

Zeitschrift: gta papers
Herausgeber: gta Verlag
Band: 7 (2022)

Artikel: Affective productivism : Betty Glan in the Soviet Union
Autor: Vronskaya, Alla
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-1046646>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. [Siehe Rechtliche Hinweise.](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. [Voir Informations légales.](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. [See Legal notice.](#)

Download PDF: 08.02.2025

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

Affective Productivism: Betty Glan in the Soviet Union Alla Vronskaya

Betty Glan (1904–1992) was born before the Russian Revolution and passed away after the Soviet Union ceased to exist. From 1929 to 1937 she was the director of the Central Park of Culture and Leisure in Moscow, a vibrant site of architectural and cultural experimentation – “the Magnitogorsk of proletarian culture,” as it was hailed by the Soviet press. ¹ fig.1 Her spectacular career rise was interrupted by the purges of the 1930s, and Glan would spend the next decade and a half in prison and exile. Rehabilitated in the 1950s, she resumed a comfortable, privileged life as a respected mass performance director. In philosopher Giorgio Agamben’s terms, Glan’s life vacillated between *bios*, the life of a citizen, and the merely biological *zoē*, pertinent to those whose life is not protected by law. ² This article assesses these transformations, which both reflect the turbulence of Soviet history and exemplify the paradoxes of Soviet culture, which Glan herself helped to shape. In addition to the park, her own self became an equally important project for Glan, one that she firelessly directed, curated, and chronicled.

Glan’s fate was similar to that of another Jewish woman, the activist, writer, and editor Eugenia Ginzburg, who had been an ardent supporter of Soviet power but became a victim of political repression, eventually rehabilitated after Joseph Stalin’s death. Ginzburg’s memoir *Journey into the Whirlwind* (1967; first Russian publication in 1988) remains among the darkest testimonies of Stalinism. ³ Avoiding all mention of the purges and focusing instead on her work as an organizer of mass spectacles and celebrations before and after her prison sentence and exile, Glan’s autobiography (also published in 1988) could not be further in spirit from Ginzburg’s. In an homage to Ernest Hemingway’s biographic depiction of his life in Paris in the early 1920s, Glan cheerfully and seemingly forgetfully titled her memoir *A Moveable Feast* (the literal translation of her Russian title is “Holiday is always with us”). ⁴ How could someone whose life was ruined by Stalin’s repressive machine be so cheerful? In pondering this paradox, the present article views Glan’s biography from the standpoint of Hayden White’s *Metahistory* (1973), which suggests that all history is, in essence, a form of fiction. At issue is not whether a historical text is truthful but to what genre of historic fiction the narrative belongs, and that, for White, is a question of metahistorical analysis. ⁵ Moreover, detached writing about history, making history through one’s life, and chronicling that life through one’s memoir are poetic gestures.

Alla Vronskaya is Professor of the History and Theory of Architecture at the University of Kassel.

¹ V. Mentsinger, “Napisat’ istoriiu parka,” *Park kultury i otdykha*, no. 23 (10 September 1932), 1.

² Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 4.

³ Eugenia Ginzburg, *Journey into the Whirlwind* (New York: Harcourt, Brace 1967).

⁴ Hemingway’s *Moveable Feast* (1964) was published in Russian as *Prazdnik kotoryi vseгда s toboi* [Holiday that is always with you], trans. M. Bruk, L. Petrov, and F. Rozental’ (Moscow: Progress, 1966). The Russian translation of the title avoids the Christian connotation of the English original. Glan, in a collectivist spirit, modified the title to *Prazdnik vseгда s nami* (Holiday is always with us). Betty Glan, *Prazdnik vseгда s nami* (Moscow: Soiuz teatral’nykh deiatelei, 1988).

⁵ Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973). I am indebted to Adam Jasper for making me think about Glan’s staging of her life in terms of White’s historiographic method.

