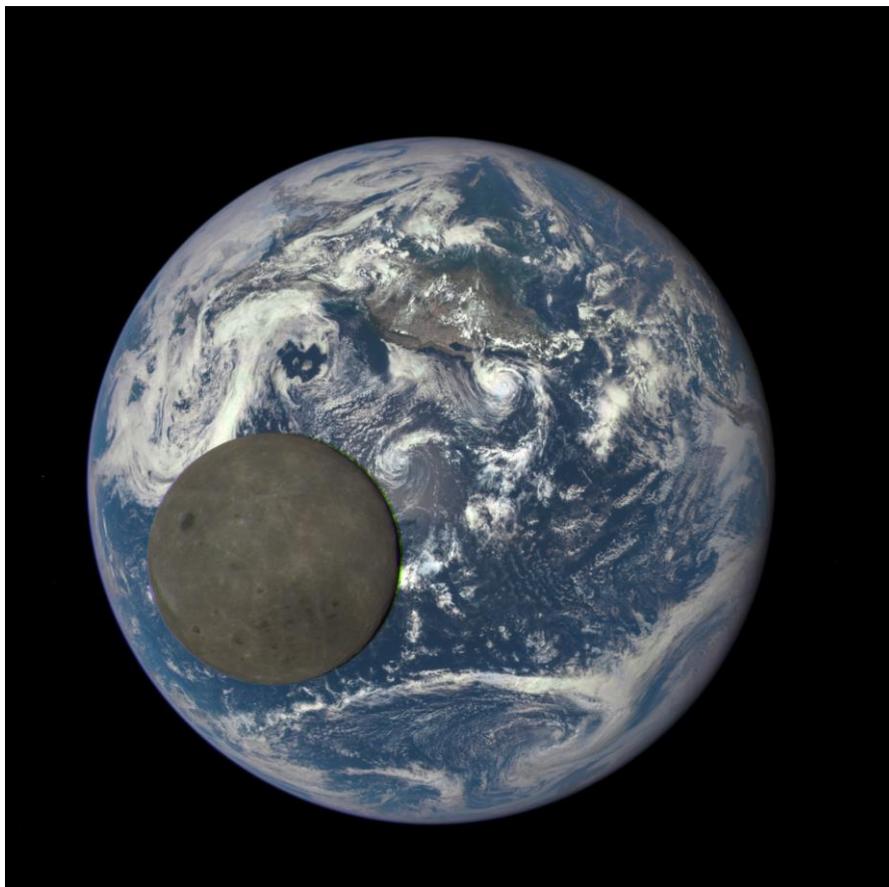


A Voice Comes To One

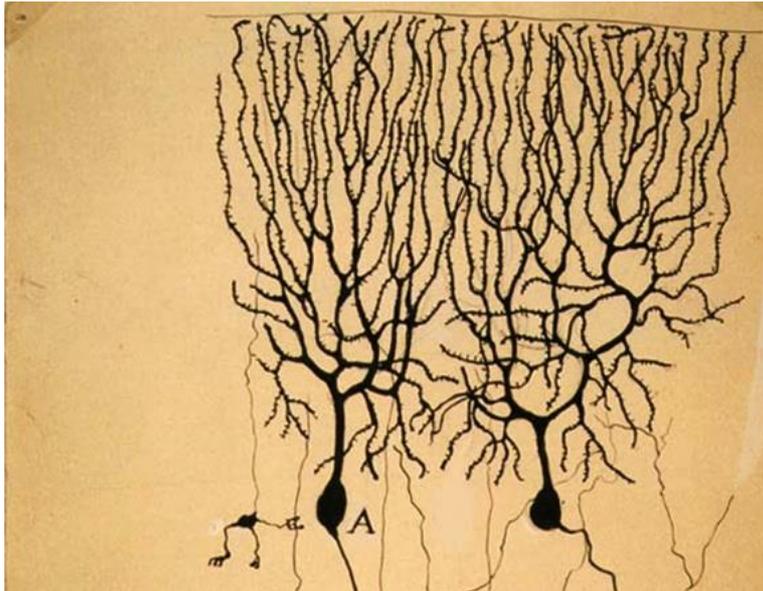
Ronald Jones

A voice comes to one in the dark. Imagine.

