higher pressures and flexibility are considered, the selectivity values are dropping down closer to the upper boundary, hence confirming the overestimation of the performance in screenings based on rigid approximations at infinite dilution. But the best performing materials are still above the Robeson's upper bound and can therefore be used in mixed matrix membranes with polymeric membranes. Budhathoki et al. developed a screening methodology for MOFs in mixed matrix membranes for carbon capture applications by estimating permeation values in these composite materials using a Maxwell model.[134] The authors even proposed a pricing for each material compared to their relative performance. Similar studies have been carried out on different materials, Yan et al. showed the influence of decorating COFs with different chemical compounds on the membrane selectivity.[135]

The transport properties screening is based on the calculation of diffusion coefficients at infinite dilution and in rigid molecules. There are different methods to calculate them (mainly MD and TS-based methods). Flexibility and pressure dependence are very hard to incorporate directly in

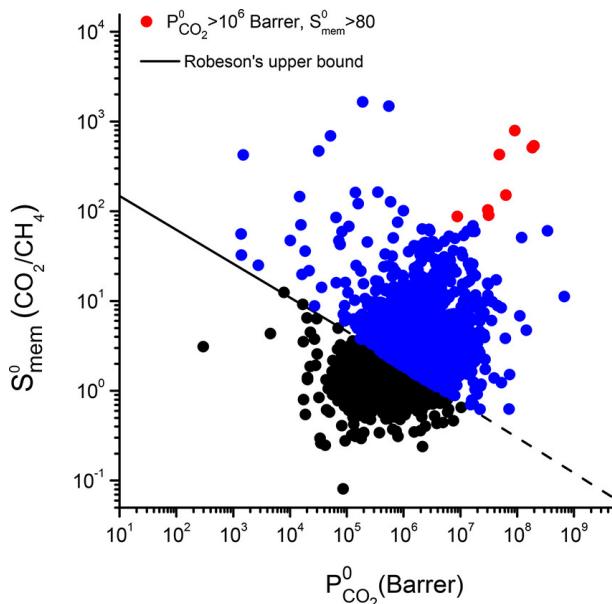


Figure 1.6 – Selectivity and permeability of metal–organic framework (MOF) membranes for CO_2/CH_4 separation computed at infinite dilution by combining Grand Canonical Monte Carlo and molecular dynamics simulations.[133] The black solid line represents the Robeson’s upper bound.[131, 136] MOFs that can exceed the bound are shown in blue, and the 8 top-performing MOF membranes are shown with red symbols. Reprinted with permission from Ref. 133. Copyright 2018 American Chemical Society.

the screening procedures. Researchers usually consider these factors at the end of the screening on the most promising structures because of the computational complexity of the corresponding simulations. To take account of pressure dependence, we need an MD simulation of several adsorbates that takes much more time than running single component simulations,[137, 138] which makes it harder to include in a high-throughput screening. Flexibility could be taken account by calculating snapshots and running multiple MD simulations, or by using flexible force fields, which means in both cases an increase in computational run-time. Some faster methods of quantitatively predicting the impact of flexibility on diffusion are being investigated in ZIFs and could give an interesting alternative to these expensive methodologies.[139]

1.2.3 Thermodynamic Adsorption Properties

In its early development, computational screening was mainly used to predict thermodynamic properties in adsorption processes. Three main applications have been identified in the associated literature: gas storage (for energy or medical applications), gas separation (noble gas, hydrocarbons, carbon dioxide, etc.) and post-combustion CO_2 capture. These applications are closely linked to urgent environmental and energy issues that are yet to be solved. Screening can guide the development of better performing materials by shedding light upon unknown structure-property relationship, probes possible theoretical limitations (unreachable targets) and identifies potential candidates that need to be experimentally tested.

GAS STORAGE

One can leverage the high surface density of the nanoporous materials, especially the MOFs, to stock in very low-density gas. In the field of energy storage or transportation, natural gas (mainly methane) or hydrogen are considered plausible alternative fuels to replace conventional

ones for transport. The US Department of Energy (US DOE) recently financed research programs and set targets for methane and hydrogen storage. Nanoporous materials could reduce energy, infrastructure and security cost due to the required compression and cooling. In this section, we are focusing on high-throughput screening for methane storage in nanoporous materials, before broadening the scope hydrogen and other perspectives.

One of the pioneering works in computational screening was published in 2012 by Wilmer et al.[10]. They performed a large-scale screening of 137,953 hypothetical MOF structures to estimate the methane storage capacity of each MOF at 35 bar and 298 K based on the US DOE standards. Back then, the US DOE set a target methane capacity value of $180 \text{ vol}^{\text{STP}}\text{vol}^{-1}$ (which has since been achieved by several materials reported in the literature). In their large-scale analysis, Wilmer et al. found over 300 hypothetical MOFs that meet the targeted requirements and the best one can store up to $267 \text{ vol}^{\text{STP}}\text{vol}^{-1}$, surpassing the state-of-the-art of the time. From their large dataset, a preliminary structure-property relationship analysis revealed that void fraction values of approximately 0.8 and gravimetric surface areas in a range $2500\text{--}3000 \text{ m}^2 \text{ cm}^{-3}$ resulted in the highest methane capacities. Optimal pore size is also shown to be around the size of one or two methane molecule(s). Maximization of gravimetric surface area was a common strategy in the MOF design for storage applications, but this study showed the existence of an optimal range of surface area values. Computational screenings can draw clear relationships between structural descriptors and performance. Later, a more quantitative relationship was drawn by Fernandez et al. using ML models as illustrated on Figure 1.7. Beware not to over-interpret the relation given by the response surface, since the identified maxima do not always have a physical reality, especially where there is no training data in the area pointed by the red arrows. However, it highlights promising unexplored feature space and shows potential research directions.

Since then new materials above the target have been found and the US DOE decided to set a higher target of $315 \text{ vol}^{\text{STP}}\text{vol}^{-1}$. Until now, this new target is not yet reached. This is why the recent developments have focused on assessing the feasibility of such a target by accelerating the screening methods so that more data can be screened, and by interpreting the QSPR models to extract important knowledge for the design of novel materials. For instance, Gómez-Gualdrón et al. showed that even by artificially quadrupling the Lennard-Jones interaction factor ϵ and by increasing the delivery temperature by 100 K, the newly set target is only reached by a handful of MOFs.[140] This study suggests the impossibility to reach the DOE target using a preconceived (experimentally or theoretically) material to store methane. However, this theoretical limitation can be overcome by increasing the surface density of sites with high affinity with methane and by increasing the delivery temperature.

Later, a larger-scale screening on methane storage was carried out by Simon et al. on 650,000 experimental and hypothetical structures of zeolites, MOFs, and PPNs. This study confirmed that the classes of materials currently being investigated were unlikely to meet the new target. The authors suggested that it wasn't surprising since the target was based on economic arguments, while the screening is based on thermodynamic arguments.[61] This example illustrates the power of large-scale screening to settle questions of physical feasibility (if simulations are accurate) and hence avoiding experimental efforts spent on impossible tasks.

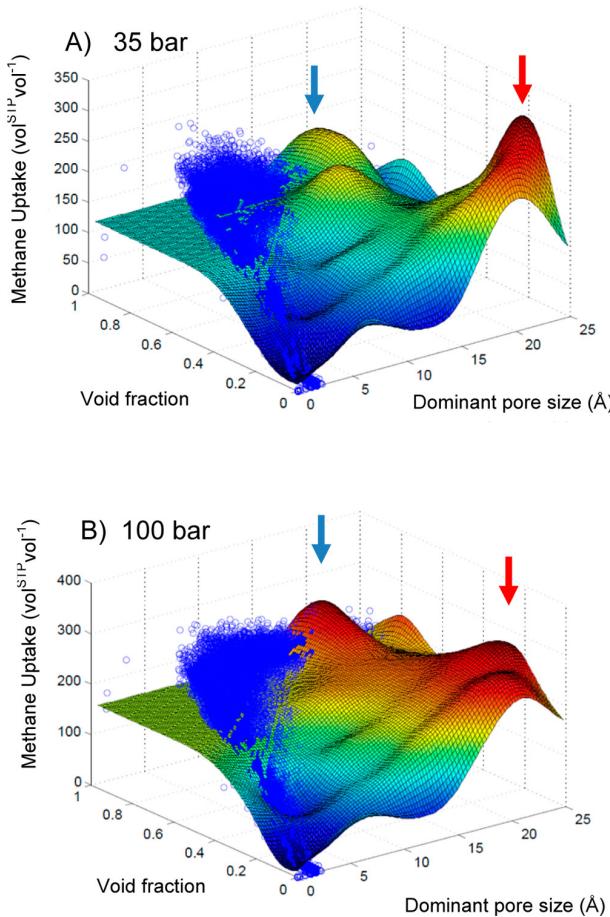


Figure 1.7 – Two-dimensional response surfaces of the support vector machine (SVM) models trained by Fernandez et al. for methane storage at (A) 35 bar and (B) 100 bar using void fraction and dominant pore size. The blue dots represent the GCMC simulated uptake values. The color of the surface represents the methane storage value, from blue (the lowest values) to red (the highest values). Blue and red arrows indicate maxima on the response surface. Reprinted with permission from Ref. 82. Copyright 2013 American Chemical Society.

More recently, a dataset containing trillions of hypothetical MOFs have been screened for methane storage.[141] Lee et al. developed a methodology using machine learning combined with genetic algorithm to perform the largest screening until now. In addition to confirming most of the results (theoretical limits and QSPR) found by previous screenings, 96 MOFs were found to outperform the current world record. This study shows the scaling potential of ML-assisted screenings in handling “Big data”.

Similarly, computational high-throughput screenings have been applied to other storage applications such as hydrogen storage. Computational screenings showed that cryogenic storage of hydrogen can meet the DOE target of 50 g L^{-1} .[62, 79, 142] Anderson et al. performed a large-scale screening based on neural networks to test out multiple pressure/temperature swing conditions to find that the maximal deliverable capacity cannot exceed 62 g L^{-1} .[143] Compared to the density of liquid hydrogen (72 g L^{-1}), this upper limit seems reasonable since the adsorbent material takes at least 10-20% of the tank. Here, we only showed some flagship results of the field. For a more detailed meta-analysis, Bobbitt and Snurr wrote a very complete review on computational high-throughput screening of MOFs for hydrogen storage.[144]

1.2.4 Gas Separation

As a representative example of what could be done in the field of gas separation, we are going to focus on Xe/Kr separation. Nanoporous materials can be used as a safer, cheaper and less energy-intensive option for this gas separation. However, experimental design of top-performing materials can be cumbersome. Computational screenings is an ideal tool to kick-start the development of this new technology by identifying rapidly the best candidates.

SMALL-SCALE SCREENINGS

Metal–organic frameworks, and later other supramolecular porous materials like covalent organic frameworks (COFs), have been proposed for applications in separation of noble gases for a decade. With no aim of being exhaustive, we highlight some milestones in that area, both from experimental and computational point of view.

In 2012, Liu et al.[145] published an experimental study of two MOFs, HKUST-1 and Ni/DOBDC, for adsorption of Xe and Kr at ppm (part-per-million) levels in air. The target application was the removal of Xe and Kr from nuclear fuel reprocessing plants. The same group later proposed a two-column method for the separation of Kr and Xe from processed off-gases[146], based on MOF materials. At about the same time, Bae et al.[147] combined a computational Grand Canonical Monte Carlo (GCMC) study with experimental breakthrough measurements of the separation of a Xe/Kr mixture on MOF-505 and HKUST-1.

Parkes et al.[148] studied sixteen different MOF materials for Kr, Ar, and N₂ adsorption and separation, through GCMC simulations. They concluded on the potential of MOFs for separation, and a general correlation between the Henry's constant and the isosteric heat of adsorption for the three gases studied. A year later, in 2014, Chen et al.[4] demonstrated, again through a combined computational and experimental study, the potential of porous organic cages for selective binding of xenon over krypton.

Later experimental work expanded these early separation studies to different types of MOF materials. Xiong et al.[149] studied a flexible zinc tetrazolate framework for xenon selective adsorption over krypton, argon and nitrogen. Thermodynamic analysis of the adsorption isotherms at various temperatures confirmed the occurrence of a “breathing” structural transition upon Xe uptake, contributing to a high working capacity for a pressure swing adsorption (PSA) cycle. Lee et al.[150] compared the selective adsorption properties for Xe/Kr mixtures on three highly studied MOFs, namely UiO-66(Zr), MIL-100(Fe) and MIL-101(Cr), and confirmed a high potential of UiO-66(Zr) for separations under dynamic flow conditions. These authors also assessed the hydrothermal and radioactive stability of the material, a test seldom performed in the existing literature, and found it to be good. In a further study,[151] they demonstrated that Xe/Kr selectivity could be further improved by ligand substitution.

In parallel, computational studies were published to provide insight at the microscopic level into the mechanisms behind good (and bad) separation properties. Wang et al.[152] studied 6 MOFs and COFs for adsorption of Xe and Xe/N₂ separation, through GCMC simulations looking at the impact of pressure (and therefore pore filling) on selectivity. Anderson et al.[153] combined GCMC and biased MD simulations to elucidate the nature of adsorption- and diffusion-based Kr/Xe separation mechanisms in four archetypal nanoporous materials: SAPO-34, ZIF-8, UiO-66, and IRMOF-1. These authors draw a couple of general conclusions, including the fact that diffusion selectivity for krypton dominates membrane separation selectivity, and large

pore cages and stiff pore windows are desirable — however the scope of these conclusions is inherently limited by the small number of materials actually studied.

In a different family of materials, Tong et al.[65] have surveyed the structure–property relationships of covalent organic frameworks (COFs) for noble gas separation, by GCMC simulations of 187 different materials for Kr/Ar, Xe/Kr and Rn/Xe separations. These authors included in their calculations some adsorption figures of merit (AFM), representative of the conditions of industrial vacuum (VSA) and pressure swing adsorption (PSA) processes.

One area that has been particularly explored is the tuning and improvement of separation properties through the presence and nature of coordinatively unsaturated sites (or open metal sites) in MOFs. In 2016, Vazhappilly et al.[154] used density functional theory (DFT) calculations of host–guest binding energies to probe the impact of the metal atoms in a specific framework (MOF-74) on Xe and Kr adsorption. Later, Zarabadi-Poor et al.[155] investigated — again through computational methods — a series of metal–BTC MOFs for recovering xenon from exhaled anesthetic gas, i.e., mixtures of CO₂, O₂, and N₂.

LARGE-SCALE COMPUTATIONAL SCREENING

In its early stage, computational screening has been used on a small series of nanoporous materials to generate specific knowledge on some subclasses of materials. These small-scale screenings combined with experiments helped faster identification of good performing candidates, but they failed to establish general rules of design or to explore the unknown. Larger-scale screenings overcame these limitations by trying to exhaustively cover the whole spectrum of nanoporous materials.

The first large-scale computational screening on Xe/Kr adsorption-based was performed by Sikora et al. based on the same approach previously developed for methane storage by their group at the Northwestern University.[156] This study was based on the same 137,000 structures of hypothetical MOFs.[10] They calculated the Xe/Kr selectivity using Monte Carlo molecular simulations on the whole database by iteratively increasing the number of steps and selecting the best materials similar to the approach on Figure 1.2. By analyzing the relationships between pore sizes and selectivity, they confirmed a hypothesis from a smaller scale study that the pores should be between the size of 1 to 2 xenon molecules.[157] Tube-like channel was also found to favor better selectivity. Moreover, they found that top performing materials could have a selectivity around 500; but we can only conclude on the order of magnitude of the theoretical limitation of the Xe/Kr selectivity, considering the statistical uncertainty of the simulation.

Seizing the opportunity of a formidable expansion of the nanoporous materials database triggered by the Materials Genome Initiative, Simon et al. screened 670,000 experimental and hypothetical nanoporous material structures for Xe/Kr separation (see Figure 1.8).[14] It is one of the largest-scale screenings performed in this area. Inspired by the work of Fernandez and co-workers,[82] they used ML algorithms to train a model on a diverse subset of 15,000 structures. This method allowed them to run time-consuming molecular simulations only on this training set, before applying the ML model to predict the selectivity values on the larger set of structures. On top of analyzing the links between pore descriptors and selectivity, they rationalized it using theoretical pore models of spherical and cylindrical geometries to confirm the findings of Snurr and co-workers.[156, 157] By comparing the structural descriptors of good-performing

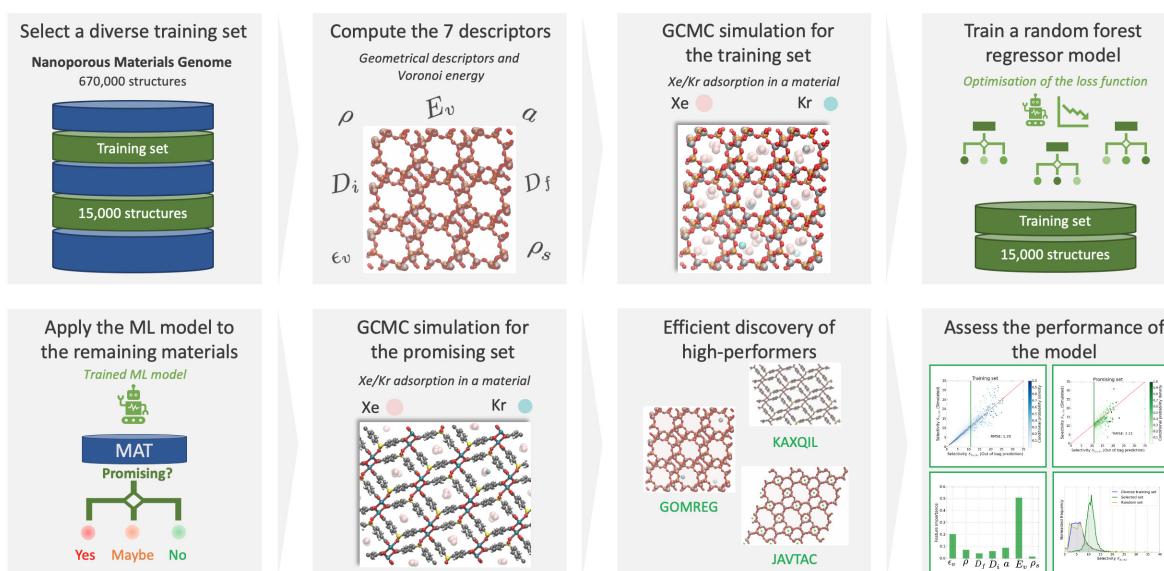


Figure 1.8 – Schematic representation of large-scale screening of nanoporous materials for Xe/Kr adsorption-based separation by Simon et al.,[14] based on a combination of Grand Canonical Monte Carlo simulations and machine learning algorithm (Random Forest Regressor). The main goal of this screening is to find high-performing materials in a large dataset of both experimental and hypothetical materials. Adapted with permission from Ref. 14. Copyright 2015 American Chemical Society.

and bad-performing structures, they concluded that geometrical descriptors wasn't enough to explain the performance. The analysis of a few top candidates suggests that different chemical insights could explain their good performance. For SBMOF-1 or KAXQIL,[47] an experimental MOF, its higher performance was explained by the tubelike 1D channel with a very favorable binding site formed by carbon aromatic rings. This nanoporous material was later tested using breakthrough experiments and proved to be one of the most promising candidates.[158] This close collaboration between computation and experimentation is a testimony of the potential of computational screenings to find nanoporous materials for any targeted application.

The experimental work on Xe/Kr separation on SBMOF-1 revealed discrepancies between the selectivity values obtained experimentally and computationally.[158] The assumption of rigid crystal structures in the molecular simulations could partially explain the difference observed. Witman et al. proposed that the flexibility of the materials that weren't considered in the screening of Simon et al. could explain the lower selectivity observed experimentally.[159] In this study, they screened the Henry regime separation of about 4,000 MOF structures of the CoRE MOF 2014 database[63], and found that intrinsic flexibility, i.e. the thermal vibration of the material, can make the pore size derive from the ideal value for the separation and hence lower the selectivity. This study further confirms the importance of the pore size by highlighting the effect of its evolution over time.

In 2019, Chung et al. screened the most extensive simulation-ready and experimentally synthesized MOF structures for Xe/Kr separation.[64] This study pointed out the potential of coordinated solvent molecules to fine-tune the selectivity for any separation application, since their presence can enhance selectivity in some cases. The results of their screening confirm the

potential of structures such as SBMOF-1 found by Simon et al., but they also described a few structures with similar selectivity but with better xenon uptake. The authors emphasize the importance of considering other figures of merit such as the adsorption capacity. Other factors should be taken into account to find the best trade-off between all the relevant figures of merit; we could think of the kinetics of such a separation, the effect of flexibility on the performance, the stability of the materials (especially in radioactive environment), the financial aspects, and more.

After this quick overview of the different screening studies in the field of xenon/krypton separation, we are now going to detail its industrial context, the foreseen top materials that could fulfill the industrial separation and what further studies are needed to better understand the process while discovering new materials.

1.3 SEPARATION OF XENON FROM KRYPTON

In this section, we will try to see how we can apply the above-mentioned screening methodologies to help us understand the origins of the Xe/Kr separation and identify promising materials for industrial applications.

1.3.1 Industrial applications

The industrial interest for noble gases lies first in the many applications attached to them. For instance, xenon has multiple applications in the medical (e.g. anesthesia, painkiller, imaging), [160–162] aeronautical[163, 164], lithographic[165], microelectronic[166] or lighting sectors, [167, 168] just to cite a few. To meet the demand for these noble gases, one should consider all available sources, the most obvious one being the air we breathe. Xenon and krypton have both very low atmospheric concentrations; out of a thousand liters of air, we would extract at most one tenth of a milliliter of xenon and one of krypton.[1] Nevertheless, direct extraction from the air remains the main production mean for xenon and krypton along with chemical plant off-gases that contains a higher concentration of inert gas (e.g., ammonia purge gas). In these cases, the industry more commonly uses cryogenic distillation to extract xenon and krypton, which requires a compression and cooling of the gas mixture at very low temperatures. The separation process can be broken down into three steps: first the condensation of all gas with a boiling point higher than the oxygen, then the purification of oxygen resulting in a 20-80 xenon/krypton mixture, and finally the separation of xenon from krypton. In 1997, several cases of explosion of separation units were caused by the reaction of non-filtered dangerous hydrocarbons with purified liquid oxygen produced in the second step of this long process.[169, 170] The extreme chemical and physical conditions required for cryogenic distillation support the need for less energy-intensive and safer alternatives.

Industrial application	Xe/Kr composition
Extraction from ambient air[1]	20/80
Spent nuclear fuel[171]	90/10
Molten Salt Reactor[172]	?

Table 1.1 – Composition of the Xe/Kr mixture in different applications.

The role of a dispatchable source of low-carbon energy can only be fulfilled by batteries charged by renewable energies (wind or solar) or by nuclear plants. However, one of the major criticisms on this source of energy concerns the management of the radioactive waste. As promising technologies in gas separation emerge, there is an increasing need for a solution for the release of very small amount of radioactive off-gases like Kr₈₅ from nuclear spent fuels.^[173] Furthermore, stable xenon isotopes are also produced in these spent nuclear fuels, which can be used in all the above-mentioned applications. In the context of a regained interest in nuclear energy, the fourth generation nuclear plants are projected to be built on other technologies such as the light water or the molten salt technologies.^[174] Molten salt reactors would continuously produce xenon and radioactive krypton in the electricity generation process.^[172] The development of gas separation units in these facilities would represent a promising source for xenon production. Yet, we can laboriously imagine deploying standard cryogenic distillation units in a nuclear facility for obvious security reasons. Consequently, nanoporous materials are considered as the alternative technology for xenon/krypton separation. Zeolites are already used as a pre-purification system,^[1] and they are now projected to be used as a standalone separation system.

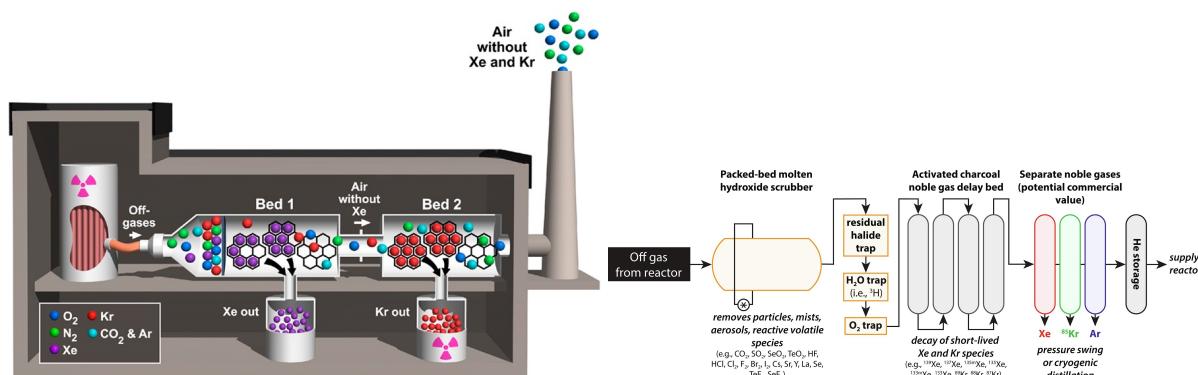


Figure 1.9 – Representation of xenon/krypton separation process using porous materials in a nuclear fuel reprocessing plant and in a molten salt reactor. Reprinted with permission from reference 175 copyright ©(2014) American Chemical Society and reference 172 copyright ©(2019) Elsevier.

Banerjee et al. proposed a two-bed system with a first bed filled with MOFs designed for xenon separation and then a second one for radioactive krypton capture.^[175] The authors proposed some examples of material that could be used for this separation unit; more research is needed to find out what the best materials for these separations are. In the following section, we will review the most promising materials for this separation and the structural explaining their high performance.

1.3.2 Promising Materials for the Separation

Several experimental reports used the strategy outlined by computational screenings to improve separation properties, as well as tuning the chemical nature of the organic linkers. The main criteria outlined by the different studies on xenon/krypton separation call for pore size tailor-made for xenon and also for maximized interactions with the framework atoms obtained either through the chemical nature or the shape of the cavities.

In the early phase of the experimental design of materials for the xenon/krypton separation, Wang et al. synthesized a cobalt MOF Co₃(HCOO)₆ with a selectivity of 12 that present rather

narrow pores (around 5 Å) connected by zig-zag segments.[152] Later, Chen et al. synthesized a selective porous cage material by not only focusing on the pore size but more importantly on the shape of the cavity, the selectivity of around 20 was considered record high at that time. For instance, the cage windows are open for small noble gases such as krypton, whereas they close around the xenon hence maximizing the interaction.[4] Mohamed et al. also designed a material with a similar selectivity,CROFOUR-1-Ni. However the performance was now explained by the chemical nature of the chromium oxide ligands that interact more strongly with the more polarizable xenon than the krypton molecules.[176] Finally, Banerjee et al. tested a previously synthesized[47] MOF after it was identified through high-throughput screening[14] for its outstanding theoretical selectivity around 70. However, experimental measurements showed that its selectivity was not exceeding the one of the previous top materials. Similar emphases were made on the ideal pore size coupled with highly attractive framework atoms.[158]

More recently, Li et al. proposed a rigid squarate-based MOF with “perfect pore size” (comparable with the kinetic diameter of Xe), and an internal pore surface decorated with very polar hydroxyl groups. This material experimentally demonstrated record-high Xe/Kr selectivity of 60.6 at low pressure (0.2 bar) and ambient temperature.[5] Later, Pei et al. discovered even better performing materials with Xe/Kr selectivity of 74.1 and 103.4 in the same conditions 0.2 bar and 298 K. In addition to the perfectly tailored pore size, the structure features two oppositely adjacent open metal sites that strongly clamp the adsorbed xenon molecule.[6] These studies clearly show the potential of polar sites that preferentially interact with the more polarizable xenon over the krypton, hence explaining these record-breaking separation performances.

