



**BODILY METAMORPHOSES AND LIVED EXPERIENCES OF IDENTITY IN  
ACQUIRED DISABILITY: CRITICAL CONSIDERATIONS BASED ON  
CATHERINE MALABOU AND ALFRED SCHÜTZ**

**METAMORFOSES CORPORAIS E VIVÊNCIAS IDENTITÁRIAS NA  
DEFICIÊNCIA ADQUIRIDA: CONSIDERAÇÕES CRÍTICAS À PARTIR DE  
CATHERINE MALABOU E ALFRED SCHÜTZ**

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**Abstract:** In this article, we discuss how an accident resulting in an acquired disability can profoundly alter the subject's lived experience of identity. We argue that this event impacts not only the physical body but also the person's relationship with themselves, their identity, and the meaning of life. Drawing on Catherine Malabou's ontology of the accident and Alfred Schütz's phenomenology, we seek to understand how returning home after hospitalization or rehabilitation involves more than simply going back to a familiar space; rather, it represents a re-encounter with a transformed everyday life, requiring the subject to develop new ways of interpreting and inhabiting the world. From this perspective, the home is no longer the same, nor is the individual who returns. The adaptation process reveals the emergence of new ontological conditions wherein the continuity between the "before" and "after" of the disability is ruptured, demanding a subjective and relational new beginning.

**Keywords:** Acquired disability; Ontology of disability; Alfred Schütz; Catherine Malabou; Philosophy of disability.

**Resumo:** Neste artigo, discutimos como o acidente que resulta em uma deficiência adquirida pode alterar profundamente a vivência identitária do sujeito. Argumenta-se que essa experiência impacta não apenas o corpo físico, mas também a relação da pessoa consigo mesma, com sua identidade e com o sentido da vida. Com base na ontologia do acidente de Catherine Malabou e na fenomenologia de Alfred Schütz, buscou-se compreender como a volta para casa, após internação ou reabilitação, envolve mais do que o simples retorno a um espaço conhecido: trata-se de um reencontro com um cotidiano transformado, exigindo do sujeito novas formas de interpretar e habitar o mundo. Nessa perspectiva, o lar já não é o mesmo, tampouco o indivíduo que retorna. O processo de adaptação revela o surgimento de novas condições ontológicas, nas quais a continuidade entre o "antes" e o "depois" da deficiência se rompe, exigindo um recomeço subjetivo e relacional.

**Palavras-chave:** Deficiência adquirida; Ontologia da deficiência; Alfred Schütz; Catherine Malabou; Filosofia da deficiência.

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## 1 Introduction: Malabou and the Ontology of the Accident in Acquired Disability

Catherine Malabou (2014), in her book titled *The Ontology of the Accident: An Essay on Destructive Plasticity*, presents the thesis that, with the passage of time, quite naturally, we become what we are or what we believe we are predestined to transform into. In a certain sense, it is most common that, despite all changes and renewals, the passing of days and years merely strengthens the fixation or determination of a given identity, without this necessarily implying a contradiction or dissolution of being.

However, there are beings who will see their life cleaved and bifurcated when exposed to the unexpectedness of an event that generates, by means of an accident, a severe trauma capable of splitting their life in two — a “before” and an “after” — marked by the emergence of a subject unknown even to themselves and to others. It is a figure forged by the force of the accident, born of an actuality that does not even contain an anteriority or a past that might foreshadow its emergence. These are beings marked by absolute existential improvisation and who, usually — at least in the beginning — will have their body and soul defined by identity impermanence (Malabou, 2014).

Generally, such persons are more easily identified when we refer to patients with Alzheimer’s and those who, for various reasons and conditions, have suffered brain lesions. We speak, also and especially, of all victims of armed conflicts who survived partially or completely degenerated by war, as well as those who suffered the psychological and physical impacts of catastrophic events — natural or even political. Evidently, we focus here, above all, on the most diverse individuals who acquire a disability in a completely abrupt manner. But we cannot fail to highlight that any one of us can, at any moment, have our life and body suddenly transformed by an unwanted accident, with sufficient force to turn us into someone else, without any capacity for return or for full reconciliation with a prior self.

Quite the contrary, in these circumstances, we have a new being that emerges from the rift of time or outside it, by the effect of a destructive plasticity that cleaves identity and interrupts it abruptly, bringing an unprecedented lived experience of self. Malabou (2014) identifies this plasticity as an explosive power with high potential for disorganization and destruction. For her, this explosive potency virtually inhabits every human being and, at any moment or movement, can reveal its deregulating and unexpected force, thus remodeling not only the routine of life but also subjectivity and identity. Therefore, we can say that the



Phenomenon of pathological plasticity, of a plasticity that does not repair, of a plasticity without compensation or scar, which cuts the thread of a life in two, or into several segments that will never meet again, has nonetheless its own phenomenology that needs to be written. Phenomenology, indeed. Something shows itself on the occasion of the damage, of the cut, something to which normal, creative plasticity gives neither access nor body: the desertion of subjectivity, the distancing of the individual who becomes a stranger to themselves (Malabou, 2014, p.12).

