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**MULTISENSORY
INTERIORS**

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EDITORIAL

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Multisensory Interiors

Comfort and Regeneration in the Reuse of Spaces

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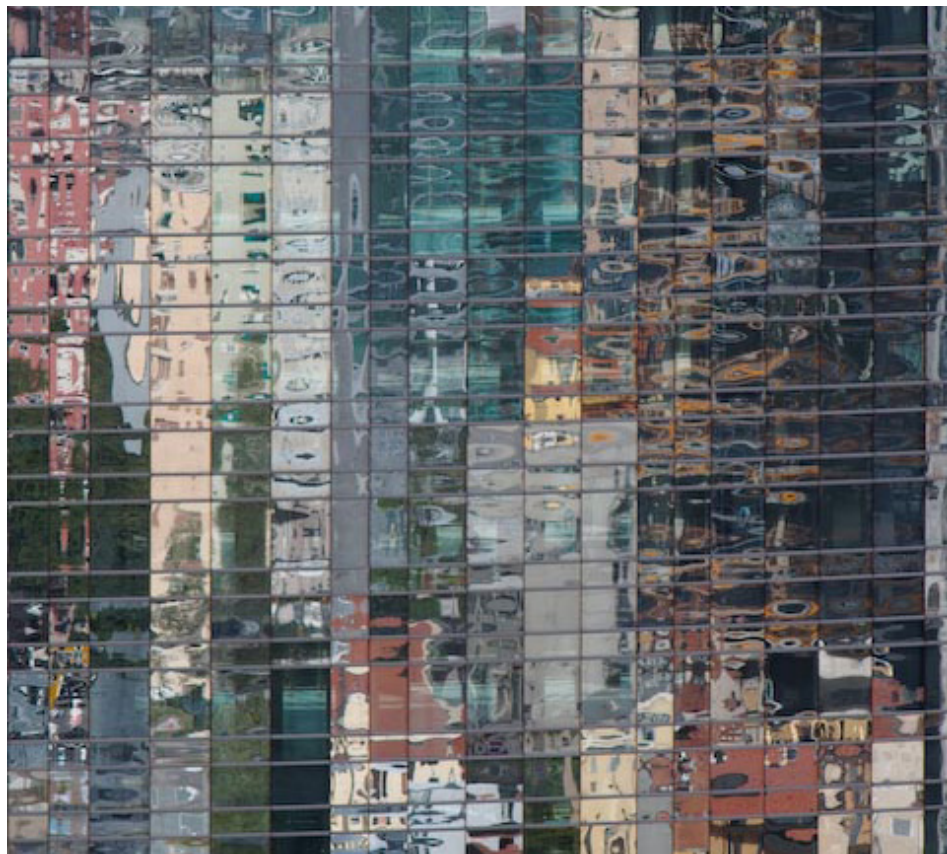
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The accelerating environmental, social, and cultural transformations of recent decades have profoundly reshaped the way we conceive the built environment. The climatic crisis, the growing awareness of the finite nature of resources, and the widespread presence of abandoned or underused buildings call for a radical rethinking of design practices. Rather than constructing new buildings, contemporary design is increasingly challenged to regenerate what already exists, transforming neglected places into meaningful, inclusive, and emotionally engaging environments. In this perspective, the reuse of spaces is not merely a technical or environmental strategy but becomes a cultural act capable of renewing the relationship between people, memory, and place.

This Special Issue, *Multisensory Interiors. Comfort and Regeneration in the Reuse of Spaces*, explores how a multisensory approach can enrich contemporary interior architecture and spatial design, offering new theoretical perspectives and practical methodologies for the regeneration of existing environments. Bringing together contributions from scholars and designers working across different geographical and disciplinary contexts, the issue investigates how the orchestration of sensory experiences can foster comfort, well-being, place attachment, and regenerative relationships between humans and the environments they dwell.

Although vision has traditionally dominated architectural discourse, our experience of space is intrinsically multisensory.

Opening photo: Pierfrancesco Sarzi Braga, *Composite Perception*.

