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THE URBAN DISPOSITION. A SARTREAN FRAMEWORK FOR THE ANALYSIS OF URBAN LIFE

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to examine two concepts of Jean-Paul Sartre's later philosophy, *praxis* and *hexis*, in terms of their applicability for the philosophical analysis of the urban environment. By utilizing these concepts, the city can be reinterpreted as a practical ensemble that enables certain options for action while simultaneously limiting human freedom by presenting practical constraints. The constant clash of different forms of materiality in the shape of both human beings and artifacts cultivates the urban disposition. It is a dialectical movement of stabilizing equilibrium on one side and oscillating progress on the other. The coshaped reality of the city is characterized by tension between structural dependencies and increased possibilities.

Keywords: Existentialism; Dialectics; Praxis; Philosophy of Technology; Urban Environment.

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A disposição urbana. Um enquadramento sartriano para uma análise da vida urbana

Resumo

Este artigo tem como objetivo investigar dois conceitos da filosofia tardia de Jean-Paul Sartre, *praxis* e *hexis*, em termos de sua aplicabilidade à análise filosófica do meio urbano. Ao utilizar estes conceitos, a cidade pode ser reinterpretada como um conjunto prático que possibilita certas opções de ação ao mesmo tempo que limita a liberdade humana ao apresentar restrições práticas. O constante choque entre diferentes formas de materialidade na forma tanto de seres humanos como de artefatos cultiva a disposição urbana. É um movimento dialético de estabilização do equilíbrio por um lado, e de oscilização do progresso, por outro. A realidade da cidade moldada em conjunto caracteriza-se pela tensão entre dependências estruturais e possibilidades ampliadas.

Palavras-chave: Existencialismo; Dialética; Praxis; Filosofia da Tecnologia; Ambiente Urbano.

Introduction

The early philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre is known for its focus on the existential situation of the human being. Human activity is perceived as a free endeavor, that is bound by nothing but what itself determines to be obstacles. However, in his later philosophy, Sartre is more concerned with the material conditions that influence the projection of self. In *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, he introduces the concepts of *praxis* and *hexis*, that emphasize the dialectical character of human agency. Rather than conceiving human *praxis* as one of pure freedom, it is conceived as the product of the relations of production and the societal class the historical human being is situated in. The following paper is the attempt to operationalize Sartre's *praxis-hexis* framework in order to analyze human-world interaction as a mutually constitutive activity between two sectors of materiality, that enables and disables options for action by structuring the city as a practical field. The research question of this paper is: What are the advantages of a Sartrean framework for the philosophical study of the urban environment and how can this framework be applied to analyze the city as a disposition of practical constraints and possibilities? Sartre's concepts enable the analysis of a dispositional interaction between human beings and technology in the form of matter, that avoids the problems of an essentialist philosophy of technology. As such, it is of interest for philosophers of technology as well as philosophers of the city. It provides new and unbiased

insights into human-technology interaction. Also it enables philosophers to regard cities as practical ensembles, that provide the material basis for questions concerning urban justice, urban environments and inclusion/exclusion.

The attempt to answer the research question consists of several steps. Firstly, Sartre's early and later philosophy will be introduced with regard to the dialectical principle of totalization. Secondly, the tension between *praxis* and *hexis* will be elucidated. Thirdly, the advantages of the *praxis-hexis* framework for philosophical analysis will be focused. The paper concludes with an attempt to operationalize the *praxis-hexis* framework.

1. Intentionality and Self-Projection as Totalization

The key concept of Sartre's *praxis-hexis* framework, the dialectic synthesis of human *praxis*, is based on the functional principle of totalization. It is the basis of the two concepts intentionality and self-projection. Even though these two concepts have been elucidated in great depth by Sartre himself, it is necessary, to reconstruct them again with a strong emphasis on the dialectic element both have in common. The following paragraph is mainly to provide examples for the more abstract concept of totalization.

