

## Philosophical and Cultural Foundations of the Concept of “Nihitogenesis”

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### Abstract

The goals of this research are: 1) to substantiate the conceptual content and introduce into the terminological circulation of the philosophy of culture the concepts of “nihitology of culture” and “nihitogenesis”; 2) to substantiate the intensification of ontologization of the negative in the second half of the XX century and the present. Data were achieved using observation and description of the behaviour of modern man in virtual and real cultures; hermeneutic analysis of observation results, as well as a description of the results of virtualization and simulation of modern culture. The article extrapolates the ontological method to the aesthetic and social spheres. Research results are as follows: 1) the following metamorphoses of non-being in the space of culture being have been discovered: anthropologization of the negative; semiotization and aesthetization of non-being; “hollow” attitudes of everyday worldview and individual experience of inner devastation; production and consumption of simulacra; virtualization of cultural reality; 2) the processes of diminishing or even loss of reality are associated by the author with various factors, such as: the transition from the individual’s solid identity to its “fluid” form, and ultimately to the loss or destruction of identity; the ongoing destruction of the integrity of "ego" of a modern subject. This is expressed in the fall of stable norms, including ethical ones, in the absence of a single anthropological ideal and in highlighting visibility in the form of "flickering of countless guises", "masks"; an increase in the volume of simulacra in the spheres of media, art, morality, religiosity, and in everyday life as well; active interest in negative entities manifested by postmodern art; loss by a person of a sense of spiritual security, compensation for this loss by hedonism, unlimited consumption of material goods; communication virtualization, etc.

**Keywords:** *culture, philosophy of culture, nihitology, nihitogenesis, non-being, emptiness, nothingness, ontology.*

### Introduction

In the modern state of culture, the tendencies are revealed, which cannot be interpreted as the variants of universality or reanimation of the old ideas of culture. Romanticism and modernism

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had such powerful potentials that even the second half of the 20th century was strongly influenced by them with marked orientations on the temporality and the ideas of the cyclicity and rhythmic nature of cultural history. Incompletion of the romantic and modern epochs is no longer questioned and noted by philosophers and sociologists of culture as their immanent characteristic. Therefore, in the 20th century oftentimes a “return”, “repetition” or “neo” was discussed (new Dark Ages, neo-antiquity, neomythologism, archaeo-avant-garde), which created a context for understanding, re-coding and establishment of the culture universals.

In the last decade of the 20th century and in the first decades of the 21st century, the formation of such characteristics is observed which cannot be interpreted as the return of old forms. Besides, a number of phenomena of the post-modern culture have acquired the characteristics of the negative not as the connotation-related but the core ones, which have transformed their essence.

Philosophical reflection on the simulation and virtualization of reality, as well as the change of the negation status in modern times makes us to discuss the necessity of development of a new ontology of culture (Jones, 2019; Baubonienè et al., 2018). We think that contemporary culture in its artefacts and meanings is not something negative or opposite, but altogether different in comparison with the classical one, and hence requiring different approaches, evaluation criteria and the ways of understanding. In particular, it does not appear possible to us to interpret the being of contemporary culture using solely the laws of dialectics. The culture today is not a system but a rhizome; Saussure’s law of inseparability of the signifier and the signified is often violated; cultural genesis in our time is “sliding along the surface”, an accelerated process of the endless creation of forms and impulses to the emergence of new meanings. We refuse to assess the state of modernity as degradation. We can explain it in a Nietzschean manner: our view of culture is not pessimistic, but tragic.

### **Research Question**

Why and for what purpose we need to introduce in the philosophy of culture the term "nihitogenesis"? In order to systematize and unite the variety of metamorphoses of non-being in consciousness, language and culture, it is necessary to operate with a new philosophical concept.

