

## THE NOTHING - A MULTIDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

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### Abstract

I have chosen a multidisciplinary approach, due to the meaning of the term itself, *multidisciplinary* referring to the study of an issue by a number of subjects at the same time. We admit that we wanted to use a *transdisciplinary*, which would have implied the analysis and assessment of an issue among various subjects and taking a little bit of something from each one. We thought that our purpose was not to confirm or infirm a concept from the mosaics of demonstrations, but simply to present it in its entire complexity, in order to highlight what we can retain or whether or not we can retain something new for linguistics.

**Keywords:** *nothing, multidisciplinary approach, linguistic point of view.*

1.1. In grammar, a morphological analysis of the *nothing* makes us enter the subclass of the negative pronoun. In the Romanian Language Grammar<sup>1</sup> it is described as immutably inflexional, being able to be combined exclusively with a nominal of masculine gender and singular nominative-accusative (*He is a nothing*) of feminine, but in this case the pronoun doesn't adept its form: *She is a nothing*. In the popular and colloquial version, the concept can also be found with the form *nothing (nimica)*, a phenomenon which also appears when it comes to another negative pronoun, *nobody (nimenea)*. Also, in the process of language usage, it can be used with a noun value, which appears by definite articulation or by adding the plural desinence: *the nothing*; we also mention that the diminished form of *nothing (nimicuța)*, also has a noun value. The lexico-grammatical transposition capacity is best described in phrases, where the term has different morphologic belongings: adverbial<sup>2</sup>-*for nothing / in vain / with nothing / in no way, not at all, nothing on the clock / in a crack, fast*; noun - *a piece of cake / something which has no value, unimportant*; adjectives - *for nothing*. The Explanatory Dictionary of the

Romanian Language explains the *nothing* from an etymological point of view using an older form, *nemică*, originally composed from the old Latin form *ne mica (ne mica quidem)* or *nec mica*, that can be translated as absolutely nothing; it is also said that in very few situations the old language was preserved in the etymological sense of "not in the least:" *they didn't start taking care of the weapons, but they started running* (Gr. Ureche); *there's no verdure left* (Dosoței). The connection with the primary Latin etymon can also explain the derivative capacity of this pronoun, in relationship to other pronouns from the pronominal system; therefore, Romanian language also includes the derivatives: *to destroy (verb, with the meaning of to annihilate, to cross out)*, *destructive (adjective, meaning destructive)*, *nothingness (noun, meaning vanity, nullity)*. The connection with the primary Latin etymon can also explain the derivative capacity of this pronoun, in relationship to other pronouns from the pronominal system; therefore, the Romanian language also presents the derivatives: *to destroy (verb, meaning to annihilate, to cross out)*, *destructive (adjective, meaning destructive)*, *nothingness (noun, meaning vanity, nullity)*. As one can notice, the negative connotation appears only in one of the meanings of the noun *nothingness*, whereas the others mainly express the idea of attitude, of destructive manifestation. For example, in the statement *They had an argument over nothing*, the term does no longer express the void, the lack, but, on the contrary, it clearly expresses the idea that it is *something small, without value, which is not worth considering*, but which has a clear objectification, suggestive for the fullness of *nothingness* - it is obvious that since there is anger, there is also a cause for it,

even though it is a minor one. And because popular intelligence never lies, we tend to believe that the *nothing* is valued. Moreover, Shakespeare's play *Much Ado About Nothing* draws attention to the harmless state of the nothing, its lack of aggression. Also, Socrates's statement *I know that I don't know anything* full of humility, hides exactly the realization of the capacity of the human to get to know new realities. In other words, in many of the speaker's well-known contexts, the nothing has a full semantic content. For Saint Augustine<sup>3</sup>, the *nothing* was equal to the devil, due to its identification with the abyss, the depth, the area of non-evidence, the nadir, which in the popular beliefs belongs to the evil spirits (Brodie, 2009).

