

Anna Brzezińska

ARON Y. GURIEVICH'S *ISTORIA ISTORIKA* —  
AN AUTOHISTORY OR AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY?

In 1999, when he was already on the sidetrack of university life, Aron Gurievich, generally acknowledged as a classic and co-creator of historical anthropology<sup>1</sup>, decided to work out his notes from the times of the Soviet Union. *Istoria Istorika (A Historian's History)* was published by Rosspien in Moscow five years later, in the series "Ziarno Viechnosti" (Grain of Eternity). It is based on the diary the author kept in the 1970s; he shelved it, however, for the political conditions made it impossible to publish the book. At the beginning of the 1990s Gurievich and his wife, Esfir, checked and edited the diary in order to have it published. The book consists therefore of two layers: the text of the diary and the author's comments written more than twenty years later.

*Istoria istorika* does not deal only with Gurievich's fate. The Russian medievalist also paints in it a suggestive portrait of humanists from the Mikhail Lomonosov Moscow University during nearly half a century. The author dedicated his story to contemporary and future generations, especially historians, in memory of Soviet science's experiences under communism. He does not regard these experiences as a past, closed chapter. Taking advantage of the privileges of a man who was nearing the end of his life (he died in 2006), he turned concrete persons into the heroes of his *Istoria*. Since each name is a colourful psychological portrait, the reader is shown a wide range of attitudes to-

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, W. Wrzosek, *Historia. Kultura. Metafora. Powstanie nieklasycznej historiografii (History. Culture. Metaphor. The Emergence of Non-Classical Historiography)*, Wrocław 1995, p. 127; M. Klebs, *Idea dialogu z przeszłością w antropologii historycznej (The Idea of a Dialogue with the Past in Historical Anthropology)*, "Przegląd Bydgoski. Humanistyczne czasopismo naukowe", vol. 15, 2004, p. 17.

wards totalitarianism As befits a scholar of his class, Gurievich does not avoid exposing opportunism, envy and cowardice. The fluent story is often interrupted by bitter memories of the past. For historians of historiography— or perhaps for fans of historical anthropology — this personal tone is of great value for it allows readers to perceive the sphere of mentality and emotion, so important if we want to understand “the Other”.

Gurievich thought that the number of publications which could be regarded as testimonies to the period of totalitarianism was highly insufficient in the new Russia. In his view, the older generation’s disinclination to speak about the past might lead to shallow, superficial notions about everyday life in the Soviet empire: *everybody has his own ideas, his own evaluation of what happened, and this is why a compilation of reminiscences of various persons about the same matter is not without advantage*<sup>2</sup>. It is worth mentioning the few publications which have been brought out.

As far as Russian, or to be more precise post-Soviet humanists are concerned, the following writers can be included in the group that shared the experiences of Gurievich’s generation: Yevgeniya Gutnova<sup>3</sup>, Vladimir A. Uspienskiy<sup>4</sup>, Rebeka Frumkina<sup>5</sup> and Igor D. Kovalchenko<sup>6</sup>. Since Gurievich emphasised that a diversity of accounts was needed to get as full a picture of the past reality as possible, a comparison of Gurievich’s work with Gutnova’s reminiscences will be of interest to future researchers into the history of science in the Soviet Union.

What assumptions are at the root of the memoirs written by the generation of *shestidiesiatnikov*<sup>7</sup>. The genre most prob-

<sup>2</sup> A. Gurievich, *Istoria istorika*, Moskva 2004, p. 10.

<sup>3</sup> In the periodical “Sredniye veka”, № 63, Moskva 2002, Gurievich criticised Gutnova’s reminiscences (*Perezhitoye*, Moskva 2001), saying that it was tendentious.

<sup>4</sup> V. A. Uspienskiy, *Sierebrianiy vek strukturnoy, prikladnoy i matematicheskoy lingvistiki v SSSR. Kak eto nachinalos (zametki ochevidsa)*, in: V. A. Uspienskiy, *Trudy po niematematikie*, vol. 2, Moskva 2002.

<sup>5</sup> R. Frumkina, *O nas — naiskosok*, Moskva 1997.

