

thinking

togetherness

ANDREJ BOŽIČ (*Ed.*)

**THINKING TOGETHERNESS**

**PHENOMENOLOGY AND SOCIALITY**

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The scientific monograph is published as part of the effectuation of the research program *The Humanities and the Sense of Humanity from Historical and Contemporary Viewpoints* (P6-0341), the research project *The Hermeneutic Problem of the Understanding of Human Existence and Coexistence in the Epoch of Nihilism* (J7-4631), and the infrastructure program *Center for the Promotion of the Humanities* (I0-0036).

The publication of the book is financially supported by the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency (ARIS).

CIP - Kataložni zapis o publikaciji  
Narodna in univerzitetna knjižnica, Ljubljana

165.62:316(082)

THINKING togetherness : phenomenology and sociality / Andrej Božič (ed.). -  
Ljubljana : Institute Nova Revija for the Humanities, 2023. - (Humanistična zbirka  
INR = The Humanities Series INR)

ISBN 978-961-7014-40-2  
COBISS.SI-ID 172262659

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PHENOMENOLOGY AND SOCIALITY

**INR** | INSTITUTE NOVA REVUJA  
FOR THE HUMANITIES

Ljubljana 2023

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Gintautas Mažeikis

## FAUSTIAN HOPE AND POWER

BATAILLE, BLOCH, HABERMAS

*Abstract:* The article discusses the ideas of Bataille and Bloch about the transgressiveness of hope and the role of hope's energy in the cases of individual and collective actions. A hope is the "not-yet-conscious," but it is not neutral; it is socially and culturally oriented. There are many forms of expectation, but the article focuses on the Faustian visions that, according to O. Spengler, characterize Western thinking. The principle of hope explored by Bataille, Bloch, and Habermas presupposes that individuals or cultural communities create different fantasies of the future, and turn them into utopias and rational projects of modernization. Faustian hope exists either as a disruptive, cynical desire for the vertical power, or as a narcissistic, even ecstatic practice. The article discusses Faustian hope in the case of the vertical of power and the state of exception.

*Keywords:* Faustian hope, utopia, transgression, the accursed share, the vertical of power.

### Introduction

Contemporary phenomenology and Critical Theory presuppose that the social and cultural role of emotions depends on the imaginary and communicative praxis of human beings. Unlike faith, which is primarily a passive emotion, hope is an active action. It does not resign but engages people in the struggle to overcome the current situation and open up a new or the lost old state. Thomas Meisenhelder ponders upon active interactions between phenomenology and

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The article was written as part of the project *Critical Theory and Cultural Policy in Lithuania* (No. S-LIP-20-9) supported by the Research Council of Lithuania.

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Critical Theory (Meisenhelder 1982), analyzes Jean-Paul Sartre's dialectics of emotions as a way of apprehending the world, discusses Maurice Merleau-Ponty's concept of hope that displaces the instinctive, the carnal fear of death, and shows Jürgen Habermas's theory of hopeful speech acts as the driver of constructive social communication. My approach is similar, because the analysis is based on the intersections between phenomenology and Critical Theory, as well as also different, because the attention is paid to Georges Bataille's and Ernst Bloch's considerations. Bataille presented hope as an ecstatic praxis of self-creation; Bloch analyzed the principle of hope and its ability to support class liberation from the Marxist perspective. Habermas is critical of the Marxist interpretations of dreams of class struggle, and develops the theory of communicative action. Faustian symbolism that is wide-spread in literature could be interpreted as negative and critical public communicative praxis that intends to limit individual, aristocratic, or capitalistic cynicism. Assuming that our desires are less realistic and even illusory as well as that dreams are fantastic and sometimes dangerous, any society seeks to control or exploit them through education, public relations, and propaganda. The development of human beings could be either horizontal, quantitative, or vertical, qualitative. For example, a career in the institutions of the apparatus of power and religious hierarchies presupposes a thinking of the vertical. They even use the concept of the vertical of power and interpret it through ecstatic imagination. For a long time, the concept of vertical transgression was perceived as a sacral act performed by angelic or demonic forces. The exegetical biblical literature interpreted the sinful fall or becoming a saint by the metaphor of Jacob's ladder that was substituted by the form of the imaginary of career and, later, of any institutional lift of possibilities.

