

Metabletics and the Art of Psychotherapy
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One of van den Berg's earliest publication on the topic of metabletics contains a marvelously thoughtful essay on the nature of the miracle. This essay provides us with a most important key to van den Berg's thought in general, and to his thought on psychotherapy in particular. Let me present you, first of all, with a short summery of this essay and then draw out the implications it may have for future developments in psychopathology and psychotherapy.

The article begins by making a brief reference to a post medieval historical development in which the power and presence of the divinity was progressively removed from everyday life and confined to the time of the creation of the universe. Van den Berg writes:

"Descartes removed God from the line which connects the past with the present, and when he made him go to point where the line began, it was no longer God who was put there, but a question mark. Descartes did not notice the difference. And now the difference has disappeared."

Let us follow this thought closely. Descartes thought removes God from what is present, it removes his presence from the miraculous bond that links one thing to another, relates one being to another, connects one person to another and to a world. This withdrawal of the divine from the vital connections we experience between one thing and another, one person and another, leaves us a denuded world that can be understood only in terms of causality, necessity or accident. We might say that the hospitable presence of God, the one that brings coherence to the world in which we live, was withdrawn from the modern world, was removed from our actual day to day experience of our world and placed at the remote time and place of the beginning of creation.

Once it had been banned to that remote position the divine presence ceased to infuse our world with its hospitable presence. We were then forced to live in a world in which all coherence is derived from material principles, where the fabric of life is but accidental happenings stitched together with the help of causal connections. This new situation forced us to inhabit a world from which all welcoming presence had been removed and in which all human relationships had to be re-interpreted in terms of material necessity or mathematical probability.

A world configured in such an inhospitable manner no longer points to the meeting of self and other as an ultimate destiny. It becomes a matter of fact world, a theater in which human beings are reduced to spectators while a cast of natural materials and forces performs its roles on center stage. Ultimately nothing of importance remains to be seen in such a world except the clash of physical and biological forces, and nothing more remains to be thought except the means by which we might anticipate these various material clashes and interactions. The theater of the human world is thereby transformed into a giant laboratory, a universe of a billion questions in which all of intellectual, psychological, spiritual life is reduced to the posing and answering of questions about material interactions.

All presence of a primordial, hospitable other is withdrawn from such a universe and in its place we find question marks that forever refer us to a natural scientific universe. It is in this manner that a realm that once was lived as a mysterious meeting ground between a self and an other became transformed into a natural and physical world and that questions about intersubjective life became transformed into questions about material relations.

Let us imagine ourselves as survivors of a shipwreck washed ashore on a seemingly uninhabited island. After we recover from the first shock of the disaster we begin to explore the island with one or two other survivors. We find no sign of human inhabitants throughout the day, but when evening begins to fall and the sun sets over the vast ocean we explore a mountainous region and discover a narrow entrance to what appears to be a large cave. We are not sure whether the cave is inhabited by humans or animals, by friend or foe, by ferocious animals or vicious cannibals. Thus it is with the greatest circumspection that we enter the cave, slipping through the narrow opening only after we have listened carefully for any suspicious sounds, and studied the ground for any traces of footprints. Our exploration of the interior will be undertaken with the greatest care and in a constant state of alert for disagreeable surprises. We have entered in a world where every phenomena is a question mark, where nothing can be taken for granted and where our entire practical and intellectual life is reduced to posing and answering practical questions and formulating tentative predictions about the possible or likely outcomes of material interactions. It is in this way that the island begins to resemble a laboratory where we subject every aspect of our material world to a constant and defensive probing and questioning. If we were to continue in this skeptical and alert exploration we would soon have laid the basis for a natural scientific and technological civilization, whose sole aim would be to neutralize all the physical dangers that lie hidden in the physical environment. Every step taken and every initiative contemplated takes the form of an experiment. All our daily activities, all our various encounters with what is inside or outside the cave take on the form of natural scientific questions. When we are finally able to take our ease and drift off to sleep at night while others keep watch, we might dream of an island unburdened of all its secrets, of a completely mastered universe that has ceased posing questions to which we are forced to respond in order to survive. But in our waking life we would discover that such an

island, or such a universe, even if it had been neutralized of all its surprises, and even if it yielded complete and unhindered access to every square inch of its territory, could not ever extend a welcome to us or become truly inhabitable or be capable of truly supporting a flourishing human civilization.

