Silicon(i) chemistry: the NHC-stabilised silicon(i) halides Si2X2(Idipp)2 (X = Br, I) and the disilicon(i)-iodido cation [Si2(I)(Idipp)2]⁺††

Marius I. Arz, Daniel Geiß, Martin Straßmann, Gregor Schnakenburg and Alexander C. Filippou*

An efficient method for the synthesis of the NHC-stabilised Si(i) halides Si2X2(Idipp)2 (2-X, X = Cl, Br, I; Idipp = C[N(dipp)CH2]2) was developed, which involves the oxidation of Si2(Idipp)2 (1) with 1,2-dihaloethanes. Halogenation of 1 is a diastereoselective reaction leading exclusively to a racemic mixture of the RR and SS enantiomers of 2-X. Compounds 2-Br and 2-I were characterised by single-crystal X-ray crystallography and multinuclear NMR spectroscopy, and their electronic structures were analysed by quantum chemical methods. Dynamic NMR spectroscopy unravelled a fluxional process of 2-Br and 2-I in solution, which involved a hindered rotation of the NHC groups about the Si–NHC bonds. Iodide abstraction from 2-Br by [Li(Et2O)2.5][B(C6F5)4] selectively afforded the disilicon(i) salt [Si2(I)(Idipp)2][B(C6F5)4] (3). X-ray crystallography and variable-temperature NMR spectroscopy of 3 in combination with quantum chemical calculations shed light on the ground-state geometric and electronic structure of the [Si2(I)(Idipp)2]⁺ ion, which features a Si=Si bond between a trigonal planar coordinated Siᵢ atom with a Si–I bond and a two-coordinate Siᵢ³ center carrying a lone pair of electrons. The dynamics of the [Si2(I)(Idipp)2]⁺ ion were studied in solution by variable-temperature NMR spectroscopy and they involve a topomerisation, which proceeds according to quantum theory via a disilaiodonium intermediate (π-bonded isomer) and exchanges the two heterotopic Si sites.

Introduction

The molecular chemistry of silicon has witnessed remarkable progress in recent years following the discovery that N-heterocyclic carbene (NHCs) are particularly suitable Lewis-bases for the thermodynamic and kinetic stabilisation of highly reactive, low-valent silicon species.¹ Appealing examples substantiating this development include the Si(0) compounds Si2[NHC]2 (NHC = C[N(dipp)CH2]2, dipp) and C[N(dipp)CH2]2 (Sidipp); dipp = C6H3-2,6-iPr2) and Si[bNHC] (bNHC = chelating bis(N-heterocyclic carbene),² the Si(1) chloride Si2Cl4(Idipp)2,³ the NHC-stabilised Si(1) compounds SiX2 (X = Cl–I),⁴ Si(X)R (X = Cl, Br, H; R = aryl, amino, silyl),⁵ Si(R)(SiR2) (R = C6H4-2,4,6-iPr3)⁶ and 1-silacyclopenta-2,4-dienylidenes SiC3R4 (R = Ph, NMe2)⁷ and the NHC-trapped silylumyldene cations [SiR2]⁺ (R = 1, aryl)⁸ and SiR³ ions.⁹ More recently, NHC-stabilised phosphosilylenides Si=PR (R = C6H4-2,4,6-iBu3)⁹ and disilavinylidenes Si=Si(R)R (R = C6H4-2,6-{CH(SiMe3)2}2-4-iBu) were also isolated, fortifying the binding capacity of NHCs.¹⁰ All these compounds offer new avenues of chemical exploration with potential applications in both molecular chemistry and materials science due to their functional versatility originating from the simultaneous presence of many reactive sites, such as the Si lone pairs, the silicon-halogen bonds or the displaceable NHC groups. In fact, the Si(1) halides SiX2(NHC) (X = Cl–I, NHC = Idipp and Sidipp) and SiCl(R)(NHC) (R = C6H4-2,6-TiP2, TiP = C6H4-2,4,6-iPr3; NHC = C[N(Me)CMe]2) were shown to be valuable starting materials, which paved the way to new classes of unsaturated silicon compounds, including silyldyne complexes, zwitterionic silylidyne complexes, metallosilylenes and metallosilanones.¹¹

