
Mindful Uncertainty in Artmaking

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January 31, 2023

Thesis submitted in fulfilment for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
at the
University of Canberra, Australian Capital Territory, Australia

Abstract

Research examining applications of mindfulness in professional and educational activity has proliferated in recent years, establishing theoretical frameworks and empirical validation for the use of mindfulness tailored to specific professional and educational pursuits. Yet there is little research into potential benefits of mindfulness in arts practice and education. This study examines mindfulness as a method to address challenges artists face in engaging productively with the uncertainty that is intrinsic to artists' work. It affirms that practicing mindfulness in processes of artmaking can enable artists to tolerate uncertainty. The research also finds that by enabling ease with uncertainty, mindfulness can offer artists access to generative potentials of not knowing. These include mental engagements known as flow and beginner's mind, and the ability to authentically inhabit narratives that, in their embrace of uncertainty, facilitate expanded horizons of possibility in artmaking. Utilising arts-based research methods, the project also demonstrates the value of practice-led and interdisciplinary models of research in the field. Establishing a beachhead for the inclusion of arts-based discourses in mindfulness research, this examination suggests future lines of enquiry into potential benefits of mindfulness to artists, and a model of interdisciplinary mindfulness research involving arts-based methodologies available for evaluation and extension.

Acknowledgments

My heartfelt indebtedness goes to my supervisors Dr. Ross Gibson and Dr. Tony Eaton. This would not have been possible without them. In his quiet wisdom and patient trust of uncertainty, Dr. Gibson guided me through the development of this project. Dr. Eaton's gentle but firm guidance and caring disposition enabled me to complete the thesis. I thank Dr. Anne Cooper for generous conversations that helped keep the work of this project tied to my own story. I would also like to thank Dr. Auriol Weigold for her sensitive copy editing, and Candida Spence for her patient help with formatting. Finally, I thank Chris, who supported me in countless ways throughout this project.

Conversations with each of you will continue to sing in my mind well beyond project's end.

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Preface

This PhD is focused on ways that mindfulness can assist artists, such as myself, to dwell at ease in the unknown. This PhD is about ways that *mindful uncertainty* can enable artists to both tolerate and thrive in unsettled and borderless processes of artmaking.

I'm a sound artist—working across performance, sound installation, and *radio art*¹—and a mindfulness teacher in a hospital setting. It's from the intersection of these perspectives that my research project has emerged.

Thus, I commenced my research with a strong implicit sense, perhaps a little more substantial than a hunch, that artistic practice can be enhanced by what I have described as mindful uncertainty. This doctorate has been conducted to test this implicit sense. I intend to draw it into an explicit status so that it can be analysed and explicated until a clearly espoused set of principles epitomising mindful uncertainty in artmaking can be generated and communicated to the creative and scholarly community.

For this arts-based research doctorate I developed a program involving two creative projects, in the form of two new radio programs. One is a radio documentary essay that forms the basis of my contextual review in chapter two. The other is a work of radio art that catalyses practice-led research in this project. Thus, the full doctoral dossier is a combination of the creative artworks I have made for this project, and a text that reflects upon and synthesises everything I have learned in relation to my research questions using the arts-based research methods.

To examine artists' perspectives in the field, I have relied on both a thorough accounting of my own mindful uncertainty in artistic processes, and descriptions by dancers, painters, film makers and writers. To obtain their accounts of mindful uncertainty in artmaking, I conducted qualitative research with a reference group composed of five artists, each an experienced meditator. Even so, a substantial amount of knowledge generated in this doctorate has come from my own, purposeful practice-led research, as I drafted, refined, delivered, and reflected upon the radio artwork that I deliberately staged as an experiment to draw my implicit understanding into an explicit status. The

¹ Radio art can take the form of soundscape, sound art, documentary, experimental narrative, performance, radio drama, electroacoustic music, sound poetry and other creative forms intended for the radio.

artwork, discussed in chapter four, has provided me with rich caches of evidence, from which I draw insights about the utility of *mindful uncertainty*, and upon which I can base the principles that I have finally extracted from the entire doctoral inquest.

Through undertaking this research project I've come to understand my art practice as a way of attending to what life presents—a willingness to respond creatively amidst the flux.

I am an ocean swimmer. At times, when the sea is rough, feeling my body pulled this way and that, I imagine myself to be swimming to shore only to realise that great atmospheric forces roiling the ocean have turned me out to sea again. Occasionally the tidal unrest is so forceful I sense that if the ocean wanted to take me, it would take me. In such moments, I focus on the felt sense of being moved by great forces. I notice the experience of seeing sand below me uplifted, moving in swirling twisters. I register the cold on my skin and the eerie absence of hearing. Thoughts flow on in the periphery as I focus on this silent awareness that takes in things as they are, in the moment of their appearance. The usual schools of fish whose darting movements I often follow—they too are absent. Where, I wonder, do they seek refuge in storms like these.

During the writing of this thesis the *COVID-19* pandemic has exposed life's precariousness, and our collective need for thriving within uncertainty. Artists' work has never been more important. The quality of the awareness that informs such work has never been more vital.

Sherre DeLys, Sydney, June 30, 2022

Chapter 1 Mindful Uncertainty in Artmaking



Figure 1. Young, K.S (2022) Blurred image. Adapted from Arhats of Daily Introspection, From Five Hundred Arhats from Changnyeongsa Temple Powerhouse Museum, Ultimo NSW, Australia. <https://www.maas.museum/event/five-hundred-arhats/> Image taken by Sherre DeLys.

And I guess I just don't know
And I guess that I just don't know
—Lou Reed, "Heroin"

1.1 Introduction

This arts-based research examines how practicing mindfulness might assist artists to tolerate and even to thrive in uncertainty, and ways that facilitates access to the generative potentials of uncertainty in artmaking.

Artists work in cognitive realms of the indeterminate (Carabine, 2013; Grierson, 2007).

Carabine (2013) identifies the mental capacity to tolerate high levels of uncertainty as a key skill in artmaking. Despite this, she argues, we know little about how artists might build a capacity to stay with the, sometimes, anxious uncertainties of the artistic process, as this aspect of an artist's growth is rarely addressed in the literature (Carabine, 2013).

I intend to demonstrate that mindfulness can strengthen artists' abilities to withstand difficult but necessary aspects of art practice. Further, my aim is to uncover ways that mindfulness can render the generative potentials of uncertainty increasingly available in artists' work.

In aiming to offer a vision for the potentials of arts practice in which the productive potentials of uncertainty are increasingly free flowing, the research is also conceived in direct relationship to the broader social context.

1.2 Social Context

Uncertainty is the condition of our times. Examining ways in which practicing mindfulness can enable artists to tolerate and to thrive in states of uncertainty, my broadest hope is that this research will support artists' abilities to address challenging uncertainties of the current era. And though this hope takes me beyond the limited scope of my research, it is important that I identify my axiomatic position.

We live in an era characterised by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA) (Murugan et al., 2020). During the writing of this exegesis, the Covid-19 global pandemic, declared by *The World Health Organization* on 11 March 2020, has caused ongoing social and economic disruption around the world (Foss, 2020; Karalis, 2020; Krammer, 2022; Majumdar, Biswas, & Sahu, 2020; Pujawan & Bah, 2022; Savić, 2020). Meanwhile increasingly urgent warnings of the need to address climate catastrophe to prevent worst case scenarios (Legg, 2021), are described by the *UN Secretary General* as “*code red for humanity* (United Nations Secretary General, 2021)”. These and other fast-evolving disruptions² have pulled back the curtain on the prevalence of uncertainty.

Bell (2020) describes this period in history as liminal time, in which things once deemed settled are now unknowable, and what was stable has become unreliable. She claims that

² For example, as I write, the world also watches anxiously as the war in Ukraine destabilises the rules-based order that has provided security since WWII, with the Indo-Pacific region also in a period of rising strategic uncertainty (McBride, 2022).

acknowledging this creates a space to imagine new futures and make new meanings (Eggleton 2020).

Laurie Anderson (2021), a pioneer of the avant-garde, concurs, and further argues that many artists are attempting to understand our times and to tell stories that are inherently uncertain. Yet given pervasive instability, and unknowability in this era,³ the sound and performance artist is unsure whether innovatory artists can continue to fulfill the sense-making role previously performed by the avant-garde (Anderson 2021).

I contend that, in these uncertain times, innovative artists can continue to help make sense of current realities and envision alternative futures. But perhaps it's a different sort of sense-making that I imagine. In discerning and expressing shared current realities, I believe artists' embrace of uncertainty is what is most called for. But, as this thesis will demonstrate, artists require skills to tolerate and to thrive in uncertainty. In a powerful account of her own struggles as an artist, Carabine (2013) describes the anxiety of uncertainty as terrifying, leaving her momentarily paralysed. By learning to thrive in uncertainty artists open the door to increasing ease in their working processes. With less influence from imprisoning mental categories, artists' capacities for envisioning new futures are honed. And with unprecedented challenges that underscore interdependence in an uncertain world, artists trained to thrive in uncertainty can also inspire resilience.

This thesis is current as of June 2022. It does not take account of changes in social conditions arising after that date. But our human experience has always been unpredictable, and uncertainty our essential condition. In mindfulness meditation, through a delicate practice that dismantles the perceived solidity of experience, over time the meditator can gain a different sense of security based in an attuned and attentive connection to the moment.

1.3 Introducing the Researcher

I'm a sound artist, and a mindfulness teacher. My sound art practice spans performance, sound installation, sound sculpture, and *radio art*. In practice-led research components of this

³ Anderson cites the invisibility of algorithms that shape our lives, and current unsettled reckonings around histories of colonialism and marginalisation as examples of unknowability instability and that challenge understanding.

thesis I employ studio practices of radio documentary and *radio art*, while also referring to my practice in the sphere of improvisatory performance.

The radio art field includes programs like *This American Life* and a growing array of popular podcasts. In creating a distinctive new voice in this field, my work has been described by some of the form's pioneers as a seminal influence on a generation of producers, journalists, storytellers, and audio artists, at the outset of the *new wave* of creative radio and podcast storytelling (e.g., Abumrad, 2012, 00:09:45; 00:12:57; Biewen, 2017, p. 8).⁴

My mindfulness practice is younger than my artmaking. For some fifteen years I have undertaken regular ongoing training in vipassana (mindfulness) meditation retreats. I am qualified, by the *Center for Mindfulness* at UMass Memorial Health⁵, to teach *Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction*, the most highly researched mindfulness training protocol. I've also undertaken training in compassion—an attitudinal quality of mindfulness—through *The Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education*, Stanford University School of Medicine.^{6 7}

I stepped back from radio and podcasting in 2015 to examine relationships between mindfulness and artmaking. Noticing the increasing integration of my mindfulness practice within my arts-practice of more than forty years, I felt called to make this embodied know-how explicit and available to the broader scholarly and practice-based communities.

This intention builds on foundations I have created in weaving together mindfulness and art in various contexts. In 2015, I was awarded a six-month *Tending Space Fellowship* to explore the intersection of art and meditation. I've provided mindfulness consultancy for organisations developing mental health interventions delivered in the arts sector⁸. I've co-developed a strand

⁴ Abumrad is the founder and former host of *Radiolab*, one of the most downloaded shows within the genre. In a number of public presentations, he has also cited the influence of my work upon him personally, and upon the aesthetic of *Radiolab*. John Biewen is Co-editor of the influential survey *Reality Radio*, and Audio Program Director at Duke University's *Center for Documentary Studies*. He is also creator of the podcast *Seeing White*.

⁵ <https://www.umhhealth.org/umass-memorial-medical-center/services-treatments/center-for-mindfulness>

⁶ <http://ccare.stanford.edu/>

⁷ I'm also a former Board Director of *The Insight Dialogue Community*, a global network sharing relational meditation practices worldwide. <https://insightdialogue.org/> I've designed and led courses in *mindful leadership* for MA level human centred designers at RMIT University, and for *CanTeen* Australia <https://www.canteen.org.au/>, and I teach mindfulness at *Chris O'Brien Lifeshouse Cancer Research Hospital* <https://www.mylifeshouse.org.au/>

⁸ For example, I've contributed to projects such as *Embodimap*, designed by UNSW *felt Experience & Empathy Lab* <https://feel-lab.org/> + https://feel-lab.org/research_projects/embodimap/

of study designed to assist artists to integrate their practices in the frameworks of art and Buddhist psychology for the *Barre Center for Buddhist Studies*.⁹

My research question—to be discussed shortly—has emerged from the intersection of these perspectives. Having made these identity claims to establish my perspective and to indicate the implicit knowledge this thesis will explicate, I should also add that, through mindfulness, I've come to understand that my sense of selfhood is made up not of activities or achievements, but by the qualities of my attention to the unknown. My practice-led work in chapter four will explore this idea in some detail.

1.4 Shape of the Enquiry.

1.4.1 Evolving Questions

As I've worked through successive stages of the research my investigation has been guided by an evolving sequence of questions. The source of this cascading river of inquiry is my initial research question:

To what extent and in what ways can practicing mindfulness assist artists to tolerate and to thrive in uncertainty, and what are some of the generative potentials of uncertainty in artmaking this might facilitate?

1.4.2 Proposals

Within the research, I advance three proposals. In keeping with the two-part enquiry of my research question, here I advance two of those proposals:

- Artists can use mindfulness to *tolerate* uncertainty in the interest of releasing its generative potentials in artmaking.
- Artists can use mindfulness to *thrive* in uncertainty in the interest of releasing its generative potentials in artmaking.

⁹ <https://www.buddhistinquiry.org/>

I make these proposals based upon my implicit knowledge and my initial grasp of the literature, as I will detail in this chapter.

In chapter three, my analysis leads me to the third proposal.

1.4.3 Dispersed Contextual Review

This evolving set of questions and proposals requires ongoing review of the literature as it becomes contextually relevant.

1.4.4 Aims and Objectives

- I aim to demonstrate ways that mindfulness can assist artists to tolerate and to thrive in uncertainty in ways that enrich artmaking.

In this research I use *thrive* as an umbrella term to denote capacities to harvest generative potentials of uncertainty in artmaking with ease. While varieties of such capacities are potentially inexhaustible, this thesis has identified three specific ways that practicing mindfulness assists artists to thrive in uncertainty. Therefore, in this exegesis, thrive denotes the capacity to create art using mental engagements known as *beginner's mind* (Suzuki, 1973) and *flow* (Csíkszentmihályi, 1990). Further, the term thrive is used to signify the potential to authentically inhabit narratives that embrace uncertainty, further facilitating expanded horizons of possibility in artmaking.

- I aim to demonstrate the use of radio art and field recording as forms to explore and examine these ideas.
- I aim to insert arts-based research and discourse into the arena of mindfulness research.

1.4.5 Objectives

Under the umbrella of these aims, I've set objectives to:

- identify foundational common ground between mindfulness frameworks in Buddhist psychology and contemplative science that sheds light on my research aims
- examine and demonstrate artists' perspectives in the mindfulness research field

- identify one mechanism by which mindfulness can assist artists to tolerate and thrive in uncertainty in artmaking; namely, the diminished *self-focus* that mindfulness affords
- use practice-led methods to demonstrate that the proposals propelling this research were derived by making explicit my experiential knowledge of using mindfulness to learn to tolerate and thrive in uncertainty
- offer to the field a heuristic model of broadly defined arts-based research that incorporates findings from contemplative science and methodologies ranging from qualitative to practice-led enquiry
- identify new concepts that emerge through the research

These include: the term *dynamic stillness*, a vital new way to describe the mindfulness *pause*; the concept *mindful uncertainty*.

(Note: I created the latter term in the process of my research. While I'm aware that variations of the term have been infrequently used in a range of fields, my use of the term is grounded in the evidential base of mindfulness as defined in this thesis. Therefore, descriptions of mindful uncertainty discussed here are intended to instantiate this term into the mindfulness research field.)

1.4.6 Emergent Methods and Self-reflexivity in the Context of Mindfulness Research

Methods used in this project spring from the needs of the evolving research. My discussion of emergent methods used in this research is dispersed throughout the exegesis. However, to contextualise upcoming sections, here I will forecast the nature of, and argument for, self-reflexivity and methodological approaches used in the project.

The project favours reflexive first person voice over a disinterested third person voice. This is to explicitly acknowledge the influence of the researcher's subjectivity. Given my histories, at times the voice in this exegesis may read more like a radio voice than an academic voice.

Inherently post-positivist and epistemically anti-foundational (Rolling, 2010), arts-based research demands that the researcher account for the situated nature of knowledge they produce.

For example, at the outset of this research I indicate that I am a committed mindfulness practitioner, and I begin to examine the histories that have informed my research question.

The self-reflexive approach of arts-based research foregrounds the interlinked nature of knowledge and context (Barrett & Bolt, 2014). While this approach contrasts with methods currently dominant in mindfulness research, the field of contemplative science has recognised the productive potentials of disrupting business as usual. For example, identifying issues of allegiance effects and confirmation bias posed by high numbers of mindfulness researchers who are also committed mindfulness practitioners, Van Dam et al. (2018) advocate innovative research models such as adversarial collaboration (Kahneman, 2003). This involves investigators who have conflicting *views and hypotheses* regarding a particular empirical question, collaborating with an aim to resolve their dispute (Bateman et al., 2005; Matzke et al., 2015). This thesis will argue that models involving interaction of differing *epistemological paradigms* are also full of promise (Rolling, 2010). I contend, for example, that the self-reflexive rigour and post-positivism of arts-based research would be helpful in disentangling the complex issue of allegiance effects.

But more broadly, my proposition envisages a field that continues to open itself to ongoing knotty conversations in recognition of the benefits of paradigmatic pluralism. An inclusive and curious attitudinal stance in relation to the production of knowledge is already demonstrated with the growing inclusion of perspectives from Buddhist psychology in the research field. Later in this chapter I will suggest the case for increasing *epistemic insecurity* (Standal, 2013; Eales & Peers 2016). And, introducing a modest example of interdisciplinary enquiry involving arts-based research, I will outline how this project deliberately smudges the hard borderlines of research paradigms in recognition of the complexity of human experience.

1.4.7 Chapter Outline

Chapter one lays out the research project. This includes a statement of my research questions and two of the three proposals that drive this research forward. I discuss key concepts, and I undertake an initial review of the literature. I identify the dearth of mindfulness research reflecting artists' perspectives and methods, and I commence an ongoing demonstration of the value of these in the field. I outline methods used in the research and I argue that arts-based

methods carry potential to address methodological issues of concern identified from within the field of contemplative science.

Chapter two contextualises the project within the current field of mindfulness research and practice. It reflects upon my survey of the field—a survey that produced the radio documentary *Who Owns Mindfulness* (DeLys, 2017d). Responding also to a critical debate, the dialogue between the radio documentary and my reflection on it, identifies and tests two axiomatic positions that I bring to the project. (Potentially exhaustingly wide-ranging, my survey of the debate—surrounding ways that mindfulness has been transformed in its accommodation to new purposes within a context of scientific validation—is effectively constrained around the focus I apply to my specific topic.) The reflection demonstrates that an interdisciplinary approach is nascent in the mindfulness field. This demonstration sets the stage not only for my reliance on consilient findings from Buddhist psychology and contemplative science, but equally for my introduction of arts-based research into the mix.

Chapter three introduces artists' perspectives in the mindfulness field. I engage qualitative research to test my initial proposals, probing a reference group of artists who are also experienced mindfulness practitioners in the root meditation tradition I examine. I investigate their accounts of tolerating and thriving in uncertainty with the use of mindfulness. And with the aid of reflective journals, I begin to examine my own experience in relation to patterns I detect in these accounts. Unexpectedly, one pattern detected suggests that an ability to embrace uncertainty informs artists' narrative accounts. Based on this observation, and relevant literature, I formulate a third proposal: embracing uncertainty through mindfulness can give new form to artists' narratives, expanding potentials in artmaking.

Chapter four, in its employment of practice-led methods, is the heart of this arts-based research. I reflect upon *Mindfulness and the Moon* (DeLys, 2018b), a narrative radio work that blends fiction and non-fictional accounts of my experience. I created this work early in the research project using processes of improvisation to tap implicit understandings. In chapter 4, I reflect upon its processes and products to examine the knowledge it reveals in relation to patterns of experience identified in research cycles subsequent to the radio work's creation. Reflecting on an unanticipated experience of mindful audio recording, my findings demonstrate Grierson's (2007) notion that art often discloses rather than forecloses "the possibilities of indeterminacy as a meaning-making strategy or process" (p. 535). This experience also reveals one new way

of evaluating research success suggested by arts-based methods: its potential to engage audiences in reflection and action on embodied research themes.

In chapter five, concluding the thesis, I reflect on outcomes of the research, and point to relevant lines for further inquiry within the fields of both mindfulness and artistic research. The chapter casts forward to suggest future directions for my own research, with specific reference to a commissioned abstract for the radio program *This American Life*, and further acts of practice-led research based in a performance.

A good research project will often pose more questions than it answers. This is particularly true of a quest designed to fortify artists' ability to *live the questions*, to paraphrase the poet Rilke, that they may one day, perhaps, *live into* the answers (Rilke, 1993). Such a quest, whose very promise is to extend artists' ability to thrive in ever-widening horizons of *not knowing*, should itself embody a productive relationship with uncertainty. I invite you to join me in finding the answers that this research project can authentically live into.

1.5 What is the Practice of Mindfulness?

To avoid problems of semantic ambiguity regarding meditation practices studied in this research it is important to tightly define the contemplative discipline examined (Van Dam et al., 2018).

The similarity of practice espoused within recent clinical mindfulness research and *insight meditation* (or *vipassana* in Pali, the language of early Buddhism) has led researchers to designate a single practice tradition: *mindfulness | insight meditation* (Brewer et al., 2011). Throughout this thesis, my definition of mindfulness practice is restricted to processes and states espoused and examined within the *mindfulness | insight meditation* tradition. For brevity, I will refer to this single tradition as either mindfulness, or insight meditation, with my reference dependent upon context.

To address contemporary needs in healthcare and clinical research, useful constructs have been adapted from knowledge originating within Buddhist psychology. In clinical mindfulness research, the practice of mindfulness has been described as the intentional cultivation of nonjudgmental moment-to-moment awareness (Kabat-Zinn, 1996, p. 161). Bishop et al. (2004) propound a two-component model. This model involves regulating

attention to maintain it on the present-moment, and approaching all experiences—regardless of their valence (or hedonic tone)—with an orientation of curiosity, openness, and acceptance.

Such constructs are easy to understand and therefore offer useful, shared, starting points that gesture toward richer lived experiences. In this doctorate, they are at times used as a heuristic, with an intention to point toward, and stimulate investigation of, practices of paying attention in the present moment, on purpose, and nonjudgmentally in artmaking. Use of clinical mindfulness descriptions as a heuristic is an established practice, as is the understanding that any activity can become a mindfulness meditation when the intentional present-centred awareness, and the curious and accepting attitudes of mindfulness are applied (e.g., Consilio & Kennedy, 2019; Steinfeld & Brewer, 2015).

This research project also takes a specific perspective on mindfulness as a method by which to dwell in uncertainty—whether in formal mindfulness meditation practice or through the process of artmaking. This is supported by the framework of Buddhist psychology, in which mindfulness is established to bring about experience that is free from grasping at stability due to discomfort with uncertainty (Brazier, 2014).

1.6 Other Key Terms

Let's draw a line around other key terms that comprise the research focus, and delineate the boundaries of their uses in this thesis, since uncertainty, mindfulness, and arts practice are investigated from myriad angles.

Uncertainty: While this term has broad meanings, in this thesis I primarily refer to *states of uncertainty in artmaking*. In this research I view these as vital states of being uncertain that facilitate a potentially productive (but also potentially paralysing) sense of ambiguity and open possibility.

Mindful Uncertainty: Describing both a state and a practice, this term refers to mental states of uncertainty and ambiguity experienced mindfully, as circumscribed by definitions of mindfulness used in this thesis. As a shorthand for mindfulness of uncertainty, mindful uncertainty involves bringing awareness to cognitive, affective, and physiological experiences of uncertainty, in the present moment, on purpose and nonjudgmentally. (At times I will describe this as *dwelling* or *resting* in the unknown.)

