



and



PANGEA
WORLD THEATER

Two Theaters, One Voice: Unmasking the Human Drama

HOMO DRAMATICUS

BY ALBERTO ADELLACH

DIRECTED BY

**Sir Curtis Kirby III, Alberto Justiniano,
Meena Natarajan and Dipankar Mukherjee**

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Homo Dramaticus is produced collaboratively with Pangea World Theater and Teatro del Pueblo.

ABOUT THE COLLABORATION

Teatro del Pueblo and Pangea World Theater are proud to stand beside Penumbra Theatre, Mu Performing Arts, and New Native Theatre as members of the Twin Cities Theatres of Color Coalition (TCTOCC). The coalition formed to build knowledge, capacity, and take action around the challenges and opportunities of diversification in the American theatre. We lead conversations, making available the wealth and depth of knowledge housed in our theatres through the dissemination of tools, practices, and consultation to bolster responsible and accountable engagement around the representation of our communities.

ABOUT THE PLAY

Homo Dramaticus is composed of three short pieces. Together, they weave a story that shines a light on the importance of Drama in the cultural, political and spiritual life of human beings and its great creative force in the face of the ineffable destiny of all people. The scenes are playful, absurd and violent; the beings that inhabit them will try, in a last desperate gesture, to build the relationships that give meaning to their (our) existence before the inevitable end.

The original order of the acts as written by Alberto Adellach is *Criaturas* (Children), *Marcha* (March) and *Palabras* (Words). In this production we decided to reorder the acts to *Marcha* (March), *Palabras* (Words), and lastly *Criaturas* (Children).

Marcha (March): A surreal tragicomedy that acts as a cautionary tale against dehumanization. Three characters continue in a repetitive cycle of violent death and deployment as they march towards an undefined destination.

Palabras (Words): A man attempts to preach the Sermon on the Mount. As he does, his audience tries to preach through body language. He wants to impose the word of Jesus Christ. They want to impose physical action. Their bond is one of pure violence and at the end there is death.

Criaturas (Children): John and Andrew, two children played by adults, are creating different scenarios for them to play pretend through. They play pretend war, play pretend as aviators, as castaways, and as astronauts. However, as they continue to play out these different scenarios, real dread seems to grow within them.

When I saw Homo Dramaticus staged in New York several years ago, I watched the actors transcend the limits of language. In one scene, two children's playing evolves into a game of war and they are terrified. That existential dread is audible in any language.

- Laura Cresté (Alberto Adellach's granddaughter)

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT



Carlos Cresté (1933 -1996), who published under the pseudonym **Alberto Adellach**, defined himself solely as a playwright. Residing in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Adellach was a journalist, advertiser, essayist, writer for television and playwright. His adoration of the Absurd and Beckett as a main inspiration can be reflected in his work. The production *Upa-la-la* (1966), integrated by two plays of Adellach ('*Vecinos y amigos*' and '*Criaturas*'), and the *Act without words number 2* by Samuel Beckett, promoted the inclusion of Adellach among the avant-garde authors. Later, he wrote plays that lead to 'Grotesque,' the literary genre with an Argentinian flair as introduced by Ramón María del Valle-Inclán. In 1976, he won two of Argentina's most prestigious artistic awards: a Martin Fierro Award for his work in television, and the Argentores Award from the General Society of Authors of Argentina.

After the coup d'etat and subsequent Dirty War in Argentina, Alberto Adellach was blacklisted for his leftist plays, and fled the country in 1976. A fellow playwright, Griselda Gambaro, claimed that Adellach never wrote again after his children were kidnapped. On the contrary, he did continue to write while living in the US such as the play *Romance de Tudor Place* -- a play about the mothers of La Plaza de Mayo who marched in front of the Presidential Palace weekly in memory of their children who disappeared during the dictatorship. Adellach never returned to Buenos Aires, but his collected works have been reprinted in the hopes of a revival.

ABOUT THE DIRECTOR OF MARCHA (MARCH)



Alberto Justiniano is one of the founders and Artistic Director of Teatro del Pueblo. He curates Teatro's Political Theater series and the Latino/Asian Fusion series with Pangea World Theater. He has been active as a director, playwright, screenwriter and independent producer for both film and theater. His community-based work has integrated the creation of art by community members in ways that engage participants in social justice issues. His honors include the 1993 Many Voices Residency Award, St Paul Companies 1994 Leadership and Arts Award, 2009 Fransico Rosales community award, the 2012 Target Community Award and the 2013 Pangea Social Justice award.