Sartre's early work *Being and Nothingness* starts with a complex introduction in which the author explains the phenomenological foundations of his philosophy. With regard to being, Sartre distinguishes two modes of existence. Human beings operate in the mode of being-for-itself, whereas everything non-human, e.g. the world and its various phenomena, operate in the mode of being-in-itself. The tripartite structure of this being-in-itself is described as follows: «Being is. Being is in itself. Being is what it is»¹. This means, that being is neither active nor passive, but pure contingent givenness. It has no *noumenon* and «does not point over its shoulder to a true being»². Instead, it is completely how it presents itself. As such, it is prone to be the object of the subjective intentionality of human consciousness. From a phenomenological point of view, consciousness is a summary term for all psychological or intentional experiences³. Every variation of intentional relationality between subject and object, e.g. touching, smelling, thinking and

¹ Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Being and Nothingness*, Routledge, London and New York 2003, p. 22.

² Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, op. cit., p. 2.

³ Stegmüller, Wolfgang, *Hauptströmungen der Gegenwartsphilosophie. Eine kritische Einführung. Band I. Stuttgart*, Kröner 1989, p. 63.

more, constitutes a different finite adumbration of the phenomenon within an infinite series of possible adumbrations⁴. Yet none of these finite adumbrations fully determines the phenomenon's being. Sartre even claims that the simultaneous presence of all contradictory, colliding or conflicting determinations within human consciousness is impossible⁵. Nevertheless, human consciousness can transcend individual determinations towards the meaning of the phenomenon. By identifying this meaning as the «principle of the series of its appearances»⁶, Sartre draws attention to its status as a totality. As such, it is the product of a synthetic act, i.e. a totalization, carried out by human consciousness. In his later work *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, Sartre describes the totality as «a being which, while radically distinct from the sum of its parts, is present in its entirety, in one form or another, in each of these parts, and which relates to itself [...]»⁷. It has the ontological status of being-in-itself. But this process is never complete. The meaning of a phenomenon always represents a lack of being. Since «it would require an infinite process to inventory the total contents of a thing»⁸; new determinations replace outdated ones or change its overall meaning. The totalization of determinations and its product, the constituted meaning, build the foundation for Sartre's conception of the projection of self.

The most obvious and at the same time most subtle difference between human beings and phenomena is that human beings are more than they appear. Their self can not be the principle of the series of their appearances. Sartre argues that this is because of human being's particular mode of existence, known as being-for-itself. This is characterized by the constant need to self-reflect and self-relate. Sartre calls this need freedom⁹ and it is the gap between being-for-itself and being-in-itself that prevents human beings from becoming self-contained totalities. Since being-for-itself is relational, it can only exist as an ongoing totalization towards the future¹⁰. The meaning of phenomena is the way in which they appear; the meaning of human beings is the way in which they determine themselves. This self-determination can

⁴ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, op. cit., p. 3.

⁵ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, op. cit., pp. 16 – 17.

⁶ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, op. cit., p. 5.

⁷ Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Critique of Dialectical Reason I. Theory of Practical Ensembles*, New Left Review, London 1978, p. 45.

⁸ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, op. cit., p. 7.

⁹ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, op. cit., pp. 48 – 50.

¹⁰ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, op. cit., pp. 101 – 102.

be understood as a negation of the full positivity of being-in-itself¹¹. As such, being-for-itself is the totalizing existence towards one possible self while also being the negation of other possible selves. By doing so, it constitutes a specific horizon of possibilities¹². Simultaneously, it posits itself as a lack of being to exist towards¹³. In this way, contingent positings of being-in-itself become concrete conditions of being-for-itself, coupled with the necessity to exist towards them. For instance, a bus driver is not a philosopher, not a road worker, not a musician. All of those are possible selves, yet the human being may only mainly exist towards one of them by simultaneously negating the others. In doing so, it realizes certain possibilities that belong to its existing towards being a bus driver. This includes the incorporation of totalities such as buses, streets, traffic lights, traffic regulations etc.