In comparison, the chemistry of NHC-stabilised silicon(i) halides (Chart 1, B) has not been explored so far. This can probably be attributed to the severely limited access to this very reactive class of compounds, as revealed by the very low yield synthesis (6.1%) of the only presently known example Si2Cl4(Idipp)2 (2-Cl) upon the reduction of SiCl4(Idipp) with CeK.²¹ Compounds B can be viewed as bis(NHC) adducts of the disilynes SiR2 (A, Chart 1), the chemistry of which has flourished since the isolation of the first thermally stable compounds in 2004.¹² The NHC-stabilised Si(1) halides B bear as their amidinato (C, Chart 1)¹³ or (phosphino)enamido-
stabilised congeners (D, Chart 1), a reactive Si-Si single bond and a lone pair of electrons at each silicon atom, but contain additional halide and NHC substituents, which offer additional dimensions of reactivity. In the present work, an efficient synthesis of NHC-stabilised SiI halides SiX2(Idipp)2 (2-X, X = Cl, Br, I) is reported, facilitating the exploration of their reactivity. Moreover, iodide abstraction from 2-1 is demonstrated to provide access to an unprecedented Si(i) salt containing the NHC-trapped [Si2I]2⁺ cation.

Results and discussion

We presumed that halogenation of the Si–Si double bond of the disilicon(0) compound (Idipp)Si=Si(Idipp) (1) might be a suitable reaction for the synthesis of the target silicon(i) halides, analogous to the well-known olefin halogenation in carbon chemistry. The 1,2-dihaloethanes 1,2-C2H4X2 (X = Cl, Br, I) proved to be particularly suitable reagents to accomplish this transformation. In fact, the addition of a stock solution of 1,2-C2H4X2 to a dark red solution of 1 in THF or toluene at low temperature was accompanied by a rapid color change to red-orange and gas evolution (ethene), and selectively a temperature was reached that previously reported for 2-Cl (184 °C).6 However, in toluene solution, 2-Br starts to decompose at a much lower temperature (at 85 °C, ca. 10% decomposition within 2 h), and the decomposition leads to Idipp, SiBr2(Idipp) and an unknown toulene-insoluble solid (see Fig. S5 in the ESI†).

Compounds 2-Br and 2-I are the first molecular silicon(i) bromide and iodide to be reported and were comprehensively characterised by single-crystal X-ray crystallography, NMR spectroscopy and quantum chemical calculations.†

The molecular structures of the n-hexane semisolvates 2-Br-0.5(n-C6H14) and 2-I-0.5(n-C6H14) were determined by single-crystal X-ray diffraction (Fig. 1, Table 1 and Fig. S23 in the ESI†). All compounds 2-X (X = Cl-I) feature two stereogenic trigonal pyramidal silicon centers of the same configuration and display similar bonding parameters (Table 1). The halogen substituents of 2-X adopt a synclinal conformation and the sterically more demanding Idipp groups adopt an anti-periplanar conformation, as indicated by the X–Si–Si–X torsion angles (2-Cl: -46.5(1)°, 2-Br: -46.4(1)°, 2-I: 50.46(3)°) and C_{NHC}-Si–Si–C_{NHC} torsion angles (2-Cl: -162.9(3)°, 2-Br: 161.5(1)°, 2-I: -160.31(9)°), respectively (Fig. 1). The degree of silicon pyramidalisation (DP) of the SiI halides ranges from 57–64% and is considerably smaller than that of the SiI halides SiX2(Idipp) (DP = 70–78%) (Table 1). This suggests a lower s-character of the lone pair orbitals in 2-X compared to those in SiX2(Idipp), which was confirmed by comparative NBO analyses (see Tables S6 and S7 in the ESI†). Furthermore, these analyses indicate a higher s-character of the Si hybrid orbitals employed in the bonding to the NHC groups in 2-X, providing a rationale for the observed shortening of the Si–C_{NHC} bonds of 2-X versus those in SiX2(Idipp) (Table 1). These trends follow the predictions of Bent’s rule made for a replacement of one halogen atom in SiX2(Idipp) by the more electropositive substituent SiX(Idipp). The Si–Si bond lengths of 2-X (2-Cl: 2.393(3) Å, 2-Br: 2.383(1) Å, 2-I: 2.3909(9) Å) are slightly longer than that in z-Si (2.352 Å) and lie in between those of the amidinito-substituted SiI compounds C (2.413(2) Å and 2.489(2) Å) and the (phosphino) enamido containing compound D (2.331(1) Å (Chart 1).14
Remarkably, a plot of the Si–Si bond length of the SiI compounds B, C and D versus the sum of the bond angles at silicon revealed a good linear correlation, with the Si–Si bond length decreasing upon an increase in the sum of the bond angles (decreasing pyramidalisation) at the silicon atoms (see Fig. S25 in the ESI†).

