Ineta Lipša, Kārlis Vērdiņš, and Kaspars Zellis, eds. *Klusumā. Kvīri, padomju vara un sabiedrība Latvijā, 1954-1991*. (In Silence. Queers, Soviet Power, and Society in Latvia, 1954-1991). Rīga: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2024. 351 pp.

My first trips to Latvia occurred months before and after the USSR's collapse. Like many of my colleagues in the diaspora who were attending conferences designed to establish professional networks and become familiarized with local scholarly practices, I grew less preoccupied with presenting than with packing scarce everyday items that Moscow's informal economic blockade of the secessionist Baltic republics had rendered luxury goods for my peers: toilet paper, aspirin, ballpoint pens, coffee, office sundries. Given these conditions of privation and limitation, I was surprised to spot a brief notice in a mainstream American magazine—I can't recall…*Out*/*Week*? *The Advocate*?—announcing a weeklong international gay and lesbian camping festival in the Latvian countryside featuring music, food, seminars, and, most intriguingly, "pagan massage." Although my upcoming visit wouldn't coincide, I wrote the contact, hoping to expand yet another network, offer organizational assistance, and perhaps observe post-Soviet paganism. Weeks later, I met a young couple at Rīga's Freedom Monument and learned that there was no festival in the works, just two nineteen-year-old men hoping to find kindred spirits abroad. Nonetheless, I was taken to a pop-up queer disco in a factory canteen, where I met the editor of a new Saint Petersburg-based LGBTQ publication, who explained that he was visiting because he found Rīga's comparative openness energizing. I spent an afternoon interviewing an octogenarian alumnus of the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo who shared backstage photos of Anna Pavlova and tales of assignations between male dancers and some of interwar Latvia's highest state and military officials, as well as the love story of two gays who survived internment in Stalin's gulag to then live a quiet domestic existence in a seaside resort. And I witnessed tentative but intrepid public displays of camaraderie among my young hosts and their small circle of male friends.

These heartening glimpses into a community, augmented later by my own research into Rīga's vital hippie subculture of the 1970s and an adjunct artistic milieu of nonconformists in the 1980s, formed assumptions about a world I fully expected to find analyzed anthropologically and sociologically in *Klusumā*, Latvia's first collection of scholarly essays devoted to non-heteronormative life during the Soviet occupation. Instead, it contains little material to suggest that even preconditions existed for this incipient, *fin-de*-Soviet queerness. Admittedly, 1991 is but the exceptional terminus of the book's 37-year scope. The volume's priority is to map four decades of one Baltic republic's post-Stalinist legal codes, official health policy, and prevailing medical attitudes with respect to sexual minorities, and then to determine the variable impact of these upon the policing of public behavior (and self-policing in the private sphere). It plots inconstant, relative processes of liberalization and regression within Latvia, correlates republican conditions with all-

Union directives and laws elsewhere in the socialist bloc, and, most vitally, secures rapidly fading personal memories. In sum, this book presents an impressive initial effort undertaken by the first homegrown generation of Latvian researchers trained in issues of gender and sexuality, although, one year prior, this group had published a good portion of this material as articles in a special issue of *Latvijas Vēstures Institūta Žurnāls* [*Journal of the Institute of Latvian History* 120 [2024]), which also included pieces written by Estonian and Lithuanian peers, all with English translation.

An introduction by the co-editors soberly assesses the challenges of recuperating a mostly occult history. In two previous attempts by Rīga-based journalists to collect oral testimonies, one failed outright while the other resulted in a slender (though pioneering) volume in 2012 of thirteen interviews—twelve gay, one trans—with the vast majority of stories coming from the 1980s.[1] Extreme reluctance by subjects to share their life histories has been only minimally ameliorated during the intervening decade by growing public acceptance of LGBTQ individuals and, in fact, data collection was further complicated by the death of older potential interviewees and survivor's continued resolve to shield reputations of the deceased. Nonetheless, approximately thirty new interviews were conducted in preparation for this book, although most of these were straight allies reporting from a certain remove. Attention is focused almost entirely on Latvian lives, an acknowledged imbalance in a Sovietized society eventually comprising 48% non-Latvians, which the authors claim results from heightened homophobia among Russophone populations—a premise that remains unexamined. Ultimately, the decision to proceed along a sequence of three very different routes sidesteps such impediments. The first part of the book devotes itself to documenting institutional discrimination against homosexuality, followed in part two by a critical study of autobiographical material generated by three widely-known personalities from the cultural sphere. The third section addresses broader terrain: public perceptions of lesbian desire and the presence and circulation of female couples within the social space, as well as the various forms that awareness and tolerance of dissimilar sexualities assumed in interactions between straight and queer communities.