6 Glan, *Prazdnik vseгда s nami*, 10.

7 Glan, *Prazdnik vseгда s nami*, 11–12.

8 Kozintsev's sister Lyubov, herself a painter who would study at Moscow's Higher State Artistic and Technical Studios (VKhUTEMAS) under Alexander Rodchenko, married Ehrenburg (her second uncle) in 1919. Yakov Ilyin also became a VKhUTEMAS student; however, he left the school after less than a year.

Glan was born Berta Naumovna Mandelzweig into a rich Jewish family in Kyiv. Her grandfather was a singer and artist, and her father was the chief manager of a food factory. The family had likely been baptized to assimilate into Russian imperial society. 6 From early on, Betty (the nickname she received within the family and that she later officially adopted) was trained in music and foreign languages. She studied at the elite gymnasium founded by Empress Maria, finishing with distinction. There, she became fluent in German and French (later in life she would also learn English and Italian). Simultaneously, Glan studied piano performance at Kyiv Musical Conservatory. Her true passion, however, was theater. In the gymnasium, she cofounded an amateur theater group, directed by a local actor. 7 Betty had four siblings and found a close soul mate in her younger brother, the future acclaimed Soviet writer and journalist Yakov Ilyin (1905–1932), whose successful career in Moscow ended with his premature death from tuberculosis at the age of twenty-seven. A friend of Vladimir Mayakovsky, Ilyin was a member of the Central Committee of the Komsomol (the Young Communists movement) and the editor-in-chief of its popular newspaper, *Komsomol'skaya pravda*. Yakov's childhood friend Grigori Kozintsev, a classmate from an art school in Kyiv, would become Betty's first sweetheart. Subsequently an influential Soviet theater director, Kozintsev was an aspiring futurist artist, and his mother was a cousin of writer Ilya Ehrenburg, a collaborator of El Lissitzky, and a friend of the revolutionary Nikolai Bukharin. 8 These early influences and connections would both guide and haunt Glan's life. But in 1920, when the civil war between the supporters and opponents of the revolution raged in Russia, and when Ukraine and Belorussia were shaken by the Soviet-Polish War, the future of a sixteen-year-old conservatory student was uncertain. To ensure herself a useful profession, Glan took stenography courses.

In April 1920, Kyiv was occupied by the Polish army of Marshal Józef Piłsudski. Glan, who had been politically radicalized during her time in the gymnasium, escaped with her communist friends to Odessa, where she found employment as a typist in the election commission of the local revolutionary committee. There, she was assigned as a stenographer to philosopher and aesthetic thinker Anatoly Lunacharsky during his brief visit to the city. Another native of Kyiv, Lunacharsky, in the aftermath of the revolution, became the head of the Ministry of Culture and Education (Narkompros) — a role that carried little political agency but gave him the power to shape the emerging Soviet culture. Impressed with Glan's enthusiasm and her knowledge of foreign languages, Lunacharsky recommended she be hired as the secretary of the

fig.1 Illustrated children's book *Park of Culture and Leisure* by artists Valery Alfeevsky and Tatyana Lebedeva (Mavrina). Published as *Park kultury i otdykha. Risunki Alfeevskogo i Lebedevoi* (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1930)



army's political department for the summer of 1920 and invited her to Moscow to join Narkompros and resume her studies later on. Arriving in Moscow that fall, Glan started work as secretary of the Chief Artistic Committee of Narkompros, simultaneously enrolling in evening classes with the French Department of the Higher Courses of Foreign Languages at Moscow State University. ^{fig.2} Soon she moved to work in the Communist International (Comintern). In the mornings, before her regular working day, she also worked at the Moscow Airplane Factory, organizing cultural events and teaching the children of factory workers. "But," she asked in her memoir, "can one consider that an overexploitation or too long of a working day for a seventeen-eighteen-year-old? There was so much happiness in that whirlpool, and the feeling of the joy of being!" ⁹

fig.2 Glan as a French aristocrat in a play staged during the graduation ceremony of the French Department of the Higher Courses of Foreign Languages, Moscow, 1922. Photograph: unknown

⁹ Glan, *Prazdnik vseгда s nami*, 29.

¹⁰ The legend appears in Gorky's short story "Old Izergil" (1895).

