

Thinking Philosophically about Psychoanalysis: The Brazilian Case

Weiny César Freitas Pinto

Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul - BR

Abstract

The article intends to present the Brazilian philosophical reception of psychoanalysis as an illustrative case of what it means to think philosophically about psychoanalysis. Therefore, 1) it contextualizes the proposal and results of the X CIFIP – International Congress of Philosophy and Psychoanalysis, held in November 2023 by the Philosophy and Psychoanalysis Working Group of ANPOF (National Association of Postgraduate Studies in Philosophy), 2) it answers the question where is the philosophy of psychoanalysis going?, synthetically presenting the original contribution of the Brazilian philosophical reception of psychoanalysis through the thought of Luiz Roberto Monzani (1946-2021). The conclusion is dual: 1) the proposal and results of the X CIFIP opened a horizon of work with enormous local and international potential, which can generate significant advances in the field of the philosophy of psychoanalysis in Brazil, and 2) the contribution of Brazilian philosophical reception of psychoanalysis, mediated by Monzani's thought, is original compared to other philosophical traditions because it points to a break with the 'interpretive epistemological model' of the traditional reception, creating a new method of philosophical reception.

Keywords: philosophy of psychoanalysis, Brazil, philosophical reception, method

1. Introduction

Philosophy's interest in psychoanalysis is remarkable and is widely documented in the philosophical literature of the 20th century. Philosophers from the main contemporary philosophical traditions, from Heidegger to Wittgenstein, for example, dialogued intensely and vibrantly with the Freudian 'plague'. In the case of Brazilian philosophical thought, *Freud: a trama dos conceitos* (1982), by Renato Mezan (1950), and *Freud: o movimento de um pensamento* (1989a), by Luiz Roberto Monzani, are, amid a vast and productive literature, two very representative examples of the philosophical reception of psychoanalysis in Brazil, a philosophically creative reception, which resulted in a large and active research community in a new field of investigation called, in a very particular way, although still without consensus, 'philosophy of psychoanalysis'.

Not having even half a century of existence, the identity of this new philosophical field of research has, since its origins in the eighties, gradually established itself and is increasingly consolidating in Brazil. However, work on its history, theoretical and methodological systematization, and on the limits and possibilities of its varied contributions still require further advances. Only recently, in the last two decades, has the Brazilian philosophical reception of psychoanalysis begun to look at these aspects and investigate them with greater rigor and depth (Freitas Pinto, Padovan, Simanke & Bocca 2021).

A significant part of the consolidation already achieved by the field is certainly related to the *Philosophy and Psychoanalysis Working Group* of ANPOF, which, for two decades of creative and productive existence, has permanently brought together Brazilian researchers in the *philosophy of psychoanalysis* and, among several work activities, holds its important International Congress.

In this sense, CIFIP undoubtedly constitutes a privileged moment and space to *think philosophically about psychoanalysis*. Under this title, whose content is a replica with adaptations of my participation in the Congress, I would like to develop two basic tasks in this article: 1) to reflect and contextualize the proposal and results of the X CIFIP, whose theme *Between the plot and the movement: Where is the philosophy of psychoanalysis going?* constitutes, in a way, the central axis of an entire research program dedicated to *thinking philosophically about psychoanalysis* in Brazil, and 2) to try to answer the question *Where is the philosophy of psychoanalysis going?* by presenting, albeit in an incipient way, one of the many responses by the Brazilian philosophical reception of psychoanalysis, that of the philosopher Luiz Roberto Monzani.

2. Contextualization of the proposal and results of the X CIFIP

The *International Congress of Philosophy and Psychoanalysis*, held biannually since 2005 by the *Philosophy and Psychoanalysis WG* of ANPOF, reached its tenth edition in 2023, taking place between the 13th and 17th of November, for the first time in the central-western region of Brazil, in the city of Campo Grande, state of Mato Grosso do Sul, at UFMS (Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul). Resuming its traditional face-to-face format, after holding its last edition online, in 2021, during the terrible coronavirus pandemic, the X CIFIP questioned *the plot and movement of the philosophy of psychoanalysis*, that is, the *origin* and *destination* of this philosophical field of research, which, according to our hypothesis, has very characteristic features in Brazil.

