

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 are 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 contrasts 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 (עוֹלָם אֲצִילוּת) and b'r'iah (עוֹלָם 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 (עוֹלָם יְצִירָה) the world of formation, and asiyah (עוֹלָם יְצִינָה), 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.

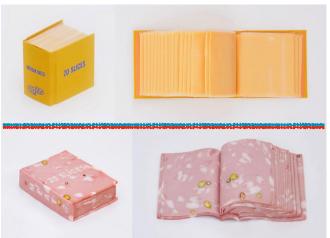
In the kabbalistic cosmology this is based on the teaching that creation—at the 4 distinct levels of subtlety above—could not hold the light of unity/singularity (ein sof): the vessels cracked (shevirat ha kelim, שבירת הכלים): it is quite similar to South African artist William Kentridge's mission statement 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, עוֹלֶם 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



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

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

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 letterforms in traditional correspondence could be one example. The cultural backdrop of Platonic solids—point, line, surface and volume—and kabbalistic mark, line, drawing, sculpture.