¹¹ On the role of Nietzsche in Russian revolutionary culture, see *Nietzsche in Russia*, ed. Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986); Edith W. Clowes, *The Revolution of Moral Consciousness: Nietzsche in Russian Literature, 1890–1914* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1988); Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, ed., *Nietzsche and Soviet Culture: Ally and Adversary* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994); and Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, *New Myth, New World: From Nietzsche to Stalinism* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002).



Giving her whole self to work, and ultimately to others, Glan was inspired by the writer Maxim Gorky's iconic literary hero Danko, who pulled his heart from his chest, using the fire of love that burned within him to light the way out of a thick forest. ¹⁰ Those whom Danko saved walked upon his still-burning heart with indifference, but he had not been hoping for gratitude. Gorky's story remains optimistic: Danko's sacrifice was not in vain, for its purpose was not recognition but the salvation of the human race. In the 1910s, Gorky and Lunacharsky, alongside philosopher Alexander Bogdanov, developed these ideas as the philosophy of collectivism, which celebrated life and vital energy, reconciling Friedrich Nietzsche's admiration of strength with Marxism. ¹¹ The new collectivist human was not only strong in spirit and body, noble and brave, but, unlike Nietzsche's individualist *Übermensch*, deeply altruistic. For the collectivists, as well as for Glan later, care for humanity, including sacrificing one's life for the life of the other was the only source of meaning. This ultimate humanist care was heroic, and, conversely, heroism was defined through care. Locating humanism at the core of Soviet revolutionary aesthetics might seem surprising in the light of the brutality of the revolution, the civil war, and ultimately Stalinism, yet the two were intricately interrelated. As Glan's life and writings demonstrate, while the Russian Revolution was presented as a heroic humanist sacrifice, the violence it unleashed was romanticized as a challenge that proved one's commitment to unconditional care for the other.

Glan's adopted last name, which she started using in the early 1920s, honored Thomas Glahn (spelled *Glan* in Russian), the protagonist of the popular novel *Pan* (1894) by Norwegian writer

Knut Hamsun, who in 1920 was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature.¹² Exemplifying vitalist ideals, Hamsun's Glahn rebels against social norms and conventions, turning instead to nature and cosmos. Similarly, Hemingway's young self as depicted in *A Moveable Feast* is poor but full of life, health, energy, and youthful idealism. Applied to the writing of history, such Nietzschean idealism, according to White, exemplifies the genre of romance, "a drama of self-identification symbolized by the hero's transcendence of the world of experience, his victory over it," "a drama of the triumph of good over evil, of virtue over vice, of light over darkness."¹³

¹² Knut Hamsun, *Pan* (Copenhagen: P. G. Philipsens, 1894).

¹³ White, *Metahistory*, 8–9.

Aesthetic thinkers associated vital force with true creativity. Lunacharsky's collectivism departed from pan-idealism, a philosophy developed by his former classmate at Zurich University, Rudolf Maria Holzapfel, who devised a hierarchy of human feelings and states that culminated with the ideal. In the pan-, or universal, ideal, which served everyone, Holzapfel found the maximum development of individual creative personality, which alone could build a new society. Revolution, Lunacharsky professed in the spirit of Holzapfel, had to unfold each person's individuality, bringing joy and playfulness – moreover, it was joy and playfulness that sustained the revolution. This is why, as the head of Soviet culture and education, Lunacharsky devoted himself to educating spiritually, physically, and culturally developed and enthusiastic builders of socialism. Tireless, energetic, and burning with enthusiasm, Glan was, in his eyes, the new Soviet person par excellence.

How was one to translate this ideal to the masses? In 1924, Glan was appointed the director of the newly opened Krasnopresnensky workers' club. In comparison to other workers' clubs founded in Soviet Russia during these years, the Krasnopresnensky club was underfinanced: receiving little state support, it had to rely on the work of volunteers to care for the building, stage performances, and organize guest lectures and dance evenings. Glan prided herself in being able to attract workers to this activity. Her early directorial success was a costume party and contest that she organized in the club. In a twist of irony, the first prize was unanimously awarded to the costume "When the mistress is not at home" (or "The victim of female equality"): a Primus stove and a pot attached to the belt of a woman, who was "fiercely lulling the baby on the go."¹⁴

¹⁴ Glan, *Prazdnik vseгда s nami*, 33–34.

