

## **The affect of doubt in recent Argentine history and performance: *Última(s) catástrofe(s)* by Compañía de Funciones Patrióticas**

*El afecto de la duda en la historia reciente y la performance de Argentina: Última(s) catástrofe(s) por la Compañía de Funciones Patrióticas*

Nahuel Telleria

### **ABSTRACT**

Following the framework of affect theory and performativity, the investigation traces how doubt emerges among subjectivities and constructs structures of feeling around recent history in Argentina. To develop its affective theory of doubt, the paper presents a case study of *Última(s) catástrofe(s)*, a site-specific performance by Compañía de Funciones Patrióticas. Through an immersive, first-person dramaturgical analysis of the performance event, the paper re/constructs the sensations at play and postulates doubt as a vital tool of societal re/making.

**Keywords:** Affect; Recent history; Site-specific; Performance; Argentina.

---

**Nahuel Telleria** 

University of Oklahoma – United States. [nahuel.telleria@ou.edu](mailto:nahuel.telleria@ou.edu)

## RESUMEN

Siguiendo el marco de la teoría del afecto y la performatividad, la investigación rastrea cómo surge la duda entre las subjetividades y construye estructuras de sentimiento en torno a la historia reciente en Argentina. Para desarrollar su teoría afectiva de la duda, el artículo presenta un estudio de caso de *Última(s) catástrofe(s)*, una performance *site-specific* de la Compañía de Funciones Patrióticas. A través de un análisis dramático inmersivo en primera persona del evento escénico, el artículo re/construye las sensaciones en juego y postula la duda como una herramienta vital para la re/fabricación social.

**Palabras clave:** Afectos; Historia reciente; Site-specific; Performance; Argentina.

## 1. Introduction

From 1976 to 1983, the last civic-military dictatorship in Argentina kidnapped and tortured civilians in clandestine detention centers, forcibly disappeared 30,000 people, and appropriated 400 children born to detained parents. This data has been corroborated by numerous studies, testimonies, and legal documents, of which the Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas's *Nunca más* (1984) is the most famous, and the ongoing trials of crimes against humanity like the Megacausa San Juan III and Hogar de Belén are the most recent (Secretaría de Derechos Humanos, 2023). The military government is also responsible for the deaths of 649 combatants during the failed war with England over the Malvinas in 1982 (Perera, 2019), and for installing the neoliberal economic system that eventually led to the financial crisis of 2001 (Kulfas, 2016, p. 25). This actual wounding of Argentines by its own government has had various consequences, the most serious being the loss of life and the societal, familial, and economic cost of such trauma. But the consequences have also been epistemic, with a marked erosion of public trust in the last forty years: the turnover of political interests, economic strategies, leadership models, and national imaginaries has shaped an emotional atmosphere of doubt.

As a para-conscious sensation, visceral intensity, or “structure of feeling” (Williams, 1977, p. 132), doubt emerges as one of the most salient and structuring affects of the postdictatorial era in Argentina (1983–present). The doubt of Madres, Abuelas, and HIJOS revolves around the whereabouts of their disappeared family members and the deliverance of memory, truth, and justice: *What happened to my child? Where are my grandchildren? Who are my parents?* The doubt of other skeptic Argentines revolves around the stability of a centrist narrative: *Was it actually 30,000 people? Were they all innocent? Can we trust oral testimony?* And the doubt of a neoliberal democracy post-dictatorship, depression, and pandemic revolves around the instability of politics, finance, and news: *Will a leader keep their promise? Where did all our money go? Can we trust the media?*

According to cultural theorist Sara Ahmed, affects such as doubt occur when sensing bodies meet other bodies, objects, and socio-physical phenomena. She argues, “feelings do not reside in subjects or objects, but are produced as effects of circulation” (2004, p. 8). To frame affect in this way allows Ahmed to study emotions as malleable cultural constructs in constant circulation, shaping social interactions in hegemonic and counter-hegemonic ways. Citing Judith Butler's work

on gender performativity (1990), Ahmed notes that those who examine the flows of affect can begin to sense “how subjects become *invested* in particular structures” (2004, p. 12), that is, how they repeat and consequently build on structures of feeling across generations, both making and passing on feeling through time. Ahmed surmises:

Emotions tells us a lot about time; emotions are the very “flesh” of time. They show us the time it takes to move, or to move on, is a time that exceeds the time of an individual life. Through emotions, the past persists on the surface of bodies. Emotions show us how histories stay alive, even when they are not consciously remembered; how histories of colonialism, slavery, and violence shape lives and worlds in the present. The time of emotion is not always about the past, and how it sticks. Emotions also open up futures, in the ways they involve different orientations to others. It takes time to know what we can do with emotion. (Ahmed, 2004, p. 202)

Thus, by theorizing the affect of doubt as a cultural performance invested in and through time, we can sense it at work in the construction of memory and recent history in Argentina. We get to witness *doubt being done*.

In theater, the affect of doubt takes centerstage in Patricia Zangaro’s *A propósito de la duda* (2000), a play that captures a troubled collective mood rooted in a series of unanswered questions. In Zangaro’s text, the inaugural performance of Teatro por la Identidad, an annual theater festival sponsored by Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, a fictional character wonders whether he is the son of disappeared parents and thus an appropriated child. The chorus asks him, “Y vos, ¿sabés quién sos?” (p. 4). This question thematically reinforces the mission of Abuelas—to have appropriated children doubt their parentage so they might begin the legal process of returning to their blood families—and reverberates on a symbolic level. Though a play about biological identity, *A propósito de la duda* is also an allegory about all kinds of contested identities. The play asks the nation: do we know who we are?