To fully understand this point let us think about an entirely different course of events for the survivors of the shipwreck. Let us imagine that we wash ashore on a very different island inhabited by a genial elderly woman who is herself a survivor of an earlier shipwreck. Let us call her Diotima and imagine that she came to meet us on the beach only minutes after we washed ashore. We discover that she has constructed a very interesting life for herself on the island. She has transformed a cave in the sandstone mountains into a magnificent dwelling, furnished with marvelous objects she has fashioned from driftwood, homespun wool or crafted from clay. She has built a large garden, domesticated animals, and taught herself to hunt and fish. She even has been able to build herself a small library from the contents of trunks that have washed ashore.

Wherever we go on the island we find evidence of her ingenious and vigorous presence, and when we sit at her table for the first time and taste her food and engage her in conversation we are overcome by her generous and enterprising nature.

When we look at the cups and saucers on the table, or the elegant shapes of the wooden spoons we do ask ourselves questions, but questions that profoundly differ in kind from those we would have posed under the very different circumstances of the first island. We now look at the cups and the spoons because we marvel at the nature of our hostess and seek further access to her presence. We are grateful for this presence and we bask in it. We look at her garden, her kitchen, her shell collection, her carefully arranged stash of books, her homespun clothing and each time we find a different revelation of her presence.

Let us imagine that we do not find a means to leave the island and for many years come to make it our home. When Diotima eventually dies of old age we bury her with heartfelt ceremony. We compose songs for her, inscribe a book with our collective memories of her for our children. We tell stories about her, some of these not literally true, but true in the profound sense of rendering her present. In this way we transmit the gift of her presence to future generations.

Where the first island might have been able to support the beginning stages of a scientific and technological civilization, the second island would become the home of story, myth, poetry, art and music, of culture and religion.

Let us return to van den Berg's reflection on the nature of the miraculous, which in final instance is *the miracle of the presence of an other*. He tells us the story of a small child who on a visit to his aunt becomes scared at night in his unfamiliar bed. "Aunt" cries the child out of the bedroom, "aunt please say something, I am scared

and it is so dark". And then, to justify his plea he adds the marvelous line: "Aunt, when you talk it gets light." To the child the familiar voice means light in the darkness. The miracle of copresence restores order to a world that threatens to become uninhabitable in its absence.

In another anecdote Van den Berg reminds us of an episode in Gide's "Si le grain ne meurt". It tells of the time when Gide went on a walk with his nurse as a young boy. He recalls her being very happy that day and asking her what made her feel that way. She answered innocently enough: "For no reason at all. But isn't the weather gorgeous?" Gide recalls that "the whole valley became filled with love and happiness" at that moment..

For the boy that was Gide the entire valley suddenly filled with delight: the flowers became more colorful, the shadows grew deeper, the blue of the sky became a more penetrating blue and the sun was more radiant. All of this happened because of a few words. But those few words testified to the presence of someone nearby; they testified to the presence of a near-dweller, or most literally to a neighbor. And it is the neighbor who makes our world, our landscape, our island, inhabitable.