In the 29Si[1H] NMR spectra in C6D6, the SiI halides display a characteristic singlet signal (2-Cl: δ = 38.4 ppm, 2-Br: δ = 34.9 ppm, 2-I: δ = 18.7 ppm), which appears at a lower field than that of the corresponding Si(II) halides SiX2(Idipp) (X = Cl: δ = 19.2 ppm, Br: δ = 10.9 ppm, I: δ = 9.7 ppm) (Table 1).† In both series of compounds, the 29Si NMR signals shift progressively to a higher field upon Cl → Br → I substitution, and the same trend is observed for the 13C NMR signals of the Si-bonded CNHC atoms (Table 1). The 1H and 13C[1H] NMR spectra of 2-Br and 2-I display a single set of signals for the homotopic Idipp groups originating from the time-averaged C2-symmetry of the BR/SS stereoisomers (the C2 axis perpendicularly intersects the Si–Si bond).† The peripheral N-bonded dipp substituents are locked in an orthogonal conformation versus the N-heterocyclic rings (Fig. 1), which, in combination with the presence of stereogenic Si centers, gives rise to two different sets of 1H/13C NMR signals for the ortho- and meta-positioned groups, respectively (see Fig. S1, S2, S6 and S8 in the ESI†). Whereas all the 1H (300.1 MHz) and 13C (75.47 MHz) NMR signals of 2-Br were sharp at 298 K, several signals of 2-I were broadened under the same conditions, suggesting a dynamic behavior (see Fig. S6–S8 in the ESI†). Variable-temperature 1H NMR spectroscopy of 2-Br and 2-I in the temperature range 203–333 K revealed a hindered rotation of the NHC groups about the Si–CNHC bonds, which leads to a duplication of the signals of the dipp substituents and the N-heterocyclic C4,5-H ring protons in the slow-exchange limit spectra (see Fig. S4 and S10 in the ESI†). Analysis of the full coalescence behavior of the two singlet signals observed for the N-heterocyclic C4,5-H ring protons in the temperature range 203–333 K (see Fig. S4 and S10 in the ESI†) allowed an estimation of the standard Gibbs energy of activation for the hindered Si–CNHC rotation [2-Br: ΔG° = 46 kJ mol−1, Tc (coalescence temperature) = 228 K; 2-I: ΔG° = 51 kJ mol−1, Tc = 248 K].†

Compounds 2-X contain many reactive sites for further functionalisation with the most appealing ones being the displacable halide and Idipp groups, which are not available in the silicon(II) congeners C and D (Chart 1). First reactivity studies were carried out focusing on the abstraction of the halide groups. In fact, the addition of one equivalent of [Li(Et2O)2.5][B(C6F5)4] to a solution of 2-I in fluorobenzene at ambient temperature was accompanied by a colour change from bright to dark red and precipitation of LiI. Iodide abstraction from 2-I selectively afforded the disilicon(I) salt [Si2(I)(Idipp)2][B(C6F5)4] (3), as evidenced by NMR spectroscopy of the crude reaction mixture (Scheme 2). The salt was isolated after a work-up and...
**Table 1** Comparison of selected bonding and NMR spectroscopic data of 1, 2-X and SiX$_2$(L) (X = Cl, Br, I; L = Idipp) (bond lengths [Å], bond angles [°], sums of angles at silicon ($\Sigma$) [°], degrees of pyramidalisation (DP) [°], and chemical shifts ($\delta$) (ppm)).

<table>
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<th></th>
<th>1$^a$</th>
<th>2-Cl$^b$</th>
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<th>2-I</th>
<th>SiCl$_2$(L)$^b$</th>
<th>SiBr$_2$(L)$^c$</th>
<th>SiI$_2$(L)$^d$</th>
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<td>Si-Si</td>
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<td>2.385(1)</td>
<td>2.3909(9)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1.939(6)</td>
<td>1.940(3)</td>
<td>1.943(2)</td>
<td>1.985(4)</td>
<td>1.989(3)</td>
<td>1.984(7)$^f$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>2.3602(8)</td>
<td>2.6036(6)</td>
<td>2.159(2)</td>
<td>2.3607(8)</td>
<td>2.573(6)$^f$</td>
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<tr>
<td>C$_{\text{NHC}}$-Si-Si</td>
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<td>98.8(2)</td>
<td>97.87(9)</td>
<td>97.04(7)</td>
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<td>$\Sigma$Si</td>
<td></td>
<td>108.8(3)$^f$</td>
<td>103.91(8)</td>
<td>102.9(7)</td>
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<td>102.9(7)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>108.4(3)$^f$</td>
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<td>103.91(8)</td>
<td>102.9(7)</td>
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<td>62</td>
<td>78</td>
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<td>18.7</td>
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<td>10.9</td>
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<td>$\delta$(C$_{\text{NHC}}$)$^f$</td>
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<td>170.0</td>
<td>174.4</td>
<td>168.5</td>
<td>164.5</td>
<td>158.4</td>
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$^a$ The data were obtained from ref. 2a. $^b$ The data were obtained from ref. 2a. $^c$ The data were obtained from ref. 2b. $^d$ The data were obtained from ref. 2d. $^e$ The data were obtained from ref. 4a. $^f$ The data were obtained from ref. 4b. $^g$ The data were obtained from ref. 4c. $^h$ The data were obtained from ref. 4d. $^i$ The data were obtained from ref. 4e.