1.2. In the mind of the speakers of the Romanian language, *nothing* is used when they notice that they lack something or someone, its notional content can be described using the statement *A defines non-A*; this is why we believe that we cannot explain this term without connecting it to other non-pronominal and non-grammatical notions, which, at least, at the level of pragmalinguistics, express *emptiness, void*. Therefore, in a study on nothing<sup>4</sup>, John Barrow presents the concept of nothingness, speaking about a subject that studies the nothing. Since, over the years nobody wanted to study the nothing, because they didn't believe beforehand in its conceptual fullness or, at least, in its camouflage role as something that cannot be perceived using the senses, we doubt that the author innovates this term only to analyse its history. A semantic radiography of the concept highlights what we have suspected, that *nothing* did not always mean ....zero!, and therefore, the analysis will go from complicated to complex and the other way round. And this is because not even *zero* expresses nullity, because, according to Barrow, together with a figure, it increases<sup>5</sup> its value, even if, according to mathematicians, this quality is only a convention. In the Romanian Language Grammar<sup>6</sup>, it is said that *zero* associated with a noun expresses *an empty set*, as in *zero books*, in which case it has an adjectival value, or in the phrase *absolute zero* which has a noun value; it is also a numeral when it appears in a series of numerals: 5.4.3.2.1.0 or the score was 3-0.

Also, *zero* can be considered a negative cardinal numeral when it starts the series of numerals which have a minus in front: 0, -1, -2, -3 etc. Its individuality in relationship to other full numerals is also noticeable due to its impossibility of having a representation in Roman number, as it is a variant of the letter O. John Barrow, in the quoted study, says<sup>7</sup> that zero derives<sup>8</sup> from the Hindus words *sunya*, meaning *void, absence*, which in the Arabic language has the form *as-sifr, sifr*, later transformed into *cipher*. Basically, the paternity of the term belongs to the people from Babylonia and Maya, but the one which is most widely used comes from India. In Sanskrit, zero was considered to be the point on the Indian girl's forehead, which presents information about their marital status, or it was a representation of the minor traces of the states, seen from high distances, anyway it had a full connotation; he cites from a poem from the 6th century, Vasavadatta: *The stars were shining far away, as the zero points, spread throughout the sky*. The old text is quite ambiguous; therefore, on the one side it is contradictory for the ones who admit that zero is equivalent to nothing; on the other side, it is completely revelatory for the ones who support the idea of the fullness of nothing. It is certain that, in other literatures, the point is the first baby of the nothing, a vision which is also presented by Mihai Eminescu in The first Epistle: *Suddenly, a dot starts moving - the primeval, lonely Other.../*

*It becomes the father potent, of the void it makes the mother/*

*Weaker than a drop of water, this small dot that moves and bounds/*

*Is the unrestricted ruler of the world's unbounded bounds/* The point is therefore the tool, the engine of the universe, a creation of nothing (Barrow, 2006).

1.3. The Old Testament doesn't even mention *the nothing*, the only concept that suggests the idea of a starting point in the creation process has a temporal nature: *At the beginning, God created heaven and earth*. Only when the earth is described there are some adjectives which have the value of *nothing*: *And the earth was without any form and empty*. *The nothing* has an objectual meaning, it doesn't suggest neither time nor

space, meaning the sensible intuition forms belonging to Kant; It is the substance which seems to have been eternal and at the disposal of God and used as a construction element for the world. Here, *the nothing* is no longer a negative pronoun, but it has a positive connotation, our information being the only ones that make us interpret the nothing as a void. Analysing the nothing from a religious perspective guides us towards the unitary vision of Stefan Lupasco and Basarab Nicolescu regarding the hidden third party, a scientific and philosophical metaphor of God. According to the mentioned authors, without it, the sciences would only offer us a mechanical performance of a continual and circular moment of the universe. The sacred moment from *The making* is once again presented by Eminescu in The first epistle, where *the nothing* appears as a series of rhetorical interrogations:

*To the very first, when being and non-being were  
nought still,  
When there was but utter absence of both  
life-impulse and will,  
When unopen there was nothing, although  
everything was hidden,  
When, by His own self peroaded, resting lay the  
Allforbidden.  
Was it an abyss? a chasm? wat'ry plains without  
an end?  
There was no estate of wisdom, nor a mind to  
comprehend.  
For the darkness was as solid as is still the shadows'  
ocean,  
And no eyes, had there been any, could have formed  
of it a notion.  
Of the unmade things the shadows had not yet  
begun to gleam  
And, with its own self-contented, peace eternal  
reigned supreme.*

In *Lucifer*, the poet becomes even more explicit in valuing the nothing: *For that region is boundless and / Searching regards avoids /And Time strives vainly there to come / To life from the dark voids./ 'Tis nought. 'Tis, though, thirst that sips him / And which he cannot shun, /' Tis depth unknown, comparable / To blind oblivion.*

The poet links *the nothing* with the precipice, the void, the depth, respectively with spatial notions, but also with sensorial ones, such as *the thirst*, that swallows him. In relationship to

physics this can also mean a metaphorical reference to *the gravitational force* of the star whose weight is 3 times higher than of the Sun, which goes into implosion, becoming a black hole, and in which particles enter continuously, and none comes out. It becomes a headquarters of the full, of the spacious. For Eminescu, *the nothing* is also a correspondent for *the depth, the limitless abyss* which is compared to the blind oblivion, meaning *death* or with *the eternal existence*, from the Christian belief (Lupasco, 1967).

In the Romanian fairy tale *Youth without old age and life without death*, Prince Charming goes into a space which is characterized by oblivion, the space of entering into being or of eternal life, as C. Noica used to call it, meaning a world of oblivion where events abolish and which can be correlated with eternity. All these are expressions of the full, while the world of the people, of becoming into becoming, is one full of memories and emotions. It is a never-ending *fortuna labilis*, presented in the popular text through the hero's forbidden area, in which he enters, apparently full of recklessness and which leads him to death. Another full meaning of *the nothing* is offered by Veronica Micle, which has the following stanza written on her ledger:

*And dust, you become mari,  
Because this is the world's unmitigated law,  
The nothing brings you, the nothing resumes you,  
And nothing will be left behind you.*

Here it is no longer clear the closeness between the nothing and the black hole, because it has the property of creating worlds and destinies, the poet being closer to the religious doctrine of genesis than to the physical one, allowing the nothing to become a source of life: *The nothing brings you*, but also an attractor of dead beings, as it is suggested in the verse: *the nothing takes you again*, which means that it *reclaims you*. Lucian Blaga also offers the nothing a concrete meaning, but one full of mystery, in the following verse: *Mother, nothing, the great, the fear of the great shakes my garden every night!* Does it suggest the physical principle of A. Lavoisier: *Nothing is lost, nothing is gained, but everything is transformed?*

2.1. In the November 2016 issue of the journal *Science and Technique*, Cristian Rom an presents a

complex study *About Nothing*, in which he presents the history of the term and of its notional content; he considers that *although it wasn't taken into account for a long time, it now became the central element of modern physics*, obviously referring to the physicists from CERN, involved in rebuilding the primary moment of genesis. They are looking for *God's particle*, called in technical terms *Higgs's boson*, capable of creating a special field, fundamental in the birth of the universe. *The nothing is the starting point of our universe and it also conditions our future*, says Cristian Român, suggesting that even the Nobel Prize winner, Frank Wilczec, who was asked the question: *Why does something exist, when there should be only the nothing?*, answered that because it is **Strange**. If it is strange means that we can ask ourselves other questions: *this nothing is very unstable*, said the researcher. In order to have a complex image, the author of the article schematically presents the evolution of the concept, explaining that, for example, for the Greeks, the nothing had no representation, because, in their opinion, it does not exist<sup>9</sup>. However, even if Thales denies the existence of the blank, of nothing, the result of his experiment, by pulling out everything there is into a volume, highlighted that the nothing has a definite value, which is *water*. In its tradition, other researchers have extended the number of elements that could fill the gap, and these are *air, water, fire and earth*, and the gap was named ether, which is considered to be easier than air. For Newton<sup>10</sup>, the *ether* was a vehicle for light, idea also supported by Toricelli (in the 17<sup>th</sup> century), who states that the light of the stars which comes towards us, would raft across the blank, *meaning the nothing*, which therefore gains concreteness. In the quantum mechanics, *the nothing, the blank has its own energy*. Leonard Susskind, in his study *The Cosmic Landscape* considers that *The answer lies in the strangeness spread throughout the world of quantum mechanics. [...] Physicists see the blank as being full of particles, which appear and disappear so quickly that they cannot be traced under normal circumstances. They*<sup>11</sup> form a quantic foam, which is in a continuous fuss, in which we notice violent energy fluctuations, and which come from nothingness and disappear into nothingness the virtual particles; they empty the void, the nothing, which therefore becomes

