CHAPTER 6

The Despotic Eye: An Illustration of Metabletic Phenomenology And Its Implications[1]

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I. Introduction: A theory of changes

Metabletics is Van den Berg's theory of changes, and phenomenology is the logos or study of phenomena, that is of things as they appear, of the given appearance of things. Conjoined as metabletic phenomenology Van den Berg's psychology is a study of the changing reality of things, of the changing character of the world, of the changing nature of humanity. Were such a psychology, however, merely the acknowledgement of the obvious fact that things, the world, and humanity change, it would not merit much concern. But Van den Berg's psychology is much more than an acknowledgement of this obvious fact. It is the radical claim that change is discontinuous, which means that reality (things, world, humanity) *as such* is mutable. The world and humanity, together and in relation with each other—through each other we might say—change in such a way that the very materiality of things and the human body are different in different historical ages. As an example of this claim consider that before the seventeenth century men and women lived with a different heart. Indeed, *before* the pioneering work of the English physician William Harvey, whose publication in 1628 announced a divided heart, a heart whose septum cordis had no tiny microscopic pores or holes in it, a heart, therefore, in which the septum cordis had become a wall, the human heart had holes within it.[2]

Undoubtedly, so bold a claim raises a host of difficult issues, and perhaps our first impulse is to dismiss it as absurd. But metabletic phenomenology insists on such a claim, and indeed it is a claim such as this which characterizes the importance and the originality of Van den Berg's work. Thus, in considering the splitting of the atom in the twentieth century he asks 'whether matter itself has not played a role in achieving this end' (Van den Berg, 1971, 286). Why only now, and

not before, has the atom been split and its tremendous energy released? 'Is it really so certain', he asks, 'that, for instance, medieval matter would have allowed this artifice?' (ibid.). Did medieval man merely lack the technical knowledge and skills to bring about this achievement? Van den Berg replies in the negative here. It was not simply the absence of technical skill and knowledge, but the presence of *a different sort of matter* which made this development impossible. Simply stated medieval matter was not atomic. Not even the stars of the medieval night sky, he says, burned with the fires of nuclear explosions. The stars of that sky were different, *and* medieval man looked at those stars and saw a different reality. Moreover, their stories about the stars which they saw 'must after all be taken seriously, if ever we expect future generations to take us and our words seriously' (ibid. 287).

The claim of metabletic phenomenology about the changing nature of reality is, therefore, a claim about the *relation* between humanity and reality. Whether we are speaking about the human heart or the matter of the world, metabletic phenomenology makes two essential points. First, it indicates that reality is a reflection of human life. *What* reality is is, in other words, inseparable from *how* humanity imagines or envisions it. In this respect humanity's psychological life is *visible* as the specific and concrete historical manifestations of an age. The way in which an age paints its paintings and builds its buildings, for example, mirrors the way in which that age dreams its dreams and understands its reasons.[3] That we have split matter in the twentieth century is, therefore, as much a matter of psychology as it is of physics.

Second, metabletic phenomenology indicates that the mirror relation between humanity and reality is one of *participation*. The atomic structure of matter is no more a mere *discovery* of what matter as a matter of *fact* is in itself, than it is a *creation* of *mind*. Rather, this atomic structure of matter, like the divided heart, appears *between* humanity's way of looking and what is there to be seen. The changing nature of reality does not occur apart from a changing humanity, Van den Berg says. 'On the other hand, things do not change by intervention of man alone' (Claes, 1971, 275). In this respect, human life is the *real-ization* of the world, that is the activity of making the reality of the world real. For metabletic phenomenology human perception, which includes every incarnated way of experiencing and expressing reality, is the generative and historically transformative effort of making the world into places and times which are liveable and believable realities.

Van den Berg's work abounds with examples of the visibility of human experience and the relation of participation between humanity

and the world, and any one of them could be used to discuss further metabletic phenomenology and its implications. The occasion of this volume, however, requests of the author something more than a commentary. On this honorary occasion an effort of thought, inspired by the work of Van den Berg, is to be made. The next section makes such an offer, however brief and unfinished it must be. In the final section of this essay these issues of visibility and participation are taken up in another context.

II. Linear Perspective: The Eye of Distant Vision and the Eclipse of the Human Body

The reader is invited to look at Figures 1 and 2. Figure 1 is a presentation of the city of Florence which dates from approximately 1359. Figure 2, also of the city of Florence and known today as 'Map with a Chain,' dates from about 1480.[4] Between these two dates the world and humanity's perception of it has radically changed. Between these two paintings there is a world of difference.

In the later work the anonymous artist has made use of linear perspective, a way of seeing developed earlier in the century by Filippo Brunelleschi and later described in Leon Battista Alberti's treatise on painting *De pictura* (1435–36). Linear perspective, which already presumes as a pre-condition for its appearance that space is infinite and homogeneous, relies essentially on the notion of a vanishing point. Originally called by Alberti the centric point, it fixes in pictorial space the point toward which parallel lines converge. Also known as the *punto di fuga*, the point of flight, the vanishing point, makes visible a new relation between the see-er and the seen, between humanity and the world. That relation is one according to which one can best know the world by removing oneself from it. In fact the further removed one is from the world the better one knows it. Increasing distance brings greater knowledge. Indeed the ideal embedded within the technique of linear perspective is a distance which is infinite.

The relation between humanity and the world which the fifteenth century artist newly imagines and makes visible before the scientist, will turn that relation into a method, and the philosopher will transform it into an epistemological principle; that relation, which the technique of linear perspective originates, makes the body, as vehicle of knowledge and as humanity's ground in the world, *dispensable*. It installs in place of the body a detached eye, a disincarnated eye, as the vehicle of relation. It originates an eclipse of the body in favor of an eye that is fixed, an eye of singular vision, an eye which has withdrawn itself from the world.