The themes of *plot/origin* and *movement/destination*, guided by the question: *Where is the philosophy of psychoanalysis going?*, aimed at a double objective: in addition to promoting reflection on the history of the field, it also sought to highlight the multiple meanings and directions that constitute it, exposing its already consolidated lines of

research, as well as its possibilities for expansion and transformation. In this way, the X CIFIP proposed to question not only *where, when, and how* this field of investigation emerged (in Brazil and the world), but also what it currently represents, its consequences and implications, its most relevant philosophical problems, and mainly what its current state is and where it is heading to.

Fundamentally, it was an invitation to think about the challenges and potentialities of the articulation between philosophy and psychoanalysis, an articulation that in itself encompasses a myriad of possible relationships, especially if we take into account the enormous diversity of research in the field, which has productions arising from different theoretical intersections (psychoanalysis and epistemology, psychoanalysis and politics, for example), from which, in turn, the most varied themes arise: archeology of psychoanalysis, critical analysis of the structure of psychoanalytic theories, the problem of philosophical reception of psychoanalysis by different traditions and authors of philosophy, post-Freudian philosophy and psychoanalysis (Lacan, Winnicott, and other authors), psychoanalysis and femininity, psychoanalysis and social criticism, among many other possible themes.

Furthermore, by taking place in the third week of November 2023, the X CIFIP coincided, on November 16th, with *World Philosophy Day*, a date established by UNESCO in 2005, and since then celebrated annually in all parts of the world, every third Thursday in November. Its purpose is to highlight the value and importance of *Philosophy* for the cultural and individual development of human thought. This coincidence seemed quite fruitful to us as it allowed us to associate our *X International Congress of Philosophy and Psychoanalysis* with local extension actions (cultural and social interventions) to promote *World Philosophy Day* in the state of Mato Grosso do Sul.

Thus, the X CIFIP, associated with *World Philosophy Day* (UNESCO), became a particularly symbolic occasion for our philosophical question, after all, asking *where the philosophy of psychoanalysis is going* is also one of the many ways of asking: *Where is Philosophy going?*

The results? In short, there were five days of activities, and more than fifty scientific communications by researchers from all regions of Brazil and also from Costa Rica and Norway (partially published as abstracts in the *Congress Proceedings*). There were two international conferences (Italy and USA), six thematic tables with 18 presentations by research professors (the majority of which can be fully appreciated in the format of a scientific article in this international dossier of *Critical Hermeneutics*, which, in turn, inspired the organization of a book in Portuguese – work in progress! –, scheduled for 2025), a technical meeting of the WG members, a book launch session, the creation and launch of FEFICH-MS (State Forum of Philosophy and Human Sciences of the state of Mato Grosso do Sul), and a *Letter of Intent* relating to an international cooperation agreement between UFMS and UniCa (Università degli Studi di Cagliari). Three of these sessions were held in locations outside the University, marking our cultural and social interventions – one of them at *Casa Quintal Manoel de Barros*, the house-museum of one of the greatest Brazilian poets, another at *Estação Cultural Teatro Mundo*, a local theater company, and another at *Bioparque Pantanal*, one of the largest freshwater aquariums in the world, transformed into a research and environmental conservation station for the Pantanal biome. The X CIFIP united, in its results, science and culture, leaving a significant local legacy concerning the scientific and cultural activity of philosophy, psychoanalysis, and human sciences in general.

3. Where is the philosophy of psychoanalysis going? Monzani: one of the Brazilian responses

3.1. Luiz Roberto Monzani

Luiz Roberto Monzani was a Brazilian philosopher whose works on modern philosophy, notably the 18th century, and on psychoanalysis, especially Freud, are widely used as references in philosophy and psychology studies in Brazilian universities, and are also frequently referenced in national scientific articles on the subject¹. However, despite being quite widespread, we do not have a broad and established critique concerning the Monzanian *philosophy of psychoanalysis*.

The notable absence of such work with a critical scope is not exclusive to Monzani, it is, unfortunately, a characteristic of Brazilian philosophical reflection. There are several reasons and problems that this topic raises, and it is not appropriate to discuss them here, but I would like to draw attention to this kind of tacit agreement that philosophical thought in Brazil seems to have established with the non-critical repercussion of its own intellectual production. Everything leads us to believe that, precisely the philosophy that should, in principle, be the first to contest and vehemently oppose any agreement of this nature, has adhered to it to an unsustainable extent: Brazilian philosophers meet a lot, read each other little, and debate even less!

