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Data storage and processing apparatus, and method for fabricating the same

The present invention concerns a data storage and -processing apparatus comprising ROM and/or WORM and/or REWRITABLE memory modules and data-processing modules, wherein the apparatus is provided on a substrate, wherein memory and processing modules are provided in a single main layer or multiple stacked main layers on the top of the substrate, wherein the memory modules and the data-processing modules in each main layer communicate through vias, surface or edge connections with other main layers and with circuitry provided on or in the substrate, and wherein the apparatus comprises active circuits with transistors and/or diodes for operating the apparatus. The present invention also concerns a method for fabricating a data storage and processing apparatus comprising ROM and/or WORM and/or REWRITABLE memory modules and data-processing modules, wherein the apparatus is provided on a substrate, wherein memory and processing modules are provided in a single main layer or multiple stacked main layers on the top of the substrate, wherein the memory modules and the data-processing modules in each main layer communicate through vias, surface or edge connections with other main layers and with circuitry provided on or in the substrate, and wherein the apparatus comprises active circuits with transistors and/or diodes for operating the apparatus, and wherein the memory and data-processing modules are provided by depositing the main layers and the functional sublayers thereof in successive steps, the method being

The invention particularly concerns a data storage and -processing apparatus 3D scalable single- and multilayer memory and data-processing modules and apparatus; and which even more particularly are based on ROM and/or WORM and/or REWRITABLE blocks addressed in a passive matrix scheme.

The present application claims priority from Norwegian Patent Application No. 982518 titled "Scalable integrated data-processing device" which has been assigned to the applicant of the present invention and which hereby additionally is incorporated by reference. This scalable integrated data-processing device, particularly a microcomputer, comprises a processing unit with one or more processors and a storage unit with one or more memories. The data-processing device is provided on a carrier substrate and comprises mutually adjacent, substantially parallel layers stacked upon each



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other. The processing unit and the storage unit are each provided in one or more such layers and/or in layers formed with a selected number of processors and memories in selected combinations. In each layer are provided horizontal electrical conducting structures which constitute internal electrical connections in the layer and besides each layer comprises further electrical conducting structures which provide electrical connections to other layers and to the exterior of the data processing device. These further electrical structures in a layer are provided on at least a side edge of the layer as electrical edge connections and/or preferably as vertical conducting structures which form an electrical connection in the cross-direction of the layer and perpendicular to its plane to contact electrical conducting structures in other layers. Particularly the layers may be formed of a plurality of sublayers made of organic thin-film materials. Some of all layers or sublayers may also be made with both organic or inorganic thin-film materials. A preferred embodiment of the data-processing device according to the priority application is shown in fig. 1. Advantageously are here processors and memories, the latter e.g. RAMs assigned to the processors, provided in one and the same layer. A processor interface 3 with an I/O interface 8 is provided on a substrate S and above the processor interface 3 follows a processor layer P_1 with one or more processors. Both the processor interface 3 and the processor layer P_1 may as the lowermost layers in the data-processing device and adjacent to the substrate be realized in conventional, e.g. silicon-based technologies. Above the processor layer P_1 is provided a first memory layer M_1 which may be configured with one or more RAMs 6 assigned to the processors 5 in the underlying processor layer P_1. In fig. 1, however, the separate RAMs 6 in the memory layer M_1 are emphasized in particular. On the other hand it is shown how the memories in the memory layer M_1 may be directly connected to the underlying processor layer P_1 via buses 7, the stacked configuration allowing such buses 7 to be provided in a large number by being realized as vertical conducting structures, while the configuration layer-on-layer allows for a large number of such bus connections being provided between the processor layer P_1 and the memory layer M_1 and in addition with short signal paths. It will be realized that the juxtaposed arrangement in a surface would in contrast require longer connections and consequently longer transfer times. Further the data-processing device as shown comprises combined memory and processor layers MP_1, MP_2, MP_3 provided with processors that are

connected mutually and to the processor interface 3 via the same processor bus 4. All the combined memory and processor layers MP comprise one or more processors 5 and one or more RAMs 6. Above the combined memory and processor layers MP there is provided a memory interface 1 with an I/O interface 9 to external units and above the memory interface 1 follows memory layers M_2, M_3, ... in as large number as desirable and possibly realized as the mass memory of the data-processing device. These memory layers , M_2, M_3 etc. are in their turn connected to the memory interface 1 via memory buses realized as vertical conducting structures 2 through the layers M_2, M_3, ...

The integrated data-processing device has a scalable architecture, such that it in principle can be configured with an almost unlimited processor and memory capacity. Particularly can the data-processing device implement various forms of scalable parallel architectures integrated with optimal interconnectivity in three dimensions.

In addition to comprising random accessible memories, the storage unit of the data-processing device shall also comprise memories in the form of ROM, WORM or REWRITEABLE or combinations thereof.

The present invention particularly discloses how the three-dimensional scalable single- and multilayer memory and data-processing modules may be implemented with architectures and processing methods making them suitable for application in a scalable integrated data-processing device of the above-mentioned kind, but not necessarily limited thereto.

The background art shall now briefly be discussed.

Published international patent application WO95/09438 (Zawracky & al., assigned to Kopin Corp.) discloses an integrated circuit device in the form of a multilayered structure, particularly a microprocessor divided into functional blocks, such as an arithmetic unit, controller, memory elements etc., fabricated in the same or separate or semiconductor wafers and then stacked. The functional blocks of the circuit device are divided into sections, with one section provided on a bulk chip and the remaining sections on an overlying thin film with components electrically connected through an intervening isolating layer. The circuit device comprises both bulk and thin-film semiconductor layers, where the circuit elements can be formed the

in bulk inorganic semiconducting material or as composite structures including bulk silicon material and/or thin-film gallium arsenide. The various layers of the circuit device can be stacked by fabricating each circuit layer in a separate wafer of thin-film material and then transfer the layers onto the stack and using separate interconnections extending vertically through the isolating layers which separate each circuit layer in the stack. In one preferred embodiment the circuit device is realized as a volumetric processor device with microprocessor and RAM in separate and interfoliated stacked layers with vertical connections formed by metallic vias extending through the layers. However, Zawracky & al. does not give any hint for implementing memory modules of e.g. the ROM or WORM type and the envisaged structure of the circuit device is not amenable to the realization of memory modules with passive matrix addressable memory elements.

US patent No. 5714768 (Ovshinsky & al.) essentially discloses a combination of a memory with a logic processing device, the memory being provided as one or more memory arrays deposited on the top of the logic processing device. Each memory array is made up of memory cells arranged in a matrix and addressable via bit and word and lines forming the addressing electrodes of the memory cells which are disclosed as separate functional units. Particularly the memory cells are realized with an electric phase change memory material based on inorganic compounds of the chalcogenide type, which can be deposited with low-temperature deposition processes.

Advanced DRAM demonstration dies are presently available in 1-gigabit (Gbit) modules based on a 0.18 μm process over a 570 mm^2 chip area. The conventional one-transistor DRAM cell requires roughly $10\lambda^2$ area (where λ is the minimum feature size) although processing "tricks" can reduce this significantly (40%). However row and column decode, drivers, sense amplifiers, and error correction logic cannot share the same silicon area and account for a significant fraction of the DRAM die area. More importantly, existing DRAM designs to date have not proven scalable to a 3D stacked architecture. By their design, high density DRAM's are also inappropriate as ROM memories. The conventional NOR-gate based ROM requires a nominal cell of $70\lambda^2$ (though again reduced by processing tricks) limiting densities to $<10^8$ bits/cm^2 under even the most aggressive lithography assumptions. Higher densities can only be achieved through the use of both dense metal designs (minimum metal pitch) coupled with 3D integration. Technically and

commercially viable devices of this type have as yet not been forthcoming, although the enormous commercial potential has prompted a great deal of R&D efforts by the electronics industry, which in term has spawned a voluminous patent literature.

