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Lim et al.

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(54) **SEMICONDUCTOR DEVICES INCLUDING STACK STRUCTURE HAVING GATE REGION AND INSULATING REGION**

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G11C 5/02 (2006.01)
H01L 29/788 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.**
CPC ***H10B 41/27*** (2023.02); ***G11C 5/025*** (2013.01); ***H01L 29/788*** (2013.01)

(58) **Field of Classification Search**
CPC H01L 27/11556; H01L 29/788; H01L 27/11582; H01L 27/11575;
(Continued)

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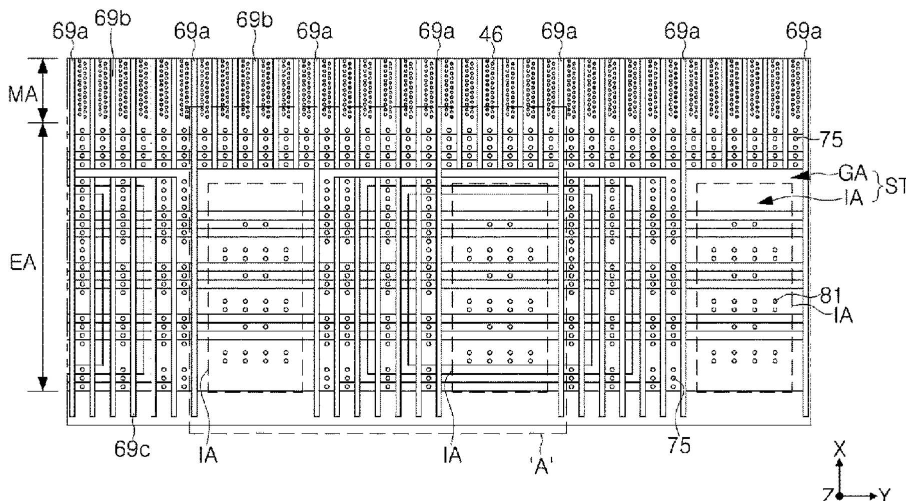
(57) **ABSTRACT**

A semiconductor device includes a lower structure and a stack structure that extends into a connection region on the lower structure, where the stack structure includes gate pads and mold pads. The mold pads include intermediate mold pads that include first intermediate mold pads and a second intermediate mold pad between a pair of the first intermediate mold pads, each of the first intermediate mold pads has a first length in a first direction, the second intermediate mold pad has a second length in the first direction, greater than the first length, one of the intermediate mold pads includes a mold pad portion and an insulating protrusion portion on the mold pad portion, one of the first intermediate mold pads includes the mold pad portion and the insulating protrusion portion, and a central region of the second intermediate mold pad does not include the insulating protrusion portion.

20 Claims, 28 Drawing Sheets



(58) **Field of Classification Search**
CPC H01L 27/11517; H01L 27/11521; H01L 27/11551; H01L 21/0217; H01L 21/76829; H01L 21/76837; H01L 21/76841; H01L 21/8234; H01L 29/66825; G11C 5/025; H10B 41/27; H10B 43/27; H10B 43/50; H10B 41/00; H10B 41/20; H10B 41/30
See application file for complete search history.

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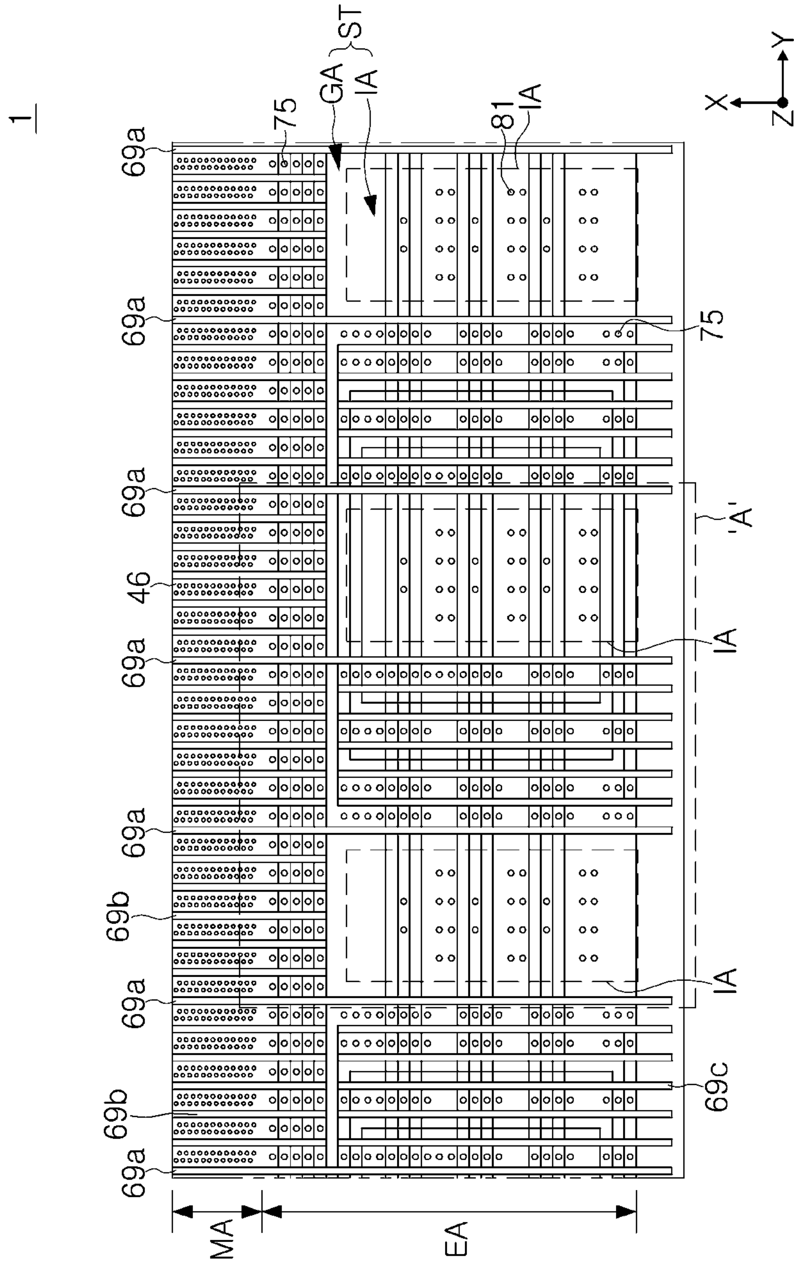


