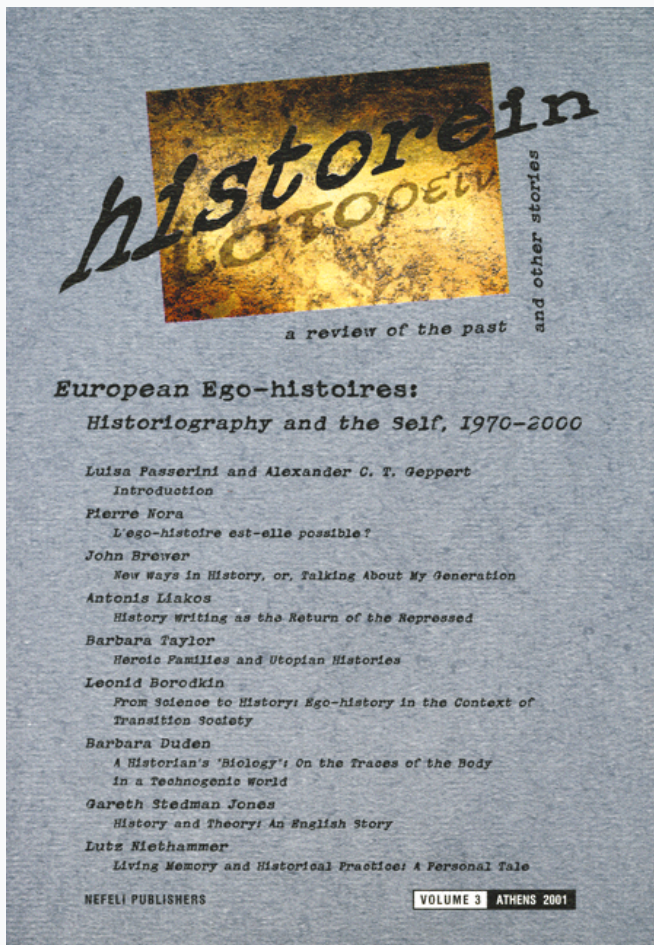


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From Science to History: Ego-history in the Context of Transition Society

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*From Science
to History:
Ego-history in
the Context of
Transition
Society*

Leonid Borodkin

The last fifteen years were exciting, promising, dramatic and decisive years for historians in the new states of the former Soviet Union. Political, social and economic changes during this period influenced not only academic life as a whole but individual “professional trajectories” as well. The USSR had one of the largest communities of scholars and university teachers in the world, who had a more or less privileged position in Soviet society, despite limitations on academic freedom in Soviet Union. These included not only censorship and ideological pressure but also isolation from the international academic community, limited access to professional information, and restrictions on foreign contacts and exchanges. After Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in 1985, the situation improved step by step. Now academic freedom in Russia is comparable to “world standards.” However, the transition period was accompanied by growing material, i.e. financial, difficulties, which posed a question of survival for a substantial number of scholars. Part of them left the profession, and others left Russia. Accompanying these difficulties, the academic community of historians (and scholars more generally) confronts political and ideological division as a result of divergent attitudes towards the Russian reforms of the 1990s.

I suppose my ego-history reflects to some extent this dramatic process of change in Russian academic life over the last two decades.

I would like to start with a few words about my family history. My mother and father are from the city of Dnipropetrovsk – a big industrial centre in southern Ukraine. Before 1939 my

father was a worker at the huge metallurgical plant, and my mother was a medical student in that city's university. They became acquainted in 1937 and planned to marry in 1941, when mother would graduate from university. In 1939 my father was recruited to the Red Army. His tank regiment was located on the Soviet-Polish border. Mother graduated from university in June 1941. She left her city on 21 June by train, to be near her fiancé. The next night, the beginning of the war, German aircraft bombed the train she was on. Fortunately she survived and returned to the city. Very soon after, she became a military surgeon, serving at a military hospital on the front line. During all four years of the war, my father and mother were in search of each other, but never met. As they clarified after the war, twice they were very close, a couple of kilometres from each other, in neighbouring villages. Accidentally they met each other in Berlin, in May 1945. They returned to Russia and were married in Moscow in 1945. I was born the next year. As my mother used to tell me, I should have been born in 1942 – and should therefore be four years younger than I am.

