

# Obligations Beyond Competency: Metabletics as a Conscientious Psychology<sup>1</sup>

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*A Heideggerian reading of J.H. van den Berg's writings contributes to an appreciation of phenomenological psychology as a cultural therapeutics. Both van den Berg's structural phenomenology of human existence and his Metablectic theory of historical changes lead to a notion of culture as a disclosive construction of the world. Our technological culture, in its reduction of all forms of relatedness to functionality (what van den Berg refers to as secularization), has repressed the spiritual dimension of contemporary life. The resultant derangement of social existence gives rise to the individual distress brought in to psychotherapy. Attention to the spiritual unconscious is the ethical obligation of phenomenological psychology that transcends, and in so doing, contextualizes considerations of professional competency.*

In his elegy *Bread and Wine*, Hölderlin asks “what are poets for in a destitute time?” I believe that the work of Jan Hendrick van den Berg raises that same question for phenomenological psychology: “what are psychologists for in a destitute time?” Van den Berg’s answer is found in his definition of phenomenology: “[W]ould you like to hear the definition which I myself hold dearest?” van den Berg asked an audience at Duquesne University in the late 1970’s. Phenomenology, he said,

is cosmotherapy. Or else, if we strip the word psyche of its one-sided Cartesian meaning, there is a more modest, but equally daring and shortest possible definition: Phenomenology is psychotherapy. (1980, p. 48)

Phenomenological psychology in our destitute time is cosmotherapy, therapy for the psyche in its sophisticated, complex meaning that Robert Romanyshyn (1985) refers to when he characterizes van den Berg’s approach as a “cultural therapeutics” (p. 103).

The very notion of a cultural therapeutics directs psychology to obligations beyond those of competency. Competency is a watchword of contemporary relations, a hallmark of our current calculative rationality, and a guiding norm of modern Western culture. Competency has become a quantitative delineation of pragmatically assessed functional proficiency. As a technological norm, competency calculates how things are to be done;

it does not consider whether that “how” is what should be done. Questions of values, meanings, and morals are foreclosed in the face of the reduction of all qualitative deliberations to the one dimensionality of quantitative calculations (v. Marcuse, 1964). While certainly intended to avoid incompetence, current certifications of professional competency are less related to the Ethics of the American Psychological Association than to the demands of productivity and efficiency issuing from a managed mental health care system. This alone would make ours a destitute time for psychologists.

Van den Berg’s notion of phenomenology as psychotherapy, specifically a cultural therapy, calls psychology to ethical obligations that subordinate competency to spiritual concerns. Van den Berg identifies “spirituality” with the domain of ideals and reflection, the place of that which makes us go beyond the “individual and the selfish,” the house of our mortality and the sanctuary of that “impenetrable” something which “bears of old the name God” (1971b, p. 353). The destitution of our time, according to van den Berg, is that the spiritual domain has been repressed and is thus our unconscious. This repression is what van den Berg calls the “secularization” of modern life (1971b, p. 354). Human dwelling has been cut loose from its mooring in any contexts that transcend mundane functioning. Heidegger sees the “homelessness” of humanity in our technological age (1977a, p. 219) as the yield of this secularization. What remains, according to van den Berg, is “everyday life, with little reflection, few ideals, without constant awareness of life and death” (1971b, p. 354). Phenomenological psychology is cosmotherapy because the unconscious to which it attends is that of the cosmos, the world. Accordingly, the obligations to which van den Berg calls psychology’s conscientious attention are other than those of the functional consciousness that so prizes competency. The word “obligation” refers to what one owes in return for something given or granted—a favor, a service or a gift. Psychology is obligated by what is unconscious yet continues to claim us in the technological world.

What follows is a Heideggerian reading of Professor van den Berg’s writings, a reading that coincides with that of Romanyshyn (1985), that argues that cosmotherapy or therapeutics of culture is the obligation of phenomenological psychology which transcends, and in so doing, contextualizes considerations of professional competency. This reading revolves around a conception of culture that is not directly van den Berg’s but is implicit in his work—culture as the visibility (and as we shall see, invisibility) of the dialogues a particular historical people have with the “givens” or

“facts” of human existence. In the course of this reading, I will make use of the structural phenomenology van den Berg so eloquently articulates in *A Different Existence*, show the necessity of the radically historical perspective he provides in *The Changing Nature of Man*, and consider his provocative portrait of contemporary spiritual unconsciousness.