In an interview that reflected on the play’s impact and its many productions before and after the financial crisis of 2001, Zangaro and other members of the creative team noted that doubt persists to this day; however, they also argued that doubt is a pathway toward acknowledging and working through a collective problem (Grupo de Estudios sobre Teatro Contemporáneo, 2021, pp. 186–187). Rather than dismiss this uncomfortable affect, *A propósito* vindicates it as a tool for social change. Doubt, therefore, produces identities on and off the Argentine stage and has the potential to mount what philosopher Diego Sztulwark calls “una ofensiva sensible” (2019, p. 26), an affect-centric way of knowing that will allow Argentines to feel themselves into new structures outside those imposed by dictatorial neoliberalism. Though the affect of doubt has the potential to re-entrench status quo skepticism directed toward non-hegemonic subjects, imaginaries, and discourses, it can also help people turn toward more inclusive ways of structuring our lives. Doubt allows us to slowly circle around an issue, to feel a little longer, to ruminate before we move toward what’s yet to come.

The following article explores and develops an affective notion of doubt in contemporary Argentine theater, considering the aftermath of the military dictatorship, the nation's recurring economic downturns, ongoing neoliberal policies, resistance to these measures, human-rights discourses that champion individual and collective identity formation through memory, and emerging theories of precarity and crisis. Some definitions:

1. *Doubt* refers to the persistent affect that results from sociopolitical and economic instability in Argentina, the constant anxiety of not knowing who or what to trust in a revolving door of national interests. Doubt applies to lapses in collective memory (who and what become official history) as well as to political leadership (who can lead the country for the better). It combines the skepticism of “que se vayan todos” of 2001 after the *corralito* and the gnawing sensation of betraying one's own values, like the ongoing forced relocation of Indigenous communities in the country perpetrated and perpetuated by right and left alike. In short, doubt describes a general mood for the country's seeming stagnation.
2. *Debt* refers to the financial collapse of 2001 and the ongoing neoliberal apparatus installed in the 1970s with the last civic-military dictatorship. It refers to all the futile agreements with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the historical burden Argentines feel in respect to the US dollar, a burden that according to Mariana Luzzi and Ariel Wilkis is nearly a century old (2019). Since the end of the twentieth century, Argentina as a country has been consistently defined by its financial debts and the corporate interests of other nations.
3. *Disappearance* refers to the 30,000 forcibly disappeared people during the dictatorship of 1976–1983 but it also refers to the *longue durée* of this practice from the forced disappearance and relocation of Indigenous and Black people during 500 years of colonization, like the nineteenth-century annexation of Patagonia in President Julio Roca's so-called “Conquest of the Desert,” to the most recent disappearances of the twenty-first century, like the death of Santiago Maldonado in 2017.

These topics appear time and time again as subject matter for theater makers, but they also create affective moods or atmospheres (Anderson, 2012; Proaño Gómez, 2020) that move between the dramaturgies of theater makers and the bodies of performers and audience members. Thus, in their works, affects such as doubt become productive sociopolitical forces and recurring theatrical practices that invite their participants to rehearse new ways of being through feeling.

As an artform accustomed to rehearsing and creating affective relationships among bodies, theater has an intrinsic and historical understanding of affect from which scholars can theorize sociopolitical intensities among groups of peoples. Furthermore, because dramaturgical tools of analysis shed light on structures, on the way plays are constructed—in and through action—theater allows researchers to study affect in motion. The following research contributes to nascent

debates about affect and theater in Argentina by analyzing the relationship between structures of performance (dramaturgy) and structures of society (politics).

At its center, this paper is a case study of *Última(s) catástrofe(s)* (2022), a site-specific performance by Compañía de Funciones Patrióticas, which explores the cultural politics of going round in circles or *dar vueltas* in the City of Buenos Aires, the work of turning over the catastrophes of doubt, debt, and disappearance in the country's recent history. Compañía de Funciones Patrióticas (2008–present) ironically borrows its name from theatrical events performed during national holidays commemorating key historical figures and dates. Rather than celebrate official history zealously, Funciones Patrióticas posits critical thinking and counter-official action to resist the totalitarian pull of nationalism and perform an alternative pride in community based on the ethical bonds between people, across difference.

In its perimeter, this investigation riffs on Henry Rousso's idea that contemporary history organizes itself around the "latest catastrophe" (2012/2016). Pursuing the bends of this circum(re)flexion allows the paper's findings to converge with debates about simultaneity and continuities in recent Argentine history that disavow periodizations based on linear progressions of time and ruptures. According to Mariana Eva Perez, "la amplia noción de *postdictadura* [...] corre el riesgo de homogeneizar períodos históricos muy diversos en lo atinente a las interpretaciones del pasado" (2022, p. 25). Therefore, like the circulation of affect and the circles audience members make during a performance of *Última(s) catástrofe(s)*, conceiving recent history like a loop of many interacting and mutually constituting surfaces allows the economic and humanitarian crises of the 1970s in Argentina to meet the economic and humanitarian crises of today. Through an analysis of doubt in performance, other performances with cyclical patterns emerge—the social, political, and economic movements of the last forty years that give the Argentine catastrophe its persistent shape. Revealing this seemingly ineluctable loop likewise reveals possible paths of resistance.

