

LUCIAN BLAGA'S LAW OF NON-TRANSPONIBILITY

HENRIETA ȘERBAN*

ABSTRACT: Lucian Blaga departs from the aesthetic conceptions of the 19th century. His law of non-transponibility (LNT) emphasizes an original approach to the autonomy of art, providing topical criteria for defining and evaluating “kitsch”, one of the many forms of aesthetic failure. Natural beauty and artistic beauty are not the same. LNT is neither idealism nor aestheticism. It is meant to capture what is most important in the question of the autonomy of art, by clarifying the function of specific artistic criteria, which should not be overly simplified, as aestheticians tend to do.

In his view, art is a direct consequence of the human being's positioning in the horizon of mystery. Art and knowledge meet in their shared failure to absolutely conquer mystery. In accordance with Blaga and LNT, aesthetic failure is rather a betrayal of human becoming and positioning in the horizon of mystery. In conclusion, the study discusses LNT in contrast to natural beauty – the first experience of symbolic eloquence, proportion, and the refusal of stridency – as well as the scientific metaphor, understood as art returning to the expressivity of natural experience (the “immediate”), with epistemological and non-kitsch benefits.

KEYWORDS: Lucian Blaga; aesthetics; law of non-transponibility (LNT); abyssal categories; stylistic matrix; horizon of mystery; scientific metaphor.

Motto:

“Plagiarising nature: The birds which – as an ancient anecdote has it – swooped upon a picture of some cherries made by a painter merely wanted noisily to denounce plagiarism, not at all to clap their wings in applause for a great work of art.”

[Lucian Blaga]

THE LAW OF NON-TRANSPONIBILITY

The Romanian philosopher Lucian Blaga (1895–1961; metaphysicist¹ and creator of a philosophical system, philosopher of knowledge, philosopher of culture, poet and playwright)² defined the “law of non-transponibility” in *The Trilogy of Value* (1946), a part of his philosophical system alongside *The Trilogy of Knowledge*, *The Trilogy of Culture* and the *Cosmological Trilogy*. *The Trilogy of Value* is composed of the studies *Science and Creation* (1942); *Magical Thought and Religion*, with its two

* Institutul de Filosofie și Psihologie „C. Rădulescu-Motru” al Academiei Române

parts, *On Magical Thought* (1941) and *Religion and Spirit* (1942); and, *Art and Value* (1939). In *Art and Value*, we encounter the topic of *the law of non-transponibility* occasioned by a philosophical meditation on consciousness, art and the autonomy of art, aesthetics and values – culminating in a discussion of the metaphysics of values.

The law of non-transponibility (LNT) is a corollary of the artistic aesthetic, distinct and set apart from the natural aesthetic. Although the artistic domain is the realm of intuitions, improvisation, suggestions and surprising visions representing the world, and although it may seem an exaggeration to speak of one or more laws governing the artistic aesthetic, Lucian Blaga, as a metaphysicist, couldn't resist correlating the description of the specificity of the artistic aesthetic with a law. He thus emphasized its most important trait through a law, namely, LNT.³ In Blaga's conception, the objective structures of the natural aesthetic led to poor art; to a lesser art that is no longer art – *kalia* (χαλιά), para-kalia or *kitsch*.

Blaga aimed to defend "the total autonomy of 'artistic aesthetic', a matter that has not yet been dealt with adequately, that is, with the implied, necessary and adequate theoretical instruments".⁴ The philosopher's interest in knowledge, philosophy, science and creation stands at the core of his philosophical endeavour and here we may also trace the roots of his lawful approach to the autonomy of artistic aesthetic. Art, in all its forms, is the result of a revelatory act. In *Art and Value*, Blaga undertakes an investigation aimed at identifying "the aesthetic structure of art and the values that intervene, either directly or indirectly, in the creation and appreciation of the work of art".⁵ Nevertheless, his endeavour is both sustained and hindered by a specific conceptual framework.

Here, as well as in *The Genesis of Metaphor and the Meaning of Culture* and in *Anthropological Aspects* Blaga underlines the human specificity of existence in relation to mystery and revelation as a prerequisite for the creative destiny of the human being and for a deeper understanding of the work of art as "creation of culture". His metaphysical conception and his conception of art are intertwined, reinforcing each other within Blaga's philosophical system. Here, the ontological dualism, termed by Blaga "the amphibianism of the human consciousness" – a consciousness that engages with and takes advantage of both the material and spiritual dimensions to a comparable extent – "proves fruitful in analyzing aesthetic structures and values".⁶ The human being is a singular ontological mutation in the universe, endowed with special aptitudes for exploring mysteries and engaging both with them and with the material elements of the world. The human being is both a knower and a creator, living not only in the horizon of the concrete world and for self-preservation, but also in the horizon of mystery: two distinct and heterogeneous ontological modes.

Man as a conscious being has something of the amphibian, possessing the latitude to breathe, with alternating emphasis, in two entirely different horizons. Man cannot [however] cancel at will one of these two horizons [represented by the realm of the concrete and the realm of mystery].⁷

Living in the “horizon of mystery”, the human being is a naturally born artist, creating and analysing art. In order to further explore these aspects, Blaga proposes a complex conceptual set of instruments: the amphibian quality of human consciousness (diving into the dual material and mysterious dimensions of ontology), mystery, proto-mystery, horizon of mystery, Luciferian knowledge, ontological mutation, culture, non-transponibility, para-aesthetic, polar values, vicariant values, tertiary values, flotant values, accessory values, transcendent censorship, abyssal categories, transcendent conversion and many more. We shall describe and analyse, as follows, those closest to the aesthetic endeavour. Art and knowledge are constituted by attempts to reveal mysteries and, in this respect, they are similar activities, standing together under the empire of stylistic categories, always metaphorical.⁸

LNT can be neither defined nor discussed without all of these concepts, which have the greatest utility in analysing art and aesthetic qualities of art. Art is the domain of feeling and introspection, so the role of consciousness in art is especially important. Artistic creations are facts of consciousness. Acknowledging the contribution of Descartes to ontological dualism and the problem of consciousness, Blaga considers that Descartes⁹ did not exhaust the topic and that many more aspects should be taken into consideration. He therefore proposes the amphibian mode of the human being. The ego or the self represent implicates of consciousness and thus of any act of creation and knowledge, rendering spiritual realities in abstract terms. The category of mystery is central to Blaga's philosophy, standing at the intersection of his theories of aesthetics, knowledge, and metaphysics. The “horizon of mystery” emerges within human consciousness and storms and problematizes the ego. This surge of the horizon of mystery in man is the specifically human consequence of the ontological mutation that the human being underwent.