The child crying out to his aunt seeks to re-establish the essential relationship to a near-dweller in order to prevent his world from becoming uninhabitable. And the young Gide discovers this inhabitable aspect of his surrounding world in the presence of the woman who loves him and opens the world for him. That inhabitable aspect of the landscape manifests itself in the promise it holds. This promise is contained in the expanses of grass inviting the child to run, to hop and skip, to lie down and stretch out. It is contained in the trees offering themselves to be climbed, in the hills inspiring a wish to tumble and the water's edge waiting for someone to cool his feet, to splash about, to swim or fish. All those possibilities become unlocked in the hospitable presence of the neardwelling neighbor. If she were to suddenly faint or disappear, all color would drain from the sky and the fields, all its promise would suddenly be withheld and the child would be as lost in the meadow as the other child was in the darkness of the unfamiliar bedroom. The darkness that frightens is always one that announces the absence of the near-dweller.

The miracle described by Van den Berg is that of finding oneself within a close relationship to an other that is configured in such a way that it gives access, all at once, to the self, to the other, and to a surrounding world. It is the miracle of this presence that constitutes the foundation of human dwelling. Human love and desire, no matter whether it takes the form of a neighborly relation, a friendship, a marriage, or that of a cult honoring a god or an ancestor, endlessly encircle the mystery of this presence of an other that bestows access to a human world.

Van den Berg protests against the modern understanding of miracles as natural events that run counter to the laws of nature, and that are placed as such beyond the range of human scrutiny as supernatural occurrences. How could those events

which form the foundation of our humanity, which form the center of our life to which we turn and return in perpetual wonder ever be viewed as alien to normal life, as *contra naturam*, beyond the pale of natural functions and belonging to the realms of the super-, para- or extra-normal ? How was it possible for us to come to understand these events as defying, rather than as laying the very foundation for a human order. How could the very scaffold that upholds us in our daily life ever be banished to the never never land of the supernatural or the abnormal?

The fundamental miracle in human life is the presence of those dwelling near-by. It lays the foundation of an inhabitable world that can subsequently be approached from a variety of different points of view, including a natural scientific one. It is thus on the basis of this miracle of co-presence that a human world arises, that a culture can develop, that a natural scientific attitude can be assumed and cultivated, and that a science such as physics or biology can come into being and made to prosper. The discovery of a natural scientific universe governed solely by natural forces has this miracle of co-presence and intersubjectivity as its foundation. The world of natural science is ultimately illuminated by the same light that illuminates the darkness of a frightened child's bedroom and that gave the young Gide access to a landscape. It is the miracle of the near-dweller that opens for us a world, including a world of natural science.

Let us draw one more contrast between our respective shipwrecks on the two islands. The first island clearly lacked the miracle of presence. It offered no welcome to those who survived the shipwreck. It remained enclosed in the darkness that terrified the child of Van den Berg's story. It presents to the survivors the world the young Gide would have encountered had his beloved nurse suddenly disappeared. In the absence of a sustaining hospitable presence, the survivors who arrive on the first island are limited in what they can explore and discover. They move in a world that resembles a minefield, where every footstep can set off a fateful explosion. The best they can hope for is a complete material mastery of the terrain, capable of removing any unforeseen response to a human action. They can hope only to attain a mastery that will transform the initial hostility and unpredictability of a natural world into something that will not unduly interfere with the human presence. "Understanding the island" means here being able to walk around the island without facing grave dangers at every turn of the road. It does not entail hospitable relations with the environment. It does not engender the transformation of the island into a realm that is fully inhabitable. For that to occur the explorers must enter into a very different relationship. Not an instrumental relationship in which we subdue the earth, not a technical or natural scientific relationship in which we learn to use and transform the natural resources of our environment, but an intersubjective relationship in which our world becomes a meeting ground between self and other.

