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Figural Co-Production:
Unexpected Receptions of the History of Science

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Abstract:

The aim of this article is to provide a critical revision of the notion of “reception” of academic works in general and of the histories of the sciences in particular. This will broaden the scope of the notion in a way that can include the new and unexpected receptions of the history of science in Latin America. To achieve this, I propose the concept of “figural co-production”, which I understand as a set of situated practices where the available cultural resources are appropriated, and that allows for productive interactions between heterogeneous collectives that aim for the configuration of knowledge. This theoretical proposal enables me to analyze Verónica Tozzi Thompson’s appropriation of the works of Steven Shapin and Martin Kusch in her pragmatist approach to the philosophy of history. This appropriation, I contend, can be seen as a case of reception of the shapinian history of science in Argentina.

Keywords: Figural Co-Production; Historiography of the Sciences in Argentina; Narrativist Philosophy of History; Testimony; “Marita Verón” judiciary case

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Introduction

How can we address the reception of the history of science throughout a variety of academic disciplines? How can we rethink how non-academic collectives appropriate the historiographies of science made available by academia? And conversely, how can we rethink the academic appropriations of non-academic cultural resources? To answer these questions, the present article problematizes different understandings of the notion of ‘reception’ of academic works in general and of the history of science in particular. The objective is to present a critical proposal of the notion in such a way that it includes the plural and unexpected receptions of the history of science in Latin America. To this end, I propose the

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concept of “figural co-production”, which I develop by appropriating and bringing together White’s (1999) concept of “figural causation” with Jasanoff’s (2004) idioms of co-production. The concept of “figural co-production” will allow me to examine the productive interactions that took place within heterogeneous collectives in the configuration of knowledge.

Drawing from this analysis, I present the work of the Argentinian philosopher Tozzi Thompson (2012) and her appropriation of the work of Shapin and Kusch as an illustration of the unexpected reception of the shapinian history of science. Tozzi Thompson examines the testimonies of survivor witnesses of dictatorial violence by understanding them as performative acts in the present. Thus, the production and circulation of testimonies are knowledge-constitutive. Besides the richness present in her disciplinary appropriation of different disciplines, Tozzi Thompson’s article deserves special attention because it allows me to present a reception case outside academia: the court case of María de los Ángeles Verón, better known as “Marita Verón’s case”.

Verón’s disappearance on 3 April of 2002 in the province of Tucuman (Argentina) was reported as kidnap and as a case of sexual exploitation by a women’s trafficking organization. At the beginning of the 21st century, the search for Marita, which was led by her mother Susana Trimarco, became a flagship of the struggles against gender violence and sexual exploitation in Argentina. Ten years after her disappearance, an oral trial took place in room II of the Penal Chamber in Tucuman. There, the organization accused of kidnap was acquitted on the grounds that the testimonies provided by the testifying victims of sexual exploitation were unreliable. Nevertheless, the Supreme Court of Justice of Tucumán (2013) later overturned the ruling and condemned the accused. Claudia Sbdar, Judge of the Supreme Court, actually cited Tozzi Thompson’s article in order to support her decision to validate the victims’ testimonies. *History and Theory*, the academic journal where the article had been originally published, highlighted this fact in their social networks, where they asked: “Have you ever wondered whether work in theory of history or the journal itself has any impact on the ‘real world?’”.

Throughout the present work, I emphasize the productive relationship between the philosophy of history, the history of science, and the idioms of co-production of science and technology studies. This relation facilitates the understanding of the interweaving of appropriations or “expropriations” that configure the porous borders between different collectives both within and outside academia.

Figural Co-Production and Appropriations

Writing a history of the receptions of the history of science in Latin America commits us to revise the reception relation. This revision involves a set of philosophical questions that, far from leading to the mere development of the affinities, similitudes, and redefinitions of a historiographic corpus, enables us to examine the epistemological, ethical, and political commitments underlying both our selection of “antecessors”—which includes those deserving our affiliation as well as certain “antecedent” productions—and their incorporation to our traditions. Such commitments can be found in the recognition or the rejection of those affiliations that the histories of receptions carry forth; in the nomination of a canon for the history of science, to which we recur when attempting to identify the receptions; or in drawing the limits within which we accept the relation of reception (Must the histories of the receptions be kept inside the margins of the history of science? Or can be extended to other disciplines and even to non-academic fields?).

The relation of reception is a specifically historical bond, and as such, we must avoid repeating two unfruitful considerations in order to gain a deeper insight into this relation: either examining it as part of a causal-deterministic relation or examining it as the predictable realization that, built from teleological grounds, develops previous potentials. In both cases,

the established nexus is thought to have an orientation that moves from the past to the present. Thus, the mechanistic causal relation and the genetic relation invisibilize the situated practices in which the available cultural resources are used in new forms that respond to the problems posed by the present (White 1999).

I propose to clarify our understanding of the practices of reception through Narrativism, which I understand, with Tozzi Thompson (2021), as a program of philosophical and theoretical research into history for the discipline, for life and the public sphere. I consider that the notion of “figural causation” and the “figure-fulfillment” model, resignified by Hayden White (1999) from the work of Erich Auerbach (2003), allows us to provide a fruitful understanding of, first, the way in which the relations among historical events are established in the plots of historical representations and, second, of the genealogical relations that may constitute a tradition.