In Sartre's case, totalization follows a dialectic triad of positing, negation and situation. The situation is in itself another positing and the triad begins anew. In intentional relations, the triad depicts the synthesis of opposing determinations and their sublation within the meaning of the phenomenon. The projection of self follows this dialectic process insofar, as being-for-itself is the real sublation of all its possible projections that are nevertheless still a part of it. As such, it can take advantage of certain possibilities that are the starting point for further dialectic processes. In Sartre's philosophy, life is never a self-contained totality but the constant totalization towards itself; outside, in a world filled with things and other people.

2. The Coefficient of Adversity

What is at least a curiosity in the early and the cornerstone of the late Sartre is how he assesses the importance of the so called coefficient of adversity of things. In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre considers the social, economical and bodily dimensions of the human condition as a factor that is conditioned by the contingency of being-in-itself. Since this thrownness or *Geworfenheit* is negated by the self-determining projection of human beings; it is they who determine the severity of the coefficient of adversity. For the early Sartre: «the coefficient of adversity in things can not be an argument against our freedom, for it is by us - i.e. by the preliminary positing of an end - that this coefficient

¹¹ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, op. cit., p. 22.

¹² Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, op. cit., pp. 106 – 108.

¹³ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, op. cit., p. 110.

arises»¹⁴. A stone is only an obstacle, if human beings determine themselves to be bothered by it on their road of freedom. The early Sartre is not interested in the power of things and their practical constraints beyond the point of self-projection.

The later Sartre accepts «without reservation the thesis set forth by Friedrich Engels in his letter to Karl Marx: ‘Men themselves make their history but in a given environment which conditions them’»¹⁵. But in his opinion, the Marxist philosophy of his time has lost sight of this fact. Sartre criticizes, that Marxism and especially Dialectical Materialism have become dogmas. Instead of analyzing the situation of human beings within capitalist societies, these dogmas expose them to dialectical laws of history. Even though Sartre is primarily concerned with human freedom, his later work, including the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, is the attempt to handle the coefficient of adversity. The focus of his later book lies on the tension between human agency and a world full of recalcitrant things. Ultimately, this tension leads to Sartre’s conceptualization of *praxis* and *hexis*.

The Marxist focus of Sartre’s later philosophy can be disputed. Nevertheless, the strictly material base of his concepts provides advantages for a philosophical analysis of the interactions and interdependencies within an urban environment. By conceptualizing materiality as a constituent of *praxis*, problematic concepts about a supposed essence of technology or a deterministic relation between human beings and things, can be avoided.

3. *Praxis* and Materiality

Sartre considers both intentionality and self-projection to follow the triadic structure of dialectic synthesis, known as totalization. In order to analyze the tension between human beings and the world, the later Sartre slightly changes the emphasis of his philosophy. Starting from the lack of being, Sartre questions why human beings are confronted with this lack in the first place. In the intentionality of human consciousness, the lack of being represents that additional content of the phenomenon, that is not sublated within its meaning. In relation to the self-projection, it represents the future self that is posited as that which human beings strive to become, but yet miss to be.

¹⁴ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, op. cit., pp. 503 – 504.

¹⁵ Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Search for a Method*, Random House Inc., Toronto 1963, p. 85.

Sartre considers these lacks to be the internal side of external needs, e.g. physical deficiencies, desires, goals etc. He conceptualizes need as the initial totalizing relation between human beings and the world. Nevertheless, it is not his concern to reduce all human actions to these needs, but rather to identify them as a constituent moment of practical world relatedness. He does so, in order to operationalize the human-world relation as a practical engagement between two sectors of materiality.