After World War II, my father continued to serve as an officer in the Soviet army. We lived in the city of Pskov, one of the oldest Russian cities (the first mention of Pskov in the historical chronicle dates back to the year 903), located in the northwest of the country. This city's very present past was an impetus to my deep interest in history. Each day of my childhood, I could see archaeological excavations around the city. Sometimes they uncovered birch-bark letters written in the thirteenth or fourteenth centuries. As a secondary school pupil, I became interested in both the humanities and the sciences. I graduated from secondary school in 1965, with a gold medal. It was not easy for me to make the choice between humanities and science to enter university. I ended up choosing cybernetics. To explain that choice, one would have to recall that in the 1960s, the USSR had developed a highly impressive space program. *Sputnik* and *Gagarin* had become global words. Soviet movies and novels, reflecting the atmosphere of the times, depicted scientists as romantic heroes. So the image of scientists, including specialists in physics or computer science, was very attractive. They were appreciated publicly as symbols of future social progress. Images of modernity were closely associated with people in white overalls operating complicated equipment, huge computers, nuclear reactors and so on. Cybernetics was a part of that alluring world, providing at the same time a bridge between science and the humanities. To become a university student in such fields, one had to pass sophisticated exams and excel in high competition (among my competitors, only one in ten were accepted).

During my student life in Moscow I realised that my future professional life would be oriented to the social sciences and humanities, especially to history. Being students in the advanced department of cybernetics and information science, we were actively engaged in discussions of current political and social events in the Soviet Union and abroad, the nature of Stalinism, and the Russian revolution. I would say that politically and socially, we were more active than our students nowadays. The mid-1960s were still a time of some liberalisation in Soviet life

(generated by Khrushchev's "thaw.") The social atmosphere changed, however, after August 1968. We were disappointed deeply by the tragic events in Czechoslovakia. Several professors of my faculty who were highly respected by students signed a letter of protest and were dismissed. One of my friends, the best student of our group, was caught reading Solzhenitsyn's book (which was illegal of course) and was removed from the university. I was more lucky in this respect, reading the same kinds of books (more exactly, photocopies of books printed in the West and prohibited in the Soviet Union), but never being caught.

An important part of the social experience of student life was associated with summer break. Most Soviet students spent two or three months each year working as members of *artels*, student labour brigades, in the countryside. As a rule it was obligatory for first year students; however, most male students preferred to continue the activity each summer. I spent four summer vacations working as a builder in the central Russian countryside, as well as in Sakhalin (the far eastern area of the country), as a timber-floater in Siberia and a dockworker on the Kolyma river (in the Magadan region, the main Gulag area). It was not just the need to earn money, which was certainly important for any student. It was also the way to "relax" after intensive studies during the academic year, to understand oneself deeper in extreme circumstances, to discover the wilderness, and to realise what social life, human relations and values far from Moscow meant. It's difficult to overestimate the influence of that experience on my perception of Soviet social life and its historical roots.

My master's degree was defended in the field of social process modelling. Just after my graduation from university in 1971, I was invited to work at the Institute of Russian History, USSR Academy of Sciences. It was a time of strong belief in the power of scientific methods and mathematical models in studies of social phenomena, including historical processes. In 1971, the Laboratory for Application of Mathematical Methods and Computers in Historical Research was established at the institute. The staff of that laboratory included young historians interested in quantitative methods and computer scientists interested in history (twelve scholars in all). The founders of the laboratory searched for specialists mostly among graduate students in the departments of history, computer science and applied mathematics. That young and interdisciplinary team generated a creative atmosphere for developing new methods of historical research. Starting from the early 1970s, and until today, my main research interest has been widening the "toolbox" of the historian, mainly through use of information technology and quantitative approaches and models. I have not been restricted just to this sort of methodology, however. I believe that there are some fields of historical research and some types of historical sources where applications of approaches mentioned above are useful and efficient, but they are not a panacea in all research situations. In most cases, the historian will gain more by combining different research tools. I have to stress that it is impossible to verify new methods if you are not deeply involved in some research project(s) oriented to a concrete historical process or event. This is why year by year I became

more and more a historian. It is also why the topics of my research projects changed more often (I suppose) than in the case of a “normal” historian. However, in each case, changes were influenced by both general and individual causes.