### I.

Allow me to begin with several definitions of culture. The first is “the essentially semiotic” conception of the anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973): “Believing with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be these webs” (p. 5). These “webs of significance” serve, among other things, to create a familiar world. My next definition comes from mainstream psychology, specifically from a textbook in developmental psychology. “Culture,” according to this text, is the set of values, assumptions, and customs, as well as the physical objects—everything from clothing, dwellings, and cuisine to technologies and works of art—that a group of people have developed over the years as a design for living to structure their life together (Berger and Thompson, 1996, p. 10). Last but I think most profound are the musings of a young Camus (1965): “Culture: The cry of men in the face of their destiny” (p. 36).

Leaving Camus’ remark for later consideration, we can see that the already cited phenomenological conception of culture, as the visibilities of the dialogues particular historical people have with the question of what it is to be human, is closely related to our first two definitions. This visibility consists in the “set of values, assumptions, and customs, as well as physical objects” referred to our definition from mainstream psychology. However, in place of the phrase “design for living,” I would refer to a culture’s “*mythos*.” A culture’s *mythos* is its implicit articulation of what it is to be as a being-in-the-world-with-others-alongside-things. This *mythos* is the intelligibility out of which are woven the “webs of significance,” to use Geertz’s term, which provide the ground of the mundane occurrences of the culture. It is the shared intelligibility that gets expressed in a culture’s language as, for example, when Wittgenstein (1958) speaks of a language game as a form of life.

In speaking of the “givens” of human existence I have in mind what Heidegger, in *Being and Time*, calls the existentials. The existentials are the ontological structures that comprise the human kind of being or *Dasein*. They are not hierarchically arranged structures, one derivative from another.

Rather, the existentials are equally fundamental, or in Heidegger's term "equiprimordial." The equiprimordiality of the existentials means that human existence must be understood in terms of a plurality of constitutive structures that necessarily imply each other. Unlike scientific categories that indicate properties of things, the existentials refer to possible ways for human being to be. The human kind of being is not to be taken as a thing possessed of possibilities. We are our possibilities, possibilities of relatedness to self, world, others, and things. We always find ourselves as delivered over to being as these possibilities, thrown into an existence structured by fundamental capacities. This is part of what Heidegger calls facticity. Facticity is made up of the existential "facts;" the givens of existence over which we have neither authorship nor control. It is these existentials to which I referred earlier as being-in-the-world-with-others-alongside-things.

The existentials appear in van den Berg's work as the basic relations of human existence. His articulation of these relations in *A Different Existence* is a masterpiece of phenomenological psychology. Like Heidegger, van den Berg does not claim to provide an exhaustive enumeration of the existentials or basic relations. His choice of things, others, body and time is motivated by the concrete concerns of psychotherapeutic practice. He chooses to examine those basic relations that he sees as problematic in the suffering of his patients. Discussion of our basic relationship to things and to others will serve as illustration.

In van den Berg's account, neither the pure object nor the pure subject exist. To speak of such things in and of themselves is to engage in an intentional and methodical abstraction from the reality of concrete human experience. Things are what they are only within their context, a context that always necessarily—never accidentally—involves us. Indeed things gather that context, a meaningful context, or better yet, a context of meanings in which things figure as the particular things they are and we discover who we are. To paraphrase van den Berg (1972), the relationship between person and thing is so close that it is erroneous to separate them in a psychological or psychiatric examination (p. 39). If they are separated, both cease to be what they are. "If," as van den Berg writes, "we want to understand man's existence, we must listen to the language of objects. If we are describing a subject, we must elaborate on the scene in which the subject reveals itself" (p. 40). If things change, so do we. The relational truth, the truth of our experience, is that things do change, the "physiognomies" (p. 68) of the world change, and indeed, so do we.

What is the nature of the relationship between person and other? Van den Berg (1972) is adamant that that relationship is nothing between two otherwise isolated selves or egos. "There is no 'between'" (p. 67). Being with another is a being together in a shared world. As he phrases it, "the relationship between man and fellow man is such that it realizes itself in the form, and in the nearness or distance, of world and body" (p. 71). To be close to someone is to be intimate with the significance of their worldly things, to be with them in a shared relatedness to things, and to be given our own embodied being in that relatedness.