Beginner's mind: This mind state involves both a willingness and a capacity to meet the present anew, seeing everything as if for the first time. Amalgamating existing definitions in the field (C. Feldman & Kuyken, 2019, Kabat-Zinn, 1990, p. 22), this description denotes mind-states that are both eager to, and capable of, meeting experience without preconceptions.

Art practice: By art practice I refer simply to the ways in which artists go about their work. Beyond the physical activities of making art, the term includes concepts, influences, expertise, inputs, and tools (Labadie, 2015).

Arts-based research: I adopt Leavy's (2017) use of the term arts-based research to describe an overarching classification that incorporates all artistic approaches to research. This thesis takes a broad position in relation to the classification of artistic process, defining as artistic process any element of the research process that is generative of the artworks produced. Further, in the present project arts-based research also encompasses hybrid forms where art is treated as a form of knowledge alongside more traditional research outputs.

Buddhist psychology: While this term encompasses broad scope, its use within this thesis will focus on contemporary scholarly accounts of early Buddhist understanding of practices of meditation. Other primary themes encompassed in Buddhist psychology¹⁰ will be explored only to the extent that they become relevant to discussions of meditation in this project. (For example, Buddhist psychology holds that it is possible to recognise within one's own subjective experience that affective and cognitive states are dependent on causes and conditions, as part of a larger web of interwoven events.¹¹)

Contemplative science: I adopt the definition provided by (Van Dam et al., 2018) who describe contemplative science as "the scientific study of contemplative practices including, but not limited to, mindfulness meditation" (p. 7).

¹⁰ For example, in addition to the practice of meditation, Kelly (2022) identifies further primary themes in Buddhist psychology, including "the structure of consciousness; the natures of active cognitive processes and passive states; and the relationships between material and mental phenomena" (p.1). Themes of enquiry specified are explored in the historical Buddha's primary teachings, and the Abhidharma, a collection of psychological works from the tradition (Kelly, 2008; 2022).

¹¹ Here I refer to the central Buddhist tenets of *conditionality* and *dependent arising*. An example of conditionality, Buddhist psychology contends that one's cognitive and affective states can be influenced by conditions and causes such as surrounding environment, activities, and connections with others (Brazier, 2003). Further, an explanation of causality in the framework of Buddhist psychology, dependent arising is "the conditional interrelation of phenomena, constituting a web of interwoven events, where each event is related to other events by way of cause and effect" (Anālayo, 2006, p. 110).

1.7 Challenges in Tolerating Uncertainty

Later in this chapter, a self-reflexive account will reveal that the idea to conduct this research germinated as I began to reflect upon ways my experience with mindfulness and uncertainty in the health sector might be transferable to the setting of artmaking. But it's not only existential threats that contribute to excessive worry and anxiety. Uncertainty itself can be threatening, because the brain registers uncertainty as a threat (Tanovic, Gee, & Joormann, 2018).¹² In the field of neurobiology, Peters et al. (2017) define the very essence of stress as uncertainty. Humans feel uncertain, the authors assert, when we anticipate that outcomes will turn out to be something other than expected, and uncertainty frequently leads to anxiety and hypervigilance (Peters et al., 2017).

Importantly then, the distress of uncertainty is based, not on actual threat, but on appraisal of threat. And anxiety is a preparatory response comprising worry regarding a potential, unidentified, or unrealized threat (Asmundson, Taylor, Bovell, & Collimore, 2006; Barlow, 2002).¹³

1.7.1.1 Mindfulness in Tolerating Uncertainty

This thesis proposes that through practicing *mindful uncertainty*, as defined in this thesis, artists can cultivate a capacity for working in the realm of the unknown without, or with less, stress. Let's look briefly at contemplative science literature that supports my framing up of a specific term.

Harp et al. (2022) posit that mindfulness prevents individuals from being paralysed in the face of uncertainty. Mindfulness may reduce anxiety by helping individuals notice their distress is caused by the state of uncertainty *itself*, and observe their feelings with a sense of detachment (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Mindfulness fosters *safe-uncertainty* (Bullock et al., 2013; Moss, Waugh, & Barnes, 2008).¹⁴ Exploring consilient findings within Buddhist psychology and the scientific literature, Feldman and Kuyken (2019) find that it does so by helping the practitioner

¹² Prediction is a central mechanism of the mind. The mind is adapted to predict what's going to happen in the future to do what is needed to survive (Goldstein, 2020). Recent theory and evidence suggest that to deal with the uncertainty of all experience, human brains are adept at "surfing the waves of noisy and ambiguous sensory stimulation by, in effect, trying to stay just ahead of them" (Clark, 2015, p. 22).

¹³ Appraisals of uncertainty can create *uncertainty intolerance* (Grupe & Nitschke, 2013), based in the perception of uncertainty as threatening, regardless of the threat (Tanovic et al., 2018).

shift from avoidance patterns (automatic pilot mode) to a willingness to meet present-moment experience *as it is*.

As discussed, the thesis introduces the term mindful uncertainty, as circumscribed by understandings of mindfulness used in this thesis. In doing so, I proceed with caution to not privilege biomedical / scientific frameworks over other forms of expertise. Creating labels that could be seen to medicalise practices in both mindfulness and the arts has pros and cons. For example, as will be discussed in detail in chapter two, Purser (2019) asserts that biomedical accounts of mindfulness obscure other potentials of the practice, and, in the field of *Health humanities*, mechanistic labels that position the arts as a form of treatment has been challenged (Crawford, Brown, & Charise, 2020).

Yet in the health setting with which I'm familiar, lack of clear terminology has been shown to obstruct efforts to integrate vital approaches into systems of care (World Health Organization, 2010; as cited in Seaman et al., 2020), and I am swayed by Seaman et al (2020) who argue that labels can help ensure concepts are not trivialised.¹⁵

1.8 Research Focus—A Self-reflexive Account

The self-reflexivity demanded by arts research methods demands that I take account of the systems that, as a researcher, I am embedded within. In this section I reflect upon my experience in systems of clinical mindfulness practice and creative practice in arts and design that have interdependently generated my research quest.

Mindfulness has been integrated widely into the practice of medicine to provide care for a broad range of patient cohorts (Malpass et al., 2012). I teach mindfulness in the framework of a cancer treatment centre, in which uncertainty is pervasive. In researching and teaching at *Chris O'Brien Lifehouse Cancer Research Hospital* as part of an interdisciplinary *complementary care* team, I've used mindfulness to tolerate and even thrive in uncertainty. The idea for this research project revealed itself as I began to reflect upon how a reservoir of experience of

¹⁵The model of care referred to is: *interdisciplinary team-based practice*. My lived experience of the *acceptance challenges* of such interdisciplinary models in healthcare, bears out the conclusion reached by Seaman et al (2020).

mindfulness and uncertainty that I've gained in a healthcare context might be transferable to the setting of artmaking.

1.8.1 Uncertainty and Mindfulness in the Hospital Setting

A significant body of literature identifies uncertainty as a cause of anxiety with negative consequences for health workers, and links intolerance of uncertainty with health-worker burnout (Bachman & Freeborn, 1999; Bovier & Perneger, 2007; Ireland et al., 2017; Kimo et al., 2014; Kuhn et al., 2009). Mindfulness interventions that include themes of being present to uncertainty can decrease physician burnout (Krasner et al., 2009). Noting that inherent uncertainty in practicing medicine may contribute to anxiety disorders, Roy et al. (2020) found that the app-based mindfulness training, *Unwinding Anxiety*, may be an effective therapy to diminish anxiety and burnout in medical practitioners. I was invited to beta-test this app-based training program before its release. Doing so has impacted my research as I will describe shortly.

In the training, the app's creator, researcher Judson Brewer, defines anxiety as "a feeling of worry, nervousness, or unease, typically about an imminent event or something with an uncertain outcome" (Sharecare, 2022). As I learned to recognise the feelings of anxiety in the body, I developed awareness of how anxiety can develop in uncertain situations. I noticed that the mind often extends and amplifies the process through habitual *worry loops* (as Brewer describes worry thought patterns that reinforce anxiety)¹⁶. Becoming curious about the physical sensations produced by uncertainty, I became familiar with the difference in feeling (or hedonic) tone I experience when I react to uncertainty by planning or ruminating versus when I focus my awareness on uncertainty with curiosity and acceptance. Befriending difficult feeling states rather than enacting habitual cognitive attempts to wrestle control, I learned to tolerate and even to thrive in uncertainty. Consistent with categorisations of *second-generation mindfulness-based interventions* (Van Gordon & Shonin, 2020), the app stimulated my exploration of uncertainty in a manner consistent with understandings of mindfulness based in Buddhist psychology.¹⁷

¹⁶ The training presents a novel approach that uses mindfulness training to target worry as a habit underlying the perpetuation of anxiety (Judson A Brewer & Roy, 2021; Judson A Brewer, Roy, Deluty, Liu, & Hoge, 2020; Roy et al., 2020).

¹⁷ This app-based training is part of what Van Gordon and Shonin (2020) describe as second-generation mindfulness-based interventions (SG-MBIs) developed and researched since 2005. SG-MBIs, the authors argue, take into account, for example, Buddhist contemplative notions of impermanence, not self, and clinging as sources of suffering.

On reflection, I've traced lines that connect the idea for my current research project back to this experience. Rummaging through journals created as I beta-tested the training program, I find entries illustrating my interest in learning to identify the difference between uncertain mental states that promote anxiety, and those conducive to creative practice and to flow. For example, this:

I've noticed that uncertainty produces anxiety, and I typically try to rid myself of anxiety through planning. Using mindfulness to explore the somatic feelings of anxiety, I get data about what planning and worrying feel like. I've noticed I never get the aha [creative insight, or beginner's mind] feeling when I'm worrying or planning, whereas I often do when not resisting uncertainty.

When I created this journal, I was also teaching mindful leadership skills to students of *human centred design*¹⁸, as my journal reflects:

Design students say it's hard to stay in the problem space....Worry moves them into reaching for solutions too soon. Mindfulness helps me stay in this problem space where not knowing and uncertainty can lead to novel outcomes.

Reflecting on these entries, I see that, at least in part, insights I gained while beta-testing this mindfulness training program generated the curiosity that led me to formulate my research question and proposals. Continuing to call upon these journals as a valuable source of self-reflective material will help guide me throughout it.

1.8.1.1 Tolerating Uncertainty in the Hospital Setting

Epstein (1999) argues that patient care requires the clear seeing mindfulness provides. To offer empathy, the health worker must be able to witness their own reactions to patients' suffering, and separate one from the other. He finds too that the curiosity of mindfulness can enable the health worker to see each situation as it is rather than how the health worker might wish it to be (Epstein, 1999).

¹⁸ In the field of design education, uncertainty is theorised as a threshold concept (Tovey, Bull, & Osmond, 2010).

As a mindfulness teacher in a hospital setting, I've identified my ability to practice this curious and accepting focus on present moment experience as a key skill as I step into the unknown alongside patients. To create a safe space for our work together, I need to provide a receptive and present-centred patience in which we can hold the tensions of uncertainty together until insight emerges. I need to embrace vulnerability, to see it clearly and take it into my arms.

This willingness to be with difficult feelings, often described as *befriending* such experiences, is a key component of mindfulness. The Japanese hermit monk poet Saigyō (1118-1190) wrote about such friendliness.

In this mountain village
where I've given up
all hope of visitors,
how drab life would be
without my loneliness

(Saigyō, 1991)

Without such befriending of difficult experiences as I work with patients, I have found that my attempts to avoid the discomforts of uncertainty will impinge on our work together. For example, when faced with an uncertainty, I am likely to worry—as an attempt to problem solve (Borkovec et al., 1983). These avoidant reactions to unpleasant emotions can be triggered as they provide a feeling of control (Freeston et al., 1994).¹⁹ Becoming caught up in cognitive reactions like seeking solutions, jumping to the future, or self-consciousness will take me away from the present moment.

Quick, unreflective responses to distress are known in the mindfulness literature as *automatic pilot mode* (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). At the hospital, mindfulness enables a pause enabling me to shift out of automatic pilot. By developing the capacity to stand back, notice that I'm worrying, and choose instead to embrace fear and anxiety in way the poet Saigyō embraces loneliness, I increase my freedom from automatic behavioural patterns. No longer using mental energy to

¹⁹ This is one of several salient possibilities postulated by research that seeks to understand worry as a *reward behaviour*, in keeping with theories of operant conditioning.

avoid uncertainty, I'm more able to discern what is skilful in this moment with a patient, and what is not. Befriending fear and anxiety, this caring attitude sets the frame for our work.

And even in a sea of doubt our practice together can become a safe harbour.

1.8.1.2 *Thriving in Uncertainty in the Hospital Setting*

Mindfulness does not only enable patients and health workers to *tolerate* uncertainty. The practice also enables them to *thrive* in uncertainty. Carlson (2016) demonstrates that mindfulness-based interventions allow cancer patients to embrace uncertainty, affording access to beneficial aspects of the experience of not knowing. And in a demonstration of beginner's mind, Epstein (1999) claims that for the physician too, mindful curiosity can turn the challenges of uncertainty into positives. He argues that by shining a light on the limitations of existing categories, the practice assists in creating novel ways of framing problems, allowing for new diagnostic and therapeutic possibilities.

1.9 Thriving in Uncertainty in Artmaking

1.9.1 Beginner's Mind: A personal account

This same affordance of mindfulness that illuminates the limitations of existing categories and offers novel ways of framing problems also allows for new artistic possibilities.

In assessing my radio work, scholars and colleagues in the field often emphasise the productivity of uncertainty that imbues both my working processes and experiences for the listener (e.g., Biewen, 2017, p. 8).²⁰

Beginner's mind is one form of thriving in uncertainty that this research has identified, and I would like, at this early stage, to instantiate the idea of beginner's mind in artistic practice, using an example of my own work. This example demonstrates implicit knowledge that I bring to this research project.

²⁰ In citing me as amongst the most influential and innovative practitioners of new radio documentary styles, Biewen (2017) writes: Sherre DeLys makes a point of bringing no consistent bag of tricks to her projects. She approaches each as an improvised, open-ended dialogue with her subject. You never know what approach she'll take, and neither does she, but the result is often breathtaking (p. 8).

At the same time, as analysed by radio colleagues and scholars, the example of *If* also suggests ways that, when imbued with ambiguity, the outcomes of art as research can engage audience members as active participants in knowledge-making, creating opportunities for further questioning (Barone & Eisner, 2011).

In speaking of my work *If*, Jad Abumrad (2012), founder, and former host of *Radiolab*, argues:

I think a lot of people of my generation who were there at the beginning [of the *new wave* of creative radio and podcast] and heard this piece probably had the same reaction. It turned the boy into music..... And it was so spooky. We all sat there spellbound (00:09:45).²¹

Discussing the ending of the piece, he adds:

It's like you've got an if/then statement, but you only have the first half...I just think what a brave ending. You just leave people hanging.... There was something about the story that just flipped a switch for so many people.... This was an entirely new voice on the radio.... I'd never heard anything like this (Abumrad 2012, 00:12:38).

Spinelli (2006) cited the same work, *If*, as exemplary of a groundbreaking class of radio works that constructs radio “not as linear narrative, but as a set of palimpsestual and polyvalent opportunities for interpretation” (p.1). In *If*, he argues, “slips of the tongue that sound similar to the expected word or the established grammatical structure make a stronger impression (become more memorable) and can suggest a deeper concern or reality” (p. 205).

And elucidating the inherent tensions that make ambiguity in art works powerful, Spinelli also argues of *If*:

²¹ Others have named this *spooky* quality of the work. For example, Kestecher states: *From Scratch*, by Sherre DeLys, is the first thing that comes to mind [when asked about the audio work that has affected her most profoundly]. It's such a strange... feature ... I remember feeling incredibly sad when I first heard it, and I couldn't explain why that was (Kestecher, 2018).

Here we have an object that is a veritable cliché of sentimentality moving to a large extent in the opposite direction, becoming a formal object for artistic contemplation....Ultimately the listener is drawn into a tension between aestheticization and empathy, invited to question it, to meditate on it, and to meditate on the traditional use of radio as sentiment/emotion *machine* (Spinelli, 2006, p.206).

In interviews canvassing processes of experimentation in my art practice I have emphasised the role of mindfulness in fostering beginner's mind (DeLys, 2021). While beginner's mind is also referred to as *mind of a child*, in my research the term indicates an intentional practice that can be trained through mindfulness. This view incorporates poet David Whyte's definition of innocence, not as naivety, but the ability and willingness to be found by the world you're inhabiting (Tippett, 2016). Mindfulness offers artists just this ability to be found by the world, because it trains the ability to move beyond concepts to direct experiences, and to see what can be learned there (C. Feldman & Kuyken, 2019).

A note to the reader: Lest this discussion create a false expectation, I should mention that the creative components of this thesis were commissioned by an *Australian Broadcasting Corporation* that has increasingly diminished opportunities for radio content that exhibits ambiguity and mystery. (This is reflected upon briefly in chapter four). Thus, the commissioned works that form the creative content of this thesis, while highly effective in this project, do not display the levels of formal innovation alluded to in this section. If you would like to hear works referred to in this section, along with other innovative artworks you can find them at my website.²²

1.9.2 Thriving in Uncertainty through Narrative Embrace of Uncertainty: William Kentridge's Politics of Uncertainty

For me, the artist William Kentridge is a living embodiment of a beginner's mind freedom to create works that offer new insights, through effortlessly dissolving habitual mental categories. Yet the artist also offers a readily available depiction of a second form of thriving in uncertainty examined in this project—namely the embrace of uncertainty in narrative form.

²² <http://www.sherre.be>

“I think the category of uncertainty, political uncertainty, philosophical uncertainty, uncertainty of images is much closer to how the world is” (Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, 2014, 00:08:25), the artist declares.

And so, argues Kentridge:

...uncertainty is a very key category...the uncertainty at the start of the film where there isn't a script or a storyboard is, on the one hand, my inability to write a script or a storyboard, but it also allows it to function in a more emblematic way of how we understand the world (Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, 2014, 00:09:00).

In arguing that uncertainty is closer to how the world is, Kentridge embraces the immanence of uncertainty. This welcome of the intrinsic contingency and interdependence of existence offers something of a preview of artists' narratives that champion uncertainty, such as I unearthed through probing my reference group. Such narratives are deemed a key instance of thriving in this project because narratives impose structure on our experience (J. Bruner, 2020a, 2020b; J. S. Bruner, 2003). And, as my practice-led research will demonstrate, embracing uncertainty in narratives opens the door to previously unknown creative engagements (Siegel & Siegel, 2014).

1.10 The Burgeoning Field

The popularity of mindfulness has grown exponentially in research. Baminiwatta and Solangaarachchi (2021) noted that since 2006 there has been an exponential growth, with over 16,000 research publications between 1966 and 2021, the vast bulk of these within the decade 2011 - 2021.

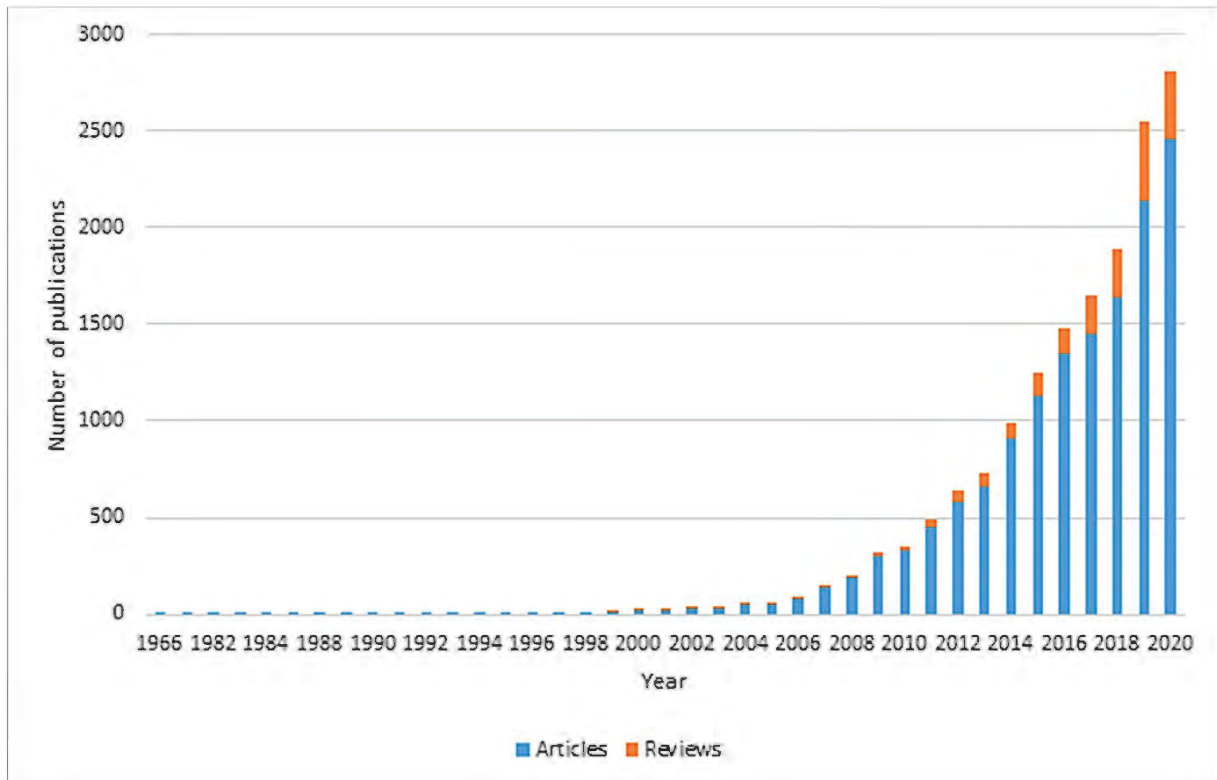


Figure 2. Number of publications on mindfulness indexed in Web of Science 1966–2020 (Baminiwatta & Solangaarachchi, 2021). Data obtained from an ISI Web of Science search of the term “mindfulness” in academic journal article titles

A large body of evidence has accrued supporting mindfulness as an effective treatment for a variety of psychological and physical problems. With popularity however, a great deal of hype (tendencies to tout exaggerated positive and negative claims) has shadowed mindfulness research (Van Dam et al., 2018). But while more good studies and improved methodologies are needed in this relatively new research area, mindfulness based interventions (MBIs) have been demonstrated to decrease stress and anxiety, effectively address issues of chronic pain, and enhance personal well-being, perceptual sensitivity, concentration, empathy and cognitive performance, and more (Shapiro & Weisbaum, 2020). MBIs are now popular in healthcare, education, business, government, sports, criminal justice, and the military (Shapiro & Weisbaum, 2020; Wilson, 2014).

1.10.1 Mind the Gap

But mindfulness research relating to the arts, or using arts-based methodologies, has not been similarly forthcoming.²³

Recently, a bibliometric analysis of the mindfulness literature identified the top 25 research areas in the field (Baminiwatta & Solangaarachchi, 2021). Scrutinising this analysis that spans humanities and the arts, science and social sciences between 1966 and 2020, I am struck by a stark absence of arts related research areas.²⁴ Likewise, among the top 50 keywords with the strongest citation bursts as identified by Baminiwatta and Solangaarachchi, there are no terms that I associate with arts practice or arts-based methodologies. Taken as a whole, the analysis displays the overwhelming dominance of empirical research in the field, and implicitly it reveals a reliance on empirical research methodologies.

Research I conducted in 2009 for *ABC Radio National* whilst producing a series of radio programs on mindfulness innovators first drew my attention to this gap. As part of the series, my program featuring the role of mindfulness in the artist Bill Viola's work made a small contribution (S. DeLys, personal communication, 2009).²⁵

Returning to the topic in 2017 near the start of this research project, the following charts demonstrated that, at that stage, while the growth in clinical mindfulness studies since 2006 had been exponential each year, research that explores artists' perspectives or uses arts-based research methods was still virtually flatlining.

²³There is a growing literature studying mindfulness and creativity, but my distinct research pertains to a range of processes focused on the practice of artmaking. Yet it is worth noting that this project is also poised to contribute to the literature on the psychology of creativity, as researchers suggest that one new direction in the field is to study the processes of accepting and overcoming uncertainty as a construct that mediates the relationship between cognitive processes and creativity (Kornilova, & Kornilov, 2010)

²⁴ Baminiwatta and Solangaarachchi found the top three research areas to be psychology, psychiatry, and neuroscience, while other areas identified included health care, business, family studies, education, public environmental occupational health, environmental sciences and more. Bibliographic data was drawn from the *Web of Science Core Collection*.