The private and the professional were entangled in Glan's own life, much of which was that of a single mother. In 1925, after studying by correspondence, she received her second higher-education degree, graduating as an economist and diplomat from the Department of Foreign Relations of the Faculty of Social Sciences of Moscow State University. She then moved to take a

position as secretary to the Soviet delegation of the Communist Youth International (KIM) and the editor of the Russian edition of the KIM's bulletin. Through the KIM, she met young Yugoslav communist Milan Gorkić, whom she married at the end of 1925. Born Josip Čižinski, Gorkić came from a Czech family that shortly before his birth had settled in Sarajevo (Bosnia), where he grew up and became involved with revolutionary struggle. Thanks to the patronage of Bukharin, Gorkić would soon gain power within the international communist movement, becoming the head of the underground Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY) in 1932. Spending most of his time in Europe, Gorkić rarely visited Moscow, leaving Glan to take care of their daughter Elena, born in 1928.

The most important project of Glan's life, and one of the most ambitious experiments in early Soviet culture, began at this very time. After a two-year period at the KIM, in 1927 Glan returned to her work at the club of the Moscow Aviation Factory, which had by then been rebuilt as a state-of-the-art flagship palace of culture, boasting a six-hundred-seat hall, the largest in Moscow. This experience proved to be valuable when, in May of 1929, the head of the Moscow City Soviet, Konstantin Ukhanov, invited Lunacharsky to become an adviser for the first Soviet Park of Culture and Leisure.¹⁵ The park, which had opened in 1928 on the site of the All-Russian Agricultural Exposition designed by architect Ivan Zholtovsky in 1923, was in need of architectural transformation. More important, it needed a program that would serve not only this park but all other parks of culture and leisure to be created throughout the country. At Lunacharsky's suggestion, Glan was appointed the park's first director, tasked with developing its program. She was excited about the opportunity, later recalling, "Lunacharsky was my political and spiritual mentor, whose influence crystallized my worldview and life principles; now he became my theoretical and practical supervisor in an endeavor to which, as it seemed to me then, I had already aspired for years."¹⁶

The Central Park of Culture and Leisure became the laboratory for developing the principles of a socialist urban public space where workers could recuperate after long workdays. In his novel *Ten Horse Powers* (1929), Ehrenburg had offered a poignant critique of how industrial capitalism – especially Fordism, which drove the division of labor to perfection – dehumanized and mentally crippled workers:

"The worker does not know what is an automobile. He does not know what is a motor. He takes a bolt and puts a nut. The neighbor's raised hand already holds the setting. If he loses

¹⁵ Glan, *Prazdnik vseгда s nami*, 25–26.

¹⁶ Glan, *Prazdnik vseгда s nami*, 26.

ten seconds, the car will move further. He will be left with the bolt and [salary] deduction. Ten seconds is a lot and very little. Ten seconds can be enough to recall one's whole life and not enough to take a breath. He has to take a bolt and put a nut. Up, right, half circle, down. He does this hundreds, thousands of times. He does this eight hours straight. He does this his whole life. He does only this." 17

In response, Ilyin's most successful novel, *The Big Conveyer* (published posthumously in 1934), offered an alternative vision of the relationship between human and machine. Factory work, Ilyin believed, did not have to be dehumanizing. Quite the opposite: it offered an opportunity for creativity and active and engaged labor. "Nonsense," Ilyin replied to Ehrenburg through his hero Bobrovnikov,

"Those who write this do not know or did not see other forms of physical labor. Isn't the work on a textile loom monotonous? Does the shuttle beat in different directions and not one? Stamping, molding, hammering, loading sacks in a port — any physical work is monotonous in essence. It is absurd to blame the conveyer for monotony. Only handicraftsmen can be afraid of it." 18