According to Malabou (2014), such phenomenology is marked by the power of plastic corrosion, in which traumas incline life toward a point hitherto unknown and unexpected — at times, opaque and disheartening. Not rarely, baleful and threatening. In these lived experiences established by destructive ontological plasticity, the subject appears as a metamorphosis without return and without possibility of escape.

Despite their desire to flee this new form brought about by the accident, it will be precisely such impossibility that leads them to a marked and painful tension, in seeking a place (which does not exist) outside of all this. That is to say, it is a matter of a lived experience in which annihilating plasticity triggers the emergence or constitution of an alterity without transcendence or desertion — above all, an alterity initially without assimilation, which imposes upon the subject the necessity of being an other to themselves.

However, Malabou (2014) does not fail to point out that apparently less astonishing events, and even those closest to our everyday life, can also hold the capacity to end a life cycle and transfer the subject to a field of experiences completely reallocated in relation to a previous mode of existence. Here, she refers, for example, to events such as the end of a relationship, financial difficulty, a problem of social interaction, personal embarrassment experienced due to political issues or unemployment, the loss of a loved one, or even leaving home, etc. This is because, although superficially identifiable regarding the causative motive, such situations may possess a surprising force of metamorphosis, insofar as they cast the subject into a situation that, for them, will remain incomprehensible — thus forcing a transformation such that, little by little or promptly, will make them a stranger to themselves. That is, even if they are not configured as actual accidents, such occurrences are lived as such, since they have both the capacity to forge a new form of existing and to reorder the perception of self, as if the person had become a divergent species in relation to an antecedent style.

In any case, it is worth highlighting that, when we refer to these modes of existence, we speak, above all, of beings traversed by forms of post-traumatic subjectivities that, for the most part, are little understood by traditional psychotherapeutic



approaches — mainly by psychoanalysis. In this part, we are referring to persons with a survivor identity that establishes itself in the face of a totally unprecedented vital normativity and ontological condition. That is, the focus here that we need, above all, to problematize and understand concerns the “distancing of the individual who becomes an ontological stateless person, intransitive (he is not the other of someone), without correlate, without genitive, without a country of arrival. A new person, whose novelty is not inscribed, however, in any temporality” (Malabou, 2014, p. 27).

Approaching this discussion will be of paramount relevance for the subsequent elaborations, since the ontology of the accident leads us to reflect that, quite unlike orthodox metaphysics — which prefers to think of the change of form without the alteration of nature — in the scenario cited thus far, we speak of the accident as something that compromises both form and nature and which gives rise to a mode of living as a new form of being.

In other words, this means that there are accidents that operate as a force of plastic and ontological explosion in which

The individual’s history is definitively ruptured, cut by the accident without signification, an accident that is impossible to reappropriate through speech or recollection. A brain lesion, a natural catastrophe, a brutal, sudden, blind event cannot, in principle, be reintegrated *a posteriori* into an experience. Such events are pure forces that strike, that lacerate and pierce subjective continuity, authorizing no justification or resumption by the psyche (Malabou, 2014, p.31).

Seen in this light, it becomes perceptible that the ontology of the accident, as Malabou (2014) understands it, operates as a law that brings together and affects logical and biological elements. Although we know that her reflection reveals a difficult philosophical task — as the author herself states — we must nonetheless consider such ontology, for it helps us to better problematize these lived experiences, so often complex, abstract, and incommunicable, which ultimately reveal to ourselves that, on the general plane of our existences, “ ‘normal’ identity is always already a mutable and transformable entity, always capable of taking a turn or saying goodbye to itself ” (Malabou, 2014, p. 32).

Complementary to this discussion, Peggy Tessier (2015) remarks that the accident, even today, remains among us as the undesirable, the surprising, and the incomprehensible. It presents itself as that which we desire to master and toward which we direct all our forces in an attempt to escape, and is regarded as a dysfunction or disorganization of (or in) the order of a system. In the contemporary world, particularly,



the accident is seen as an abrupt and deadly movement, in which chance acts as a destructive causality.

In this sense, Tessier (2015) asserts that the accident places us before the unforeseen and the unpredictable, and precisely for this reason, in current times, the most diverse societies seek ways to create possible strategies to manage its appearance and its risk. However, in this audacious human intention to manage all risks and to foresee the totality of unforeseen events that threaten life, accidents remain only partially controlled. And if such a task reveals itself, in fact, impossible, it is because, in truth, the accident is an integrated component of our lived experience, for it is inexorably linked to the sensible and to experience — it is, above all, an existence that has no being and which reveals itself through the force of the encounter.

Having completed this initial trajectory, in the next sections we will seek to understand how the experience of an acquired disability can promote a new ontological condition, in which the person, during and after this lived experience, comes to live not only with a body modified due to the event in question, but also with the intrinsic necessity of establishing a different meaning for themselves and for their mode of being-in-the-world. Before that, however, we will return to Schützian phenomenology, in an attempt to better elucidate the idea that the return home — after an accident that causes an acquired disability — shows us that an episode of this nature usually provokes considerable bodily or psychological alterations, generating, furthermore, serious consequences to the feeling of personal integrity and to the individual's self-concept. As we shall see subsequently, such an occurrence takes place, above all, because the relationship we establish with our body is of fundamental relevance to the way we construct our identity and self-image, since it is through our bodily attributes that we seek to reference and describe ourselves.

