

Secreted lives: notes on perversion in the Witness Protection Program

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Abstract: This article addresses perversion in the clinical and social field, comprehending the clinic as a field of investigation through which it is possible to access the current social phenomena and dominant discourses. We worked with research in psychoanalysis, choosing to dialogue mainly with readings of two authors – Contardo Calligaris and Edilene Queiroz – who use their experience in the psychoanalytical clinic to build an analysis concerning the social field. Taking a text by Calligaris (1991) entitled *A Sedução Totalitária* (1991), along with the book *A Clínica da Perversão* (2004), by Queiroz, we intended to merge them, having as common thread a professional experience working in the Witness Protection Program (Provita). Some of the psychoanalytical concepts that are used in this study are the perverse structure, discourse and assembly, as nodal points of the clinical and social analysis. The working experience with the witnesses in the Program enabled some associations with aspects concerning the field of perversion.

Keywords: perversion, clinic, social, Witness Protection Program.

First considerations

This study addresses perversion in the clinic and in the social field, considering the clinic as a research area through which we can have access to social phenomena and to dominant discourses. For this study, we have read texts from two major authors of psychoanalysis and, more particularly, in the field of perversion: Contardo Calligaris and Edilene Queiroz. We began with the assumption that one reading always takes us to other readings and other associations, as we can infer from an expression by Roland Barthes “lifting the head as we read” (Barthes, 1988, p. 40). Throughout the reading of these texts, we associated perversion with some aspects verified in the work with witnesses in the Witness Protection Program (Provita).

The relevance of conducting a study on perversion is justified by considering what Queiroz (2004) stresses when she says that, during the 100 years of psychoanalysis, much was produced about neurosis and psychosis, while perversion was in a kind of limbo, with little literature regarding its clinic. However, in recent decades, we see a change in this scenario, as the theme of perversion has been a subject for discussions in academic research (theses, dissertations, scientific articles) as well as at conferences and meetings. According to the author, the current interest attests changes in the contemporary social field, as it establishes the “emergence of new forms of symptoms related to the clinical picture, while, at the same time, it reveals an effort to organize knowledge on the specificity of perversion and its clinic” (Queiroz, 2004, p. 15).

Phenomenological clinic versus structural clinic

Contardo Calligaris wrote his doctoral thesis on perversion as a social pathology. At a conference held in Bahia, in 1986, he spoke about perversion from a social point of view. The question that guided his presentation was: could perversion be a form of social bonding? To answer this question, he starts by saying that the way we habitually speak of perversion from a phenomenology that is considered, by him, to be unacceptable: the phenomenology of so-called deviant sexual conduct. He subsequently explains why this phenomenology would be unacceptable by listing two sets of reasons.

The first reason would be epistemological, because the catalog of so-called sexual perversions (sadism, masochism, voyeurism etc.) was established by the canon law, which was its legacy for medicine, at the beginning of the 19th century, that is, when the modern law, the Napoleonic Code, ceased to be interested in people’s private lives. Therefore, a clinical practice may not justify a set of phenomena that are gathered by a moral criticism (Calligaris, 1986).

He then approaches the second set of reasons, which would be more psychoanalytical. Given that the psychoanalytic clinic is a structural clinic and that it is founded on transference, it is not based on an objective phenomena but rather directly in the clinical structure. Thus, diagnoses are not made based on basic phenomena, but on the way transference occurs. According to him, we cannot make a diagnosis of perversion based on sexual conduct (Calligaris, 1986).

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Calligaris (1986) then describes how a perverse person behaves in transference. The perverse always behaves in two ways: the first is within the realms of complicity, from the position of the instrument and knowledge – he speaks with the analyst as if that was the other place, as if he was with him in the same phantasm. The second way is the challenge – in this case he speaks as if the analyst was the Other, but in the challenge, because if the analyst is the Other, he (the patient) is the one who knows how to make him experience *jouissance*.

Edilene Queiroz devoted herself to an extensive clinical research project on the perverse discourse, which resulted in the book *A clínica da perversão* (2004). In this book, the author also discusses perversion regarding transference in the clinic, from the point of view of the analyst-analysand relationship, focusing on the characteristics of the patient's discourse. We know that transference allows, in the clinic, a more intense appearance than what occurs in the social field. Transference is understood as the reissuance of certain patterns of relationship. Queiroz (2004) refers to the *perverse discourse* – and not only to the *discourse of the perverse people* – and takes “a kind of discourse produced by subjects who exhibit perverse traits” (p. 18) as a reference. When talking about the characteristics of this discourse, she discusses some points that converge with those exposed by Calligaris.

