

**John Myrton Johnson,**  
professor, School of Justice & Social Inquiry, Arizona State University

**Мельников Андрій Сергійович,**  
асистент кафедри соціології Восточноукраїнського Національного Університету  
імені В. Даля, г. Луганск

## **EXISTENTIALISM AND THE EMERGENCE, GROWTH, AND DEVELOPMENT OF EXISTENTIAL SOCIOLOGY**

*В статье анализируется проблемное поле экзистенциализма и выделяются пять основных тем, на которых сконцентрировано внимание этого направления философской и художественной мысли. Рассматривается влияние тематики экзистенциализма на возникновение и развитие экзистенциальной социологии в соотношении с различными социологическими подходами, такими как феноменологическая социология, социальный конструктивизм, социология эмоций, символический интеракционизм и постмодернизм. Коротко проанализировано развитие социологической концепции "экзистенциальной самости".*

*В статті аналізується проблемне поле екзистенціалізму й виділяються п'ять основних тем, на яких сконцентрована увага цього напрямку філософської й художньої думки. Розглядається вплив тематики екзистенціалізму на виникнення й розвиток екзистенціальної соціології в співвідношенні з різними соціологічними підходами, такими як феноменологічна соціологія, соціальний конструктивізм, соціологія емоцій, символічний інтеракціонізм і постмодернізм. Коротко проаналізовано розвиток соціологічної концепції "екзистенціальної самості".*

Existential thought is defined as one of the influential cultural phenomena of the last century. Works of existentialist writers still attract attention of scholars from different disciplines, frequently causing disputes and debates. Existentialism is not an academic school or a systematic paradigm with logically defined ideas and precise concepts. Moreover, existentialism appeared as a revolt against systematic abstract thought, categorizations and method of traditional philosophy. Therefore, existentialism is considered not only as influential perspective, but also as one of the most contradictory and ambiguous expressions. Philosophers and scientists, who are seeking to impart clearly *what existentialism is* all about face many difficulties. Since existential sociology emerged in 1960-70<sup>th</sup> sociologists have also faced these difficulties.

For that reason, studies that are aimed at clarification of the general theoretical and methodological problems of both existentialism and existential sociology are very demanded and actual. Such existential sociologists as Edward Tiryakian, Jack Douglas, John Johnson, Andrea Fontana, Joseph Kotarba, and others have already put a basis for the further studies in this field and the main purpose of our paper is continuation and development of reflections on central problems of existentialism and specific manifestation of these problems in sociology. We consider some of fundamental themes of existentialism, which form a subject of researches for existential sociology. We try to define the place and significance of existentialism for complex relations of various sociological approaches (from symbolic interactionism to postmodernism) and the influence of existential thought on the emergence, growth and development of existential sociology.

### ***Existentialism & Existential Sociology***

Existentialism emerged and achieved its greatest popularity in the years following World War II, chiefly because of the persona and literary works of French philosopher Jean Paul Sartre. In the realm of philosophy, existentialism is not best seen as a new or distinct philosophy, but as a revolt against traditional philosophy, such as rationalism or empiricism, which asserted the primacy of ontological principles or the structure of the external world. Moreover, the word "existential" is used as an adjective to identify styles in art, dance, literature, theatre, poetry, spirituality, even sculpture. Some of the writers, philosophers, and artists identified with this movement have explicitly rejected the label existential. Given this complexity, it is best to see existentialism as a sensibility, a passion for living, an orientation to the emerging drama of actual lived experience.

The formal literature of the existentialist perspective emphasizes one or more of the following five themes. First is the nature of the individual and his or her struggle to find and create meaning in life. Implied here is the idea that what is distinctly human is that which has meaning for individuals. Meaning is