The climbing of people up the vertical ladder is stimulated by the desire for power to realize personal or world changes, and to justify cultural, scientific, and technical progress. Hegelian and Marxist philosophy argues for the dialectical negation as a leap from one level of socio-economic formation to a higher socio-political state and, to this end, develops the idea of individual and collective becoming or *Bildung*, which can be presented as the fulfillment of immanent sources and as a liberation from previous structural forms. Hegel and the Marxists associated *Bildung* with the concept

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of *Aufhebung*, which means stepping up by exploiting the results of previous stages and negating its power that nowadays corresponds to advancing a career by the bureaucracy ladder: the previous stages have to serve the new status of the subject.

Many poets and philosophers (Goethe's Faust, Lord Byron's Manfred, Oscar Wilde's Dorian Gray, and Friedrich Nietzsche's Zarathustra) exploited the topic of Faustian hope. The condition for the fulfillment of the forbidden desire was a free self-relation with the radical Negation that could be signified by the figure of Satan or by rebellion against God. Today, human beings guided by Faustian hope seek supernatural elevation and use related technologies of power; they expect a trans-human development, the limitless expansion and rejuvenation of human forces, cynically ignoring the interests of other people and generations. To achieve the Faustian ideal of wisdom, omnipotence, and youth, they are ready to reject other communities' interests even by committing crimes. The character of "vertical" growth, especially if it is exceptional or criminal, is supplemented by ecstatic praxis and is presented as some sort of demonic or divine collaboration and corresponding sacrifice.

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Bataille explored the parallel between the danger of excess energy and the desire for the individual to become a sovereign, and linked the idea of individual and social development to the breaking of moral boundaries, to the phenomenon of the damned part. To get exclusive power over other people the subject is ready to break social and moral norms as well as law. "The accursed share" (Bataille 1991–1993) is at the same time a transcendent, sacred part, and a crime, and the actual becoming depends on the character of political class, individual imagination, and existing practices of breaking social norms. Bataille was less interested in the interpretation of archetypal images and figures like Faust, although the figure of Marshal Gilles de Rais, which Bataille interpreted, has many similarities to the Faustian tradition. Bloch ignored Bataille's idea that "the accursed share" could be used for illegal or revolutionary uprising, and supported György Lukács's theory of class-consciousness and historical development. Bloch considered the phenomenon of becoming in the context of the concepts of hope and utopia, and explained the role of archetypal imagination as the form of substituted interpretation of social and class development. He was critical of the Frankfurt School of Social Research but was involved in discussions with them, especially

before World War II. There are parallels between Bloch's approach to Marxist interpretations of Faustian hope and Horkheimer's and Adorno's reasoning about archetypal figures of Odysseus, Marquis de Sade, and Faust. Habermas tried to reconsider the ideas of Bataille and Bloch in several books, and critically drew attention to the power of symbols and the energy of utopias to understand the potential progress of social heterogeneity and the public communicative role of archetypal symbolism.

### **Bataille's excess of the accursed share**

354 Bataille associates affective power with the accumulated excess energy that should be wasted in nonproductive actions, in order to escape the social explosion and liberate human beings from surplus reification. However, the same energy can be used for military purposes or persuasion of the masses, or the accumulation of the symbolic power necessary for the ascension through the social and religious hierarchies. According to Bataille, "the accursed share" is the surplus-value of the successful economy that cannot be invested into economic growth, not only in the case of the absence of technologies and skills necessary for it, but, moreover, should be wasted for the satisfaction of nonproductive wishes to normalize social relationships. Accursed sharing means spending surplus-value on the rituals, arts, luxury, fiestas, or wars.