Intentionality and self-projection as such are no longer the main focus of the later Sartre. Instead, they are instantiations of the practical relation between human being and world. This *praxis* is the exteriorized functional principle of totalization; the material transition between a given lack of being and its sublation through synthesis¹⁶. Through *praxis*, external factors of concrete matter become internalized nexuses of meaning, thus the meaning of phenomena is constituted. And through *praxis*, these internalized nexuses and other internal factors like needs, wishes, and values are externalized as the striving towards a future self. The transition from lack to need and the concomitant conceptualization of *praxis*-oriented human-world relations is also the transition from a mostly internal to a mostly external view of these relations. Rather than trying to grasp the challenges of human freedom within a situation, human-world relations can be analyzed as a constituting as well as constituted engagement. Constituting, because human beings change the world and themselves in order to satisfy their needs; constituted, because *praxis* is dependent on various material factors and influenced in return by its own imprint on materiality.

Most importantly, Sartre implements a modal view of human activity. Since every *praxis* is embedded in a practical field, i.e. a structured totality of materials and means¹⁷, it is both enabling and disabling possibilities, by relating possible means to possible ends. Here, Sartre's analyses correspond to Hegel's thoughts about means and ends as described in Hubig's *Die Kunst des Möglichen I*¹⁸. All three follow a modal concept of technology, that analyzes the mediating role of technology and technological artifacts, by focusing on their enabling and disabling capabilities. Even though Sartre does so only implicitly while focusing on the individual human being, his conception of *praxis* and practical fields, as disposing possibilities for action provides the key concept for the analysis of the urban disposition.

¹⁶ Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, op. cit., pp. 80 – 83.

¹⁷ Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, op. cit., p. 87.

¹⁸ Hubig, Christoph, *Die Kunst des Möglichen I. Technikphilosophie als Reflexion der Medialität*, transcript, Bielefeld 2006, p. 113.

4. The Imprint of *Praxis* on Matter

According to Sartre, «[e]very *praxis* is primarily an instrumentalisation of material reality»¹⁹. Through this totalizing *praxis*, both human beings and the world become inertial. This *practico-inert*²⁰, i.e. the totalities constituted through *praxis* like future selves, objects, ideas, concepts, can be understood as reifications of human activity²¹. As such, they are passively-active and dispose further *praxis*. The explanations given seem to be very abstract at first, yet they allow the human-world relation to be regarded as a result of mutual influence. The above-mentioned example of the bus driver helps to elucidate this. In order to work as a bus-driver, a human being has to learn how to drive a bus. This means, that it has to engage with an artifact. The bus itself can hold 50 people, has an automatic gear for stop-and-go traffic and a suspended seat for long sittings. By virtue of being designed, i.e. meaningfully constituted through *praxis*, the bus «transforms natural, meaningless forces into quasi-human practices, that is to say, into passivised actions»²². In artifacts, human *praxis* remains active over time by acting passively. This allows its usage as a means to specific ends. Instead of being in constant need to constitute the meaning of the artifact as part of a free endeavor, Sartre's later conceptualization of *praxis* and the *practico-inert* allows a much more nuanced analysis of the coefficient of adversity. Things are considered to be material signifiers of their meaning, constituted through *praxis*. In this way, human beings again become subject to that very *praxis* through which others or they themselves externalized their *selves* in the world. This also changes the perception of non-manufactured phenomena in the world so that they might initially be put into an involvement whole as standing reserve or *Bestand*.

Praxis, as dialectic synthesis to satisfy needs, and the *practico-inert*, the world as changed through *praxis*, constitute a practical ensemble. As the inventory of world relatedness under very specific material conditions, it is the framework for further *praxis*. The practical ensemble of the above-mentioned bus driver consists of the bus, the road, his or her expertise and the various reasons, e.g. lacks and needs, to follow this particular line of work. It enables and disables possible options for actions by limiting and delimiting the practical field that contains the roots of *praxis*.

¹⁹ Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, op. cit., p. 161.

²⁰ Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, op. cit., p. 46.

²¹ Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, op. cit., p. 161.

²² Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, op. cit., p. 161.