Every environment is perceived through the continuous interaction of visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory, thermal, proprioceptive, and kinaesthetic stimuli, which together shape our understanding of places and influence our emotions, behaviours, and memories. Human beings do not simply observe spaces; they inhabit them through their bodies. As embodied beings, our minds, bodies, environments, and cultures are inseparably connected through dynamic processes of perception and action. Recent advances in behavioural neuroscience, environmental psychology, neuroaesthetics, and cognitive science increasingly demonstrate that perception emerges from the integration of multiple sensory modalities rather than from isolated sensory channels. As Bruno (2023) argues, many perceptual experiences are the result of automatic multisensory interactions in which information received through one modality is interpreted in relation to another. Likewise, Mallgrave (2015) has emphasized that architecture is never experienced solely through visual observation: spaces evoke bodily actions, movements, and emotional simulations that contribute to their meaning and experiential quality.

These findings invite designers to move beyond a predominantly visual conception of interiors and to embrace an organism-centered understanding of spatial experience. Design thus becomes the careful composition of multiple sensory cues capable of supporting cognitive fluency, emotional resonance, and environmental comprehension.

Among the most significant concepts emerging from contemporary neuroscience are cross-modal correspondences

- the spontaneous associations that human beings establish between stimuli belonging to different sensory modalities. These associations are not arbitrary cultural conventions but largely reflect shared perceptual tendencies rooted in human biology. When design aligns sensory information according to these naturally corresponding patterns, perceptual processing becomes more fluent, reducing cognitive effort and generating experiences that users tend to perceive as harmonious, aesthetically pleasing, and comfortable. Conversely, incoherent sensory signals require greater cognitive resources, often producing disorientation, discomfort, or reduced environmental legibility. Integrating knowledge of multisensory perception into interior architecture therefore represents more than an aesthetic opportunity: it offers an evidence-informed framework for designing spaces that support psychological well-being, orientation, emotional regulation, and meaningful engagement with place.

The regenerative potential of multisensory design becomes particularly relevant in the context of reuse. Abandoned industrial buildings, neglected infrastructures, historical complexes, post-disaster landscapes, and urban voids constitute a vast material and cultural heritage whose value extends beyond their physical structures. These places preserve memories, narratives, identities, and collective experiences that contribute to individual and social belonging.

Environmental psychology has long demonstrated that place attachment plays a fundamental role in shaping both personal and collective identity. Historical environments frequently generate stronger emotional bonds than newly built settings

because they embody continuity with the past, preserving cultural traditions and reinforcing shared memory. The adaptive reuse of existing architecture therefore represents not only a sustainable strategy for reducing environmental impact but also an opportunity to reactivate emotional, cultural, and social connections between communities and their environments.

Within this framework, regeneration acquires a broader meaning. It is no longer limited to restoring buildings or improving physical performance, but extends to restoring relationships: between people and places, between cultural memory and contemporary life, between ecological systems and human experience. Comfort itself can be understood as a multidimensional condition emerging from the harmonious interaction of environmental qualities, sensory coherence, emotional well-being, and social inclusion.

The contributions collected in this Special Issue illustrate the richness of this perspective through diverse theoretical approaches, empirical investigations, pedagogical experiences, and design explorations.

1. Reuse and Regenerative Beauty

The first section, Reuse and Regenerative Beauty, investigates adaptive reuse as a process capable of transforming abandoned environments into restorative places. The contributions examine interdisciplinary frameworks, multisensory strategies for regenerating interiors, and the role of reuse in disaster-affected contexts, highlighting how regeneration can foster both environmental sustainability and human well-being.

In the paper *From Regenerated Spaces to Restorative Places. An Interdisciplinary Approach to Multisensory Reuse*, Fatone and Greco propose an interdisciplinary framework that reinterprets adaptive reuse as a process capable of transforming disused spaces into restorative places. Integrating interior design, environmental psychology, cognitive neuroscience, and the principles of cross-modal congruence, the paper argues that regeneration depends not only on physical intervention but also on perceptual qualities such as sensory coherence, organized complexity, fascination, and spatial identity. A proof of concept, developed through three multisensory installations in a former fire station, provides preliminary evidence that carefully arranged sensory configurations can enhance comfort, emotional engagement, and perceived regenerativity. The study highlights the potential of multisensory design as an evidence-informed strategy for adaptive reuse, positioning reused interiors as environments that promote psychological restoration, well-being, and meaningful relationships between people and place.