²⁵ This program is no longer online. It exists as an audio file that is available upon request.

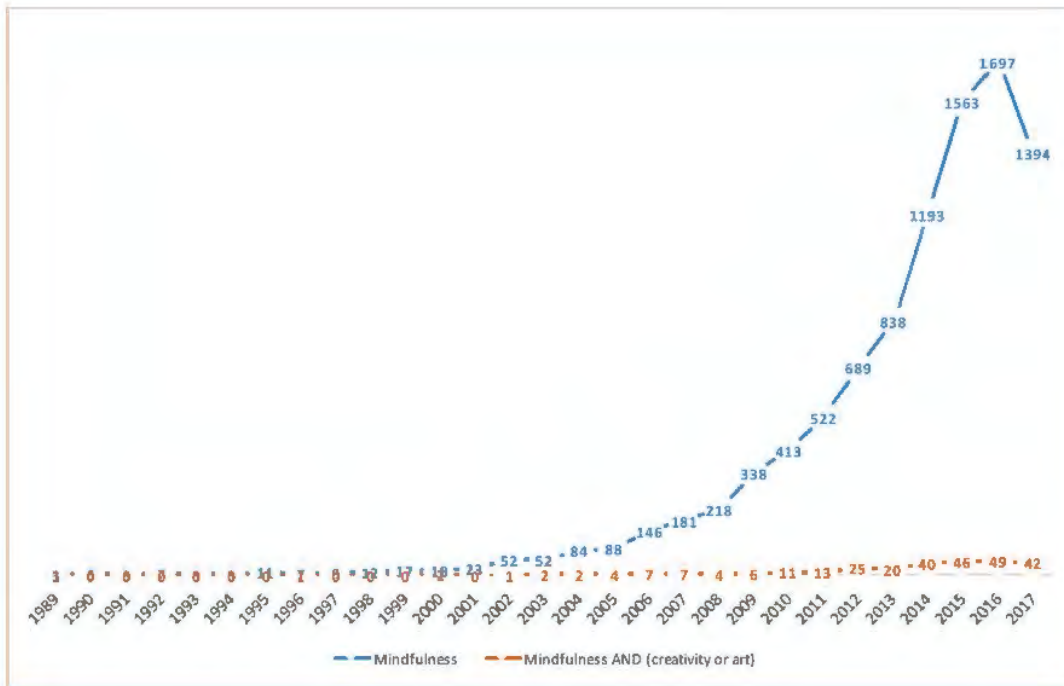


Figure 3. Searches of peer-reviewed literature from Scopus, using the terms mindfulness or mindfulness AND (creativity OR art) in the abstract, title or keywords between 1989 and 2017.

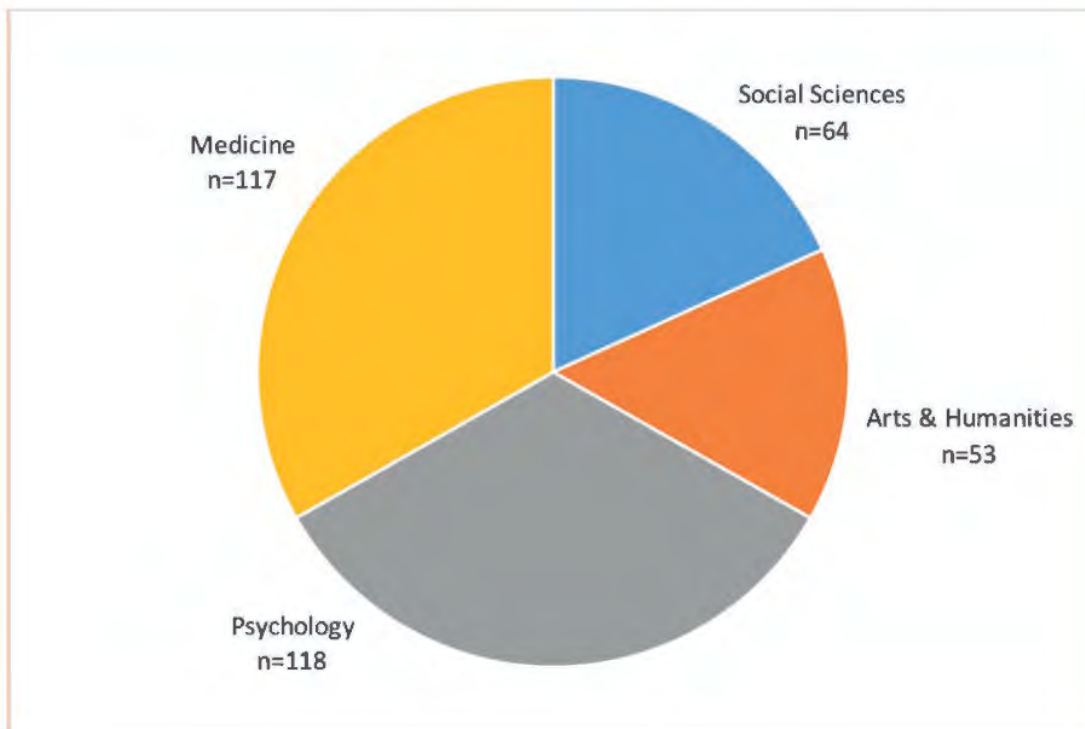


Figure 4. Less than 352 peer-reviewed publications between 1989 and 2017 in key subject areas from Scopus found using the terms mindfulness AND (creativity OR art) in the abstract, title or keywords. Some publications appear in both categories.²⁶

²⁶ The bibliographic databases (Psych Info 1833–2017, Medline 1924–2017, Scopus 1960–2017 and Embase 1974–2017) were searched in June 2017. The subject-specific keywords [mindfulness] AND [art]

I find this gap astonishing. We know much about the benefits of mindfulness for so many groups, but so little about its potential benefits for artists. Yet as a route to being present, nonjudgmental, curious, and open, mindfulness has much to offer to artists' work.

Even more critically, the field has neglected arts-based methodologies.

This research project addresses both issues—mindfulness' potential benefits for artists, and the potential benefits of arts-based research methods to the field.

1.11 Artists' Perspectives and Methods Critical

Only through research into artists' perspectives can the potential of mindfulness be available for use by artists.

Equally urgent, the contemplative science field is largely missing out on critical methods developed within arts-based research. One resulting impoverishment was summed up succinctly by Judson Brewer, Director of Research and Innovation at the *Mindfulness Center at the School of Medicine*, Brown University. Interviewing him for *Who Owns Mindfulness*, a creative work that forms part of my contextual review, I ask: "What is it that science can't bring to our understanding of mindfulness?" Brewer's reply is immediate: "I don't know anybody that's come up with a good measure for mystery" (DeLys, 2017d, 00:20:30).

1.11.1 Embrace of Uncertainty

Artists may not have a measure for mystery but, as this research will demonstrate, the artist's professional and research goals encourage a distinct rapport with complexity, perplexity, and uncertainty. Just as artists' works often point toward mysteries—expressing irrational, ambiguous and obscure qualities of existence—arts-based research methods afford possibilities to articulate insights that transcend the unequivocal conceptual grasp. And notwithstanding the demonstrable value of the scientific method's commitment to generalisable findings, uncertainty in the mindfulness research field is frequently understood as something to be worked through and eliminated. Often it is more or less a transit-zone on the path to clarity and proof-bolstered certainty, and a measure of probabilities and likelihoods that describe understanding of a particular outcome (Gibbs et al., 2013, p. 15).

This is not to deny that inventive science proceeds from an open engagement with uncertainty, as I will discuss shortly.²⁷ And even in applied clinical research there is an argument that to make progress researchers should pay attention to, rather than neglect, paradoxical results (e.g., Baker, 2021). But it is useful to distinguish between uncertainty as a problem to be solved, and uncertainty as an openness to the provisional and the unknown that characterises arts-based research.

I assert that arts-based research can open new pathways of research in the relatively new field of mindfulness. Injecting fresh perspectives and unbraiding established ways of knowing, arts-based methodologies can also suggest ways through current entanglements in the field of contemplative science.

A constructive critique of mindfulness research practice emanating from within the domain of contemplative science forms a useful starting point for my argument.

Identifying impacts of the hype that has accompanied the exponential growth of mindfulness on research, Van Dam et al. (2018) offer a corrective agenda aimed at improving research quality. Though targeted to assist contemplative psychological scientists and neuroscientists, the authors' work has been crucial to my understanding. On the one hand, it's helped me to safeguard the integrity of this research. For example, their discussion of semantic ambiguity in mindfulness research informs my approach to defining mindfulness in this study. On the other hand, their analysis has helped me clarify ways that arts-based and practice-led research methods are potentially useful to the contemplative science community.

For example, Van Dam et al. (2018) claim that some contemplative science researchers have simplified the complexity and ambiguity surrounding mindfulness research, often to meet media demands for simple explanations. They recommend contemplative neuroscience researchers communicate more accurately with the media and the public. Elsewhere, one of the paper's authors identifies a broader cultural problem at play. Saron (Hasenkamp, 2021) argues that partly responsible for this oversimplifying of research is a public perception that oversimplifies the methods and outcomes of science in general. He suggests that, rather than conforming to a caricature of science that sets up expectations for simple explanations of

²⁷ For example, Nobel prize winning physicist Neils Bohr famously said "How wonderful that we've met with a paradox, now we have some hope of making progress" (Bohr as cited in Baker & Kramer, 2007. p 105).

universal truths, contemplative science researchers might instead strive to generate public understanding of the lived experience of the contemplative scientist. This includes, he argues, the uncertainties they face, the essential indeterminacy of phenomena they study in human research, and the contingent circumstances that determine their work. On this latter point, Saron claims the craft of scientific research has much in common with other creative pursuits, including choices of what to study, what method to use, to what ends, and within which worldview. Acknowledging this reality, he contends, would make it easier to explain to the public that, especially in the realm of contemplative science, researchers' currency is fundamentally "clouds of unknowing, rather than firm facts" (Hasenkamp, 2021, 01:13:35).

Saron's recognition of similarities between the craft of science and other creative pursuits echoes representations of research as practice, and the reciprocal shaping of theory, methodology and practice in arts research (Barrett & Bolt, 2014).

This lays a critical foundation for my argument, because the conditions, dilemmas, and ethical considerations in human research Saron describes are among the factors that have catalysed the development of disciplined methods within arts-based research.²⁸ His eloquent explanation of the *predicament* of the contemplative scientist (Hasenkamp, 2021, 01:15:34) suggests to me numerous ways that arts-based research methods could help unknot theoretical dilemmas and ethical quandaries in the field, and contribute to researchers' capacities to approach such predicaments with critical and creative skills. It is beyond my scope to enumerate each of Saron's reflections on predicaments and movements in the field. But I will seize the opportunity to discuss one issue Saron raises, and ways that methods demonstrated in this research project might point toward imaginative responses.

Saron (Hasenkamp, 2021, 01:23:20) argues the need to acknowledge that contemplative-science proceeds on iterative refinement of simple models that don't reflect the complexity of nature. While acknowledging the utility of simple models and explanations in the context of clinical application (Hasenkamp, 2021, 01:22:48), he suggests a conversation that asks: "where can we

²⁸ In part, arts-based research has arisen in response to growing awareness that the researcher's subjectivity shapes research processes and results, as well as to critiques revealing ways standard research methods reproduce discourses of power and authority (Eales & Peers 2016).

move the set point for the sophistication of research models, so that new thoughts arise?” (Hasenkamp, 2021, 01:23:55).

In this conversation, arts-based research has an important seat at the table. But importantly, referring to the *epistemic insecurity* that I make a case for here, Standal argues, “the outcome of insecure practices is not accumulation of experience in order to become more secure, but rather developing ways of handling the inescapable insecurity” (p. 211).

I argue that in handling the inescapable insecurity of knowledge-making in the face of the uncertainties contemplative scientists face arts-based research presents a rich and complementary addition to scientific approaches. These uncertainties include (Hasenkamp 2021): the ethical need to acknowledge that, ultimately, meditation experiences under study are individual, contingent, and not necessarily predictive for others (01:15:34); the need (for greater personal, intellectual, and scientific inclusivity) to shift to collaborative research models involving dialogue between scientific methods and the lived experience of diverse meditation research participants (01:08:06); and the urgent need to acknowledge the interconnectedness with others and with the physical world that defines the contemplative researcher (01:26:54).

1.11.1.1 *Attention and Culture*

As this research will demonstrate, arts-based research draws upon kinaesthetic and sensory knowledge. McGilchrist (2019) claims that the experiential nature of knowledge acquisition welcomes uncertainty.²⁹ It enables, for example, apprehension of the full bandwidth of experience in its impermanent interconnectedness. Locating the origins of music and art in this experiential mode of attending to the world, he argues that this form of attention has been critical in shaping civilisation (McGilchrist, 2019).³⁰ In contrast to the more detached conceptual/analytical mode of knowing that isolates phenomena in a narrow focus, this broad

²⁹ Feldman and Kuyken (2019) demonstrate that McGilchrist’s indexing of modes of paying attention and knowing is part of a body of recent findings regarding conceptual and experiential modes as different ways of being in and knowing the world. Psychological scientists they include in this group are Phil Barnard, Daniel Kahneman, Zindel Segal, John Teasdale, Francisco Varela, and Mark Williams (Feldman & Kuyken 2019).

³⁰ McGilchrist’s distinction between two modes of knowing is useful as a tool of cultural criticism, and it is possible to sustain his conclusions regarding the effects on culture of these different ways of knowing, without reference to the controversial divided brain analysis that he builds alongside it (Cottingham, 2019; De Haan, 2019). If the reader is further interested in a robust scholarly exchange on these issues, one that is critical to the understanding meditation (Coakley, 2019), see this special issue journal (Wildman, 2019).

form of attention engenders perception of phenomena as forever changing, unstable, and therefore uncertain (McGilchrist, 2019).

While cultural creations based in conceptual modes of enquiry are equally important, conceptual knowing divides experience in ways that do not always serve beginner's mind. And when an experience becomes a concept, thinking tends to close to other ways of construing the experience (Langer, 2006). I argue that this experiential mode of attending, that also makes it possible to hold ambiguous possibilities in suspension without premature closure on one outcome (McGilchrist, 2018), offers important contributions to the field. For example, in chapter three, where I research artists' perspectives on working with mindfulness to thrive in uncertainty, an ambiguous account of individually situated experience results in what I contend to be an exciting new term, *dynamic stillness*, that presents new and rich ways to understand the familiar mindfulness *pause*.

1.11.2 Integrating Modes of Paying Attention

Until this point, I have contrasted, methods that harness the power of analysis to seek proof bolstered certainty, with those that seek to generate new ways of modelling and externalising personally situated knowledge to offer possibilities to surpass the unequivocal conceptual grasp.

But, as I see it, these methodological and application issues in the domains of science and arts-based research are not diametrically opposed. I also do not see them as equivalent to the subjective and objective points of view. Drawing upon my research processes and findings, I contend the difference in these forms of research is better expressed in terms of different modes of paying attention—namely the experiential and conceptual modes. As such they are not in conflict, but rather they are two essential and complementary components of producing knowledge.

I acknowledge that particular research paradigms are best suited to examine particular kinds of questions (Rolling 2010).³¹ But to address additional concerns about a proposal to reconsider the research field as a conversation reflecting present-day, multi-paradigmatic approaches, I

³¹ Using methodologies of contemplative science, the field has succeeded in developing a body of evidence that support mindfulness as an effective treatment for a variety of problems, and in examining mechanisms underlying such beneficial uses.

point out that the power of continuing, if messy, dialogue between alternative enquiry paradigms has already been proven in the mindfulness research field. As I will demonstrate in my contextual review of the field, increasing acceptance of Buddhist psychology and its first-person enquiry methods as a partner in mindfulness research has demonstrated tangible benefits.³²

In this, I sense the maturing of the mindfulness research field. Arts-based research, which draws upon kinaesthetic and sensory knowledge, has not been part of this germinal interdisciplinarity. And yet, in common with Buddhist psychology, the situated and experiential nature of knowledge acquisition inherent in arts-based approaches presents a rich and complementary addition to scientific approaches.

The present research is offered, in part, as a modest introduction of arts-based research into the conversation to move the set point for the sophistication of research models.

It is beyond scope to describe the many ways arts-based research harnesses potentials of artmaking to create new ways to understand and communicate research (see for e.g., Leavy, 2017), or the myriad fields, including medicine, currently being invigorated by arts-based approaches (see for e.g., Eales & Peers 2016). This research provides one, nascent, model of innovative mindfulness research available for evaluation and extension. The model of arts-based research presented here is informed by *pragmatism* as a research paradigm, “which offers an alternative worldview to those of positivism/postpositivism and constructivism and focuses on the problem to be researched and the consequences of the research” (Feilzer, 2010) p.7). A toe in the water, it suggests possibilities, and I assert that it can be usefully understood as a heuristic for interdisciplinary research involving the arts in the mindfulness field.

1.12 Methodology Statement | Research Axiology

I provide a very brief research methodology/axiology overview here, while use of evolving methods will be demonstrated throughout the exegesis.

In this research, I triangulate observations of my relevant experiences—gained through practice-led research and reflective journaling, and others’ accounts—gained through

³² Connecting to an even wider range of epistemological approaches, flagship research bodies such as the *Mind and Life Institute* have further demonstrated the value of interdisciplinary exchange and dialogue. <https://www.mindandlife.org/>

qualitative analysis, with contemplative science findings that form the evidence base for mindfulness as an effective treatment for a variety of problems.

This approach—cross-referencing my experience against accounts of reference group members and the contemplative science—ensures a robust research process. The approach also demonstrates a promise of arts-based research as a pluralistic practice that is free to generate contentious admixtures of methodology, inaugurating fresh perspectives and visions (Rolling, 2010). My own admixture of methods is informed by pragmatism, as a research paradigm that “supports the use of... a continuous cycle of abductive reasoning, while being guided primarily by the researcher’s desire to produce socially useful knowledge” (Feilzer, 2010).

The approach I’ve described suggests the innovative potential of the fluid location and application of creative arts research (Barrett & Bolt, 2014).

It is important to note that, in this project, the utilisation of findings from the evidence base of contemplative science literature is best viewed as generative and/or supportive of the research process, rather than conclusive of it. My research methods rely upon interviews with mindful artists, and, primarily, with reflection upon my own works of creative practice. As appropriate to arts-based research, method is emergent from the research itself, and this emergence produces findings in its own terms. Given the complexity and ambiguity inherent to examining relationships between uncertainty, mindfulness, and arts-practice, as we progress through the phases of the research it will become clear that my methods and findings necessitate becoming increasingly attuned to uncertainty. My axiological commitment means that my final goal is understanding and communication. And my instrumental goal, the criteria for the research to be evaluated is anti-foundationalist—persuasiveness insightfulness, and use in future research.

1.12.1 Mindfulness Supports Arts-Based Methodologies

1.12.1.1 Embodied Self-reflexivity and Enhanced Critical Thinking

As I proceed through my research, I will work within a framework of embodied self-reflexivity that extends self-reflexivity beyond discursive, abstract, and symbolic processes (Pagis, 2009). This framework is anchored in mindful awareness of bodily sensations used as guides to psychological states and emotions. Mindfulness trains the *experiential* mode of attention that involves present-moment awareness of one’s always changing experience (Feldman & Kuyken,

2019; McGilchrist, 2021; Siegel & Siegel, 2014). In doing so mindfulness supports the artist's methodological embrace of uncertainty.

However, while utilising the conceptual mode of knowing, the present-centred, disinterested monitoring of mindfulness can guide my critical reflection by enabling me to step-aside from the habitual and bias reinforcing auto-commentary of the mind (Anālayo, 2020).

1.12.1.2 Flexibility

Mindfulness will provide flexibility in working with different forms of reflexivity in this research project. In enabling the artist to notice how experience is created in the mind, mindfulness offers familiarity with different modes of knowing and being, as well as the ability to shift between modes according to what one deems most skilful in the moment (Crane et al., 2017; Feldman & Kuyken, 2019).

1.13 Findings Preview

This research finds that when freed from the vigilant focus of *automatic pilot mode*, an artist can redirect attention to the context of art practice in which it is often skilful to stay with the not knowing. Over time, mindfulness creates an unshakeable experiential understanding that enables the artist to tolerate uncertainty, in ways the research will also demonstrate.

But the research investigates ways that mindfulness can assist artists, not simply to tolerate uncertainty, but also to thrive in uncertainty. Mine is a focused study of how thriving in uncertainty manifests in artists' experience, and ways that this assists processes of artmaking. Accordingly, this research demonstrates that artists can gain an ability through mindfulness to access beginner's mind, as each presupposed mental construction is made available for questioning, training the artist to notice perception as a constructive and creative process.

Unanticipated, the research has also produced data suggesting that artists who practice mindful uncertainty have an enhanced capacity to enter flow states. Also unanticipated, it has demonstrated too that such artists display a welcoming attitude to uncertainty in their narrative accounts, and that this further potentiates thriving in uncertainty. And in chapter four, when I reflect on a work of narrative non-fiction for radio, I'll demonstrate how learning to thrive in uncertainty through mindfulness led to a change in self-perspective that refreshed my own

narrative embrace of uncertainty. And practice-led research will demonstrate that in doing so, the narrative continues to keep me in touch with the novelty of beginner's mind and flow and opens me to ongoing artistic growth.

1.14 Entering the Research Gate

At this point I ask the reader to, in a sense, leave behind everything that has been revealed in this opening chapter.

I'd like to take you down the pathway that led me to this knowledge. In this way you too can take a beginner's mind approach to the discovery process.

Before I proceed any further in this quest, I need to attain a broad overview of the terrain of mindfulness research. Please join me in chapter two, as I survey the field.

Declaration for Thesis Chapter 2

In the case of *Who Owns Mindfulness Radio Documentary*, the nature and extent of my contribution to the work was the following:

Nature of Contribution	Extent of Contributions (%)
I conceived and produced this program. This included researching, interviewing, recording, editing, scripting, narrating, pre-mixing, and guiding the final mix in ABC studios.	90%

The following co-authors contributed to the work:

Name	Nature of Contribution	Contributor is also a UC student (Yes/No)
Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Radio National	Executive Production oversight, and approvals, and final studio production	No


Candidate's Signature

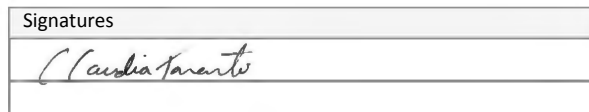
10/06/2022
Date

The undersigned hereby certify that:

- (1) the above declaration correctly reflects the nature and extent of the candidate's contribution to this work, and the nature of the contribution of each of the co-authors.
- (2) they meet the criteria for authorship in that they have participated in the conception, execution, or interpretation, of at least that part of the publication in their field of expertise;
- (3) they take public responsibility for their part of the publication, except for the responsible author who accepts overall responsibility for the publication;
- (4) there are no other authors of the publication according to these criteria;
- (5) potential conflicts of interest have been disclosed to (a) granting bodies, (b) the editor or publisher of journals or other publications, and (c) the head of the responsible academic unit; and
- (6) the original data are stored at the following location(s) and will be held for at least five years from the date indicated below:

[Please note that the location(s) must be institutional in nature, and should be indicated here as a department, centre or institute, with specific campus identification where relevant.]

Location(s):	Australian Broadcasting Corporation Archives Department
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Signatures	Date
	9 June 2022

Chapter 2 Who Owns Mindfulness: A contextual review



Figure 5. Arhat Lost in Thought. From Five Hundred Arhats from Changnyeongsa Temple (2022) Powerhouse Museum, Ultimo NSW, Australia. <https://www.maas.museum/event/five-hundred-arhats/> Image taken by Sherre DeLys.

Before establishing artists' perspectives in mindfulness research, it is necessary to understand the broader field of mindfulness research and professional practice.