According to the figure-fulfillment model, the links between anterior and posterior phenomena are established retrospectively and are presented through a double articulation: “The later terms in a series of presentations (*Darstellungen*) have an explanatory function *vis-à-vis* the earlier ones: the later terms complete, consummate, or otherwise explicate the earlier ones (...) [T]he earlier term explains the later one insofar as its serves as a necessary precondition of the latter” (White 1999, 94). The Whitean interpretation claims that we are in the presence of a specifically historical mode of causation, “figural causation”, according to which a historical event “remains open to retrospective appropriation by any later group that may choose it as the legitimating prototype of its own project of self-making and hence an element of its genealogy” (White 1999, 96). The figural character of this causal relation does not risk the facticity of the previous events but does question their configuration *qua* antecedents. The events do not change; what changes is the relationship that agents of the later time retrospectively establish with those events (White 1999).

At the same time, as White notes (1999), the model is employed by Auerbach to provide a diachronic plot of the history of Western literature. A representative literary text can be both the consummation of a previous text and the potential prefiguration of some later text within a tradition: “in the way that a premise of a joke fulfilled in its punch line, or the conflicts in an opening scene of a play is fulfilled in its ending. The later figure fulfills the earlier by repeating the elements thereof, but with a difference” (White 1999, 91). If we extrapolate this analysis to the reception of historical works in general—and the history of sciences in particular—we can consider that the successive connections result from retrospective acts of appropriation, or better said, of expropriation of previous works which are then configured in its antecedents.

These acts of expropriation witness what is new and original in the present, and thus go beyond merely signaling continuity with the past. Inasmuch as the affiliations and the constitution of a historiographic genealogy of science are established through the historians’ own decisions, who chose “to regard themselves and their cultural endowment *as if* they had actually descended from earlier prototype” (White 1999, 89), their historical productions are performative acts that not only intervene in the present but that are projected toward the future—presenting themselves as promises that can be followed in the ways of configuring science and its history.

I want to analyze the receptions one step further and explore this phenomenon concerning the lives of individuals, collectives, and communities. Do we appropriate academic productions in our everyday lives? Do we share and occasionally challenge academia’s epistemological, ethical, and political commitments? Can the notion of a “figural causation” account for the appropriations of historiographical productions that take place in our daily lives?

White (2014) focuses on the appropriations of the past made from everyday life. To this purpose, he distinguishes between a historical and a practical past, a distinction that he takes from Oakeshott (1983). However, rather than dwelling in the analysis of the receptions

that take place within everyday life, he uses this distinction to show *what* type of commitments to the past are established by historiography and by the non-historiographic realizations, as well as their usefulness in relation to people's daily actions. The historical past constructed by academic historiography is, he writes, "a highly selective version of the past understood as the totality of all the events and entities that once existed but no longer exist and most of which have left no evidence of their existence" (White 2014, xiii). This past, White affirms (2014), is just an esoteric product that lacks the resources to fulfill the everyday needs of a situated activity or respond to public interest problems. While academic history can, in the last instance, account for what other people did in other times, places, and circumstances, it is not possible to infer what is needed in order to respond to existing problems. Thus, the explicit recognition from the academic historians that their study of the past is carried forth in their own terms seems to prevent historiographical realizations from becoming appropriated by individual agents in their everyday lives. In contrast, the practical past—that is, "the past that people as individuals or members of groups draw upon in order to help them make assessments and make decisions in ordinary everyday life as well as in extreme situations" (White 2014, xiii)—is a space of experience for action, opened up by literature, as well as by a plurality of critical-theoretical perspectives that confront the way the past is represented within academia.

Nevertheless, even if the notion of "historical past" allows for the examination of receptions and interactions, it overemphasizes the portrayal of academic historiography as an impotent discipline vis-à-vis the situated public action. The realizations of professional historiography, confined to an esoteric sphere, are unable to intervene in practical and political matters. In White's account, professional history does not appear as a cultural resource available for individual or collective action. Still, the figure-fulfillment model does not *a priori* exclude the constitution of a link between academic historiography and non-academic discourses that emanate from the lifeworld, nor does it limit the former's possible intervention in public controversies or its cooperation in situations that require knowledge of the past.

Given that my objective is to address the notion of "appropriation", understood as a movement that relates to heterogeneous collectives—and not only to those collectives belonging to academic disciplines—I propose to bring together the concept of "figural causation" with the focus on the co-production of scientific knowledge as developed by Jasanoff (2004). The key aspect behind the idioms of co-production is the claim that "the ways in which we know and represent the world (both nature and society) are inseparable from the ways in which we chose to live in it" (Jasanoff 2004, 2). In this sense, the emergence, stabilization, and changes in our knowledge of the world, the world itself, and people's forms of life within it are mutually constitutive.