Even without considering our basic relationship to our bodies and to time, we can reach the recognition to which van den Berg leads us again and again. We are first and foremost worldly beings, for the world is the very configuration of our basic relationships. "World," as Rollo May (1958) writes, "is the structure of meaningful relationships in which a person exists and in the design of which he participates" (p. 59). In van den Berg's (1987) words:

[T] he most essential feature of phenomenology which, alas, also provokes the greatest resistance....is that the nature and the characteristics of human existence are to be found not by investigating man's subjectivity however we choose to understand it), but by studying and describing his world. (p.8)

To describe a person's world is to depict the concrete, experiential configuration of their basic relatedness to self, others, and things. These relations appear as the "physiognomies of a world" (Van den Berg, 1972, p.68). The faces of the world tell of the character of the basic relations wherein we encounter our humanity. The faces of the world reveal, as van den Berg (1987) says, "the nature and the qualities of people in their historical context" (p. 9).

## *II.*

In that the changing nature of the human mirrors changes in the physiognomies of the world, a structural phenomenology of existence necessitates a historical phenomenology. Van den Berg's "metabletics" is such a phenomenology, a phenomenology that attempts to understand radical shifts in what it means to be human. Metabletics is not merely the addition

of a historical index to each phenomenon, not merely the inclusion of a historical viewpoint in the ensemble of perspectives that make up psychology's mainstream. Understanding world-historical changes requires relinquishing the prejudice of progress that dissolves qualitative change into quantitative continuity. The idea of the march of progress is predicated on the twin assumptions of the continuity of human nature and the consistent nature of the world. This allows us to read our particular nature, born of a specific historical world, into the worlds of the past. The inevitable conclusion is that the past is an underdeveloped version of the present. The light of the present's "development" of human reason in accord with causal determinism—that is, reason as the calculation of causality—renders all world historical differences in the nature of being human as primitive modalities or childish stages. The historical perspective becomes an evolutionary framework.

As a historical phenomenology, metabletics rejects evolutionary reductionism. Its understanding of world changes is predicated on the qualitative appreciation of difference. It seeks to understand what difference changes in the world mean for what it is to be human. It studies the historical configuration of the "basic relations in which human existence is given" (Jacobs, 1968, p. 41). The givenness or facticity of existence is twofold in that we always find ourselves as structurally defined and situationally delineated. Not only are we thrown into the human kind of being, i.e., being as an embodied-being-in-the-world-with-others alongside-things, but thrown as well into a specific cultural-historical world, which grants the meaning of those structures in their concrete, lived reality. Delivered over to being-in-the-world, the character of our relatedness is delineated by our world. Our possibilities of relatedness are always worldly, always what they are in terms of the referential context of meaningfulness that is the world. Rather than allowing the meaning of historical changes to disappear in the ideology of development, trampled underfoot by the march of progress, metabletics understands world-historical changes as materialized in different meanings of what it is to be human.

The issue of how the givens of existence are given, the twofold dimension of facticity, returns us to the notion of culture as a dialogue. The visibility of that dialogue is a people's historical world. "Our world is our home, a realization of subjectivity," writes van den Berg (1972, p. 40). Romanyshyn follows van den Berg in arguing that "history is a psychological matter and that humanity's psychological life, its hopes and its dreams, its fantasies and fears, its images and inspirations, are shaped as a cultural world" (1989, p.

12). We are reminded of Camus' remark: "Culture: The cry of men in the face of their destiny." Can we say that the cry is in the face of human facticity, the structural-historical givenness of existence? I believe the answer can be found in Heidegger's notion of destiny leading to both an understanding of history as the destining of human and world, and to a conception of historical change that recommends the practice of metabletics.

Heidegger distinguishes between historiography (*Historie*) and history (*Geschichte*). Historiography explores the past by way of representing periods, places and events, the names, dates and battles found in our history textbooks. "Historiographical representation grasps history as an object wherein a happening transpires that is, in its changeability, simultaneously passing away" (Heidegger, 1977c, p. 158). On the other hand, "history", as *Geschichte*,

not does take place primarily as a happening. And its happening is not evanescence. The happening of history occurs essentially as the destiny of the truth of Being and from it. Being comes to destiny in that It, Being, gives itself. (Heidegger, 1977a, p. 215).