In fact, we cannot even build the social figure of the 'philosopher' in the Brazilian cultural imagination! From within our 'university caves' (Japiassu 1997) we carry out our work, some with philosophical

¹ Here is a list of Monzani's main works on psychoanalysis. Books: *Freud: o movimento de um pensamento* (1989a), written and 1982 and having a new edition in 2014; *Desejo e prazer na idade moderna* (1995), although not a book specifically about Freud and psychoanalysis, it is part of a theme of enormous psychoanalytic interest. Articles: *Sedução e fantasia* (1984); *Discurso filosófico e discurso psicanalítico: balanços e perspectivas* (1991a), written in 1988; *A 'fantasia' freudiana* (1991b); *O suplemento e o excesso* (2005a); *A teoria freudiana do sonho* (2005b); *As tópicas freudianas* (2005c); *O paradoxo do prazer em Freud* (2005d). Newspaper articles: *Uma revolução semântica* (1989b); and *A sintaxe da pulsão* (1999).

excellence, we lead research groups, we maintain a huge list of scientific journals, we hold academic conferences, courses, translations, debates, research, and publications, all of this mainly about international philosophers and, however, almost none of these works circulate internationally.

Worse than that is the fact that we study very little and reflect on our own research, theses, and theories, that is, our 'philosophical tradition', from which we then manage to create the incredible paradox of being, at the same time, a country in which philosophical research of the highest level is produced, but in which the figure of the 'philosopher' almost does not exist, significantly.

Controversies aside, this helps to situate and more or less justifies the problem of the critical reach of Monzani's work. Although it is a work of undeniable heuristic value, we still do not have a rigorously consolidated and in-depth critique of his philosophical thought.

We also do not have an intellectual autobiography or biographical work on the philosopher, which would certainly contribute to the understanding of his work. What we know about him, his history, and his relationship with philosophy and psychoanalysis generally comes from informal personal conversations, reports from fellow teachers, and mainly from his former students.

In this sense, the collective tribute made in the book *O movimento de um pensamento: ensaios em homenagem a Luiz Roberto Monzani* (Simanke, Caropreso & Bocca 2011) is not only very well deserved but also very useful scientifically since it is the only work in which we have formal access to some biographical references and to a first moment of specific theoretical repercussion of Monzani's thought.

Thanks to this tribute, we know, for example, about the 'poem archiver' philosopher (Moreno 2011), a philosopher who 'reads much more than he writes and who writes much more than he publishes' (Simanke 2011: 15, our translation), the philosophy student with

nocturnal habits, the excellent teaching skills of the teacher of college entrance exam courses, who 'spent all the money he earned from classes buying books', therefore, a voracious reader and 'owner of an exceptional library' (Vasconcelos 2011: 217–218, our translation), we even know about a certain characteristic of the philosopher's personal reserve:

[...] a young intellectual who I did not know where he came from, maybe from the countryside of São Paulo because of his accent, but I did not know how many brothers he had, who his family was, if he had a father, a mother, where he had gone to school. Monzani was a *Deus ex machina*, he appeared abruptly, suddenly, on Rua Martim Francisco (218, our translation).

Strictly from a theoretical point of view, the publication that pays homage to Monzani brings reports from his former students, either reflecting on themes developed by the philosopher himself or thinking about them through him, Simanke's *A arte da leitura e os efeitos do pensar: uma introdução ao pensamento filosófico de Luiz Roberto Monzani* (2011) is the first text to carry out a minimally systematic and rigorous reflection on the specificity of Monzanian thought.

Therefore, regarding the theme of the critical reach of Monzani's *philosophy of psychoanalysis*, if, on the one hand, a certain traditional apathy towards Brazilian philosophical self-reflection explains the absence of an effectively consolidated and established critique, on the other, there is a certain tendency, arising within Brazilian research into the *philosophy of psychoanalysis* itself, which begins to oppose this nonsense agreement of the national philosophical tradition. My own work tries to fit into the sequence and limits of these first steps.

