



ANXIETIES OF KNOWING: ACADEMIC PATHOLOGIES, CRITICAL PHILOSOPHY AND THE CULTURE OF SELF¹

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ABSTRACT. This exploratory paper coins the term “academic pathologies” to discuss in a critical approach the culture of the academic self focusing on what is called “anxieties of knowledge”. The paper plays with these themes in reference to the work of Kierkegaard, the American film director Woody Allen, and Jacques Derrida. This topic and paper has eluded me over the years as I tried to gapple with various formulations. The paper that follows the history of my failed attempts is an exercise in self-therapy, confession and self-examination about my continuing inability to produce this paper.

Keywords: academic pathologies; anxieties of knowing; Kierkegaard; Woody Allen; Derrida

Anxiety may be compared with dizziness. He whose eye happens to look down into the yawning abyss becomes dizzy. But what is the reason for this? It is just as much in his own eye as in the abyss, for suppose he had not looked down. Hence anxiety is the dizziness of freedom, which emerges when the spirit wants to posit the synthesis and freedom looks down into its own possibility, laying hold of finiteness to support itself. Freedom succumbs in this dizziness

—Søren Kierkegaard (1968) *The Concept of Anxiety*, p. 152

Who has the more difficult task: the teacher who lectures on earnest things a meteor’s distance from everyday life-or the learner who should put it to use?

—Søren Kierkegaard (1962) *Works of Love*, p. 62

1. Background

I have been trying to write one particular academic paper now for many years, at least over a decade and I can’t cut the mustard so to speak. This

paper has gone by different names that have stabilized around the words “academic pathologies”. Sometimes I have tried unsuccessfully to write this paper with different co-authors including my wife and partner Tina Besley who has a therapy background as a counselor in one of her past lives: I am one of her “works in progress”. Other times I have tried to work on the paper with other colleagues. The paper has never got much beyond an idea or a few scribbled notes. Actually I lie: I counted recently when coming to write this paper seven different beginnings some of a few lines, others, an abstract, a table of contents, and an introduction sketching out the contours of the concept. I will share these failed attempts a little later. I should say this failure to write is a very unusual situation for me because I write easily and freely. It has not always been the case. I should explain that by most standards I do write quite a lot. I have written over 60 books and some 500 papers and chapters. I also do a lot of editing. At last count I edit over 32 issues of journals per year.

This paper is an exercise in self-therapy, confession and self-examination about my continuing inability to produce this paper. It is also a public exorcism. I am hoping that I can finally rid myself of this ghost paper, an insistent idea that forever returns to my academic consciousness and says: “write this paper it is probably the most important piece you will ever write!”; “make this idea!” “Create!” Only by finally writing it will I be able to stop thinking about it. There is a certain anxiety with not being able to produce. For me there is also as well the sheer luxury of being able to endlessly dwell in a state of indecision and contemplation, a state of anxiety *before* knowledge, before choosing how and with what words one will put a stamp on a series of difficult concepts and aspects of experience that swim in the imagination but refuse the various forms I try to assign them: I call this the “anxieties of knowing”.

I believe that I coined this phrase linking it to a range of different academic pathologies. “Anxieties of knowing” include anxieties about reading, writing, speaking, thinking and learning. By anxiety I mean the commonly accepted definition that emphasizes “uneasiness” or “apprehension” or “uncertainty” and sometimes “fear” of an anticipated state, event or situation that may cause psychological impairment or feelings of insecurity and helplessness. The notion of anxiety here could easily be called by a variety of other kinship terms: “dread”, “angst”, even “despair” or less dramatically, “annoyance”, “irritation”, “disturbance”. It’s a universal sentiment or feeling that is often associated in the philosophical literature with “doubt” or “skepticism” and sometimes with forms of “madness” that we might say take the form of pronounced, exaggerated, deep anxiety that can lead to desperation, despair, anguish and depression.