1.3.3 From the Computer to the Test Tube

To connect back our study to computational screenings, we are now going to present one of the rare cases of direct contribution of high-throughput screenings to the lab testing of a material. In 2015, Simon et al.[14] analyzed the Nanoporous Materials Genome,[61, 77] a database of about 670,000 experimental and hypothetical porous material structures, including MOFs, zeolites, PPNs, ZIFs, and COFs, for candidate adsorbents for xenon/krypton separations. This study led to the rediscovery of SBMOF-1, a promising nanoporous material that was presented one year later.[158]

It is possibly the largest-scale study performed in this area, both by the sheer number of frameworks involved and by the diversity of their nature. Because such a set is too big for brute-force screening with GCMC simulations, they proposed a multiscale modeling strategy combining machine learning algorithms (trained on a diverse subset of 15,000 materials) with molecular simulations (used both to generate the ML training data, and to refine the separation properties for the top performers obtained by the ML predictor). Without going into details (see Fig. 1.8 for more details), the ML model they trained was mainly based on geometric structural descriptors, with the addition of a single energy-based descriptor: the Voronoi energy (i.e., the average energy of a xenon atom at the accessible nodes in the Voronoi partition of space). In addition to identifying and describing some top performing materials, the authors also analyzed the correlations between high Xe/Kr selectivity and the geometric properties of the frameworks, in order to “rationalize the strong link between pore size and selectivity”. In particular, by developing theoretical pore models of spherical and cylindrical geometries, they

could highlight the general geometrical trends observed, but also the fact that there is a wide diversity of performance beyond the geometrical features of the frameworks, which suggests the key role of the chemical nature of the cavities.

By looking at the distribution of the most selective materials ($s \geq 14$) compared to the less selective ones ($s < 14$) in the Figure 1.10, Simon et al. established a first profile of the selective materials. These materials have pore sizes of a specific diameter very close to the kinetic diameter of xenon around 4.4 Å depending on how it is defined. They have rather low surface areas and porosities (void fractions) unlike what we would normally expect since the adsorbable surface is a key reason for using nanoporous materials in adsorption applications. This behavior can be rationalized by the fact that small pores of the order of a few Å drives mechanically to smaller pore volumes and surface areas (the framework atoms have more space). The crystal density is therefore also a bit higher for these reasons. Moreover, the pore's shape is also a crucial factor since a shape closer to a sphere would interact with the xenon with more atoms, hence increasing its affinity and the selectivity. Finally, last but not least, the Voronoi energy described the physical nature of the binding between the xenon and the pore atoms, the more negative it is and the more selective the material will be. To wrap up, the ideal materials have a pseudo-spherical shape (a complete sphere would stop the diffusion of the adsorbates) with a size close to the diameter of a xenon which is rather dense and not very porous.

The chemical nature of the cavities was best described using the Voronoi energy descriptor they developed. This descriptor gives an idea of the xenon adsorption isosteric heat of the material. Given these results, more studies should focus on describing the adsorption thermodynamic quantities such as the adsorption enthalpy but also the Henry adsorption constants. This study finally leads to the synthesis and testing of one of the top performing materials in the field. However, we cannot stop but wondering why there is a discrepancy between the theoretical selectivity of around 70 of SBMOF-1 and its actual experimental selectivity of 16. In the final chapter of this thesis, we will try to give an explanation for this. In the future, such close collaboration between experimental and computational teams are crucial even if they are still too rare. A recent paper suggests that these collaborations are rare across all nanoporous fields and a lot of improvements are needed to foster cooperation between the labs.[177]

1.3.4 The Future of Screening

Despite the progress made, important drawbacks of the current methodologies remain. High-throughput screenings rely too much on oversimplified assumptions such as the rigidity of the framework, the absence of defects, the use of Lennard-Jones potentials and inaccurate charges. For instance, the rigidity of the framework only takes into account one conformation of the framework. Yet, thermal agitation induces a “breathing” movement of the framework with an amplitude dependent on its intrinsic flexibility. The pores of the framework can change depending on the number of adsorbates to interact more optimally with them, which can be induced by a change in pressure. The issue of flexibility is rarely tackled, and when considered, it is only on the few most selective structures given by an inaccurate screening based on the rigid crystal approximation. One can wonder about the results obtained if it is applied to larger sets of structures. Witman et al. found that flexibility applied to top performing materials can decrease the selectivity, because the pore does not have an optimal size anymore.[159] In some cases, the selectivity of a well-performing material can even increase to become a top

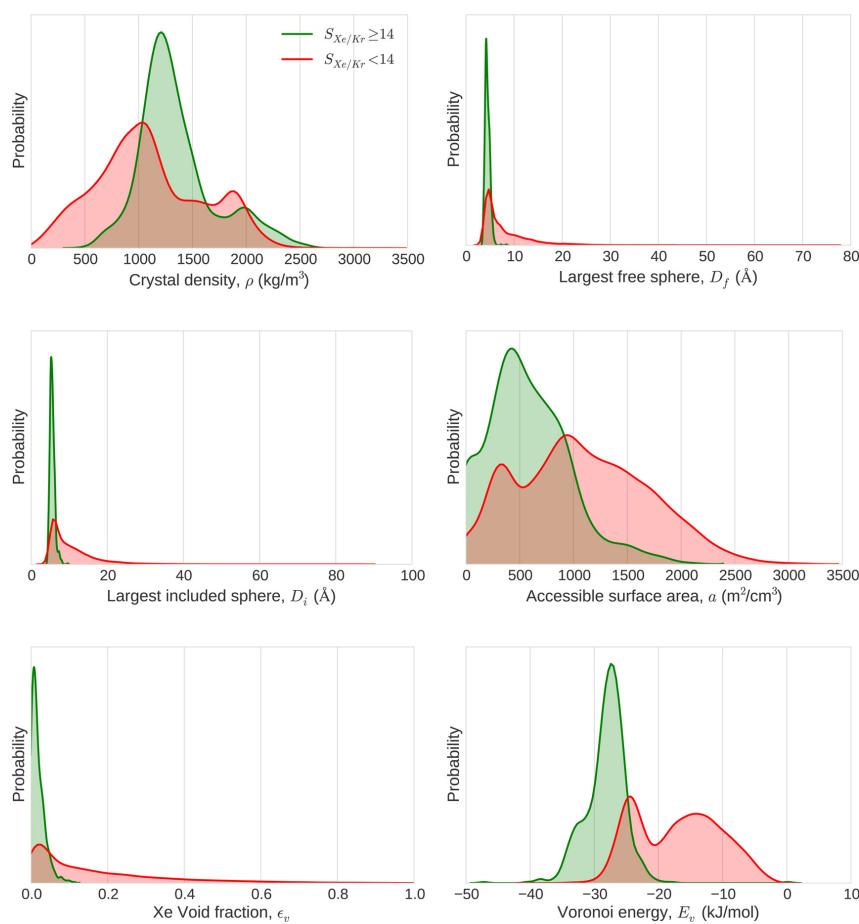


Figure 1.10 – Statistical analysis of the adsorption separation of xenon/krypton mixtures by nanoporous materials. The graphs represent the distributions of structural descriptors explored by highly selective (green) and poorly selective (red) materials separately. Reprinted with permission from Ref. 14. Copyright 2015 American Chemical Society.

performing one. Computational screenings can be closer to predict experimental values of selectivity, diffusivity, and other key performance metrics.

Many open problems remain for the design of efficient high-throughput computational screenings. The connection between different properties for a given application is not systematically integrated in the screening procedures. For example, in methane storage, the working capacity of the material is the main property to optimize, but the kinetics of the adsorption/desorption or the mechanical resistance to compaction among others also need to be considered. Designing a nanoporous material is in fact a multivariate optimization problem with tacit constraints, for example the synthesizability. For instance, the diffusion coefficients of adsorbates in a xenon/krypton separation problem can help us better understand the breakthrough simulations and eventually the whole separation process in pressure or temperature swing adsorption beds. For this reason, studying transport properties along with uptake capacities and thermodynamic selectivity of the xenon/krypton separation can give a more complete picture of the industrial process we ultimately want to model.

Moreover, the transferability of the methodology to a broad range of materials is often achieved at the expense of accuracy in specific cases. And one can rightly question the universality

of depending on faster but less elaborated models, which boils down to a trade-off problem between prediction accuracy and computational cost (or complexity). For instance, classical forcefields are broadly used in rigid materials for adsorption properties, but the switch to more costly *ab initio* methods or the addition of flexibility can result in a more accurate description at the expense of computational resources. The addition of polarization could be very promising since several top performing materials harbor open metal sites and highly polar sites that explain the acute affinity to xenon adsorbates.

The development of ML-assisted screenings is paired with the advances in data science techniques and algorithms. Recent advances in deep learning have enabled the development of transformer-based (the technology at the foundation of ChatGPT) machine learning models to predict adsorption properties.[178, 179] More importantly, the construction of descriptors tailored to the many possible applications is also an ongoing work. This construction work cannot be dissociated to the physical and chemical intuition of the scientists. Topological, chemical, electronic and other descriptors have been developed on top of the more common geometrical and thermodynamic descriptors, which displays the importance of strong physical chemistry knowledge. Recently Shi et al. highlighted the key role of energy histograms in predicting adsorption properties.[17] The discovery of novel relevant descriptors remains the main lever for increased performance of the ML models and is closely related to a rigorous theoretical work. For these reasons, we worked during this thesis on more accurate and faster ways of calculating these interaction energies to extract valuable energy/thermodynamic descriptors.

The development of databases is another key aspect in the promotion of data science in the field of materials science in general, and nanoporous materials chemistry in particular. The diversity of materials, the inclusion of experimental data (successful or failed), the addition of understudied classes of materials (e.g., amorphous) are all key aspects to upgrade the existing database. Even if existing attempts to create a centralized database have been initiated by the materials project,[113] this database does not contain all the existing information on each material. Furthermore, this high amount of data will need to be efficiently explored, and non-supervised deep learning algorithms have been developed to do so.[180] Coupled with synthesis robot, these methods can navigate through the unexplored databases to find the few most interesting candidates for a given targeted application.

In the future, computational high-throughput screening could be integrated more tightly into the design process of nanoporous materials, hence further improving its efficiency. The computational prescreening can be coupled with automated screenings of the most promising materials to finally identify candidates for further studies. This automated design process is described by Lyu et al. in their paper on “Digital Reticular Chemistry” and set out promising perspectives for computational screenings in the field.[7] Some studies are already pioneering this new research area by combining high-throughput characterizations, active learning algorithms and robotic synthesis.[181, 182] Another step towards faster industrialization would integrate process modeling to enrich the purely atomistic approach.

THERMODYNAMIC EXPLORATION OF XENON/KRYPTON SEPARATION

2.1	Simulation of Adsorption Equilibrium Properties	33
2.1.1	Geometrical descriptors	33
2.1.2	Mixture adsorption simulations: Grand Canonical Monte Carlo	35
2.1.3	Infinite dilution adsorption: Widom insertion	37
2.1.4	The thermodynamics behind adsorption-based separation .	40
2.2	Preliminary analyses	41
2.2.1	Structure-selectivity relationships	42
2.2.2	Thermodynamic quantities correlations	47
2.3	Selectivity drop	51
2.3.1	Thermodynamic origins	51
2.3.2	Detailed investigation	57
2.3.3	Conclusion and introduction to the follow-up studies.	63

[Partie sur la détermination des descripteurs géométriques améliorable]

2.1 SIMULATION OF ADSORPTION EQUILIBRIUM PROPERTIES

2.1.1 Geometrical descriptors

Before going into the details of the adsorption properties themselves, we will first introduce the different simulation techniques used to characterize the internal pore structure of a material key in interpreting the adsorption properties obtained using more complex molecular simulations. All the geometrical descriptors used in this thesis have been calculated using the Zeo++ software;^[42] other tools exist,^[43, 183] but the use of Voronoi decomposition of the volume speeds up the calculation making it the preferred tool for this task (efficiency gain mainly on volume calculation).^[15]

PORE SIZE

There are a multitude of pore sizes depending on the point where we measure it, all these pore sizes compose what we call a pore size distribution. Some specific values are, however, uniquely defined and used to put a single value to characterize pore sized. The pore limiting diameter (PLD) is the diameter of the largest sphere that can diffuse freely in the structure, it is also noted D_f . The LCD corresponds to the diameter of the largest included sphere along a free diffusion path also denoted D_f ; the global cavity diameter (GCD) is the diameter of the largest included sphere (not necessarily in a free diffusion path) also denoted D_i . The Figure 2.1 illustrates the difference between these pore sizes.

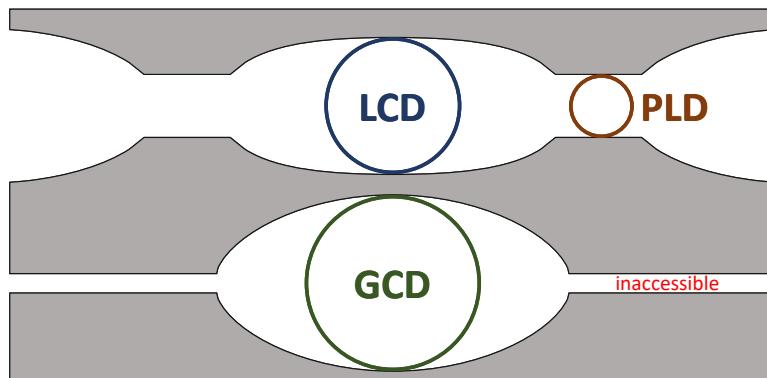


Figure 2.1 – Illustration of the different pore sizes PLD, LCD and GCD.

To define thesees pore sizes, we need to first set the radii of the framework atoms that will shape the surrounding pores. These radii can be defined using different methods, the default mode uses the Cambridge database radii. We used a similar approach than the one developed by Hung et al. instead of the default definition.[\[44\]](#) All Zeo++ calculations use an atomic radius that corresponds to the distance where the LJ potential reaches $3k_B T/2$, for $T = 298$ K. This type of definition can be more easily compared to the molecular simulations.

SURFACE AREA

The surface areas are calculated using a random sampling over the surface of the different atom surfaces. The algorithm counts only the points that do not overlap with another atom. For each atom we can therefore calculate an adsorbable surface. By summing up all the surfaces, we finally have the surface area. This “rolling ball” algorithm has been developed since 1973 by Shrake and Rupley.[\[184\]](#) the By defining a probe, the Voronoi tessellation defines the accessible and the non-accessible areas of the structure. Depending on where the surfaces are, they are either counted in the accessible or the non-accessible surface areas. In this chapter, we will use the accessible surface area defined by a probe of 1.2 Å; this is a computational equivalent of the experimental N₂ BET surface area.

PORE VOLUME AND POROSITY

The pore volume is calculated by random sampling of the accessible and inaccessible Voronoi cells. Similar algorithm, random sampling over a regular mesh. If the probe does not overlap with a framework atom, then it is counted in N. The ratio of this final N and the total number of points sampled gives the fraction of the pore volume. This ratio is called the void fraction or the porosity. Using the Voronoi decomposition, we can also define the accessible and non-accessible void fractions.[\[\]](#)

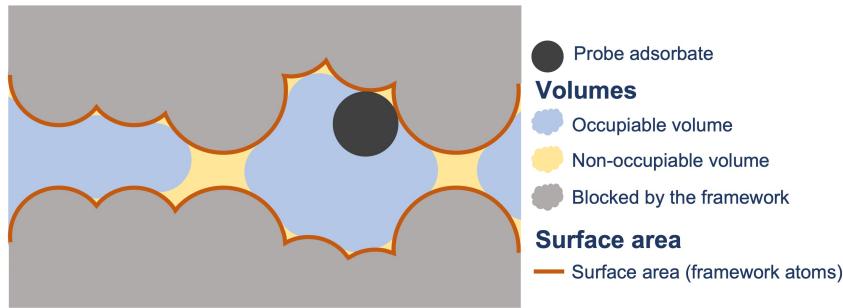


Figure 2.2 – Illustration of the pore surface area and volume in a nanoporous material. As illustrated, there are different definitions of the pore volume: we can either consider the whole volume of the pores or the volume occupiable by a given probe. The surface area also changes depending on the definition. Studies have shown that occupiable volume has a better accordance with experimental data.[185]

2.1.2 Mixture adsorption simulations: Grand Canonical Monte Carlo

As explained before, we can think of adsorption as a gas–solid or liquid–solid interfacial phenomenon, the adsorbate phase fills the accessible pore volumes depending on the physical conditions the material is put under. No simple model can predict how the adsorbates would interact with the pore surface, how many of them can fit in, what configuration is the most stable, etc. To answer these questions, we can evaluate all possible adsorption configurations that would undeniably have different numbers of adsorbate, and only keep the most thermodynamically plausible ones. To do so, these configurations will have to follow a given probability distribution, the grand canonical ensemble probability for instance, because it allows the variation of the number of molecules (adsorbate molecules) and the total energy. With the help of a Monte Carlo simulation, we can vary the energy and the loading inside the pores so that the distribution of configurations c follows this probability law:

$$P_c = \frac{1}{\Xi} e^{-\beta(E_c - \mu N_c)} \quad (2.1)$$

where E_c and N_c are respectively the energy and the number of adsorbate particles in the configuration c . Normally the energy and the number of molecules of all particles should be considered, but for now, since the whole system is considered rigid we will only focus on the adsorbate molecules. The chemical potential μ and the temperature T inside β correspond to the ones of the gas phase in equilibrium with the adsorbent material. And the pressure and volume V are considered fixed under the rigidity assumption. The grand canonical partition function $\Xi(\mu, V, T)$ will then be the following sum over all possible configurations:

$$\Xi(\mu, V, T) = \sum_c e^{-\beta(E_c - \mu N_c)} \quad (2.2)$$

This multiplicative constant does not need to be known in the Monte Carlo simulation we will describe now.

Beyond these theoretical considerations, the grand canonical Monte Carlo simulation, referring to a Metropolis-Hastings Monte Carlo algorithm in the context of the grand canonical thermodynamic ensemble, will need several key characteristics in order to fulfill the previous claims on the probability distribution of the configurations. Monte Carlo (MC) refers to the randomness

inherent to the gambling games of the eponymous casino on the azure coast of Monaco. The MC simulations are therefore relying on randomly generating atomic configurations; however in order to do it efficiently, we need to stay as much as possible in the physically possible atomic space, while exhaustively exploring all the chemical configurations. In molecular simulations, to do so, only the initial configuration c_0 is really randomly generated, but then the algorithm has different rational moves to change the configuration with a controlled amount of randomness. The second key feature (acceptance or rejection condition) was introduced by Metropolis and co-workers that allows to reproduce any distribution with an unknown multiplicative prefactor.[186] The configuration c_1 resulting of the random move is evaluated by calculating the transition probability (like in a Markov chain) or acceptance rate $acc(c_0 \rightarrow c_1)$:

$$acc(c_0 \rightarrow c_1) = \min \left(1, e^{-\beta(E_{c_1} - E_{c_0} - \mu(N_{c_1} - N_{c_0}))} \right) \quad (2.3)$$

Any move that has a greater probability of occurring is always accepted, if the probability is lower than the acceptance rate depends on the probability ratio. The multiplicative prefactor has no influence on the algorithm, we do not need to know the chemical space to explore beforehand, which is a valuable simplification. This sequence of a Markov-type chain can then be used to approximate the probability distribution of the grand canonical ensemble we seek to describe in the equation 2.1.

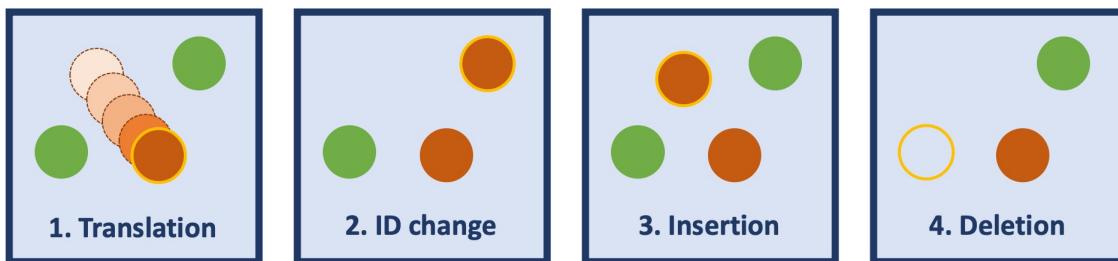


Figure 2.3 – MC moves for monoatomic atoms with multiple components

To complete the description of the grand canonical Monte Carlo (GCMC) simulation we are interested in, let us now consider the different MC moves used to generate a configuration from another. Depending on the parameterization, these moves have different probabilities of occurring. For monoatomic atoms only four moves are relevant (see Figure 2.3): (1) the translation of a randomly chosen molecule with a displacement randomly chosen within a given radius, (2) the change of identity of a randomly chosen molecule into another, (3) the insertion of an adsorbate molecule and (4) the deletion of an adsorbate molecule. We deliberately omitted the rotations of the adsorbate because of the spherical symmetry of noble gases and the change of volume since the flexibility of the material framework is neglected.

By using a GCMC algorithm, we can now generate a set of configurations according to their probability of occurrence. Because the probability law is directly taken from equation 2.1, the series of configurations describe the thermodynamic equilibrium state of a nanoporous material in contact with a reservoir of a xenon-krypton mixture at a given composition, pressure and temperature. Different thermodynamic quantities can be derived from ensemble averaging: the averaging loading or uptake at a given pressure (several pressures give the isotherm) and the

isosteric heat of adsorption of each adsorbate (Xe and Kr). The ratio of the uptakes q informs on the selectivity s of the thermodynamic separation process:

$$s = \frac{q^{\text{Xe}}}{q^{\text{Kr}}} \times \frac{y^{\text{Kr}}}{y^{\text{Xe}}} \quad (2.4)$$

where y^{Xe} and y^{Kr} designate respectively the mole fractions of Xe and Kr in the gas phase reservoir.

To characterize a separation process, we theoretically only need to perform a GCMC calculation at every pressure conditions that we are interested in. However, this type of simulation requires a lot of time to converge since we need to test out a lot of insertion/deletion moves to accurately estimate the number of adsorbed molecules and the composition of the mixture. Hence, faster methods (machine learning) are developed to estimate the selectivity at any pressure conditions.[14, 178] If we are interested in the infinite dilution case, faster methods are already available, we are now going to introduce the Widom insertion that can estimate the adsorption performances at infinite dilution by estimating the Henry adsorption constant.

2.1.3 Infinite dilution adsorption: Widom insertion

In 1963, the professor B. Widom introduced a simple method of calculation of thermodynamic properties in a material or fluid mixture.[187] Generally, this method allows accessing to the difference of internal energy before and after the insertion of a Widom test particle while fixing all other particles, therefore comparing the N-particle and (N+1)-particle states. This difference of energy $\Delta\Phi$ can then be used to deduce the excess free energy associated to it $\Delta F_{\text{exc}} = -k_B T \ln (\langle \exp(-\beta\Delta\Phi) \rangle)$, which corresponds to the excess chemical potential induced by the addition of a particle. In the domain of fluid phase equilibrium, Widom insertion is the most straightforward method to calculate a chemical potential value; however it has drawbacks in liquid-like phases because the insertable space is very narrow, and no relaxation is implemented to account for the reorganization of the surrounding particles.[188] In our case, we will be only interested in the insertion from 0 to 1 particle, where no problems of overlapping between adsorbate particles can happen. Widom insertion is in our case only a random insertion of an adsorbate into an empty nanoporous framework. By randomly sampling the void space, we obtain a distribution of interaction energies \mathcal{E}_{int} , the average of the Boltzmann weights associated is directly proportional to the adsorption free energy ΔG_{ads} and the Henry adsorption constant K_H . By taking the Boltzmann average of the interaction energies, we can also compute the adsorption enthalpy ΔH_{ads} . All these quantities stay only valid at infinite dilution, for higher quantities of adsorbates the previously described GCMC technique should be used.

In the infinite dilution case, this test particle insertion technique is similar to a random sampling of the adsorbable space inside a material. If the sampling is thorough enough, we can derive the following definitions of ΔG_{ads} (equation eqn:gibbs), K_H (equation eqn:henry) and ΔH_{ads} based on a complete sampling of the interaction energies \mathcal{E}_{int} .

The adsorption Gibbs free energy ΔG_{ads} is equal to the excess free energy previously calculated in a Widom insertion since the structure is rigid and PV does not fluctuate ($G = F + PV$).

$$\boxed{\Delta G_{\text{ads}} = -RT \ln (\langle \exp(-E_{\text{int}}/RT) \rangle)} \quad (2.5)$$

To derive the Henry constant K_H , we need to consider an ideal gas. The number of adsorbed molecules n_{ads} can be expressed using the bulk density of the gas $\rho_{\text{ads,bulk}}$ and the volume of the pores V_{pore} :

$$n_{\text{ads}} = \rho_{\text{ads,bulk}} \times V_{\text{pore}} \quad (2.6)$$

The pore volume can be seen as the continuous sum of each voxel times the Boltzmann probability of presence, which is represented by the following integral of the Boltzmann factors. This integral can then be changed to the average of the Boltzmann factors:

$$V_{\text{pore}} = \int_V \exp(-E_{\text{int}}(\mathbf{r})/RT) d\mathbf{r} = V \langle \exp(-E_{\text{int}}/RT) \rangle \quad (2.7)$$

Let us apply the equation 2.7 and the perfect gas equation of state $P = \rho_{\text{ads,bulk}} RT$ on the bulk gas in equilibrium, we can change the equation 2.6 to:

$$\frac{n_{\text{ads}}}{V} = \frac{P}{RT} \langle \exp(-E_{\text{int}}/RT) \rangle \quad (2.8)$$

If we now consider the gravimetric loading L_{ads} (in mmol g^{-1}), we need to divide the equation by mass density of the framework ρ_f :

$$L_{\text{ads}} = \frac{n_{\text{ads}}}{V\rho_f} = \frac{\langle \exp(-E_{\text{int}}/RT) \rangle}{\rho_f RT} P \quad (2.9)$$

Since the Henry's law is described by $L_{\text{ads}} = K_H \times P$, we have the final relation between the Henry adsorption constant and interaction energy distribution.

$$\boxed{K_H = \frac{\langle \exp(-E_{\text{int}}/RT) \rangle}{\rho_f RT} = \frac{1}{\rho_f RT} \exp\left(-\frac{\Delta G_{\text{ads}}}{RT}\right)} \quad (2.10)$$

Note that the ρ_f factor comes from the use of a gravimetric loading expressed in mmol g^{-1} and is not always present in the different derivations of the literature.[43] The RT factor comes from the perfect gas assumption we made, which is a good approximation in the noble gas case.