Samuel Beckett, *Company*



Taken from a million miles away, a picture of the Moon in an Earth-crossing. This image shows the far side of the moon, illuminated by the sun, as it crosses between the DSCOVR spacecraft's Earth Polychromatic Imaging Camera (EPIC) camera and telescope, and the Earth - one million miles away.



Santiago Ramón y Cajal
Neurons, 1909

I no longer care if I die, said Korin, then, after a long silence, pointed to the nearby flooded quarry: Are those swans?

László Krasznahorkai, *War & War*

Sed res docuit id verum esse, quod in carminibus Appius ait, fabrum esse suae quemque fortunae.

Appius Claudius Caecus

My eyes closed. Philip Glass' composition *Facades* playing, while in my mind's eye, I shadow the Ancient, Iconic, Orator. Trailing the *scent* of The Blind Philosopher . . . that poignant life, lived by Appius Claudius Caecus, and not least, Homer. Both paradoxical characters, where, in place of a sighted life, each possessed a lyrical, transfigured vision, where the poetic realm opens beneath the feet of the blind philosopher, *as surely as it will beneath yours*. The Blind Philosopher, the poet, is your prescient host. . .

Where Homer was concerned, blindness became a gift allowing the means to freely explore, encompassing transformative, even metaphysical revelations, indeed a *visionary passage* for as far as you can see. Lost sight serves us, *as you will surely see*, turning each of us inward, and while focused there, the gifts of our own imagination flourish in ways that only moments before, were unreachable. And then? In that shadowy state, we mercurially experience, perhaps for the first time in our lives, what it is to *truly see*. And then? We take on the mantle of the Orator. And then? We take on our debt, . . . a debt only settled as we, take our turn, genteelly guiding others, through *their* visionary passage. And then . . .

No later than February of 1652, John Milton, suffering from glaucoma, became no more than a witness to his own encroaching blindness; it washed over him, and flooded his creative life. But rather than drown his artistry, his audience came to understand that blindness graciously if ironically served as the balm of his creativity; *he saw things they never would*. Milton gives pause for a few reasons. First amongst them? To remind you that Milton, whispered the entirety of *Paradise Lost*, revealing a world heretofore unseen, and *unforeseen*. The Blind Orator, that ancient character, is still, warm with relevance. Why, one has only need recall the 1983 premier of *The Gospel at Colonus*, on the stage of the Brooklyn Academy of Music, where the Five Black Blind Boys from Alabama, one hand on the shoulder of the next, played the blind prophet Oedipus, in their musical version of Sophocles' tragedy, *Oedipus at Colonus*. The perfectly ironic tragedy; the Blind Poet from antiquity, sowed unfailingly rich inspiration out of what he had perfectly envisioned.

“. . . every experience requires an external object to which it corresponds” is a philosophical riddle laid out by Tim Parks and Riccardo Manzotti, both

Professors at IULM, University in Milan. In response to this we might ask, indeed our innocence drives us to ask: corresponds to *what kind of experiences*, or could this mean *every last experience*? Is this only to shrug in admonition that experience inevitably defeats its own description? But I have another answer for you. Experience corresponds to the theory of Agnoseology, or the limits of knowledge, or what philosophers, since Aristotle, have variously called the “theory of unknowability.” Agnoseology, as one would expect, became increasingly imperative to Western philosophy during the last century. Ludwig Wittgenstein guiding us through the “unsayable” memorably admonished - “Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent” - and then, following on, there was Jean-François Lyotard, with his own endlessly fascinating absorption with the unsayable. And Lyotard’s exemplar? *The Holocaust*, about which he said: “does not say the unsayable, but says that it cannot say it.” As for *experience*, Wittgenstein could only ever characterize it as the laconic “unsayable,” which Lyotard then populated with experiences for which there is no language. A present example comes from today’s *New York Times*. To the largest humanitarian crisis in Africa, since the creation of the United Nations, President Trump bluntly turned his back yesterday. From the President’s blunt ignorance, to the brutality of the Holocaust’s sincerity at mass murder, and other frightening episodes, . . . well these are examples of the “unsayable.” Words fail those experiences existing beyond descriptive language. How might expression act upon or suspend this syncopated counterpoint between the *unknowable* and the *unsayable*? How can it pair Agnoseology with the Unsayable to immerse us within an experience as majestic as it is disquieting, just *there*, . . . *right there*, yet, forever adrift from language?