3D data storage: Stacking of thin layers of memory on top of each other to achieve high volumetric and areal densities has been attempted by using e.g. lift-off techniques for inorganic thin film circuitry. However, the background art has led to designs that have proven too complicated or costly to have a commercial impact. In US Patent No. 5,375,085 "Three dimensional ferroelectric integrated circuit without insulation layer between memory layers", B.E. Gnade et al. have disclosed a layered, passively addressed memory stack based on a ferroelectric memory substance. However, no concrete information is given, in particular relating to processability in multiple levels, showing how complete memory devices can be made that include all the required ancillary active circuitry. Several patent applications involving stacking of thin film memory layers etc, and which are of relevance for the present invention, have been filed by the present applicant. These include Norwegian patent applications NO 973993, NO 980781, the above-mentioned NO 982518, NO 980602 and NO 990867.

Dense metal designs: Passive matrix addressing provides a density corresponding to a unit cell area of approximately 4 λ^2 .

A number of patents exist where ROM devices employ passive matrix addressing schemes, e.g.: U.S. Pat. 4,099,260 of D.N. Lynes et al.: "Bipolar read-only-memory unit having self-isolating bit-lines"; U.S. Pat.4,400,713 of K.G. Bauge and P.B. Mollier: "Matrix array of semiconducting elements"; U.S. Pat. 5,170,227 of M. Kaneko and K. Noguchi: "Mask ROM having monocrystalline silicon conductors"; U.S. Pat. 5,464,989 of S. Mori et al.: "Mask ROM using tunnel current detection to store data and a method of manufacturing thereof"; U.S. Pat. 5,811,337 by J. Wen: "Method of fabricating a semiconductor read-only memory device for permanent storage of multilevel coded data" and PCT Pat. WO 96/41381 of F. Gonzalez et al.: "A stack/trench diode for use with a multistate material in a non-volatile memory cell". However, such schemes rely explicitly on traditional silicon wafer processing, involving e.g. thermal treatment, implantation and etching

procedures which are incompatible with the goals of the present invention, i.e.: low cost and optionally multilevel data storage.

The above-mentioned cited U.S. Pat. 5,375,085 discloses devices based on passive matrix addressing, but restricted to the special case of ferroelectric memory materials. The ferroelectric materials referred as examples in that patent have, however, proven unsuitable in simple passive matrix addressed memory schemes due to loss of polarization in unselected cells subjected to repeated partial switching. One- and two-transistor ferroelectric RAM (FERAM) devices avoid this problem, but have not lent themselves to simple 3D scaling.

In U.S. Pat. 5,441,907 "Process for manufacturing a plug-diode mask ROM", H-C. Sung and L. Chen discloses a passive matrix addressed ROM where binary data are coded at each matrix crossing point by the presence or absence of a diode connection. However, methods describing fabrication of devices according to the referred patent involve several high temperature steps, include final annealing, which precludes construction of multilayers and the use of low-cost, low temperature compatible materials.

Thin film ROM devices: In GB Patent 2,066,566 "Amorphous diode and ROM or EEPROM device utilizing same", S.H. Holmberg and R.A. Flasck discloses thin film memory devices based on fluorine-containing amorphous silicon. In U.S. Pat. 5,272,370 "Thin-film ROM devices and their manufacture", I.D. French discloses a ROM device based on thin-film memory cells in a passive matrix addressing arrangement. Emphasis is explicitly on multilevel (i.e. multi-bit) data storage in each memory cell, by providing multilayer structures that can be individually selected for each memory cell.

It is a main object of the present invention to provide architectures and technical solutions where dense bit cell patterns in 2D can be incorporated into 3D storage structures, employing easily implementable, low-cost manufacturing technologies.

It is a further object of the present invention to provide ROM, WORM, and REWRITABLE memory devices with short random access times, high data transfer rates and low power consumption. In the present document, the term "REWRITABLE" shall be used in connection with memory cells where

information that has been stored can be exchanged by new information through an erase/write or direct overwrite operation. Depending on the application, this operation may be performed only once, or repeatedly.

It is yet a further object of the present invention to provide integrated data storage and processing devices where memory structures and device architectures can be created in very dense structures characterized by short, highly parallelized interconnection paths in two and three dimensions.

Finally, it is also an object of the invention to provide a fabrication method for a data storage and -processing apparatus based on low-temperature compatible processes and materials suited therefor.

The above-mentioned objects and advantages are realized according to the invention with a data storage and processing apparatus which is characterized in that each main layer of a memory module and/or data-processing module comprises a stack of functional sublayers, each functional sublayer realizing one or more specific circuit functions, that at least some of the active circuitry is provided in the main layer or main layers, and that at least some of the functional layers comprise a combination of low temperature-compatible organic film materials and low temperature-compatible processed inorganic films.

In an advantageous embodiment of the apparatus according to the invention at least one of the main layers comprises memory modules with passive matrix-addressable memory elements defined in a memory material at the crossings between electrodes of a first set of parallel electrodes provided on a surface of the memory material and a second set of parallel electrodes provided on the opposite surface of the memory material and in intersecting relationship with the first set of electrodes, the memory elements being realized as non-linear impedance elements at the crossings, and the memory elements in order to improve the addressability thereof are each provided with a logic value given by an electrical impedance parameter of the memory material between the intersecting electrodes. Preferably are then the non-linear impedance elements rectifying diodes diodes made of one or the following materials, viz. silicon, gallium arsenide or germanium in amorphous, polycrystalline, microcrystalline, bulk or process-defined single crystal form, or organic semiconducting materials including molecules,

oligomers or polymers or combinations thereof; or thin-film transistors made of one of the following materials, viz silicon, gallium arsenide or germanium in amorphous, polycrystalline, mirocrystalline, bulk or process-defined single crystal form; or organic semiconducting materials including molecules, oligomers or polymers or combinations thereof.

In this embodiment it is also preferred that at least one main layer comprises dual passive matrix-addressable memory modules in separate sublayers, one overlying and one underlying memory modules sharing one set of row or column electrodes, and wherein more than one layer is provided, that at least two of the main layers comprise common row or column drive electronics and as well as optional sense electronics connected therewith through common wires.

In another advantageous embodiment of the apparatus according to the invention, wherein more than one main layer is used, each main layer comprises more than one memory module, the memory modules being provided in the form of juxtaposed segments stacked on the top of similar segments in an underlying main layer to form two or more juxtaposed stacks on a common substrate, and a part of each segment in each stack is connected to a portion of the substrate and communicates electrically with the circuitry provided thereon or therein.

In a further advantageous embodiment of the apparatus according to the invention, wherein more than one main layer is provided, each main layer comprises more than one memory module, the memory modules being provided in the form of juxtaposed segments stacked on the top of similar segments in an underlying main layer in a staggered arrangement, such that each memory module in the stack is provided staggered in relation to adjacent neighbour modules, and a part of each segments in each stack is connected to portion of the substrate and communicates electrically with the circuitry thereon or therein.

In the apparatus according to the invention preferably a plurality of throughgoing electrical conductors or vias providing power and signal connections between the main layers and between the latter and the substrate is distributed laterally in a staggered arrangement.

In various preferable variant embodiments of the apparatus according to the invention at least one of the memory modules is a masked ROM or patterned ROM, or a WORM, or comprises memory cells of the REWRITEABLE type.