Queiroz, when talking about one of her patients, says she he complained constantly about the analyst-analysand relationship, defined by him as authoritarian and uneven, causing him to try and change seats, which led to an impasse. “To remain in the relationship with the other, the perverse person almost always requires the *establishment of pacts and complicity*” (Queiroz, 2004, p. 66, our emphasis).

Thus, for both Calligaris and Queiroz, the diagnosis of perversion, in a clinic founded on transference, is based on discourse, the way someone treats the analyst and the place in which the former places the latter when talking to him/her. In psychoanalysis, discourse refers to the place from where the analysand speaks and the game he plays. In this sense, Calligaris (1986) stresses that the diagnosis of perversion can be made when this place is one of *complicity* or *challenge*, when this type of complicity or challenge is the *decisive* way to talk for the subject.

Many authors elect the challenge as a distinctive aspect of the perverse discourse. What the formulations of Calligaris and Queiroz have in common is the presence of a double movement in the way the perverse person addresses the analyst: the attempt to challenge him and, at the same time, make a pact with him. Joël Dor, when talking about perversion, says that the father's phallic attribution, which gives him the Symbolic Father authority (representative of the law) will never be recognized, in the perverse structure, except to be relentlessly challenged. Hence the mechanism, unable to be overcome, of two structural stereotypes that work regularly in the perversions: the challenge and the transgression (Dor, 1991).

Until now, we have only talked about perversion as a structure and as a trace of discourse. However, Calligaris proposes another possibility to address the issue of perversion. In the text of his conference, in 1986, he states that what interests him the most regarding the issue of perversions is not so much the perverse structure, which is unusual, but rather the ease with which the neurotic person is taken in perverse formations. For Calligaris, the perverse formation is the center of our social life, of the social life of a neurotic person. This author complements this by saying that every neurotic person dreams of being perverse. A person dreams of being perverse because the neurotic position is very unsatisfactory, and he (the neurotic person) is ready to accept almost anything to join the perverse assembly, to reach an easier mode of *jouissance*.

Five years later, on the same line of formulations presented in the conference of 1986, Calligaris published an essay titled “A sedução totalitária” (1991) in the book *Clínica do Social*. This book is a publication from *O Sexto Lobo* and consists of a collection of different authors who discuss about aspects of the clinic in social life. Calligaris says that the purpose of this project is to “create the conditions for a multi-disciplinary dialogue for those who try to discursively intervene today in the social symptom according to a set of ethics consistent with the ethics of psychoanalysis” (Calligaris, 1991, p. 12).

The neurosis exit through perversion

In “A sedução totalitária”, we can see Calligaris' position in the first paragraph. He intends to treat perversion as a social and not a sexual pathology. As we have seen, he addressed this same issue in the conference of 1986, but in this new text he intends to go forward. Regarding this advancement that Calligaris anticipates, we realize that he took a specific point mentioned at the conference and developed it in more detail, which resulted in a very interesting and dense, but very clear, text concerning his theses on the “passion of being an instrument”, and “perverse exit of the neurosis” (Calligaris, 1991, pp. 112-111).

To illustrate his ideas, he uses the example of Albert Speer, Hitler's first architect and Reich Minister of Armaments, who directed, in the final years of the Second World War, the German industrial and military effort. During the years he spent in prison, Speer wrote a kind of political autobiography, in an attempt to defend himself at the Nuremberg trials (1945-1946). In these writings he tries to clarify how and why Nazism prospered and found in him an adept and accomplice.

Albert Speer revealed a particular care and concern for Germany's future, as a people and nation, by assuming the position that the responsibility for Nazism and the war was a collective responsibility of the leaders of the Nazi party, among which he included himself, not being in any way a collective responsibility of the German people. Despite stating that he “did not know” (which Calligaris considers a successful way of repression), Speer

still claimed his own responsibility for the horror that he claimed to not know about.

When trying to explain what happened, Speer argued that what happened would have been an effect of the development of modern technique, i.e., “the war was inevitable because it had the technical means for it” (Calligaris, 1991, p. 109). On this issue, Calligaris says that it is not enough to think that technical development is alienating and that it is not consistent to think that, if there are the technical means to wage war, this is inevitable. In order to explain what happened it would be necessary “to introduce something more into the conception of a specific form of *alienation of the subject*” (p. 109; emphasis of the author).

To corroborate this idea, Calligaris argues that one cannot think that the participation of Speer in Nazism could be justified by a concern regarding career or, on the other hand, that he had been a big sadist who found a specific form of pleasure in the idea that he was producing tools to kill. On the contrary, “he was a great family man, an educated and sensitive man, who would have been a great friend to us all” (Calligaris, 1991, p. 110).