Truth is understood by Heidegger as *aletheia* or unconcealment. The destining of being is its self-presencing in unconcealment, a presencing that gives itself to be disclosed by human beings. The manner of being's presencing calls for the mode of its disclosure by human beings, and in so doing sends humans upon a course of revealing. "Man does not decide whether and how things appear, whether and how God and the gods or history and nature come forward into the clearing of being, come to presence and depart. The advent of beings lies in the destiny of Being" (Heidegger, 1977a, p. 210). Destiny, in this sense, is the essence of history. "We call the sending that gathers [*versammelnde Schicken*], that first starts man upon a way of revealing, destining [*Geschick*]" (Heidegger, 1977b, pp. 306-307). Destining sends humanity into the gathered presence of an open world that *Dasein* preserves as the realm of its possibilities.

The coming together, the belonging together of being's presencing and human revealing is what Heidegger calls *Ereignis*, the Event of Appropriation. *Ereignis* is the ongoing happening of *Dasein* as the realm of the presencing of being. In *Ereignis*, being and human beings are mutually appropriated in that the "there" of *Dasein's* disclosive engagement is granted by the presencing of

being just as *Dasein's* disclosive engagement preserves the “there” of being among beings. In Medard Boss' (1988) words: “*Ereignis* is the invisible unity of the appeal of being and of *Dasein's* response to this appeal” (p. 61).

Lest we misconstrue *Ereignis* as a factual occurrence set in linear time, we need to appreciate the character of Heidegger's notion. *Ereignis* is a relational and dynamic understanding as opposed to a reified and static concept. It is an imaging of the origin of *Dasein* as continuously occurring, concurring with the advent of the world. It is not a primal origin, set once upon a time, but the perpetual happening of *Dasein's* being called into its existing, its being called upon to be. Being, as understood in *Ereignis*, is no-thing—not a thing whose presence *Dasein* is set upon revealing. Instead it is the dynamic coming-into-presence which sets forth any and all things as present before us, the coming into-presence which prevails upon us to preserve what has been presented. Joseph Kockelmans (1984) observes that “[i]n each concrete case, the appropriating event binds together Being and beings; it weaves Being, man, things, and world together into an articulated and textured whole” (p. 62). The Event gives us not a metaphysics of presence, but a mystery whose unfolding is the heart of our worldly existing.

The presencing of being as a destining always has an epochal character. The prevailing of this presencing, in its revelation by human beings, founds specific historical eras. In the turning of being, the changing of its presencing, destiny turns. Human revealing is called forth in a new mode; a different reality, a new historical age comes into being. The world and the being-in of it, changes. So it is that in referring to the human kind of being, Heidegger can speak, for example, of Greek *Dasein* as a particular historical kind of existence. The occurrences that transpire in the world of such *Dasein*, the things chronicled by historiography—indeed the “set of values, assumptions, and customs, as well as physical objects” referring again to the definition of culture from mainstream psychology—are the visibility of being's presencing and human revealing. In the belonging together of presencing and revealing, that is, in *Ereignis*, we have the discourse that animates our definition of culture.

The part of human revealing, in generating a culture, is best understood as a disclosive construction of being's presencing. Humans neither create the world *ex nihilo* nor construct it out of neutral sense data. How beings, as the presencing of being, are disclosed sets the limits of their human construction. As Boss (1983) writes:

Every age grants to humanity a Da-sein, an existence as a perceptive open realm, whose limits are peculiar to that age. Here “limit” should be understood in its double meaning: where something ends and also as what throws the form peculiar to a thing into relief. Limits, then, are what allow a thing to appear as what it is, what allow a being to be what it is. (p.193)

These limits cannot be known in advance, empirically predicted or metaphysically intuited. We are as delivered over to our epoch, thrown into our historical situatedness. The limits, in Boss’ double sense, of construction inform us of the limits of a historical *Dasein*. World-historical changes are the product of human construction but what is constructed is always the human disclosure of being’s presencing. As van den Berg argues, world-historical changes always come of human making, yet never of such making alone. The change is invited. Being’s disclosed presencing invites various possibilities of human construction, some more persuasively than others. So it is that only within the technological disclosure of beings as resources can they be constructed in the manner of modern industrial society. Using one of Heidegger’s examples, our construction of the Rhine as a source of hydroelectric power is invited by its disclosed presence as a resource.

