

# J. H. Van den Berg Revisited: Reflections on the Changing Nature of Neurosis

Bertha Mook  
University of Ottawa

*In his original metabletic research on the nature of neurosis, Van den Berg revealed how, towards the 19th century, the increasingly complex and dividing nature of Western society led to the emergence of neurosis as a form of divided existence. By the mid 20th century, the manifestations of neurosis itself changed from a crystalized disorder to vague neurotic disturbances which Van den Berg related to the societal disorder, incoherence and instability which followed the second world war. He identified a series of neuroticizing factors at the time including the ambivalence of society, the increased mobility, a changed sense of time, the disappearance of small groups, the weakening of family ties and the fear of death. In our postmodern world today, the nature of neurosis has changed once again and awaits a new metabletic investigation to reveal its nature and its particular manifestations.*

My first encounter with Jan Hendrik van den Berg was in September of 1969 when he gave a five-day lecture tour in Cape Town, South Africa. Two years later, I met him again as quest Professor of the University of South Africa in Pretoria. Over the course of 15 months, he introduced a large group of mental health professionals and students to phenomenology and metabletics through a series of fascinating lectures. We were all captivated by this brilliant man and by his highly original metabletic approach. We felt honored to be taught by an existential phenomenologist and psychiatrist who had developed his own vision of the changing nature of people and things situated in time and space in the context of Western civilization. Through his broad approach and penetrating observations and descriptions of phenomena, he opened up a new landscape and a new way of understanding and explanation of life as lived and experienced over the course of time. During his time in South Africa, Van den Berg also provided a training analysis to a core group of practicing psychiatrists and clinical psychologists, including myself, and founded the first South African Institute for Psychotherapy in 1972. Over the years, I kept in contact with him and read his books. From the beginning I felt greatly enriched by his vision, his original research approach and his surprising discoveries.

In his own psychiatric training, Van den Berg studied with a leading Dutch phenomenologist, H. C. Rumke, who first taught him how to apply the principles of phenomenology to psychiatry, e.g., how to see a patient first

of all as a human being in a world of relationships whose reality needs to be taken seriously and who should be listened to in an unbiased fashion. He also spent time with Ludwig Binswanger, Gaston Bachelar and several other French phenomenologists. However, he decisively embraced phenomenology after reading Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* and meeting with him in person. Phenomenology became a key principle of his metabletics which is also referred to as a historical phenomenology. His scholarship spans over 50 years during which he authored more than 30 books and numerous articles. He was repeatedly invited as quest professor to universities in several countries, including South Africa, the United States, Belgium, England and Japan (Kruger, 1984).

Van den Berg's overriding research interest was to systematically explore the changing nature of Western man, woman and children from the Middle Ages to the present time. His unique metabletic approach moved in original ways across the natural and human sciences as he explored the changing nature of mathematics, the human body, the human being in the world and his relationship to things, to others and to God. His metabletic studies dealt with human existence as given in relationships within a specific historical time period and social cultural context. It addressed the world of men, women, and children in their relationships to each other, to things and to God and employed a phenomenological method to describe reality as lived amongst them. A shift in a metabletic sense meant that a phenomenon had changed in a significant way, and opened up a new way of life and a new meaning expressed simultaneously in diverse fields of human activity. In his main four volumes on metabletics (van den Berg, 1956, 1959, 1961, 1963, 1968), he provided ample evidence that human beings and their worlds had changed over the centuries from the Middle Ages to the present time. His writings reflected that he was highly concerned about the road human beings had taken over the past centuries. He perceived it as increasingly problematic, culminating in a divided existence during the latter part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and an outbreak of neurotic disorders by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Van den Berg's central thesis—that the human being changes over time depending on when and where he lives—has fundamentally influenced my own thinking in psychology. As a phenomenologist, professor and clinical psychologist, I have taught his metabletic approach to numerous graduate students in clinical psychology and supervised several dissertations applying his research methodology. It has also deeply influenced my own research activities and writings. In this chapter, I will focus on the changing nature of Van den Berg's concept of neurosis as a divided existence embedded in and

reflective of a certain historical and social cultural era. This will be followed by a reflection on his perception of the neuroticising factors of modern Western society as formulated nearly fifty years ago.