Bataille found that heterogeneous groups (individuals, aristocrats of spirit, religious believers, merchants, and militaries) of interests could waste or utilize surplus energy in a subjective and non-instrumental way, which has non-commercial symbolical value. He explains the wasting of nonproductive energy as different modes of transgression that do not correspond to rational utilitarian, normative behavior, but satisfy expectations of rituals, holidays, and carnivals, and argues for charismatic power. The concept of transgression replaces the ideas of dialectical negation, rejects the compulsory synthesis, and, in many cases, presupposes liberation from previous moral and status conditions: the slave can become a king for some time. Bataille considers the radical transgression as a result of "the accursed share," which Giorgio Agamben related with the phenomenon of *homo sacer* and the state of exception. On the other side,

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the effect of the accursed share promises that any person can become a king or a saint and climb up the heaven's hierarchies.

The excess energy of the accursed share encourages the mystical search for demons and angels, supports religious and sexual journeys, helps to create a sacred vertical of power, and wastes resources for the symbolical, unproductive purposes. Potlach and religious sacrifice, ecstatic religious and ideological rituals are forms of transgressive becoming affected by the accursed share. Bataille's reflections on the trial of the French Marshal Gilles de Rais in 1440 give an example similar to the searches of Faust and de Sade. De Rais was the military commander of the French army and fought hand in hand with Joan of Arc at the end of the Hundred Years' War. After military action, de Rais was greatly disappointed by the brutal burning of Joan, frustrated and devoted to the search for demonic forces. To that end, he performed demonic rituals and, according to evidence gathered by the Inquisition, brutally killed many children. The Inquisition "proved" that he was seeking a sacral relationship with the devil. Bataille interprets the case of de Rais as an example of the traumatic mental syndrome of feudal egocentric consciousness in searching for the sense of life stepping down by the vertical of power. Military feudal lords imagined themselves as centers of any sacred transgression, as a turning point of the mystical vertical: "Day in and day out, he waits for the Devil, his supreme hope [...]" (Bataille 1991, 283.)

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Bataille interpreted Marquis de Sade's practices and writings and explained the radical violations in Sade's book *The 120 Days of Sodom, or the School of Libertinage*. De Sade's writings and life present analogous intentions to de Rais, but more philosophical and reflective, without demonic mystification. De Sade demonstrated the hope that sexual violence will become a restoration of the original forces of nature. In order to liberate sexuality and violence, he broke many moral norms to create a new relationship based on the excess of "natural" desires and cruelty (Bataille 2001, 119). Bataille explains the excess of being and the accursed share that sadistic ecstasy can reach. De Sade corresponded to and illustrated the time and spirit of the Great French Jacobin Revolution, the cult of violence, and its sexual significance. He did not need the vision of the devil, and hoped to restore the laws of nature, and in his book *Philosophy in the Bedroom* he created a philosophical-sexual utopia. Bataille analyzes and

discusses similar examples to explain the ecstatic character of the verticals of being in many cases presented in the form of the vertical of power. According to Habermas, Bataille's proposal is "impossible" (Habermas 2008, 211) for a morally and rationally homogeneous society.

The European hope of becoming a young-old state, the wish to be energetic, impulsive, and educated at the same time is a Faustian idea transposed onto the national level. At first glance it seems that the Faustian state remains old, experienced, and young, energetic, and full of love at once, after it had been revived after selling its soul to Mephistopheles. On the contrary, the failure of Renaissance and the end of Reformation demonstrate a downfall, like a sunset. The fear of decline drives the Western people to seek for the inner spirit of Mephistopheles, in order to obtain another youth. Nazi Germany was an example of the national Faustian idea and its implementation. The Third Reich promised to build a new, youthful Germany with thousands of years of experience and scientific knowledge. The desire to be a leader in Europe, hubris, and the wish to become young again, but also the fear of novelty, leads to resentment, to moral transgression.

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As a new example of a hedonistic cynicism without hope for the future, we could cite the cynicism in the novels of the French writer Michel Houellebecq. Interesting is his novel *La Possibilité d'une île*—a post-Faustian dystopia of eternal youth concerning the continuation of an endless man, the absurdity of eternal life. The Russian writer Dmitry Glukhovskiy published the book *Futu. re* on the same subject of the halting of aging and the eternal continuation of life. His post-Faustian conclusions are even more destructive than the ones presented by Houellebecq. Eternal youth is achieved by destroying childhood and old age, and thereupon such a continuation becomes the emptiness and meaninglessness of hedonism. The lack of an opportunity to sacrifice one's family, friends, and neighbors for a better life destroys a person's personality.