Meanwhile the general atmosphere of Soviet academic life was not very inspiring in the 1970s. It was a period of stagnation not only in the political and social development of Soviet society but in the development of the humanities and social sciences as well. Just one example of that situation: In 1972 the Soviet historians who belonged to the so-called “New Direction” group (“*Novoe napravlenie*”) were heavily criticised (by the Department of Science of the CPSU Central Committee) after a conference devoted to working-class history. The historians represented mostly the Institute of Russian History of the USSR Academy of Sciences and shared the Marxist-Leninist platform of course. However, they were not orthodox. They considered the pre-revolutionary Russian economy as a mixture of advanced and backward forms of capitalism (“*mnogoukladnost*”), in opposition to the canonical point of view, which stressed the dominance of the advanced capitalist system. They also didn’t overestimate the role of Russian monopolies or the degree of “monolithic” revolutionism of the Russian proletariat at the beginning of the twentieth century. As a result of party pressure and censorship, the director of the institute, who was also a member of the USSR Academy of Sciences, was dismissed in 1973. During the next dozen years, he worked as an ordinary researcher at the Institute of Technology and Natural Science History. The academic careers of several historians stopped in 1973 as a result of that “ultimate discussion of Soviet historians,” as it was termed in a recently published review.¹

In that situation, we young research fellows preferred to develop new research techniques, including adopting quantitative methods to study non-political issues. So during the 1970s my research interests focused on computerised studies of medieval Russian manuscripts. Our research group, headed by Prof. L. Milov, examined, for instance, how to detect the authors of anonymous medieval texts on the basis of statistical parameters of writing style, and how to establish “genealogical” relations between copies of well-known Russian medieval texts and reconstruct histories of reproduction from authentic texts. We published a number of articles and a book (ten years later), using computerised methods of authorship attribution.²

However year by year my research interests shifted to the period around the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, one of the most interesting and decisive periods in Russian history, embracing industrialisation, social modernisation, social conflicts, and wars. To some extent that period is similar to what we have in Russia at the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first century. In 1979, I defended my Ph.D. dissertation and was invited to work at the faculty of history of Moscow Lomonosov State University, where I continue to work as a professor. The period of transition deep into the new area of research took about ten years, during which time I was mainly involved in projects headed by one of the leading Soviet historians, Prof. I. Kovalchenko. We created a regional typology of agrarian

development in order to establish the dominant type of agrarian development in Russian provinces at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – the manorial (the so-called “Prussian”) or farmers’ (the so-called “American”) type. I remember one conference in the early 1980s when we were strongly criticised at the closing session by hard-liners due to some differences in our results and Lenin’s writings. In that circumstance, it was necessary to write a letter of explanation to a “high level authority” arguing that the differences were not radical; and a prominent scholar, a member of the Academy, signed that letter together with me – a relatively young research fellow.

In the meantime, *Perestroika* arrived. The second half of the 1980s provided more opportunities for historians and other scholars. For instance the role of *Glavlit*, the censorship organisation, diminished, and then it finally disappeared altogether. By the way, to send a one-page abstract of a paper to organisers of any conference abroad, one had to officially go through the censorship procedure (independent of the paper topic) and receive an official stamp of approval. The procedure could take up to one month. It was one of the reasons why Soviet historians were not active in participation in international conferences. In all fairness, though, it should be noted that before the 1990s, all-Russian (or all-Union) conferences attracted many more historians than in post-Soviet times. The capacities of Soviet universities and research institutes to support their staff members were better then than now.

However the process of widening academic freedom was not so fast, as can be seen even from my own experience. My first book was published at the end of 1986. It developed a quantitative approach to studies of Russian economic history of the late nineteenth-early twentieth centuries.³ The publishing editor (who was not a person just to correct your literary style) noted that the first page of the introduction to my book didn’t contain references to works by Marxist-Leninist classicists. “At least two of them” – I was told. My arguments about the nature of the book had no effect. The editor’s work on my book had been stopped. Finally I found two references to Lenin. They were inserted on the first page of my book. The first citation claims the necessity of transition “from description of social phenomena to their scientific analysis”; the second one noted the limitation of scholars who do not have “solid theory on a method in social sciences.” The editor was more or less satisfied.