ABOUT THE CO-DIRECTORS OF *PALABRAS* (WORDS)



Meena Natarajan is a playwright and director, currently the Executive and Artistic Director of Pangea World Theater, which she has co-led since its founding in 1995. She has co-curated numerous professional and community programs and written over ten full-length works, including adaptations and original pieces focused on war, spirituality, and memory. Meena leads ensemble-based processes for stage productions and has directed various original theater and performance art pieces. She serves on the board of the Consortium of Asian American Theaters and Artists and is a National Theater Project Advisor at the New England Foundation for the Arts. Additionally, she was part of the Advisory Committee for the Community Arts Network and held leadership roles in the Network of Ensemble Theaters and Women’s Playwrights International. Meena has received grants from the Theatre Communications Group, Playwrights Center, and the Minnesota State Arts Board, and was awarded the Visionary Award for mid-career leaders by the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits.

ABOUT THE CO-DIRECTORS OF *PALABRAS (WORDS)*



Dipankar Mukherjee is a professional director from Calcutta, India, with 25 years of directing experience. He serves as the Artistic Director of Pangea World Theater, which he co-founded in Minneapolis as a progressive space for arts and dialogue. In 2023, he received the McKnight Distinguished Artist Award. His artistic approach is shaped by his commitment to social justice, equity, and spirituality, alongside relevant political issues. Dipankar has directed in India, England, Canada, and the U.S. He has been awarded the Humphrey Institute Fellowship to Salzburg and served as a Ford Foundation delegate to India and Lebanon. Recently, he received the Bush Leadership Fellowship to study non-violence and peace methodologies in India and South Africa. Additionally, he was invited to the White House as part of the Asian American and Pacific Islanders Delegation. In his workshops, Dipankar facilitates processes that challenge colonial, racist, and patriarchal norms, seeking collaborative alternatives.

ABOUT THE DIRECTOR OF *CRIATURAS* (CHILDREN)



Sir Curtis Kirby III, Bois Forte Band of Ojibwe and African American descent, is enjoying his 7th year directing the Ikidowin Youth Theater Ensemble. He has been selected as Emerging Artist for a TPT Minnesota Original. Kirby is mentored by Dipankar Mukherjee, Artistic Director of Pangea World Theater, and has participated in the Next Generation Theater Director's Institute for the past three years. He was awarded a two-year Directing Fellowship with Pangea World Theater. Kirby was the Assistant Director for *Five Weeks, Sabra Falling, Mother Courage and Her Children* and *Hecuba* by Marina Carr. He directed a one-act play in New York City, 2020 Reflections of Native Voices as an emerging director.

THEATRE OF THE ABSURD

Theatre of the Absurd was a dramatic movement that began in Europe in the 1950s and continued into the late 1980s. The movement was a reaction to the collapse of social, political, religious, and moral structures after World War II. Theater of the Absurd is often rooted in the ideas of the freedom of choice and individual action. Understanding the action of the play is not as important in this art form, but rather what you personally glean from it.

COMMON PRINCIPLES

Building on the ideas above, Theatre of the Absurd is strongly **Anti-Character**, **Anti-Language**, **Anti-Drama** and **Anti-Plot**. This is often embodied by the following theatrical methods:

1. Mundane themes displayed in an exaggerated manner
2. Tension built in the beginning that drops throughout the play
3. Unstructured plot: Many Absurdist plays repeat certain parts of the plot
4. Characters without a deep personality or identity and instead are used as puppets to move the plot forward
5. An absence of time and space
6. A prompting of the audience to think about moral or political themes
7. Strong use of movement, repetition, and circular motions in its staging
8. Nonsensical dialogue
9. A focus on allegory -- for example, actors mirror the sad fate of humanity, neither performing cynicism or sincerity, just performing sadness

ABSURDIST CHARACTERS

In the script, Alberto Adellach was specific (or specifically vague) about description of the characters in each act.

