



Detail from Kader Attia's installation/space *The repair* at dOCUMENTA13, in 2012. Masks, and faces from WWI.

A question that emerges from the class activities in the theory development course with the master-class in the early spring of 2023, is that reception—a paradox, perhaps—works through adopting a *learning-contract* with others *and* ourselves. Taking a step back to grow an *alternate* point of view. Looking at one's own work in the mode of discovery. Taking in the works of others before passing a critical review of it. Learning that art is *not only* production but *also* reception.



Kintsugi—the Japanese art of repair. Filling cracks with gold. By Daderot - Own work, CC0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=45589849>

We could see *reception* as a practical and socially immersive version of the *phenomenological* project in philosophy: how an object/a work appears as such (an object/a work) on **an** horizon/background to a knowing subject. Arguably, this openness to *matter of fact* through a *fictional construct*—that we are 'empty, without prejudice and radically available'—is part of the *modernist* legacy. An example of the general notion that fiction can be marked by reality. Here, we do not learn by **submitting/copying** to the master.

Our 'art-school phenomenology' asks us to make ourselves *available* without prejudice. This would contrast with interpretation—*hermeneutics*—that *spells out* prejudice, by *laying out* what is received: what we see, or what we, more broadly, *sense*. We *describe* what we receive as a basis for the *emotional*

investments and *explanations* that we *then* are ready to expound. If it is critical of the work, the person whose work is critiqued will understand that it is *relative* to a certain reception/description.

What is the difference between the *phenomenological* and *hermeneutic* takes on reception? Looking *carefully*, we do *not* have to accept that they exclude one another—although they *appear* to be logically opposite—if we look at *what they do*: while reception in the *phenomenological* sense is to walk a *solitary* path in 'taking knowledge' of someone's work, reception in the *hermeneutic* sense is to engage by interacting *hands-on* with it. Here, the sense of the work will articulate from a *zero-mind* of the phenomenological reception and the *articulation* of hermeneutic reception.

If we look to other traditions where there is an *apprenticeship* of reception—e.g. the *kabbalistic* tradition spanned by Alejandro Rebollar Heres in his *media*-presentation to the design master-class Friday March 3rd—the paradoxically 'active zero-mind' comes *before* 'creation through

articulation', that we find in the phenomenology-hermeneutic *combo* of art-school reception. The awakening to intuitive *sensorial* availability comes *before* the *articulation* of reception.

These to first steps correspond—in the kabbalah—correspond to *atziluth* (עולם אֶצִּילוּת) and *b'r'iah* (עולם בְּרִיאָה): the world of *emanation* (*olam atziluth*), the *solitary path* of reception; the world of *creation* (*olam b'riah*), the *interactive articulation* of reception. These worlds are hidden in the sense that they must be evoked: *olam*, in Hebrew, also spells *elem* (hidden). Below these worlds you will find *yetzirah* (עולם יְצִירָה) the world of formation, and *asiyah* (עולם אִשְׁיָה) the world of action.

All the worlds can involve us *actively*, but only *yetzirah* and *asiyah* in the form of *action* proper: creative action (*yetzirah*) and moral action (*asiyah*). Reception is involved in this way: in *yetzirah* the world is *in formation*, and we can partake of this as *creators of form* (i.e., artistic creation). In *asiyah* the world is one of *regularity* and *rule*: it is one where work can be brought to *completion*. In sum, the kabbalistic worlds states that what *we take as one thing*, actually *are worlds apart*.

In the kabbalistic cosmology this is based on the teaching that creation—at the 4 distinct levels of subtlety above—could not hold the light of unity/singularity (*ein sof*): the vessels cracked (*shevirat ha kelim*, שבירת הכלים): it is quite similar to South African artist William Kentridge's mission statement for the [Centre of the less good idea](#). Our task is to take it from there and working to *repair* the world (*olam ha'tikun*, עולם הַתְּקוּן). That is, through *vision*, *articulation*, *formation* and *action*.

As I have been conversant with this tradition for many years—certainly, a domain for *life-long* learning—I want to remove it from secrecy/occultism/esotericism as possible, and underscore its *plain application* in a Bauhaus inspired modern framework. I will try to explain the difference here. The occult/esoteric angle on kabbalah is also a playground for authoritarian leadership and for nationalism. But in kabbalah there are also a potential to tease out a new depth of modernism.

I am not going to exhaust the topic of the relationship between *modernism* and **kabbalah** here. But, in my view, it is as real as the depth of *zen* in Japanese modernism. Therefore we are perhaps talking about a type of knowledge which has to be sought and solicited in order to be elicited and shared. It is not produced. This is not because it is secret/occult/esoteric but because it belongs to the culture of *reception*: being receptive to one another as a mode of knowing.

That is, a *modus operandi*—performative mode—og a certain type of knowledge and transmission. It would *not* have been possible to write these lines if it weren't for Alejandro Rebollar Heres address in class. As a professor of theory & writing I *cannot assume* the the MA-students will be interested in the *kabbalah*. Without the issue being raised—putting it into question—there is *no assignment*. For this sort of *task* there has to be an *occasion* for it to yield an *encounter*.

When Chonlada Panpakdeediskul presented books made of food, in the master-class, she started

by making a statement of her breakfast as a book, and then proceeded to show books made of/for food. When we concluded that her presentation changed our notions of what is a cookbook, we re-paired her examples with books in general. *Repair also writes re-pair*. This is **kabbalah**. Learning from the *singular* what allows *precisation* of the ensemble: in this case, *clarifying the terms on which the problem of the book is set*, in our contemporary culture.

Vision, articulation, formation and completion. Topics that concern the way we work in design in an art-school. But also featuring in older cultural practices, of which the **kabbalah** is but an example. The composition of earlier letter-forms in traditional correspondence could be one example. The cultural backdrop of Platonic solids—*point, line, surface* and *volume*—and kabbalistic *mark, line, drawing, sculpture*.



Ben Denzer, (2018). 20 SLICES of American Cheese. Catalog Press.

Ben Denzer, (2020). 20 SLICES of Meat. Catalog Press