Active Objects

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> Cézanne's difficulties are those of the first word. He considered himself powerless because he was not omnipotent, because he was not God and wanted nevertheless to portray the world, to change it completely into spectacle, to make *visible* how the world *touches* us. A new theory of physics can be proven because calculations connect the idea or meaning of it with standards of measurement already common to all men. It is not enough for a painter like Cézanne, an artist, or a philosopher, to create and express an idea; they must also awaken the experiences which will make their idea take root in the consciousness of others. A successful work has the strange power to teach its own lesson.[01]

What can objects *do?* For what might they be responsible?

The 'Appears'

For Hannah Arendt, Plato accomplished the supersession of the *dokei moi,* "it-appears-to-me,"[02] by the *phainesthai,* "'to appear' and 'shine forth.'"[03]

These are both ancient Greek verb phrases.[04] *Dokei moi* is an impersonal third-person present verb in the active voice and a pronoun in the dative case. The (active, present) infinitive form of *dokei* is *dokein.* The impersonal *dokei moi* is something of an idiom and may obscure *dokein*'s rather singular use of the dative—the first two words of Plato's *Symposium,*

01 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Cézanne's Doubt," in *Sense and Non-Sense,* Maurice Merleau-Ponty (Northwestern University Press, 1964), 19.

02 Hannah Arendt, "Philosophy and Politics," *Social Research* 57, no. 1 (1990): 81.

03 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (University of Chicago Press, 1958), 226.

for instance, are *doko moi.* While *doko* is the first-person to *dokei*'s third, the dative *moi* appears here in a "reflexive" use "virtually confined to [*dokein*]." K. J. Dover suggests that we take this *doko moi* as "I think that I...," something (perhaps) subtly different than 'I appear to me.'[05] Per the LSJ, senses of "seeming" are delimited to "objects" ("c. dat. pers. et inf. pres.").[06] The word 'appear' does not appear.

Phainesthai is a present-tense infinitive.[07] We have a Sappho fragment (31) nicknamed *phainetai moi* (third-person verb and dative pronoun) after its opening words, usually taken in translation as "he seems to me." In the third stanza, the speaker seems to herself, "φαίνομ᾽ ἔμ᾽ αὔτ[α]" (16), to be close to death in passion for her beloved where the "he" of "he seems," sitting next to her beloved, seemed equal to the gods, "ἴσος θέοισιν" (1).[08] But translations of seeming (shared with *dokein*) elide a phenomenal specificity to which Arendt rightly orients us wherever she invokes this lemma: *phainesthai,* particularly in the middle-passive form she always uses, is the *glowing* verb, "freq. of fire [shining brightly]," "freq. of the *rising* of heavenly bodies," "of the first gleam of daybreak [original emphasis]."[09] The man sitting next to the speaker's beloved *shines* to her equal to the gods; she *gleams* to herself "dead—or almost."[10]

04 For explicit references to *dokei* moi and *dokein,* see Arendt, "Philosophy and Politics," 80–85; Hannah Arendt, "Thinking," in *The Life of the Mind,* Hannah Arendt (Mariner Books Classics, 1981), 21, 25, 38, *77,* 94; Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy,* ed. Ronald Beiner (University of Chicago Press, 1992), 55–56; Hannah Arendt, *Denktagebuch: 1950–1973,* eds. Ursula Ludz and Ingeborg Nordmann (Piper, 2022), 391, 399, 402, 406, 420, 784, 796–97. For explicit references to phainesthai and the related adjective phanos (morphology and alpha privative notwithstanding), see Arendt, *The Human Condition,* 143, 225–26; Hannah Arendt, "What Is Authority?," in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought,* Hannah Arendt (Viking, 1961), 112; Arendt, *Denktagebuch,* 391, 457, 459, 531; Arendt, "Thinking," 131, 143, 165, 170. See also Arendt, "Philosophy and Politics," *77.* This list is probably incomplete.

05 Plato, *Plato: Symposium,* ed. K. J. Dover (Cambridge University Press, 2009), *77.*

06 Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, "δοκέω," in *A Greek-English Lexicon,* ed. Henry Stuart Jones (Clarendon Press, 1996).

