

Review / Reseña

Lazzara, Michael J. *Civil Obedience: Complicity and Complacency in Chile since Pinochet*.
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**Complicit with Dictatorship and Complacent with its Legacy:
Accomplices and Bystanders in Chile after Pinochet**

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What responsibility do we have to the people around us when we narrate our own stories? How does making ourselves vulnerable to judgement for our prior actions affect our community? These are just a few of the important questions about accountability and community that Michael J. Lazzara considers in his book *Civil Obedience: Complicity and Complacency in Chile since Pinochet*. Going beyond an emphasis on the importance of restoring memory surrounding the human rights violations of General Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship (1973-1990), the works examined in this book shed light on the present-day impact of narratives by complicit and complacent subjects. Crucially, Lazzara argues that Chile's protracted struggle to reckon with its violent past is exacerbated not only by the failure of civilian actors who were *complicit* with the regime to meaningfully account for their actions, but also by the *complacency* of

those who benefitted from the continuation of the dictatorship's neoliberal economic model.

Civil Obedience: Complicity and Complacency in Chile since Pinochet draws on a wide variety of mostly nonfiction primary texts to construct its argument, including biographies, autobiographies, films, and television interviews. Each chapter deals with one specific subject position, although Lazzara is careful to acknowledge that this is only a selection from the endless variety of subject positions possible on the spectrum of complicity. In some cases, the texts are produced by the complicit subjects themselves, and in other cases they are produced by those who wish to conjure the subject's ghost in an attempt to either redeem it or to cast it away. Lazzara chooses to focus on representations of the following subject positions, with a great deal more nuance than the following simple labels might suggest: the complicit subject (Mariana Callejas), the primary civilian architect of Chile's neoliberal economy (Jaime Guzmán), the bystander (Hugo Zambelli), the accomplice (Jorgelino Vergara), and a selection of former revolutionaries who, over time, became complacent with the neoliberal system (Max Marambio, Eugenio Tironi, and Marco Enríquez-Ominami). The question asked of each representation is whether it makes its subject vulnerable to judgement in a way that allows society to cut ties with the toxic attitudes that normalize state-sponsored brutality and/or the vast inequality in today's Chile. With few exceptions—although some representations make admirable progress—none manages a true avowal, demonstrating the difficulty that the complicit or complacent subjects themselves (and anyone with ties to them) have with exorcising these ghosts.

What exactly, though, does it mean to make oneself or another vulnerable, and how do complicit subjects avoid this? Lazzara's argument builds on Judith Butler's writings¹ about the social implications of self-referential speech. For Butler, "the act of self-telling [is] an invitation to write or speak responsibly, in the interest of others more than in the interest of the self" (17). Making oneself vulnerable by speaking honestly and without self-interest serves to disable "individualistic doctrines" like neoliberalism (18). This act of making oneself vulnerable is tied up in Michel Foucault's idea of avowal, which is "not simply to speak what one believes to be true but to do so in a way that is selfless and for another." Avowal always comes with a cost: that of "assuming the consequences of one's words" and accepting one's vulnerable position

¹ Lazzara cites Judith Butler's book *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2005) as influential to his ideas, as well as writings about speaking in the first person by Emmanuel Levinas, Shoshana Felman, and Michel Foucault, among others (8, 17).

(66). Opening oneself up to judgement this way is particularly difficult for complicit and complacent subjects whose personal history puts them in dubious ethical standing, so instead they execute complicated “psychic and narrative” maneuvers to “save face” when speaking about the past (24).

Lazzara calls these maneuvers *fictions of mastery*, and he makes the case that complicit and complacent subjects alike utilize them to smooth over the contradictions between who they are and who they would like to be. These fictions of mastery avoid meaningful apology or any true recognition of the harm or impact caused, which would represent a loss of control that makes them vulnerable to judgement. For the subject of the first chapter, Mariana Callejas,² and for many other complicit subjects, more than one fiction of mastery is necessary to save face over time. In the 1980s, Callejas’ fiction evinces an attempt to deal with her shame by “externalizing shame via thematization, blurring subject positions, compartmentalizing subjectivity, [and] escapism”, while her autobiographical writing of the 1990s normalizes her subjectivity as accomplice and de-ideologizes her former self (51).

In another instance, the *homo neoliberal* (the neoliberal man)³ who bought into the dictatorship’s imposed economic system often justifies the regime’s human rights violations on the basis of the economic outcome and resulting political stability. However, Lazzara deems this kind of distinction between “Pinochet the murderer [and] Pinochet the economic reformer” as a “self-appeasing fiction of mastery or an act of wishful thinking” (65) that grossly discounts the rights of others both in the past and in the present. Regarding the attempts by Jaime Guzmán’s “heirs and allies” (55) to reckon with his legacy as “the Pinochet regime’s most influential civilian collaborator” (59), the second chapter demonstrates that (although some made more progress than others) none of their avowals managed to fully cast away Guzmán’s ghost. Even Guzmán’s nephew, Ignacio Santa Cruz, cannot disavow him completely. Santa Cruz, an openly gay actor who stars as his uncle in the film *El tío* (Mateo Iribarren, 2013) and identifies with the political left, pushes the boundaries with his representation of Guzmán, but not to the point that it destabilizes Santa Cruz’s own identity.