In the apparatus according to the invention, it is also considered preferable that one or more memory modules comprise a combination of at least two different memory types in the form of a ROM, WORM or REWRITEABLE integrated into at least one main layer in a stack.

In yet a further advantageous embodiment of the embodiment according to the invention at least a portion of the substrate underlying one or more main layer on the top thereof comprises circuitry which is electrically connected with one or more of the main layers. It is then preferable that a portion of the substrate comprising circuitry contains semiconducting materials in doped or undoped form provided in bulk or as thin film on a passive carrier, and that the semiconducting materials are selected from one or more of the following, viz. silicon, gallium arsenide and germanium in amorphous, polycrystalline, microcrystalline, bulk or process-defined single crystal form, or organic semiconducting materials including molecules, oligomers or polymers or combinations thereof.

Preferably the inorganic film material is silicon, silicon compounds, metals, metal compounds, or combinations thereof.

Preferably the circuitry provided on the substrate is realized by one or more of the following technologies, viz. CMOS, NMOS, or PMOS, and preferably the circuit provided on or in the substrate also comprises one or more cache memories in the form of SRAM, DRAM and/or ferroelectric RAM (FERAM).

Advantageously the circuitry provided on or in the substrate may separately or in combination comprise processors for the detection and correction of errors and defects in the memory modules in the main layer or layers, and/or processors for remapping defect memory modules in the main layer or layers, and/or processors for dynamically remapping the memory modules in the main layer or layers in order to optimize performance and lifetimes of said modules.

Preferably in the apparatus according to the invention the circuits in the main layers are wholly realized in thin-film technology.

The above-mentioned objects and advantages are also realized according to the invention with a method for fabricating a data storage and processing apparatus according to the invention, the method being characterized by depositing and processing said layers under thermal conditions that avoid subjecting an already deposited and processed underlying layer or layers to a static temperature exceeding a value in the temperature range of 150-450°C or dynamic temperatures exceeding the transient stability limit of polymer materials, said transient stability limit being defined as less than 500°C for not more than 10 ms, or to process-induced chemical damage, the materials for the layers being selected among thin films of amorphous, polycrystalline or microcrystalline silicon or germanium, oxides, dielectric materials, metals, or combinations thereof, and deposited by one of the following processes, viz. sputtering, evaporation, chemical vapour deposition or plasma assisted chemical vapour deposition, spin coating; processing a deposited layer with a conventional semiconductor process compatible with the stated thermal conditions, the conventional semiconductor process being selected among, but not limited to photolithography, wet etching, dry etching including reactive ion or plasma etching, chemo-mechanical polishing, ion implantation, and/or combinations thereof; processing a deposited layer by transient heating with pulsed laser or particle beams for inducing crystallization of deposited amorphous films, grain refinement of deposited films, and incorporation and activation of dopants therein; and depositing molecular, oligomer or polymer materials for the layers by one of the following processes, viz. solvent techniques, evaporation, sputtering or other vacuum-based techniques, or by film transfer techniques or combinations thereof.

In an advantageous embodiment according to the invention are the thin-film silicon-based circuitry and transistors fabricated by a low temperature-compatible process using laser-induced crystallization and dopant activation of the thin-film transistors.

In order to realize a memory module as a matrix-addressable memory with isolation diodes, this can in preferred embodiments of the method according to the invention be done by forming the isolation diodes in either vertical or

planar configuration by depositing directly amorphous microcrystalline or polycrystallines n- and p-type silicon or germanium films and depositing directly semiconducting organic thin films of oligomer or polymer; or by forming the isolation diodes by laser-induced melting and solidification of deposited n- and p-type amorphous or microcrystalline films of inorganic semiconducting material directly on underlying low temperature-compatible layer or layers. In the latter case it is then preferable protecting the underlying layer or layers from reacting with the molten semiconductor material during a laser-induced crystallization by providing a thin-film diffusion barrier, and also the preferable designing a reaction between a molten semiconductor material and an underlying layer or layers to form a stable electrical conducting compound, such as silicide.

In order to realize a memory module as a matrix-addressable memory with isolation diodes this can in other preferred embodiments of the method according to the invention be done by forming the isolation diodes by laser-induced melting and solidification of deposited amorphous or microcrystalline inorganic film, and forming a pn junction of the diodes with compensating doping, the pn junctions being realized either from a deposited layer on an underlying metallization or from so-called autodoping by using alloying elements in a passive matrix metallization; or by forming the isolation diodes by laser-induced melting and solidification of a deposited amorphous or microcrystalline inorganic film and forming a Schottky-barrier diode with an underlying metallization structure or a compound formed by a reaction with the underlying metallization structure.

In further preferred embodiments according to the invention the laser-induced crystallization is constrained within an explosive crystallization regime, thus requiring only a transient melting of the surface on the film and the formation of self-propagating liquid film in order to crystallize the remaining volume of the film, and the isolating structures are formed from high resistivity or anisotropic contact materials which are used as an isolation diode in the vertical direction and a non-conductive interlayer dielectric in the horizontal direction relative to the layers.

In the latter case it is preferable realizing both the isolation diode and the non-conductive interlayer dielectric by a chemically or thermally induced modification of said contact materials, and the chemically or thermally

induced modification can then preferably take place by autodoping of high-resistivity amorphous silicon and laser-induced crystallization of high resistivity amorphous silicon.

Finally, in a yet further advantageous embodiment of the method according to the invention a memory module can be realized as a matrix-addressable memory with isolation diodes by forming a diode in spatially limited regions such as the intersections of a matrix and simultaneously providing lateral isolation between the diodes by means of a self-aligned process limiting the formation of diode junctions to the spatially limited regions only by means of one the following processes, viz. laser-induced crystallization with modulation of absorbed laser energy by features of underlying layers or structures, laser-induced crystallization with modulation of absorbed laser energy by antireflective or reflective thin films, constraining nucleation during laser-induced crystallization to metal regions by controlling an interlayer dielectric surface, using underlying layers or structures as dopant sources for diode junction formation via explosive crystallization, or selective chemical or physical vapour deposition of amorphous or microcrystalline films effected by surface modification of an interlayer dielectric surface.

In the method according to the invention it is considered advantageous separating the functional sublayers by a planarizing dielectric layer formed by spin-coating or other deposition methods and chemo-mechanical polishing, said dielectric layer being made of oligomer, polymer or inorganic material, and it its also considered advantageous initiating the induced crystallization by directed energy sources other than lasers, including pulsed ion and electron beams.

The invention shall now be discussed in more detail, with reference to exemplary embodiments and the appended drawing figures, of which

fig 1 shows an embodiment of a scalable integrated data-processing device to which the present invention may be applied,

fig. 2 the schematic layout for a 1 GB ROM apparatus according to an embodiment of the present invention,

fig. 3 the layout of the row/column addressing lines of a pair of memory planes of the ROM in fig. 2,

fig. 4 a staggered stacking arrangement of memory planes of the ROM in fig. 2,

fig. 5 a combination of several staggered stacking arrangements of the kind shown in fig. 4 into a multisegmented staggered stacking arrangement of the memory planes of the ROM in fig. 2,

fig. 6 staggered vertical or horizontal vias for connecting through or across memory planes and connecting the latter to underlying circuitry,

fig. 7 a graph of the access time versus the number of memory block segments,

fig. 8 a graph of the average addressing power requirement versus the average block (read) addressing size,

fig. 9 vertical diodes in "on" and "off" memory element in a ROM,

fig. 10 vertical diodes as in fig. 9, but fabricated by a self-aligning and -planarizing process.