In a field in which the methodologies of contemplative science predominate, to claim a valid role for artists' methods is daring. To build my claim for the value of artists' perspectives it is important to survey histories of researchers and professionals who've paved the way by establishing perspectives on mindfulness that are most relevant to their constituent groups. I start my survey with a rhetorical question—Who owns mindfulness?

Additionally, I feel it essential to survey a limited part of a broad debate that surveys ways that mindfulness practice(s) have been transformed (and rebadged) in accommodating them to new purposes, within a context of scientific validation (first in the West, and by now globally). The debate in its broad form is beyond my scope, and my address of aspects of the debate is effectively constrained around the focus I apply to my specific topic. I will focus on debate that stems from the *McMindfulness* critique that as contextualised within the *mindfulness movement*, as it is often called, mindfulness is stripped of its potential to support human flourishing and societal transformation. Even more specifically, I will focus on ways in which this *McMindfulness* critique challenges two axiological positions that serve as foundations for my project.

As we parse this territory together, I invite you to consider these intertwined gestures—surveying key ideas and moments through the eyes of some of the mindfulness movement’s most significant innovators, and examining a debate that challenges my foundational axiomatic positions—as something of an establishing shot.

But equally, under my examination, the debate will become a palimpsest of ideas and research that build towards my later conclusions, because my rebuttal to the critique is also calibrated to reveal human challenges and mindfulness mechanisms that are key to my research quest. My argument then is multi-layered. While it preserves the distinctness of the debate that is essayed in this wide shot, an intentional slippage will allow us to also probe an idea that in later chapters will show up as central to our inquiry—namely the burden of self-consciousness. My findings demonstrate that an ability to tolerate and thrive in uncertainty is closely related to how focused one is on self-centric narratives; the affordance that mindfulness provides, in diminishing such narratives and opening attention to the *other*, is key to its benefits.

2.1 Introduction: Who Owns Mindfulness—A practice-led component of my contextual review

To survey the field, I created a documentary essay for radio. It is one of the creative components of this thesis, and it forms a foundation for my contextual review in this chapter. Shortly I’ll invite you to listen to *Who Owns Mindfulness*, published in 2017 by the *Australian Broadcasting Corporation*. But first I offer some background to the piece that I researched, wrote, recorded, edited, performed, and produced.

2.1.1 McMindfulness Debate

The term *McMindfulness* has become a masthead for the assertion that some mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) teach a very superficial, and harmful, version of mindfulness. For example, Purser (2019) argues that many current mindfulness stakeholders promote individualist and neoliberal goals (e.g., success, happiness, productivity, wealth) that contrast with the orientation toward collective well-being of Buddhist meditation and the Dharma (described by Purser as a collective term for the Buddha's teachings).

Van Gordon and Shonin (2020, p. 1) position the *McMindfulness* argument as one extreme of an ongoing mindfulness authenticity dialogue. In the broad, this rich dialogue/debate encompasses discussion of: the meaning and uses of Buddhist meditation practice(s) in their original context(s); what has been jettisoned in the process of their accommodation to new purposes within a context of scientific validation; and ways of understanding the contemporary mindfulness movement (as it has been described unproblematically until this point in this thesis). To my mind, this broad debate that underlies the far more limited critique I will survey, is vital.³³ However I will limit my discussion to ways the *McMindfulness* critique challenges two axiomatic positions that I bring to the research.

The term *McMindfulness* was first used in an essay *Beyond McMindfulness* in which Purser and Loy (2013), claimed that to achieve its social potential, mindfulness should be scaffolded by an appropriate ethical framework. Within Buddhism, they argued, mindfulness is contextualised within a framework that promotes well-being for others as well as for the self; held within this context, mindfulness offers the potential to bring about social as well as personal transformation.

Beyond McMindfulness inspired heated debate in popular and academic discourse. Its claim of an emerging discursive split in accounts of mindfulness was endorsed by many (e.g., King, 2016). It also inspired counter claims that contemporary mindfulness-based interventions are *too* grounded in Buddhism and that the science should prevail (e.g., Baer, 2015). Others

³³ For example, the debate is vital I believe because greater intellectual inclusivity produces greater (ethical) integrity. More collaborative models involving genuine dialogue between scientific methods and those who represent the traditions from which mindfulness derives "might lead to a genuine and productive expansion of both scientific knowledge and therapeutic possibilities" (Samuel, 2015). Finally, I agree with Saron (Hasenkamp, 202) that there is an urgent need to acknowledge the interconnectedness of humans with others and with our physical world (01:26:54).

proposed that, having been appropriately re-contextualised for secular Western settings, contemporary mindfulness nevertheless offers the universal essence of dharma, with the same potential to address social problems (e.g., Kabat-Zinn, 2017a).

The *McMindfulness* debate is still not settled and continues to occupy the attention of researchers. Anālayo finds the *McMindfulness* debate has achieved the status of myth (Anālayo, 2020b). It is important then that I assess the validity and currency of the *McMindfulness* critique.

This is especially so as, in response to the broad authenticity debate, there has been a growing development of mindfulness interventions that more closely embody some traditional contemplative approaches, and my research is underpinned by one such clinical intervention.

2.1.2 Overview

Who Owns Mindfulness is based on interviews I conducted with leading figures in the spread of mindfulness in the West—in both a Buddhist context, as well as in contexts of healthcare, business, and social justice. *Who owns Mindfulness* is the result of over 10 hours of audio interviews conducted in 2015 in the United States. Most interviews were conducted in Massachusetts, in some senses the epicentre for the evolution of contemporary mindfulness that has influenced other parts of North America, Europe, Australia, Asia and elsewhere.

Through the words of protagonists, the documentary provides an encapsulated survey of the major streams of mindfulness research and practice in the West. It charts the journey of mindfulness since it was introduced, within the context of 1970's American counterculture. The practices introduced in this context are based in the tradition of *Buddhist modernism* (Samuel, 2015). The documentary then focuses on the development, in 1979, of *Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction* (MBSR)—identified as the starting point for the exponential spread of mindfulness into various areas of society (Wilson, 2014), Application of mindfulness as an intervention for clinical problems began with the work of Jon Kabat Zinn who created MBSR—the 8-week training protocol that offers mindfulness training to help individuals relate to their physical and psychological conditions with acceptance and nonjudgment (Keng, Smoski, & Robins, 2011). (Kabat-Zinn is one of several teachers with whom I worked as I trained to teach *MBSR*.) The documentary proceeds to examine second-generation mindfulness research (Van Gordon & Shonin, 2020) that is concerned with identifying Buddhist knowledge that can assist in

developing scientific understandings that might alleviate the suffering caused by attachment to a sense of self.

In the documentary my interview with prominent critic of biomedical accounts of mindfulness, Ron Purser, serves as a lens for my enquiry. Given the *McMindfulness* article's popularity, and its co-author's consequent profile as a figurehead for public debate, in the context of an ABC commission to create a thirty-minute popular radio documentary I chose to shorthand a range of *authenticity* debates through this discussion with Purser. We discuss the *McMindfulness* critique that, reframed for medical and corporate uses, mindfulness is being stripped of its ethical potential to support true human flourishing and societal transformation.

2.1.3 Axiological Positions

Essaying this debate is no dry exercise to gain a critical perspective from an informed history of ideas. I invite you to consider my attention to this debate as a necessary precursor to situating my work as an arts-led researcher in the field. It is necessary because the critique challenges two axiological positions that I bring to this research project. And since these positions affect how I will conduct the research and what I'll value in my findings, I need to reflect upon and test them before proceeding.

2.1.4 Axiology One: Buddhist psychology in dialogue with contemplative science

I believe my research should draw upon both contemplative science and Buddhist psychology. For example, Buddhist psychology's focus on mindfulness as a method to cease reactivity to the uncertainties of impermanence, instability, and unreliability of all phenomena offers a great reservoir of understanding that can enrich and even lead scientific understanding of the ways mindfulness might assist artists to rest at ease with uncertainty.

In my professional and research experience, Buddhist and contemplative science perspectives on mindfulness are implicitly linked, if not wholly consilient. I acknowledge that the relationship of Buddhist and scientific understandings is far more complex than our discussion will allow, but they are linked in my experience as, for example, in offering mindfulness teaching and consultancy, I incorporate perspectives gained from both Buddhist psychology and the clinical domain. Indeed, some of the protagonists in *Who Owns Mindfulness*,

responsible for the spread of mindfulness in the West through both *Buddhist Modernist* and clinical pathways, have been my meditation teachers. Given my training, in my own professional and personal work the two epistemological systems aimed at reducing human suffering remain in a productive, if messy, conversation. And I believe that areas of productive cooperation, and aspects of consilience between practice traditions that have stood the test of time and contemplative science have much to offer to my research project.

Straddling what the *McMindfulness* critique proposes as a great divide, I examined claims of a decisive split in accounts of mindfulness.

2.1.5 Axiology Two: Social mindfulness

In chapter one I identified my axiological position that, by embracing uncertainty in our methods and narratives, artists can become increasingly poised to help make sense of current realities and envision alternative futures. My investigation of the potential role of mindfulness in enabling the artist to tolerate and thrive in uncertainty is underpinned by this value, and my methodology includes supportive reference to the clinical mindfulness literature. For example, my examination of mindfulness' capacity to assist artists to tolerate uncertainty, focuses on the demonstrated capacity of mindfulness to tolerate the stress, excessive worry, anxiety, and other difficult feelings. And yet Purser claims that, when employed for reducing stress and fostering calm, secular mindfulness training promotes tacit acceptance of the status quo. More broadly, the *McMindfulness critique* asserts that the so-called biomedical account of mindfulness obscures the social and ethical potentials of the practice (Purser, 2019; Purser & Loy, 2013).

It is important then that I explore whether the clinical literature and experience that informs my proposals might indeed work against the social potentials that I claim are embedded in my research.³⁴

2.1.6 Please Listen

Please listen to *Who Owns Mindfulness* before moving to the next section of this chapter. The radio program portrays broad issues in a manner appropriate for a general radio audience. Later

³⁴ The *McMindfulness* debate challenged a third axiological position I hold, namely that mindfulness is intrinsically ethical, in that it contains within it a clear intentionality guided by ethics. This is challenged by Purser's critique that the so-called biomedical account of mindfulness obscures the social and ethical potentials of the practices. But that discussion is outside the scope of this project, so I will not address it further.

in this chapter we will parse these issues more specifically, within the context of my research. My arguments will also extend to a topic precluded by the nature of the ABC documentary commission—namely, ways in which arts-based researchers too, might *own mindfulness*.

You can access the documentary/ literature review *Who Owns Mindfulness* by scanning this QR code and clicking the link that appears to access the file.



(In case of difficulty the file can also be accessed on the ABC website here: [*Who Owns Mindfulness*](#).)

After you've listened, I invite you to join me again in this chapter, as I reflect upon the radio documentary essay.

2.2 Exegetical Reflection

As you've now listened to *Who Owns Mindfulness*, I invite you to consider my reflection upon this documentary component of the literature review. Drawing on my own experience with mindfulness—as a practitioner, teacher, and artist—I will add nuance to the contextual review and bring the focus of this thesis into greater relief than was possible in the nationally broadcast documentary.

2.2.1 Examining Common Ground and Dialogue Between Buddhist Psychology and Biomedical Accounts of Mindfulness

Claims that the so-called biomedical account of mindfulness harmfully denatures mindfulness challenge my axiomatic position that this research project should be grounded in the dialogue between Buddhist psychology and contemplative science. In the documentary, Purser, *presents such claims*. Using his critique as a framework, I interview innovators researching

and practicing in the domains of health and business, alongside pioneers associated primarily with Buddhist contexts.

Reflecting upon the documentary, I find that, far from demonstrating a radical discursive split, I have created the documentary in such a way as to identify foundational common ground, and dialogue, that are relevant to this research project.

2.2.2 Second-generation mindfulness-based interventions

The program applied significant focus to the research work of Judson Brewer. In this exegetical account I identify Brewer's work as *second generation* mindfulness research, in alignment with Van Gordon and Shonin's (2020) description of second generation mindfulness interventions (SG-MBIs). SG-MBIs have been formulated and investigated in response to claims that MBIs had drifted so far from their Buddhist roots that it is inaccurate to call them mindfulness (Van Gordon et al., 2015). In identifying SG-MBI's, the authors describe a phase of investigation that began in 2005 and focussed on Buddhist contemplative practices involving ethical and empathic awareness; around 2013 a phase of research emerged that is concerned with investigating Buddhist concepts including nonattachment, impermanence, and nonself (Van Gordon & Shonin, 2020).

Drilling deeper into research focusing on the central Buddhist concept of nonself, Lin et al (2018) find that, drawing upon the Buddhist understanding that mindfulness practices reduce self-focus, contemplative scientists have begun to examine the effects of mindfulness training on self-referential processing. Such research was featured in *Who Owns Mindfulness*, and I will focus upon it here in this exegetical account.

Importantly, this example provides a fertile case study because my research in coming chapters finds that mindfulness' ability to help artists diminish focus on the self as a fixed entity is a key mechanism by which it enables them to tolerate uncertainty. And both Buddhist and scientific understandings of this process have been key to revealing this.

2.2.3 Self-Referential Processing and Attachment to Notions of a Fixed Self

Demonstrating ways in which Buddhist psychology has helped the mindfulness research field identify new avenues of exploration, the example of research into self-referential processing

demonstrates a productive conversation between Buddhism and science with the potential to broaden our understandings of mindfulness. To examine my claim, first consider Buddhist understandings of attachment to the self as a fixed entity, and the role of mindfulness in alleviating suffering that results.

Upādāna is the Sanskrit and Pāli word for an important Buddhist concept referring to clinging, attachment, or grasping. A key Buddhist understanding is that clinging to notions of self as a fixed entity is a primary source of suffering. This plunge into suffering occurs through identifying with or holding to experience as *mine* (Bodhi, 2010). Given this mechanism of self-making, craving (*tañhā* in Pāli) is identified in Buddhist psychology as the central problem. This drive is seen to produce a sense of self because the objects of craving become “that which ‘I’ crave to have, and that which ‘I’ crave to avoid” (Peacock, 2012, Three forms of craving section).

In a Buddhist framework, to arrive at an experiential understanding of the ways that clinging to a sense of self leads to suffering, it is necessary to take up meditation (Bodhi, 2010). In insight meditation practitioners are instructed to be aware of everything within their experience with dispassion, not clinging. Such mindfulness enables the practitioner to notice “what arises—without grasping at things that are presented in order to fit them into a personal blueprint” (Brazier, 2014, p. 33).

As discussed, increasingly drawing upon Buddhist understandings in forging new mindfulness theories and applications, contemplative scientists have begun to examine the effects of mindfulness training on self-referential processing. Self-referential processing is defined in the literature of science as “the experience of strongly relating to one’s person” (Lin et al., 2018, p. 172). In a review integrating neuroscientific studies on aberrant self-referential processing in internalising disorders with contemplative science scholarship examining the effects of mindfulness training on the self-referential system., Lin et al. (2018) demonstrate that anxiety and depression may stem from excessive attachment to the self as a fixed narrative entity. Further the authors find that mindfulness reduces activation in self-referential brain regions implicated in anxiety and depression.

In *Who Owns Mindfulness*, researcher Judson Brewer explains his hypothesis that a particular brain region—the posterior cingulate—is activated when we get *caught up in* our own

experience; in contrast mindfulness meditation decreases activity in this same brain region (DeLys, 2017d, 00:18:10).

Brewer describes getting caught up in one's own experience as when we take something personally (DeLys, 2017d, 00:19:45). Elsewhere he's used the terms craving and attachment for this possible sub-component cognitive process of self-reference, stating that posterior cingulate cortex (PCC) activity increases when one is attached to one's experience "such as when caught up in a drug craving or a particular viewpoint" (Brewer et al., 2013, p. 1). Also described as holding on, getting caught up in experience increases PCC activity, whereas mindfulness decreases PCC activity (Brewer et al., 2013). Further, Brewer et al. (2013) argue that while craving is an obvious experience of being caught up, the PCC seems to be activated also "with more subtle experiences such as identifying with or being attached to attributes of ourselves" (p. 5).

Brewer also identifies getting caught up in one's own experience as a source of suffering. As an addiction psychiatrist, he explains, he feels a great responsibility to translate research findings into programs to help his patients who struggle with the addictive behaviours that result (DeLys, 2017d, 20:07-20:30).

Interviewed for the *New York Times*, Brewer further offers a further example of Buddhist psychology's influence in current research. Highlighting the need to develop new metrics to analyse mindfulness as a medical intervention to reduce craving, he calls upon ancient Buddhist understandings. "Buddhists didn't talk in terms of anxiety and depression," states Brewer. "They used words like 'clinging' or 'attachment.'" Alleviating clinging, or *stickiness*, Brewer notes, is what mindfulness is supposed to do. "So, to know if mindfulness is helping to ease suffering, "we need a stickiness measure" (Tingley, 2020, para .9).

Brewer also highlights the convergence of Buddhist theory and scientific evidence supporting the role of feeling tone (*vedanā*) in forming and perpetuating a sense of self (Judson A Brewer, 2018). For example, pleasant feeling tone can support a problematic self-focus. Brewer (2018) outlines ways that feeling the pleasant effects of intoxicants (chemical and behavioural) builds and supports a self that requires their continued use to survive. Conducting clinical trials targeting behavioural mechanisms highlighted by Buddhist psychology—namely feeling tone

and its relationship to craving—Brewer suggests that early Buddhist psychological models suggest ways to tap into or *hack* these very mechanisms for benefit (Judson A Brewer, 2018).

In Buddhist and scientific accounts above, it is possible to observe both the influence of Buddhist knowledge on current mindfulness research, and an apparent convergence of understanding as to causes of suffering, and mechanisms, or methods, by which mindfulness holds potential to reduce excessive attachment to the self as a fixed entity (i.e., releasing attachment/ craving / clinging).

Sedlmeier et al. (2012) propose that in seeking to understand the therapeutic mechanisms of meditation training researchers should derive precise psychological theories from Buddhist approaches. In focusing on an example of a researcher doing just that, I believe the evident generativity of the approach has demonstrated ways that such linkages can greatly expand our understanding of the causes of suffering and precise ways that mindfulness might alleviate suffering. Lin et al. (2018) note that such an approach enables researchers to avail themselves of the immense mindfulness literature developed over many centuries, and to contribute to a conversation between two critical epistemological systems aimed at reducing human suffering.

Using the example above, my primary intent has been to demonstrate at least limited and pragmatically oriented levels of consilience between Buddhist psychology and contemplative science, as well as productive conversations occurring in the field.

However, claims of a more fundamental consilience are also made, and these demand closer scrutiny.

Identified as the founder of the modern mindfulness discourse, Jon Kabat-Zinn has responded to the *McMindfulness* and other authenticity critiques by claiming that the dharma (which he describes as the *lawfulness* discovered, outlined, and skilfully methodised by the historical Buddha) was included in the original mindfulness-based clinical intervention, MBSR, from the beginning (Kabat-Zinn, 2017a).³⁵ He argues that while MBSR does not explicitly address the

³⁵ In claiming that mindfulness and MBSR are grounded in a universal dharma Kabat-Zinn invokes *pan-Buddhist* understandings of the origins and cessation of suffering. (While the predominate MBSR origin narrative considers the Theravāda-based *neo-vipassanā movement* as the primary influence in MBSR, in fact MBSR techniques derive from both Theravāda-based vipassanā and nondual Mahāyāna approaches (Husgafvel, 2018).

classical foundations of mindfulness these foundations have always been the soil in which MBSR and other MBI's are rooted.

Yet I am convinced by Samuel (2015), a social anthropologist and Buddhist studies scholar, who argues that the central Buddhist tenet of nonself fits poorly into the contemporary therapeutic context.

In a Buddhist framework, all elements of experience change from moment to moment, without anything substantial persisting through the change. The constituents of one's being are, like all things, empty of a stable core. Thus, there is nothing one can cling to as a basis for security; there is only a constantly disintegrating flux which, when clung to in the desire for permanence, brings suffering (Bodhi, 2010). In the *satipatthana discourse*, which for millennia has provided instructions for establishing mindfulness (Feldman, 2019), meditation training serves to bring about freedom from suffering caused by misperceiving oneself as permanent and fixed (Anālayo, 2006).

Samuel (2015) acknowledges that:

to the extent that some forms of mindfulness therapy ... are engaged in the cultivation of positive social emotions, then they are at least moving human subjects away from an exclusive sense of themselves as individuals towards a sense of themselves as deeply connected with others (pp. 494-495).

However, widening the aperture, Samuel (2015), with his specialist focus in Tibetan medicine and Tibetan healing traditions, argues that traditions arising from the Buddhist understanding of nonself offer much more than this limited aim.

Having published widely on relationships between body, materiality, and consciousness in relation to healing, Samuel suggests that, as opposed to a narrow focus on their efficacy, current mindfulness therapies might be regarded as an invitation to explore a wider range of practices available in Buddhist traditions. Further, he proposes that rather than simplifying such practices to fit into Western knowledge frameworks, it would be appropriate to aim to include more of their philosophical frameworks in Western adaptations (Samuel, 2015).

I believe Samuel's position is an important addition to vital conversations about linkages between Buddhism and Western science. In problematising simplistic or evasive notions of consilience, his suggestions offer potential for a greater range of useful therapeutic interventions. Giving the lie to self-assured depictions of a cozy positivist rendez-vous at *the site of truth*, his critique affords opportunities for greater intellectual inclusivity and ethical integrity.

In doing so Samuel's proposals support the argument I make in this thesis for less *epistemic security* and greater inclusiveness when it comes to enquiry models in the mindfulness field, and I will return to this theme at the end of this chapter.

Even so, this perspective steers wide of the specific scope of my research, informed, as it is, by pragmatism as a research paradigm which focuses on the problem to be researched. With my tightly focussed quest, this project's appropriate focus is just such a narrow focus on efficacy with an aim to identify the current productive conversations between Buddhist psychology and scientific frameworks that can help me identify ways that mindfulness can assist artists to tolerate and to thrive in uncertainty.

In ways that speak directly to my research and its consequences, *Who Owns Mindfulness* has identified substantial pragmatic linkages between scientific and Buddhist understandings regarding a source of suffering, and the role of mindfulness in alleviating that suffering. In demonstrating this with a primary aim to validate my use of consilient findings from both knowledge traditions in this research, I have also strategically focused on the example of a productive conversation around the role of self-focus, in support of my own research findings (to be discussed in following chapters) that suggest mindfulness' ability to ease the burden of self-focus has positive consequences for artists learning to tolerate and to thrive in uncertainty.

2.2.3.1 *First Assertion*

Who Owns Mindfulness identifies pragmatically oriented common ground, and the productivity of conversations, between Buddhist and contemplative science frameworks of relevance to the current research.

2.2.3.2 *Implications of Adaptations*

Yet I agree with Shapiro et al. (2020) that to understand the interactions between Buddhist histories of mindfulness and adaptations within healthcare and other domains there is a need for careful consideration. Accordingly, the documentary closely parses some of the most prominent adaptations made to mindfulness training protocols and teaching language. Referring to the most consequential of those, MBSR, the training protocol's creator, Jon Kabat-Zinn, discusses adaptations to the level of rigour required of patients in learning mindfulness. Prior to MBSR, insight meditation was typically taught at residential retreats that can last from a week, to months or even years. In the documentary Kabat-Zinn states that he wanted to challenge patients to undertake a level of mindfulness practice "appropriately rigorous, but not so rigorous that it would blow everyone out of the water" (DeLys, 2017d, 00:16:30).

Exploring adaptations stemming from perspectives outside the medical sphere, the documentary examines the process of adaptation that created the *Search Inside Yourself* course at *Google*. A former software engineer, Chade-Meng Tan, states that he created the course for *Google* engineers "to create a high-level perception of emotion" (DeLys, 2017d, 00:26:30). Underscoring adaptations in language and practice Meng (as he is known) states: "So the right question is: How do I front-load the joy?" (00:26:05). With that course now popular with businesses around the world, Meng is currently developing *zencubators* to create mindful start-up companies (00:27:14).

2.2.4 **Examining Social Mindfulness vs the Privatisation of Mindfulness**

Purser's claim that the *privatisation of mindfulness* obscures the social and ethical potentials of the practice challenges my axiomatic position that social mindfulness can assist in transformational work by artists. I believe that by enabling artists to tolerate and thrive in uncertainty, secular mindfulness can assist positive social transformation. Like my position that this project should be grounded in the dialogue between Buddhist psychology and contemplative science, so my belief that artists' use of mindfulness has an important social/transformational dimension is foundational in this research.

