

# Victor Pelevin is an existentialist writer

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**Abstract:** The article is devoted to examining the existential aspect in the works of Viktor Pelevin. An attempt is made to determine the distinctive features of Pelevin's existential philosophy compared to the generally accepted concept of classical existentialism. Special attention is given to the writer's later novels, where the existential dimension manifests itself through reflections on being, loneliness, the search for the meaning of life, and the confrontation of an individual with the absurdity of the surrounding world: «iPhuck 10», «Secret Views of Mount Fuji», «Invincible Sun», «Transhumanism Inc.», «KGBT+», «Journey to Eleusis», «Cool».

**Keywords:** Existence, philosophy, crisis, search, self-identification, simulation.

**Introduction:** Victor Pelevin is a contemporary Russian writer whose works can be viewed through the lens of existentialism. His writing deeply explores questions of human existence, the meaning of life, and the search for identity in a world full of absurd and paradoxical phenomena.

In his works, Pelevin frequently turns to the philosophy of existence, contemplating the nature of reality, the place of the individual in the world, and their role in society. Existentialist themes can be traced in his early works, such as *Chapayev* and *Void*, where the protagonist searches for his path in a world filled with mirages and illusions, or *The Blue Lantern*, which explores the philosophy of perceiving the surrounding reality. These themes are also evident in his later novels, including «iPhuck 10», «Secret Views of Mount Fuji», «Invincible Sun», «Transhumanism Inc.», «KGBT+», «Journey to Eleusis», «Cool».

## Main Part

In Viktor Pelevin's latest novels, existential motifs are prominently present, reflecting his philosophical reflections on the nature of being, consciousness, and personal freedom. Let us examine some of them.

In the novel "iPhuck 10" (2017), Pelevin explores spiritual quests through the lens of existential discourse. The protagonist, a police-literary algorithm "ZA-3478/PHO Bilt 9.3," an artificial intelligence named Porfiry Petrovich, grapples with questions of self-

awareness and the essence of human existence in the digital age. The novel raises themes of identity, reality, and simulation, prompting the reader to ponder the boundaries between the artificial and the human.

In the equally fascinating novel "Secret Views of Mount Fuji" (2018), the author delves into Buddhist philosophy, exploring the path to enlightenment and the search for the true self. The main character, businessman Fedya, disillusioned with worldly pleasures, turns to a startup offering various forms of happiness, leading him to profound meditative experiences and a reevaluation of his life. The novel raises questions about the nature of happiness, the illusory nature of the material world, and the pursuit of spiritual liberation.

Thus, existential motifs in Viktor Pelevin's latest novels manifest through deep philosophical reflections on the nature of reality, consciousness, and personal freedom, encouraging the reader to engage in self-discovery and a reassessment of the surrounding world.

In Viktor Pelevin's novel "Invincible Sun" (2020), existential themes manifest in several aspects:

### 1. The Search for the True "Self" and the Illusory Nature of the World

The protagonist finds herself in a strange and enigmatic reality where her very existence is constantly questioned. The world she inhabits is a game of simulations, blurring the line between the real and the

fictional. This idea aligns with existentialist philosophy, where an individual is forced to define their own essence in a state of uncertainty.

## 2. The Symbolism of the Sun as an Existential Choice

"Invincible Sun" is not only a mythological or esoteric symbol but also a reflection of the philosophical search for the meaning of existence. In the existential tradition, light and the sun often serve as metaphors for enlightenment and awareness, or conversely, as something that blinds and prevents one from seeing the truth.

## 3. Death and Freedom

Like Sartre and Camus, Pelevin employs the concept of death as a key existential experience. In the novel, the protagonist constantly faces the threat of disappearance –whether through physical death or dissolution within the simulation. The freedom to choose between submission to the system and an attempt to comprehend it becomes a central existential dilemma.

## 4. Simulation and the Absurdity of Existence

As in many of Pelevin's works, reality in "Invincible Sun" is a simulacrum, a digital illusion, or a form of false being. This resonates with Jean Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality but also echoes an existential question: if the world is an illusion, is there any meaning in the search for authentic existence?

Thus, existence in Pelevin's novel is expressed through the motifs of identity search, freedom of choice, acceptance of the absurdity of the world, and the contemplation of death. The protagonists find themselves in situations where traditional philosophical categories become blurred, and existence turns into a metaphysical quest.

In Viktor Pelevin's novel "Transhumanism Inc." (2021), existential themes are vividly expressed through reflections on the nature of human existence, consciousness, and the boundaries of reality. The work consists of seven interconnected stories set in a distant future, where technology allows the human brain to exist independently of the body, granting immortality in virtual reality. However, access to this technology is reserved only for the wealthiest and most influential individuals, emphasizing themes of alienation and the absurdity of existence. Ordinary people live under strict control, with implants and collars that collect data and influence their behavior, raising questions about free will and the authenticity of human experience. These aspects align with existentialist philosophy, which explores the meaning of life, freedom, and individuality in an absurd world.