A preferred design according to the invention is realized as a layered structure built on a single crystal silicon substrate which contains all active electronic circuitry. The latter communicates with one or more overlying memory layers through vias. Each memory layer contains low-temperature processed diode ROM and/or WORM and/or REWRITABLE arrays where high areal bit density is achieved through the use of passive matrix addressing. Each memory layer constitutes a self-contained entity and requires no high-temperature or chemically aggressive processing that can damage the underlying structures during manufacture. Thus, the memory modules can be positioned on top of active electronic circuitry in the substrate, conserving substrate real estate and providing short electronic pathways between the active circuitry and the memory modules. Furthermore, memory capacity can be expanded by adding more memory layers on top of the first, leading to a 3D stacked structure with very high volumetric bit density.

Devices as described above lend themselves well to "back-end" processing of the memory modules, where all circuitry on the single crystal silicon substrate is first prepared using traditional silicon foundry processing. The subsequent deposition of the memory layer(s) may be performed in a separate facility, e.g. if it is desirable to employ materials and processes in this step which might represent a contamination problem for the silicon processing.

The driver and sense circuits are preferably fabricated in a standard CMOS process on single crystal silicon substrate to minimize costs and to achieve required high data transfer rates. The ROM/WORM/REWRITABLE arrays are then built above the final metallization layer coupled by vias to the underlying drivers. The diodes can be inorganic, e.g. amorphous, polycrystalline or microcrystalline silicon, or they can be based on an organic material such as a conjugated polymer or oligomer. The passive matrix addressing scheme and the 3D architecture employing the low temperature diodes provide a dramatic storage enhancement over all existing ROM/WORM/REWRITABLE designs, at only marginal cost above the underlying CMOS circuit.

Vertical interconnections as used in the apparatus according to the invention can take many forms: One is penetrating conductors through vias, in which case the short distances and large areas available in the stacked concept permit high data transfer speeds as mentioned above as well as flexible architectures, involving, e.g. staggered arrangement of vias as described in more detail in connection with a preferred embodiment below. Vertical interconnections can also be achieved by electrical conductors in each layer leading to the edge of the layer in question, where they are exposed and can be electrically connected to similarly exposed conductors in other layers. This may e.g. be facilitated by a step-wise extension of the edges of the lower-lying layers. Another class of vertical interconnections relies on contact-less (non-galvanic) communication through the layers. This is possible due to the layered architectures, i.e. capacitive, inductive or optical coupling between circuits in different layers.

For clarity and concreteness, a detailed description of the invention shall be given below in terms of a preferred embodiment based on low-temperature processed poly-Si diode ROM arrays in a stack with four double-layer. The design can be easily extended for WORM memories applications utilizing

either induced explosive crystallization of amorphous diodes or conductance modulation of interlayer organic films, and to REWRITABLE memories by incorporating highly functional memory materials in the memory matrices; cf. other patent applications belonging to the present applicant, quoted in the present document.

The schematic layer layout for a 1 gigabyte (GB) apparatus according to the invention is shown in fig. 2. Row demultiplexers and drivers, sense amplifiers, and column multiplexers are implemented in a conventional VLSI CMOS single crystal chip forming the base of the structure. All of the diode-ROM layers are fabricated after completion of the VLSI circuitry above a final dielectric deposition and CMP planarization.

The details of the VLSI CMOS circuitry will not be discussed except as it specifically relates to the memory planes. The drivers and sense amplifiers are essentially identical to those used in conventional DRAM modules and the designs can be lifted almost intact. Row driver inverters will have to be resized to accommodate the high capacitance of the diode-ROM configuration, and the sense amplifiers will need to be modified for slower charging rates.

The memory planes are stacked layerwise and each ROM layer consists of simple row/column line crossing linked potentially by a vertical diode structure; a binary 0 (or 1) indicated by the presence of the diode. A total of eight memory planes, each incorporating 10^9 bits, are required to yield the gigabyte module. To reduce the total number of mask levels, row lines are shared between two memory planes – reducing the speed, but simplifying the overall fabrication.

The electrical schematic for each pair of memory planes is shown in fig. 3. Once a row address is latched (RAS), a final inverter drives one row line to ground. Current flows through the diodes from the column lines (symmetrically from both column pairs) and the voltage droop on the column line is sensed in parallel for all column lines. Following read, the row line is returned to V_{DD} potential and the column lines to their quiescent potential (between ground and V_{DD}-0.7). The power and speed penalty for the diode defined memory (compared to a NOR MOS design) is more than offset by the density increase permitted by a row/column dense metal crossing layout. In

a block-oriented data access device, driving a single row inverter provides data readout for two columns. Although the speed of each row access may be limited by capacitive charging, the total data transfer rate is "amplified" by twice the column length. As discussed further below, the random data access time can also be adjusted by appropriate segmentation of the memory, something which shall be discussed in more detail below with reference to fig. 5.

Independent of the segmentation, the 3D memory layering requires staggered stacking of the memory planes on the Si die to provide area for the row drivers, sense amplifiers, and peripherial circuitry. This staggered stacking arrangement is shown in fig. 4 wherein the memory planes are indicated by the light grey with single-crystal Si blocks defined by darker grey. Each memory plane pairs is offset both horizontally and vertically to provide single-crystal silicon real estate for the row drivers (large inverters) and sense amplifiers. All of the row drivers are fed from a common row decoder (NANDed with the final plane pair select) logic. The drawing is not to scale; in particular the fraction of the area required for row drivers and sense amplifiers decreases roughly as the square root of the memory size. Sense amplifiers, assuming even a segmentation of 4096x4096 will occupy less than 10% of the die real-estate. For 256 Mbit arrays, this area is less than one percent of the total die.

In the stacked design with memory arrays above the single crystal logic, a significant fraction of the die remains unused. Some fraction of this is required for bad-cell mapping and error-correction logic, but the remainder should be implemented as a SRAM data cache to reduce multiple accesses to the memory planes. As considered below, the primary power dissipation occurs during memory access – reducing the number required by resolving requests from cache has the potential to dramatically reduce the overall power even in a random-access mode. For random memory access, the cache would need to still provide some sort of look-ahead predictive reads from memory to compensate for power and speed limitations on direct access. For highly block-oriented memory applications, the cache becomes less critical and the area could instead be devoted to higher order error correction algorithms to improve die yield and reduce costs.

Because of the capacitive loading from the diode elements, the optimal memory structure of an 8-plane, 1 Gbit/plane, will not be 32,768x32,768 arrays. Both the row line capacitance (from dielectric and diode elements) and the column line capacitance increase linearly with the array size. The row charge and diode current transfer set the power dissipation; the column capacitance directly determines the charge integration time required for the sense amplifiers. To increase speed, the 1 Gbit memory blocks could be segmented as shown in fig. 5, wherein the stacked arrangement in fig. 4 is used for combining several such planes alternating the sense of stacking between the separate blocks – at the cost of increased driver electronics real-estate. But since large areas of the Si substrate are unused in this design (remainder dedicated to cache), this cost is not significant. The optimum segmentation depends strongly on the application – in particular the averge size of the memory block accesses. In general, smaller segments are essential, for power dissipation reasons, as the block size drops. Minimum random access speed can also be dramatically improved by increasing the number of memory segments. (Both of these issues are considered further below.)

It is also possible to implement the multiple array blocks using only a single pair of sense amplifiers using common column vias with diode isolation between the planes. However, there is a severe speed penalty in this design due to the time required to turn-on the isolation diode for the planes. In the futures when active MOS isolation transistors are viable on the memory planes single sense amplifier designs can be utilized for some applications. But the die size gains are minimal since the underlying substrate is not real-estate limited.