2.2.4.1 Reflecting on this Second Axiological Position

In chapter one, outlining the social context of this research project, I noted that the global pandemic, and climate crisis are just two of the fast-evolving disruptions to life creating uncertainty around the globe (Foss, 2020; Legg, 2021; United Nations Secretary General, 2021). Such events can only serve to exacerbate what Eckersley (2006) described decades earlier as a breakdown of community, resulting in a heightened sense of risk, uncertainty, and insecurity—in turn prompting an epidemic of anxiety disorders. Such disruptions do have consequences for mental health. For example, the social isolation of quarantine has deleterious psychological impacts (Brooks et al., 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic and prolonged lockdown measures negatively impacted the mental health of children and young people (Crawford, 2021).

The pandemic conditions also revealed that one potential antidote to the *cabin fever* of lockdown is engaging with or experiencing creativity through the arts (Crawford & Crawford, 2021). This bolsters my argument that artists have a key role to play in these uncertain times. I contend that by developing skills to thrive in the uncertainty of artists' borderless and ambiguous methodologies, our capacities to envision alternative futures is increased. In our interconnected fates, artists' resilience—the ability to adapt well in adversity or threat (American Psychological Association, 2014)—can be harvested for the benefit of others.

Crawford et al., (2013) demonstrate that creative practice in the arts promotes connectedness in support of *mutual recovery*. As an example, my project *The Listening Room*³⁶—a durational performative project that invites listeners to speak, and to be heard in silence, without judgment—is designed to build resilience through our innate human interconnectedness.

2.2.4.1.1 The Listening Room, Pilot

I conducted a pilot of this project in the framework of *The Empathy Clinic* for *The Big Anxiety Festival* 2019. As I saw it even then, collective, and individual resilience is threatened in this historical moment as interlinked crises pull back the curtain to reveal our fundamental condition of uncertainty.³⁷ The design of *The Listening Room* pilot was informed by mindfulness practices

³⁶ <https://www.thebiganxiety.org/events/sherre-delys/>

³⁷ For example, many scholarly articles around that time reported the negative impacts of climate change on mental health and related strains to the social fabric (e.g., Hayes, 2019; Hayes et al., 2018; Hayes & Poland, 2018; Obradovich et al., 2018; Sanson et al., 2019). *Time Magazine* reported that, in 2019, eco-anxiety stemming from uncertainty over climate effects, had

that cultivate empathic awareness, and scientific findings that demonstrates the role of connectedness in building resilience. Practicing in silence in *The Listening Room*, I cultivated empathic awareness as a kind of not knowing (Tronick, 2020); practicing empathy requires acknowledging context that extends beyond the limits of one's perception and knowledge (Han, 2018; Jamison, 2014).

Carefully agreed upon safety protocols enabled *The Listening Room* participants and myself to explore resilience in uncertainty³⁸. Patterns I have identified in the journal notes I wrote over the six days of *The Listening Room* reveal that as I attuned increasingly to reciprocal relationships between empathy and uncertainty, my sense of self progressively loosened. The more this occurred, the more I sensed that visitors to *The Listening Room* were able to use my presence to construct something they needed for healing and meaning making. With my silence, and in the uncertainty of this unusual presentation, different participants described me alternately as a shaman, the Oracle of Delphi, a Buddhist monk, a psychotherapist, a nun, and more. And with these projections taking centre stage, each used the session with their chosen figure to good effect. After a long period of silence together, one participant described *The Listening Room* as a form *Brechtian distancing*, revealing that this and my quiet presence had allowed a stability and meta-awareness enabling her to hold trauma mindfully in the moment. With others, our time together unfolded as co-created works of performance art that often seemed to break the spell of discomfort, enabling the participant to share stories of anxiety and resilience. Many came to sit or walk, to cry, or talk, or play.

Broadly, I see *The Listening Room* in the context of a maturing interdisciplinary and applied field (*Health Humanities*) that, in disrupting hierarchies of expertise and foregrounding arts-based enquiry over biomedical models, presents a vision for the arts in transforming health care (Crawford et al., 2020).

exploded across the Western world (Nugent, 2019) In developing *The Listening Room*, I was also sensitive to impacts of race-based traumatic stress, and a common diagnosis that a critical mass of social anxieties was contributing to growing tribalism in western societies.

³⁸ Please note: I have intentionally kept descriptions of these sessions broad, and I have excluded details that could identify participants. However, I have also received formal permissions from each participant to include broad descriptions such as these in my exegesis.

As the writer Toni Morrison (2015) said of the artist's role in times of dread and fear, "we speak, we write, we do language. That is how civilizations heal" (para. 14).

Returning to my reflections on the documentary, it is therefore unsurprising that I set the overriding question in *Who Owns Mindfulness* in this voiced narration: "In a time of rising inequality, chaotic politics, and the ransacking of the planet, could this ancient technology of consciousness help the whole world find its way? Now that's my question." (DeLys, 2017d, 00:22:38) And on reflection I see that my conclusion is in the affirmative. Let's explore this in two parts—mindfulness' pro-social affordances, and the practice's potential contribution to social transformation.

2.2.4.1.2 External Mindfulness: Pro-social Affordances

Mindfulness research focussed on Buddhist contemplative practices involving ethical and empathic awareness is of growing interest (Van Gordon & Shonin, 2020). The idea that mindfulness practiced in a secular framework offers a relational orientation is supported by a wealth of research. For example, mindfulness can free people to act with less bias from past associations (Bishop et al., 2004; Kang, Gruber, & Gray, 2013). As an example of this beginner's mind, in a relational context, Lueke and Gibson (2015) found that this capacity reduces implicit out-group bias.

Yet on reflection I note that, from the hours of recorded interview materials, I selected a statement from Purser that includes reference to external mindfulness. In the documentary, Purser states: "So I think we have to get beyond the biomedical model of stress and develop mindfulness that's not just turning inward to look at one's own emotions and thoughts, but also externally" (DeLys, 2017d, 00:22:26).

As a Buddhist practitioner, Purser's focus on external mindfulness is understandable. The *satipatthana discourse* that provides instructions for establishing mindfulness, articulates a repeated refrain to establish each focus of mindfulness both internally and externally. The discourse provides instructions for achieving mindfulness, voicing a repeated refrain to establish each focus of mindfulness both internally and externally. The most accepted scholarly understanding considers external mindfulness to refer to being aware of other persons (Anālayo, 2020c).

Like Purser, Anālayo suggests that adopting an understanding of mindfulness that includes external mindfulness would be useful to society. Such broadening, he argues, can open the door to new avenues in mindfulness research, extending the acknowledged benefits of mindfulness to activities of relating to others (Anālayo, 2020c). For example, Anālayo (2020a) finds that early Buddhist perspectives on mindfulness applied to the external realm could extend existing programs that use the practice to counter racial oppression.

I support the call for external mindfulness to be given more explicit attention in the research.

But while I agree that the popular mindfulness movement has focused on individual states (Anālayo, 2020a), I find the claim that contemporary mindfulness is therefore individualising simplistic. In teaching mindfulness in domains of cancer treatment, leadership training, and artmaking, I have observed that the effects of practicing contemporary mindfulness, even with its focus on the individual, always extends to encompass the realm of human interactions.

To demonstrate this position, I return to statements in *Who Owns Mindfulness* that offer an example of how individual mindfulness practice contains a (pro)social orientation. And once again I select an example that also demonstrates the relationship of *self-focus* to external mindfulness.

As discussed earlier, practicing mindfulness is shown to diminish self-referential processing. Let's reflect once more on Judson Brewer's statements, that demonstrate perspectives of SG-MBI's in the documentary.

When asked what he means by *getting out of our own way*, Brewer's answer uses everyday language to reference feeling (or hedonic) tone that we discussed earlier. But his answer is revealing in other ways too.

It's an experiential quality. So, if somebody yells at me and says, you know, 'I think your research is stupid' and I clench up around that, right, or I become defensive, there's this feeling of contraction, as compared to when ... somebody's being kind. I open the door for somebody, or somebody opens the door for me, the opposite of that happens. There's this expansive quality

to experience. So, it's really an experiential quality of contraction versus expansion. So, the contraction is when we get in our own way.... And then when we get out of our own way is when it's not about us. It's just *getting into the flow of life* [emphasis added] (DeLys, 2017d, 19:12- 20:05).

It is worth noting that Brewer mentions *flow* in this interview. My findings will involve the flow construct later in this exegesis.

But let's continue to explore what the documentary reveals about the social role of mindfulness, as described by the literature of contemplative science. Brewer chooses the example of helping another in a friendly manner, to explain the experiential quality of expansiveness (pleasant feeling tone) that he's also linked to diminished activity in a part of the brain involved in self-referencing. In this, Brewer connects evidence of mindfulness' reduced self-referencing to relational activity. This example, along with multiple research findings, implicitly refutes Purser's assertion that secular mindfulness is individualising and therefore lacking in social potential. For example, Vago and Silbersweig (2012) find that in altering aspects of self-processing, mindfulness facilitates social relations that transcend self-focus, while the practice also increases empathy and altruism. Indeed, Shapiro et al. (2006) cite the social realm as a primary instance of the *reperceiving* meta-mechanism underlying mindfulness, in which what was subject becomes object. Offering the ability to shift one's perspective from a personal frame of reference, they argue, mindfulness increases one's capacity to take the perspective of another (Shapiro et al., 2006).

And once again, linkages between prosocial relational activity and diminished self-reference discovered by contemplative scientists are in keeping with Buddhist psychological understandings formed over many centuries of observation and analysis. A key Buddhist understanding finds that "when we are no longer bound to the summons of desire / craving there is a spontaneous upsurge of feelings of dispassion towards oneself, and at the same time, compassion towards others. Compassion works on dispassion" (Peacock, 2012, Glimpses of nibbāna section).

But let's now return to my reflection on the documentary *Who Owns Mindfulness* and continue to explore the challenge of Purser's critique to my axiomatic position that mindfulness can be used for social, and socially transformative, ends.

2.2.4.2 Social Transformation

We now turn to the role mindfulness might play in social transformation. On reviewing *Who Owns Mindfulness*, I see that my attentiveness to a social focus extends to address uses of mindfulness in desirable social transformation. In the documentary my narration notes that the development and popularisation of insight meditation stemmed from an anti-colonial impetus in British-occupied Burma in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It declares that the idea that mindfulness could change the world has a long history, and I offer several examples, including early Buddhist dismissal of the caste system.³⁹

But let's review the arguments advanced by Purser, as he asserts that the contemporary mindfulness movement precludes mindfulness' potential in this domain. Through my editing choices, I've given priority in the program to Purser's broadest formulation of this critique. Near the start of the program, Purser states: "...we're not really asking the deeper question, 'What is the good life, and how do we live it?' Instead, we're given tools and techniques to live the life that we're putting up with" (DeLys, 2017d, 00:1:50)

I disagree with this perspective. In contrast, I agree with statements in the documentary made by the Buddhist teacher and author best known for his *Secular Buddhism*, Stephen Batchelor. Discussing contemporary secular mindfulness training such as the MBSR course, Batchelor argues that MBSR provides, for many people:

...the first real experience of an inner stillness and calm and presence, in which they're able to discover a whole new perspective on what it means to be human. Inevitably this raises ethical questions such as: What is this life for? and: How should I live? (DeLys, 2017d, 0:29:50).

³⁹ In ancient India, early Buddhism granted priority to ethical conduct over birth (Anālayo, 2020a).

Purser has proposed that teaching mindfulness to employees promotes subjugation.

Discussing the uses of mindfulness in the corporate sphere Purser states:

“...how can we be more conscious and critical of how mindfulness could be of benefit to society in such a way that it doesn't just help individuals cope and adapt to the toxic conditions that they're already having to work in?”.

(DeLys, 2017d, 00:24:26).

We hear shortly from former *Google* employee, Meng Tan. He explains his plan to create *zencubators*, co-locating a Zen monastery with a tech incubator. “The first effect I hope is that companies get wisdom and compassion in their DNA from day one. So, when they [the company] graduate, and when they [the company] become *Google*, they have wisdom and compassion from day one” (DeLys, 2017d, 00:28:20).

In *Who Owns Mindfulness*, Kamala Masters argues for the beneficial ethical influence of mindfulness on heads of corporations she has taught (DeLys, 2017d, 00:7:00). And, as I will demonstrate in chapter four—where practice-led research brings me to reflect on my own experience with mindfulness and corporate life—far from subjugating me, in the past mindfulness has helped liberate me from neoliberal agendas.

In contrast to the compliance with corporate agendas Purser highlights, Tan and Masters suggest that the awareness created by practicing mindfulness has potential to wake up ethical considerations that serve to liberate mindfulness practitioners from such agendas. While Purser's scepticism about the motivations of corporate managers and business entrepreneurs offers a useful contribution to the public discussion about uses of mindfulness in the West, I assert that his analysis underestimates the disruptive potential of mindful awareness. For mindfulness encourages the practitioner to step out of habitual narratives and look deeply at their own lived experience (Shapiro & Weisbaum, 2020).

In its closing remarks, the documentary offers a statement by a Buddhist meditation teacher, Thanissara. In this important *conclusive* section of the documentary, my editing choices highlight her critique that there needs to be a challenge to a movement that was (at least at the

time of the recording) “very white, very middle class, very comfortable.... “This practice”, she argues, “isn’t just about ourselves at this point. It’s about: How do we bring this into the world to decolonise ourselves, and the structures and systems we’ve been shaped within for centuries that are contributing to this decimation of nature and marginalised peoples?” (DeLys, 2017d, 00:32:45).

This statement was important to my deepening awareness of the transformational uses of mindfulness, because Thanissara’s claim deepens the question as to who *owns* mindfulness. Going beyond the challenge to the dominance of the science research as I have framed it, she brings into play the *whitening of mindfulness* (Ng & Purser, 2015), and power structures that have shaped mindfulness in the West. The statement by this meditation teacher and former nun also demonstrates that questions of *ownership* also have implications for *applications* of mindfulness.

2.2.4.3 *Second Assertion*

Giving the last very word in the documentary component of this contextual review to Thanissara, the program foregrounds her statement that MBSR, like its Buddhist mindfulness training counterparts, has the power to *seed a revolution* (DeLys, 2017d, 00:33:20).

While I agree there is a need to be wary of the hype, commercialisation and, at times, anti-social uses of mindfulness, in concluding the program in this way I assert my own hopeful declaration that new uses of mindfulness and a new generation of research—including my own—will make far-reaching contributions at this critical moment in human history.

Moving beyond the documentary, in this belief in the power of mindfulness to contribute to societal transformation, I’m broadly in agreement with Thich Nhat Hanh, the monk scholar and meditation teacher who was known for his environmental and political activism. He states: “...truly engaged Buddhism is first of all practicing mindfulness in all that we do” (2008, p. 77).

More specifically, I agree with Anālayo (2020b) that mindfulness offers an important tool to face environmental devastation and can counter denial and contribute to adaptivity in the face of climate change (Anālayo, 2019).

2.3 Conclusions

The thrust of arguments in *Who Owns Mindfulness* corroborate the view of Anālayo (2020b), who finds that the term *McMindfulness* is not a reasonable characterisation of MBSR and related mindfulness-based practices. My reflections have made explicit my agreement with Van Gordon and Shonin (2020). They argue that the essence of the *McMindfulness* claim is that some contemporary mindfulness offerings have enabled cliques of mindfulness teachers and stakeholders to profit from integrating a watered-down mindfulness into various settings. My reflections have suggested my agreement with the authors' argument that, in seeking to propagate its own legitimacy, the *McMindfulness* initiative could result in a *McMindfulness ego*, creating further confusion as to the nature of authentic mindfulness practice (Van Gordon & Shonin, 2020).

I acknowledge that consilience between Buddhist meditation and science, however, is far more complex than this brief account has allowed. Yet reflecting on *Who Owns Mindfulness* I've carefully woven together ideas that some legitimately argue to be separate, in a manner that speaks to my research concerns. Straddling contested divides essayed in *Who Owns Mindfulness*, my reflection is an act of alignment between different contextual orientations that I have worked within, and now build upon to assemble my own unique position.

2.4 Interdisciplinary Conjunction

At the broadest level, in this documentary/literature review, my intention has been to honour critical conversations about disruptions to the continuity of mindfulness traditions occurring at this dynamic moment in history.

In its aims and scope *Who Owns Mindfulness* suggests, along with Shapiro et al. (2020) that those within the field of mindfulness should consider their collective history as a fertile source for reflection, in which the different strands can be seen as part of a whole. Additionally, and more broadly, I agree with Samuel (2015) that “the Mindfulness Movement, by popularizing Buddhism and other non-Western forms of knowledge, is assisting in a much-needed pluralization of human resources in general, at a time when that might be particularly useful” (p. 496).

In creating and reflecting upon this work, I found evidence for my axiomatic view: namely that to achieve its full potential, mindfulness research should be conducted in a spirit of mutually respectful interdisciplinary exchange. It should take account of Buddhist and science-based perspectives, along with an array of professional discipline-based frames of reference, including arts-based research.

In my own research, this need for inter-disciplinary conjunction (potentially exhaustingly wide-ranging) is effectively contained and constrained around the focus I apply to my specific topic. For example, Buddhist psychology's focus on mindfulness as a method to cease reactivity to the uncertainties of impermanence, instability, and unreliability of all phenomena, including the sense of self, offers a conceptual reservoir that can enrich understanding of ways mindfulness might assist artists to rest at ease with uncertainty, ambiguity and the unknown.

In the final moments of *Who Owns Mindfulness*, I sum up the journey of understanding I've taken in making the piece. My narration compares the flow of mindfulness through the West to a river that is permanent, yet ever changing:

The current of the flowing river does not cease, and yet the water is not the same water as before. So goes a famous expression of the Buddhist concept of impermanence by a Japanese monk in the 13th century (DeLys, 2017d, 00:33:37).

But this quote from the 13th century work *Hōjōki*, by Japanese Buddhist poet Kamo no Chōmei, does more than express Buddhist psychology's appreciation of the uncertainty of all phenomena, and the ever-changing nature of mindfulness as it moves through cultures and time.

By offering this metaphor of the flowing river, in which a current that appears constant is at the same time in flux, I also quietly stake a claim for the mindful artist's perspective in the mindfulness research field. For metaphor offers a betweenness that calls upon the listener to engage with imagination. Metaphor asks of the listener, not to reason or resolve, but to enter and engage. This is the artist's way.

2.5 Turning Toward the Upcoming Research

Casting toward the chapters ahead, I can reveal that in detailing a process by which the field has recently worked to identify common ground between mindfulness frameworks in Buddhist psychology and contemplative science, my intention has also been to demonstrate that an interdisciplinary approach in the field is nascent. There are productive tensions already moving the field beyond positivist and constructivist binaries that have separated the arts and humanities from the sciences.

And in common with the field's growing acceptance of the findings and processes of Buddhist psychology, the potential of arts-based research to generate new ways of externalising personally situated knowledge while also exposing the role of social, cultural, and philosophical frameworks (Barret & Bolt, 2014) is ripe for extension into the mindfulness field. The present research, I believe, exemplifies this claim.

In the following chapter, we will transition to consider artists' perspectives in the field. As a prelude, I'd like to undertake a quick review of findings concerning the burden of self-consciousness that have been revealed within this chapter, as in shortly these findings will show up as central to our inquiry.

2.5.1 Review of arguments Concerning Self-referential Processing

As discussed, I consider this chapter to be palimpsestual in conveying layers of relevant knowledge. While essaying a broad debate an intentional strategy has enabled us to also survey scientific findings and contemplative knowledge that reveal relationships between self-centric focus and mindfulness.

We've considered the sticky quality of self-referential processing. We've considered Buddhist and scientific knowledge suggesting that objects of craving—drugs, viewpoints, self attributes, or anything else that becomes sticky in experience—reinforce a narrative attachment to the self as a fixed entity. We've also parsed consilient knowledge that excessive attachment to the self as a fixed narrative entity causes suffering, and may be central to the experience of anxiety. In considering the therapeutic effects of mindfulness, we've reviewed findings across Buddhist psychology and contemplative science that mindfulness offers a unique mode of self-reference

that facilitates the experience of sensory phenomena through the lens of self-detached observation rather than self-centric narratives.

These pieces of consilient knowledge from Buddhist psychology and contemplative science build a platform for our upcoming examination of ways artists might, with the use of mindfulness, tolerate and thrive in uncertainty.

I invite you now to join me on a journey to explore mindful artists' perspectives in the field in chapter three, followed by my research conducted using practice-led methodologies in chapter four.

Chapter 3 The art of Don't Know Mind



Figure 6. Young, K.S (2022) Detail from Arhats of Daily Introspection. From Five Hundred Arhats from Changnyeongsa Temple Powerhouse Museum, Ultimo NSW, Australia.
<https://www.maas.museum/event/five-hundred-arhats/> Image taken by Sherre DeLys.

A pilgrim, Fayan, was walking from temple to temple, practicing wherever he found himself. At one point he came across a respected hermit at his hermitage.

The hermit said to Fayan: “Where are you going?”

“Wherever my feet take me”, said Fayan. Probing more deeply, the hermit asked: “But what are you looking for?” “I don’t know”, Fayan replied.

Said the hermit, “Not knowing is the most intimate”.

3.1 Introduction

This Zen story, as I've heard, or at least remembered, it is a fitting preamble to my own research journey, aimed at introducing artists' perspectives into the mindfulness field. For here, as I set out, the story reminds me to relax into the questions—at ease in uncertainty. It challenges me to meet each moment in the research process ahead with the intimacy of not knowing.

3.1.1 Overview

In this chapter, addressing my aim to enrich the mindfulness research field with artists' perspectives and methods, I introduce first-person accounts offered by a cohort of artists that serves as my research reference group. Moving to qualitative analysis, I undertake discussions with artists who practice mindfulness to reveal patterns of experience that illuminate my research questions. In turn I open myself to how artist's experiences might influence these questions. As I analyse patterns of artists' experience, I'll cross-reference their accounts with journals I kept while beta-testing the *Unwinding Anxiety* mindfulness training app, a reflective source of insights that occurred while I learned to release the stickiness of self-focus and move into the flow of uncertainty. Broadly speaking, I consider the work of this chapter to be part of my studio practice, as it will generate questions and a proposal that determine my practice-led research in chapter four.

My aim in this chapter is to look for patterns of reported experience that address my two initial research proposals, as stated in chapter one:

Artists can use mindfulness to learn to *tolerate* uncertainty in the interest of releasing its generative potentials.

Artists can use mindfulness to learn ways to *thrive* in uncertainty in the interest of releasing its generative potentials.

I will first focus on demonstrating that artists value uncertainty as a productive state from which to create, and detail particular ways in which they experience this productivity.

I'll also demonstrate that while states of uncertainty can be motivating for artists, uncertainty can be paralysing, preventing artists from availing themselves of uncertainty's productive potentials.

3.1.2 Statement of Positionality and Reflexivity

In this chapter I consult closely with five artists who practice mindfulness. This group, of which I'm a member, first formed in 2015 with face-to-face meetings in Barre, Massachusetts at two *dharma and art* retreats that I co-designed. The group has continued to meet online to discuss our experiences of relationships between art practice and Buddhist psychology.

My subjective position as a member of this group is a key part of my axiological and epistemological position in relation to this phase of the research. I consider myself to be a *halfie* researcher—both a member of the group and a researcher within its midst.⁴⁰ My insider's perspective on practice distinctions meaningful to group members is likely to elicit richer information than studies undertaken from an outsider point of view. However, an insider status can cause me to miss other details. Here, mindfulness practice that challenges me to meet each moment in the research with the intimacy of *not knowing* will prove critical.

Situated reflexivity regarding my status as a halfie involves navigation and management of the dual characteristics of this identity. To strengthen my independent outlook, I will also cross reference artists' accounts with the mindfulness evidence-base.

3.1.3 Common Practice

Like me, each artist in the group has practiced mindfulness for many decades, having undergone rigorous retreat and home training in insight meditation, also known as *vipassana*.

