

Editorial

Gaston Bachelard, the “non-psychoanalyst”

The relationship between Gaston Bachelard's philosophy and psychoanalysis can be described as changeable, even turbulent. The common points and ruptures, the departures and returns, the criticisms and reformulations of the source-concepts linked to the ambiguous attitude that Bachelard had towards psychoanalysis overlapped the changes already inscribed in his philosophy. We must add the importance of the diversification of theoretical and methodological proposals that arose in the psychoanalytical movement in the broad sense.

We can consider this relation of Gaston Bachelard's thought to psychoanalysis first of all from the perspective of the history of philosophy, as an example of influence and inventive reinterpretation. One can also study the approaches of the concepts by paying attention to their vitality and the meanings inscribed in them and generated by them. Finally, one can focus on philosophy itself as a research project that develops in a particular context of history and problems.

Bachelard adapted the key notions and methods of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis and Carl Gustav Jung's analytical psychology to his own research needs, both in the analyses of the development of scientific knowledge and in the reflection on the poetic imagination. Let us underline the originality of Bachelard's psychoanalytical projects. From a research point of view, the philosopher uses psychoanalysis to: 1) examine reveries, their images and ideas, as well as the work of the creative imagination and the consciousness of the dreaming subject; 2) to purify the mind of unconscious epistemological obstacles that result from the activity of the subjective and dreaming imagination, the source of images. According to Bachelard, these obstacles are always an unauthorized departure from the abstraction of scientific thought.

Independently of this originality, or perhaps because of it, this philosophy cannot be qualified as “psychoanalytic” because it goes beyond the limits of psychoanalysis, both in its theoretical and practical layers. In the following pages we want to show this particular attitude, both free and deeply philosophical, which links Bachelard to psychoanalysis. We will try to sketch its main characteristics on the example of one of the concepts taken up by Bachelard from psychoanalysis and reformulated by himself in the course of the discussion with its original formula and with the wider theoretical context in which the concept is examined.

There are many concepts of this type, specific to psychoanalysis and reformulated by Bachelard; the complex, sublimation, the unconscious, or the superego are some examples. Each of them is strongly rooted in his original theory. Nevertheless, in each case, Bachelard gave them a new meaning closely linked to his own philosophy. In this context, Leszek Brogowski calls Bachelard's thinking "conceptual nomadism"¹. Bachelard uses categories from various contexts, not only psychoanalytical ones. He gives them new meanings derived from his own projects. In the theoretical horizon of psychoanalysis itself, the ways of understanding these categories are quite unexpected and "unconventional". However, in the case of Jung's doctrine, certain meanings of the terms "archetype", "unconscious" or "complex" seem to indicate close, broadening and, in some cases, particularly precise perspectives. These meanings are often interpreted from the perspective of other forms of human activity, or literary images – individualized, "skillful," and "genuine", as Bachelard would say. Depending on the fields of reference, the term "archetype" here shows its potential to activate innumerable, beautiful, and creative forms of realization that reveal the astonishing variety and undeniable richness of imagination.

In the following pages we want to draw the reader's attention to this broad and deep category of the "archetype" which Bachelard derived from the analytical psychology of Carl Gustav Jung. Although this category was not created by Jung, his theory of the collective unconscious and the patterns rooted in it – patterns which manifest in the conscious lives of individuals and cultures – has strongly influenced contemporary interpretations of this category. Bachelard's philosophical understanding of the archetype is closely related to Jungian psychology and is a direct result of his interest in Jung's writings.

However, this category appears in Gaston Bachelard's philosophy within a new methodological context, different from that of Jung. Let us again quote Leszek Brogowski, who rightly calls Bachelard a "non-psychoanalyst", underlining his penchant for polemics which corresponds to the methodological postulates of his philosophy: "the philosophy of no". Bachelard wants to rise above the concepts and theories that he adopts. He wants to develop them and go beyond them. Thus, instead of limiting himself to the framework of psychoanalysis, the "non-psychoanalyst" seeks distinct and individual ways to understand it.