Finally, if we consider an adsorption equilibrium (e.g., $Xe_{(g)} \rightleftharpoons Xe_{(\text{ads})}$), we can define an equilibrium constant $K_{\text{ads}} = x_{\text{ads}}/y_{\text{gas}}$ where x_{ads} is the mole fraction in the adsorbed phase and y_{gas} the mole fraction in the gas phase for a given compound (e.g., Xe). For a pure gas ($y_{\text{gas}} = 1$) at infinite dilution, we can apply the Henry's law to derive the following relation:

$$K_{\text{ads}} = \frac{n_{\text{ads}}}{n_{\text{site}} y_{\text{gas}}} = \frac{K_H P \rho_f V}{n_{\text{site}}} = P V \frac{\langle \exp(-E_{\text{int}}/RT) \rangle}{n_{\text{site}} RT} \quad (2.11)$$

where n_{site} is the number of sites considered constant since it is much higher than n_{ads} at infinite dilution.

Now by applying the Van't Hoff equation to this infinite-dilution adsorption equilibrium constant K_{ads} , we can derive an expression of the adsorption enthalpy at infinite dilution:

$$\Delta H_{\text{ads}} = -R \frac{d \ln (K_{\text{ads}}(T))}{d(1/T)} \quad (2.12)$$

Then by decomposing the logarithm on the fraction of equation 2.11,

$$\Delta H_{\text{ads}} = -\frac{d \ln (PV/n_{\text{site}})}{d(1/T)} - R \frac{d \ln (\langle \exp(-E_{\text{int}}/RT) \rangle)}{d(1/T)} - R \frac{d \ln (1/T)}{d(1/T)} \quad (2.13)$$

Then, PV/n_{site} being a constant, we can reduce the expression to two derivatives, the first one being the logarithmic derivative of itself ($1/T$) and the second being the logarithmic derivative of the sum of the exponential terms.

$$\Delta H_{\text{ads}} = 0 - R \frac{d \ln (\langle \exp(-E_{\text{int}}/RT) \rangle)}{d(1/T)} - RT \quad (2.14)$$

Knowing that for any function f the logarithmic derivative equals the quotient of its derivative f' , $\frac{d \ln(f)}{dx} = f'/f$, we can calculate the derivative of the average of the Boltzmann factors $\langle \exp(-E_{\text{int}}/RT) \rangle$:

$$\Delta H_{\text{ads}} = -R \frac{1}{\frac{1}{N} \sum e^{-\frac{E_{\text{int}}}{RT}}} \frac{1}{N} \sum \frac{d \exp(-E_{\text{int}}/RT)}{d(1/T)} - RT \quad (2.15)$$

where N corresponds to the number of points where the Widom particle has been inserted. The exponential derivative makes the energy factors come out, and we get the following expression:

$$\Delta H_{\text{ads}} = -R \frac{1}{\sum e^{-\frac{E_{\text{int}}}{RT}}} \sum -\frac{E_{\text{int}}}{R} e^{-\frac{E_{\text{int}}}{RT}} - RT \quad (2.16)$$

With some simplification, we can express the adsorption enthalpy ΔH_{ads} as a Boltzmann average of the interaction energies minus a term RT that comes from the ideal gas assumption (perfect gas equation of state).

$$\Delta H_{\text{ads}} = \frac{\sum E_{\text{int}} e^{-\frac{E_{\text{int}}}{RT}}}{\sum e^{-\frac{E_{\text{int}}}{RT}}} - RT \quad (2.17)$$

From the values of the adsorption free energy and enthalpy, we can now deduce the adsorption entropy ΔS_{ads} using the definition of the Gibbs free energy ($G = H - TS$):

$$\Delta S_{\text{ads}} = \frac{1}{T} (\Delta H_{\text{ads}} - \Delta G_{\text{ads}}) \quad (2.18)$$

We already defined the selectivity as the ratio of the proportion of Xe/Kr in the adsorption phase to the proportion in the gas phase in the equation 2.4. At infinite dilution, we can rewrite the selectivity using the Henry's law ($q^i = V\rho_f K_H^i y^i P / n_{tot}$) and simplifying the constant term $PV\rho_f / n_{tot}$:

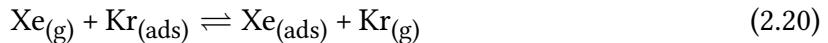
$$s = \frac{K_H^{Xe} y^{Xe}}{K_H^{Kr} y^{Kr}} \times \frac{y^{Kr}}{y^{Xe}} = \frac{K_H^{Xe}}{K_H^{Kr}} \quad (2.19)$$

By extrapolating at the zero loading regime, the Xe/Kr selectivity can be simply expressed as the ratio of the Henry adsorption constant of xenon and krypton.

In this section, we saw that simple thermodynamic quantities such as the adsorption Gibbs free energy, enthalpy and entropy can be derived from the study of a simple adsorption equilibrium equation. In the next one, we will explore a thermodynamic characterization of the adsorption-based separation process using another equilibrium.

2.1.4 The thermodynamics behind adsorption-based separation

Now that the main simulation tools used to describe the competing adsorption of Xe/Kr binary mixtures are introduced, let us rationalize the separation process by modeling the process within a theoretical "exchange" equilibrium that corresponds to the exchange of gas phase Xe and Kr on a model adsorption site representing all the most attractive sites for a given pressure condition:



The equilibrium constant associated to the Equation (2.20) at any pressure for a given composition is simply the selectivity s , defined in the equation 2.4, because the gas phase activities of $Xe_{(g)}$ and $Kr_{(g)}$ correspond the partial pressures y^{Xe} and y^{Kr} , and the adsorption phase activities of $Xe_{(ads)}$ and $Kr_{(ads)}$ correspond the mole fractions q^{Xe} and q^{Kr} . The Gibbs free energy at equilibrium can be directly defined using the equilibrium constant, by applying this relation to the exchange equilibrium we can define an exchange Gibbs free energy $\Delta_{exc}G$:

$$\Delta_{exc}G = -RT \ln(s) \quad (2.21)$$

This exchange equilibrium can be seen as the subtraction between the adsorption equilibria of xenon and krypton. So by applying the Hess's law of constant heat summation, we can derive an expression of the exchange enthalpy as the difference of the adsorption enthalpies between xenon and krypton within the mixture.

$$\Delta_{exc}H^{Xe/Kr} = \Delta_{ads}H^{Xe} - \Delta_{ads}H^{Kr} \quad (2.22)$$

Moreover, the adsorption enthalpies $\Delta_{ads}H$ can be obtained in a GCMC calculation using a formula derived from the fluctuation theorem in statistical mechanics (see a derivation in this online article [189]):

$$\Delta_{ads}H^{Xe} = \frac{\langle EN \rangle - \langle E \rangle \langle N \rangle}{\langle N^2 \rangle - \langle N \rangle^2} - RT \quad (2.23)$$

where E corresponds to the energy of the adsorbates and N the total number of adsorbates at every step of the simulation. Note that this equation remains only valid for $N \gg 1$, because the first step of the derivation is based on a first order Taylor expansion $\langle E \rangle(\langle N \rangle + 1) - \langle E \rangle(\langle N \rangle) =$

$\frac{\partial \langle E \rangle}{\partial \langle N \rangle}$. This expression of the adsorption enthalpy echoes with the one at infinite dilution (equation 2.17), where for $N \rightarrow 0$ we now have $\Delta H_{\text{ads}} = \langle E \rangle(1) - \langle E \rangle(0) - RT = \langle E \rangle(1) - RT$.

Now that we defined the exchange Gibbs free energy and an exchange enthalpy at any pressure, we can now use the same approach as for the equation 2.18 to derive the exchange entropy:

$$\Delta_{\text{exc}}S = \frac{1}{T} (\Delta_{\text{exc}}H - \Delta_{\text{exc}}G) = \frac{1}{T} \Delta_{\text{exc}}H + R \ln(s) \quad (2.24)$$

Before concluding this methodological section, we need to note that the thermodynamic quantities associated to this newly defined adsorption exchange equilibrium can be defined at different pressures and different methodologies can be used to calculate them. At infinite dilution, we would preferably use Widom insertions and the adsorption free energies and enthalpies to deduce these exchange quantities; at higher pressure, we would use the GCMC calculation to define a free energy (via the loading values) and the isosteric adsorption heat to define them. In the following study, we will focus on only two pressures: the ambient pressure (at 1 atm) and the limit of zero loading (infinite dilution). At 1 atm, the previously defined quantities will have an index 1 to differentiate them from the infinite dilution case where an index 0 will be used; for example, $\Delta_{\text{ads}}H_1^{\text{Xe/Kr}}$, $\Delta_{\text{exc}}G_1^{\text{Xe/Kr}}$ or $s_1^{\text{Xe/Kr}}$ at 1 atm, and $\Delta_{\text{ads}}H_0^{\text{Xe/Kr}}$, $\Delta_{\text{exc}}G_0^{\text{Xe/Kr}}$ or $s_0^{\text{Xe/Kr}}$ at the low-pressure limit. One final note on the simulation details, to run the GCMC calculations and the Widom insertion, we used the Raspa2 software developed by Dubbeldam et al.[190] And the intermolecular Van der Waals interactions were described by a Lennard-Jones (LJ) potential with a cutoff distance of 12 Å. The LJ parameters of the framework atoms are given by the universal force field (UFF),[191] and the guest atoms (xenon and krypton) have their LJ parameters taken from a previous screening study.[157] All the MOFs described here are taken from the CoRE MOF 2019 database.[64]

2.2 PRELIMINARY ANALYSES

As we have seen above in the existing literature, the computational screening of the nanoporous materials – both existing frameworks and hypothetical structures – for targeted adsorption properties has been the object of many studies, and several of those high-throughput screening studies have focused on noble gas separation, and Xe/Kr separation, in particular. For large-scale studies we have found that, in addition to the testing and validation of methodological developments, the screening aimed in most cases at one of three objectives: (i) to identify top performing materials for synthesis and/or characterization; (ii) to better understand the limits of possible performance, and the relationships and trade-offs between various metrics of performance (selectivity, uptake, etc); (iii) identify structure–property relationships, correlating separation performance with structural properties of the materials that can be more easily determined (i.e., at low computational cost). In this initial screening study of the thermodynamic quantities, we performed a screening of around 9,700 tridimensional structures of a preprocessed version of the CoRE MOF 2019-ASR (all solvent removed) database that are publicly available – only the non-disordered structures and the structures with a cell volume smaller than 20 nm³ (to limit the overall calculation time) were considered. We will focus on the different relationships of the Xe/Kr selectivity has with structural descriptors based on geometrical analyses, and then with different thermodynamic descriptors (free energy, enthalpy, entropy).

2.2.1 Structure-selectivity relationships

An adsorption separation process is primarily characterized by a pivotal performance metric called the selectivity we defined in equations 2.4 and 2.19. By comparing this selectivity to geometrical descriptors calculated by the Zeo++ software,[42] we want to characterize the materials that will most likely be selective for a separation of a 20-80 Xe/Kr mixture (to compare with most literature screenings on a mixture extracted from the air). Three structural descriptors have been calculated: the accessible surface area of a N₂-sized probe of 1.2 Å, the void fraction occupiable by a 2.0 Å radius probe (roughly the size of a xenon),[185] and the largest cavity diameter (LCD) using specially designed atom radii. Inspired by a recent work on the comparison of pore limiting diameters and self-diffusion coefficients,[44] we defined a list of Van der Waals radii to be read by the Zeo++ software (more details in https://github.com/eren125/zeopp_radtable). All Zeo++ calculations use an atomic radius that corresponds to the distance where the LJ potential reaches $3k_B T/2$, for T = 298 K.

XENON UPTAKE

Before digging deeper in the structure-selectivity relationship, we will look at the relation between the xenon uptake (the number of adsorbed xenon in the GCMC simulation) and the selectivity at 1 atm. For instance, the xenon uptake could also be very important in a separation process, because it defines the working capacity of xenon produced by adsorption/desorption cycles. According to the Figures 2.5 and 2.8, first high xenon uptakes are associated with a high selectivity, but at some point very high selectivity is associated to lower uptakes. There seem to be an area where materials have selectivity over 100 and Xe uptake around 3 mmol g⁻¹, whereas an uptake over 6 mmol g⁻¹ can only be obtained for a selectivity between 10 and 20. One cannot maximize both uptake and selectivity metrics at the same time, a trade-off needs to be made when designing nanoporous materials for xenon/krypton separation.[192] Different strategies have been implemented to optimize both metrics using mixed metrics such as the adsorbent performance score (APS).[193] This trade-off can be rationalized by using the different structural descriptors (pore size, surface area and volume) we presented earlier.

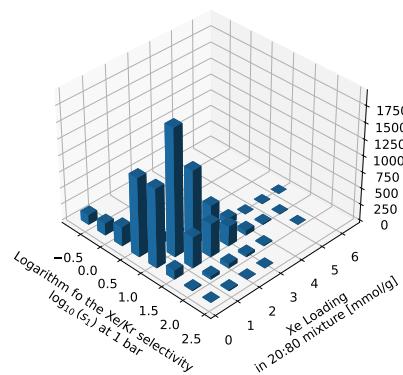


Figure 2.4 – 3D histograms of in a bidimensional space formed by the Xe/Kr selectivity and the xenon uptake. The z-axis represents the number of structures with characteristics close to the one specified in x and y-axis. A base 10 logarithm has been applied to the selectivity values.

Furthermore, even if we know that it is possible to optimize either the xenon uptake or the Xe/Kr selectivity, these very successful materials are very rare inside a given diverse dataset.

In the histogram presented in Figure 2.4, the number of very selective materials is very low, same for the high-capacity materials. The most frequent materials have a selectivity between 1 and 10 and an uptake below 3 mmol g^{-1} . These values can be considered the standard values of nanoporous material for Xe/Kr separation, which sets reference values to compare the various performance metrics and build a chemical intuition. A selectivity above 20 is therefore considered rather high (even if the top materials have a much higher selectivity[6]) and a xenon uptake above 4 mmol g^{-1} is also a pretty good adsorption capacity. The rarity of these top-performing materials gives the impression of searching a needle in a haystack, which has prompted some computational studies to design their algorithm to focus on finding the best materials rather than to describe equally all materials.[194, 195]

SURFACE AREAS

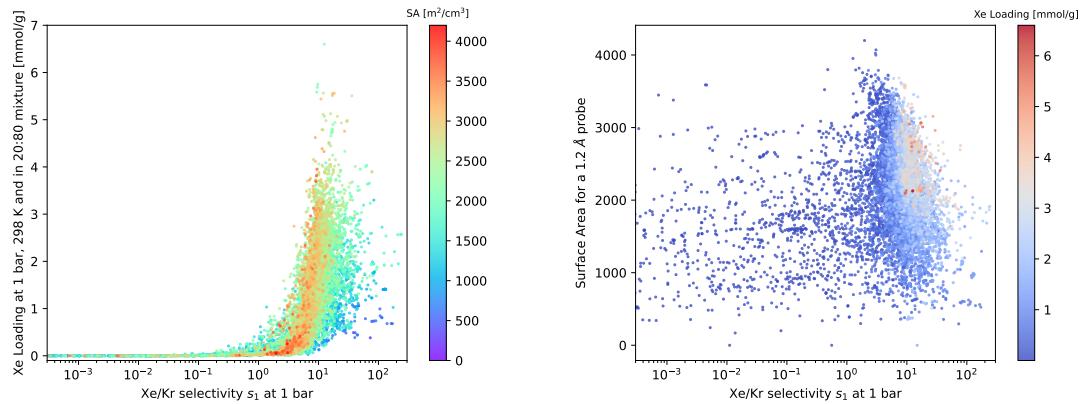


Figure 2.5 – On the left: scatterplot of the xenon uptake as a function of the selectivity and labeled by the values of the surface area. On the right: scatterplot of the selectivity and the surface area labeled by the quantity of xenon adsorbed. The selectivity and uptake are calculated by a GCMC simulation of a 20:80 Xe/Kr mixture.

As demonstrated by other studies on methane storage applications by Wilmer et al.[10] and then later by Fernandez et al.[82], the methane uptake is maximal for a specific optimal range of surface area values ($2500\text{-}3000 \text{ m}^2 \text{ cm}^3$). Higher values of surface area will not yield to higher values of methane uptake. This limitation also occurs for the selectivity as we can see in the right plot of the Figure 2.5. Materials with a selectivity around 5 will have any surface areas from 0 to $4000 \text{ m}^2 \text{ cm}^3$, whereas the ones with a selectivity above 40 will have a surface area below $2500 \text{ m}^2 \text{ cm}^3$. The optimal surface area for xenon uptake would on the other hand be between 2000 and $3000 \text{ m}^2 \text{ cm}^3$. The relationship between selectivity and surface area is quite complex, we cannot clearly state a precise range of surface areas that guarantees a high selectivity. This structural descriptor cannot characterize the selectivity, it needs to be coupled with other descriptors.

Looking at the 3D histogram on the Figure 2.6, we can see the breakdown of the surface area ranges for different categories of selectivity. For selectivity values higher than 92, the surface areas are most likely to be under $2000 \text{ m}^2 \text{ cm}^3$; between 92 and 35, there is a slightly wider range that goes to $2500 \text{ m}^2 \text{ cm}^3$; between 35 and 13, the interval goes even further to $3500 \text{ m}^2 \text{ cm}^3$ but is mostly centered between 1000 and $2500 \text{ m}^2 \text{ cm}^3$. This split view of the distributions gives a better grasp on what the best materials look like; however the surface area will never be a deterministic variable — we will never be available to deduce the selectivity by simply

looking at the surface area, because a surface area between, for instance, 500 and 1000 m² cm⁻³ have a relatively good chance of being selective but it concerns a lot of materials and it even has a higher chance of having a selectivity between 5 and 35 than a selectivity higher than that.

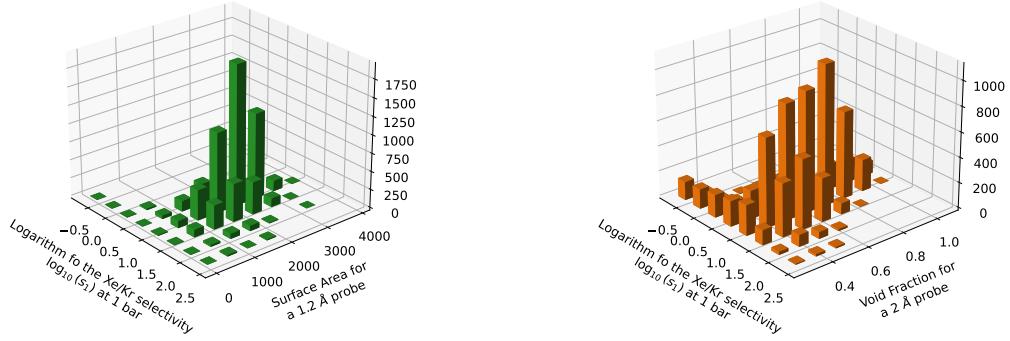


Figure 2.6 – 3D histograms of in a bidimensional space formed by the Xe/Kr selectivity and the surface areas (on the left) and formed by the Xe/Kr selectivity and the pore void fractions (on the right). A base 10 logarithm has been applied to the selectivity values. Bin size increased by 2.4 (on log scale) for the selectivity, by about 500 m² cm⁻³ for the surface areas and by 0.125 for the void fraction.

VOID FRACTION

A similar analysis of the relationship with the void fraction was also carried out by Wilmer et al. (Figure 5 of Ref. [10]) and an optimal value of the void fraction was found at around 0.8. As we can see on the plots of the Figure 2.8, the materials with the highest value of Xe uptake have void fraction values around 0.5, whereas the ones with the highest value of selectivity have much lower void fractions around 0.1. The optimal range of void fraction for uptake would be between 0.2 and 0.6, whereas the one for selectivity is completely dissociated and is below 0.2. We can characterize a bit more finely the selectivity using the void fraction than using the surface area, even though they both give very similar results. Both descriptors describe a rather dense material with a “microporosity”, in the sense of the IUPAC[35], which is characterized by medium-low pore volume and surface area.

By carrying out a similar analysis than for the surface areas bu for the void fraction using the Figure 2.6 (right), we can also identify different intervals of void fractions that correspond to highly selective materials. For instance, selectivity values above 92 correspond to materials with a porosity between 0% and 37.5% (with a higher peak between 12.5% and 25%); selectivity values between 92 and 35 can be found in materials with a void fraction between 0% and 50.0% and much more frequently found for void fraction between 12.5% and 37.5%; selectivity values between 35 and 13 can be found in materials with a void fraction between 0% and 75.0% in a bell distribution centered around 31%. This center of distribution shifts toward higher values of the void fraction as lower selectivity values are considered, which suggests that a rather low porosity (below 25%) is preferable for selectivity performance. However, as we mentioned for surface areas, the void fraction is not a deterministic variable neither, we cannot predict the performance of the material solely based on this descriptor. Let us investigate whether adding

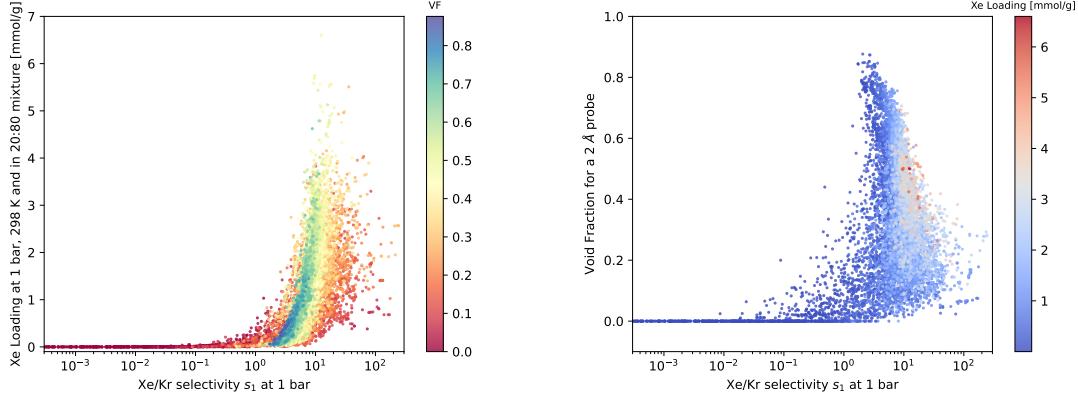


Figure 2.7 – On the left: scatterplot of the xenon uptake as a function of the selectivity and labeled by the values of the void fraction. On the right: scatterplot of the selectivity and the void fraction labeled by the quantity of xenon adsorbed. The selectivity and uptake are calculated by a GCMC simulation of a 20:80 Xe/Kr mixture.

another variable like the pore size as a joint variable wan better characterize the material's performance.

PORE SIZE

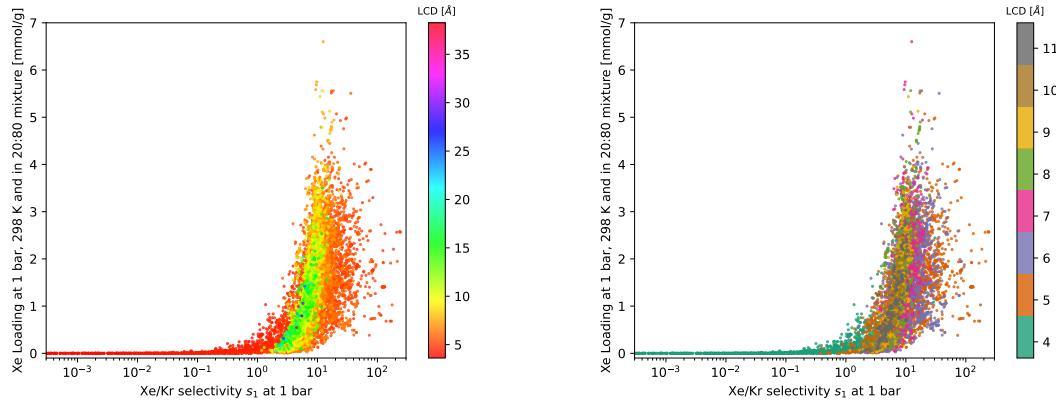


Figure 2.8 – Scatterplot of the xenon uptake as a function of the selectivity (20:80) and labeled by the values of the LCD (left). The same scatterplot restricted to values of LCD between (3.6 and 11.6 Å) and labeled using a different color code to distinguish the most selective materials from the least selective ones. The most selective materials are colored in orange corresponding to a pore size adapted for xenon adsorption (around 5 Å). The least selective ones are in green, with a pore lower than the size of a xenon hence preventing its adsorption. [change D_i to D_if]

If we now look at the joint effects of the void fraction and the largest cavity diameter (LCD) on the selectivity, we can note that the most selective materials are located in a very particular domain of this bidimensional descriptor space. On Figure 2.9, the structures with a selectivity over 10 are very likely to have a void fraction under 0.4 with a rather wide range of LCD. However, as we can see on the filtered version of the plot (on the right), the most selective materials (over 40) exist, on the other hand, in a very narrow range of LCD values between 4.8 and 6 Å approximately. This can be explained by the size of a xenon atom being very close to these LCD values, which allows a maximal stabilization of the xenon that we want to

separate from krypton. The krypton being slightly smaller, the interaction with the pores are less favorable, hence explaining the higher selectivity we observe.

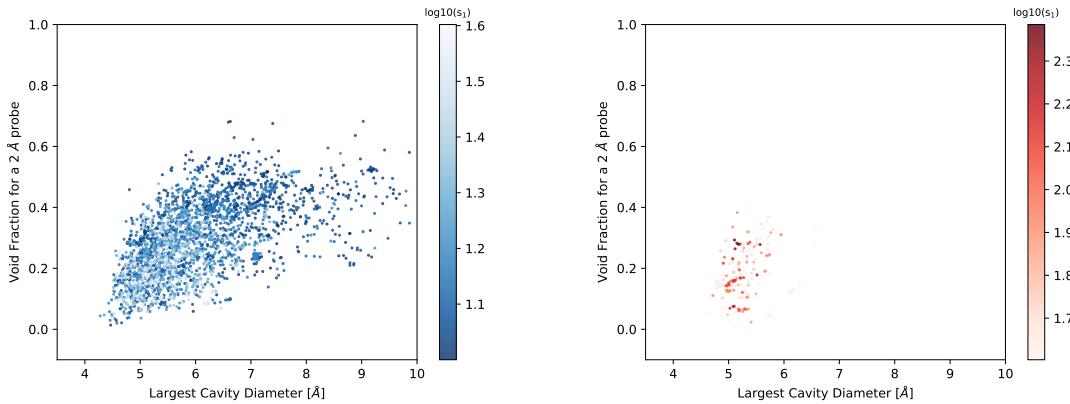


Figure 2.9 – Scatterplots of the void fraction as a function of the LCD and labeled by the \log_{10} of the selectivity values. On the left, only the materials with a selectivity between 10 and 40 are considered; and on the right, selectivity values over 40. [change D_i to D_if]

As presented in the previous chapter, Simon et al. found that the most selective materials have a pseudo-spherical shape with a size close to the diameter of a xenon which is rather dense and not very porous. By taking a slightly different approach and including the xenon uptake as a co-metric alongside the selectivity, we found very similar results by identifying specific intervals of the cavity diameter and the pore volume. However, this structure–property relationship can only be used as a description of selective materials, and no prediction could be achieved by only using structural descriptors.