To Blaga, mystery pre-exists theory. Theorizing is the result of the fact that for man mystery is not a foreign realm situated at the fringes of existence but a true “home” and inner substance of human consciousness. Man is the creator of culture by the same privilege. Any abstraction is the result of such problematization and, ultimately, so is all human knowledge and creation. The Cartesian ego is an implicate of animalic and paradisiac consciousness that naïvely approaches the materiality of the world in a logical and positivistic manner of knowing. The opposite type of knowledge is most likely to be involved in the creation of superior art: Luciferian knowledge¹⁰, an extra-logical mode (characterized by “ecstatic”¹¹, metalogical rationality) or, at times, a surprising and seemingly illogical mode. Separately from proto-mystery, the human mode of existence unfolds among the numerous manifestations of the idea of mystery, due to knowledgeable actions and endeavours of man and resulting from the theoretical processes of knowledge.¹²

Blaga undertook a transdisciplinary move by transposing the concept of mutation from biology to philosophy and, more specifically, to metaphysics. He used it to explain his view of the ontological modes and human singularity, considered together not through morphological mutations, as in naturalist philosophies and

sciences, but through *ontological mutations*. These are “foundational facts placed at the basis of the world, that knowledge has only to acknowledge as such; they are gushing out, or they are uttered as the words of the Holy Ghost over the waters in the days of Genesis”.¹³ The appeal to seemingly theological vocabulary is a deliberate metaphysical choice in Blaga, similar to Hegel’s metaphorical evocation of the Spirit above the waters.¹⁴ Let us not forget that, in Blaga, the human being is also a metaphorizing being. The use of poetic and spiritual vocabulary with a theological “tinge” has a role in describing a foundational vision of the world and not a true preoccupation with theology, nor with Orthodoxy. At the same time, the philosopher resorts to such vocabulary because it is already available to describe the individuations of mystery and the whole of man’s “work” with mystery. Blaga’s philosophy approaches the singularity of the human being as a unique ontological mutation, describing man primarily as a cultural and spiritual being.

In Blaga’s philosophy, there is a distinction between morphological and ontological modes of existence. The former are individuations, expressed in numerous “creatural patterns”. The latter are fewer: the crystals, the plants, and animalic existence, within which Blaga includes the prehistorical anthropoids and the paradisiac man. This last figure is introduced to illustrate an ontological stage of the human being as a theoretical landmark, opposed to the “whole” man – the superior ontological mutation, a creative and knowledgeable consciousness living in the horizon of mystery.¹⁵ All superior ontological modes “encapsulate” (include and assimilate) the inferior ones. These are fully integrated into the higher mode but nevertheless retain their autonomy.¹⁶

LNT IN DEFINING AND DISCUSSING THE WORK OF ART

In Blaga, the work of art tends to reveal intuitively and concretely the mystery; it is stylistically modelled, and it remains metaphorical in correlation with mystery. Against this complex metaphysical design, culture entirely *implies the revealing act* with defining metaphorical and abyssal stylistic categorial and dominant traits. There is no “distance” between the revelatory ontological human mode in the horizon of mystery and cultural creation. In Blaga, the scope of cultural creation is widely extended: it may be concrete or abstract in nature, it may be an object or a movement, and it may be theoretical, scientific, artistic, or metaphysical.¹⁷ The human being creates as she/he lives, so with revelation as the defining and specific ontological mode, human creation is the most specific activity, and the work of art is a dominant ontological outcome, not a rarity or an unwanted occurrence. Attributing culture to the spiritual activity of a “subject with intellectual attributes”, or as a “receiver of meanings”, or as a “bundle of categorial functions” is still vague and unproductive in Blaga’s perspective, for these are characteristics encountered to some extent in animals, anthropoids, and the paradisiac man as

well. Yet, in Blaga's philosophy, the anthropoids and the paradisiac man are not whole versions of "man". So, "The spirit, in its structure and functions, does not lead in any necessary manner to culture".¹⁸

Culture is the defining mark of humanity, and man is bound to a destiny of cultural creation. The human being worthy of the name is the result of an irreversible ontological mutation. Existing in the horizon of mystery and for revelation, man exists by revealing more than the immediate, concrete world – a world he transcends culturally, creatively, metaphorically, and through Luciferian knowledge. This cultural and creative overcoming of the concrete immediate world is possible only due to the abyssal categories, functions that are part of the cosmological-genetical privileged access to the universe, unique to man. However, this privileged access is not absolute. The abyssal categories, while granting access, in fact provide only a *limited* kind of access, specific to the complete human being and a consequence of transcendental censorship. It is precisely this human ontological dualism ("amphibianism"), a dualism of horizons, that is decisive for the quality of human aesthetic creations. Thus,

Depending on each of the two existential modes, with their specific horizons, aesthetic values (both positive and negative) are constituted, which are, quite simply, non-transponible [my emphasis] from one horizon to another. Thus, the "beautiful" (the positive aesthetic) that is constituted as a value within the horizon of the given world is not transponible into the horizon of mystery and revelation, where the "beautiful" (the positive aesthetic) implies entirely different criteria. In other words, within each of the two great horizons, aesthetic values, both positive and negative, take shape – values that are absolutely heterogeneous and irreducible [to one another].¹⁹

LNT is predicated upon the definition of art as the creation of culture and as the outcome of the revelatory human ontological mode. Art emerges through confronting and revealing mystery, which is the most characteristic and "natural" way of existing for man.