Anyway, *Perestroika* opened the floodgates for revisions of unwavering (ideological) precepts of official historical science. During that first stage, journalists and other non-academic writers were more active; they published a lot of critical material showing the “blank spots” in Russian/Soviet history. However, year by year, academic historians became more involved in the process, giving new interpretations of the main events of Russian history based on archival documents which were previously unavailable. It was a complicated and contradictory process. A substantial number of historians didn’t accept the new revisions and indicated the danger of the “loss of historical memory” for the structure of mass consciousness, and of an “unbalanced” (i.e. over-critical) version of Soviet history. Russian historians were never so

divided in recent history as they were during the late *Perestroika* years and just after. Even today this division is a significant component of social life in the professional community. It has affected my relations with some colleagues, who no longer communicate with me. They don't accept many of the changes as a result of *Perestroika* and its aftermath. Even the word *Perestroika* has a negative sense for them (they usually write: "In the period of so-called '*Perestroika*'...").

In the years of *Perestroika*, my research interests widened. During the past fifteen years I have concentrated mostly on labour history as well as a number of methodological and theoretical issues. Why methodology and theory of historical research? During the *Perestroika* period and especially in post-Soviet Russia, historians and writers very actively discussed the principal events and processes in Russia in the twentieth century. The most exciting thing for me about these discussions was the issue of *alternatives* in history. It was stimulated by that time – a time of making historical choices, searching for alternatives of Russian social development. Did alternatives exist in the past? If yes, how could we study them? These questions may sound naive, however they were not discussed in Soviet historiography before the 1980s. The deterministic approach was ideologically dominant.

One of the most discussed periods of Soviet history was the transition period of the New Economic Policy (NEP, 1921-1929), which was an attempt to combine mostly state industry and private agriculture in some kind of regulated "market" economy. The last year of NEP was the year of the so-called "Great Break" – a transition to collectivisation and socialist industrialisation. One of the most important arguments of the political leadership to move towards that "Great Break" was based on the expectation of "social war" in the countryside – the supposedly deepening differentiation and polarisation of the peasantry (as it was claimed at party congresses and conferences in the latter half of the 1920s). However, nobody investigated the validity of that argument. So we built a computerised model based on parameters estimated from real data on the social mobility of Soviet peasantry in 1920s and projected these social movements through the next decade in order to verify the argument of incipient polarisation. The results of our simulation demonstrated something different: the middle strata in the countryside widened year by year into the 1930s, and the poorest sector of peasants diminished in size. Our publication provoked criticism and active discussion. Conservative historians were strongly against "*if-history*," as they called this type of counterfactual modelling.

However, unexpectedly, academician Ivan Kovalchenko, who was possibly the leading Russian historian at the end of 1980s, asked me to assist him in studies on Stolypin's agrarian reform (which started in 1906). The research question was: what would be the social structure of the Russian peasantry after 1906 under the hypothesis of the absence of the agrarian reform? The simulation gave an opportunity to compare the efficiencies of the two alternative variants. Nowadays the issue of historical alternatives is one of the most popular discussions among

Russian historians.⁴ For instance, the last issue of the respectable Russian annual *Odysseus. Man in History* has the following subtitle: "The Subjunctive Mood in History?"⁵ The central material of this issue is a roundtable discussion of the problems of historical alternatives and methodology of their investigation. Ten years ago such a topic hardly could have arisen due to the predominance of a determinist perception of historical alternatives; in contrast, today all fifteen discussants of that roundtable were more or less positive in respect to the issue.⁶ The epistemological and political context of discussions of historical alternatives in Russia is traditionally associated with historical materialist "regularities of historical process." Advocates of the idea of inevitability of the October Revolution, collectivisation, socialist industrialisation, repression, and coercion suddenly found themselves among people who denied the inevitability of *Perestroika*, disintegration of the Soviet Union, and transition to the market system. Paradoxically, the same advocates talked about alternatives of the historical process in Russia in the 1980s-1990s, mentioning "mistakes" made by Gorbachev, Yeltsin, et al.; at the same time, they perceive few, if any, alternatives in the Soviet period. I had a lot of such (as a rule, private) discussions after 1985.