- In *Criaturas* (Children), the characters have proper names and descriptions: "John and Andrew (both played by adults)."
- In *Marcha* (March) the characters are referred to as numbers: "They march in place, keeping a certain formation. 1 becomes 4, 2 becomes 5, 3 becomes 6, and so on."
- In *Palabras* (Words), the characters lose their description and blend into the stage directions: "(In a black space several figures standing, sitting or lying on the floor. The character comes in, gets on a small elevation by the back stage and starts to recite, consulting from time to time a small book)."

This choice of his to remove the identity of the characters through the acts lines up perfectly with a common principle of Theater of the Absurd - actors performing as puppets instead of solo characters in a play.

Some questions to think about as you watch the play:

- As you watch the play, pay attention to how characters are portrayed and their sense of individuality and autonomy. What commentary is Adellach making about the impact of war on the human psyche?
- On *Marcha* (March): In the script, Adellach lists each character only using numbers (1, 2, and 3). Unlike the first act, these characters did not have formal names like John or Andrew. Why do you think he chose to do so? What message is he sending to the audience?
- On *Palabras* (Words): Who do you think is the main character? Is he a priest? Some other religious figure? Why do you think Adellach chose to leave the character nameless and without any context? What message does this send to the audience?

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The play is not set in a specific time or place, as is typical for the genre Theater of the Absurd. But the events of the Dirty War in Argentina impacted Adellach's work as someone who lived through the dictatorship.

ARGENTINA'S DIRTY WAR



*General Juan Perón
(1985 - 1974)*

Juan Perón was elected president of Argentina in 1946. Perón's work in industrializing Argentina, increasing economic and social benefits to the working classes and the poor brought him unwavering support from millions of laborers, known as descamisados, or 'shirtless ones.'

In 1955, Perón was overthrown and went into exile. In 1971 the Peronist party was re-established, and Peronist candidates won the presidential election the following year. Juan Perón returned to Argentina and was elected as president in a special election.

What happened after Juan Perón's death in 1974, led to a dictatorship known as the Dirty war where up to 30,000 were killed or made to disappear by anti-communist forces in Argentina.



*Brute force: a protester
against the regime is
arrested in Buenos Aires.
Photograph: Daniel Garcia*

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

JUNE 20TH, 1973

Argentine Anti-Communist snipers attack a crowd of over 2 million people near Buenos Aires airport, resulting in over 300 civilian injuries and 13 deaths, marking the decline of Peronistas.

Perón is elected as President for his second term

OCTOBER 12TH, 1973

JULY 1ST, 1974

Juan Perón dies of a heart attack and is succeeded by his widow and vice president, Isabel "Evita" Perón as head of state.

The Argentine Armed Forces plan a coup against Perón, leading to his arrest and the establishment of the National Reorganization Process, aiming to restore "moral values" and representative democracy.

OCTOBER, 1975 - MARCH, 1976

1976

The National Reorganization Process target Peronistas and Leftists, setting up over 300 secret prisons to detain suspected subversions. Strict censorship, curfews, suspension of congress, bans on political parties, and deregulation policies further destabilized the Argentine Peso.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS (cont.)

1976

The National Reorganization Process target Peronistas and Leftists, setting up over 300 secret prisons to detain suspected subversions. Strict censorship, curfews, suspension of congress, bans on political parties, and deregulation policies further destabilized the Argentine Peso.

Argentina wins the world cup, used to rally people under nationalist pretense, very little was reported on the country's political atmosphere by international reports on the win.

1978

APRIL-JUNE 1982

Argentina invades UK-occupied Falkland Islands, South Georgia, and the South Sandwich Islands. After two months, Argentina surrender, leading to further protest against the National Reorganization Process and its downfall.

Reynaldo Bignone takes over as president after Galtieri's failed Falklands Islands War launch, allowing political parties to resume, announcing general elections, and addressing military crimes.