The concrete given world is no longer, for man and for his existence, a horizon in the absolute sense, but only a sign or a complex of signifiers of the true horizon, which is "mystery".²⁰

This observation is an axiomatic starting point for the explanation of the origin and function of art. However, even this very important prerequisite is not sufficient. One has to acknowledge that in Blaga the mysteries are not really elucidated, but alleviated, addressed and sometimes even "enhanced". Only with this corollary can we catch a glimpse of the complex nature of human art: it is varied, rich, surprising, and sometimes paradoxical. As a consequence, "art will therefore appeal to sight, hearing, and touch, but not to smell or taste [...], senses destined to put us in contact with materials that, by their very nature, resist being processed into stylistic patterns".²¹ In Blaga's perspective, smell and taste belong more to the realm of the "immediate". Nowadays, however, we regard smelling and tasting as functions of artistic gatekeepers in the culinary arts; and smell plays a similar role in the more artistic realm of the perfume industry. We consider both the perfume industry and refined culinary activity

to be art, although they are, to a significant degree, indebted to the science of chemistry as well. Moreover, there is today a rather widespread tendency to place “art” – even more than “science” – before the names of other activities, concepts, or phenomena, thereby granting those creations supplementary prestige. In Blaga’s philosophical conception, man is truly a human being when she or he creates – but there are creators, and then there are creators. In contrast to everyday man, the genius is “gifted to live with special intensity in the horizon of mystery”²², converting mysteries through revelatory metaphors and within abyssal patterns. Talent is defined as the varied “useful competencies”²³ in “fighting the material” – that is, the immediacy – for metaphorizing revelations. Given the origin and function of art in the “ontological mode in the horizon of mystery”, Blaga does not accept the idea of a closeness between art and games, between art and the expression of vitality (which lies too close to biology, to material immediacy), or between art and therapeutic practices.

LNT does not aim to construct a type of aestheticism. The autonomy of art upon which LNT is founded does not imply aestheticism. However, in our view there is a tension between the fact that Blaga maintains we should not envision a hierarchy of the cultural “branches” (domains) and the fact that he gave special consideration to the theme of the “autonomy of art”. In Blaga, in contrast to Kant or Schopenhauer, *all* cultural specialisations (art included) are conceivable as “transcendentally censured revelations of mystery”. The criteria for a hierarchy of the cultural domains are, in Blaga’s perspective, deemed untrustworthy or precarious. While he accepts the delimitation of art from other cultural creations, he also maintains that external structures (whether moral, political, philosophical, or any other kind of governing structures that are not aesthetic) should not be imposed as regulators of art. Blaga adds that the action of the “aesthetic purification of art” led to, or degenerated into, *aestheticism* (positing “art for art’s sake”, the idea that art should be produced to be beautiful – axioms of the 19th-century movement famously sustained by Oscar Wilde and Walter Pater). It is a very weak argument to attempt to defend the autonomy of art while criticising aestheticism as an exaggeration or “degeneration” by installing the “hegemony of art in culture” and thereby producing the “anaemia of art”. Especially surprising is the idea phrased as follows:

Aestheticism favours in art the emergence of rare and artificial forms, stripped of the virile content of a mythical vision. Aestheticism favours the parasitic growth of aesthetic structures as such and, being accompanied by a curious phobia towards any broader or deeper substance or significance, inevitably leads to an anaemia of art. One may also raise against aestheticism the accusation that it seeks to absolutize the aesthetic in the world. [...] Aestheticism, aspiring to install the hegemony of the aesthetic both in culture and in life in general, leads within the whole of culture to a kind of quasi-artistic elephantiasis.²⁴

Blaga’s explanation – that revelatory artistic creation is accomplished through specifically artistic means (sensitivity, concreteness, intuition), by “converting the mystery at the level of intuition”²⁵, and that “the autonomous field of art is that of the intuition captured stylistically”²⁶ – does not adequately address the difference between

aestheticism and authentic art, nor explain why, in this case, there is no longer a hegemony of art in culture. At the same time, it is not entirely clear what a “virile content of a mythical vision” implies and why it should be central to high-quality art. For intuition may be present in artistic products without a “virile mythical vision,” since revelatory metaphorical representations need not be “virile” by necessity – especially given that this aspect relates far too closely to the *immediacy* from which Blaga distances revelatory metaphors, revelatory acts, and art.

So, all creation is revelatory. The autonomy of art amid these varied creations is a matter of the specificity of its definition and its evaluative criteria. Nevertheless, by acknowledging that in the case of science “the revelatory acts emerge at the level of imaginary concepts and schematism”, and that in the case of metaphysics the revelatory acts emerge at the level of “abstract visions”, it becomes clear that in Blaga all distinctive areas of culture possess their own forms of autonomy, and all these autonomies run parallel to one another.

LNT does not aim to prove that art is absolute or ideal in any sense. Contrary to idealism, which affirms that art renders the idea concretely, in sensible appearance, Blaga maintains that art's approach is to convert mysteries, not to sustain or impose ideas. While Platonic, Neoplatonic, and German idealism acknowledge Ideas as expressions of the absolute, in Blaga they are “particular metaphysical revelations of mystery, i. e., abstract-visionary revelations impregnated with certain stylistic categories, specific to certain times and peoples”.²⁷ Human visions cannot be absolute. They are all censured transcendently and are governed and impregnated stylistically. Thus, they are abyssal, intuitive, and sensible. In his argument, Blaga gives the example of Goethe, who, at the end of his life, confessed to Eckermann that in his works – including *Faust* – he did not wish to convey ideas.²⁸ The point is that Goethe too, in his art, differentiated between knowledge and art: in *Faust* he created art, not knowledge. Namely,

[T]he revelatory attempts of knowledge are made through imaginary-intellectual means and with the tendency to convert mysteries onto a plane of intelligibility, whereas the revelatory attempts of art are made through intuitive-concrete means and with the aspiration to convert mysteries into terms of sensitivity.²⁹

However, art and knowledge meet in their failure to fully conquer the mystery. The horizon of the immediate world displays “sensible signs” whose role is to signal heterogeneous mysteries which are to be revealed by man through cultural creations (a broader category that also includes scientific creations). This constitutes the most important human task, carried out through our abyssal categories.