To demonstrate this eye consider the illustration in Figure 3. It is a woodcut of Albrecht Dürer executed in 1525, a full century after Bru-

Figs 1 and 2

nelleschi's original experiment with linear perspective. By that time linear perspective had become a common practice, and so Dürer's woodcut could easily make explicit its central themes. Notice the arrangement and the posture of the artist. He has withdrawn behind a screen which is in fact a grid upon which he is mapping in reduced scale the subject seated beyond him on the other side of the screen. This screen, which eventually was known as Leonardo's window, was in fact described by Alberti himself in 1435. He called it a *velo*, a veil, and it 'was a means for organizing the visible world itself into a geo-

Fig 3

metric composition, structured on evenly spaced grid coordinates' (Edgerton, 1975, 119). Certainly it is correct to say that the seeing eye is always veiled, that humanity sees the world through a veil of symbols or meanings. The fourteenth century artist also saw Florence through a veiled eye, a 'velo' which was symbolic and sacred. But Alberti's velo, depicted here so vividly by Dürer, differs in several essential ways. First, the symbolic veil has become a **literal fact.** It has become an object actually placed between the see-er and the world. Second, the veil has become literal in a specific way. It has become a **window** and *as such* it has invited the see-er to gaze upon the world as if he were now an outsider looking in. The veil between see-er and world has become a **separation** of them. Third, the window which the veil has become is itself of a special kind. We miss the significance of Alberti's velo as window if we regard this window as a transparent piece of glass, because it is in fact a window with a design. It is a **grid** which is mathematical and *as such* it invites the see-er to ***look at it*** **rather than** ***through it.*** If it places the see-er as an outsider gazing in upon the world, this window nevertheless already creates the world

which is seen. Perhaps, then, it is less a window and more a magic glass which projects a world to be seen. Perhaps we may even call this magic window the first 'movie projector', throwing onto the world which has now become a blank screen, a 'story' of the world as geometric, as essentially mathematical. Fourth, as a grid to look at rather than to see through, Alberti's velo intends to reproduce upon its surface the world which lies beyond it. It intends to reproduce it in a geometric-mathematical way. It intends, in other words, a reduction of the world not only to set of numbers and the spatial relations between things, but also a reduction of the world to the eye which looks *at* this veil of geometric patterns. The velo, portrayed in Dürer's woodcut, intends to *squeeze* the world into the eye and in this respect the artist already anticipates that *narrowing* of vision by which Newton will squeeze colour out of the light of day, and as a consequence will squeeze colour out of the life of things.[5]

The veil which has become a literal object is not, however, the only thing which we should notice about this illustration. That veil between eye and world; that veil of separation and distance; that veil of reduction which would now map the world to geometric scale presumes that the world has become a matter for the eye alone. This presumption is explicitly visible in Dürer's woodcut. Look at the artist! His eye rests behind a small wooden apparatus. That apparatus, which draws attention to the eye, concretely illustrates that the eye has now become the measure of the world. Moreover, it also illustrates two peculiar features of this eye. First, the eye which will now take the world's measure is precisely that—it is *an* eye, a singular eye, a seeing which is a monocular vision. Second, it is an eye which is fixed, a static eye which belongs to a see-er who in order to envision the world must no longer move through it.

Linear perspective vision is a way of seeing which dispenses with the body. It inaugurates a psychology of infinite distance which has as its necessary pre-condition a denial of the body. Born in the space of fifteenth century pictorial representation, this new psychology will be firmly established by the time of Dürer's woodcut. Less than twenty years after Dürer's representation, Copernicus in 1543 will ask us to see a moving earth with this eye of distant vision, with this eye detached from the body. And Vesalius in the same year when Copernicus makes this appeal will portray for us what this discarded body, no longer needed to experience the world, has become. He will indicate for us that it has become a corpse, itself an object of vision. The fixed, singular eye of distant vision, that eye of "single vision and Newton's sleep" from which the poet Blake (1970, 693) much later will beg our deliverance, will be born in the imaginary space of the artist's canvas and later will be secured in the laboratory of the

scientist and the mind of the philosopher. Brunelleschi will father that eye, but *after* him a Galileo and a Descartes will become inevitable. Brunelleschi will inaugurate that vision, but *after* him Copernicus and Vesalius, Harvey and Newton, will become psychological necessities. And the irony of this psychological tale will be that the eye which originates this vision of distance will itself become an object of this vision. Descartes will study the life of vision by taking "the eye of a newly dead man" (Descartes, 1971, 245). He will study the living eye from the distance of death. All this is prepared in the eye of the fifteenth century artist. The fixed and singular eye of distant vision with its eclipse of the body is anticipated in the canvas of linear perspective. Let us secure this eclipse by returning to our opening illustrations. Let us allow the difference between them to indicate this detachment of the eye from the body.

Look at the fourteenth century illustration of Florence again! Compared with the later view it seems primitive and confusing. This is so because in part it offers a cluttered landscape. Everything seems so compacted, without a clear focus, and lacking a coherent, stable center. Edgerton himself makes this point when he says that the earlier view is an "*uncentralized* representation" (ibid., p. 9, my emphasis). Apparently, then, the confusion of the earlier portrayel is related to the absence of a center. The issue however is not so simple, for we do not yet understand the centre whose absence seems so crucial. Moreover, the claim that the earlier portrayal is confusing because it lacks something tells us nothing of that portrayal on its own terms.