According to this reasoning and the author’s hypothesis, when Speer defends the idea that what happened was a result of technical development, one could infer that what he calls the triumph of technique, of the instrumentality, is only a triumph to the extent that men work as an integral part of this technique, i.e., they act as instruments. The technique itself could not cause anything. Thus, it would not be the effect of the technique, but the “effect of human passion and interest in getting out of the banal neurotic suffering alienating the subjectivity, better yet, reducing the subjectivity to an instrumentality” (Calligaris, 1991, p. 110). Then we could talk about the “passion of being an instrument,” which could be read as the passion of being part of a gear, which would be the inertial trend of any neurotic person.

So, for Calligaris, the subject’s consent to turn him/herself into an established instrument of knowledge would be a kind of neurosis exit in terms of what he calls *perversion*. That would be priceless to the neurotic person; it would be an irresistible temptation. And he continues:

For an assembly of this kind to work, in which a subject turns into an instrument of a knowledge that orders him to eventually kill thousands of people, throw kids against a wall, burn a house full of people, this is a price that perhaps most neurotic people are willing to pay to find the relief that the perverse assembly promises. (Calligaris, 1991, p. 114)

Regarding this relief being an instrument of knowledge, Calligaris gives Rudolf Hoess as an example, commandant of Auschwitz concentration camp who, in his memoirs, wrote “I was an exemplary employee” as a justification and defense of his actions. For the psychoanalyst, this is not an easy excuse or an attempt to

unload his responsibility, he would be really answering the question, because he was saying: “Your question is poorly formulated, because my pleasure was not killing people, my pleasure was being an exemplary employee, and, eventually, to become an exemplary employee, I was willing to kill people” (Calligaris, 1991, p. 114).

During the 1986 conference, Calligaris addressed this point by saying that “the issue is not the sadism of the torturer, otherwise we could never get out of this (we cannot conceive that half of Germany had been stuck in a sadistic phantasm of this kind)” (Calligaris, 1986, p. 10). Thus, it would be much easier for the neurotic person to enter a perverse assembly of this type than to stay at the neurotic conflict.

Calligaris considers unacceptable that, to exit the banal neurotic suffering through a perverse semblance, the neurotic person may consider that any price is good; to get the relief that the obedience of an exemplary employee provides, he would be willing to take any order. In this sense, returning to the concern of Albert Speer, the matter of responsibility should be placed very differently from how he wanted, because the responsibility cannot be taken only by the leaders, but by everyone who enjoyed the workings of Nazi Germany.

Hannah Arendt, German political philosopher of Jewish origin, wrote her first work, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, at the end of the 1940s, which was first published in 1951. The work is divided into three parts – *antisemitism*, *imperialism*, and *totalitarianism* – and, in the latter, Arendt suggests that both Nazism and socialism are totalitarian ideologies. Among her theories, she talks about the trivialization of the terror and the participation of the masses in the consolidation of Nazism, on the same line of Calligaris’ thoughts.

A few years later, in 1963, Arendt wrote *Eichmann in Jerusalem: a report on the banality of evil*, based on the press coverage that documented the trial of Adolf Eichmann for the *The New Yorker*. In this book, she reports that the great exterminator of the Jews was not a devil (as the Jewish activists believed), but someone horribly normal. A typical bureaucrat who limited himself to following orders diligently.

In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt (1951/1998) says it would be “an even more serious mistake to forget, because of this impermanence, that totalitarian regimes, as long as they are in power, and totalitarian leaders, so long as they are alive, command and rest upon mass support” (p. 356). Then, she complements stating that what is baffling in the success of totalitarianism is the devotion of its supporters or, in Calligaris’ terms, the easiness of paying any price to “exit the banal neurotic suffering alienating the subjectivity” (Calligaris, 1991, p. 110).

For Arendt, it is understandable that the convictions of a Nazi are not shaken by crimes committed against the enemies of the movement, but the amazing fact is that he (the subject taken in the assembly) did not waver even when “the monster starts devouring its own children, not even

when he himself becomes a victim of the oppression, when he is framed and convicted, when he is expelled from the party and sent to a concentration or a forced labor camp” (Arendt, 1951/1998, p. 357). In other words, there is a complete alienation of the subjectivity itself.

Then, through the examples described by Calligaris, we can see that perversion is inserted in the social field, in everyday life. Perversion would be something else, something other than a sexual deviation. Also, it would not even be something in the order of a deviation. In the social scope, it would be a kind of “choice.” We put the word choice between quotation marks because, often, it is not a conscious choice; it is about accepting another way out, another path. For Calligaris, the vast majority of people who enter a totalitarian system are taken in a perverse assembly, and a large part of neurotic people, when taken in a perverse assembly “consider that the benefits they take from that are priceless. It seems that they are ready for any dirt to remain in this assembly. But this is not only true for Nazism” (Calligaris, 1986, p. 12).