<sup>6</sup> I. D. Kovalchenko, *Nauchniye trudy, pisma, vaspominaniya (iz lichnogo arkhiva akademika)*, Moskva 2004.

<sup>7</sup> The *shestidiesiatniki* generation — a term referring to academic workers who began to study during Stalinism and started an independent scientific work at the end of the 1950s or the beginning of the 1960s. See Denis Khol-

ably developed thanks to the evolution of the theory of historical knowledge which, owing to the *nouvelle histoire* circle or post-modernist philosophy, has expanded its perspectives by the category of memory. On the other hand, one can hardly eliminate the historical conditions in which memoirism arose. The collapse of the Soviet Union led to the disintegration of the entire paradigm of Soviet historiography. Researchers who belonged to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union or submitted to its programmatic outlines had no difficulty in getting access to new world scientific literature, even to the literature defined as "bourgeois" or "imperialist". The point is that they adopted it in a specific context: *In our country historical science is experiencing a profound, long-lasting crisis ...The monopoly of Marxism, conceived narrowly and dogmatically in the simplified Leninist-Stalinist version, has left an indelible imprint on historical thought ...Authentic knowledge has been replaced by myths ... Without knowing the past it is impossible to understand the present correctly or to plan the future*<sup>8</sup>. Memoirs, in addition to being a valuable source for future generations, give their authors the possibility of expressing their opinions, explaining their choices and finding a fuller truth about themselves.

Like every attempt to describe one's own fate, *Istoria istorika* is a subjective narration. But its author, being also an expert in the methodology of history, wanted his work to be "a testimony for future generations". One cannot therefore help asking what instruments he uses to make his story credible so that it might be regarded as an historical source in the future. The reason why we want to know whether we are dealing with an autohistory or an autobiography is that it is necessary to define to what extent *Istoria istorika* is a professional source publication. Why this terminology? Autobiography is an obvious category. Defined briefly as *a description of one's own life; a literary work (a diary, a memoir, an autobiographical novel) testifying to the author's experiences, his attitude and opinions*<sup>9</sup>, it presupposes a presenta-

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vorstin's blog *Zapiski lingvista* (<http://www.khvorostin.ruserv.com/frumkina.html>. 10.06.2007)

<sup>8</sup> A. Y. Gurievich, *Poslesloviye* in: J. Le Goff, *Tsivilizatsiya srednieviekovo Zapada*, Moskva 1992, pp. 352–353.

<sup>9</sup> This is a standard definition quoted after *Encyklopedia Gazety Wyborczej*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Kraków 2004.

tion of the author's own experiences, frequently in an emotional way. It gives the author the possibility of creating a picture of himself in the eyes of other people, it allows him to "express himself" before the world.

The expression "autohistory", used as a working term here<sup>10</sup>, while emphasising that the events are presented by the author, refers to history as a science which uses a definite method of describing the phenomena within its competence. In the light of the post-modernist discussion it is now difficult to cling to the assertion, which was obvious to researchers at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, that objectivity is the main feature of the historical method. Such a thing as "one history" does not exist. Nevertheless, being a science, history strives to formulate theories which are as universal as possible, given the contemporary state of knowledge. Auto-history is therefore, on the one hand, an account by a subject participating in a given historical time and, on the other, an account by a subject who, being aware of the insufficiency of his own cognitive possibilities, employs the methods of scientific research. I am not using the notion *ego-histoire* here, this term has a tradition in the "Annales" school<sup>11</sup>. First, because in the opinion of its main champion, Pierre Nora, it still seems to be an exclusive term<sup>12</sup> and secondly, because Gurievich who had learned the term before editing *Istoria* criticised its deficiencies, a matter I will discuss later.

Let us go back to the interpretative principles of *Istoria istorika*. Because both forms are narrations, it is worth drawing attention to the source of their expression. The superior element in an autobiography is a subjective experience of the world, broadened by the author's auto-reflection. An autohistory is also a subjective presentation but its subjective character is not

<sup>10</sup> To put the term "autohistory" into context let us recall the term *ego-histoire, un genre nouveau, pour un nouvel age de la conscience historique*, proposed in the 1980s by representatives of the third generation of the Annales school: J. Le Goff, G. Duby, E. Le Roy Ladurie and P. Nora. See: *Essais d'Ego-histoire*, ed. P. Nora, Paris 1987.