## **2 Schütz and the Homecomer in the Experience of the Accident**

In *Phenomenology and Social Relations*, Alfred Schütz (1979) revisits the myth of Odysseus with the aim of returning to mythology to recount what is, probably, the greatest case of returning home in our literary creation. Briefly, this story narrates the adventures of Odysseus who, after a journey of twenty years of extreme challenges, is left by Phoenician navigators on the shores of Ithaca (his homeland). Upon awakening from his sleep, he realizes that he was in the very land of his progenitors. However, he



could scarcely identify where he was, for everything seemed very strange to him, to the point of exclaiming a lament, by the bays and cliffs, frightened by not knowing where that place was and what he was doing, in fact, there.

In a certain sense, his astonishment was not due solely to not recognizing the land of his fathers, but rather because the goddess Pallas Athena had changed the air surrounding him, rendering it heavier and denser, so as to make it unrecognizable until he, finally, “awakened to things”.

Such story is taken up by Schütz (1979) with the aim of presenting the idea that, when returning home, the home presents itself — at least initially — with an unfamiliar appearance. As if it revealed, in some way, a little-known country, and which makes the one who returns home a kind of stranger among those who remained there.

Although Odysseus desires, to some extent, to return to the environment that, for so long, had been within his knowledge and was intimate to him — as if it were enough to presuppose it to reappropriate and move within it again — the reentry into the home left behind occurs as a shock, which brings to the surface an other world, only partially or precariously identical to that of memories preserved in the past of lived experiences, such that, indeed, “the homecomer is not the same man who left. He is neither the same for himself nor for those who await his return. This statement holds true for any kind of homecoming” (Schütz, 1979, p. 299).

One of the diverse examples of this homecoming is that of the war soldier. However, many others also serve as an illustration, namely: the traveler who, for years, was in foreign lands; the immigrant who, for some reason, decides to return to the environment of their birth; a young person who, after acquiring social and/or financial stability in another country or city, returns to the home where they grew up; and, evidently, the person who, after an accident, returns home with an acquired disability.

In this specific context, we consider that the person subjected to an accident that imposes the acquisition of a disability, as well as those patients subjected to long periods away from domestic life to undergo necessary medical and hospital care, are also possible and plausible examples of what Schütz intends to narrate. After all, such cases (and without exception), upon returning home, seem to demonstrate, above all, a “definitive” return to a familiar point, allowing us to think of home as both a place of origin and of final destination. That is, from this perspective,

Home is not only the place — my house, my room, my garden, my city — but everything it symbolizes. The symbolic character of the notion of “home” is emotionally evocative and difficult to describe. Home means different things



to different people. It means, of course, father's house, mother tongue, family, love, friends; it means a beloved landscape, "songs my mother taught me", food prepared in a particular way, familiar things for daily use, customs, personal habits — in short, a peculiar way of life, composed of small, important, and cherished elements (Schütz, 1979, p. 291).

Such experiences, which for many, in their everydayness, are so little perceived and admired — since they are no longer available to routine and daily admiration — are experienced as a lack, revealing that, although they previously composed merely a set of routine things, in the face of their absence, they come to represent an inestimable symbolic value. Therefore, when thinking about the idea of home, we must consider that it diverges from person to person, insofar as it has one signification for those who remain in it, and another sense for those who are far from it. Regarding the one who went away from home, we can say that "there is no longer the total experience of the beloved person, his gestures, his way of walking and speaking, of listening and doing things; what remains are memories, a photograph, a few written lines" (Schütz, 1979, p. 295).

When one leaves the familiar home and changes environment, both for those who remained and for the one who departed, the experiences and lived experiences of reality change the system of relevances, such that things which previously had little importance are reconsidered and apprehended under a new interpretative sense.

In this regard, Schütz (1979) explains to us that the systems of relevances can be divided in two ways: a first one, termed *intrinsic system of relevances*, in which interests occur in an autonomous, spontaneous, and independent manner, generally respecting a genuine desire to solve a specific problem or achieve the realization of a goal through the exercise of our reasoning; and a second, called *imposed system of relevances*, in which interests are not chosen, much less determined, through an active and genuinely authentic attitude of the subject; on the contrary, they are constrained by events, people, or situations that affect the preponderant autonomy of the subject in relation to their own personal interests and desires.

Evidently, both systems connect and interact throughout life and very rarely can be seen in their original form without the entanglement of one in the other. However, it is worth highlighting that especially "imposed relevances remain empty, unfulfilled expectations" (Schütz, 1979, p.233). In the specific case of acquired disability, we will see that the second system tends to be the most preponderant among those who experience the ontology of the accident, considering that the existential metamorphoses will be



interpreted as a discontinuity of the natural course of life and an unpleasant imposition of fate.