Perversion in the Witness Protection Program

Some points addressed by Calligaris can be included in other contexts. When the author says that this issue about the perverse assembly is not only true for Nazism, we immediately associate it with a professional experience as members of a technical team that accompanies witnesses in the Witness Protection Program – the Provita. By having worked directly with these witnesses for approximately three years, we realized certain aspects of what Queiroz and Calligaris say about perversion. Calligaris wrote about being locked in a perverse assembly that apparently offers many benefits to those who are part of it. We will use, in a few moments, the word Program to refer to Provita.

A brief background about the Witness Protection Program is necessary. The Provita was founded in 1996 through the experience of the Gabinete de Assessoria Jurídica às Organizações Populares (GAJOP [Office of Legal Counsel to Popular Organizations])¹ –, which contributed to the reduction of high levels of impunity in the state of Pernambuco. Three years later, the Protection Program was instituted by Federal Law No. 9,807/1999 and regulated by Decree No. 3.518/2000, with the aim of ensuring protection and assistance to people who were coerced or exposed to serious threat because they had cooperated with an investigation or prosecution. The Protection Program was created as a response to the necessity of preserving the witnesses of murders committed by police officers, extermination groups, or organized crime; today, the Program collaborates with the verification of several other crimes involving torture, slave labor, arms and human trafficking, drug trafficking, corruption, and electoral crimes.

According to Silveira (2010), the Provita is one of the most important public policies, and it is structured on a National System, composed of a Federal Program of Assistance to the Victim and the Witness, and 19 State Programs. We believe that the existence of a Program of this type helps to reduce the levels of impunity, fighting the so-called “law of silence” and permeating the social imagination as a possibility of effective protection for those who decide, for various reasons, to collaborate with Justice. According to Silva (2008), the fear of reporting the occurrence of a crime and to testify is, undoubtedly, a factor that distances people from competent authorities, mainly as they are unaware of the existing protection mechanisms.

Applying these considerations to the terms that Calligaris proposes – about the perverse assembly – the difficulty of witnessing is also, in many cases, the difficulty of no longer participating in an assembly that offers assurance and, consequently, certain comfort. The people assisted by the Program are victims and/or witnesses of various types of crimes and criminal organizations, however, many (perhaps most) of the witnesses who join the Program are people who, somehow, were part of the criminal organization and who, for different reasons, decided to report it. There are few witnesses who simply were “in the wrong place at the wrong time”, and saw what they “should not have”. To be inserted in the Program, these witnesses are transferred to another city or state, which is not chosen by them, but by the staff of the Program based on risk mapping.

During these witnesses’ appointments, concerns arose about whether they were perverse subjects, considering that many of them had, in fact, committed crimes, participated in atrocities and had a peculiar relationship with the Law. However, what often transpires is that while they were involved in the “scheme” (in the assembly), everything was fine. They had a role in that gear, performed it with jurisdiction (i.e., were exemplary employees), they took advantage of it (whether financial, social status etc.), and provided benefits to one another, often standing out and being praised for their good work.

It is necessary to stress that those who come to the Program are hardly the leaders of the gear. On the contrary, they are employees. They are exemplary employees that, for various reasons, felt excluded or found themselves forced to exit the assembly. They are the *horribly normal and banal subjects* that Hannah Arendt detected. It is important to have this in mind because few decided to leave the scheme on their own accord. When Calligaris (1986) says that it is “much easier for the neurotic person to enter a perverse assembly of this type than stay at the neurotic conflict” (p. 11), that it is much easier to join a scheme instead of oscillating in conflicts of conscience, this is very clear in these cases. If it was up to some of these witnesses from the Program, they would have remained in the assembly. Most did not remain simply because something went wrong along the way. But the position they occupied until then seemed to be very comfortable.

¹ The information about Provita’s history was found on the website <<http://www.gajop.org.br>> Accessed on October 10, 2014.

Gerald Shur, founder of the United States Federal Witness Protection Program, the WITSEC, wrote a book, with Pete Earley – investigative journalist – in which he tells of his Foundation experience with the Program and follow-up of witnesses, many of them former members of the Mob. He mentions enough data and information to convince us of how hard it is to exit a perverse assembly, and that these witnesses only left for extreme reasons or when they saw no other choice. “I had no illusions about the reasons why they were helping the government. Some felt that they had done a good deal. Most knew that it was the only chance to stay alive. Others wanted to take revenge on their former partners” (Earley & Shur, 2002, p. 420).