Methodological approaches in studies of historical alternatives seem to be closely connected to some of the principles of *chaos theory*. The last fifteen years of instability and (inconsistent and contradictory) permanent reforms in Russia stimulated my research interest in unstable and, in some sense, chaotic historical processes and situations. I believe the accumulation of social and economic problems generates instability, which leads to the emergence of "turning points" or bifurcations (to use the terminology of chaos theory and synergetics).⁷ This is why in the mid-1990s I started to develop applications of synergetic concepts and methods to our studies of historical process alternatives. The main idea is that the dominating metaphor "large-large" (large consequences normally are caused by large influences) is incorrect in unstable situations where small (or accidental) impulses can generate large results; it means that alternatives can emerge at such a bifurcation point. "Chaos," which appears under these conditions, means that evolution of the process becomes *internally* unpredictable, but not as a result of external factors.

In this approach's framework, understanding the role of personality in historical process seems to be much more complicated than we learned from historical materialism (an obligatory discipline for all Soviet students), which stated that a historical person can modify only slightly any facet of historical phenomenon. Now we understand that the question is not whether this is a correct statement or not; actually we need to detect bifurcation points where small inputs, occasional fluctuations and even personal features of the political actor can seriously influence development of the process under consideration. In this framework it becomes clear that "inevitability" has nothing to do with reality under conditions of chaotic process.

We used that approach in our studies of the evolution of social and economic life in Russia at the end of nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. It was a period when intensive

industrial development was accompanied by social conflicts, strikes and revolutions. Social conflicts often contain unpredictable peaks of activities and relatively long periods of unstable behaviour. How could we explain such non-linear, chaotic behaviour? Which are more significant – internal factors of these effects or external causes? Sometimes historians take into account only external factors as the main causes of given historical phenomena, though those factors possibly play the “trigger” role in the processes of “social explosions.” Such questions can be asked in the studies of the strike movement in pre-revolutionary Russia and of the “financial explosions” of the St. Petersburg stock market in the same period. Our studies detected chaotic behaviour in both dynamic processes; we revealed the great role of the mechanism of information transfer and the significance of internal factors in both cases. This year we will publish our book *Chaos and History. Applications of Synergetic Concepts* (in Russian).⁸ This book can be considered a step forward after the discussion of the applicability of chaos theory concepts to historical research held in the journal *History and Theory* in the first half of the 1990s. The discussants then touched on mainly theoretical-methodological questions, leaving in the shadows the practical aspects of detecting chaos in serial historical time.

The second area of my current professional interest is labour history, as mentioned above. Why labour history?

In the course of *Perestroika*, it became clear to me and my colleagues that it was possible to begin studies of a “non-canonical” history of Russian and Soviet workers. It should be noted that two fields of historical research in the Soviet Union had been specifically controlled by the Communist Party: the history of the Party itself, and the history of the working class.

The basic precepts of official working-class, pre-revolutionary history were the following: the workers’ movement was almost entirely led by Bolsheviks; workers’ living standards and material conditions were very bad and worsened year by year; the working class was more or less homogeneous, etc. For several decades, Soviet historians developed more or less the same approaches: of the pre-revolutionary proletariat it was obligatory to demonstrate its movement towards socialist revolution; of the Soviet working class – its active participation in the socialist and communist “alignment.” The bibliography of such publications by Soviet historians in this field filled more than one large volume. However in the 1980s some new tendencies emerged, including studies on working-class social dynamics, social structure and differentiation. Applying quantitative methods and database technology, a number of Soviet historians (Prof. Andrey Sokolov first among them) introduced a mass of primary source material and statistical data to studies of working-class history at both micro- and macro-levels. However, these tendencies were not dominant, and by the mid-1980s official Soviet labour history drove this field of historical research to an impasse. As Sokolov concluded, working-class history had developed in the framework of an étatist-institutional approach and not as a part of social history.

While Western discussions on “the end of working class-history” were based on a rethinking of methodological and theoretical approaches, in the current Russian situation this problem is much more dramatic. Removal of Marxist-Leninist ideology and party dictate resulted in a real crisis of working-class history; simultaneously, its dogmatic Soviet version became anachronistic. Today, nobody is interested in its development. Many former party ideologists switched radically and adopted a theory of totalitarianism to study the history of power in the USSR and to expose its crimes. Most historians of the working class left this field and shifted to other research areas which seemed to be more promising (such as history of pre-revolutionary political parties, history of repression in the USSR, social history of the Party, gender history, etc.).