To a certain extent, this can also be a problematic issue when we take, for example, the situation of the soldier who, upon writing letters to the family, notes that things that are totally important and significant to him are disregarded and of little relevance to those who do not share the same ontological space of experiencing reality. From this we can infer that

This is the aspect of the social structure of the home world for the man who lives in it. The aspect changes entirely for the man who has left it. For him, life at home is no longer at his immediate disposal. He has entered, so to speak, another social dimension, not covered by the system of coordinates used as a reference code in home life. He no longer experiences as a participant in a vivid present the many We-relations that form the texture of the home group. His departure from home replaced these lived experiences with memories, and these memories preserve only what life at home meant up to the moment he left it. The course of development was paralyzed (Schütz, 1979, p. 295).

With this, one can note that, as time passes, the regime of “familiarity” between the soldier and his closest ones is lost in terms of intimacy, making it impossible, to a certain degree, for both to interpret and welcome each other based on the lived experience of a knowledge based on intimacy, which is something extremely necessary to understand what the other expects of us and to anticipate their actions and responses. This occurs because, besides the family members not having a clear and distinct notion of the soldier’s experience of reality in combat, the distance causes those at home to take the combatant merely by his stereotype constructed by social media. Thus, “when the soldier returns and starts to speak — if he starts to speak at all — he is surprised to see that his listeners, even those sympathetic to him, do not grasp the unique quality of these individual experiences, which have made him another man” (Schütz, 1979, p. 297).

The familiarity and intimacy of our lived experience in a home allow us to adopt routine and pragmatic activities, as well as to establish goals based on previously tested and validated experiences, enabling the routine itself and the knowledge of it to allow us to assume and build a core of habits and traditions for a more active and effective realization of the activities and interactions necessary for personal and social life.

Upon absenting oneself from a home, it is common that this organized pattern of things, relations, and routines is altered or does not remain, continuously, at our disposal. This causes that, after a long absence, the homecoming shows itself no longer as a return to a known place, but rather to a new, reformulated environment, which may in no way resemble the home one left or expected to find. Thus, Schütz (1979) shows us that, at



least initially, this return will always be a novelty that will demand from the one who now returns an adjustment and, also, a re-establishment of a new routine and the reconstruction of ties with the people and things that remained. After all, even if something shows itself to be recurrent, in this new lived experience,

The recurrent is no longer the same. The repetition may be aimed at and desired: that which belongs to the past can never be re-established in another present exactly as it was. When it appeared, that which belongs to the past carried with it empty anticipations, horizons of future development, references, chances, and possibilities; now, in retrospect, these anticipations prove to have been fulfilled or not; the perspectives have changed; what was peripheral has shifted to the center of attention or disappeared entirely; what were previously possibilities have become realities or proved to be impossibilities — in short, the previous experience has now another meaning (Schütz, 1979, p. 298-299).

Therefore, Schütz (1979) warns us — through the figure of the soldier who returns disfigured from war — to the fact that, upon returning home, the traveler or the person with acquired disability must be aware of the need to prepare themselves for a process of “re-accommodation and recognition” of the new world of daily life. Besides them, the family and the entire home group also need to be prepared to receive this return. Evidently, it is not a matter, under any hypothesis, of understanding this return only in a superficial and limited way, but rather of understanding, according to the particular history of lived experience (and of unexpected accidents) of these subjects, the need to be cared for by reason of what they now think, live, and feel after their return.

After all, as we will discuss subsequently, whether due to a disease, an acquired disability, or a process — in theory natural, such as aging — such experiences can provoke an identity rupture, a certain self-estrangement, for, depending on their type of occurrence, such accidents are capable of producing impotent bodies never before experienced. An unknown face, for the first time wrinkled; an unstable and vacillating mood; a memory that fails and does not allow the recollection of old and beloved people and things. All these experiences — although lived in distinct rhythms and through continuous gradual modifications — can arise as a purely undesirable, unprepared condition, which disfigures the person not only in their physical appearance, in their face, but above all regarding their routines and the way they relate to themselves and to others. Therefore, we can say that it is especially in the rhythm and in the identity composition that these lived experiences most produce their unexpected effects (Marin, 2014).



### 3 Body and Lived Experience of Identity in Acquired Disability

In this regard, Peggy Tessier (2015), in *Le corps accidenté: bouleversements identitaires et reconstruction de soi*, clarifies that the concept of identity is theoretically broad, for it encompasses, even today, a vast range of meanings and interpretations, since, throughout history, it has been defined in multiple ways and without managing to reach a universal scientific and philosophical consensus. However, generally speaking, we tend to define identity as being the character of that which tends to remain equal or constant to itself over the course of time.

Often confused with other words such as “personality”, “subjectivity”, and “singularity”, identity distinguishes itself by possessing its own signification and importance, for it refers, in particular, to the specific set of characters and attributes that define the character traits of a given individual. Additionally, we can also say that a person’s identity is formulated, from the initial moments of early childhood, through investigations and experiences originating from our relationship with the world, with the other, and with ourselves. Thus, even though identity is personal, it is usually established based on our interaction with a given environment and with other individuals who possess, themselves, a subjectivity and, also, an identity. That is, our identity formation is constructed with the co-participation of an other who confronts us regarding that which we hold as equal or divergent to him (Tessier, 2015).