*Van den Berg's Concept of Neurosis as a Divided Existence*

In his first major and highly original publication entitled *Metablistica* (1955), translated as *The Changing Nature of Man* (1961), Van den Berg explored and established his thesis that the human being changed over the course of history from the Middle Ages through the Renaissance to modern times. He pointed out that psychology under the influence of a natural science paradigm ignored the changing nature of man and instead assumed that he remained the same. He wrote: "The whole science of psychology is based on the assumption that man does not change. Even the theory of neurosis and its therapy leans on this assumption" (1961, p.7). Through his remarkable metablistic investigations, Van den Berg revealed how the child in the Western world was seen for centuries as a little adult because he could participate in and understand the adult world. Up to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, daily life for adults and for children was relatively unified, accessible and comprehensible. However, over the course of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, life became gradually complex, learned and divided which made it increasingly invisible, inaccessible and incomprehensible. This was especially so for children who gradually slid out of the adult world and became children in the modern sense of the world with their own mode of being, thinking and feeling. The last quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century saw not only the birth of childhood but also the birth of the modern family in contrast to the traditional family of the past (Mook, 1977).

Van den Berg saw a meaningful relationship between the structure of society and the structure of human personality. For him, the increasingly complex and dividing nature of Western society in the latter part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century affected the unity of the adult personality and led to a dual existence which was a new state of being. He masterfully traced this development in his celebrated work, *Divided Existence and Complex Society* (van den Berg, 1974). He showed how, for the first time in history, a certain duplicity in human existence emerged and expressed itself in various marginal phenomena like artificial somnambulism and an interest in hypnosis, the occult and the unknown. A heterogeneous synchronistic development saw the emergence of a new theme in literature in the form of a "doppelganger" or an alter-ego. The first true alter-ego novel was Richter's *Siebenkas* in 1796, followed by a long series of other novels with a similar theme. Van den Berg (1961) explained: "Human existence at that time, the time of the French

Revolution, was of such a double nature that a second condition originated spontaneously” (p.96-97). He made a significant contribution when he concluded on the basis of his metabletic research that the origins of depth psychology, subjective dualism and neurosis were to be found in the latter part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and not at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as generally believed (Mook, 1984).

Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the theme of a dual existence was recognized in daily life and attracted the attention of many psychiatrists, especially in France, e.g., Ribot (1884), Bernheim (1884), and later Janet (1889) and Bergson (1889). Van den Berg (1974) discovered a remarkable heterogeneous synchronism which occurred between 1891 and 1893. First, in 1893, the sociologist Emile Durkheim observed that Western society suffered from a state of social disorder and that it could no longer hold its members together. He also saw that each individual had at least two lives: one for himself and one for society. In 1891, this was confirmed by the social scientist, William James, who had also realized that the human personality was not unitary but multiple. He added that man has at least three selves, i.e., a spiritual self, a material self and a social self, or rather, as many social selves as the social groups to which he belongs. Again, in 1893, Breuer and Freud published an article on their first neurotic patient and reported that she was living in duality, i.e., being partly conscious and partly unconscious, with her unconscious seen as a hostile alter-ego to her conscious life. Soon Freud declared that every person was living in twofold with a conscious self and hostile unconscious, and this perception of a dual, divided personality became the cornerstone of his depth psychology. By linking the simultaneous discoveries of Durkheim’s view of a disordered Western society, James’ novel formulation of multiple social selves and Freud’s discovery of the dual nature of the neurotic patient, Van den Berg provided a new and powerful understanding of the changing nature of the human personality over time and in particular, of the birth of neurosis seen within a historical and social cultural context.

