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"Mal′chik-Starchik": The Biohistorical Subject of Yan Satunovsky's Poetry

Abstract: This article identifies and analyzes a corpus of poems on old age and aging in the works of the unofficial Soviet-era poet Yan Satunovsky (1913–1982). Focusing especially on Satunovsky's experiments with short poetic form, e.g. with quoted language, parataxis, ellipsis, and numerical shorthand, the article discovers in these texts sites of the poet's sustained reflection on subjectivity, history, biography, and temporality. The lyric subject that emerges from these texts represents himself and his embeddedness in history through oblique interiority, often intuited from third-person descriptions, and makeshift temporalities that are ironically assembled from citational fragments and narrative omissions. These readings are contextualized through reference to Soviet biopolitical conditions.

Keywords: aging, lyric subjectivity, poetry and temporality, biopolitics, unofficial literature

In characterizing Yan Satunovsky's distinctive lyric subject, scholars have noted two interrelated features: a reliance on external, borrowed speech and a detached, observational mode of perception, including that trained on the subject himself (e.g., Korchagin 2021: 564; Kazarina 2004: 330–331). This lyric speaker achieves a fractured self-positioning by ironically absorbing official rhetoric and everyday Soviet vernacular, alongside and as part of his own speech.· Readings of Satunovsky's oeuvre have focused especially on poems about war, Jewish experience, and Soviet daily life. Little attention has been paid to his many poems on aging and old age, which, as this essay shows, form a crucial and revealing part of his oeuvre, one that might allow us to finetune, or even revise the notion of Satunovsky's subject's externality or detachment

and shift attention to his physiological embodiment and biographical embeddedness in a temporality that is both personal and historical.

As any student of Satunovsky's corpus quickly discovers, his work returns repeatedly to certain thematic preoccupations, producing constellations of poems around specific topics. These clusters sometimes emerge within a short span, forming loosely chronological cycles; in other cases – as with "old age" – they accrue across decades, suggesting a long-term, recursive engagement.[1] This tendency toward cyclization or, rather, elaboration of theme through variations, often characterizes poets working in the short lyric form, going back to Fyodor Tiutchev and Afanasy Fet in the nineteenth century, and particularly abundant among poets in Satunovsky's Lianozovo milieu (especially Igor′ Kholin and Vsevolod Nekrasov). Attending to the accretion of such poems, rather than isolating individual texts, can illuminate persistent creative habits and help describe the structure of a lyric subject and temporalities shaped less by a narrative arc or Bildung than by patterned repetition and thematic recurrence.

Old age and aging constitute one such thematic node in Satunovsky's work, appearing across dozens of poems.[2] This article brings together a representative selection of these texts to trace conceptual through-lines that frame Satunovsky's lyric subject as a *biohistorical* construct. By "biohistorical", I mean to draw attention to the dense entanglement of biological and historical time in Satunovsky's short form. While this reading implicitly draws on biopolitical theory – as making visible the management of life and the curtailment of agency under state socialism – my primary focus lies elsewhere: on the internalized, subjective dimensions of that pressure, and, most centrally, on how Satunovsky's lyric configures experience through specific formal mechanisms. The thematic focus on aging, as a temporal and experiential category, thus brings into sharper relief such qualities of Satunovsky's short lyric as the split subject, parataxis, ellipsis, and numerical shorthand, as well as an intonational inflection that constitutes the subject indirectly, through voice rather than extensive biographical detail. In this context, Soviet biopolitics emerges not simply as a shaping force, but as a condition that Satunovsky's lyric form renders legible – whether through witness and ironic inhabiting, or

1 On cyclization in Satunovsky, see Kulagin 2016, who calls him a "'cyclical' author" ("tsiklicheskii avtor"; ibid.: 30).

2 Cf. Oleg Burkov on the theme of old age in Evgeny Kropivnitsky's work (Burkov 2012: 116–126). Most of Kropivnitsky's old age poems, by my count a smaller corpus than Satunovsky's, adopt a parodic tone.

more obliquely through understatement, euphemism, and resistance. More broadly, then, this essay contributes to discussions of both life-writing in postwar Soviet literature – by demonstrating how non-narrative, compressed forms can function as biographical practice – and of Satunovsky's distinctive poetics, here read at the intersection of lyric voice, historicity, and biography.

Life Stories

Satunovsky's poems that take old age as their starting point tend to imply a life already lived yet left largely unnarrated. The result is a curious deflection of autobiographical content: a self whose potential for story is hollowed out, or deemed too trivial or common to recount, yet whose presence – fragmented and ironic but clearly shaped by lived experience – is unmistakably felt. This is a subject who is both forgetful of his past and insistently marking the lacunae his memory or speech cannot fill. Consider first this pair of poems that explicitly signal the omissions involved in any, but here particularly Soviet, life-narration. One is a first-person lyric statement; the other, an ironic synopsis of a humdrum Soviet life belonging to another character:

Забываю, куда пошёл,
забываю, зачем пришёл,
жизнь
была
или не́ была,
забелило,
заволокло,
очереди за молоком,
очереди за хлебом;
прозеваю очередь за хлебом,
вспоминаю,
кого не следовало,
а кого любил,
тех
давно забыл.

4 декабря 1963
[150, no. 291]

I forget where I was going,
I forget why I came here,
life
was
or wasn't,
things have all
gone white and fuzzy,
lines for milk,
lines for bread;
I blink and miss the line for bread,
I call to mind
the ones I shouldn't,
while those I loved
I've
long forgotten.[3]

4 December 1963

Рассказать вам всё?
Не сказать ничего?

Были два партнёра,
два монтёра
в нашу Любку влюблены.
Стала Любка
тётей Любой,
слабой и беззубой,
взрослые дочки
у матери-одиночки,
космос,
климакс —
всё
слилось
воедино,

3 The author is grateful to Ainsley Morse for contributing all poetic translations in this article.

рассказать вам всё —
не сказать ничего.

22 сентября 1964
[164; no. 323]

Tell you everything?
Say nothing at all?

Once there were two partners,
two repairmen,
both in love with our Lubka.
Our Lubka turned
to Auntie Luba,
weak and toothless,
grown-up daughters,
single mother,
outer space,
menopause –
all
became
one,
telling you everything –
says nothing at all.

22 September 1964

Both poems originate in commonplace colloquialisms and, correspondingly, sketch lived life as taken over by banal, everyday activity.[4] This is an ordinary Soviet life: queues for milk and bread, single motherhood, space exploration

4 The second poem recalls the matter-of-fact, paratactic structure of the epitaphs in Igor' Kholin's *Zhiteli baraka (Barrack Dwellers)*, which tally up the meager facts of disfigured Soviet proletarian lives with wry detachment. In contrast to Satunovsky's portraits of the living, Kholin's poems offer a kind of final life summation. The record of one such life, selected here for its brevity, reads as follows: «Умерла в бараке 47 лет. / Детей нет. / Работала в мужском туалете. / Для чего жила на свете?» (Kholin 1999: 24) ("She died in the barracks

rendered as rote public discourse. As past, these deflated, unheroic experiences blur together (*zabelilo, zavoloklo; vsë slilos' voedino*) and obscure the stuff of lyric poetry: love (*kogo liubil*) and life (*zhizn' byla ili ne byla*). The narratives are bare for many reasons: they resist the heroic teleology of Soviet biography, underscore the eroding force of Soviet *byt*, mark the texts' circulation in milieux where things must remain un- or under-stated, and acknowledge the shared and ordinary content of the lives that are so familiar they need not be told.