The process of co-production always operates "against the backdrop of an extant order, in which people already 'know' in pragmatic terms what counts as nature or science and what as society or culture" (Jasanoff 2004, 19). This is why the boundary works never reach definitive stability. On the contrary, the limits are subject to conflicts and disputes regarding the scope of those domains, and are submitted to processes that change them, remodeling (sometimes subtly and provisionally, while other times drastically) the ways in which the world is organized. In what way do the different social agents use the available cultural resources? How are those resources articulated throughout the agents' formal and informal practices? Who contests their uses? How are these resources reevaluated, and in what way do the appropriations they are subject to challenge the established delimitations? These are questions that expose the profoundly political sense of scientific co-production, as well as the problems that it brings with it. Practices of making-identities, making-discourses, and making-institutions are at stake in the public arenas, and they are enabled not only by mismatches and controversies but also by the collective production of knowledge and the ways in which people choose to lead their lives.

I propose to use the notion of “figural co-production” in order to account for the set of situated practices, carried forth by a heterogeneous collective, of cultural resources expropriation as well as knowledge, natural order and social order co-production. In this way, the practices of reception—that is, the appropriations and the configurations of a genealogy—can be extended beyond the disciplinary limits, and therefore produce links between heterogeneous collectives.

In the specific case of the reception of the history of science in Latin America, the notion of “figural co-production” warns us about the variety of spaces in which the historiography of science has been appropriated, and about the way the latter has navigated across borders that are in constant motion. It also highlights the local character of the appropriations and of the novelties that result from its situated uses; the ways in which the scientific understanding of the past is related to contemporary issues; and, finally, the figural character of the receptions—which are taken as promises that, in White’s words, move progressively “toward a goal that is never ultimately realizable nor even fully specifiable” (White 1999, 88).

In what follows, my aim is to examine the bonds within an unexpected genealogy. Its unpredictability lies in how it brings together appropriations that elude the usual disciplinary canons at play. In general terms, the history of science has established links with the philosophy of science and the studies of science and technology. Even when these appropriations are sometimes cut across by conflicts, the meta-scientific disciplines seem to be the adequate sites to explore the genealogies constructed in relation to the history of science. However, few studies connect the philosophy of history, historical theory, and social epistemology with the history of science, as is the case in the appropriations before us. My interest in these types of unexpected appropriations lies in the way they allow us to conceive of the possibility to expand the disciplinary canons. This is particularly relevant when it comes to highlighting problems, providing new answers, and opening up the playing field to new and creative analytical interactions within the historiographic studies of science.

Embodied Science: The Emergence of an Unexpected Genealogy

The spaces and the embodied nature of scientific knowledge constitute a figure that is portrayed throughout Shapin’s work as a promise that needs fulfilled (1988, 1994, 1998; Shapin and Shaffer 1985; Ophir and Shapin 1991; Shapin and Lawrence 1998). As Shapin puts it: “no space, no science; no bodies, no science” (Shapin 1995, 258).

In *Leviathan and Air-Pump* (Shapin and Shaffer 1985), a metonymy of place grounds new experimental practices: “The experimental philosophy is founded in groups whose primary index is spatial locality. Groups are defined by scenes as sites, and agents are set there in laboratories (...). To know means to be in a place” (Clark 1994, 41-42). The connections between the constitution of knowledge and the spatial distribution of the participants or the access to spaces of knowledge—who is allowed access and how is this related to the value of experimental knowledge?—exhibit the ways in which “[t]he public display of the moral basis of experimental practices depended upon the form of social relations obtaining within these sites as much as it did upon who was allowed within” (Shapin 1988, 374).

Experimental philosophy built a space where access to the facts was made possible, and its moral certainty was expressed. The facts, “foundational item [s] of experimental knowledge, and of what counted as properly grounded knowledge generally, [were] an artifact of communication and whatever social forms were deemed necessary to sustain and enhance communication” (Shapin and Schaffer 1985, 25). The laboratory was marked by the construction of the facts, and that demanded the multiplication of witnesses. The testimony was the device that was to secure the presence of a true state of affairs in nature.

Experimental philosophers had the urgency to establish what constituted reliable scientific knowledge, and, consequently, to model a truth-teller and to regulate their testimony. Therefore, the laboratory, as a public space, had to be configured simultaneously as a physical and a social-moral space. However, the “public” dimension turned out to be problematic: the presence of witnesses was crucial, and still, the decision of whom to trust was far from easy to take. Who could be that trustworthy voice that would recount the truth?

The nascent laboratory and the identity of the experimental philosopher were jointly modeled according to the resources made available by a “gentlemanly” culture. Even when the laboratory initially occupied a great variety of places—pharmacies, cafes, gentlemen’s private residences, laboratory tool-shops—it was still configured in accordance with the physical site where, most times, the social relations of experimental life took place: the public rooms of the gentlemen’s private residences (Shapin 1988). In turn, given that the legitimation of the experimental practice depended upon the configuration of the experimental philosopher’s identity, the moral virtues of the philosopher had to lead to truthfulness and trust in his testimonies. The cultural practices of the 17th century in England attributed to the gentlemen the virtues of integrity and independence: a gentleman was obliged by a code of honor to be truth-teller, and never to lie to another gentleman. Therefore, the transference of those virtues to the identity of the experimental philosopher secured the link between the moral and epistemic orders, and, with this, the trustworthiness of the experimental witnesses (Shapin 1994).