The work of art is constituted by the horizon of mystery, the intention of revelation, and the intervention of the abyssal categories.³⁰ These are also key moments in understanding the autonomy of the artistic aesthetic in relation with the natural aesthetic. LNT was conceived in the effort to bring to the fore a strong defence of the absolute autonomy of art. The artistic aesthetic should be distinguished from both the natural aesthetic and the para-aesthetic. LNT states that

[T]he objective structures of the natural aesthetic cannot be transposed identically into art without the loss of their initial qualities, nor can it happen the other way around: the objective structures of the artistic aesthetic cannot be transposed as such into nature.³¹

The displacement of structures leads to para-kalia, to a sort of aesthetic failure which is also captured by the German term *Kitsch*, defined as a “pretended form of aesthetics that triggers artistic pleasure for certain people”.³²

The background of 19th-century aesthetics is present in the background of LNT: Kant and Hegel also affirmed the autonomy of art, and *the value of great art lies in the independence of its form, which also carries soul or spirit* (in Blaga’s view, the abyssal categories introduce part of man’s inner world into the work of art, alongside the instantiation of a human revelation). For Hegel, beauty has its source in the spiritual content (*Geist*), which embodies itself in an appropriate sensuous form. However, aspects such as the search for comfort, novelty³³ or a glimpse of truth are not particularly important in Blaga’s conception of the work of art. In Hegel, truth is synonymous with beauty, although art remains a subjective experience. Helmut Walser Smith, in “Monuments, kitsch, and the sense of nation in imperial Germany”, analyses the temporal and spatial dimensions of what he called “nation objects”, considered in terms of the role they play in the constitution of everyday national identity. Many monuments, including those dedicated to Germany’s great intellectuals, are examined as metonyms of a world of objects largely deemed *Kitsch*. Such objects, signifying the nation, point to a national sentiment governed less by the sharp logic of ideology than by the harmonising tendencies of kitsch.³⁴

For Blaga, kitsch is only one instance of the para-aesthetic. We may think of the splendour of a sunset or the astonishing beauty of a remarkable biological specimen, but these are beautiful only for individuals who cannot transcend the aesthetic criteria of nature. Educated taste excludes such seemingly artistic objects as kitsch. And conversely: “an archangel in Byzantine style may be totally satisfying within the artistic order, but transposed into nature it is nothing other than a monster”.³⁵

LNT is meant to capture the most important aspect of the autonomy of art, by clarifying the function of specific artistic criteria, which should not be overly simplified, as aestheticians tend to do. Aestheticians such as Volkelt, Dessoir, Geiger, and Uitz speak of the differentiation of the artistic aesthetic from the natural aesthetic only in terms of variations in intensity and complexity, but Blaga underlines that LNT affirms the “absolute irreducibility of the artistic aesthetic quality to the natural one” and vice versa, although “it is possible that intuition and artistic taste have always functioned in agreement with LNT”.³⁶ Rhythm, proportion, harmony, and unity in variety might be similar in certain artistic and natural aesthetic creations. This correspondence probably led some aestheticians to “align” the artistic aesthetic with the natural aesthetic. Blaga brings to the fore the importance of the different *functions*³⁷ played by such characteristics in nature and, respectively, in art, thus opposing mimetic theories about art. Blaga cites Guido Reni and Murillo (French masters of Rococo) as creators of para-aesthetics, as well as traditionalist works in the Romanian current known as

“sămănătorism”³⁸, along with Klimt³⁹ and Max Klinger. Following the difference between the functions of artistic aesthetics and those of natural aesthetics, Blaga takes his critique of mimetic art to a more interesting level. He discusses the mimesis of the interior life of the human being transposed into art, and art as the expression of feelings (the *Erlebnis* in Dilthey). From this starting point, he opens a discussion around “intro-pathia” (a term proposed by Blaga to describe the emphasis on inner feelings, experiences, and realities transposed into art; a central idea in German aesthetics of the 20th century). He concludes that the sphere of aesthetics is wider than the sphere of such inner realities transposed into art – what Blaga calls “the intropathic complex”.⁴⁰

Theodor Adorno wrote “Bloch’s ‘traces’: The philosophy of kitsch”⁴¹ to capture a philosophical theory of primary experience, construing Indian stories to emphasise that in the immediate aspects of existence – in traces, or in a broken twig – there is something hidden, something not yet present, but in the process of becoming. Speculative thought follows this path, which is also the path taken by Blaga. Conundrums, the attempt to formulate the unformulable, and the ineffable itself lie at the core of speculative thought. Such thought explores not only the world and what lies beyond it, but also the limits of human subjectivity – as seen, for example, in immoderate fear or in what Adorno calls “groundless joy”. The idea that “there is more than meets the eye” is key to the reception of the work of art. The “obvious” and the strident, in general, are the marks of kitsch. Similarly to kitsch in the visual arts, popular or naïve philosophy strikes false notes like a poor pianist, eager to impress and desperate to astonish a candid, probably uneducated audience.

Adorno’s theory of art emphasises art’s role in engaging with human suffering, with repression and repressive systems, thereby promoting the possibility of change for the better and constituting part of our defence against barbarism. His philosophical view includes the subtleties of approaching art’s truth as truth through its “semblance of the illusionless”, highlighting the importance of representation and the fleeting utopian vision of what could be.