While the poems flirt with fragmentation and erasure – through drifting paratactic syntax, colloquial diction, weakened confessional force, and the overall negation of transcendence – they are also encircled by framing refrains that suggest coherence. Each poem's end loops back to its beginning, that is, poetically remembers the past while thematically foregrounding the failures of memory and storytelling: "I forget where I was going, / I forget why I came here […] I call to mind / the ones I shouldn't, / while those I loved / I've / long forgotten" and "Tell you everything? / Say nothing at all? / […] telling you everything – / says nothing at all". Though the life narratives surface primarily through absence, the poems assert their own formal wholeness. Their frames perform a meta-lyric function. They reach for disclosure while simultaneously withdrawing from it, acknowledging both the excess that lies beyond memory or articulation and the impossibility of full recall, even as they enact the impulse to speak. In this way, they reconstitute the lyric in a skeletal, ironic mode at the site of narrative's collapse, shifting attention from life's particular content to its bare form, a short poem.

A still more ironic and minimalist takedown of life narrative is performed in the 1968 poem "Chem dal'she k starosti i smerti…" ("The closer to old age and death…", no. 562):

> Чем дальше к старости и к смерти
> (алаверды, алаверды),
> тем ближе плач в Генисарете
> и вопли Синей Бороды:

at age 47 – / No kids. / She was a men's bathroom attendant. / Why did she live?"; Kholin 2017: 67).

— жили не мы —
— мы не жи́ли —
— нас женили —
— нежели вы —

19 марта 1968
[242]

The closer you get to old age and death
(allaverdi, allaverdi),
the closer the weeping in Gennesaret
and the Bluebeard screams:

– lived not we –
– we lived not –
– we were wed –
– in your stead –

19 March 1968

The approach of old age and death is associated here not with the accretion of experience, but with the recognition of foreclosed possibilities: healing that will not come (the cries from Gennesaret, evoking both the skepticism and longing of those who witnessed Jesus's miracles) and desires that will grow more ravenous yet remain unsatisfied (the frustrated outbursts of Bluebeard). *Allaverdi* – a word used to pass the turn to speak at a Caucasian feast – casts the entire poem in ironic quotation marks, turning it into a shorthand for ritualized speechifying and festal drunkenness, but also highlighting the formulaic nature of what is being said, its shared and well-rehearsed quality and maudlin sentimentality. The dashes in the poem's second half turn the fragments of life narrative that they enclose (*we didn't live, it is not we who lived, we were married off*) into a collective lament and serve as placeholders: both for the hollowed-out lives they gesture toward and strike through, and for the ritualized, clichéd discourse that need not be repeated in full. The lives Satunovsky captures thus contain much, but amount to little, at least when it comes to unique plots, self-expression, lyrical reflection, or other forms that

agency might take and life narrative record. Life happens elsewhere[5], and marriage in particular is cast as an imposition by others: *we were married off* or, as in another poem, «[…] 30 лет принудиловки брака, 33 […]» ("30 years of marital drudgery, 33"; [162]). Similarly, life is something that befalls Luba, the protagonist in poem no. 323, who, in a paratactic sleight-of-hand, transforms from the youthful Lubka into the aging *"auntie"* Luba, her experience accumulating not as Bildung, but only as name adjustment and visible biological decline – weakness, toothlessness.

Reflecting in 1954 on the transformed pace of modern life and her contemporaries' experience of old age, Lydia Ginzburg, Satunovsky's older contemporary and one of the most incisive chroniclers of Soviet experience, draws an illuminating distinction between biological and social aging. The twentieth-century subject, she argues, lives according to fixed life scenarios that delay or even foreclose the arrival of maturity:

> Если зрелости не будет, если сознание стабильно, совершается только биологический процесс одряхления. […] Загадочность будущего — основной признак молодости, по понятиям XIX века. Человек XX века, не знающий, что именно случится с ним завтра, представляет себе зато, что ждет его через год, через десять и двадцать лет. В его развитии предвидимо все — образование, предприятие, учреждение, местопребывание. Теоретически учреждение и местопребывание пожизненны (места ведь меняют не от хороших причин).
> (Ginzburg 2002: 191–192)

5 A later poem returns to the theme of life happening elsewhere – this time in a political register – recasting the Soviet pastime of tuning in to Western radio as a search for extraterrestrial life that underscores the absence of life at home. That the seeker is a retiree marks him as already removed from active life, but also implies a backward glance at a Soviet life devoid of agency, a life he can neither locate nor recognize as having occurred: «Целый день / крутит радио / домодед-пенсионер. / И чего ему, спрашивается, надо? / Жизни / нет / и на Луне» ("All day long / stay-at-home gramps / plays the radio. / And what does he do it for, you might ask? / No / life / on the Moon either"; [305]).

> If there is to be no maturity, if consciousness remains static, then there transpires only the biological descent into decrepitude. […] The mystery of the future is the defining characteristic of youth, according to 19th-century notions. A person of the 20th century, not knowing what exactly will happen to him tomorrow, nevertheless has a good idea what awaits him in a year, in ten or twenty years. Everything in his development is predictable – education, employment, institution, place of residence. In theory, both the institution and the place of residence are determined for life (after all, people don't change places for good reasons).

While presented as an observation about the twentieth century generally, the stasis that Ginzburg describes sums up particularly the postwar Soviet reality and its bureaucratically framed milestones: *obrazovanie*, *predpriiatie*, *uchrezhdenie*, *mestoprebyvanie*. (Satunovsky might have added marriage to this list.) Under the conditions of monotony, a young person's future becomes predictable and static, and old age arrives as an external phenomenon, exposing the discrepancy between man's biological and social being.

The same temporal suspension that flattens lived experience and thwarts the twentieth-century subject's maturity also stunts creative life when it is forced underground. Ginzburg, speaking in general philosophical terms but no doubt including herself, turns briefly to the fate of the "unrealized man" ("nerealizovavshiisia chelovek") and the uncanny decay of unofficial writing when left without a reader:

> Написанное в стол, к сожалению, не лежит там спокойно. Время, отказавшее этой продукции в нормальной социальной жизни, не отказывает ей в смерти, в распаде. Пятидесятилетний, скажем, автор насчитывает уже несколько периодов творчества в стол — раннее, зрелое, позднее… Он может следить, как написанное, лежа в столе, теряет своевременность; как в нем проступают черты наивности или безвкусицы; как загнивает нежившая материя.
> (Ibid.: 189)

> What is written "for the drawer", unfortunately, does not lie there peacefully. Time, which has denied this work a normal social life, does not deny it death and decay. A fifty-year-old author, for instance, may already tally several peri-

> ods of work for the drawer – early, mature, late… He can observe how the work, lying in the drawer, loses its timeliness; how traces of naïveté or vulgarity begin to show through; how matter, never having lived, begins to rot.[6]

In this poignant fragment, historical time passes the drawer-bound work by while inevitably dating it. Withheld and bounded, the private is nevertheless imprinted with public history. It is the recognition of both the disjunctures and the complex mutual imprinting between public and private time that motivates the split subject of Satunovsky's lyric and the many ellipses in his construction of biography. Satunovsky's lyric subject is, in this sense, the unofficial subject *par excellence*. Being unofficial doesn't require being an underground writer. It names a condition of unrealizability, where life unfolds out of sync with official time and gets told through ironic gaps rather than coherent narrative. This subject exists between public and private time, constantly marking the contradictions and acts of withholding that define this double temporality.

Satunovsky's lyric takes up, and makes formally palpable, the same insight that Ginzburg articulates philosophically: the paradox of time denied as development yet still unfolding as chronology, delay, and senescence. A New Year's poem (no. 302) captures this predicament with stark simplicity:

> Вот уже
> в шестьдесят четвёртом году
> я иду
> по снежной Остоженке.
>
> Вот уже
> в шестьдесят четвёртом году
> я стою
> у стоянки автобуса.
>
> И чего я
> таюсь?