The solid-state structure of 3-(C$_6$H$_5$F) was determined by single-crystal X-ray diffraction and it is composed of well separated [Si$_2$(I)(Idipp)$_2$]$^+$ ions.† The closest Si···F interionic contacts (6.371(3) Å) are significantly longer than the sum of the van der Waals radii of silicon and fluorine (3.6 Å). The cations [Si$_2$(I)(Idipp)$_2$]$^+$ feature a trigonal planar coordinated Si1 atom (sum of the bond angles at Si1 = 359.7(1)°) and a two-coordinate Si2 atom with V-shaped geometry (Fig. 2). The two silicon atoms form a planar core with the end-on bonded iodine atom and the two C$_{\text{Idipp}}$ atoms (C1 and C28). The Si-Si bond of 3-(C$_6$H$_5$F) is considerably shorter (2.1739(9) Å) than the Si-Si single bond of 2-I (2.3909(9) Å), and also shorter than the Si-Si double bond of 1 (2.2291(1) Å), but lies in the reported range of Si=Si bond lengths. The presence of a Si-Si double bond was further confirmed by the electronic structure analysis of [Si$_2$(I)(Idipp)$_2$]$^+$ (vide infra). The bulky NHC groups are trans-crystallisation from a fluorobenzene/n-hexane mixture as dark red crystals of the fluorobenzene monosolvate (3-(C$_6$H$_5$F)$_2$) in 62% yield, and was comprehensively characterised.†

Compound 3-(C$_6$H$_5$F) is an extremely air-sensitive solid, which is instantly degraded by air to a colourless powder. It is stable in THF- $d_8$ solution for several days under strict exclusion of air, and decomposes upon heating in a sealed glass capillary tube under vacuum at 208 °C.

The solid-state structure of 3-(C$_6$H$_5$F) in the single crystal. Thermal ellipsoids represent 30% of the electron probability at 123(2) K. Hydrogen atoms are omitted for clarity. Selected bond lengths [Å], bond angles [°] and torsion angles [°]: C1–Si1 1.901(12), Si1–I1 2.4654(7), Si1–Si2 2.1739(9), Si2–C28 1.93(12); C1–Si1–1104.56(7), C1–Si1–Si2 112.83(7), I1–Si1–Si2 142.27(3), Si1–Si2–C28 96.61(7), C1–Si1–Si2–C28 –178.5(1), I1–Si1–Si2–C28 –6.7(1).

![Scheme 2](Image)