5. *Praxis* and *Hexis* as Enabling and Disabling Capacities

The constant repetition of certain actions leads to the refinement of the accompanying means and to a better understanding of the achieved ends. Ultimately, this entails the preference of some and the abandonment of other practices. This may lead to a relatively stable equilibrium of interactions, that enable the achievement of reproducible and reliable results. The product of this ongoing interaction with the material world and the constant change of the conditions of that interaction is what Sartre calls *hexis*²³, «that is to say, both [...] a physiological and social determination of human organisms and [...] a practical project of keeping institutions and physical corporate development at the same level»²⁴. This *hexis* is a set of rules, norms and practices and the way of their practical implementation, that mutually shape the way human beings and world constitute each other. As cultivated through *praxis* and the *practico-inert*, it is the ongoing autopoietic dialectic totalization of both human agency and practical constraints and the result of constant theoretical and practical interaction, through which human beings internalize the way their practical ensemble operates²⁵.

It is simultaneously enabling and disabling certain possibilities by limiting and delimiting the practical field in a specific way. The most important aspect of *hexis* is, that it is cultivated through the repetition of successful interactions. Their ongoing success can increasingly obscure the initial tension between lacks and needs as constituents of a free human *praxis*. As the material resistance gradually vanishes, certain practices become ends in themselves instead of being conceived as focal points of dialectic totalization. Over time, this *hexis*, i.e. the structure of material relations brought forth by *praxis*, can gain the status of a determinant. Even though it is a product of the self-projecting dialectic relation between the free being-for-itself and the contingent being-in-itself; this being-in-itself increasingly starts to determine the self-projection in return. The conceptual roots of Sartre's *hexis* lie in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. Here Aristotle describes *hexis* as a disposition towards a specific way of performing actions²⁶. Also, in the social theory of Bourdieu, which was highly influenced by Sartre's later

²³ Here I chose the spelling *hexis* with the rough breathing from Greek ξις.

²⁴ Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, op. cit., p. 126.

²⁵ Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, op. cit., p. 455.

²⁶ Aristotle, *NE*, Book 2.4

work²⁷, *hexis* is the perceivable side of *habitus*²⁸.

6. The Advantages of Sartre's *Praxis-Hexis* Framework

Especially in considering the workings of *hexis*, Sartre's *praxis-hexis* framework can be of advantage for the philosophical analysis of the city. It allows to conceptualize the city as a merger of practical relations between human beings and matter. Also, since Sartre considers every interaction between two separate entities to be a form of *praxis*, this framework allows to uncover connections between seemingly unrelated spheres, e.g. the social and the material/technical sphere. By conceiving human *praxis* as the product of the totalization of material factors and freedom, the city becomes a vast repository for philosophical problems. Questions of inclusion and exclusion arise in a completely new way and the modal focus enables analysts to measure the practical field of the city anew. With the *praxis-hexis* framework in mind, the city is a suitable location to investigate the constant clashes of *praxis* and the *practico-inert*. By virtue of these clashes mere possibilities of being become realities of the material world. And through these realities, as products of interaction and material resistance, new options for action present themselves.

Within the necessities of the city, the possibility of a future human self might even become apparent in the first place. The above-mentioned bus driver has to feel the need for convenient mass transport systems in order to project towards his or her future self. This need is initially presented to him or her through the totalization of the material factors and social relations within the practical ensemble this human being is situated in. The *praxis-hexis* framework might also be applied to other sectors of urban life. It can provide new insights to the problem of the supposed politics of artifacts²⁹, by re-interpreting the relation between these artifacts and marginalized groups as one of enabling and disabling possibilities. Also, it presents a different view on the agency of assemblages³⁰, since practical ensembles are considered to be totalities, that can have structuring power. In terms of power and power-

²⁷ Bourdieu, Pierre, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1995, pp. 72 – 76.