FIG. 1

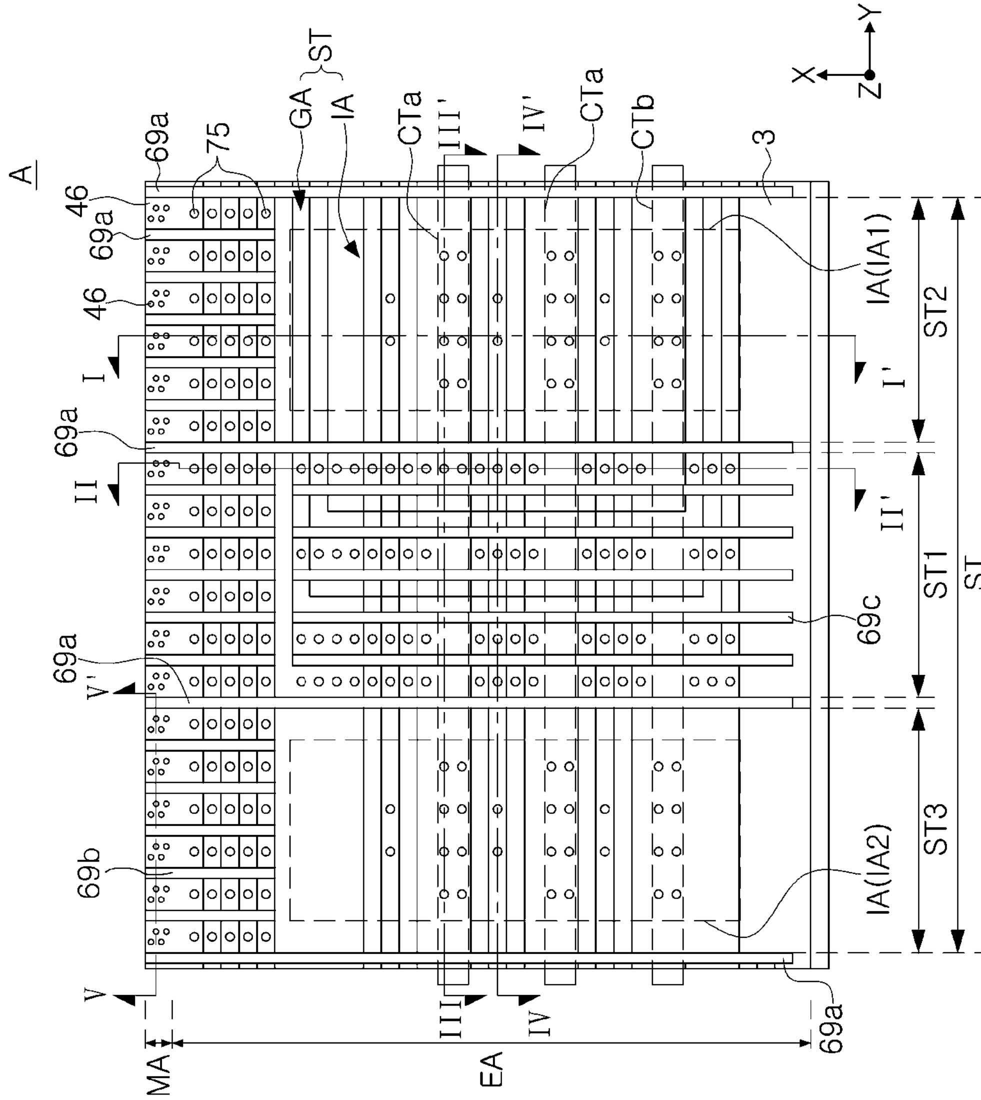


FIG. 2

FIG. 3

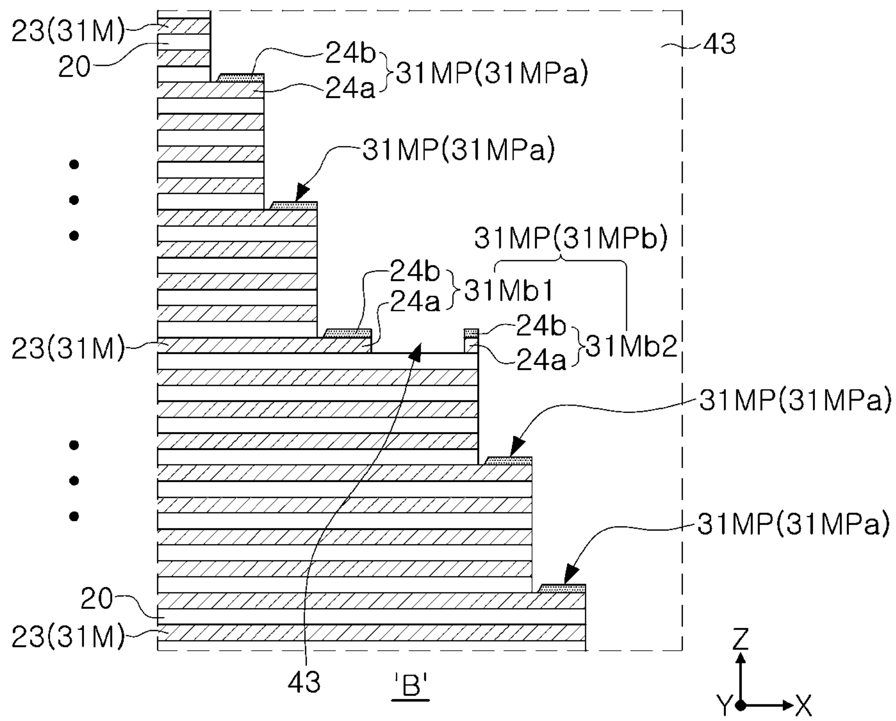


FIG. 4

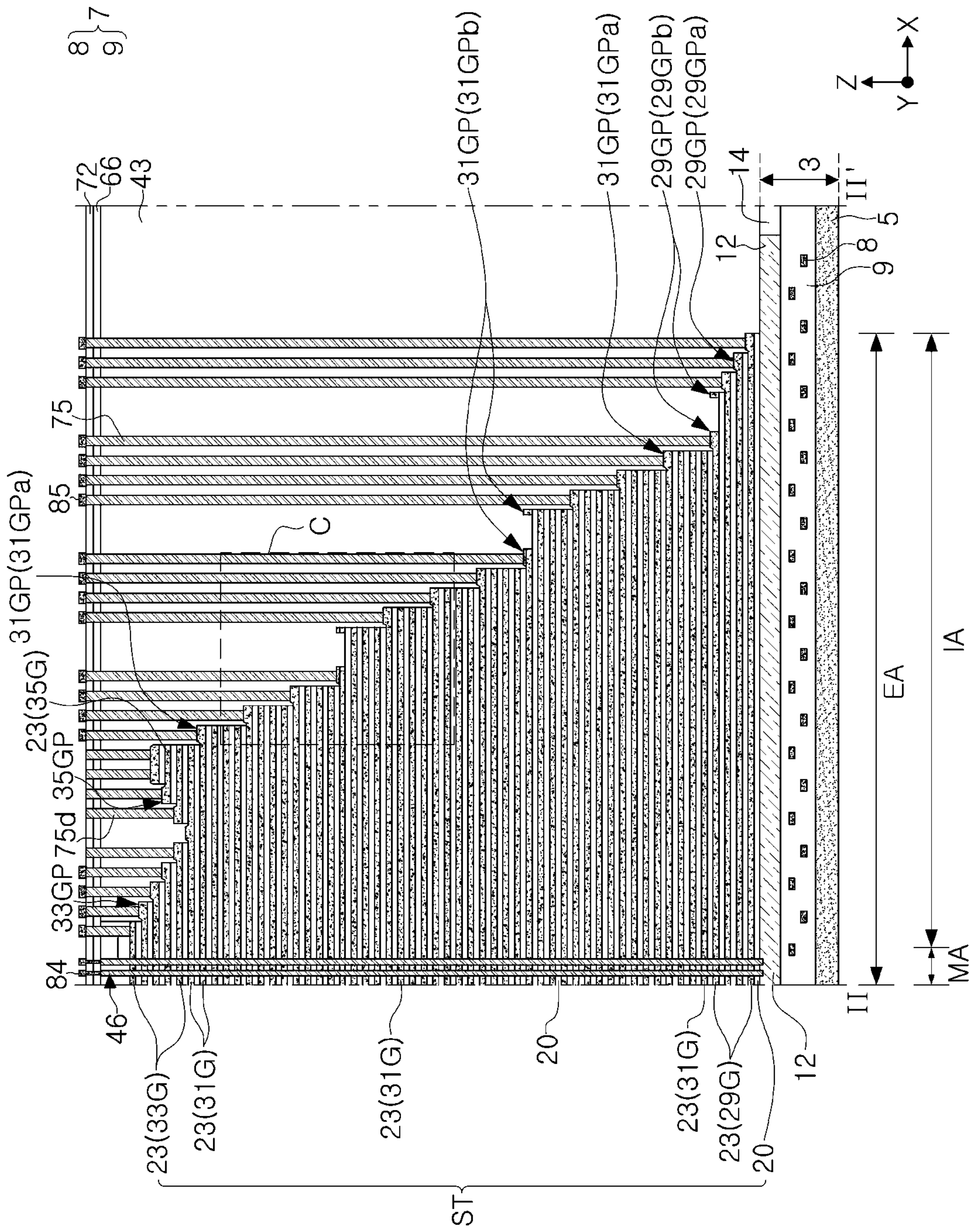


FIG. 5

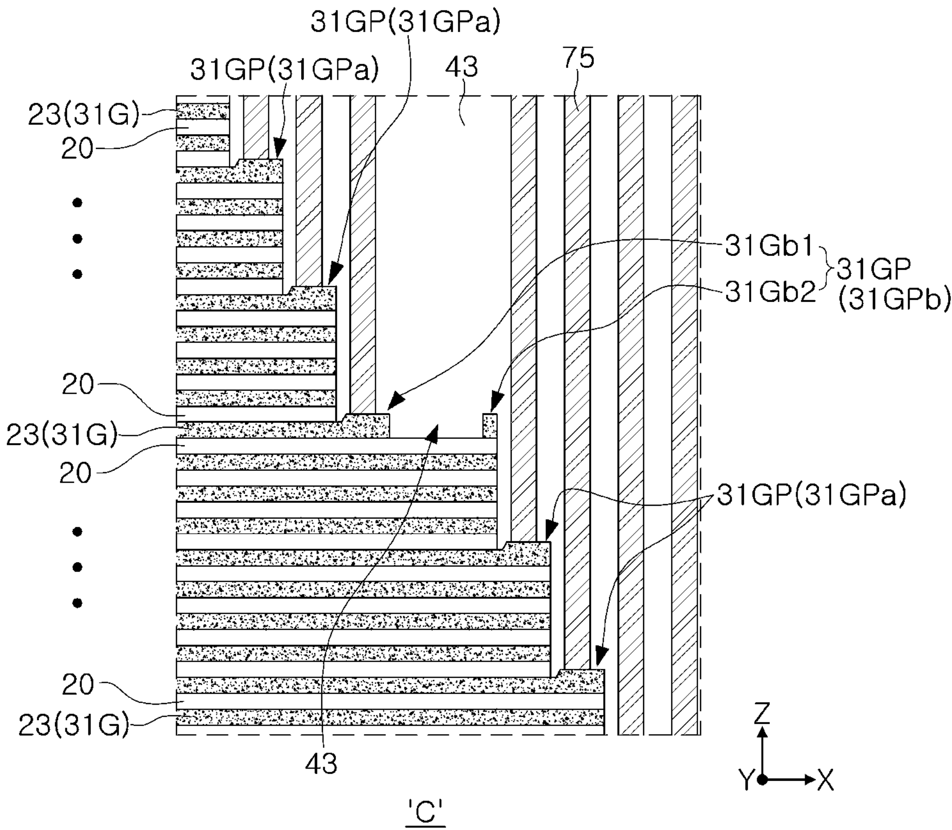


FIG. 6

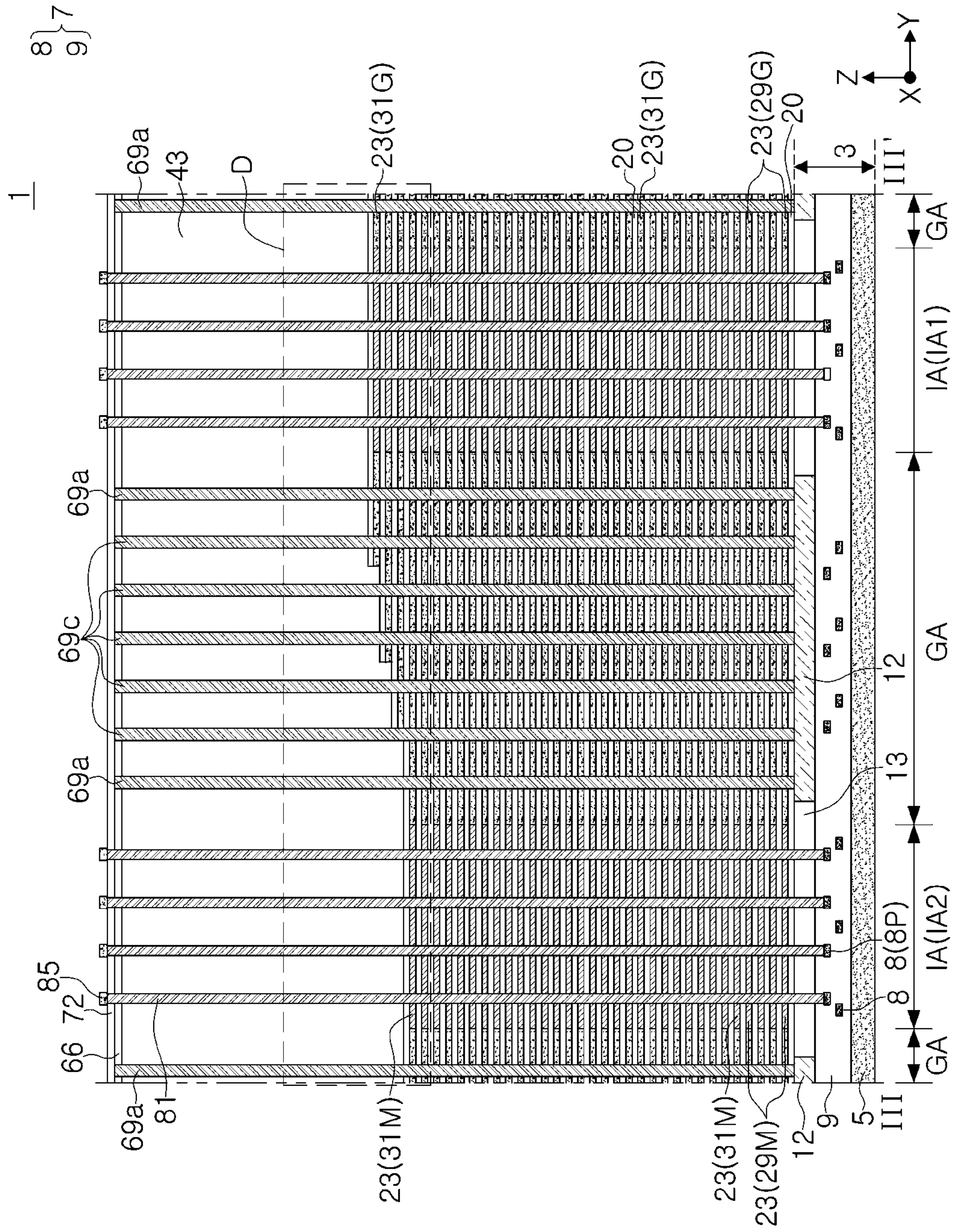


FIG. 7

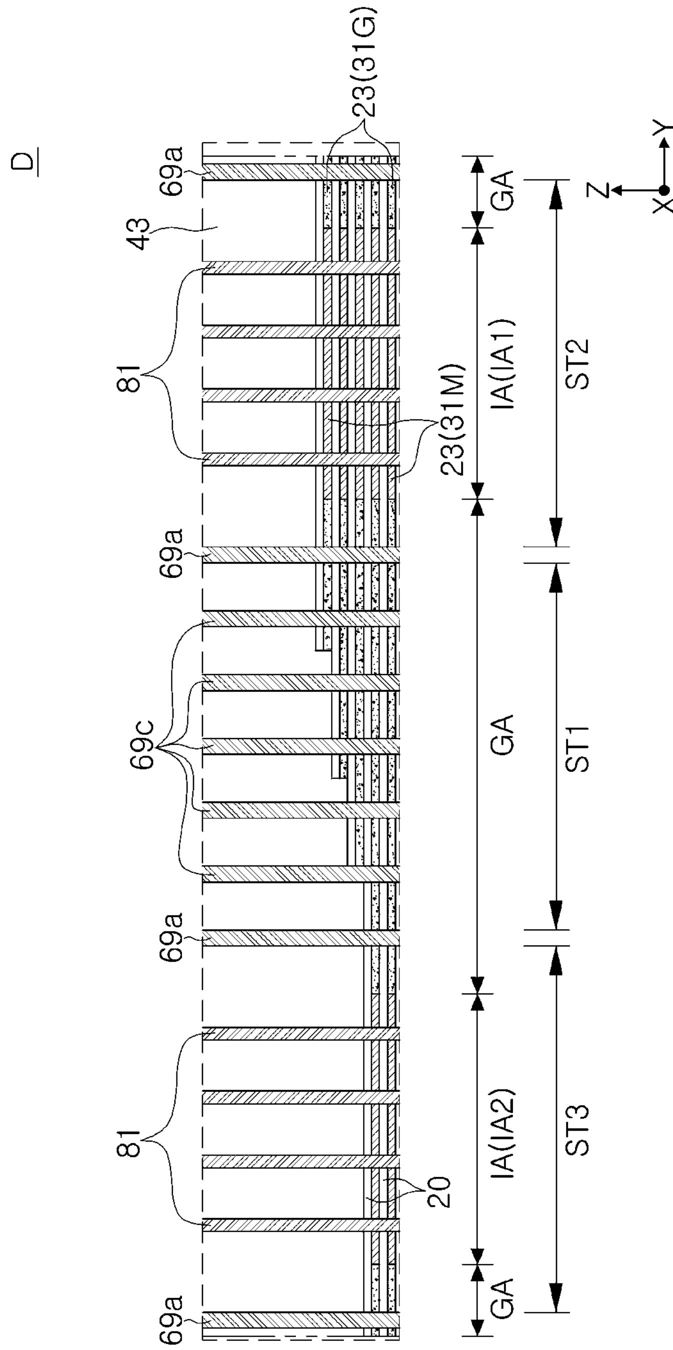


FIG. 8

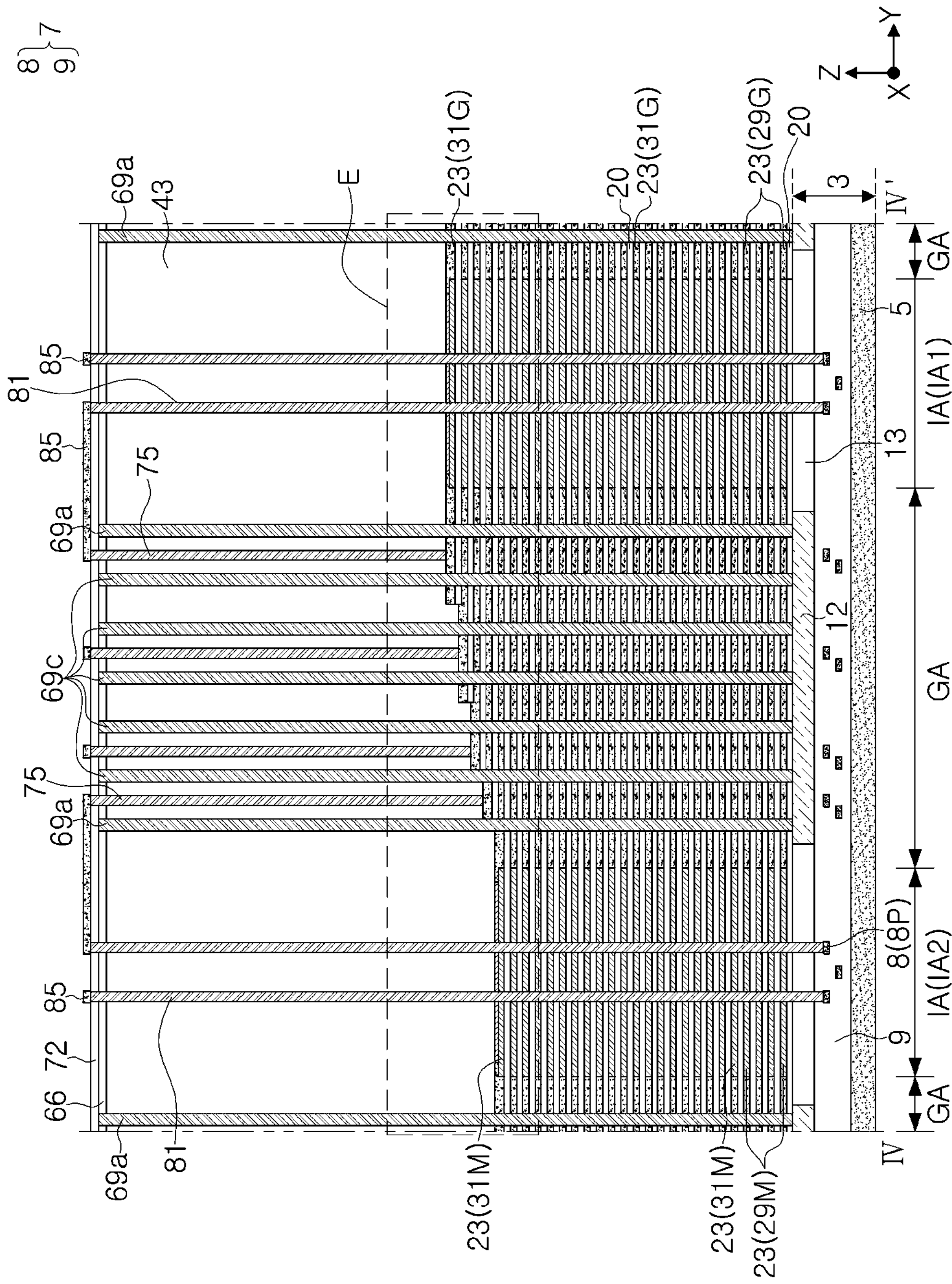


FIG. 9

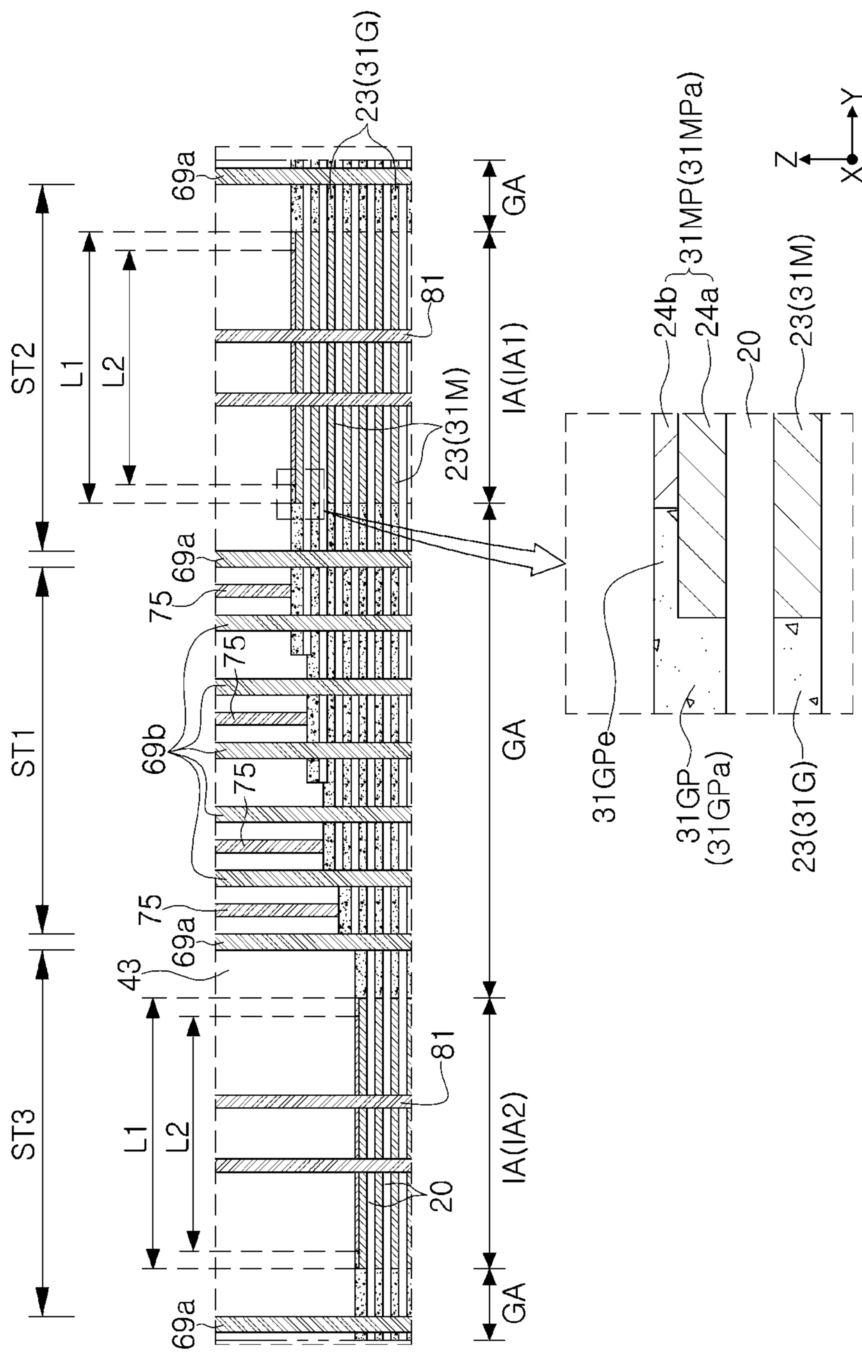