To overcome the crisis we intensified international contacts in the field of labour history, introducing Russian historians to the experience of Western labour history, which was not associated with such dramatic collisions. On the basis of Russian-Dutch cooperation in the field of social history five years before, we started the publication of the annual *Social History*,⁹ which has been accepted by Russian historians as an inspiring initiative. The papers published in the issues of this annual use different approaches: micro-history, quantification, history “from below” and history “from above,” everyday-life history, gender history, and studies of discursive practices. Labour history is one of the main sections of the annual.

Reflecting on the difficulties of the current reforms in Russia, we concluded that one of the main causes is a lack of appropriate work incentives. The system of state patronage created special work incentives. The transition from state-centred economy to market economy made it evident that the work incentives typical for a worker of a socialist enterprise are not the same as a market system demands.

This is why three years ago we started a research project oriented to the evolution of work incentives in Russia in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Russia is a country where maybe more than anywhere else, experiments with different systems of incentives have taken place, in particular after the revolution.

What were the actual stimuli of productive work in Russian industry before and after the revolution? How could we use historical experience in this respect? Most of all I was interested in studies of changes in work incentives generated by revolution. For instance among Russian historians there is no single opinion on the trends and results of state regulation of industrial labour mobility during the period of New Economic Policy (1920s), in particular the wages of workers occupied in the state industrial sector. The role of material incentives in labour productivity increases is demonstrated by the fact that among all strikes in Soviet Russian industry in the 1920s, the highest percentage was based on the demand for higher wages. So what was the evolution of labour payment principles in the NEP years? How were those material incentives realised in practice? Did they manage to avoid the (high enough) wage differentials of workers set by Russian industry before the revolution? What were the roles of coercion and commitment in the early Soviet system of labour mobility? How can we combine

micro-data revealed from archives with statistical data related to the main branches of Soviet industry? These very questions are the focus of the research framework of our joint Russian-Dutch project.

The last part of my paper concerns the role of international cooperation in developing new approaches to Russian historical research. It is difficult to overestimate this role in terms of my ego-history, as well as that of many others. My own experience stems from the areas of my professional interests (currently I head the Laboratory for Historical Computing and the Centre for Economic History in the Faculty of History at Moscow Lomonosov State University).

Let me look very briefly at the Soviet past in this context. It was a real problem for Soviet scholars to participate in conferences abroad. One had to go through the Party commission responsible for giving permission as well as get financial support from the Ministry of Higher Education (and they were “selective” in their decision-making). By the end of the 1980s I had only once participated in a conference abroad (1982 in Budapest). I was thirty-six at the time, and most of my colleagues in the same age group never had such an opportunity. Of course some high-positioned scholars had more and better chances, but basically we were in a situation of isolation. Most Soviet historians had no contacts with their Western colleagues. Their knowledge of foreign languages was very poor. They were out of the international mainstream of historical thought. Access to Western historical literature was very limited (in contrast to the pre-revolutionary situation in Russia). I can give one typical example. It concerns one of my university colleagues. His American colleague sent him his book on strikes in Russia before the revolution. Three months later the Russian professor received an official letter informing him that he would be allowed to read the book at the special (secret) department of the State Library.

The situation changed at the end of the 1980s. My first trip to Western Europe to participate in an international conference was in 1989, when I was 43. At that conference I gained more professional knowledge than I did during the previous year. I took part in discussions of papers given by outstanding economic historians, including future Nobel Prize winners. Since 1989, I have participated in more than thirty international conferences, workshops and meetings in Western Europe, Australia, and North and South America. This happened for a number of my colleagues as well. This international experience has been a great impetus to our centre’s research agenda and teaching activities.