not one of the givens of life, however, so the existentialist literature emphatically asserts that individuals are free to create meaning (or experience meaninglessness). One may not be totally or absolutely free, but there is freedom to respond to the conditions which confront or face the individual; there is freedom to create meaning in the immediate here-and-now of the moment. All individuals are born into a family, culture, community, nationality, religion (or none), racial or ethnic group, and so on. Individuals do not so much "choose" these as they are "thrown into" them, embedded in social, cultural, and political contexts. The works of Martin Heidegger stressed this idea of being "thrown into" the world. Language acquisition is crucial, because as children grow into adulthood they progressively acquire the terms, concepts, vernacular, and other meanings associated with the collective membership of that social grouping or community. Are individuals 99% free or one percent free? Existentialists would find this question entirely irrelevant and uninteresting; even if it tends more to the one percent, there remains an openness to discretion, interpretation, and choice. Even a prisoner in solitary confinement has a choice on how to spend the time, existentialists would insist, whether to discover and explore the nature of solitude or to fuel the fires of anger and rage. A key concept for existentialists is "choice", and the insistence that individuals possess freedom to respond to the conditions which face them, and to elect one course of action (or interpretation) over another. An oft-quoted aphorism of Sartre is that individuals are "condemned to be free". An individual can approach his or her life "in good faith", which means an acceptance of one's freedom to make choices in response to situations, and be responsible for them; or one can live in "bad faith", which means a denial of one's agency, often with attribution of meaning to external circumstances, people, or structures. Existentialism emphasizes freedom, action, choice, and responsibility. Individuals are seen as active subjects, creating meaning in the circumstances which confront them. Many of the existentialist novels and plays dramatize individuals' agonizing struggles to find and create meaning.

The second theme concerns emotion and its fundamental importance in life. While some of the pre-Socratic Sophists emphasized the central role of emotions in life (and thus are often interpreted retrospectively as early progenitors of existentialism), from the time of Socrates to contemporary times the primary emphasis has been on reason and rationality. From this traditional view, individuals achieve the pinnacle of their humanity and meaning to the extent they develop and cultivate their mind, the powers of their reason. A well-known statement of philosopher Immanuel Kant is "Nothing great was ever accomplished without reason". Emotions are seen as a secondary or degraded side of existence, as potential obstacles to higher forms of reason. By contrast, existentialists emphasize the passionate and emotional aspects of life, and assert the relative dominance of emotions over reason in many circumstances. This emphasis is prescriptive: one should embrace and passionately engage in the present moment, the here-and-now, and not allow the past or future to distort the present. Friedrich Nietzsche had a difference spin on the aphorism by Kant noted above, "Nothing great is ever done without passion". The subjective emotions are not to be denied, to be regarded as secondary to reason. They should be embraced and examined. Even superficial reflection shows that our main emotions – love, family loyalty, friendship, joy, ecstasy, appreciation, and many more – are not antithetical to meaningful life, or even reason; they are often the very wellsprings of meaning.

The third theme is the irrational potential of life, even the absurd. "Absurd" is a theme in some existentialist literature, especially the plays of Camus, Kafka, and Beckett, and here the word "absurd" means without intrinsic or inherent meaning. We are thrown into the world, thrown into specific circumstances, but these have meaning only to the extent it is created by individuals. This theme is explored in several of Albert Camus' novels, especially *The Stranger*, written in the immediate post-war period. The protagonist Mersault is an indifferent "everyman", but one divorced even from his own self and feelings. He has no plans, no ambitions, no sense of his emotions, even only indifference to his own mother's death. A series of exigent circumstances result in Mersault shooting an Arab (six times) on a beach. The subsequent trial becomes a literary vehicle for resurrecting Mersault, and in it he is confronted with others' perceptions of him. He was a stranger to himself, but now in his trial he becomes capable of self-reflection, and thus guilt for his crimes. At the end of *The Stranger* Mersault says he opens his heart to the "benign indifference of the universe", which is to say a world without inherent meaning, hence absurd. The phrase "benign indifference of the universe" is a way of expressing emphatic opposition to what structural sociologists hold as true, the "sui generis" (or independent meaning) of social phenomena. Another literary expression of the irrational is Camus' 1948 play *The Plague*. Set in Algeria, the plague spreads throughout society, and decimates many, many citizens. The plague is a metaphor for Nazi occupation. The purpose of the play is to show the different individual responses to this scourge. The protagonist in *The Plague* is the ironically-named Mr. Grand, who like Mersault is a perfectly ordinary "everyman". The Czech author Franz Kafka often created

either surreal or alienated characters to represent the struggle with the absurd; in *The Metamorphosis*, for example, a man awakens one morning to the realization that he has turned into a cockroach. In the contemporary time of the twenty-first century, many postmodern and post-postmodern writers talk about the failure or dissolution of "The Grand Narratives" of life (God, Capitalism, Socialism, Communism, Democracy, Christianity, and so on); this engages the same issue which postwar existentialists called "the absurd".