<sup>11</sup> It was above all Pierre Nora who was active in propagating the idea of *ego-histoire* as an independent current in historiography. See *Ego-histoires. Ecrire l'histoire en Suisse romande*, Neuchâtel 2003., P. Nora, *L'ego histoire est-elle possible?* "Historien", vol. 3, 2001, pp. 19–26.

<sup>12</sup> P. Nora, *L'ego-histoire*, pp. 19–20.

superior to other narrations. The subject's opinion is presented alongside the opinions of other participants in an event; it does not determine the reader's perception of the event.

The author's attitude to the character of *Istoria* does not seem to be explicit. In the preface he defines the book as an "autobiography"<sup>13</sup> but the stages of his work described below seem to indicate that he had higher aspirations. Gurievich decided to prepare the text for his seminar: *...in the winter of 1999 I presented orally ...my reminiscences which reflected the experience of a historian who had worked for over half a century*<sup>14</sup>. For the author, this was a kind of experiment; he was interested in his students' reaction to the spontaneous form of the presentation. This had an impact on the final shape of the publication: *... I submitted my story to a specific censorship. ... In some cases the cuts were made because I did not want to offend the persons mentioned in the story, in others, because I did not want "to pull skeletons out of the cupboard"*<sup>15</sup>.

The editing was entrusted to professional persons: a student of history, the author's daughter — a doctor of Scandinavian philology, and the author's wife — a historian. Gurievich describes the birth of the work in words which contrast with those used in the preface: *my wife ...always insisted that memory of the vicissitudes of my life as a historian should be preserved for future generations*<sup>16</sup>. The Russian medievalist was aware of this aim. He presented the initial version of his work to students of the humanities because he realized that the younger generation knew very little about those events: *I will venture to say that the youth: students, post-graduate students and other young scientific workers ...in most cases either do not know the latest history of native and world science or know it very poorly*<sup>17</sup>. In view of the author's opinion it is not surprising that the story about his scientific inspirations, supplemented from time to time by a characterisation of important currents in historiography from the 19<sup>th</sup> century up to contemporary times, became one of the

<sup>13</sup> A. Y. Gurievich, *Istoria*, p. 7.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 280.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 8.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 10.

essential themes of his reminiscences. *Istoria* is also a specific exposition of his professional ethics. In this respect he was inspired by Marc Bloch whose *Apologie pour l'Histoire* was, in his view, one of the most significant works in historiography.

The next problem perceived by Gurievich was the shaping of historical memory: *young people not only do not know the recent past but have a negative attitude to it "let the dead bury their dead"*<sup>18</sup>. This is why he wanted *Istoria istorika* to be also a testimony to people's attitudes to totalitarianism. He gives grounds for his moral right to include statements of this kind: *By the verdict of fate and not without my will I found myself in the thick of events, some pressure affected me, and that is why I can present a first-hand testimony, naturally with all those restrictions and corrections without which a diarist cannot do*<sup>19</sup>. Gurievich's feeling that he must give testimony to the past is by no means surprising for *he belonged to that exceptional generation which was fated to experience Stalinist repression, the bloodiest war in the history of humanity, the appearance of the most destructive weapons human beings had ever had at their disposal, the first space flights, the rises and falls of several dictators, the birth and collapse of at least one empire*<sup>20</sup>. Moreover, he always felt responsible for his scholarly honesty. *Is it of no importance to us how our intellectual honesty and scientific perspicacity will be evaluated? A historian's work is always a valuable source for evaluating the history which produced him ...When reading it future historians will pronounce their verdict on our ability to grasp the past and will say what they think about our spiritual, intellectual and moral equipment ...I panic when I think about it. Historians who are in good health now have given ample evidence of their guilt for future generations to sue them*<sup>21</sup>, he wrote in 1987.

Gurievich leaves it to the reader to evaluate the type of narration used in his reminiscences but declares at the very begin-

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>20</sup> A. Yefimov, *Istoria i sudba, ili Saga Arona Gurievicha. Umier odin iz samykh avtoritetnykh rossiyskikh uchiennykh-gumanitariyev* (www.lenta.ru/articles/2006/08/05/gurevich/, 10.06.2007).