In the essay *Multisensory and Crossmodal Strategies for the Reuse of Abandoned Interiors: Between Fascination, Comfort, and Regeneration*, Tonin and Ferrara investigate how multisensory and crossmodal design strategies can transform abandoned interiors into regenerative environments while preserving their material and atmospheric identity. Drawing on literature review, expert interviews, and two temporary adaptive reuse case studies developed in Italy and Brazil, the authors argue that comfort in reused spaces does not emerge from the elimination of sensory complexity but from the coherent orchestration of

light, sound, texture, smell, and spatial sequences. Introducing a layered analytical framework that connects existing spatial conditions, multisensory interventions, perceptual mechanisms, and experiential outcomes, the paper highlights the importance of crossmodal coherence, temporal experience, and material agency in shaping embodied perception. By critically addressing issues of accessibility, sustainability, and the potential aestheticisation of decay, the contribution positions multisensory design as a reflective and inclusive strategy capable of transforming abandoned interiors into meaningful, restorative, and culturally resilient places.

In the essay *Disaster-Affected Spaces as Multisensory Living Labs: Comfort and Regeneration through the Reuse of Abandoned Spaces*, Giraldi and Morelli reinterpret post-disaster abandoned environments as multisensory living labs, proposing adaptive reuse as a process of perceptual and regenerative activation rather than physical reconstruction. Drawing on two case studies developed within the Horizon 2020 Search & Rescue project, the authors demonstrate how the arrangement of light, sound, materiality, microclimate, and spatial organization can enhance orientation, perceived safety, cognitive clarity, and emotional well-being in unstable environments. The paper introduces five comfort patterns - sensory coherence, spatial legibility, embodied anchoring, refuge zones, and biophilic devices - as transferable design principles for transforming disaster-affected spaces into resilient, meaningful, and inhabitable environments. By framing ruins as perceptual infrastructures rather than residual voids, the study highlights the potential of multisensory design to foster

adaptive reuse, resilience, and sustainable regeneration while preserving memory and place identity.

2. Multisensory Installations

The second section, Multisensory Installations, presents experimental projects that investigate perception beyond conventional visual paradigms. Through artistic installations and inclusive museum experiences, these contributions demonstrate how multisensory design can expand accessibility, stimulate imagination, and foster alternative forms of engagement with cultural heritage.

In the essay *The Asylum is Full of Flowers, but You Can't See Them*, Masoero and Schinco explore the regenerative potential of multisensory artistic installations through *The Revealed Beauty*, an immersive project developed from archival research on former Italian psychiatric hospitals. By intertwining visual art, narrative, sound, and tactile experience, the installation transforms forgotten histories into an embodied encounter with memory, demonstrating how multisensory design can foster empathy, compassion, and collective healing while restoring dignity to invisible lives. According to the Authors, the experience of beauty can be seen as something that goes far beyond mere recreational enjoyment, placing us on the frontiers of questions concerning the very possibility of “being well and healthy” within the parameters of our civilization.

In the contribution *Beyond “Seeing”. A Pilot Audio/Tactile Experiment for a Synesthetic Approach to Museum Accessibility*, Riccò and Hou explore how synesthetic design can expand

museum accessibility by creating coherent relationships between tactile, auditory, and visual communication. Framed within the recent evolution of international accessibility policies and museum practices, the paper presents a pilot experiment involving tactile-audio prototypes inspired by Raphael's *School of Athens* and tested with students at Politecnico di Milano. Comparing different tactile translations under varying visual and auditory conditions, the study demonstrates that communicative accessibility depends not simply on the multiplication of sensory channels but on the consistency between them. By introducing the concept of synesthetic translation as a design methodology, the authors show how multisensory experiences can foster richer engagement with cultural heritage while supporting universal accessibility. The contribution therefore positions museum design as an experimental field where multisensory communication enhances both inclusion and the quality of aesthetic experience.

3. Biophilia in Interior Design

The third section, *Biophilia in Interior Design*, expands the discussion by exploring multisensory relationships between humans and the more-than-human world. The authors investigate ecological attunement, organism-driven design, and multisensory cohabitation as approaches capable of enhancing domestic environments while promoting collective well-being and ecological awareness.