*Última(s) catástrofe(s)* asks Argentines to doubt. By doubting in Plaza de Mayo, a symbolic center of national memory and democratic values, we begin to critically sense and examine the feelings structuring our relationships to recent history. By doubting, we become sensible to the ongoing catastrophes shaping our circular path and thus sensible to potential openings for change.

## 2. Methodology

This case study documents my attendance of *Última(s) catástrofe(s)* on July 2, 2022, in Plaza de Mayo, Buenos Aires, Argentina. As a researcher, I have published previously on the company and its 2015 performance of *Relato situado: Acción de memoria urbana* (Telleria, 2021). As a theatermaker, I have contributed digital performance material for two of their works: *Relato situado: Memoria del aislamiento 6* (2020) and *Relato situado: Los barrios tienen memoria* (2021). These artistic collaborations were undertaken as part of my involvement with the Grupo de Estudios sobre Teatro Contemporáneo, Política y Sociedad en América Latina (Instituto de Investigaciones Gino

Germani, Facultad de Ciencias Sociales, Universidad de Buenos Aires). Therefore, given the aforementioned intellectual and creative ties to Funciones Patrióticas, the following qualitative study of their work has been written in the first person.

To describe *Última(s) catástrofe(s)*, I draw from (1) my embodied memories and sensations as a public participant, (2) my handwritten notes of the event, (3) a series of photographs I took on my cell phone, (4) a performance program, and (5) an online SoundCloud album containing music played throughout the artistic intervention. Through these diverse archival objects, the paper reconstructs the performance as a testimonial narrative in order to immerse the reader and relay the sensations and perceptions I experienced during the performance.

To examine the event, I combine a series of interpretive approaches derived from theater and performance studies, affect theory, and ongoing debates about recent history and collective memory. First, I look at *Última(s) catástrofe(s)* through a dramaturgical lens, in which I parse out the work's storytelling structure, production aesthetics, and overall meaning as expressed through its verbal and scenic languages. Then, I apply the frameworks of affect, recent history, and collective memory to reveal how the performance mobilizes doubt in relation to the contested and ongoing sociopolitical constructions of Argentine history and memory since the civic-military dictatorship of 1976–1983.

### 3. Description

*Dar vueltas* can mean going round the city, walking through its streets, strolling like a flaneur. *Dar vueltas* can also mean to idle, to loiter, to turn things over, to mull, to spin like a wheel caught in mud. *Dar vueltas* is simultaneously movement and inaction. It is not a straight line but a circular motion. *Dar vueltas* touches on recurrence, of coming back to a beginning or a similar place. *Dar vueltas* is uncanny, in the Freudian sense of the word, arriving at a town square and feeling distanced and drawn toward the nightmare of that scene (Freud, 1919/2003, p. 144). In Buenos Aires, *dar vueltas* is what the Madres de Plaza de Mayo did every Thursday during and after the civic-military dictatorship of 1976–1983, as an act of silent protest against the forced disappearance of their family members: these persistent women wore iconic white headkerchiefs and walked circles around the Pirámide de Mayo, a symbol of Liberty and the Argentine Republic. The Pirámide de Mayo was built in 1811, a year after the May Revolution of 1810, which granted Argentina partial independence from Spain; the allegorical figure of Liberty on top of the pyramid was added in 1856, when the monument was rebuilt. The pyramid has always stood in the city's main square, a witness to the history of the nation itself.

*Dar vueltas* is what audiences do when they attend *Última(s) catástrofe(s)*. They gather at the Pirámide de Mayo and meet up with Martín Seijo, one of the leaders of Funciones Patrióticas and this performance's guide. He wears a black puffer jacket, carries a small backpack, and holds out a QR code pasted on a piece of cardboard the size of a pamphlet (Figure 1). Audience members can



then scan the code with their mobile phones, which links them to a music album on SoundCloud (Funciones Patrióticas, 2022a). Though Seijo is the only physically present member of Funciones Patrióticas during this performance, his fellow compatriots appear digitally through the album's music. During the approximately half hour of the performance, the audience listens to the seven songs on the album written and performed by Jimena Aguilar, Felipe Rubio, Martín Urruty, and Seijo. Each audience member listens to the album on their respective headphones; Seijo also listens to the album on his device. Like the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, who marched silently around the Pirámide, the audience of *Última(s) catástrofe(s)* circumrotates the memorial in reflective silence. Unlike the Mothers, audience members have literal music in their ears, an auditory act of union and simultaneous estrangement. Participants march together, share the same music, but remain distinct in their individual bodies, attuned to their own sensations as they unfold.

Figure 1. Martín Seijo of Compañía de Funciones Patrióticas holds out a QR code that directs audience members to a music album on SoundCloud.



Source: Photograph by the author.

When the performance begins, Seijo holds up another piece of cardboard with a “play” symbol and starts walking around the pyramid, which the audience imitates. During the length of three songs on the album, the silent participants walk in a counterclockwise direction, following the stencils of white *pañuelos* on the floor, taking steps the Mothers took and the stencils com-

memorate (Figure 2). As the performance progresses, the audience's circular path progressively tightens around the monument's base. In this manner, participants circle the pyramid two times, listening to "Agua en mis zapatos," "Ruge mi viento," and "Estado Memoria," a trio of songs that take on the point of view of Madres protesting in literal and figurative storms.