<sup>21</sup> A. Gurievich, *Historia i antropologia historyczna (History and Historical Anthropology)*, transl. by B. Żyłko, "Polska Sztuka Ludowa. Konteksty", No. 1-2, 1997, p. 16.

ning that they will be subjective: *my stories about what happened cannot but be subjective and full ...I stress the significance of some event, another does not seem essential to me ....these reminiscences bear the imprint of the person before you and of the time when he recollects them*<sup>22</sup>.

To end our reflections on the principles on which Gurievich based his work, let us add that his "scholarly dossier" was also inspired by the texts he had used in his works on medieval mentality and culture. It is especially Peter Abelard's *Historia Calamitatum* and St. Augustine's *Confessions* that made a deep imprint on his mind for he found in them the same experiences he had gone through. They strengthened his conviction, a purely anthropological conviction, that the emotions contained in a narration enhance the value of a text as a source. Through an analysis of the author's feelings or his way of thinking, the reader can grasp the context of a situation, to see it as it was seen by the author. Sometimes, especially when a distance of many centuries separates the researcher from the author he examines, it is the evidence of the examined author's mentality that is of decisive importance for a correct understanding of the source. During the years when he tried to grasp the mental capacity of medieval societies, Gurievich was frequently forced to confine his research conclusions to cautious hypotheses because the feelings of individuals were marginalised during that epoch. St. Augustine and Peter Abelard, inflexible, uncommon personages, were the exceptions that broke that rule.

It is difficult to state explicitly whether, and to what extent, the construction of the medieval world reminded the Russian historian of the realities in the Soviet Union. Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie hinted at this possibility after reading *The Categories of Medieval Culture*, but he may have been influenced by the conclusions drawn from Mikhail Bakhtin's works which in France are regarded as an allegory of the totalitarian system<sup>23</sup>. Gurievich had never openly expressed his opinion on this

<sup>22</sup> *Ide m, Istoria*, p. 10.

<sup>23</sup> This is how Bakhtin was interpreted. M. Bakhtin, *Twórczość Franciszka Rabelais a kultura ludowa średniowiecza i renesansu* translated by A. and A. Goren, Kraków 1975; see: Bakhtin, *Stalin and Modern Russian Fiction. Carnival, Dialogism and History*, ed. M. Keith Booker, D. Juraga, Westport, Connecticut, London 1995; M. Yaguello, preface to M. Bakhtin, *Le marxisme*

subject, but the following words give food for thought: *in a system completely incomparable (to the Middle Ages) the author of 'Istoria istorika' (experienced) a breakdown of his scientific convictions. One of ... the results was a conflict with official ideology and the principles dictated by it ... Were not the attacks of my colleagues and 'party bodies' urging me to give up ... my new methods ... a kind of metaphor of 'scientific castration'?*<sup>24</sup> Aware of these similarities, he imparts a medieval-like character to his story. In the view of the Russian historian a presentation of his personal experience of Soviet totalitarianism was the main chance to enhance interest in the complexity of the past and make people see its present results. He explains: *by examining the fate of people in the past we inevitably compare it with our own fate in order to find ... similarities and to get a better idea of the Other, because acquaintance within the Other helps us to understand ourselves*<sup>25</sup>.

The idea of a "historian's reminiscences" was not an idea conceived by the Russian historical anthropologist. *Essais d'Ego-histoire*, a collection of autobiographical essays by third-generation researchers of the "Annales" school, published in Paris by Gallimard in 1989, was a similar venture<sup>26</sup>. Gurievich was disappointed by these essays: *what drew my attention was that these historians, if one can believe what they say, did not experience any special difficulties in their lives*. Their careful style, their stories, which in fact were confined to the successive stages in their scientific careers — no mention was made of the intellectual ferment at the end of the 1960s, which produced the third generation of the "Annales" school historians — all this made this kind of *ego-histoire* unreliable in Gurievich's eyes. Gurievich regarded Marc Bloch as the contemporary master of this current, despite the fact that Bloch's *Eulogy of History* did not pretend to be an *ego-histoire* when it was published. This is how the Russian researcher explained the style of *Essais d'Ego-histoire*: *between us, the people of Russia, and the people of the*

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*et la philosophie du langage. Essai d'application de la methode sociologique en linguistique*, Paris 1997.