Related to this idea, and in contrast to Blaga, Adorno was not entirely opposed to mimesis. He considered that art can resist the cultural totalising logic of capitalism through a form of mimesis that critically captures aspects of reality which are marginalised, concealed, or discarded by capitalism. Capitalist “nature”, when transposed into representations as art, becomes art not when it merely describes but when it exposes critical aspects.⁴² Mimesis as resistance or resistance through mimesis is a contradiction of LNT.

In Blaga, “«feeling» is one of the structures acceptable in art only *conditionally*. Feeling becomes art not simply through expression, but through «artistic» expression”.⁴³ However, the unconscious, with its abyssal categories and “cosmotic nature” (ordered, complex, and self-contained)⁴⁴, is important for the work of art.

The work of art is thus “an ample organization of heterogeneous values, hierarchically correlated and merged into a unitary whole”.⁴⁵ In nature, the aesthetic values of sensibility are not inferior, as they are in art. *In art, the intuitive, the concrete, is exponen-*

*tially organized, both through the categories of consciousness and through the stylistic-abyssal categories.*⁴⁶ In this organized conglomerate of various values, we grasp the specificity of the work of art in comparison with other revelatory acts of culture.

In Blaga values are differentiated into polar, vicariant, tertiary, floating and accessory.⁴⁷ The polar type of values is predicated upon the tension that exists between structures of opposite character, and the work of art achieves a balanced dosage between mystery and sensible revelation, unity and multiplicity, the significant and the irrational, the spontaneous and the constructed, the canonical and the original, etc.⁴⁸ Blaga explains that the variability of polar structures is always independent: the dosage of the elements within one polarity does not determine the dosage of the others.⁴⁹ This rapport of the elements composing the polarity – their dosage – is determinant for value, and there is no single structure or pure element that leads to accomplished artistic value.⁵⁰

Blaga introduces vicarious values as replaceable, non-fixed values, grounded in the existence of abyssal categories. Abyssal categories, “conceptual transpositions of factors that operate in the subconscious”, are extremely important in Blaga’s thought. They are not only manifested as shaping factors in cultural creations but can also appear at the level of consciousness as values.⁵¹ Artistic will functions in accordance with the abyssal categories. In our view, the impact of the values introduced by Blaga describes not only aesthetic freedom, but also the awareness-raising, ethical, constructive, and political impact of aesthetics. Blaga also states that conscious stylistic values are vicarious, meaning that they can be replaced with others of the same kind.⁵² In his view, this aspect is most apparent in art criticism: “An immanent criticism, a true judgment on the work of art, can only be given from the perspective of the abyssal categories that make up its unconscious backbone”⁵³, categories that also play a structuring role for our conscious thought and our creations. These abyssal categories come together to form a culturally specific stylistic matrix with fluctuating composition. In the categorial heterogeneity of the abyssal nature of the human unconscious, Blaga discerns “horizon-describing” categories of space (infinite, plane, undulated, spherical; space conceived as formed by nests; germinative space; multi-curtained space) and of time (geyser-fountain time, oriented toward the future; cascade time, oriented toward the past; and river time, centred on the present); attitudinal categories (affirmative, negative, or neutral); categories of movement and destiny (anabasis, catabasis, holding ground – Blaga correlates movement with becoming); and formative categories (typicalisation, individualisation, and elementalisation).⁵⁴

The cognitive (Kantian) categories, mostly adopted from outside the being, and the abyssal inner categories may stand in a relation of asymmetry, as Blaga states. To illustrate, he notes that Cézanne aspired to become a good Impressionist painter, but was not an Impressionist after all. In Blaga’s view, the conscious artistic will can be embodied in works of art only if it corresponds to the specific matrix of an artist’s abyssal categories. Aspects such as proportion, harmony, “intropathic” complexes, the expression of feelings, the metaphorical imaginary, the intuitive qualities of plastic form, colour and sound,

and the concrete particularities of the word are “tertiary values”⁵⁵ that belong exclusively to sensibility. However, they are subordinate to polar and stylistic values, which are more important and ultimately responsible for “great” art.

The illustrative has an important role in Blaga's conception of art and LNT. As R. T. Allen⁵⁶ also noticed, Blaga's philosophy deserves the attention of Anglophone philosophers, for he also avoids the kind of immediate generalisations that produce impressively sounding *dicta* yet remain untested, as if moving in a world of abstractions without concrete illustrations. Thus, R. T. Allen proposes a list of primary paradigmatic concepts to be approached and investigated in interlocked connection: “Mioritic Space” as an example of Blaga's search for empirical illustration; “paradisiacal” and “Luciferian” knowledge; “integration into mystery”; “abyssal categories of the unconscious”; “stylistic matrix”; and so on – not to mention Blaga's metaphysical terms: “the Great Anonym”, “divine differentials”, and “transcendental censorship”.

As we have shown, in Blaga the idea emerges that human expression overlaps with human existence (and historicity), with its manifestations of knowledge through creativity; fashioned by the “stylistic matrix”, generated by the “abyssal categories”, with “ontological functions” correlated to the structure of the unconscious human spirit. Although not a personalist, Lucian Blaga emphasises the ontological difference of spiritual and creative nature between human beings and other beings, so that the perspective described comes close to the field of personalist studies.⁵⁷ In the light of Blaga's philosophical conception, art is personal, even though it seeks public display. The inner abyssal categories are personal in the sense that they shape revelation and the very configuration of the individual positioning within the horizon of mystery. In Lucian Blaga's philosophy, aesthetic failure is rather a betrayal of human becoming and positioning in the horizon of mystery. The “styles” that “colour” and “control” the final form of the work of art express individual ways of living, becoming, and acting within the world. Merleau-Ponty, emphasising the fact that human beings do not dwell in an abstract geometrical space, even though they can conceive of it, faintly indicated the dual ontological capacity of man. Blaga, as a philosopher of culture, correlated a theory of creation with a theory of knowledge within a broader, unitary human ontology, thus significantly surpassing a philosophy centred on spiritual, vectorised lived experience (as in Merleau-Ponty). For Blaga, lived experience involves cognition, creativity, art, and spirituality, harmoniously inscribed in a unitary and metaphysical, yet less essentialist, philosophy.