In Arendt's idiom, Heideggerian influence/quarrel notwithstanding, these phrases stand for two distinct (if entangled) experiences of appearance.[11] *Dokei moi,* it-appears-to-me, is shorthand for the reality-giving *perspectivity* necessary to the world and the space of appearance, for the characteristic dative-ness of appearance *to* particular and non-overlapping witnesses.[12] For Arendt, every perspective *must* be distinct if appearances are to have any real significance—appearance as such and the public space of appearances (glossed as "people who see and hear" in *The Life of the Mind*) are conditioned on infinitely distinct spectators in the plural number.[13]

By contrast, the *phainesthai*-style 'appears' names both the experience of philosophical wonder and the distortion of a *polis* measured by ideas in the political philosophy of a perfidious Plato. For the philosopher, knowledge is the direct experience of the shining what-*is,* that is, *not* the dull seeming-detritus of the world that can only be subject to opinion. From a plural but shadowed and false cave of mere appearance, the philosopher turns to the "clear sky, a landscape without things or men."[14] His solitude is the real sticking point: without a plurality of spectators, the Being of the

07 See Linda M. G. Zerilli, "Wittgenstein, Arendt, and the Problem of Democratic Persuasion," in *Wittgenstein and Democratic Politics,* eds. Lotar Rasiński et al. (Routledge, 2024), 212–13.

08 Sappho and Alcaeus, *Greek Lyric, Volume I: Sappho and Alcaeus,* ed. and trans. David A. Campbell (Harvard University Press, 1982), 79; Sappho, *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho,* trans. Anne Carson (Random House, 2002), 63; Sappho, *Sappho: A New Translation of the Complete Works,* trans. Diane J. Rayor and André Lardinois (Cambridge University Press, 2014), 44.

09 Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, "φαίνω," in *A Greek-English Lexicon,* ed. Henry Stuart Jones (Clarendon Press, 1996).

10 Sappho, *If Not, Winter,* 63.

11 On the issue of Arendt's disagreement with Heidegger in terms of the dokei moi, see Jacques Taminiaux, *The Thracian Maid and the Professional Thinker: Arendt and Heidegger* (SUNY Press, 1997), 127–128.

12 Arendt, *Denktagebuch,* 428.

13 Arendt, "Thinking," 94, 72; see also Arendt, *Human Condition,* 57, 199.

14 Arendt, "Philosophy and Politics," 95.

phainesthai is apprehended by its beholder—the "invisible eye of the soul"—in speechless contemplation.[15] Indeed, this appearer could not shine to anything but a perspectiveless subject: plural spectators can only apprehend that which appears in its *aspects* and finite sides.[16] To appear to many is incompatible with the shining totality of the absolute.

Socrates' death at the hands of the Athenian people drives Plato to find in this *phainesthai* a tool for the remediation of the primacy of opinion in the public realm. *Dialegesthai,* the form of *doxa*-finding conversation to which Socrates dedicated his life, had failed to secure for him the immortality in remembrance that the *polis* form was meant to afford.[17] Against persuasion, shadows, and seemings, Plato attempts to find a force without bare violence in "his tyranny of truth, in which it is not what is temporally good, of which men can be persuaded, but eternal truth, of which men cannot be persuaded, that is to rule the city."[18] Returning to the cave in order to translate the shining-forth ideas of the *phainesthai,* the philosopher-king has gained "absolute standards" according to which he can judge the people of the city and with which to substitute the predictability of fabrication for the ineffable stuff of politics.[19] Arendt marks this tyrannical measure as "the first catastrophe of Western philosophy."[20] People should not be made like tables.[21] Even the shiniest

15 Arendt, "Thinking," 7; see also Arendt, "Philosophy and Politics," 96–103.

16 Zerilli, "Wittgenstein, Arendt, and the Problem of Democratic Persuasion," 212–14.

17 Arendt, "Philosophy and Politics," 75, 78; Arendt, "What Is Authority?," 93.

18 Arendt, "Philosophy and Politics," 78.

19 Arendt, "Philosophy and Politics," 75.

20 Arendt, *Denktagebuch,* 132; cited in Hannah Arendt, *The Promise of Politics* (Schocken Books, 2005), 3.

21 Though it is not our concern here, I think Arendt is wrong about Plato and too quick to reach conclusions on the use of the verb *phainesthai* in Plato's thought. See, e.g., a recent schematization of the possible senses of one single *phainetai* at *Phaedo* 74b: "It has been plausibly argued that three senses of *phainetai* are possible here: (i) 'turns out'; (ii) 'shows itself (to someone)' or 'is found (by someone)'; (iii) 'seems (to someone).' This threefold distinction will be adopted in what follows. *Phainetai* with senses (i) and (ii) usually (but not always) is completed with a participle and has veridical force, whereas *phainetai* with sense (iii) usually (but not always) is completed with an infinitive and carries no implication of truth. In view of this difference, senses (i) and (ii) taken together are often called 'veridical', and sense (iii) is called 'non-veridical'…