The fourth theme is individual responsibility. One this theme Jean Paul Sartre is one of the most emphatic about man's responsibility to himself. This philosophy is perhaps most forcefully expressed in his 1956 work *Being and Nothingness*, and it is here Sartre utters the famous remark, "Everyone gets the war her deserves". This means that, while individuals may have relatively little freedom to create the social and political and economic conditions of their existence (or to prevent war), they do have some freedom of choice to make what one can of one's situation. One may adopt an attitude of conformity, resignation, resistance, escape, rebellion, or reform, but whatever the choices, those choices then act back upon the individual and define who they are in the world. What does it mean to be human? For Sartre, the Nazi occupation of France and World War II became illustrious of how individuals responded with their feelings, perceptions, actions, decisions, and choices [See 1-2].

The final theme is related to the above. It is "bad faith". Living in bad faith means that one denies one's freedom, choices, agency, and responsibility. It is to impose an "order" of the external world, often interpretations of others which deny their freedom, agency, choice, and responsibility. Living in bad faith means that one is oriented to others' values, interpretations, perspectives, and judgments. The opposite of living in bad faith is living an authentic existence, which means one accepts one's freedom to make choices, and accepts one's responsibilities for those choices. This theme is exemplified in Sartre's 1938 novel *Nausea*, one of his most famous works; here the protagonist Roquentin is a researcher in a small town who becomes highly conscious of "the indifference of the world", including his own consciousness. The freedom to act and decide in a world which is indifferent to those actions and decisions, this is indeed a major theme of existential freedom.

In the decades since the post-World War II era, social scientists have made many efforts to incorporate one or more of the above themes in their work, and in many cases to take these existentialist concerns as empirical research questions. Existential perspectives have been developed in sociology, psychology, education, architecture, linguistics, and of course philosophy. The following sections present some of these important tendencies in the development of existential sociology as a distinctive perspective on social and cultural life.

### ***Existentialism and Phenomenology***

Existentialism and phenomenology share origins and progenitors, so the linkages between them are inescapable. Existentialism emphasizes real individuals in-the-world, the lived-experience of actual experience, so this raises the question of human perception, and how the external world appears to and is known by individuals. This is where phenomenology comes in. Phenomenology is the rigorous study of consciousness. The goal or purpose of phenomenological analysis is to penetrate the taken-for-granted world of commonsense (which is termed "the natural attitude") in order to grasp and understand how ideas, emotions, and other meanings are seen and interpreted by self or others. There are three main intellectual branches of phenomenology, which stem from the seminal writings of G.W.F.Hegel (1770-1831), Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), and Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). Each is interested in how phenomena appear to consciousness, but important differences arise in terms of the purpose of such an analysis, for example, whether one is interested in establishing ontological or philosophical principles or a "descriptive psychology" of ordinary humans.

An early writer in the hermeneutic (interpretive) tradition was Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911). He asserted that the study of human meaningful action was radically different than that usually employed by scientists. To do this properly requires that an observer brings to the observation prior cultural knowledge of what it means to be human in that culture, and then to empathically understand what thoughts and actions mean to specific individuals in actual settings. Phenomenology seeks the origin, the ground of meaning in the manner by which the (external and internal) world becomes known to us. The origins of truth and reality must be sought in the particularities of the relationship that binds the human knowing subject to his or her world. The phenomenological method is essentially descriptive, not explanatory. Understanding (*verstehen*) is the cornerstone of Dilthey's method; it involves all of one's perceptive, cognitive, and affective capacity in the comprehension of another individual and what objects mean to him or her. This method of *verstehen* was later developed by the famous German sociologist Max Weber for sociological analysis, and Weber's analyses are critical for understanding the eventual evolution to Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann's *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966), another important application of the phenomenological method for sociological analyses.