DISCUSSION. LNT VS. NATURAL BEAUTY AS EXPERIENCE OF SYMBOLIC ELOQUENCE, GOOD DOSAGE AND REFUSAL OF STRIDENCY. THE SCIENTIFIC METAPHOR

Natural beauty educates the artistic sense in two ways: it teaches us about proportion and about stridency. The first artistic education comes from the contemplation of nature, its harmony, and its sense of proportion. But for man, one thing always leads to another. Nature is eloquent, and man is a metaphorsing and symbolic animal. In the

contemplation of nature lies also the beginning of the symbolic dimension; from here, the step toward abstraction is not far. Numbers, as abstractions and as scientific metaphors, are the first experience of the relationship between the explicit and the implicit. Polar values, as well as vicarious and abyssal values, play a special role here. The artistic metaphor works to bring out the unfamiliar, the abstract, gradually moving toward a thought or a revealed mystery.

A scientific metaphor works somewhat in reverse: from the abstract to the familiar to explain the world.

We can take the example of the “wormhole”, which has a special role in the theory of relativity. From within the abstraction of the theory, this metaphor draws on experience with nature – more precisely, the tunnel dug by a worm between two points on the surface of an apple, establishing a “shortcut” that can intuitively support and enhance the scientific explanation. It is a toned-down type of mystery. The electron “fur” of atoms or the “cloud” of electrons are other examples of explanatory metaphors that alleviate mystery. In other cases, the scientific metaphor intensifies mystery – as in the case of the mathematical metaphor “zero”, whose practical intuition, the intuition of lack, does not explain why we can speak of something that is at the same time also “nothing”.

As we have emphasised, in Blaga’s view, in nature the aesthetic values of sensibility are not inferior, as they are in art. *In art, the intuitive and the concrete are exponentially organised, both through the categories of consciousness and through the stylistic-abyssal categories.* However, these two sets of categories also come together to influence man’s scientific activity. In science, the aesthetic values of sensibility are likewise not inferior, but rather paradigmatic forces by virtue of their illustrative and explanatory power. As Blaga has shown in *Science and Creation*, science itself is creation, with a double specificity: type I (paradisiacal) and type II (Luciferian), corresponding to human existence situated in two worlds – the immediate and the horizon of mystery. Blaga writes:

To illustrate Type II of cognition we shall resort, by repetition, to an image that we have already employed. In this type of cognition, one encounters not only the horizon of the sensible world and categories of the Kantian sort but, constitutively, also a horizon of mystery and stylistic (abyssal-unconscious) categories shaping the “theoretical constructs” used in uncovering mysteries.⁵⁸

Going back to the example of the scientific metaphor of the “wormhole”, it is extremely interesting for our argument because it is artistic, taken from nature, a kind of kitsch – but not quite so kitschy, since it is not meant to be admired but to be understood, as a cognitive instrument. In Lucian Blaga’s terminology, a scientific metaphor is a specifically human instrument for coping with mystery – to manage it, to increase it, to expose it, to diminish it; to reveal mystery somehow, by intriguing, creative, and surprising human means. In the case of the scientific metaphor, one might be tempted to deduce that the application of LNT would show scientific metaphors to be kitsch. However, since the scientific metaphor primarily

follows an intuitive opening toward explanation, it is more accurate to conclude that LNT does not apply here at all. Scientific metaphors are metaphors in the full sense and can only artificially be considered “something other” than metaphors in fine art or literature. Yet their function is primarily explanatory and only secondarily aesthetic. They represent art in the service of explaining theoretical abstraction – “useful fictions” with epistemological functionality. To apply LNT to them would be an exaggeration. As Blaga states:

Thus, science places itself, obviously, by its main intentions, by the predominant mass of its corpus of theses, in the sphere of Type II cognition. Biologico-pragmatic positivism, of all shades, understands the constructs of science as if they had emerged in the horizon of the given world as “useful fiction”.⁵⁹

With scientific metaphors we reach the outskirts of the law of non-transponibility, where the aesthetic (the metaphor) is present for evaluative, suggestive, interpretative, and explanatory purposes in theorising nature. The natural, the artistic, and consciousness are part of the same “equation”, revealing reality – but a reality for and of man. The wormhole is a scientific metaphor, predicated to a certain extent on the aesthetics of ugliness and the aesthetics of decay.

As Alfred N. Whitehead also pointed out, man cannot help but push knowledge beyond the limitations of an exclusively materialistic understanding of the universe; he cannot help but look through and among the fragments of matter toward dynamic processes of becoming, understood as events in relation, and then toward metaphysics, beyond “hurdling matter”.⁶⁰

Douglas Youvan introduces the notion of “the metaphysical wormhole”⁶¹ discussing a vision of the human being as linked to everything⁶² around and beyond the empirical or factually examinable realms – extending into other realms, traversed and transgressed through the metaphysical wormhole, much like Alice in Wonderland. Are these connections undertaken? Do people dare to make such journeys of connection to everything? Are they enriched, or are they lost in the process? These are among the most important questions haunting the philosophical mind. Blaga, situating man uniquely in the horizon of mystery and for revelation, answers in favour of such connections and journeys. In the light of his philosophy, these are journeys for human spiritual enrichment, correlating with a human life destined to be drawn to cognition and creation and to be lived as a work of art. Moreover, the tension within the human ontological amphibian condition strongly orients human creation in accordance with the influence of the abyssal categorial forces and with the law of non-transponibility.

NOTES

¹ We prefer the term “metaphysicist” to “metaphysician”, making a conscious choice in favour of the former, as it is closer to the formation of the word “metaphysics” from “meta” and “physics”.