One of the cases, which the interdisciplinary technical staff (psychologist, social worker, and lawyer) accompanied in the Provita that we worked for, is similar to some aspects that Calligaris described about Nazism. After reading about the case for the first time, the staff was shocked by the amount of crimes that this witness helped commit, never directly, but working as a key part so that everything worked as it should. For example, one witness used to drive cars for escapes, carrying bodies to “dump them”, kept secrets about political schemes etc.

When we met this witness in person, everyone on the staff felt baffled. He was not a sadistic person, he had not enjoyed participating in the crimes, but the gear simply worked very well, and he was part of it. Following our coexistence with this guy and his family, we were able to realize that he was a devoted father and husband, and a very dear neighbor in the community in which he started living.

John Partington is one of the first federal agents (U.S. Marshals) in the United States to ever work in WITSEC. In 2010, along with Arlene Violet (lawyer of the Federal Government), Partington published a book that tells of their work experiences protecting witnesses of WITSEC; many of whom were part of the Mob. In an excerpt of the book, he reports experiences similar to what we went through.

When I started to be part of the lives of Mob members, I realized that these men had a code of honor. They were not 100% bad [...] Raymond Patriarca had a good side. For example, when a boy in the neighborhood lost an eye, Patriarca made sure he had the best doctors in the country and paid the costs of all the necessary care. (Partington & Violet, 2010, p. 8)

A little further, he reports, in detail, how he accompanied Joe Barboza (known as “The Animal”), the witness who was directly denouncing Raymond Patriarca, the leader of the Mob. He says: “We talked about how our lives could have been different if we had made other choices. He was as cold as they usually are, he could kill me in the blink of an eye, but, on the other hand, he wrote poetry and loved his daughter” (Partington & Violet, 2010, p. 28).

Shur reports something about talking to the witnesses he accompanied:

I remember arriving at a prison unit, in which we kept the most difficult criminals in the Program, and finding many of them sitting on the floor making posters with cartoon characters for children from hospitals. Most of these men were murderers and, still, they prided themselves on their work for the children. (Earley & Shur, 2002, p. 420)

In short, many of these witnesses were common people, perhaps even neurotic people who “chose” perversion, because it is so seductive. Hannah Arendt, in her terms, writes about what we understand by seduction of the neurosis exit through perversion: “The attraction of evil and crime for the mob mentality is nothing new. It has always been true that the mob will greet deeds of violence with the admiring remark: it may be mean but it is very clever” (Arendt, 1951/1998, p. 356). Arendt, here, uses the word “mob” to refer to the masses, to ordinary and common people.

To guide our questions we tried to think about the Witness Protection Program as a sort of device that could make possible the exit of neurotic people from the perverse assembly in which they are inserted. Some, in fact, never exit, the chiefs and leaders, for example. Maybe they are perverse in their structure, those who would never exit the gear, the smart ones, those supposedly safe from any danger.

During the appointments conducted with the witnesses from Provita, we noticed aspects similar to those that Queiroz (2004) and Calligaris (1986) pointed out regarding the position of the analyst while listening to a subject, a patient with a discourse that shows perverse traits. The place of Psychology *in* the Program (as an institution) did not allow for a simultaneous existence with the place of Psychology with the witnesses. Thus, it was necessary to refer them to other psychologists and psychoanalysts, outside the Program, when there was demand for some kind of psychological and psychotherapeutic support or psychoanalytic follow-up. However, the contact of the psychologists from the Program was very frequent and direct with the witnesses and their families, which, inevitably, turned into long hours of conversation throughout the whole protection period.

During these conversations, we noticed a particular type of discourse, addressed to the Program; resembling the discourse reported by Queiroz. We stress that this resemblance, obviously, did not concern the discursive content, but “the *way* of reporting it, i.e., the discursive phenomenology, was a difficult to register fact” (Queiroz, 2004, p. 60, our emphasis).

In regards to this report, Queiroz (2004) evokes an imagery discourse, whose purpose would be to *see* and *show* through words. She points out that “the language appears to be merely denotative, loaded with hyperbolic

descriptions that give the narrative a unique texture” (p. 30). Thus, having in mind some of the similarities we perceived among the discourses, we can highlight: the challenge (the analyst and, similarly, the staff of the Program); the imagery and denotative discourse (in relation to situations that needed protection, situations with “heavy” content); the position of superiority regarding knowledge.