measurement will translate to violence in a realm for whose reality "no common measurement or denominator can ever be devised."[22]

But something's missing from this picture. Shiningness belongs to solitude and speechless wonder, yes, but the world and its things—that is, reality, appearance with datives—are shining-forth constantly. Glory "*shine[s]* through the centuries" in Herodotus' *Histories.*[23] "In private life one is hidden and can neither appear nor *shine.*"[24] "[In the permanence of art, a premonition of immortality] has become tangibly present, *to shine* and to be seen, to sound and to be heard, to speak and to be read."[25] "[A]lthough the durability of ordinary things is but a feeble reflection of the permanence of which the most worldly of all things, works of art, are capable, something of this quality … is inherent in every thing as a thing, and it is precisely this quality or the lack of it that *shines forth* in its shape and makes it beautiful or ugly."[26] Shining brightness "*obviously* [emphasis added]" inheres to beauty,[27] which in its uselessness "had much more right to become the idea of ideas" than the good but which was snubbed so that ideas could become good *for* something under the rule of the philosopher-king.[28]

In the heroes-and-villains version of the story, the *dokei moi* (as opposed to the *phainesthai*) "is the mode, perhaps the only possible one, in which an appearing world is acknowledged and perceived."[29] Our unique standpoint among

A second distinction, which crosscuts the veridical/non-veridical contrast, is that *phainetai* with sense (ii) or (iii) is a cognitive verb that governs an explicit or understood personal dative, whereas *phainetai* with sense (i) is not and merely denotes what proves to be the case," Ryan Bitetti Putzer, "Mere Appearance or More? A Crux at *Phaedo* 74b–c Revisited," *Méthexis* 36, no. 1 (2024): 99.

22 Arendt, *Human Condition,* 57.

23 Hannah Arendt, "The Concept of History: Ancient and Modern," in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought,* Hannah Arendt (Viking, 1961), 41.

24 Arendt, "Philosophy and Politics," 81.

25 Arendt, *Human Condition,* 168.

26 Arendt, *Human Condition,* 172.

27 Arendt, *Human Condition,* 225–26.

28 Arendt, "Philosophy and Politics," 77.

other unique standpoints is the condition of the reality of the world and the possibility of our existence. The *phainesthai* is implicated in the attempted projection of fabrication onto politics and the elision of the intersubjectivities that endow public life with significance; the *vita activa* is that which we practice in the "dark cave of human affairs" and the shining illumination of the realm of ideas obliviates this space of appearance.[30]

Alternatively, that beauty *obviously* belongs to the *phanotaton* and *ekphanotaton,* superlatives of the shining-forth adjective *phanos,* might give us particular pause. Arendt assigns the quality of the beautiful to the superlative, worldliest strata of worldly objects: "Without the beauty, that is, the radiant glory in which potential immortality is made manifest in the human world, all human life would be futile and no greatness could endure. The common element connecting art and politics is that *they both are phenomena of the public world* [emphasis added]."[31] In other words, the thingiest, most fit-for-reality thing is the thing that, removed from the deterioration of use, marks the durability of the world that dually precedes and proceeds every living creature's appearance in it.[32] Here, beauty coalesces around what Arendt has above construed as polar and conflictual nodes: the general, Absolute, shining ideas beheld outside the cave in singular, speechless, contemplative wonder and the inextricably particular things appearing to and between plural, quarrelling spectators in dark and necessary partiality, that is, in terms of their aspects and not of their wholes.