### **Bloch on the Faustian principle of hope**

Bloch developed ideas related to Faustian hope in his books *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* and *Tübinger Einleitung in die Philosophie* that Habermas interpreted as "a mirror of a philosopher's wanderings and of his inner development—a

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mind's Odyssey in the spirit of Exodus" (Habermas 1970). Bloch interpreted the phenomenon of hope in the context of the Hegelian phenomenology of spirit: hope foresees, thematizes, and perceives the future. Bloch interprets Faust's idea as a terrible hope, as an alienated and altered case of social consciousness. Parallely to Horkheimer's and Adorno's discussion of Odysseus's metaphor in the book *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Bloch considers the Faustian principle to be a phenomenon of the European enlightenment. They all borrowed such interpretations from Hegel while interpreting the phenomenology of spirit either as a journey of Odysseus or as the desires of Faust in the history of the Western thought. They rethink the concept of *List der Vernunft*, which describes both Homer's Odysseus and Goethe's Faust. The rational ruse of Odysseus was revealed on the journey, and this was the beginning of the enlightened consciousness (*aufgeklärtes Bewusstsein*), which was presented in Hegel's *Phänomenologie des Geistes*. Bloch interprets the cunning reason differently than Horkheimer and Adorno, and presents it in the context of a people struggling against exploitation as "the human part of the weak" (Bloch 1995a, 354). He explains that many of the heroes of myths, fairy tales, and history, such as, for example, Odysseus and Faust, do not express the ideas of open class struggle, do not present productive social emancipation, but are the form of "anticipatory consciousness" (Kellner 1976, 16). Bloch interprets anticipatory consciousness as a figurative prolongation, as a feudal self-liberation, as a capitalist cynicism, or as a dream of the emancipation of exploited people. The future can be imagined as fantastic and alien, but if we develop our political consciousness and our critical competencies, hope will turn into individual or communal becoming. There is no immanent dialectics of subjects (individual, community, society) without a painful transformation or metamorphosis up or down the ladder of the power of social hierarchies. Bloch considers the stages of development of human consciousness in the context of Hegel's *The Phenomenology of Spirit* and Nicholas of Cusa's dialectics of self-explication (Bloch 1970, 53) that correlates to Goethe's idea of *Bildung* as a vertical becoming. There are many archetypal characters for the hope of becoming:

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The fictional figures of *human venturing beyond the limits* then appear: Don Giovanni, Odysseus, Faust, the last precisely on the way to

the perfect moment, in utopia which thoroughly experiences the world; Don Quixote warns and demands, in dream-momania, dream-depth. (Bloch 1995a, 16).

Mythological figures and archetypes are not neutral to each other and can negate, support each other, or create new symbolic organizations and developmental trajectories, delivering either friendship or “forms of hatred.” The most popular are mythical archetypes, but they can also be of literary origin: Don Quixote and King Lear, Don Juan, Faust.

358 Bloch divides affects into two major groups. The first is prepared and full of emotions (jealousy, greed, respect). The second consists of open, yet undeveloped emotions of waiting (fear, hope, faith). Bloch considers the role of expectations in the context of class *Bildung*—class becoming. The European culture has developed a special poetic and symbolic practice of cultivating individual, communal, and societal emotions. Poets, writers, and philosophers cultivate hope, turn it into works of ethics and aesthetics, reflect upon it, and associate it with religion, ideology, with the basic norms of society harmonizing with cultural and civilizational requirements of their *Zeitgeist*. Literally and philosophically developed hopes turn into utopias and gain political significance in the shaping of plans for the “utopian frontier-content” (Bloch 1995a, 16). The Faustian idea of immanent rebirth is limited depending on the approach to novelty. On the one hand, Goethe’s Faust seeks to open up new horizons of knowledge, and Mephistopheles helps him. On the other hand, the role of knowledge is limited by serving the cynical needs of the subject. The French Jacobins and the Soviet Communists were more radical in terms of innovation and the future, they tried to break all old life forms, and had other hopes and utopias. Marxists maintained the image of Prometheus and historical symbols of the uprising, such as Spartacus, or created new images of Marx, Rosa Luxemburg, and Lenin.