Similar to Soviet labor theoreticians Osip Yermansky and Peter Palchinsky, who critiqued Taylorism from a humanist perspective, offering their own versions of labor management and organization theory (both were influenced by Bogdanov's collectivist theory of organization), Ilyin argued that industrialization was fully compatible with humanism. 19

The program of the park was developed in response to these discussions. Glan wanted to create a space that would support humanist industrialization, ensuring that factory work stayed close to Ilyin's rather than Ehrenburg's vision. Transforming the debilitated and exhausted factory workers into the mighty men and women of the future, the park offered educational opportunities that elucidated to workers the meaning and significance of their work and enabled their physical recuperation. In 1933, the park was officially named after Gorky, who paid a much publicized visit in 1934. In the early 1930s, Glan also met with Gorky on other public and private occasions, discussing the program and activity of the park.

As the newly appointed director, Glan was unhappy with the decorative scheme of Hungarian artist Béla Uitz, who had painted all park pavilions in red — the color of the revolution. This approach was, she found, too formalist and hostile to the architectonics of buildings. "The park urgently needed a new outlook. It needed an artist! Contemporary, colorful, having a feel for space and nature," Glan decided. And, "Of course, one has

17 Il'ia Ehrenburg, *10 l.s.* [1929], <https://www.rulit.me/books/10-l-s-read-402852-1.html> (accessed July 14, 2019).

18 Yakov Il'in, *Bolshoi Konveier* (Khabarovsk: Dal'giz, 1936), 10.

19 See Loren Graham, *The Ghost of the Executed Engineer: Technology and the Fall of the Soviet Union* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

to search first and foremost among theater artists.”²⁰ The avant-garde work of brothers Vladimir Stenberg and Georgii Stenberg in the Chamber Theater of Alexander Tairov was, Glan quickly realized, what could save the park. The Stenbergs’ work in the park took two years, and by the 1931 season the park was transformed; it became cheerful, optimistic, and playful.

“Its theaters, sports pavilions, the library, the children’s village, the café, which were all painted in light colors – white transitioning to blue, beige, lemon-yellow (with colorful pictures of smiling children, running athletes, theater masks) – now looked taller, lighter, and more elegant. The beautiful wooden caryatids on the variety theater by [sculptor Sergey] Konenkov became noticeable and prominent, intricate gazebos and small stages – latticed and transparent.

Having highlighted the buildings with spring brightness, the Stenbergs decorated all alleys and grounds with an unusual banner ornament. Already earlier, many red flags had been hanged on the [park’s] territory on holidays, but this time a new decoration system, comprising flags and banners of different shapes and sizes – long, vertical, attached to poles and lamps, wide horizontal on several buildings, and small triangles, waving on the wind on the spires of low buildings.

For the first time flags of other colors – light and dark blue, white, orange, were used. [Contrasted] with the background of greenery, they looked surprising and cheerful.

But particularly beautiful the green and flower decoration of the park looked in combination with fountains, pools, streams, waterfalls. In the evenings, greenery, water, sculpture, skillfully lit, seemed completely different than during the daytime – so enigmatic and magic.”²¹

At first sight, Glan’s dismissal of modernist seriousness and her preference for a vibrancy and richness that would soon be labeled as “kitsch” by the likes of Clement Greenberg, prefigures Stalin’s notorious motto, “Living has become better, comrades. Living has become happier” (1935), and socialist realism as the new aesthetics of Stalinist imperialism. However, what the case of the Park of Culture and Leisure actually demonstrates is that, far from being a manifestation of a top-down, coherent, and complete program, socialist realism was a project of many authors, inspired by a variety of sources, modernist and traditionalist, right and left, Marxist and otherwise. If Glan’s cheerfulness fit the general direction of socialist realism, her love for the magical and the playful stood apart from the nascent artificiality of the official aesthetics.