The absent centre, which makes the earlier portrayal confusing, is a special kind of centre. It is a centre which belongs to that immobile eye, to that eye that is fixed in space. This earlier portrayal is not intended for this eye. Indeed this eye does not yet exist. The human eye does not yet exist in this way, apart from the body which bears it. It must await the development of the centric point, the development of linear perspective. Today we have such an eye, and the earlier portrayal reminds us of it. It reminds us that this way of looking requires a special eye which in our forgetful use has become natural for us. It reminds us that what we today regard as a natural way of looking is a historical style of vision, a psychology of seeing. Looking at the Florence of 1389 we are made aware of *our* way of seeing. *The confusion which we see reflects or mirrors the eye with which we see.* It awakens us to the fact that we are attempting to see with a fixed, detached eye, a scene which is not intended for the eye alone. But, then, to what eye is the earlier portrayal addressed? What is the eye if it is other than these watery orbs, safely enclosed within a skull, looking out upon the world from afar?

Edgerton's comment on the earlier canvas gives a reply. Its artist,

he says, 'believed that he could render what he saw before his eyes convincingly by representing what it felt like to *walk about*, experiencing structures, almost *tactilely* . . .' (ibid., p. 9, my emphasis). The artist's eyes which saw fourteenth century Florence and portrayed on that canvas what was seen, also portrayed a way of seeing. The artist portrayed a see-er whose eyes are embodied, that is, whose eyes are as much a matter of active muscle as they are of receptive nerve, eyes which take hold of the world by moving through it as much as they may behold it from a point fixed in space. That anonymous artist and his canvas depict eyes whose sensing of the world is a sensuous contact with it, eyes which in looking at what they see caress and are caressed by what they see, eyes in the midst of the world, surrounded by it as it were, rather than an eye removed from the world in order to confront it head on, as it were, along the straight lines sketched out by the geometry of linear perspective.

Tactile eyes, muscular eyes which *walk* about in the world, are the eyes which are other than those orbs safely encased within the skull, and the earlier portrayal of Florence addresses itself to these eyes. It appeals to eyes in *touch* with the world which they *see*, so unlike the eye portrayed in the latter view of Florence, an eye 'completely out of *plastic* or *sensory* reach of the depicted city' (Edgerton, ibid., pp. 9–10, my emphasis). The eyes of this anonymous fourteenth century artist still belonged to the world. They had not yet retreated behind a literal veil to be fixed within the human skull. However, once this withdrawal had occurred, the body which would bear the eyes through the world would disappear.

One can already see the tension between this eye of distant vision and the body in a painting by Jan van Eyck illustrated in Figure 4. The background space is not yet explicitly executed in linear perspective style, but Van Eyck's painting, which dates from the same year as Brunelleschi's experiment (1425), already anticipates the struggle with the body. Against the background space of the Church the Virgin's body looms large. Her size, however, is not startling to pre-linear perspective eyes, because her size is an index of her *importance*. It is only with the eye of distant vision that her size appears monstrous. It is only within the progressively shrinking space of the disincarnated eye that she seems too large. Nevertheless, placed within that space she will have to be reduced. Placed within that space the body will have to be re-figured in such a way that size will reflect a law of distance, according to which a body decreases in relation to its distance from the viewer. In that reduced space of the mathematical eye the importance of the sacred body will diminish as humanity withdraws itself farther and farther away from it. With the eye of distant vision humanity will put God in His place, a place of distance, and

Fig 4

the human body, so central as a reminder of our creation and our fall, will shrink toward disappearance, following the ideal distance of linear perspective toward infinity.

Indeed the shrinking of the body toward disappearance will follow a prescribed pattern and will reach its limit as we should already expect at the level of the human head. The linear perspective artist will make use of the technique of 'horizon line isocephaly' which Edgerton claims is not 'seen in pictures anywhere before about 1425' (ibid.

p. 44). The principle is a simple one to describe. It consists in 'aligning the heads of all standing figures both in the foreground and far distance along a common horizon line . . .' (ibid. 27). Since this common horizon line passes through what is called in linear perspective *the vanishing point,* that is, the point at an infinite distance where all parallel lines meet, the principle in effect states how the body is to be reduced to fit into the space of linear perspective. As figures are placed closer to the vanishing point the body *except for the head* shrinks in importance. The head and the head alone is aligned along a common horizon suggesting that as we move toward the vanishing point only the head remains as the shared bond between us. As 'heady' men and women we move toward the vanishing point, toward an infinite distance from the world. The head is our common vehicle of retreat from the world. This principle and what it suggests is illustrated in Figure 5.

This principle, so essential to the appearance of linear perspective, makes sense not only technically but also psychologically. In that space of the disincarnated eye which denies the body, we should expect to find a technique which prescribes the eclipse of the body in such a way that only the 'heady' eye, the eye of mind, remains. At the vanishing point we become what linear perspective intends us to be: body-less heads; detached, distant eyes. The principle of horizon line isocephaly places us upon the path which leads to the Cartesian cogito. It places us upon that path where we are destined to become in the fine phrase of C. S. Lewis, 'men without chests' (1947). To appreciate how this principle has indeed sketched such a destiny for us, listen to its description offered by Leon Battista Alberti. After offering a description of the horizon line and the centric point (vanishing point) he goes on to illustrate his remarks in the following way:

> This is why men depicted standing in the parallel furthest away are a great deal smaller than those in the nearer ones, a phenomenon which is clearly demonstrated by nature herself, for in churches we see *the heads of men walking about,* moving at more or less the same height, while the feet of those further away may correspond to the knee-level of those in front. (Edgerton, ibid., p. 43, my emphasis)

The image is striking, important, and psychologically accurate. In the space of linear perspective there is space only for the heads of men and women to move about