FIG. 10

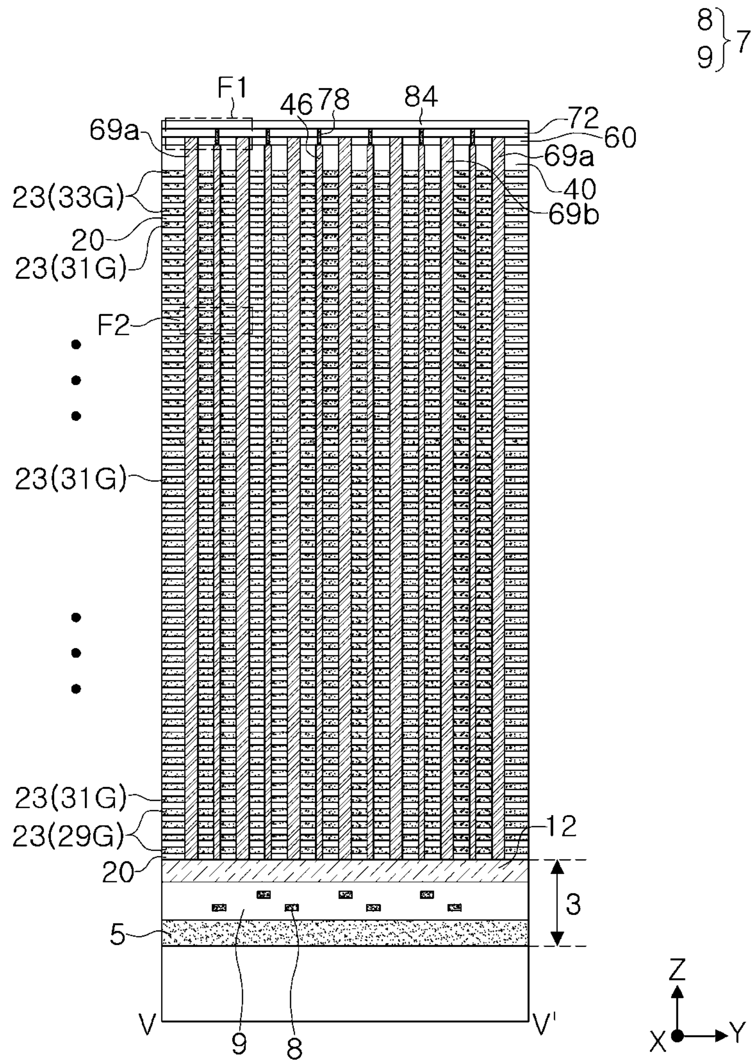


FIG. 11

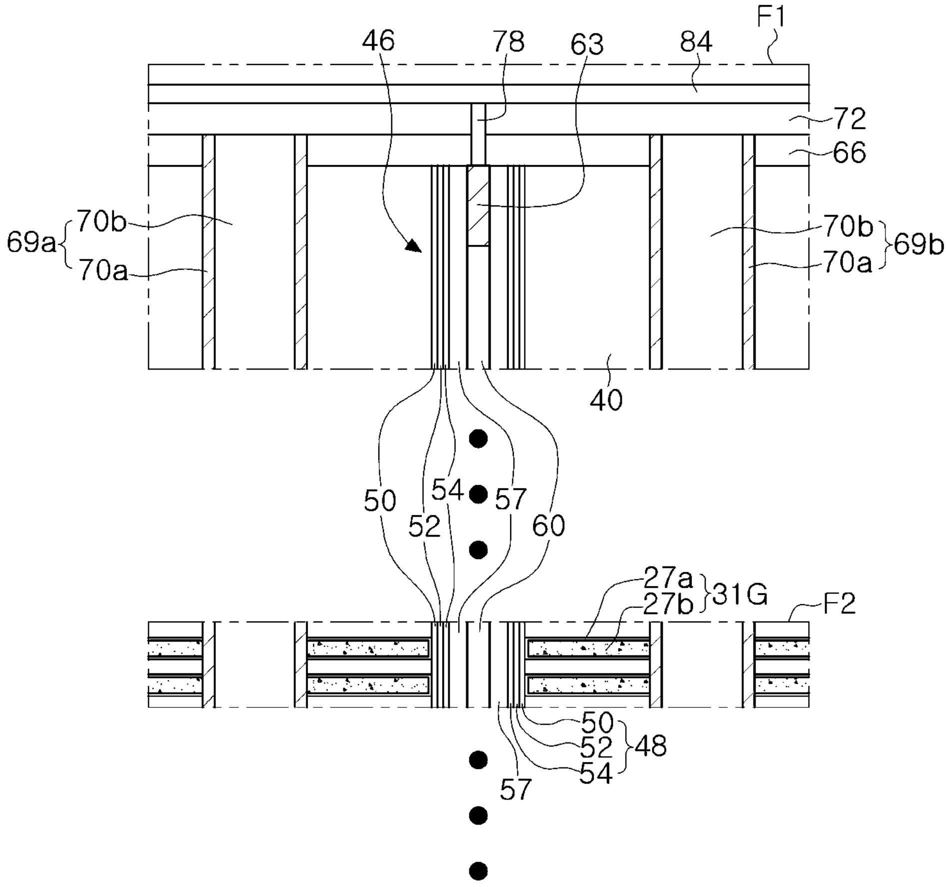


FIG. 12

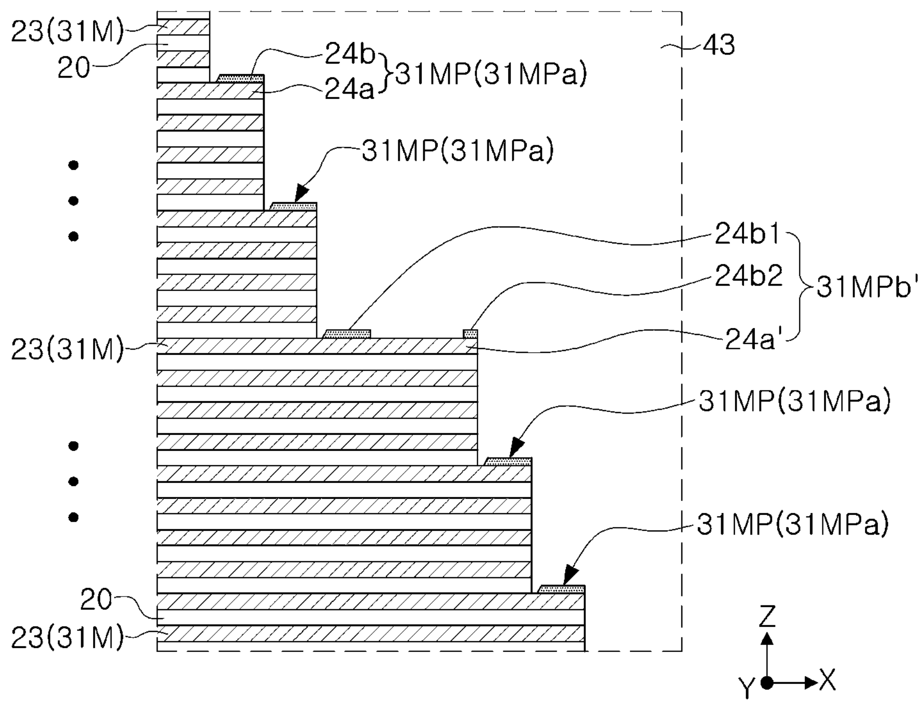


FIG. 13A

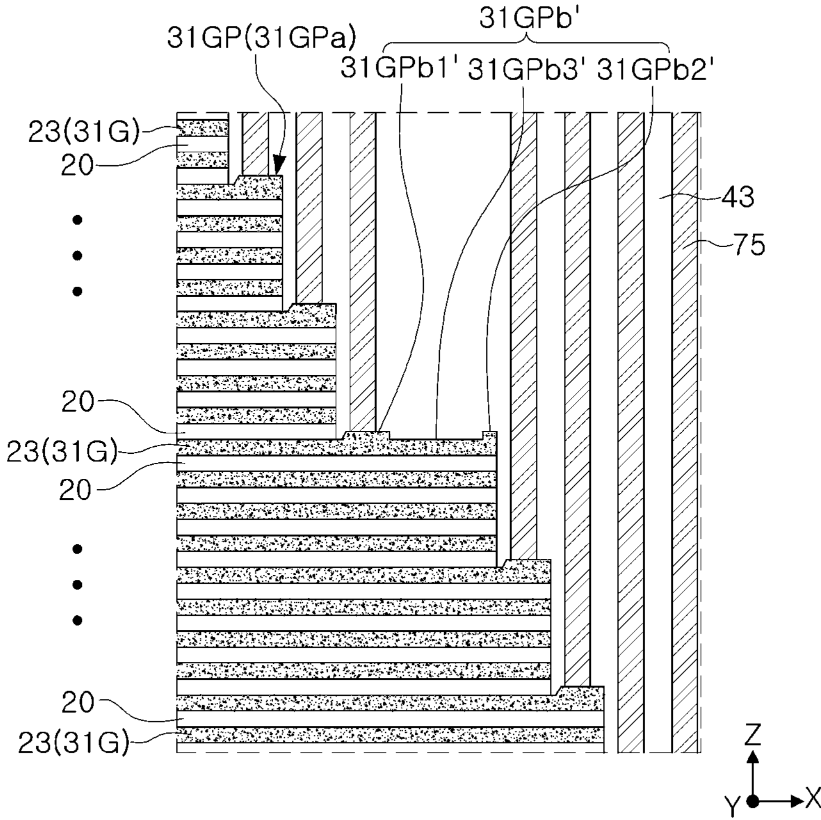


FIG. 13B

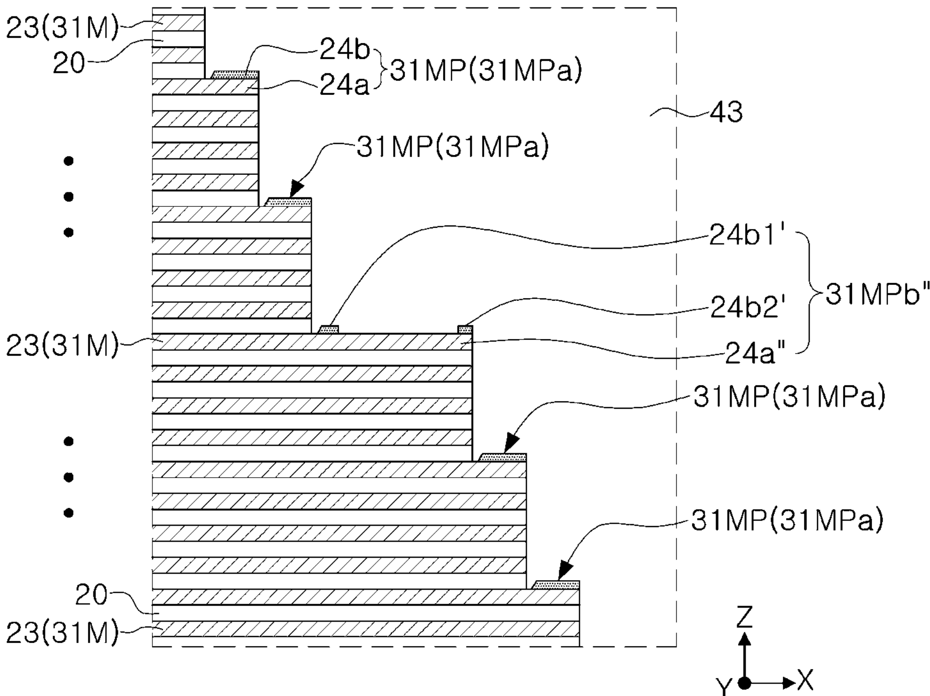


FIG. 14

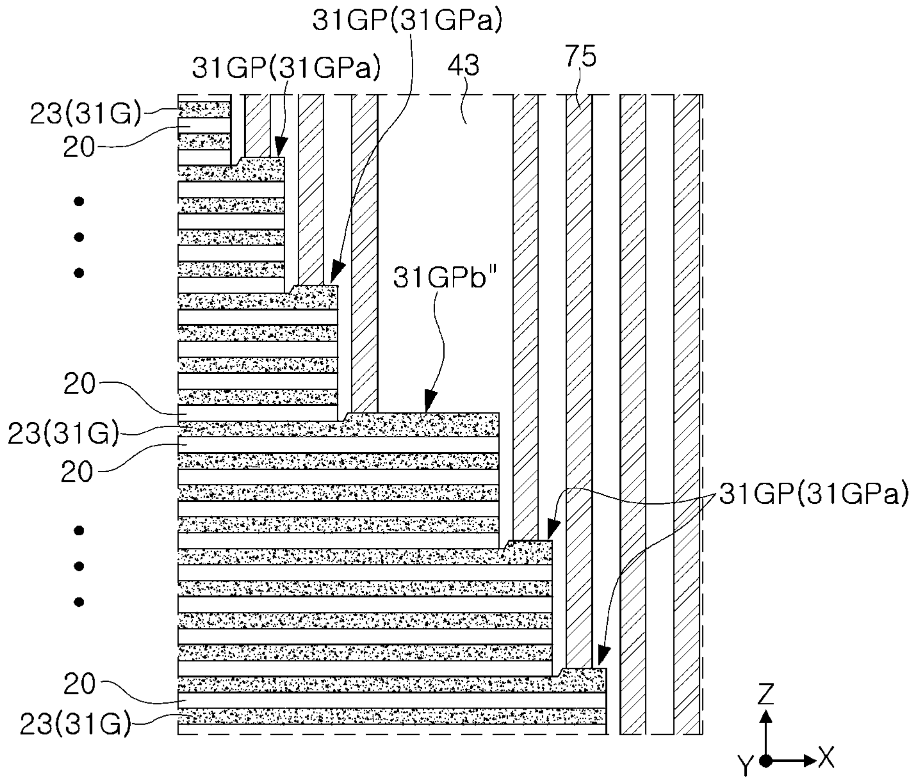


FIG. 15

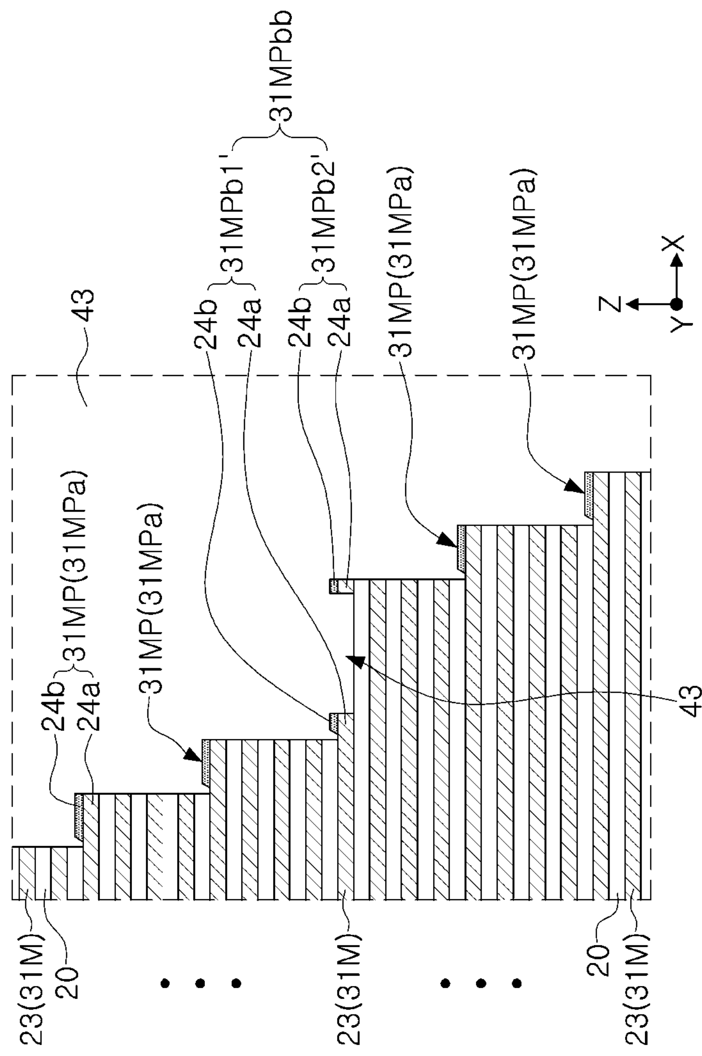
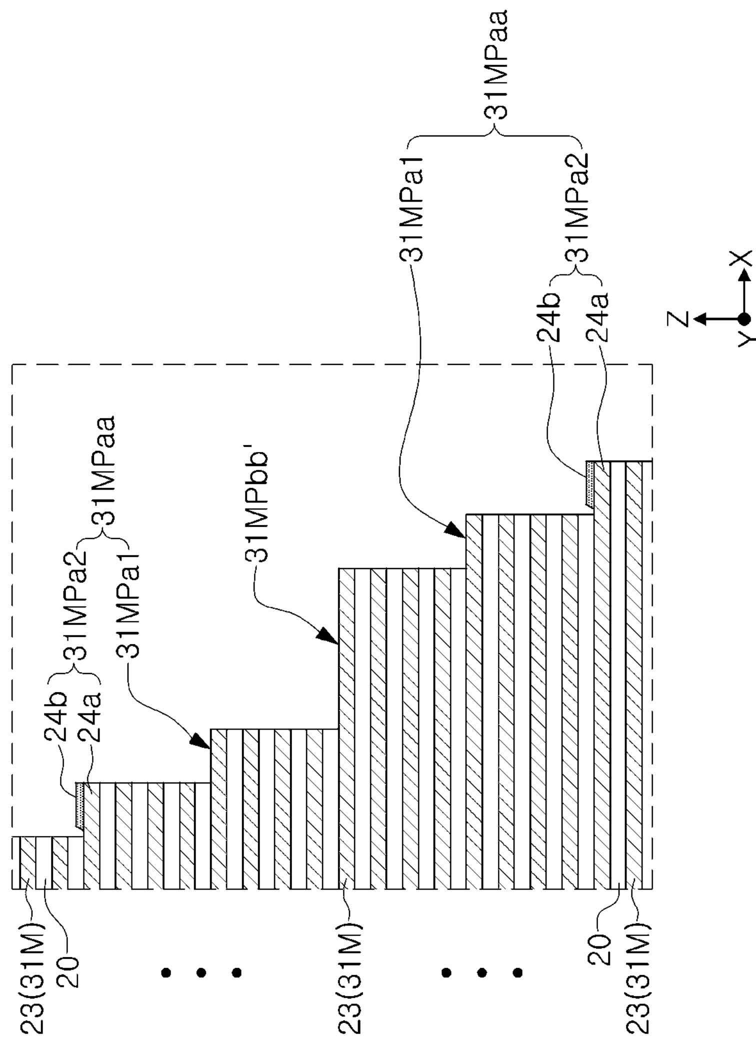