EFFECT OF THE COMPOSITION

Finally, we previously only tackled one type of composition (20:80) associated to the extraction of xenon and krypton from a cryogenic distillation from the air (see section 1.3.1). We are now going to investigate the effects of the composition by looking at the case of xenon/krypton separation in spent nuclear fuel off-gases. In nuclear applications, the mixture has a 90:10 Xe/Kr ratio, which is much richer in xenon in comparison to the previous one. For this reason, the quantity of xenon adsorbed in the materials will mechanically be higher than previously. However, the second quotient in the formula of selectivity in equation 2.4 compensates the first one that will be logically higher. Here, we want to evaluate these two effects to see if they cancel each other out or there are different trends depending on the composition value.

As shown on the Figure 2.10, selectivity values of both compositions are quite close. However, we can note a slight decrease in performance when increasing the proportion of xenon in the mixture for some materials that are moderately selective (s between 2 and 50). This loss in performance could be explained by the fact that the materials display pores with different xenon affinities. With a lower proportion of xenon, the Xe adsorbates would access preferentially the most favorable pores and the small quantity of xenon is concentrated there. Whereas when there is a higher content of xenon, these most favorable sites begin to saturate and the xenon need to compete with krypton in much less favorable sites hence decreasing slightly the selectivity. We will see that later, we could use very similar reasoning to explain another variable that could change the selectivity.

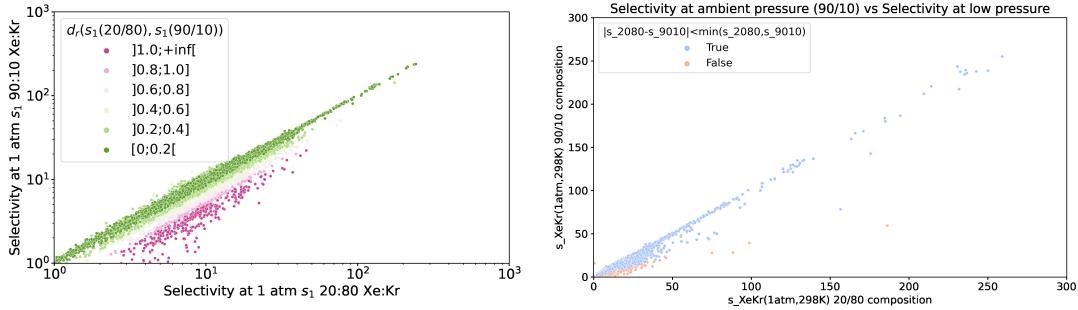


Figure 2.10 – Illustration (scatterplot) of the difference of selectivity ($s_1(20 : 80)$ and $s_1(90 : 10)$) for two different Xe/Kr mixture compositions 20:80 (x-axis) and 90:10 (y-axis) at 1 atm and 298 K. On the left, the axis is in log scale and the relative difference of selectivity between the two compositions is particularly high for the points labeled in purple. On the right, the axis is in linear scale and we only label the point to differentiate the materials with relative difference under and over 1.

We will now see the effect of the composition on the different analysis we carried out on the different structural descriptors. One of the major changes when considering a mixture with much more xenon is the values of the xenon uptake. The nanopores of selective materials ($1 < s_1 \leq 50$) are much more saturated in Xe and the maximum amount of xenon is therefore much higher. By comparing the Figures 2.8 and 2.11, the maximum uptake is now 11.7 mmol g^{-1} instead of 6.6 mmol g^{-1} (for the 20:80 composition). For moderately selective materials, at 20:80, the xenon competes with krypton mainly in the most selective nanopores, but when we increase the xenon content it has to compete with krypton in much less favorable sites since the other sites are already saturated. We previously stated that the most selective ($s_1 > 50$) materials could reach up to 4.0 mmol g^{-1} of xenon uptake, for a composition with a higher xenon content, and it reaches up to 4.2 mmol g^{-1} again, which is not a big change. For the most selective materials, the previous conclusion on the maximum uptake can still stand. Because of the extremely high selectivity, the change in composition does not change the nature of the adsorbed state and about the same quantities of xenon are present in the pores. Finally, we can say that a higher content in xenon does not influence a lot the most selective materials' performance but it could alter the selectivity and increase a lot the xenon uptake for some moderately selective materials.

Finally, the composition does not affect the previously determined structural characteristics that a material needs to be very selective. As we can see on the right plot of the Figure 2.11 (right), the most selective materials still have pore size around 5 \AA and porosity under 40%. This structural domain constitutes a necessary condition a selective material should have but being in this domain is not enough since less selective materials can also display these characteristics. Now that we described the geometrical conditions needed to have a good selectivity, we will focus on the thermodynamic origins of the selectivity by focusing on energy-based quantities and the different correlations between them.

2.2.2 Thermodynamic quantities correlations

In this section, our goal is not directly to address the structure–property relationships, but rather to map out the details of the thermodynamic features of Xe/Kr adsorption and separation in nanoporous materials. We used the high-throughput screening methodology as a way to map

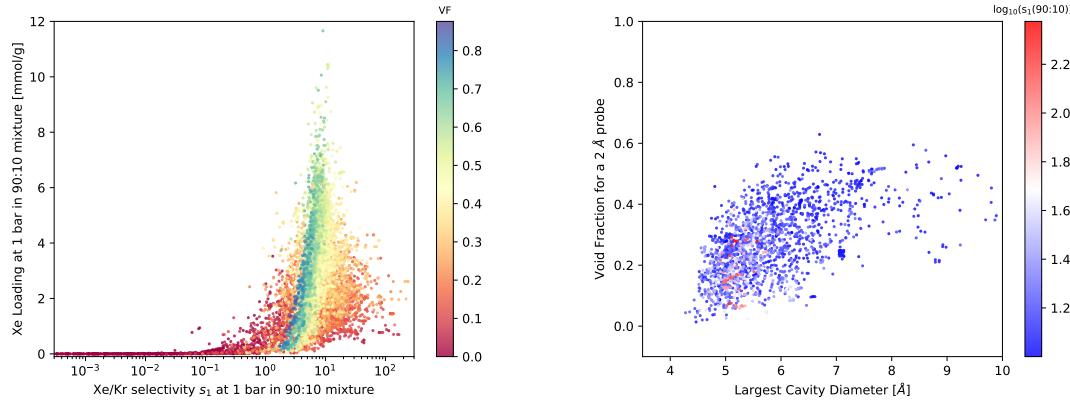


Figure 2.11 – Illustration of the effect of the composition by representing the same figures as in 2.8 and 2.11 but for a 90:10 composition. On the left: scatterplot of the xenon uptake as a function of the selectivity ($s_1(90 : 10)$) and labeled by the values of the void fraction. On the right: scatterplots of the void fraction as a function of the LCD and labeled by the selectivity ($s_1(90 : 10)$) values superior to 10 in log-scale. [change D_i to D_if]

out the space of thermodynamic properties, going beyond the usual quantities of selectivity and uptake, to focus more specifically on the role of adsorption enthalpy and entropy, the differences between Xe and Kr adsorption thermodynamics, and between selectivity at low and high pressure.

To evaluate the performance of a given nanoporous material for separation in the low loading (or low pressure) limit, Henry's constants are often calculated from linear fits of low-pressure adsorption isotherm data — both experimentally and computationally. In this section, we investigate the thermodynamics of Xe and Kr adsorption at low pressure. Here, we have calculated the low-pressure adsorption properties by using the Widom insertion method [187, 196] on 9,668 structures from the dataset selected. It has higher accuracy than the fitting of isotherms, where it can be difficult to know what the extent of the linear adsorption regime is. With these simulations, we could obtain for each material the Henry's constant K and the adsorption enthalpy $\Delta_{\text{ads}}H_0$ (at the zero loading limit) for both xenon and krypton. The Xe/Kr thermodynamic selectivity s_0 in the low-pressure limit is then determined by the ratio $s_0 = K^{\text{Xe}}/K^{\text{Kr}}$ of the Henry's constants for the two gases. In the following, we look at the statistical relationships between the thermodynamic quantities at low pressure: s_0 , K^{Xe} , K^{Kr} , $\Delta_{\text{ads}}H_0^{\text{Xe}}$, $\Delta_{\text{ads}}H_0^{\text{Kr}}$ and $\Delta_{\text{exc}}H_0$.

We display the distribution of thermodynamic properties of materials with favorable thermodynamic Xe/Kr selectivity ($s_0 > 1$) in Figure 2.12 — we restrict these plots to selectivity above 1, because those are the materials of interest for separation, and doing so removes several outliers with specific geometries or binding sites (but does not change the overall conclusions). We can first see that although the logarithm of the Xe Henry's constant K^{Xe} is weakly correlated to the logarithm of the selectivity s_0 , this correlation is stronger for highly selective materials. Therefore, in a multistep screening study to identify the most selective materials, it could be possible to use as a "first filter" criterion based purely on Xe adsorption, discarding materials below a certain threshold (e.g., the materials with $s_0 \geq 30$ are contained in the subset with

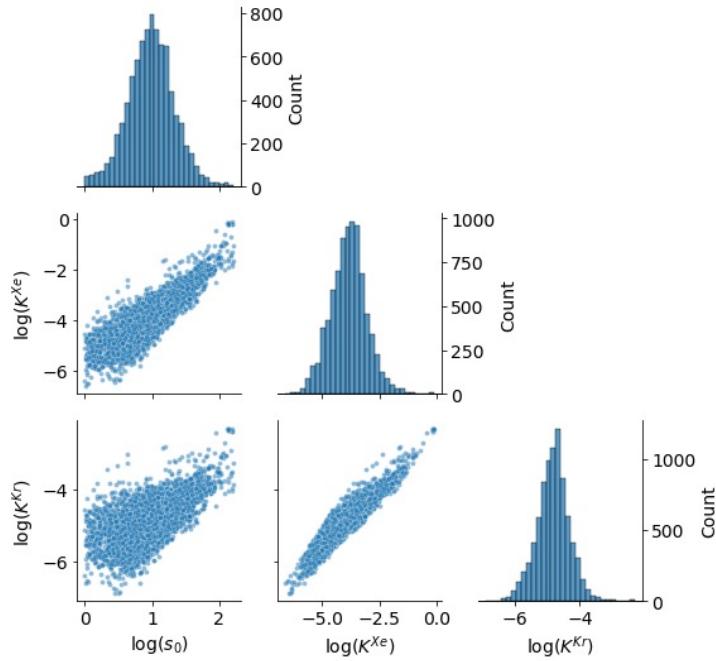


Figure 2.12 – For 8,401 MOFs with favorable thermodynamic Xe/Kr selectivity ($s_0 > 1$), pair plots of $\log_{10}(s_0)$, $\log_{10}(K^{Xe})$ and $\log_{10}(K^{Kr})$ (the Henry's constants are in $\text{mmol g}^{-1} \text{Pa}^{-1}$) in the off-diagonal subplots (note that the y-axis is displayed on the right side) and the distribution of each quantity are on the diagonal (note that the y-axis displayed on the right side corresponds to the count and the x-axis is correctly labeled below each subplot).

$K^{Xe} \geq 2.7 \cdot 10^{-1} \text{ mmol g}^{-1} \text{ Pa}^{-1}$). The correlation between K^{Kr} and s_0 , on the other hand, is weaker.

With regard to Henry's constants, we observe a broad selection of behavior, with K^{Xe} ranging from $2.6 \cdot 10^{-7}$ to $7.9 \cdot 10^{-1} \text{ mmol g}^{-1} \text{ Pa}^{-1}$, and K^{Kr} ranging from $1.3 \cdot 10^{-7}$ to $5.1 \cdot 10^{-3} \text{ mmol g}^{-1} \text{ Pa}^{-1}$. We also see that statistically, a high affinity for xenon usually translates into a high (relative) affinity for krypton, which is a general trend for noble gases where the adsorption sites are not strongly specific. In order to look more in detail into the thermodynamics behind this wide diversity in behavior, we plot in Figure 2.13 the enthalpies involved.

We first observe that the low-loading adsorption enthalpy of xenon ($\Delta_{\text{ads}}H_0^{Xe}$) is strongly correlated to that of krypton ($\Delta_{\text{ads}}H_0^{Kr}$). Echoing the similar correlation seen between respective Henry's constants, it suggests a rather generic physisorption mechanism is at play in the majority of materials, and that host–adsorbate affinities are mainly determined by the enthalpy. The main driver of Xe/Kr selectivity is neither the xenon nor krypton adsorption enthalpy alone (both are weakly correlated to the selectivity), but as expected their difference, $\Delta_{\text{exc}}H_0$, which is strongly correlated to $\log(s_0)$. This is further confirmed by the lack of correlation between selectivity and adsorption entropies (c.f. Figure 2.14): the separation is mostly enthalpic in nature, and the entropy causes the dispersion in the correlation between selectivity $\log(s_0)$ and $\Delta_{\text{exc}}H_0$.

Analyzing the Figure 2.14 in more detail, the adsorption entropy of xenon and krypton being noticeably correlated, their difference (the exchange entropy) does not have a lot of variations (see Figure 2.15) compared to the enthalpy. This thermodynamic quantity plays a minor role

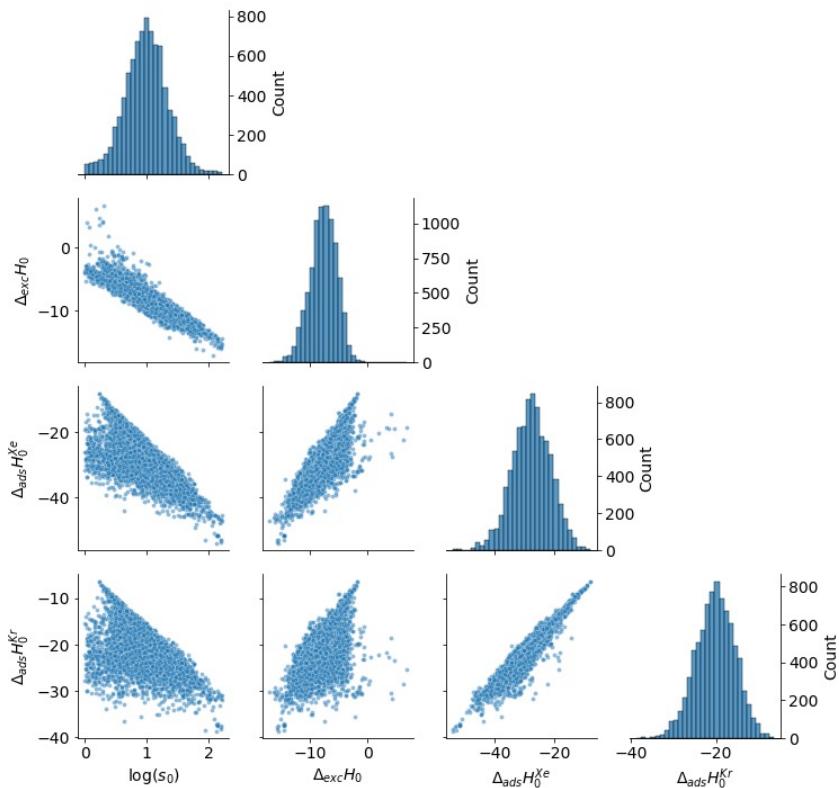


Figure 2.13 – For 8,401 MOFs with favorable thermodynamic Xe/Kr selectivity ($s_0 > 1$), pair plots of $\log(s_0)$, $\Delta_{exc}H_0$, $\Delta_{ads}H_0^{Xe}$ and $\Delta_{ads}H_0^{Kr}$ (the enthalpies are in kJ mol^{-1}) in the off-diagonal subplots and the distribution of each quantity is on the diagonal.

in the selectivity performance of the materials. However it seems that the most selective materials do not have any values of exchange entropy but is centered around a value of about $-10 \text{ kJ mol}^{-1} \text{ K}^{-1}$. This is not a clean correlation but rather a necessary attribute of a selective material.

To emphasize one more time on the enthalpic nature of the separation by comparing the base 10 logarithm of the Henry constant (proportional to the adsorption free energy) and the adsorption enthalpy for both xenon and krypton. We can see, Figure 2.16 that the free energy can be almost totally explained by the enthalpy, which confirms the secondary role of the entropy that explains the variance in this linear relation. The effect of the entropy makes the correlation quite weak for the less favorable adsorption materials, but as we move to more negative values of the adsorption enthalpies, the correlation is stronger and stronger. The most selective materials have an almost negligible entropic contribution in the final free energy value ($G = H - TS$).

The takeaway messages of this section are based on two relations. The first one is between the Henry constant of xenon and the selectivity: knowing the performance of xenon we can infer the Xe/Kr selectivity — the most selective materials have very high xenon affinity. The second one concerns the relation between enthalpy and selectivity — the separation process has an enthalpic nature as a first-order approximation, which is even more true for the most selective materials. By studying the energy interactions within the material, we can understand most of the performance of it. We only looked at the thermodynamic properties at infinite dilution, in

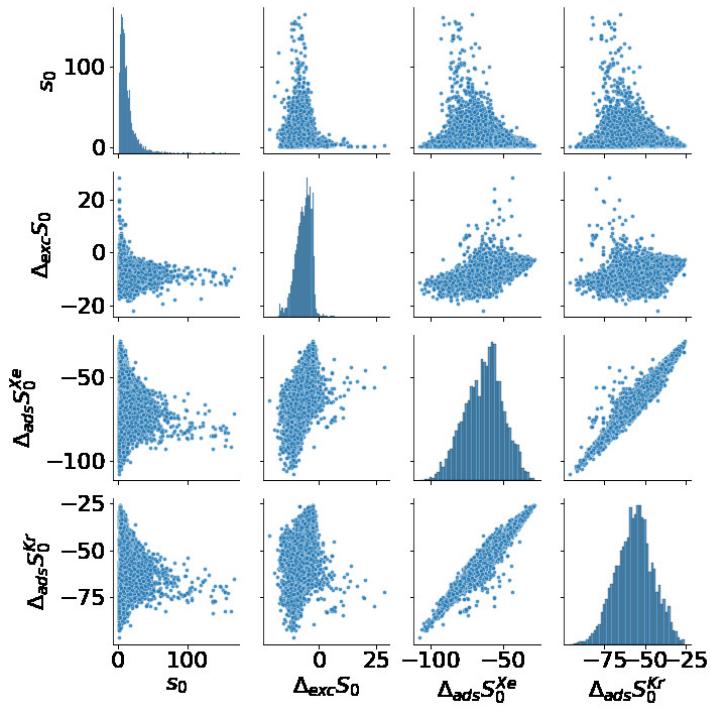


Figure 2.14 – For 8,401 MOFs with favorable thermodynamic Xe/Kr selectivity ($s_0 > 1$), pair plots of s_0 , $\Delta_{exc}S_0$, $\Delta_{ads}S_0^{Xe}$ and $\Delta_{ads}S_0^{Kr}$ in the off-diagonal subplots and the distribution of each quantity are on the diagonal.

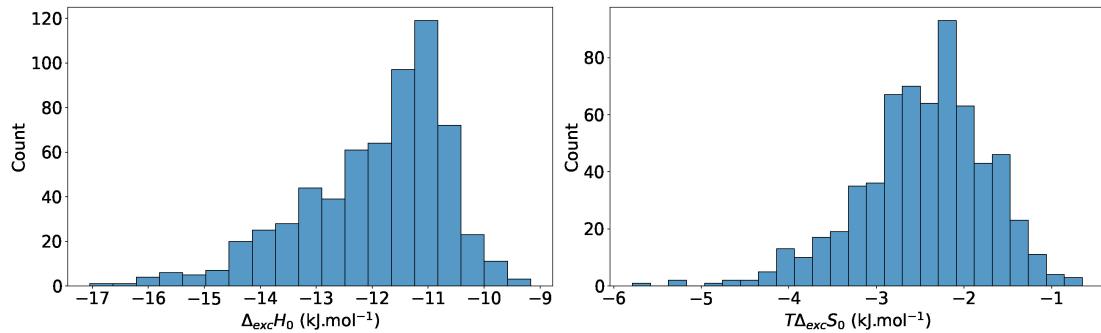


Figure 2.15 – Distribution of the enthalpy $\Delta_{exc}H_0$ and entropy $T\Delta_{exc}S_0$ of exchange at low pressure on the 630 most selective structures

the next section we will focus on the effect of the pressure in the selectivity by focusing on a 20:80 Xe/Kr mixture at 1 atm and 298 K.

2.3 SELECTIVITY DROP

2.3.1 Thermodynamic origins

In this section we focus on the impact of a change of working pressure on the adsorption selectivity, and analyze its thermodynamic origins. This is key to accurately assess the thermodynamics of adsorption in different working conditions for specific industrial processes, and any insight into the impact of pressure on selectivity may allow for faster screening limited at selected thermodynamic conditions.

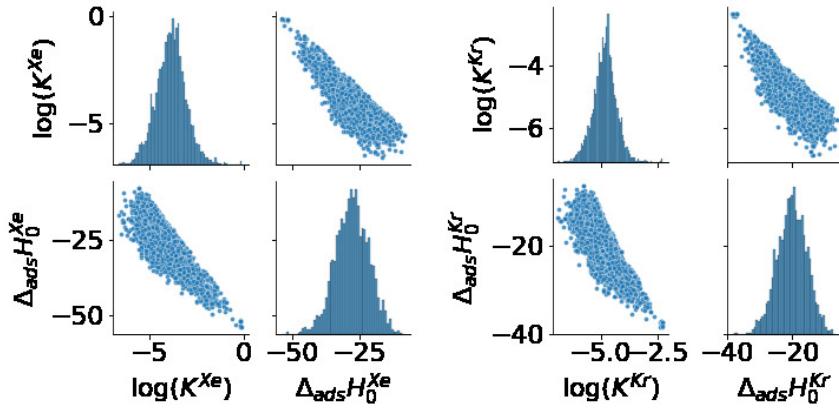


Figure 2.16 – For 8,401 MOFs with favorable thermodynamic Xe/Kr selectivity ($s_0 > 1$), pair plots of $\log(K_H^i)$ and $\Delta_{ads}H_0^i$ in the off-diagonal subplots for both $i=Xe$ and $i=Kr$ and the distribution of each quantity are on the diagonal.

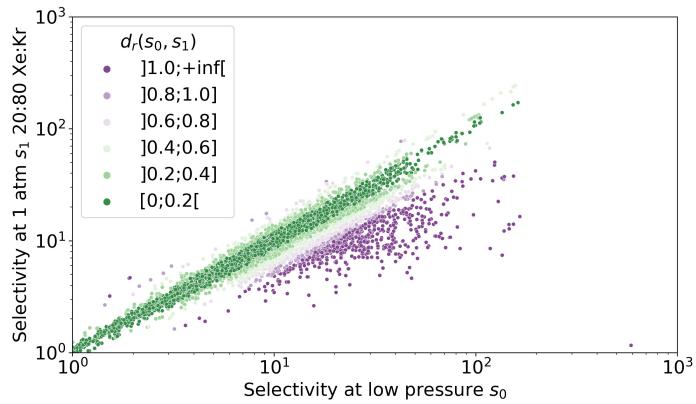


Figure 2.17 – Difference of selectivity between low pressure and at a 1013 hPa pressure for a 20:80 xenon krypton composition. The relative difference between the low-pressure selectivity and the ambient pressure is particularly high for the points labeled in purple.

We calculated the selectivity s_1 at pressure 1 atm and ambient temperature using GCMC calculations on the entire dataset, with Xe/Kr mixture composition of 20:80 (found in a byproduct stream from air separation[1]) and 90:10 (found in the off-gas streams from nuclear waste[171]). For high-selectivity materials, we find that the impact of composition appears rather marginal (c.f. Figure 2.10). In the following, we discuss the selectivity for the 20:80 mixture, which is the most commonly studied one in the literature. To measure the difference in selectivity between low and ambient pressures, we consider a relative difference $d_r(s_0, s_1)$ defined in equation 2.25.

$$d_r(s_0, s_1) = \frac{|s_0 - s_1|}{\min(s_0, s_1)} \quad (2.25)$$

In Figure 2.17, the selectivity at ambient pressure s_1 is plotted against its low-pressure counterpart s_0 (for materials where $s_0 > 1$, as before). The points are color-coded according to the value of $d_r(s_0, s_1)$, in 6 discrete categories for the sake of clarity. There is some broad level of correlation, see near the diagonal with 61.5% of materials where the difference is below 20%

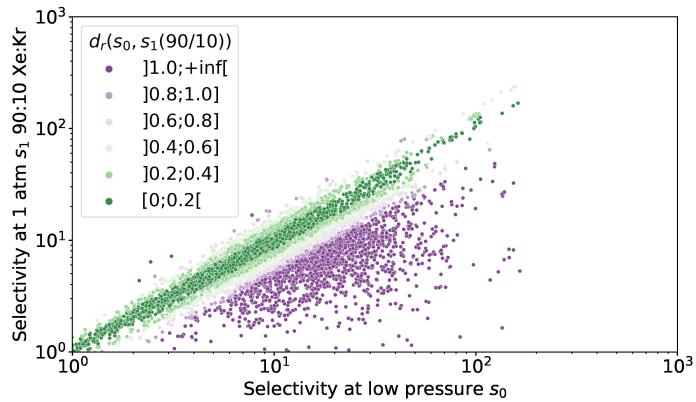


Figure 2.18 – Difference of selectivity between low pressure and at a 1013 hPa pressure for a 90:10 xenon krypton composition. The relative difference between the low-pressure selectivity and the ambient pressure is particularly high for the points labeled in purple.

(near the $s_0 = s_1$ line). We also see clearly that there are many more points (74.3% among the materials with $d_r(s_0, s_1) \geq 0.2$) below the first bisector ($s_1 < s_0$) than above: for these materials the selectivity s_1 at 1 atm is significantly lower than the one at low pressure s_0 .

This drop in selectivity mainly concerns the materials with a relatively high selectivity $s_0 > 10$ (see Figure 2.17), and forewarns that considering solely pure-component Henry's constant (i.e., zero-pressure selectivity) for materials screening could be misleading in some cases. Although it is simpler and faster to calculate, those low-pressure results that can overestimate selectivity by more than 100% in a significant number of materials (646 out of 9,668 in our dataset). By using a thermodynamic approach, we now try to explain the reasons behind these shifts in selectivity.

If we now look at the 90:10 composition, we can note that the drop in selectivity is even more important. The selectivity with a higher proportion of xenon was already found to be higher than the selectivity for 20:80 composition (see Figure 2.11); we explained this drop by the presence of more or less favorable adsorption sites. In some materials (labeled in purple), at a low xenon content composition, the xenon and krypton mainly compete in the most favorable sites until these sites are saturated and no xenon is left to compete in the less selective sites. When we increase the Xe/Kr ratio, these less selective nanopores drive the overall selectivity down. Combined with the effect of increasing the pressure, some materials undergo both phenomena and have an exacerbated drop in selectivity compared to the selectivity at low pressure.

To evaluate quantitatively the thermodynamic effects at play in the competitive adsorption in different regimes, we can consider thermodynamic properties of the “exchange equilibrium” predefined in equation 2.20. We plot in Figure 2.19 the exchange entropy at low pressure (plotted as $T\Delta_{\text{exc}}S_0$) against the exchange enthalpy $\Delta_{\text{exc}}H_0$. In this scatterplot, the points are color-coded according to the selectivity s_0 (with discrete categories for the sake of clarity), which is related to the enthalpy and entropy through Equation ?? – meaning iso-selectivity lines are parallel straight lines in this scatterplot.