**Scheme 2** Synthesis of the disilicon(I) iodo salt 3 by iodide abstraction from 2-I. Formal charges are not included for simplicity.
Table 2 Comparison of selected bonding parameters of the cations [NHC][R]Si=Si(NHC)+ (NHC = C(N(dipp)CH2)2 (Idipp)), the NHC-stabilised disilavinyldienes R2R3Si=Si(NHC) (NHC = C[N(dipp)CH2]2 (Idipp)), the neutral NHC-stabilised disilavinyldienes R2R3Si=Si(NHC) (NHC = C[N(dipp)CH2]2 (Idipp)); R2 = Br, R3 = C6H5-2,6-(CH(SiMe3)2)2-4-Bu (Tbb), the NHC-stabilised disilenes (NHC)R2Si=SiR3 (NHC = C[N(Me)CMe2]2, R2 = SiPr(2-CH(SiMe3)2)2) and the disilenide anions [R2R5Si=SiR4] (NHC = C[N(Me)CMe2]2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>d(Si–Si) [Å]</th>
<th>∠Si–Si–Si [°]</th>
<th>Ref.</th>
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<tr>
<td>2.1739(9)</td>
<td>96.61(7)</td>
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<td>2.1873(8)</td>
<td>95.34(6)</td>
<td>27</td>
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<td>2.1909(8)</td>
<td>95.13(6)</td>
<td>27</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.167(2)</td>
<td>96.7(1)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1989(6)</td>
<td>120.35(2)</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2034(9)</td>
<td>102.69(3)</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The angle at the two-coordinate Si atom is quite narrow ([Si1–Si2–C28 = 96.61(7)°]) and compares well with those observed in 1 (Si–Si–C6H5 = 93.37(5)°) and the NHC-stabilised phosphasilenylidene (Idipp)Si=Si(Pr) (R = C6H5-2,4,6-Bu3P; Si–Si–C6H5 = 96.90(6)°). The rational for the narrow angle at Si2 is provided by the NBO analysis of [Si2I(II)Idipp]+, which indicates the presence of a sterically active lone-pair in an orbital of high s-character (77%) and Si2 hybrid orbitals of high p-character employed for the σ-bonding to the Si atom and the NHC group (87 and 89%, respectively, see Table 4). The Si1–I bond (2.4654(7) Å) compares well with that of the iodotriaryldisilene Tipp[I]=Si···TiPp2 (2.4520(7) Å, Tipp = C6H5-2,4,6-Pr3), but is considerably shorter than the Si-I bond lengths of 2-I (Si1–I: 2.6036(6) Å; Si2–I2: 2.5919(6) Å) (Table 1). This trend can be rationalised according to comparative NBO analyses of 3 and 2-I with the increased s-character of the Si hybrid orbital employed in the Si–I bond of 3 (20%) compared to that in 2-I (4%), and this is also reflected in the Si–I Wiberg bond indexes (3: WBI (Si1–I) = 0.89; 2-I: WBI (Si–I) = 0.78) (see Table 4 and Table S8 in the ESI†). The Si–C-NHC bond lengths of 3 (C6H5F) (1.901(2) and 1.931(2) Å) have similar values to those of 2-I (1.943(2) Å and 1.939(2) Å) and 1 (1.927(2) Å) (Table 1).²⁸

Notably, a comparison of [Si2I(II)Idipp]3+ with the related cations [Si2I(H)(Idipp)]3+ and [Si2I(Me)(Idipp)]3+, the NHC-stabilised disilavinyldienes, the NHC-stabilised disilenes and the disilenide anions (Fig. 3) reveals a similar electronic structure of these molecules leading to common structural features, such as a planar core, similar Si=Si bond lengths and similar bond angles at the two-coordinate Si atom (Table 2).²⁰,²⁷,²⁹

Variable-temperature ¹H, ²⁹Si and ¹³C NMR studies of 3 (C6H5F) in THF-d₈ revealed an interesting dynamic process leading to an exchange of the heterotopic Si sites. The degenerate isomerisation (topomerisation)²⁸ is suggested by quantum chemical calculations to proceed via a NHC-stabilised disiladiionium ion (Scheme 3).³¹

Thus, two well separated ²⁹Si NMR signals at δ = −26.4 ppm and +75.3 ppm are observed in the slow exchange limit ²⁹Si[¹H] NMR spectrum of 3 (C6H5F) at 203 K (Fig. 4, right), which are assigned by B97-D3/IGLOIII/ZORA-def2-TZVP (iodine atom)/ZORA/COSMO(THF) calculations to the three-coordinate, I-bonded silicon (Si1) and the two-coordinate silicon (Si2) nuclei, respectively.²² In comparison, no ²⁹Si NMR signals could be detected at 298 K even after a long accumulation time (intermediate time regime) (Fig. 4, right). Similarly, the slow-exchange limit ¹H NMR spectrum of 3 (C6H5F) at 203 K displays a double set of resonance signals for the chemically different Idipp groups (see Fig. S11 and S12 in the ESI†). Most distinctive are the two singlet signals for the N-heterocyclic C₅₋₅-H ring protons, which, upon increasing temperature coalesce at Tc = 235 K, and then merge into one sharp signal in the fast-exchange limit ¹H NMR spectrum at 298 K (see Fig. 4, left and
Fig. S20 in the ESIf). Likewise, the $^{13}$C($^1$H) NMR spectrum of $3\cdot(C_6H_5F)$ at 203 K shows a double set of signals for the inequivalent Idipp groups (for example, two singlets for the Si-bonded C$_{NHC}$ nuclei at $\delta$ = 153.6 and 172.2 ppm), which merge into one set of signals at 298 K (see Fig. S14–S17 in the ESIf). The number and relative intensity of the signals in the slow-exchange limit $^1$H and $^{13}$C($^1$H) NMR spectra of $3\cdot(C_6H_5F)$ are compatible with the results of the single-crystal X-ray diffraction and show an averaged C$_s$-symmetric structure of the cation [Si$_2$(I)(Idipp)$_2$]$^+$ with fast rotating NHC substituents about the respective Si–C$_{NHC}$ bonds.$^{34}$