I belong to the Russian academic community that initiated, from the beginning of the 1990s, close and fruitful contacts with our colleagues from the West. I mean the International Association for History and Computing (AHC), first of all. It is not a secret that the last decade was a difficult period for Russian universities and research institutes. Instead of an “iron curtain” we encountered a “golden curtain.” State support of the Russian higher education system and research institutes was reduced extensively. In the first half of the 1990s, it was very difficult for us to purchase PCs, to publish new textbooks or collections of papers.¹⁰ The joint projects

initiated by AHC, however, gave us those opportunities. In 1992 we established the Russian Association for History and Computing (AIK) which attracted about 200 historians from different states of the former Soviet Union.¹¹ AIK organised very efficient partnerships with the AHC and its national branches, especially the Dutch and British branches. I remember summer 1993 when British universities organised unprecedented events and activities in support of historical departments in Russian universities. Dr. Mary Morris from Manchester Metropolitan University was co-ordinator of one of those actions; she and her students loaded a van with forty PCs and drove (themselves and the van) through Sweden and Finland to St. Petersburg and further on to Moscow. I met them at the Russian-Finnish border; it was an unforgettable meeting. We distributed the computers among several Russian universities (including in Siberia – can you imagine computers used at Oxford University and installed at the Faculty of History at Altai State University?). The next year we received a lot of computer equipment from Germany – due to the initiative of Dr. Manfred Thaller and Dr. Wolfgang Levermann. Again it was distributed among universities of the former Soviet Union. So hundreds of our students-historians learned historical computing on these computers.

In 1994-1995 our German colleagues from the Max-Planck-Institut für Geschichte (Göttingen) initiated a project to publish a series: “Ten New Russian Textbooks in Historical Disciplines.” 30,000 copies of “new generation” textbooks were published under the aegis of AIK in a period of insufficient state support of that important educational activity. Another side of our collaboration concerned the “autumn school” in “New Methods of Historical Research,” which was supported in 1992-1996 by the Volkswagen Foundation and took place in the History Faculty of Moscow State University. Together with Dr. Manfred Thaller (president of the AHC at that time), over five years we managed the two-week intensive educational programs (eight Western teachers and about 100 students and young scholars from different states of the former Soviet Union). For almost all of us, both students and scholars, it was the first acquaintance with advanced Western European methodologies of historical research. By the way, the “autumn school” gave me a new experience of teaching – more feedback from students, more discussions, more tasks and tests than we usually had. That initiative was one of the best examples of altruistic cooperation in the field of teaching new approaches in historical research methodology. The most exciting autumn school was in October 1993, which took place in the troubled days of a curfew regulation in Moscow. None of the eight teachers from Western European universities accepted my proposal to cancel their visit to Moscow, taking into account the dangerous situation in Moscow. Every day in the morning before teaching at Moscow State University, they discussed the previous evening’s document checks as well as gunfire, which they could see from their hotel rooms.

We had very fruitful cooperation with our Dutch colleagues both in the field of historical computing (especially with Dr. Peter Doorn from Leiden University who led two joint projects) and labour history (especially with Dr. Jan Lucassen from the International Institute for Social

History, Amsterdam). We started this collaborative project supported by NWO (the Dutch State Foundation) in 1999.¹² During the last couple of years we organised three workshops in Russia and published a number of articles as part of this project. Four groups of Russian scholars from Moscow (representing the Russian Academy of Sciences and Moscow Lomonosov State University), Yaroslavl and Tver State Universities are involved in archival work, building databases, publishing sources, and analysing data on industrial work incentives. As Jan Lucassen noted, “much of what seems to be totally different between Russia and the West may be more alike than we have thought so far. Just to give some examples from the forgoing: non-material incentives (“commitment”) are certainly not absent in the West, nor are piece rates in Russia under communism, and absenteeism was a problem on both sides of the Iron Curtain.” We believe that this Russian-Dutch collaborative project (as well as other international activities of Russian social historians) will contribute greatly to the real renaissance of the social history of labour in Russia.¹³

It should be noted that the theoretical background of my research on the evolution of work incentives in Russian industries was influenced to a great extent by the papers of our Dutch colleagues. More generally, my participation in international cooperation with other historians has extended the theoretical and methodological basis of my research, especially in the field of the economic and social history of Russia. For instance my work on material incentives and wage differentiation of Russian workers is operating in the mainstream of cliometrics (by the way, I am a member of the Cliometric Society); my research on non-material work incentives (“commitment”) can be attributed as well to various methodologies of social science history. My most recent research, on the relations between workers and managers/entrepreneurs of a big textile manufacture located near (early twentieth century) Moscow, is based on a micro-history approach. Combining a traditional Russian methodology of historical research – a particularly comprehensive critique of sources – with advanced Western research approaches, we hope to develop a new model of research in some fields of Russian economic and social history.