The denotative feature and imagery discourse gives a more impoverished tone to the discourse, because it ends up being restricted to the description of the events, usually in a very detailed mode, but without representation. Often the many “heavy” details were intended to shock the listener (in this case, the analyst or the technical team). Queiroz (2004) wrote that, in this context, the signifier is engaged in the act of representing. When talking about a specific patient, the author says that any intervention towards the search for meaning seemed not to echo, the reports of the experiences were repeated as mere description of facts.

We found the same in the discourses of some witnesses from the Program. What they were talking about was closer to the description of facts and often no one sought to make sense of that experience. This becomes understandable if we consider, on the one hand, that the actual condition of a “witness” boils down to narrating facts. Testifying is something completely different from narrating or making a confession. When a witness is before a judge, what matters is what he saw, heard, the details. That is, something that is more related to the sensory-perceptual and cognitive field (what he saw or heard) than to the subjectivity. Obviously the judge is not interested, it is not part of the protocol, in asking how the witness felt, which was his position regarding the facts, the place from where he spoke, etc.

One of Queiroz’s patients, for example, complained constantly of the analyst-analysand relationship, defined by him in terms of authoritarianism and asymmetry. She says that sometimes his purpose was to reverse the places, which promoted an impasse. Later, when talking about this double movement, she says that the analysand believed he should undergo the analyst’s knowledge, “giving himself as an offering, at the same time he got deeply angry, and sought ways to reverse the situation.” (Queiroz, 2004, p. 68).

We also noted this double movement in the Witness Protection Program. The witness, in giving himself to the Other (in this case to the State, the Law, the Program), constantly tries to challenge it, transgress it. He questions the unequal position, lived as a disadvantage for him. Then, he puts himself in the position of he who holds the power and knowledge, with phrases such as: “the Justice needs my testimony”; “it is just because of me you have your job”; “the Program needs witnesses to exist”. Meanwhile, at the same time, he knows he is in the vulnerable position of needing special protection, for not being able to protect himself and because the Program became the last solution, the last resort.

In fact, the position is uneven, asymmetrical. As it is in the analysis. The Program uses aliases, fictitious

names for both the witnesses and the people of the staff, responsible for the protection. The difference is that the staff knows the real name of the witness, while the witness does not know the true identity of the staff. In addition to the name, the staff knows many details of the witness’ life, while the witness knows almost nothing about the staff, not even where the headquarters of the Program is. Similarly, the analyst knows details of the patient’s life, feelings, and desires, in general, the most intimate ones, those that no one else knows, while the patient has restricted access to the analyst’s personal life.

Although the purpose of the Program is to protect witnesses, distancing them from the crime and their partners, their own entrance into the Program, is under the threat of another kind of perverse assembly. This refers, firstly, to anonymity, taking anonymity as a way not to take responsibility for what is said or done. The issue of anonymity is a striking feature of the perverse operation and, when entering the Program, for their own protection, the witnesses must remain anonymous. This requires that the witness avoid performing any kind of national registration/record, in the place of protection, given the risk of being tracked by his/her perpetrators. The witness is placed in a position nearly outside the symbolic, almost foreclosed, and his access to the symbolic is mediated by a fictitious name and by a staff. In addition, the witnesses have to create a cover story regarding the details of their lives, their cities of origin, the reasons for the change of city, their former lives. They need to invent a fictitious story. For having revealed a secret (information about a crime and the people responsible), they needed to be secreted from their place of origin, they had to be segregated. Thus, they need to live secreted lives, in secret, elsewhere.

For the witnesses in the Program, secrecy is an essential condition for staying under protection. After joining, they sign a Commitment Letter, through which they agree to maintain absolute confidentiality about everything related to the Program and the information about their early life that may compromise their security.

These agreements allow the subject to entry a new perverse assembly, because we know that the anonymity, although distressing for many people, is also a way of not taking responsibility for acts and words. It is a way of making wishes come true without having to pay the price for it. There are even cases of witnesses who entered the Program asking for a legal name change (which rarely happens in Brazil), so they could continue committing crimes, with a new identity, erasing their previous history. Thus, the new crimes could be committed by a sort of alter ego, an alternate ego.

Mario Fleig, in his book *O Desejo Perverso*, talks about some distinct characteristics of the perverse functioning and, among them, the anonymity.

It is not for nothing that a number of perverse tendencies are called “*a desire that dare not speak its name*” (Lacan). . . . It is the anonymity, the

clandestine place, the action that is not enough to implement the passage by the authentication in the Other (Fleig, 2008, p. 71, emphasis added by the author).