The rate constants of the dynamic process were determined by full line-shape analyses of the signals of the N-heterocyclic C$_{4,5}$H$_n$ ring protons in the temperature range of 203–263 K (Fig. 4, left and Fig. S20 in the ESIf). An Eyring plot of ln($k/T$) against $1/T$ ($k$ = rate constant, $T$ = temperature) afforded a linear relationship (see Section 3 in the ESIf). The activation parameters of the dynamic process were obtained from the slope and the intercept of the corresponding regression line ($R^2$ = 0.9966) and were found to be $\Delta H^\ddagger$ = 47.3 (±0.7) kJ mol$^{-1}$, $\Delta S^\ddagger$ = 1.39 (±3.0) J K$^{-1}$ mol$^{-1}$ and $\Delta G^\ddagger$ ($T_c$ = 235 K) = 47.0 (±1.4) kJ mol$^{-1}$.$^{15}$

The potential energy hypersurface (PES) of the cation [Si$_2$(I)(Idipp)$_2$]$^+$ was studied by quantum chemical calculations at the B97-D/3 level of theory$^{17}$ in order to analyse the isomerisation process of $3\cdot(C_6H_5F)$ observed in solution. Geometry optimization of [Si$_2$(I)(Idipp)$_2$]$^+$ afforded a “σ-bonded” minimum structure ($3_{calc}$) with an excellent agreement between the calculated and the experimental bond lengths obtained for $3\cdot(C_6H_5F)$ by single-crystal X-ray crystallography (Fig. 2 and Table 3).

Furthermore, a “π-bonded” $C_2$-symmetric minimum structure ($3'_{calc}$) was located on the PES, which is less stable by 18.5 kJ mol$^{-1}$ than the “σ-bonded” isomer of [Si$_2$(I)(Idipp)$_2$]$^+$ ($3_{calc}$) (Fig. 5). The two minimum structures are connected via a transition state ($3''_{calc}$), which lies at an energy 37.6 kJ mol$^{-1}$ higher than the overall minimum structure $3_{calc}$ (Fig. 5). The transition state has an imaginary frequency of $-92$ cm$^{-1}$, and connects the two minimum structures via a rocking vibrational mode of the iodine atom. The calculated barrier of 37.6 kJ mol$^{-1}$ compares acceptably well with that obtained from the variable-temperature NMR studies (vide supra). The most striking bonding parameters of $3'_{calc}$ are the elongated Si–Si single bond (2.463 Å), which is considerably longer than the Si–Si bond of $3_{calc}$ (2.171 Å), as well as the Si–I bonds (2.696 Å), which are longer than that of $3'_{calc}$ (2.502 Å). These bonding parameters suggest that $3'_{calc}$ can be better described as a NHC-stabilized disilaiodonium ion$^{14}$ rather than a Si$_2$(Idipp)$_2$ (1) π-complex of I$. Notably, the structure of $3'_{calc}$ is reminiscent of those of the symmetrical 1,2-bridged halonium ions, which have been extensively studied in organic chemistry.$^{35}$

A comparison of the frontier Kohn–Sham orbitals of the ion [Si$_2$(I)(Idipp)$_2$]$^+$ with those of the NHC-stabilized disilavinyldiene.

Table 3 Comparison of selected experimental bond lengths, bond angles and dihedral angles of $3\cdot(C_6H_5F)$ with the calculated (B97-D/3) $^{12}$ bond lengths and angles of $3'_{calc}$. $^{3TS}_{calc}$ and $^{3''}_{calc}$