This is the “dark epistemology” of not-knowing, the neuroanatomy of the visceral mind, the confusion of unruly, inchoate and formless thought that troubles us and calls for resolution and order, if only temporarily. The word “knowing” is used here with imprecision: some people will say why not “writing” or “thinking”? I am happy to contemplate these substitute notions but I also employ the poet’s license to invent the metaphors. “Anxieties of knowing”, “academic pathologies”: *Anxiety, Dread, Angst, Despair*. This run of concepts reminds me of Kierkegaard’s example of a man standing on the edge of a cliff who fears falling into the abyss but also feels the terrifying impulse to throw himself over it.

The experience of anxiety or dread is a fact of our complete freedom to do something that includes the most terrifying possibilities and triggers our feelings of dread. In Kierkegaard’s theological discussion, “anxiety” precedes “sin”. Hence, for Kierkegaard, “anxiety is the dizziness of freedom”. As he says in one of his journals, “Anxiety is the first reflex of possibility, a look yet a terrible spell” (JP, vol 1, 102: Pap. X2 A22). The Kierkegaard scholar Arne Gron (2008) explains: “The concept of anxiety leads us directly to freedom, but what freedom means is encircled negatively by examining forms of unfreedom. In anxiety the possibility of freedom presents itself, but in anxiety a human being also becomes unfree” (p. ix). For Kierkegaard, as Gron reminds us, anxiety opens up the question of what it means to be a human being.

I use the term “anxieties of knowing” to suggest the “burden of freedom” that one faces in choosing words to formulate a sentence, or a research topic, or an interpretation of a work, or indeed an utterance. On any topic, there is a vast literature, a myriad of choices of word and phrases. The past is strewn with many literatures: so many great thinkers, poets, writers have gone before us. The prospect of saying something—anything—of significance is daunting, and many students and faculty are prone to ask themselves: what do I really have to say? Do I have *anything* to say? Who am I in the history of ideas to add anything of consequence? Conscious of the past couple of thousand years of tradition, these anxious individuals are reduced to silence and to the anguish of thinking they have nothing to contribute.

The phrase “anxieties of knowing” also reminds me of the greatest living Jewish New York philosophers, film director Woody Allen. The gravity of his philosophy is explored in a series of movies, scripts, roles, plays and books that exemplify the American tradition of stand-up and slapstick comedy inflected with European art cinema, particularly Bergman and Fellini. He starts his “Speech to the Graduates” (1979) with the following remark:

More than at any other time in history, mankind faces a crossroads. One path leads to despair and utter hopelessness. The other, to total extinction. Let us pray we have the wisdom to choose correctly.

I speak, by the way, not with any sense of futility, but with a panicky conviction of the absolute meaninglessness of existence which could easily be misinterpreted as pessimism.

It is not. It is merely a healthy concern for the predicament of modern man. (Modern man is here defined as any person born after Nietzsche's edict that "God is dead," but before the hit recording "I Wanna Hold Your Hand.") This "predicament" can be stated one of two ways, though certain linguistic philosophers prefer to reduce it to a mathematical equation where it can be easily solved and even carried around in the wallet.

Adam Cohen (2007), writing for the *New York Times*, suggests: "More than any other American writer, Mr. Allen put existential dread on the map." Reviewing Allen's two collections of his comedic essays, *The Insanity Defense: The Complete Prose* and *Mere Anarchy*, he writes:

When Mr. Allen started out doing stand-up comedy in Greenwich Village clubs, young people sat in cafes reading books like Sartre's "Being and Nothingness," and debated man's fate late into the night. Mr. Allen found himself turning to the same questions. "What if everything is an illusion and nothing exists?" he wondered. "In that case, I definitely overpaid for my carpet."

Existence is considered as an absurd cosmic joke. As Allen once said about all the characters in his films: "You're born and you don't know the script, you suffer tragedy and catastrophe, and then you are wiped out for no offence that you have committed". Allen explores the desire of many of his characters to ground their lives in traditional ethical values despite their realization that such values may no longer be certain and the idea that contemporary American society is rapidly descending into barbarism precisely because of societal failure to maintain a sense of individual moral responsibility.

Might this not apply especially to the academy? Can it not be suspected that a certain pathology, a kind of academic neurosis, might arise out of the desire among many academics to ground their lives in traditional academic values despite their realization that such values may no longer be certain, and the insight that contemporary academic culture is rapidly descending

into barbarism? And might barbarism not be a result of societal failure to maintain a sense of individual intellectual responsibility?