The blurring of boundaries between reality and

virtuality allows the author to play with the idea that the world around us might be a simulation. The protagonists, realizing they exist within a digital reality or a controlled social matrix, confront questions of the authenticity of their existence. This resonates with the ideas of Jean-Paul Sartre and Martin Heidegger, who argued that humans are constantly in search of authentic being.

The protagonists of the novel exist in a world where technology, corporations, and digital simulations undermine traditional notions of identity, creating a crisis of selfhood. The question "Who am I?" becomes central to their existential struggles. Pelevin explores to what extent a person remains themselves if their consciousness can be reproduced in another environment or subjected to external algorithms.

Existentialists asserted that freedom is the essence of human existence. In the fictional world of the novel, people face constraints imposed by the digital age: social networks, propaganda, and artificial intelligence shape their worldview. Freedom becomes an illusion – individuals are embedded in a system that controls their thoughts and desires. This highlights the problem of freedom in a technologically advanced society.

In Viktor Pelevin's novel "KGBT+" (2022), as in many of his other works, the central theme is the illusory nature of being and the impossibility of distinguishing reality from simulation. Existence is expressed through reflections on the nature of consciousness, reality, and human existence in a world governed by hidden mechanisms of power and informational control.

The protagonists find themselves in a space where the boundaries between virtuality and reality are erased. The existential crisis manifests in the realization that their existence might be part of a global algorithm controlled by invisible forces – an idea closely related to Jean Baudrillard's philosophy and his concept of simulacra, where reality is replaced by its digital projections, and existence becomes a game of consciousness.

One of the key aspects of existentialism is the feeling of isolation and the meaninglessness of existence unless it is filled with personal choice and awareness. The novel's characters seek a way out of a state where their reality is determined by external forces, but each attempt leads to a new level of simulation, ultimately resulting in solitude – a solitude that, paradoxically, motivates them to search for meaning.

In the spirit of Sartre and Camus' philosophy, the characters confront a fundamental question: are they truly free agents, or is their fate predetermined? Viktor Pelevin develops this dilemma through the lens of total control – where the state, corporations, and digital

technologies increasingly constrain individuals, shaping their reality. Death emerges as the ultimate existential question—the final point of self-awareness. In the novel, the theme of death manifests as the realization of the illusory nature of the self: if a person can be replaced by lines of code, then what, ultimately, is death?

Thus, in "KGBT+", Pelevin continues his reflections on the nature of existence in the digital age. The author illustrates how individuals become prisoners of simulation, their freedom limited by algorithms, while their search for true meaning is constantly confronted with the unsettling idea that any "reality" may be part of a greater deception. This makes the novel yet another philosophical parable about the modern world, where existential questions take on new, digital forms.

In "Journey to Eleusis" (2023), Pelevin turns to the theme of existence through the lens of ancient mythology, consciousness, and virtual reality. The central motif is the idea of a spiritual and philosophical journey undertaken by the protagonist, who explores the boundaries of perception—both of reality and of himself.

The existential themes in the novel are realized through the search for the true "self." The protagonist finds himself in a world where the lines between reality and illusion are blurred, forcing him to question his own nature and existence. He is compelled to reconsider familiar models of perception, asking: Who am I, really? What is the nature of reality?

One of the key themes of existentialism is freedom of choice and the responsibility that comes with it. In the novel, the protagonist, Markus Sorgenfrey, is confronted with the possibility of transcending ordinary perception, but this path is fraught with risks. As in traditional existentialist philosophy, freedom here is a burden rather than a blessing. The surrounding world is filled with mysteries and irrationality, reminiscent of Camus' concept of the absurd. Markus must navigate a state of uncertainty, facing the possibility that everything around him is merely an illusion. This reflects the existentialist dilemma of a person searching for meaning in a world that offers no definitive answers.

As in many of Pelevin's works, the theme of death in this novel is not just about the physical end of life but also about the transformation of consciousness and personal identity. In this sense, death is not an ending but a beginning – a transition to a new state of awareness, aligning with existentialist ideas that view death as a crucial step toward authentic existence.

Thus, in "Journey to Eleusis", Pelevin masterfully blends

existentialist philosophy with artistic narrative, creating a novel where the protagonist finds himself in a space where conventional categories of being lose their stability, and the boundaries of reality and consciousness dissolve. Through this, the author invites the reader to reflect on their own existence, the nature of perception, and the search for meaning in a world where everything may ultimately be an illusion.