There are good reasons that this should be so. Maybe beauty goes wherever appearance goes, falls to whatever in any field of appearance is the most useless and permanent.[33] Maybe Kant, for whom the free play of the imagination was the movement of cognition between the particular and the general (as opposed to more rectilinear subsumption under general concepts or application of general concepts to particulars), offers us a compelling frame with which to insist that beauty must reside in precisely these two kinds of appearance. What's mutually exclusive about the *dokei moi* in the *phainesthai* is not the experience of seeing but the solitude of the philosopher vs. the plurality of the public

29
Arendt, "Thinking," 21.

30
Arendt, *Human Condition,* 226.

31
Hannah Arendt, "The Crisis in Culture: Its Social and Its Political Significance," in *Between Past and Future*, Arendt, 118.

32
Arendt, *Human Condition,* 172.

33
Arendt, "Philosophy and Politics," *77.*

realm—beauty shares in both the disembodied universality of cognition and the internal sensation to which we give the metaphor 'taste.'[34] Let it belong to reality and to truth.

This reconciliation is all the more palatable because beauty, for Arendt, is not a quality that paradigmatically belongs to people, or, as she rather expansively puts it, "sentient beings." The *phainesthai* can interfere here without danger to plurality itself. This living-creature category of appearances requires an explicit *inclusion* in the space of appearance qua appearance, that is, qua not-exclusively-transcendental-subject. Even so, what is beautiful—what shines forth—is not "men and animals" but their reputations and glories, inextricable from the work of fabrication that installs their *doxa* in worldly reality.[35] Conversely, beautiful appearances are elided into objects: "The proper criterion by which to judge appearances is beauty; if we wanted to judge objects, even ordinary use-objects, by their use-value alone and not also by their appearance—that is, by whether they are beautiful or ugly or something in between—we would have to pluck out our eyes."[36] Things suffer precisely the fate of the *polis* under the rule of the philosopher-king:

> In contrast to the inorganic thereness of lifeless matter, living beings are not *mere* appearances. To be alive means to be possessed by an urge toward self-display which answers the fact of one's own appearingness. Living things *make their appearance* like actors on a stage set for them. The stage is common to all who are alive, but it *seems* different to each species, different also to each individual specimen… [J]ust as the actor to make his entry depends upon stage, fellow-actors, and spectators, every living thing depends upon a world in appearance as the location for its own appearance, on fellow-creatures to play with, and on spectators to acknowledge and recognize its existence [emphasis added].[37]

In other words, subjects are allowed to take on the objectivity of objects, but objects are barred from the subjectivity of subjects, the actor's act, the "urge to self-display." They perform an extraordinary function—they relate and separate us—but their shapes are effects of fabrication, not agents of appearance properly speaking. Appearing-as-acting is a

34 Arendt, "The Crisis in Culture," 210.

35 Arendt, "Thinking," 19.

36 Arendt, "The Crisis in Culture," 210.

37 Arendt, "Thinking," 29.

capacity left to living creatures around whom living and deliberate form relentlessly gravitates whereas the criterion of shining brightness marks objects as lowercase-b beings. The world is a stage, actors walk upon it, but even the performance-object of the drama only *reifies.*[38] The durable stuff beneath Hamlet's feet is a field for his superimposed intervention. It itself does not and could not *affect.*

Phainesthai, you'll recall, is a middle-passive conjugation of *phaino.* In ancient Greek, the middle and passive look the same in some tenses and different in others—in the present tense (*phainesthai, phainomenon*), they look identical.[39] Were Arendt's *phainesthai* to be read in the middle voice, we would have to understand the appearance of the object not as "caused by some other agent nor as an effect produced in an observer."[40] But if Heidegger was specifically attached to the middleness of the *phainomenon,* Arendt cannot, I think, be read the same way.[41] Her *phainesthai* is an appearance in the passive voice, however much the spectators are plural in an ostensibly active *dokei moi* to which durable objects lend a frame. As *mere* appearance, lifeless matter can be judged and used but cannot *make* its appearance. Things have no urges and therefore no urges to self-display. Subjects share in the objectivity of stone and bridge but stone and bridge qua things do not and cannot, in their existence ever-plotted on an axis of eternity and distance, *change* anything.

What if they could?

38 Arendt, *Human Condition,* 187–88.

39 See Jill Frank, *Poetic Justice: Rereading Plato's Republic* (University of Chicago Press, 2018), 123. Philologically, it may be hazardous to delineate sharply between senses of middle and senses of passive in morphologies which themselves do not delineate between them; this is an issue I will not attempt to decide in a footnote.