JULY 17TH, 1982

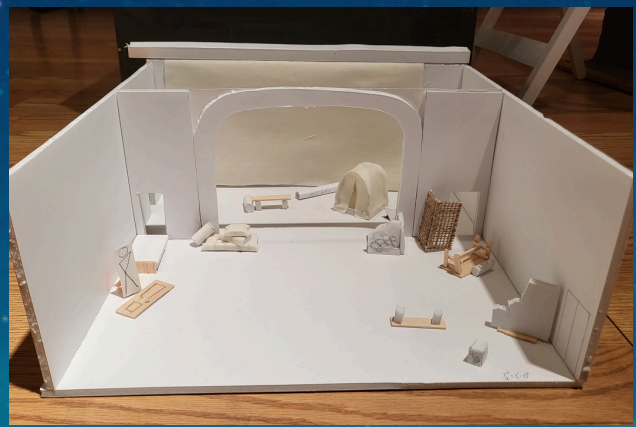
DECEMBER, 1983

Argentina transitions from military rule back to civilian with the election of Raúl Alfonsín, the leader of the center-left political party named the Radical Civic Union, cementing the end of The Dirty War.

SET DESIGN

In many rehearsal processes, the directors, actors, and designers rehearse in a space other than the performance space. As such, the designers often create renderings (detailed architectural drawings) and models to help the director visualize what the space might look like. In set design, the designer often creates a small scale model. This model is used to support blocking of actors and imagining different ways the set can be used or lit.

The Set Designer for *Homo Dramaticus* is Mike Grittner who created the model below.



The Southern Theater with an empty stage. Model of set for *Homo Dramaticus*.

- In the model above, in what ways has Mike utilized the architecture of the space? How might you design this set if you were the set designer?
- When you step into The Southern, take a look around. How similar or different does the space look compared to this model? What set pieces are on stage? What has been removed or changed?
- During the performance, how do the actors use or transform the set? Is there a specific place you think of? Does this place change or stay the same throughout the course of the play?

GLOSSARY

- **Bomber:** an aircraft designed to carry and drop bombs
- **Castaways:** someone who's stranded on shore, often after surviving a shipwreck or plane crash
- **Lieutenant:** a junior commissioned officer rank in the armed forces of many nations, as well as fire services, emergency medical services, security services and police forces
- **Marlboro:** an American brand of cigarettes
- **Tailspin:** a rapid, uncontrolled, and steep descent of an aircraft in a spinning motion
- **The Beatitudes:** In *Palabras* (Words), most of the text spoken are **Biblical Quotes** often referred to in the Christian Bible as The Beatitudes. These are statements from Jesus during what is known as the 'Sermon on the Mount' in the book of Matthew. The Beatitudes are said to summarize the ethos of the kingdom of heaven as well as the actions and virtues that would reward a person to enter.

PRE-SHOW DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- In what ways do you see plays, movies, or tv shows reflecting the world (culturally, politically, socially) we are living in? Now that you know a little about when *Homo Dramaticus* was written and its background, see if you can identify how this play reflects or responds to what the playwright lived through.
- What have you read about the impact of authoritarian governments/leaders on people (children, parents, families, military, etc.)? Keep these in mind as you watch the play and reflect on the messages you are gleaning from the play and what you have researched prior.



A protest in 1982 by the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, a group founded by mothers searching for children taken by the military regime.

PRE-SHOW EXERCISE

This is Not a...

In the play, the cast plays with the different ways the set can be used to transform where the act takes place. With your students, you can play this game to echo the sense of play directors and actors engage with to create imaginary spaces on stage.

Instructions:

1. Have all students sit in a circle.
2. Pick an object that can be easily held in your hand. E.g. a pen, a bowl, etc.
3. The first person to hold the object will have to imagine it as something other than what it is like a toothbrush, hairbrush, etc.
4. Once they have an idea, they will say: "This is not a pen (*or object you selected*). This is a toothbrush (*or imagined item*)."
5. After saying the statement, the person will pantomime using the object as a toothbrush then hand the object off to the next person in the circle.
6. The next person will then repeat the exercise but will have to imagine the object as something new (i.e. not a toothbrush).

The goal of this exercise is to move quickly and have students say the first thing that comes to mind – allowing that sense of play that is required to imagine everyday objects as something else.

Reflection questions:

- How was it to play that game? What felt challenging? What made that challenge easier?
- Were there any moments that surprised you? Or maybe you surprised yourself?

POST-SHOW DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- This play has been produced both as individual one-acts and in full as you have seen today. What would you say is the through line or connection between the three acts? How do the three acts speak or respond to each other?
- For our production, we changed the order of the acts from what is written in the script. If you directed this production, in what order would you perform the acts? How does the order of acts influence the message the audience might walk away with at the end?
- For this production, there was a combination of pre-recorded audio and live music. What did you notice about the way the live music was used? How did the music support the story telling of each act? How might the production have felt different if there was no live music on stage (i.e. entirely pre-recorded audio)?
- In what ways do you see the principles of Theater of the Absurd enacted in the production?