Glan's favorite means of architectural expression were color, greenery, water, and light. Among her most cherished architectural projects in the park was the Green Theater (1929–1933) by architect Lazar Cherikover. ^{fig.3} The largest open-air theater in the country, the Green Theater seated twenty thousand people and was equipped with modern audio and light technology. Proud of its modernity, Glan loved it for the magical effect created by the stage set of trees and the ceiling of night sky. In 1935, she asked Alexander Vlasov, who replaced Lissitzky as the head architect of the park, to design the Island of Dance — a ballet stage on a pond — and an open-air amphitheater with eight hundred seats on the bank. The figures of dancers were mirrored in the water, lime trees provided the stage set, and hundreds of fountain streams served as the curtain, reflecting the rays of setting sun and, after sunset, of colorful projectors. The Water Theater



fig. 3 Advertisement poster for the Green Theater, Central Park of Culture and Leisure, Moscow. Public domain

became a perfect stage for the *féerie* — a nineteenth-century genre of magical extravaganza advocated by Gorky's friend, writer Aleksey Tolstoy, and revived by Glan in the park. ²²

In the park, Glan's authority was maternal. As the director, she hosted the visits of important foreign and domestic guests, directed theatrical performances, and supervised all other work. Many years later she would recall how once, on a Sunday, her daughter Elena, who was then five, was brought to visit her in the park. The girl found her mother inspecting the park in the company of its board of directors. The group moved through the park, noting what needed to be done. Turning to the author of

²² For a discussion of the concept of *féerie*, see Alla Vronskaya, "Objects-Organizers: The Monism of Things and the Art of Socialist Spectacle," in *A History of Russian Exposition and Festival Architecture, 1700–2014* (London: Routledge, 2019), 151–67.

fig.4 Cartoon.
Source: Archive of
the State Museum
of Architecture,
Moscow, Russia
(MUAR), collection
of Mikhail Korzhev.
From: *Bulleten'
rabochikh i
sluzhashchikh Parka
kul'tury i otdykha
im. Gorkogo*, no. 2
(November 26, 1929).
Image courtesy of
MUAR



architectural guides Petr Portugalov, Elena said, “You are evil, you torture my mom: you don’t leave her alone even on a Sunday.” “Ah, what if it were us – it is she who doesn’t leave us alone,” Portugalov retorted. ²³ “We cannot without mommy,” a cartoon published in the park’s internal bulletin in 1929, depicts Lissitzky (in the middle) and two other unidentified male employees holding Glan’s skirt as they push their sledge up the park’s celebrated sledding and skiing ramp. **figs. 4 and 5**

²³ Minutes of the meeting of the veterans of the first Gorky Central Park of Culture and Leisure (1974), 27–28, in Central Moscow Museum-Archive of Personal Collections (TsMAMLS), Fond L-33, opis’ 1, delo 53.

The park received many famous Soviet and foreign guests, including Nikita Khrushchev, then the secretary of the Moscow party organization. **fig. 6** Another guest, Romain Rolland, a known enthusiast of Holzapfel’s philosophy, visited the park in 1935 and could not hide his excitement about its mission:

“I wish that the world of the West, which conceitedly drapes itself in ‘humanism,’ which intends to satisfy the pride and dispel the boredom of a narrow group of selected few, came here to learn the true and noble humanism, which nurtures all humanity, rejuvenating the body and soul.” ²⁴ The elevation of workers’ lives from *zoē* to *bios* was the goal of the park.

²⁴ Glan, *Prazdnik vseгда s nami*, 117.

Glan’s faith in humanism was put to a hard test when she was arrested in June 1937, following Bukharin’s arrest earlier that year. At the same time, Gorkić was ordered to travel from Paris, the seat of the underground headquarters of the CPY, to Moscow, where he was immediately detained and executed in November. His replacement as head of the CPY was Josip Broz



Tito, a collaborator of Stalin’s secret police (NKVD). Glan’s trial took much longer, lasting until April 1939. In jail, she again met Khrushchev, who was examining prisons in the company of the head of Moscow NKVD, Stanislav Redens. In his memoirs, Khrushchev recalls their uncanny encounter:

fig. 5 El Lissitzky, poster for the ski ramp at the Central Park of Culture Leisure, Moscow, 1934. Public domain