<table>
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<th>$\delta$-Bonded</th>
<th>C1–Si–C2–C8 $^\beta$</th>
<th>Si1–Si2 $^\beta$</th>
<th>C1–Si1–Si2</th>
<th>I–Si1–Si2</th>
<th>$\varphi_{NHC1}^\gamma$</th>
<th>$\varphi_{NHC2}^\gamma$</th>
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<td>$^{3TS}_{calc}$</td>
<td>2.1739(9)</td>
<td>1.901(2)</td>
<td>1.931(2)</td>
<td>2.4654(7)</td>
<td>112.83(7)</td>
<td>112.27(7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$^{3''}_{calc}$</td>
<td>2.366</td>
<td>1.950</td>
<td>1.936</td>
<td>2.618</td>
<td>95.39</td>
<td>97.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$^{3}_{calc}$</td>
<td>2.463</td>
<td>1.977</td>
<td>1.975</td>
<td>2.696</td>
<td>101.49</td>
<td>98.24$^b$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$^a$ The dihedral angles $\varphi_{NHC1}$ and $\varphi_{NHC2}$ are the respective angles between the least-square plane of the atoms C1, Si1, Si2 and C28 and the respective NHC central ring planes.$^{8}$ The corresponding angles C28–Si2–I and I–Si2–C28 are 76.12° and 49.48° ($^{3TS}_{calc}$) and 98.24° and 62.84° ($^{3''}_{calc}$).
Fig. 5  Schematic Gibbs energy profile \( (T = 298 \text{ K}) \) for the degenerate isomerisation of the cation \([\text{Si}_2(\text{I})(\text{dipp})_2]^+\), including the optimized minimum structures \(3_{\text{calc}}\) and \(3'_{\text{calc}}\) and the transition state \(3_{\text{TS,calc}}\) with selected bonding parameters. The N-bonded dipp substituents are omitted for clarity and only one half of the symmetric energy profile is depicted.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{d}_{\text{Si-Si}} &= 2.171 \text{ Å} \\
\text{d}_{\text{Si-I}} &= 2.502 \text{ Å} \\
\text{d}_{\text{Si-Br}} &= 2.366 \text{ Å} \\
\text{d}_{\text{Si-I}} &= 2.618 \text{ Å} \\
\text{d}_{\text{Si-Br}} &= 3.440 \text{ Å} \\
\end{align*}
\]

\(3_{\text{calc}}\):
Fig. 6  Selected Kohn–Sham orbitals (B97-D3/I) of \(3_{\text{calc}}\) (top) and \((Z)-(\text{SIdipp})\text{Si}=\text{Si}(\text{Br})\text{R}\) (bottom, \(R = \text{C}_6\text{H}_2-2,6\{\text{CH(SiMe}_3\}_2\}^{-}4\text{-tBu}\)) and their corresponding energy eigenvalues. Isosurface value: 0.05 \text{ e bohr}^{-3}. The LUMO of \(3_{\text{calc}}\) is a symmetrical combination of a \(\pi^*\) NHC and \(\sigma^*\) Si–I orbital, whereas the LUMO of \((Z)-(\text{SIdipp})\text{Si}=\text{Si}(\text{Br})\text{R}\) is a \(\pi^*\) NHC orbital.
Si=Si, Si–C\textsubscript{NHC}, and Si–I bonds (Table 4). For example, the Si–Si σ-bond NBO is occupied by 1.90 electrons and the Si–Si π-bond NBO is occupied by 1.89 electrons. Whereas the Si=Si σ-bond is slightly polarised towards the Si1 atom and is formed from the overlap of a Si1 natural hybrid orbital (NHO) with high s-character (59%) and a Si2 NHO with high p-character (87%), the Si–Si π-bond NBO is less polarised and is formed from pure Si p-orbitals. The moderate polarisation of the Si=Si bond of \(\text{Si}_2\) and the high occupancies of its NBO lead to a high Wiberg bond index (WBI) of 1.81, which is twice as large as the WBI of the Si–Si single bond of \(\text{Si}_2\) (0.89) and \(\text{Si}_2\) (0.96). These findings verify the presence of a Si=Si bond in the “σ-bonded” isomer \(\text{Si}_2\) and a Si–Si single bond in the “π-bonded” isomer \(\text{Si}_2\) or \(\text{Si}_2\), and are further confirmed by the NRT Si–Si bond orders, which, in the case of \(\text{Si}_2\), is twice as large (NRT-BO = 1.95, Table 4) as that of \(\text{Si}_2\) (0.95) or \(\text{Si}_2\) (0.93) (see Tables S8 and S10 in the ESI†). In the “π-bonded” isomer \(\text{Si}_2\), the two-coordinate silicon atom (Si2) carries a lone pair of electrons in an NHO with high s-character (77%, Table 4), as was found for the NHC-stabilised disilavilinylidene.39 In comparison, both Si atoms in the “σ-bonded” isomer \(\text{Si}_2\) carry a lone pair of electrons in NHO orbitals with high s-character (79%, see Table S10 in the ESI†), providing additional evidence for the different structures of the “σ-bonded” and “π-bonded” isomers of \(\text{Si}_2\) or \(\text{Si}_2\).