Parting from those configurations, the experimental philosophers came to assert the existence of a causal relationship between the polity structure of the scientific community and the authenticity of the produced knowledge. The polity organization of the community, according to this, was composed of free men that transmitted, accurately, whatever they had witnessed, and whatever they sincerely believed. Whoever pretended to interfere with this way of life was interfering with the capacity of knowledge to reflect reality (Shapin and Schaffer 1985). The community of experimental philosophers acted as an ideal and stable society that could help with political and ecclesiastical standardization. Even when claiming to be neutral vis-à-vis any controversy surrounding the state or religion, this claim was nothing but a strategy intended to make sure that the polity organization of the experimental community could be conceived of as a model to follow for general social matters.

In this way, the metonym “no space, no science; no bodies, no science” unfolds when drawing the boundaries of experimental knowledge. Such boundaries simultaneously configure the facts, the testimonies, the identity of truth-tellers, the experimental space, the polity organization of the community of experimental witnesses, and, finally, the social and political model that is proposed as a solution for the crises unfolding in England during the period of the Restoration.

The Performativity of Testimony. Honoring the Testimony

Martin Kusch (2002; 2009) goes beyond the meta-scientific realm, and appropriates the works of Shapin (1994) and of Shapin and Shaffer (1985) to develop a communitarian epistemology: “the starting point of this book was the attempt to translate some of their central insights [Barry Barnes, David Bloor, Harry Collins, and Steven Shapin] into the language of epistemology, and to work through the tensions that result from such translation,” he writes. “However, this book does not aim for a faithful translation” (Kusch 2002, 4). Kusch’s appropriations, as he points out, are certainly not translations, but rather attempts to fulfill the figures proposed by the sociology of scientific knowledge, which are now extended to the forms of common knowledge.

These appropriations unfold in the gap between individualistic and communitarian epistemologies. For the former, knowledge is fundamentally a property of the individual, and

only acquires its social dimension thanks to interpersonal transmission. Conversely, Kusch affirms (2002), the term “knowledge” as well as its cognates (“know”, “knower”) signal social status, and as such, they only exist to the extent that there are communities that construct, impose, or confer them. In this sense, the existence of knowledge is dependent on the existence of communities. Hence why, for Kusch, knowledge is social not only because it is conferred social status, but also because it is attributed to groups and not to individuals. Yet, despite the differences, there is a common denominator in all the different epistemological perspectives, a space all must transit when aiming to address the social dimensions of knowledge: the testimony.

Kusch considers that rewriting a communitarian epistemology requires a commitment with the revision of the testimony, and to draw it apart from its association with the legal context. Within this context, the original meaning of “testimony” as a knowledge-transmitting mechanism underpins an individualistic epistemology, as well as the refusal to recognize the testimony as knowledge-constitutive.

In his rewriting, Kusch also explicitly acknowledges the debts he has to the sociology of scientific knowledge. Kusch presents the testimony, a synecdoche of knowledge, as the fulfillment of the shapinian history and of the theory of social institutions forwarded by the sociology of scientific knowledge. In so doing, Kusch performs a movement that starts with the figure “To know means to be in a place” and then presents the performative testimony as a generative source of knowledge, one whose characteristics provide meaning to the whole, i.e. to knowledge –“Testimony is almost always generative of knowledge: it constitutes epistemic communities and epistemic agents, social statuses and institutions, taxonomies (including taxonomies of the natural world), and the category of knowledge itself” (Kusch 2002, 12).

In the first place, the development of the figure of a performative-generative testimony points toward Barry Barnes’ (1988; 1995) and David Bloor’s (1996; 1997) analyses of social institutions. In Bloor’s words (1997), the social institutions can be treated like giant performative utterances produced by social collectives. Every social institution refers to something created collectively through self-referential practices. To be a member of a group is a necessary and sufficient condition to be a member of that group. What we know when we know that someone belongs to a group is not a property inherent to the person, but is rather something about the knowledge that others have about that member of the group and of the practices performed in relation to such a group.

Therefore, knowledge as social status is constituted by the widely distributed communal performative: Knowledge is a social referent created by references to it; and these references occur in testimony—as well as in other forms of talk. Such talk includes claiming that something is knowledge, challenging knowledge, testifying to knowledge, questioning knowledge” (Kusch 2004, 71). Every direct and indirect reference to knowledge is a performative act that creates knowledge as a status. What is more, any social status and any social institution is a product of a performative testimony.