In the essay *Multisensory Ecological Attunement: Engaging with the More-than-Human Through Design and Pedagogy*, Moriarty, Ratti and Reed reconceptualise multisensory design

as a practice of ecological attunement capable of fostering meaningful relationships between humans and more-than-human environments. Combining the analysis of contemporary design precedents with the pedagogical experience of the RMIT design studio *Downstream: towards an ecological interior*, the authors identify four complementary modes of multisensory engagement – Perceiving, Inhabiting, Embodiment, and Imagining – through which sensory awareness can be translated into relational spatial practices. By integrating *dérive*, ecosystem mapping, field observation, and ecological analysis into interior design education, the paper demonstrates how sensory literacy can become a methodological tool for understanding environments as dynamic systems of organic, inorganic, spatial, and temporal relationships. The contribution ultimately positions multisensory design as an ecological and systems-based approach capable of enriching both professional practice and design pedagogy.

In the contribution *Enhancing Domestic Built Assets through Multisensory Cohabitation: An Organism-Driven Approach to Communal Well-Being*, González Cabrero, Ávila Ochoa and González Vega investigate how multisensory interior systems can regenerate existing domestic environments by reorganising everyday routines rather than relying on physical expansion or replacement. Adopting a research-through-design methodology based on academic design studios, the authors examine three domestic scenarios – compact living, fragmented infrastructures, and ageing-oriented environments – to demonstrate how furniture can operate as a behavioural and multisensory infrastructure supporting multispecies cohabitation.

Through the analytical dimensions of sensory coherence, behavioural synchronization, and perceptual load, the paper shows how tactile continuity, spatial organisation, and material consistency foster comfort, accessibility, and communal well-being. By reframing domestic interiors as relational ecosystems shared by humans and other living beings, the study proposes an organism-driven perspective that extends regenerative design beyond environmental performance toward care, inclusion, and everyday multisensory experience.

4. Spatial Perception and the Contribution of Neuroscience

Finally, the fourth section, Spatial Perception and the Contribution of Neuroscience, connects design practice with emerging knowledge from neuroscience and environmental psychology. From multisensory urban regeneration in African inner-city precincts to evidence-informed approaches for contemporary interiors, these studies illustrate how scientific understanding of perception can inform more inclusive, restorative, and emotionally meaningful environments.

The essay *Multisensory Urban Regeneration in Practice: How Everyday Governance and Spatial Management Shape Perceived Comfort and Attachment in African Inner-City Precincts* by Mashiri expands the discussion from interiors to the urban scale, arguing that the success of regeneration depends not only on physical transformation but also on the multisensory qualities through which places are experienced and inhabited. Introducing the concepts of multisensory coherence and sensory governance, the paper shows how everyday practices of maintenance, lighting, security, and infrastructure shape

comfort, place attachment, and social inclusion in African inner-city precincts. By advocating community-led sensory assessments as part of regeneration processes, it proposes a more inclusive and culturally grounded approach to urban renewal, where preserving sensory identities becomes as important as improving physical conditions. Integrating a community-defined sensory baseline and sensory impact statement ensures that interventions are assessed by what is preserved, legitimised, or displaced, allowing lived experience to guide genuine urban repair.

In the contribution *Multisensory design approaches in contemporary interiors*, Anzani, Di Prete and Lonardo examine the evolution of multisensory design from its phenomenological roots to contemporary evidence-based methodologies, arguing that sensory experience should become the primary driver of interior design rather than a secondary aesthetic concern. Revisiting Clino Trini Castelli's *Design Primario*, the paper traces how light, sound, texture, microclimate, and scent have progressively redefined design processes and representational tools. It further expands the notion of the human sensorium to include vestibular, proprioceptive, thermal, temporal, and social dimensions, presenting biophilic and neuroinclusive design as complementary frameworks for creating adaptive and restorative environments. Finally, the contribution highlights the role of immersive technologies and neurophysiological assessment in supporting evidence-based design, positioning interiors as dynamic multisensory ecosystems capable of enhancing cognition, emotional well-being, inclusion, and human health.

Increasingly, designers are called upon to engage with knowledge produced across neuroscience, psychology, ecology, anthropology, and the cognitive sciences. Such transdisciplinary convergence does not diminish the cultural specificity of design; instead, it enriches its capacity to respond to some of the most pressing challenges of our time, including climate change, social inclusion, public health, and the quality of everyday life.

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Designer and Ph.D. candidate at the Design Department of Politecnico di Milano, her research explores the environmental responsibility of design across multiple domains, including urban biodiversity, circular exhibition design, and design for the energy transition. Her doctoral research focuses on the phenomenon of plant blindness, investigating how design can counteract it and foster plant awareness through situated practices in urban public spaces. Since 2019, she has been an

assistant in didactic activities in the Interior Design Bachelor's Degree of Politecnico's School of Design, and in 2020 she started working with the association Repubblica del Design, where she has taken care of the design and implementation of participatory design-didactic workshops, with partners such as the Municipality of Milan, Milan Triennale, and SOUX school of architecture for children.