### III.

According to Heidegger (1969), “We attain to the nearness of the historic only in a sudden moment of a recall in thinking” (p. 67). Metabletics is the artful enactment of such a recalling or recollecting of the historic. Metabletics attains to recall the moment of a new disclosive construction of beings, to recollect the different world that appears in that moment. It is incorrect to describe metabletics as looking back to the past. Looking back from the vantage point of the present, all one sees is the continuity represented by historiography. Van den Berg has taken great pains to differentiate metabletics from that kind of approach to history. Looking back, he says, is not enough. One must merge with the past. “Merging with the event, that is making the past into the present, one finds a different pattern revealing itself. It can make you breathless to see what happened; it can fill you with terror to see it happened this way and not differently” (quoted in Claes, 1971, p. 271). The different pattern which metabletics attempts to catch sight of is the patterning, the configuration of the basic relations,

which mark the opening of a historical world.

The path of metabletic recollection is marked out in the six principles of van den Berg's method—three of which are theoretical, three of which are practical. In the theoretical principles we clearly recognize the hallmarks of van den Berg's phenomenology. Phenomenology is "an attitude," "a way of observing which is "obsessed by the concrete," that "listens to what the incidents, the phenomena, tell him" (Van den Berg, 1972, pp. 76-77). Refraining from the explanatory tactic of causal analysis, phenomenology chooses instead to describe, to carefully articulate the meanings of things within their context.

The metabletic "principle of non-interference" codifies the phenomenologist's respect for how things show themselves. To subject things to analytical dissection or reduce their appearance to causal factors (that is, to impose our schema upon them) would interfere with what they have to say. Metabletics acknowledges the reality of things appearing in ways that may differ from our contemporary experience. It accepts and attempts to appreciate phenomena within the context of the lived meanings of their own time. Thus the "principle of reality" requires that the things of the past be taken at their word, on their own terms—the terms of their world and time. This is no easy task as recognized in the "principle of change or mutability." Difference is real...things and their worlds do change. The impossibility of direct understanding of what things really mean—on their terms—testifies, as Jacobs (1968, p. 42) notes, to the difference that comes of world-historical change. To understand things differently than we, in our historical epoch usually do, requires the careful, respectful labor governed by metabletics' three practical principles.

Metabletic inquiry into changing historical worlds and their different realities begins with concrete examples. The principles of "simultaneity," "unique incident," and "emphasis or prominence" guide the selection and treatment of these examples. Following upon the recognition of the reality of world-historical change, the "principle of simultaneity" directs attention to the simultaneous appearance of such change in multiple guises. Metabletic expects to encounter the new reality appearing not only in other versions within the same field but as well in the discoveries of different fields, the seminal transformations of different areas of thought and practice within close temporal proximity. Inauguration of the same new world is announced in different discoveries. The non-accidental character, the necessary coincidence of these different events issues from their belonging together in, to use Heidegger's term, a destining.

Metabletic citing of these different incidents is focused by the “principle of the unique incident” which requires that each originary discovery is taken in its originality. Each discovery is sighted in the way it stands out within its context. Within its context, what makes the incident unique is its discontinuity with what has come before it. Metabletics endeavors to appreciate such incidents at the moment when they stand out from the past, from their past, as the inception of something new. Indeed the work is to appreciate the incident before its uniqueness fades in the taken for granted habitation of the new world. Concern, as van den Berg tells us, is with “discovering words and deeds before they have been smoothed out by the deeds which followed” (quoted in Claes, 1971, p. 276). Historiographic representation levels down the unique incident not by denying it, but by explaining it as a step in the march of progress, a phase of inevitable human development. Interpretative projection of continuity takes precedence over the reality of world-historical change.

To genuinely grasp the unique incident in its originality, the last of van den Berg’s practical principles instructs that it be given “special emphasis.” Prominence is given to the unique event, the new discovery in that not only is its visibility enhanced, but also its significance amplified. Quoting van den Berg (1971a), “It must be examined, explored and the depth of its secrets revealed and thereby we may be able to see more clearly why it stands all by itself and is yet of such eminent importance” (p. 289). Metabletic emphasis on the unique event reveals and articulates the world-historical change offered by that event itself.

The remarkable studies which follow the path of metabletic recollection provide specific, concrete evidence that “earlier generations lived a different sort of life, and that they are essentially different” than we are today (Van den Berg, 1975, pp. 7-8). How we are today is the issue. Life today has become problematic in ways in which it was not before. People bring specific questions into the consulting room: “How should I treat my spouse, my children, my neighbors? How do I deal with things at home, at work, and at play? How do I grow old?” How is the psychotherapist to respond to such questions? How are psychotherapists to respond to the “chaos” which inflicts the “totality of social existence” (Van den Berg, 1971b, p. 369) and speaks in all of their patients’ afflictions?