## Theoretical Background

A mental procedure, denoted by a term ending by *-zation*, is implantation, augmentation or “pollination” of one field with the concepts and principles of another. Ontologization is consideration of something through the prism of “tempo-topos-kinesis”. However, describing the modern scientific implementation of this operation, R. Yu. Rakhmatullin, for example, understands ontologization as “... *the process of modifying knowledge in order to give it a form of image*” (Rakhmatullin, 2014; 160). He clarifies: “Among the examples of scientific ontologization are transformation of empirical and theoretical knowledge about the Sun, the Earth, other celestial bodies into the image of the Solar system, knowledge about elementary particles and fields into the image of atom, etc. The results of religious ontologization are images of the many-armed Buddha, Hell and Paradise, which are a sensual form of expression of knowledge of people of a certain era and culture” (Rakhmatullin, 2014; 160). Thus, ontologization of the negative is philosophical attempts to talk about the unpronounceable, the search for images for the image-less. These problems are solvable on the basis of analysis of the being of culture and man, which is characterized as borderline or synthesized.

On the other hand, the “pollination”, with we discuss in the context of analysis of ontologizations, is “cross-fertilization”.

We insist on using the term “nihitology of culture”, which is different in content from the term “nihilism”.

**Table 1**

*Comparison of terms “nihitology of culture” and the term “nihilism”*

<i>Nihitology of culture</i>	<i>Nihilism</i>
– is a method of interpretation of culture	<p>– is a worldview, which is expressed in the denial of the meaningfulness of human existence, the significance of generally accepted moral and cultural values; non-recognition of any authority;</p> <p>– is a phenomenon of culture, which engender or, in other cases, is engendered by the corresponding doctrine.</p> <p>Nihilists adhere to some or all of the following statements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is no reasonable proof of the presence of a higher ruler or a creator;</li> <li>• No “realmorality” exists;</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In certain sense, life does not have a truth, and no action is objectively preferable to any other.</li> </ul>
This is the perceiving of an empty center or the absence of an ontologically motivated content in the being of the absolute.	It assumes the denial of god, sacredness and absolute.
Nihilology understands nothingness in nature as a measure and grandeur, and nothingness in culture as a condition of being.	In nihilism, nothingness is the emptiness and void of both the natural and the human world.

Proceeding to a “positive” consideration of nothingness is by no means nihilism, but a set of ontologization procedures for the negative. “The essence of nihilism consists precisely in the oblivion of nothingness ...” On the contrary, existential-historical thinking (as M. Heidegger calls his philosophy) recognizes that “nothingness”, “groundlessness” (Abgrund) is not a bare denial of existence, not “insignificant”, but the “Being” itself, however, “not in the direction to the existing, and not away from it, but from its truth. ”

Some modern researchers consider nihilology as a novel form of nihilism: “Fatigue from the expectation of a utopian miracle has been replaced by the most dangerous form of fatigue, the fatigue from being as such. Nihilism, bypassing the phase of romantic projection, became nihilology. From a metaphor, nothingness has become reality” (Ulyanov, 2009; 122). Our concept is not nihilism, because we do not reduce being to non-being, do not deny the existence of everything; we are talking about a specific structure of the being of culture, into which non-being is aspectually embedded.

Introducing the ontology concepts into the philosophy of culture entails a partial change in their content. Since it is impossible to say anything about absolute (pure) non-existence, therefore, one can talk about the *non-existence-related characteristics of the existence of culture* or *ontologized negation*. In an ontologized form, non-existence can be represented in a wide range of existential modes (that is, “breakthroughs” into existence and borrowing forms from existence).

As the main non-existence-related characteristics of being that can be discovered in the forms of culture, the subject of culture and cultural processes, we indicate:

1. increased temporality (or acceleration of dynamics),
2. nonlinearity,
3. discreteness,
4. simulation

5. rhizomaticity (lack of systemacity, fundamental incompleteness),
6. potentialism,
7. situationality,
8. absence (abolition) of a center.

This list is fundamentally open, since any properties and concepts can be included (or excluded from it) when some negation is detected in their semantic structure or functional sphere.

In our use, the “nihitology of culture” is a doctrine about cultural genesis, in which the phenomenon, images, names and transformed forms of non-being appear primary; whereas the need to “fill in the voids”, “patch up the holes” and “close the gaps”, i.e. to transform non-being into being or in various ways to objectify, to arrange non-being is considered as the key motive of cultural creation.

We are well aware that an interpreter of culture, selecting a single concept, looks at all phenomena through a single prism. Surely, we see a difference in the status of negative phenomena and the negation process itself in various cultures and epochs. However, the contemporary state, which we tend to characterize, following Baudrillard, as transparency, does not aspire to metamorphoses of non-being into being, and therefore a conviction is created that contact with non-being is an exclusive characteristic of modernity.