Sociologists who seek to use phenomenological principles or insights focus on the everyday world of commonsense action and commonsense actors, but their goal is to think about and analyze what ordinary actors take for granted. Husserl called the ordinary, taken for granted world "the thesis of the natural standpoint", and this is what he says about its uncritical awareness:

I find continually present and standing over against me the one spacio-temporal fact-world to which I myself belong, as do all other men found in it and related in the same way to it. This "fact world", as the word already tells us, I find to *be out there*, and also *take it just as it gives itself to me as something that exists out there*. All doubting and rejecting of the data of the natural world leaves standing the *general thesis of the natural standpoint*. "The" world is a fact-world always there; at the most it is at odd points other than I supposed, this or that under such names as "illusion", "hallucination", and the like, must be struck *out of it*, so to speak; but the "it" remains ever, in the sense of the general thesis, a world that has its being out there [3, emphasis in original].

The purpose of Husserl's vision of phenomenology was to rebuild the foundations of natural science, but two scholars who tried to use these insights to build a better sociology were Alfred Schutz (1899-1959) and Edward Tiryakian. Schutz tried to extend Husserl's ideas about consciousness to the realm of everyday life and social knowledge [4-5]. Schutz investigated the everyday world of commonsense, and observed that the world of social interaction with others produced the intersubjectivity of existence, and the social basis of knowledge.

Edward Tiryakian emphasized the commonsense actor's "assumptive frame of reference", or AFR, drawing attention to the variable social knowledge individuals have, depending on the social context of their action [6, p. 199]. His earlier work *Sociologism and Existentialism* sought a theoretical synthesis of existentialism and the dominant sociological tradition, sociologism. In this work Tiryakian noted, that if we accept Durkheim's position about social essence of human nature, what gives man his humanity is the interpenetration of the social in the individual, then it may be equally possible to accept that "*being-in-society is an intrinsic existential structure of human-being*" [7, p. 164]. The recognition of these two perspectives in their unity can make reliable connection between sociology and existential philosophy. If we consider society as an existential reality, it becomes very important for sociologists to see how the "existential structure of human-being" is reflected in "societal existence" [7, p. 165]. This position Tiryakian designates as one of the main research questions for existential sociology. But existential sociology is not the end point of synthesis. Tiryakian aspires further to broader trend:

To supplement its own positive or objective method, sociology might greatly profit from the utilization of the phenomenological method employed by many existential thinkers. Sociology could probe the ways in which society and collectivities perceive the world and the ways in which social actors orient themselves to the social world. We would like to propose that the "world" itself is a social product... [7, p. 166].

In *Sociologism and Existentialism* and in some of subsequent works Tiryakian expands a range of synthesis of existentialism and sociologism toward rethinking of the general sociological tradition through the prism of existential phenomenology. This convergence of sociology, phenomenology and existentialism is based on "underlying consensus", which he calls "subjective realism". Subjective realism is manifested in the sociological tradition (in voluntarism, pragmatism, integralism, sociologism) and considers social reality as it is phenomenally experienced by actors. Offered by Tiryakian this great synthesis is aimed to development of "the general theory of social existence", which thereby avoids the pitfalls of both materialism and idealism [See 8]. According to Andrea Fontana's analysis of existential sociology, it's necessary to say that Tiryakian is unique in his effort to unify many of classical sociologists (such as Mannheim, Weber, Simmel, Thomas, Sorokin, Durkheim, Parsons, and others) under a common banner of existential phenomenology [9].

Another attempt of synthesis we find in *The Social Construction of Reality* by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann. Authors provide a major scholarly work which brings together the interests of existentialism and phenomenology and the traditional questions of sociology [10]. In the last four decades this synthesis has had an important impact of many disciplines and theories.

### ***Social Constructionism***

Social Constructionism (also called Social Constructivism) is a sociological theory which seeks to bring together what were previously considered incompatible perspectives in sociology. The first view is largely associated with the paradigmatic work of French sociologist Emile Durkheim, who forcefully argued that social forces and phenomena exist independently of the actions, decisions, feelings, and behaviors of individuals. This is the view of those who tend to emphasize the importance of *social structure* in sociology, and in *The Social Construction of Reality* Berger and Luckmann refer to this view as "Society in Man". The second view is the existentialist view, also associated with scholars who emphasize the importance of *social interaction*, and this view tends to see social actors as having some freedom, choice, discretion, or agency. Berger and Luckmann capture this perspective with the phrase "Man in Society". Their purpose is to bring these views together into a new synthesis.