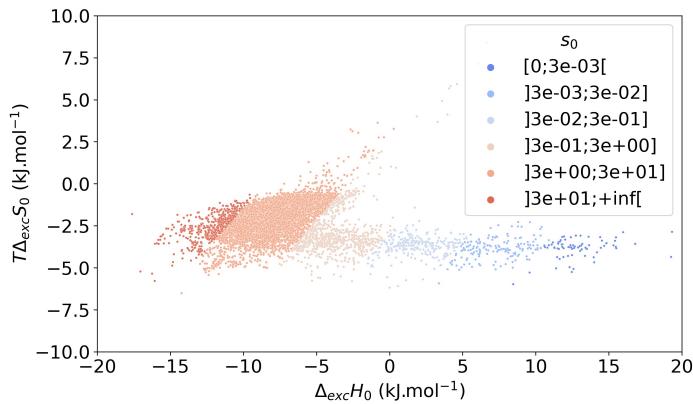


Figure 2.19 – The energetic equivalent of exchange entropy $T\Delta_{\text{exc}}S_0$ and enthalpy $\Delta_{\text{exc}}H_0$ at low pressure labeled using the selectivity s_0 at low pressure. The limits between labels follows an affine function of slope $1/T$ and of intercept $-R \ln(s_0^{\text{lim}})$ where s_0^{lim} is the limit selectivity value (cf. Equation (2.24)). In other words, the iso-selectivity lines are all parallel lines of equation $y = f(x)$ where f is the affine function described previously.

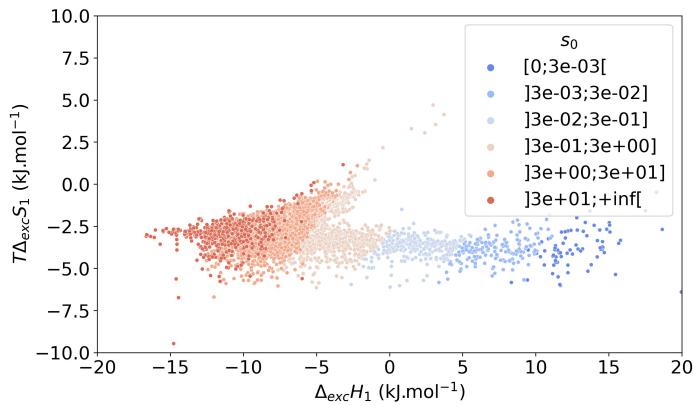


Figure 2.20 – The energetic equivalent of exchange entropy $T\Delta_{\text{exc}}S_1$ and enthalpy $\Delta_{\text{exc}}H_1$ at ambient pressure labeled using the selectivity s_0 at low pressure. The points are layered so that the points with higher s_0 are always above. To see a split version of this plot, please refer to the Figure 2.22.

In the Figure 2.15, we display the distributions of the exchange enthalpy and entropy at low pressure. For the 630 most selective materials ($s_0 > 30$), the distribution of the exchange enthalpy $\Delta_{\text{exc}}H_0$ is centered on $-12.0 \text{ kJ mol}^{-1}$ with a standard deviation of 1.3 kJ mol^{-1} , whereas the distribution of the exchange entropy (plotted as $T\Delta_{\text{exc}}S_0$) is centered on -2.5 kJ mol^{-1} with a standard deviation of 0.7 kJ mol^{-1} . These figures, along with the overall distribution plotted in Figure 2.19, further confirms the moderate role of entropy in the low-pressure selectivity: it is equivalent in average to about 20% of the exchange enthalpy at low pressure.

Looking at the Figure 2.22, at ambient pressure, we can state the same conclusions on the limited influence of the entropy on the selectivity values. The distribution of the entropic term $T\Delta_{\text{exc}}S_1$ is now centered around -3 kJ mol^{-1} , which is also quite small in comparison of the values of $\Delta_{\text{exc}}H_1$. For the most selective materials, the entropic term represents about 19% of the exchange enthalpy at ambient pressure.

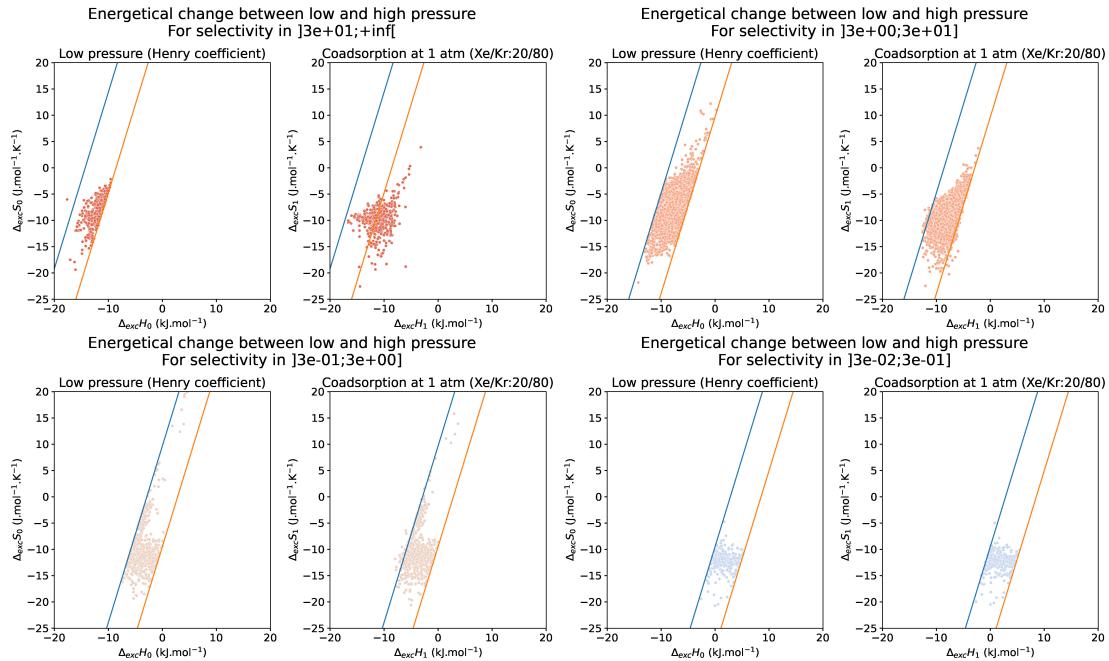


Figure 2.21 – Split view of the Figure 2.19 and 2.20. The iso-selectivity lines for the limit considered are represented with blue and orange lines. We can clearly see the shift in exchange enthalpy for the structures with a selectivity higher than 30.

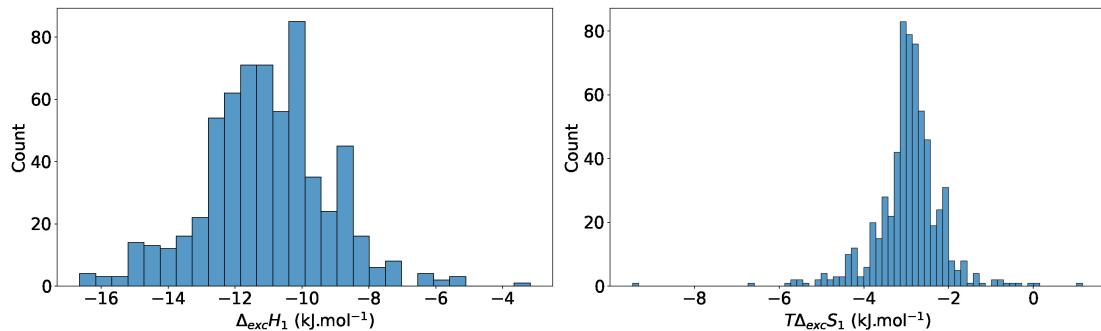


Figure 2.22 – Distribution of the enthalpy $\Delta_{\text{exc}}H_1$ and entropic term $T\Delta_{\text{exc}}S_1$ of exchange at ambient pressure on the 630 most selective structures.

Figure 2.20 represents a scatterplot of the exchange entropy at $P = 1 \text{ atm}$ $\Delta_{\text{exc}}S_1$ against the exchange enthalpy at ambient pressure $\Delta_{\text{exc}}H_1$. To compare it to the Fig. 2.19, the points are color-coded according to the low-pressure selectivity s_0 . Compared to the iso-selectivity s_1 straight parallel lines (*c.f.* Figure 2.22), we can see that many materials with high s_0 have lower s_1 — seen as a migration of points to the right of the plot, compared to Fig. 2.19. This shift is therefore mainly due to a higher (less favorable) exchange enthalpy, hinting at an important role of enthalpy to determine higher pressure selectivity.

To quantify this change, we consider the distributions of the exchange enthalpy $\Delta_{\text{exc}}H_1$ and the energetic equivalent of the exchange entropy $T\Delta_{\text{exc}}S_1$ at ambient pressure (Figure 2.22). The enthalpy $\Delta_{\text{exc}}H_1$ is now centered on $-11.1 \text{ kJ mol}^{-1}$ with a standard deviation of 1.9 kJ mol^{-1} . Compared to the zero-pressure values, the enthalpy distribution is more dispersed, showing that there are important changes in individual values, and is higher in average — majority of materials have lower ambient pressure selectivity due to enthalpic effects. This can be

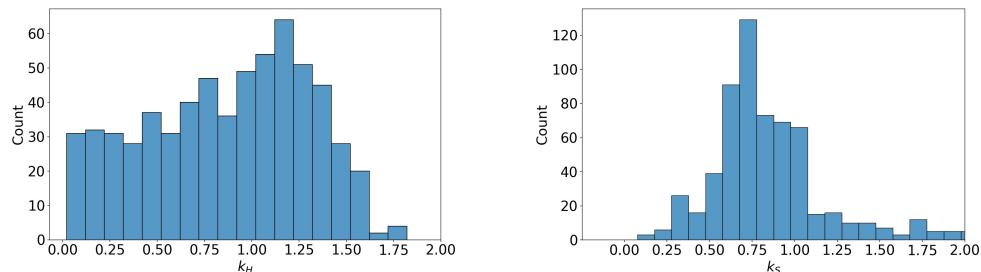


Figure 2.23 – Distribution of the enthalpic k_H and entropic k_S contributions to the change of selectivity from low to ambient pressure for the 630 materials with $s_0 > 30$. k_H has a rather uniform distribution, whereas k_S has a bell-like distribution.

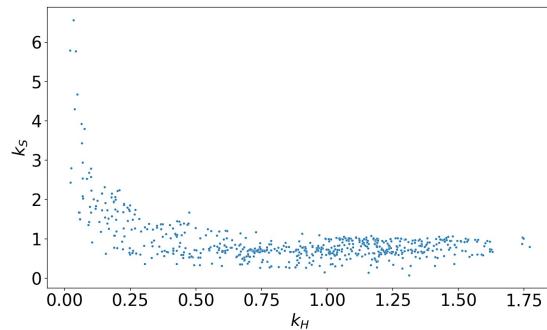


Figure 2.24 – Scatterplot of the enthalpic contribution k_H and entropic contribution k_S for the 630 materials with $s_0 > 30$. The entropic compensation occurs when the enthalpic contribution is around 0.1, else its value is around 1 and has little effect on the selectivity change.

explained by the very general increase of adsorption enthalpy upon loading in the gas phase, which is linked to the presence of more adsorbed molecules. In fact, the correlations (Figure 2.12) suggest that highly selective materials have high affinity in xenon; therefore they feature significant uptake at 1 atm and the large Xe loading means the most favorable adsorption sites can be saturated, and further adsorption involves weaker host–guest interactions and therefore increases the average adsorption enthalpy at non-zero loading.

The entropic term $T\Delta_{\text{exc}}S_1$ is now centered on -2.9 kJ mol^{-1} , with a standard deviation of 0.8 kJ mol^{-1} (almost unchanged from low-pressure). The entropy is on average lower, which means an overall less favorable separation due to entropic effects: this evolution of the entropic term hints at the potential of a reorganization of the adsorbed molecules inside each material. The difference in distribution of enthalpy has, overall, more impact on the high-pressure selectivity than that of entropy. This suggests that the overall contribution of enthalpy remains more decisive than the role of entropy in the selectivity change, even at ambient pressure. This is an interesting conclusion for screening studies, because evaluation of adsorption enthalpy can be computationally faster than that of the adsorption free energy (or entropy).

To further investigate the thermodynamics of the selectivity change, we quantify in this section the contributions of enthalpy and entropy. The ratio s_1/s_0 is equal to the product $k_H \times k_S$

where k_H and k_S are the enthalpic and entropic contributions to the selectivity change defined as:

$$\begin{aligned} k_H &= \exp\left(-\frac{\Delta_{\text{exc}}H_1 - \Delta_{\text{exc}}H_0}{RT}\right) \\ k_S &= \exp\left(\frac{\Delta_{\text{exc}}S_1 - \Delta_{\text{exc}}S_0}{R}\right) \end{aligned} \quad (2.26)$$

As we can see in Figure 2.23, the entropic contribution k_S has a bell-like distribution, with a mean of 0.9 and a standard deviation of 0.6. This confirms that k_S is close to 1, and has therefore only a marginal effect on the selectivity change. On the other hand, the enthalpic contribution k_H has a more uniform distribution ranging from 0.1 to 1.5, which means that enthalpy has a crucial role in the selectivity change we observe. There are a significant number of materials with a k_H close to zero, they correspond to the same materials highlighted in Section 2.3.1.

Furthermore, the scatterplot of k_H and k_S (shown in Figure 2.24) confirms a rather moderate effect of entropy. For most of the materials with $0.25 \leq k_H \leq 1.75$, we see that k_S is close to 1. The most significant entropic contributions are found for materials where k_H is close to zero (typically below 0.25). If we look in more detail at the 29 materials with $k_S > 2$, the entropic contribution k_S moderately compensate the enthalpic contribution as the average ratio s_1/s_0 is around 0.25. In such cases, the entropy is non-negligible and it can partially compensate the enthalpic contribution to the selectivity change, but the general trend is still given by enthalpy, since the overall selectivity is decreasing as a result.

2.3.2 Detailed investigation

Table 2.1 – Enthalpic (k_H) and entropic (k_S) contributions to the selectivity change (s_1/s_0) between low and ambient pressures for some archetypal structures selected for their high s_0 selectivity at infinite dilution. Every structure is identified using a CSD Refcode and a reference the first article that mentions it. The pore size is also characterized using the LCD and the pore limiting diameter (PLD) values in Å.

CSD Refcode	Ref.	s_0	s_1	s_1/s_0	k_H	k_S	LCD	PLD
VOKJIQ	[197]	157.17	242.73	1.54	1.46	1.06	5.2	3.2
KAXQIL	[47]	103.78	132.57	1.28	1.32	0.96	5.2	4.1
JUFBIX	[198]	106.11	114.83	1.08	1.08	1.00	5.3	3.0
FALQOA	[199]	162.20	171.10	1.05	1.09	0.96	5.1	3.5
GOMREG	[200]	114.14	73.83	0.65	1.01	0.64	5.8	4.0
JAVTAC	[201]	117.38	66.93	0.57	0.77	0.74	5.5	4.3
GOMRAC	[200]	124.11	47.34	0.38	0.58	0.66	5.7	3.7
MISQIQ	[202]	138.94	37.32	0.27	0.51	0.53	4.6	4.4
BAEDTA01	[203]	154.10	37.74	0.24	0.12	1.97	5.7	4.6
VIWMOF	[204]	81.13	13.24	0.16	0.04	4.30	10.2	5.3
LUDLAZ	[205]	165.68	16.42	0.10	0.16	0.63	6.7	4.2
WOJJOV	[206]	146.32	13.94	0.10	0.06	1.68	8.2	6.8
VAPBIZ	[207]	146.73	12.76	0.09	0.06	1.50	6.3	3.7

In this section, we go over some of the most selective materials, as identified at low pressure and listed in Table 2.1, and we provide a detailed investigation of the thermodynamic effects behind their behavior. We can split them into three main categories: materials with a slight increase in selectivity or little change in selectivity ($s_0/s_1 > 0.8$), materials with a slight decrease in selectivity ($0.5 \leq s_0/s_1 \leq 0.8$) and materials with a significant decrease in selectivity ($s_0/s_1 < 0.5$). In this section, we investigate the origins of these different behaviors: all materials are referenced by their CSD refcode.

Table 2.2 – Thermodynamic quantities associated for a few archetypal structures. Henry's constant K^{Xe} , K^{Kr} are in $\text{mmol g}^{-1} \text{Pa}^{-1}$, loadings q_1^{Xe} and q_1^{Kr} are in mmol g^{-1} , enthalpies $\Delta_{ads}H_0^{Xe}$, $\Delta_{ads}H_0^{Xe}$, $\Delta_{ads}H_1^{Xe}$ and $\Delta_{ads}H_1^{Xe}$ are in kJ mol^{-1}

CSD Refcode	Ref.	s_0	K^{Xe}	K^{Kr}	$\Delta_{ads}H_0^{Xe}$	$\Delta_{ads}H_0^{Kr}$	s_1	q_1^{Xe}	q_1^{Kr}	$\Delta_{ads}H_1^{Xe}$	$\Delta_{ads}H_1^{Xe}$
VOKJIQ	[197]	157	$7.92 \cdot 10^{-1}$	$5.04 \cdot 10^{-3}$	-53.9	-38.2	243	2.57	0.04	-61.1	-44.5
KAXQIL	[47]	104	$3.01 \cdot 10^{-2}$	$2.90 \cdot 10^{-4}$	-44.6	-30.5	133	1.41	0.04	-41.5	-26.8
JUFBIX	[198]	106	$1.59 \cdot 10^{-2}$	$1.50 \cdot 10^{-4}$	-45.6	-31.4	115	0.80	0.03	-45.7	-31.3
FALQOA	[199]	162	$2.23 \cdot 10^{-2}$	$1.38 \cdot 10^{-4}$	-47.3	-32.0	171	0.68	0.02	-48.6	-33.1
GOMREG	[200]	114	$9.16 \cdot 10^{-2}$	$8.03 \cdot 10^{-4}$	-44.7	-31.1	74	2.59	0.14	-47.5	-33.8
JAVTAC	[201]	117	$1.24 \cdot 10^{-1}$	$1.06 \cdot 10^{-3}$	-47.7	-33.5	67	1.50	0.09	-48.5	-34.9
GOMRAC	[200]	124	$1.17 \cdot 10^{-1}$	$9.45 \cdot 10^{-4}$	-45.6	-31.8	47	2.51	0.21	-47.3	-34.8
MISQIQ	[202]	139	$6.87 \cdot 10^{-1}$	$4.94 \cdot 10^{-3}$	-51.9	-37.4	37	2.30	0.25	-45.6	-32.8
BAEDTA01	[203]	154	$1.39 \cdot 10^{-2}$	$9.04 \cdot 10^{-5}$	-47.7	-31.7	38	1.05	11	-34.0	-23.1
VIWMOF	[204]	81	$7.87 \cdot 10^{-3}$	$9.70 \cdot 10^{-5}$	-46.3	-30.1	13	2.99	0.90	-26.0	-17.8
LUDLAZ	[205]	166	$9.04 \cdot 10^{-2}$	$5.46 \cdot 10^{-4}$	-45.4	-30.9	16	1.59	0.39	-38.3	-28.3
WOJJOV	[206]	146	$4.19 \cdot 10^{-2}$	$2.86 \cdot 10^{-4}$	-46.4	-30.7	14	2.82	0.81	-33.0	-24.4
VAPBIZ	[207]	147	$3.54 \cdot 10^{-2}$	$2.41 \cdot 10^{-4}$	-46.4	-30.5	13	2.50	0.78	-34.1	-25.3

Before introducing the different archetypal structures that undergo different changes in selectivity, let us bring in some notions on adsorption isotherms. The isotherms are representation of the adsorbed quantity as a function of the pressure for different components at a given temperature. Here, we will only tackle the case of pure-component isotherms at 298 K. Different models have been developed to interpret these plots,[208] but here we will only use the Langmuir model as it is the most prominent equation to explain adsorption equilibria. The Langmuir model is a local model of adsorption based on the filling of a monolayer by non-interacting adsorbates. Depending on the distribution and shape of the pores, these isotherms can be either modeled by a 1-site Langmuir or a 2-site Langmuir model. At given temperature, some mono-site materials' isotherm can be described by the following equation:

$$q(P) = N_{\max} \frac{KP}{1 + KP} \quad (2.27)$$

where q is the adsorbed quantity of a mono-component gas, K is the adsorption equilibrium constant and P is the pressure. When the material has 2 sites, the isotherm can be described by the following equation:

$$q(P) = N_{\max} \left((1 - \alpha_2) \frac{K_1 P}{1 + K_1 P} + \alpha_2 \frac{K_2 P}{1 + K_2 P} \right) \quad (2.28)$$

where q is the loading of a given mono-component gas, K_1 and K_2 are the adsorption equilibrium constants in the respective sites, α_2 is the proportion of secondary sites, and P is the pressure.

We first study a few examples of the category of materials where ambient-pressure selectivity is close to (or even higher than) the low-pressure value. For VOKJIQ, the selectivity is multiplied by 1.5 between low and ambient pressure. We see that the adsorption enthalpy of xenon $\Delta_{\text{ads}}H^{\text{Xe}}$ decreases from $-53.9 \text{ kJ mol}^{-1}$ to $-61.1 \text{ kJ mol}^{-1}$, whereas for krypton $\Delta_{\text{ads}}H^{\text{Kr}}$ decreases from $-38.2 \text{ kJ mol}^{-1}$ to $-44.5 \text{ kJ mol}^{-1}$ (*c.f.* Table 2.2). This increased stability of the adsorption sites upon loading is not common in nanoporous materials for rare gas adsorption, and can be linked to a cooperative effect between the adsorbed molecules. The stabilization favors the xenon molecules over the krypton molecules, due to an interatomic distance inside the pores that is a closer match to the energy well for favorable Lennard-Jones potential for xenon-xenon interactions than for krypton-krypton interactions (which is the case for a distance higher than 4.2 \AA ; see Figure 2.25).

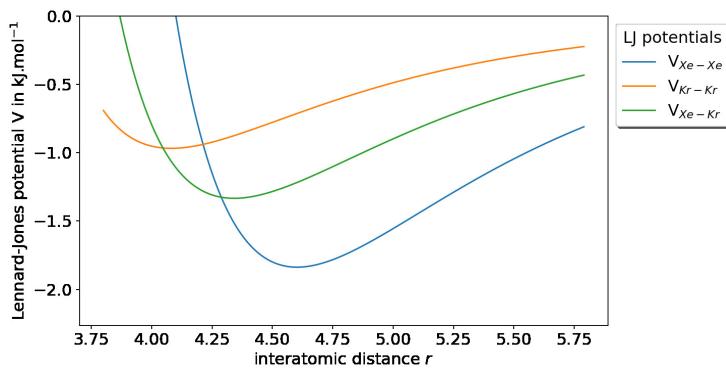


Figure 2.25 – The LJ potentials for xenon and krypton interactions. The xenon-xenon interaction is more stabilizing than the krypton-krypton interaction for interatomic distance higher than 4.2 \AA .

In the case of KAXQIL, the channels are one-dimensional tubes (see Figure 2.26) and the distance between two adsorption sites is approximately the unit cell parameter along the direction of the tube (5.6 \AA). There the selectivity increases with pore filling, for enthalpic reasons, which we can explain by relatively simple reasoning. The Lennard-Jones potentials V_{LJ} can be estimated for all species at 5.6 \AA : $V_{\text{Xe}-\text{Xe}} = -1.0 \text{ kJ mol}^{-1}$, $V_{\text{Kr}-\text{Kr}} = -0.3 \text{ kJ mol}^{-1}$ and $V_{\text{Xe}-\text{Kr}} = -0.5 \text{ kJ mol}^{-1}$. In a simplistic model where all adsorbed molecules are 5.6 \AA apart, the cooperative effect is higher between two xenon molecules, which explains the increased selectivity at high uptake. If we look further at the adsorption enthalpy of both xenon and krypton (*c.f.* Table 2.2), they both increase: the guest molecules move from the “ideal” adsorption sites, and the guest–guest interactions do not fully compensate. The selectivity change in this material is therefore a consequence of the guest–guest interactions that rearranges the position of the adsorbates inside the nanopores.

To further corroborate the role of the guest–guest interactions, we look at another material with one-dimensional tubelike channels: JUFBIX, a cobalt(II) coordination polymer based on carboxylic acid linkers (see Figure 2.27).[198] The periodicity along the direction of the tubes is much higher at 7.2 \AA . The pair interaction energies corresponding to the LJ potentials at this distance are $V_{\text{Xe}-\text{Xe}} = -0.24 \text{ kJ mol}^{-1}$, $V_{\text{Kr}-\text{Kr}} = -0.06 \text{ kJ mol}^{-1}$ and $V_{\text{Xe}-\text{Kr}} = -0.13 \text{ kJ mol}^{-1}$. By looking at the adsorption enthalpies (Table 2.1), these values are too small to affect the position

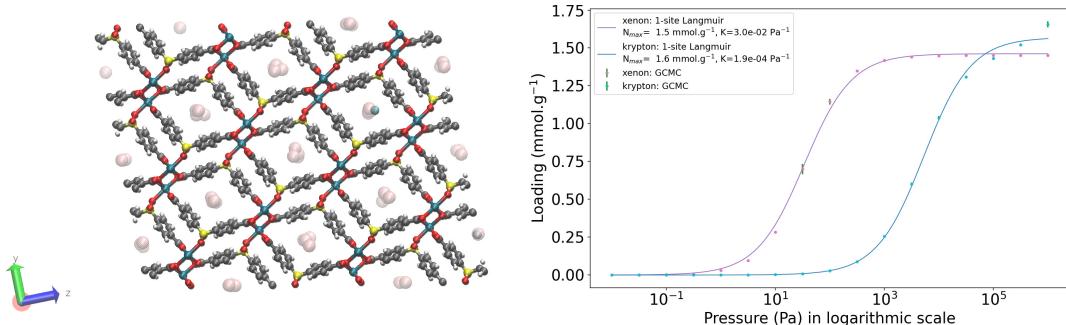


Figure 2.26 – KAXQIL: On the left side, an illustration of a clean version (all solvent removed) of the calcium coordination framework [Ca(SDB)]·H₂O, where SDB = 4,4'-sulfonyldibenzoate loaded with xenon and krypton obtained by GCMC calculations. Color code: Ca in dark cyan, C in gray, O in red, H in white, S in yellow ; Xe in transparent pink and Kr in cyan for the adsorbates. The mono-component isotherms fitted with a 1-site Langmuir model (Equation 2.27) for both xenon and krypton at 298 K is represented on the right side.

of the adsorbed molecules. At high loading, the distance between adsorbed molecules is high, and every adsorption site is independent of the others. The ambient-pressure selectivity s_1 is therefore the same as the low-pressure selectivity s_0 , since every guest–guest interactions are negligible. It confirms the crucial role of cooperative effects between guest molecules when considering a saturated material.