Figure 2. Participants of *Última(s) catástrofe(s)* walk around the Pirámide de Mayo, following the stenciled outlines of the white *pañuelos*, symbols of Madres de Plaza de Mayo and their silent path of protest.



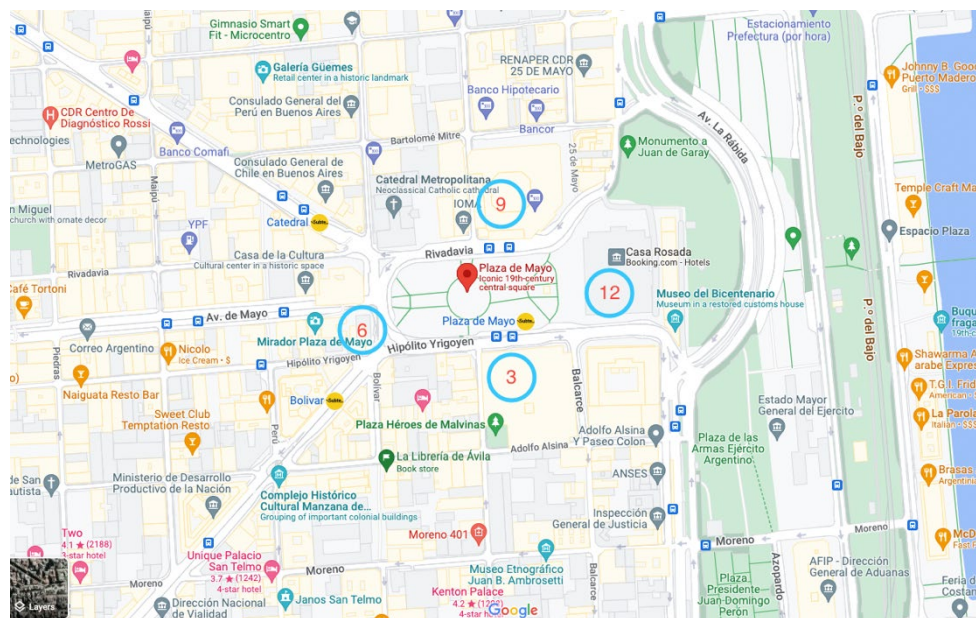
Source: Photograph by the author.

When I attended the performance last June, I took notes on everything I noticed as I perambulated. We looked like a tour group, and some folks thought about joining our miniature parade: Seijo held out the QR code for them to join, but they didn't. Perhaps they were intimidated or thought we were protesting (which we might have, in our own way, by historical association). I also noticed we were falling into a rhythmic pace with one another, but it was a pace that Seijo set, since he was always at the head of the group, slowly marching forward. Perhaps because the first song was about shoes, I looked down first, but eventually my gaze went upward, traveling through the iconography surrounding Plaza de Mayo: at 6 o'clock, the Cabildo, at 3 o'clock the Federal Administration of Public Income (AFIP, Argentina's tax agency), at 12 o'clock the Casa Rosada, and at 9 o'clock the National Bank (Figure 3). The Pirámide is at the center of this wheel, the crux of money and politics (the Cathedral somewhere in between). We interrupted our circle once, as a couple was taking a photo. I noticed that the AFIP had a banner that said, "Malvinas nos une,"



a reference to the Malvinas War of 1982. Clearly, Plaza de Mayo performs its history on loop; the songs on the album reminded me of this, too. Lyrics like “Es un dolor / poner el cuerpo, / salar heridas, / llorar sin muerto” (Funciones Patrióticas, 2022b) and “Hacen falta más siluetas / hacen falta más baldosas / hacen falta más pañuelos / hacen falta más” (Funciones Patrióticas, 2022b) directly refer to the Madres and the fight for memory, truth, and justice in Argentina after the forced disappearance of 30,000 people during the last civic-military dictatorship. This first part of the album comprises three songs about resistance, about the patience of *dar vueltas*, of going round for a cause.

Figure 3. A screenshot of Buenos Aires’s central square makes evident the intersection of political and economic power; the Pirámide de Mayo is at the center of it all. 12: Casa Rosada; 3: AFIP; 6: Cabildo; 9: Banco Nacional.



Source: Google Maps screenshot intervened by the author.

Before beginning a third trip around the Pirámide, however, Seijo breaks the circular pattern and walks in a line toward the Casa Rosada. He stops by the statue of General Manuel Belgrano on horseback and takes off his puffer jacket to reveal a black T-shirt with white lettering that says “Milei 2023” on the front (Figure 4). This is a reference to Javier Milei, the extreme-right, conservative libertarian gunning for the 2023 presidency, espousing the vitriolic rhetoric and anti-civil-right stances of Donald Trump and Jair Bolsonaro. Suddenly, the silent march of Madres de Plaza de Mayo turns into a sheeplike, uncritical following of a new allegorical figure: the figure of the Right. As the audience follows the Milei figure, they hear the songs “Peligro inminente” and “Hombre blanco.” During the latter, an actual recording of Milei’s hate speech against left-wing ideologies filters through the static playing in our headphones:

Si vos estás del otro lado, a vos te van a estropear, te van a matar, te van a dar con lo que sea. No les importa arruinar la vida —¿por qué?— porque no pensás como ellos. [...] Y como estamos siendo tan mejores con ellos, como los estamos aplastando en la batalla cultural, los estamos pasando de arriba, porque no solo le ganamos en lo productivo, somos superiores moralmente, somos superiores estéticamente, somos mejores en todo y les duele, les duele. Entonces como no pueden pelear con las herramientas legítimas se apalancan en el aparato represivo del estado poniendo torres de guita para hacernos mierda y aun así no pueden, no pueden. [...] Están desesperados, están perdiendo la batalla cultural, los zurdos de mierda, por primera vez se ven acorralados, los zurdos de mierda. (Canosa, 2021)

Figure 4. Martín Seijo reveals his Milei 2023 T-shirt and stands in front of the Casa Rosada. Will the right-wing extremist run and become president in the coming elections?