3.2. The 'spiral thesis' and its implications

Monzani published his *Freud – o movimento de um pensamento* in 1989. The work, written seven years earlier, is the result of his doctoral thesis in philosophy and goes through the entire Freudian work in detail, carrying out a rigorous theoretical analysis of the main psychoanalytic concepts.

I will focus on exploring here only the major thesis that Monzani (1989a) supported there: that there is in Freud a very particular 'movement' of thought, whose metaphor – method? – that best represents it is the image of the spiral². Let no one be fooled by the simplicity of the formula – in our opinion, we are facing a new philosophical understanding of psychoanalysis.

The Brazilian philosopher's thesis, expressed in the title of the work, consists of demonstrating that a certain 'movement' is what essentially constitutes the Freudian way of thinking. 'Movement', in a very precise sense, whose nature is not defined in terms of 'overcoming', in the Hegelian dialectical sense of the term, nor in terms of 'development', in the genealogical or evolutionary sense that the term may imply (Simanke 2011). It is, above all, and in a very particular way, an 'oscillation' movement, whose vectors are structured along the lines of a pendulum and a spiral (Monzani 1989a).

Substantially, Monzani's thesis is a response to the problem of knowing how Freud proceeds with the articulation of the transformations of his concepts in the construction of his theory: would there be, after all, in Freud's work, 'radical ruptures' or would it be

² For a comprehensive analysis of the work, see Namba (2015) and Bairrão (2014). We will limit our analysis to the implications of this thesis regarding Monzani's *philosophy of psychoanalysis*. We know that a rigorous study of his work in general, especially his *Desejo e prazer na idade moderna* (1995), a book in which there is a 'screaming silence' in relation to Freud, would significantly deepen the understanding of his spiral thesis, however, given the extent of the theoretical universe to which we would be led, we thought it would be better to establish this debt with Monzani, to be paid with the rigor it deserves on another occasion.

constituted through an 'uninterrupted continuity?' (Monzani 1989a). The central point of the philosopher's position is precisely to show that Freud's thought cannot simply be concluded by choosing one of the poles of a certain understanding – the 'radical ruptures' alternative –, nor in the option of a progressive and absolute understanding – the 'uninterrupted continuity' alternative. On the contrary, Freudian thought is guided by a living and original 'movement', which, although it has its predeterminations, is never based on them.

In fact, the Freudian procedure seems to be of another nature, where questions are treated and revisited at several different levels, and the image that perhaps best expresses this discursive movement is that of the *spiral*. 'Spiral' movement, therefore:

[...] where the same issues are addressed, 'forgotten', resumed, but not at the same level as they were being treated previously [...] It is about several procedures and operations [...] What we have is always a progressive re-articulation and redefinition of concepts determined by their internal logic and the progressive integration of data from the experience. Either it is about the deepening and broadening of a concept [ego]. Either the emergence of an implicit but ordering notion [the death drive], etc. And each of these operations, in turn, often leads us to be forced to rethink the set of concepts that surround them, and so on (303, our translation).

In short, this is because in Freud, according to Monzani (301, our translation), it is, above all, '[...] a thought that advances through oscillations [...]', in which, in the end, we do not find, therefore, neither radical rupture nor regular continuity. What exists is a deepening of levels of understanding, a thought that develops in layers, successively complementing itself without the obligation to reject the previous

thought, and without the need to crystallize into what is current.

In other words, the *démarche* of Freudian thought is, for the Brazilian philosopher, of the nature of a 'pendulum-spiral' movement: on one side, it oscillates like a pendulum, on the other, it advances like a spiral, from where what we have is never precisely rupture and continuity, but always a progressive redefinition and re-articulation of concepts, whose own logic adds to a permanent integration of new data (Monzani 1989a).

In this way, with his spiral thesis (pendulum-spiral movement), Monzani (1989a) places us at the heart of the problem of understanding Freud's thought: the main issue is not to analyze Freud's works to discover whether there are two or three, or however many are the possible 'Freuds' to interpret, and then conclude to what extent these interpretations are close or distant from each other, but rather what is necessary to understand, what fundamentally constitutes the biggest problem in understanding Freudian thought is the question of knowing the way – the method? – Freud thinks.