The word neurosis itself was coined for the first time by William Cullen in 1769, by which he meant a disorder of the nervous system and its neurons. By the time of Freud, the term neurosis indicated a whole class of “nervous disorders.” Freud transformed the term neurosis to indicate a psychological disorder distinguished by a high degree of anxiety and at times bodily symptoms (Monte, 1993, p.12). For him, neurosis was a product of past traumatic experiences where a repression of vital drives led to the formation of symptoms. In his psychoanalysis, Freud showed that neurosis could be cured through psychoanalysis by interpreting its symbolic manifestations

of the patient's unconscious. Van den Berg moved beyond the Freudian paradigm by arguing that neurosis cannot be explained only as a product of past experiences but needed to be understood in a patient's present relational and social cultural context. His own metabletic reflections on the nature of neurotic disorders as lived and experienced by his own patients, led him to the insight that the nature, the frequency and the occurrence of neurotic disorders as formulated by Freud had changed and that the manifestation of neurosis itself was dependent upon time and space. In brief, he believed that neurosis was a product not of the past but of the present and that its cause needed to be found not in the patient's intrapsychic unconscious but in his world and his present human relationships.

Although Van den Berg was impressed by the revolutionary thinking of Freud, he believed that his theory of neurosis needed to be seen in the context of the specific synchronisms of his time. In a historical phenomenological study, Van den Berg (1970) described the rise and the decline of Freud's depth psychology. In one of his heterogeneous synchronisms, he related it to a brief analysis of several European domestic interiors. He provided a detailed phenomenological description of a painting of a typical living room in 1810, followed by a photo of Sarah Bernhard's room in 1880 and two modern interiors from 1970. These descriptions clearly revealed the differences in the way people lived in the various historical time periods. The typical living room of 1810 appeared neat and ordered with its family members, limited furniture and a few additional objects clearly visible. In contrast, Sara Bernhard's room in 1880 was overly full and chaotic, but the modern interiors of 1970 were once again sparsely furnished with maximum visibility. It is Sarah Bernhard's room at the time of Freud which stood out in its disorder and its overlaid fullness with cushions, various types of cloths and a great diversity of objects, some of which were partly or fully hidden from our view. Van den Berg boldly claimed that Freud's concept of the unconscious as a hidden, invisible realm of existence was also present in Sarah's room, but absent in the early interior of 1810 as well as in the later 20<sup>th</sup> century. He concluded that this particular Freudian unconscious manifested itself towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and has again disappeared in our time.

### *A Phenomenological Approach to Neurosis*

As an existential phenomenologist, Van den Berg believed that although patients vary in their diagnosis and in their symptomatology, they are more alike than different as they all share the same human existence.

In *The Phenomenological Approach to Psychiatry* (1955), he criticized and rejected a psychoanalytic interpretation of neurosis and reformulated the defense mechanisms of projection and conversion, the transference relationship and the unconscious in phenomenological terms. He saw a neurotic patient first of all as a unique person who found himself in the world and who expressed himself concretely in his relationships to his surroundings, to others and to things. In order to understand a patient, a therapist needs to inquire about his world, because a person and his world are interwoven and cannot be separated.

Van den Berg provided us with a concrete and illuminating phenomenological description of the life-world of a 25-year-old student who suffered from a severe neurotic disorder. The patient complained about his concrete world with its wide streets and old, dilapidated houses which seemed about to collapse, about his alarming heartbeat although he had objectively no heart problem, about other people who irritated him and who remained distant and about his parents who he claimed had never understood him. Van den Berg emphasized that this disturbed world was real for the patient. As a psychotherapist, he was interested in meeting his neurotic patient and listen to his perception of his world as he saw, lived and experienced it on an everyday basis. As a phenomenologist, he knew that what the patient revealed was true for him, and therefore he took his patient's life story seriously in order to gain an understanding of how his neurotic way of being was concretely lived and experienced. He summarized the complaints of his patient in terms of a series of phenomenological questions about his perception of his world, his body, his relationship to others and his relationship to his past and future, and he described how these various person-world relationships had changed in his state of neurotic disorder. In general, he held that: "The past provides the conditions of neurosis; neurosis itself originates from the inaccessible future" (van den Berg, 1972, p. 86).