Viktor Pelevin's novel "Cool" (2023) is a multilayered work in which he continues to explore themes of illusion, simulacra, power, consciousness, and existential loneliness. As in his other works, "Cool" raises the question of existence in a world that is not so much material as it is virtual and simulated.

The protagonist is a representative of a post-human civilization that exists in a digital space. Pelevin examines the existential conflict between free will and the total control of the system. His characters often find themselves in situations where they believe they possess freedom—only to realize that invisible forces are manipulating them. This reflects key existentialist ideas about fear, alienation, and the impossibility of attaining true freedom.

The novel's characters come to understand that their existence lacks an objective meaning and that the reality surrounding them is merely the product of algorithmic processes. This echoes Sartre's famous assertion: "Man is condemned to be free," but in the context of "Cool", freedom becomes a trap – it exists only nominally, while in practice, everything is predetermined.

The existential crisis in the novel manifests in the dissolution of individuality and the loss of uniqueness. The protagonist is forced to confront the realization that his identity is nothing more than a set of programmed directives.

Existence in 'Cool' is a state on the edge of illusion and reality – a struggle to understand oneself in a world where the boundaries between the self and simulation have blurred. Once again, Pelevin demonstrates that being is a process dependent on perception and that any attempt to make sense of oneself in this world ultimately leads to the recognition of its absurdity.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The existential foundation in Viktor Pelevin's work is undeniable. His characters often find themselves in a state of inner crisis, where questions about the meaning of life become central. Interestingly, the author blends existentialism with elements of irony and satire, prompting the reader not only to reflect on profound philosophical issues but also to perceive them through the lens of absurdity and surrealism.

Certain fundamental existential traits can be identified in Pelevin's works, allowing us to assert that the writer follows the traditions of existential aesthetics:

### 1. The Problem of Identity and Freedom

Pelevin's characters frequently struggle with questions of their own existence, the search for meaning, and the boundaries of freedom. In novels such as *Chapaev and Void*, *Life of Insects*, *Generation P*, and others, protagonists attempt to understand who they truly are. This theme is closely linked to existentialist thought.

### 2. The Absurdity of the World

The worlds Pelevin constructs are filled with grotesque elements, illusions, and simulacra, reminiscent of the absurdist ideas of Camus and Sartre. For instance, the protagonist of *Chapaev and Void* questions whether he even exists, while in *S.N.U.F.F.*, people live in an artificial reality.

### 3. Crisis of Identity

Pelevin's characters are often uncertain of their own reality, unable to distinguish the authentic from the simulated. This aligns with the ideas of Jean-Paul Sartre, who argued that a person must create their own essence.

### 4. The Motif of Enlightenment and Nirvana

Many of Pelevin's works conclude with the protagonist's transition into a state resembling Zen-Buddhist enlightenment or dissolution, as seen in *The Hermit and Six-Toes* and *Invincible Sun*. From an existentialist perspective, such an ending can be interpreted as the character's final choice in confronting the absurdity of existence.

Viktor Pelevin is difficult to classify as a traditional existentialist in the vein of Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, or Martin Heidegger. However, his works undeniably contain a strong existential foundation. The unique aspects of Pelevin's existential philosophy, which distinguish it from classical existentialism, lie in his ability to seamlessly blend:

#### 1. Metaphysics and Buddhism

Unlike European existentialists, who were primarily influenced by Western rational philosophy, Pelevin actively incorporates Eastern thought, particularly Buddhist philosophy.

#### 2. Irony and Postmodernism

Pelevin's works do not merely pose existential questions; they simultaneously expose and satirize them, undermining the seriousness of existential philosophy.

#### 3. Simulacra and Virtual Reality

Instead of exploring the meaning of human existence in

the real world, Pelevin illustrates how this meaning dissolves within postmodern culture and simulations. Unlike traditional existentialists, he portrays the world as a collection of illusions manipulated by marketing and ideological forces.

Thus, Pelevin is undoubtedly an existential writer, but in his own distinct postmodernist style. He merges existentialism, Buddhism, and postmodernism, creating narratives where the fundamental question – "Does human existence even matter?" – remains open-ended.

### CONCLUSION

Pelevin's existential perspective is revealed through his exploration of being, loneliness, the search for meaning, and humanity's confrontation with the absurdity of the surrounding world. His works are infused with philosophical themes that resonate with the ideas of Sartre, Camus, and Nietzsche. By blending Western existentialism with Eastern teachings, Pelevin constructs a unique literary space where individuals attempt to comprehend their nature but inevitably encounter emptiness. This reflects a core existential dilemma: a person does not exist in an objective reality so much as in their interpretation of that reality. It is the recognition of this fact – and the struggle to transcend the illusory world – that makes Pelevin's work profoundly existential.

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