Bloch believes that the myth of Prometheus presents an energetic past, which could blow up the present (Bloch 1995a, 9). According to him, Marxist philosophy seeks to open up the future by exploring the energy stored in the past and thus resurrecting the most radical dreams. The image of Prometheus competes with the picture of Lucifer. Lord Byron portrayed Lucifer’s

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revolutionary role in the poetic work *Cain*, where Lucifer acts like a Prometheus: they both carry light, give it to the people, and oppose the will of a higher god. However, Lucifer, like Faust, remained an individual cynic, and, despite Byron's attempts, did not become a symbol of the socialist revolution. Communists rejected the cultural proposals of the feudal lords and the aristocracy, and choose the tragic figure of Spartacus, the leader of the ancient Roman slave uprising (Bloch 1995b, 1171). At the end of World War I, the German socialist revolutionaries called themselves "The Spartacus League" (*Spartakusbund*) and edited the newspaper entitled *Spartakusbriefe*. Prometheus, Spartacus, and Faust represented different symbolical constellations in the same historical time and proposed different matrixes to interpret reality: Spengler supported the aristocratic Faustian imaginary, and Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht were active in the *Spartakusbund*.

### **Communicative energy of hope and utopia**

Habermas criticizes and continues some of Bataille's and Bloch's ideas, and explores their conceptions of the excess power and the crisis of utopian thinking. Bataille and Bloch emphasize different energies: Bataille discusses the excess of the accursed share as part of the energy that is libido and eroticism, and, conversely, Bloch emphasizes the stimulating power of hunger in the direct physical and metaphorical sense: "Bloch follows the same motif when he stresses hunger over Freudian libido as the fundamental drive [...] Hunger appears as the elemental energy of hope." (Habermas 1969/1970, 311.)

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However, there is the third source of wild energy: anxiety or even fear, which was discussed by Martin Heidegger and the follower of Habermas Axel Honneth. The fear of death and Nothingness, and the radical negation coerce people to fight for their survival in the tragic periods of history and, according to Bataille, open the gate for the vertical transgression.

Habermas realizes that Bataille and Bloch have very different views, although they are both looking for visions of future and hope for them. According to Bataille, the accursed share and its energy are unproductive, undefeated, and can free people from alienated self-reproduction and commodification. Bloch also seeks to free people from stagnation and confusion by encouraging

dreaming and creating utopias, yet relies not on considerations of libidinal energy, but on political classes driven by hunger and scarcity. Habermas synthesizes both of them: Bataille's creative and subjective approach, which is in line with Nietzsche's and Adorno's visions of subjective power, and Bloch's concepts, which are partly similar to Lukács's, Horkheimer's, and Herbert Marcuse's ideas of social liberation.

360 Habermas supports and criticizes Bloch who tried to galvanize socialist utopian energies, and thinks that the trauma of the Western expectations and the crisis of the utopian future after the collapse of the Soviet Union characterize contemporary consumer liberal society. He does not consider that soviet imperial hopes can start to be a new totalitarian utopia, as the case of the Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2022 demonstrates. The social and political utopias are exchanged by rational instrumental projects, calculation of benefit, or by the desire for power. And Faustian hope for the greatest power characterizes Stalin's, Hitler's, and Putin's ecstatic dreams. Faustian irrationality characterizes state and individual hopes for reaching cynical imperial happiness and for the construction of a new utopia for this purpose. However, does this mean that we need to reject all the utopias? Habermas asks, what does it mean to think about the political future, if we have no public hopes? His conception of publicity (*Öffentlichkeit*) is communicative, it negates Faustian subjectivity, and presents new perspectives on the heterogeneous and public communicative mind with its archetypal symbolism. The entropy of utopian energy in cynical and individualistic consumer society and the ideology of the selfish welfare state demonstrate the limits of neoliberal society and illusions of public communication. The crisis of utopian thinking in liberal societies gives opportunities for the building of new totalitarian states with strong verticals of power and promises for mass society. Democratic societies have to revive political hopes through public discussions of utopian images, in order to stop future wars, to help refugees, or to control global warming. Habermas considered utopia as an important condition of the *Zeitgeist* or the feeling of future:

Infected by the *Zeitgeist*'s focus on the significance of the current moment and attempting to hold firm under the pressure of current problems, political thought becomes charged with utopian energies—

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but at the same time, this excess of expectations is to be controlled by the conservative counterweight of historical experience. (Habermas 1991, 49.)