The art in this exhibition sits near the center of one of the most crucial philosophical dilemmas of our time, and that is to wonder where the limits of language exist, and in turn, where the limits of experience and knowledge exist, or more crucially to try to imagine *what we cannot know*. The irony stings, signaling that we have just crossed into the philosophical and artistic territory of Agnoseology. From here, we coast beyond the unsayable, streaming toward the unknowable. And it is certainly within this “territory of

Agnoseology,” that the art in this collection has crossed, and scouting the way, has *presaged* our passage. Well, I “suspect” this, but of course the paradox of our dilemma stings again, because we simply do not have the language, *nor will we ever*, to fully describe the experience of these artworks, other than as *expressions of Agnoseology*.

The best description I’ve found is a metaphor which is known as “averted vision” in astronomy. Averted vision occurs when you focus on a star and its light is therefore projected close to your retina where there are few rod cells, and as the result? The star appears to vanish. And so by averting your gaze, looking just to the side of the star, it comes back into view because the dim light of the star will be striking more of your rods. After all, Agnoseology carries us to the very limits of knowing, where, just as if we were looking at the star, we must first adjust to a new way of seeing? The averted vision.

When led through Oedipus’ door, deep within our imaginations, we too are *inspired*; these artworks reveal new worlds and new ways of being in the world. Like Oedipus, we skim along our moment-by-moment experience inside them, worlds of revelatory duskiness. A convenient example of this experience is serendipitously found by returning to Tim Parks’ and Riccardo Manzotti’s aforementioned exchange in more detail. As they unpack Manzotti’s theory of consciousness, which he calls the “Mind-Object Identity Theory,” Parks explains: “Riccardo set out a radical alternative: our experience of the world (light, color, sound, smell, touch) is not a ‘movie in the head’ provided by our neurons, nor the interaction between our bodies and our environment, but nothing other than *the object itself*. When I see an apple in front of me, *I am the apple*. Every perception is nothing more, nothing less, than the object perceived, hence every experience requires an external object to which it corresponds.”

As a case study from this collection, this serves as the lyric-theory of artists Lundahl and Seitl’s oeuvre, wherein the “external object,” in Riccardo’s theory – “every experience requires an external object to which it corresponds” – is indeed *your* externalized experience of *their* art, the sheer physical experience

you wear like a skin, ironically enhanced, even enlivened by your blindness, infused with the whispering narrative, intangibly, yet literally, corresponding to the external; Lundahl's gentle bidding hand and Seidl's beckoning voice, all of it, abiding poetry, inscribed in sound, and written into the weightlessness of voice and touch. It can *only ever* correspond, because in the end, *it is your experience, beckoned* by their art. You are beckoned to witness, to see things others never will.

Beckoned? Beckoned on to where?

My encounter with Lundahl and Seidl's work has always been a matter of deeply internalizing the experience of their ambiguous *mashup* between my experience and my consciousness. *Subject and object blur*, literally enhanced by the unforeseeable, but then one might well ask, what other experiences will you foresee, foretell, from your place, deep within a Lundahl and Seidl work, other than the invaluable experience of riding along the edge of this *perpetually irresolvable ambiguity? As ambiguous as indefinable*. Has language, finally, come to the end of the road?

Is this the best I can manage, to convey my experience, rooted within the art of Lundahl and Seidl? This, I believe, is the central power and influence of their work, the ability to consistently *defer language, . . . to consistently suspend spoken description, always in favor of experience*. This is their deeply satisfying tautological psalm. And it is not at all an exaggeration to admit that this has been their primary contribution to our culture.

On to something else. To gain a measure of historical and critical perspective, Lundahl and Seidl simply stare down the ontologically fueled and immeasurably influential art of the late twentieth-century, beginning with Conceptual, and then Performance Art. Putting multiple historical landmarks into play simultaneously, it is apparent that by comparison, their work sits to

the far side of what *INFORMATION* represented, the pioneering exhibition, organized in 1970 at the Museum of Modern Art by Kynaston McShine. Going further, were we then to use Robert Pincus-Witten's Postminimalism as a second landmark, Lundahl and Seidl's art represents a magnitude of departure, from the influential stylistic modes currently in circulation, as great as the difference between Richard Serra's re-introduction of the personality of the artist into the process of art-making, which Pincus-Witten described as epistemological conceptualism. To the other side of Serra was, for example, Sol LeWitt, Pincus-Witten's held up as an exponent of the critic's notion of ontological conceptualism.