²⁸ Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, op. cit., p. 87

²⁹ Winner, Langdon, «Do Artifacts Have Politics?», *Daedalus*, 109,1 (1980) 121 – 136.

³⁰ Bennett, Jane, *Vibrant Matter. A Political Ecology of Things*, Duke University Press, Durham and London 2010, p. 20.

relations, Sartre's framework may take its place beside Foucault's *dispositiv* and Latour's network as a modeling for the power of technology. The modal focus of this framework prevents deterministic interpretations of technology, since it conceives the practical relations as producing both desired and undesired effects. Thus, the conceptualization of who or what is determining whom is dependent on the way these practical relations are modeled, according to the epistemic interest³¹. *Hexis* might also be analyzed with regard to the analogy of grammar³².

Within the philosophy of the later Sartre, the concepts of *praxis*, the *practico-inert* and *hexis* are already operationalizations of mutually totalizing human-world relations. His method to analyze *praxis* and *hexis* is called progressive-regressive method. In the regressive momentum of his method, the sum of all social relations that condition human beings in their self-projection are reconstructed. This includes all necessary information about history, nature and scientific paradigms that are in any way influential. The progressive momentum of this method is mainly concerned with how human beings constitute themselves by progressively analyzing how each self-projection is a succession of former conditioned projections³³. The sticking point of Sartre's method is neither the progressive nor the regressive momentum but the constant back and forth between these two. Due to the constant exchange within this method, from regression to progression and vice versa, its results have to be considered hypothetical totalizations. Nevertheless, Sartre supposes that this hypothesis is «immediately verifiable; the only valid one is that which will realize within a creative movement the transverse unity of *all* the heterogeneous structures³⁴». Sartre is convinced, that a reconstruction, which includes all influencing factors of materiality, can be considered to be explanatory for the way, this human being has become who he or she is. Considering the sum of information that has to be accumulated in order to produce significant results, Sartre's method may only be useful under certain circumstances. His own approach in using this method, namely his *Family Idiot* study about Gustave Flaubert, remains an unfinished project while spanning over thousands of pages.

³¹ Hubig, Christoph, *Die Kunst des Möglichen III. Macht der Technik*, transcript, Bielefeld 2015, pp. 114 – 124.

³² The following paper is an evolved version of an earlier presentation given at SPT 2017. However, the analogy of grammar has its limits in elucidating the structuring role of *hexis*.

³³ Sartre, *Search for a Method*, op. cit., p. 134.

³⁴ Sartre, *Search for a Method*, op. cit., pp. 147 – 148.

Nevertheless, the *praxis-hexis* framework can be utilized otherwise. Since *hexis* is a result of *praxis* such an approach may also follow the two steps of regression and progression; but not without significant modifications. Also, in order to narrow down the object area, the focus has to shift from the individual human being within history to the enabling and disabling of options for action as a result of practical interaction. In the last part of this paper, a short outline of an operationalization of Sartre's *praxis-hexis* framework is provided.

7. A Short Outline of an Operationalization of the *Praxis-Hexis* Framework

The first and most significant modification is affecting the regressive moment of Sartre's method. As mentioned before, this step includes the reconstruction of all social relations that conditioned the self-projection of the historical human being. This is mainly done in order to understand all the social and material factors that lead to estrangement and exploitation. For the analysis of the urban disposition, the regressive step provides the first challenge. Since it is necessary to find adequate empirical data as a starting point for philosophical analysis, aspects of postphenomenological approaches can be utilized.

The main claim of postphenomenology is, that the relation between human beings and lifeworld is a mediated one. The notion of lifeworld is prominently featured in Husserl's *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Philosophy*³⁵. For Husserl it is the entirety of all immediate intentional relations with phenomena. Ihde, remarks that the lifeworld can never be as immediate as Husserl proposes. Because technologies are used in almost every sector of contemporary human life, human beings live in a deeply mediated world that constantly changes. Husserl's undisturbed I-world relation is replaced by various I-technology-world relations. Verbeek emphasizes the importance of a postphenomenological approach that is «motivated by the postmodern aversion to context-independent truths and the desire to overcome the radical separation of subject and object, but that does not result in relativism»³⁶. Through this, the postphenomenological approach allows the

³⁵ Husserl, Edmund, *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaft und die transzendente Phänomenologie*, Martinus Nijhoff, Den Haag 1962.