This is where the whole issue lies and it is from there that Monzani draws the most decisive implications of his thesis. What is important is to radically interrogate the logic behind the functioning of Freud's discourse. This problem is so decisive that, according to Monzani (1991), it was its neglect that led many readings of Freud to fail. In theory, it was the non-recognition of a specific way, of a specific method, of the Freudian thought being constituted and developed that, to a large extent, is responsible for the recurring misunderstandings and distortions of Freud's work.

Now, this is exactly what is at stake in the important 1991 essay, *Discurso filosófico e discurso psicanalítico: balanços e perspectivas*. In it, Monzani (1991: 113, our translation) shows in detail, '[...] how a deeply embedded in philosophical discourse trend ultimately led to an in-depth re-reading of Freud's work [...]', that is, how, paradoxically, a

certain philosophical reception of psychoanalysis, despite its own distortions, enabled a more original and integral, less biased, apprehension of Freudian ideas.

This is because, on the one hand, several 'philosophical interpretations' of Freud followed one another, neglecting completely any autonomy and specificity to the Freudian discourse, thus imposing on it interpretative schemes and models external to his own³; on the other, a 'new attitude' emerged, a 'work' of '[...] purification, elucidation, clarification and precision of psychoanalytic concepts' (127, our translation), whose main effect was none other than to ensure that Freud's thought was recognized in its own way of functioning⁴.

This framework of positions resulted in at least two decisive implications: the first was the observation that the most diverse 'philosophical interpretations' of Freud, '[...] in the obstinate attempt to read a discourse through significant networks and criteria which are foreign to this discourse [...]' (125-126, our translation), only led to the distortion of Freudian thought. It is a model that '[...] to date has only given negative results and, apparently, it always will [...]' (132, our translation).

The second decisive implication was the discovery that the 'new attitude', based on a work that was 'more attentive and rigorous with the Freudian texts themselves' (127), ended up enabling, once and for all, the emergence of a type of reflection that, taking into account the epistemological particularities of psychoanalysis, understands with greater completeness the radical meaning of Freud's thought. Monzani considers this model to be much more fruitful and promising.

³ Monzani mentions, for example: Dalbiez, Binswanger, Hyppolite and Ricœur.

⁴ Monzani mentions the works, in France, by: Lacan, Laplanche, Aulagnier, Viderman, Green, Assoun; in Brazil, by: Hermann, Mezan, Garcia-Roza, Gabbi Jr. and Prado Jr. We certainly include here Monzani's work.

In short, the model of this 'new attitude' consists of: 1) a precise theoretical work of psychoanalytic concepts; 2) a genealogical work of certain psychoanalytic concepts and entities; 3) a work around the meaning and implications of Freudian texts; 4) a work to delimit the rules and procedures that regulate the constitution of the analytical field; and 5) a work on the epistemology of psychoanalysis (Monzani 1991).

Because this is a didactic division, I understand that, for conceptual purposes, all the first four activities can be combined, without any harm, to the last; that is, everything that involves this 'new attitude' can be fully understood as what Monzani very precisely conceived as 'epistemology of psychoanalysis'.

As it is not possible or necessary to provide here a detailed characterization of the 'Monzanian epistemology of psychoanalysis' – the interested reader can find it in Freitas Pinto (2023) –, I can only, by extracting from it precisely its most radical consequence, indicate the following points: a) the epistemology of psychoanalysis, according to Monzani, brings together the set of activities of a 'new attitude' about Freud's thought, b) whose main result was the discovery of a new understanding of psychoanalysis, now much more acknowledged and less expropriated in its epistemological status.

In fact, it is necessary to radicalize here, albeit in summary, the implications of this 'new understanding' in order to finally establish the exact meaning that we want to attribute to Monzani's spiral thesis.

In my view, through the 'Monzanian epistemology of psychoanalysis' we have a clear definition of two distinct models of philosophical understanding of Freud's thought: on the one hand, what I would call the 'interpretive epistemological model', based entirely on the various 'philosophical interpretations' of psychoanalysis, whose main characteristic is to ignore the epistemological specificity of Freudian thought. On the other hand, what I would personally call the

'spiral epistemological model' – the term sounds strange, it is true, but it is full of meaning! This model is based above all on that 'new attitude', on that 'work' or 'in-depth re-reading' of Freud's work, which led Monzani to a new 'epistemology of psychoanalysis' through which he founds his own philosophy of psychoanalysis.