6 Cf. Satunovsky's declaration that the meaning of poetry is "to live without going stale" ("chtob zhit' ne zalezhivaias'"; [302]).

И чего я
жду
вот уже в шестьдесят четвёртом
году?

2 января 1964
[152]

And now
in nineteen sixty-four
I walk
along snowy Ostozhenka.

And now
in nineteen sixty-four
I wait
at the bus stop.

And why am I
hiding?
And what am I
waiting for,
now, in nineteen
sixty-four?

2 January 1964

Here, the steady march of calendar time only accentuates the subject's own inertia and resignation. Contrasting with the imperfective verbs of his daily routines and habits of self-censoring and hiding, the refrain "vot uzhe" ("and now") conveys the poem's structuring temporal tension. It creates a sense of both change and stasis, immediacy and belatedness, as if the timestamp of 1964 and the arrival of the new year should carry meaning but instead do not register anything new.

A complication of this contrastive temporality can be discerned in one of Satunovsky's better-known poems (no. 594), written the day after the Warsaw Pact troops entered Czechoslovakia in August 1968:

Како́е крестьянство?!
Кака́я интеллигенция?!
Како́й рабочий класс?!

Еще вчера по-чешски:
— Pozor! Pozor!
Сегодня по-русски…

Когда же я буду жить?!
Мне уже за тридцать!
Я ошибся!
Мне уже под шестьдесят!

21 августа 1968
[264]

What peasantry?!
What intelligentsia?!
What working class?!

Just yesterday in Czech:
– Pozor! Pozor![7]
Today in Russian…

When will it be my turn to live?!
I'm already over thirty!
I'm wrong!
I'm already almost sixty!

21 August 1968

7 'Pozor' means 'attention!' in Czech; the same word means 'shame' in Russian.

In his overview of Russian literary responses to the invasion, Tomáš Glanc identifies in the final stanza of Satunovsky's poem the same suspension, or even reversal, of *Bildung* that Ginzburg theorizes:

> Происходит некая негативная инициация. Если инициация знаменует переход индивидуума на новую ступень развития, подъем, то здесь имеет место противоположная тенденция к упадку. Потеря перспективы, надежды или иллюзий — это повторяющийся лейтмотив в репрезентации событий 1968 года.
> (Glanc 2011: 82)

> A kind of negative initiation takes place. If initiation typically marks an individual's transition to a new stage of development, a rise, here we see the opposite tendency toward descent. The loss of perspective, hope, or illusions is a recurring motif in representations of the events of 1968.

While the discrete statements made in each of the poem's three parts are more or less legible on their own, it is crucial to unpack the dialectical relationship implied in their sequence. The idealism of class unity questioned in the first stanza is fully discredited by the Soviet military intervention, a political rupture that the second stanza renders poetically through code-switching: "*Pozor!*", the Czech cry of warning, morphs into its Russian echo – a false gesture of pan-Slavic affinity, where phonetic kinship only sharpens semantic and political estrangement, becoming instead an admission of shame. If the third stanza functions as a kind of synthesis or *pointe*, delivering the upshot of the collision between ideology and practice staged in the first two, then the despair it voices is strikingly personal, retreating from historical event into autobiographical reckoning, a space of lyric utterance. An entire life – from Satunovsky's arrival in Czechoslovakia as a young officer in the Soviet liberating army ("I'm already over thirty" – note the insistent "already", *uzhe*) to his involuntary complicity in the 1968 invasion as an aging Soviet citizen ("I am already almost sixty") – is both invoked here and shown to be indefinitely deferred. Again, this life remains to be read between the lines but not narrated. If the contrast between "eshche vchera" ("just yesterday") and "segodnia" ("today") marks an event, the Soviet regime's final fall from grace, the analogous contrast between the speaker's own past and present (at thirty and

sixty) is conspicuously elided. In the transfer of public history into the private domain, the event of the invasion is exposed not as a singular crisis, but as a symptom of a chronic condition, one in which life and agency are repeatedly thwarted. That the speaker can so drastically misstate his own age implies, moreover, a still more radical realization: the unspoken equivalence between the two wars, mirroring the equivalence suggested by the homonymic irony of "Pozor!" The speaker's deferred life becomes a sacrifice to a permanent state of exception mandated by the entirety of Soviet history. The "state of exception" fits this poem uncannily well: its coda shows the speaker suddenly recognizing that his personal agency and meaning have been endlessly suspended in the name of ideological emergency, whether it be the battle against Nazism in 1945 or the defense of state socialism in 1968.

We begin to see that Satunovsky's short form generates a temporality that corresponds neither to an individual lyric moment nor to a more diffuse impressionism. Rather, in their minimalism, the subject's mundane, colloquial observations – once realized as finished poetic gestures – open onto multiple co-present timelines. Originating in a specific speech situation, as all the poems discussed here do, these texts also replicate (often via conspicuous ellipsis) the layered assumptions, background knowledge, unspoken contexts, and spatiotemporal and historical coordinates that structure any act of speech and any life story. Far from being externalized or sidelined, the lyric subject and lyric utterance are compressed and in fact consolidated by these frames.

Ginzburg's analytical humanism is grounded in the prepositional logic of generalization and universalizes individual experience, invoking *chelovek* (Man) as a theoretical construct. Satunovsky offers only brief vignettes toward a theory of constrained life – a theory that might be ironically intimated between the lines, but whose pathos finds no place in his lyric, or one might argue, in the lyric more broadly, as he understands it. His economical poetic form, by contrast, is committed to the particular and, specifically, to its verbal, intonational contour. In a much-cited commentary, Vsevolod Nekrasov captures this interplay between the individual and the universal in Satunovsky's work:

> Он-то знал. И на том стоял. И уже лет тридцать, как это делал: высказывание — всегда частность. Частный случай, единичный. Стихотворение — частное лицо. Партикулярное явление. Личное и индивидуальное. […] А максимально своё личное — оно и есть всеоб-

> щее. Старый фокус лирики: чем больше я — я, тем больше я — всякий. Вот каким мне представляется кредо С<атуновского>.
> (Zykova/Penskaia 2016)

> He knew. And insisted on it. He'd been doing this for thirty years: the utterance is always a particularity. An individual case, singular. A poem is a private citizen. A particular phenomenon. Personal and individual. […] And what is most one's own, most personal – that is the universal. The old trick of lyric poetry: the more I am 'I,' the more I am 'anyone.' That, as I see it, was S<atunovsky>'s credo.

All the poems discussed so far formally enact a constrained life and a censored biographical narrative. Their lyric speakers, at once idiosyncratic and representative, inhabit multiple chronologies: from the personal to the various forms of collective time. Their syntax elides cause or development, stripping narrative to its structural scaffold, locating remnants of narrative in the intonational habits of everyday speech, and leaving the short lyric form to contour these lacunae. In these texts, the individual comes into view through the inflection of ordinary language by poetic form; both ordinary and poetic language are here understood as residue and distillate of experience. This layering of temporalities reflects the fractured existence, temporal dislocation, and suspended agency of the unofficial subject, whose symptomatic condition, in turn, renders legible the more diffuse predicament shared across postwar Soviet life.

Old Age Personae

Most of "40 let stikhov. Kratkaia avtobiografiia" *(*"40 Years of Poems. A Brief Autobiography", 1979), a page-long sketch Satunovsky penned as preface to a manuscript compilation of his selected works, focuses on enumerating the wars of the first half of the twentieth century that the author experienced and the dislocations they entailed. But when the sketch reaches the more than three decades of his postwar life, it runs out of steam. Satunovsky turns instead to the poetic language of others, quoting Mayakovsky and Pasternak in a staccato, trivializing succession, as if briefly to inhabit the retrospective lyric posi-

tions borrowed from these others before finally referring the reader to his own verse as a substitute for what the narrative cannot capture.