To conclude my ego-history, I would like to emphasise how it is correlated with dramatic changes in Soviet/Russian academic community life and – more generally – with the character of a long Russian transition. My professional life became more exciting, more intensive, more interesting and – more difficult, more complicated as well. My research interests and questions and issues of scholarly work were influenced mostly by changes in the social and political atmosphere of Soviet/Russian society, by the course of current reforms and recent historical developments. Through research of the past, we try to find alternative models of development for the present. During the last decades we realised that the role of *path dependence* is very high in the transition period.

We are also now more integrated in the international community of historians. We are in the same “intellectual professional field,” so my scholarly work is now to a certain degree influenced by this international factor.

I believe that interdisciplinary approaches in historical research will become a part of ego-history for a growing number of historians, as has happened with me. I believe that such approaches will provide a basis for historians (using terms introduced by one of the founders of the new interdisciplinary paradigm at the end of the twentieth century, Ilya Prigogine) to *explore complexity*¹⁴ of and in the past, as well as to study historical processes *from being to becoming*¹⁵ and *from chaos to order*,¹⁶ under conditions of *the end of certainty*.¹⁷

¹ *Sovetskaia Istoriografiia*. Ed. by Yurii N. Afanasiev. Moscow: Russian State University for the Humanities, 1996, pp. 349-400.

² In that book we summarise the results of our studies of more than 100 texts including letters of Ivan the Terrible, for example.

³ Leonid Borodkin, *Mnogomernyi statisticheskii analiz v istoricheskikh issledovaniakh*. Moskva: Izdatel'stvo Moskovskogo Universiteta, 1986.

⁴ The first serious works in the field of counterfactual modeling of the past were published in the 1960s - 70s by Robert Fogel, an American economic historian who analysed the processes of developing railroads in the USA as well as the abolition of slavery (in co-authorship with Stanley Engerman). These books generated hundreds of reviews (mostly negative), however Fogel was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1993, due largely to the efficiency of the counterfactual models which he implemented in his works. Now counterfactual modeling is one of the important elements for the methodology of cliometrics ("new economic history").

⁵ *Odysseus. Chelovek v istorii. Istoria v soslagatel'nom naklonenii?* Moscow: Nauka, 2000.

⁶ Being one of the discussants, I expected to be in the minority of participants who supported the existence of "the subjunctive mood in history."

⁷ The term *synergetics* was introduced by German scientist Hermann Haken, the founder of the interdisciplinary Stuttgart school of nonlinear dynamic systems research, stressing the effects of self-organisation. This field of research is associated also with the name of Nobel Prize winner Ilya Prigogine.

⁸ Andrey Andreyev, Leonid Borodkin, Mikhail Levandovskii, *Istoria i Khaos. Kontseptsii synergetiki*. Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2001.

⁹ See, for instance the last issue: *Sotsialnaia Istoriia. Ezhegodnik-2000*. Ed. by Leonid Borodkin, Andrey Sokolov. Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2000.

¹⁰ Now the situation changed in a positive way, however the living standards of most of university teachers and scholars from Academy are still lower than in the Soviet times.

¹¹ I was the first president of AIK (in the period 1992-2000).

¹² The coordinators of the joint project from the Russian side are Leonid Borodkin and Andrey Sokolov.

¹³ It should be noted that not all of our historian colleagues appreciate our activities in developing joint

research projects and other forms of international co-operation. Recently one respectable historian accused me publicly of “attracting Western money.” This is just one episode of the current academic “cold war.”

¹⁴ Ilya Prigogine, Grégoire Nicolis, *Exploring Complexity. An Introduction*. New York: W. H. Freeman, 1989.

¹⁵ Ilya Prigogine, *From Being to Becoming. Time and Complexity in the Physical Sciences*. New York: W. H. Freeman, 1980.

¹⁶ Ilya Prigogine, Isabella Stengers, *Order Out of Chaos. Man's New Dialogue with Nature*. New York: Bantam Books, 1984.

¹⁷ Ilya Prigogine, *The End of Certainty. Time, Chaos and the New Laws of Nature*. New York: The Free Press, 1997.