I am not talking here about the fear or anxiety as a clinical or a practical problem, but rather as a philosophical and educational problem; one that is connected with a range of other problems of self, fundamentally of self-expression, of the culture of the academic self, often exacerbated by “performance anxiety” in an environment of academic capitalism.

The fear of writing is not simply a fear experienced by scholars and students who experience problems with writing but also by those for whom writing is everything.

I am often asked why I write so much. “Writing too much” can be seen as compulsive behaviour, as an academic pathology in itself. One colleague told me facetiously and semi-seriously some years ago that my new performance target for next year was to write half of what I wrote last year and the following year to write half again. He is a colleague for whom writing is a form of self-torture causing him deep and continuing distress, sleepless nights, and hours of sitting at a computer mulling over the same sentence for hours. He can spend a week writing a paper and end up with nothing but a whole raft of feelings of self-disgust and emptiness. It is self-imposed distress, a form of self-hurt and personal self-inflicted behavior often causing deep psychological suffering. He and many others—both students and colleagues-- have a deep anxiety about and fear of writing.

Philosophically speaking, we can consider it an “academic pathology” that is connected to deeper problems of the academic self and to the question of style and to problems of self-stylization or self-creation. We might say simply “writing the self” to use an expression used by the late Michel Foucault.

Both terms--“academic pathology” and “writing the self”-- I have used consistently in my thinking and in my work over the years. I borrowed the latter term from Foucault who used it to describe an ancient form of self-writing (*hupomnemata*) used by the Greeks, a kind of journal or notebook to capture the already said, to collect what one has managed to hear or read, and for a purpose that is nothing less than the shaping of the self” (Foucault, 1997: p. 211). It is an ancient art for “care of the self”. The concept of “writing the self”, like reading or speaking the self, is part of attaining selfhood in the world of literacy and especially in academic culture. Texts, especially those in the humanities, are autoethnographies in this sense, and we have genres that consist entirely of the expression of self: diaries, letters, confessions, autobiographies. Some scholars argue that the modern novel arises as a narrative expression of character. Is all writing both autobiographical and therapeutic?¹

Foucault's colleague at the College de France, Pierre Hadot, signals to us the importance of writing the self as the basis for understanding the development of academic cultures. In his investigations of "spiritual exercises" in Latin antiquity Hadot (1995: 81), he describes in the philosophy of the Stoics the way in which "thought, as it were, takes itself as its own subject-matter" as the basis for an art of living where the individual is transformed into an authentic state of heightened self-consciousness providing both inner peace and freedom.²

But if it is the case that the academy itself is unhealthy, one might read distorted self-writing and the pathologies of academic life in terms of the fundamental tension between the individual's quest for freedom and the demands of conformity placed on him by the culture in which this freedom is to come to expression, i.e. see it in light of Freud's reflections on the notion and consequences of a "sick" culture in *Civilization and its Discontents*. Academic pathologies, then, have to do with the development and consequences of changes in subjects who suffer from impediments to their fundamental self-expression, often caused or brought about by the academic culture itself.³

2. First Attempt

Against the backdrop of these reflections on the position of the individual academic writer in contemporary academic culture, let me now return to this paper that refuses to be written. Let us call it "Academic Pathologies". Here is the one of my first failed attempts to deal to or realize this concept, one that came with trying to frame an abstract:

In this paper I coin and explore the term 'academic pathologies' as a form of analysis for understanding disorders of the academic self. The paper first provides a genealogy of the various depth hermeneutical models employed by Freud focusing on the thinkers in the critical theory tradition and it evaluates the attempts of Marcuse (*One Dimensional Man*), Adorno (*The Authoritarian Personality*) and Wilhelm Reich (*The Mass Psychology of Fascism*) to provide a critical psychoanalysis that serves to interpret the structure of the personality in relation to the structure of society, a relation first contemplated by Freud in *Civilization and Its Discontents*. I indicate how in the critical tradition such as Christopher Lasch (*The Culture of Narcissism; The Minimal Self*) and Michel Foucault (*Madness and Civilization; The Birth of the Clinic; History of Sexuality*) provide some interesting possibilities for developing an alternative to mainstream educational psychology in understanding academic behavior.