Follow this paradoxical logic if you will. The substance of the difference between Lundahl and Seidl's art, and more conventional contemporary culture, is literally the same difference as that, between Martina's whispering voice, doomed to do no other than betray the limits of language, *while, paradoxically, struggling to describe as precisely as possible, the limits of language*. An irresolvable paradox of Beckettian proportions. But it is this irresolvable paradox Lundahl and Seidl lift up, willfully using language, which they already know will only flounder describing its own vexing limitations. Doomed. They have masterminded a tautology of magnificent proportions where language is in constant deferral, to the experience it is at pains to describe. It cannot but help describe the limits of the outward parameters of language, while attempting to describe the experience of language itself. Perpetually irresolvable. How delicious.

Still, there is more. This vivid paradox, essential to their art, is on common ground with Apophatic theology, or negative theology, a realization that words only fail to describe God, leaving us only to speak in negation, or in terms of what remains unsayable about "perfect goodness." I cannot say what it is, but I can tell you what it is not. Theology aside, this is the language Lundahl and Seidl, have chosen for their art, a language of *what may not be said*, always attempting, but always languishing, repeatedly failing to describe

with consequence, the paradoxical tides of experience . . . consequential and yet, ultimately inarticulate

Lundahl and Seidl's enigma, their paradox, which masterfully spawned a language of *what may not be said*, necessarily, and consequentially, opens the door to yet another subject. The History of Imagination. Our understanding of "imagination" reaches back to the original Hebrew word "yester," which centered on the Biblical accounts of rebellion. What the stories of Adam and Eve, and the Tower of Babel hold in common was a decision to rebel against the limits, God set on human imagination. "Behold the people, how nothing will be restrained from them, from what they have imagined to do," *Genesis II, 6*. Richard Kearney the Charles Seelig professor of philosophy at Boston College, writes: "As a power first dramatized in man's defiance of divine prohibition, the yetser bears the stigma of a stolen possession." And to reach even farther back in time, the ancient Greek word for imagination, "phantasma," comes even closer to the deepening sources of Lundahl and Seidl's art. In *The Republic*, Plato conceives of imagination, writing: "Imagine ... the figure of a multifarious and many-headed beast, girt round with heads of animals, tame and wild, which it can grow out of itself and transform at will. That would tax the skill of a sculptor; but luckily the stuff of imagination is easier to mould than wax." And here, existing at something like a genetic level, we begin to uncover the source material of Lundahl and Seidl's own imagination. Not simply the material circumstances of their art, but the dramaturgy of their imagination, and ours too, the intangible experience of what Plato would have understood as *phantasma*. To be put in words Plato would appreciate, Lundahl and Seidl rebel, in spirit with the meaning yester holds. Their rebellion is against any limits on phantasma.

And now, from Plato, a deepening font for the work of Lundahl and Seidl, I carry our discussion towards the work of David Hume (1711-1776) who provides quite an appropriate means for the interpretation of their work. While ultimately delivering a significant basis for modern psychology and philosophy, initially Hume's work was greeted with befuddlement, or simply ignored, until a fresh breeze of appreciation was felt from the German

philosopher Immanuel Kant. As happens, creditability emerged.