<sup>24</sup> A. Gurievich, *Istoria*, p. 278.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>26</sup> *Essais d'Ego-histoire*, ed. P. Nora, Paris 1989.

West there is also the following difference: if you ask a European or an American 'how is the world treating you', he will invariably reply: 'I'm fine'. In fact he may be having great difficulties, but they are in the sphere of his privacy and do not concern his interlocutor. This is not customary in our country, the differences in mentality are very obvious<sup>27</sup>.

So is this an autobiography or an autohistory? The last quotation clearly indicates convergence with Bakhtin's idea of dialogue. The above-mentioned cuts in the original diary show that Gurievich finally said what he wanted to say, that he had full control over the material. He chose a subjective, even an emotional narration for as a result of his experience in historical anthropology, he was convinced that the influence of this method was the most effective.

How then does the Russian medievalist paint the picture of the Soviet epoch? And is the Soviet epoch "his own" or "an alien" cultural reality for him? In view of Gurievich's intention to make his *Istoria* a testimony, I will now focus on his description of the external experience, the socio-political situation in which it was his lot to exist. The inner dimension, linked to the researcher's intellectual formation, will in this context be interesting only so far as it can be regarded as a direct result of Gurievich's contact with totalitarianism. Besides, Gurievich's scientific path has had quite a lot of commentaries and studies which are widely accessible<sup>28</sup>.

Being one of the main theoreticians of historical anthropology, Gurievich held the view that the chief value of an historical source is that it offers access to the mentality of its author, to the mental conditions of the epoch in which it was written. Hu-

<sup>27</sup> A. Gurievich, *Istoria*, p. 51.

<sup>28</sup> Above all: L. M. Batkin, *O tom, kak A. Ya. Gurievic vozdielyval svoy alod*, "Odissiey. Cheloviek v istorii", 1994, pp. 5–36; J. Le Goff, *Saluting Aron Gurevich*, "The Medieval History Journal" 2004, vol. 7. № 2, *W poszukiwaniu antropologicznego wymiaru historii: A. Guriewicz i C. Ginzburg. Interpretacje (In Search of an Anthropological Dimension of History: A. Gurievich and C. Ginzburg. Interpretations)*, ed. J. Pomorski, "Res Historica" 1998, № 2. I write about this in greater detail in my Master's thesis: A. Świnoga (Brzezińska), *Od marksizmu do antropologii kultury. Próba rekonstrukcji wizji historii Arona J. Guriewicza (From Marxism to Cultural Anthropology. A Tentative Reconstruction of Aron Y. Gurievich's Vision of History)*, Łódź 2005, archiwum Katedry Historii Historiografii Instytutu Historii Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego.

man psyche was for him the very beginning of everything *made by human hands, irrespective of whether it is a literary work, a legal document, a craftsman's product ...or a work of art*<sup>29</sup>. The author wanted his *Istoria* to be accepted as a document of the epoch. In Gurievich's view it should help the generations which in his opinion were living with the legacy of those experiences to understand the period of communism, even if they do not want to realise this. In view of these principles, what is the structure of his reminiscences?

The titles of the chapters refer mainly to "great history": *Medieval Studies at Moscow University in the 1940s, The Rout of Science, Crucial Times, Perestrojka. Discovery of the World*. The book is arranged chronologically, with stress on the turning points in the Soviet Union's political history. But in each chapter the author's personal experiences at the successive stages of his scientific career come to the fore. Academic life and the histories of other researchers are referred to rather to illustrate the sovietisation of the humanities, the pressure exerted by the political system, than to faithfully describe their fate. The author does not draw attention to his private life, apart from his marriage, the birth of his daughter and of his grandson, that is events that are also of social dimension. What predominates in the narration, despite the book's steady historical context, is a description, sometimes very frank, of the author's feelings: *It was difficult to live, not only because I felt hungry all the time but also because every minute spent on scientific work had to be appreciated. There was hardly any time to meet friends*, this is how Gurievich recalls the final years of World War II<sup>30</sup>.