Source: Photograph by the author.

Delivered live on conservative television in 2021, Milei’s repudiable rhetoric echoes the military’s discourses during the dictatorship. For example, Jorge Rafael Videla announced on March 30, 1976: “Utilizamos [la fuerza del estado] cuantas veces haga falta para asegurar la plena vigencia de la paz social. Con ese objetivo combatiremos, sin tregua, a la delincuencia subversiva en cualquiera de sus manifestaciones, hasta su total aniquilamiento.” In both Milei’s and Videla’s rhetoric, the arguments about how best to deal with the nation’s economy and its social issues turns into a battleground of extermination, in which defeat must be total —economic, aesthetic, and cultural. Here, the Manichaeian *teoría de los dos demonios* rears its ugly head, a hydra with no end in sight.

In Argentina, the *teoría de los dos demonios* promotes a binary understanding of the civic-military dictatorship of 1976–1983 and its violent encounters with the militant guerrillas and resistance movements of the 1960s and 1970s: it suggests that “two sides” are equally to blame for the humanitarian crisis of the time. Critical interventions in public and official discourse since the early 2000s have questioned this theory and instead opted for a more ethical analysis of power in

which the state's repression isn't seen as justified retaliation but rather as systemic abuse (Crenzel, 2007). Though the dictatorship ended in 1983, the discourses, economic system, and sensibilities it promoted continue to make their rounds, as Milei's speech makes evident.

When I participated in the performance, I suddenly became more self-conscious as Seijo revealed his Milei T-shirt. Because I've met Seijo and have studied other performances by Funciones Patrióticas, the satiric tone of the piece was evident; however, I wasn't so sure what those around us in Plaza de Mayo would think. Would our performance be read as an avowal of Milei? Was this performance fanning the flames of neoliberal fascism? Were we as audience members meant to challenge Seijo/Milei and interrupt the performance? Disrupt the linear progression of the march toward the Casa Rosada? Before I could answer these questions, the songs playing in my headphones switched and so did the mood.

Seijo turns his backpack toward the front of his body, hiding the Milei advertisement (or is it a warning?). As "Trauma que trama" plays on the album, audiences go right up to the Belgrano monument, which is surrounded by a short plexiglass fence. But the fence isn't there to protect the statue: it's there to protect the hundreds of stones that have been placed there by family members who have lost loved ones to the Covid-19 pandemic (Figure 5). Seijo shares a rock and a permanent marker with an audience member, who writes a name upon it before laying it to rest among its stony brethren. The song lyrics reflect:

El pasado todavía no es pisado  
y se aparece hasta el hartazgo.  
No hay escape, no hay olvido, ni futuro  
que lo cancele, hay que enfrentarlo. (Funciones Patrióticas, 2022b)

Figure 5. The performance pauses to reflect on the memorial for those who died during the Covid-19 pandemic, which emerged around the base of the General Manuel Belgrano statue in front of the Casa Rosada.



Source: Photograph by the author.

At this moment, I notice a confused family looking at what we are doing. As we remember the connection between the dictatorship, Madres marching, Milei's possible election, and the pandemic, tourists stare at us for a moment before deciding to go visit Puerto Madero and take more pictures. (Puerto Madero is a wealthy neighborhood that lies behind the Casa Rosada, on the other side of the Río Dársena, by the docks.) Plazo de Mayo contains the contradictions of remembrance and forgetting: its plot is circular in logic.

In the final section of the performance, Seijo turns back toward the Pirámide, revealing another slogan, this time on the back of his T-shirt: "El Fin" (Figure 6). The group then carries out a third lap around the pyramid, listening to the song "Vuelta." As we move around the pyramid for a third and final time, the afternoon sun lighting up our way, I listen to Funciones Patrióticas sing:

Trató de...  
 darle la vuelta,  
 vuelta a la violencia de los tontos,  
 darle la vuelta,  
 vuelta a la inocencia de los probos,  
 [...] vuelta a la inconsciencia de los probobos. (Funciones Patrióticas, 2022b)



Figure 6. Martín Seijo turns around to face the Pirámide de Mayo and walk its orbit once more. His shirt announces the end of the performance and perhaps the (eschatological) end of time.



Source: Photograph by the author.