Fifteenth century linear perspective as a psychology of infinite distance places us in the world in such a way that we become fixed, *immobile* see-ers, visionaries if you will, who gaze upon the world as an object, as something over against us and to be viewed with the detachment of infinite distance. This conclusion, however, seems strange because it has been *since* the fifteenth century and not before

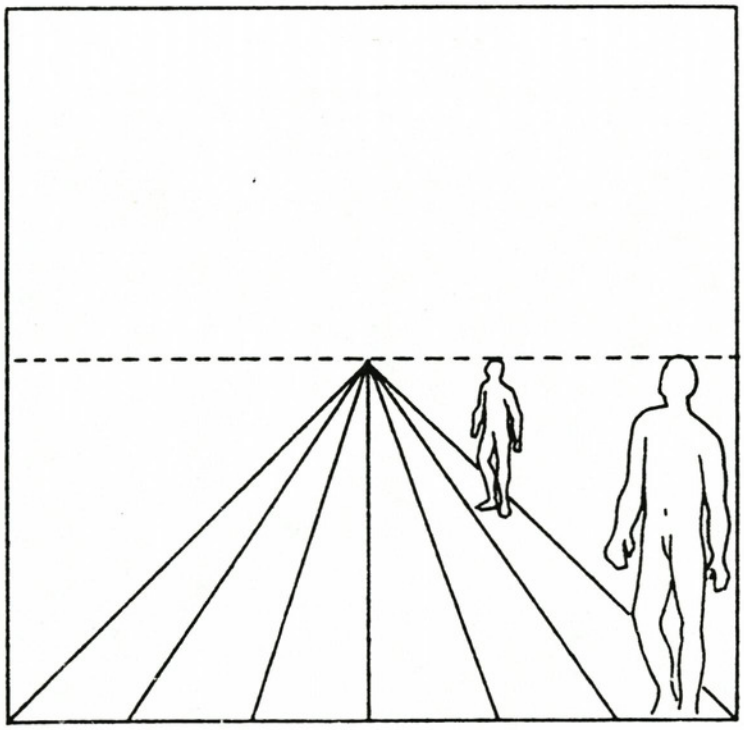

Fig 5

it that we have become wanderers over the face of the earth. *Since* that time and not before it we have *moved* across the barriers of oceans and mountains. The seeming contradiction disappears however when we realize that the vision of the detached eye has its own kind of movement. Freed from the body and retreating from the world the eye of distant vision has allowed us to roam the world as a matter of mind, making actual bodily involvement with the world a secondary consequence, an expected outcome already conceived in the mind's eye. We are not surprised, therefore, to discover Leonardo da Vinci's praise of the eye to be cast within this context of movement. 'This eye', he says, 'carries men to different parts of the world' (Edgerton, ibid., p. 92). It is a brief but significant quote. The eye now carries the body; the body no longer carries the eyes. Movement, we might say, becomes a matter of vision, that is a matter of thought, in place of vision being a matter of movement.[6] We may say, then, that the eye of distant vision, detached from the body, increases the

spatial range of movement, but only by eclipsing the *sensuous* contact between embodied eyes and the world within which they move. Edgerton again confirms these two points. With respect to the increase in the spatial range of movement he says that 'The same forces which changed the artist's view of the visible world sent man to confront the unknown terrestrial world, and, closing the latitudinal circle, to discover his own planet' (ibid., 122). With respect to the decrease in sensual contact he notes how the masters of the early fifteenth century, influenced by Brunelleschi's rules about linear perspective, shifted the accent of their paintings away from the '*sensuous* charm of pictorial surface [toward] a more *intellectual* contemplation of the picture's holy subject' (ibid., p. 35, my emphasis). There is no doubt, therefore, that since the fifteenth century we have increasingly moved over the face of the earth, going farther and faster. But there is also no doubt that as we have done so we have increasingly lost *touch* with the earth over which we have moved. Both of these possibilities are given in the latter view of Florence. Both of them belong to the eye of distant vision which sees farther and more of the world it surveys because it no longer needs to be in touch with the world. And lest we doubt it let us look one final time at the later representation of Florence. Notice that the artist has painted in his own perspective. That little figure in the lower right hand corner is the man of distant vision. Seated on a hill *above* the city, sketch pad in hand, he has, as it were, a bird's eye view of things. From that distance his eye can roam over the entire landscape, but he will never know from that distance either the words of anger or the sounds of love uttered by those living in the city.[7]

This brief effort to illustrate a metabletic phenomenology would fail however were it to end here, because, as Van den Berg has emphasized, change in one area of human life is inseparable from changes in other areas. Indeed Van den Berg makes this notion one of six principles of his metabletics. He calls it 'the principle of simultaneity'. His two-volume work on the metabletics of the human body and his volume on the metabletics of matter are detailed illustrations of this principle. In English translation we have *The Changing Nature of Man*, and *Divided Existence and Complex Society* as illustrations.[8] Following this principle let us conclude our very brief example by at least noting two reflections of the despotic eye of distant vision in fifteenth century life.