> […] Дальше уже ничего не было — «жил, работал, стал староват» (Маяковский). «И жизнь прошла, успела промелькнуть, как ночь под стук обшарпанной пролётки» (Пастернак).
> Много лет как автор на пенсии по старости. Вот, пока, и вся биография. Кроме того, что есть в стихах, писать почти что нечего.
> [4]

> […] After that [his return from WWII] nothing happened – "I lived, I worked, I became rather old" (Mayakovsky). "And life passed by, allowing just a glimpse, like night to the clatter of a shabby old carriage" (Pasternak).
> For many years now the author has received an old-age pension. And that's it so far for the biography. Besides what's in the poems, there's almost nothing to write.

The final paragraph marks out two spaces of elision: the narrative of a life in which nothing is worth writing about and the lyric which reconstitutes that life, but, as we have come to expect, in a patently non-narrative sparing form. The switch to referring to himself as "author", together with the sketch's title and Satunovsky's practice of diary-like numbering and dating of poems, gesture toward an uninterrupted, continuous totality of the poetic career and locate the subject's more substantive life story and identity outside narrative structures.

In the context of this disavowal of life-writing and its recuperation in the lyric, it is revealing to recall the roles and life-myths that Satunovsky was rejecting: the teleological biographies of socialist realism, the more compact but still progress-driven service records of Soviet employees (a genre most directly echoed in the sketch), the concept of retirement as "deserved rest" (*zasluzhennyi otdykh*), and indeed the entire culture of what scholars have described as the autobiographical boom starting in the Thaw era (Klots/Romashova 2018: 581). Summing up more than a decade of his life in retirement, Satunovsky's sketch ends not in a heroic highpoint, but in a narrative void: "pisat′ pochti chto nechego" ("to write there is almost nothing", if we preserve the word order of the Russian). The text retreats into the publicly invisible pri-

vate sphere, which is immediately marked as the domain of poetry. Equally instructive, from a retrospective vantage, is how sharply Satunovsky's elliptical mode diverges from the autobiographical writing, in both memoir and lyric, that surged after perestroika. These later texts, made possible by the lifting of censorship, are animated by a drive to bear witness, reclaim suppressed histories, and impose narrative coherence on lives previously distorted by ideology. For Satunovsky's witnessing subject, suspended in the Soviet present, such testimonial narrativization is both impossible and stylistically alien. As he writes in poem no. 585 (1968): «Я помню, / я ничего не помню, / я видел, / но мало сказать — я видел» [258].[8] A reader who shares Satunovsky's historical coordinates may intuitively fill in the blanks, but also registers them as deliberate lacunae, where the constraints on speech originate as much from historical circumstance as from the pressures of lyric form.

Satunovsky's elliptical strategies become still more historically specific when we consider how Soviet institutions defined the very category of "old age" that he inhabited. "40 Years of Poems" mimics the official language of Soviet employment records (*trudovye knizhki*), which, as in Satunovsky's own file, stated: «Уволен из института в связи с уходом на пенсию по старости» [704].[9] Due to the nature of his employment at a research institute, Satunovsky retired earlier than the state-mandated age of sixty: he was fifty-four at the time he received this stamp of "old age" in March 1967, with his pension already assigned in November 1966. The comprehensive retirement pension system, adopted in 1956, inadvertently created a new social category – the able-bodied retiree, a figure somewhat at odds with the guiding Soviet slogan, "from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs" (Klots/Romashova 2018; Neumeyer 2023: 204). Thus, the new policy effectively institutionalized inconsistencies between bureaucratic and biological old age, as well as between the ideology and practices of labor and care. It is the former discrepancy that is of particular interest to us as we consider the lyric subject of Satunovsky's old-age texts. On the biographical level, it is captured in Igor' Kholin's terse description of Satunovsky in his memoirs: «Активная натура

8 "I remember, / I remember nothing, / I saw, / but it's hardly enough to say – I saw". For other poems explicitly marking memory lapses and omissions, see nos. 872 and 882.

9 "Dismissed from the institute in connection with retirement due to old age".

крайне. Он на пенсии. Ему 57 лет будет 23 февраля» (Kholin 2020: 171).[10] Other accounts mention that Satunovsky might have experienced retirement as a kind of liberation, a chance to devote himself fully to writing (Bychkov 2010). Hence perhaps the cessation of the language of public life in "40 Years of Poems", where retirement quite literally becomes an occasion for ending life's prose summary and turning to the collected poetic works.

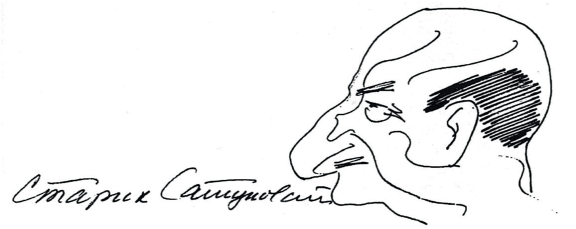

Fig. 1: Satunovsky's drawing "Old Man Satunovsky" (1967; [609])[11]

Even by the newly adopted 1956 pension standards, Satunovsky's change of status was early, feeding (as his post-retirement poems suggest) his characteristic sensitivity to the impositions of discourse, here experienced on the biopolitical level.[12] Although Satunovsky's poems begin noticing aging well before his retirement, initially musing over the subject's ability to fall in love "на старости лет" ("in his old age")[13], only in the mid-sixties, as his retire-

10 "Extremely active by nature. He's retired. He will be 57 on February 23".

11 I am grateful to Ivan Akhmet'ev for sharing this image and its dating. This drawing appears on the last page of the manuscript of "Tri romansa" ("Three Songs"). It is remarkable that Satunovsky gives this self-portrait (one of many that he sketched throughout his life) this particular inscription in the same year that he retires.

12 Stephen Lovell cites the following official age classification in effect when Satunovsky retired: "In 1960, the Soviet medical classification of age was changed to take account of the increased life expectancy of Soviet people. Middle age was now extended to 60, those between 60 and 75 were considered 'elderly', old age proper began at 75, while those older than 90 were 'long-livers' (*dolgozhiteli*)" (2007: 211).

13 E.g., nos. 146 (1958); 184 (1959): «Неправда, она не меняется, — / на старости лет / как и встарь / волнуется и влюбляется / душа, / которая — пар» ("It's not true, it doesn't change – / in one's old age / as in days of old / it is stirred and falls in love, / the soul, / which is vapor"; [101]); 308 (1964): «Признак, известный в медицине: / с приближением старости / мужчине / хочется любить всех женщин, / а молодых — в особенности» ("A symptom, known in medicine: / with the approach of old age / a man wants to love all women, / and young ones – especially"; [15]).

ment takes effect, does he begin representing old age as a role that never quite fits. This performative experience is summed up starkly in poem no. 693:

Никак не запомню, что я старик
(старик — такое амплуа) — никак,
никак не запомню.

6 октября 1970
[311]

I just can't remember that I'm an old man
('old man' is a stock character) – I just can't,
just can't remember.

6 October 1970

While this poem displays the split between the "stock character" of old man and the interiority of the "actor" perhaps most explicitly, many others cast old age as the site where the lyric subject becomes most aware of the discrepancy between external appearance (the signifier) and inner experience (the never fully articulated signified). But in this poem one also detects irony in the speaker's inability to remember the role – a lapse that belies his presentation of old age as merely a social performance.[14] The old man's stock part is ironic rather than tragic.