Utopian hope breaks at the frontier and transcends existing norms and rules of the socio-political regime. The most energetic symbols and discourses are related to wars, revolutions, crises, and religious movements; they have great mobilizing or disorganizing power and are deeply embroiled in myths, into the “Not-Yet-Conscious” (Bloch 1995a, 118) of people. This “Not-Yet-Conscious” (*das “Noch-Nicht-Bewusste”*) signifies that hope is not fully rational in the sense of logical or databased scientific thinking, and acts between a dream and the rational choice. Esteban Marín-Ávila maintains that hope is similar to trust and is the condition for rational actions in society. On the contrary, in the analysis of propaganda implementation in the case of vertical power and desires of crowds, we meet the situation of manipulative, irrational “Not-Yet-Conscious” (Marín-Ávila 2021). Habermas found that contemporary welfare state and the Western consumerism lost the capacity to open transcendent expectations for public discussions and exhausted utopian energy because of the growth of alienated individualism. He supports the idea of heterogeneity, not only because of the wasting of excess energy on the ecstatic, for example, artistic rituals, but regarding the rational policy of diversity, communicative symbolical interactions, and the funding of the growth of social diversity. The idea of ecstatic energy is, thus, transformed into the idea of social and cultural, artistic energy, and into the orientation towards diversity.

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## Conclusions

Many people hope for a career in the vertical of power and interpret it mystically as dependent on the irrational power of authoritarian solutions. Aristocratic, individualistic, cynical transgression of the communicative rules and common praxis demands specific archetypes and images that help to ignore the values of communities. Christian mysticism, which originated in the Middle Ages, meditates on the ascent upon Jacob’s ladder as an alienated form of climbing the steps of hierarchy, discusses Providence, manipulates by using Theurgy, or

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builds exclusive supremacy. However, the problem lies in the social recognition of vertical becoming and the legitimation of the vertical of power, which demands special narratives. Diversity of power narratives creates heterogeneity and inequality. Bataille interprets heterogeneity as some sort of irrational social diversity, as an opportunity for exceptions that can be achieved through luxury, potlach, organizing of parties, gifts, modern arts, or as an ecstasy, whether in psychedelic or cruel rituals. The accursed share lies neither in the productive activity nor in the instrumental mind, nor in the realm of reification and market exchange, but is an irrational waste, a subjective but disinterested vision of art, and it helps to construct the irrationality of the vertical of power. Habermas believes that social gifting is a form of communal solidarity and communicative action, and can thus enable participation without selfish benefits. The diversity we create depends on the images we nurture and the hopes we turn into practical action. Bloch acknowledged that many of our expectations and desires correspond to mythological or fictional archetypes: Faust, Don Juan, Lucifer, Prometheus, Spartacus, Medea, Salome, etc., and related symbolic organizations.

362 Any artistic action requires a certain topic and narrative to reflect and change the expectations of the ruling class. The role of philosophy is to translate the artists' and writers' imagination and alienated class expectations into critical language. Habermas is cautious in interpreting Bloch's Marxist concept of the social and cultural imagination, but supports that our public communication is themed around significant and powerful symbols. Bloch is full of hope for socialism, which is compatible with the history of the European culture, and reveals the essential development of man. Habermas avoids such a harsh Marxist, classical approach in this regard, but tends to support Bataille's and Adorno's ideas about the artist's ability to subjectively express universal ideas. He believes that this creative initiative refreshes and energizes the diversity of our communication activities and destroys the hard verticals of power. Without this energy, heterogeneous becoming would be impossible, and social and cultural diversity would not be revealed.

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