To achieve required data transfer rates, all of the sense amplifiers must be latched during data strobe providing a block transfer to the column decode logic. This would naturally occur within a SRAM cache as part of the design. Assuming a CD-ROM based replacement, the majority of data accesses will be resolved from the column latch cache without additional row data strobes.

Limitations arising from dense vias between device level and the upper memory blocks could be of concern, but this is not the case since the vias can be staggered satisfying both design rules for conventional via attach and

achieving dense metal wiring density for the memory arrays. Simple staggering of the vias, as shown in figure 6, illustrates one possible solution. Vias are staggered up (or across) the die to rigorously satisfy the 2x2λ via size, 1λ metal overlap on all sides of the via, 3λ minimum via spacing, yet maintaining wiring at full dense metal within the memory array itself. The vias will generally be separated further than illustrated to accommodate the actual required space of the sense amplifier or row drivers. In this layout, one line in N is lost. To maintain uniform metal density and optimize process development (necessary to push metal pitch beyond random logic design rules), the missing line is replaced with a dummy metal line (no connection). The reduced row/column density arising from this stagger approach is incorporated in calculation results given in the design analysis below. Although illustrated for a 2λ via, the extension to an arbitrary size via for connecting memory arrays to Metal 1 or 2 is obvious.

With the general layout defined as above, the required die size can now be determined. The memory plane density is limited by memory metal wiring pitch and sets the overall density of the memory. A conservative design requires metal pitch based on both minimum via overlap and metal-to-metal spacing. The overall die size will then be roughly 20% larger than the memory plane itself (for staggered layout and peripherial drivers). However, it is not necessary to limit metal to random logic design limitations. By moving to a full dense metal array with uniform spacing and density, the line width and spacing can be reduced considerably. As long as random wiring is minimized on the memory planes, lithography and etching can be specifically optimized to the dense metal pitch allowing use of poly or metal 1 line widths even in these upper layers. This cannot apply to the vias – but as shown above these are fabricated well within the design rule limits.

In addition, the simple design of the memory cell does not require via metal overlap within the memory cell; lithography misalignments may reduce the contact area (one axis), but the subsequent interlayer dielectric will passivate the exposed diode component. These two process modifications allow the maximum metal pitch resulting in the $4\lambda^2$ cell areas (where λ is approximately the metal width/spacing).

Table 1 fully compares three technologies based on 0.35, 0.25, and 0.18 μm lithography (design rules taken from both TSMC and MOSIS scalable

designs). The table below summarizes results for a 1 GB design assuming 512 byte average block transfers and a design requirement for 1000 MB/s total data transfer. The segmentation is the recommended size to balance access times, with a 100 ns maximum requirement.

Table 1

	0.35 μm	**0.25 μm**	**0.18 μm**
Via size / spacing	0.50/0.45	0.36/0.38	0.24/0.28
Metal width / spacing	0.60/0.50	0.40/0.40	0.28/0.28
Metal via overlap	0.20	0.15	0.10
Dense metal (cells) width	0.40	0.30	0.24
Dense metal (cells) spacing	0.40	0.30	0.24
Minimum cell size	0.8x0.8 μm	0.6x0.6 μm	0.48x0.48 μm
Cell area	0.64 μm^2	0.36 μm^2	0.23 μm^2
Memory Density/Layer	0.156 Gb/cm^2	0.278 Gb/cm^2	0.435 Gb/cm^2
Optimal Segmentation (#)	16	4	4
Die area	742 mm^2	402 mm^2	257 mm^2
Random Access Time	52 ns	76 ns	68 ns
Power dissipation (array)	25 mW	22 mW	9 mW

It is thus feasible to implement a 1 GB memory in existing 0.25 μm technologies – with a die size well within reasonable constraints (<500 mm^2). For 0.35 μm design rules, the single chip die size is probably too large to be manufacturable, but a 0.5 GB array is within reason. The only caveat on 0.35 μm technology is that the upper level metal planarization must be

implemented as a CMP process to provide the planarity required for dense metal on upper layers.

Memory speed and power dissipation shall now be considered in relation to design and operating parameters.

Design parameters: For the purposes of this design example, the following approximations were used:

- Row and column line parasitic capacitances will taken as equal to the direct capacitance
- Interlayer dielectric is 300 nm of SiO_2 equivalent
- Metal line conductivities are 0.07 Ω/
- Sense amplifier minimum threshold is 10 mV
- Diode transconductance is 10^3 A/cm^2 for a 1V forward bias
- Diodes are one-sided junction with 400 nm depletion width at zero bias (10^{17} doping)

Data transfer rate: The desired 1 Gbit/s sustained data transfer rate is easily achieved once the column latches are filled. Even in a 4096 segmentation, each row access satisfies 8192 latches requiring row read times of only 10 μs, whereas actual data access times are sub 1μs. However, this assumes the data transfer is highly correlated and all 8192 column bits are useful. The penalty arises in power as this is violated.

Access time: The instantaneous data access speed (time from RAS to data available on CAS latches) is determined by the charge time through the diodes to the column line capacitance. This will be the more difficult parameter to achieve within a diode-based ROM cell. The time is a complex function of the array size (segmentation), diode conductance, diode capacitance (major), row drive line resistance and sense amplifier minimum voltage sensitivity.

The access time is the sum of the row charge time ($R_{row}C_{row}$), the column sense integration time to the minimum specified voltage swing ($C_{col}\Delta V/I_{diode}$), and an estimate of random logic delays for row/column addressing.

As evinced by the graph of fig. 7, the access speed is only slightly dependent on the lithography rules, but strongly depends on the segmentation size. There are decreasing returns above 16 segments for the array.

Power dissipation: The primary design parameter influencing the power dissipation is the average size of the block transferred in each read. As long as the read request can be resolved out of the row read cache, the power required for charge and sense amplifiers can be averaged over a large number of read cycles. But if the access becomes random requiring a row charge cycle for every access, the power requirement will grow substantially. The graph of fig. 8 illustrates the estimated power requirement as a function of the average block read size with a sustained data transfer rate of 1000 GB/s. For this purpose, the four-segmented 0.25 μm design was used. Note that the scale are logarithmic. As long as the average block size remains above a few hundred, the power dissipation is determined by the intrinsic transfers. As the size drops though, additional row reads are required and the power rises inversely with the block size.

Memory plane fabrication: The multiple plane implementation of an e.g. ROM memory according to the present invention requires that upper level processing retain planar structures with minimal topography growth (over 12 metal layers). Processing must be consistent with metal line exposure on row/column vias – effectively limiting processing to <250°C. Preferably, the fabrication of the diodes shall also be self-aligning with the contact vias to reduce mask count.

Two feasible routes shall now be discussed, based on inorganic semiconducting materials:

- microcrystalline Si selectively deposited on a metal/Si seed layer through vias (or blanket deposition and CMP etch).
- explosive crystallization of blanket a-Si – leaving high resistivity a-Si for planarization – using laser intensity modulation with the via dielectric.

Memory density at $4f^2$ requires the isolation diodes to be fully processed and contacted in a vertical configuration – in contrast to the traditional planar configuration present in today's technology. The isolation diodes in either a

ROM or impedance controlled RAM devices are fabricated directly on the row/column metal as indicated in figure 9. The memory cell on the left, for a ROM, is "on" while the memory cell on the right remains off. In the simplest configuration, the only difference between memory cells is the presence or absence of a cut in the interlayer dielectric patterned over the diode material. Several specific fabrication technologies will be discussed, beginning from the most complex using present manufacturing technology to those involving only more esoteric processes.