² Lucian Blaga left behind an original philosophy structured in interrelated trilogies: *The Trilogy of Knowledge*, *The Trilogy of Culture*, *The Trilogy of Values* and *The Cosmological Trilogy* (posthumous, 1980–88). *The Trilogy of Knowledge* (1943) consists of the following works: *On Philosophical Consciousness*

(1947), *The Dogmatic Aeon* (1931), *Luciferian Knowledge* (1933), *Transcendental Censorship* (1937), and *The Experiment and the Mathematical Spirit* (1969). *The Trilogy of Culture* (1944) gathers the works *Horizon and Style* (1936), *The Mioritic Space* (1936), and *The Genesis of Metaphor and the Meaning of Culture* (1937). Of particular interest for the purpose of our study is *The Trilogy of Value* (1946). Lucian Blaga examined the interrelations of knowledge, creation, and human existence as aspects of a unique universe. More than leaving behind a philosophical work of reference, he built a modern and contemporary philosophical system worthy of investigation. It is notable that, so early on, he envisioned a structure for his philosophical system that he almost completed, emphasizing it as a “metaphysical vision of the totality of existence”. This outline was included in *Schița unei autoprezentări filosofice* [The Sketch of a Philosophical Self-Presentation, 1938], where it was associated with the metaphor of “the church with several domes”, an “architectural” plan materialized in a disciplinary philosophical system with conceptual content of great value.

³ Lucian Blaga’s philosophy was well received, but has seen limited translation into English. However, there is one very good introduction in his philosophical work in English, containing well selected translated fragments. See Angela Botez, Richard T. Allen, and Henrieta Anișoara Șerban (eds.), *Lucian Blaga: Selected Philosophical Extracts*, With a Foreword by Calvin O. Schrag, Wilmington/Malaga, Vernon Press, 2018. The volume includes a substantial introduction to Lucian Blaga’s life and work, along with excerpts from many of his philosophical writings, each preceded by a concise, explanatory, and contextualizing abstract: *Philosophical self-presentation* (1938), *The Dogmatic Aeon* (1931), *The Divine Differentials* (1940), *Transcendental Censorship* (1934), *Luciferian Knowledge* (1933), *Science and Creation* (1942), *The Genesis of Metaphor and the Meaning of Culture* (1937), *Horizon and Style* (1935), *The Mioritic Space* (1936) and Aphorisms. At the end of the volume, there is a Glossary that includes an explanation of LNT (p. 153). The volume ends with a complex bibliography comprising a detailed outline of Lucian Blaga’s work and a comprehensive Romanian and international bibliography on him.

⁴ Angela Botez et al. (eds.), *Lucian Blaga: Selected Philosophical Extracts*, p. 153.

⁵ Lucian Blaga, *Artă și valoare*, 1996, p. 34.

⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 34–36.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 33.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 87.

⁹ René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy* [*Meditationes de prima philosophia*], trans. George Heffernan, Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1990.

¹⁰ See “Luciferian Knowledge” in Angela Botez et al. (eds.), *Lucian Blaga: Selected Philosophical Extracts*, p. 154 (“Glossary”).

¹¹ “Ecstatic rationalism”, *ibidem*, p. 152.

¹² Lucian Blaga, *Artă și valoare*, 1996, pp. 31–32.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 28.

¹⁴ G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel’s Philosophy of Nature*, 3 volumes, translated and with an introduction by Michael John Petry, London, George Allen and Unwin, 1970. See also G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit, 1827–28*, translated with an Introduction by Robert R. Williams, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007.

¹⁵ Lucian Blaga, *Artă și valoare*, 1996, pp. 17–19.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 32.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 22.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 26.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 34.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 20. Michael Jones (“Religion as philosophy and art in the Work of Lucian Blaga”, *Faculty Publications and Presentations*, Vol. 28, 2015, https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/phil_fac_pubs/28) introduces the thought of the Romanian philosopher Lucian Blaga on religion as a cultural creation that has value *apart* [our emphasis] from questions regarding the truthfulness of religious doctrines. In this interpretation, religion has considerable aesthetic and philosophical significance in Blaga. Jones analyses it within the context of Blaga’s metaphysical and epistemological vision and illustrates this with a new translation of one of his most famous poems.

²¹ Lucian Blaga, *Artă și valoare*, 1996, p. 38.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 41.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 45.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 71.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 73.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 79.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 75.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 77.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 81.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 87.

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 90.

³² *Ibidem*, p. 91. There is no single author conventionally credited with the paternity of the term “kitsch”, but it is generally considered a contribution of German philosophy of aesthetics. In the early 20th century, the Austrian novelist Hermann Broch developed the notion of kitsch as both a moral and aesthetic failure, rooted in sentimentality and emotional effect to the detriment of value. It is not bad art, but a cunning art – something that only seems to be art, yet does not rise to genuine aesthetic value. The Czech novelist Milan Kundera built on Broch's ideas, defining kitsch as the sentimentalism that induces a seemingly genuine shared emotion, as if experiencing the real thing. This sort of sentimental deception is ultimately harmful. In Blaga, such sentimental deception – that is, kitsch – poses as a revelatory act, which it is not.

³³ As in Hegel, the *Zeitgeist* always moves forward, and the history of art must likewise advance toward new forms of expression. There is no eternal return in Hegel. For him, nostalgic or vintage art would run against the *Zeitgeist* – and would therefore be kitsch. Steven M. Cahn et al., *Aesthetics – A Comprehensive Anthology*, Second Edition, Hoboken, John Wiley & Sons Inc., 2020; Jim Vernon, *Hip Hop, Hegel, and the Art of Emancipation: Let's Get Free*, Cham, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018; Allen Speight, „Philosophy of art”, in *G. W. F. Hegel: Key Concepts*, ed. M. Baur, London, Routledge, 2015, pp. 103–115.

³⁴ Helmut Walser Smith, “Monuments, kitsch, and the sense of nation in imperial Germany”, *Central European History*, Vol. 49, Nos. 3–4, 2016, pp. 322–340.