As a general rule, the regularity of our identity is corroborated by the observation that our body — despite natural transitions — remains the same and, above all, under our control. However, when an accident occurs that generates, for example, an acquired disability, such a fact instigates a confrontation with the identity previously established throughout life, such that this event — external to the subject — through lesions and permanent damages, arbitrarily produces severe transformations and traumas in the progressive and natural process of human development.

Therefore, in the specific case of acquired disability — or of illnesses that create fixed alterations in the lived experience of well-being in a healthy body — we see human identity being modified by the effect of the ontology of the accident, which establishes, by force of constraint, an *other* mode of the subject feeling embodied in the world and in equilibrium with the integrity of their lived body.

Something is lost or changed in the sense of the objective materiality of the body (height, weight, strength, virility, dexterity) or of its symbolic apparatus (sense of beauty



or esteem, gratitude for life, or charisma). Even a face slightly disfigured by an accident is already sufficient for an individual to feel the experience of self no longer as a perception that he is the same as before. This is because the habitual body, which accompanies us and is regularly within our reach and in our company, embodies our identity. Seen in this way, we must then consider that

To think of identity as lived in a body also means running the risk of thinking it through its fragmentation. Identity is then defined as “identity lived experience”, through which the subject relates to past forms of himself through an autobiographical continuity. Identity is conceived as an essentially dynamic and embodied experience (Tessier, 2015, p.222, our translation).

Complementary to this discussion, it is worth highlighting that the body holds an identity role in this process. After all, frequently understood and used as the place of all infinite possibilities of the experiencing of self, it is what reveals what we are — since we are essentially a body, and it is through it that we experience our existences and explore ourselves and the world. This means that, generally speaking, we seek to possess the body as a way of demarcating our presence and our authenticity; we appropriate it not only as a property, but as a source of expression, social bonding, and freedom — hence the occurrence of bodily transformations through voluntary metamorphoses in which the body is tattooed and/or dressed as a means of affirming a certain personal style and mode of life. Thus, following the words of Tessier (2015), we can say that

It is undeniable that our body changes ceaselessly. That is why an individual's identity is lived. Identity is lived because it is always subject to bodily change. It is in some way “plastic” and, we could say, performative, relative to a context of dynamic evolution corresponding to the progress of science and technology (Tessier, 2015, p.220, our translation).

Claire Marin (2014), in her book *La maladie, catastrophe intime*, contributes to this question by commenting, for example, that a person in a situation of illness may develop a life with greater inconstancies and one that is much more volatile and oscillating, which ends up generating an experience of life that moves between the feeling of existing and the constant fear of disappearing. It would not be merely like feeling thrown or inhabiting two distinct universes, but rather of possessing and having to manage two totally distinct identities. In other words, it is as if such a condition at times rendered the subject with less force of expression and of presence in the world and before himself, and at other times as if it made him exist even more present to himself, but now based on a painful self-perception due to an alarming and distressing anguish of death.

Thought in this way, we can consider, above all in the case of acquired disability or a situation of more serious illness, that both create a certain hiatus — a zone of passage



— between what the person was and what he or she is now being or has become. The clothes that previously fit and marked a style now neither fit nor make sense anymore. Generally speaking, it is the body that becomes strange and is taken as a foreigner when it presents itself in the mirror in contrast with an old photograph that reveals a biography extremely different from the current one (Marin, 2014).

Not without reason, Marin (2014) will say that the person with illness — or even the person with such acquired disability — shares a body under the effect of a fragmentation that elevates the subject to a condition of exile. This is due not only by reason of the emergence of an alteration of rhythm and time for the execution of tasks, nor even because one sees an other identity, fluctuating, arise, but, above all, because this exile is a sign that the destructive ontological plasticity has made the subject lose fundamental experiences in his feeling of self, no longer offering him his body and the habitual lived experiences — thus making it impossible for him to inhabit his organism as usual and to feel prepared to sustain himself autonomously in the world with the decisional power and strength capable of enabling him to appropriate existence and decide to be well and remain healthy.

#### **4 Schütz and the World of Everyday Life**

To better develop this thesis, in this section we will seek to draw again upon the Austrian thinker Alfred Schütz (1979), as he presents the concept of the “life-world” as a world of intersubjective order that precedes our birth and is formed through a social process of lived experiences and interpretations that precede our appearance in this world and make it, as such, an organized world, according to its own principles.

Currently, as participants in this organization, this very world is at our disposal, at this instant, to our presence and experiencing. However, it is common that all interpretative activity occurs grounded in a stock of experiences already available regarding this world — whether they be those we ourselves constructed in the course of our ontological investigations, or those experiences taught by the family and/or social group to which we belong. Therefore, we can say that this stock of knowledge operates as a “knowledge at hand” that acts as a reference code for our most intimate lived experiences.

According to Schütz, in his “natural attitude”, man does not conceive the world only in his private and individual condition, but rather as an intersubjective world, socially



shared and much more directed toward a zone of practical interests than merely to theoretical aspirations. Thus, the world of daily life would be both the scene of our personal investments and, also, the object of our most singular activities and relations.