In seeking answers to his patient's questions, Van den Berg provided a phenomenological description of man's relationship to his world, to his body, to his fellow men and to time. He subsequently applied his answers towards understanding the concrete lived world of his patient as well as the world of patients in general. As such, he not only threw light on the nature of neurosis but also formulated the principles of a phenomenological psychopathology.

*Neurosis as Sociosis: The Neuroticising Factors in Western Society*

In his book *Mind, Self and Society*, G. H. Mead (1937) agreed with William James that human existence was divided and that a person had as many selves as the social groups to which he belonged. He emphasized that this condition was not problematic as long as society itself remained unified, for, in his view, a unified society guaranteed the unity of its members. However, Van den Berg (1955) revealed not only that people lived in multiplicity but that Western society itself had lost its unity since the latter part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and that it had become increasingly disordered since that time. By the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, he warned that people, and the modern patient in particular, were vulnerable to the detrimental impact of the incoherent social relationships in an disordered society. Also drawing upon the William James theory of the social self, he claimed that neurotic disorders arose when different social selves became antagonistic to each other, were pushed out of awareness and became disconnected. He argued that the primary, albeit not the only, reason for such disorders must be sought in the rapidly changing nature of the community, society and culture of which the individual forms a part. His emphasis on the crucial importance of the social and cultural context led him to suggest replacing the concept of *neurosis* with the term *sociosis*.

The fact that society and culture could contribute and even cause neurosis was acknowledged by Freud (2002) in *Civilization and its Discontents*, which was first published in 1930. Although his classic theory of neurosis was formulated in intrapsychic terms, he later saw the individual in conflict with society and actually coined the term *social neurosis* for the first time. Other leading psychoanalysts of the time, notably Karen Horney, also pointed to the role of society and culture in the formation of neurosis. She discovered that many of her patients during the great depression of the thirties suffered from the prevailing social and economic conditions of her time. She found that Freud's predominantly biological psychoanalytic theory was not sufficient to explain her patient's economic and social problems, and concluded that his theory applied to people who lived in a different time and place. This awareness led her to create the first social-cultural school of psychoanalysis. In her book, *The Neurotic Personality of Our Time* (1937), she described the neurotic person as suffering from conflicts, anxieties and many difficulties in relationships to others and to himself. She expressed her novel view at the time that the basic similarities between neurotic persons "are

essentially produced by the difficulties existing in our time and culture” (p. 34). Despite Horney’s emphasis on the social cultural context, she believed that the origins of neurosis were to be found in childhood, and particularly in defective parent-child relationships and early feelings of basic anxiety and basic hostility. Since the fifties, many other health professionals were looking beyond the individual towards the family and society to account for the growing stress, anxiety and interpersonal conflict between people. For example, family research started in the early fifties and most of the pioneering schools of family therapy originated in the mid-fifties.

Van den Berg described Western society after WWII as profoundly changed and manifesting an alarming degree of disorder and instability. He perceived that: “We think differently and feel differently, we behave differently and dress differently. The relationships between man and woman, between adults and youth, as well as amongst adults and amongst youth show a fermenting unsettledness” (van den Berg, 1955, p.3). He astutely saw that, in such a time of great change and societal disorder, the influence of social and cultural factors on people’s behavior, relationships and mental health in general needed to be understood and taken into account. He observed correctly that the earlier, crystalized neurotic syndromes of Freud had declined in frequency and instead gave way to vague, diffuse neurotic disturbances affecting a wide range of people.