Another poem (no. 575), written two years earlier, dramatizes this same slippage between social labeling and self-image in a more comical mode:

А ну, кому там вздумалось,
что Ян ещё дитя?
Он дед уже,
он дед уже,
он дед уже,
хотя
красотки в парикмахерской,

14 Cf. similarly functioning lapses of memory in poems nos. 785 and 872.

которые стригут,
его ещё не дедушкой —
папашей зовут.

5 мая 1968
[253]

Come now, who got in their head
that Yan is still a child?
he's a grandpa,
he's a grandpa,
he's a grandpa,
although
the beauties at the hair salon,
the ones who snip and trim,
still don't call him grandpapa –
daddy, they call him.

5 May 1968

If the name Yan and the pronoun 'he' denote a consistent identity, the third person also suggests a degree of role play and alienation implicit in any association between person and age. The resulting subject is assembled from a makeshift temporality, patched together from others' perceptions and the context-dependent markers of "eshche" (still) and "uzhe" (already). The string of generational labels – *ditia*, *ded/dedushka*, and *papasha* with its dubious erotic capital – function not merely as chronological signposts, but as citational fragments of everyday speech, each bearing specific social scripts and relational expectations.[15] These monikers are overheard or inferred through others' address, and the subject's ironic distance from them highlights their social contingency. His life story and even his "I" omitted, this subject is shaped

15 Cf. Satunovsky's closing line and doodle from a 1974 letter to Vsevolod Nekrasov: «Ваш „дядя Яша" (лучше бы уж „дед", но, конечно, дело ваше, как хотите, так зовите). Я» (Zykova/Penskaia 2016; "Your 'Uncle Yasha' (though 'Grandpa' would be more fitting – but of course, it's up to you; call me whatever you like). Ya/I").

by exposure; his interiority, hidden behind the third person and the lack of explicit self-reflection, reveals itself obliquely, as self-consciousness.

Written two years earlier, "Kusocheck Sochi…" ("A Piece of Sochi…", no. 457), is one of several poems commenting explicitly on the erotic stakes of age's social legibility, a recurrent preoccupation in this corpus. If the previous poem casts age as a matter of social address and nomenclature, the Sochi poem relocates this tension to the sphere of libidinous looking, where the aging subject's desire collides with his diminished capacity to be desired in return[16]:

Кусочек Сочи.
Вот женщина, предел твоих мечтаний:
с бесстыдными мешками под глазами,
с бесстыдными глазами над мешками.
Она в неоновом нейлоне
на лоне новой гостиницы Магнолия.

Ещё кусочек.
Ещё по Сочи
ходит старичонок,
заглядывая в глаза девчонок,
отворачиваясь от старух,
так непохожих на его когдатошних подруг.

Спи, мальчик-старчик.

6 октября 1966, Сочи
[200]

16 Other poems (nos. 441, 577, 670) also associate resort-town settings with bodily display and casual desire. In the context of aging, I will only cite the finale of no. 441, written in Yalta: "Мне уже за 50 лет. / Видимо, / мне уже не получить / на половой вопрос / половой ответ" ("I'm over 50 now. / It doesn't look like / I will ever get / any sexual answers / to the question of sex"; [196]).

A slice of Sochi.
Here's this woman, the acme of your dreams:
with shameless bags beneath her eyes,
with shameless eyes above the bags.
She basks, swathed in neon nylon
on the banks of the new Hotel Magnolia.

Another slice.
Around Sochi
minces a little old man,
peeking into all the girlies' peepers,
reeling back from the old women
so unlike the girlfriends of yesteryear.

Sleep, little boy-old boy.

6 October 1966, Sochi

The lyric speaker presents himself as both the contemplating subject in the first stanza and the observed object in the second. The stanza break enacts the very gap between interiority and externality that the old-age poems make so visible in Satunovsky's lyric generally. The uncomfortable merger between the experiencing consciousness and the social spectacle is performed in the poem's lullaby pointe: the compound *mal'chik-starchik*. The phrase is prepared by the contrasts between young girls and old women, and women of the present and the past of the previous stanza. But if the language of age categories recognizes and names *devchonki* (girlies) and *starukhi* (old women) as separate entities and objectifies them into a typology, the subject's account of himself apprehends this same categorical language as an ironic deadlock. As with the generational categories in the previous poem, these age nouns designate fixed ontological properties, reductive for the subject's temporal complexity. The hyphen in *mal'chik-starchik* functions simultaneously as marker of fusion and division, of biographical coherence and crisis. At the same time, "Spi, mal′chik-starchik" reworks this existential split as an ironic rather than tragic predicament, not only through its playful diminutives, but by casting the poem's finale

as mockingly citational. The imperative "sleep!" – suggestive of a range of meanings, from the deflation of sexual arousal to the anticipation of death's final sleep – points to any number of lullabies, Valery Briusov's 1919 "Kolybel'naia" ("Lullaby"; Briusov 1955: 442) perhaps most immediately. And the entire line puns on the name of the fairy-tale character *Mal'chik-s-pal'chik* (Tom Thumb), further reducing the subject to a diminutive man of folklore and picaresque adventure.

In a more solemn, later poem (no. 917), whose opening anticipates the autobiographical list of milestones in "40 Years of Poems", interiority again emerges only indirectly – this time framed as a borrowed line from a novel and staged, simultaneously, as if part of a play:

— Детство, отрочество, война, —
«разговаривая с самим собой, как с посторонним»,*
входит старик,
жалкий, как черновик.
Так что давнее сдаётся давешним.

* Из переводной прозы
15 января 1976
[390]

– Childhood, boyhood, war –
"talking to oneself as if to a stranger",*
enter an old man,
pathetic as a rough draft.
Thus the long-ago seems recent.

* From translated prose
15 January 1976

The opening line – both the old man's direct speech and a quotation from Leo Tolstoy – disrupts the familiar progression of *Детство. Отрочество. Юность* (*Childhood. Boyhood. Youth*, 1857) with the harsh incursion of "war", itself only a common milestone of many Soviet life stories. The next line adds another layer of quotation by alluding to Albert Camus' *The Stranger* (*Postoronnii*, likely in

Nataliia Nemchinova's 1969 translation), a text that is, as the poem's footnote underscores, both foreign and in prose – hence doubly estranged from Satunovsky's lyric subject. The third line theatricalizes the scene by framing it within a stage direction and thus reinforcing the sense that the subject, a self-alienated, implicit 'I', who performs the stock part (*amplua*) of an old man, is an assemblage of borrowed scripts (recall, too, the *allaverdi* poem in the previous section of this essay).[17] The final textualizing layer is the comparison of old man to a rough draft, where the draft can be understood as provisionally inscribing different historical moments (childhood, boyhood, war) and borrowed texts (Tolstoy, Camus, dramaturgy) into a single text. This simile ironically recasts old age as a point where no self-coherence has been achieved. In this way, it anticipates the final line's epigrammatic shuttling from "davnee" to "daveshnee".

As we will see in the next section, this kind of telescoping reflection, whose nimbleness is enabled by the short form, is characteristic of Satunovsky's historical thinking. For now, it is important to register this poem's integration of interiority and externality. This merger of inner experience and outside point of view constitutes Satunovsky's lyric subject as one interpellated by multiple, often disjointed discursive formations. Paradoxically, lyric subjectivity emerges through its apparent dissolution into the ironic third person and borrowed scripts. The third person contains the shadowy presence of the first. The "old man" character, just like the previous poem's "mal′chik-starchik", becomes a displaced site of lyric interiority.