Gerald Shur reported this difficulty with the anonymity issue, in regards to the new identity of the witnesses. In the United States the change of legal identity always happens. “In its first decade of operation, witnesses from WITSEC committed 12 murders after they were relocated to other cities. Others used their new identities to avoid creditors and steal millions of dollars through new frauds and schemes” (Earley & Shur, 2002, p. 8).

Many of these witnesses seem to always, whatever the situation, put themselves (or end up) in the position of an instrument. In both situations – before and after entering the Program – they are objects, pieces in the gear. Before entering, they are the key element in the perverse assembly and, after entering the Program, they are the key element in the scheme.

During the 1986 conference, Calligaris was asked whether the tendency to belong to a group, an institution, and to be recognized by it, would not be in some ways a perverse attitude. His answer was yes, he also said that perhaps life is not possible without the perverse assembly. He gives the psychoanalytic institutions and associations of fishermen as examples, in which this assembly would be quite innocent. “The problem is that the perverse assembly goes much further” (Calligaris, 1986, p. 12).

In the case of these witnesses with whom we worked – those who were part of the group who were denouncing – there is a perverse pact, as one could call a win-win situation, that is, a situation in which both parties win. It is as if Justice said to the witness: “By law, you should be arrested. And by *your* law, you should not denounce your partners. But, through our pact, you help me and I help you. I let you go (or reduce your time) and give you protection and, in return, you tell me what you were doing, how you were doing it, and who was involved.” It was with this kind of pact that many families in the Mob began to break their silence, the so-called *omertà*. As Partington and Violet (2010) tell in their book: “We are protecting the bad guys, so we can get the worst guys” (p. 27).

Returning to the question about the characteristics of the perverse discourse, Queiroz (2004), when talking about the repetition of lines as a mere description of facts, says that “every analysis begins when the need to tell runs out” (p. 54). We can perceive something similar, in some cases, with the witnesses from the Program. Sometimes after some time being protected in another city, away from the crime scene, they seem to overcome the phase of “descriptions”, as they come to the Program after having repeated the facts that led to their inclusion many times, the crime, etc.

In certain cases we see that, after some time, the witnesses – for the first time – begin to question, they question their role, their position in the whole story and,

sometimes, they even show interest in having a different life or learning to live with uncertainty and limits. While they were taken in the perverse assembly, many of these witnesses lived in an organization as if there were no limits, nothing that could stop them. On the other hand, when entering the Program, everything that they experience are uncertainties and limitations. There are uncertainties of various types: they do not know beforehand where they will live; in which city; whether it will be a house or apartment; who they will meet; which way the process will go; if the perpetrators will be arrested or not; if some day they will feel safe or if they will be threatened again. There are no guarantees in any way.

Silva (2008) gives an explanation about what their aim is regarding the witnesses protected by the Program. For them, it is expected that these subjects can build new relationships in a new territory with the intention that, through them, they can put down roots and build new life projects that enable them to enhance their own autonomy, strengthening bonds, in such a way that they no longer return to the crime scene or other areas of risk.

Final considerations

We believe that one of the main – and also most difficult – purposes of the technical team from ProVita, which deals directly with the witnesses, is trying to help them to live and face the uncertainties, the faults, which used to be filled by the perverse assemblies, by perverse leaders, or by situations outside the law.

In this sense, we agree with Elia (2010) who, in his elaborations on the work with psychoanalysis at institutions, says that psychoanalysis opens up possibilities to work with subjects inserted within institutions. According to him: “In these institutions, the axis of an analytical work can be pinched, since it is oriented by the listening to what precisely makes it arise as a subject, without disregarding all social factors present in the concrete reality of these subjects” (Elia, 2010, p. 144). Thus, we think that in addition to helping the witness to be reinserted socially in a new city, the team’s work can also help the subject to deal with faults and uncertainties. Maybe some work can be done in order to allow a passage, the renewal of the neurotic person who was stuck in a perverse assembly, a way out of these assemblies and towards other possibilities that can create a social bond.

At the end of the 1986 conference, there was a direct question made, to which Calligaris relates the concept of perversion: “So, is perversion a social bond? Yes or no?”. His answer is yes, and that perversion must be the social bond in the common sense of the *social bond* – that is, *what makes people relate*. It is, in fact, very noticeable that perversion (or the perverse assembly) makes people relate to each other. Everyday life is filled with perverse acts and pacts. These pacts are those in which both parties win at the expense of a third party, in which for one to win the other has to lose, etc. Again, we are not talking about perversion

as a structure, but as perverse formations, formations that allow the constitution of social bonds. Thus, for Calligaris (1986), our everyday social bond is a perverse assembly, even if there was no perverse structure. For him, two neurotic people are enough for a perverse assembly.