FIG. 16


31MPaa
31MPa1
31MPa2
24b
24a
Z
X
Y
31MPbb'
23(31M)
20
FIG. 17

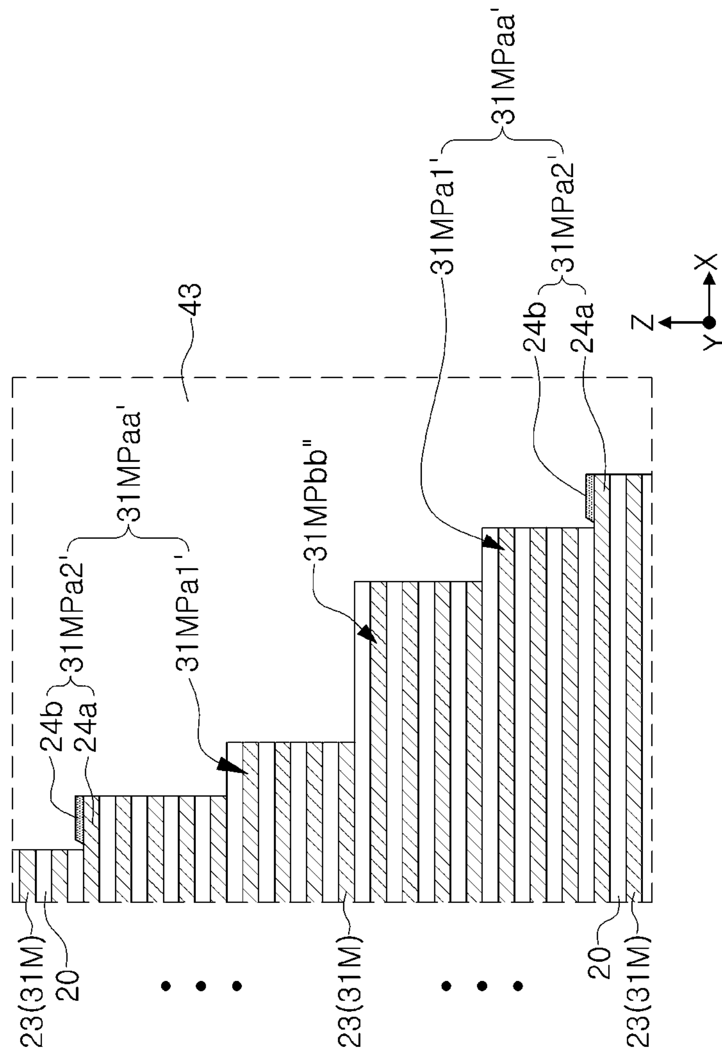


FIG. 18

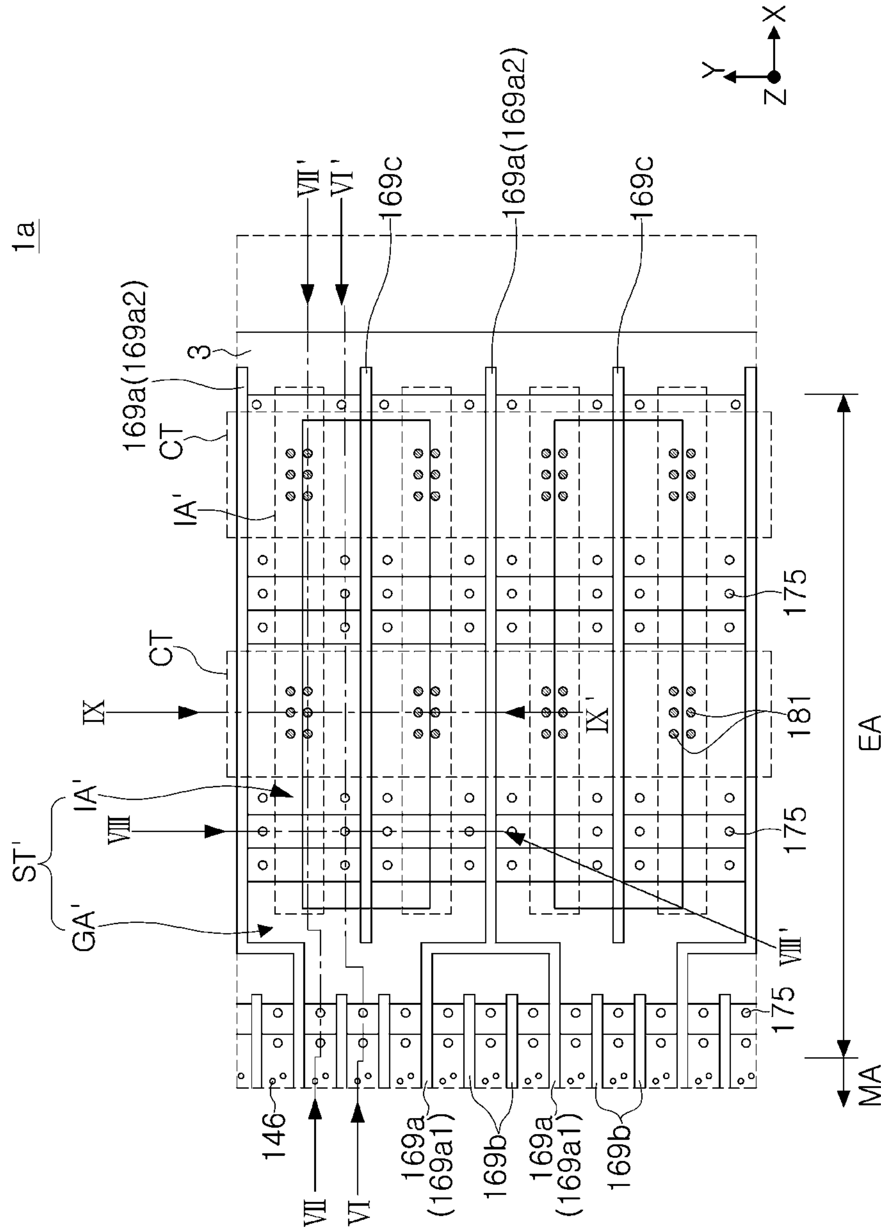


FIG. 19

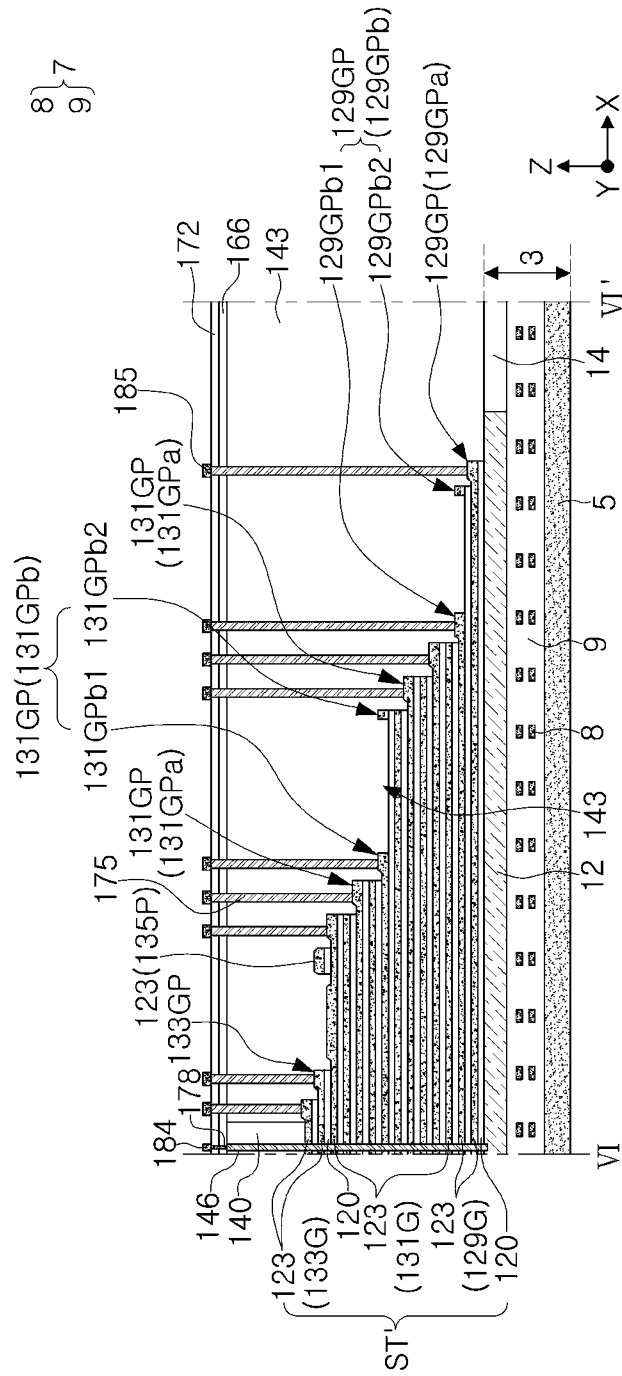


FIG. 20A

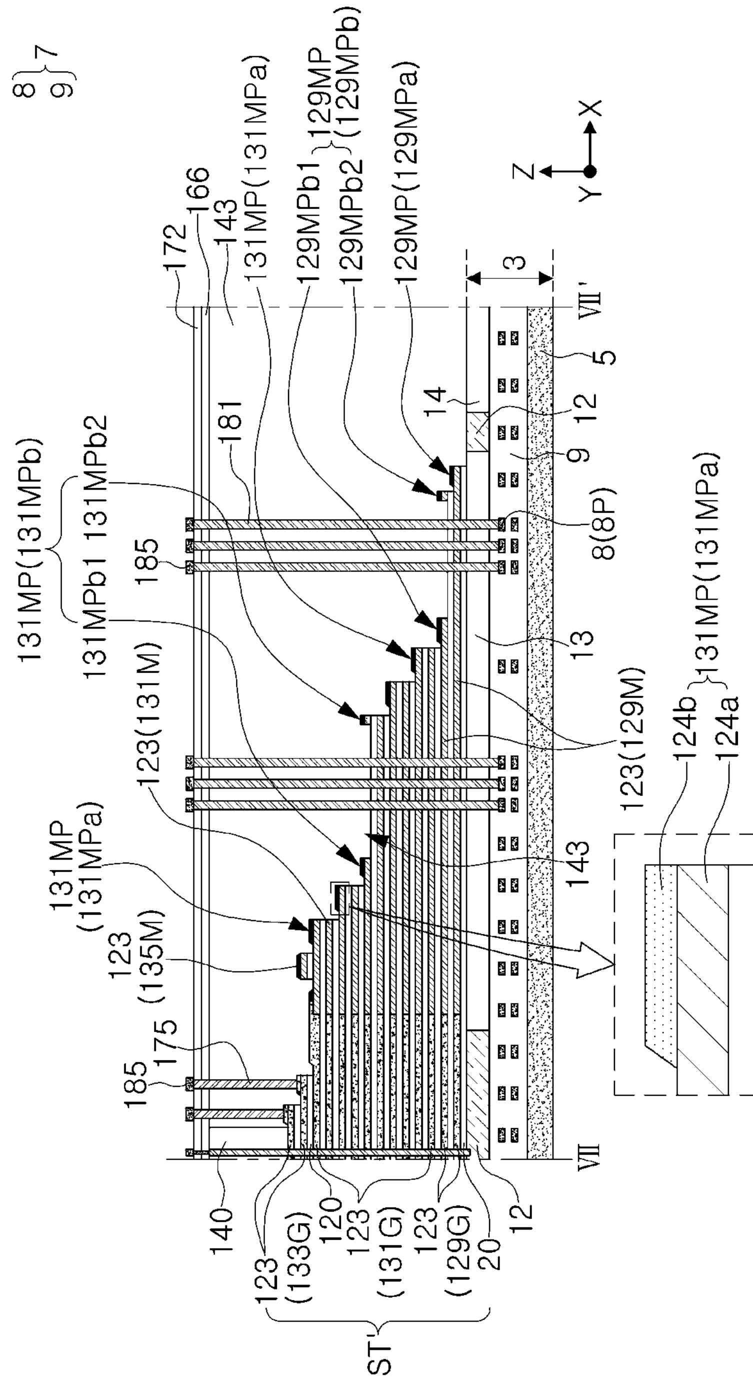


FIG. 20B

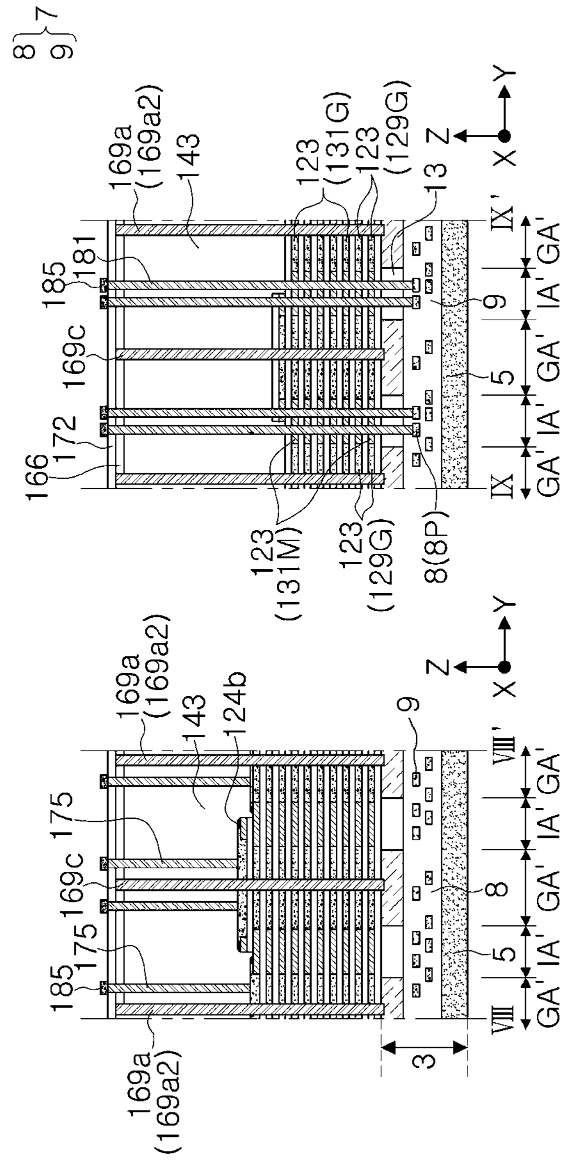


FIG. 20C

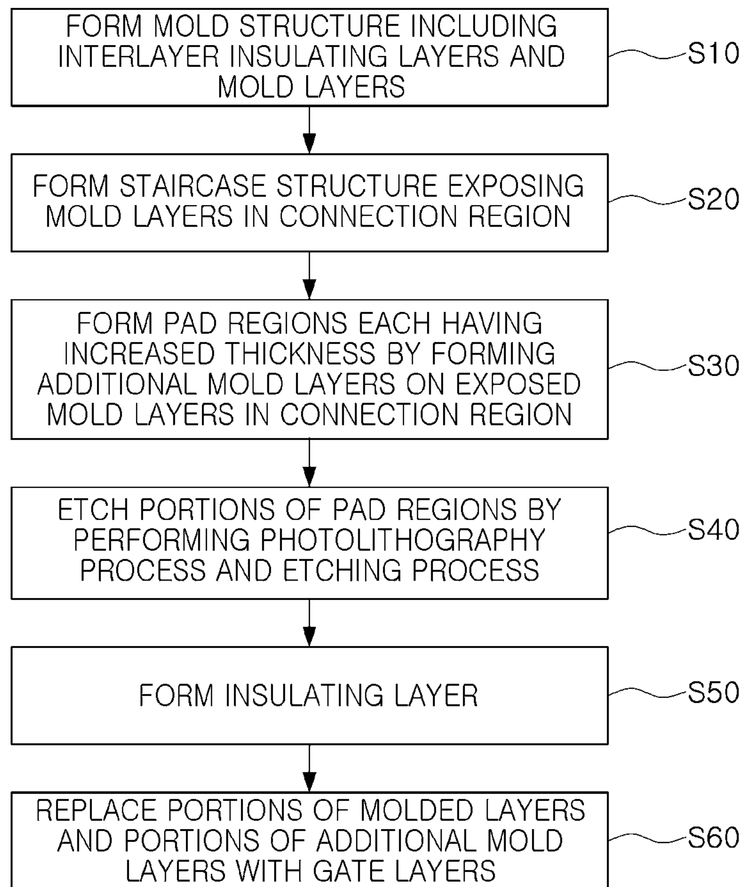


FIG. 21

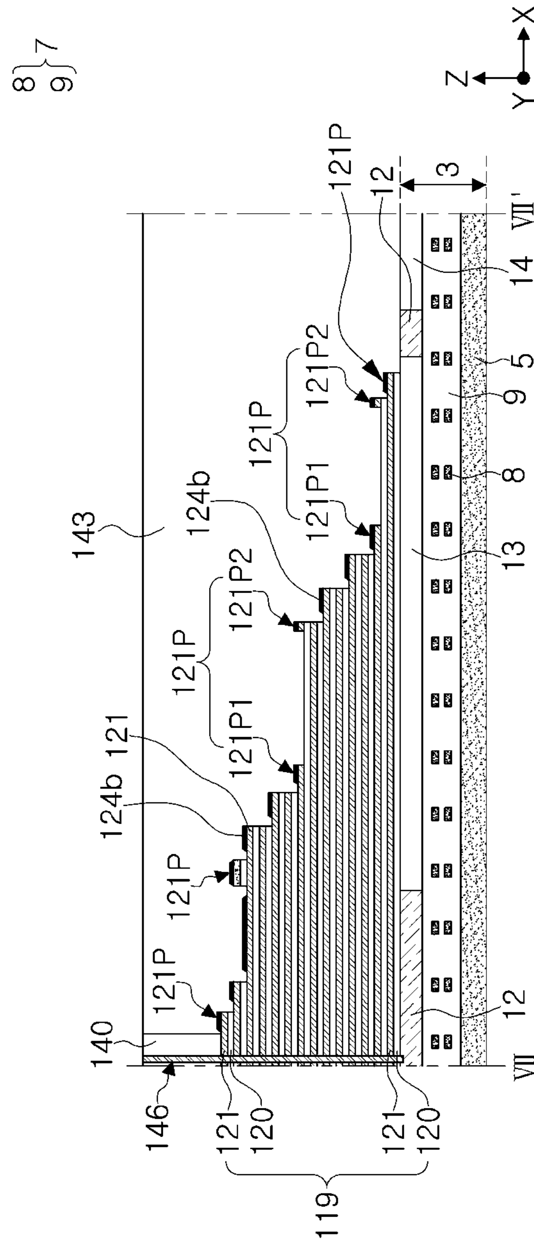


FIG. 22A

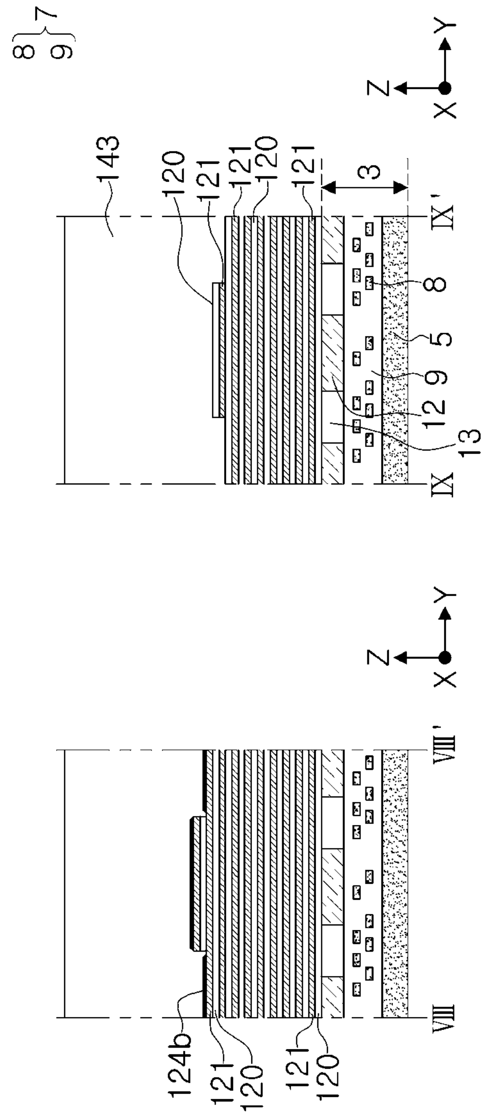


FIG. 22B

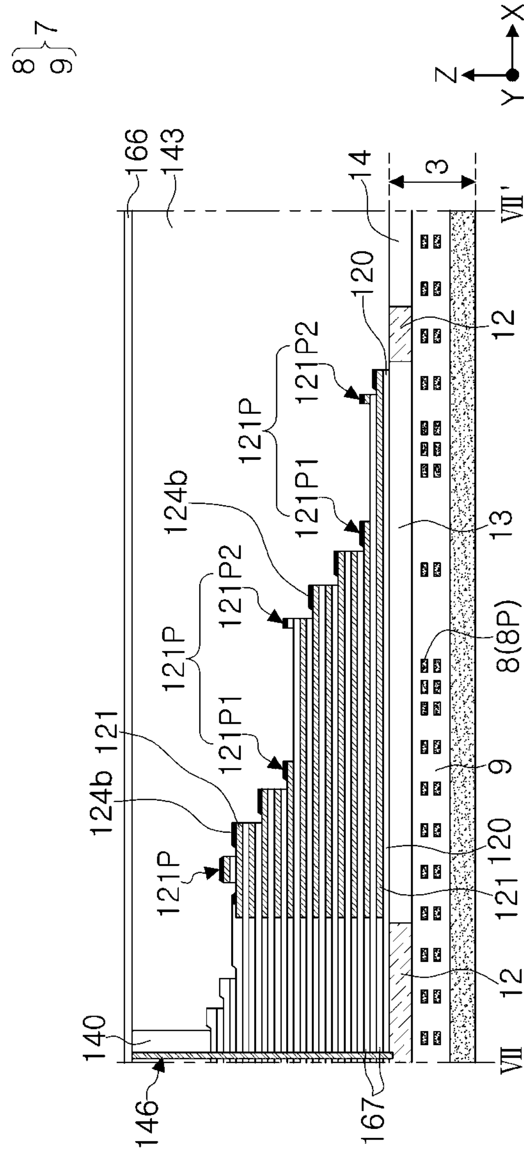


FIG. 23A

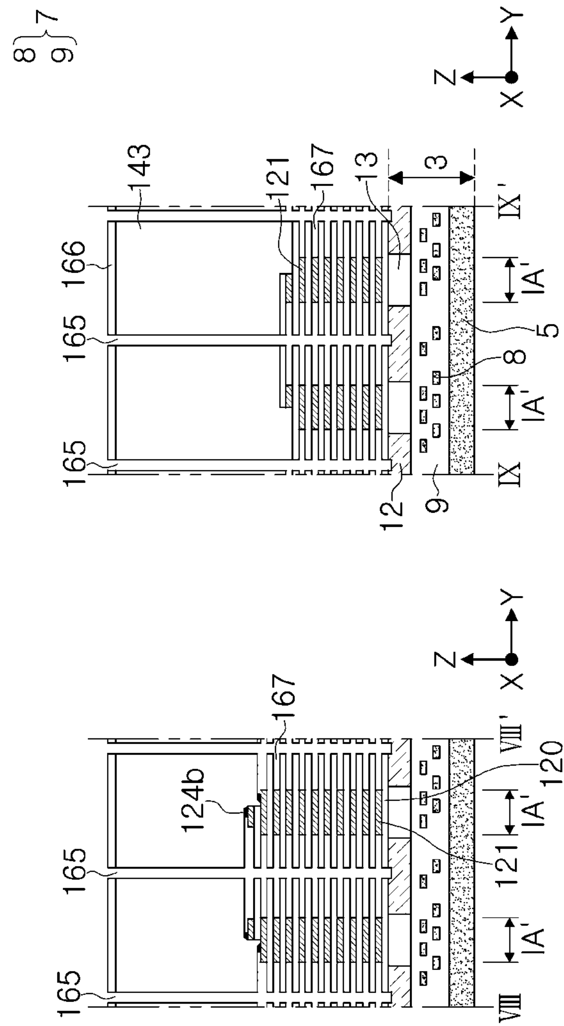


FIG. 23B

SEMICONDUCTOR DEVICES INCLUDING STACK STRUCTURE HAVING GATE REGION AND INSULATING REGION

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION(S)

This application is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 16/856,560, filed Apr. 23, 2020, which application claims benefit of priority under 35 U.S.C. § 119 to Korean Patent Application No. 10-2019-0086900 filed on Jul. 18, 2019, in the Korean Intellectual Property Office, the disclosure of which is incorporated herein by reference in its entirety.

BACKGROUND

Example embodiments of the present inventive concepts relate to semiconductor devices, and more particularly, to semiconductor devices including a stack structure having a gate region and an insulating region.

A semiconductor device including gate electrodes stacked in a direction perpendicular to a surface of a semiconductor substrate has been developed. To improve integration density of a semiconductor device, the number of the stacked gate electrodes has been increased. As the number of the gate electrodes stacked in the direction perpendicular to the surface of the semiconductor substrate has been increased, difficulty in a process of electrically connecting the gate electrodes to a peripheral circuit has increased, and unexpected defects have occurred.

SUMMARY

An example embodiment of the present inventive concepts provides semiconductor devices which may have improved integration density.

According to an example embodiment of the present inventive concepts, a semiconductor device includes a lower structure including a lower substrate, an upper substrate on the lower substrate, a peripheral circuit region between the lower substrate and the upper substrate and including peripheral wirings, and a gap-fill insulating layer penetrating the upper substrate; a stack structure in a memory cell array region on the lower structure and extending into a connection region on the lower structure, wherein the stack structure has a staircase structure in the connection region, the stack structure includes a gate region and a first insulating region, the gate region is in the memory cell array region and extends into the connection region, and the first insulating region is in the connection region; a capping insulating layer on the stack structure; and a memory cell vertical structure in the gate region in the memory cell array region, the stack structure includes a plurality of first layers and a plurality of second layers alternately stacked on the lower structure, the plurality of second layers include a plurality of gate layers in the gate region, a plurality of mold layers in the first insulating region, a plurality of gate pads extending from the plurality of gate layers, and a plurality of mold pads extending from at least one of the mold layers, each of the plurality of gate layers includes a conductive material, each of the plurality of mold layers includes an insulating material, the plurality of mold layers include one or a plurality of lower mold layers, a plurality of intermediate mold layers on the one or the plurality of lower mold layers, and one or a plurality of floating mold layers on the plurality of intermediate mold layers, the plurality of mold pads include a

plurality of intermediate mold pads extending from at least one of the plurality of intermediate mold layers, the plurality of intermediate mold pads include a staircase structure descending in a first direction, the first direction extends to the connection region from the memory cell array region, the plurality of intermediate mold pads include a plurality of first intermediate mold pads, and a second intermediate mold pad between a pair of the plurality of first intermediate mold pads, each of the plurality of first intermediate mold pads has a first length in the first direction, the second intermediate mold pad has a second length in the first direction, greater than the first length, at least one of the plurality of intermediate mold pads has a mold pad portion and an insulating protrusion portion on the mold pad, at least one of the plurality of first intermediate mold pads includes the mold pad portion and the insulating protrusion portion, and at least a central region of the second intermediate mold pad does not include the insulating protrusion portion.

According to an example embodiment of the present inventive concepts, a semiconductor device includes a lower structure; a stack structure in a memory cell array region on the lower structure and extending into a connection region on the lower structure, where the stack structure includes a gate region including a plurality of gate pads and an insulating region including a plurality of mold pads; and a memory cell vertical structure penetrating the gate region in the memory cell array region, the plurality of mold pads includes a plurality of intermediate mold pads, the plurality of intermediate mold pads include a plurality of first intermediate mold pads, and a second intermediate mold pad between a pair of the plurality of first intermediate mold pads, each of the plurality of first intermediate mold pads has a first length in a first direction, the second intermediate mold pad has a second length in the first direction, greater than the first length, at least one intermediate mold pad of the plurality of intermediate mold pads includes a mold pad portion and an insulating protrusion portion on the mold pad portion, at least one first intermediate mold pad of the plurality of first intermediate mold pads includes the mold pad portion and the insulating protrusion portion, and at least a central region of the second intermediate mold pad does not include the insulating protrusion portion.

According to an example embodiment of the present inventive concepts, a semiconductor device includes a lower structure including a lower substrate, an upper substrate on the lower substrate, a peripheral circuit region between the lower substrate and the upper substrate and including peripheral wirings, and a gap-fill insulating layer penetrating the upper substrate; a stack structure in a memory cell array region on the lower structure and extending into a connection region on the lower structure, where the stack structure includes a gate region and an insulating region, the gate region is in the memory cell array region and extends into the connection region, and the first insulating region is in the connection region; a memory cell vertical structure penetrating the gate region in the memory cell array region; and a capping insulating layer on the stack structure, the stack structure includes a plurality of first layers and a plurality of second layers alternately stacked on the lower structure, the plurality of first layers comprise interlayer insulating layers, the plurality of second layers include a plurality of gate layers in the gate region, a plurality of mold layers in the insulating region, a plurality of gate pads extending from the gate layers, and a plurality of mold pads extending from at least some of the mold layers, the plurality of mold pads include a plurality of intermediate mold pads, the plurality of intermediate mold pads include a plurality of first inter-

mediate mold pads and a second intermediate mold pad between a pair of the plurality of first intermediate mold pads, each of the plurality of first intermediate mold pads has a first length in a first direction, the second intermediate mold pad has a second length in the first direction, greater than the first length, the first direction extends to the connection region from the memory cell array region, and at least one of the plurality of first intermediate mold pads has a first thickness, and a central region of the second intermediate mold pad includes an insulating material layer having a second thickness less than the first thickness, or the central region of the second intermediate mold pad comprises the capping insulating layer.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

The above and other aspects, features, and advantages of the present inventive concepts will be more clearly understood from the following detailed description, taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, in which:

FIG. **1** is a plan diagram illustrating a semiconductor device according to an example embodiment of the present inventive concepts;

FIG. **2** is an enlarged plan diagram illustrating portion "A" illustrated in FIG. **1**;

FIGS. **3** to **12** are cross-sectional diagrams illustrating an example of a semiconductor device according to an example embodiment of the present inventive concepts;

FIGS. **13**A and **13**B are enlarged cross-sectional diagrams illustrating a modified example of a semiconductor device according to an example embodiment of the present inventive concepts;

FIGS. **14** and **15** are enlarged cross-sectional diagrams illustrating another modified example of a semiconductor device according to an example embodiment of the present inventive concepts;

FIG. **16** is an enlarged cross-sectional diagram illustrating another modified example of a semiconductor device according to an example embodiment of the present inventive concepts;

FIG. **17** is an enlarged cross-sectional diagram illustrating another modified example of a semiconductor device according to an example embodiment of the present inventive concepts;

FIG. **18** is an enlarged cross-sectional diagram illustrating another modified example of a semiconductor device according to an example embodiment of the present inventive concepts;

FIG. **19** is an enlarged cross-sectional diagram illustrating another modified example of a semiconductor device according to an example embodiment of the present inventive concepts;