extremely populated! *Each type of elementary particle is presented in the violent fluctuations of the sea of virtual particles that we call blank*, says Susskind. *In this sea, we come across electrons, positrons, photons, neutrons, and many other particles. The total energy of the blank is the sum of all the energies of these virtual particles, each type of particle having its own contribution. In this way, the blank, the nothing, is valued*; Susskind states that *using the estimation offered by quantum physics, there is an energy quantity which equals 10 to the 116 Joules. This energy quantity can make the whole water in the universe to boil. It is an energy quantity higher than that our Sun can radiate in billions of years. It is a higher energy than the one that of all stars in the universe can produce throughout their lives*. Cristian Român states the opinions of Alexei Filipenko and Jay M. Pasachoff, who, in the study *The Cosmos: Astronomy in the New Millennium*, place the nothing as the source of creation for our entire Universe. Researchers claim that this is due to the quantum fluctuations produced within a primordial space, in which, due to unknown reasons, some of them triggered the process that led to Big Bang. Without making physical analysis, we notice the author's comment on the types of energies that particles have, some of them positive, other negative, the energy of the blank is called *the dark energy* and it is responsible for the acceleration of the Universe's expansion. These interpretative coordinates allow us to admit that the fundamental nothing, made out of particles and analysed by physicist conditioned the birth and the existence of the Universe, together with the religious vision regarding this moment. The limits of the sciences are however obvious, because researchers can only approximate that  $t_0$ , while anything that appeared before the nothing can hardly be imagined. It stays within the mystery zone protected by the included third party, which we believe as a datum, without continuing to forever research!

2.2. We continue our analysis by asking ourselves if the nothing represents a chaos or not. Solomon Marcus<sup>12</sup> considers that chaos appears as it is triggered, so it is not an already existing state. But we also don't know if the nothing is a state, an initial datum, or it is a sum of nothing

and up to know we don't have access to their description; that is why it can also be analysed as an effect-phenomenon<sup>13</sup>. It is certain that the nothing appears as an linguistic marker of an unseen but suspected order and there are many questions about it and that is why any discussion about it can represent an invitation to the gala of the postmodern sciences (Solomon, 2006).

### Conclusions

These interpretative options allow us to believe that, in an objective way, nothing does no longer satisfy the requirements of a pronoun, but those of a noun or adjective, being regarded, both in literature and philosophy, using abstracts such as *thirst, force, depth, eternal peace*, or with the help of concept from physics, such as *ether, blank* or black hole. Based on the fact that the nothing is *the blank, zero, death*, meaning elements that have the property of absolute continuity, than the creation, material are actually discontinuities, the instruments of life and, therefore, of the nothing. In Basarab Nicolescu's terms, our intelligence represents exactly the capacity to notice the discontinuities of continuity, the sense of nonsense. We could say, due to the nature of the subject approached here, the capacity to understand the nothing. Basarab Nicolescu suggests, using the brilliant statement: *The logical delirium of the sacred rationalized reason gives birth to monsters*, that we must admit both *the logical basis of the illogic and the illogic basis of logic*; here, the blank or the fullness of the nothing are the characteristics that we can intuit, although we know that they aren't demonstrable, they are not included in the rigor of proofs. Therefore, we lack the intelligence to discover the fullness of nothing using the tools of science. Perhaps, in order to do this, we might need to make use of the axioms of knowledge belonging to Lucian Blaga: using the paradisiac knowledge, the mystery of the nothing would partially be reduced (taking into account the demonstrations of the physicians); using the Lucifer's knowledge, the mystery could be increased (we refer to the literary and religious texts that analyse the nothing). Both types of knowledge can only be revealed with the help of the Great Anonymous (Sypher, 1962).