² Mariana Callejas was a writer who, in association with her husband Michael Townley, became an agent in Pinochet’s secret police group DINA (*Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional*). She was involved in the dictatorship’s crimes inside and outside of Chile, including the assassination of Carlos Prats (the commander in chief of the army who clashed ideologically with Pinochet) and his wife Sofía Cuthbert in Buenos Aires.

³ Lazzara borrows the term *homo neoliberal* from Kathya Araujo and Danilo Martucelli’s 2012 book, *Desafíos comunes: Retrato de la sociedad chilena y sus individuos*, vol. 1.

In one of several gestures toward a better future, Lazzara argues in the third chapter that Diamela Eltit's account of a bystander (Hugo Zambelli) and his fictions of mastery in her book, *Puño y letra: Juicio oral* (2005), advocates for a more community-based politics and a broader definition of justice. To demand only *legal* justice regarding complicity is to sell the health of the larger community short; instead, justice should not be "simply responsive or reactionary but rather a set of values that guides our way of life and helps us to live democratically and in solidarity with one another" (119). The fourth chapter suggests that where legal consequences do not apply, complicity must be dealt with in "the court of public opinion" (147)—but responsibly, lest we see more dangerous representations like those of Jorgelino Vergara (aka "El Mocito"), which normalize, make a victim of, and even admire the accomplice figure. Lazzara contends that in 2013, around the fortieth anniversary of the coup, there was an expanded space for discourse on memory, but that instead of taking that opportunity to engage meaningfully with the complexities of Vergara's position, interviews with him flattened the complicated aspects of the accomplice in a way that also endangers a fuller understanding of the dictatorship's impact on Chilean society.

In perhaps the most nuanced and innovative chapter in the book (the fifth and final chapter), Lazzara puts a broader definition of justice to the test and gives examples of *complacent* figures: former revolutionaries whose political ideologies have shifted over the years of the neoliberal system and the transition. Not to be confused with complicit subjects, these complacent subjects abandoned their dreams of radical political change over time and failed to seriously question the neoliberal status quo. Looking at three books and one film created by "figures whose lives and public actions have evinced mixed reactions in Chile" (153), the chapter shows that these subjects use similar narrative tactics as are seen in accomplice or bystander accounts (strategies ranging from "the transformation of subjectivity, to the parsing of the self, to unmitigated fantasy" (151)). The use of these tactics betrays how complacency can become a "capacious memory framework" that colors how subjects interpret past, present, and future (157).

For Max Marambio, a former member of the militant leftist party *Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria* (MIR), bridging the gap between past and present in a meaningful way in his book, *Las armas de ayer* (2008), would mean risking his current position as a wealthy businessman. The way that Eugenio Tironi, a sociologist and lobbyist who had a prominent role in the transition, narrates the past in *Crónica de viaje: Chile y la ruta a la felicidad* (2006) inflicts "a deep cleavage in history" (165) that impedes a fuller

understanding of both the past and the present. Marco Enríquez-Ominami—the son of the founder of MIR, Miguel Enríquez, and the stepson of a Socialist senator, Carlos Ominami—himself embodies the tension between legacies of armed struggle and political consensus. In both a documentary film (*Chile, los héroes están fatigados* (2002)) and a book co-authored with his stepfather (*Animales políticos: diálogos filiales*, 2004), Enríquez-Ominami claims that “Chile has irreversibly passed from one era to another, and there is no going back” (170).

The temporal gap generated by these complacent narrators poses a problem because it fails to “think *between* eras” (175). It excludes any possibility of change that lies outside the boundaries of the global market economy. Trying to think within these boundaries forestalls any productive dialogue between eras and prevents Chilean society from extracting any lessons from the revolutionary era that could be useful in the present. Complacency with the neoliberal economy and the deep inequality of the present impedes serious, critical thought about “what that lost era can teach us about achieving justice—real (social) justice—in a new context where the rules of the game have clearly changed” (119). The book’s epilogue (while also thinking about complicity and complacency in a more global context) emphasizes that amid political corruption scandals, massive student protests, and generally elevated mobilization among citizens, in today’s Chile the “memory question” is expanding to include not only the dictatorship’s human rights violations, but also its “social and economic legacies” (183).

Throughout the book, Michael J. Lazzara succeeds at intelligibly weaving together myriad sources, displaying a comprehensive political and cultural understanding of both the recent history of Chile and the complicated reality of its present day. *Civil Obedience* represents an important contribution to the country’s cultural studies, so much so that the book is currently being translated to Spanish by Marisol Vera, the founder and editor of Editorial Cuarto Propio. Due to the slippery nature of the spectrum of complicity, a great deal of nuance and self-awareness is required when advocating for an amplified definition of justice, and Lazzara avoids generalizations and stops at multiple moments in the book to make his distinctions perfectly clear. In asking for a broader definition of justice, he is careful not to discount conventional transition reforms such as truth commissions, rewriting the constitution, and fighting for legal justice, but instead proposes holding complicit figures accountable and challenging the neoliberal status quo as further steps toward a healthier community. Leading by example, the book invites readers to think critically between eras by modeling this behavior in its own analyses. Beyond the notable contributions of this

book to the Chilean context, *Civil Obedience* also encourages readers to imagine vulnerable self-referential narratives as a stepping stone toward a more equitable, community-centered world.