Nevertheless, we would like to clarify why the conversation about the destruction of the rigid “being-nonbeing” opposition is somehow possible in modern times. The human being, having created a global mechanism of generating secondariness (copying, quoting, short description, creating remakes, analogues, etc.) and artificiality, which successfully and unceasingly works, today can no longer leave the simulation space (in order to see or perceive primariness). Accelerating and increasing intensity of the production of copies (many of which have no original samples) eliminates the strictness of oppositions in the picture of the world, does not allow the choice from infinity of options due to lack of criteria. Therefore, the human being has to uncritically accept (and consume) all options. In synergetics, this state of culture is called chaos<sup>5</sup>. In the context of our problems, the situation is called "ontological asymmetry".

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<sup>5</sup>Chaos is a phase of increased instability of structural-formative and semantic principles in the system, difficulties in determining the possibilities of interaction of elements inside the system (and with other systems), in which a special situation of search and “increased creativity” is created, activating the processes of self-organization. See: (Astafieva, 2003; 395).

One of the impulses for constructing our concept was that we heeded the appeal by M. S. Kagan: “Ontology should do the same thing to the ‘non-being’ concept as synergetics did with the ‘chaos’ concept: free it from absolute negativity preserved from mythological times”(Kagan, 2006; pp. 82-83).

Nihitogenesis is the process of generating new meanings of the forms of non-being. It is also a process of introducing negation into the elements of culture, which transforms them into non-existence properties or entities. It often includes destruction, elimination, annihilation, that is, the aspiration to the forms of non-being in order to discover behind non-being a different, unprecedented meaning or to attribute such meaning to it. Most actively, this process is unfolding in postmodern art.

The analysis of the forms of non-being in culture is a study of what does not really exist but has a strong impact on the person’s entire life and the existence of culture. If something really does not exist, then how is it possible to classify and name the manifestations of this something in culture? The history of culture is usually aimed at clarifying the meanings, at transforming the incomprehensible into the understandable. The task of the theory of culture and our task as researchers are not to clarify the unrevealed, but to identify the mechanisms of generation of the indefinite in culture (the central aspects of nihitogenesis).

### **Methods**

Our study is theoretical. However, observation of the behavioral models of modern man in a virtual environment (social networks, blogs, forums) and real culture (communication among fellow teachers, students, pupils), as well as the work with post-modern literary texts allowed collecting the empirical material that is interpreted through using a hypothetical-deductive method and hermeneutic techniques (inclusion of the third element; “implantation” in the logic of an event or text; expanding the context). In addition, the authors actively use the empirical method of describing the results of virtualization and simulation of modern culture.

The article extrapolates the ontological method to the aesthetic and social spheres.

The issue about the methodology of the philosophical understanding of modernity remains open. Should the modern culture be analyzed using the post-modern methods, which, first, themselves are a phenomenological component of the culture (J. F. Lyotard), secondly, they very aggressively change the analyzed object in the process of consideration (J. Derrida, J. Deleuze)? Besides,

postmodern philosophy is a philosophy of language, discourse (M. Foucault), text (R. Barthes), literature (M. Blanchot), it itself takes on the features of a literary text. Post-modern art, today's media sphere, as well as modern philosophy, are trying to erase or make transparent the boundary between the being of culture and the interpretations of being (textuality), and they are doing it successfully. Thus, the central methodology of philosophical studying not only culture as such, but also the specifics of its being, is hermeneutics (in particular, the procedure of interpretation) and semiotics (in particular, the analysis of the structure of signs).

The interdisciplinary perspective is so broad in our paper: philosophy, aesthetics, cultural studies, and semiotics. Our task was to demonstrate how the modes of non-being work in the culture-creation process: "formlessness", "chaos", "nothingness", "void".