The two reflections which mirror this new psychology of distance lie on either side of Brunelleschi's experiment with linear perspective. The first one dates from approximately 1400 and coincides with the arrival in Florence of Ptolemy's *Geographia*. Its significance to the theme of linear perspective is stated by Edgerton. Comparing Giotto's

art with the much used portolan charts of the time Edgerton notes how both art and chart gave good approximations of 'angle and direction but not of distance' (1975, 97). Making use of the specific painting 'Expulsion of Joachim from the Temple' which was done around 1306, he writes that 'Giotto's painting, like a Petrus Vesconte map, . . . reflects the tactile perceptions—looking, touching, and moving about—which characterized art not yet attuned to geometric abstraction' (ibid.). Ptolemy's system of mapping the world contained in his *Geographia* changed the art of map making in the same way that Brunelleschi's experiment with linear perspective changed the art of painting pictures. In place of the portolan charts reflecting those tactile perceptions but lacking a good estimation of distance, the *Geographia* proposed a system which advised that 'before the viewer did any mapping at all, he should have a firm optical impression of the *oikumene* as the imagined base of his visual cone,' ('Edgerton, 1875, 101). In other words, Ptolemy's system began with the *known world* becoming an object of the viewer's eye. This eye, moreover, was intended to be fixed so that the map was in principle 'a projection from a single point representing the eye of an individual human beholder' (ibid., 104). The projection, then, like the linear perspective painting, was intended as a window through which the fixed and singular eye of distant vision could map the world. It was intended, or at least it functioned, as a window through which the see-er could see the world with a detached eye.[9]

The second incident which belongs to this story of the detached eye occurred around 1454 which is the date traditionally assigned to the appearance of the Gutenberg Bible, the first book printed in the West by the process of moveable type. The significance of this shift from a manuscript to a print culture is well stated by McLuhan (1962). It coincides with the tale we have told, for on one hand it offers a form of communication which is predominantly visual, and on the other hand it makes possible and even demands a fixed point of view. Indeed these two points belong together, for as McLuhan argues, the printed page in emphasizing the visual connection of components—letters to words to sentences etc.—de-emphasized the interplay and ratio among the senses. This isolation of the visual factor in experience fixed the eye, and in this respect the printed page fixed the reader to *a point of view* (a visual metaphor) like linear perspective drawing fixed the see-er. We need only add here how the printed page tended to increase *silent reading* (which is indeed a very curious phrase and one which would have sounded quite strange to a man or woman of the Middle Ages) to appreciate how it fostered that new sense of distance and isolation. We find it easy, therefore, to agree with McLuhan's assessment of typographic man as one who is an

'outsider' (1962, 254). The silent reader, the one for whom the word is a matter of the eye and of the eye alone, is akin to the artist on the hill above and beyond the city. Artist and reader both share a silence which is the condition and the consequence of that new vision which increases the distance between humanity and the world.

III. Metabletic phenomenology: Four psychological themes

The conjunction of metabletics and phenomenology in Van den Berg's work yields a unique and original approach to psychological matters. Guided by the example of metabletic phenomenology offered in the previous section, we want to mention four psychological themes which can be found either explicitly or implicitly in Van den Berg's work. The first and second themes concern respectively the character and the place or psychological reality. Themes three and four are addressed to the inherently therapeutic and ethical dimensions of Van den Berg's psychology.

A. Psychological reality is a metaphorical reality

In the first section of this essay we mentioned the divided heart and quoted Van den Berg's words regarding the splitting of the atom in the twentieth century. Both of those examples illustrated the claim that reality is mutable. Both of them indicated that between man and world reality changes. The example of the despotic eye in the previous section illustrated the same point. The Florence of 1359 and that of 1480 are *different* cities, and the difference is more than the obvious addition of Brunelleschi's dome. The city has changed. It is a different reality as the two paintings so vividly make visible. And yet, it is the *same* city. It is Florence. The former one made visible in the earlier painting is no less real than the latter one. It is Florence as men and women of that earlier age saw it and lived it, even if we, who live after them and see with different eyes and live in a different world, find it strange. It is strange to our eyes. It is a different city. But it is real. We have, therefore, before us a reality which in its mutability is the same *and* different. We have before us in those two paintings the reality of Florence which is a paradox of identity *and* difference. Metabletic phenomenology in its radical insistence upon the principle of mutability presents a paradoxical picture of reality. It asserts that a thing is both what it is and not what it is. The world which shrinks to the size of my bedroom when I am ill is, for example, the same and a different world.[10] I am sick *and* the world changes. The conjunction is not a consequence or an effect. It is a *relation* so that in saying one the other is also said. Reality is mutable because the real is a *relation* between the see-er and the seen. We be-

gin to see with the fixed eye of distant vision *and* the city of Florence changes.

What is such a reality which in principle is mutable in the sense that it is, and is not what it is? What is this reality which in its difference remains the same and in its identity is a difference? What is this reality which is in principle a relation?

In another place (Romanyshyn, 1982) I have proposed that we call this reality *metaphorical* and we need not repeat that work here. Suffice it to say that the principle of mutability implies that reality is metaphorical in character, because a metaphor, like this principle, affirms a paradox of sameness and difference by proclaiming a reality which is and is not what it is. Moreover, like the principle of mutability affirms reality, a metaphorical reality emerges between a perceiver and the perceived, between a speaker and what is spoken of, between man and world. A metaphor is in this respect a relation. Thus, for example, when Van den Berg in writing of illness says that 'The world has shrunk to the size of my bedroom, or rather my bed' (1966, 27), we must understand not only that he is speaking metaphorically, but also that he is speaking about a reality which is in principle metaphorical. The verb shrunk makes a metaphorical claim not an empirical one, and if we are to understand it, as we immediately would of a sick friend who spoke in that way, we have to be attuned to the metaphorical nature of reality. Indeed who would not be so attuned? Who, in hearing his friend speak this way, would take up ruler and pencil to measure the room in order to convince his friend that it has not grown smaller? Such a person would fail to understand that at that moment they are speaking about two different rooms which are nevertheless the same. Such a person would fail to understand that the room does and does not shrink, and perhaps most importantly he would fail to understand that when it does so it shrinks *in relation to* the one who is ill. Indeed the shrinking room *is* the illness. Or perhaps it is better to say that in so far as the room is a mutable reality, a reality which is metaphorical in character, it lends itself to my friend in such a way which allows him to tell me of his sickness and his suffering by saying 'Illness is a shrinking world'. How very much more do I understand him when he speaks in this way. How very much more do I sense his suffering and his isolation when he speaks of his illness this way, metaphorically, and when I hear his words as indicative of another world, a *different* reality, which is nevertheless the world which we share.