A social construction is a concept or practice which may appear conventional or normal in the culture, as a taken-for-granted cultural reality, but upon closer inspection is revealed to be a social creation by specific individuals. Social constructionism is commonly taken to imply that individuals have some freedom to make choices, or "voluntarism", and this is opposed to the "determinism" of those who think that transhistorical institutions direct or cause the meanings to cultural phenomena. Social constructionists and social interactionists tend to emphasize the partially open, fluid, dynamic, processual, negotiated nature of human reality. One of the classic articles is Howard S. Becker's *Becoming a Marijuana User*, where his research showed that becoming a socially recognized and competent marihuana user was not a function of the pharmacological agent, but rather involved a *social learning process* where neophyte users learned the effects of smoking from the veteran users within an interactional and social context [11].

The field of deviance has proven to be one of the most important areas of research for social constructionists, many of whom consider themselves to be symbolic interactionists. Symbolic Interaction is a perspective which focuses on the face-to-face interactions between individuals, and studies how people communicate and negotiate meanings. They also study the legal and political processes involved in the creation of deviant identities. They often cite an important statement by Howard S. Becker:

*Social groups create deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitute deviance and by applying those rules to particular people and labeling them as outsiders. From this point of view, deviance is not a quality of the act the person commits but rather a consequence of the application by others of rules and sanctions to an "offender". The deviant is one to whom the label has been successfully applied: deviant behavior is behavior that people so label [12, p. 9].*

The labeling theory of deviant behavior has become an important theory in Britain and the U.S., and has directed scholars to study how new deviant categories get created in the first place, what parties are involved, who is to gain, what the enforcement procedures are, how race, class and gender biases influence enforcement, and so on. These studies have tended to show that deviance is not a simple matter, but a complicated social and political process which occurs within a specific culture. Symbolic interactionists have played an important role in the study of social problems. They often want to know why some social conditions get defined as problems worthy of a cultural response, whereas other equally or more dangerous problems are ignored. Who has the power to make their definitions stick, and what role do the mass media play in such creative processes. The late Spencer Cahill summarizes this research perspective:

Social problems are as much a matter of definition as other aspects of human reality. Many social conditions have negative consequences for someone. Some are simply not recognized by most people, others are considered personal rather than social problems; as still others are considered an unfortunate but inevitable fact of human life. Such social conditions only become social problems when they gain the attention of the public, and policymakers as a particular kind of problem that can and must be addressed. In most cases, activists, such as Mothers Against Drunk Driving, or professionals, such as doctors and social workers, make claims that a certain social condition, such as alcohol-related traffic accidents or some forms of adults' treatment of children, is a serious problem requiring public concern and intervention. These "primary claims makers" also define the characteristics of the problem or just what kind of problem it is, such as "drunk driving" or "child abuse" [13, p. 269].

Many constructionist and symbolic interactionist researches have emphasized that laws and social policies are the products of complicated interactional processes, which involve groups and bureaucracies interacting with each other, often over long periods of time. What are ultimately institutionalized as a

nation's laws are invariably the result of political and social conflict, with parties and groups fighting with each other, using the mass media, and being used by the mass media. One of the founders of peacemaking criminology, also a contributor to the constructivist tradition, Richard Quinney writes:

Law is determined by the few.....who dominate the political process. Although the law is supposed to protect all citizens, it starts as a tool of the dominant class and ends by maintaining the dominance of that class. Law serves the powerful over the weak; it promotes the war of the powerful against the powerless. Moreover, law is used by the state....to promote and protect itself. Yet, we are all bound by the law, and we are indoctrinated with the myth that it is our law [14, p. 7].

Laws which define deviance are a complex interactional process, involving political conflict between social groups in the culture. These constructions invariably involve meanings of class, race/ethnicity/nationality, and/or gender. Scholars in this tradition do empirical studies of how these complex and overlapping interactions occur, who dominates and who loses. One of the key concepts from symbolic interaction is "definition of the situation". Those who have social and political power have the power to define situations for others, to define them as "social reality" for that culture.