The main characteristic of this model is the fact that it fundamentally rests on the incessant search for the most authentic radicality of Freud's thought. And in this context, Monzani's work has a central role. In addition to being the best synthesis we have regarding the specificity of the *philosophy of psychoanalysis* in Brazil (Simanke 2011), it represents a decisive break with a certain trend constant in the philosophical reception of Freud's work until then, that one represented by the model that I previously designated as 'interpretive epistemological model'.

It is precisely in this rupture that we see Monzani's 'spiral thesis' placing the *Brazilian philosophy of psychoanalysis* in prominence compared to other traditions of the philosophical reception of psychoanalysis. Somehow, Freud found greater freedom and less theoretical resistance in Brazil than in other established philosophical traditions. After Monzani, it is no longer a matter of interpreting and completing psychoanalysis philosophically, imposing external epistemological references on it, it is no longer a matter of using psychoanalytic discourse as a mere instrumental resource of philosophical criticism, even less is it an attempt to provide the epistemological statute of psychoanalysis what it supposedly lacks: criteria of scientific validity. None of this, the 'pendulum-spiral movement' that Monzani conceives in Freud – the 'spiral thesis' – is, at its base, at the same time a radical refusal to all these old alternatives for the appropriation of Freudianism by philosophy and a new form of philosophical reception of psychoanalysis.

In other words, neither German phenomenology and critical theory, nor Anglo-Saxon epistemology or pragmatics, nor French structuralism or hermeneutics – although they play a relevant role in this context (Simanke 2011) –, Monzani's 'spiral thesis' constitutes an irrevocable novelty: that the Brazilian philosophical reception of psychoanalysis developed with Freud's ideas a new 'method' of philosophical reception.

4. Conclusion

In this article, I gave myself the task of having the double objective of, in the first part, reflecting and contextualizing the proposal and results of the X CIFIP, of the *Philosophy and Psychoanalysis WG* of ANPOF, and in the second part, trying to answer the question *where is the philosophy of psychoanalysis going?*, highlighting the contribution of Brazilian philosopher Luiz Roberto Monzani. With these two objectives, I intended to carry out an even greater task: *to think philosophically about psychoanalysis based on the Brazilian case.*

Regarding the first part, all of which is highly informative, there is not much to conclude, other than to draw attention to the enormous potential of the varied results achieved by the X CIFIP: from local to international actions and projects, a whole horizon of work was opened, whose development will certainly result in significant advances for the field of the *philosophy of psychoanalysis* in Brazil.

Regarding the second part, of a more theoretical nature, it is worth resuming in a conclusive summary the main points or the most decisive consequences of the Brazilian philosopher Luiz Roberto Monzani's response to the question *where is the philosophy of psychoanalysis going?*

With Monzani's 'spiral thesis', the philosophical understanding of psychoanalysis gains a 'method' capable of highlighting that dialectics, with all its figures of progression (*telos*, synthesis, meaning, etc.), although present in Freud – in fact, this is what the pendulum metaphor

attests to –, is definitely not the main aspect of Freudian thought.

The most determining movement in Freud's thought is precisely that which challenges the 'coming and going' of the pendulum, that which confronts dialectics and its image of progress, in a word: the spiral, the movement of a thought, whose advancement is not made forward, as in Hegel's phenomenology, nor backward, as in Husserl's phenomenology, an advance that is made downwards, *en descendant* (Simanke 2011). Here we have a clear answer from Monzani as to *where the philosophy of psychoanalysis is going*.

Surely, we still do not know the real scope and exact philosophical meaning of what this represents. In my opinion, we have not yet completed with due rigor the transition from the 'metaphor' to the 'method' of the spiral and we are therefore unaware of the other implications that may derive from this. In any case, I am convinced that with Monzani's 'spiral thesis' the history of the philosophical reception of psychoanalysis gains a new and decisive chapter: the 'interpretive epistemological model' of the traditional reception has been broken and we are now forced to question ourselves about in which spin of the spiral are we, at what point of depth is our reflection on what we call the *philosophy of psychoanalysis*?

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