The metaphorical character of reality is a theme which is, I believe, implicit in Van den Berg's psychology. It is a theme which can be drawn out of his work, a consequence as it were of the principle of mutability. Metabletics, one might say, leads to metaphorics, which

is an acknowledgement that the changing nature of reality and humanity rests upon the participatory relation between them. The houses, the streets, the pier, and the very stones of the town where Van den Berg spent his youth are changed, as he notes, when the bridge over the river disappears. Changed and different! And yet as he says, '*Both stones are real*' (Van den Berg, 1971, 284). The stones near the vanished bridge are no less real than those near the present one. To see in this way, however, means to see without the interference of a judgment which would cancel one reality in favour of another, which would dismiss or forget one set of those stones for the other. They are both real, and they have changed, and they are different. But to see in this way also means, at least implicity, that these different stones nevertheless share an identity, for how else could the poignancy of the moment, the somewhat bitter-sweet recognition of change and difference, be noted. Those stones share a kinship of sorts which does not abolish the difference, but which also does not make the difference an absolute separation between them. Those stones, we might say, remember each other in their difference, which is perhaps why Van den Berg, or any one of us, could notice the change and the difference. And perhaps that is after all what must be said of metabletics and metaphorics; they presume, and I think rightfully, that the things of the world do somehow re-member each other, making it possible for us who pass by them to remember their identity in their difference.

Place

B. PSYCHOLOGICAL REALITY IS VISIBLE AS A WORLD

A second psychological theme which is explicit in Van den Berg's work, and which is already anticipated in the first theme, is the worldly, material, or visible presence of experience. If the *character* of psychological experience is metaphorical, its *place* is the changing world. Indeed it is because the changing world is the locus of psychological reality that the character of that reality is metaphorical. Van den Berg's work is filled with examples of this theme of visibility and we have in fact already made use of one of them in discussing the shrinking room of illness. We need not, therefore add any additional examples. We need only note here one of Van den Berg's most direct statements of this issue. *A Different Existence* (Van den Berg, 1972), which is a small book devoted to the principles of phenomenological psychopathology, is a simple but eloquent presentation of the point that the 'world is our home, our habitat, the materialization of our subjectivity' (Van den Berg, 1955, 32).[11] He who would wish, then, to become acquainted with another 'should listen to the language spoken by the things in his existence' (ibid.). He who would wish to

describe the other must 'make an analysis of the "landscape" within which he demonstrates, explains and reveals himself" (ibid.).

The brevity of the discussion of this theme should not lead us to underestimate its value, because its presence in Van den Berg's psychology is nothing less than a challenge to one of the most deeply-rooted preconceptions of scientific psychology *and* our age. It is the assumption of the inner man, the unexamined belief in the interiorization of experience which lies at the foundation of our subject-object dualisms, and which allows us to speak of psychopathology as *mental* illness, as if psychopathology were somehow a disturbance of a mind apart from the world and indifferent to the things which compose the world *and* to the body which experiences that world. Moreover, Van den Berg's work not only presents this theme and the challenge inherent within it, it also examines the historical origins of its appearance. The final chapter of *The Changing Nature of Man* (1961) entitled 'The subject and his landscape' is an example.[12] This historical analysis is important because it allows us, for example, to approach scientific psychology with a new vision. What we might otherwise be inclined to accept uncritically as an established fact—psychology is a natural science—is shown to be a historical *and* psychological decision. In this respect Van den Berg's psychology borders on a psychology of psychology. Indeed it becomes a psychotherapy of modern psychology and in a larger sense a psychotherapy of modern culture. Van den Berg's metabletic phenomenology is a cultural therapeutics. But with this statement we are led to the third psychological theme to be found in his work.

C. METABLETIC PHENOMENOLOGY AS CULTURAL THERAPEUTICS

The brief description of the origin and appearance of what we have called the despotic eye of distant vision indicated that *after* Brunelleschi's experiment with linear perspective in the fifteenth century a Galileo and a Descartes became psychologically *necessary*.[13] Van den Berg, however, notes that 'At the moment that history comes into being, everything is uncertain.' In other words, at that moment 'Nothing is necessary' (Claes, 1971, 276). Everything, we might say, is at that moment, open.

Metabletic phenomenology situates itself between these two moments of the uncertain or the open and the necessary. It is a way of thinking which in moving between these two moments recovers the open *in* the necessary. It recovers, in other words, how the open is already present in the necessary, and in this respect it transforms the necessary by allowing us to see that what we would otherwise take for granted as a necessity is a historical-psychological achievement on

the part of humanity. What we would take for granted; what we would culturally live out as a necessity of fate; what we would live out forgetfully and literally as a fact in itself is thereby re-membered and de-literalized. The despotic eye of distant vision which continues today, for example, in our technological approach to *medicine*, which is indeed incarnated in the very instruments of that technology, is recovered from that space within which it operates as an *assumed* account of the way the human body really is in itself. The body, which within that space appears as an *object of vision*, is recovered as *a way of seeing*. And indeed this is perhaps the clearest way to characterize metabletic phenomenology as a movement between the two moments of the open and the necessary. In this movement which is its work it *remembers* that *what* we experience as the world is also *how* we experience the world. In this re-membering it recovers what we experience as a how or a way of experiencing. It throws us back upon what we would ordinarily forget: the recognition that the visible is also a vision. In short, metabletic phenomenology in its reflections on the cultural-historical world as the field of human psychological life recovers the reflections of the see-er in the seen. It recovers from the changing facades of the visible cultural world the changing psychological face of humanity.