“It was terribly hot, being summertime, and the cell was terribly overcrowded. Redens had warned me that we might meet so-and-so and so-and-so, that personal acquaintances had ended up there. And sure enough, an intelligent and very active woman I had known was sitting there – Betty Glan. Today [in 1967], it seems, she is still alive and well. She had been a director of Gorky Park in Moscow. But she had been not only a director; she had also been one of the founders and creators of that park. I didn’t go to diplomatic receptions back then, but as someone who came from a bourgeois family Glan knew the etiquette of

high society, and [Maxim] Litvinov always invited her, so that in a way she represented our government at such receptions. And now here I was encountering her in prison. She was half naked, like all the others, because it was so hot. She said: 'Comrade Khrushchev, what kind of enemy of the people am I? I am an honest person, a person devoted to the party.'"²⁵

²⁵ *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev: Commissar, 1918–1945*, Vol. 1 (University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 2004), 50.

Yet, even as her life was degraded to *zoë*, Glan not only fought to restore its dignity but devoted herself to dignifying others. In December 1939, she was found guilty of counter-revolutionary activity and sentenced to five years in a labor camp.²⁶ In September 1942, Glan was convicted for the second time and sent to the Volga-region city of Saratov. There, still a prisoner, she became deputy director, as an engineering technologist and economist, of the textile factory of female labor-educational colony (labor camp for underage girls) and the head of the colony theater group. A recommendation letter from the colony director, written in 1944, mentions that, during the three years Glan spent there, she conducted giant "industrial-mass work, contributing to socialist labor education of children and the increase in the productivity of their work"; the letter also praises her for treating "the students well and with attention" and for actively contributing "to their education in the spirit of communism."²⁷ In August 1946, Glan was released and moved to the industrial center Ivanovo, where she found employment as the artistic director of the lecture program of the Ivanovo philharmonic while simultaneously directing the "cultural and educational work" of the Ivanovo regional party committee. Things seemed to improve, and in 1948 Glan became the director of the Ivanovo All-Soviet composers' sanatorium and simultaneously the head of the house of culture of a collective farm in Cheganovo in Kineshma District of the Ivanovo region. A recommendation from the head of the collective farm mentions her frequent visits, during which Glan helped organize cultural and educational work, "paying particular attention to cultural events that help agricultural campaigns." Glan also invited Moscow and Ivanovo actors and musicians to the farm and lectured the farmworkers about music and literature.²⁸ Yet, in November 1948 she was convicted a third time, again for counterrevolutionary activity, and sentenced to "special settlement" in the Kazachinsky district of the Krasnoyarsk region in Siberia. There, she created and directed clubs and amateur theater groups in the collective farms Kemscoe and Udachny and in the village of Momotovo. In 1951, Glan moved to the local center, Krasnoyarsk, where she directed the amateur choir and theater collectives of the Spartak shoe factory, the local

²⁶ Under Article 58-10 of the Penal Code of RSFSR.

²⁷ *Zaveduiushchii uchebno-vospitatel'noi chast'iu zav. TVK#1, "Kharakteristika: Glan Betti Nikolaevna,"* December 5, 1944, in TsMAMLS, Fond L-33, opis' 1, delo 198.

²⁸ Solov'ev and Evgenova, "Otzyv: Glan Betti Nikolaeva," 1947, in TsMAMLS, Fond L-33, opis' 1, delo 198.

textile factory, and the Trade School of Physical Culture, where she also taught music. In August 1954, following Stalin's death, she was fully rehabilitated and released.