Measuring Time

Satunovsky's retirement coincided with, and was perhaps precipitated by, the birth of his grandson Ilya in 1966. Satunovsky wrote several poems on this occasion; among other instances, the play with the appellation "grandpa" in "Come now, who got in their head" (no. 575) no doubt responds to his new role. Other poems stage playful dialogues with the infant, sometimes recalling the style of the nursery rhymes that Satunovsky was so fond of and the

17 I am grateful to Ilya Kukulin for helping me identify this reference. The relevant passage most likely appears at the end of Chapter 2, where the narrator realizes that the voice he hears is in fact his own, speaking to himself as if to a stranger. On citationality as the structuring principle of Satunovsky's verse, which speaks in ready-mades that are "half-appropriated and half-estranged", see Kukulin 2021: 637.

children's poetry that he wrote.[18] These encounters often prompt reflections on aging and time. Thus, in a poem titled "Vremia" ("Time", no. 499), an exchange with the grandson frames a meditation on generational succession and a philosophical proposition about the nature of time itself.

Время

Илюшка!
Мальчишка, запустивший в деда фонтаном!
Мужчина!
Через 50 лет тебе будет меньше,
чем мне сейчас.

Полвека!
Какая это громада — вон та́м, впереди!
Какая это малость — та́м вон, позади…

25 марта 1967
[213]

Time

Ilyushka!
The little boy who aimed his fountain at grandpa!
Man!
In 50 years you'll be younger
than I am now.

Half a century!
What a colossus – over there, still ahead!
What a speck of nothing – all over, back behind…

25 March 1967

18 For more on Satunovsky's poetry for children, see Ainsley Morse's article in this volume.

The poem recounts an ordinary situation of a grandfather's early encounter with his newborn grandson, and the arithmetic the speaker performs is as commonplace as its cooing rhythmic intonations. The speaker spatializes time, making it more material and thus imaginable for a young child. The spatial deixis of the final two lines and the stress marks (not obviously needed for a single-syllable word) in "вон та́м, впереди! […] та́м вон, позади" replicate the demonstrative gestures of nursery rhymes.[19] Two words that would be similarly conventional on this occasion encapsulate the boy's identity: *mal'chishka* (little boy) marking his current age and *muzhchina* (man) pointing admiringly and jokingly to any number of more lasting traits that manhood might connote in a culture that essentialized gender (hence, too, the admiration for the "fountain"). Here, however, the sequencing of the two words serves also to project time's passage; it is a telescopic form of measurement (just like the switch from Lubka to auntie Luba, or the hyphenation in "mal′chik-starchik"). The perfectly pitched mimesis of the mundane allows philosophical illumination to emerge. The poem's meditation on physical versus psychological time, on clock time versus duration, on arithmetic (50 years), history (half a century), and language (*mal'chishka – muzhchina*, *von tam – tam von*) as well as on past and future is delivered as a first lesson to a little boy whose own communication (the "fountain") is at this point still endearingly immediate and non-verbal, unaware of anything but the present.

A similar domestic scene unfolds in poem no. 619 as internal dialogue, in which the aging speaker catches himself in the confusion of his own nostalgic and vaguely erotic reverie. Here, too, the poem's insight arises from a seemingly trivial moment – and from the persistent lure of analogy, which unsettles the generational distinctions he otherwise recognizes.

> Похожа на Лёльку Шувалову.
> Какая Лёлька Шувалова?
> Лёльки Шуваловой можбыть уже на свете нет.
> Лёльке Шуваловой сто лет в обед.

19 Cf. for example, the exaggerated vowel in this birthday song: "Каравай вот тако́й вышины, вот тако́й ширины". Just as children use their bodies to measure the imaginary bread ("this big, this wide"), the grandfather uses spatial deixis to help his grandson imagine temporal duration. The "громада" ahead and "малость" behind become measurable through the same gestural logic as the *karavai*.

Старик, ты опять за своё? Опять штучки-дрючки?
У тебя — хвороба,
у дочки подружка,
сидят, разговаривают.
Выдумал: Лёлька Шувалова, Лёлька Шувалова.

8 января 1969
[278]

She looks like Lyolka Shuvalova.
What Lyolka Shuvalova?
Lyolka Shuvalova is probly no longer with us.
Lyolka Shuvalova's old as the hills.

Old man, are you at it again? Again with your shenanigans?
You've got your ills and chills,
your daughter has a friend over,
they're having a nice chat.
And you come up with: Lyolka Shuvalova, Lyolka Shuvalova.

8 January 1969

This poem works with colloquialisms – *mozhbyt'*, *sto let v obed*, *opiat' za svoe*, *shtuchki-driuchki*. In this colloquial environment, "starik" activates its secondary slang meaning as a term of address, equivalent to English "old man", "dude", "buddy", or "pal", alongside its literal meaning of "old man".[20] The word *starik* thus becomes another hyphenated identity akin to *mal'chik-starchik*, carrying both the casual familiarity of the younger generation's slang address and the biological fact of old age. The same linguistic doubling of casual address and biological reality underwrites the speaker's perception of the young girl, in whom he discovers a similar hybrid, part flesh-and-blood contemporary, part

20 The slang meaning was in wide circulation in the 1960s; thus, the corpus of Russian language records instances of this usage in a range of texts from Vasily Aksenov's *Pora, moi drug, pora* (*It's Time, My Friend, It's Time*, 1963) to Eldar Ryazanov's 1969 film *Zigzag udachi* (*Fortune's Zigzag*).

a girl from his own youth, Lyolka Shuvalova.[21] The diminutive "Lyolka" implies young age and familiar relations, and the name therefore, while anchoring the speaker's memory, proves equally inadequate for the impossibly old "original" Lyolka and for the young girl who is not Lyolka at all.[22] The signifier, albeit meaningful for the speaker, cannot attach to a specific signified. As it vacillates between memory and perception, the sign (constituted in the relationship between name/age and person) is revealed as deeply unstable. This layering of memory and perception makes it difficult to tell time, and only the speaker's own physical decline (*khvoroba*) can serve as a reminder.

Generational time structures both "Time" and other grandson poems, as well as this one. At once linear and cyclical, it trains the speaker's attention on measuring duration even as it in fact catalyzes the slippage or ironic lack of distinction between past, present, and future. Ilyushka's future maturity, at slightly over fifty, is measured against the speaker's present age; by virtue of their kinship, the grandson hypothetically replicates the grandfather's trajectory. But only imperfectly: the boy's prospective fifty years differ greatly, if here only quantitatively, from the grandfather's retrospective lived life. One might say that the daughter's role in the Lyolka Shuvalova poem is in part to act as a placeholder for the speaker, who daydreams of insinuating himself into the pseudo-Lyolka's company or, more importantly, of being her contemporary, of being young. Yet, it is now the daughter's turn to be the young girl's peer, and the encounter with the original Lyolka cannot be relived.

More broadly, Satunovsky's thinking about generational time as duration and cyclicity is, I would suggest, connected to his play with semiotic instability that we have seen in many of these poems. A limited repertoire of terms of familial relation come to signify an expansive and ever-aging cast of referents. These slippages are pithily summed up in a poem marking the death of

21 In the *Sochi* poem we also find this doubling, though it is not reconciled at the level of the word or sign. *Mal'chik-starchik* is conjoined by a hyphen that maintains the discrete hypostases of the subject, and *devchonki* and *starukhi* are presented as separate entities, though the developmental link between them is implied. The slippage between *mal'chishka* and *muzhchina* in "Time" works similarly.

22 An elaboration of this point is found in this later poem: «Как странно — в 40, 60 и 80 / мы остаемся Мишами, Володями, / хотя для взгляда постороннего, / но, впрочем, это ведь не ново» ("Isn't it strange – at 40, 60 and 80 / we are still Mishas and Volodyas, / even though others might see, / well, anyway, this is nothing new"; [548]). Note, too, Satunovsky's use of a numerical shorthand that we have already seen in "Time" and will analyze further.

