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Is the open-plan office closed?

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Office design evolves with neuroscience to improve well-being and productivity

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'But something is happening here, and you don't know what it is,' Bob Dylan prophetically asked (1965) in 'The Thin Man Ballade', 'do you Mr. Jones?' After the pandemic crisis, but also well before, there started to be a surge in the request to spatially wrap daily cycles inside workplaces, taking more seriously the account of humans inhabiting those rooms. As Byung-Chul Han stresses in 'The Burnout Society' (2015), our age is featured by 'neuronal violence' with mental disorders of many types increasingly detected, particularly in younger generations, caused by a self-exploitation for the sake of self-realization only grounded in the productive dimension. Workload rhythms are not the only ones, nor the worst elements causing an improvement of this risk. Beyond the 'meaning deprivation' permeating daily routines, the too-frequent absurd fragmentation of the tasks, and the daily hierarchical pressure on the labor-time extension 'thanks' to always active digital devices, rooms' architecture is conquering the

foreground. Workplaces are one of the principal boosters of this harmful outcome. Appropriately, on this threshold, neuroscience and design are working to create environments that are more capable of attuning the space to all the various users' needs, almost permanently unconscious.
Meaning & Purpose, Body and Playfulness, New Work, Territory & Personalization, and Slow Productivity are key topics guiding our exploration in this upcoming issue. Through four pieces, we aim to render the state of the art of how human sciences are nourishing this crucial irrevocable shift in workplace design:
We will start with a book review that opens the discussion, focusing on the intersection of neuroscience and office design. Secondly, through a case study, we will investigate the application of neuroscientific findings to spatial design and the implied challenges. Then, an interview will bring together experts from different disciplines—design, office development, and neuroscience—to discuss current trends and common misconceptions. Lastly, an article will expand the investigation, focusing on practical experiments and research on office environments viewed through a neuroscientific lens.
On the cover: frame from the film The Apartment*, by Billy Wilder (1960)*

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