The song is both warning and encouragement—in short, a call to action. *Funciones Patrióticas* isn't just putting on a patriotic display; rather, the company is showing the *functions* of patriotism, how it's used to push people away from one another with unthinking violence (“la violencia de los tontos”) or unthinking ignorance (“la inconsciencia de los probobos”). This thirty-minute walk around the Pirámide de Mayo reveals itself to be a meditation exercise, a way of comprehending the loop of time and simultaneously slowing it down for critical thought to emerge. *Dar vueltas* in this case means to think history over, not to end it. In what ways are the socioeconomic and political debates in Argentina today a return and in what ways are they still part of that same historical spiral? Are the Mileis of the world always an inherent part of the journey? Or can that bend be avoided on a future trip around the cycle? Is suffering a necessary turn? Or can the circumstances change? Can *dar vueltas* around a series of issues turn up a meaningful answer toward positive change? The performance concludes there should be no end to critical thought. The spiral of thought keeps the “inconsciencia de los probobos” at bay. In its circular pattern of movement and dramaturgical reorientations (am I following Seijo, Madres, or Milei?), the performance productively plays with doubt. This doubt revolves around nationalism, justice, violence, truth, and the unknown catastrophes we face and might yet face as we turn (together) in time.

#### 4. Discussion

The performance's title —*Última(s) catástrofe(s)*— contains three references to historical catastrophes, which can be mapped onto the three critical moments of the piece as mentioned in the previous section. These references are:



The “latest catastrophe” in terms of what Henry Rousso (2012/2016) refers to as the event that organizes the historiography of a recent past or contemporary history, which in Argentina would be the civic-military dictatorship of 1976–1983 and the violences surrounding it. In the performance, this corresponds with the opening circles around the pyramid, following the steps of the Madres.

The latest catastrophes in plural, as all those events in recent Argentine history which recur in collective memory, like the dictatorship, the Malvinas War of 1982, the 2001 Financial Collapse, the Pandemic, and inflation. This is the middle section with the rectilinear march toward the Casa Rosada, the surprise encounter with the Milei figure, and the pensive interaction with the mourning stones by the Belgrano statue.

The end of time, economically via neoliberalism and also eschatologically via the Milei/Trump/Bolsonaros of the world, plus environmental collapse. Apocalypse. Also, the end of the performance.

These three aspects circle around each other just as the audience walks around in circles during the half hour of the performance. And walking this performance is like walking through the spirals of time, in which we meet the Madres, Malvinas, Milei, Belgrano, 2001, and the Pandemic all on the same journey. Seijo as the performer starts to hold a lot of the characterological meaning. He embodies contradictions and even walks those contradictions out —the difference between the commemorative reclamation of a circle and the totalitarian demands of a straight line. That he embodies all aspects of recent Argentine history, beyond a Manichean division, means that the circle of catastrophe envelops us all. No division is possible: it’s our duty to make sense of the contradictions. For me, the idea of “dar la vuelta” means to think about whose steps you follow. We have to turn it around literally in a political sense, walk away from the brinkmanship of hate, but also turn the economy around, turn society around, and also have some time to think. Reflect, *darle una vuelta al sistema*. Give it another go, not upend, like a revolution, but amend, the second or third or fourth time around the merry-go-round of recent history.

In “Cuerpos subvertidos” (2020), Lorena Verzero joins Henry Rousso’s idea of “the latest catastrophe” (2012/2016) with Florencia Levín and Marina Franco’s definition of *historia reciente* (2007). She argues that for Argentina, the “latest catastrophe” is the civic-military dictatorship of 1976–1983: “Son esos años catastróficos el lugar de gestación del trauma que se sigue elaborando a través de distintos tipos de mecanismos, que se extienden desde los procesos judiciales hasta las prácticas culturales” (Verzero, 2020, p. 141). For Verzero, the latest catastrophe changes the way people structure their interactions with one another, which *Última(s) catástrofe(s)* makes abundantly clear with the audio of Milei citing military discourses of extermination sharing time–space with the stencils of the Madres’s *pañuelos* circumscribed around the Pirámide de Mayo. But the title of the performance pushes back on Verzero’s and Rousso’s interpretation of recent history as tied to a singular event. Is it perhaps a plurality of events that makes multiple catastrophes possible?

For me, as a concept, the “latest catastrophe” corresponds to a group of people who experience history and catastrophe in similar ways. That is, there can only be a “latest catastrophe” if it is interpreted as such. For example, historically, what for some would be the latest catastrophe as a people is not considered a catastrophe by others at all. Case in point: colonization. For Indigenous and Black peoples, European expansion across the Americas and Africa was a major historical catastrophe that for White Europeans was a supremacist act of triumph. This 500-year-old, *ongoing* event might as well be the Americas’ “latest catastrophe,” what Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui refers to as “pasados no digeridos e indigeribles” (2018, p. 17). In a way, *Funciones Patrióticas*’s *Última(s) catástrofe(s)* alerts us to catastrophes in plural, like circles within circles. The performance invites us to think about the continuities between the penultimate catastrophe and the current catastrophe. Are they that separate? Of course, the idea of a latest catastrophe is meant to be an organizational principle, to remind us that it is about the survivors, the agents involved in that event, that make the event’s hold on the present moment more prescient. A “latest catastrophe” describes the psychic, affective, and spiritual hold certain traumatic moments have on collective consciousness and the way we choose to reinforce them as significant events. But we should also question what micro-histories we may be ignoring in the process. *Funciones Patrióticas* joins the macro and the micro within their title, a place where Madres and Milei can live at the same time as colonial history and tourists off to Puerto Madero. The performance makes us doubt unified theories of time. Like our walks around the Pirámide, they were taken together, but that doesn’t mean we all sense the same. Our albums were in our own ears.