Satunovsky's father in 1965 (no. 401) and likely also registering the news of his daughter's pregnancy: «Второй месяц, / как мы схоронили „деда". / И теперь я́ стал „дедом"» ("'Two months now / since we buried 'grandpa.' / And now I'm the 'grandpa"; [182]). This foreshortened elegiac fragment compresses the transformation from son to grandfather. As the sole, intonational eruption of lyric interiority, the emphatic, stressed «я́» ('I') comes to recognize itself as a new referent denoted by a borrowed, defamiliarized signifier "ded". The stress on the "ia" and the repetition and scare quotes around "ded" capture a moment between mourning's refusal to release the old referent and succession's demand for a new one.[23] Generational time creates the conditions for semiotic slippage, and Satunovsky's minimalist form captures both the mechanical nature of this process and the subjective shock of living through it, just like everyone else, but for the first time.

The generational strain in Satunovsky's poetry can be traced from the late 1950s onward. While the poems analyzed thus far approached aging on a personal and familial scale, others take it up on the level of literary and political history. One of the earliest such texts probes the subjective nature of aging even as it reconstructs the history of Soviet generations. The objective age (30, 40, 45) and subjective agedness are here plotted on the hidden temporal axes of pre-war past and post-war present.

> Вы были для нас стариками,
> нам было сколько же? —
> от силы 30, а вам —
> вам уже под 40,
> а то и все, пожалуй, 45.

23 Remarkably, in the commentary to this text, Ivan Akhmet′ev notes that the card following the one on which this poem was written, states: «„Дед? а, дед?": / А где он, где?» ("'Grandpa? Hey, grandpa?' / Where is he now, where?"; [652]. If the poem treats "ded" as a signifier adopted by changing signifieds, this one asks a more metaphysical question about the father's disappearance or persistence beyond death. Cf. poem no. 219 on the passing of Satunovsky's mother that figures death as erasing the relational (familial, generational) signifiers: «Вот / и месяц прошёл. / Месяц, как мы опустили в яму / маленькую старушонку. / Чужую. / С поджатыми губами. / Которая / в жизни была совсем другая./ Которая была / наша мама» ("Now / it's been a month. / A month since we lowered into the earth / A tiny old woman. / A stranger. / With pursed lips. / Who / was someone else entirely in life. / Who was / our mama"; [117]).

Вы были для нас стариками,
мы смотрели на вас, как на обречённых,
и мычали, что, мол, старость не радость.
А теперь нам самим за 40,
и мы старики,
пусть не для себя — для других.

2 июня 1959
[461]

You were old men to us,
and how old were we? –
30 at most, while you –
you were almost 40,
or as much as, maybe, 45.
You were old men to us,
in our eyes you were all condemned,
we'd mutter: old age is no picnic.
But now we're all ourselves past 40,
and we are old men,
if not to ourselves, then to others.

2 June 1959

Presented as a mundane, everyman's reflection, the poem's spare numerical references – "almost 40", "maybe 45" – function as historical markers, situating the speaker, his peers, and his older and younger contemporaries within specific Soviet generational cohorts. The term *starik*, which we have already noted for its layered connotations in Satunovsky's verse, emerges here as a key category in Soviet generational thinking. As Marietta Chudakova observes, *starik* was ubiquitous in the Soviet lexicon of the 1920s–30s. It carried not only age but also class associations and was applied both to *byvshie liudi* – members of the "former" classes rendered obsolete and even undesirable by the revolution – and to old Bolsheviks, the party's old guard or "old timers" (Lenin

himself was nicknamed *starik* within the party).[24] While the term circulated broadly, its semantic instability allowed it to denote, depending on context, political obsolescence or revolutionary legitimacy (Chudakova 2023: 552–553). Symbolic, discursive superannuation of different cohorts for ideological or other reasons not having directly to do with biological age continues into the post-war period. This relegation of particular social and generational strata to the past went hand in hand with the celebration of youth and the future – a hallmark of Soviet teleological discourse more broadly, and especially pronounced in the 1920s and again during the Thaw, which is no doubt the immediate context for Satunovsky's old-age poems.

In this poem, the *stariki* recalled by the speaker were born at the turn of the century, in contrast to his own generation, born in the early 1910s. Both generations went to war – the older men when they were in their forties, the Satunovsky generation in their thirties; there the older generation seemed "condemned" to perish. Neither, however, belonged to the cohort most often associated with wartime heroism and postwar poetic authority: the *frontoviki*, or frontline generation, born in the late 1910s and early 1920s – figures such as Satunovsky's younger contemporaries Boris Slutsky (1919–1986) and David Samoilov (1920–1990), whose early adulthood was shaped directly by the war.[25] The older generation of poets who joined the war effort in their forties included writers likewise significant to Satunovsky, such as Ilya Selvinsky (1899–1968) and Georgy Obolduev (1898–1954).[26] The poem even anticipates, perhaps only intuitively, the further supersession of Satunovsky's own generation – as well as Slutsky's – by the poets of the 1960s, the post-war generation. What seem at first glance minor generational gaps – mere years – emerge here as historically and aesthetically charged distinctions, refracted through the Soviet idiom of aging, utility, and survival. Yet, this fine-grained vision is made to coexist with the sense that things merely repeat themselves, and that

24 Cf. a remarkable monostich from 12 October 1979, where Satunovsky marvels at the continued survival of these party old timers, so many of whom had perished in the purges and the war that their deaths only in the late 1970s seem nothing short of a miracle: «…ещё умирают члены КПСС с 1916-го года…» ("…there are CPSU members since 1916 who are only now dying…"; [570]). Note again, just as in "You were old men to us", how much is accomplished through the juxtaposition of numerical shorthand within the poem and its precise dating.

25 Both poets are explicitly mentioned by Satunovsky elsewhere.

26 Ilya Kukulin retraces the relationship between Satunovsky and Selvinsky in the present volume.

experience that had seemed unique invariably falls into an ironic pattern. This deeper historical layering is intimated beneath the speaker's casual generational musings and the faux rationalism of arithmetic.[27]

By now we have seen that, similarly to ellipsis and parataxis, numerical shorthand becomes a characteristic strategy of Satunovsky's minimalist lyric, coarticulating personal and historical experience within a seemingly rationalist epistemology of dates and ages. This approach finds its most theoretically explicit and complex expression in a 1975 prose poem, no. 903, that takes Henri Bergson, the philosopher of subjective temporal experience, as its point of departure.

> …философ Анри Бергсон умер в 41-м году, Франция уже два года воевала, а я думал — это что-то такое, что ещё ДО 13-го года! Потому что до 13-го, ДО моего рождения. ДО моей жизни — это абсолютно не то, что в 41-ом или, допустим, 21-ом году. В 21-ом у нас во дворе в сортире повесился какой-то дяденька, на Украине был голод, до сих пор помню, какая это вкуснятина — макуха или «жмых по-русски сказать». Мы боялись заскакивать в уборную, в низком ящике у входа жрали что-то свиноподобные крысы, мы хлопали и хлопали дверью, мы кричали: — пошли вон! — а они не уходили, только зырили на нас. Ещё через десять лет я в Университете проходил Канта и Лавуазье, а в 41-ом осенью драпал через Херсон до Мелитополя со всем своим взводом на грузовике.
>
> *30 сентября 1975*
> [386]

27 Satunovsky is given to similar elliptical reflections about the succession of poetic generations elsewhere. The most striking for our purposes is the short piece from 24 June 1976, in which Satunovsky overlays his own life-frame onto that of Fyodor Sologub (1863–1927): «Мне было пять месяцев, когда Фёдор Сологуб — а ему было пятьдесят лет уже — написал такие стихи […]. А умер он шестидесяти четырех лет (и мне сейчас шестьдесят четвертый)» ("I was five months old when Fyodor Sologub – and he was already fifty – wrote these verses […]. And he died at sixty-four (and I'm in my sixty-fourth year now"; [559]).