### ***The Study of Emotions***

Sartre had emphasized the important role of emotions in life, and in 1957 he published a book *Existentialism and Human Emotions* to focus on this aspect of his thinking [15]. The significance of emotions takes on a central role in the early anthology edited by Jack Douglas and John Johnson, *Existential Sociology*, where many of the contributors advocate for the centrality of emotions as a matter of empirical research and theory development [16]. During the last three decades considerable empirical research has established this field on a solid foundation, and today the Sociology of Emotions section of the American Sociological Association numbers about 2000 scholars. The research of existentialists and symbolic interactionists were responsible for bringing this topic into the mainstream of sociology. In study after study the point was demonstrated that emotions are profoundly social, not only in their social expressions within the culture, but in their origins as well. They emerge in social contexts, and they are influenced by group norms and expectations. An early paper by symbolic interactionist Norman Denzin conceptualized *self-feeling* as an important component of how the self tries to define a situation in interaction with others [17-18]. And Arlie Hochschild's award-winning book *The Managed Heart* reported an empirical study of how people manage their emotions with the *emotion work* they do while in interaction with others in social contexts [14].

The concept of emotion work has proven important in many later researches, especially those done in work settings. Jennifer Pierce used this idea to study how lawyers manage their emotions in their everyday lives in law firms, and Daniel Martin studied how managers announced and managed shame within large organizations [20-21]. Susan Martin studied how women police officers managed their emotions while on patrol in urban police settings [22]. Kathy Charmaz reported compelling research about how the elderly present and manage their emotions in her book *Good Days, Bad Days* [23]. In *Speaking of Sadness*, David Karp reported his long-time, longitudinal study of depression [24]. The works of Steven Gordon and Susan Shott contain excellent summaries of the early works of this research tradition [25-26].

Emotions are central to life. Rather than being "irrational", our basic emotions of love, friendship, family fealty, joy, grief, and many others are the very wellsprings of meaning. The emotions play a central role in creating and maintaining our social self or identity.

### ***The Existential Self and Identity***

The origins and development of the social self has been a topic of symbolic interactionist research and writing since the time of its founders, Charles Horton Cooley, George Herbert Mead, William James, Charles Saunders Pierce, John Dewey, and many others at the University of Chicago at the turn of the twentieth-century. This tradition has emphasized the social nature of the self, and how it emerges and changes in the contexts of interactions with others, at home, with play groups, with peers, friends, in churches and communities, and so on. Our sense of self is invariably linked to these early interactions with others, and their definitions of the social situation. We achieve a sense of self and identity in the course of these face-to-face negotiations and interactions, and this social identity is thus both a social product and an ongoing, developmental process. In 1985 Andrea Fontana and Joseph Kotarba sought to join this older

tradition of symbolic interaction to the existentialist perspective in the publication of their book *The Existential Self in Society* [27]. This book reported empirical researches on how battered women experience the victimization of battering, and then how they negotiate the social identity of a battered woman [28]. Other studies include empirical research of how ex-nuns experience the transformation of their self when they leave the convent, how individuals experience giving blood to blood banks, how individuals experience and develop a homosexual self and identity, how wheelchair runners define their selves, and how mass-mediated personalities develop a "media self".

Each of these researches addresses the existentialist idea of "becoming", and many of these studies use the idea of a "turning point" (also called an "epiphany" by others), a time when the social actor becomes aware of the transformation from one social identity to a new one. These *social definitions* are not a matter of making a decision cognitively, but are the result of an ongoing process of interacting with others. These contemporary empirical researches in the existentialist tradition tend to fuse nicely with the older writings of Maurice Merleau-Ponty who also emphasized social action and decisions made in real-world contexts [29].

All of the existential studies of emotion and identity use some form of qualitative research. In the early decades of the existentialist influence in the social sciences, this meant participant observation or field research, similar to the traditional field work carried out by anthropologists in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, much of which oriented itself to positivistic standards of scientific validity and reliability. The 1975 book by John Johnson *Doing Field Research* contained compelling evidence that the scientific observer/subject is invariably intertwined with the observations, in complex ways which force a revision of what the idea of "objectivity" in science means [30]. He argued that scientific observers should make these complex relations explicit, as part of a final report, so that readers may judge for themselves the impact or consequences. This position was formulated later by David Altheide and John Johnson in their 1994 paper *Criteria for Assessing Interpretive Validity in Qualitative Research* [31].