The second island, by contrast, is entirely permeated by the welcoming presence of an hospitable other. Part of the intellectual, emotional and spiritual life of that island will take the form of a reflection and a practice on the mystery of this

presence, which always takes the form of a concrete, personal manifestation. Part of the cultural life of the island will therefore necessarily involve us in reflections about the appearance and identity of the hostess Diotima. These reflections and practices will be guided by the question: "Who is this woman?", "In what forms does she appear to us?", "What are her constant attributes", "why do we feel the way we feel when we are in her presence?" "What is the nature of hospitality and of human love?" We no doubt will also engage in psychological questioning and ask what we can learn about her character and her life from the way she laid out her garden, from her choice of plants, from the ingenious irrigation system in place? What can we tell about her from her fishing gear, her bow and arrow? All these objects can be encountered as manifestations of her nearby dwelling presence. All these various items refer to a presence that gives meaning and context to our world. But the most fundamental question that stirs alive all the others from below concerns the one about the miracle of co-presence, of inter-subjectivity, of the neighbor who gives form and legitimacy to our dwelling alongside.

Our world becomes unified when it is hospitably received by the other. In the absence of such a reception our world falls apart into numberless fragments that no logical system, no expertise concerning physical or biological forces can ever put together again. The coherence of our world can not ultimately be explained by a natural science. The coherence of the world is not the accomplishment of a physical body, a biological brain, or a material universe, but the miraculous outcome of an inter-personal, intersubjective relation.

The child in the darkened room becomes frightened as his world begins to fall apart. But the voice of the welcoming other is able to re-establish order to his world, restore its order and heal its divisions. The integrity of our world is the outcome of an intersubjective achievement, never the mere accidental result of natural occurrences. All psychology, sociology, anthropology or philosophy must eventually come to terms with this inescapable starting point.

Buber approached the miraculous order and unity of our world in a slightly different, but ultimately compatible way. He sought to understand the miraculous way in which the world of our senses intertwine with and disclose a world beyond the senses. Like van den Berg he concluded that the encounter between a visualizing body and a visible world, between the activity of hearing and the sound disclosed in that hearing, is in last instance not a matter of material accident, but constitutes a miraculous event that has an intersubjective encounter as its foundation. He wrote:

"we customarily speak of the world of the senses to refer to a world in which there exists vermilion and grass green, C major and B minor, the taste of apple and of wormwood. Was this world anything other than the meeting of our senses with those unapproachable events about whose definition physics always troubles itself in vain? The red that we saw was neither there in the "things", nor just in the

"soul". It at times flames up and glowed just so as a red-perceiving eye and a red-engendering oscillation found themselves over against each other. Where then is the world and its security? The unknown "objects" there, the apparently so well-known and yet not graspable "subjects" here, and the actual and still evanescent meeting of both, the "phenomena" ---was that not already three worlds which could no longer be comprehended from one alone?? What was the being that gave the world which had become so questionable its foundation?" (Buber, M. (1952) *Eclipse of God*. New York, Harper and Row. p. 5)

Buber is pointing to the mysterious, hospitable ground that founds a human world. This world cannot be reduced to physical oscillations, but requires the foundation of a unifying and hospitable ground. The unity of that world cannot be understood in last instance as a material accident but must be understood as resulting from an interaction between a host and a guest. Merleau-Ponty points in a very similar direction in his last essay, *L'oeil et l'esprit* when he wrote:

"A human body comes into existence when a crossing over occurs between seeing and something visible, between a touching and something touched, between one hand and an other, when a spark alights between sensing and what is sensible, when a spark flies from the one to the other, igniting a fire that will keep alive till some accident within the body undoes what no accident would have been able to cause to be..." (Merleau-Ponty, M. (1964) *L'oeil et l'esprit* Paris: Gallimard p. ii , translated by the author)

A spark begins to fly creating the mysterious unity of a human body that brings together what is visible which what sees, what can be sensed with what is sensing. This unity is that of the human body, not that of a biological organism, or a living thing. The spark will some day cease to jump and will thereby *défaire* (undo) the unity *que nul accident n'aurait suffi à faire*, what no accident by itself would have sufficed to bring about. The essential vision of van den Berg and Buber is here. The mysterious spark that alights, the fire that continues burning, the endless back and forth between sensing and the sensible, between touching and the touched, already conforms to a pattern of conversation, to that of an exchange between one person and an other, and can be seen as already laying the foundation of an intersubjective world. With these authors we have entered a world that is no longer the sole domain of accident, cause and effect, or mathematical correlations. The spark and the fire that bind together the human body into the dual unity of a sensible-sensing and a visible seeing already has ceased to be a mere phenomena of nature. It already form part of a world of words and symbols, of passages accross thresholds that bind the world together in ways that "*nul accident n'aurait suffi à faire*". It already belongs to the inhabited world of miracles, which is a world of conversation, of myth, and intersubjectivity.