How does Gurievich describe the epoch of communism? It is difficult to find explicitly expressed evaluations in *Istoria*, even though its author witnessed the fall of the USSR and knew what everyday life was like on the ruins of the empire. Gurievich has adopted a chronological arrangement and he recalls the successive stages of his life, trying to free his recollections of his later reflections. For instance, instead of saying that because of rising anti-Semitism he was not admitted to the line of studies he had dreamed about, he recalls the preliminary conversation he had

<sup>29</sup> A. Gurievich, *Historia i antropologia*, p. 13.

<sup>30</sup> Idem, *Istoria*, p. 84.

at the newly-opened faculty of international relations at Moscow University:

*One boy, greatly perturbed, comes out and shouts:*

— *The Jews need not trouble, get away at once!*

— *I said I was interested and ask: — What is the matter?*

— *They can't stand them there.*

— *Well, we shall see.*

What is interesting is the use of *praesens historicum* in all examples of this kind. Thanks to this the reader accompanies the author during the development of the situation, sees the lecturers who are members of the examination commission, and puts his imagination, or even empathy, in motion. The action gathers speed, and then comes the last question of the examination: *When did a ship with metal elements appear for the first time in world history?* At this moment Gurievich turns to readers: *For the life of me, I still don't know.* He then sums up: *I was flabbergasted, I did not reply, he suspended the conversation at this point and it became obvious to the whole commission that I am an inadequately educated man unfit for diplomatic service if I don't know things which are of elementary importance for a diplomat.* A comment, or rather an explanation of the scene, comes only at the end: *The war was coming to an end, new trends appeared in our social life, nationalism and chauvinism were developing especially in our patriotic and state propaganda ...I now learned at first hand that anti-Semitism was mounting in our country*<sup>31</sup>.

The contrast between the irony or even comism of the above scene and the serious, laconic summing up allows the reader to form his own opinion about the events described by the author. But the situation affected not only the author. By means of microhistory Gurievich paints a picture of social relations under the shadow of totalitarian propaganda. The contrast also reveals the paradox of the conditions at that time: an individual's mentality faced with the absurdity of the power machine.

Anecdotes are one of the most frequently used means to present, or rather expose, the true face of communism. What kind of lecturers were the most willingly admitted to work with students? Who was entrusted with lectures on the methodology of history and constitution teaching? *Nikolai Nikolayevich M. made*

<sup>31</sup> *Idem*, p. 13.

a strong impression on everyone. He was a candidate of science<sup>32</sup> but he knew nothing — a tabula rasa, one on which it was impossible to write anything. The anecdote concerns a lecture during which the students asked M. to tell them something about the ancient Greek philosopher Nofelet. When the lecturer began to describe him as an advocate of communal power, a materialist, though not devoid of idealistic deviations, one of the students stealthily sent him a slip of paper: *Comrade Professor, Nofelet is just the word telephone (telefon in Russian) read backwards. Just put yourselves in his place, concludes Gurievich, he was incapable of replying to any question, but he had to reply and he did*<sup>33</sup>.

But the author describes this situation mainly in order to explain the reasons for the difficulties he experienced in his academic career (the quotation comes from the chapter entitled *Exile to Tver*<sup>34</sup>). What aroused apprehension was not only his “bad” social origin and his doubtful ideological attitude but also his intellectual independence. Since he was an inconvenient, thinking researcher, efforts were made to separate him from talented students, which made it impossible for him to work at the best universities.

Did he not feel isolated by being put on the margin of Soviet scientific milieu, a marginalisation which at first was due to an external evaluation, for his choice of methodological stance, signalled for the first time in *Problemy genezisa feodalizma v Zapadnoy Yevropie*<sup>35</sup> (*Problems of Feudal System's Genesis in Western Europe*), was made after Stalin's death. Paradoxically, it was during Khrushchev's thaw that the narration is for the first time in the third person. Gurievich describes what happened to his article in which he wrote about axiology. The scientific

<sup>32</sup> A scientific degree introduced in Tsarist Russia and preserved in the Soviet Union.