I never got beyond the abstract, but it did indicate the territory I wanted to traverse.

3. Second Attempt

Here is a second more sustained effort:

One can see a certain strand of modern philosophical thinking as the evolution of the idea of identity as the product of institutional creation and self-constitution. Beginning with the rehabilitation of Hegelian thought and later Marxism and Freudianism in twentieth-century French philosophy and its coalescence with elements of the phenomenological tradition, in particular phenomenological existentialism, there emerged a critical philosophy of the subject that we are still working out.

The influence of the Frankfurt School, in particular, is relevant for its combination of modernist radicality, on the one hand, and its intellectual indebtedness to the concepts of *Bildung* and German philosophy more broadly, on the other, both fostering a set of kindred concepts for thinking—autonomy, authenticity, duty, responsibility and obligation—and calling them into question or even suspicion as thinkable “after Auschwitz”. This set of issues and problems came around to visit upon itself a form of soul-searching and self-criticism imposed by the insight that there can be no self-evident point of rest for the terrible labour of criticism, opening up for both feminist and postcolonial interventions. What became “postcolonial studies” in the 1970s, for example, developed and inspired a psychopathology of colonization.

This felt I was on the right track. Intuitively, I felt my instincts were close to the heart of the matter, but I again faltered. The scope was too large, even if it pinpointed the phenomenological beginnings. It spanned across the whole of nineteenth century German philosophy and twentieth century French and German philosophy.

4. Third Attempt

Starting over, I took another take, which began with a couple of quotations from Wittgenstein:

What is your aim in philosophy?
–To show the fly the way out of the fly bottle (PI 309)
--Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*

I am sitting with a philosopher in the garden; he says again and again “I know that that’s a tree”, pointing to a tree that is near us. Someone else arrives and hears this, and I tell him: “This fellow isn’t insane. We are only doing philosophy.”
--Wittgenstein, *On Certainty* § 467

It continued with the following introduction:

Wittgenstein was strongly influenced by Sigmund Freud, Karl Krauss, and William James. He famously develops a therapeutic view of philosophy as one that sees philosophy as a parasitic and infectious discourse feeding on the use of words in ordinary language and failing to get a clear view of the way we talk about the world. Philosophy is not only destructive (or deconstructive) in the sense of dismantling pseudoproblems, it has therapeutic effects and philosophy can act as a kind of purgative enabling us to stop doing philosophy thus freeing us from philosophical pathologies. Linguistic therapy can defuse and neutralize miscreant theories and it can also free us from the dominant or ruling metaphors that hold us captive. Wittgenstein alerts us to the way in which very general pictures of how we view the relation between language and reality easily become part of our philosophical illusion and a fit subject for pathology of the intellect. In an obvious sense, these broad philosophical assumptions that govern the discourses of the human sciences, of the humanities and social sciences, constitute a clear picture of academic pathologies based on the kind of confusion that takes place when language goes on holiday. In this context, as Wittgenstein demonstrates, philosophical understanding is often a matter of will rather than intellect.

Wittgenstein once said he regarded himself as a disciple of Freud. Indeed, Jacques Bouveresse, in *Wittgenstein Reads Freud*, argues that ‘Wittgenstein is the “disciple” of Freud who seems to do nothing but raise objections to his master’ (p. 41). And while Wittgenstein attacked the scientific status of psychoanalysis, he did also believe that Freud had invented a line of thinking. Wittgenstein’s view of Freud was tempered by his own reappraisal of positivism, and his view on the purity of language came from the Viennese satirist and critic Krauss who in the journal *Die Fackel* wrote: ‘Psychoanalysis is that spiritual disease of which it considers itself to be the cure.’ Krauss believed reason to be instrumental and values to arise out of creative imagination. Wittgenstein, in turn, sought to clarify and purify language, linking language to ethics as a critique of culture. Russell Goodman (2002) has argued that Wittgenstein learned a great deal from William James’ *The Principles of Psychology* and *The Varieties of Religious*

Experience, and shared a set of commitments: “to anti-foundationalism, to the description of concrete details of human life, to the priority of practice over intellect, and to the importance of religion in understanding human life” (p. 5).”