The dual unity of a question that seeks a response, of a speaking that finds its completion in a listening, of a sensing that forms a dual whole with what is sensed, repeats itself in the unity of host and guest, lover and beloved, mortals and

immortals. In this description Merleau Ponty has left the world of natural scientific thinking to explore a different discourse in which the fundamental unity of the human body is no longer felt to be merely biological, but is understood instead as an intersubjective and cosmic unity of call and response. Within this intersubjective and mythical context the unity of body, soul and human world reveals itself as a labor of love that links the right hand as a neighbor to the left hand, that understands the unity of eye and world as a marriage, and that cultivates the unity of the human world in the manner in which we cultivate all other human alliances and partnerships.

Van den Berg understands the problems of modernity and neurosis within the context of a revolution of thought that has collectively obscured the central mysteries of human existence. The human sciences are themselves deeply implicated in this obfuscation mystification that has removed the spark of intersubjectivity from the horizon of our experience. This is the spark that not only flies between the right and left hand, or between eye and mind, or even between the senses and the meaningful world they reveal, but also between neighbors, the living and their dead, and ultimately between human guests and their divine host. In the wake of the historical developments that have obscured the existence of near-dwelling others our world has tended to break apart into mutually uncommunicative parts that each have their own logic, will and desire. Modernity is marked by this progressive fragmentation which we find detailed in such masterpieces of the literary imagination as Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* and Stevensons *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. This same fragmentation also finds expression in Freud and Breuer's psychoanalytic theories about an internal psychic division between an unconscious and a conscious life. Van den Berg also quotes with approval the sociologist P.M. Sorokin when he writes: "A neurosis is a conflict between different social egos." (p.169)

The neurotic suffers thus from a malaise that affects almost everybody, but that renders only a few manifestly ill. To be neurotic means to suffer from not being able to be oneself, or rather from not being able to remain a recognizable self under different circumstances. The fundamental problem of modernity in general, and of neurosis in particular, is the inability to construct an ordered whole out of one's life. An ordered whole is one in which every part interacts with, and helps to give definition to, every other part of the whole. Such a well-constructed, ordered whole is endowed with presence. It is for this reason that after having seen a great painting, or heard a marvelously coherent tale, or made contact with an exemplary life, we gather the impressions of having been somewhere, of having made contact with something distinctive, of having understood and seen something that was marvelous and coherent.

On the other hand, a badly composed painting, a story filled with loose ends, a disorderly life in which events and action follow each other without rhyme or reason, all leave us dissatisfied in the sense that we are unable to connect up with a distinct vision and a distinct presence. There is something vaguely disconcerting

about being unable to connect with a story, an image, or a life. There is something infinitely sad, and also something vaguely disorienting, in walking past buildings or art works or faces that have nothing to say to us, that are there without being truly *present* to anyone.

Let us think back for a moment to Van den Berg's example of the little boy in the unfamiliar dark bedroom of his aunt. His world was disintegrating because he no longer felt the presence of a nearby other. He called out to his aunt and her response lit up his darkness and restored to him a vital presence. It was this presence that renewed his access to an inhabitable world. A human domain becomes inhabitable only when it is sustained by a near-dwelling presence. All human domains are necessarily neighbored by other domains. Such domains become inhabitable through a threshold that orders all relationships between a "here" and a "there", a self and an other, a dweller and a nearby dweller. An inhabited domain, whether it is a human body, a home, a village or a state, necessarily disintegrates and loses its humanity and viability, the very moment it is deprived of the near-dwelling other. When Van den Berg describes the nature of miracles he focuses on the particular miracle of this near-dwelling presence which orders and supports our identity and makes human dwelling possible.