It’s vital to remark here on the peripatetic strategy of the performance event. Following Cusicanqui’s ideas of walking and *nudar*, Diana Taylor in her most recent book *¡Presente!* argues: “I came to see this inquiry as a form of walking theory, thinking in and through the embodied and discursive acts of transfer” (2020, p. 9). For Taylor, “Walking and talking, or the peripatetic method, underlines the notion of knowledge production as doing —seeing, listening, reading, thinking, talking are all actions that we undertake together” (p. 38). The circular kind of walk that *Funciones Patrióticas* undertakes in this performance echoes the circular peripatetic turns Taylor observes in Francis Alÿs’s *Cuentos patrióticos* (1997), a video performance which featured a man going around in circles around a column. Trailing after him, a series of actual sheep (or was he trailing after them?). The performance Taylor analyzes, the silent circles the Madres made, and the peripatetic movements we undertook in *Última(s) catástrofe(s)* are all what Taylor calls an “animative.” That is, unlike a *performative*, which is uttered in speech, “Performed action makes its own heuristic interventions and claims” (2020, p. 59). What was the animative of this performance up to? A whole bunch of doubt!

*Funciones Patrióticas* has been making walking performances since 2008. They typically have audience members cross city blocks, walking up and down neighborhoods. But this is the first time they had people literally go around in circles. Rather than take the usual processional, parade/protest march tactic of filing off in a singular direction, they had us intentionally walk differently from their other performance modes. For Verzero, who has followed the performance group in several essays, and writes about performance activism in Argentina:

El activismo artístico contemporáneo intenta despertar a la sociedad de las ilusiones del neoliberalismo, señalando la violencia física y simbólica, subvirtiendo los usos del espacio público, subrayando el carácter antidemocrático de la hegemonía patriarcal y de los modos de organización social, política y económica, que de él se desprenden y están naturalizados por el sentido común. (2020, p. 158)

That *Funciones Patrióticas* asks us to reflect and reorient ourselves in Plaza de Mayo means making sense of the latest catastrophe(s) in relation to other important markers of memory: the Pirámide de Mayo, for example, the memory of the Revolution of 1810 and the creation of the Argentine Republic.

The Pirámide de Mayo was the first historical monument in Buenos Aires. Atop it is an allegorical figure of Liberty, gendered female. To circle this statue is to circle around the original “catastrophe” of Revolution itself. When we walk around it, we’re not walking toward a solution but mulling over the meaning of the values of the Republic. The effect of this animative is meditative—for that’s the effect of circles: we are meant to call attention to what we are seeing, yet again. What makes each circle different? What makes them the same? What happens when we stop going round in circles?

As a genre, walking performances are reflective of marches and protests. In a march, there’s an idea of future progress. That is, you usually walk forward. The parade starts in place *A* and ends in place *B*. In Buenos Aires, that’s either going up or down Avenida 9 de Julio or walking from the Casa Rosada to National Congress. These routes form a cross; they’re also linear. Their paths animate performances of dissent and assent across the political spectrum. Marching in a line can help express dis/satisfaction with the current head of state (Casa Rosada) or manifest support to have laws changed (Congreso). But if we think of the activities that lead up to the march, there’s the vector of coming in from the provinces, from the exterior, from the suburbs, from the outer perimeters of the city to its easternmost point, la Casa Rosada, the place of landing to turn back out and radiate outward again. There’s a sense of a there and back again effect to the performance of protest marches in Buenos Aires, the holistic, roundabout effect of the journey, its recurrence, that *Funciones Patrióticas* reminds us of.

The affect of doubt is tied to apocalyptic sensations, to the catastrophic. Seijo’s “El Fin” T-shirt announces the end times, that Milei could be the *last* catastrophe. But if he can return with discourses of hate plucked from the circles of dictatorial logic, so too can the resistance of Madres return. The good thing about meditating on national history is that one is able to see certain parts of the catastrophe coming round the bend, the second, third, or fourth time around. With doubt, we question the end—because more is to come, and that more has potential for change.

## 5. Conclusion

The financial collapse of 2001 confirmed that the uncertainty unleashed by the sociopolitical and economic crisis of the 1976–1983 dictatorship lived on, while the 2018 devaluation reaffirmed this observation. If neoliberalism helped shape the dictatorship in Argentina, it also helped shape its subsequent democracy. Theater and performances like *Última(s) catástrofe(s)* remind us that the *post* of postdictatorship does not mean the traumatic moment has been dealt with sufficiently and wounds have healed permanently, but that this crucial moment, despite being technically over, continues to exert its dehumanizing structures on state subjects. A sustained study of doubt in theater makes visible what aspects of Argentine culture, society, and politics give shape to this curious intensity, but also reveal the ways it produces new ways of thinking outside the neoliberal box, precisely by being perplexed. Far from being a negative recurrence, doubt positively constitutes an Argentine way of life.

Future investigations of doubt in Argentine theater and performance would look at other texts and events, to investigate the cumulative effect of this affective structure across various cultural samples. In particular, it would be useful to look at doubt from a hegemonic perspective, to see the work of doubt as it continues to rend the social fabric of trust and strengthen alternative networks of conspiracy theories. Doubt is not neutral as *Última(s) catástrofe(s)* has shown. Unlike more forceful affects like love and hate, doubt takes place at a lower intensity, its power being felt more forcefully over time, as it helps structure other feelings. Doubt begins what other affects end. Doubt reminds us that like the Renaissance soliloquys of figures like Hamlet, who hesitate to be or not to be before taking action, that state of vacillation is impermanent, and what happens in that suspended state informs the structures and events to emerge from our next play.