³⁵ Lucian Blaga, *Artă și valoare*, 1996, p. 98.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 93.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 101–104.

³⁸ The 20th-century Romanian cultural current called “sămănătorism”, which took shape around the cultural journal *Sămănătorul* and whose name is derived from the verb “to sow”, expresses a vision of life that emphasises not only traditionalism and the centrality of agriculture, but also the germinative dimension – and thus the creative and artistic aspects – inherent in a traditional agricultural worldview. Within this framework, one can easily perceive the transponibility from the germinative qualities of seeds to an artistic organicism, inscribable within the para-aesthetic.

³⁹ On the topic of Klimt and kitsch, more recently, see for instance Stefan A. Ortlieb and Claus-Christian Carbon, „A functional model of kitsch and art: Linking aesthetic appreciation to the dynamics of social motivation”, *Frontiers in Psychology*, Vol. 9, 2018 (<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.02437>). In this article, the authors capture the commercial “quality” and versatility of kitsch, described by Greenberg as paradoxical, both static and dynamic, for “[k]itsch changes according to style, but remains always the same”; C. Greenberg, „Avant-garde and kitsch”, *Partisan Review*, No. 6, 1939, p. 40. Highly controversial or highly praised artistic innovations are subject to adaptation at a cultural level, and may gradually become clichés of high art before being completely reframed as objects of commercial exploitation. Museum shops sell coffee mugs, T-shirts, and pillowcases imprinted with reproductions of *The Kiss/Lovers* by Gustav Klimt, whose work has lost its initial innovativeness and has become particularly prone to kitsch classification, due to its figurative character and emotional subject matter. Greenberg situated kitsch at the “rear-guard” of cultural change, even though it has been culturally successful in economic terms. In a manner of speaking, kitsch is an abuse that proves commercially successful. It is art for the sake of immediate accessibility, depicting common life experience and the familiar in other guises, implying hedonism and favouring “effortless identifiability and standard associations” over novelty, surprise, abstraction, or paradox in relation to subject matter. For further

discussion of kitsch and postmodernism, see M. Călinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism*, Durham, Duke University Press, 1987. In our view, the legacy of Mozart has also been transformed into kitsch. Yet Mozart's art, although emotional, serene, and relatively easy to receive as an idealisation of childhood, is not kitsch. A similar argument can be made for Klimt: the perception of kitsch surrounding his work derives largely from its commercial exploitation, which tends to engulf his high art products. In Mozart's case, compared to Klimt's, it is simply more difficult to "attach" music to objects (apart from music boxes or barrel organs) than to attach images to objects. The reframing of art as industriously reproducible kitsch by capitalism, through commercial exploitation, should not be taken as proof that the very work of art itself bears the mark of kitsch.

⁴⁰ Lucian Blaga, *Artă și valoare*, 1996, pp. 111–116.

⁴¹ Theodor Adorno, "Bloch's 'traces': The philosophy of kitsch", *New Left Review*, May/June 1980 (<https://newleftreview.org/issues/i121/articles/theodor-adorno-bloch-s-traces-the-philosophy-of-kitsch>).

⁴² According to Blaga's framework, socialist realism is a form of modernised and triumphalist kitsch, whereas some interpreters, using Adorno's perspective, might consider it an instance of art as resistance to capitalism.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, pp. 117–118.

⁴⁴ Angela Botez et al. (eds.), *Lucian Blaga, Selected Philosophical Extracts*, p. 161.

⁴⁵ Lucian Blaga, *Artă și valoare*, 1996, p. 120.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 146.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 120 sqq. See also Angela Botez et al. (eds.), *Lucian Blaga: Selected Philosophical Extracts*, pp. 149, 161, 165.

⁴⁸ Lucian Blaga, *Artă și valoare*, 1996, p. 120.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 122.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 123.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 128–129.

⁵² *Ibidem*, p. 135.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, pp. 125–126.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 126–127.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 142.

⁵⁶ R. T. Allen, "Why Read Blaga's Philosophy?", *Annals of the Academy of Romanian Scientists Online Edition Series on Philosophy, Psychology, Theology and Journalism*, Vol. 5, No. 1–2, 2013 pp. 133–138.

⁵⁷ Henrieta Șerban, "Lucian Blaga: The Human Being Destined for Mystery, Creativity and Knowledge", *Annals of the Academy of Romanian Scientists – Online Edition Series on Philosophy, Psychology, Theology and Journalism*, Vol. 10, Nos. 1–2, 2022, pp. 80–95.

⁵⁸ See, for a substantial fragment of Blaga's work in English, together with several illuminating introductory explanations, Angela Botez, R. T. Allen and Henrieta Anișoara Șerban (eds.), *Lucian Blaga: Selected Philosophical Extracts*, pp. 83–87 (esp. 85) and p. 149 ("Glossary": "Abyssal or stylistic categories").

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*. Also, "Science comprises a constructional part in which theoretical construction obviously influenced by style, occur. Science, therefore, is not superhistorical: it is born in a field of socio-cultural force lines that model it. As a matter of fact, the results of science are established also on the intellectual horizon of human existence and they emerge as 'values', alike to those produced in the ethical field and aesthetic plane". Lucian Blaga, "On the stylistic field", in Angela Botez et. al., *Lucian Blaga: Selected Philosophical Extracts*, pp. 87–88.

⁶⁰ Alfred N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, eds. D. R. Griffin; D. W. Sherburne, New York, Free Press, 1978, p. 54.

⁶¹ Douglas C. Youvan, "Beyond space and time: Exploring the metaphysical wormholes of human experience", preprint, 2024. (https://www.researchgate.net/publication/377746815_Beyond_Space_and_Time_Exploring_the_Metaphysical_Wormholes_of_Human_Experience).

⁶² This idea is explorable via Anaxagoras, monism, TOE and the philosophy of complexity.

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