3.1.3.1 Satipatthana Practice

Each of our practices are grounded in insight meditation's foundational instructions, the *satipatthana discourse*. This discourse provides instructions to establish mindfulness in moment-by-moment experience. The discourse divides experience into four categories—

⁴⁰ I've borrowed, and nuanced, this term from anthropology research. As I see it, in conducting this research I am half group member and half researcher. Though I recognise that I am using the term *halfie* in ways that depart from its specific use in anthropological fieldwork, I find the term a better fit than, for example, the insider/outsider identity also used there.

instructing the practitioner sequentially to be mindful of the body, mindful of feeling tone (or hedonic tone) mindful of mind states, and finally to be mindful of how experience in each of these domains comes together to create a sense of self (Feldman & Kuyken, 2019). These foundational instructions of Buddhist meditation train a process designed to aid observation of how experiences are re-shaped when perceived through their value to *me*, rather than simply in their own right. This chapter will demonstrate that these foundational instructions for experiential awareness form a training manual for learning to tolerate and thrive within uncertainty.

“The Sattipathana, it just feels natural.” says poet Carolyn Dille (C. Dille, personal communication, July 7, 2021). Carolyn is the Guiding Teacher at *Jikoji Zen Center* in Santa Cruz California . She’s also the founding editor of *Leaping Clear*, a magazine featuring artists with meditative and contemplative practices.

Daily formal meditation underpins each of these artist’s ability to practice mindfulness in everyday activities, including artmaking. “I try to sit [practice mindfulness meditation] every day for at least 30 minutes. For me it’s very helpful to have that discipline” explains painter Jim Potterton (J. Potterton, personal communication, July 7, 2021). A former Labor Studies and Psychology professor, Jim now focuses on his studio painting practice.

I’ll introduce other members of my reference group as their accounts come into focus.

3.1.3.2 *Aesthetic Intersubjective Paradigm*

The group has conceptualised the processes involved in our work together. Our *aesthetic intersubjective paradigm* (Leavy, 2017) conveys relationships to uncertainty informed by mindfulness and arts practice. We’ve identified experiential awareness as central to our encounters, as we sense into the body while responding to the enquiry questions of the day. Working with penetrating enquiry questions each time we meet, we’ve also cultivated dyadic and group enquiry practices aimed at keeping the question at hand alive, and continually returning to a state of *don't know mind*.

Incorporating awareness of our subjective perspectives, we understand meaning as arising in context and in relationship. Group member, writer and filmmaker Jana Larson describes this communal approach to knowledge creation as “healing from the dual” (J. Larson, personal

communication, July 7, 2021). *Nondual* philosophy and the practice of nondual awareness will be discussed in chapter four, where surprisingly they emerge as pivotal in my practice-led reflection. But to contextualise Jana's statement it is useful to know that many contemplative traditions maintain that in nondual states of awareness self-other distinctions can dissolve, along with self-referential thoughts, and over many centuries such traditions have developed technologies to access nondual awareness (Hanley et al., 2018). In scientific measures of nondual awareness, *self-transcendence* is a critical dimension (Hanley et al., 2018) and these measures have determined frequency of mindfulness practice to be positively correlated with nondual awareness.

As discussed within the group, members' engagements with mindfulness have revealed experience as forever in a state of change. Accordingly, we emphasise processes, not things—knowledge as practice. Choreographer Paul Matteson offers his sense of our conversations as “a partner dance” of sorts, an “ever-orienting perceptual knowledge.” (P. Matteson, personal communication, July 7, 2021). Assistant Professor in the *School of Dance*, University of the Arts, Philadelphia Pennsylvania, Paul has been a member of *The Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Company* and received a *New York Dance and Performance Award* for his body of work.

Our curiosity-driven frameworks value creating knowledge through struggling to find language even for experiences that are essentially mysteries. We understand language as creative rather than prescriptive.

3.1.3.3 *Being There*

Transitioning from my weekly *Lifeline Cancer Research Hospital* Zoom meeting to my fortnightly reference group Zoom session is always a challenge. Scheduled back-to-back, the meetings' connective technology moves more quickly than my mind can switch from medical jargon to artists' vernacular. Today, as I sign into the meeting with my reference group, I'm thankful this meeting of artists always starts with five minutes of silent meditation. As I enter the Zoom room, the group is already meditating.

I join in, slowing down, closing the eyes, and settling into the feeling of the body posture. I notice the body breathing. Moving away from the conceptual, soon I notice that the breath is not just an idea. I experience the breath as a flow of sensations—warmth, tightness, pressure, tension. When another sensation for my attention, I make that my object of meditation, opening to what it feels like in the body. I pay attention to what happens to the sensation as I hold it in awareness, attuning to appearances and disappearances of phenomena, without interpreting. And when the sensation no longer calls for my attention, I return attention to breathing. In the same way, as other phenomena call for my attention—perhaps a sound, an emotion, or a thought—I open to the feeling of these too. Steering my attention away from the conceptual way I normally navigate the world, I attune to a preverbal, preconceptual connection to the moment. I begin to experience a relaxed awareness that simply receives all phenomena. From time-to-time, thought arises, but this receptive awareness is not dissecting or interpreting, rather it is witnessing experience. I notice the felt sense of a thought arise, and what happens to the thought in the moment of awareness. Often, it feels like a soap bubble bursting. Sometimes the mind gets lost in thought before I'm aware of thinking. Then, like waking from a dream, I become aware of the process of thinking, noticing the freedom of choice I have in that moment. I might make a soft mental note, like “thinking”, “planning”, or “judging”. And even if the thinking, or any other phenomenon such as sound, sensation, or emotion continues to stream along in the periphery, I return attention to the breath to grow a sense of collectedness.

A short silent meditation practice at the start of our meeting aims to build momentum for the experience of being here and now, moment-to-moment.

As the meditation approaches its end, with the sound of a bell, I open my eyes.

3.2 Qualitative Findings

Discussing uncertainty in relation to mindfulness with my reference group has allowed me to understand the role uncertainty plays in practice for the *mindful artist*. And I've detected several significant patterns that I will lay out.

3.2.1 Pattern One; Valuing States of Uncertainty in Artmaking

A primary pattern I detect in conversations with this group is that these artists value uncertainty.

Rosie Rosensweig values uncertainty for its power to unleash *emergence*, a non-egoic mystery. “Uncertainty is discovering it as you write. It emerges from darkness, from just not knowing.” (R. Rosensweig, personal communication, June 23, 2021). A playwright and author of

Emergence: The Role of Mindfulness in Creativity, Rosie is also *Resident Scholar* in *Women's Studies Research Centre*, Brandeis University. "You find your characters and you put them in a situation, and you watch them interact. It's not you anymore, there's no ego" (R. Rosensweig, personal communication, June 23, 2021).

"There are craft things that can be focused upon, but if it's not the *not known* I just don't get it." adds Carolyn, our poet who also teaches meditation and creativity. "If I know where the next word or line is going that's really rare." (C. Dille, personal communication, June 23, 2021)

Jana adds:

What you think you know gets in the way of *sati*—pointing your mind towards something, and then *sampajañña*⁴¹— turning it over inside of this empty space where you allow it to reveal itself to you in a way that you haven't known before. And I think if you have a view, or a bias, or an opinion that's already formed, you're not allowing yourself to resonate with an object and know it anew. So you're not open to aspects and characteristics of an object that haven't yet been known. Views, biases, and opinions are a very surface crust on reality, and to be stuck there precludes any depth of knowing to really occur (J. Larson, personal communication, June 23, 2021).

For each of these artists, uncertainty yields fresh understandings. I note that this understanding contains a commitment to an experiential, even mysterious, form of knowing that is distinct from conceptual knowing.

In this experiential knowing Jim, the painter in our group, feels the excitement of risk and revelation. What feels right about working with things

⁴¹ Central to the insight meditation tradition, the ancient Pali terms *sati*, or mindfulness, and *sampajañña* which in this context is best translated as clear comprehension or clear knowing, are often paired, and refer to aspects of the process by which one monitors one's own body and mind.

that are not known is a quality of excitement and energy that I experience. So that I get a chance to play around with energy and excitement, and to follow that in my art making. It's the risk. It's revelatory too. Something else comes out of it. Beyond even the excitement and the energy, is the things that are revealed (J. Potterton, personal communication, Dec 10 2020).

But all artists in the group have indicated that it's hard to stay with this form of knowing.

“There's something about our faith in not knowing—like a longing for that mystery. It feels like a quivering animal or something.” Paul laughs as he speaks, mocking an internal conversation with himself: “No, no, just stay in that mystery, the not knowing. Don't be quick to put language to it! And ...you lost it!” (P. Matteson, personal communication, Dec 10, 2020).

3.2.2 Pattern Two; Tolerating uncertainty

Next, we'll seek to understand how mindful artists use meditation to tolerate difficult feelings of uncertainty, reflecting patterns I've observed within the reference group.

“So tolerating uncertainty is so important. You begin with tolerating it” (R. Rosenzweig, personal communication, April 2, 2019).”

I think it is important to my work to rest in uncertainty but I'm not sure how often I succeed in that. You know, uncertainty can really send me orbiting out of my body, and when I let myself get jettisoned, rattled too radically by uncertainty, that definitely gets in the way of being with uncertainty in a way that can be useful, and I am no longer resting at all. So I've been reflecting mostly on what gets in the way. One is getting too far away from mindfulness” (J. Larson, personal communication, June 20, 2019).

These two artist's statements point toward issues to be examined, and findings in this section.

Let's first look closely at how the dynamics of uncertainty play out in artists' experiences.

3.2.2.1 *Uncertainty's Polarising Potential on Artists' Affect and Motivation*

In my discussions with reference group artists, in accounts alternating between terror and delight, uncertainty's polarising effects on artists' affect and motivation has been revealed.

As a quick demonstration, I offer these short phrases extracted from a dyad practice I undertook with Paul as he responded to the question: How do you experience uncertainty?

Mixed Methods: Inspired by *Hwadu*, from the Korean *Sŏn* Buddhist tradition, in which a repeated question is used as a tool to cultivate a sensation of questioning in the mind and body, this practice is designed to foster a condition of uncertainty and experiential enquiry. In this type of contemplation, throwing the question into the moment repeatedly is a way to open to the moment and keep the question alive. Once a response is spoken the speaker repeats the question and the responder replies again, in a fast cycle of question and response to keep the mind in a questioning space, alert to thoughts, sensations and emotions that are moving through the body in response.

Sherre: Tell me how you experience uncertainty.

Paul: inviting, pregnant, generative

Sherre: Tell me how you experience uncertainty.

Paul: destroy, resist, freeze.

Sherre: Tell me how you experience uncertainty.

Paul: I'm curious, motivated, invited

Sherre: Tell me how you experience uncertainty.

Paul: I sweat. I shake. I panic.

Sherre: Tell me how you experience uncertainty.

Paul: reactivity, fear, being seen to be not on top of it

Sherre: Tell me how you experience uncertainty.

Paul: calming, pleasant

Sherre: Tell me how you experience uncertainty.

Paul: with avoidance

Sherre: Tell me how you experience uncertainty.

Paul: It's unpleasant.

Sherre: Tell me how you experience uncertainty.

Paul: challenge to equanimity

Sherre: Tell me how you experience uncertainty.

Paul: disbelief, awkward alertness in the body, quiver, critical, doom

Sherre: Tell me how you experience uncertainty.

Paul: nervousness, clamming up, react

Sherre: Tell me how you experience uncertainty.

Paul: in breath, shocking

Sherre: Tell me how you experience uncertainty.

Paul: I lie. I perform.

(P. Matteson, personal communication, June 4, 2019)

It may come as a surprise that these poles of possibility — at one extreme fearful and avoidant; at the other curious and motivated— were spoken by the same artist. In thinking about the apparent paradox of a succession of rapid responses that alternate between a welcoming attitude toward uncertainty and avoidance of uncertainty, I'm reminded of the poet Rumi, his "head bursting with the joy of the unknown" (Rūmī, 2000, p. 34). And yet it was also Rumi who also knew fear as "nonacceptance of uncertainty" (Hosn, 2016, p. 30).

I'll now examine how mindfulness can assist artists to tolerate uncertainty, thus sidestepping avoidant worrying—including self-focused worries such as Paul's worry about *being seen to be not on top of it*, and *lying/performing*? I'll explore too how it can assist artists to harvest productive aspects of uncertainty including those mentioned by Paul— curiosity, motivation, and generativity.

3.2.2.2 *Jim's Account*

3.2.2.2.1 Worry, anxiety and tolerating unpleasant feeling tones

Sajnani (2012) argues that "the aesthetic space created by the blank canvas... demands the courage to experiment at the edge of certainty" (p.82). However, unable to stand up to the demand, the artist often pre-empts insights by trying to create certainty through categorising and other means (Sajnani, 2012). To explore this let's return to Jim and consider first an arts-based approach he employs to foster beginner's mind in his artmaking. Jim's description

(below) of letting go of rules and allowing things to emerge is an excellent contextual depiction of this desirable state of mind that allows for new possibilities. It also demonstrates the difficult feelings that can block access to beginner's mind.

It's an experiment that I do in painting on paper. It's allowing things to emerge, and one line to lead to another, letting go of some of my painting rules, and to experiment with the experience of: uh oh! This is often the experience I have where I feel like I broke something, or I destroy a mark that I've made, and I feel the loss of that. And it is a very powerful experience. It's like: Oh my god! If this mark I made, that I feel happy about, has been broken, destroyed, or obliterated, what is there? So there is a feeling of having had something, and not knowing what I'm doing now (J. Potterton, personal communication, June 23 2021).

As discussed, worry can be triggered as an avoidant reaction to unpleasant emotions of uncertainty; it can provide a feeling of control. Worry thought patterns reinforce anxiety so that an avoidant habit loop is perpetuated.

To understand ways Jim uses mindfulness to tolerate unpleasant feelings so that, instead of perpetuating anxiety, he can remain in states of uncertainty that he finds productive to artmaking, let's look at a later discussion. Here Jim described how his mindfulness practice has formed a training in staying with the difficult feelings that accompany uncertainty.

When I paint, I know that if I want to have an experience that I feel has said something, or I've done something that I'm joyous or excited about, it's because I was willing to play with the ickies, because it means breaking stuff, which is a terrible feeling. The training for me in sitting practice [mindfulness meditation] has been learning to be with the ickies. The ickies could be physical ickies, they could be emotional ickies. Habits of thinking, habits of

feeling, that are just poised, ready to go. So, there is a training in ickies toleration, or ickies exploration; to not just tolerate the ickies, but to know that there's some wisdom in that uncomfortableness. And the need to be able to dwell and hang in there is part of learning to create out of that space (J. Potterton, personal communication, July 14, 2021).

It is useful to note that Jim is using mindfulness as a heuristic for investigating intentional present-centred processes, and open and accepting attitudinal qualities while painting.

Feeling (or hedonic) tone is the second category of experience referred to in the satipatthana discourse. Bringing awareness to feeling/hedonic tone (*vedanā in Pali*), and noting whether experiences in this realm are pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral, is an important aspect of establishing mindfulness. As a mindfulness practitioner, Jim notices that he's caught up in unpleasant feeling tone, that can arise with uncertainty. Feldman and Kuyken (2019) find that such experiential enquiry into feeling tone brings the possibility of less clinging to the unpleasant feelings. Providing an alternative to reacting with worry, mindfulness enables Jim to engage creatively. He can choose to stay with a curious awareness of the unpleasant sensation, observing as it ebbs and flows. And learning to dwell with uncomfortableness is, for him, part of learning to harness emergent qualities with ease. Over time mindfulness lessens automatic behaviours (Crane et al., 2017; Delorme & Brandmeyer, 2019). With this more spacious perspective, training to *hang out* with difficult feelings of breaking stuff has helped Jim feel he has *said something*. Tolerating difficult feelings of uncertainty in allowing things to emerge, rather than worrying about what he's broken, has enabled him to achieve his learning goals in artmaking.

3.2.2.2.2 The Role of Decreased Self-focus

But I sense that tolerating difficult feelings of uncertainty is not the only way mindfulness has enabled Jim to achieve his learning goals in artmaking. His worry thoughts include strong self-evaluations. My own experience described in this *Unwinding Anxiety* journal provides insight into why this resonates as important.

I noticed that perceptions of self tend to arise most strongly when the anxiety of uncertainty is present. A constricted feeling in my chest often comes with this; an early warning sign. And if I don't catch it early, the process is circular. A solid sense of *I* creates a belief that things should happen in a certain way and when, inevitably, I'm confronted with the anxiety of things being out of my control, that sense of self is further solidified as something to defend; reproach; or otherwise fuss over.

In matching this journal entry with Jim's account, I see that in recognising *habits of thinking, habits of feeling, that are just poised, ready to go*, Jim is not only training to tolerate difficult feelings and sensation. He's also de-personalising the difficult sensations. Seeing them as habits, he's no longer fused with his difficult feelings. He's taking them less personally.

The satipatthana discourse instructs the mindfulness practitioner to release clinging to a sense of self, and bring attention back to the present moment. Shapiro et al. (2006) describe this process as “dis-identifying from thoughts, emotions, and body sensations as they arise, and simply being with them instead of being defined (i.e., controlled, conditioned, determined) by them” (p. 378).

And reflecting on the challenge Jim described in trying to paint in a state of uncertainty with one line simply leading, I think more deeply about the role of focused attention. When attention shifts from the task to the self, a redistribution of cognitive resources disturbs performance (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). In this way, self-criticism (“I feel like I broke something”), and worry (“I had something, I don't know what I'm doing now”), takes Jim away from the moment-to-moment painting activity of letting one line lead to the next. Mindfulness is awareness without the evaluation of self that characterises anxiety and divides attention.

3.2.3 Pattern Three; Thriving in uncertainty

Casting forward to later findings, this also points to how mindfulness might help artists to thrive in uncertainty. Peacock (2012) describes the goal of Buddhist meditation as “coming to an experience of life as a process, unfettered by concepts and signs”. He links this with reduced self-referencing, arguing, “freedom from craving makes consciousness non-representative. We do not keep on representing things to ourselves in particular ways that are for me” (Peacock, 2012, Three forms of craving section, Glimpses of nibbana section).

Looking back at my *Unwinding Anxiety* journals, I find an entry that speaks to this.

When I approach a subject of attention for its use value to me, by definition, I have objectified and categorised it. Beginner's mind in which, not grasping at certainty, I'm aware of things in their uniqueness then, involves gaining freedom from self-focus.

In reference group interviews too, achieving beginner's mind through releasing the stickiness of self-focus achieved an unanticipated importance. But I'm getting ahead of myself. Let's return to Jim's experience. In describing his alternating experiences of uncertainty intolerance on the one hand, and approach orientation to uncertainty on the other, Jim's story takes us one step further in understanding the dynamics of uncertainty in the artist's experience.

And I have been looking at this tightrope— on the one hand excitement, and on the other hand terror— and how I will walk that tightrope. I look at how it shows up in my paintings, and some of them are like icons or tributes to my anxious mind, particularly things that I notice that are overworked. [They are] so habituated, and at the core of it is a sense of fear and desire to be in control of what's going to happen next. You know, the uncertain that's loaded with anxiety. But I'm just looking across the room at a painting I worked on this afternoon, and I remembered some moments of just ecstatic joy, mostly because I had no idea how most of the marks ended up on the painting. There was some structure, but there was a lot of play within that structure, and a joyous kind of suspension of anxiety (J. Potterton, personal communication, July 14, 2021).

Artists have access to distinct ways of knowing. In Jim's use of mindfulness as a heuristic for present-focused, non-judgmental acts of painting, like feelings in the body Jim's canvases are a source of self-reflection. They show Jim when he's gained the moment-to-moment freedom in uncertainty that these qualities can bring.

Prompted by this description of two paintings, and the generative potentials of uncertainty, I think more deeply about the role of focused attention. When attention shifts from the task to the self, a redistribution of cognitive resources disturbs performance (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). In

this way, self-criticism (“I feel like I broke something”), and worry (“I had something, I don't know what I'm doing now”), can take Jim away from the moment-to-moment painting activity of letting one line lead to the next.

3.2.3.1 Flow

On the other hand, Jim’s account of a joyous session of painting suggests to me a state often described in artists’ folklore as being *in the zone*—to describe a pleasurable, even exhilarating sense of absorption in artmaking in which one loses any sense of space, time, and self. His description of ecstatic joy prompts an unexpected insight: I’m hearing a description of flow.

Though unexpected and, it’s not clear how relevant this insight is to my research, I decide to pursue it. Arts-based research goes through iterative cycles as recurring waves of uncertainty rupture assumptions (Burke, 2019). Consulting the literature of flow states, I find that Jim’s description corresponds to each of the key dimensions of flow.⁴² Rifling through transcripts of artists’ accounts, I find many such accounts that describe flow states. But a finding that reference group artists recount flow experiences is not surprising, as more mindful individuals experience more flow (Lambert & Csikszentmihalyi, 2020). I have found little here that bears relationship to my research into mindful uncertainty.

3.2.3.1.1 Advancing the Proposition

But in looking more closely at Jim’s description of flow as *a joyous suspension of anxiety*, I note his contrasting description of a very different painting session— one caught up with *a sense of fear and desire to be in control of what's going to happen next, the uncertain that's loaded with anxiety*, resulting in overworked paintings that are *icons to an anxious mind*.

⁴² For example, Kawabata and Mallet’s (2011) description of the elements of flow reveals that Jim’s account of a *joyous painting session with no idea how most of the marks ended up on the painting* hint at the *transformation of time* that characterises flow, a sense of *enjoyment in the task at hand*, and a *loss of self-consciousness*. In Jim’s statement I also identify flow’s *sense of effortless mastery*. My hunch is confirmed as Kawabata and Mallet (2011) name a *sense of control*— defined as “the perception that one is able to respond to any challenge while engaged in the activity” (Kawabata & Mallett, 2011, p. 393) as a key component of flow. I quickly find confirmation too that Jim’s joyous painting session fits well with the *autotelic experience* described as the “experience of the activity being intrinsically rewarding” (Kawabata & Mallett, 2011, p. 394). Reading on I see that the artist’s description corresponds to another key characteristic of flow – *action and awareness merging*, described as “involvement in the flow activity to a point of spontaneity or automaticity” (Csikszentmihályi, 1990).

Jim's opposing accounts prompt me to hypothesise that if the artist had been gripped by anxiety, he would not have been able to access flow.

I check my hunch against the literature. Enter *Antiflow*.

Allison and Duncan (1988) introduced the term antiflow, identifying anxiety as an important component of the antiflow state. Anxiety prevents flow (Lambert & Csikszentmihalyi, 2020). Sorrentino et al. (2001) identify *uncertainty orientation* as an important dimension in antiflow, as the demotivational state is frequently characterised by anxiety and attempts to avoid a task where one lacks control.

I propose that *mindful* uncertainty facilitates access to flow by artists who might otherwise be subject to antiflow when uncertain. I return to transcripts of conversations with my reference group, and notice a previously unremarked pattern in my data. Using mindfulness to tolerate anxiety seems to be enabling these artists to enter, or remain in, flow states. In speaking of how she works with the anxiety of uncertainty in the act of writing, Carolyn illustrates this point well:

It's a fear state. And of course, it's not pleasant. But I just don't identify with it so much. I try to just let that fear be, and to feel it completely. If you've been developing these [mindfulness] practices, you're curious. It's more like: oh? You're just riding the wave, like you're surfing. That's all going on. And all you have to do is just stay with it. You're not in charge of it, the wave is carrying you. But you have to be attentive to how to move your body in a way, or to what words come up, or what images (C. Dille, personal communication, June 23 2021).

The poet's account of surfing uncertainty, attentive to the words and images that arise, evokes the pleasure, effortless mastery, and "action-awareness merging" of flow (Kawabata & Mallett, 2011, p. 393). Her description also advances our understanding of how mindful uncertainty might enable artists to access flow states. In declining to identify with a fear state, the poet suggests the meta-awareness offered by mindfulness that reduces identification with internal

experience (Delorme & Brandmeyer, 2019). The poet's mindful uncertainty offers awareness that fear of uncertainty is present, without the added sense: I am afraid.