In 1981, family members gathered for their first "March of Resistance," a 24-hour-long protest that became an annual event. Their activism helped turn the public against the junta and bolster awareness of a policy that counted on silence and intimidation to victimize dissidents. Photographer: Eduardo Longoni.

POST-SHOW DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

On *March*:

- Who do you think these characters were? Where were they marching toward? Why do you think they were marching and are they doing so willingly or have they been forced?
- During the act, the characters bounce between talking to each other and yelling and an unseen group of people. Who do you think these unseen people are? Why do you think we never get to see or hear from them in the act?
- Why do you think Adellach chose to only have three actors play these roles? What is the message he might have been trying to convey through the physicality of the performance?
- Why do you think the director chose to have an all-female cast? How does this choice influence the storytelling?



POST-SHOW DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

On *Words*:

- How does Adellach's use of religious language impact the nature of this scene? Why do you think this choice was made? What do you think is being said about the various roles religion plays in a war? In a dictatorship?
- What do you think is the main character's motivation to preach? Why does he keep on preaching even though he is attacked by his audience?
- Who do you think are the people enacting violence on the speaking character in this act? What do you think their intentions are? What or who do they represent?
- Why do you think the director chose to have the actors for the other two acts be the ensemble of *Words*? How does this influence the way you might have experienced this act?



POST-SHOW DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



On *Children*:

- In the script, Adellach indicated that the two characters are “boys played by adults.” What relevance or importance does this have to the act? How might you have experienced the act differently if both roles were played by elementary or middle school children?
- In what location do you think the two characters are meeting? Where do they come from and where do they go at the end of the act?
- How would you describe the characteristics of John and Andrew? Is there a difference in maturity, knowledge of adult content, violence, or boldness? In what moments did you notice this difference?

POST-SHOW EXERCISE 1

Reflection and Exploration of Themes

Take a moment and allow yourself to sit in silence as a group. After a minute or so, open up the conversation and welcome any responses to the play. This can be in the form of words, sounds, gestures.

When each student/individual in the group has responded, summarize what you heard from the group and write it down on a white board.

From here, there are several paths you can take to begin a critical conversation about the work. Some guiding prompts:

- Find a partner and talk about one moment in the play that is lingering with them. What about that moment captured your attention?
- Begin a discussion beginning with the first act, followed by the second act, and then the last. With each act, ask the students to first summarize what the act was about, then open up a discussion about what the themes or messages of the act was.

POST-SHOW EXERCISE 2

Decompressing through Gesture

Gather everyone in a circle. In response to the play and to close off on a positive note, have each person think about a silent gesture/movement that represents “hope.” Have each student practice this movement of gesture on their own a couple of times.

Once everyone has practiced their gesture of hope, they are ready to share their gesture in the circle. Without explaining what the gesture is or is about, have the first student “perform” their gesture once on their own. The role of the other students is to observe and remember as much of the movement as possible.

The student will then perform the gesture a second time and this time the entire group will copy the gesture. This allows the gesture to be embodied by everyone in the circle. Repeat this around the circle until everyone has gone.

Reflection (optional): If you would like to engage in a reflection or conversation after. Some guiding questions include: What was it like to embody each person’s gesture? Does your body or mind feel different from before we did the exercise? If yes, how and why do you think so?

RESOURCES

Online articles

- [Argentina's Dirty War and the Transition to Democracy](#) . Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training.
- [On Not Reading My Grandfather: The Playwright Alberto Adellach](#) by Laura Creste
- [Veil of Silence: The Argentine Press and the Dirty War, 1976-1983](#) by Jerry W. Knudson
- [Theater of the Absurd](#) by British Literature Wiki
- [World Without Genocide: Argentina](#)

Online Books

- [Exorcising History: Argentine Theater under Dictatorship](#) by Jean Graham-Jones

Videos

- [The Argentine Dictatorship](#)
- Documentary (1 hour) - [The Dirty War: The Horrors Of The Argentine Dictatorship](#).