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Alastair Reed

He holds a PhD in Forest Ecology and is a lecturer at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) and Melbourne Polytechnic. He brings over two decades of experience in higher education course design, working across interdisciplinary programs that connect environmental systems, design, and applied sciences.

His research spans forest genetics, viticulture, and data-informed analyses of environmental and socio-economic systems, including work on power imbalances within commercial structures. His current work focuses on multisensory design and more-than-human approaches, exploring how ecological systems thinking can inform spatial practice and support the development of responsive, relational environments.

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Dina Riccò

Associate Professor at the Department of Design (Politecnico di Milano). A graduate of architecture and with a PhD in Industrial Design, her main subject of study is applied synaesthesia to design and multimedia, communicative accessibility in audio-video and museums. Amongst her key publications: books entitled *Sinestesie per il design* (Etas, Milan, 1999), *Sentire il design* (Carocci, Rome, 2008), the book *Synaesthesia: Theoretical, artistic and Scientific Foundation* (with M. J. de Córdoba, Sean A. Day et al., ArteCittà, Granada, 2014, Spanish ed. 2012). She is the author of over 130 publications in books, journals, and national and international conferences, including the recent curations of the books *Accessibilità museale* (FrancoAngeli, 2023, Selected ADI Index 2024) and *Accessibilità comunicativa* (with M.C. Andriello; Rai Libri, 2024).

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Massimo Schinco

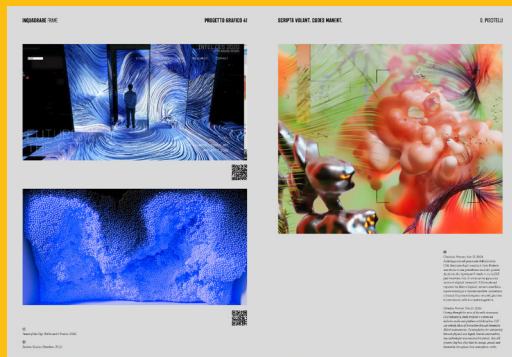
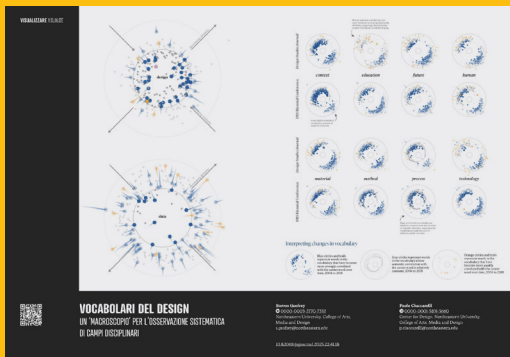
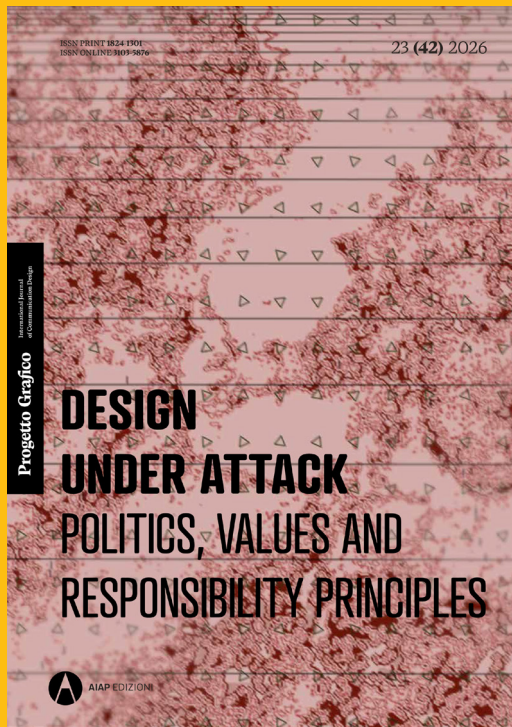
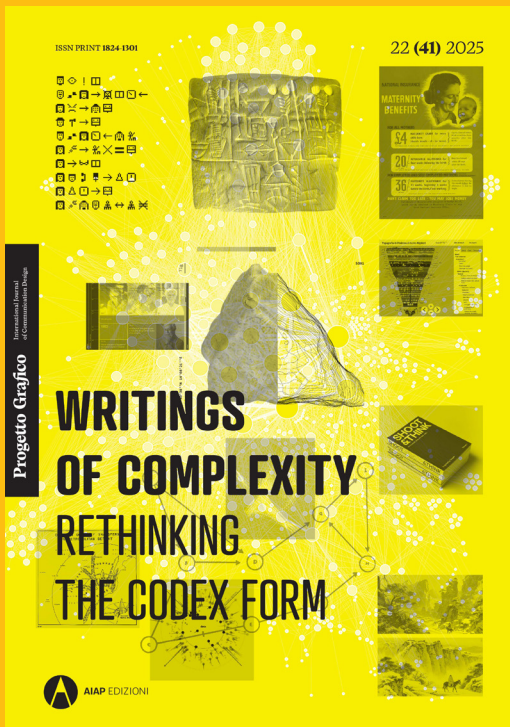
Psychologist and psychotherapist. He teaches Systemic Relational Psychotherapy in the Centro Studi Eteropoiesi, Turin, Italy. He is Adjunct Professor in the Department of Design, Milan Politecnico, Italy. His works focus on the bridge between oneiric thought and project creativity