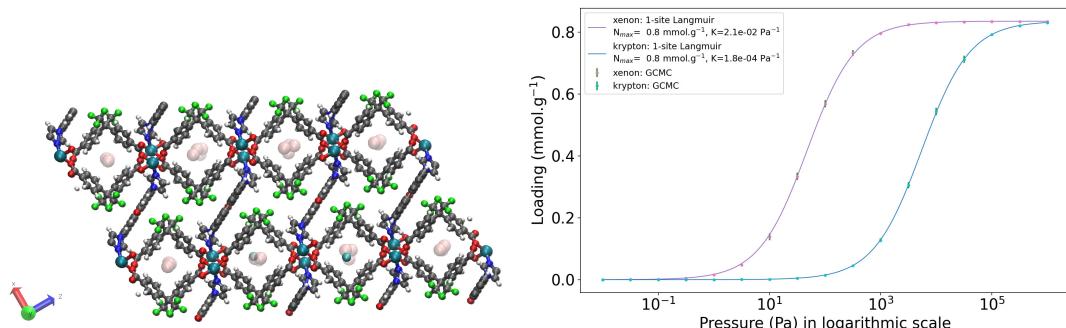


Figure 2.27 – JUFBIX: Representation of a clean version (all solvent removed) of the cobalt(II) coordination framework [Co₂(L)(ppda)₂]·H₂O, where the ligand L is 2,8-di(1H-imidazol-1-yl)dibenzofuran and the carboxylic acid ligand H₂ppda is 4,4'-(perfluoropropane-2,2-diyl)dibenzoic acid loaded with xenon and krypton obtained by GCMC calculations. Color code: Co in dark cyan, C in gray, O in red, H in white, N in blue, F in green ; Xe in transparent pink and Kr in cyan for the adsorbates. The mono-component isotherms fitted with a 1-site Langmuir model (Equation 2.27) for both xenon and krypton at 298 K is represented on the right side.

GOMREG and JAVTAC are frameworks that belong to the second category of materials, with a moderate decrease in selectivity from low to ambient pressure. In GOMREG, the channels are composed of one-dimensional tubes larger than the ones found in KAXQIL or JUFBIX (see Figure 2.28 and Table 2.1). The adsorption sites are alternating from left to right inside the channel, and the adsorbed molecules organize in a “zigzag” pattern. Looking at the adsorption enthalpies, we see that both xenon and krypton have lower enthalpies by a similar margin, suggesting an equivalent stabilization for both atoms, hence the enthalpic contribution to the selectivity change is close to 1. Since krypton is smaller and less strongly tied on its adsorption

site than xenon, it has more available space inside the pore space. This gives an entropic advantage to the Kr, seen in the entropic contribution k_S of 0.64 in Table 2.1. This indicates that even if enthalpic considerations mainly explain the observed changes at a statistical level, as discussed in the previous sections, for individual cases entropic considerations can be a strong factor in pressure-dependent selectivity.

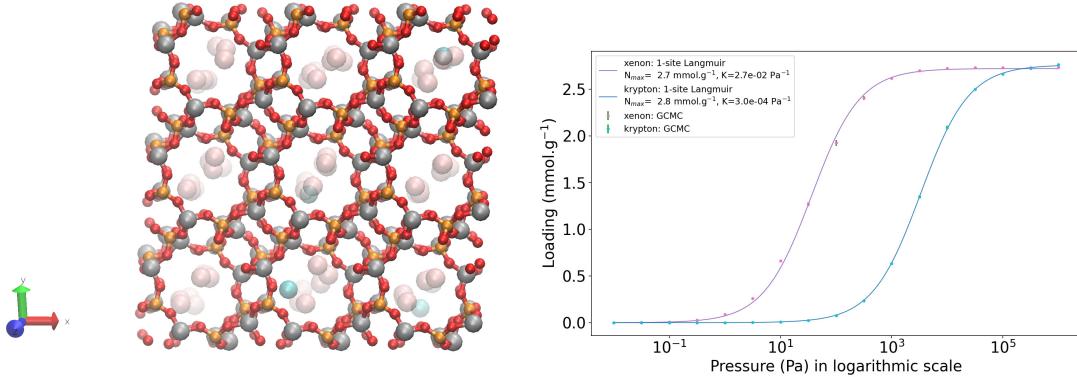


Figure 2.28 – GOMREG: Representation of a clean version (all solvent removed) of this aluminophosphate AlPO₄-n that has a zeotype LAU topology with one-dimensional 10-ring channels loaded with xenon and krypton obtained by GCMC calculations. Color code: Al in silver, P in orange, O in red ; Xe in transparent pink and Kr in cyan for the adsorbates. The mono-component isotherms fitted with a 1-site Langmuir model (Equation 2.27) for both xenon and krypton at 298 K is represented on the right side.

The remaining materials discussed here form a third category, with a strong decrease in selectivity from low to ambient pressure. We look at several phenomena that can be at the root of this decrease, which is important for screening studies as it can limit the working performance of a material that appears to be a “top performer” based on zero-pressure screening.

For example, GOMRAC has a similar structure compared to GOMREG (see Figure 2.29), except for the fact that the pores and channels are smaller (see the values of the LCD, and the PLD, in Table 2.1). The distances between the adsorbed molecules — in their ideal sites — are then consequently smaller. At such distances, we can assume that the interactions between adsorbates become more stabilizing for krypton than for xenon molecules in GOMRAC (see LJ potentials at distance lower than 4.2 Å in the Figure 2.25), which translates into an enthalpic contribution k_H of 0.58. Moreover, this is compatible with the equivalent guest–guest interactions in GOMREG, as previously discussed. It explains why the difference between the adsorption enthalpies becomes smaller for GOMRAC, whereas it stays the same for GOMREG (between low and ambient pressure). This further validates the crucial role of the interactions between adsorbed molecules, and their relationship with the guest–guest distances when considering a high loading condition.

If we look at the case of MISQIQ, we see that the pure-component Xe isotherm in Figure 2.30 cannot be fitted by a single-site Langmuir isotherm, but is well fitted by a two-site Langmuir model (see Figure 2.30). Visual inspection of the adsorbed density at various loadings shows that this is not a second, separate adsorption site that is populated at high loading: instead, the second step in the isotherm (representing about 20% of the uptake at full loading) is associated with a reorganization of the adsorbate molecules occurs at high loading, accompanying a

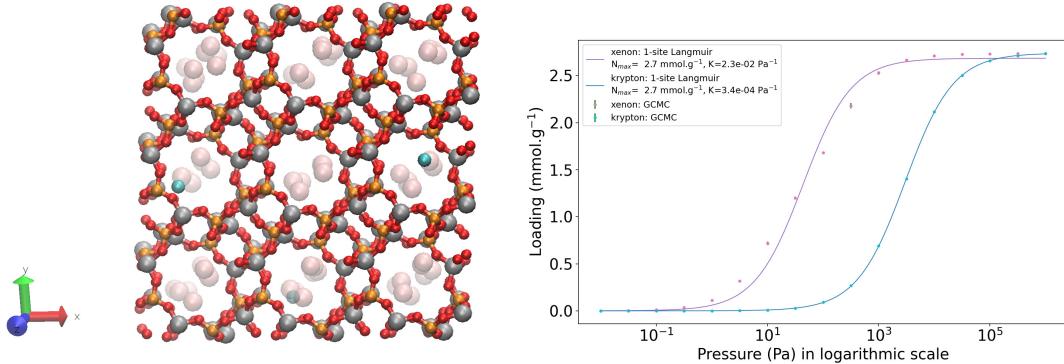


Figure 2.29 – GOMRAC: Representation of a clean version (all solvent removed) of this aluminophosphate AlPO₄-n that has a zeotype LAU topology with one-dimensional 10-ring channels loaded with xenon and krypton obtained by GCMC calculations. Color code: Al in silver, P in orange, O in red; Xe in transparent pink and Kr in cyan for the adsorbates. The mono-component isotherms fitted with a 1-site Langmuir model (Equation 2.27) for both xenon and krypton at 298 K is represented on the right side. It seems that this aluminophosphate is just a smaller version of GOMREG.

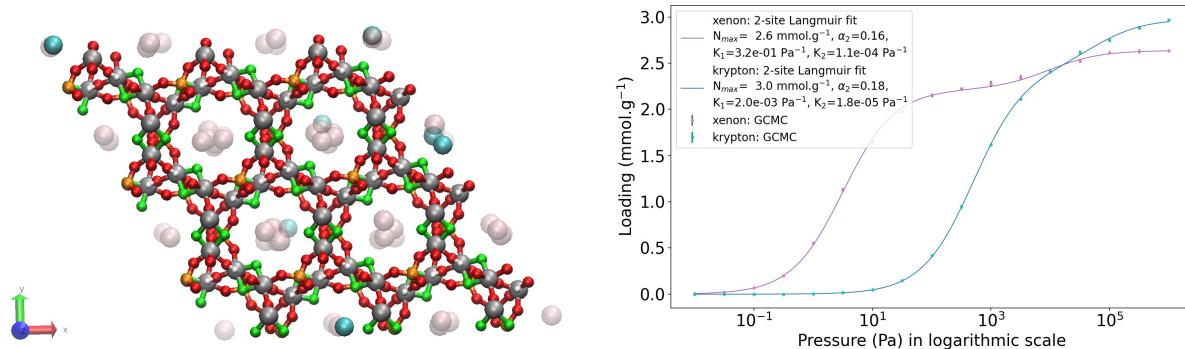


Figure 2.30 – Representation of a chiral open-framework fluoroaluminophosphate [C₄N₃H₁₆]·[Al₆P₃O₁₂F₆(OH)₆] denoted AlPO-JU89 (referenced MISQIQ in the Cambridge structural database), which has been loaded with xenon and krypton in a GCMC simulation, on the left side.[202] Color code: Al in silver, P in orange, O in red, H in white and F in green for the framework; and Xe in transparent pink and Kr in cyan for the adsorbates. The pure-component isotherms fitted with a 2-site Langmuir model (Equation 2.28) for both xenon and krypton at 298 K on the right side.

contraction of the interatomic distances. In this case, the potential for a reorganization of the adsorbate in the material's nanopores leads to the change in selectivity. This reorganization can be detected on the basis of the xenon isotherm alone, and has a major role in the selectivity at ambient pressure. This repacking of the adsorbed phase is linked to a strong entropic effect, and also impacts the enthalpic contribution to selectivity.

More extreme cases of selectivity drop can occur when more than one site is available, as is the case for materials BAEDTA01, VIWMOF, LUDLAZ, WOJJOV, and VAPBIZ. The pure-component isotherms and the representation of the materials loaded in xenon and krypton molecules (presented in the supporting information of the Ref. [18] Figures S19-23) confirm the existence of at least two distinct adsorption sites in each material. The most selective sites (i.e.,

the most favorable for Xe) are filled in priority at low loading, and the less selective sites will then be populated when the pressure increases, leading to a net selectivity drop at ambient pressure for these materials. The different types of adsorption sites, and therefore the potential for a drop in Xe/Kr selectivity (at non-zero pressure) is a factor that could be explicitly included in screening of pure-component isotherms, without the need for explicit multi-component GCMC simulations.

2.3.3 Conclusion and introduction to the follow-up studies

In the current state of the art on Xe/Kr separation by adsorption in nanoporous materials, many studies have focused on the determination of structure/property relationships, the description of theoretical limits of performance, and the identification of top-performing materials, whether for existing experimental structures or for novel hypothetical structures yet to be synthesized. Here, we provide a study based on a high-throughput screening of the adsorption of Xe, Kr, and Xe/Kr mixtures in 12,020 experimental open-framework materials, in order to provide a better comprehension of the thermodynamics behind Xe/Kr separation in nanoporous materials and the microscopic origins of Xe/Kr selectivity at both low and ambient pressure.

The statistical correlation found between Henry's constant for Xe and Xe/Kr selectivity showed that the most selective materials are those with the highest affinity for xenon. To some degree of accuracy, we conclude that directly screening for Kr adsorption or for xenon adsorption free energy may not be necessary for a coarse-grained evaluation of a nanoporous framework selectivity. This could help build more efficient screening methodologies, for example with multistage studies with a first rough selection on Henry's constant at a low computational cost, followed by more expensive GCMC simulations on the selected materials (a gain that can be between 5 and 10-fold in our setup). Furthermore, inspection of the correlations between enthalpy and entropy contributions at low pressure showed that the adsorption-based separation process in the open frameworks studied is mainly enthalpic in nature. We intend to extend the study in the future to other classes of nanoporous materials beyond MOFs, including covalent organic frameworks, porous aromatic frameworks, purely inorganic porous frameworks such as zeolites, but also amorphous porous materials such as porous polymer membranes.

In order to use nanoporous materials to separate xenon from krypton, pressure swing adsorption (PSA) processes have been widely offered: pressure is therefore a crucial thermodynamic variable in the separation cycle. Here, we studied the difference of selectivity between a system under very low pressure (at the zero loading limit, which is calculated at relatively low computational cost) and a system at ambient pressure (closer to working conditions, but obtained at higher simulation cost). We demonstrated that the selectivity could be highly dependent on the pressure, with high low-pressure selectivity that could be maintained in some materials at ambient-pressure selectivity, while in others there would be a large drop in selectivity: a high ambient-pressure selectivity requires high low-pressure selectivity, but the reverse does not hold.

Using a thermodynamic approach to describe the separation selectivity, we showed that the differences in selectivity between the different pressures (and therefore different loading regimes of the frameworks) are mainly explained by the evolution of the adsorption enthalpies for Xe and Kr. By focusing on specific examples, we uncovered the microscopic origins of

these selectivity changes, and related them to the relative roles of host–guest and guest–guest interactions. Population of different adsorption sites, or repacking of the adsorbed phase at higher loading, can lead to drastic changes in the overall selectivity. The mechanisms behind selectivity at high pressure are complex and unique to each framework, requiring a good understanding of the interactions between guest molecules constrained in the nanopores. Nevertheless, our classification of the interactions at play can help in the future to design more efficient high-throughput screening procedures.

For instance, the essentially enthalpic nature of the xenon/krypton separation process supports the need for more efficient ways of sampling the interaction energies and using them as cheap descriptors to tackle more and more numerous structures. In the next chapter, we will go over different ways of evaluating the adsorption enthalpy by comparing the computation time required and the accuracies of each of them. Finally, the influence of the partial pressure through the change in composition or in pressure questions the possible use of infinite dilution thermodynamic quantities to predict the selectivity at any pressure (GCMC). Many studies have focused on predicting the results of GCMC simulations;[14, 17, 178, 209] by using this new angle, can we achieve good results in predicting GCMC values?

Data Availability: https://github.com/fxcoudert/citable-data/tree/master/132-Ren_FaradayDiscuss_2021

3

ADSORPTION ENERGIES SAMPLING

3.1	Voronoi sampling	67
3.1.1	Theoretical considerations	67
3.1.2	Implementation in a Screening	70
3.1.3	Comparative study of the Voronoi sampling	71
3.1.4	Efficiency of the method	74
3.2	Rapid Adsorption Enthalpy Surface Sampling (RAESS)	75
3.2.1	Initial implementation	75
3.2.2	Performance improvement of the algorithm	77
3.2.3	Final surface sampling implementation	80
3.2.4	Conclusions and perspectives	82
3.2.5	Other databases	84
3.3	Grid Adsorption Energies Descriptors (GraED)	84
3.3.1	Concepts	84
3.3.2	Implementation	84
3.3.3	Energy-based descriptors	85



3.1 VORONOI SAMPLING

3.1.1 Theoretical considerations

In mathematics, a tessellation of a given space corresponds to a partition into non overlapping sub-spaces. In the Voronoi tessellation, named after Georgy Feodosevich Voronoy, a set of points (seeds) are associated to a tessellation of regions (Voronoi cells) so that each seed has a cell whose points are closer to this seed than any other seeds.[\[15\]](#) Applied in materials science, the Voronoi cells associated to each atom of the framework can be used to determine key geometrical descriptors (void volume, accessible surface area, pore sizes). At the vertices of each cell, there are Voronoi nodes that was used in the Voronoi energy calculation presented by Simon et al.[\[Simon2015\]](#)

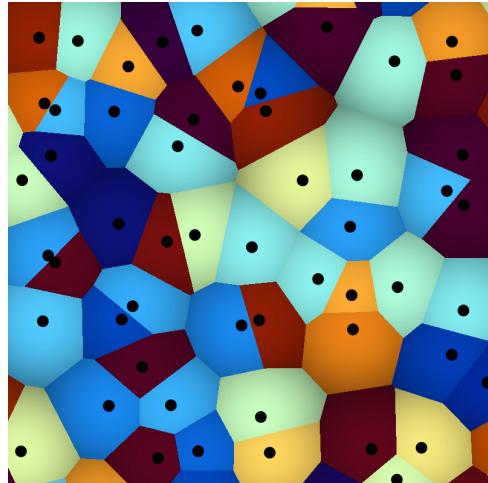


Figure 3.1 – 2D Voronoi. <https://www.shadertoy.com/view/Ms1GD8>

EQUAL RADII

In a tridimensionnal space, let us consider the positions $(\mathbf{x}_k)_{k \in \{1, \dots, n\}}$ of the n points in a box B that could be periodically propagated in the whole space. For every $k \in \{1, \dots, n\}$, we can then define a subspace S_k (also called Voronoi cell) around the atom k so that any point \mathbf{x} inside this subspace is closer to the position \mathbf{x}_k than to any other points \mathbf{x}_l ($l \neq k$).

$$S_k = \{\mathbf{x} \in B \mid \forall l \neq k, \|\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{x}_k\| \leq \|\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{x}_l\|\} \quad (3.1)$$

The set of all these 3D polyhedral subspaces S_k is then called the Voronoi partition of the space B . The edges and vertices of these polyhedra can then give valuable information of the void space between the adjacent Voronoi cells associated to them. We can quickly use them to determine the accessible and inaccessible points of the void space. For instance, a vertex \mathbf{v} of p subspaces $\{V_{i_1}, \dots, V_{i_p}\}$ is the closest point to the atomic positions $\mathbf{x}_{i_1}, \dots, \mathbf{x}_{i_p}$ — this can simply be proved by combining the different conditions of equation 3.1. The same assessment can be done for any point on an edge adjacent to some subspaces, it will be closer to the atoms associated with these subspaces than to any other atoms.

UNEQUAL RADII

The last definition of the Voronoi decomposition works only for equal-sized atoms because the closest region to an atom is also the closest to its center of mass, which does not apply to the complex atomic structures of nanoporous frameworks. To model the atomic radii $\mathbf{r}_1, \dots, \mathbf{r}_n$ of the points $\mathbf{x}_1, \dots, \mathbf{x}_n$ in the same box B , we can implement a so-called Apollonian Voronoi diagram.[210] For every $k \in \{1, \dots, n\}$, the new subspaces A_k are defined as follows:

$$A_k = \{\mathbf{x} \in B \mid \forall l \neq k, \|\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{x}_k\| - r_k \leq \|\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{x}_l\| - r_l\} \quad (3.2)$$

This new definition of the Voronoi diagram has been built on the intuitive property that stipulates that the subspace is the set of points closest to the surface of the sphere around the associated atom. It deals therefore with an unequal distribution of atomic radii, because it is now dependent on the radii. However, as we can see on the Figure 3.2, this first implementation

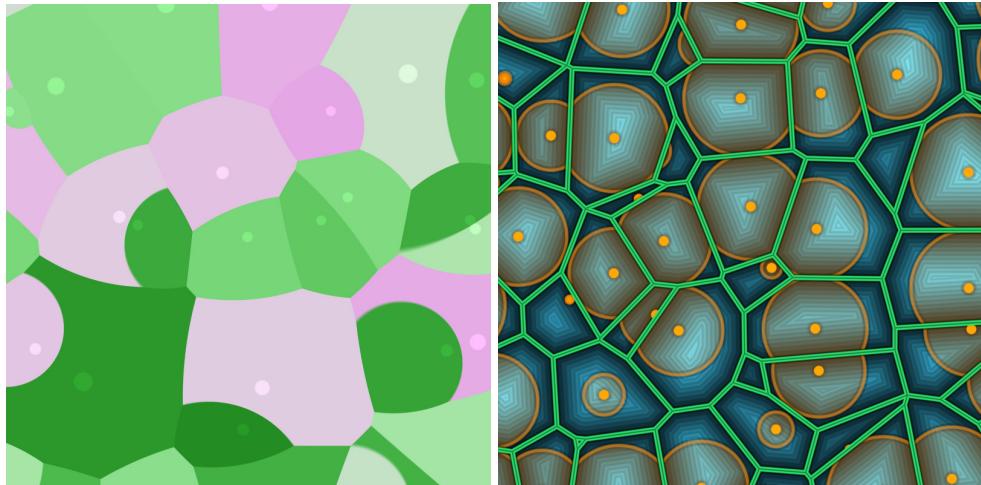


Figure 3.2 – 2D Apollonian Voronoi decomposition. <https://www.shadertoy.com/view/4sd3D7>
/ Radical Voronoi decomposition. <https://www.shadertoy.com/view/4tV3z3> []

has a very convenient definition, but the edges of the subspaces are curved, which makes it harder to use computationally.

For this reason a less intuitive implementation is more commonly used instead, which is called the radical Voronoi tessellation or power diagram or Laguerre-Voronoi diagram.[211] As we can see on the Figure 3.2, the subspaces obtained using this method are now convex polygons with straight edges instead of curved ones. The condition is way less intuitive because the condition does not rely on a simple definition. The subspaces V_k are now defined by the following condition:

$$V_k = \left\{ \mathbf{x} \in B \mid \forall l \neq k, \|\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{x}_k\|^2 - r_k^2 \leq \|\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{x}_l\|^2 - r_l^2 \right\} \quad (3.3)$$

In addition to the polyhedral form of the Voronoi cells, this new implementation presents interesting properties for porosity calculations in a framework of unequal spheres like in MOFs of zeolites.[212] First, the boundary between two overlapping spheres correspond simply to the intersection place between the spheres. Then, the boundary between non-overlapping spheres is always in the void space between the spheres. This can be simply proven by taking a point \mathbf{x} in V_k and outside the sphere, we have $\|\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{x}_k\| \geq r_k$, which implies $\forall l \neq k, \|\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{x}_k\| \geq r_k$. The point \mathbf{x} is therefore also not overlapping with any other atom, which means it is in the void space of the framework.

If we now consider a point \mathbf{v} on a boundary between p Voronoi cells $\{V_{i_1}, \dots, V_{i_p}\}$, this point would verify all the conditions $\|\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{x}_{i_1}\|^2 - r_{i_1}^2 = \dots = \|\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{x}_{i_p}\|^2 - r_{i_p}^2 = C$. We can know their minimum distance to the center of mass of every nearby atoms to test for possible overlapping. More specifically, in the Zeo++ software,[42] the Voronoi diagram is characterized by storing the minimum distance to the closest atoms and the index of the atoms for every vertices and edges (for edges that connect two different periodic images a periodic displacement vector is also stored). This information can be used to speed up the void fraction calculation, by skipping the volume calculations in the non-adsorbable Voronoi cells. It is also a fast way of determining

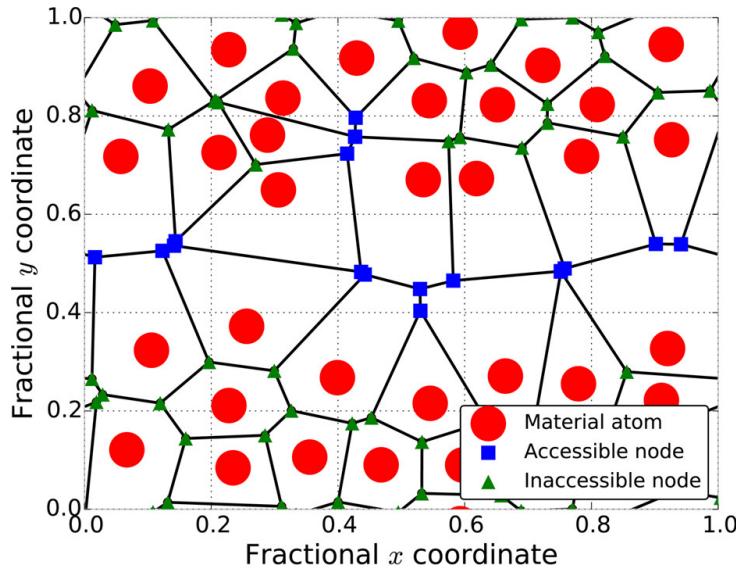


Figure 3.3 – Voronoi network model of void space (2D caricature). The unit cell of a toy material is shown. Red circles represent atoms of the material; accessible and inaccessible Voronoi nodes are blue squares and green triangles, respectively. The black lines are the edges in the periodic Voronoi graph that model the void space. Taken from Ref. [14]

the accessible and non-accessible surface areas and volumes.[42] Note that if the probe has a radius r_{probe} , then the sphere radii considered are $r_k = r_{\text{atom}} + r_{\text{probe}}$.

3.1.2 Implementation in a Screening

The use of the Voronoi decomposition of the pore space of materials for their geometric characterization has been widely employed in computational studies in the last decade,[213] in particular since it was made easily available as part of the Zeo++ software package.[214] Its use was extended recently to implement a novel sampling scheme, in a study proposing the ML-assisted screening of nanoporous materials for xenon/krypton separation. In this article, Simon et al.[14] relied on a Voronoi tessellation of the nanoporous materials and assigned the potential adsorption sites (i.e., the sampling points) at the nodes of this decomposition. The Voronoi tessellation identifies the vertices of polyhedra that correspond to the closest regions of each atom of the structure. These vertices (or *Voronoi nodes*) are the points equidistant to at least four atoms of the structure, and they can be associated with adsorption sites since they are positioned near the center of the pores.

The definition of accessibility defined by the Zeo++ software was used in a screening to find the best materials for Xe/Kr separation.[14] The interaction energies of xenon were calculated only on the accessible nodes as schemed on the Figure 3.3. The average of the energies at the accessible Voronoi nodes gives an approximation of the adsorption enthalpy. However, this sampling assumes that the nodes are close to the real, most favorable, adsorption sites. Or to put it differently, the adsorption sites need to be at the center of the pores, which is only true for structures with pore sizes close to adsorbate size. This newly defined adsorption energy descriptor was found to be one of the most influential descriptor for the ML model developed to predict the ambient-pressure selectivity.

Starting from the initial idea of Voronoi sampling, we want to question the relevance of using a direct average of the interaction energies instead of a Boltzmann averaging in describing the adsorption enthalpy. To better understand the strengths and weaknesses of this methodology, we compared different ways of approximating adsorption enthalpies using the Voronoi sampling with more accurate infinite dilution and ambient-pressure xenon adsorption enthalpies using Widom insertions and GCMC for a 20:80 Xe/Kr mixture at 1 atm and 298 K.

3.1.3 Comparative study of the Voronoi sampling

We introduced in the previous chapter, the definition of the xenon adsorption enthalpy at infinite dilution (Widom insertion section 2.1.3) and at ambient pressure (GCMC sections 2.1.2 and 2.1.4). These methods can be considered accurate methods to calculate the adsorption enthalpy which has been proven to be strongly correlated to the logarithm of the selectivity in our previous study on the thermodynamic exploration of the xenon/krypton separation using a high-throughput screening.