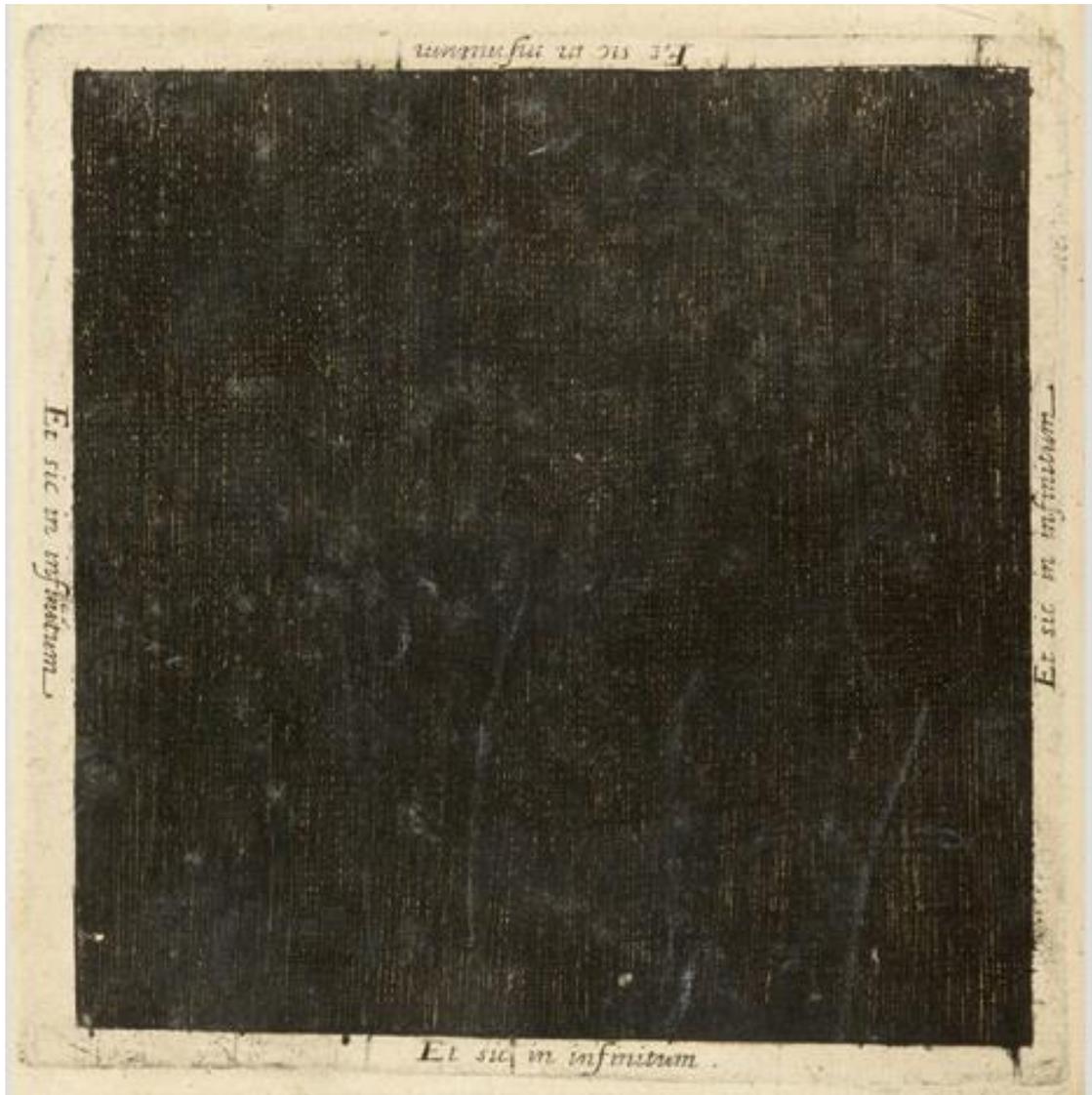
Useful to understanding the art of Lundahl and Seidl is Hume's distinction between "impressions," or what we "perceive" flowing from our senses, and how these impressions take form in the mind as "ideas." Our impressions are, in and of themselves, partial and fleeting, a fair description of your blinded experience within a Lundahl and Seidl. You are guided by the incorporeal, a mysterious, whispering voice, as your senses become immediately heightened to any impression, *your only guide towards perception*. Accumulating these impressions with time, Hume would tell us, we begin to construct "ideas" from the bleeding edge of spontaneous sensory experiences, and from that emerges a narrative, and a narrative of the same sort that unfolds immersed in a Lundahl and Seidl. At first, to try and anticipate this experience is as useless as misleading, but it is equally if oppositely true that the "image-forming" in our mind negotiates between sense and reason, as a stable and constant image of the world begins to take hold in the firmament of our minds. And what facilitates the negotiation between sense and reason amidst this flux of perception? And here, Hume agrees with Lundahl and Seidl, for the philosopher would have answered in a word: *imagination*. Imagination is what Hume would have said.

Ronald Jones

London and Cambridge

I am the daughter of Earth and Water, And the nursling of the Sky;
I pass through the pores, of the oceans and shores; I change, but I cannot die —
For after the rain, when with never a stain The pavilion of Heaven is bare,
And the winds and sunbeams, with their convex gleams, Build up the blue Dome of Air —
I silently laugh, at my own cenotaph, And out of the caverns of rain,
Like a child from the womb, like a ghost from the tomb, I arise, and unbuild it again.

Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'The Cloud,' 1820



Infinity, Robert Fludd, 1624