This work of recovery, of re-membering, of de-literalizing; this work of restoring the see-er to the seen, vision to the visible; this work of restoring the how to the what is the work of therapy, and we would submit here that metabletic phenomenology is by the very nature of this work a cultural therapeutics. In other words, it does for the *collective* life of humanity today what *individual* psychotherapy does for the person. It restores us to our place because it shows us that the cultural world from which we seem to be apart is in fact a part of us, the visible expression of a story originated by us and continuing today. In doing so, metabletic phenomenology closes the distance between us and our story, inviting us, and at times even forcing us, to acknowledge that the cultural world of technology from which we seem so alienated is our story. In other words, as a cultural therapeutics metabletic phenomenology asks us to acknowledge that in designing the cultural world which stands before us today we have also designed ourselves. And in this regard it differs little, if at all, from the work of the psychotherapist who, as Van den Berg's own example from *A Different Existence* illustrates, hears the patient speaking of himself in speaking of his world.

Should we be surprised that metabletic phenomenology is a cultural therapeutics? I think not, because a careful reader of Van den Berg's works discovers for himself that his emphasis on the world as the materialization of humanity's subjectivity, coupled with his his-

torical analyses, inevitably leads to a psychology which is necessarily a therapy of culture. A cultural therapeutics is the consequence of a phenomenology which finds human experience displayed as a world, and a metabletics which hears the present as a history which echoes itself in the here and now. It is the consequence of a phenomenology which focuses on the world as the locus or place of human experience and a metabletics which focuses on the changing character of that world. Thus we are not surprised that Van den Berg even coins a new word for neuroses, calling them 'socioses' (1971, 341). The term does not mean any crude reduction of psychology to sociology. It does not make society the cause of psychological suffering. Rather the term merely acknowledges a key point in Van den Berg's psychological work: human life is radically social. It acknowledges that the social-cultural world *is* the field of human psychological life. There is not a social world apart from the psychological world, acting upon it from the outside. Rather the psychological world is the social world and the social world is the visible expression of the psychological world, the place where psychological life is made concrete and incarnate. It follows, then, that any psychotherapy of neuroses will be a therapy of the social world, or as we have said a cultural therapeutics. We are not surprised, therefore, to discover again that in an article entitled 'What Is Psychotherapy?' (1971), Van den Berg situates the theme of neurosis within a metabletic perspective. In speaking about psychotherapy *and* neurosis he does a metabletic phenomenology of eighteenth century cultural life. And this after all is only the other side of what we have said in these brief remarks: in doing a metabletic phenomenology one also does a psychotherapy of culture.

D. Metabletic Phenomenology as an Ethical Psychology

The fourth and final theme of Van den Berg's psychology which we wish to address is one which is strongly implied by the previous remarks. We can state it simply and briefly as we bring this essay to a close. If as cultural therapeutics, metabletic phenomenology invites and even forces us to remember that what we experience is also a way of experiencing; if, for example, metabletic phenomenology allows us to remember that the body as an object of technological vision is also a way of envisioning the body, then the consequence which follows is that we as humanity are responsible for what we see and what we say. We are responsible for our visions which become incarnated as the visible cultural world. We are responsible for the ways in which we imagine, dream, envision, and build the world. To illustrate this final point and to conclude this essay let us return to the example of the despotic eye of distant vision. The fifteenth century rendition of Florence, executed by the despotic eye of linear per-

spective, is a painting and a dream. It is a portrait of the visible and a vision of the visible. Closing his book on linear perspective, the art historian Samuel Y. Edgerton makes the following point:

> Indeed, without linear perspective, would Western man have been able to visualize and then construct the complex machinery which has so effectively moved him out of the Newtonian paradigm into the new era of Einsteinian outer space—and outer time? Space capsules built for zero gravity, astronomical equipment for demarcating so-called black holes, atom smashers which prove the existence of anti-matter—these are the end products of the discovered vanishing point. (Edgerton, 1975, 165).

The vision of the despotic eye has become our world. The way of seeing mediated by that eye has become incarnated. That eye has built for itself the body of the technological world. We are the makers of that vision. We are the creators of that body. And we are responsible for what we have made. Lest we treat this claim upon us too lightly, consider how easily this claim of responsibility has been abrogated in the modern technological world. Mary Shelley's nineteenth-century novel *Frankenstein* is written at a time when the instruments of technology are still only minimally present. But that work, like the poetry of the visionary Blake, is a prophetic warning. It cautions us against that excess of distance which in exceeding the limits of nature would place us, as creators, outside of and apart from what we have made. The creature created by Frankenstein is a monster precisely because he has been abandoned by his creator. Frankenstein, the doctor, is a figure of our age. He is the one who would forget his responsibilities for and toward his creations. He is the figure who reflects back to us how much we would seek to loosen ourselves from our responsibilities, from those connections which tie us to the things we have envisioned. And the other side of that figure, the other face is the creature himself, abandoned, alone, lonely and situated in the barren and frozen wastelands of the Arctic world. Is the closing scene of the novel a vision of the desolate landscape which awaits a humanity which has distanced itself so far from the world and the body that it can no longer remember itself through the world, and is therefore no longer able to respond? At a period in history, at a time in our collective human life when we, as humanity, have harnessed the energy to turn the whole earth into a wasteland, we need a psychology which enables us to respond, which restores our sense of responsibility. We need a psychology which in its therapeutic dimension restores humanity to its place upon the earth.

FOOTNOTES

[1] I owe the suggestion of this description of the eye as despotic to a phrase of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. His exact phrase is the 'despotism of the eye'. An illustration of its use can be found in *The Friend*, Vol. IV, p. 519.