The fabrication of vertical diodes by directed energy processing shall now be discussed with reference to specific processing examples.

Example A -Fabricating diodes directly on metallization with polymer/low temperature substrates

Common to all fabrication strategies is the formation of a p-n junction diode in the vertical orientation directly on the dense metal line array forming the row or column lines of the memory. Transient thermal processing, specifically pulsed laser or ion beam, is the preferred method for fabrication as it is compatible with other low temperature materials for WORM/RAM applications. The method involves:

i. Deposition of metal film for row/column underlying matrix. The choice of the underlying metal depends in part on the method below, as discussed further below. The metal film may be a multilayer consisting of a highly conductive underlayer (Al) and an interface barrier for contact with the Si (eg. tungsten).
ii. Deposition of thin amorphous donor (n-type) doped silicon by, for example, sputtering, e-beam evaporation or PECVD.
iii. Deposition of a second layer, in-situ, of acceptor (p-type) doped silicon or germanium.
iv. Laser-induced crystallization of the amorphous films forming polycrystalline pn junction diodes. The energy density is chosen to achieve full or nearly full melt of the silicon film resulting in nucleation from the metal layer. This will result in large grain (>50 nm) polycrystalline diodes with the junction near the original p-n deposition boundary.
v. Mask and etch of the lower level row lines, followed by conformal deposition of interlayer dielectric (SiO_2).

vi. Patterning of contact level defining "on" and "off" memory cells.
vii. Column metal deposition and pattern/etch.

Example B - Modification to utilize explosive crystallization

The fluence required for crystallization in (iv) above is determined by the film thickness. The crystallization may alternatively be done using the explosive crystallization (M.O. Thompson, Phys. Rev. Lett. 52:2360 (1984) method requiring only the formation of a minimal surface melt. The enthalpy difference between the amorphous and crystal phases will drive the melt through the film with minimal net thermal impact on the lower metal layer. The resulting diode layer is a mixed amorphous/polycrystalline phase but retains sufficient current density (100 A/cm^2) for memory isolation applications.

Example C - Modification to use Schottky diodes

Instead of deposition p and n films for a junction diode, the process may be modified to fabricate Schottky barrier diodes directly with the lower metal film. This modification involves the deposition of only an n-type film, crystallization and formation of a Schottky barrier with either the direct metal (minimal liquid interaction) or with a silicide phase formed via partial melting of the metal contact. This modification is most appropriate with explosive crystallization to minimize the thermal energy dissipated in the metal layer.

Example D - Modification to auto-dope from the metal contact

Electrically active dopants can be incorporated into the metal film eliminating the need for separate films of n and p type Si (steps ii and iii above). A thin coating of arsenic or boron on a tungsten metallization, or an alloy containing boron or arsenic, can provide compensating doping to a single film deposition. The partial melting and incorporation of the impurities from the metal or metal overcoat, followed by liquid-phase diffusion and potentially segregation during crystallization, will form a p-n junction as well. The position of the interface is controlled by the crystallization dynamics and can be controlled by fluence modification, again primarily in the explosive crystallization regime.

Example E - Modification to use germanium

All of the above methods work equally well with germanium as for silicon.

Although germanium polycrystalline diodes may show higher leakage, this is offset by the 450 K reduction in all of the liquid process temperatures. Although transient, the molten phase is nevertheless extremely reactive.

Example F - Metal selection

Aside from the modification disclosed as example C above, the primary requirement for the metal is to minimize interactions with the molten semiconductor during solidification. Candidate metals then include the refractory metals such as tantalum, tungsten, and platinum, mid-transition metals including Pd, Mo, Ni, Co or Cr, current diffusion barriers such as TiN, and terminal silicide phases such as $NiSi_2$. All of elemental metals form stable silicide phases and moderate reaction is expected with the liquid Si or Ge. Use of a stable silicide would minimize such reactions; however, since the silicides are adequate conductors as well, formation of a thin silicide is generally not a problem. Formation of a well-defined silicide is required for implementation of the modification given as example C.

For self-alignment and planarization of the diodes certain processing may be introduced.

The process described in example A above is conventional semiconductor processing involving accurate overlay of the contact mask with underlying row metallization. In addition, the etch processes produce increasing rough topologies that must be planarized for stacked 3D integration. However, the 10^3-10^5 difference in conductivity between polycrystalline and amorphous phase can be used to develop self-aligning diode definition patterns and simultaneously address planarization issues. The primary modification for this mode is to leave amorphous phase material in the inter-diode regions and minimize the feature heights. The process flow in this case would be:

i. Deposition and patterning of the metal for row lines. This would be fully etched and planarized with dielectric between metal lines.
ii. Uniform deposition of n and p amorphous films (or single layer via modifications discussed above).
iii. Deposition of contact dielectric plus thin metal reflector layer (Cr or Al). Pattern etched leaving vias where diodes are to be formed.

iv. Laser irradiation through the patterned film. Only in the vias will sufficient energy be absorbed to initiate crystallization of the silicon (explosive or full melt).

v. Metal deposition for the column lines. (The reflector film, if of compatible metal, need not be removed prior to deposition – it can be etched simultaneously). Column lines patterned and etched.

vi. Dielectric deposition and planarization.

In this process, the alignment of column metal with alignment vias is relaxed. Misalignment cannot result in short-circuiting of column to row since the underlying metal is fully coated with amorphous silicon. The conductivity of the amorphous Si must be maintained sufficiently low that crosstalk between row lines is insignificant. This is easily achieved using very lightly doped a-Si films with the diode formed by incorporation of dopants from the underlying metallization (Example D above). – For the resulting diode structure, reference may be made to fig. 10.

In another modification, a long wavelength laser is used to initiate crystallization rather than using a short wavelength (excimer laser) as the irradiation source. At 1.06 um (the Nd:YAG wavelength), amorphous Si is sufficiently transparent that the energy can be transmitted through the amorphous film and absorbed only by the underlying metal film. This metal then initiates the explosive crystallization (or full melt). The advantage of this mode is that the diodes are formed only in the row metal region.

Finally the diode arrays can be patterned using a patterned laser beam (imaging through a mask) instead of using the on-wafer pattern. This is limited to larger feature sizes (1 μm) but eliminate several photolithography steps.

The present invention is by no means limited to ROM devices, but may be implemented as various kinds of memory and data processing apparatus and modules, as mentioned in the introduction. A brief discussion of alternative preferred embodiments shall now be given.

The basic architectures described above can also be adapted for WORM applications. This is achieved by starting out with passive matrix arrays where all crossing points exhibit rectifying diode behaviour initially. Writing

to a given crossing point is achieved by creating an open circuit, i.e. destroying the forward conductance of the diode.

In one class of embodiments, the matrix array is made by sandwiching a conjugated polymer between the two sets of parallel electrodes that constitute the passive matrix, with electrode and sandwich materials selected so as to create spontaneously a rectifying diode at each crossing point. The associated physics has been thoroughly investigated and described in the scientific literature. Writing to a given crossing point is achieved by one of several methods. The most straightforward one, but not the only one, is to create thermal damage by a short but intense current pulse through the polymer material at the crossing point, causing a spatially controlled reduction of the conductance, or an open circuit. Descriptions of suitable materials and geometries have been given in the following patent applications controlled by the present applicant: Norwegian patent applications NO972803 and NO973390 and applications derived therefrom.