In 1955, when Van den Berg became full professor at the University of Leiden with a chair in phenomenology and conflictpsychology, he defined conflictpsychology as the science of the nature and treatment of psychological disturbances of normal people in a disturbed society. At this time, he introduced a novel view of what he perceived as the neuroticising factors in modern Western society. He saw that these factors affected everyone but, in the oversensitive and vulnerable people, could lead to neurotic disorders. In his inaugural address, which preceded all his major publications on metabletics, he outlined what he perceived as three new neuroticising factors in contemporary Western society. Looking at it from a metabletic and an existential phenomenological point of view, he pointed first to the *complexity of society* and its divided nature. This factor, as we have seen, contributed to the outbreak of neurosis towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The accelerated pace of change by the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century increased the complexity of society and its divisiveness which impacted on all its members. This condition, in comparison to the past, made children more vulnerable and made it more and more difficult for them to reach maturity and to participate in adult life. The second factor related to the fact that people’s sense of *time*

had changed as they experienced the pressure of time in the present more than ever before. At the same time, their own past became less visible and their future more obscure. The third factor outlined that the experience of *distance* had changed as once unfamiliar places and distant countries entered the living room in an artificial manner through the media. This factor contributed to an increase in fleeting contacts between people and a simultaneous devaluing of close bonds which characteristically provided stability in human relationships.

In a later publication, Van den Berg (1969) revisited the topic of neuroticising factors in Western society and provided a brief and concise list of twelve factors which extended his earlier description. Although this list was initially formulated in view of the problem of population growth in densely populated Holland and Western Europe, they applied in principle to all Western, industrialized nations, including North America. He originally divided his list in three groups in view of their relationship to population growth. I have reordered his list to reflect first the more societal factors followed by the interpersonal and the more general factors. They are as follows:

1. *The ambivalence of society.* In Western society, the individual was seen as free and unfree, expected to live in peace and be aggressive, etc., with all the possible conflictual consequences.
2. *The modern mobility of people.* This factor led to an increase in superficial contacts between people, in comparison to a limited number of familiar relationships in the past, resulting in possible social misunderstanding, conflict and social isolation.
3. *The increase of labor amongst people.* This factor heightened dependency and vulnerability amongst people, as well as increasing the possibility of conflict.
4. *Decrease of authority and of the depreciation of talent and competency.* This factor disrupted the former structure of relationships and led to vagueness and conflict
5. *Affluence.* The factor of affluence made the individual self-reliant and independent which could lead to loneliness and social isolation.
6. *The pressure of time.* Experiencing the pressure of time in the present while obscuring the influence of the past and the expectations of the future could lead to stress and to direct bodily manifestations of neurotic disturbances.

7. *The dissolution of small groups.* Characteristic small groups became increasingly independent from each other and contributed to a plural existence of which people were only partially aware. This condition complicated relationships and led to conflicts.
8. *The disappearance of small groups.* Where large groups became bigger, small groups in the neighborhood or community tended to disappear, leading to social desolation and misunderstanding.
9. *The weakening of family ties.* The secularization of marriage and the loss of family functions increased social isolation and desolation.
10. *The sexualization of life.* Traditionally human sexuality constituted a bond between marriage partners. The propagation of sex for its own sake broke this bond and evoked conflict between the sexes.
11. *Invisibility of main aspects of maturity.* The invisibility, for example, of some professions, of sickness and of suffering impeded or blocked the growth towards maturity with possible conflictual results.
12. *The removal of death from life.* Excluding the visibility of death in life led to vulnerability towards the transitory character of life and possible related conflicts