In the second place, this construal of the testimony brings with it an epistemic-moral dimension. Kusch (2009) quotes:

Knowledge is a collective good. In securing our knowledge we rely upon others, and we cannot dispense with that reliance. That means that the relations in which we have and hold our knowledge have a moral character (...) [T]he fabric of our social relations is made of the knowledge – not just knowledge of other people, but also knowledge of what the world is like – and, similarly (...) our knowledge of what the world is like draws on knowledge about others people – what they are like as sources of testimony, whether and in what circumstances they may be trusted. (Shapin 1994, xxv-xxvi)

The strict separation between epistemic and non-epistemic values is thus blurred when examining knowledge as a collective good, and in the light of Shapin and Schaffer's (1985) dictum: the solution to a problem of the order of knowledge is at the same time a solution to a problem of the social order, and vice versa. Knowledge is produced in a moral field and moves with its assessment over the virtues and characteristics of people. The question then becomes: who can we trust?

In principle, Kusch (2009) proposes the virtues of accuracy and sincerity as non-negotiable values necessary to maintain trust in others' reports. Now, if, as Kusch considers, those values are a part of a socially shared network, and are only meaningful in relation to other values, then taking into account only accuracy and sincerity limits our comprehension of the testimony *qua* social institution. The attributions of knowledge, Kusch holds following Barnes (1995), "play a key role in the collective action that constitutes the institution of testimony. They do so by *honouring* the informants (...)" (Kusch 2009, 79). These attributions constitute performative acts through which we praise the witnesses for contributing to the community's wellbeing.

Kusch points to Shapin's (1994) analysis in order to revise the link between trustworthiness and freedom. If the institution of the testimony is a collective good, such that attributing knowledge is attributing honor, freedom, and social power, then questions arise regarding who is in a position to make their affirmations count as legitimate knowledge. These questions not only point toward the witnesses and their identities, but also evidence the witnesses' exclusions.

In England, during the 17th century, the ideals of integrity and independence of the gentleman—which were linked to truthfulness—allowed connecting the unreliable truthfulness of others with their constrained circumstances (their social roles made them dependent on other people, or their actions responded to foreign orders) (Shapin 1994). Nevertheless, as we have seen, the attributions of knowledge honor the good informants for their contribution to the existence and flourishing of a community, and therefore, not conceding these is a way to censor and dishonor. More so, the practice of dishonoring makes someone appear as incapable of participation in the constitution of a collective good, and as unable to form part of a group. In other words, to negate the status of the knower has the function of expelling that person from the community (Kusch 2009).

Building from this analysis, Kusch claims: "It would be superficial to think that gentlemen excluded women, domestics, Italians, and so on, from the category of knowledge-makers on the grounds that these latter groups were constrained in their circumstances and hence not free" (Kusch 2009, 87). Essentially, this interpretation corresponds to a reductionist and foundationalist vision, insofar as it considers that the testimonies express perceptions or experiences of submission and dependency. According to Kusch, the relation between knowledge and freedom must be understood in light of performative-generative practices of testimony. In the case of the society of the 17th century in England, to be a gentleman was a key placeholder for epistemic reliability. The economic and social independence made the gentleman a free person, free even of any obligations that could lead him to deceit. The performative practices of the gentlemen, in which they negated the ascription of knowledge and honor to women, servants, to the poor, the miserable, among other marginalized groups, guaranteed the expulsion of all of those groups from the institution of testimony.

Kusch is conscious of how unanticipated are his claims:

I emphasize it here in order to downplay the distance that exists—in the mind of many epistemologists—between the sociology of knowledge and the philosophical study of knowledge. (...) Any project that runs counter to widely held intuitions and the mainstream of the discipline is bound to appear difficult and demanding. This study, I fear, is no exception to this rule. (Kusch 2002, 4-5)

Shapin's book (1994), and his works with Shaffer (1985), Kusch affirms (2009), do not help us solve problems formulated by tradition, but they do help us to understand the reasons why we hold on to our present intuitions regarding the relationship between freedom and testimony, and why the testimony lies in the center of our reflections on knowledge.

Additionally, Kusch makes explicit some of his epistemological, ethical, and political commitments. According to him, the objective of communitarian epistemology is to comprehend rather than to change an epistemic community. Nevertheless, he sustains that "epistemology and politics are more closely connected than tradition would have it. To understand knowledge is to understand epistemic communities; and to understand epistemic communities is to understand their social and political structures" (Kusch 2004, 2).

Survivor Witnesses and the Construction of the Recent Past

The examination of the successive unexpected appropriations of some of Shapin's works reaches a crucial turning point. The expropriation that concerns us in this section takes place in the disciplinary field of narrativist philosophy of history, and is mediated by Kusch's communitarian epistemology. This expropriation is the one performed by the Argentinian philosopher Verónica Tozzi Thompson, with her publication of "The Epistemic and Moral Role of Testimony" (2012). There, she sums up her approach: "My specific, pragmatist approach combines the recent accounts of Hayden White about 'witness literature' with the 'generative-performative' consideration of testimony by Martin Kusch. The purpose is to appreciate, in a non-foundationalist way, the epistemic and moral role of testimony in the constitution of the representation of the recent past" (Tozzi 2012, 1).

