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THE OBLIQUE CONDITION

TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF SOMATIC
ARCHITECTURE (without falling)

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ABSTRACT

The Oblique Function is a theory that was developed by Claude Parent and Paul Virilio in the mid-1960s, which envisioned a wall-free architecture composed solely by non-orthogonal, inclined planes that would subsume the body in active participation. Most architecture historians regard it as a phenomenological intent in the advent of the hegemonic role played by information technologies, which consequently amounted to the exhaustion of the physical. What some failed to realise, by tagging Architecture Principe's practice as being merely about forms, is the understanding of the whole theory as a psycho-physiological experiment. I will argue that the word 'function' in the title does not necessarily relate to architecture; on the contrary, it enables the analysis of the manifesto through a psycho-physiological lense. The aim of this thesis is to understand how perception, behaviour, and movement are entangled, in order to find out how The Oblique Function can actually subvert habitual schemes while embracing the motor potential of the soma.

The argument will be constructed around the studies made by the German neurologist Kurt Goldstein. By means of his pathological findings on the 'lived-body', it will be explained how the disordered organism regains order, and how that renders the 'normal' functioning of the organism. Furthermore, his innovative setting of experiments in everyday-life circumstances will qualify to inversely place oblique architecture in a clinical scenario. Goldstein's definitions of 'concrete', 'abstract', and 'excellent behaviour' - on occasion translated by Maurice Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of experience - will show how shock and instability are used as design methods to existentially reunite the individual with its environment. In this sense the psycho-physiological consequences will be translated into the morpho-somatic ambitions of Parent and Virilio, proving both the autonomy of the individual and of architecture.