INTRODUCTION OF THE MAIN CONCEPTS

The Voronoi energy as initially conceptualized by Simon et al. is based on the average of the xenon interaction energies at the accessible Voronoi nodes. But because we will compare to thermodynamic simulations without blocking pockets, we will not consider the accessible Voronoi nodes but the adsorbable ones since it is closer to the simulation we want to approximate. For simplicity, we define the set of the adsorbable Voronoi nodes A as the Voronoi nodes with a negative energy value, we also apply a condition on the minimum distance (about the radius of a xenon 2 Å) to reduce the number of points to be calculated. This average on the adsorbable Voronoi nodes $E_{\text{voro-A}}^{Xe}$ can be written:

$$E_{\text{voro-A}}^{Xe} = \frac{1}{|A|} \sum_{i \in A} E_i - RT \quad (3.4)$$

Another interesting energy descriptor could simply be the minimum of the interaction energies among the Voronoi nodes V with a minimum distance to the nearest atom is higher than 2 Å. This minimum Voronoi energy $E_{\text{voro-M}}^{Xe}$ can be written:

$$E_{\text{voro-M}}^{Xe} = \min_{i \in V} E_i \quad (3.5)$$

Finally, to get closer to the definition of the heat of adsorption defined in the previous chapter, we can build an energy descriptor using a Boltzmann averaging. This Boltzmann average of the xenon interaction energies at the Voronoi nodes V written $E_{\text{voro-B}}^{Xe}$ can be expressed as follows:

$$E_{\text{voro-B}}^{Xe} = \frac{\sum_{i \in V} e^{-\beta E_i}}{\sum_{i \in V} e^{-\beta E_i}} - RT \quad (3.6)$$

Note that the $-RT$ term is to make the expression comparable to the one of adsorption enthalpy.

We can intuitively say that the Boltzmann averaging being closer to the definition of the adsorption enthalpy it would be a better candidate as an energy descriptor, hence improving the screening methodology. To test these different methodologies, we will now compare the different energy descriptors to more accurate evaluation of the adsorption heat.

LOW PRESSURE COMPARISON

The Widom insertion is typically used to calculate the infinite dilution adsorption properties such as the adsorption enthalpy, the Henry constant and the selectivity. The evaluation of the interaction energies of xenon at the different Voronoi nodes correspond to a low-pressure averaging and is more comparable to a Widom insertion method. It is however biased by the inhomogeneous sampling of the space, which can explain some discrepancies we could observe.

As we can see on the Figure 3.4, the average of the energies is not performing very well and is clearly less correlated to the adsorption enthalpy than the minimum interaction energy or the Boltzmann average of the interaction energies. This is because in a normal average, the high energy values have a much higher weight than in a Boltzmann average, which makes the average much more important than expected. The Voronoi average descriptor $E_{\text{voro-A}}^{Xe}$ is always higher than the infinite dilution adsorption enthalpy $\Delta_{\text{ads}}H_0^{Xe}$.

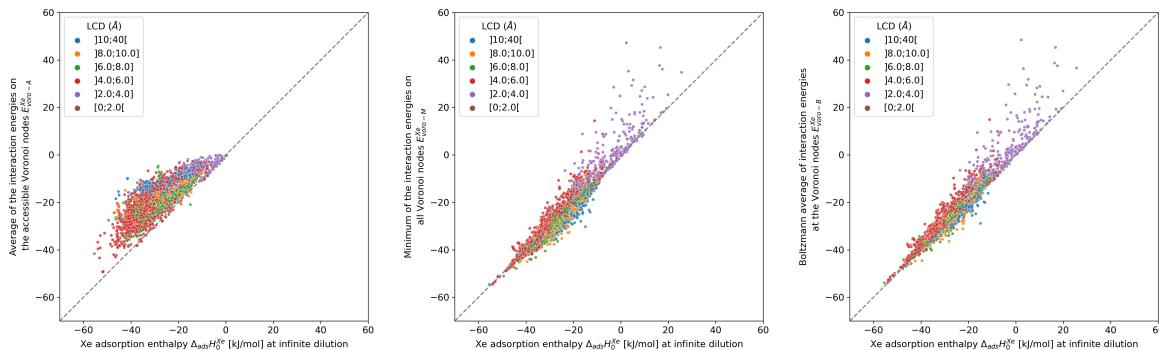


Figure 3.4 – Scatterplots of the energy descriptors $E_{\text{voro-A}}^{Xe}$, $E_{\text{voro-M}}^{Xe}$ and $E_{\text{voro-B}}^{Xe}$ calculated by a Voronoi sampling compared to the enthalpies calculated by a 100k-step Widom insertion simulation of xenon in structures of CoRE MOF 2019. The points are labeled according to the largest cavity diameter (LCD) belonging to one of the intervals.

The Pearson correlation coefficients corroborate our initial observation. The correlation coefficient between $E_{\text{voro-A}}^{Xe}$ and $\Delta_{\text{ads}}H_0^{Xe}$ is equal to 0.81, whereas for the minimum $E_{\text{voro-M}}^{Xe}$ it is 0.95 and for the Boltzmann average $E_{\text{voro-B}}^{Xe}$ it is 0.97. For this reason, to evaluate the relevance of a Voronoi energy sampling we should consider a Boltzmann average. As we have shown in the previous chapter, the selectivity is correlated to the difference of adsorption enthalpies of xenon and krypton. Better describing the enthalpy is a first step toward a better description of the selectivity. However, we only looked at the selectivity values at low pressure. What would happen for selectivity at higher pressure?

On the Figure 3.5, we can see that the selectivity drop between the low-pressure case and the ambient-pressure one also impact the enthalpy values of xenon. There is a reduction of the xenon affinity as the pressure goes up. Since the study of Simon et al. focused on the

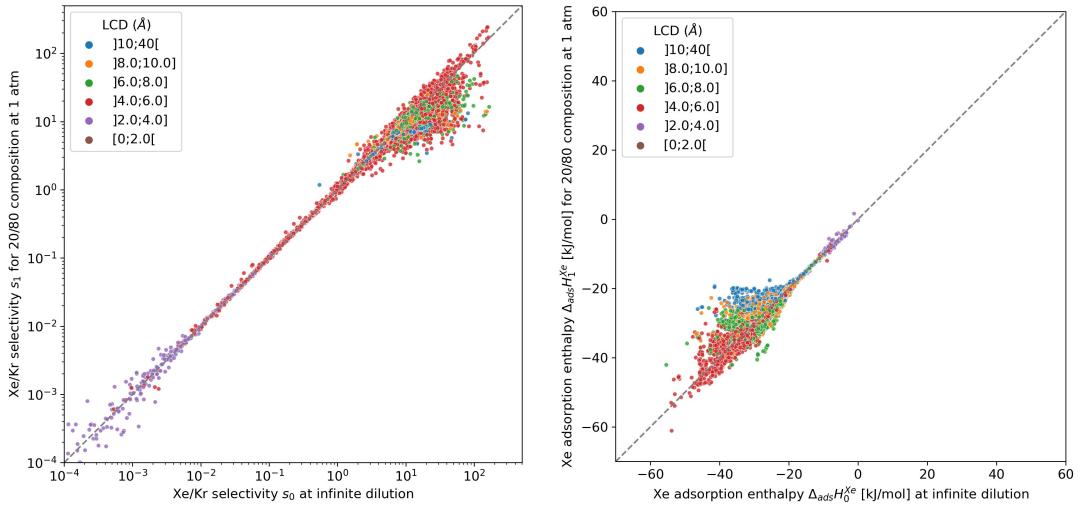


Figure 3.5 – Transition

ambient-pressure selectivity prediction, we want to see if the energy descriptor they developed could however be used to describe the adsorption enthalpy at high pressure.

AMBIENT PRESSURE

If we look at the Figure 3.6, it is not so clear which descriptor is better to describe the enthalpy at ambient-pressure. The correlation shown by the different scatterplots seem to be equally poor, and this could justify the use of a regular average rather than a Boltzmann average. The correlation coefficient for the average $E_{voronoi-A}^{Xe}$ is now equal to 0.86, which is equivalent to the one of the minimum $E_{voronoi-M}^{Xe}$ and slightly lower than the 0.87 for the Boltzmann average $E_{voronoi-B}^{Xe}$.

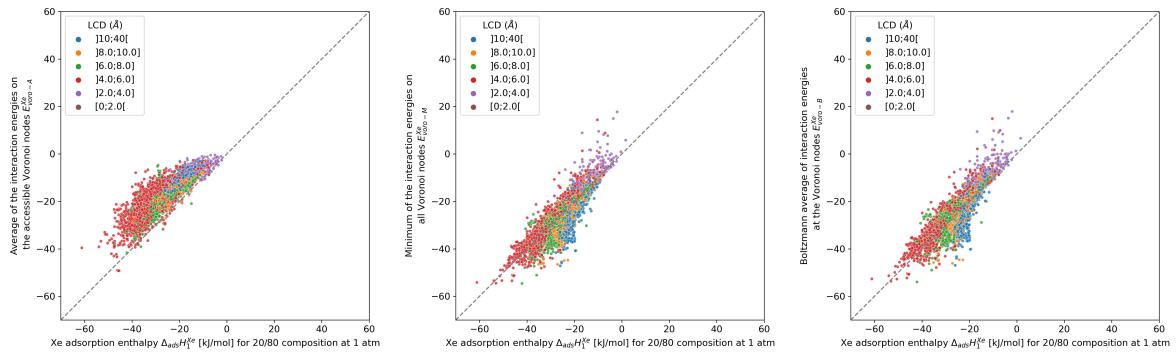


Figure 3.6 – Scatterplots of the energy descriptors $E_{voronoi-A}^{Xe}$, $E_{voronoi-M}^{Xe}$ and $E_{voronoi-B}^{Xe}$ calculated by a Voronoi sampling compared to the enthalpies calculated by a 100k-step GCMC simulation of xenon in structures of CoRE MOF 2019. The points are labeled according to the largest cavity diameter (LCD) belonging to one of the intervals.

At higher pressure, the adsorption enthalpy has higher values, which degrades the correlation with the Boltzmann average and the minimum of the interaction energies evaluated at the Voronoi nodes. For the averaging, the over-evaluation of the energy values make it closer to the values at higher pressure. Following this idea, we later come up with another idea of averaging

with bigger weights on the higher values, a Boltzmann average with a higher temperature value that will be tested in the next chapter.

3.1.4 Efficiency of the method

We will now focus on some performance metrics associated to the Boltzmann average at the Voronoi nodes and compare it to our reference sampling, the Widom insertion with 100,000 cycles. The right plot of the Figure 3.4 compares the enthalpy computed in the Voronoi sampling with the reference adsorption enthalpy (ground truth) – showing at the same time the largest cavity diameter for each porous framework. The correlation between the values of enthalpy is very good only for a restricted number of structures with enthalpy around -50 kJ mol^{-1} . For structures with higher enthalpy, the correlation starts to degrade, and becomes very poor for small-pore structures. For the points in purple, the largest cavity diameter is lower than the kinetic diameter of a xenon, the sampling of the Voronoi nodes is clearly insufficient. In addition, the accuracy loss on the other points (larger pores) can be explained by the fact that the pores are slightly bigger and the center of the pore is not a good approximation of adsorption site position anymore: the adsorption sites are actually closer to the pore surface than to the center of the pore. This conclusion is what prompted us to propose a new sampling scheme based on the molecular surface of the pore space, which we will detail in the next sections.

The root mean square error (RMSE) and the mean absolute error (MAE) for Voronoi sampling are respectively 6.78 kJ mol^{-1} and 2.01 kJ mol^{-1} , if we consider all structures in our set, which seems too high to be useful for screening purposes. However, the non-porous materials would be screened out *a priori* in any high-throughput workflow, as they would not be of interest. We can only consider the structures with large enough cavities, higher than 3.7 \AA (a bit lower than 3.96 \AA Xe kinetic diameter). Thereby, the RMSE and MAE drop respectively to 2.11 kJ mol^{-1} and 1.55 kJ mol^{-1} , which can be considered acceptable for a quick estimation of the guest–host affinity, but not for accurate adsorption enthalpy calculation.

This is reinforced by the very low computational cost of the method. The Voronoi tessellation done by the Zeo++ software is extremely quick and can output the positions of the Voronoi nodes in 0.28 s (measured as an average over all the structures of the CoRE MOF 2019 database), on a typical workstation (a single Intel Xeon Platinum 8168 core at 2.7 GHz). While a simple Python for the energy calculation took around 27 s per structure, we benchmarked that a C++ optimized implementation can perform the Voronoi sampling in around 0.4 s. We only need to remember that this method takes a few hundred milliseconds per structure, while a Widom insertion needs approximately hundreds of seconds per structure. A Voronoi sampling is therefore 2 to 3 orders of magnitude quicker than a full sampling of the pore space.

This preliminary study identified a fast method for adsorption enthalpy calculation that can be widely used in screening procedures, but has limited accuracy for quantitative prediction. This sampling technique assumes that the nodes are close to the real, most favorable, adsorption sites. Or to put it differently, the adsorption sites need to be at the center of the pores, which is only true for structures with pore sizes close to adsorbate size. It raised important questions on the importance of selecting sampling points within the pore space of materials, and we wanted to develop an intermediate technique that is both fast and accurate for the prediction of adsorption enthalpy. For this purpose, we developed and optimized a new sampling technique

that focuses the sampling on the surface of the material, which is expected to make up for the main flaws of the Voronoi sampling.

3.2 RAPID ADSORPTION ENTHALPY SURFACE SAMPLING (RAESS)

[add plots from SI]

In this section we describe the development of our surface sampling algorithm, with the goal of being more accurate than Voronoi sampling and faster than Widom insertion. Our initial idea is based on a series of theoretical considerations: (1) the strong adsorption sites are near the surface of the material; (2) by changing the problem from 3D to 2D sampling we can reduce the complexity; and (3) the algorithm can scale with the number of unique atoms in the structure (and not with the size of the unit cell), which is efficient because many porous frameworks have high symmetry. The first consideration ensures that this method will be more accurate than a Voronoi sampling, and the last two made us think that a well-optimized code would be fast. To confirm these hypotheses, we will analyze both the accuracy and the speed of this new algorithm and compare them to existing methods.

3.2.1 Initial implementation

We present here our initial implementation of the surface sampling algorithm, and its basic principles. This first implementation is a relatively basic one and already performs well compared to the other methods. In the next sections, we refine it with two additional features that will improve its accuracy and its speed.

This initial implementation speeds up the calculation of adsorption enthalpy in nanoporous materials by sampling interaction energies only near the surface. It is illustrated in Figure 3.7. For this purpose, a loop over all unique atoms (as defined by crystalline symmetry) is performed. And for each atom, a sphere around its position is sampled using a uniform distribution around it, these points will be called sampling points, and we can change the number of sampling points. The default radius chosen for the sampling spheres is the distance $r_{\min} = 2^{1/6}\sigma_{ij}$ to the minimum of the LJ potential between atoms of type *i* (belonging to the framework) and *j* (the guest), corresponding to the strongest possible pair interaction (although the neighboring atoms will of course have an influence). After calculating the interaction energy at each of the sampled points, a Boltzmann average of these energies corresponds to a biased adsorption enthalpy, as described by the equation 2.17.

In order to validate the accuracy of the approximation made using this sampling, we applied this algorithm with 300,000 sampling points per unique atom. The results are illustrated by the Figures S1 and S2 and Table S1 of the supporting information (SI). There is a good numerical agreement with the reference calculations, the RMSE and MAE are only around 0.90 kJ mol⁻¹ and 0.66 kJ mol⁻¹ considering all the structures from the database. Moreover, there is no noticeable difference of RMSE when considering the structures with a pore size above 3.7 Å (as determined by the largest cavity diameter, or LCD). Unlike Voronoi sampling, this method gives a consistent accuracy across all the structures of the database with a lower error. The fact that the RMSE error is below 1 kJ mol⁻¹ is quite promising, and validates our

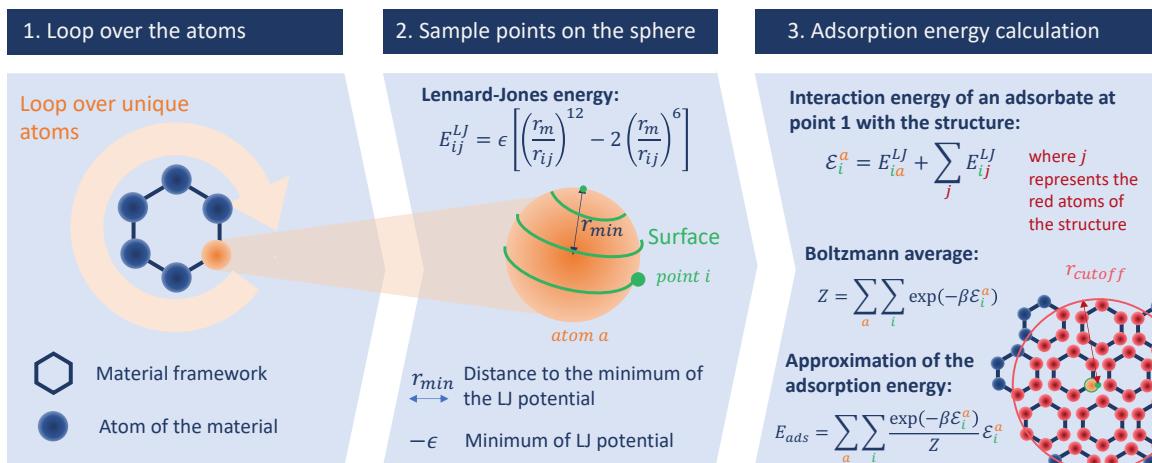


Figure 3.7 – Schematic description of our surface sampling based on the three main steps of the algorithm: the loop over the unique atoms, the spiral sampling around each atom, and the energy averaging. The adsorbate is represented by the point i and is moved across all the points around the unique atoms of the structure.

intuition that this new sampling technique can be an intermediate between the two previous methods (Voronoi and Widom).

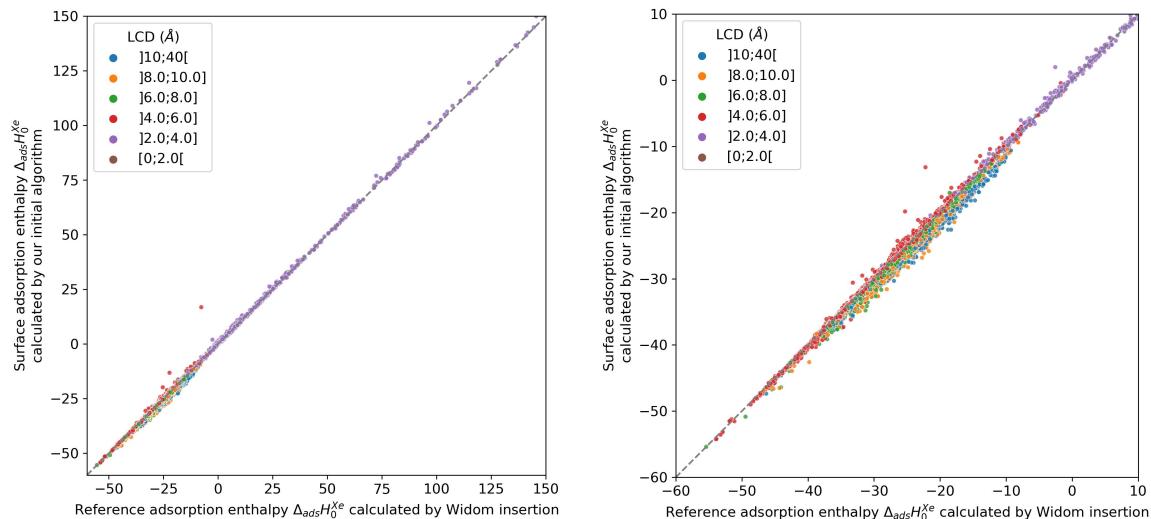


Figure 3.8 – RMSE convergence of our algorithm (left) compared to a 100k-step Widom insertion simulation (right) for xenon adsorption in all structures of the CoRE MOF 2019 database.

After proving the good accuracy of the method, we are now exploring the computation time required. We see on Figure 3.9 that the method reaches an RMSE below 1.0 kJ mol^{-1} very quickly for an average CPU time of 1.2 s (Table S1), corresponding to 2,000 sampling points per atom. This is far less than the 150 s (Table S2) required for a Widom insertion to reach its plateau value, for an RMSE of 0.10 kJ mol^{-1} with 12,000 cycles. Moreover, the Widom insertion needs around 14 s to reach a similar RMSE of 1.0 kJ mol^{-1} , which is still slower than the surface sampling. We can conclude that this initial implementation of the surface sampling is faster than a standard Widom insertion, with a good accuracy.

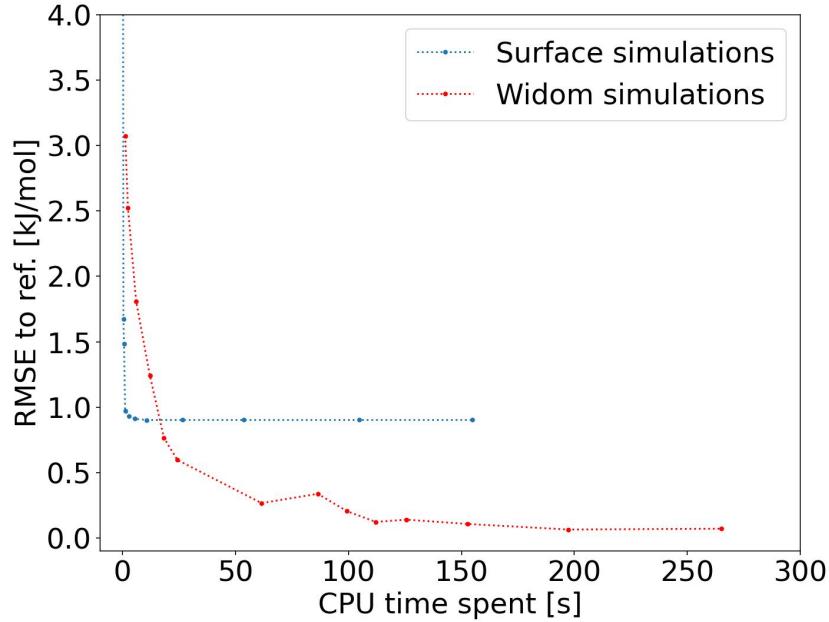


Figure 3.9 – RMSE convergence of our algorithm (left) compared to a 100k-step Widom insertion simulation (right) for xenon adsorption in all structures of the CoRE MOF 2019 database.

However, this initial implementation of the method is slower than a Voronoi sampling that only needs to sample around 1,600 points on average, instead of 13,000 sampled points on average (if we multiply by the average number of unique atoms). The sampling part would take approximately 0.15 s and the Voronoi nodes generation 0.28 s, so our surface sampling algorithm remains 2 to 3 times slower (implemented in an identical compiled language, in this case C++). In order to improve the accuracy and performance, we have further tweaked the surface sampling method, adjusting the size of the sampling sphere and adopting a fast rejection criterion. The rejection of high-energy points with little contribution to the final enthalpy value can reduce the simulation time, whereas the size of the sampling sphere can improve the accuracy. The initially chosen sphere size is only taking account of the interaction with the closest atom, we therefore chose to set it at the minimum of Lennard-Jones potential. However, the interaction with the neighboring atoms can further stabilize the adsorbate, sampling further from this minimum could in consequence increase the accuracy of our surface sampling method.

3.2.2 Performance improvement of the algorithm

SIZE OF THE SAMPLING SPHERE

The validity of the initial algorithm is based on the assumption that the adsorption site is at the minimum of the Lennard-Jones potential. It will only perform well if the closest atom contributes to almost all the interaction, but in real frameworks other neighboring atoms contribute to the host/guest interaction as well. We have found that in vast majority of materials, the adsorption sites are located farther apart compared to the LJ potential minimum, in order to maximize the contribution of all atoms — and because of the dissymmetry of the interaction potential well. In order to see if this could be introduced in our algorithm, we implemented a parameter λ , and the sampling sphere radius is now defined by $R_\lambda = \lambda\sigma$, where

σ is the distance at which the LJ potential is zero. If $\lambda = 2^{1/6}$, we fall back to our initial definition of the sampling sphere, and the adsorbent is at the minimum of the LJ potential of the atom. If $\lambda = 1$, the sampling sphere is at the zero of the LJ potential, and by increasing this parameter, we can check if our intuition was right.

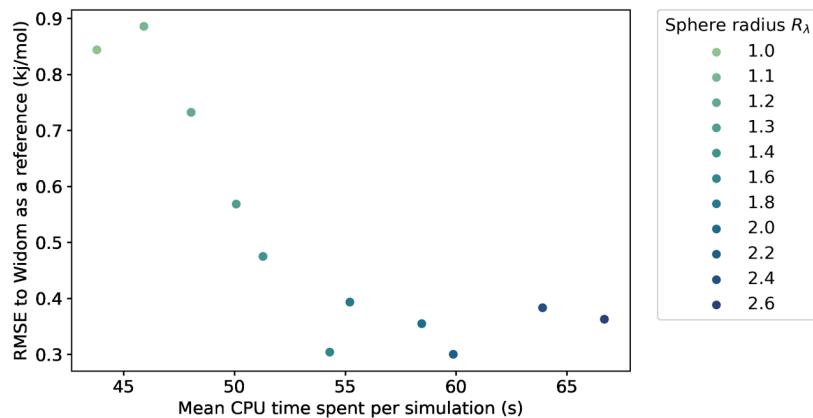


Figure 3.10 – Influence of the sampling sphere radius R_λ on the average CPU time required for a simulation of 100k sampling points and the RMSE, compared to the reference adsorption enthalpy. The averaging is done only on the structures with a largest cavity diameter (LCD) higher than 3.7 Å.

Because we have no physical model that would predict the optimal value of the sampling sphere, we followed a statistical approach. We studied the influence of the λ parameter on both the accuracy and the computation time, and the results are represented on Figure 3.10. The RMSE turns out to be relatively high around 0.90 kJ mol^{-1} for radius sphere lower than the r_{\min} , it then decreases for larger values of radius to reach a plateau around 0.35 kJ mol^{-1} . We confirm that by increasing the sampling sphere radius we can improve the accuracy of our algorithm, and find that for values of λ higher than 1.6, the accuracy is stabilized. We also find that increasing the sphere radius negatively impacts the computational efficiency, since it increases the number of neighbors considered in the energy calculation.

By choosing an optimal sampling sphere, we can more than halve the error, while increasing the computation time by around 20 percent, when comparing the case $\lambda = 1.6$ with $\lambda = 1.1$ (close to r_{\min}). In most cases, it will be an acceptable trade-off. However, in a case where the computation time is crucial, like in a rapid screening, the optimal choice might not be to increase the sampling sphere at $\lambda = 1.6$ but to have it lower at $\lambda = 1.4$ or $\lambda = 1.2$, and have an RMSE around 0.5 kJ mol^{-1} – still quite acceptable. The new scale parameter introduced in this section can therefore be tweaked to serve the users' purpose, whether it is to focus on the accuracy or to optimize the computation speed. If one wants to use it on a completely different database in very different conditions, then one can either choose a default value that works fine (e.g. $\lambda = 1.4$) or one can optimize the parameter on a small diverse sample of the unseen data.

REJECTION CONDITION

As shown above, our algorithm has better accuracy than Voronoi sampling, but its initial implementation was several times slower, which could be unsuitable for screening applications in high-throughput workflows, where the number of structures to be screened can reach one

million or more. To reduce the computational expense, we thought of rejecting the points with little contribution to the final enthalpy, i.e., the largely positive interaction energies that would vanish in the exponential of the Boltzmann average.