The authors on whom we base our work – Calligaris and Queiroz – helped us to consider perversion as part of the human condition and to keep it away from both its strictly sexual and moral connotations. Calligaris approaches some perverse aspects, pointing to a neurosis exit through perversion, emphasizing the ease with which neurotic people are often trapped in perverse assemblies. Queiroz helped us to reconsider the widely held idea that a perverse person does not seek analysis, or does not remain in analysis.

Calligaris and Queiroz, while uniting the social analysis and perverse discourse analysis at the clinic, help to deconstruct a notion that perversion would be something exceptional, out of the norm, abnormal or deviant, as the etymology of the word *perversion* indicates. The dialogue with these texts also awakened us to the realization of another reading of the work, performed along with Provita. The reading that we intended here can be useful to clinicians and the social and institutional analysts, as well as to professionals who work with the witnesses of the Program to help us understand these witnesses as subjects that may have been taken by perverse assemblies. If these subjects are taken by these assemblies, therefore, they can get out of them, some of them with the help of the Program, as a device capable of starting this exit.

Vidas secretadas: notas sobre a perversão no Programa de Proteção a Testemunhas

Resumo: Este artigo aborda a perversão no campo social e na clínica, compreendendo a clínica como uma área de investigação através da qual se pode ter acesso aos fenômenos sociais e aos discursos dominantes. Trabalha-se com a pesquisa em psicanálise, optando-se por dialogar fundamentalmente com leituras de dois autores – Contardo Calligaris e Edilene Queiroz – que partem de suas experiências na clínica psicanalítica para tecer análises sobre o social. Tomando um texto de Calligaris, intitulado “A sedução totalitária” (1991), juntamente com o livro *A clínica da perversão* (2004) de Queiroz, procura-se entrelaçá-los, tendo como fio condutor uma experiência profissional no Programa de Proteção a Vítimas e Testemunhas Ameaçadas (Provita). Alguns conceitos psicanalíticos utilizados neste estudo são: a estrutura, o discurso e a montagem perversa, como pontos nodais da análise clínica e social. A experiência de trabalho com testemunhas inseridas no Provita possibilitou algumas associações com aspectos concernentes ao campo da perversão.

Palavras-chave: perversão, clínica, social, Programa de Proteção a Testemunhas.

Vies secrétés: notes sur la perversion dans le Programme de Protection de Témoins

Résumé: Cet article adresse la perversion dans le champ social et dans la clinique, y compris la clinique comme étant une zone d’investigation à travers duquel il est possible d’avoir accès aux phénomènes sociaux et aux discours dominants. On travaille avec la recherche dans la psychanalyse, avec l’option de dialoguer principalement avec deux auteurs – Contardo Calligaris et Edilene Queiroz – qui partagent ses expériences dans la clinique psychanalytique afin de créer des analyses sur le social. En utilisant un texte de Calligaris, intitulé “La seduction totalitaire” (1991), et le titre « La clinique de la perversion » (2004) de Queiroz, on cherche les combiner, ayant comme fil conducteur l’expérience professionnel dans le Programme de Protection de la Victime et Témoins Menacés. Quelques concepts psychanalytiques utilisés dans cette étude sont: la structure, le discours et le montage pervers, comme étant des points modaux de l’analyse critique et sociale. L’expérience de travail avec les témoins insérés dans le Provita a permis l’association avec des aspects concernant le champ de la perversion.

Mots-clés: perversion, clinique, social, Programme de Protection à la Temoin.

Vidas ocultas: apuntes sobre la perversión en el Programa de Protección a Testigos

Resumen: El presente plantea la perversión en el campo social y en la clínica, comprendiendo la clínica como un área de investigación a través de la cual se puede acceder a los fenómenos sociales y a los discursos dominantes. Se trabaja con la investigación en psicoanálisis, optando por dialogar fundamentalmente con lecturas de dos autores – Contardo Calligaris y Edilene Queiroz – quienes parten de sus experiencias en la clínica psicoanalítica para tejer análisis sobre el social. Considerando el texto de Calligaris, titulado *La seducción totalitaria* (1991), junto con el libro *La clínica de la perversión* (2004) de Queiroz, se intenta entrelazarlos, con el hilo conductor de la experiencia profesional en el Programa de Protección de Víctimas y Testigos amenazado. Algunos conceptos psicoanalíticos utilizados en este estudio son: la estructura, el discurso y el montaje perverso

como los nudos del análisis clínico y social. La experiencia de trabajar con testigos insertados en el Provita hizo posible asociaciones con aspectos relativos al campo de la perversión.

Palabras clave: perversión, clínica, social, Programa de Protección a Testigos.

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