Let us recall that Bachelard – starting from questions linked to the development of knowledge, that is, to the objectifying movement of knowledge – moved on to the problems posed by the subjective experience of reverie. At first, he focused on the function of the subjective in the process of knowledge formation by marking it negatively. According to Bachelard, in the development of knowledge, subjective elements become epistemological obstacles that must be overcome. However, in the course of the development of his philosophy, Bachelard recognized subjective experience as an important subject of reflection, which he included in his theory

¹ Cf. L. Brogowski, *Posłowie od tłumacza. Gaston Bachelard: fenomenologia (marzenia poetyckiego) czy poezja (marzącego fenomenologa)?* In: G. Bachelard, *Poetyka marzenia*. Trans. L. Brogowski, Gdańsk, słowo, obraz/terytoria, 1998, p. 245.

of the creative imagination. And it is in this area of research focused on poetry that Bachelard's fascination with Jung emerges – a fascination which began in the 1940's, becoming progressively manifest in his later works. Bachelard defines imagination as the capacity to produce and transform images rooted in the unconscious. The images it yields are neither faithful reproductions of the reality nor its negations. From Bachelard's point of view, the image can be considered both from an anthropological and an epistemological perspective: it partly reflects external reality, and partly our mental structures themselves. Thus, the image operates in an intermediate position – a fact often indicated in contemporary research on the image and on photography.

Jean-Jacques Wunenburger underlines that it is the concept of the unconscious which most strongly links Bachelard's philosophy of the imagination with Jung's analytical psychology. For Jung (and also for Bachelard) the unconscious is not simply what is repressed; rather, "it is everything that, in the psyche, emerges from the inside to feed consciousness, and that allows consciousness to be permanently in relation with the deep sources of images"² rooted in the unconscious. This concept of the unconscious is linked to the thesis that the depth of the psyche and the conscious mind do readily merge, or flow into each other. This is the assumption that distinguishes Jung from Freud, who recognized the existence of blockages that distort the content of the unconscious, the proper meaning of which could only be discovered through analytical work³. Jean-Jacques Wunenburger indicates that the idea of the continuous relation between the unconscious and consciousness leads Bachelard to the thesis that "the waking consciousness is an instance and a place, a moment to phenomenologically apprehend the contents of unconscious images"⁴. Instead of turning to dreams, Bachelard turns his attention to the *cogito* of the dreamer, to the daytime consciousness that creates and transforms images, to the consciousness that dreams and expresses its reveries in language. There too, as Bachelard tirelessly demonstrates, the work of the unconscious manifests itself in full force. Let us point out here that Jung also described his position as phenomenological. However, this can only be confirmed in certain specific areas⁵.

With respect to another Jungian premise taken up by Bachelard, "the unconscious is not a temporal or spatial chaos, but a field of images already organized, even structured, in the sense of archetypes"⁶. The key category is the archetype as both the element that organizes the unconscious and its contents, and the supra-individual source of the symbols that manifest themselves in consciousness. Thanks to the hypothesis of these universal forms, "Bachelard also makes possible the idea of a universal sharing of the same imaginaries"⁷. That allows

² J.-J. Wunenburger, *Jung and the French school of the imagination: Gaston Bachelard and Gilbert Durand*. "Cahiers Gaston Bachelard" 2015, no. 13, p. 19.

³ Cf. *ibidem*.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Cf. R. Brooke, *Jung and Phenomenology*. London-New York, Routledge, 1991.

⁶ J.-J. Wunenburger, *Jung and the French school of the imaginary: Gaston Bachelard and Gilbert Durand...*, p. 20.

⁷ *Ibid.*

one to refer to the concept of the unconscious. In contemporary anthropological research one can even occasionally find concepts relating to characteristic psychological types connected, at the most general level, with the name of Freud, among others⁸.

The third great Jungian idea strongly present in Bachelard's philosophy is the notion of imagination's "androgyny". According to this idea, "the imagination, spontaneously, develops in two modes: a feminine mode and a masculine mode"⁹. The most famous Bachelardian development of this idea is well known in the famous chapter of *The Poetics of Reverie*, which examines Jung's thesis on the psychic androgyny of both women and men in relation to daydreaming, which Bachelard places under the sign of the *anima*. Let us also recall his studies on images rooted in the earth element. He distinguishes there the imagination of repose (the introverted imagination) coherent with the psyche of *anima*, and the imagination of will (the extraverted imagination) marked by the sign of *animus*.