Metabletic understanding of world-historical changes provides the perspective from which one can, according to van den Berg, “rate” “the present state of affairs in its real value” (quoted in van Spaendonck, 1985,

p. 121). The real value of any phenomenon resides in its qualitative significance—how it matters, what difference it makes in the life-context of those for whom it is a matter of concern. Remember that metabletics is not merely a historical approach to psychological phenomena. Metabletics is a psychology of historical changes—world historical changes in which the meaning of human existence changes. The answer to the question which is human existence—that is, what does it mean to be?—changes historically. Indeed these answers are the substance of history itself. If and in what way human existence becomes problematic is a function of the historical meaning of that existence. Neurosis, as van den Berg (1975) has so persuasively argued, is “sociois.”

Metabletics articulates the historical configuration of the basic relations of existence—the world—that grants the meaningfulness of life in the present. Understanding of that configuration is crucial to appreciating the qualitative significance of present life. In Heideggerian terms, metabletics articulates the character of the destining which overtakes us in the “having-been” of our existence as thrown into the world, the destining which approaches us in the “not yet” of our lived possibilities. Metabletics provides a perspective from which to rate present life by allowing us to catch sight of the destining which presences—even though it passes unrecognized as such in the everyday—in the disclosive construction of the open region through which the historiographic runs its course.

#### IV.

Now I can return to my earlier preference for the term *mythos* over the phrase “design for living” in defining culture. The reason for this preference has to do with the “rating” of which van den Berg speaks. A historical world as a particular configuration of the givens of existence does indeed provide a design for living, a design that is visible in, to quote the definition, a “set of values, assumptions, and customs, as well as physical objects.” In speaking of this design as a *mythos*, I wish to call attention to it as the intelligibility of a people’s disclosive constructions of the presencing of being which grants their historical existence. A design for living, or as I prefer, a cultural *mythos* is what comes of a people’s dialogue with the givens of existence.<sup>2</sup> Here, as I have noted, I am close to the semiotic understanding of culture held by Geertz—i.e. that culture is the webs of significance spun by human beings—although I wish not to reduce culture to only human making. A

culture's *mythos* is spun or constructed but is always a disclosure as well—a disclosive construction.

We have heard van den Berg's concern with "discovering words and deeds before they have been smoothed out by the deeds which followed" (quoted in Claes, 1971, p. 276). Metabletic's "principle of the unique incident" clues us in to the character of the *mythos* as latent in the everydayness of the culture. The smoothing out or covering over is inevitable in the *mythos*, which provides the ground of mundane occurrences. The uniqueness of a new disclosive construction must be smoothed out for the words and deeds of its historical world to follow. The *mythos* is invariably concealed by entanglement (fallenness) in everyday concerns—the practical, pragmatic character of human life. The "that" things are as they are covers over "what" they are in all but the socially prescribed necessarily circumscribed significance that is operative in everydayness. However, without the ground of its *mythos*, the words and deeds would not be those of the particular epoch.

The *mythos* appears within the everyday in the form of what Heidegger in *Being and Time* calls *Gerede* (1962, p 211). While usually translated into English as hearsay or idle talk, *Gerede* can be understood in reference to *Rede* (discourse) which is Heidegger's German for *logos*. With this in mind, we can take *Gerede* as a pre-scribed, circum-scribed *logos*. A culture's *logos* is both revealed and concealed in the taken for granted, pre-scribed circumscription of significance in terms of which the individual is as everybody (*Das Man*) is in average everydayness. The unique event is passed along to everybody's attention as it is integrated into common sense. What gets passed over, what metabletics ventures to recall, is the *logos*—the intelligibility visible in a culture's ways of everyday being—as a disclosive construction of the world and human being-in it. What is covered over, in the pre-scribed circumscription of significance, is the character of the *logos* as *mythos*.

"Myth," according to Heidegger, means the telling word. For the Greeks to tell is to lay bare and to make appear—both the appearance and that which is present in the coming to appearance, in the epiphany. *Mythos* is that which becomes present in its telling, namely, that which appears in the unconcealedness of its claim. For all human beings, *mythos* makes the claim which is in of all others and which is most fundamental. It is the claim which permits thought about that which appears, that which becomes present (Heidegger, 1968, p. 10).