### **Results and Discussion**

There takes place today is a radical transformation of culture under the influence of modern technologies, telecommunications and computer systems. The active "implantation" of the screen into culture has transformed the perception of the world, the entire environment of human existence. We associate the processes of diminishing or even loss of reality with various factors, but, at the same time, we lack a single term that unifies the significant phenomena in postmodernity, such as:

– the transition from a solid identity of the individual to its "fluid" (Z. Bauman) form, and in the limit, to the loss or destruction of identity; the ongoing destruction of the integrity of the Self of the modern subject. This is expressed in the decline of stable norms, including the ethical ones, in the absence of a single anthropological ideal and in highlighting the semblances in the form of "flickering of countless guises", "masks". In the terminology of the sociologist of culture L. G. Ionina, these are arbitrarily and rapidly changing "scenarios";

1. an increase in the volume of simulacra both in the fields of media, art, morality, religiosity, and in everyday life;
2. active interest in negative entities, manifested by postmodern art;
3. the loss by the person of a sense of spiritual security, compensation for this loss by hedonism, the unlimited consumption of material wealth;
4. virtualization of communication, etc.

How should these heterogeneous phenomena be called: “nihilism”, “negation”, “self-denial”, “alienation”? In our opinion, these already accepted terms reflect individual aspects or specific processes. But we pursue the goal of proving the genetic connection of these processes. Therefore, when proposing the term “nihitogenesis”, we mean that the existence of culture as such has non-being features. In modern times, these properties have become revealed, manifested, but have not been generated, invented or formed. It is the actualization of the non-being properties of the being of culture in modern times that has led us to the idea of their immanence to culture, and the careful process of filling, comprehending, fleeing destruction in traditional cultures (Strunc, 2019). Of course, the opposite effect is also visible, namely, in classical culture, some drives to non-being (deification of nothingness, perception of emptiness as an impulse to creativity).

First, the destruction of center in the structure of culture. Even if this does not bring culture into a state of chaos, at least it directs it to chaos.

Second, the fundamental semantic emptiness of the forms of culture, which is usually characterized as the sign essence. If the meanings can change depending on the context and the recipient, this means that the forms of culture must inherently have a hollow.

Third, the obligatory inclusion in the cycles (both micro- and mega-) of “deaths” or, in our expression, “contacts with nothingness”. This is necessary for the development and renewal of culture.

Fourth, creativity and freedom, which are the internal mechanisms of culture, are realized as a movement away from non-being or aspiration to non-being.

In our opinion, the non-being traits of culture (or nihitological entities) are not peripheral; it is them that form the specificity of the phenomenon of culture. And this means that culture, in order to be realized (and to sustain its own being), paradoxically, must create non-existence: destroy, eliminate, make senseless. This we call the nihitogenic function of culture. However, we must distinguish nihitogenicity of culture from the generating and hammering out initially empty forms and shells: simulacra, imitations, phantoms, etc.

We actively turn to the philosophy of culture of the second half of the 20th century and the present time, which is interested in “negative” phenomena and operates with “negative” categories. The discussion on the topic of ontology/nihitology in the domestic philosophy of culture has unfolded in the transitional epoch (from millennium to millennium, from modernity to postmodernity). In



the “Treatise on non-being” by A. N. Chanyshvili, the main ideas are stated: non-being exists; non-being is absolute, while being is relative; non-being is primary in relation to being (Chanyshvili, 1997).

M.K. Mamardashvili believed that “philosophy has always built a negative ontology of the human being, an ontology of absence; an ontology of what has never been, will not, but is now ... The human being has no age, the human being is always in a state of birth, that is what is usually meant by the category nothingness in the negative ontology” (Mamardashvili, 1996; 355).

We began to describe the metamorphoses of being and non-being in cultural genesis due to the semantic impulse received from the works of M. S. Kagan [Kagan, 2006]. Although M. S. Kagan analyzes in detail the fate of the “non-being” concept in the history of philosophy, at the same time he considers it unjustified to extend the non-being characteristic to the consciousness of the modern person in general and, accordingly, to contemporary art in general, “because in the bourgeois society in the West and in the current Russian society (which has rapidly become bourgeois), there take place not only the consciousness principally oriented toward Being and its artistic manifestations, but also art that seeks salvation from the abstractionist self-dissolution into Nothingness in turning to Being, and thereby, as practice has shown, from total self-negation” (Kagan, 2006; 25).