Tozzi Thompson's work shows the exploration and appropriation of different cultural resources. It also avoids falling into the usual disciplinary canons of philosophy through different creative strategies and reproducing the conventional philosophical receptions that have taken place in Argentina. Her appropriations of Shapin's theses on the sociology of scientific knowledge and the history of science are integrated with other diverse resources: the new philosophy of history, the pragmatist philosophy of John Dewey and George Mead, the analytic philosophy of science and language, social epistemology, a hermeneutic perspective. Furthermore, from her position as director of the collection *Historia y Teoría* (Prometeo editorial), Tozzi Thompson has pushed the limits of philosophical studies and of the theory of history by, for example, incorporating translations into Spanish of works by Hayden White, Dominick LaCapra, David Carr, to name a few, as well as two important works by Shapin, *Never Pure* (published as *Nunca Pura* in 2014) y *A Social History of Truth* (published as *Una historia social de la verdad* in 2016).

Tozzi Thompson (2012) presents a new metaphorical figure of testimony, focalized in the voices of witnesses, survivors of the genocidal violence of a terror state: "the testimony functions in fact as the 'constitution' of that past itself" (Tozzi 2012, 5).

The recovery of testimonies in the limit events of recent history and the problematization of the epistemic privilege—that is, the privileged access to past events possessed by the survivor witnesses of dictatorial violence—by the philosophy and theory of history is the starting point from which an epistemology of the testimony can unfold. This epistemology of the testimony thus positions itself in the center of what is known as the "new philosophy of history".

The new philosophy of history, Tozzi Thompson affirms, has been highly critical of the concept of "historical representation" as a truthful and impartial portrayal of past events. According to her, a realistic representation of the past is something to be produced, not something to be found or discovered in the evidential record. There is, thus, no single way to

realistically represent reality. Hence why, Tozzi Thompson asserts, historical controversies are not only about the past but about what constitutes a more adequate representation of it in epistemic and ethical terms (Tozzi Thompson 2021). The differences between historians lead us to the recognition that it is they who have to make decisions regarding which explanation fits best, what types of emplotment and what style of presentation are better, and what ideological commitments they hold onto in relation to the nature of historical events. However, Tozzi Thompson warns, the new philosophy of history does not affirm that evidence is irrelevant for historical research.

The victimization events on a massive scale during the past century and the confluence of their occurrence and the registers through new electronic devices—which produced great amounts of information and the capacity to manipulate it, in what Hayden White interprets as a “modernist event”—forced a revision, not only of the nature of historical events, but also of the role of testimony of survivors or victims of the recent past. How, Tozzi Thompson asks, “should the attestation of any witness survivor or victim be used? Should it be used in the classic documentary function, to prove the occurrence of the events? Or should it function as a legitimate way for the survivors or victims to dispute the appropriation of their past?” (Tozzi 2012, 5). Revising the institution of testimony, as Tozzi Thompson does, goes beyond foundationalism and reductionism, which see testimony as a mere mechanism of transmission of knowledge and epistemic privilege of experience of the survivors as its justification. On the contrary, she points out that “[a]lthough the experience of ‘having been there’ or ‘having suffered in their own flesh’ can motivate their desire to attest to what they saw and endured, their attestation is not a reflex to their experience” (Tozzi 2012, 7).

In this way, the examination of the testimony of the survivors of concentration camps that Tozzi Thompson carries forth fulfills Kusch’s communitarian epistemology. According to it, the testimonies are an original part of the production of knowledge. We accept the testimonies because of the meanings they constitute in and through their divulgation and in the responses that these receive from others. The past experience of suffering is not what grants authority to the testimony. Therefore, Tozzi Thompson concludes, “[W]hen presented with the witness testimony of experience of the concentration camp or other places of horror, we are dealing not with a direct representation of a naked experience but with the cultural resources that constitute the politics of identity of the whole society” (Tozzi 2012, 17).

Figural Co-Production in the Argentinian Judicial System

María de los Ángeles Verón is a young woman from Tucuman that disappeared in 2002 after leaving her home to attend a medical appointment. Marita Verón never returned. Her parents, the police investigation, and the prosecutors that intervened in her cause have all sustained that she was victim of kidnap and of human trafficking (which was related to prostitution). Such an accusation and the identification of the accused were fully based in proofs provided by witnesses. The cause reached the stage where an oral trial was to take place in 2012. The sentence, dictated by the Tribunal of room II of the Penal Chamber of Tucuman, in Argentina, took place on 11 December of that year. The decision was to absolve the thirteen defendants. The judges Eduardo Romero Lascano, Emilio Herrera Molina and Alberto Piedrabuena (who was the president of the Chamber) sustained in their sentence that the testimonies provided by the victims of sex trafficking demonstrated the existence of a sex trafficking network:

The witnesses have been the only relevant evidence brought to trial, that is, the young women that spent time on one of the tree venues of La Rioja: El Desafío, Candy and

Candilejas. (...) This, because the other proofs presented, the proceedings from domiciliary searches, did not through positive results at all.²

Nevertheless, the judges considered that the witnesses' testimonies were insufficient to prove the existence of the illegitimate deprivation of liberty and the promotion of prostitution exerted upon María de los Ángeles Verón: "in every case, the statements by these young women are completely at odds with the other proofs, there is no way to corroborate their testimonies, and these are not even supported by the other testimonies, with which they clash".³