While reading is performed at low bias in close analogy to the preferred embodiment discussed under Section 4 above, writing requires higher currents and a different pulsing protocol. Thus, the temporal profile of the energy dissipation at the crossing point must be closely controlled in order to obtain the required thermal history at the diode junction, as well as confining the region of current-induced impedance change (e.g.: thermal damage) to the crossing point being written. These aspects imply that the electronic complexity is higher for a WORM memory as compared to the ROM type, and this taken together with the higher current requirements during writing lead to somewhat lower bit densities. On the other hand, the all-electronic writing process implies that the foundry-based processing steps involved in manufacturing, e.g. masked ROMs are avoided.

As is readily apparent to a person skilled in the art, the basic architectures described above open up opportunities for integrating ROM, WORM and REWRITABLE arrays in a single device, either in the same layer or layers, or as separate ROM, WORM and REWRITABLE layers in a single stack. Among the many possibilities resulting from this, combining memory types of this kind, shall particularly be mentioned.

Yield enhancement by self-diagnostics: As part of the post-manufacturing testing and qualification procedures, a self-diagnosis program in the ROM is activated to identify faults in the memory. Results are stored in the WORM and linked to instructions derived from the ROM, causing faults in the memory device to be circumvented or corrected. This is implemented in a fashion which is transparent to the user, apart from a possible latency. In this manner, the manufacturing yield can be enhanced.

A direct extension of the above-mentioned devices which may or may not combine different types of memory is to include processing power into the 2- and 3-dimensional architectures. Thus, distributed processors (including but not limited to microprocessors) with fast and direct access to dedicated memories in close physical proximity shall provide provide speed and flexibility not attainable by processor/microprocessor architectures based on traditional silicon wafer technology. For a more thorough discussion of these and related themes, particularly integrated memory and processing structures in a scalable architecture, reference may be made to Norwegian patent application NO 982518, wherefrom the present application derives priority and the computer literature in general.

As can be seen from the foregoing, the realization of the objects of the present invention are particularly achieved by exploiting novel materials and processes that make possible the creation of devices with new architectures in two and three dimensions. Salient features in that connection are:

1) Memory modules are made by low-temperature compatible processes and materials, i.e. polymers or low temperature processing of poly- or micro- or amorphous silicon. Low-temperature compatible in this context refers to processes not exceeding static temperatures compatible with polymer-like substrates, or transient heating processes limited to times sufficiently short to be similarly compatible. As an example: In laser crystallization of thin film silicon, the temperature in the outermost layer is in fact quite high, but due to the short thermal pulse and total energy density, heat redistributes quickly into supporting layers. Beyond a certain depth, the latter do not reach high temperatures due to calorimetric effects. For simplicity, low temperature compatible processes and materials as described above may be referred to in the following as "low temperature processing" and "low temperature materials".

2) Low temperature processing makes possible the creation of memory modules in one superlayer or a stack of superlayers without damaging underlying circuitry nor other memory layers in the stack. This applies both to devices based on traditional single crystal silicon substrates, as well as plastic substrates with thin-film active circuitry. (In the latter case, the short duration of the heat pulse typically used in laser recrystallization appears to prevent damage to the plastic even at temperatures where a sustained thermal load would cause damage).

3) From 1) and 2) follow a number of beneficial consequences:

- Possibility of stacked layers. Leads to:
  - High volumetric data density, and:
  - High density, short vertical interconnects, leading to high data throughput:
    - Low capacitive and resistive interconnects due to short distance
    - high degree of parallelism (many vertical connections) for large word widths.
- Exploiting areas in sublayer single crystal or high performance polycrystalline, amorphous or microcrystalline layer underneath memory modules for tasks requiring high-speed active circuitry. Examples:
  - Integrated SRAM data cache
  - Driver and interface electronics
  - On-board error detection and correction block-oriented circuitry to increase reliability of memory layers
- High area data density in each layer due to the passive matrix addressing, with the option of locating driver circuitry layers below and/or above as well as in the same layer.

As is apparent, the present invention provides extension of the ideas and concrete embodiments in the above mentioned literature, through novel

architectural solutions as well as through the use of materials and processes that facilitate implementation of high density 2- and 3-D structures.

PATENT CLAIMS

1. A data storage and processing apparatus comprising ROM and/or WORM and/or REWRITABLE memory modules and data-processing modules, wherein the apparatus is provided on a substrate, wherein memory and processing modules are provided in a single main layer or multiple stacked main layers on the top of the substrate, wherein the memory modules and the data-processing modules in each main layer communicate through vias, surface or edge connections with other main layers and with circuitry provided on or in the substrate, and wherein the apparatus comprises active circuits with transistors and/or diodes for operating the apparatus, characterized in that each main layer of a memory module and/or data-processing module comprises a stack of functional sublayers, each functional sublayer realizing one or more specific circuit functions, that at least some of the active circuitry is provided in the main layer or main layers, and that at least some of the functional layers comprise a combination of low temperature-compatible organic film materials and low temperature-compatible processed inorganic thin-films.

2. Apparatus according to claim 1, characterized in that at least one of the main layers comprises memory modules with passive matrix-addressable memory elements defined in a memory material at the crossings between electrodes of a first set of parallel electrodes provided on a surface of the memory material and a second set of parallel electrodes provided on the opposite surface of the memory material and in intersecting relationship with the first set of electrodes, the memory elements being realized as non-linear impedance elements at the crossings, and that the memory elements in order to improve the addressability thereof are each provided with a logic value given by an electrical impedance parameter of the memory material between the intersecting electrodes.

3. Apparatus according to claim 2, characterized in that the non-linear impedance elements are rectifying diodes made of one or the following materials, viz. silicon, gallium arsenide or germanium in amorphous, polycrystalline, microcrystalline, bulk or process-defined single crystal form; or organic semiconducting materials including molecules, oligomers or polymers or combinations thereof.

4. Apparatus according to claim 2, characterized in that the non-linear impedance elements are thin-film transistors made of one of the following materials, viz. silicon, gallium arsenide or germanium in amorphous, polycrystalline, microcrystalline, bulk or process-defined single crystal form, or organic semiconducting materials including molecules, oligomers or polymers or combinations thereof.

5. Apparatus according to claim 2, characterized in that at least one main layer comprises dual passive matrix-addressable memory modules in separate sublayers, one overlying and one underlying memory module sharing one set of row or column electrodes.

6. Apparatus according to claim 2, wherein more than one layer is provided, characterized in that at least two of the main layers comprise common row or column drive electronics and as well as optional sense electronics connected therewith through common wires.

7. Apparatus according to claim 1, wherein more than one main layer is provided, characterized in that each main layer comprises more than one memory module, the memory modules being provided in the form of juxtaposed segments stacked on the top of similar segments in an underlying main layer to form two or more juxtaposed stacks on a common substrate, and that a part of each segment in each stack is connected to a portion of the substrate and communicates electrically with the circuitry provided thereon or therein.

8. Apparatus according to claim 1, wherein more than one main layer is provided, characterized in that each main layer comprises more than one memory module, the memory modules being provided in the form of juxtaposed segments stacked on the top of similar segments in an underlying main layer in a staggered arrangement, such that each memory module in the stack is provided staggered in relation to adjacent neighbour modules, and that a part of each segment in each stack is connected to a portion of the substrate and communicates electrically with the circuitry thereon or therein.

9. Apparatus according to claim 1, characterized in that a plurality of throughgoing electrical conductors or vias providing power and signal connections between the main layers and between the latter and the substrate is distributed laterally in a staggered arrangement.

10. Apparatus according to claim 1, characterized in that at least one of the memory modules is a masked ROM or a patterned ROM.

11. Apparatus according to claim 1, characterized in that at least one of the memory modules is a WORM.

12. Apparatus according to claim 1, characterized in that at least one of the memory modules comprises memory cells of the REWRITEABLE type.