40 Gary Shapiro, *Archaeologies of Vision: Foucault and Nietzsche on Seeing and Saying* (University of Chicago Press, 2003), 97.

41 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time,* ed. Dennis J. Schmidt, trans. Joan Stambaugh (State University of New York Press, 2010), 27.

Forth-Shining

Consider, if you will, two stations of Rembrandt's *Passion of Christ* (figures 53 and 54):[42]

[53]

42 On the order of this series and the *Entombment*'s and *Resurrection*'s place in it, see Simon McNamara, *Rembrandt's Passion Series* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), 32–35.

[54]

[The] first triumph [of the complicated technique of dark grounding and over-painting which Rembrandt followed throughout his entire work] … is significantly in a picture of the Passion, in the Munich Entombment of Christ. People and even things stand in solitude in the expanse of dark space, the colours come solely from a mysterious reflection of inner light in the world and behind the world, from a paradox of final light. Thus it stems neither from the sun nor from an artificial source of light, nor is the existing world, together with any supernatural world which is believed to exist, at all capable of dispensing this not earthly, not unearthly light… [E]ven the darkness of this background is streaked with golden brown, the group of figures stands in a sfumato perspective of both black and gold, the light works into the darkness, chromatizes even here, penetrates from a strangely existing Nowhere. Thus Rembrandt's paradoxical light is not to be found anywhere in the world, nor has it emanated, despite its continuous reflection, from any ancient metaphysics of heavenly light: it is *perspective light of hope,* deeply led down into nearness and desolation, answered. The open cosmic perspective is obliterated by dark space, but the light which both contrasts with it and mysteriously breaks through from loneliness and blackness *paints the truth of hope or of the brilliance which is not there at all, in the dark-groundings of the existing world*… And this alone is ultimately the source, in the depths, of light not as an element of the world nor of the supernatural world but as a mystical expression of Being of the figures accompanying it. This is most quietly the case in the Munich picture of the Resurrection, with Christ right down at the bottom edge, palely shining, and also escaped from and superior to the mythological heavenly light which breaks down behind the descending angel: an *Ex oriente lux* which itself is only beginning to rise and is reflected from this corpse in extreme remoteness. All Rembrandt's pictures, even the secular ones, are composed from out of the background, and his colours—of night, incense, myrrh, gold—paint the perspective: *hollow space with sparks* [emphasis added].[43]

43 Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope: Volume 2* (MIT Press, 1995), 801–02.

The perspective and long horizon of these pieces are not located in any literal openness we might identify—e.g., the skyline of Jerusalem lit by the suggestion of a setting sun in the *Entombment* or the sweep of cloud, star and sky upon which the angel descends in the *Resurrection*—but in the light from Nowhere. The utopian bent of the spark-in-the-hollow is that the spark *cannot* arise from and can have *no source* in the darkness that dominates so much of each composition, but there it is anyway. From where? is the wrong question, or at least a question without a determinate answer: it is the truth, not of the Absolute or Eternal itself but of hope, the experience of utopian latency in the smoky that-which-is. As in the *Republic,* there's a fire in the cave—but it's not behind us.

We might be forgiven for maintaining that, even if all this were true, these paintings still fail to *do* anything, i.e., their material is responsible for nothing save sheer perpetuation (like stone, bridge, so on and so forth). We would be in good company. The only comment we have from Rembrandt on any of his work comes as an advertisement for these two paintings in a 1639 letter—"in these two pictures the deepest and most lifelike emotion has been observed [and rendered]"—but this hardly rises to worldly action of appearance-among-appearance.[44] One reader, identifying self-images of Rembrandt in the *Descent from the Cross,* the *Raising of the Cross,* and the *Entombment,* finds in this bereted figure an imploration to "the viewer to again ask themselves … What am I doing for Christ? What ought I to do for Christ?"[45] But it is the artist, not the figure, who is responsible for these questions, and it is the painter, not the pigment, who *made* the appearance; if the man in the beret were not an artist and/or were not Rembrandt, there would, one suspects, be no exhortation to either heed or ignore.