Existential sociologists begin their research in everyday life. "Everyday life" is an important term, which means life and experience from the perspective of those who live and experience it. To study phenomena in everyday life, the observer must develop a heightened awareness of his or her own culture, how people talk and communicate, the meaning and timing of gestures, the meanings of cultural artifacts and events, and of course the complexities of race, class, and gender stratification. Most existential sociologists distinguish between "the observer's perspective" and "the member's perspective", with the former being attributions of meaning as made by the sociological observer, and the latter being the meanings made by the members of some actual social or cultural setting. To discern the member's meanings, it is crucial to observe people in their natural settings, and to talk with them about why they are doing what they do. It is common for existential sociologists to concentrate more on *how* social actions or decisions are accomplished, rather than *why*. In most cultures it is common for there to be some disparity between what people say and what they do, so it is essential for an astute observer to gain and develop relationships of trust with those being studied. Many new methodological techniques and strategies have been developed in recent decades, and many new ethical sensitivities have been discussed, by Americans, British, and Canadians qualitative researchers [See 32-37].

### ***The Postmodern Turn***

The term "postmodernism" is an ambiguous and complicated term, much like the term "existentialism". Like "existential", "postmodern" is used as an adjective to describe styles in art, theatre, cinema, literature, poetry, dance, architecture, politics, and all of the humanities and social sciences. Like existentialism, postmodernism is perhaps best seen as a sensibility or passion of contemporary times, not a well-developed, unambiguous theory or perspective. Those professing postmodern sensibilities also express interests in the issues which captivated earlier existentialists, the nature and quality of life in contemporary, "globalized" culture, what individual responsibility means in a culture dominated by corporations, how to struggle with meaning in a fascist state, how to find or create meaning in a world where all of the "grand narratives" have died, how to sustain an "effective-historical consciousness" [38], and so on. Our intention here is not to conflate existentialism and postmodernism, as they are very different and distinct; but there are some common elements of sensibility.

Existential sociologists influenced by postmodern writings have transformed some of the concerns into empirical research questions for sociological investigation. Especially noteworthy are the writings of David Altheide on contemporary mass media [39-40], and especially of communication identities in cyberspace [41]. Other creative research has been done by Joseph Kotarba [42] on youth music scenes so important for contemporary selves and identity, and the participant ethnography of youth dance and sex

scenes done by Scott Renshaw [43]. Andrea Fontana reported on a performance ethnography of racing on the salt flats of Utah, only one of many new instances of performance ethnography [44].

Much has changed since the post-World War II era, and existential sociology has developed and changed with the times. Many contemporary realities are very different than the ones faced by Sartre and his generation; an increasingly globalized and corporatist world, the emergence of diffusion of popular culture and mass mediated realities, diffused racial and ethnic identities, changing gender norms, mass political movements of all kinds, new technological developments which are rapidly changing most aspects of life, changing family patterns, growing crime and violence, and many more. Existential sociology will continue to evolve and change with these new realities.