Back in Moscow, Glan was able to quickly restore her social circle and return to the passion of her life: organizing mass performances. She became the deputy general secretary of the Union of Soviet Composers and the director of the All-Soviet propaganda department of the Union of Soviet Composers. In 1957 she staged her last great performance, the water carnival of the 6th International Festival of Students and Youth, whose actors included a high-speed passenger boat; motor boats; four richly decorated floating stage-barges two steam ships converted into "islands of friendship and joy of youth"; and river trams with singers, orchestras, and dancers. ^{fig.7} In 1959, retired and with the privileged status of a "personal pensioner," she



continued working as a volunteer, no less tirelessly than ever, becoming the deputy head of the Committee on Mass Spectacles of the All-Russian Theater Society. In this capacity, she was instrumental in shaping the opening and closing ceremonies of the

fig. 6 Betty Glan showing the park to Anastas Mikoyan and Nikita Khrushchev, 1935. Published in *Park kultury i otdykh: Gazeta-Desiatidnevka* (1930s)

1980 Moscow Olympics. In 1964, she was honored as a "distinguished cultural worker of Russia"; in 1970, she received the award of the All-Union Festival of Theater Performances. Unlike most of her fellow citizens, Glan frequently traveled abroad, both within and beyond the socialist bloc. ²⁹

To put it in White's terms, suppressing the execution of her husband and her own incarceration from her memoir, Glan styled it as a romance. However, the blatant discrepancy between the cheerfulness of the text and the tragic reality of her life relate it to another of White's categories of history writing: satire, "the precise opposite of this Romantic drama of redemption, a drama dominated by the apprehension that man is ultimately a captive of the world rather than its master." ³⁰ While romance, according to White, is based on the poetic trope of metaphor, satire is based on irony — "negating on the figurative level what is positively affirmed on the literal level." ³¹ Yet, rather than a satire, Glan's memoir is a stubborn defense of romance as a genre not only of writing but also of living and building history — even in the face of the pervasive accusations of hypocrisy that followed in the 1980s.

²⁹ According to her profile in the Union of Soviet Theater Workers, she visited Gorki's family in Czechoslovakia in 1966, 1968, and 1980; visited Bulgaria, Romania, Poland, East Germany, and France in 1962, 1964, 1969, 1977, and 1981; and Hungary and Canada in 1965, 1967, 1974, and 1978. See TsMAMLS, Fond L-33, opis' 1, delo 198.

³⁰ White, *Metahistory*, 9.

³¹ White, *Metahistory*, 34.

When, in the wake of *glasnost*, a journalist asked Glan about her gulag experience, she declined to respond directly:

"One cannot reduce life, and not only ours but the life of the entire generation, to one, even if deeply tragic, year. As if we were interesting only insofar that we survived 1937, only in how we lived precisely after the arrest. It is clear today that bright and strong people were destroyed. Write about what made them such, about our youth, happy and joyful. Otherwise . . . otherwise it appears that my life, the books of my brother, and the big and difficult work of Milan was not the most important in our lives." ³²

³² V. Koval', "No iarkikh krasok bol'she u sud'by," *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, unknown issue, in TsMAMLS, Fond L-33, opis' 1, delo 217.

fig.7 Water carnival, 1957, International Festival of Youth and Students, Moscow. Published in: *Prazdnik mira i druzhby* (Moskva: Molodaia Gvardiia, 1958). Public domain

As if she were a Danko whose flaming heart was trampled upon by the Soviet state, to whose enlightenment project she had dedicated her life, Glan refused to acknowledge that her sacrifice was in vain. Declining to consider herself a passive object of violence, she insisted on her political subjectivity, on possessing *bios* rather than *zoē*.

The very project of her life – the concept of the park of culture and leisure – aimed to empower the workers, whose dignity was crushed by the assembly line, and thereby to elevate their life to *bios*.



Denying her this right would have meant reproducing the act of violence on the epistemological level. Moreover, the very act of self-censoring the memory of her personal tragedy can be seen as the ultimate confirmation of her political agency. And yet, enmeshed in Glan's insistence on her subjectivity one can detect an avoidance of responsibility for the zoefication of the lives of others, the zoefication that her collectivist philosophy, which postulated altruism as the highest value, involuntarily sustained as it was instrumentalized by the Stalinist state. Politicization of *zoē*, Agamben claimed, is the decisive event of modernity. ³³ Objectification of *polis*, one could add, is its other, equally sinister, side. The boundaries between romance and satire, as genres of modern history writing, are permeable.

³³ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 4.