The quest to understand ourselves and the human condition inevitably brings us face to face with the strange phenomenon of a neighbor who makes our dwelling possible. Our reflection on this theme cannot confine itself to a particular disciplinary context, and cannot be contained completely within a psychological, sociological, anthropological or theological analysis. In approaching this subject-matter Van den Berg occasionally refers in theological terms to this near-dwelling *presence* as God. But he then hastens to add that the nearness of the divine becomes necessarily incarnate in the presence of one human being to another. (Van den Berg (1975) p. 198) It becomes possible therefore to read the story of Gide's childhood experience as a theological narrative about a child's first encounter with the divine. But it is clearly also possible to read it as a psychological tale about a child emancipating from an initially parasitic relationship with a maternal figure, and his entrance into a shared and hospitable world with her. The miracle that gives access to a world is all at once a story of maternal and of divine love, of mundane emancipation and teleology. It is impossible for this reason to make an absolute distinction between the frightened child calling from the dark room to his beloved aunt, and an equally distraught believer calling out for the ordering presence of the divine. Nor can the modern theme of "the death of God" be separated entirely from that of the death of the neighbor, or from the modern disappearance of uncles and aunts, even fathers and mothers. Nor can the fate of the threshold that holds family, friends and neighbors together be entirely separated from the fate of the cult-site or the altar, and of the conscious honoring of such limits as make possible an intersubjective world.

Once we take this perspective it also becomes impossible to make absolute, iron-clad distinctions between healthy and neurotic life. What characterizes both

modern life in general and neurosis in particular is the absence of a life-and-identity sustaining presence of a near-dwelling other.

The internal psychic division between an unconscious and a conscious self mirrors in certain respects the social alienation inherent in the life of the modern family, congregation and neighborhood. The unconscious, writes Van den Berg, is not ultimately an intra-psychic affair, but refers rather to a being ill-situated in respect to others. He comes to the conclusion that "the unconscious is not so much the affair of an individual, but of two people". (Van den Berg, 1975 p.175) Neurosis refers to a manner of living that is estranged from a near-dwelling presence, and therefore remains estranged from a common world, a common sense, a common understanding. "The cause of symptoms" he writes, "is isolation, and the remedy is that of overcoming this isolation." (Van den Berg p.182)

We note that neurosis is not primarily a matter of ignorance that can be corrected by supplying the patient with the right kind of expert knowledge, opinion or advice. What the patient requires of the therapist is not his expertise in solving life's problems, but that he be present to him in a particular manner. The entire art of psychotherapy turns on the therapist's right understanding of the place he is asked to occupy in the patient's life.

In a recently published series of lectures, originally given at the university of Leuven, Van den Berg recounts his therapy with a bright middle aged man who through indecision and personal cowardice had ruined a happy, five year long relationship with a very remarkable woman for whom he continued to feel a deep affection. He suffered from a recurring nightmare in which he stood accused of having killed a five year old child. The patient was able to put his life back in order again once he had understood that the five year old child of his nightmares represented in fact his five year long relationship with the woman he loved. The question Van den Berg posed himself following the successful conclusion of the therapy was why his intelligent and otherwise accomplished and mature patient had been unable to discover for himself the obvious meaning of his dreams. Why had he needed the assistance of a psychotherapist to come to an understanding of his plight and to put his house in order? The interpretations of his dream required no inordinate hermeneutic skills and the problems he had created for himself in his relationship to the woman he loved were only too obvious. Why then had he been unable to make a clear assessment of his own situation? "The answer to that question is obvious" writes Van den Berg. "The correct interpretation of his dream would have placed the patient before problems he could not face by himself " He was in need of someone outside his present circle, someone capable of standing by his side. This is true for psychotherapy in general; it constitutes the very heart of it. The patient is someone who comes to seek clarity. He comes so as not to stand alone while facing a difficult decision in his life. He comes to understand the dream the moment he no longer stands alone.(Van den Berg, J.H. 1996 *Geen Toeval; Metabletica van de Geschiedschrijving*, Kapellen: Pelckman's Kok Agora, p. 46)