13. Apparatus according to claim 1, characterized in that one or more memory modules comprising a combination of at least two different memory types in the form of ROM, WORM or REWRITEABLE integrated into at least one main layer in a stack.

14. Apparatus according to claim 1, characterized in that at least a portion of the substrate underlying one or more main layers on the top thereof comprises circuitry which is electrically connected with one or more of the main layers.

15. Apparatus according to claim 14, characterized in that the portion of the substrate comprising circuitry contains semiconducting materials in doped or undoped form provided in bulk or as thin film on a passive carrier, and that the semiconducting materials are selected from one or more of the following, viz. silicon, gallium arsenide and germanium in amorphous, polycrystalline, microcrystalline, bulk or process-defined single crystal form, or organic semiconducting materials including molecules, oligomers or polymers or combinations thereof.

16. Apparatus according to claim 14, characterized in that the circuitry provided on or in the substrate is realized by one or more of the following technologies, viz. CMOS, NMOS or PMOS.

17. Apparatus according to claim 14, characterized in that the circuitry provided on or in the substrate comprises one or more cache memories in the form of SRAM, DRAM and/or ferroelectric RAM (FERAM).

18. Apparatus according to claim 14, characterized in that the circuitry provided on or in the substrate comprises

processors for detection and correction of errors and defects in the memory modules in the main layer or layers.

19. Apparatus according to claim 14, characterized in that the circuitry provided on or in the substrate comprises processors for remapping defect memory modules in the main layer or layers.

20. Apparatus according to claim 14, characterized in that the circuitry provided on or in the substrate comprises processors for dynamically remapping memory modules in the main layer or layers in order to optimize performance and lifetimes of said modules.

21. Apparatus according to claim 1,
characterized in that the inorganic thin-film material is silicon, silicon compounds, metals, metal compounds, or combinations thereof.

22. Apparatus according to claim 1, characterized in that the circuits in the main layers wholly are realized in thin-film technology.

23. A method for fabricating a data storage and processing apparatus comprising ROM and/or WORM and/or REWRITABLE memory modules and data-processing modules, wherein the apparatus is provided on a substrate, wherein memory and processing modules are provided in a single main layer or multiple stacked main layers on the top of the substrate, wherein the memory modules and the data-processing modules in each main layer communicate through vias, surface or edge connections with other main layers and with circuitry provided on or in the substrate, wherein the apparatus comprises active circuits with transistors and/or diodes for operating the apparatus, and wherein the memory and data-processing modules are provided by depositing the main layers and the functional sublayers thereof in successive steps, the method being characterized by depositing and processing said layers under thermal conditions that avoid subjecting an already deposited and processed underlying layer or layers to a static temperature exceeding a value in the temperature range of 150-450°C or dynamic temperatures exceeding the transient stability limit of polymer materials, said transient stability limit being defined as less than 500°C for not more than 10 ms, or to process-induced chemical damage, the materials for the layers being selected among thin films of amorphous, polycrystalline or microcrystalline silicon or germanium, oxides, dielectric materials, metals

or combinations thereof, and deposited by one of the following processes, viz. sputtering, evaporation, chemical vapour deposition or plasma-assisted chemical vapour deposition, spin coating; processing a deposited layer with a conventional semiconductor process compatible with the stated thermal conditions, the conventional semiconductor process being selected among, but not limited to photolithography, wet etching, dry etching including reactive ion or plasma etching, chemo-mechanical polishing, ion implantation, and/or combinations thereof; processing a deposited layer by transient heating with pulsed laser or particle beams for inducing crystallization of deposited amorphous films, grain refinement of deposited films, and incorporation and activation of dopants therein; and depositing molecular, oligomer or polymer materials for the layers by one of the following processes, viz. solvent techniques, evaporation, sputtering or other vacuum-based techniques, or by film transfer techniques or combinations thereof.

24. A method according to claim 23, characterized by fabricating thin-film silicon-based circuitry and transistors by a low-temperature compatible process using laser-induced crystallization and dopant activation of the thin-film transistors.

25. A method according to claim 23, wherein a memory module is realized as a matrix-addressable memory with isolation diodes, characterized by forming the isolation diodes in either vertical or planar configuration by depositing directly amorphous microcrystalline or polycrystallines n- and p-type silicon or germanium films and depositing directly semiconducting organic thin films of oligomer or polymer.

26. A method according to claim 23, wherein a memory module is realized as a matrix-addressable memory with isolation diodes, characterized by forming the isolation diodes by laser-induced melting and solidification of deposited n- and p-type amorphous or microcrystalline films of inorganic semiconducting material directly on underlying low temperature-compatible layer or layers.

27. A method according to claim 26, characterized by protecting the underlying layer or layers from reacting with the molten semiconductor

material during a laser-induced crystallization by providing a thin-film diffusion barrier.

28. A method according to claim 26, characterized by designing a reaction between a molten semiconductor material and an underlying layer or layers to form a stable electrical conducting compound, such as silicide.

29. A method according to claim 23, wherein a memory module is realized as a matrix-addressable memory with isolation diodes, characterized by forming the isolation diodes by laser-induced melting and solidification of deposited amorphous or microcrystalline inorganic film, and forming a pn junction of the diodes with compensating doping, the pn junctions being realized either from a deposited layer on an underlying metallization or from so-called autodoping by using alloying elements in a passive matrix metallization.

30. A method according to claim 23, wherein a memory module is realized as a matrix-addressable memory with isolation diodes, characterized by forming the isolation diodes by laser-induced melting and solidification of a deposited amorphous or microcrystalline inorganic film and forming a Schottky-barrier diode with an underlying metallization structure or a compound formed by a reaction with the underlying metallization structure.

31. A method according to claim 23, characterized by constraining the laser-induced crystallization within an explosive crystallization regime, thus requiring only a transient melting of the surface of the film and the formation of self-propagating liquid film in order to crystallize the remaining volume of the film.

32. A method according to claim 23, characterized by forming isolating structures from high resistivity or anisotropic contact materials which are used as an isolation diode in the vertical direction and a non-conductive interlayer dielectric in the horizontal direction relative to the layers.

33. A method according to claim 32, characterized by realizing both the isolation diode and the non-conductive interlayer dielectric by a chemically or thermally induced modification of said contact materials.

34. A method according to claim 33, characterized by the chemically or thermally induced modification taking place respectively by autodoping of

high-resistivity amorphous silicon and laser-induced crystallization of high resistivity amorphous silicon.

35. A method according to claim 23, wherein a memory module is realized as a matrix-addressable memory with isolation diodes, characterized by forming a diode in spatially limited regions such as the intersections of a matrix and simultaneously providing lateral isolation between the diodes by means of a self-aligned process limiting the formation of diode junctions to the spatially limited regions only by means of one the following processes, viz. laser-induced crystallization with modulation of absorbed laser energy by features of underlying layers or structures, laser-induced crystallization with modulation of absorbed laser energy by antireflective or reflective thin films, constraining nucleation during laser-induced crystallization to metal regions by controlling an interlayer dielectric surface, using underlying layers or structures as dopant sources for diode junction formation via explosive crystallization, or selective chemical or physical vapour deposition of amorphous or microcrystalline films effected by surface modification of an interlayer dielectric surface.

36. A method according to claim 23, characterized by separating functional sublayers by a planarizing dielectric layer formed by spin-coating or other deposition methods and chemo-mechanical polishing, said dielectric layer being made of oligomer, polymer or inorganic material.

37. A method according to claim 23, characterized by initiating the induced crystallization by directed energy sources other than lasers, including pulsed ion and electron beams.