## References

- Anderson, B. (2012). Affect and biopower: Towards a politics of life. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 37(1), 28–43. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41427926>
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. Routledge.
- Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas. (1984). *Nunca más*. Eudeba.
- Freud, S. (2003). *The uncanny* (D. McLintock, Trans.). Penguin. (Original work published 1919)
- Funciones Patrióticas. (2022a). *Última(s) catástrofe(s)* [Album]. SoundCloud. <https://soundcloud.com/funcionespatrioticas/ultimas-catastrofes>
- Funciones Patrióticas. (2022b). *Última(s) catástrofe(s)* [Program].
- Grupo de Estudios sobre Teatro Contemporáneo, Política y Sociedad en América Latina. (2021). *Memorias de la crisis: El 2001 desde un prisma teatral*. Libretto. <https://www.edlibretto.com.ar/post/memorias-de-la-crisis-el-2001-desde-un-prisma-teatral>
- Canosa, V. (Host). (2021, June 15). *Viviana con vos* [TV Program]. A24. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?is1f657Zx70&ab\\_channel=ElPelucaMilei](https://www.youtube.com/watch?is1f657Zx70&ab_channel=ElPelucaMilei)
- Crenzel, E. (2007). Dos prólogos para un mismo informe: El *Nunca más* y la memoria de las desapariciones. *Prohistoria*, 11. [http://www.scielo.org.ar/scielo.php?script=sci\\_arttext&pid=S1851-95042007000100003](http://www.scielo.org.ar/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1851-95042007000100003)
- Cusicanqui, S. R. (2018). *Un mundo ch'ixi es posible: Ensayos desde un presente en crisis*. Tinta Limón.
- Kulfas, M. (2016). *Los tres Kirchnerismos: Una historia de la economía argentina, 2003–2015*. Siglo XXI Editores.
- Levin, F., & Franco, M. (Eds.). (2007). *Historia reciente: Perspectivas y desafíos para un campo en construcción*. Paidós.
- Luzzi, M., & Wilkis, A. (2019). *El dólar: Historia de una moneda argentina (1930–2019)*. Crítica.
- Perera, V. (2019). Teatros de guerra: Entre los derechos humanos y el arte de Lola Arias. *Nuevo Mundo Mundos Nuevos*. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.ou.edu/10.4000/nuevomundo.78102>
- Perez, M. E. (2022). *Fantasmas en escena: Teatro y desaparición*. Paidós.
- Proaño Gómez, L. (2020). Afectividad, política y conocimiento: Resistencia al neoliberalismo desde la escena teatral latinoamericana. *Investigación Teatral*, 11(18), 146–171. <https://doi.org/10.25009/it.v11i18.2654>
- Rouso, H. (2016). *The latest catastrophe: History, the present, the contemporary* (J. M. Todd, Trans.). The University of Chicago Press.
- Secretaría de Derechos Humanos. (2023). *Juicios en debate*. Juicios de Lesa Humanidad en tiempo real. <http://www.juiciosdelesahumanidad.ar/juicios.php#!/>
- Sztulwark, D. (2019). *La ofensiva sensible: Neoliberalismo, populismo y el reverso de lo político*. Caja Negra Editora.



- Taylor, D. (2020). *¡Presente! The politics of presence*. Duke University Press.
- Telleria, N. (2021). Voicing the self, performing collectives: Testimonio in contemporary Argentine theater. *Voz e Cena*, 2(2), 34–58. <https://periodicos.unb.br/index.php/vozecena/article/view/40621>
- Verzero, L. (2020). Cuerpos subvertidos: Artes escénicas y memoria en el siglo XXI: El caso argentino. *Historia y memoria*, 21, 137–172. <https://doi.org/10.19053/20275137.n21.2020.9853>
- Videla, J. R. (1976, March 30). *AV-4344, Cadena nacional: Primera comunicación de Jorge Rafael Videla tras el golpe de Estado*. [Video]. YouTube [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IAmbhpxPJtg&ab\\_channel=ArchivoPrisma](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IAmbhpxPJtg&ab_channel=ArchivoPrisma)
- Williams, R. (1977). *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford University Press.
- Zangaro, P. (2000). A propósito de la duda. *Teatro x la Identidad*. <https://teatroxlaidentidad.net/bibliotecavirtual>

## AUTHOR

**Nahuel Telleria**. Assistant Professor of Dramaturgy at the University of Oklahoma's Helmerich School of Drama. He is a 2019 Fulbright research grant recipient, a freelance dramaturg and translator, and a member of Grupo de Estudios sobre Teatro Contemporáneo, Política y Sociedad en América Latina (Instituto de Investigaciones Gino Germani, Facultad de Ciencias Sociales, Universidad de Buenos Aires) and Red de Estudios de Artes Escénicas Latinoamericanas (REAL).

## DECLARATION

### Conflict of interest

I have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

### Funding

This investigation received financial support from the Vice President for Research and Partnerships of the University of Oklahoma as part of the 2022 Junior Faculty Fellowship Program.

### Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank the Weitzenhoffer College of Fine Arts and the Helmerich School of Drama for sponsoring academic travel to the 2022 American Society for Theatre Research Conference as well as the "Persistence" Working Group at said conference for the opportunity to develop this writing.

### Notes

This article is not the product of a previous publication.