FIGS. **20**A to **20**C are cross-sectional diagrams illustrating modified examples of a semiconductor device according to an example embodiment of the present inventive concepts;

FIG. **21** is a flowchart illustrating an example of a method of manufacturing a semiconductor device according to an example embodiment of the present inventive concepts; and

FIGS. **22**A to **23**B are cross-sectional diagrams illustrating an example of a method of manufacturing a semiconductor device according to an example embodiment of the present inventive concepts.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Hereinafter, embodiments of the present inventive concepts will be described with reference to the accompanying drawings.

An example of a semiconductor device according to an example embodiment of the present inventive concepts will be described with reference to FIGS. **1** to **12**. In the description below, each element will be described with reference to FIGS. **1** to **12**, and an example of each element will be described with reference to portions of FIGS. **1** to **12**. With regard to FIGS. **1** to **12**, FIG. **1** is a plan diagram illustrating a semiconductor device according to an example embodiment of the present inventive concepts, FIG. **2** is an enlarged plan diagram illustrating portion "A" illustrated in FIG. **1**, FIG. **3** is a cross-sectional diagram taken along line I-I' in FIG. **2**, FIG. **4** is an enlarged plan diagram illustrating portion "B" illustrated in FIG. **3**, FIG. **5** is a cross-sectional diagram taken along line II-II' in FIG. **2**, FIG. **6** is an enlarged plan diagram illustrating portion "C" illustrated in FIG. **5**, FIG. **7** is a cross-sectional diagram taken along line in FIG. **2**, FIG. **8** is an enlarged plan diagram illustrating portion "D" illustrated in FIG. **7**, FIG. **9** is a cross-sectional diagram taken along line IV-IV' in FIG. **2**, FIG. **10** is an enlarged plan diagram illustrating portion "E" illustrated in FIG. **9**, FIG. **11** is a cross-sectional diagram taken along line V-V' in FIG. **2**, and FIG. **12** is an enlarged diagram illustrating portions "F**1**" and "F**2**" illustrated in FIG. **11**.

Referring to FIGS. **1** to **12**, a semiconductor device **1** in the example embodiment may include a lower structure **3**, a memory cell array region MA on the lower structure **3**, and a connection region EA. The memory cell array region MA and the connection region EA may be adjacent to each other.

The lower structure **3** may include a lower substrate **5**, an upper substrate **12** on the lower substrate **5**, and a peripheral circuit region **7** between the lower substrate **5** and the upper substrate **12**.

The lower structure **3** may further include a gap-fill insulating layer **13** penetrating the upper substrate **12**, and an intermediate insulating layer **14** on, and in some embodiments, surrounding, the upper substrate **12**. The peripheral circuit region **7** may include peripheral wirings **8** and a lower insulating layer **9** on, and in some embodiments covering, the peripheral wirings **8**.

The semiconductor device **1** in the example embodiment may include a stack structure ST on the lower structure **3**.

The stack structure ST may be disposed in the memory cell array region MA, and may extend into the connection region EA.

The stack structure ST may include a gate region GA including a conductive material, and an insulating region IA which does not include a conductive material.

The gate region GA may be disposed in the memory cell array region MA, and may be partially disposed in the connection region EA. The insulating region IA may be disposed in the connection region EA, and may be adjacent to the gate region GA.

The stack structure ST may include first layers **20** and second layers **23** alternately stacked on the lower structure **3**.

The first layers **20** may be disposed in the gate region GA and the insulating region IA. The first layers **20** may be configured as interlayer insulating layers.

The second layers **23** may include gate layers **29**G, **31**G, **33**G, and **35**G disposed in the gate region GA, and mold layers **29**M, **31**M, and **35**M disposed in the insulating region IA.

In an example embodiment, the mold layers **29**M, **31**M, and **35**M may be formed of an insulating material having etching selectivity different from an etching selectivity of the first layers **20**. For example, the first layers **20** may be

formed of silicon oxide, and the mold layers **29**M, **31**M, and **35**M may be formed of silicon nitride.

In an example embodiment, each of the gate layers **29**G, **31**G, **33**G, and **35**G may include a conductive material. For example, each of the gate layers **29**G, **31**G, **33**G, and **35**G may be configured as gate electrodes.

The gate layers **29**G, **31**G, **33**G, and **35**G may include one or a plurality of lower gate layers **29**G, a plurality of intermediate gate layers **31**G on the one or the plurality of lower gate layers **29**G, and a plurality of upper gate layers **33**G on the plurality of intermediate gate layers **31**G.

The mold layers **29**M, **31**M, and **35**M may include one or a plurality of lower mold layers **29**M, a plurality of intermediate mold layers **31**M on the one or the plurality of lower mold layers **29**M, and a plurality of upper mold layers **35**M on the plurality of intermediate mold layers **31**M.

The lower and intermediate gate layers **29**G and **31**G and the lower and intermediate mold layers **29**M and **31**M disposed on the same level in a boundary region between the gate region GA and the insulating region IA may be on opposite sides of each other and may be in contact with each other.

The gate layers **29**G, **31**G, **33**G, and **35**G may further include floating gate layers **35**G, and the mold layers **29**M, **31**M, and **35**M may further include floating mold layers **35**M.

The floating gate layers **35**G may be disposed on the plurality of intermediate mold layers **31**M in the connection region EA, and may be spaced apart from the plurality of upper gate layers **33**G. The floating mold layers **35**M may be disposed on the plurality of intermediate mold layers **31**M in the connection region EA, and may be spaced apart from the plurality of upper gate layers **33**G.

The gate layers **29**G, **31**G, **33**G, and **35**G may include a plurality of gate pads arranged in staircase form, and the mold layers **29**M, **31**M, and **35**M may include a plurality of mold pads arranged in staircase form. As used herein, a "staircase form" or "staircase structure" refers to a plurality of layers in which an outermost edge of a first layer extends laterally beyond an outermost edge of a second layer that is immediately above the first layer.

The one or the plurality of lower gate layers **29**G may include one or a plurality of lower gate pads **29**GP, the plurality of intermediate gate layers **31**G may include intermediate gate pads **31**GP, the plurality of upper gate layers **33**G may include upper gate pads **33**GP, and the floating gate layers **35**G may include floating gate pads **35**GP.

The one or the plurality of lower mold layers **29**M may include one or a plurality of lower mold pads **29**MP, the plurality of intermediate mold layers **31**M may include intermediate mold pads **31**MP, and the floating mold layers **35**M may include floating mold pads **35**MP.

The semiconductor device **1** in the example embodiment of the present inventive concepts may further include a memory cell vertical structure **46** in the memory cell array region MA. The memory cell vertical structure **46** may penetrate the gate region GA of the stack structure ST.

The semiconductor device **1** in the example embodiment may further include a plurality of separation structures **69***a*, **69***b*, and **69***c*.

The plurality of separation structures **69***a*, **69***b*, and **69***c* may include a plurality of first separation structures **69***a* crossing the memory cell array region MA and the connection region EA, a plurality of second separation structures **69***b* crossing the memory cell array region MA and extending into a partial region of the connection region EA, and a plurality of third separation structures **69***c* disposed in the connection region EA.

The plurality of second separation structures **69***b* may be disposed between the plurality of first separation structures **69***a*. The plurality of third separation structures **69***c* may be disposed between the plurality of first separation structures **69***a*.

The stack structure ST may be divided into a plurality of regions by the plurality of first separation structures **69***a*. As illustrated in FIG. **2**, in the connection region EA, the stack structure ST may include a first stack region ST**1**, a second stack region ST**2** on a first side of the first stack region ST**1**, and a third stack region ST**3** on a second side of the first stack region ST**1**, opposite the first side. Accordingly, in the connection region EA, the first stack region ST**1** may be disposed between the second stack region ST**2** and the third stack region ST**3**. The first stack region ST**1**, the second stack region ST**2**, and the third stack region ST**3** may be separated from one another by ones of the plurality of first separation structures **69***a*.

The plurality of third separation structures **69***c* may be disposed in the first stack region ST**1**, and may not be disposed in the second stack region ST**2** and the third stack region ST**3**.

In the first stack region ST**1**, the plurality of third separation structures **69***c* and the plurality of second separation structures **69***b* may have end portions opposing each other.

In the stack structure ST, the gate region GA may be disposed across the memory cell array region MA and the first stack region ST**1**, and may be disposed in a portion of the second stack region ST**2** and a portion of the third stack region ST**3**.