Historian Ineta Lipša closely studies legal debates, prosecution records, public health initiatives, and epidemiological statistics, determining that the pervasive official culture of homophobia was less a consequence of overarching legislation than of highly specific, sometimes competing, sometimes contradictory, agendas of various governmental entities with their disciplinary biases—medical and law enforcement most markedly at odds in their responses to public manifestations of homosexuality. Whether in the form of a registry of alleged homosexual men subjected to periodic, compulsory STI testing or the more generalized menace and intrusiveness of "people's volunteer order guards"—citizens deputized to patrol parks, beaches, and other neighborhood cruising venues—official measures were less motivated by puritanism than by the imperative of public order. In practice, these initiatives resulted in relatively few prosecutions that nevertheless

[1] Rita Ruduša, ed. *Pagrīdas citādība. Homoseksuāļi Padomju Latvijā* [*Forced Underground. Homosexuals in Soviet Latvia*]. Rīga: Mansards, 2012.

served as an effective deterrent to the 15,000 men whose names were ultimately logged in the registry for a nation of 2 million.

Next, literary scholar Kārlis Vērdiņš contemplates patterns of queer domesticity based on the exceptional, long-term, connubial cohabitation of a theater director and his lover, as well as the opposite extreme: the chronic homelessness and emotional instability endured by queer underground poet Jānis Silenieks. However, it was the poet's participation in a happening with his male lover and other Rīga bohemians in which they transformed an emptied villa into a zone of liberated expression and fluid sensuality that Vērdiņš most compellingly abstracts into a vision of queer utopian possibility. Using textual analysis, literary scholar Jānis Ozoliņš examines the self-censored journal of film director Gunārs Piesis, showing how diary writing—euphemism, ellipsis, then fearful erasure—functioned in the construction of homosexual subjectivity for a person acutely attuned to institutional control over both his erotic and creative freedoms. The chapters in this section contain most of the book's photographs, and the contentment on these smiling, handsome faces seems partially, melancholically vacated by the essays' end.

In the penultimate entry, political researcher Elizabete Elīna Vizgunova-Vikmane takes on the nearly impossible, triangulated task of depicting female same-sex relationships in the Soviet period through her interpretation of observations gleaned from interviews with heterosexual women who were acquainted with female couples, whose first-person accounts, regrettably, remain unavailable. Building upon Lipša's earlier observation that the state guardians of social order in Soviet Latvia never regulated female non-heteronormative sexuality because it discounted the very notion of female sexuality itself, Vizgunova-Vikmane identifies local conditions of invisibility, contending that Western constructs of lesbianism, much less of lesbian community, are so at odds with pre-1990s Latvian experience as to be almost unworkable and meaningless in that context.

The final chapter, by historian Kaspars Zellis, aggregates the memory spaces of queer individuals whose sense of self-awareness was most often formed in utter isolation and inevitably refracted through the perceptions of contemporaries (family members, friends, coworkers, neighbors) who were cognizant of other sexualities in their midst but woefully under- or misinformed. Similarly, negative stereotypes and biases reproduced in literary depictions of homosexual characters became debilitating to individuals grappling with same-sex desire, and their life narratives sometimes imitated art. More cruelly, the widely-held, paranoid theory that homosexuals were in collusion with the KGB (rather than the actual subjects of surveillance) further marginalized individuals, arguably to an extent greater than any state-administered discriminatory measures.

Klusumā is an impressively successful endeavor, despite a paucity of first-person queer testimonials, a conservative reluctance to explore hearsay as historically-contingent and -operant material, and at least one instance of taking a provably uninformed KGB informant's report as factual. (I happen to know specifics of the incident in question.) The authors and editors clearly acknowledge the rudimentary stages of their research and accurately identify a number of lacunae, yet their fluency in discursive models and investment in stakes set by LGBTQ researchers and theorists elsewhere (both within the

post-Soviet cultural sphere and beyond) promise future work with startling revelations, acute insights, restorative connections, and broad implications for queer scholarship well beyond Latvia proper.

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