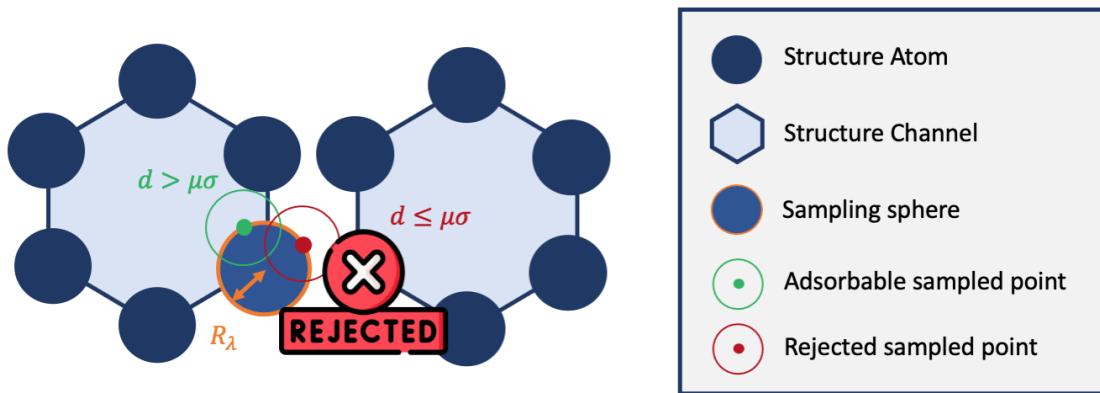


Figure 3.11 – Simplified representation of the principle of rejection condition and the concept of sampling sphere inside 2D channels of a nanoporous material.

Inspired by typical methods for accessible surface calculation, we implemented a hard sphere rejection condition based on the distance to neighbors. If the adsorbate is too close to another atom of the structure, the sampling point is rejected, i.e., its energy is not calculated (or considered to be infinite). We based this distance threshold on the σ_{ij} parameter of the Lennard-Jones potential. To determine the optimal threshold, we introduced a factor μ with real values between 0 and 1, that changes the size of the hard sphere rejection condition. If the guest–host distance is lower than $d_\mu = \mu \times \sigma$, then the point is rejected. If $\mu = 0$, then there is no rejection condition. And if $\mu = 1$, we reject all points with a positive energy interaction to at least one atom of the structure. This condition could be a bit strong and points with non negligible contribution would end up rejected. This rejection condition is schematically represented on Figure 3.11.

This rejection condition is expected to speed up the calculation, since the energy calculation is avoided for the rejected sampling points. The energy calculation accounts for the largest portion of the CPU time spent in the surface sampling. For the structure KAXQIL[215], the Lennard-Jones potential calculation represents up to 90% of the calculation time for 100,000 sampling points per sphere (with the initial algorithm). The higher the factor μ , the more rejections there would be. But, if too many points are rejected, the accuracy would drop. Here again, we used a statistical analysis to determine the optimal value of μ , making our sampling faster without compromising the accuracy of the enthalpy calculation. The results are displayed on Figure 3.12.

The values of RMSE and time on Figure 3.12 are averaged only on the most interesting structures for xenon adsorption ($LCD \geq 3.7 \text{ \AA}$). For $\mu \leq 0.85$, increasing the value of μ improves the speed of the calculation without changing the RMSE.¹ For high values of μ , the rejection condition is too strong and we reject points with non-negligible contribution to the overall enthalpy. The

¹In fact, what we observe is a deterioration of the accuracy for structures with small pores because the probability of rejection in a confined space is really high and all sampled points end up rejected. But these points are not considered, if we apply the condition on the cavity size ($LCD \geq 3.7 \text{ \AA}$).

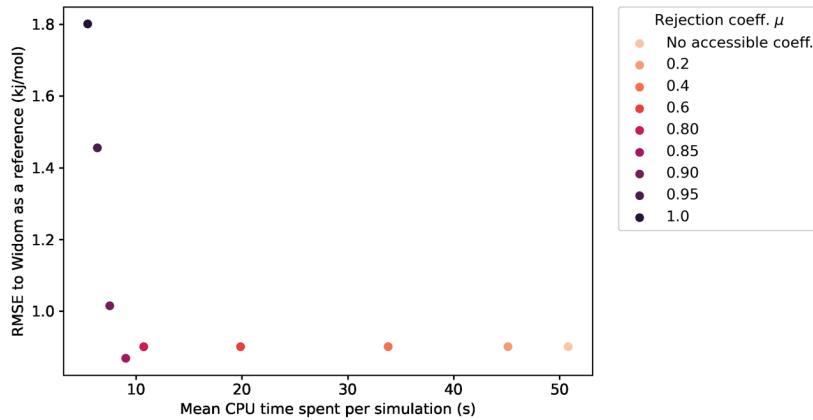


Figure 3.12 – Influence of the rejection coefficient μ on the average CPU time required for a simulation of 100k sampling points and the RMSE compared to the reference adsorption enthalpy. The averaging is done only on the structures with a largest cavity diameter (LCD) superior to 3.7 Å.

RMSE increases as a consequence. If we want to keep the accuracy unchanged, the optimal value is therefore $\mu \simeq 0.85$, because it give the lowest computation time with a similar RMSE. We note that it would be possible, in specific cases, to explore higher values of μ that trade a bit more accuracy in exchange of further speed gains.

For the simulations considered in Figure 3.12, the use of a rejection condition $\mu = 0.85$ makes the simulation four times faster than the standard algorithm. As we will see in the next section, the combination of optimal values for the λ and μ parameters generates an algorithm with very interesting performance compared to Voronoi sampling or Widom insertion.

3.2.3 Final surface sampling implementation

PERFORMANCE COMPARISON

For the calculation of adsorption enthalpy, our proposed surface sampling method is a good compromise between the accuracy of Widom insertion (full sampling of the porous space) and the speed of a less accurate method such as Voronoi sampling. The performance of our algorithm, including the two new features (sampling sphere scaling and rejection criterion) is illustrated in Figure 3.13, where we can see the improvement brought by each feature and how it compares to reference simulations. All CPU times are calculated using the smallest possible number of sampling points so that the respective algorithms reach convergence. With the implementation of a rejection condition, we find that surface sampling is even quicker than Voronoi sampling. Moreover, the increase of the size of the sampling sphere makes the surface sampling much more accurate, reaching an RMSE of 0.33 kJ mol^{-1} and an MAE of 0.21 kJ mol^{-1} . The ideal set of parameters, determined for porous materials from the CoRE MOF 2019 database, is ($\lambda = 1.6$, $\mu = 0.85$) in order to combine the lowest error and smallest computational cost. By combining both of these new features to the algorithm, we have a final surface sampling method with an RMSE of 0.33 kJ mol^{-1} and an average computation time of 0.34 s per structure. According to the data of the Table S3, it is about 6 times more accurate and 26% faster than Voronoi sampling, and it is also about 430 times faster than a Widom insertion with 12k cycles.

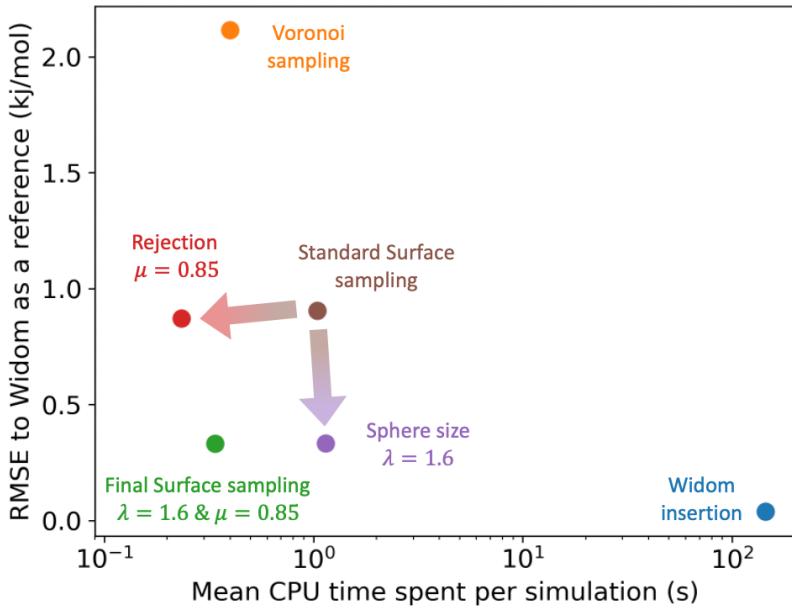


Figure 3.13 – Comparison of the RMSE to the reference Widom insertion and the average computation time for different types of enthalpy calculation methods. The surface sampling calculation were all done with 2k sampling points on each sphere and the Widom simulations were done using 12k cycles. These values correspond to the value at the convergence identified using Figure 3.9.

Finally, we suggest that the values of the parameters optimized in this work might need adjustment when applied to other adsorption systems. The optimal μ parameter depends on the size of the adsorbent, and it should be tweaked differently when considering another adsorbent. For instance, the set of structures used for the optimization of μ depends on the size of their cavities, and the 3.7 Å threshold chosen here would need to be changed according to the kinetic diameter of the adsorbate. Furthermore, as aforementioned in the section on the rejection condition, it is possible to trade-off a bit of accuracy for faster simulations especially in high-throughput screenings where speed is extremely important. Similarly, in the case of xenon, the cost of increasing the sphere size is around 10 to 20%. On very large databases, one could consider that this increase on the required computational time is not worth the accuracy improvement, and one could decide to keep a smaller sampling sphere. If this method is transposed to different molecular systems, its parameters should be tested on the specific database and adsorbate of interest.

CALCULATION OF HENRY CONSTANT AND SURFACE AREA

The main goal of our sampling algorithm is to calculate adsorption enthalpy in the zero-loading limit. But the method can also calculate at the same time the Henry constant and surface area of the materials, without significant additional computational cost. The Henry constant is a key metric for assessing the affinity of an adsorbate to a nanoporous structure. The A/B gas selectivity at low pressure is defined as a ratio of Henry constants of components A and B. This important property can be calculated using Equation ?? in a Widom insertion calculation. Instead of using the interaction energies at the Widom inserted points, we can now use the surface sampled points to get an approximate value for the Henry constant.

Using the optimized set of parameters for surface sampling, we assessed the performance of our algorithm on the values of Henry constant by comparing them to ground truth obtained by 100,000 cycles of Widom insertion. Since the Henry constant corresponds to the exponential of an adsorption free energy and we are more interested in the precision on the free energy, we are using a log-scale evaluation metric. For surface sampling, the log-RMSE of K_H is equal to 0.2, which means that the order of magnitude of the values are well predicted (Table S4). If we consider the derived free energy $\Delta F_{ads} = -RT \log(\rho_f RT K_H)$, the RMSE is of the order of 1.1 kJ mol⁻¹ reached in about 1 s (Table S6). Whereas for Widom insertion, this level of error is also reached in a similar amount of time and 0.1 kJ mol⁻¹ of RMSE is reached in about 86 s (Table S7). For free energy calculation, surface sampling is still 86 times faster to converge. If consider that the main target is the adsorption enthalpy, the Henry constant is calculated with little additional computational cost and with reasonable accuracy: we get two thermodynamic properties of interest for the price of one.

[\[add plot for xe kr widom and also free enthalpies\]](#)

The same goes for the determination of the surface area. We can adapt our algorithm to count the number of points of the sampling spheres that have a negative energy. These represent the points were a guest molecule can favorably interact, therefore when dividing it by the number of sampled points, we obtain a proportion of adsorbable area of the sphere. Summing this over all atoms, we obtain a total surface area. This implementation is summed up in Equation 3.7:

$$SA = \frac{1}{V} \sum_{a \in \text{cell}} \frac{N_{\text{accessible}}(a)}{N_{\text{total}}} 4\pi r(a)^2 \quad (3.7)$$

where V volume of the cell a atoms of the cell; $N_{\text{accessible}}(a)$ accessible points around the atom a ; N_{total} sampling points; $r(a)$ radius of the sampling sphere around the atom a . When we set $\lambda = 1$, we are sampling spheres that have a radius σ and it is equivalent as considering hard spheres all defined by σ (convention used by RASPA2 to calculate surface areas). If we compare simulation with $\lambda = 1$, we obtain surface areas that are very close to the one obtained by RASPA2 (see Figure S11 in SI). However, when we consider $\lambda = 1.6$, we lose the perfect accordance previously obtained and the points weakly correlated in log-scale (see Figure S10 in SI). The difference can be explained by the fact that the sphere size is larger, but the proportion of adsorbable points also changes. The relationship between these two adsorption surface areas is no trivial at all. Since the calculation of surface areas is quite cheap, this implementation would not be very useful, except for having a rough idea of the surface area.

[\[add plot for surface\]](#)

3.2.4 Conclusions and perspectives

In the present article, we described a novel algorithm for the high-speed calculation of adsorption enthalpy in nanoporous materials, that takes a unique approach to reduce the sampling necessary. This new algorithm is based on the core principle of dimensional reduction, from a volume problem to a surface one. The algorithm is proven to be significantly faster than the reference Widom insertion (random sampling of porous space). Moreover, the error associated is found to be of the order of 0.4 kJ mol⁻¹, tested throughout the entire CoRE MOF 2019 database, for xenon adsorption. Even when comparing to existing very fast sampling techniques such as

the Voronoi sampling, this surface sampling technique requires similar CPU time, combined with a better accuracy.

Based on these results, this algorithm has important potential for applications in the current computational analysis workflows of material databases, such as high-throughput screening studies. For instance, this algorithm can be used to get a fast approximation of the low-loading adsorption enthalpy of a molecule inside nanoporous materials. This cheap evaluation of the enthalpy can be used to screen out the structures with little affinity with the targeted adsorbate molecule. It can also be used as a thermodynamic descriptor for selectivity prediction in a machine learning model, as done by Simon et al.[14] The computational speed-up brought by this novel methodology can also enable the screening of materials databases at larger scale in the future.

We note, moreover, that the speed of our method resides in the sampling technique itself, rather than in the actual energy calculation. While we have benchmarked it in this work for a simple Lennard-Jones interaction potential, this sampling technique could equally be used to speed up samplings of space based on more expensive modeling strategies, including polarizable force fields or density functional theory (DFT) calculations. In the literature, the need for cheap *ab initio* grade thermodynamic properties is usually fulfilled by using an importance sampling method based on a classical force field.[216] In our method, the description of surface sampling is independent of any force field, and the sampling spheres can be defined according to kinetic radius, van der Waals radius or any other physically relevant distance. Consequently, given a definition of atomic radii, it is possible to define a surface on which to carry out other types of simulation such as neural network potential, DFT or any other force fields. Although the accuracy or relevance of such a sampling remains an open question, the approach will undeniably speed up the simulations. This could even be applied to calculate adsorption enthalpies while considering intrinsic structure flexibility,[159] a task whose main drawback is the high computation time required. Since surface sampling is hundred of time faster than standard methodologies, we could use hundreds of snapshots in a flexibility-aware calculation.

Finally, although the algorithm in its present form can already be applied in a wide range of applications, additional development work could allow us to generalize it to polyatomic adsorbates. For instance, we would need to work on a definition of the molecular radius for non-spherical adsorbates as well as working all the orientation conformation of the adsorbent. We could imagine making the distance to the surface depend on the orientation of the adsorbate or sample a band volume on the surface. Although the best implementation of the surface sampling for polyatomic adsorbates remains an open question, in theory it should be possible to apply it to more complex adsorbates than the spherical noble gas. This would add more complexity to the algorithm but would not change the fundamental speedup due to surface sampling, since these orientation moves are also performed in other standard methodologies. To improve even more the accuracy, we could test hybrid samplings with multiple sampling spheres, or a combination of Voronoi nodes and sampling spheres. Another idea could be to have fractions of sphere that are oriented toward the center of pore given by the Voronoi node. In theory, having a wider variety of sampling points can only improve the sampling. There are therefore multiple possible sampling techniques that could be built around the method

introduced herein. The code is made freely available on the group’s GitHub, where further development will be released.

3.2.5 Other databases

3.3 GRID ADSORPTION ENERGIES DESCRIPTORS (GRAED)

Inspired by our recent work on a faster way of calculating the low-pressure adsorption enthalpy and Henry’s constant,[16] we designed an approach based on symmetry-respecting grids. These were generated using the Gemmi project’s C++ library,[217].

3.3.1 Concepts

[\[Picture of the principles\]](#)

3.3.2 Implementation

algorithm implemented with the following steps: First, we loop over the framework atoms and the grid points around a sphere of radius $0.8 \times \sigma_{g-h}$, where σ_{g-h} is the distance at which the LJ potential energy between the guest atom g and the host atom is zero. The LJ potential energy between the guest molecule and the closes host atom is calculated and only the grid points with an energy lower than a predefined threshold (here set to 100 kJ mol^{-1}) are considered “unvisited” and will be recalculated in the following loop, the others are considered blocked by the framework and will be considered already “visited”. This first loop over the framework atoms aims at filtering out the grid points that are blocked by the framework, and we will refer to this preliminary filtering step as “blocking” in the Table 3.1. Then, a second loop over the “unvisited” grid points is performed – at each increment, if the point is “unvisited” we calculate the interaction energy between the guest and all the host atoms within the cutoff, then the symmetric images of this point are filled with the same energy value and are considered “visited” by the algorithm. This symmetry-aware grid exploration allows the algorithm to divide the time required by the average number symmetry images – this module will be referred to as “symmetry” in the Table 3.1. By combining both the “blocking” of the high energy grid points and the “symmetry” based calculation of the interaction energies, we built a “fast” version of the grid calculation algorithm that can compete with our previously developed rapid surface sampling method (RAESS).

To highlight the improvement in performance in this procedure: the average void fraction for a 1.2 \AA probe radius is equal to 0.16 and the average number of symmetric images is equal to 5.8 on the CoRE MOF 2019 database (most MOFs present symmetry operations). On average, the “blocking” procedure means that only $\sim 16\%$ of the grid points really need to be calculated. The “symmetry” procedure means only $\sim 17\%$ of points need to be considered, and the combination of both reduces the number of useful points to only 2.7% of the grid. This leads to a significant reduction in the CPU time of the calculation, as shown in Table 3.1.

From the energy values of this grid, we can now calculate many useful descriptors that are used in our final model. A fully detailed description of these descriptors as well as their labeling names are given in the Table S2 of the SI.

COMPARISON TO STANDARD METHODOLOGIES

[\[Figure compare widom\]](#)

Energy sampling method	Average CPU time (s)	RMSE on adsorption enthalpy (kJ mol^{-1})
Grid – naive – 0.1 Å	71.3	0.025
Grid – blocking – 0.1 Å	18.8	0.026
Grid – symmetry – 0.1 Å	16.8	0.024
Grid – fast – 0.1 Å	4.8	0.023
Grid – fast – 0.3 Å	0.16	0.22
RAESS[16]	0.34	0.34
Widom[187] (12k cycles)	150	0.01

Table 3.1 – Performance comparison of the new grid method to other standard techniques used to calculate the adsorption enthalpies. The RMSE is calculated by comparing to the values given by a 100k-steps Widom insertion considered as the ground truth. The associated calculations are performed on the Core MOF 2019 database with a single Intel Xeon Platinum 8168 core at 2.7 GHz.

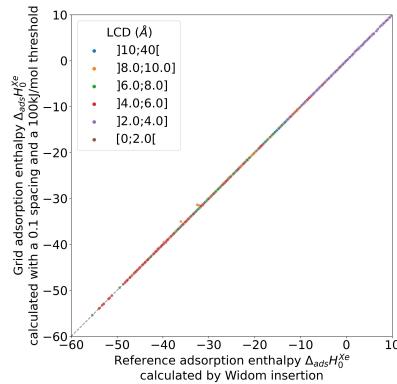


Figure 3.14 – perfect accordance except for issues of small difference of structure due to symmetry conversion

[Figure compare GCMC with averaging at 298K]

3.3.3 Energy-based descriptors

[Statistical building blocks]

[transition into ML models]

4

ADSORPTION PROPERTIES PREDICTION

4.1	Machine learning	87
4.1.1	What is machine learning	87
4.1.2	How to learn accurately	87
4.1.3	Tree-based models	87
4.2	Prediction of the selectivity	87
4.2.1	From infinite dilution to ambient pressure	87
4.3	Interpretation of the ML model	87



4.1 MACHINE LEARNING

4.1.1 What is machine learning

4.1.2 How to learn accurately

[cross validation, overfitting, hyperparameter optimization]

4.1.3 Tree-based models

random forest boosting eXtreme Gradient Boosting

4.2 PREDICTION OF THE SELECTIVITY

4.2.1 From infinite dilution to ambient pressure

4.3 INTERPRETATION OF THE ML MODEL

Origins of the selectivity drop

5

XENON AND KRYPTON TRANSPORT PROPERTIES

5.1	Current state of the art	89
5.1.1	Molecular dynamics	89
5.1.2	Transition state theory	89
5.2	ML modeling	89
5.3	Transport properties of xenon/krypton separation	90
5.3.1	Why studying diffusion for xenon krypton	90
5.3.2	Correlations	90
5.4	Fast diffusion calculation algorithm	90
5.4.1	Implementation in C++	90
5.4.2	Preliminary results	90
5.4.3	Visualization tool	90
5.4.4	ML model training.	90

5.1 CURRENT STATE OF THE ART

Experiment? [reprendre la review daglar]

5.1.1 Molecular dynamics

5.1.2 Transition state theory

[what is a transition state for diffusion?]

[how to detect TS]

Fast kinetic Monte Carlo tutrast[125]

5.2 ML MODELING

Results

5.3 TRANSPORT PROPERTIES OF XENON/KRYPTON SEPARATION

5.3.1 Why studying diffusion for xenon krypton [kinetic KAXQIL]

5.3.2 Correlations

5.4 FAST DIFFUSION CALCULATION ALGORITHM

5.4.1 Implementation in C++

5.4.2 Preliminary results

5.4.3 Visualization tool

[Take some examples for the vizualisation with comparison to the pore size and diffusion coefficient]

5.4.4 ML model training

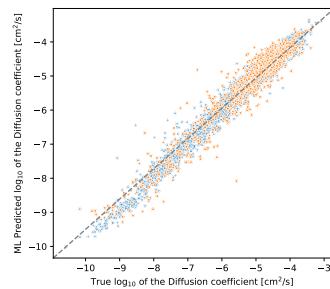


Figure 5.1

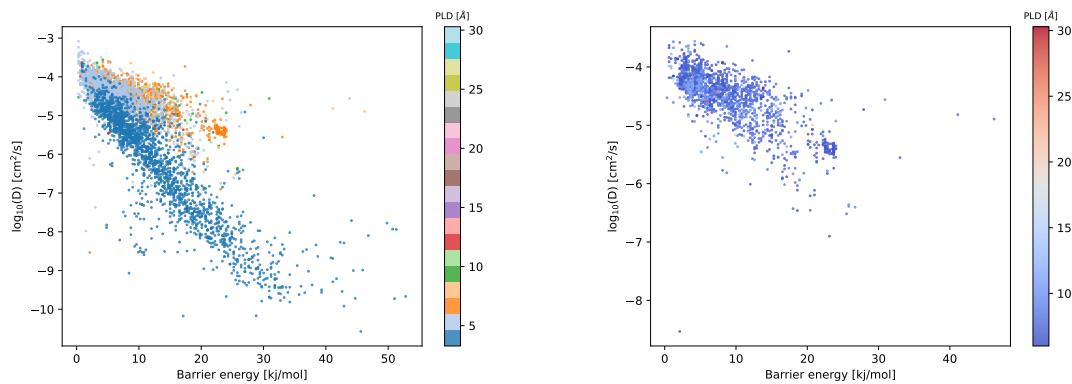


Figure 5.2

ML descriptors next steps

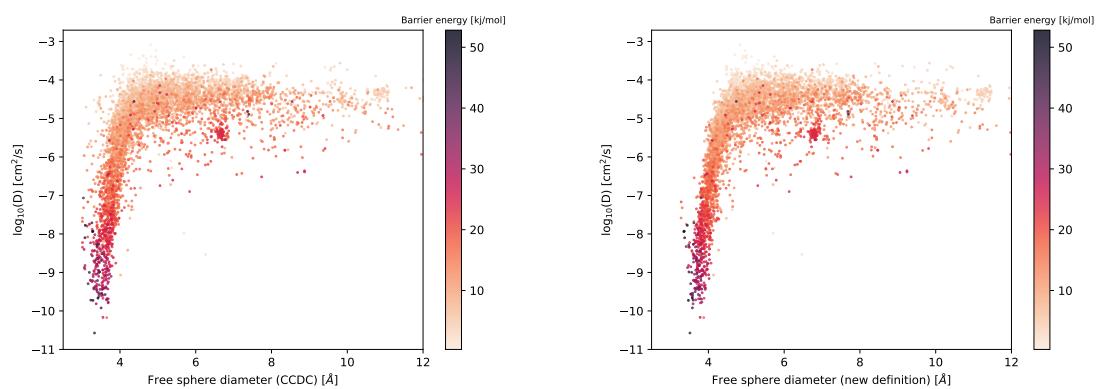


Figure 5.3

6

TOWARDS THE NEXT GENERATION OF SCREENINGS

6.1	Flexibility	93
6.1.1	Problem, literature.	93
6.1.2	Snapshot.	93
6.2	Noble gas polarisability	93
6.2.1	Problem, literature.	93
6.2.2	Perpectives.	93

6.1 FLEXIBILITY

Final screening step, easy integration into the workflow of current screenings

6.1.1 Problem, literature

6.1.2 Snapshot

6.2 NOBLE GAS POLARISABILITY

Xe/Kr difference of polarisability Open Metal Sites/polar groups [\[20220421_pres\]](#)

[Not the best material, but interesting discussion on open metal site effect] Tao et al.[218] looked at tuning (and improving) the selective adsorption of Xe over Kr by MOF open metal sites in the UTSA-74 framework structure.

6.2.1 Problem, literature

6.2.2 Perpectives

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

The work presented in this thesis is



This work opens perspectives for



LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

PEER-REVIEWED PAPERS

1. Emmanuel Ren and François-Xavier Coudert. “Thermodynamic exploration of xenon/krypton separation based on a high-throughput screening”. In: *Faraday Discussions* 231 (2021), pp. 201–223. [DOI: 10.1039/D1FD00024A](https://doi.org/10.1039/D1FD00024A).
2. Emmanuel Ren, Philippe Guilbaud, and François-Xavier Coudert. “High-throughput computational screening of nanoporous materials in targeted applications”. In: *Digital Discovery* 1.4 (2022), pp. 355–374. [DOI: 10.1039/D2DD00018K](https://doi.org/10.1039/D2DD00018K).
3. Emmanuel Ren and François-Xavier Coudert. “Rapid adsorption enthalpy surface sampling (RAESS) to characterize nanoporous materials”. In: *Chemical Science* 14.7 (2023), pp. 1797–1807. [DOI: 10.1039/D2SC05810C](https://doi.org/10.1039/D2SC05810C).

PREPRINT

4. Emmanuel Ren and François-Xavier Coudert. “Gas Separation Selectivity Prediction Based on Finely Designed Descriptors”. In: *ChemRxiv* (2023).

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RÉSUMÉ EN FRANÇAIS

Introduction 117



INTRODUCTION

[5 à 10 pages]

Les matériaux poreux sont des matériaux



RÉSUMÉ

Durant ma thèse, j'ai

MOTS CLÉS

simulation moléculaire, matériaux nanoporeux, criblage haut-débit, adsorption, apprentissage statistique

ABSTRACT

During my PhD, I

KEYWORDS

molecular simulation, nanoporous materials, high-throughput screening, adsorption, machine learning