[2] The argument justifying the claim made by this example is not given here, since the intention of this essay lies elsewhere. Readers who wish to pursue this example are referred to Romanyshyn (1982), Ch. 4.

[3] For an extended treatment of this notion of mirroring and how it arises out of a consideration of Van den Berg's work see Romanyshyn (ibid.), especially Ch. 1.

[4] These illustrations are taken from Edgerton (1975). His book is an excellent discussion of the appearance of linear perspective in fifteenth century Florence, and our discussion acknowledges a heavy debt to his work.

[5] For an extended treatment of this reference to Newton and for a more comprehensive discussion of the significance of the literalization of experience, see Romanyshyn (ibid.).

[6] That vision is a matter of movement, that the seeing eye is not simply a passive recipient of stimuli but an active seeker of it, is increasingly confirmed by more recent studies in perceptual psychology. The work of J. J. Gibson (1966; 1979) is especially to be noted here. Gibson's work, however, rests upon a critique of traditional scientific psychology. The point, then, is that the detached eye of distant vision belongs to the paradigm of modern science, including psychology as an empirical science where this eye appears as the passive recipient of external stimuli, as a camera. This eye has lost touch with the world.

[7] What has happened to those words of anger and those sounds of love which we from our infinite distance no longer hear? What has happened to the body which the eye of distant vision has discarded? What has happened to that landscape of embodied eyes, the landscape of Medieval, pre-linear perspective painting? I would like to suggest here that this landscape has become the dreamscape of modern humanity. I would like to suggest that this landscape has become the unconscious of the modern world. With the appearance of linear perspective the body as a dream was born. If the eye of distant vision sets us, as we have said, on the path toward the Cartesian cogito, it also, by its neglect of the body, sets us on the path toward the Freudian unconscious. That figure on the hill above the city can only dream of what he can no longer experience, and in this respect he is perhaps the first modern dreamer *and* the first modern neutoric. Passing from that scene now we should wonder if that figure, seated on the hill above the city, is dreaming Freud. We should wonder if the Freudian unconscious, revealed by the dream, is born from a dream, a dream of distance and detachment from the world and the body.

[8] The Dutch titles of these works are respectively: *Het menselijk lichaam: I Het geopende lichaam; II Het verlaten lichaam. Metabletica van de Materie.* English summaries of these works by M. Jacobs can be found in *Humanitas*, 1968, 4 (1), 25–59, and *Humanitas*, 1971, 7 (3), 291–320. The latter two works in English are American editions of respectively *Metabletica, of Leer der Veranderingen* and *Leven in meervoud.* Taken together these four works constitute the heart of Van den Berg's unique metabletic studies.

[9] It is true, as Edgerton, notes, that the *Geographia* was well known for centuries in the Arab world and the Byzantine East. But it had no direct bearing on the art of painting. The point, then, is that this technique becomes a psychological matter when it conspires with a radical shift in humanity's relation to the

world. It enters into human psychology at that moment when in the Christian west an increasing *distance* is beginning to assert itself between humanity and God's creation, the world. It becomes a matter of human psychology at that moment when humanity is beginning to distance itself from the created world as a first step toward a reversal between itself and the divine. Soon God will be placed at the vanishing point as humanity will take over the role of creation.

[10] This example is presented by Van den Berg in *The Psychology of the Sickbed* (1966). For four other illustrations of the paradoxical character of reality see also *Things* (1970). In passing, it should be noted here that this view of reality as a paradox of identity-difference *converges* toward the view of reality which contemporary physics has been forced to adopt by virtue of its high energy experiments at the sub-atomic level. There too one finds that the reality of sub-atomic 'particles' is essentially a relation. Indeed these 'particles' are relations both in terms of other 'particles' and in terms of the investigator's experimental arrangements. In this respect the *paradoxical* nature of light—it is a wave and a particle in relation to the experimental arrangements through which it is studied—is a fundamental feature of reality. It is not a flaw in our procedures nor a sign of our epistemological ignorance. Niels Bohr (1958) writes persuasively on this matter. And yet, while Van den Berg's metabletic phenomenology *converges* toward contemporary physics on this matter, his psychology is in fact even more radical, because *unlike* the new physics it understands that this paradoxical character of reality is not limited to the special case of the sub-atomic world. It is, on the contrary, the essential feature of the *lived world*. In this respect, the new physics only affirms as a special case what the metabletic psychologist already knows.

[11] The quote is taken from an earlier and slightly different version of *A Different Existence* entitled *The Phenomenological Approach to Psychiatry*.

[12] Another example is Romanyshyn (1982). Indeed the notion of the interiorization of experience is central to that work, and its heavy indebtedness to Van den Berg is obvious.

[13] Brunelleschi inaugurates a new psychology which, as we have seen, in principle dispenses with the body. He inaugurates a psychology which places humanity ideally at an infinite distance from the world and the body, making each of them an object of detached vision. It is *in this respect* and this respect alone that I say that a Descartes or a Galileo becomes a psychological necessity. Descartes, in this respect, takes up that distant vision as an epistemological method. Reading Descartes in another way, however, dissolves his status as psychologically necessary and makes of him a figure who inaugurates a new vision. The point then is not to make Brunelleschi a cause of some later effect. It is not to extend a *line* of development farther back into the past. Rather, it is to move within a *deepening circle* in which figures like Newton, Galileo, Descartes, Vesalius, Harvey, Copernicus, Brunnelleschi, and others continue to echo a theme whose origins are never finally determinable. At least this is how I understand and practise the task of metabletic phenomenology. Its recovery of the past in the present is always an on-going enterprise.

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