Even when more than a hundred witnesses transited the audience chamber, the Tribunal only recognized the statements of one witness, Fátima Mansilla, which they considered "the only proof by a witness that has been brought to the debate that has an incriminatory strength".⁴ Mansilla declared that she had been kidnapped and sexually exploited when she was sixteen years of age by Daniela Milhein and her husband Alejandro González, two of the accused in Verón's case. She declared to have known and spoken to Marita Verón in the house of the married couple, where the latter was said to be deprived of her liberty. Nevertheless, the judges considered that there were obstacles that prevented them from considering the testimony as truthful. On the one hand, the judges held that when comparing Fátima's declarations with those of the other witnesses some contradictions and imprecisions came to the fore. On the other hand, Fátima's credibility was diminished, according to the Tribunal, because she was a denouncer and a complainant of Milhein and González in the case of her own kidnap and sexual exploitation. Even while the judges, based on psychological skills, did not consider her to be lying, they still argued:

Without having to lie, one can still be misrepresenting the truth. The lack of truth is not originated in a psychological or pathological component (...) but in the interest to benefit oneself or to hurt someone else. In this particular case, Fátima Mansilla had no lack of reasons, if she had denounced being a victim of kidnap, mistreatment, and harassment of different kinds. An elementary consequence of this is the loss of objectivity and veracity on the part of the witness.⁵

11

These fragments, extracted from the sentence of the Penal Chamber of Tucumán, exhibit the currency of the belief in a connection between freedom and the value of a testimony, a belief inherited from the gentlemanly culture. A foundationalist argument, as the one employed by the Tribunal, derives the value of the testimony from the experience of the witness. It is expected that the witness transmits their knowledge based on their perceptions and memory. The testimony is the base from which the past is represented; it allows for the recovery of the past—of what really happened. In this sense, the objectivity and veracity of a testimony presuppose a precise correspondence between the facts and the mind's contents. However, for the Tribunal, just as in the English 17th century, the condition of dependency of women makes them unable to be truth-teller:

² CAUSA: Iñigo David Gustavo, Andrada Domingo Pascual and others s/ illegitimate deprivation of liberty and corruption (María de los Ángeles Verón). File N°23554/2002- 26/10/2012, p. 573.

³ CAUSA: Iñigo David Gustavo, Andrada Domingo Pascual and others s/ illegitimate deprivation of liberty and corruption (María de los Ángeles Verón). File N°23554/2002- 26/10/2012, p. 574.

⁴ CAUSA: Iñigo David Gustavo, Andrada Domingo Pascual and others s/ illegitimate deprivation of liberty and corruption (María de los Ángeles Verón). File N°23554/2002- 26/10/2012, p. 531.

⁵ CAUSA: Iñigo David Gustavo, Andrada Domingo Pascual and others s/ illegitimate deprivation of liberty and corruption (María de los Ángeles Verón). File N°23554/2002- 26/10/2012, p. 531.

The young women that marched through the Tribunal evidenced the devastating effects of lived experience: anguish, post-traumatic stress, profound depression, fears—patent in the medical, psychological and psychiatric histories and reports received by the Tribunal. This sickly and perverse relationship between the ruling (the misters and misses) and the ruled generated a psychological dependency. Thus, even when some of the women could in fact free themselves, some of them came back, because they had promised to do so, or they did not reveal their situation, thus collaborating in the reproduction of their own oppression.⁶

Yet, in terms of the figure-complement relation of Shapin-Kusch, we can comprehend how do the practices of dishonoring and of expulsion from a community are at play in this case. The performative act of the testimony is generative of knowledge, something that is achieved through self-referential practices of a collective or a community. As such, the Tribunal, through the performative act of denying the young witnesses the attribution of knowledge, prevented knowledge from being configured, and at the same time invalidated any proof against the defendants.

The cause reached the Supreme Court of Justice of Tucumán, where, in December of 2013, the acquittal was revoked, condemning all of the imputed. When revoking the sentence of the Penal Chamber, Claudia Beatriz Sbdar—which was at the time a member of the Supreme Court of Justice—explicitly acknowledged the epistemological presuppositions of the Tribunal:

In the present case, one observes that the declarations of the victims have not been considered to be bearers of truth given that their discourses are vague—a vagueness that is the product of the witnesses' own condition as victims of sexual exploitation. Their contributions are disqualified for not being monolithically coherent as testimonies for the cause, when, actually, the contradictions, the reluctance to declare, the hesitancy, and so forth, are an indelible sign in these types of crimes and their victims, who find themselves in an evident vulnerable situation.⁷

12

Following this, Judge Sbdar appropriated some fragments from Tozzi Thompson's article (2012), making the philosopher's words her own. The literal quotes from fragments of the article are unquoted in her text,⁸ something which accentuated the Judge's ethical-political commitments. In relation to the arguments exposed by the Tribunal of the Penal Chamber, which demanded that the witnesses present the past *as it had occurred*, Sbdar affirms, in Tozzi Thompson's voice:

When we adopt an epistemic or moral stance on genocide and state-terror events — one based on a victim's privileged voice—we cannot eliminate three presuppositions that are otherwise widely accepted: (1) the privileged access of the witnesses to the

⁶ CAUSA: Iñigo David Gustavo, Andrada Domingo Pascual and others s/ illegitimate deprivation of liberty and corruption (María de los Ángeles Verón). File N°23554/2002- 26/10/2012, p. 570.