> …The philosopher Henri Bergson died in '41, France had been at war for two years already, and I thought – that's something that came even BEFORE 1913! Because before 1913 meant BEFORE my birth. BEFORE my life – that's something completely different from something in '41 or, say, '21. In '21 in the outhouse in our courtyard some guy hung himself, there was famine in Ukraine; I still remember how incredibly tasty makukha was, or "oilcake [zhmykh], to say it in Russian". We were scared during our forays to the outhouse, the low crate by the entrance was full of piglike rats gnawing on something, we would flap the door on its hinges, yelling "get outta here!" – but they wouldn't leave, they'd just sit there gawking at us. Ten years later at university I was reading Kant and Lavoisier, and in '41 I was getting the hell out of Kherson toward Melitopol in a truck with my whole platoon.
>
> *30 September 1975*

It is unclear whether, at what point in his career, and how much Bergson Satunovsky had actually read. What we can assert with some certainty is that he knew of Bergson's considerable influence on Russian modernism, of Soviet Marxism's harsh critique which cast Bergson as a dangerous idealist, and of the philosopher's significance for Marcel Proust whose *A la recherche* Satunovsky was reading at about the time this prose poem was written.[28] That the connection of Bergson and Proust is crucial to this text becomes apparent in the image of *makukha* or *zhmykh* – a Holodomor madeleine. Its sudden coming into focus both instantiates the image-remembrance mechanisms of the Bergsonian/Proustian involuntary memory and ironizes the self-indulgence of its bourgeois Parisian origins. But the poem betrays a deeper engagement with Bergson as well, one structured by the same push-and-pull of appropriation and subversion as the image of *makukha*.

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28 See, for example, a slightly later letter to Vsevolod Nekrasov: «Что ещё? У меня ничего. Колюсь, глотаю порошки и капли, в промежутках пытаюсь читать Пруста. Не знаю никаких подробностей: кто-то (знаю) где-то (тоже) что-то (не знаю) сказал — вот так Пруст. Пруститутка, как сказал Дюма-сын» ("What else? Not much to report. I do my injections, swallow powders and drops, and in between I try to read Proust. I don't know any of the details: someone (I know who) somewhere (also) said something (I don't know what) – that's Proust for you. A Proustitute, as Dumas-fils said"; Zykova/Penskaia 2016). For a useful overview of Bergson's Russian reception in the early twentieth century, see Fink 1999.

Ironically, it is the speaker's subjective perception of time that condemns the philosopher to premature death in the speaker's consciousness. This perception, which Bergson championed as more experientially accurate than mechanical chronology, is signaled here by the emphatic "before 1913 meant BEFORE my birth. BEFORE my life".[29] On the other hand, the quantified, spatialized, rational clock time – whether as dates in this poem (1913, 1921, 1941) or numbers marking age in the previous one and elsewhere – function as madeleine-like sensory cues, each unleashing its own cascade of involuntary memory, in seeming contradiction to Bergson's critique of clock time as a distortion of true, durational consciousness. Thus, "1921" immediately conjures the hanged man, the famine, the taste of *makukha*, the ravenous rats. As a poetic shorthand, each number carries a hefty experiential cargo, and thus Satunovsky playfully weighs in on one of the most artistically significant philosophical debates of the twentieth century, that over clock and lived time (Canales 2016). Similarly, on the one hand, the poem maintains the discreteness of past experiences, arranged by decade in the speaker's personal timeline, and suggested in the mention of Kant and Lavoisier whose study is presented as an exercise in the history of science rather than in anything possibly contemporary. On the other hand, all these experiences and figures are co-present in the speaker's experiential flow and in the space of the poem; and the very realization of this co-presence is enabled by the discovery of Bergson's preternatural contemporaneity to the speaker's life. The irony of course is that the list of the Soviet man's experiences is hard to narrate as continuous: what kind of duration, narrative, life, or consciousness can hold within it the unimaginable mixture of famine and rats, highbrow university studies, and flight from the enemy in yet another war? How can this all have happened in the speaker's, let alone Bergson's lifetime? Thus, on the surface the poem establishes Bergson's irrelevance in the world of a Soviet subject born on the eve of the revolution, arguing for the radical non-synchronicity of Bergson's and the speaker's own life. At the same time, it thinks through simultaneity, duration, and lived time – all, as we have seen, Satunovsky's consistent preoccupations – alongside Bergson, though everywhere ironically.

29 Many accounts starting as early as the 1920s evidence similar surprise at Bergson's continued survival and intellectual activity past the 1910s (Canales 2015: 5, 31).

We need not overstate Bergson's centrality to Satunovsky's poetic work. If anything, the prose poem's surprise at Bergson's continued survival well into the twentieth century suggests a discovery of the persistence of aesthetic habits that had seemed obsolete, if not altogether deposed by the turbulent history starting with World War I. It might well be that the poem also implicitly pushes against the official Soviet dismissal of the philosopher as an idealist hack, thus engaging first and foremost with the discourse contemporary to Satunovsky rather than with Bergson's philosophical system.[30] Still, Satunovsky's short, seemingly perfunctory form and the ostensible spontaneity of his colloquial style belie the steadiness with which his oeuvre meditates on subjectivity and temporality.

The unlikely affinity between Bergson and Satunovsky comes through in their shared and continued preoccupation with subjective time. In Satunovsky's case, this engagement emerges not in opposition to clock time, official history, or biopolitical constraint, but precisely in proximity to them, within a heightened awareness of their pressures and in the interstices of borrowed units of measurement and borrowed language. Most importantly, this engagement with temporality manifests in the corpus I have sought to describe in a form radically different from the associative prose narrative engendered by literature's engagement with philosophy of time in the tweintieth century, from Proust to Joyce to Mandelstam (of *The Noise of Time*) and Pasternak (of *Doctor Zhivago*). Satunovsky – a kind of anti-Proust – embeds temporal consciousness in lyric utterances characterized by a radical compression: of narrative arc and the space of the subject. With their telescoping effects and ironic entrenchment of interiority in the cracks between borrowed language and outsider perspective, his poems on aging demonstrate how the minimalist lyric can function as a mode of life-writing and constitute the subject not through extensive articulation but through various forms of shorthand.

More than any other thematic cluster in Satunovsky's oeuvre, the old age poems thus bring to the fore several key aspects of his poetics. We have seen Satunovsky achieve lyricism (indeed lyric intensity) through consistently par-

30 One place Satunovsky might have encountered this discourse is the preface to the 1973 Khudozhestvennaia literatura edition of *Du côté de chez Swann*, translated by Nikolai Liubimov. Its author, the prominent literary scholar and official Boris Suchkov, rehabilitated Proust for a Soviet readership by casting him as a realist in contrast to the ideologically fraught subjectivism of Bergson – a strategic but overstated dichotomy.

ing back lyrical self-expression. Old age becomes an index of a life and of a life-story that enter the domain of language and narrative only partially, if at all. Furthermore, the subject who thus remains outside narrative is experienced by readers of his poetry as simultaneously omnipresent and underarticulated. This subject is profoundly split – not externalized or detached, as some scholars claim, but intensely aware of his own interiority: youthful, desirous, critical, piercing, striving outward (sexually, politically, poetically). At the same time, he is also conscious of his external manifestation: aging, unattractive, constrained, and composed from borrowed or incidental language. This figure is, at core, a *mal'chik-starchik*, an unofficial subject, an "unrealized man", shaped at once by clock time and lived time – a biohistorical construct.

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