Understanding oneself requires not merely the resources but also the presence of more than one persons. Or, put differently, self-understanding is not the achievement of one person, or even of many persons, it is the achievement of a particular relationship between persons. This is the kind of understanding called for in an existential decision or clarification is based on a particular intersubjective configuration. We saw that particular configuration operate in the example of the little boy calling his aunt. We observed the same configuration in the example of the young Gide, who saw a world open up before him at the very moment when he felt himself in a crucial and happy alliance with an other.

To be neurotic ultimately means to be deprived of such a crucial alliance, and psychotherapy's fundamental task is that of thematizing and enacting such enabling alliances as are capable of disclosing a human world to us.

Van den Berg writes that the patient came to him in search of what in Dutch is called *bijstand*. We may translate that term as "help", or as "assistance." But the term literally refers to the act of standing by, or standing with someone in facing a difficult situation. It is curious to note that the English "assistance", like the related Italian, French and Spanish forms of the same word, repeats the same metaphor of a standing (L. *stare*) with or by (*ad*) someone. Ancient Greek repeats it likewise in *paristemi*, as does contemporary German in *Beistand* and *beistehen*. These metaphors for assisting, helping, or supporting someone all point to what is perhaps at the same time the most basic and most essential of human relationships. This most profound relationship permits us to be human by giving us access to a human world. The art of psychotherapy concerns itself with understanding and cultivating this most basic of all relationships.

A number of years ago the American poet Wendell Berry published a book of essays which bore the title: " *Standing by Words*" (Berry, Wendell (1983) *Standing by Words* San Francisco North Point Press p.208) On the cover it featured the Chinese character Xi, which depicts a human being standing upright next to a sign for "words". The title of the book was inspired by Ezra Pound's meditation on the meaning of that sign. The meaning attached to it by Confucian teaching is that of "fidelity", "sincerity", of "faith" and that of a "keeping of one's faith and one's word." The metaphor of "standing by" someone or something performs a crucial role also in this particular context. The pictogram makes clear that words are meaningful only within the context of a faithful human presence. They become meaningless in the absence of a human presence "standing nearby".

On the other hand, the pictogram also suggests that the human figure is stayed by words, that it stands and falls depending on the relationships it maintains within a symbolic order. Neither the words, nor the human presence can exist in the absence of each other. Neither can come into being without the faithful support of the other.

The words of the pictogram represent the faithful, dependable links that connect one human being to another and each being to a human world. In the absence of those links the human figure falls and disappears. We cultivate and achieve our humanity only in our abiding, faithful relationships to others. We *are* this relationship of “standing by one another”, and it is this relationship that opens for us an inhabitable world.

Van den Berg closes his case history with the following words:

"The patient is someone who stands outside, who requires someone to stand with him. This is the very heart of psychotherapy. The patient, the person who comes seeking help, does not seek in the first place an explanation or clarification. He comes so as not to stand alone in facing an important decision. The moment he no longer stands alone the dream becomes clarified." (Van den Berg 1996, p.46)

What announces itself in this sentence is not merely the thought that we feel less anxious in facing uncertainties and dangers when we are in the presence of allies. It contains the deeper thought that it is possible to understand ourselves and our world only as long as we maintain honest and loyal relationships to others and remain stayed by truthful words. Under-standing oneself, one's dreams and one's world is here not in the first place a question of logic or cleverness or efficient strategy. Such understanding comes only with the cultivation of sound relationships and of honest words.

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