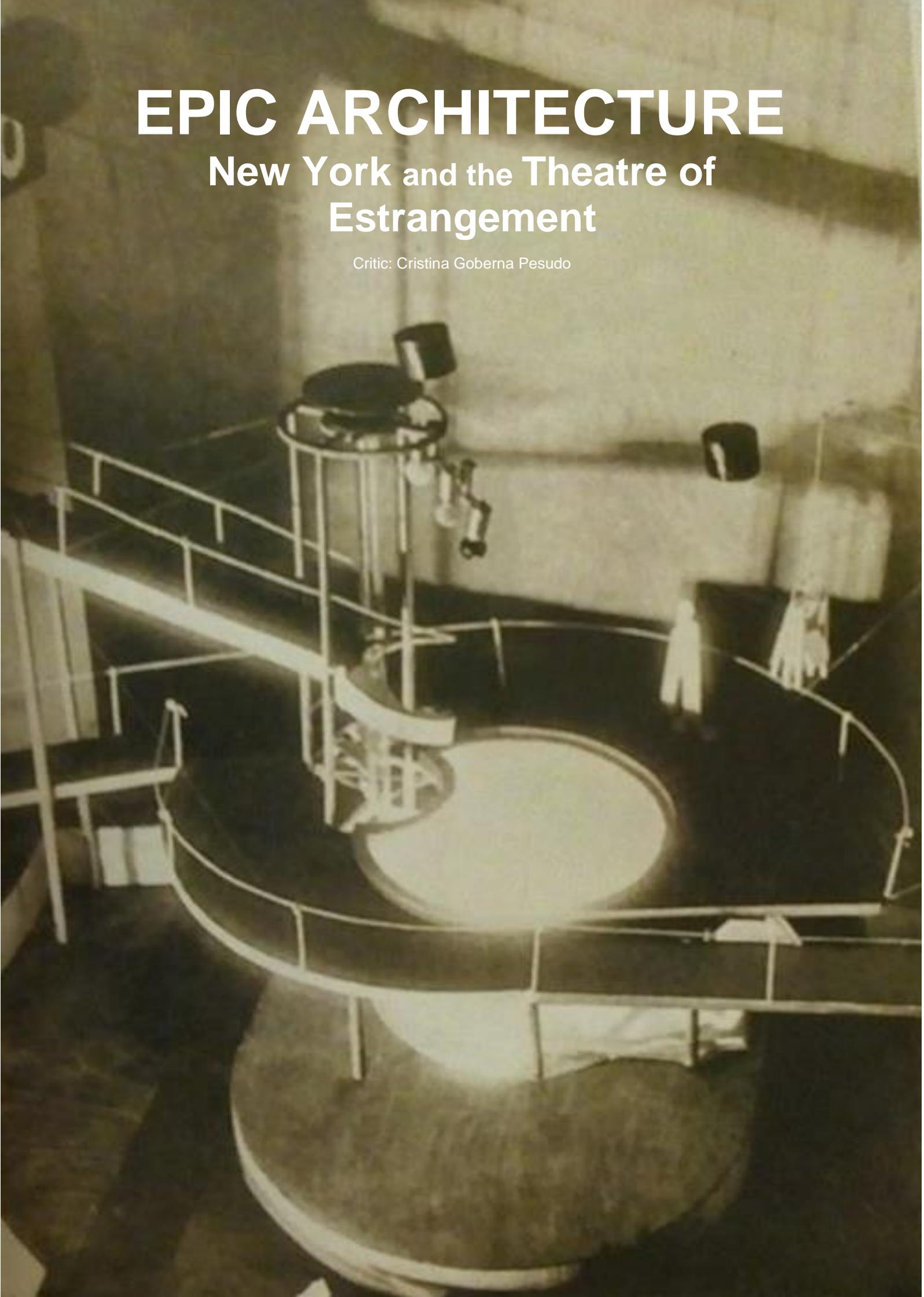


EPIC ARCHITECTURE

New York and the Theatre of Estrangement

Critic: Cristina Goberna Pesudo



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*Un théâtre est d'abord un instrument
avant d'être un bâtiment et
éventuellement un monument urbain.*