<sup>33</sup> A. Gurievich, *Istoria*, p. 57.

<sup>34</sup> In old Tver, whose name was changed to Kalinin in Soviet times, Gurievich, after obtaining the candidate of science degree, was given the post of lecturer at the Pedagogical Institute. This was an exile from the capital. A career at the M. Lomonosov Moscow University was out of the question because the young researcher did not belong to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and was of Jewish origin.

<sup>35</sup> A. Gurievich, *Problemy genezisa feodalizma v Zapadnoy Yevropie*, Moskva 1970.

worker responsible for censorship in the periodical in which the article was to appear said at the meeting of the editorial board that *axiology should be struck off in Gurievich's article. Gurievich protested that he could not strike it off*<sup>36</sup>. He assumes the position of an observer in order, perhaps, to show the reader the way of thinking of the other side or to distance himself after a lapse of time from experiences of this type. This may also have been the result of his adoption of Mikhail Bakhtin exotopy theory, which in his view was useful in historical anthropology. The use of the third person in situations which, referring to a world typical of the past reality, were particularly exotic for the receivers was perhaps to help them understand "the unknown". In the case of Gurievich's description of anti-Semitic prejudices, when the author wanted to draw the reader into the world presented by him, the situation was different for anti-Semitism still exists, being, in a way, a universal deficiency of culture. In this case empathy need not mean anything more than sympathy for an author the reader knows from his earlier books, but such sympathy is deceptive from the cognitive point of view.

The author comments on the relationship between exotopy and intuitive experience, which was earlier promoted by Wilhelm Dilthey, several score pages later<sup>37</sup>, without concealing that he has a limited confidence in the German philosopher. This is how he sums this up: *the postulates of the observer's exotopy which state that the people whose culture and mentality he examines are different from the spiritual characteristics of his own community, are much more fruitful from the cognitive point of view than an intuitive understanding of the spirit of a culture, for in this kind of understanding there is always a danger that the researcher will transfer his ideas onto the matter he examines, a danger of an unintentional, uncontrolled change of the examined culture into the culture of the examiner*<sup>38</sup>. By referring to exotopy the author assumes the position of an observer, in this case an observer of his own life, if such a breakneck construction can enhance the reliability of what he says. But other arguments can always be pointed out in favour of his reliability:

<sup>36</sup> *I dem*, *Istoria*, p. 106.

<sup>37</sup> *I dem*, p. 189.

<sup>38</sup> *I dem*, *Historia i antropologia*, p. 14.

the author's authority as a historian, the fact that the narration is based on the author's knowledge of how the story ended, and the author's ability to construct this narration.

Does this way of reflecting on one's own life as an observer — given the values of exotopy for understanding other cultures — facilitate contact with the person to whom the source is addressed? Irrespective of the authors' intentions, which we can recognise or reject, such an observation is carried out by everyone who has ever reflected on his own experiences. It may be done unconsciously for it is simply a feature of our psyche: *reflection is a process of consciousness which becomes active when activity ...or understanding is halted or blocked; it consists in man assuming an outside attitude to his experiences*<sup>39</sup>. All the author can do is to try to realise the deficiencies in his presentation of the situation and, possibly, to communicate them to the addressees. Hence the declaration of programmatic subjectivity is a strong argument showing that Gurievich wanted to be reliable.

Although in his work the Russian historian does not refer to observation as a scientific method, he becomes an observer by undertaking to relate the Soviet reality which he himself experienced or by using exotopy as a way of narration. Moreover, he consciously makes use of history's research methods. For what interests most the Russian historian is not so much professional efficiency as the hero of history: human being. The reason why Gurievich was engaged in the development and propagation of historical anthropology was that he wanted to find the best instruments which will make contact with an individual from the past the most fruitful from the cognitive point of view.