**REFERENCES:** 1. Cooper D. *Existentialism: A Reconstruction*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. – Oxford: Blackwell, 1999. 2. *Basic Writings of Existentialism* / Ed. by G.Marino. – New York: Modern Library, 2004. 3. Husserl E. *Ideal: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*. – New York: Collier Books, 1962. 4. Schutz A. *Collected Papers I: The Problem of Social Reality*. – The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1962. 5. Schutz A. *The Phenomenology of the Social World*. – Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1967. 6. Tiryakian E. *Sociology and Existential Phenomenology // Phenomenology and the Social Sciences* / Ed. by M.Natanson. – Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1973. 7. Tiryakian E. *Sociologism and Existentialism*. – Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1962. 8. Tiryakian E. *Existential Phenomenology and the Sociological Tradition // American Sociological Review*. – 1965. – Vol. 30. – № 5. – P. 674–688. 9. Fontana A. *Toward a Complex Universe: Existential Sociology // Douglas J. et al. Introduction to the Sociologies of Everyday Life*. – Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1980. 10. Berger P., Luckmann T. *The Social Construction of Reality*. – Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1966. 11. Becker H. *Becoming a Marihuana User // The American Journal of Sociology*. – 1953. – Vol. 59. – № 3. – P. 235–242. 12. Becker H. *Outsiders*. – New York: Free Press, 1963. 13. *Inside Social Life: Readings in Sociological Psychology and Microsociology*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. / Ed. by S.Cahill. – Los Angeles, CA: Roxbury Publishing, 2001. 14. Quinney R. *Critique of Legal Order*. – Boston: Little, Brown, 1974. 15. Sartre J.P. *Existentialism and Human Emotions*. – New York: Philosophical Library, 1957. 16. *Existential Sociology* / Ed. by J.Douglas, J.Johnson. – New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977. 17. Denzin N. *A Note on Emotionality, Self, and Interaction // American Journal of Sociology*. – 1983. – №89. – P. 402–409. 18. Denzin N. *On Understanding Emotion*. – San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1984. 19. Hochschild A. *The Managed Heart*. – Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984. 20. Pierce J. *Gender Trials: Emotional Lives in Contemporary Law Firms*. – Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995. 21. Martin D. *Organizational Approaches to Shame Management, Announcement and Contestation // The Sociological Quarterly*. – 2000. – №41. – P. 125–150. 22. Martin S. *Breaking and Entering: Police Women on Patrol*. – Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980. 23. Charmaz K. *Good Days, Bad Days*. – New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1991. 24. Karp D. *Speaking of Sadness*. – New York: Oxford University Press, 1996. 25. Gordon S. *The Sociology of Sentiments and Emotion // Social Psychology: Sociological Perspectives* / Ed. by M.Rosenberg, R.Turner. – New York: Basic Books, 1981. 26. Shott S. *Emotions and Social Life: A Symbolic Interactionist Analysis // American Journal of Sociology*. – 1979. – №84. – P. 1317–34. 27. *The Existential Self in Society* / Ed. by A.Fontana, J.Kotarba. – Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985. 28. Johnson J., Ferraro K. *The Victimized Self: The Case of Battered Women // The Existential Self in Society* / Ed. by A.Fontana, J.Kotarba. – Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985. – P. 119–30. 29. Merleau-Ponty M. *Phenomenology of Perception* / Translated by Colin Smith. – London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962. 30. Johnson J. *Doing Field Research*. – New York: Free Press, 1975. 31. Altheide D., Johnson J. *Criteria for Assessing Interpretive Validity in Qualitative Research // Handbook of Qualitative Research* / Ed. by N.Denzin, Y.Lincoln. – Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994. – P. 485–499. 32. *Handbook of Qualitative Research* / Ed. by N.Denzin, Y.Lincoln. – Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994. 33. *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* / Ed. by N.Denzin, Y.Lincoln. – Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005. 34. *Handbook of Interview Research: Context and Method* / Ed. by J.Gubrium, J.Holstein. – Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2002. 35. *Handbook of Ethnography* / Ed. by P.Atkinson et al. – London: Sage, Ltd., 2001. 36. Miller G., Dingwall R. *Context and Method in Qualitative Research*. – London: Sage, Ltd., 1997. 37. Van den Hoonaard W. *Is Anonymity an Artifact in Ethnographic Research? // Journal of Academic Ethics*. – 2003. – Vol. 1. – № 2. – P. 141–151. 38. Gadamer H. *Truth and Method*. – New York: Seabury Press, 1975. 39. Altheide D. *Creating Fear: News and the Construction of Crisis*. – New York: Aldine, 2002. 40. Altheide D. *Terrorism and the Politics of Fear*. – Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press, 2006. 41. Altheide D. *Toward a Mapping of the Mass Media and "E Audience" // Postmodern Existential Sociology* / Ed. by J.Kotarba, J.Johnson. – Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press, 2002. – P. 41–62. 42. Kotarba J. *Baby Boomer Rock 'n' Roll Fans and the Becoming of Self // Postmodern Existential Sociology* / Ed. by J.Kotarba, J.Johnson. – Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press, 2002. – P. 103–126. 43. Renshaw S. *Postmodern Swing Dance and the Presentation of a Unique Self // Postmodern Existential Sociology* / Ed. by J.Kotarba, J.Johnson. – Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press, 2002. – P. 63–86. 44. Fontana A. *Short Stories from the Salt // Postmodern Existential Sociology* / Ed. by J.Kotarba, J.Johnson. – Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press, 2002. – P. 201–218.