In Van den Berg's view, all of the above neuroticising factors affected everyone in society and contributed to conflict and social misunderstanding between people. As a psychotherapist, Van den Berg experienced with his own patients how these factors led to social conflicts, misunderstanding, isolation and loneliness. Van den Berg's viewpoint that neurosis was not seated in the psyche of the individual but rather in the nature of his interpersonal relationships within society, was novel at the time and a substantial contribution to the theory of neurosis. Although his summarized list of neuroticising factors was brief, the scope was broad and revealed many themes in his previous and subsequent publications. Primarily, they reflected the nature of his metabletic insights in the changing nature of neurosis as a manifestation of a changing Western society characterized by ambivalences and disorder. They also incorporated his existential phenomenological insights into the increasingly complex road to maturity, people's altered sense and experience of time and distance, and the impact of the invisibility of death. Finally, they revealed his attunement to the stresses and conflicts of Western society in the fifties and sixties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Some of Van den Berg's neuroticising factors were recognized and elaborated upon by other health professionals and social scientists, notably in the family therapy movement. The familial and other interpersonal neu-

roticising factors have been addressed by various family therapists since the late fifties, starting with Nathan Ackerman (1958) in his classic work, *The Psychodynamics of Family Life*. Trained as a psychoanalyst, he observed in his practice that a disturbed patient almost always belonged to a disturbed family. He became the father of family therapy and was the first to coin the term *neurotic family*. Soon other pioneering schools of family therapy were created to meet the rising demands of relational problems between family members, the weakening of family ties and the growing instability of family life.

The far-reaching results of modern mobility in North America was recognized and discussed in detail by Packard (1972) in his well-known book, *A Nation of Strangers*. For example, he pointed to the alarming fact that over 20 percent of all Americans changed their home address once or more every year. Changing homes so frequently implied an uprooting of families and neighborhoods, broken social networks and communities leading to a pervasive sense of social isolation and loneliness. Packard's timely and important study supported Van den Berg's insight that modern mobility and the disappearance and dissolution of small groups could contribute to the neuroticising factors in contemporary society.

Similar to Van den Berg, Erich Fromm (1955) expressed his concern about the poor state of mental health in Western society in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In a comprehensive and unique viewpoint which draws upon psychoanalysis, social-analysis and existential insights, he explicated the nature of a sick versus a sane society as well as the conflicts between human beings and society in North America. He pointed out that a sane society needed to meet man's basic existential needs, e.g., the need for relatedness, transcendence, rootedness, sense of identity, and a spiritual frame of reference. Lack of satisfaction of these needs could lead in vulnerable individuals to neurosis and in a society to social neurosis. He drew some important distinctions and cautioned that there was a difference between individual and social mental illness, as well as between the concepts of neurosis and defect. In his view, if an individual failed to meet his basic existential needs, and thus to attain freedom, spontaneity and a genuine expression of self, he revealed a severe defect but did not necessarily suffer from neurosis. If many members of the same society revealed these characteristics, society itself was sick as it manifested what he called the phenomenon of a *socially patterned defect*. Fromm found that American society was suffering from this phenomenon and called for the formation of a humanistic psychoanalysis and humanistic communities in society to meet the basic human needs of its members.

Van den Berg's concept of *sosiosis* could be related to Fromm's concepts of social neurosis and socially patterned defects in society in that they are predominantly social in origin and have an impact on all its members. However, it is important to keep Fromm's basic distinctions between individual neurosis and social neurosis in mind. If a majority of people in a given society suffer from socially patterned defects, then society itself is the patient and in need of treatment. In his incisive analysis of American society, Fromm concluded that this society was sick. Van den Berg's suggestion to speak of *sosiosis* instead of neurosis pointed in the same direction. Drawing on the insights of both Van den Berg and Fromm, we can conclude that by the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, both individual and social neurotic disorders manifested themselves in the Western world. In comparison to Freudian times, the pendulum had shifted from a former emphasis on individual neurosis to the recognition of both individual and social neuroses and *socioses*. The latter pointed to socially patterned defects and a manifold of neuroticising factors which manifested themselves in modern Western society at the time.