³⁶ Verbeek, Peter-Paul, *What Things Do. Philosophical Reflections on Technology, Agency, and*

analysis of the constitution of multistabilities, i.e. complex connections between cultural and technological factors³⁷ that constitute a meaning context or *Sinnzusammenhang*.³⁸

However, two problems arise with good reason. The first is one concerning the need for addressing the tension between *praxis* and *hexis*, if a strict postphenomenological approach provides all the necessary data for an analysis of the urban disposition. Yet, postphenomenological approaches do not claim to provide such complete analyses. Even if they can give insights into the multistable relations between human beings and the various artifacts within cities, they can not provide a sufficient understanding of the agency of artifacts. Rosenberger, who is analyzing the phenomenon of park benches in cities, complements the postphenomenological approach with insights from Actor-Network-Theory. This allows him to draw remarkable conclusions about the agency of these seemingly mundane artifacts.³⁹ The second problem arises in terms of the need for a postphenomenological modification. Not only does Sartre himself utilize a classical phenomenological approach in almost all of his own analyses, he also considers it a «crucial discovery of dialectical investigation [...] that man is ‘mediated’ by things to the same extent as things are ‘mediated’ by man»⁴⁰. So he talks about the co-constitution of human beings and materiality in a pre-postphenomenological way. Postphenomenology and the Sartrean *praxis-hexis* framework complement each other insofar, as the former reasonably narrows down the object area and the latter provides the theoretical framework to render the analyzed ensemble intelligible as a disposition between *praxis* and *hexis*. The postphenomenological modification represents an initial *epoché*⁴¹ that limits the available data to a feasible degree. Since world relations present themselves differently under different viewpoints, the modification focuses on only one of them. Instead of confusing I-world, human-technology, human-world and technology-world relations, the tools of postphenomenology are made for the analysis of human-technology-world relations, i.e. the way human-world relations are me-

Design, The Pennsylvania State University Press, Pennsylvania 2005, p. 113.

³⁷ Ihde, Don, *Technology and the Lifeworld*, University Press, Indiana 1990, pp. 144 – 150.

³⁸ Rosenberger, Robert - Verbeek, Peter-Paul, *Postphenomenological Investigations. Essays on Human-Technology Relations*, Lexington Books, Lanham 2015, pp. 11 – 12.

³⁹ Rosenberger, Robert, «Multistability and the Agency of Mundane Artifacts: from Speed Bumps to Subway Benches», *Human Studies*, 13, 3 (2014) 369 – 392.

⁴⁰ Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, op. cit., p. 79.

⁴¹ Vetter, Helmuth (ed.), *Wörterbuch de phänomenologisch Begriffe*, Felix Meiner Verlag, Hamburg 2004, p. 145 – 151.

diated by technology. These can be categorized as embodiment, hermeneutic, alterity, background and cyborg relations⁴². Also, the focus on the modality of practical fields fits the postphenomenological framework well, since it considers the role of the *practico-inert* within concrete actions, instead of applying a classical theory of philosophy to it⁴³.

The second modification of the progressive-regressive method is affecting the progressive moment. Sartre initially conceptualizes this step to be a synthesis of all totalizing relations that constitute the historical situation of the human being. Driven by the epistemic interest in the tension between human freedom and material influence factors, Sartre considers various social determinants like societal class, relations of production, education etc. In order to analyze the urban disposition however, the epistemic interest is a different one. Since *hexis* is established through the complex interplay of practical relations and their stabilization over time, the relationality of these practices as relatively stable totalities has to be focused. In doing this, the urban disposition can be analyzed as a set of relations of relations that yields possibilities and practical constraints of second order. This step follows Sartre's thoughts about the triadic dialectic structure of *praxis*.