We are currently waiting for the physicians from CERN to tell us more about the sacred particle which could make the nothing less ambiguous, but if they keep silent, it means that they themselves don't know enough yet! In this case, the mystery still belongs to God, meaning the included Third Party or the Great Anonymous. He is the only one who knows about the fullness or emptiness of the nothing. We therefore only have the joy of having a nominee to the theory of the fullness of the nothing, unperceivable by our senses and, for now, impossible to support using the tools of science. All things considered, we tried to offer a multidisciplinary description of the nothing and we understand that because it is impossible to perceive it using our brains, it is a concept belonging to the area of the mystery, and for the linguists it remains captive in the subclass of the negative pronouns. But we cannot conclude without asking ourselves the following question: *What is the nothing in the educational process?* More precisely, if we admit the theories of mathematicians<sup>14</sup>, is there a nothing in the mind of a student or is it just the impotence of the teachers, pedagogues and specialists in education sciences to discover the right software in order to activate the individual hardware?

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### Endnotes

1. Editura Academiei Române, 2005, pag. 270
2. Tot cu valoare adverbială este utilizat termenul *nimic* și când este precedat de adverbe de aproximare: *mai nimic, aproape nimic, cam nimic*.
3. a se vedea studiul lui J. Barow, pag. 73.
4. *Mic tratat despre nimic*, Editura Tehnică, 2006, pag. 1-8.
5. idem, pag. 52
6. Pag. 292

7. Pag. 50
8. În *DEX online*, ni se oferă și o prezentare a accepțiunilor termenului: Iohan Tropfe (*Geschichte der Elementar-Mathematik*, vol. I) zice că Leonardo Pisano (pe la 1180-1250) a latinizat cuvântul, scriind **zephirum**, iar Iordanus Nemorarius († 1237) și alții, anonimi, au uzitat forma **cifra**. Tartaglia (1499-1557) zice: *circolo, cifra, zero, nulla*. – La noi, Asachi zice **nulă** și (măi rar) zero.
9. Frank Close, *Nothing: A Very Short Introduction*, citat de Cristian Român
10. în "*Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica*", citat de Cristian Român
11. Analizele și interpretările sunt preluate din studiul lui Cristian Român.
12. În *Paradigme universale. Pornind de la un zâmbet*, Editura, Paralela 45, 2006, pag. 161.
13. Stefan Lupasco, *Journal en miettes*, Paris, Mercure de France, 1967, pag. 62: *nimic nu există, este gândit numai în opoziție cu un contrariu care există și pe care îl refulăm*. În studiul *Pierderea Sineului (Loss of the Self – in Modern Literature and Art*, New York, 1962, pp. 87-109), Wylie Sypher consideră că „[...] Ionesco elimină legile cauzei și efectului pe care au fost clădite și teatrul și știința. În locul lor, Ionesco acceptă [...] logica lui Stéphane Lupasco, a cărui operă ne oferă cheia a ceea ce face Ionesco în teatru” (*Ibid.*, p. 99). Tdeoreticianul literaturii îl compare pe Ionesco cu Heidegger, ambii fascinați de abisul vidului sub zodiac căruia se duce existența noastră. Mai mult, Ionesco vrea cu tot dinadinsul să capteze *nesustenabilul*, spune exegetul teatrului absurd.
14. Richard Brodie, *Virusul minții sau memetica*, Editura Paralela 45, 2009