In his interpretation of the archetype, Bachelard follows Jung in noting the matrix character of this particular potentiality. According to this view, the archetype is a heritage constituted in the secular process of human experience. It is the context in which individual experiences (premonitions, fears and other given contents of consciousness) find their justification. Bachelard analyzes archetypes from the perspective of the fundamental category for his philosophy of the image. He considers archetypes as a kind of sequence of images that may, or may not, be realized. Thus, they become a ground that offers the possibility to define the human situation and the activity of human imagination. In this sense, they become an anthropological basis.

However, the presence of common elements does not mean that Bachelard's theory of the unconscious and archetypes is identical to that of Jung. What distinguishes these two positions are the goals of the analyses carried out. Jung's research is cognitive and practical: the reflection on the symbolism and imagery of myths, dreams or literary works opens for him a path leading to the knowledge of the functioning of the human psyche. This knowledge is then developed in his therapeutic method. We can therefore conclude that the primary objective of Jung's research is to find a method of healing (fusion) of the psyche. This indicates here that, in Jung's later writings, his concept of the unconscious expands considerably, an expansion which he expresses explicitly. The unconscious becomes the basis for processes related to the development of mental and extra-mental reality (*unus mundus*), which was rarely noticed in the research on Jungian psychology. Such considerations can be found in Christine Maillard's work (although approached from a different perspective and with reference to the early stage of Jung's work), who adds the idea of the evolution of the absolute¹⁰.

⁸ Cf. E. Nowicka, *Świat człowieka – świat kultury*. Warszawa, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2007, p. 393.

⁹ J.-J. Wunenburger, *Jung and the French school of the imaginary: Gaston Bachelard and Gilbert Durand...*, p. 21.

¹⁰ Cf. C. Maillard, *Les Sept Sermons aux Morts de Carl Gustav Jung*. Nancy, PU Nancy, 1993.

For a “word-dreamer”,¹¹ an epithet Bachelard ascribes to himself, the images rooted in the unconscious, the common structures that appear in the mind of the dreamer are “poetized,” as Simone Rosenberg and Ionel Bușe indicate¹². Undoubtedly, the aim of Bachelard’s research is also cognitive: he wants to understand the essence and functioning of the creative imagination. However, his research also has a deeply aesthetic, and even personal meaning. After all, Bachelard, who as a philosopher of science had eliminated subjectivity, also found his own path of reverie, as evidenced by numerous fragments published in his books on the poetic imagination.

The Bachelardian interpretation of the “archetype” category is like a lens through which all the characteristics of his approach to psychoanalysis are concentrated. This free and unorthodox approach requires treating psychoanalytic theories and notions broadly, both as a creatively stimulating inspiration and as a continuous – yet constantly shifting – reference point. Bachelard debates the theories that inspire him, as well as his own conclusions. These discussions, we might add, sometimes become intensive by taking the form of a polemic which may even lead to the philosopher’s abandonment of the doctrine that initially inspired him, a shift which does not mean a definitive rejection (as in the case of Freud’s psychoanalysis). Bachelard’s psychoanalytical inspirations – particularly the idea of the therapeutic impact of philosophy (purification and healing, both spiritual and cognitive) – reveal the importance of the practical dimension he found in philosophy. This in turn reveals the profoundly humanistic dimension of Bachelard’s philosophy that is strongly present in both his epistemology and his poetics.

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¹¹ Cf. G. Bachelard, *La poétique de la rêverie*. Paris, Les Presses universitaires de France, 1968, p. 25.

¹² Cf. S. Rosenberg, *L'image chez Bachelard et chez Jung: l'archétype est-il "poétisable"?* “Cahiers Jungiens de Psychanalyse”, 1988/4, n° 59, p. 48-57; Buse, I., “*Animus*” et “*anima*” chez Gaston Bachelard et Mircea Eliade, “Cahiers Gaston Bachelard. Numéro spécial: Bachelard et l’écriture”, 2004, pp. 21–32.

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