Metabletics, in attending to the epiphany of a new *mythos*, retrieves the claim that comes in advance of and is most fundamental to a historical

world. Metabletics retrieves the *logos* in its originary dimension as a *mythos* before its telling becomes hearsay. What is more, metabletics remembers the moment of freedom when the disclosive construction could have been other than it was: the moment, as van den Berg says, “that can make you breathless” (quoted in Claes, 1971, p. 27). In its character as a *mythos*, the disclosive construction of a historical world could always have been other than it came to be. In advance of its historiographic necessity for the words and deeds of its epoch to follow, the world’s disclosive construction could have followed another path. It could have not been. It could have been another, a different construction of being’s same disclosure. Destining, as Heidegger (1977b) says, “is never a fate which compels” (p. 306). Within any destining, within the limits ordained by being’s presencing, there abides the possibility of alternative disclosive constructions. These possibilities reside in the *mythos* as the latency of the everyday circumscribed prescription of what can and cannot be.

Metabletics recovers the *mythos*’ finite freedom of possibility at the heart of the circum-scribed, pre-scribed *logos*’ historical necessity. And yet, the circum-scribed, pre-scribed *logos* inevitably covers over the *mythos*. What can vary, and hence what is at issue in rating a disclosive construction, is neither freedom nor necessity but rather the relationship between them, i.e. the kind of covering over. The question is that of the particular character of latency in the everyday. And this, in turn, is the issue of the unconscious. Van den Berg has had a lot to say about the unconscious from a phenomenological perspective. Rather than repeat all of his arguments here, suffice it to say that far from being something inside the individual, van den Berg demonstrates that the unconscious refers to precisely what the individual lacks. To be more precise, the lack itself resides in the cultural world.

We could say that the measure of (repressed) unconsciousness of the individual is equal to the degree of derangement of the community.... In the aspect of our existence called consciousness, each one of us (with the customary variations) is identical with the existence of the whole community. (van den Berg, 1974, p. 173)

Communal derangement occurs in the exclusion of a basic relatedness of existence from the common sense of things. A domain of human relatedness is precluded from the realm of social discourse. The unconscious correlates with the “socially rejected domain” (van den Berg, 1971b, p. 355).

Unconsciousness issues from a literally pre-scribed cultural *logos*. Beyond the inevitable covering over which comes of the circumscription of any disclosive construction, literalism denies whatever is outside its prescription of everydayness. Any latency to the everyday is repressed. The mythic dimension of the *logos* is denied. The very nature of the *logos* as a disclosive construction is concealed and is passed off as the definitive and decisive discovery of things in themselves.

Repression is a specific kind of covering over, a kind of covering over which not only conceals but conceals its very concealing. The way things are constructed categorically denies, preempts, the very possible of an alternative construction. In so doing, a repressive construction denies its nature as a disclosive construction and presents itself as the objective representation of reality.

So it is in the present, in our epoch. The literally pre-scribed, circumscribed *logos* of our time is what van den Berg calls secularization. Secularization breeds unconsciousness. Before the triumph of secularization in the latter half of the nineteenth-century, “there was no unconscious” (van den Berg, 1971b, p. 285). Secularization is a disclosive construction that unilaterally restricts all relatedness to that of functionality, reduces all possibilities to calculable causes, equates the real with the quantifiable, and unequivocally denies that it is either a disclosure or construction. Heidegger understands such a disclosive construction to be that of being’s presencing in the destining he calls the Enframing of Technology. The Enframing sends us on a course of revealing in which we are unconscious of the mythic dimension of our secularized, technological *logos*. The mythic claim of our culture’s *logos*, “the claim which is in of all others and which is most fundamental.... the claim which permits thought about that which appears (Heidegger, 1968, p. 10) in secularized everydayness, is denied. The latency repressed in this denial is that of spirituality—the domain of reflection on what claims us.

The spiritual domain contains the disclosive construction of the essential givenness of existence as finite, the essential relatedness to ourselves as mortals. The *mythos*’ finite freedom of possibility lays claim to us as mortals. What we disclosively construct of such freedom is what we make of our mortality. Remember Camus’ saying that culture is the cry of men in the face of their destiny. Camus, as is well known, is the philosopher of the absurd. What is most absurd for Camus is death—that we will die and we know it. No matter the destining, it is our destiny to be as mortal. We rate our culture when we bear witness to its repressive *logos* that prescribes spiri-

tual unconsciousness. We can rate our secularized culture with Heidegger's observation that homelessness is coming to be "the destiny of the world" (1977a, p. 219). The homelessness of our time is one in which the essence of human being, the being claimed as mortal-being-in-the-world-with-others-alongside-things, "stumbles aimlessly about" (1977a, p. 218). Without the reflection of the spiritual domain, the "totality of social existence" (van den Berg, 1971b, p. 369) is deranged. A destitute time, indeed. And what are psychologists for in such a time?