So as Carolyn surfs uncertainty, observing the waves of fear peak and diminish without reacting, her ability to *feel fear completely and let it be* is enhanced by *just not identifying* with fear. Seeing anxiety, as opposed to seeing through the lens of anxiety, the poet can remain in the flow, attentive to the words and images that arise in the act of writing.

3.2.3.1.2 Sense of Self and Antiflow

"I'm trying to play the truth of who I am. The reason it's difficult is because I'm changing all the time" Charles Mingus (cited in Hentoff, 2001, p. 99).

I'd refer once again to my *Unwinding Anxiety* journals.

Bringing mindful curiosity to that moment of anxiety sometimes seems to set conditions for flow. In contrast, when I'm getting in my own way [getting caught up in self-referential processes], habitually trying to get rid of anxiety through fixing or planning, I am very far from flow— more like hypervigilant.

When writing the journal entry, I hadn't heard of *antiflow*. But it seems I was using the app to examine flow and antiflow, in relation to mindful uncertainty. My growing sense of the relationship between antiflow and self-referencing is evident in the second entry.

I've noticed that the less the sense of anxiety, the less the sense of self. For example, when I am in a creative process, I register no sense of self as my attention is fully taken by a flow of ideas and insights. It is only when I grasp— perhaps grabbing my phone to write down an insight—that I notice at least a subtle stress and sense of *mine* presenting itself.

My experience is consistent with a study of music making, which finds that focusing undivided attention on an object of meditation would diminish or prevent anxiety, as it would be impossible to get caught up in fear or self-judgment (Steinfeld & Brewer, 2015).

3.2.3.1.3 Paul's Account, Flow in Dancing: The pause

By enabling artists to notice processes by which the mind reacts to phenomena, mindfulness offers an opportunity to pause, and respond rather than to react to experience. Paul describes how learning to pause has facilitated flow in dancing.

One example is a performance where I had to pitch myself into these double turns, and rehearsals were going terribly. In the performance something went screwy with the lights so we couldn't see where the floor was. I couldn't even see where to step. And I settled back, and I had the performance of a lifetime. I could do no wrong. There was no question. And it was based on the conditions changing (P. Matteson, personal communication, Dec 10, 2020).

Paul *settled back* into the uncertainty of changing conditions, creating a space between stimulus and reaction in which he could choose to respond flexibly and creatively.

And so now I feel that happening in dance. Right when things don't go as expected, instead of taking me out of performance, I stop. I just don't do anything. I've been able to not be anxious about what I'm doing, with doubt and uncertainty. I see the understandable choice to figure it out, or to do something, but I do the very opposite, I hold back into stasis. I come into such a dynamic stillness. And that not doing anything has really worked for me. I can feel it translating now. I can feel it takes me right into a sense of merging into the present moment (P. Matteson, personal communication, Dec 10, 2020).

Paul uses mindfulness to pause, and to make a new choice.

But let's pause ourselves, to notice that we have witnessed here a compelling example of how artists' perspectives and first-hand accounts can enrich the mindfulness research literature.

Identified at the start of mindfulness research as a key component through which the practice enables responding, not reacting, to perceived threats (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). In teaching—whether to children (Sileo, 2017) or to business leaders (Davi & Spelman, 2020), the pause is often taught as the most important tool mindfulness offers.

But despite its centrality, Feldman (2018) finds that the pause has hardly been described in the literature. He suggests that to better understand mindfulness, and to facilitate reactivity management in everyday life, the term should be further illuminated.

Let's return now to Paul's account. The dancer's physical embodiment of this pause, his expression of a dynamic stillness that merges him into the present moment, offers entirely new ways of understanding. Challenging inherited descriptions of this critical affordance of mindfulness, Paul's expression of dynamic stillness exceeds the limitations of linear thinking. It suggests the entanglements and tensions of lived experience. Rather than reifying a notion of the pause as a platonic form—abstract, transcending time and space, and unchanging—Paul articulates a paradoxical understanding. Offering his dancer's sense of the permanence of a thing in its changeability, the artist addresses us as creatures in a dynamic, fluxing world.

Reification of experience into more or less static concepts is a legitimate way of making something easy to understand. But as I see it, Paul's paradoxical description of dynamic stillness provides deeper experiential understanding. In reflecting on his description of movement built into the heart of stasis I'm reminded of T.S. Eliot's evocation of the still point of the turning world (*Eliot, 1943*).

At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;

Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,

But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,

Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor towards,

Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point,

There would be no dance, and there is only the dance. (*Eliot, 1943*).

An artist's fluency in inhabiting and communicating spaces of flux and transition where thresholds are blurry is to my mind not only beautiful, but vital. By embracing uncertainty, things, situations, or concepts previously perceived as fixed or static can be understood in new ways. The ability to hold paradox is closely associated with comfort in uncertainty (McGilchrist, 2019), and the artist's facility with this productive incongruity is a reminder to me that artist's value uncertainty as a state that is full of potential. It is also supportive of my claim that introducing the tolerance of uncertainty inherent to arts-based research into the mindfulness research field is a laden with potential to broaden research outcomes in productive ways.

3.2.3.2 *Beginner's Mind*

Paul's evocation of dynamic stillness is a powerful demonstration of beginner's mind; it provides another instance of *thriving* in uncertainty.

Like Paul, other mindful artists described being able to move from fixed understandings to dynamic and novel ones. Analysing these artists' accounts, key phrases recur: *love of ambiguity; receptivity; seeing the whole; empathic; making connections; betweenness; relational; unpremeditated; improvisatory; nonconceptual; timelessness; out of narrative flow; reaching toward the unknown without an agenda; and no fixed categories.*

I think of each of these keywords as suggestive of beginner's mind. In chapter one, I offered my definition of beginner's mind as a willingness and a capacity to meet the present anew. I can reveal now that this definition was informed by these discussions with reference group artists. While some might imagine beginner's mind as an empty mind—a concept, these artists accounts reveal beginner's mind as a process—a way of attending to, and engaging with, experience.

Mindfulness enables one to intentionally shift from experiencing the world as filtered by language and concept to an experiential way of being (Feldman & Kuyken, 2019; Ostafin & Kassman, 2012). It trains the practitioner to observe sensual experience as it occurs, and to see how it is ultimately represented in the mind, thus learning to navigate and be playful with the constructive processes of perception (Feldman & Kuyken, 2019).

3.2.3.3 Thrive: Findings

3.2.3.3.1 Beginner's Mind and Flow

Addressing my second proposal, this qualitative examination of artists' experience has demonstrated that mindfulness enables artists to thrive in uncertainty by providing access to flow (through avoiding antiflow), and to beginner's mind.

As a *sensibility* that one cultivates, mindfulness is “embodied, receptive, and perplexed” (Batchelor, 2015, p. 39). I turn now to one additional way that mindfulness, enables artists to thrive in the borderless realms of uncertainty. It stems from a question I asked myself, as I analysed artists' accounts of thriving in uncertainty: Apart from practice of mindfulness, what other ways might artists cultivate this sensibility that is eager to plunge into perplexity?

3.2.3.3.2 Narrative Stance and Uncertainty

The dancer Paul's statement is an example of the power of an artist's narrative that embraces uncertainty. In articulating an enlivening and vital understanding of how his dance has changed through embracing uncertainty, he has opened the door to leap further into uncertainty.

The first pattern I detected, and named, near the beginning of this chapter, was *Valuing States of Uncertainty in Artmaking*. But it is only now that I'm seeing that these artists have actually created narratives that embrace uncertainty. In considering how such narratives further bolster the ability thrive in uncertainty, we need only recall artists' statements included near the beginning of this chapter as evidence that they value uncertainty. We might recall Jim's narrative expressing joy in the energy, excitement, and revelatory potential of uncertainty. Or Jana, valuing the way that uncertainty enables her to clearly see a thing as it is, without being constrained by what she thought what she thought she knew. Or Rosie, explaining with pleasure how she delights in observing her characters speak to one another and the structure work itself out seemingly on its own. Narratives based around the value of uncertainty seem to me to have become part of what we might call the artist's narrative stance. I intuit that such narratives assist in creating a *sensibility* that is eager to plunge into perplexity.

Consulting the literature, I find evidence for this claim. The stories we tell ourselves are powerful in shaping how we make sense of our lives, what we imagine, and our sense of what is possible (Bruner, 2003; 2020a; 2020b). In considering how autobiographical accounts create

the unfolding narrative of our lives, Siegel and Siegel (2014) argue “When we expand our narrative stance to embrace uncertainty, we come to open our minds to new and enriching ways of being” (p. 30).

Based in this account, I see that reference group artists’ valuing of productive relationships with uncertainty might further enrich the artist’s practice—in a sense recursively bolstering their ability thrive in uncertainty.

3.3 Third Proposal

This qualitative research has identified a third form of thriving in uncertainty. From this, I’ve developed a third proposal: **Practicing mindfulness can enable artists to authentically embrace uncertainty in their narratives, expanding their sense of what is possible in artmaking.**

Thus, as the next stage of this evolving project, I will undertake practice-led research, founded in an act of self-reflexive storytelling, a radio artwork. In this work, I will examine ways I have learned to tolerate and thrive with uncertainty, looking for patterns established in this chapter as guided by discussions with my reference group. Within this examination I will also be looking for ways that these processes have enabled me to authentically embrace uncertainty in narratives such as this autoethnography of my experience, and ways that doing so has expanded my sense of what is possible in artmaking.

I made the radio work, at an early stage of this research project, to understand the nature and role of mindfulness as a heuristic, in relation to my life as a sound artist. When I created it, I had not yet found my research question. I saw the autoethnographic account as a preliminary, and foundational part of the research. But with subsequent stages of the research cycle in mind, I will now look for patterns, if any, that might demonstrate underlying correspondences with my findings in this and previous chapters.

Declaration for Thesis Chapter 4

In the case of **Mindfulness and the Moon, Radio Art program**, the nature and extent of my contribution to the work was the following:

Nature of Contribution	Extent of Contributions (%)
I conceived and produced this program. (I researched, interviewed, recorded, edited, scripted, narrated, pre-mixed, and guided the final mix in the ABC studios.)	95%

The following co-authors contributed to the work:

Name	Nature of Contribution	Contributor is also a UC student (Yes/No)
Russell Stapleton	Technical Production/ Sound Engineering for Broadcast	No



Candidate's Signature

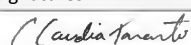
10/06/2022
Date

The undersigned hereby certify that:

- (1) the above declaration correctly reflects the nature and extent of the candidate's contribution to this work, and the nature of the contribution of each of the co-authors.
- (2) they meet the criteria for authorship in that they have participated in the conception, execution, or interpretation, of at least that part of the publication in their field of expertise;
- (3) they take public responsibility for their part of the publication, except for the responsible author who accepts overall responsibility for the publication;
- (4) there are no other authors of the publication according to these criteria;
- (5) potential conflicts of interest have been disclosed to (a) granting bodies, (b) the editor or publisher of journals or other publications, and (c) the head of the responsible academic unit; and
- (6) the original data are stored at the following location(s) and will be held for at least five years from the date indicated below:

[Please note that the location(s) must be institutional in nature, and should be indicated here as a department, centre or institute, with specific campus identification where relevant.]

Location(s):	Australian Broadcasting Corporation Archives Department
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Signatures	Date
	9 June 2022

Chapter 4 From List to Listening



Figure 7. Young, K.S (2022) *Detail from Arhats of Daily Introspection, with Researcher's Reflection in Mirror. Five Hundred Arhats from Changnyeongsa temple. Powerhouse Museum, Ultimo NSW, Australia.* <https://www.maas.museum/event/five-hundred-arhats/> Image taken by Sherre DeLys.

4.1 Introduction

Habit is the ballast that chains the dog to his vomit. Breathing is habit. Life is habit. Habit then is the generic term for the countless treaties concluded between the countless subjects that constitute the individual and their countless correlative objects. The periods of transition that separate consecutive adaptations (because by no expedient of macabre transubstantiation can the grave-sheets serve as swaddling-clothes) represent the perilous zones in the life of the individual, dangerous, precarious, painful, mysterious, and fertile, when for a moment the boredom of living is replaced by the suffering of being (Beckett, 1965, p. 19).

Samuel Beckett's description of *perilous zones in the life of the individual* conveys the vitality of being present to moments of transition in which mystery breaks through imprisoning habit. My second creative output, a work of narrative non-fiction for radio and podcast, explores just such transition zones in my own life—unsettled spaces at once *perilous, precarious, painful, mysterious, and fertile*.

I formulated the radio artwork *Mindfulness and the Moon*, and the narrative self we encounter in the story, as an act of practice-led research. Reflecting upon this creative work some four

years after I made it, I will further demonstrate ways that mindfulness enables at least momentary freedom from Beckett's *countless treaties* designed to avoid uncertainty. Examining *Mindfulness and the Moon* in relation to patterns of data I've identified in research cycles subsequent to its creation, I'll look for ways that using mindfulness to tolerate uncertainty has enabled me to thrive in the fertile borderlands of which the writer / director speaks. I'll also look for evidence that addresses my proposal that practicing mindfulness can enable artists to authentically embrace uncertainty in their narratives, expanding their sense of what is possible in artmaking.

Beckett's exaltation of the mysterious inspires me to declare that this chapter will display similar regard for mysteries. Paradoxically, my findings here have deepened my relationship with mystery. Making *Mindfulness and the Moon* was research practice in *the artist's way*—if I'd known where I was headed the work would have nothing to teach me. A generative conversation between myself and a great mystery, this reflection has stretched my research into the unknown in ways that refresh my narrative stance.

As I parse the stumbling points, the perilous zones that provide powerful reflective moments in my search to understand, I hope my sense of discovery infuses itself into my words so that the reader experiences the fertility of mystery alongside me.

4.2 Title and Opening Statements

The title, *Mindfulness and the Moon*, references the Zen aphorism, *Don't confuse the finger for the moon*—an admonishment against confusing words, form, or teachings with that to which they point. I understand this as a reminder that traditional frameworks surrounding mindfulness are but constructs that point beyond themselves. Noting this, I see roots of my use of mindfulness as a heuristic—a notion that I advanced at the outset of the research. As I stated there, simple, shared definitions make the idea of mindfulness easy to understand, but any activity can be construed as a practice of mindfulness if the present-centred awareness, and the curious and accepting attitudes of mindfulness, are applied. And in this chapter, I use mindfulness as a heuristic for practices of audio field recording and improvised radio production conducted with mindfulness of uncertainty.

On reflection, I see that by folding this reminder about the finger and the moon into the title, I flagged my departure from pre-existing narratives of mindfulness—whether from Buddhist psychology or clinical research. With this work, I offer a narrative of my own long-accrued experience. I offer a tale of an artist’s journey that can stand in the mindfulness field alongside the bulk of research, as conducted in the framework of contemplative science. And in a satirical nod to those for whom such frameworks have become more important than that toward which they point, I also offer a *trigger warning* at the top of the show: Mindfulness bears no responsibility for my actions. Still, I’ll keep doing them anyway (DeLys, 2018b, 00:02:05).⁴³

4.3 Getting Started

But such hubris also masked anxieties I experienced at the outset of the project. How would I research and communicate personal histories of mindful uncertainty to produce evidence-based knowledge I wondered. How might I tell a story of ineffable experiences of relationships between mindfulness, uncertainty, and artmaking when those experiences were implicit and obscure to me? The piece had been commissioned by the *Australian Broadcasting Corporation* for the program *Earshot*, on *Radio National (RN)*. This too presented a disabling source of perplexity. I’d need to present this phase of my research in a form that might communicate successfully to diverse audiences located in rural, regional, and urban environments across Australia and around the world.

And what might mindfulness research colleagues make of a piece that was bound to depart from traditional research perspectives and frameworks? The answers were hidden from view.⁴⁴

Arts-based research demands that the researcher understand and accept uncertainty (Springgay, 2002). To gain mastery in the mindfulness field through arts-based research, I must abandon the security of accepted frameworks of knowledge in the field. I needed to risk the discomfort.

⁴³ In this I paraphrased composer John Cage, whose working methods of often arose from Zen principals. Cage once remarked ‘Zen bears no responsibility for my actions. Still, I’ll keep doing them anyway’.

⁴⁴ My own process started with no script or storyboard. And I commence my reflection mindful of William Kentridge’s words, quoted in chapter 1, that this moment represented on the one hand ‘my inability to write a script or a storyboard’, but also ‘an emblematic way of how we understand the world’—namely by proceeding through stages of uncertainty.

My response to fear at the start of *Mindfulness and the Moon* provides an opportunity to demonstrate how my capacity to meet uncertainties from a non-reactive stance was key to moving forward.

4.3.1 Mindful Uncertainty

Noticing my mind was attempting to gain security by ruminating, I made the choice to intervene by establishing an experiential awareness in which my attention might flow along with direct experience in the present moment. I started with sound as the object of meditation.

Attuning to my environment, I noticed sounds as textures and vibrations coming and going. Connecting and sustaining attention on the ever-changing soundscape, I soon gained a sense of resting in the awareness of hearing.

There was an ease then, as I shifted the focus of awareness to the body sitting. I noticed as sensations called for my attention—much like sounds call for one's attention when listening. In this non-reactive awareness, I observed pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral sensations arise and eventually pass away. I observed thoughts and emotions arise and pass away. When difficult feelings associated with uncertainty persisted, I attuned to them, opening to how they felt in the body. At these times I made a soft mental note—*not knowing*—and then refocused my attention on the whole body as a field of awareness, just being with sensations with a sense of imperturbability.

Then, widening my attention to include the entire sensorium, I challenged myself—how long could I stay with the moment-by-moment flow of experience with courage to simply rest in the unknown? Getting lost in thought—returning to the sensory flow—getting lost in thought again—I kept flowing with this process, noticing that thinking felt like stepping on the brake. Always returning to the moment-to-moment stream of awareness, I monitored the uncertainty of everything in my experience. If attention lapsed, I re-cultivated interest in this fast stream of life happening at an intimate level, including urges to control as they too appeared and disappeared. Equanimous now in the flow of sensory data, I let go even of directing the attention. I was following it, flowing with it. Sound—breath—physical sensations—sound—lost in thought—sound—lost in thought. Awareness following attention in the moment-to-moment flow of sensory experience, I observed as more and more the process just did itself.

Trusting the inherently uncontrollable rhythms of experience, I was rewarded by establishing a state of awareness flowing with direct experience, beyond my control.

And after several minutes, sensitive, yet stable and unperturbed by the unknown, I returned to my art project.

At the outset of making *Mindfulness and the Moon*, difficult feelings associated with uncertainty triggered attempts to grasp at premature certainty. Mindfulness meditation enabled me to approach rather than avoid the difficult feelings of uncertainty, while simultaneously observing the uncertainty inherent to every moment of human experience. By moving from thinking into experiential awareness, I freed my attention to respond to the artistic task at hand.

4.3.2 Improvisatory Processes

Listening and field recording offer profound opportunities to quieten the mind and develop an open experiential awareness. (DeLys, 2021)⁴⁵

Unsure of how to begin this autoethnography of my experience, I turned intuitively to my audio archive. Having recorded both the ordinary and extraordinary for over thirty-five years, my collection of field recordings is vast and auto-biographical— a reflection of my experiences over decades of venturing with microphone in hand. Working with these recorded sounds in an array of art projects, I've come to trust these recordings as a foundation for dialoguing with the self. But I was also intrigued by a conflation of audio recording and mindfulness — a focus on electronic recording and auditioning as a way of slowing down the moment.

To go past the perimeter of my own knowing, I used an experimental procedure to review and select recordings from my archive, allowing my choices to be guided by processes below my threshold of awareness.

A substantial early phase of my multi-disciplinary sound art practice has been spent working in improvised (music) performance. Though my practice moved eventually into sound installation and radio art, techniques of improvisation learned in my early years have served as the basis of all my arts practices. Sajnani (2012) argues that arts researchers often rely upon central skills of improvisation. Such skills, he asserts, encompass investment in uncertainty, attentiveness to contrast, and the aesthetic judgement required to register significance. He contends that in practicing improvisation the researcher gains flexibility and responsiveness amidst unruliness,

⁴⁵ In an annual lecture I offer for film sound students at the *Australian Film, Television and Radio School*, I include a discussion about the importance of listening. I relate that this ability to quieten the mind and listen can be trained, and I suggest field recording to train this capacity.

even amidst awareness of impulses to control and to abandon the uncertainty of not knowing what will result from the process.

Further, as I see it, using mindful awareness of feeling tone to guide such improvisatory processes, in this phase of the work I was performing embodied self-reflexivity (Pagis, 2009)—a corrective to the view of self-reflexivity that focuses exclusively on narrative in inner self-relations.

Of my improvised sound selections, explicitly related to mindfulness were three recordings I'd made as I undertook various mindfulness practices. One I recorded while using the *Unwinding Anxiety* mindfulness app at my office workplace; a second was recorded while performing walking meditation at the dry mouth of *Murrundi (the Murray River)* on *Ngarrindjeri* country; and the third was a field recording made while on meditation retreat in a Thai jungle. (As I write this, it occurs to me that my later use of these three recordings suggests an examination of *Mindfulness and the Moon* in the terms of a three-act narrative structure. It would be ironic however that, with origins in highly improvisatory and uncertain processes, the narrative should be examined in the terms of this mainstream tool for analysing narratives. I will consider this further shortly.)

Beyond these, I selected ten other recordings. Several were linked directly with mindfulness, but most were not obviously related. Mostly these were recordings of time spent with friends.

These disparate recordings I then edited and arranged on a timeline, using a similarly visceral process—in which I allowed embodied feelings of *rightness* of experimental associations to guide my initial rough cuts.

While the assemblage arrayed was readily available to multiple readings, I decided to create a storyline. I wrote narration to define a path through the complexity, offering listeners a clear narrative arc for the taking. Somewhat like a dream, never to be fully understood but to be related to in a creative way, the story itself was not intended as a *proving*, but as a making and sharing of meanings that creates new knowledge.

Although I undertook this process as creative research, it was not appropriate to my ABC commission to represent my research project overtly. I was commissioned to create an

entertaining and informative audio essay conveying a personal history of mindfulness practice, in the context of the growing popularity of mindfulness amongst ABC listeners. The online program description states: “Mindfulness and the Moon” follows a sound artist, and ardent student of mindfulness as she sifts through sound recordings reflecting on what mindfulness has pointed to in her life” (Earshot, 2018). Addressing the listener directly at the start of the program, I (as narrator) say “...they may be my memories, but I’m just looking at the same moon that you can see too” (DeLys, 2018b, 00:01:45). This invitation to audience members to imagine their own relationships to mindfulness is the first of many invitations to engagement in the program that demonstrate arts-based research as a mode of enquiry with potential to open worlds for audiences.

However, for the purposes of my research, this program forms the basis of an autoethnographic enquiry (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) into my lived experience of mindfulness in relation to the research question. More specifically, as an emergent method in this project, the practice-led component is used, if you will, to reshuffle qualitative and quantitative data identified at prior stages of the project to open new pathways of thinking and practice (Rolling, 2008).

Using intuitively curated audio recordings to create the story arc of *Mindfulness and the Moon* provided an opportunity to literally piece together relationships, and to then trace an informative line of connections that were previously beneath my awareness.

Given the nature of the ABC commission, in the radio piece I present radical shifts in my media-art-practice, and I claim their relationship to mindfulness without explanation. In acknowledgement of the critical role of audience in the process of meaning-making I trust to the listener her own creative leaps, formation of questions, and possibilities for further reflection. Arts-based research encourages a plurality of understandings and frames of reference in relation to the same piece of research (Barone & Eisner, 1997).

Yet here in my exegetical account, contemplating the storying results will enable me to unearth the unique perspectives that first generated and still drive this research project. Through analysis and reflective writing, I’ll be looking for ways in which the processes and products of the artistic activity furnish me with the evidence I need to demonstrate my gradual accumulation of competence in mindful uncertainty.

Having stated the processes, contexts, and aims of this radio work, I invite you to listen. You can find *Mindfulness and the Moon* by scanning this QR code and clicking the link that appears to access the file.



(In case of difficulty the file can also be accessed at the [this ABC webpage](#).)

The piece is just over twenty-eight minutes in duration.

When you've finished listening, please re-join this chapter for my autoethnographic reflection on the work.