8. The Urban Disposition

Now, having the necessary tools at hand, the urban disposition can be investigated. Since the epistemic interest is clearly defined through the focus on the possibilities and practical constraints within the city, the initial postphenomenological progression has to include a number of human-technology-world relations within cities. Because the practical ensemble of the bus driver has been established as an example to explain the features of Sartre's *praxis-hexis* framework, it will continue to be used. Through postphenomenological analysis it is possible to determine, that the bus driver's relation to the world is mediated by at least two artifacts, namely the bus and the time clock. The bus-relation is both an embodiment relation, as physical instantiation of the bus driver's movement through the city, as well as a background relation to the bus as workspace. The time clock-relation is a hermeneutic relation, since

⁴² Verbeek, Peter-Paul, «Beyond Interaction: A Short Introduction to Mediation Theory», *interactions*, 22, 2 (2015) 26 – 31, pp. 29 – 30.

⁴³ Achterhuis, Hans, *American Philosophy of Technology: The Empirical Turn*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis 2001, pp. 6 – 9.

the time clock frames the individual stops of the bus driver's route as a physical representation of time.

Progressing from this initial regressive analysis with the *praxis-hexis* framework in mind, these two seemingly insignificant human-technology-world relations can be interpreted in terms of the dialectical interaction of their elements. Both the bus and the time clock are not mere tools for the bus driver to use, but are actively changing the way he or she perceives the world in terms of space and time. By occupying a workspace that is simultaneously moving within a city and immovable by sitting in it, the bus driver totalizes his or her self while generating possibilities for others. The bus as *practico-inert*, is by design presenting options for action, that are actualized through the *praxis* of the bus driver. The time clock is passively regulating this *praxis*, which is beneficial for the production of reliable results. Considering the relativity of both elements, the bus driver as subject relating to the bus as object changes in the same way, as the alarm clock as subject relating to the bus driver as object does. Both elements actualize possibilities that they only have because of the other's recalcitrance and both are subject to practical constraints within this relation.

Since these individual practical ensembles are as such totalizations that reach the relatively stable status of totalities, they can become elements of another totalization that eventually cultivates a *hexis*. This may lead to further practical constraints in the form of fixed bus schedules that are dependent on the working hours of other city dwellers; and also to new possibilities in the form of regular and more reliable bus services.

Even though this example also works for other contexts outside of the city, it is nevertheless very symptomatic for its mutually constitutive practical relations and its accelerated lifestyle. What characterizes the urban disposition is the way human beings engage in material relations that change the way they live their lives. The almost constant supply of goods is providing both relief and option paralysis. Technologies mediate the flow of goods and people through a complex net of traffic signals, speed bumps, railroad crossings, buslanes and pedestrian zones; all illuminated by the sepia glow of street lights and headlamps. Depending on the epistemic interest, the *praxis-hexis* framework can provide insight into the various ways human beings might appear to be trapped within the constraints they cultivate for themselves. But it also shows, that the city is not a hostile force that oppresses them. It is the complex interplay of *praxis*, both in human and material form. A city without human beings would be a more or less loose collection of buildings and streets. But

even those buildings and streets are materialized *praxis* that is presenting itself as a nexus of meaning, which lets human beings relate to it in a very particular way. Vice versa, a city without these streets and buildings would just be a loose collection of human beings. But they immediately start to feel the need for shelter, food and connection, thus starting to satisfy their needs in the material world.

The urban disposition is one of stabilizing equilibrium. It provides relief through the repeatability of actions and also remedy through the reproducibility of totalities. But it is also one of oscillating progress, because it can slightly alienate human beings from the *opus* of their own *praxis* by making it appear to be their fate.

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