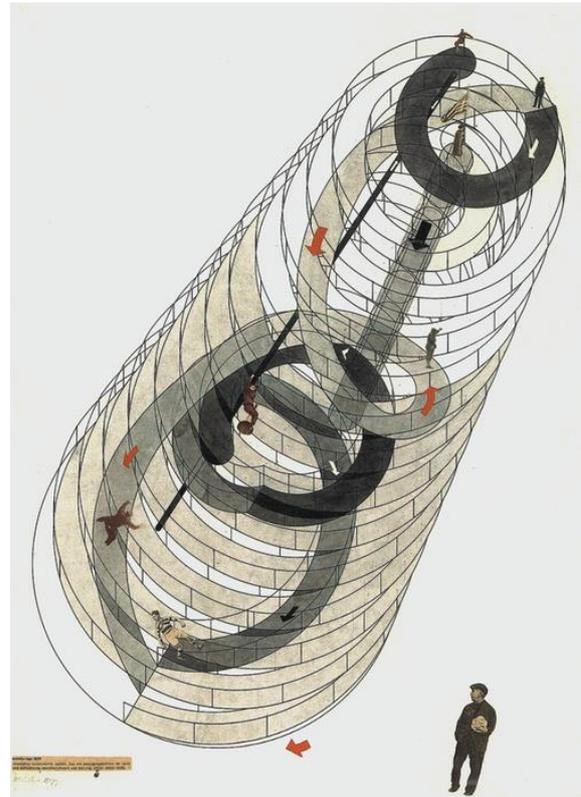
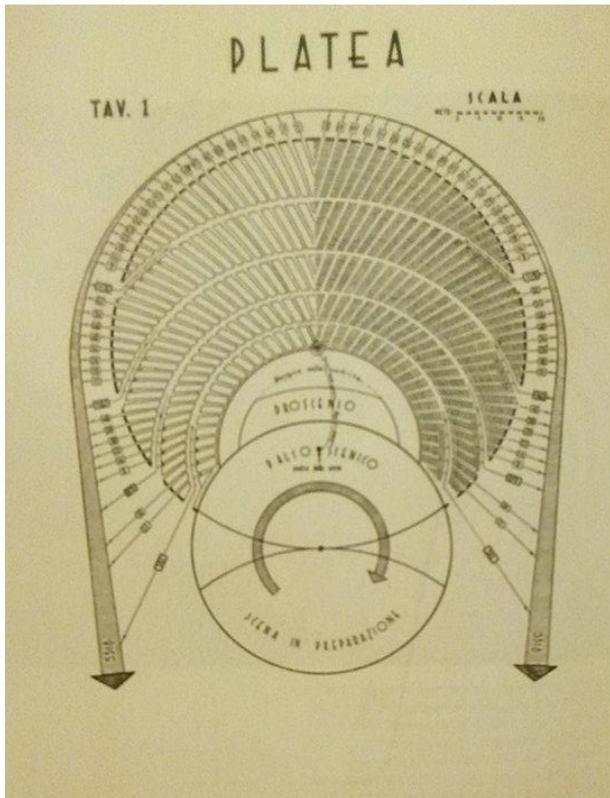
Epic Architecture. New York and Theatre

Taking Bertolt Brecht's Epic Theatre as primary reference, Epic Architecture aims to encourage architects to address current polemical issues from the discipline, the city and beyond. The idea is to create architectural artefacts that more than resolving problems render them visible, more than showing good intentions rise questions and instead of being pragmatic are designed to create an estrangement effect that would transform its users in critical observers of architecture and reality.

New York City has a rich tradition of theatre, from informal shows in beer gardens in its times as New Amsterdam to the arrival of British theatre companies; from secret cabarets in speakeasies during the prohibition to avant-garde companies and venues during the 60's and 70's and from Broadway plays to current Off and Off-Off-Broadway formats. One feature that characterizes theatre and its architecture in general across the centuries and in New York in particular is that it operates as a social condenser,

as a space of cultural friction as well as a disciplinary thermometer and therefore, a potential agent for provocation.

In the current atmosphere of political turmoil, this studio explores the design of theatres in contested areas of New York City. Taking as precedent the local tradition of drama in its varying formats we will propose *Replicas* or *Critical Typological Corrections* to historical theatres of the architectural avant-gardes from the XXth and XXIth centuries that consider current architectural, cultural and political affairs.



Architecture as Double Secret Agent

This studio explores the potential of agonism in architecture to open unexpected paths for the identification and confrontation of current polemics in the field. Its final aim is to produce architecture that operates as a double (secret) agent working for opposite ideological agendas. The term *Agonism* comes from the Greek *Agos* that means fight. The current high-speed consumption of architectural imaginary entails the naturalization of issues that could otherwise be publicly contested. This domestication of architectural polemics and the general disinterest in discussion that it produces hinders the debates that could potentially generate advancement in the field. From the 20's avant-garde movement's trust in architecture as agent for revolution, to the 70's sense of disbelief, the complicated relation of architecture and class struggle has been a recurrent source of discussion that seemed to be dormant for the past decades. Yet movements as the *Arab Spring*, the uprisings in Greece, *Indignados* in Spain or

Occupy Wall Street in New York evidenced a remarkable absence of architecture and architects—especially as producers of representation— that makes urgent the re-evaluation of architecture’s participation as a potential agent of provocation or change. Assuming that current architecture doesn’t seem to be interested, able or accepted in frontline confrontations of dissent, questions emerge: Could it act as an infiltrated agent working with and against opposite ideological agendas? This course vindicate the role of the architect as a *Public Intellectual*, that is, a designer that not only is actively involved in discussions about the construction of cities, but also takes critical positions in controversies that inform the evolution in the design of architectural typologies.



References

Some of the sources that the studio will use will be the magazine *The New Yorker*, the current Graham Foundation exhibition “*Spaces without drama or surface is an illusion, but so is depth*”, the book *Théâtres en Utopie* by Yann Rocher and a number of theatres and plays currently showing in New York.

Modus Operandi

This class will operate with principals of critical pedagogy and the motto of *Less Competition and More Collaboration* among its participants. The students will be trained to develop a critical agenda and strong proposals in their designs. They will work in four parallel lines of investigation:

- 1) The design of an architectural typology.
- 2) The construction of a strong, studied, controversial and sophisticated critical architectural argument.
- 3) An intensive investigation on experimental architectural representation.

4) Effectiveness in graphic and oral presentations.

The classes will be organized and run as *Intelligence Clusters*, that is, as *Research and Design Specialized Groups* that will operate daily as intensive team production workshops with weekly exhibitions and pin ups, roundtables and constant explanation of their advances in orchestrated games and open discussions.