Schütz (1979), in the chapter “On Multiple Realities” of his book titled *Phenomenology and Social Relations*, revisits an important chapter of William James's *Principles of Psychology* (1890) to elaborate the idea, as the aforementioned thinker expounds it, that there is in the world an extremely diverse and infinite number of orders of realities, each possessing its own special style and existential particularity. Such orders of realities are described as “sub-universes” and concern, for example, the “world of sense or physical things (the paramount reality), the world of science, the world of ideal relations, the worlds of mythology and religion, the world of the ‘idols of the tribe’, the various worlds of individual opinion, and the world of sheer madness and vagary” (Schütz, 1979, p.248).

In James's theory (1890), a world exists and is real insofar as the subject attends to it. However, despite each world possessing its own special style, it may disappear under the effect of a new attention. That is, reality thus conceived articulates itself with the emotional and active life and is, in a certain way, created or altered by everything that excites and arouses our interest. Precisely for this reason, we have the tendency to posit as real everything we perceive as long as it remains without ambiguity or confusion.

Starting from Jamesian theory, Schütz (1979) considers that each of the diverse worlds and multiple realities possesses experiences that, integrated into the cognitive style of these worlds, become consistent and congruent as a whole, even if not necessarily adequate to the real meaning of the world of daily life.

For the German sociologist, the finite provinces of meaning are qualified, each one, by its specific tension of consciousness — which ranges, for example, from wide-awakeness, when we are awake, to sleep, as we enter the world of dreams (Schütz, 1979). Furthermore, such provinces possess, each one, a notion of time [time perspective] that is individual and subjective to it, a specific mode of experiencing oneself, and, finally, an intrinsic manner of bonding and being in a process of socialization [form of sociality/spezifische Form der Sozialität?]. Precisely for this reason, the author comments that

We prefer to speak of finite provinces of meaning upon which we bestow the accent of reality, instead of sub-universes, as William James does. With this change in terminology, we emphasize that it is the meaning of our experiences and not the ontological structure of the objects that constitutes reality. Each province of meaning – the paramount world of real objects and events, which



we can affect through our actions, the world of imaginations and phantasms, as well as the child's play-world, the world of the insane, but also the world of art, the world of dreams, the world of scientific contemplation – has its special cognitive style. It is this special style of a set of our experiences that constitutes them as finite provinces of meaning (Schütz, 1979, p.248-249).

Despite recognizing James's (1989) accuracy in designating the “sub-universe of the senses and of physical things” as the paramount reality, Schütz (1979) opts to consider as paramount reality what he identifies as being the reality of our daily life. For him, each of these worlds is a finite province of meaning; that is, they all possess a cognitive style that is peculiar to them. For example, the cognitive style of the world of dreams is distinct from the cognitive style of the world of scientific contemplation or of the world of art.

Furthermore, the ontological and lived experiences of each of the worlds, regarding their individual cognitive style, tend to possess their own internal system of organization, consistency, and compatibility. Thus, it can be stated that, from the point of view of each of these finite provinces of meaning, all of them acquire their accent of reality in a particular way. In this sense,

The consistency and compatibility of experiences with respect to their peculiar cognitive style subsist only within the boundaries of the particular province of meaning to which these experiences belong. By no means will that which is compatible within the province of meaning *P* be also compatible within the province of meaning *Q*. On the contrary, seen from *P*, supposedly real, *Q* and all the experiences belonging to it would appear fictitious, inconsistent, and incompatible, and vice versa (Schütz, 1979, p.251-252)..

Conceived in this way, to say that the provinces of meaning are finite implies postulating that it is not possible to refer one province to another merely through the constitution of a *formula of transformation*. For example, the world of religious experience, the child's play-world, and the world of the sick can only be accessed through a crossing that necessarily implies a “leap” — that is, something like a “shock”, which is lived by the subject as a radical modification of the attention to life and its respective transformation of the tension of consciousness into another specific one. This is because, according to the author,

To the peculiar cognitive style of each of these different provinces of meaning belongs, thus, a specific tension of consciousness, and consequently a specific epoché, a specific experiencing of one's self, a specific form of sociality, and a specific time-perspective (Schütz, 1979, p.252).

According to Schütz (1979), the world of working, within the scope of daily life, tends to be experienced as the general and collective model of the human experience of reality. The other finite provinces of meaning constitute, in a certain way, modifications of this primordial archetype, deriving from it their fundamental structure of meaning. In



other words, it is the world of working that provides the basic pattern of reference for the other spheres of experience.

Even the diverse worlds of fantasy originate in this initial model, expressing, at times, the recurrent human desire to escape the outer world. Such a desire reveals the attempt to avoid confrontation with the obstacles and conflicts characteristic of objective reality, as well as to evade the effort necessary to devise strategies that allow one to withstand the limits and challenges imposed by concrete existence, frequently marked by irreversible realities and adverse situations.

However, as Schütz (1979, p. 254) warns, “the imagining self does not transform the outer world”. Fantasy, therefore, provides only a momentary suspension of reality, without, however, modifying its objective structure nor the concrete conditions that sustain it.