In the stack structure ST, the insulating region IA may include a first insulating region IA**1** disposed in a portion of the second stack region ST**2** and a second insulating region IA**2** disposed in a portion of the third stack region ST**3**.

In the connection region EA, the upper gate layers **33**G may include upper gate pads **33**GP descending to a first height (e.g., in the Z direction in FIG. **3**) in a first direction X. In other words, respective ones of the upper gate pads **33**GP are lower in the Z direction as the respective upper gate pads **33**GP extend in the first direction X. The first direction X may be directed to the connection region EA from the memory cell array region MA.

In the connection region EA, the intermediate gate layers **31**G and the intermediate mold layers **31**M may respectively include intermediate pads **31**GP and **31**MP descending to a second height (e.g., in the Z direction in FIGS. **3** and **5**) higher than the first height in the first direction X. In other words, a distance between respective adjacent ones of the intermediate pads **31**GP and **31**MP is greater in the Z direction than a distance between respective adjacent ones of upper gate pads **33**GP.

The intermediate pads **31**GP and **31**MP may include the intermediate gate pads **31**GP of the intermediate gate layers **31**G and the intermediate mold pads **31**MP of the intermediate mold layers **31**M. In the second stack region ST**2** and the third stack region ST**3**, respective ones of the intermediate pads **31**GP and **31**MP may be disposed at a constant level in a second direction Y. In the first stack region ST**1**, respective ones of the intermediate pads **31**GP and **31**MP may be lowered to the first height in a direction from the second stack region ST**2** to the third stack region ST**3**.

In the connection region EA, the lower gate layers **29**G and the lower mold layers **29**M may include lower pads **29**GP and **29**MP lowered to a first height in the first direction

X from a staircase having a certain height in the second stack region ST**2** and lowered to the first height in a direction towards the third stack region ST**3** from the second stack region ST**2** in the first stack region ST**1**. The lower pads **29**GP and **29**MP may include lower gate pads **29**GP of the lower gate layers **29**G and lower mold pads **29**MP of the lower mold layers **29**M.

The first direction X may be directed to the connection region EA from the memory cell array region MA, and the second direction Y may be perpendicular to the first direction X.

In the connection region EA, the floating gate layers **35**G and the floating mold layers **35**M may include floating pads **35**GP and **35**MP lowered to a second height in a direction towards the upper gate pads **33**GP from a staircase having a certain height in the second stack region ST**2** and lowered to the second height in a direction towards the third stack region ST**3** from the second stack region ST**2** in the first stack region ST**1**.

The floating pads **35**GP and **35**MP may include floating gate pads **35**GP of the floating gate layers **35**G and floating mold pads **35**MP of the floating mold layers **35**M.

In example embodiments, the first height may refer to a distance between upper surfaces of the second layers **23** adjacent to each other in a vertical direction Z.

In example embodiments, the second height may be greater than the first height. For example, the second height may refer to a distance between an upper surface of a lowermost second layer of four second layers **23** arranged in the vertical direction Z and an upper surface of an uppermost second layer.

A first capping insulating layer **40** and a second capping insulating layer **43** may be disposed on the stack structure ST. The first capping insulating layer **40** may be on, and in some embodiments cover, an uppermost second layer of the second layers **23**, and the second capping insulating layer **43** may have an upper surface coplanar with an upper surface of the first capping insulating layer **40** and may be on, and in some embodiments cover, a remaining portion of the stack structure ST.

A first upper insulating layer **66** and a second upper insulating layer **72** stacked in order may be disposed on the first capping insulating layer **40** and the second capping insulating layer **43**. The first to third separation structures **69***a*, **69***b*, and **69***c* may penetrate the stack structure ST, may extend upwardly, and may penetrate the first and second capping insulating layers **40** and **43** and the first upper insulating layer **66**.

Bit line contact plugs **78** penetrating the first upper insulating layer **66** and the second upper insulating layer **72** and electrically connected to the memory cell vertical structure **46** may be disposed.

In the connection region EA, gate contact structures **75** penetrating the first upper insulating layer **66** and the second upper insulating layer **72**, extending downwardly, and electrically connected to the lower, intermediate, and upper gate pads **29**GP, **31**GP, and **33**GP may be disposed.

Peripheral contact structures **81** in contact with peripheral pad portions **8**P of the peripheral wirings **8**, extending upwardly, and penetrating the gap-fill insulating layer **13** and the insulating region IA of the stack structure ST may be disposed.

Gate connection wirings **85** may be disposed on the gate contact structures **75** and the peripheral contact structures **81**.

In an example embodiment, in the connection region EA, dummy contact plugs **75***d* penetrating the first upper insulating layer **66** and the second upper insulating layer **72**, extending downwardly, and electrically connected to the floating gate pads **35**GP may be disposed. The dummy contact plugs **75***d* may be electrically insulated from the gate connection wirings **85**. Bit lines **84** may be disposed on the bit line contact plugs **78**.

In the description below, the intermediate mold pads **31**MP of the intermediate mold layers **31**M will be described in greater detail with reference to FIGS. **3** and **4**.

Referring to FIGS. **3** and **4**, the intermediate mold pads **31**MP of the intermediate mold layers **31**M may include first intermediate mold pads **31**MPa and a second intermediate mold pad **31**MPb disposed between the first intermediate mold pads **31**MPa. The second intermediate mold pad **31**MPb may be disposed between some of the plurality of first intermediate mold pads **31**MPa and some of the plurality of first intermediate mold pads **31**MPa.

The first intermediate mold pads **31**MPa may respectively have the same or similar structure, and the second intermediate mold pad **31**MPb may have a structure different from the structure of each of the first intermediate mold pads **31**MPa.

In an example embodiment, each of the first intermediate mold pads **31**MPa may have a first length in the first direction X, and the second intermediate mold pad **31**MPb may have a second length in the first direction X, greater than the first length.

In an example embodiment, each of the first intermediate mold pads **31**MPa and the second intermediate mold pad **31**MPb may include a mold pad portion **24***a* and an insulating protrusion portion **24***b* on the mold pad portion **24***a*.

The insulating protrusion portion **24***b* may be formed of a material having etching selectivity different from etching selectivity of the mold pad portion **24***a*. For example, the mold pad portion **24***a* may be formed of a first insulating material based on (e.g., including) silicon nitride, and the insulating protrusion portion **24***b* may be formed of a second insulating material based on (e.g., including) silicon nitride having an etching speed higher than an etching speed of the first insulating material, though the present inventive concepts are not limited thereto. For example, the mold pad portion **24***a* may be formed of a first silicon nitride, and the insulating protrusion portion **24***b* may be formed of a second silicon nitride configured to be more porous than the first silicon nitride. The second silicon nitride may have an etching speed higher than an etching speed of the first silicon nitride with respect to an etchant including phosphate.

In an example embodiment, the second intermediate mold pad **31**MPb may include a first portion **31**Mb**1** and a second portion **31**Mb**2** spaced apart from each other in the first direction X. The first portion **31**Mb**1** and the second portion **31**Mb**2** may be spaced apart from the memory cell array region MA in order. For example, the first portion **31**Mb**1** may be between the second portion **31**Mb**2** and the memory cell array region MA in the first direction X.

Each of the first portion **31**Mb**1** and the second portion **31**Mb**2** may include the mold pad portion **24***a* and the insulating protrusion portion **24***b* described above. A length of the first portion **31**Mb**1** in the first direction X may be greater than a length of the second portion **31**Mb**2** in the first direction X.

The length of the first portion **31**Mb**1** in the first direction X may be substantially the same as a length of each of the first intermediate mold pads **31**MPa in the first direction X. A length of the second portion **31**Mb**2** in the first direction X may be less than a length of each of the first intermediate mold pads **31**MPa in the first direction X.

In an example embodiment, one or a plurality of the second intermediate mold pads **31**MPb may be disposed. When the plurality of second intermediate mold pads **31**MPb are disposed, each of the plurality of second intermediate mold pads **31**MPb may be disposed between one of the plurality of first intermediate mold pads **31**MPa and another of the plurality of first intermediate mold pads **31**MPa. When the plurality of second intermediate mold pads **31**MPb are disposed, each of the plurality of second intermediate mold pads **31**MPb may have the first portion **31**Mb**1** and the second portion **31**Mb**2**.

The plurality of second intermediate mold pads **31**MPb may be disposed in each of the first insulating region IA**1** and the second insulating region IA**2**. In FIG. **2**, portion "CTa" overlapping the first insulating region IA**1** and the second insulating region IA**2** may refer to a central region of the second intermediate mold pad **31**MPb disposed between the first portion **31**Mb**1** and the second portion **31**Mb**2** of each of the plurality of second intermediate mold pads **31**MPb. At least the central region of the second intermediate mold pad **31**MPb may not include the insulating protrusion portion **24***b*.

The central region of the second intermediate mold pad **31**MPb may include, and in some embodiments be filled with, the second capping insulating layer **43**. The second capping insulating layer **43** may include an insulating material different from an insulating material of the intermediate mold layers **31**M. For example, when the second capping insulating layer **43** is formed of a single material such as silicon oxide, or the like, a region between the first portion **31**Mb**1** and the second portion **31**Mb**2** of the second intermediate mold pad **31**MPb may be filled with the silicon oxide of the second capping insulating layer **43**. Differently from the above-described example embodiment, when the second capping insulating layer **43** is formed of at least two materials of a barrier insulating layer and a capping insulating layer, a region between the first portion **31**Mb**1** and the second portion **31**Mb**2** of the second intermediate mold pad **31**MPb may be filled with the barrier insulating layer of the second capping insulating layer **43**. The barrier insulating layer of the second capping insulating layer **43** may be formed of a material different from silicon nitride, such as aluminum oxide, or the like, for example, and the capping insulating layer of the second capping insulating layer **43** may be formed of silicon oxide.

Referring back to FIG. **3**, the lower mold pads **29**MP of the lower mold layers **29**M may include first lower mold pads **29**MPa and a second lower mold pad **29**MPb. The second lower mold pad **29**MPb may be disposed between the first lower mold pads **29**MPa and the first intermediate mold pads **31**MPa.

A length of the second lower mold pad **29**MPb in the first direction X may be greater than a length of each of the first lower mold pads **29**MPa in the first direction X. The second lower mold pad **29**MPb may have a structure the same as or similar to a structure of the second intermediate mold pad **31**MPb and may be formed of a material the same as or similar to a material of the second intermediate mold pad **31**MPb.

In FIG. **2**, portion "CTb" overlapping the first insulating region IA**1** and the second insulating region IA**2** may refer to a central region of each of the second lower mold pads **29**MPb.

In the description below, the intermediate gate pads **31**GP of the intermediate gate layers **31**G, arranged in the first direction X, will be described in greater detail with reference to FIGS. **5** and **6**.

Referring to FIGS. **5** and **6**, the intermediate gate layers **31**G may include the intermediate gate pads **31**GP each having an increased thickness.

The intermediate gate pads **31**GP may include first intermediate gate pads **31**GPa, and a second intermediate gate pad **31**GPb disposed between adjacent ones of the first intermediate gate pads **31**GPa. For example, the second intermediate gate pad **31**GPb may be disposed between one of the plurality of first intermediate gate pads **31**GPa and another of the plurality of first intermediate gate pads **31**GPa.

The second intermediate gate pad **31**GPb may have a structure different from a structure of each of the first intermediate gate pads **31**GPa.

In an example embodiment, each of the first intermediate gate pads **31**GPa may have a first length in the first direction X, and the second intermediate gate pad **31**GPb may have a second length in the first direction X, greater than the first length.

In an example embodiment, the second intermediate gate pad **31**GPb may include a first portion **31**GPb**1** and a second portion **31**GPb**2** spaced apart from each other in the first direction X. A length of the first portion **31**GPb**1** in the first direction X may be greater than a length of the second portion **31**GPb**2** in the first direction X.

A length of the first portion **31**GPb**1** in the first direction X may be substantially the same as a length of each of the first intermediate gate pads **31**GPa in the first direction X. A length of the second portion **31**GPb**2** in the first direction X may be less than a length of each of the first intermediate gate pads **31**GPa in the first direction X.

In an example embodiment, one or a plurality of the second intermediate gate pads **31**GPb may be disposed. When the plurality of second intermediate gate pads **31**GPb are disposed, each of the plurality of second intermediate gate pads **31**GPb may be disposed between one of the plurality of first intermediate gate pads **31**GPa and another one of the plurality of first intermediate gate pads **31**GPa.

Similarly to the second intermediate mold pad **31**MPb, a central region of the second intermediate mold pad **31**MPb may include and, in some embodiments be filled with, the second capping insulating layer **43**. For example, a central region between the first portion **31**GPb**1** and the second portion **31**GPb**2** of the second intermediate gate pad **31**GPb may include, and in some embodiments be filled with, the second capping insulating layer **43**. In FIG. **2**, portion "CTa" overlapping the gate region GA may refer to a central region of each of the second intermediate gate pads **31**GPb.

The lower gate pads **29**GP of the lower gate layers **29**G may include first lower gate pads **29**GPa and a second lower gate pad **29**GPb. The second lower gate pad **29**GPb may be disposed between the first lower gate pads **29**GPa and the first intermediate gate pads **31**GPa.

A length of the second lower gate pad **29**GPb in the first direction X may be greater than a length of each of the first lower gate pads **29**GPa in the first direction X. The second lower gate pad **29**GPb may have a structure substantially the same as the structure of the second intermediate gate pad **31**GPb and may be formed of a material the same as or similar to a material of the second intermediate gate pad **31**GPb. In FIG. **2**, portion "CTb" overlapping the gate region GA may refer to a central region of each of the second lower gate pads **29**GPb.

In the description below, the insulating region IA and the gate region GA will be described in greater detail with reference to FIGS. **7**, **8**, **9**, and **10**. FIGS. **7** and **8** may illustrate a cross-sectional surface of a region between the

first portion **31**Mb**1** and the second portion **31**Mb**2** of the second intermediate mold pad **31**MPb spaced apart from each other in the first direction X, illustrated in FIG. **4**. FIGS. **9** and **10** may illustrate a cross-sectional structure of a central region of one of the first intermediate mold pads **31**MPa in the second direction Y.

Referring to FIGS. **7** and **8**, in the cross-sectional structure of a region between the first portion **31**Mb**1** (in FIG. **4**) and the second portion **31**Mb**2** (in FIG. **4**) in the second direction, an uppermost second layer of the second layers **23**, the second intermediate mold layer **31**M and the second intermediate gate layer **31**G, may not include a portion having an increased thickness.

In the cross-sectional structure of a region between the first portion **31**Mb**1** (in FIG. **4**) and the second portion **31**Mb**2** (in FIG. **4**) in the second direction, a width of the insulating region IA in the second direction Y may be determined by a width of the second intermediate mold layer **31**M in the second direction Y.

Referring to FIGS. **9** and **10**, in the second stack region ST**2** (in FIG. **2**), the intermediate pads **31**GP and **31**MP may be disposed at a constant level. In the first stack region ST**1** (in FIG. **2**), the intermediate gate pads **31**GP of the intermediate pads **31**GP and **31**MP may be lowered to the first height in a direction towards the third stack region ST**3** (in FIG. **2**) from the second stack region ST**2**. In the third stack region ST**3** (in FIG. **2**), the intermediate pads **31**GP and **31**MP may be disposed at a constant level.

As described in the example embodiment with reference to FIGS. **3** and **4**, each of the first intermediate mold pads **31**MPa may include the mold pad portion **24***a* and the insulating protrusion portion **24***b* on the mold pad portion **24***a*. A length of the insulating protrusion portion **24***b* in the second direction Y may be less than a length of the mold pad portion **24***a* in the second direction Y.

Each of first intermediate gate pads **31**GPa of the intermediate gate pads **31**GP adjacent to the first intermediate mold pads **31**MPa may include a gate extension portion **31**GPe extending from an upper region of a portion having an increased thickness to an upper surface of the mold pad portion **24***a* and adjacent to a side surface of the insulating protrusion portion **24***b*. The gate extension portion **31**GPe may be in contact with an upper surface of the mold pad portion **24***a* and may be in contact with a side surface of the insulating protrusion portion **24***b*. Accordingly, each of the first intermediate gate pads **31**GPa of the intermediate gate pads **31**GP adjacent to the first intermediate mold pads **31**MPa may include the gate extension portion **31**GPe overlapping an upper surface of the mold pad portion **24***a* of the adjacent first intermediate mold pad **31**MPa. A width of the insulating region IA in the second direction Y may be determined by a length of the insulating protrusion portion **24***b* in the second direction Y. A length of the insulating protrusion portion **24***b* in the second direction Y may be less than a length of each of the intermediate mold layers **31**M in the second direction Y. A length of the mold pad portion **24***a* in the second direction Y may be the same as a length of each of the intermediate mold layers **31**M in the second direction Y.

The insulating region IA may have a first length L**1** in the second direction Y in the cross-sectional structure of a region between the first portion **31**MPb**1** (in FIG. **4**) and the second portion **31**MPb**2** (in FIG. **4**) in the second direction Y as in the example embodiment illustrated in FIGS. **7** and **8**. The insulating region IA may also have a second length L**2** in the second direction Y in a cross-sectional structure of the central region of one of the first intermediate mold pads **31**MPa in the second direction Y as in the example embodiment illustrated in FIGS. **9** and **10**. The first length L**1** may be greater than the second length L**2**.

In the description below, the gate layers **29**G, **31**G, **33**G, and **35**G, the memory cell vertical structure **46**, and the separation structures **69***a*, **69***b*, and **69***c* will be described in greater detail with reference to FIGS. **11** and **12**.

Referring to FIGS. **11** and **12**, each of the gate layers **29**G, **31**G, **33**G, and **35**G may include a first gate layer **27***a* and a second gate layer **27***b*. The first gate layer **27***a* may cover a lower surface and an upper surface of the second gate layer **27***b* and may extend to a region between the second gate layer **27***b* and the memory cell vertical structure **46**.

In an example embodiment, the first gate layer **27***a* may include a first conductive material (e.g., tungsten (W), or the like), and the second gate layer **27***b* may include a second conductive material (e.g., titanium nitride (TiN), tungsten nitride (WN), or the like) different from the first conductive material.