In his extraordinary essay "What Is Psychotherapy?" from which we have already drawn so much, van den Berg (1971b) agrees with Freud. "Psychotherapy is the making conscious of the unconscious" (p. 325). Psychotherapy is a relationship that renders speakable that which had been precluded from the realm of discourse. Phenomenological psychology is a therapeutics of culture in its bearing witness to the latent spiritual sector, to the unconscious prescribed in our culture's repressive *logos*. To bear witness is to stand in relationship to what is witnessed. Such a relationship is not functional; it is an entering into the sector that transcends functionality. The unconscious spiritual sector has been made conscious. Or at least, this is a start.

Culture is the visibility of the dialogues a particular historical people have with the givens of existence. A cultural therapeutics is obliged to the rectification of our culture's repressive pre-scribed *logos* by way of retrieving its *mythos* in an alternative kind of disclosure construction. In distinction to the literalism of our repressive pre-scribed *logos*, we can follow Romanynshyn (1985, p. 100) in characterizing the alternative as metaphorical. Metaphorical pre-scription of cultural intelligibility would be non-repressive in that metaphor affirms both the literal and latent. Rather than repressing, a metaphorically pre-scribed *logos* shelters, safe keeps, preserves its latent *mythos*. A metaphorically pre-scribed *logos* includes, rather than precludes disclosive construction in, for example, the forms of ritual and belief (van den Berg, 1975).

Ritual deliteralizes concrete action to evoke the embodied experience of spiritual relatedness. Likewise, belief offers an alternative to causal calculation in which things are allowed to matter as mystery and miracle (Sipiora, 1994, p. 334). Transcendence of function in ritual and belief, far from obliterating the functional, grants meaningfulness to functional everydayness. Ritual and belief recover an order to things that rectifies the derangement wrought by secularization. They restore reflection, ideals and an awareness of life and death to everyday life. Ritual and belief recover the

spiritual sector which a cultural therapeutics bears witness to as the repressed unconscious of our culture.

As a conscientious psychology, metabletic phenomenology does not reject the claim of functional competency. Its conscientiousness resides in the subordination of functional competencies to the obligations that issue from the repressed unconsciousness of spirituality. These are the obligations which inform the competencies van den Berg (1972) cites: "Psychology...is a communicative, meditative and descriptive science. The psychologist must be able to talk, to sympathize, to see, to consider and to write" (p. 78).

Beyond these competencies, even before them in the sense of priority, lies that competency which is decidedly other than efficient functioning. In Romanyshyn's (1985) view, metabletics is "an ethical psychology" (p. 105) that "restores our sense of responsibility" (p. 106) for the world we have disclosively constructed. In its restoration of our culture's latent *mythos*, metabletic phenomenology restores our ability to respond to what obligates us as human beings. And yet what obligates us, the spiritual domain, remains unconscious. So it is that the phenomenological psychologist, in van den Berg's (1971b) words, "waits for the unconscious sector to be uncovered" (p. 369). To be able to wait—to wait upon the return of the spiritual unconscious by attending to the repressed *mythos* of our secularized technological culture—is the essential and most difficult competency required by the ethical obligations of metabletic phenomenology.

"[T]he name 'ethics', in keeping with the basic meaning of the word 'ethos', as Heidegger (1977a) suggests, "should...say that 'ethics' ponders the abode of [human being]..." (pp. 234-35). In bearing witness to our spiritual unconsciousness, metabletic phenomenology ponders the abode of human being in the concrete form of "the set of values, assumptions, and customs, as well as the physical objects" (Berger and Thompson, 1996, p. 10) that make visible our design for living. In bearing witness to our spiritual repression, in waiting upon the return of our cultural unconsciousness, metabletic phenomenology ponders the cry of mortals in the face of their destiny.

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### Notes

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<sup>2</sup> Compare discussion of the "cultural matrix," social constructivism, and philosophical hermeneutics in Cushman, P. (1995). *Constructing the self, constructing America: A cultural history of psychotherapy*. New York: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.