Linking the Kraussian-Wittgensteinian view of therapy with to Adorno’s *The Authoritarian Personality*, I tried to develop a sort of typology of academic disorders. Horkheimer’s Preface provides a telling description of the starting point of the book, which I felt captured something of what I wanted to do:

The central theme of the work is a relatively new concept— the rise of an "anthropological" species we call the authoritarian type of man. In contrast to the bigot of the older style he seems to combine the ideas and skills which are typical of a highly industrialized society with irrational or anti-rational beliefs. He is at the same time enlightened and superstitious, proud to be an individualist and in constant fear of not being like all the others, jealous of his independence and inclined to submit blindly to power and authority. The character structure which comprises these conflicting trends has already attracted the attention of modern philosophers and political thinkers. This book approaches the problem with the means of sociopsychological research.

Adorno’s “authoritarian personality” referred to a cluster of traits reflecting a desire for order, a kind of rigidity, unquestioning obedience, respect for authority, a desire for highly structured command, scapegoating and a highly conventional outlook. The authoritarian personality theory was devised to explain racism and the F-scale that Adorno et al designed is no longer used, partly because group loyalty is seen as a commonplace and ethnocentrism and stereotyping are also seen as common and ineradicable psychological processes.

I stopped here, because there seemed to be no point in trying to resuscitate a theory that had lost its vitality.

5. Fourth Attempt

In yet another version, I entitled the essay: “Academic Pathologies: Power, Identity and the Political Psychology of Institutions”. I was trying to focus on institutional power relations as a crucial factor in the development of academic pathologies. In part I, was motivated by my own very personal observations in different university institutions around the world of the simple truism concerning the effects of administrative power on individuals: how suddenly the power and status of an administrative position would

transform the personality of an individual and how it led often to the effects of the exercise of administrative reason and academic life, deforming it, regulating it, counting it. I wanted to theorize this condition or at least I wanted to ensure that any theory of academic pathology could take account of this common observation. I tried to understand the larger institutional forces at work in terms of academic reason, sometimes cross-cut and disruption by administrative reason and increasingly by commercial or entrepreneurial reason.

The attempt ended up in a return to early Western origins, although under the same title:

On Temple of Apollo at the Theatre of Delphi in the valley of Docis in Greece-- the site of the Delphi Oracle, perhaps the most famous in classical Greece--three inscriptions were carved into the lintel of the Temple:

γνωθι σεαυτόν (gnothi seauton = “know thyself”)

μηδέν άγαν (meden agan = “nothing in excess”)

Εγγύα πάρα δ'ατη (eggua para d'atē = “make a pledge and mischief is nigh”)

These maxims are attributed to the Seven Sages. The inscriptions reputedly have their origins in prehistoric times and in the worship of the Goddess Gaia. There is some archeological evidence to suggest occupation of the site around the 8th century BC. Apollo spoke through the Oracle, generally virtuous older women known as the Pythia. According to Dr E. Partida, the archaeologist at the Hellenistic Ministry Culture’s website at the archeological ruins, the Oracle was consulted on all major occasions and made prophecies:

Between the sixth and fourth centuries BC, the Delphic oracle, which was regarded as the most trustworthy, was at its peak. It was delivered by the Pythia, the priestess, and interpreted by the priests of Apollo. Cities, rulers and ordinary individuals alike consulted the oracle, expressing their gratitude with great gifts and spreading its fame around the world. The oracle was thought to have existed since the dawn of time...

The rise of the Rationalist movement in philosophy in the third century BC, damaged the oracle’s authority, yet its rituals continued unchanged into the second century AD, when it was consulted by Hadrian and visited by Pausanias.

As Foucault notes in *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* , ‘Know thyself’ is the founding expression of the relation between the subject and truth and ‘know thyself’ has a fundamental relationship to ‘care of oneself’ (*epimeleia*

heatou). Foucault suggests that the inscription ‘know thyself’ ‘did not prescribe self-knowledge, neither as a basis of morality, nor as part of a relationship with the gods’ (p. 3). The inscription only gathers the significance concerning self-knowledge much later. At the time, it meant something like ‘don’t ask too many questions’ or ‘as a mortal don’t presume too much of the gods’.