⁷ Supreme Court of Justice of Tucumán: (17/12/2013) “Iñigo David Gustavo, Andrada Domingo Pascual, González Sofía De Fátima, Medina Myriam Cristina, Derobertis Humberto Juan s/ illegitimate deprivation of liberty and corruption”. File: p23554/2002. Veredict 1098/2013, p. 167. <https://www.cij.gov.ar/nota-12751-Caso-Marita-Ver-n--fallo-de-la-Corte-Suprema-de-Justicia-de-Tucum-n.html>

⁸ All citations from Tozzi's article (2012) are present in the Supreme Court of Justice of Tucumán: (17/12/2013) “Iñigo David Gustavo, Andrada Domingo Pascual, González Sofía De Fátima, Medina Myriam Cristina, Derobertis Humberto Juan s/ illegitimate deprivation of liberty and corruption”. File: p23554/2002. Veredict 1098/2013, p. 168.

past events that they witnessed; (2) the homogeneity of the experience of the victims; and (3) the homogeneity of the ways in which that experience is expressed. (Tozzi 2012, 3)

Nevertheless, Sbdar warns, the new epistemology of testimony, as put forward by Dr. Tozzi, still recommends

looking at the testimony of witnesses not as a journey to the past but as an action in the present. (...) [The] testimonies are neither secondary sources of knowledge nor are they dependent upon experience and reason. Moreover, the production-circulation of testimonies acts not only in the context of justification but also as legitimately constitutive of knowledge. (Tozzi 2012, 3)

The judge, therefore, embodies the communitarian epistemology, and with it, its ethical and political commitments: “To adopt this posture implies that the tribunal must abandon the idea that the testimony constitutes a sheer document that remits to the past,” she states, only to come back to Tozzi Thompson, whose words she once again appropriates:

This communal and social approach has three valuable consequences for the subject of the nature and role of witness testimony. First, it frees witness testimony from the idea that it is essentially a transmission without interpretation (and therefore distortion) of a direct experience. Second, it calls upon survivors of limit events to participate in the collective job of creating and shaping representations of what has happened. Third, by insisting that testifiers play the game of cognitive construction, it directs attention to the linguistic conventions of testifying and to its performative character. That is, it allows us to see the language games in which testimonies take place in ordinary life. (Tozzi 2012, 15-16)

13

It is relevant for this analysis to bring together the appropriations done by judge Sbdar with the campaign against human trafficking that gained relevance during the first decade of the present century. Gender violence and sex trafficking become fundamental issues in the gender agenda of that epoch, which can be defined as post-neoliberal (Pecheny 2013). One of the particularities of the campaign against trafficking in Argentina was certain activist collectives’ invocation of the political rhetoric and symbols used by human rights organizations in their demand for “memory, truth, and justice” for the crimes committed during the civic-military dictatorship. Using the language of human rights allowed us to interpret cases of sex trafficking as disappearances (Varela 2018). In line with that available resource, the work of Tozzi Thompson, which focused on the testimony of the victims of state terrorism, is signaled by Sbdar as a figure to be fulfilled through the sentence that grants the attributions of knowledge to the victims of sex trafficking.

Through the notion of “figural co-production”, we are able to bring together the availability, circulation, and appropriation of heterogeneous resources that, in this case, were part of the configuration of sex trafficking as a public problem. The appeal to Tozzi Thompson’s work by judge Sbdar is not simply a scholarly reference that circumstantially connects an academic production with a legal case—as tends to happen with scientific counseling. We must, rather, understand this appeal, in terms of a figural co-production, as part of a set of complex practices of making-identities, making-discourses and making-institutions, which a part of the Argentinian community articulates, and thus reconfigures the world, its representations, and the way they decide to inhabit such a world—reconfigurations that are always incomplete and thus open to further change.

Conclusion

In this article, I have introduced a broadening of the concept of “reception”, which is understood as a figural co-production, something that allows us to account for the ways in which academic and non-academic productions are articulated and what are their epistemological and ethical-political commitments, as well as the practices of world-making of a certain community. The notion of “figural co-production” enables us to explore the processes of reception of the history of science in Latin America, challenging the disciplinary limits, canons, and reified dilemmas. In this way, we can also navigate the creative ways in which theory is appropriated within our communities.

Likewise, the particular case study addressed constitutes an invitation to consider and to strengthen the productive relations between the narrativist philosophy of history and the historiography of science. If we broaden the scope of our inquiries and orient our sights toward historians of science *qua* narrators of their own work, then a set of questions emerges: What linguistic resources are available to the different history of the science in order to represent the past realistically? How do the historians of science establish and account for the historical distance that constitutes—in epistemic, aesthetic, ethical, and political terms—a more adequate representation of science’s own past? Through our situated inquiries, we will be able to broaden this set of questions.

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