As has been stated at the outset, Gurievich had a clearly defined aim when he set to work on his book: it was to acquaint the enigmatic future generations with the mechanisms which governed the lives of Soviet citizens, in order to explain the present time in Russia. In order to reach his aim he carefully chose the types of narration to make his message easier to understand. One can therefore speak of premeditation in the author's efforts to be equal to his original principles. *Istoria* does not record

<sup>39</sup> J. Trzebiński, *Narracyjnie konstruowanie rzeczywistości (Construction of Reality in Narration)*, in: *Narracja jako sposób rozumienia świata*, ed. idem, Gdańsk 2002, p. 30.

a flow of consciousness: the material has been carefully edited, the author has left out some facts, but he explains to the reader why he has done so. The chronological order of the narration, the outlining of the individual themes in the sub-titles of the chapters, the use of notes which he made “during the events”, all this shows that the narrator wanted to give his story a systematic arrangement. One can therefore say that in his account of his scientific road and of everyday life under totalitarianism the Russian historian met the formal conditions required of a participating observer<sup>40</sup>. The fact that these conditions have been met does not predetermine the value of the work, but can be regarded as an additional argument for recognising *Istoria* as an autohistory.

It would be a simplification to say that Gurievich applied the research methods of post-modernist historiography, but since he used exotopy in his works on the culture and mentality of medieval people, it can be said that he observed the principle of “representation” (as Frank Ankersmit calls it) or “presentation” (Hyden White’s term)<sup>41</sup>. According to White and Ankersmit, a historian’s narration is not subject to the category of truthfulness. Historians’ narrations represent reality, but in the sense of “being instead” (Ankersmit) they are “a historian’s rhetorical construction” (White). If *Istoria istorika* is to meet the author’s intentions, that is, to serve future generations as a testimony of the epoch, as a source, it is rather in accord with White’s principle. For according to Ankersmit’s theory it is but a testimony to the narrator’s mental attitude to the persons and situations it describes (which would not cancel its value as a source, for Ankersmit is an advocate of subjectivity in historiography)<sup>42</sup>. The settlement of the question which category — an autobiography or an autohistory — better reflects the final character of

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<sup>40</sup> See S. Nowak, *Metodologia badań społecznych (Methodology of Social Research)*, Warszawa 1985; J. Sztumski, *Wstęp do metod i technik badań społecznych (Introduction to the Methods and Techniques of Social Research)*, Katowice 1999.

<sup>41</sup> F. Ankersmit, *History and Tropology*, Berkeley, Los Angeles–Oxford 1994, pp. 97–125. Gurievich refers to White’s theory in his *Postscriptum to Istoria*, p. 278.

<sup>42</sup> See F. Ankersmit, *In Praise of Subjectivity*, in: idem, *Historical Representation*, Stanford 2001, pp. 75–107.

Gurievich's reminiscences will at the same time be a reply which of the two theoreticians of history was right in this case.

The author is no longer with us. In accordance with tradition, a few months after his death a modest lecture in his memory was organised at a seminar of the history of humanistic sciences of the Rossiyskiy Gosudarstvienniy Gumanitarniy Universitet (RGGU)<sup>43</sup>, where he had lectured from 1992. The way in which young researchers interpreted Gurievich's achievements and experiences as a scholar filled the late historian's friends invited to the seminar with consternation. Defined jokingly as a man who transgressed conventions, he was presented as a "lucky blighter" who had the opportunity of working on the latest Western humanistic texts during the years of the Soviet Union. The authors of papers paid no attention to Gurievich's conflict with the communist authorities of Moscow University, to the long boycott of his person by the community of Soviet medievalists or to the difficulties he encountered in his professional career because of his Jewish origin. The modest obituaries which appeared rather in the daily than scientific press, apart from the periodicals in which he had been a member of the editorial board, seem to portend that his works will become a museum piece on a dusty shelf reserved for "outstanding persons of great merit". The fact that *Istoria istorika* has not become a bestseller is not surprising, what is surprising is that it has aroused no interest among the author's pupils. It is appreciated by a handful of friends, mostly Gurievich's contemporaries for whom the experiences described in the book are their own experiences and who know that the bygone epoch cannot be evaluated and classified unequivocally.

(Translated by Janina Dorosz)

<sup>43</sup> R. Frumkina, *Niet, rebiata, wsio nie tak ...* (<http://www.polit.ru/author//2007/01/10/gurevich.html>. 10.06.2007)