In other words, when being in the world, we produce and act not only within it, but, principally, upon it. This means that all our bodily movements and activities directly affect the world — producing alteration and modification in its objects and mutual relations. Therefore, we can define that “world, in this sense, is something that we have to modify by our actions or that modifies our actions” (Schütz, 1979, p. 73).

In addition to this, we must also consider that man is, in fact, defined by the biographical situation that indicates where he stands. That is, we are in relation to the regularity or discontinuity of the events that reach us. With the development of an acquired disability, for example, we can say that the lived experience or the experience of the person with a disability (just as that of all men, generally speaking) is constituted by the present moment in relation to the physical, cultural, and social space, as well as his location regarding the geography of his life and his historical time, added to his status within a society.

Therefore, it can be conjectured that the concept of situation is, above all, defined by biography, since it possesses its own history and is consolidated by the experiences accumulated by man and transformed (in terms of organization) into “habitual” possessions that arise from (and belong to) the stock of knowledge at hand which such singular lived experiences, as a unique and individual possession, gave to this subject. According to Schütz,

I experience both these transcendences, that of Nature and that of Society, as being imposed upon me, in a double sense: on the one hand, I find myself at any moment of my existence within nature and within society — both are permanently constitutive elements of my biographical situation and are, therefore, experienced as belonging irremediably to it; on the other hand, they



constitute the only framework within which I have the freedom of my potentialities, and this means that they prescribe the scale of all possibilities of the definition of my situation (Schütz, 1979, p. 242).

Considered in this way, we can infer that human identity formation is constituted through a process of identification considered as circumstantial, wherein our identity, in this sense, undergoes various transformations and changes depending on the personal history of each individual and the global context of his life. Viewed thus, we cannot elaborate the idea that we possess only a unitary identity. On the contrary, throughout our biography, we tend to experience diverse experiences that change (and will change) our identity forms due to our biographical and relational development.

Lima (2021), for example, when addressing the theme of disability in his doctoral dissertation, contributes to this discussion by defending the idea that, throughout our history, we may experience crises, changes, and transitions. However, it is worth noting that there are substantial differences between such terms. This is because, while we consider that transitions pertain to events of transformation that enable us to traverse from one stage of life to another differently, changes (strictly speaking) relate more to the objective part of a given process. In other words, while change corresponds to the objective system, transition illustrates more the subjective component of these itinerant movements of life and can be experienced with or without the specific presence of a crisis.

This demonstrates that certain events can provoke profound changes without the subject necessarily being able to make the transition from one historical or identity cycle to another. Some factors may contribute to the success or failure of these transitions; among many, we can cite: the speed with which the changes occurred; the subject's difficulty in systematically developing analytical or psychotherapeutic work regarding such events; the severity and impact of the transformations and implications; in addition, evidently, to the more social aspects, especially when these demand greater community participation regarding the recognition, inclusion, and belonging of these individuals.

In interface with this perspective of the ontology of disability, we can infer that Schütz (1979) believes that the human being experiences the world within his actual reach in accordance with a specific component or cycle of his personal biographical condition, which consequently generates a transcendence in his interaction with his Here and Now. In this way, we must emphasize that the biographical situation of a person with acquired disability relates especially to the memories of the past world that was within his reach,



but which, currently, are no longer at his disposal as a lived experience since he has transitioned from what has already happened to the Now.

Thus, based on a reinterpretation of Schützian theory regarding bodily metamorphoses and identity lived experiences within the ontology of acquired disability, we can deduce and present the thesis that we generally seek to move our world of past recollections into our current actual reach. To this end, we tend to want to retrieve what has already been lived through a retreat or return to the place from where we came in our world, which was once within our reach, as if it were still restorable. In doing so, however, we end up not taking into account current conflicts, acquired personal limitations, and other technical problems, in addition to, of course, disregarding that the past is a concretely irretrievable instance.

The expectation of a “return to the world within my restorable reach” before the acquired disability may develop the belief that it is possible to return to it and find it essentially the same, even if relatively modified and altered, just as it was lived while it was within our actual reach.

The same holds true regarding the future, since we tend to assume that what is currently available within our actual reach will, with the passage of time, pass out of our reach as we move towards the future, but that, nevertheless, we expect to be able to retrieve (substantially, as a “reliving, a resumption”), should we, subsequently, wish to return to what we are experiencing now, in the current present.

With this, Schütz (1979) states that it is common for the subject to feel inclined to distinguish and mark certain objects with the expectation that, at a future moment, such marks left upon the world may serve as “*subjective indications*” or “*mnemonic devices*” capable of acting as legitimate subjective reminders. At this point, we can infer that

Certain facts, objects, and events are known to me as interrelated, in a more or less typical way, but my knowledge of the particular type of interrelationship may be quite, or even totally, vague. If I know that event B normally appears simultaneously with event A, or succeeds or precedes it, I take this as a manifestation of a typical and plausible relationship existing between A and B, although I know nothing about the nature of this relationship. Until further notice, I simply expect, or take for granted, that any future recurrence of an event of type A will be associated, in the same typical way, with the recurrence of an event of type B before, simultaneously, or after. I can, then, apprehend A not as an object, fact, or event in itself, but as a representative of something else, that is, relative to the past, present, or future appearance of B (Schütz, 1979, p.100).