#### *A Postmodern View of Neurosis and Sociosis*

The great changes in society and culture in the fifties and sixties brought an end to the modern age in Western society and culture and made room for the advance of postmodernism. In the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we once again witnessed a time of rapid change and social upheavals, but this time the transformation was of a magnitude never experienced before. It led to large shifts in perception and thought and has altered our sense of self, family, society and of neurosis. The postmodernists criticized modernity and its belief in progress, regularity and universality. With it, they rejected the natural science model with its strict boundaries and its objectified notions of truth and reality. In response, they called for an understanding of the differences between people, and a recognition of the irregularities and the particularities of life. They emphasized that knowledge is embedded in a historical, social cultural and linguistic context, and defended the use of qualitative research methods in the human sciences (Roseneau, 1992, Mook, 1999).

In today's postmodern, Western world, people suffer from stress at home and at work. Postmodern families are mostly dual-career families and tend to be overloaded in trying to balance the demands of work and family life. Single-parent families tend to be even more overloaded and suffer in

addition from the effects of divorce, separation and loneliness. All of Van den Berg's neuroticising factors formulated in the mid-fifties are still operative today but in an accentuated form. We have witnessed an increasing level of conflicts in interpersonal relationships, more social isolation and desolation and more loneliness amongst people. In comparison to Van den Berg's observations in the fifties and sixties, we could say that post-modern society today is more ambivalent, more mobile, more affluent, and that the pressure of time is greater than ever before. We saw that the dissolution and disappearance of small groups have increased and that there has been an alarming breakdown of the family with a skyrocketing rate of divorce, etc. The excessive and often overwhelming demands of our postmodern life have led to an increase in anxiety, depressive and somatoform disorders.

In 1980, the long used term neurosis as a diagnostic category was dropped from the *DSM-III-R*, i.e., the diagnostic and treatment manual for psychiatrists and psychologists. It was replaced by the broad category of Anxiety Disorders (Monte, 1993) and by a form of depression called Dysthymia or Depressive Neuroses. According to the latest diagnostic and treatment manual, the *DSM-IV-TR* (First & Tasman, 2004), Anxiety Disorders include Panic Disorders, Social and Specific Phobias, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder and Traumatic Stress Disorders, each with their own list of symptoms. The common denominators of Anxiety Disorders are that the person experiences intense anxiety and defensive mechanisms to manage this anxiety, and that he is subjectively distressed by his symptoms but remains oriented to reality (Monte, 1993). On a continuum of severity, anxiety disorders are preceded by the category called Adjustment Reactions which indicate a temporary disorganization of personality coupled with distressing emotional and cognitive dysfunctions. It is seen as a relatively brief emotionally distressing reaction in a person's failed attempt to deal with psycho-social stress in his life which in turn affects his work and his interpersonal relationships. Psycho-social stressors include life events which may overwhelm a person and trigger anxiety and depression. Such events include divorce, loss of a job, death of a loved one, prolonged physical illness, rape or other types of assaults, etc.

In terms of our current diagnostic system, Van den Berg's concept of sociososis and his neuroticising factors are closely related to the diagnostic category of Adjustment Reactions. In terms of common denominators, the Anxiety Disorders remain close to the traditional concept of neurosis as formulated by Freud although its subtypes have changed. For example, the category of hysteria is excluded where Panic Disorders and Traumatic

Stress Disorders are included. The long known form of conversion hysteria is now categorized under Somatoform Disorders which includes Conversion and Pain Disorders. In his historical study of psychosomatic illness, Shorter (1992) pointed out that hysteria and paralysis in the times of Freud has been transformed in our time into complaints of pain and fatigue and the chronic fatigue syndrome.