Why, then, does Ernst Bloch care? The self-purported aim of the text from which this excerpt is taken is to fill the everything-sized hole in extant philosophy that belongs to "venturing beyond." Not until Marx, he says, did we begin to apply ourselves to understanding the problem of hope nor the utopian slant to all human desiderata and since Marx not much progress has been made. "Forward dreaming," "expectation and what is expected," "the huge occurrence of utopia in the world," and "the future tense" stand in apposition

44
For both the letter and the lengthy history of debate on this turn of phrase, see Walter L. Strauss et al., *The Rembrandt Documents* (Abaris Books, 1979), 161–62.

45
McNamara, *Rembrandt's Passion Series,* 127. These are questions from St. Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises.*

to the Not-Yet-Conscious, to intending, and to innumerable Becomings.[46] To apprehend not only human beings, not only history, but "the basic determination of objective reality as a whole," it is *this* element we must grasp: the tendency of all things toward utopia captured in affect by the experience of hope and the latency of the longed-for otherwise.[47] He offers this unfinishedness to us, in part, in the enumeration of all things by which utopia makes itself known in *Vor-Schein,* translated by Plaice, Plaice, and Knight as "pre-appearance" (but denoting also pre/before-seeming, pre/before-shining, etc.). This *Vor-Schein* is particularly bright in "great art," i.e., works of genius that penetrate Becoming itself, but is visible in anything at all.[48] Even in instantiations of deceit "as dished up by capitalist democracy and later by fascism,"[49] everything shines, anticipation is everywhere, and "every negative [serves] as a means of access to that positive which it conceals."[50] The task of Bloch's text is, in part, to demonstrate this worldly shining as exhaustively as possible.

For Bloch, these paintings are something other than stages for actors, backgrounds upon or occasions at which people or creatures might appear, nor, as in Arendt, are objects qua objects innocent of their own significance: Light and color are the subjects *making* that which appears (at least grammatically speaking): "the light works into the darkness, chromatizes … penetrates," "the light … *paints the truth of hope,*" the light is "a mystical expression of Being of the figures accompanying it," "the mythological heavenly light … breaks down behind the descending angel," Rembrandt's "colours … paint the perspective: *hollow space with sparks.*" Rembrandt is not the *actor,* though his hand and genius are never far from view—it's the lead white doing the work of constituting the truth and perspective "*in aesthetically immanent terms.*"[51] It is *this* light, *this* Jesus, *this* "night, incense, myrrh, gold," that show us "the brilliance which is not there at all."

Arendt's art object is also a particular *this,* but the thisness of Arendt's art object and the *dokei moi* it expresses/enables chafes against the thisness of Bloch's light: the *Entombment* and *Resurrection* obviate not only the capacity but the possibility of judgment and perspectivity in our aesthetic engagement. They are both tyrannies: in painting the perspective, the colors of the *Entombment* and the

46 Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope: Volume 1* (MIT Press, 1995), 5–6.

47 Bloch, *The Principle of Hope: Vol. 1*, 7.

48 Bloch, *The Principle of Hope: Vol. 1,* 216–21.

49 Bloch, *The Principle of Hope: Vol. 2,* 584.

50 Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton University Press, 1974), 133.

51 Bloch, *The Principle of Hope: Vol. 1,* 214–15.

Resurrection show you something you could neither deny nor be persuaded of. There *is* light. It has no source, but it's there—illuminating Jesus's shroud, sun-rising the Angel at the resurrection—and there is no rhetoric that might change it. This fact is indifferent to Christ's divinity (whatever it may be) and wholly responsive to the *thing* in front of us. Whether we take on board that this indicates a radically open future is a different question—we might, following Fredric Jameson, distinguish between Bloch's hermeneutics and Bloch's philosophy—but, on Bloch's account, there is no living creature interceding to *make* this appearance, however much a living creature may be required to behold it.[52] Our judgment, sight, or *dokei moi* does not determine the significance of either painting. Its shape, *idea,* form, the particular and specific way it and nothing else appears, is Truth qua a particular image and arrangement of material.

52 Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, 125.

At the risk of hijacking *phainesthai* completely, we might say of Bloch's object that it conjugates the appearance of truth from *phainetai,* 'shines,' to the appearance of the attainable pre-appearance in *phainei,* which, in the active voice, signifies something like '*brings* to light.' Where the intransitive middle-passive *phainetai* takes no direct object, *phainei,* like chromatizes, penetrates, and paints, takes a direct object. Where dativeness rules the activity appropriate to Arendt's space of appearance, an accusative that relates to sight rules the experience of Bloch's shining totality. On this paradigm, perspective is flattened (or clarified) to our place in time and sight is hammered against an anvil by the form of that which it sees. The active-transitive-accusative constellation is, like the fabrication to which the *polis* is subjected in Plato, violent. What you see and your judgment of that appearance—its significance for you and for every other spectator—is compacted into the shape and particularity of the thing in question. You can close your eyes or you can lie, but the truth is a blunt instrument.