Additionally, we must also consider that we dispose of *zones of belief* which often develop in ways that are not entirely legitimate and rational. This eventually occurs



because we are not uniformly inclined to dedicate ourselves to the multiplicity of strata of the world within our reach. In other words, *the world is taken for our knowledge through a selective function that interrelates with our personal interest in things* and has a very direct relationship with how we structure the world according to a greater or lesser degree of importance.

Evidently, we can consider this regarding our more private interests, but we can expand this question and also inquire about our interests and concerns regarding the particularities of social life involving the creation and grounding of a more just, inclusive, and democratic world for all, especially those who find themselves constantly excluded from belonging and inclusion within the general dynamic of the neoliberal regime that keeps out all those who are considered unfit for the interests of a productivist and performative society.

In a certain sense, it is imperative that we step out of this personal and collective mode of functioning in which we continuously only dwell upon and engage with those “facts, objects, and events which are, in fact, or will become, possible ends or means, possible obstacles or conditions, for the realization of my projects, or which are, or will be, dangerous or enjoyable or, in some other way, relevant to me” (Schütz, 1979, p.100).

According to Schütz (1979), we possess a zone of things taken for granted which could be defined as a sector of the world that, connected to a given practical or theoretical problem which engages our attention at a particular moment, is taken by us as of lesser relevance or requiring less clarification and distinction — even if, in fact, we know little or almost nothing about it. In other words, that which is taken for granted is generally something that presents itself as “given” and superficially interpreted, only insofar as it appears and how it appears, according to the way the subject or others interpreted or experienced it throughout life.

However, it is precisely within this entanglement of things already given and taken for granted that man must trace his destiny and develop his own path, thus allowing himself, and especially regarding the occurrence of an acquired disability, to question what lies hidden in this world of apparently unknown things that predispose his life. However, this must not be a lived experience of re-signification of existence starting from the subject himself and for himself alone, but, rather, a struggle and a collective claim, which engages us all and in which citizens fight, each one, for the recognition of the other through the pursuit of better conditions of well-being and dignity, regardless of the destiny bequeathed to each of us.



Such a postulate must be posited as indispensable, even if, in a certain way, we know and are fully aware of the fact that, to a certain extent, “an outstanding feature of man's life in the modern world is his conviction that his life-world as a whole is neither fully understood by himself nor fully understood by any of his fellow-men” (Schütz, 1979, p. 231).

## 5 Final Considerations

As we have been able to problematize throughout this article, the acquisition of a disability can lead the subject to moments of disorientation and disenchantment regarding himself and life, as if he seemed to float between two worlds, since he no longer possesses the same identity reference points, nor those of space and time, that existed previously, and which, for some time, may remain absent without even being replaced by others with which he can identify and orient himself in his interaction with the (new) world in its state of alteration (Lima, 2021).

Thus, we can conceive of acquired disability as a radical event that provokes ruptures in the most diverse domains of human life. For some, such an event may entail drastic repercussions for the physical, academic, and leisure activities they previously engaged in; for others, the impacts and consequences may be more related to the financial and professional fields, and, or even, to all spheres of life.

Although this is not a generic event with standardized and universal responses, it is known that the most common reactions to such occurrences oscillate between emotions such as pain, sadness, and powerlessness, in addition to profound feelings of anger, emptiness, and revolt. In any case, it is important to emphasize that the initial lived experiences resulting from the event establishing the disability seem to attest to a clear loss, split, or alteration of the sense and feeling of reality.

With these elaborations concluded, we can perceive that identity is vulnerable and susceptible when a body is wounded or injured. In a way, this also allows us to consider that identity, in itself, is subject to rupture and disintegration depending on the accidents that may befall the being.

This fact occurs, in a certain way, because in these situations of an acquired disability, the subject comes to feel unfit or resistant to conceiving the new body as his own — which, evidently, will consequently engender a difficulty in self-recognition. In this way, it can be said that the accident causes identity stability to waver insofar as it



separates life between two moments: that prior to and that subsequent to the event of the acquisition of a disability, generating a crisis marked by the emergence and rediscovery of self starting from an other body (Tessier, 2015).

In short, it is necessary to reflect that, faced with the experience of the accident of acquired disability, the person in this condition will require an extended and continuous process of living with and recognizing self and world — a fact which, in some way, will be extremely opportune for the constitution and continuous reformulation of an understanding in favor of the living of new meanings and of a better understanding regarding the actions and initiatives necessary in the face of the emergence and establishment of this unprecedented life experience.

Ultimately, such an experience may be better developed from the moment the subject initiates a practical, conscious, and critical conduct in the face of such an event, so as to set out to observe, in the most reflective manner possible, the alteration of his habitual world and construct new lived experiences and reconceptualizations that may, effectively, enable the experimentation of active actions in order to reposition himself in the life cycle, given that, in these circumstances, “the process is only truly resolved when there occurs a realization that the previous world has ceased to exist and functioning alternatives are found [that are] comfortable with the subject’s style” (Lima, 2021, p. 103).

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