The research of the culturologist-essayist M. N. Epstein are devoted to negative aesthetics, apophatism, and the metaphysical specifics of Russian literature and culture (Epstein, 2006), as well as new philosophical articulation (Projective Philosophical Dictionary, 2003). The diversity of forms of non-being in the artistic space in a broad interdisciplinary perspective, covering philosophy, aesthetics, theory and history of literature and art, is considered in the concept of “indefinite in culture” due to M. Yampolsky (Yampolsky, 2010). The philosopher shows how the categories of uncertainty, such as “formlessness”, “chaos”, “nothingness”, “randomness”, work in the creative process of culture.

Also in the domestic philosophy, the author’s concept by N. M. Solodukho is being developed (Solodukho, 2001; 2002; 1999; 2006; 2010), in which the solution of the problems of the human being and his/her culture in the context of the philosophy of non-existence occupies a significant place. The philosopher poses and proposes solutions to the following issues: “Immersion of the person into Nothingness”, “Consciousness as a subjective reality”, “Negational character of the

person's individuality", "Metamorphoses of non-being in creative activity", etc. (Solodukho, 2002).

V.A. Kutryov is the author of well-known works devoted to a radical criticism of postmodernism as a reality of culture (as the author puts it, "transpostmodernism") and the postmodern philosophy of culture, in which being and non-being enter a state of semantic inversion (Kutryov, 2009). Kutryov explores the processes occurring in the "object world": the expansion of machines and economy on the person's spirituality leads to its depletion, the transformation of individuals into actors, agents, into a "human factor" and, gradually, to the dismantling of natural forms of procreation: its replacement by social and biotechnological design. We consider it logical that writing such a portrait of the person (non-person) of postmodernism brings the philosophy of culture to the level of extreme nihilism. V. A. Kutryov calls the influence of informational reality on the person's fate a genuine "cry about non-being". As applied to human being, postmodernism, deconstruction, and grammatology are perceived by the philosopher as the ideology of removal, elimination, inclusion in the virtual world, "in which folds and singularities are left from people; in the best case, personages"(Kutyrev, 2010).

In the concept of S. A. Lishaev, a typology of dialogues with non-being is arranged, which is illustrated by fragments of literary works. In the third part of his book "The Aesthetics of the Other," he systematically and in detail gives a general description of the ugly and, which is the most valuable, insists on the person getting the experience of "formlessness", "ugliness", non-peacefulness, chaos, foreignness when meeting with the ugly object. "The ugly is chaos (Non-being), which finds expression not in something "limitless", not in the uncertainty of space, but in a certain thing and form" (Lishaev, 2008; 218). Division of non-being into positive and negative makes the ontology of culture deeper. "Nothingness is positively present in the thing (and we feel it, involuntarily turning away from such a thing): it is present in the disharmony of its elements, in a peculiar combination of the color spots "simulating" it, as well as in the characteristic pattern of its movement, etc. An object will be ugly for us, the sensual form of which serves not to express meaning, but, on the contrary, to express no-meaning; in the ugly "Nothingness, no-thing" is hiding under the guise of something; here the formedness, which in itself is, at least, a minimal expression of meaning, turns out to be an instrument of nonsense, here formlessness is established by form, here form serves to reject the Presence as a way of meaningful existence (existence in a formed-meaningful world). The ugly thing for us is "chaos that has been faceted, a form that carries

the form-less in itself, “alien”. The ugly is the embodied contradiction: the image of the image-less, the sensual givenness of the insensible, Non-being in its positive presence” (Lishaev, 2008; 218). The explanation is very convincing of why the ugly frightens us: “The presence of Non-being is a threat to my ability to be present, and therefore the ugly thing not only repels from itself, but also frightens” (Lishaev, 2008; 219).

S. A. Lishaev connects negative non-being with the “inclinations” for melancholy, spleen and boredom. “The world in a situation of melancholy (boredom, spleen) is not saved in the experience (is not catharsically cleansed) by the reality of the Other as Being, but, at the same time, it does not perish under the onrush of the Other as Non-Being, it retains its formal definitiveness. In an empty world full of melancholy, the formal correspondence of the signifier to the signified and of language to the world is preserved; in a depressive disposition, the person is present in the world, but does not understand “why”. In the experience of melancholy, the Other acts as Nothingness ...” (Lishaev, 2008; 67) According to S. A. Lishaev, non-being is the rejection of being, nothingness is the deprivation of being. “Nothingness-in-the-world” is a way of empty, formal presence, presence without meaning, without being as the source that provides sense to the being.