In another example embodiment, the first gate layer **27***a* may include a dielectric material, and the second gate layer **27***b* may include a conductive material (e.g., TiN, W, or the like). A dielectric material of the first gate layer **27***a* may include a high-k dielectric such as aluminum oxide (AlO).

The memory cell vertical structure **46** may include a dielectric structure **48**, a channel layer **57**, a core layer **60**, and a pad layer **63**. The channel layer **57** may be disposed on a side surface of the core layer **60**, the pad layer **63** may be disposed on the core layer **60**, and the dielectric structure **48** may be disposed on an external side surface of the channel layer **57**.

The dielectric structure **48** may include a first dielectric layer **50**, a second dielectric layer **54**, and a data storage layer **52** disposed between the first dielectric layer **50** and the second dielectric layer **54**. The second dielectric layer **54** may be disposed between the channel layer **57** and the data storage layer **52**.

The bit line contact plugs **78** may be in contact with the pad layer **63**.

In an example embodiment, the intermediate gate layers **31**G may include word lines. Regions of the data storage layer **52** opposing the intermediate gate layers **31**G which may be configured as word lines may be configured as data storage regions which may store data in a flash memory device.

In an example embodiment, at least the one lower gate layer **29**G or at least one of the plurality of lower gate layers **29**G may be configured as a lower selection gate electrode, and at least one of the plurality of upper gate layers **33**G may be configured as an upper selection gate electrode.

In another example embodiment, when a plurality of the lower gate layers **29**G are provided, one of the plurality of lower gate layers **29**G may be configured as a lower selection gate electrode, and the other may be configured as a lower erasing gate electrode used in an erasing operation of a flash memory device. One of the plurality of upper gate layers **33**G may be configured as an upper selection gate electrode, and the other may be configured as an upper erasing gate electrode used in an erasing operation of a flash memory device.

In an example embodiment, each of the first to third separation structures **69***a*, **69***b*, and **69***c* may include a separation spacer **70***a* and a separation core pattern **70***b*. The separation core pattern **70***b* may be formed of an insulating material, and the separation core pattern **70***b* may be formed of a conductive material.

In another example embodiment, each of the first to third separation structures **69***a*, **69***b*, and **69***c* may be formed of an insulating material, silicon oxide, for example.

In the description below, a modified example of the second intermediate mold pad **31**MPb (in FIG. **4**) illustrated in FIG. **4** will be described with reference to FIG. **13**A. FIG. **13**A is an enlarged diagram illustrating a modified example of the second intermediate mold pad **31**MPb (in FIG. **4**) illustrated in FIG. **4**.

In the modified example, referring to FIG. **13**A, a second intermediate mold pad **31**MPb' may include a mold pad portion **24***a*', and a first insulating protrusion portion **24***b***1** and a second insulating protrusion portion **24***b***2** disposed on the mold pad portion **24***a'* and spaced apart from each other. The first insulating protrusion portion **24***b***1** and the second insulating protrusion portion **24***b***2** may be spaced apart from a memory cell array region MA in order. A length of the first insulating protrusion portion **24***b***1** in the first direction X may be greater than a length of the second insulating protrusion portion **24***b***2** in the first direction X.

In the description below, a modified example of the second intermediate gate pad **31**GPb (in FIG. **6**) illustrated in FIG. **6** will be described with reference to FIG. **13**B. FIG. **13**B is an enlarged diagram illustrating a modified example of the second intermediate gate pad **31**GPb (in FIG. **6**) illustrated in FIG. **6**.

In the modified example, referring to FIG. **13**B, a second intermediate gate pad **31**GPb' may include a first portion **31**GPb**1'** and a second portion **31**GPb**2'** arranged in order in the first direction X and each having an increased thickness, and a third portion **31**GPb**3'** connecting the first portion **31**GPb**1'** to the second portion **31**GPb**2'**. A thickness (e.g., in a vertical Z direction) of the third portion **31**GPb**3'** may be less than a thickness of each of the first portion **31**GPb**1'** and the second portion **31**GPb**2'**. The third portion **31**GPb**3'** may be a central region of the second intermediate gate pad **31**GPb'. The central region **31**GPb**3'** of the second intermediate gate pad **31**GPb' may include a conductive material layer. The first portion **31**GPb**1'**, the second portion **31**GPb**2'**, and the central region **31**GPb**3'** may include the conductive material layer.

In the description below, a modified example of the second intermediate mold pad **31**MPb (in FIG. **4**) illustrated in FIG. **4** will be described with reference to FIG. **14**. FIG. **14** is an enlarged diagram illustrating a modified example of the second intermediate mold pad **31**MPb (in FIG. **4**) illustrated in FIG. **4**.

In the example embodiment, referring to FIG. **14**, a second intermediate mold pad **31**Mb" may include a mold pad portion **24***a"* and a first insulating protrusion portion **24***b***1'** and a second insulating protrusion portion **24***b***2'** disposed on the mold pad portion **24***a"* and spaced apart from each other. A length of each of the first insulating protrusion portion **24***b***1'** and the second insulating protrusion portion **24***b***2'** in the first direction X may be less than a length of each of first intermediate mold pads **31**MPa in the first direction X.

In the description below, a modified example of the second intermediate gate pad **31**GPb (in FIG. **6**) illustrated in FIG. **6** will be described. FIG. **15** is an enlarged diagram illustrating a modified example of the second intermediate gate pad **31**GPb (in FIG. **6**) illustrated in FIG. **6**.

In the modified example, referring to FIG. **15**, a second intermediate gate pad **31**GPb" may have a thickness substantially the same as a thickness of each of first intermediate gate pads **31**GPa, and may have a length in the first direction X greater than a length of each of the first intermediate gate pads **31**GPa in the first direction X.

In the description below, a modified example of the second intermediate mold pad **31**MPb (in FIG. **4**) will be described with reference to FIG. **16**. FIG. **16** is an enlarged diagram illustrating another modified example of the second intermediate mold pad **31**MPb illustrated in FIG. **4**.

In the modified example, referring to FIG. **16**, a second intermediate mold pad **31**MPbb may include a first portion **31**MPb**1'** and a second portion **31**MPb**2'** spaced apart from each other in the first direction X. Each of the first portion **31**MPb**1'** and the second portion **31**MPb**2'** may include the mold pad portion **24***a* (FIG. **4**) and the insulating protrusion portion **24***b* (FIG. **4**) described in the aforementioned example embodiment.

A length of each of the first portion **31**MPb**1'** and the second portion **31**MPb**2'** in the first direction X may be less than a length of each of the first intermediate mold pads **31**MPa in the first direction X.

In the description below, modified examples of the first intermediate mold pads **31**MPa (in FIG. **4**) and the second intermediate mold pad **31**MPb (in FIG. **4**) will be described with reference to FIGS. **17** and **18**. FIGS. **17** and **18** are enlarged diagrams illustrating modified examples of the first intermediate mold pads **31**MPa (in FIG. **4**) and the second intermediate mold pad **31**MPb (in FIG. **4**).

In the modified examples, referring to FIG. **17**, a second intermediate mold pad **31**MPbb' may not have an increased thickness. Each of partial first intermediate mold pads **31**MPa**1** of first intermediate mold pads **31**MPaa adjacent to the second intermediate mold pad **31**MPbb' may not have an increased thickness, and each of the other first intermediate mold pads **31**MPa**2** may have an increased thickness. For example, the first intermediate mold pads **31**MPa**2** of the first intermediate mold pads **31**MPaa, each of which has an increased thickness, may include the mold pad portion **24***a* and the insulating protrusion portion **24***b* described in the aforementioned example embodiment, and the first intermediate mold pads **31**MPa**1** of the first intermediate mold pads **31**MPaa, each of which does not have an increased thickness, may only include the mold pad portion **24***a* and may not include the insulating protrusion portion **24***b*.

In the modified examples, referring to FIG. **18**, a second intermediate mold pad **31**MPbb" may not have an increased thickness, each of partial first intermediate mold pads **31**MPa**1'** of the first intermediate mold pads **31**MPaa' adjacent to the second intermediate mold pad **31**MPbb" may not have an increased thickness, and each of the other first intermediate mold pads **31**MPa**2'** may have an increased thickness.

The first intermediate mold pads **31**MPa**1'**, each of which does not have an increased thickness, may be referred to as first thin intermediate mold pads, and the first intermediate mold pads **31**MPa**2'**, each of which has an increased thickness, may be referred to as first thick intermediate mold pads.

A difference in height between the first thin intermediate mold pad **31**MPa**1'** of the first intermediate mold pads **31**MPaa' disposed at a level higher than a level of the second intermediate mold pad **31**MPbb", adjacent to the second intermediate mold pad **31**MPbb", and the second intermediate mold pad **31**MPbb" may be less than a difference in height between the first thin intermediate mold pad **31**MPa**1'** and the first thick intermediate mold pad **31**MPa**2'**.

A difference in height between the first thin intermediate mold pad **31**MPa**1'** of the first intermediate mold pads **31**MPaa' disposed at a level lower than a level of the second

intermediate mold pad **31**MPbb", adjacent to the second intermediate mold pad **31**MPbb", and the second intermediate mold pad **31**MPbb" may be greater than a difference in height between the first thin intermediate mold pad **31**MPa**1**' and the first thick intermediate mold pad **31**MPa**2**'.

In some aforementioned example embodiments, each of some of the plurality of intermediate mold pads **31**MP may include the mold pad portion **24***a* and the insulating protrusion portion **24***b* on the mold pad portion **24***a*, each of at least some of a plurality of first intermediate mold pads **31**MPa may include the mold pad portion **24***a* and the insulating protrusion portion **24***b*.

In some aforementioned example embodiments, at least a central region of the second intermediate mold pad **31**MPb may not include the insulating protrusion portion **24***b*. For example, as illustrated in FIG. **4**, the central region of the second intermediate mold pad **31**MPb may include, and in some embodiments be filled with, the second capping insulating layer **43**.

In some example embodiments, a first intermediate mold pad of the plurality of first intermediate mold pads **31**MPa, including the mold pad portion **24***a* and the insulating protrusion portion **24***b*, may have a first thickness, and in some example embodiments, a central region of the second intermediate mold pad may have a second thickness less than the first thickness. For example, as illustrated in FIG. **13**A, the central region of the second intermediate mold pad **31**MPb' (in FIG. **13**A) may include an insulating material layer having the second thickness less than the first thickness. The insulating material layer of the central region of the second intermediate mold pad **31**MPb' (in FIG. **13**A) may be a portion of the mold pad portion **24***a*.

In example embodiments, by providing the stack structure ST including the gate region GA and the insulating region IA, integration density of the semiconductor device may improve.

In the description below, a modified example of a semiconductor device **1***a* will be described with reference to FIGS. **19** to **20**C. With regard to FIGS. **19** to **20**C, FIG. **19** is a plan diagram illustrating a modified example of a semiconductor device. FIG. **20**A is a cross-sectional diagram illustrating a region taken along line VI-VI' in FIG. **19**. FIG. **20**B is a cross-sectional diagram illustrating a region taken along line VII-VII' in FIG. **19**. FIG. **20**C is a cross-sectional diagram illustrating regions taken along lines VIII-VIII' and IX-IX'.

Referring to FIGS. **19** to **20**C, a lower structure **3** substantially the same as in the aforementioned example embodiment may be disposed. The lower structure **3** may include a lower substrate **5**, an upper substrate **12** on the lower substrate **5**, a peripheral circuit region **7** between the lower substrate **5** and the upper substrate **12**, a gap-fill insulating layer **13** penetrating the lower substrate **5**, and an intermediate insulating layer **14** on, and in some embodiments surrounding, a side surface of the lower substrate **5**.

A stack structure ST' may be disposed on the lower structure **3**. The stack structure ST' may be disposed in a memory cell array region MA and a connection region EA on the lower structure **3**. The stack structure ST' may include a gate region GA' and an insulating region IA' which does not include a conductive material.

The gate region GA' may be disposed in the memory cell array region MA and may be disposed in a portion of the connection region EA.

The stack structure ST' may include first layers **120** and second layers **123** alternately stacked on the lower structure **3**. The first layers **120** may be disposed in the gate region GA' and the insulating region IA'. The first layers **120** may be configured as interlayer insulating layers.

A first capping insulating layer **140** and a second capping insulating layer **143** may be disposed on the stack structure ST'. The first capping insulating layer **140** may be on, and in some embodiments cover, an uppermost second layer of the second layers **123**. The second capping insulating layer **143** may have an upper surface coplanar with an upper surface of the first capping insulating layer **140**, and may be on, and in some embodiments cover, a remaining portion of the stack structure ST'.

A plurality of separation structures **169***a*, **169***b*, and **169***c* penetrating the stack structure ST' may be disposed on the lower structure **3**. The plurality of separation structures **169***a*, **169***b*, and **169***c* may include first separation structures **169***a* crossing the memory cell array region MA and the connection region EA, a second separation structure **169***b* crossing the memory cell array region MA and extending into a portion of the connection region EA, and a third separation structure **169***c* disposed in a portion of the connection region EA.

Each of the first separation structures **169***a* may include a pair of first portions **169***a***1** crossing the memory cell array region MA and extending into a portion of the connection region EA, and a second portion **169***a***2** connected to the pair of first portions **169***a***1** and extending in the first direction X in the connection region EA.

The third separation structure **169***c* may be disposed between the second portions **169***a***2** of the first separation structures **169***a*. The second separation structures **169***b* may be disposed between the first portions **169***a***1** of the first separation structures **169***a*.

A distance between a side surface of the third separation structure **169***c* and a side surface of the second portion **169***a***2** of each of the first separation structures **169***a* adjacent to the third separation structure **169***c* may be greater than a distance between side surfaces of the second separation structure **169***b* adjacent to each other. A distance between a side surface of the third separation structure **169***c* and a side surface of the second portion **169***a***2** of each of the first separation structures **169***a* adjacent to the third separation structure **169***c* may be greater than a distance between a side surface of the second separation structure **169***b* and a side surface of the first portion **169***a***1** of the first separation structure **169***a*, adjacent to each other.

The second layers **123** may include gate layers **129**G, **131**G, **133**G, and **135**G disposed in the gate region GA' and mold layers **129**M, **131**M, and **135**M disposed in the insulating region IA'. Accordingly, respective ones of the lower and intermediate gate layers **129**G and **131**G and respective ones of the lower and intermediate mold layers **129**M and **131**M disposed at the same level in a boundary region between the gate region GA' and the insulating region IA' may oppose each other (e.g., respective ends of the lower and intermediate mold layers **129**M and **131**M may face respective ends of the lower and intermediate gate layers **129**G and **131**G).

In an example embodiment, the mold layers **129**M, **131**M, and **135**M may be formed of a material the same as a material of the mold layers **29**M, **31**M, and **35**M illustrated in FIGS. **1** to **12**.

In an example embodiment, each of the gate layers **129**G, **131**G, **133**G, and **135**G may include a conductive material. For example, each of the gate layers **129**G, **131**G, **133**G, and **135**G may be configured as a gate electrode.

The gate layers **129**G, **131**G, **133**G, and **135**G may include one or a plurality of lower gate layers **129**G, a

plurality of intermediate gate layers **131**G on the one or the plurality of lower gate layers **129**G, a plurality of upper gate layers **133**G on the plurality of intermediate gate layers **131**G, and a floating gate layer **135**G on the plurality of intermediate gate layers **131**G.

The mold layers **129**M, **131**M, and **135**M may include one or a plurality of lower mold layers **129**M, a plurality of intermediate mold layers **131**M on the one or the plurality of lower mold layers **129**M, and a floating mold layer **135**M on the plurality of intermediate mold layers **131**M.

The gate layers **129**G, **131**G, **133**G, and **135**G may include a plurality of gate pads arranged in staircase structure, and the mold layers **129**M, **131**M, and **135**M may include a plurality of mold pads arranged in staircase structure. For example, the one or the plurality of lower gate layers **129**G may include one or a plurality of lower gate pads **129**GP, the plurality of intermediate gate layers **131**G may include intermediate gate pads **131**GP, and the plurality of upper gate layers **133**G may include upper gate pads **133**GP. The one or the plurality of lower mold layers **129**M may include one or a plurality of lower mold pads **129**MP, and the intermediate mold layers **131**M may include intermediate mold pads **131**MP.

At least one of the lower, intermediate, and upper gate pads **129**GP, **131**GP, and **133**GP may have a thickness greater than a thickness of each of the gate layers **129**G, **131**G, and **133**G. A thickness of each of the gate layers **129**G, **131**G, and **133**G may refer to a thickness of a region of each of the gate layers **129**G, **131**G, and **133**G in which the lower, intermediate, and upper gate pads **129**GP, **131**GP, and **133**GP are not disposed.

At least one of the lower and intermediate mold pads **129**MP and **131**MP may have a thickness greater than a thickness of each of the gate layers **129**G, **131**G, and **133**G.

In some embodiments, at least one of the lower and intermediate mold pads **129**MP and **131**MP may have a thickness greater than a thickness of each of the mold layers **129**M and **133**M. A thickness of each of the mold layers **129**M and **133**M may refer to a thickness of a region of each of the mold layers **129**M and **133**M in which the lower and intermediate mold pads **129**MP and **133**MP are not disposed.

The intermediate gate pads **131**GP may include first intermediate gate pads **131**GPa formed of a material the same as a material of the first intermediate gate pads **31**GPa (in FIG. **6**) illustrated in FIG. **6** and having a structure the same as a structure of each of the first intermediate gate pads **31**GPa, and may include a second intermediate gate pad **131**GPb formed of a material the same as a material of the second intermediate gate pad **31**GPb (in FIG. **6**) illustrated in FIG. **6** and having a structure the same as a structure of the second intermediate gate pad **31**GPb. The second intermediate gate pad **131**GPb may include a first portion **131**GPb**1** and a second portion **131**GPb**2** spaced apart from each other as in the example embodiment illustrated in FIG. **6**, and a central region of the second intermediate gate pad **131**GPb between the first portion **131**GPb**1** and the second portion **131**GPb**2** may be filled with the second capping insulating layer **143**.