Only when it appears in philosophical discourse (such as the *Apology*) does it take on added significance, especially when coupled with ‘take care of yourself’. Indeed, Foucault maintains that the latter -‘take care of yourself’- is the ground or foundation for the former -‘know thyself’. Thus, ‘take care of yourself’ was, according to Foucault, ‘a fundamental principle for describing the philosophical attitude in Greek, Hellenistic and Roman culture’ (p. 8). Epicurus uses the Greek word ‘therapeuein’ meaning both medical care (therapy for the soul) as well as service to a master. This attitude became the principle of moral rationality in Greek culture and even permeated Christianity, appearing especially in Christian asceticism.

Within the Western philosophical tradition the self has been posited as an objective, unified and universal entity—both ahistorical and acultural—that transcends particular historical and cultural contexts. The concept has grown out of religious and theological discussions where the enduring part of the essential, “true” or authentic self focussed upon the soul, spirit or mind—an immaterial aspect—that survived the body. In modern Western thinking associated with the names of Descartes, Hobbes, Locke and Kant, the sovereign self has been conceived as distinct, individuated, autonomous and rational, conceivable independently of, and logically prior to, society, history and culture. Indeed, this tradition of the rational, autonomous subject has taken two influential forms: the Kantian ethical subject and the self-interested individual of liberal political economy established by Adam Smith and David Ricardo—so-called *homo economicus*, based on assumptions of individuality, rationality and self-interest. Both lines of development have been responsible for founding and structuring the central institutions of liberal culture synonymous with modernity.

While socially and politically progressive in its day—when these related conceptions first received their formulation—a number of telling critiques have been mounted against the self as sovereign individual. These critiques have come from all quarters. Numerous feminist philosophers have argued that the dominant Western concept of self is both patriarchal and masculinist, and have substituted most often a relational notion of self, based on the ethic of care. Marxist and socialist critics have drawn attention to the ideological nature of the subject underlying liberal political economy, insisting that the self is a set social relations defined largely by underlying economic forces. Scholars from psychoanalysis have criticised the

assumptions of rationality and individuality positing relational modes of analysis that recognise more fully the role of emotions and desire. Communitarians have criticised the liberal individual as the atomic political sub-stratum beyond which one cannot go to invoke a communitarian view of the polity. Critics from other cultures have questioned the ethnocentrism and Eurocentrism of Western notions of self and the way it has been advanced as the basis of a universalist global society. Some of these strands of critique share with postmodernist and poststructuralist accounts the radical working assumption that the Western concept of self is an historical and cultural construction--an historical ontology--that is inextricably bound up with questions of power. On this view, Western concepts of the self have shifted over time and are neither necessary nor universal.

The rest of this attempted and failed essay goes on to explore themes similar to those recounted above and finishes with the following notes for different sections on Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard. I took this passage from Jens Glebe-Moeller's (1997) "Notes on Wittgenstein's Reading of Kierkegaard:"

Wittgenstein told his friend Maurice Drury that Kierkegaard was the most profound author of the nineteenth century and a saint. Both Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein regard philosophy as an ethical pursuit in which analysis and conceptual clarification are to be employed not in the service of speculative thought, but to identify self-deception and dispel illusion in order to make it possible to live an authentic life.

At this point and in reflection of where I have been, I realize that there are at least two lines of argument I would like to add to this *mélange*. First, a new insertion from Judith Butler's (1997) *Excitable Speech* that introduces the gender dimension into the speaking, writing, thinking subject. Butler here formulates gender as a *performative* category rather than a fixed or stable identity, and explores the phenomenon of "hate speech" in the US. "Excitable speech" is a metaphor for the complex interrelations between language, identity and agency. Butler maintains we are all linguistic beings and become ourselves through the continual and always risky negotiation with the very linguistic system that permits our semiotic identity to emerge. For Butler, linguistic being proceeds from the intersubjective nature of language that is both enabling and disabling, with great power to wound but also makes possible the speaking and writing time of the subject. If the notion of "anxieties of knowledge" applies at all most certainly it applies with regard to the discursive (self-)positioning.