In the domestic philosophy of culture, the problems of the ontology of culture and man in our chosen perspective were considered by P.P. Gaidenko (Gaidenko, 1997), V.D. Gubin (Gubin, 2003), G.K. Saykina (Saykina, 2007). The images of non-being in avant-gardism and postmodern art were analyzed in detail by M. Lipovetsky, V.V. Bychkov (KorneviShChe, 1999), N. B. Mankovskaya, M. Yampolsky, I. I. Ilyin, A. V. Venkova. The problems of nihilism in European and Russian culture are developed by A.I. Pigalev (Pigalev, 1991), P.A. Saprionov (Saprionov, 2010; 2011), V.G. Kosykhin (Kosykhin, 2008, 2009). Religious interpretations of the modes of non-being are analyzed in the studies of Yu. M. Duplinskaya. Various aspects of the relation between the images of death and non-being are described in the works of V.V. Savchuk, A.V. Demichev, M.S. Uvarov. Solving the issues of the being of man and culture, G. L. Tulchinsky introduces the concepts of “ontophany of freedom”, “the prior-to-being”, “the out-of-being”. D.V. Vorobyov investigates the mental specificity of nothingness. F. I. Girenok, the founder of the philosophical direction of “archo-avant-garde”, explaining the specifics of the language of philosophy and creating a new anthropology, actively uses the concepts of “emptiness”, “simulation”, “eluding of being”, etc. (Girenok, 2001) Besides, F. I. Girenok causally correlates ecological problems (“desertification of the earth”) to the processes of “human devastation” and

considers the former as secondary to the latter (Girenok, 1994). P.V. Shubina considers emptiness as an ontological and gnoseological category, reveals the instrumental functions of emptiness in the semiotic and post-structuralist analysis of culture and subjectivity (Shubina, 2005).

In 2015, A. V. Krichevsky's book, "The power of non-being: Metaphysics beyond the Ontology" was published which theoretically justifies the possibility of constructing the doctrine of the absolute outside the doctrine of being (Kirichevsky, 2015).

In 2013, the Center for Fundamental Research at the Higher School of Economics carried out the "Ontology of Negativity" project, the results of which are arranged as a collection of scientific papers (Ontology of Negativity, 2015). The studies of this project compare the ontological premises of various interpretations of the concepts of "negation" and "negativity" in the history of philosophy and logic, and also demonstrate the key transformations that have occurred in the intellectual practice of mastering these categories by the contemporary continental and analytical philosophy.

Currently, the concept of "nihitology" is actively developed in the works of contemporary foreign philosophers and culturologists. Among them is one of the leading Japanese aesthetician T. Imamichi (the work "Crisis of morality and the problems of meta-technology"), as well as such famous French philosophers as J. Laurent, V. Carraund, S. Chauvier<sup>6</sup>.

A range of research on the problem of "images and topics of nothingness in culture" was presented at the exhibition and symposium "Big Nothing. Opposite likenesses of the human being" (Baden-Baden, 2001). The semiotics of absence is also the key theme of Brian Rotman's book "Signifying Nothing: The Semiotics of Zero" (Rotman, 1987).

### **Conclusion**

Based on observations of modern cultural practices and a review of the transformations of the concepts of "nothing" and "nonexistence" in the ontology of culture, we consider it productive to understand the essence of culture and its interpretation using dynamic models, in particular, the model of the mutual generation and interdependence of being and nothing. This determines the first facet of nihitogenesis.

In addition, we build an understanding of the existence of culture in the form of a variety of

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<sup>6</sup>These authors deal with the problem of ontologization of "possible worlds" in modern culture. See (Laurent, 1991), (Carraund, 2002), (Chauvier, 2000).

metamorphoses of non-existence, which opens the second facet of nihitogenesis. Finally, as a result of research reasoning, a philosophical and cultural interest is formed not only in the creation of culture from the void, but also in the creation of the void itself (destruction, simulation in art, a new virtual sociality, etc.). The usual way of terms is as follows: from use in specific texts to fixation and systematization in a dictionary. For terminological tokens in philosophy, not so much modernity is important as timeliness. In the indicated aspect, the term "nihitogenesis" is timely.

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