Finally, a natural population analysis of \(\text{Si}_2\) indicates a considerable charge flow from the NHC to the disilaaluminium ion \(\text{Si}_2\), as evidenced by the overall NPA charges of the NHCs (SiI-bonded: \(q(\sum\text{NHC}) = 0.41\); Si2-bonded: \(q(\sum\text{NHC}) = 0.28\) (Table 4).

**Conclusions**

An efficient method for the synthesis of silicon(i) halides \(\text{Si}_2\) (2-X, \(X = \text{Cl}, \text{Br}, \text{I}\)) was developed, which involved a diastereoselective halogenation of \(\text{Si}_2\) (1) with 1,2-dihaloethanes. This allowed the isolation of the first silicon(i) bromide (2-Br) and silicon(i) iodide (2-I) in high yield, enabling first reactivity studies of 2-I. The geometric and electronic structures of 2-Br and 2-I were comprehensively studied by experimental and theoretical methods. Iodide abstraction from 2-I selectively afforded the unprecedented disilicon(i) iodido salt \(\text{[Si}_2\text{I}(\text{Idipp})_2]_\text{2}^-\text{[B}(\text{C}_6\text{F}_5)_2\text{I}]\) (3), the geometric and electronic structure of which is isolobal to that of a NHC-stabilised disilavilinylidene recently reported by our group. The topomerisation of the cation \(\text{[Si}_2\text{I}(\text{Idipp})_2]_\text{2}^-\text{[B}(\text{C}_6\text{F}_5)_2\text{I}]\), leading to an exchange of the two heterotopic Si sites, was studied by variable-temperature NMR spectroscopy and the underlying dynamic process was analysed by quantum chemical calculations. The calculations suggest the intermediate formation of a \(\text{C}_2\)-symmetric π-bonded isomer with homotopic Si sites reminiscent of the symmetrical 1,2-bridged halonium ions in organic chemistry. The present results corroborate the ability of N-heterocyclic carbenes to stabilise low-valent main-group element centers with unusual bonding features. Further studies addressing the reactivity of the NHC-stabilised Si(i) halides 2-X and the SiI salt 3 are currently underway.

**Acknowledgements**

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**Notes and references**


17 The following abbreviations were used to designate the levels of theory used for the quantum chemical calculations: B97-D3/I = B97-D3/def2-TZVP(Si, N and carbene C atoms)/def2-TZVP-ZORA(iodine atom)/def2-SVP(peripheral C atoms and all H atoms)/RIJCOSX/COSMO(THF); B97-D3/I = B97-D3/def2-TZVP(Si, N and carbene C atoms)/def2-SVP(peripheral C atoms and all H atoms)/RIJCOSX/COSMO(THF).


19 Remarkably, both diastereomers were reported for the isolobal 1,2-dihalodiphosphanes P2X2R2 depending on the substituents. For example, P2I2Mes2 (Mes = C6H2-2,4,6-Me3) adopts a meso form in the solid state, whereas for P2I2(n2-1,3-C3Me3)2 the (R,R) stereoisomer was found: (a) D. C. Pesta and P. P. Power, Inorg. Chem., 1991, 30, 528; (b) H.-G. Stammler, P. Jutzi, B. Neumann and A. Baceiredo, Angew. Chem., 1995, 123, 1139.

20 A degree of pyramidisation (DP) value of 0% describes a trigonal planar coordination of the silicon atom with the sum of the bond angles equal to 360°. A DP value of 100% corresponds to a trigonal pyramidal coordination of the silicon atom with the sum of the bond angles equal to 360°.


24 Si=Si bond lengths of disilenes have been reported to range from 2.118(1)–2.2700(5) Å: T. Iwamoto and S. Ishida, Struct. Bonding, 2014, 156, 125.
The dihedral angles between the least-square planes of the NHC central rings and the C1–Si1–Si2–C28 plane are 96.69(7)° and 95.78(7)°, respectively.


Only one set of signals was observed for the ortho- and meta-positioned nuclei of the N-bonded dipp substituents of each Idipp group. In the case of frozen Si–CNHC rotations, instead, a double set of signals would be expected, given the fixed orthogonal orientation of dipp substituents versus the respective N-heterocyclic rings and the orthogonal orientation of the N-heterocyclic rings versus the planar core of the cation [Si2(I)(Idipp)2]+.

Disilahalonium ions [Si2X]+ (X = F, Cl) have been observed by mass spectrometry. However, their structures are not currently known. (a) W. D. Reents, Jr., A. M. Mujse, V. E. Bondybey and M. L. Mandich, *J. Chem. Phys.*, 1987, 86, 5568; (b) D. Schröder and H. Schwarz, *Russ. Chem. Bull.*, 2001, 50, 2087.