### *Concluding Comments*

Metabolics as a science of change with its phenomenological method and its historical, social cultural perspective offers a strikingly appropriate scientific approach for our present day postmodern and post-postmodern era. With its principles of homogeneous and heterogeneous synchronisms, it opened the door to a systematic study of the interconnectedness of phenomena across the human and the natural sciences and thus offered a deeper and broader understanding and explanation of them. Applying his metabolic approach to the concept of neurosis as defined by Freud at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Van den Berg made a tremendous contribution towards our understanding of this enigmatic phenomenon. He revealed its origins in the individual as well as in society as it took shape in the latter part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and broke out in a clear psychological syndrome at the time of Freud. By the mid-fifties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Van den Berg was one of the first to realize that the nature of society and, with it, the nature of neurosis had changed once again. He saw that society itself had become so complex and so incoherent that it affected the mental health of all its members, where the most vulnerable and sensitive ones might fall victim to a neurotic disorder. His perception and articulation of the neuroticising factors of Western society were very astute and comprehensive for his time and led him to suggest that the term *sociosis* was more appropriate than *neurosis*. Furthermore, his phenomenological description of the world of one neurotic patient broke through conceptual barriers and revealed the real suffering of the patient as he lived concretely in his world and in his relationships to himself and to others. In our post-postmodern world today, neurosis has changed once again and awaits a new metabolic investigation to reveal its nature and its manifestations.

## References

- Ackerman, N. (1958). *The psychodynamics of family life*. New York: Basic Books.
- First, M. & Tasman, A. (Eds.) (2004). *DSM-IV-TR mental disorders*. Chichester: Wiley.
- Freud, S. (2002). *Civilization and its discontents*. London: Penguin Books.
- Fromm, E. (1955). *The sane society*. Greenwich: Fawcett Publications.
- Horney, K. (1937). *The neurotic personality of our time*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Jacobs, M. (1969). Metabletics of loneliness: An account of J.H. van den Berg's life in multiplicity. *Social Research*, 36(4), 606-639.
- Kruger, D. (Ed.) (1984). *The changing reality of moder man*. Johannesburg: Juta & Co.
- Mead, G.H. (1934). *Mind, self and society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Monte, C. (1993). *Still, life*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Mook, B. (1977). *The Dutch family in the 17th and 18th century*. Ottawa: Ottawa University Press.
- Mook, B. (1984). Van den Berg's contribution to the theory of neurosis and psychotherapy. In D. Kruger (Ed.), *The changing reality of modern man* (pp. 204-211). Johannesburg: Juta.
- Mook, B. (1999). Metabletic and the family. In The Simon Silverman Phenomenology Center (Ed.), *Metabletics: J.H. van den Berg's historical phenomenology*. Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University.
- Packard, V. (1972). *A nation of strangers*. Richmond Hill: Simon & Schuster of Canada.
- Rosenau, P.M. (1992). *Post-modernism and the social sciences*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Shorter, E. (1992). *From paralysis to chronic fatigue*. New York: The Free Press.
- Van den Berg, J.H. (1955). *A phenomenological approach to psychiatry*. Springfield, IL: Thomas.
- Van den Berg, J.H. (1955). *Over neurotizerende factoren*. Nijkerk: Callenbach.
- Van den Berg, J.H. (1956). *Metabletika*. Nijkerk: Callenbach.
- Van den Berg, J.H. (1959). *Het menselijk lichaam. (Vol. 1)*. Nijkerk: Callenbach.
- Van den Berg, J.H. (1961). *Her menselijk lichaam. (Vol. 2)*. Nijkerk: Callenbach.
- Van den Berg, J.H. (1963). *Leven in meervoud*. Nijkerk: Callenbach.
- Van den Berg, J.H. (1968). *Metabletika van de materie. (Vol. 1)*. Nijkerk: Callenbach.
- Van den Berg, J.H. (1969). *De zuilen van het Pantheon*. Nijkerk: Callenbach.
- Van den Berg, J.H. (1970). *Dieptepsychologie*. Nijkerk: Callenbach.
- Van den Berg, J.H. (1974). *Divided existence and complex society*. Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press.