Conclusion

What, then, can objects *do?* For what might they be responsible? Or: to what voice do we assign the shininess of objects?

Whether objects shine is a different and prior question to which the answer may be no. Even if the answer is yes, grammatical analogies may fail us. The appearance of sentient beings or objects or both may turn out to be irreducible to voices, cases, transitivities. Even if grammatical analogies do *not* fail us, there are voices yet to be plumbed. What about the middle? Might this be the register of what Arendt calls, as opposed to the accusative of violence and the dative of the in-between, the "accusative of the singing poem" in which lies "salvation?"[53] Or, perhaps, the deponent verb, active in meaning but middle-passive in appearance, will be the cipher?

As plausible as these scenarios may be, the dative and accusative modes in Arendt and Bloch's thinking nevertheless lend themselves to useful (if perhaps ultimately specious) archetypes of the impotence or power of things. Whereas the dative may be a more familiar and more intuitively democratic case by which to imagine the meaning of lifeless matter for political life—a case by which persuasion and opinion condition all human living-together—an accusative must, in the absence of a *phanei* that does not *make* visible but mediates visibility elsewise, undergird any attribution of power to objects. If, for example, we want to assign power and possibility to what Bloch calls the "aesthetically portrayed," we need to have answers to the following questions: how can appearances without urges, without decision, and without freedom, properly speaking, show us anything without thereby *forcing* us to see it?[54] What redeems an active object from the malediction of tyranny? If, by contrast, we hold that the condition of human reality is that significance arises from human judgment and intersubjective negotiation without recourse to eternal truths, do we therefore accept that what we see cannot be *made* differently by the appearance of things quite independently of their authors, of other spectators, or of living creatures altogether? That is: does that which appears bring-to-light or seem-to-me?

53 Arendt, *Denktagebuch,* 428; cited in Patchen Markell, "Politics and the Case of Poetry: Arendt on Brecht," *Modern Intellectual History* 15, no. 2 (2018): 503; see also Arendt, *Denktagebuch,* 246.

54 Bloch, *The Principle of Hope: Vol. 2,* 809.

Why is tyranny, in this instance, objectionable? The word is certainly ugly. But the tyranny of the accusative is not *precisely* Plato's tyranny—there is no philosopher-king measuring twice and cutting once, as the saying goes—but the more abstracted tyranny of causation. Kant remarks that

> if we were to assume that the distinction between things as objects of experience and the very same things as things in themselves, which our critique has made necessary, were not made at all, then the principle of causality, and hence the mechanism of nature in determining causality, would be valid of all things in general as efficient causes. I would not be able to say of one and the same thing, e.g., the human soul, that its will is free and yet that it is simultaneously subject to natural necessity, i.e., that it is not free, without falling into an obvious contradiction; because in both propositions I would have taken the soul in just the same meaning, namely as a thing in general (as a thing in itself) and without prior critique, I could not have taken it otherwise.[55]

Whatever of the *phainesthai* threatens the *dokei moi* threatens it along the lines of such an "obvious contradiction." Lifeless matter should not appear according to the accusative because lifeless matter should not act as an efficient cause on "sentient beings" (cf. Kant's "rational being").[56] The obvious contradiction operates so long as seeing is fundamentally tied up with living sentience, i.e., so long as when, in referring to living creatures, we do so without distinguishing the aspect that belongs to efficient causes and that which does not.

Perhaps a reconciliation for Arendt lies in making such a differentiation—the accusative object upon which the appearance acts belongs to our bodies as matter and not to whatever stores up our faculties of judgment. (She is, after all, willing enough to bifurcate the eyes of the body and the eyes of the mind.) If we are unwilling to divvy up our eyes, we are left, perhaps, with things of two kinds: the paradigmatically passive and the despotically active which threatens, always, to fabricate anew.

55 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 115.

56 Arendt, "Thinking," 19; Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* 678–81.