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Paulo Eduardo Tonin

He is an architect and PhD Candidate in Design at Santa Catarina State University (Universidade do Estado de Santa Catarina), and a visiting researcher at the Politecnico di Milano. His research focuses on experience design, with particular attention to multisensory and cross-modal experience, sensory branding, and material agency in interior, retail, and phygital environments.

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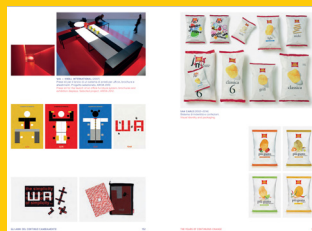
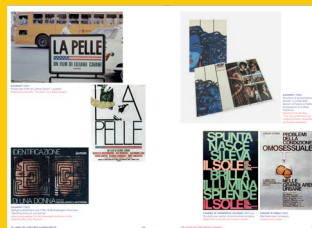
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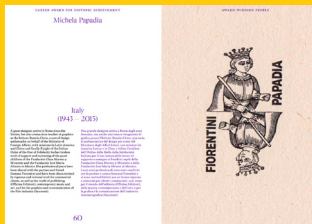
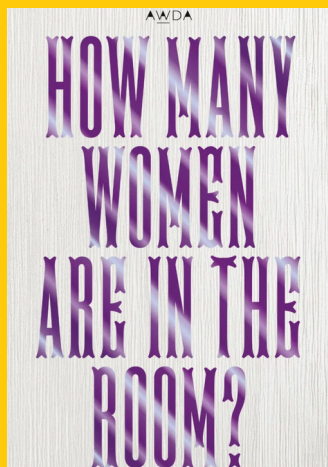
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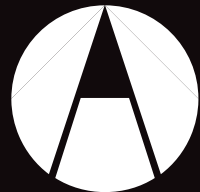
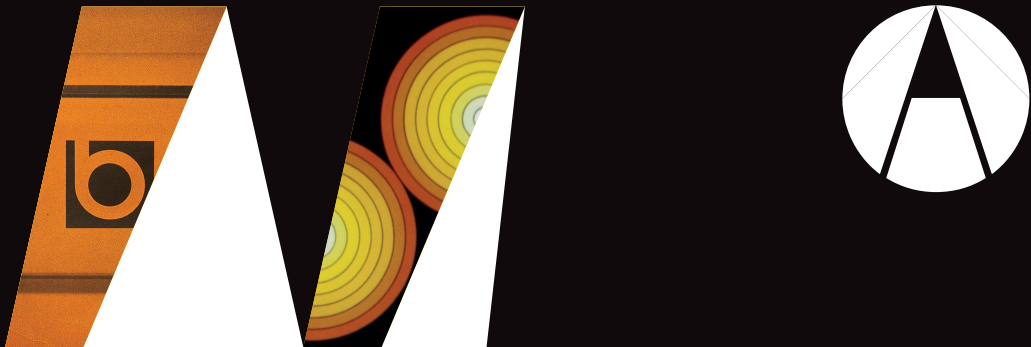
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