The lower gate pads **129**GP may include first lower gate pads **129**GPa formed of a material the same as a material of the first lower gate pads **29**GPa (in FIG. **5**) illustrated in FIG. **5** and having a structure the same as a structure of each of the first lower gate pads **29**GPa, and may include a second lower gate pad **129**GPb formed of a material the same as a material of the second lower gate pad **29**GPb (in FIG. **5**) illustrated in FIG. **5** and having a structure the same as a structure of the second lower gate pad **29**GPb. The second lower gate pad **129**GPb may include a first portion **129**GPb**1** and a second portion **129**GPb**2** spaced apart from each other as in the example embodiment illustrated in FIG. **5**, and a central region of the second lower gate pad **129**GPb between the first portion **129**GPb**1** and the second portion **129**GPb**2** may be filled with the second capping insulating layer **143**.

The intermediate mold pads **131**MP may include first intermediate mold pads **131**MPa formed of a material the same as a material of the first intermediate mold pads **31**MPa (in FIG. **4**) illustrated in FIG. **4** and having a structure the same as a structure of each of the first intermediate mold pads **31**MPa, and may include a second intermediate mold pad **131**MPb formed of a material the same as a material of the second intermediate mold pad **31**MPb (in FIG. **4**) illustrated in FIG. **4** and having a structure the same as a structure of the second intermediate mold pad **31**MPb. For example, each of the first intermediate mold pads **131**MPa may include a mold pad portion ***124a*** and an insulating protrusion portion ***124b*** on the mold pad portion ***124a***. The second intermediate mold pad **131**MPb may include a first portion **131**MPb**1** and a second portion **131**MPb**2** spaced apart from each other as in the example embodiment illustrated in FIG. **4**. A central region of the second intermediate mold pad **131**MPb may not include the insulating protrusion portion ***124b***. For example, the central region of the second intermediate mold pad **131**MPb between the first portion **131**MPb**1** and the second portion **131**MPb**2** may be filled with the second capping insulating layer **143**.

The lower mold pads **129**MP may include a first lower mold pads **129**MPa and a second lower mold pad **129**MPb. The second lower mold pad **129**MPb may be adjacent to the intermediate mold pads **131**MP, and may include a first portion **129**MPb**1** and a second portion **129**MPb**2** spaced apart from each other. A central region of the second lower mold pad **129**MPb may not include the insulating protrusion portion ***124b***. For example, the central region of the second lower mold pad **129**MPb between the first portion **129**MPb**1** and the second portion **129**MPb**2** may be filled with the second capping insulating layer **143**.

In FIG. **19**, a reference numeral "CT" may refer to a central region of the second intermediate mold pad **131**MPb, a central region of the second intermediate gate pad **131**GPb, a central region of the second lower mold pad **129**MPb, and a central region of the second lower gate pad **129**GPb.

A first upper insulating layer **166** and a second upper insulating layer **172** stacked in order on the first capping insulating layer **140** and the second capping insulating layer **143** may be disposed. The first to third separation structures ***169a***, ***169b***, and ***169c*** may penetrate the stack structure ST', may extend upwardly, and may penetrate the first and second capping insulating layers **140** and **143** and the first upper insulating layer **166**.

Bit line contact plugs **178** penetrating the first upper insulating layer **166** and the second upper insulating layer **172** and electrically connected to the memory cell vertical structure **146** may be disposed.

In the connection region EA, gate contact structures **175** penetrating the first upper insulating layer **166** and a second upper insulating layer **172**, extending downwardly, and electrically connected to the lower, intermediate, and upper gate pads **129**GP, **131**GP, and **133**GP may be disposed.

Peripheral contact structures **181** in contact with peripheral pad portions **8**P of the peripheral wirings **8**, extending upwardly, and penetrating the gap-fill insulating layer **113** and the insulating region IA' of the stack structure ST' may be disposed.

Gate connection wirings **185** may be disposed on the gate contact structures **175** and the peripheral contact structures **181**.

Bit lines **184** may be disposed on the bit line contact plugs **178**.

In the description below, an example of a method of manufacturing a semiconductor device will be described with reference to FIGS. **21**, and **22**A to **23**B. FIG. **21** is a flowchart illustrating a method of manufacturing a semiconductor device according to an example embodiment of the present inventive concepts. FIGS. **22**A to **23**B are cross-sectional diagrams illustrating an example of a method of manufacturing a semiconductor device according to an example embodiment of the present inventive concepts. FIGS. **22**A and **23**A are cross-sectional diagrams illustrating a region taken along line VII-VII' in FIG. **19**, and FIGS. **22**B and **23**B are cross-sectional diagrams illustrating regions taken along lines VIII-VIII' and IX-IX' in FIG. **19**.

Referring to FIGS. **19**, **21**, **22**A, and **22**B, a mold structure **119** including insulating layers **120** and mold layers **121** may be formed on a lower structure **3** (S**10**). The insulating layers **120** may be formed of silicon oxide, and the mold layers **121** may be formed of silicon nitride. The insulating layers **120** and the mold layers **121** may be alternately stacked.

The lower structure **3** may include a lower substrate **5**, an upper substrate **12** on the lower substrate **5**, a peripheral circuit region **7** between the lower substrate **5** and the upper substrate **12**, a gap-fill insulating layer **13** penetrating the lower substrate **5**, an intermediate insulating layer **14** an, and in some embodiments surrounding, a side surface of the lower substrate **5**.

The mold structure **119** may be formed in a memory cell array region MA and a connection region EA on the lower structure **3**.

In the connection region EA, a staircase structure exposing the mold layers **121** may be formed (S**20**). For example, a staircase structure may be formed by patterning the insulating layers **120** and the mold layers **121**, and the mold layers **121** may be exposed by the staircase structure. Forms of the staircase structure may not be limited to the example illustrated in the diagrams, and may be varied. For example, the staircase structure may be configured as the staircase structure of the stack structure ST illustrated in FIGS. **1** to **12**.

In the connection region EA, pad regions **121**P each having an increased thickness may be formed by forming additional mold layers **124***b* on the exposed mold layers **121** (S**30**).

By performing a photolithography process and an etching process, portions of the pad regions **121**P may be etched (S**40**).

In an example embodiment, each of the etched partial pad regions may have a length in the first direction X, greater than a length of each of the other pad regions in the first direction X. The etched partial pad regions may be divided into a first portion **121**P**1** and a second portion **121**P**2**.

In an example embodiment, the etching the portions of the pad regions **121**P may include removing the additional mold layer and the mold layer of the etched pad region.

In another example embodiment, the etching the portions of the pad regions **121**P may include removing only the additional mold layer and leaving the mold layer of the etched pad region.

Capping insulating layers **140** and **143** on, and in some embodiments covering, the mold structure **119** may be formed. The capping insulating layers **140** and **143** may include a first capping insulating layer **140** formed before forming the staircase structure, and a second capping insulating layer **143** formed after forming the staircase structure. A memory cell vertical structure **146** penetrating the first capping insulating layer **140** and the mold structure **119** may be formed. The memory cell vertical structure **146** may have a structure the same as a structure of the memory cell vertical structure **46** (in FIG. **12**) illustrated in FIG. **12**.

Referring to FIGS. **20**A to **20**C along with FIGS. **19**, **21**, **23**A and **23**B, an insulating layer **166** may be formed (S**50**). For example, a first upper insulating layer **166** may be formed on the first and second capping insulating layers **140** and **143**. Separation trenches **165** penetrating the first upper insulating layer **166**, the first and second capping insulating layers **140** and **143**, and the mold structure **119** (in FIG. **22**A) in order may be formed.

Portions of the mold layers **121** and portions of the additional mold layers **124***b* may be replaced with the gate layers **129**G, **131**G, **133**G, and **135**G (in FIGS. **20**A to **20**C) (S**60**).

The replacing portions of the mold layers **121** and portions of the additional mold layers **124***b* with the gate layers **129**G, **131**G, **133**G, and **135**G (in FIGS. **20**A to **20**C) may include forming empty spaces **167** by partially etching the mold layers **121** and the additional mold layers **124***b*, exposed by the separation trenches **165**, and forming the gate layers **129**G, **131**G, **133**G, and **135**G (in FIGS. **20**A to **20**C) in the empty spaces **167**.

The remaining mold layers **121** (in FIGS. **23**A and **23**B) and the remaining first upper insulating layer **166** may be included in the mold layers **129**M, **131**M, and **135**M described in the aforementioned example embodiment with reference to FIGS. **20**A and **20**B.

Referring to FIGS. **19** and **20**A to **20**C, separation structures **169***a*, **169***b*, and **169***c* (in FIG. **20**C) filling the separation trenches **165** (in FIG. **23**B) may be formed. A second upper insulating layer **172** may be formed on the first upper insulating layer **166**.

Bit line contact plugs **178** penetrating the first and second upper insulating layers **166** and **172** and electrically connected to the memory cell vertical structure **146** may be formed.

Gate contact structures **175** penetrating the first and second upper insulating layers **166** and **172**, extending downwardly, and electrically connected to the gate pads **129**GP, **131**GP, and **133**GP of the gate layers **129**G, **131**G, **133**G, and **135**G (in FIGS. **20**A to **20**C) may be formed.

The peripheral contact structures **181** penetrating the insulating region IA' (in FIG. **19**) including the mold layers **129**M, **131**M, and **135**M and electrically connected to peripheral pad portions **8**P of peripheral wirings **8** of the peripheral circuit region **7** of the lower structure **3** may be formed.

A bit line **184** may be formed on the bit line contact plug **178**.

Gate connection wirings **185** may be formed on the gate contact structures **175** and the peripheral contact structures **181**.

According to the aforementioned example embodiments, by providing the stack structure including the gate region and the insulating region on the lower structure including the peripheral circuit region, integration density of the semiconductor may improve.

While the example embodiments have been shown and described above, it will be apparent to those skilled in the art that modifications and variations could be made without departing from the scope of the present inventive concepts as defined by the appended claims.

What is claimed is:

1. A semiconductor device, comprising:

a lower structure comprising a lower substrate, an upper substrate on the lower substrate, and a peripheral circuit region between the lower substrate and the upper substrate;

a stack structure in a memory cell array region on the lower structure and extending into a connection region on the lower structure, wherein the stack structure comprises a gate region and a first insulating region, wherein the gate region is in the memory cell array region and extends into the connection region, and wherein the first insulating region is in the connection region;

a capping insulating layer on the stack structure; and

a memory cell vertical structure in the gate region in the memory cell array region,

wherein the stack structure comprises a plurality of first layers and a plurality of second layers alternately stacked on the lower structure,

wherein the plurality of second layers comprise a plurality of gate layers in the gate region, a plurality of mold layers in the first insulating region, a plurality of gate portions extending from the plurality of gate layers in the connection region, and a plurality of mold portions extending from at least one of the mold layers in the connection region,

wherein the plurality of gate portions and the plurality of mold portions have a staircase structure in the connection region,

wherein each of the plurality of gate layers comprises a conductive material,

wherein each of the plurality of mold layers comprises an insulating material,

wherein the plurality of mold layers comprise one or more lower mold layers, and a plurality of intermediate mold layers on the one or more lower mold layers,

wherein the plurality of mold portions comprises a first intermediate mold portion and a second intermediate mold portion,

wherein at least one of the first intermediate mold portion and the second intermediate mold portion comprises a mold pad portion and an insulating protrusion portion on the mold pad portion, and

wherein at least a central region of the first intermediate mold portion does not comprise the insulating protrusion portion.

2. The semiconductor device of claim 1, wherein the second intermediate mold portion comprises the mold pad portion and the insulating protrusion portion, and wherein the second intermediate mold portion is at a different level than the first intermediate mold portion.

3. The semiconductor device of claim 1, wherein a thickness of the second intermediate mold portion is greater than a thickness of each of the plurality of intermediate mold layers.

4. The semiconductor device of claim 1, wherein the first intermediate mold portion comprises a first portion and a second portion spaced apart from each other in a first direction,

wherein the first portion and the second portion of the first intermediate mold portion comprises the mold pad portion and the insulating protrusion portion,

wherein a length of the first portion of the first intermediate mold portion in the first direction is greater than a length of the second portion of the first intermediate mold portion in the first direction,

wherein the mold pad portion comprises a same material as a material of the plurality of intermediate mold layers, and has a same thickness as a thickness of each of the plurality of intermediate mold layers,

wherein the mold pad portion comprises a first insulating material, and

wherein the insulating protrusion portion comprises a second insulating material, the second insulating material having an etching speed higher than an etching speed of the first insulating material.

5. The semiconductor device of claim 1, further comprising:

a plurality of peripheral contact structures penetrating the first insulating region; and

a plurality of gate contact structures electrically connected to the plurality of gate portions,

wherein the plurality of gate layers comprise one or more lower gate layers, a plurality of intermediate gate layers on the one or more lower gate layers, and a plurality of upper gate layers on the plurality of intermediate gate layers,

wherein the plurality of gate pads comprise a plurality of upper gate pads extending from the plurality of upper gate layers, a plurality of intermediate gate pads extending from the plurality of intermediate gate layers, and one or more lower gate pads extending from the one or more lower gate layers,

wherein each of the plurality of intermediate gate pads has a first thickness greater than a second thickness of each of the plurality of gate layers, and

wherein an uppermost gate pad among the plurality of upper gate pads has the second thickness.

6. The semiconductor device of claim 1, further comprising:

a plurality of separation structures penetrating the stack structure,

wherein the stack structure further comprises a second insulating region, and

wherein a portion of the gate region is between the first insulating region and the second insulating region.

7. A semiconductor device, comprising:

a lower structure;

a stack structure in a memory cell array region on the lower structure and extending into a connection region on the lower structure, wherein the stack structure comprises a gate region and an insulating region in the connection region; and

a memory cell vertical structure penetrating the gate region in the memory cell array region,

wherein the stack structure comprises a plurality of first layers and a plurality of second layers alternately stacked on the lower structure,

wherein the gate region in the connection region comprises a first gate pad region and a second gate pad region,

wherein the insulating region is between the first gate pad region and the second gate pad region,

wherein the plurality of second layers comprise a plurality of gate portions in the first and second gate pad regions, and a plurality of mold portions in the insulating region,

wherein the plurality of gate portions and the plurality of mold portions have a staircase structure in the connection region,

wherein the plurality of mold portions comprise a first mold portion,

wherein at least one mold portion of the plurality of mold portions comprises a mold pad portion and an insulating protrusion portion on the mold pad portion, and

wherein a central region of the first mold portion does not include the insulating protrusion portion.

8. The semiconductor device of claim **7**, wherein the plurality of mold portions further comprise a second mold portion, and

wherein at least a central region of the second mold portion comprises the mold pad portion and the insulating protrusion portion.

9. The semiconductor device of claim **7**, wherein the first mold portion comprises a first edge region and a second edge region,

wherein the central region of the first mold portion is between the first edge region and the second edge region, and

wherein each of the first edge region and the second edge region of the first mold portion comprises the mold pad portion and the insulating protrusion portion.

10. The semiconductor device of claim **9**, wherein a length of the first edge region in a first direction is greater than a length of the second edge region in the first direction.

11. The semiconductor device of claim **10**, wherein a length of the central region in the first direction is greater than the length of the first edge region in the first direction.

12. The semiconductor device of claim **7**, wherein the plurality of gate portions comprise a plurality of intermediate gate pads and a plurality of upper gate pads on the plurality of intermediate gate pads,

wherein an uppermost gate pad among the plurality of upper gate pads has a first thickness,

wherein each of the plurality of intermediate gate pads has a second thickness, and

wherein the second thickness is greater than the first thickness.

13. The semiconductor device of claim **7**, wherein the first layers comprise interlayer insulating layers, and

wherein a material of the interlayer insulating layers is different from a material of the plurality of mold portions.

14. The semiconductor device of claim **7**, wherein the mold pad portion comprises a first insulating material, and

wherein the insulating protrusion portion comprises a second insulating material different from the first insulating material.

15. The semiconductor device of claim **14**, wherein the second insulating material has an etching speed higher than an etching speed of the first insulating material.

16. The semiconductor device of claim **7**, further comprising:

a plurality of peripheral contact structures penetrating the insulating region in the connection region; and

a plurality of gate contact structures electrically connected to the plurality of gate portions in the first and second gate pad regions,

wherein at least one of the plurality of peripheral contact structures penetrates through the central region of the first mold portion.

17. A semiconductor device, comprising:

a lower structure;

a stack structure in a memory cell array region on the lower structure and extending into a connection region on the lower structure, wherein the stack structure comprises a gate region and an insulating region in the connection region;

a memory cell vertical structure penetrating the stack structure in the memory cell array region; and

a capping insulating layer on the stack structure,

wherein the stack structure comprises a plurality of first layers and a plurality of second layers alternately stacked on the lower structure,

wherein the plurality of first layers comprise interlayer insulating layers,

wherein the plurality of second layers comprise a plurality of gate portions in the gate region, and a plurality of mold portions in the insulating region,

wherein the plurality of gate portions and the plurality of mold portions have a staircase structure in the connection region,

wherein the plurality of gate portions comprise an intermediate gate portion and an uppermost gate portion,

wherein a thickness of the uppermost gate portion is greater than a thickness of the intermediate gate portion,

wherein the plurality of mold portions comprise a first mold portion,

wherein the first mold portion comprises a first mold pad portion and a first insulating protrusion portion on the first mold pad portion,

wherein at least a portion of an edge region of the first mold portion comprises the first mold pad portion and the first insulating protrusion portion, and

wherein a central region of the first mold portion does not include the first insulating protrusion portion.

18. The semiconductor device of claim **17**, wherein the gate region in the connection region comprises a first gate region and a second gate region, and

wherein the insulating region is between the first gate region and the second gate region.

19. The semiconductor device of claim **17**, wherein the plurality of mold portions further comprise a second mold portion,

wherein at least a central region of the second mold portion comprises a second mold pad portion and a second insulating protrusion portion on the second mold pad portion,

wherein the second mold pad portion comprises a same material as the first mold pad portion, and

wherein the second insulating protrusion portion comprises a same material as the first insulating protrusion portion.

20. The semiconductor device of claim **18**, further comprising:

a plurality of peripheral contact structures penetrating the insulating region in the connection region; and

a plurality of gate contact structures electrically connected to the plurality of gate portions in the first and second gate regions,

wherein at least one of the plurality of peripheral contact structures penetrates through the central region of the first mold portion and is spaced apart from the first insulating protrusion portion.

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