This slightly provocative title is mainly intended to bring into focus the question of the topicality and relevance of existentialism – a vast, unsystematic body of doctrines whose presence has been so vividly felt in such fields of human discourse as philosophy, psychology and psychiatry, literature (novels and dramas) and the visual arts for almost two centuries. It cannot be denied that existentialism or existentialisms is not a front page (if one is allowed to resort to such a criterion in the humanities) phenomenon whose general purport and meaning – or perhaps better mission – is already accomplished. One should, however, be very cautious in using the term existentialism, as it has at least three basic connotations, more often than not lacking in sharp terminological distinctions and shades of meaning. Let us recall the most popular and at the same time the most misleading understanding of the word. It came into current usage in Paris during the gloomy, meager post-war years in the late forties of the last century Existentialism was regarded as a true, authentic voice of the lost generation, “a completely new way” of interpreting the surrounding reality (facticité to use the technical term). Moreover, this style of philosophizing seemed to pose embarrassing questions (what is the sense of it all, why must we die, why is one condemned to overpowering, uncontrollable freedom, is it not better to commit suicide right now?) which once were not accepted and admitted into a proper, academic i.e. Cartesian discourse. Soon this kind of existentialism (a victim of unprecedented vulgarization), referring to some Sartre’s and Camus’ key ideas, was to pass into the history of a certain life style, a certain fad, as exemplified by those les jeunes who used to wear black, existentially worn-out sweaters and tight pants, cut their hair à la Gerarde Philippe, listened to jazz (like A. Roquentein in Sartre’s La Nausée) and talked and talked over alcohol in smoky Parisian cafés late into the night. This all – pervasive feeling of historical and personal crisis, of abandonment, this acute consciousness of the lack of moral or ethical orientation (after all this horrible carnage, the Nazi and Soviet atrocities), the experience of Absurdity (the Godot syndrome) and the absence of any justification or raison d’être of both human-being and the world were constitutive elements and factors of the world-view of the time, a world-view closely associated with existential philosophy.
In the rich, abundant and by now voluminous literature devoted to existentialism the above-mentioned phenomenon belongs to what the present author classified as existentialism sensu-largo; a set of existentialism-related events, fads, manners, “thought idioms” and a certain life-style in post-war Paris, and much later in New York, Rome or Warsaw. Only in this sense can the so-called existentialism be understood (or rather misunderstood) as a philosophy of gloom, crisis, unsurpassable disillusionment and spiritual, intellectual or social indolence. Sartre was infuriated seeing those youngsters reveling in heavy boozing, time and again raving about his literary output, about Camus’ absurd l’homme revolte or the Heideggerian Sein zum Tode, doing all this under the auspices of a philosophy he was so closely connected with. In his famous lecture Existentialisme est un humanisme the author of l’Etre et le Néant categorically states that “the word existentialism is now so loosely applied to so many things that it no longer means anything at all”. In the aforementioned lecture (addressed to a broad public) Sartre proposes that a precise terminological delineation be made at last. Existentialism should be regarded as a strict philosophy: the philosophy of an epoch demanding concrete solutions. It is worth mentioning here that Sartre goes so far as to try to discard, to turn a blind eye to all apparent (soon it turned out otherwise) differences, rifts and polemics among the Existential thinkers. Thus the Parisian manner of “doing philosophy” is a passé event now and it goes without saying that it has totally lost the sense the French term actualité, and only in this sense can existentialism be deemed dead and defunct.

However, what we are interested in this essay is the meaning (or connotation) that this vast notion can have in XXI century. Thus another sense of the term (of existentialism sensu largo) ought to be invoked in this place. To my mind the term (or rather the semantic part of it) covers a vast area, multifarious, enormously rich, rife with images, ideas, fictional but life-like situations. As has often been underlined (see the studies of Marcel, Sartre, Camus, Unamuno, Shestow and Heidegger) existentialism – as a strict philosophy has always had (from the time of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche) close relations, if not affinities with the art-world, to resort to Arthur Danto’s terminology. Here any historical criterion would certainly fail us. As Walter Kaufman observed on one occasion this type of – let us call it literary, or still better, aesthetic existentialism reflects a perennial tendency, deeply seated in human creative resources. The latter are expressive of attempts to grapple with problems of our being (our existing) in the world, “here and now”. It would be very difficult, if not impossible to mention even the most important figures of this literary existentialism. From the widest perspective one is justified to include most of the literary works of Sophocles, Dante, Langland, Shakespeare, Milton, the metaphysical poets, the English and German Romantics, Lautrément, Dostoyevski and