Second, and in relation to educational and philosophical themes that run so deep in Aotearoa, what I am going to call the "imperial writing subject".

I cannot do justice to the complexity of this topic here but let me at least provide a telling example of the kind of worry that I have: prior to 1988, Maori children who were fluent speakers of te reo, Maori speakers who grew up of marae in rural areas like Pungaru, at school were forced to “write” te reo Maori rather than “speak” it in NZ School Certificate Examinations. Successive generations of Maori children fluent in te reo Maori were failed at the subject “Maori” because it was an examination that examined only written Maori (i.e., the anglicized, alphabetized English literate form), and for many this was equivalent to *failing at their own culture*. The pathological consequences have been enormously damaging for Maori students.⁴

7. In Lieu of a Conclusion

This paper has been a history of my failed attempts to manufacture a usable concept of “academic pathology” that does not simply rest on disorders of the individual academic self, and to address problems surrounding the anxiety of knowing or the fear of writing. Throughout the essay and during its writing it became clearer to me that the *positionality* of the subject was important but also, and increasingly, the cultural specificity of how fear is experienced, how anxiety manifests itself, and how power relations are perceived. For instance, how does the fear of writing manifest itself in traditionally oral cultures? How is gender made manifest in academic writing? And what is entailed in the making of an academic self for women, for Maori, for cultural minorities, for immigrants, for those for whom thinking and writing in ideographs is the cultural norm?

To deal adequately with these anxiety disorders—anxieties of knowing—we need to locate them firmly within the wider psychological ecology of the culture of the self and to encourage an ongoing set of reflections on the question of academic self-knowledge. In this way, we may come to understand more deeply that knowing has its own pathologies.

NOTES

1. An earlier and longer version of this essay was published earlier in *Linguistic & Philosophical Investigations*, 2014, 13: 55–76.

2. I have used the term “writing the self” in relation to the Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein’s confessional style of philosophizing that is compelled to tell the truth and thus creates conditions for ethical self-formation (Peters, 2002). See also my wider work on Wittgenstein with colleagues Jim Marshall, Nick Burbules and Paul Smeyers, Peters et al (1999; 2008). I regard this noting of writing the self as an outgrowth of the Continental tradition of the philosophy of the subject. For various formulations around this theme see Peters (1993, 1997, 2001, 2003, 2005), Besley and Peters (2008). On discourse and positioning theory, see Peters & Appel (1996) and Peters and Howie (1996). More recently, see my recent essay on Guattari (Peters, 2013) and the edited collection with the Mexican philosopher Alicia de Alba on *Subjects in Process* (Peters & de Alba, 2013).

3. For my considered position, see my Introduction to my selected works (Peters, 2012). On academic genres and writing, see Peters (2009).

4. I talk of the *architexture* of fear of writing: Fear of writing is often fear of being an author (being a subject); Fear of writing is fear of self-expression; Fear of writing is deeply concerned with questions of self and identity; Fear of writing is also fear of thinking (if one accepts a close connection between writing and thinking); Fear of writing is not only individually experienced, but also socially experienced and constructed; Fear of writing involves choices about discursive form which may have an unconscious element; Fear of writing may be related to fear of reading, speaking, thinking. Chandler (2007) indicates: “In Composition Studies, many researchers assumed that emotions connected to students’ life situations and individual psychology, and could not be integrated into pedagogical practice” and she reviews theories of embodied cognition and explorations of writing and healing. Composition Studies is not generally recognized in NZ universities except for a few classes in “creative writing”.

5. The project Te Reo o te Taitokerau was concerned with introducing an oral component into the exam, but it had a much wider political agenda. I spent seven years in the field working in the Tai Tokerau on a range of related projects. This experience early in my career was at once personally transformative. I began to understand the significance of the oral, its place in the stream of life at the heart of Maori culture. I also began to understand the marginalized nature of teachers of te reo Maori in the state system of education, the way in which “enforced writing in English” was conceived by early educationalists because te reo Maori was widely regarded as “an imperfect vehicle for thought”, and I witnessed in the 1980s the widespread extent of institutional racism in NZ schools. See Peters and Marshall, 1988; 1989a,b,c, 1990 and Peters, Para & Marshall, 1989.

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