4.4 Exegetical Reflection: Mindfulness and the Moon

In my reflection upon this work, I aim to tease out underlying themes that respond to my research. Meeting an objective stated in chapter 1, this conversation between radio art practice and my commentary will reveal ways that hitherto unrecognised experiential knowledge catalysed the proposals developed intuitively at the outset of the research project.

Given my initial coincidental selection of three recordings (made while I practiced mindfulness in various settings), and their consequent use as primary elements, I have decided, on balance, to examine *Mindfulness and the Moon* in terms of a three-act structure. I understand that my use of this dominant tool of narrative analysis will privilege certain elements over others. A more nuanced notion of structure would reveal multiple informative phases, turning points and meanings available in the piece. I agree with Brüttsch (2015) that widespread characterisation of the three-act structure as timeless and objective is “a myth disguised as universal truth” (p. 321). However, considering the appropriate scope of this chapter, limiting the number of readings available is useful, as is the wide recognisability of the three-act pattern. And much as I earlier acknowledged the utility of certain paradigms in approaching certain problems in

mindfulness research, I acknowledge the utility of the three-act paradigm in the current context. I do not submit the analysis it yields as singularly valid. Rather, I offer this selected reading, for the purpose of this practice-led research, in this moment, and I apologise for where my reading of the piece crowds your own.

4.4.1 Overview: From fear to flowing

Upon reflection, using the three-act paradigm to analyse the work, I understand this as a story of the protagonist's traverse from fear to *flowing beyond flow*. Each act represents a letting go of knowing that enables the next.

In three parts that roughly correspond to a setup, then confrontation, followed by resolution, the work focuses on three learning milestones as I developed the ability to tolerate and to thrive in uncertainty. It relates three events I experienced not long before formulating my research question and proposals. The narrative arc sees the protagonist (a fictionalised version of myself) move from constraining anxiety to creative flowing through an ever-deepening practice of mindful uncertainty. Also becoming progressively less identified with a fixed sense of self, she eventually has an experience of consciousness as undivided. In this state she finds not knowing more pleasant than knowing. At the end of *Mindfulness and the Moon*, this experience is named as a spur to further enquiry.

4.4.2 Act One: Dry vs moist - recognising anxiety vs flow

Although the wind
blows terribly here,
the moonlight also leaks
between the roof planks
of this ruined house.

Although the wind (no Komachi & Shikibu, 2015).

4.4.2.1 Act One Overview

Act one of *Mindfulness and the Moon* tells the story of the protagonist training to *be with* unpleasant physical sensations. In this setup phase, using a clinical mindfulness training app

she learns to pause, and move into the experiential mode of awareness. Opening her to the flow of life, this experiential mode also draws her to recognise her longing for mindful artmaking, and her need to face her deepest anxiety. She resigns from her job to make space for artistic growth, entering uncertainty.

4.4.2.2 Act One Narrative Arc

The narrative arc of *Mindfulness and the Moon* finds the protagonist at first anxious and creatively constrained in response to uncertainty. The material I'll reflect upon begins six and a half minutes into the piece, with the sound of a bell and the song *Texas Traveller*.⁴⁶

4.4.2.2.1 Reflecting on Anxiety and a Clinical Mindfulness App

Act one finds her in her workplace, overtasked and anxious. She mentions planning and worrying. She's using the mindfulness training app *Unwinding Anxiety* to address anxiety, and we hear recordings of the app's creator Judson Brewer taken from its training videos (DeLys, 2018b, 06:29).

The workplace where I made these recordings was the *Australian Broadcasting Corporation*. I was originally employed at the ABC to make radio art, but it had become impossible to work as an artist within the system. Work required in the new *attention economy* ran counter to my values (DeLys, 2017c),⁴⁷ and I perceived a neo-liberal agenda at work in the corporation's recent exclusion of opportunities to treat radio as a platform for artmaking (DeLys, 2017a).

Reflecting on act one of *Mindfulness and the Moon*, I notice the stark truth that this scene finds the protagonist, not in an artist's studio, but tenuously inhabiting an open plan office. She's failed to notice that gradually changing circumstances threaten her survival as an artist. Through mindfulness she comes to understand that a to do list is a cognitive means of attempting to keep

⁴⁶ I've excluded everything prior to this point from my reflection, except for this brief note. This *introduction* uses a selection of recordings of friends—an artist discussing the changing autumn leaves and Magritte's colour palette as we sat in a North American wood; a poet speculating on memory and presence; and a Texan friend singing a song made from a fragment of text unearthed in an old barn. I see that in selecting these recordings I was influenced by the aspect of *remembering* that is contained in the Pali word, *sati*. *Sati* nowadays is commonly translated as mindfulness. *Sati* literally denotes the ability to remember, and it is used to illustrate the function in meditation practice of remembering to keep awareness trained on the four *satiipatthanas*, or establishments of mindfulness.

⁴⁷ At this time the ABC had undergone large scale editorial shifts in conformance to a neo-liberal ideology that represented a redirection from the charter-based focus of the organisation at the time I joined.

chaos, the unpredictable, at bay. In contrast, the *Unwinding Anxiety* app offers mindfulness practices designed to build experiential awareness.

I'm unsurprised that the improvisatory first stage of this creative practice research led me to select recordings of myself using the app. As discussed, my *Unwinding Anxiety* journals reveal that using the app I learned to spot the difference between conditions that lead to anxiety in uncertainty and those that lead to creative flow. Reflecting now on the story I constructed to create *Mindfulness and the Moon* has sent me back to my beta-testing journals once again. And I find an unexpected entry.

I rode out an anxiety moment just now. It's going to be that kind of day. I'm on deadline with an editor waiting, and I experience anxiety whenever something impedes my progress. This training, with its intimate demonstration of the precise nature of anxiety that comes from working in conditions un conducive to flow, has decided me [sic] to leave the corporate world.

I see here that moving closer to difficult sensations of anxious uncertainty allowed a more spacious stance from which to view my experience. This meta-awareness or expanded view helped me to understand the self as contextual. *Unwinding Anxiety* enabled me to let go of habits of anxiety, and habitual contexts for my creative practice. In doing so, the mindfulness training paved the way for new ways of perceiving that are more conducive to artmaking.

4.4.2.2.2 Reflecting on Catherine's Room

Let's return to the process of making the radio program, and to the other spontaneously selected recording I used in act one—a discussion with artist Bill Viola about his video work *Catherine's Room* (B.Viola, personal communication, 2009, 14 January).

I originally made the recording for *The Still Point*, an ABC radio series about innovators using mindfulness to change the fields within which they work (DeLys, 2009). In *Mindfulness and the Moon* I used this recording to represent the first call to mindful uncertainty in art making.

As the story goes, towards the end of act one, mindfulness focuses the protagonist's awareness on a multiscreen video artwork that has, until then, formed a barely noticed object of her daydreaming. Encountering the work mindfully, reflexively, she finds there is much to learn.

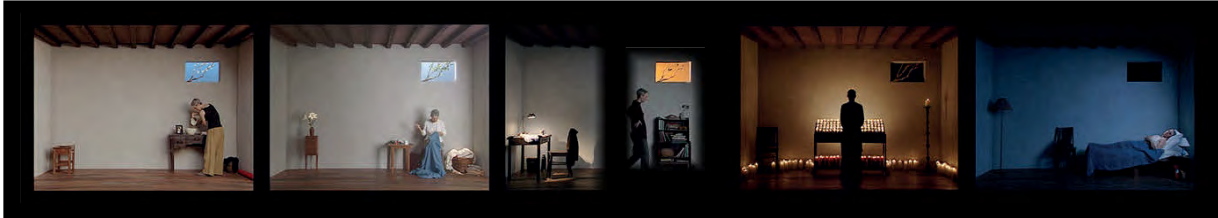


Figure 8. Viola, B. (2001) *Catherine's Room* detail [Online Image]. New York Arts. <https://newyorkarts.net/2017/01/bill-viola-moving-portrait-smithsonian-national-portrait-gallery-washington-dc-november-18-2016-may-7-2017/> Photo by Kira Perov. © Bill Viola.

To my mind, *Catherine's Room* is a picture of mindful uncertainty. The video work shows five temporal scenes of a female figure at mindful activity. In sequence, her physical, artistic, and spiritual routines move her through the temporal dimension of existence—both towards evening and towards death. Catherine is also connected to the temporal by the scene beyond the room's window through which we observe the seasons changing. To my mind, the figure has attained a grounded-ness amidst the flux of ever-changing experience. When, as featured on one of the screens, uncertainty bedevils her in her writing activity, she recovers. Catherine tolerates and thrives in uncertainty.

Reflecting again on *Mindfulness and the Moon*, I see that mindfulness has brought awareness to our protagonist of her desire for such mindful uncertainty that facilitates creativity and flow. The once alive questions that see each act of artmaking as a venture into the unknown have been reframed by repetitive workplace demands, but she's reminded by *Catherine* that art participates in mystery. Mindful contemplation of the image taps an implicit awareness that she longs to make art grounded in the moment-by-moment flow of experience, attuned to the stream of life and secure in the rhythms of impermanence.

This first stage of attaining mindful uncertainty has set up the protagonist to undertake a journey, a task with uncertain outcomes and intent. And at the end of act one, a rising noise level as she departs the comforts of certainty is a cry of freedom. Mindfulness has enabled her to free herself from distracted awareness, to create conditions in which she can listen to the inherent uncertainties of existence.

4.4.2.2.3 A Threshold Experience

But as I now reflect even more deeply upon Viola’s video I begin to focus on the window—this verge between inner and outer worlds—that he placed in the setting of Catherine’s room. Attentive to its presence, I understand that at this point in the radio piece the protagonist stood at a threshold. She would, in act three, move into an uncertain otherness for which she was not yet ready. The next act of *Mindfulness and the Moon*, that I will call *River*, can be seen a ritual that allowed our protagonist to cross the threshold with mindfulness. Standing before it as I do now, *River* appears to me to be a necessary zone that separates two territories of being. Because, as the story goes, she wouldn’t have been able to free herself from uncreative habituation had she not first travelled alongside ultimate uncertainties—through contemplation on the end of life on earth as we know it.

Finally, I see too that in starting *Mindfulness and the Moon* with a small attainment mastered through an app-based clinical mindfulness intervention, I chose to commence with a form of evidence-based mindfulness practice that connects to my work in the health sector. But to go deeper still, I felt it necessary to survey Buddhist traditions in which mindfulness practice challenges one to live in the *groundless ground* of uncertainty—at ease in a direct encounter with the world of experience, free from illusions of certainty.

4.4.3 Act Two: River

Yet what you encounter, recognise, or discover depends to a large degree on the quality of your approach. Many of the ancient cultures practiced careful rituals of approach. An encounter of depth and spirit was preceded by careful preparation and often involved a carefully phased journey of approach. When we approach with reverence, great things decide to approach us (O’Donohue, 2010, p. 36).

4.4.3.1 Act Two Overview

Act two, the confrontation phase, follows the protagonist’s instinct that she is not yet finished with learning to tolerate uncertainty.

4.4.3.2 Process

Recordings of my 2009 journey to the mouth of *Murrundi* (*the Murray River*) on *Ngarrindjeri* country, during the *Millennium Drought* to practice an ancient form of mindfulness meditation—a contemplation of death—would serve as the foundation for this act. Another

selection, a recording of a conversation about a meditative response to eco-anxiety (Nugent, 2019) seemed an obvious pairing.

To connect these recordings, I constructed a story in which learning to tolerate uncertainties surrounding environmental collapse is a crucial step in the journey of learning to thrive in uncertainty. This story was based on my life experience. Similarly motivated, I travelled to *Murrundi* in 2009, and later created a collaborative artwork based in the experience (Gothe & DeLys, 2010).

4.4.3.3 Act 2 Narrative Arc

The section I'm calling act two begins with a strike of a bell that signifies the start of a new recording, and the protagonist's words: "Let me play you another mindfulness scrapbook recording, from 2009 during the *Millennium Drought* ... because I don't think I could have listened so closely to myself, and walked out the door like that, if this didn't happen first" (DeLys, 2018b,12:20).

Again, it is contemplating an image that starts the protagonist's journey. The story finds her at an exhibition of late 19th century landscape photography—a voyeur on a lost natural world. She's looking at a night-time photograph captured with a flash of artificial light when an animal tripped a wire. A sudden illumination, and she's brought to tears—mindfulness as a breaking open. She looks to her friend James Thornton, Founding CEO of Client Earth, for advice on how to work with the grief that had burst unexpectedly from her body.

I originally made the recording used in *Mindfulness and the Moon* as part of creating *The Still Point*, a radio series about four innovators using mindfulness to change the field within which they work (DeLys, 2009). To my mind, Thornton, a Zen Priest, exemplifies this idea. He has developed a radical approach to environmental law—one that recognises the interconnectedness of everything. In creating this approach, he drew on his training in the nondual philosophical system of Zen Buddhism, eventually founding a team of environmental lawyers whose goal is to protect life on earth and all species that depend on it. My discussions with Thornton (J. Thornton, personal communication, 2009, 5 June) revealed that his leadership style is based in mindfulness principles, including the role of meditation in generating insights; a cultivated ease in states of not knowing; deep listening; and bearing witness to all parts of a system with an aim to act in the interests of all.

As I write today, years after intuitively selecting our recorded conversation to help make up *Mindfulness and the Moon*, I notice that the way I've used the recording in the program's storyline establishes Thornton as a mentor in the piece.

Responding to the protagonist's request for advice on working with climate grief and anxiety, Thornton reminds her of an ancient form of contemplation undertaken in charnel grounds. He draws a parallel with present-day contemplation of the climate crisis. Looking at climate catastrophe directly, and seeing the consequence of our actions, he suggests, can be seen as a contemporary version of this ancient practice (DeLys, 2018b).

Mindfulness and the Moon's protagonist is called to travel to the mouth of *Murrundi* during a devastating drought, to sense for herself the bitterness of a ravaged environment. In this desolate place she records herself brooding on the state of the environment, communities, and industries that all rely on a healthy *River Murray*. Although mindfulness suggests she sense into the catastrophe's texture and her fear, at first the protagonist slips into habit, reporting the story into the microphone.

The self-consciousness this engenders causes her to abandon her recording in frustration. Reflecting now, I see this as an abandonment of attempts to get to grips with fear of uncertainty through cognitive means. Instead, she reflects on a recording of Yingiya Guyula, a *Liya-dhālinymirr Djambarrpuyŋu* man, describing the ancestral voices he hears in the sound of the wind whistling through trees on his country in *Miwatj* | north-east Arnhem Land (DeLys, 2018b).

I made this recording in which Guyula sings and dances the story of his country in 2007, when he invited me there to demonstrate aspects of Australian First Nations Peoples' connection to land, through forms of deep listening. I'd originally used the recording to make radio pieces, including *Speaking Through the Land* for *Atlantic Public Media* (DeLys, 2007a; DeLys 2007b). Years later, in the making of *Mindfulness and the Moon*, I selected and deployed this recording in a visceral way. With it I pay my respects to the past, present and future Traditional Custodians of country across Australia and the continuity of their contemplative practices,⁴⁸ such as the spiritual connectedness through deep listening that Yingiya Guyula showed me.

I also convey Guyula as a second mentor. In the section of the recording featured in *Mindfulness and the Moon* he explains that in the whistling of a tree bent over by wind he can

⁴⁸ While it is beyond my scope, forms of indigenous meditation include practices like *Dadirri*—from the Ngan'gikurunggurr and Ngen'giwumirri languages of indigenous Australians of the Daly River region, NT that describes a practice of deep listening (Ungunmerr, 2017).

hear his ancestors weeping a welcoming, or a lonely weeping, crying out *come back home and be with me* (DeLys, 2018b, 19:05).

Reflecting on this section of the recording prompts a memory of our day-long road trip deep into the unknown—a trip into a culturally inscribed landscape as well as a physical journey. Guyula was my mentor on that trip, and on reflection, I see that positioning Guyula as a mentor in the story was a call to attunement enacted through responsive listening to voice in contemplative practice.

This insight provokes me to consider my arts practices of listening and voice, and their relationship to meditative practice. For example, as a field recordist, whether crouched near my equipment at dawn in a rainforest of north Queensland, or by a creek on Bundjalung country at dusk where frogs call in the evening after a spring rain, I've listened for hours on end—my small self disappearing into the voices of the natural world. But as Neumark (2017) argues, for those located in Australia “it is Indigenous Australians who remind us of the materiality of voice, the multiplicity of voice and the groundedness of voice in country: country that knows, country that feels and country that speaks” (p. 33).

I'd understood this implicitly, affectively. At the end of our road trip to his country, Guyula danced on the land within moments of our arrival at the billabong at Barmanwiliya while I recorded the sounds of wind through the Nambaw trees. As distinct from my ear witness recordings of the birds and the moaning winds, Guyula responded to the voices of birds, of country, of invisible atmospheric patterns, displaying an intense regard for kinship (DeLys, 2010).

But until Neumark's articulation I had not registered that the reason this recording of Guyula is a key part of the threshold experience that is act two is to be found in the case that it makes for contemplative practice grounded in affective relationality and country. I'm reminded now that a similar groundedness of practice was key in learning to tolerate uncertainty in walking at the mouth of *Murrundi*. In the face of fear, it was the materiality of walking slowly on the land and the intentional offering of compassion to myself and to all beings who depend on that environment, that anchored my mindfulness practice.

Provoked by these realisations, at this moment I am seeing contemplative practice, as if through a kaleidoscope, where rotation sees its crystalline shapes reflected in an endless variety of patterns. Despite the different forms of contemplative practice, each reflects the human capacity to be reminded of our (affective) interconnectedness with the world in all its manifestations.

And as I reflect on the frustration the protagonist expresses in the beginning of this act—frustration at the divisions between human communities—I'm reminded of several lines from a poem by Jane Hirshfield.

SOME QUESTIONS

Who first asked it?

The sand or the footprint,
the remembering or the forgetting?

....

Me, you / us, them—

what

molecule cell creature

came first to feel it?

Was it painful?

How came separation to chisel,

to cherish, to chafe?

Hammock of burning carbon

life wove from,

hammock life slept in,

unravelling—

did you find us useful,
interesting,
comic?
Will you miss them,
the cruelty and hunger,
the manatees and spoonbills
awe's inexplicable swaying?

Jane Hirshfield (Hirshfield, 2019)

4.4.3.4 Narrative Arc Continued

Insight Meditation too is a form of listening to inner and outer voice.

In *Mindfulness and the Moon*, where river meets sea, drought has obliterated flow. Performing walking meditation at the dry mouth of the River Murray, where the Coorong Wetlands were dying and the lakes at their lowest levels in a thousand years, our protagonist attempts to be with the difficult emotions by mindfully walking the land, recording her steps.

Rather than describe this walking meditation in the piece, I used collaged sounds to stand in for the experience, and for a transformation that occurred. Sound objects whose relationship to mindfulness were mysterious to me had drawn my attention when selecting recordings that would later be pieced together intuitively to create *Mindfulness and the Moon*. Those recordings include a piano, hatchlings, a hummingbird, wing flaps, insects, walking in gravel, a human cry of despair, a stone thrown into water, frogs in water, rain, and a Tibetan chant master performing a meditation. Other sound objects selected were my field recording of dense clouds of bats returning to feed their young after a night of hunting, and a friend in Lubbock Texas, just miles from my ancestral home, singing a 200-year-old Christian hymn.

Meanings evoked by these recordings are too numerous to reflect upon here. I single out the Christian hymn *Ye Objects of Sense* to offer a flavour of the deep personal and research

relevance of each of these recordings. I see that I intuitively grasped the relevance to my research quest of this song's lyrical offer of eternal security in afterlife over an experiential awareness of moment-to-moment uncertainty grounded in the beauty of the landscape. The hymn comes from the shape-note tradition of congregational singing that formed my Texan ancestors. I recorded the song while in Texas making a co-created radio piece, *What a Cowboy Hears* (DeLys & Cannon, 2015), and both cowboy singer, and the program's co-creator are my kin.

Returning to *Mindfulness and the Moon*, in hindsight, using collaged sounds to represent a transformative experience of mindfully walking the land attuned to fearful emotions was my attempt to express the ineffable. Listening now I hear a mysterious journey told through footstep. As I understand it, the protagonist's despair is so great her words become impossible, and we hear instead a mind-storm. The protagonist walks in a place beyond words, simply letting the feelings flow until, expressing catharsis, the sound of rain clears it all away. The strange power I feel in this section—its *dark night of the soul* and cathartic qualities—suggests a healing.

To reflect on why walking at *Murrundi* is a second milestone in my learning thrive in uncertainty, I refer to journal notes I wrote there. I made these notes at the time to reveal and recall the fertile inner landscape during practice. Here, they offer further insights into how this practice enabled a *crossing*: a healing of habits of fear that would enable me to traverse into uncharted territories.

I offer here two entries, one from the beginning of my days at *Murrundi | Murray River*, and one from the end. This first starts with an ordinary description of the landscape. I see, my mind was full of fearful *storying*. The description reaches into the past and the future. Its imagery is laden with negative affect, including a fearful imagining of apocalypse. That seems to be borrowed from well-worn biblical stories.

Walking alone out on the barrages linking the islands that once formed a shoreline, wind rattles the rails of the barrages. I can see where the water used to be...now it's exposed rock and weeds. The pumping stations like a life support system. I imagine the Southern Ocean rise up over the dunes, submerging the dry pans.

To take a moment out from exploring my journal, this entry has reminded me of a watercolour by Albrecht Dürer that, together with the artist's text, describes an apocalyptic nightmare the artist experienced in June 1525. A massive torrent of water bursts from the heavens flooding the landscape, as smaller columns of water begin to issue from above. Durer dreamt this vision in a period of extreme religious uncertainty (the Protestant Reformation) when many feared a flood would soon destroy the world.



Figure 9. Durer, A. (1525) Dream Vision [Online Image]. Wikimedia Commons.

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Traumgesicht,_Albrecht_D%C3%BCrer_dokumentiert_einen_seiner_Albr%C3%A4ume_\(1525\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Traumgesicht,_Albrecht_D%C3%BCrer_dokumentiert_einen_seiner_Albr%C3%A4ume_(1525).jpg)

I've included this as a vivid depiction by an artist that demonstrates the power of artmaking to render moving portraits of the fear of uncertainty. I also note that the work has impressed itself upon my memory, and my journal indicates that when first arriving in my own fear at the river, in dealing about the uncertainties I felt around the climate crisis, I was caught up in ready-made stories such as we can observe in this powerful depiction of religious fear.

Returning to my own journal, then, as it proceeds to describe the commencement of mindful walking practice, the entry shows me that, in place of clinging to stories and fear, I was able to be *directly* with difficult emotions.

I slow my walking to follow the trajectory of mindfulness of the landscape, and the bodily landscape of sensations. Mindful felt sense of emotions, mind states, thoughts, reflections—I'm just feeling that happening, free of a story about it. I move to beginner's mind gaze, not focused—just seeing the colour-scape. I notice anxiety as tensing, the eyes screwed tight. I offer a kind internal voice, and holding releases into the feelings of sadness, and fear. Can I simply hang out in the fire of uncertainty? I notice how the mind tries to move toward resolution. What does it feel like to just be with the tension of uncertainty? I feel the sensations passing. For a moment I understand the end of anxiety about uncertainty. All things arise and pass away—every sensation, every emotion, the body, the species, the land. I feel a release of the ways I idealise experience. It's a clear awareness that has no self-reference. Fear and sadness are simply fear and sadness. Impermanent like all things.

At *Murrundi*, no longer fused with my fear, I was able to see apocalyptic stories about how the climate crisis will play out as just that: stories. I understood that my identity is not made up of such stories. Instead, my identity is formed by the way I'm paying attention to the unknown. Perhaps this is where I was finally able to embody Rilke's counsel to *live the questions* (Rilke, 1993). I believe this is where I opened the door to thriving in uncertainty.

Buddhist psychology suggests that by clearly seeing the realities of impermanence, unreliability, and the lack of fixed self, change can occur (Brazier, 2014). At *the Murray River*, I learned to live at ease with the truth that no one knows how the climate crisis will turn out.

The final extract from my journal demonstrates that practicing at the mouth of *Murrundi* afforded me an insight into the dynamic flow at the heart of all experience.

I pause to take in the barrages. My skin cool in the frosty air, I watch as the changing light of the rising sun strikes the metal of a barrage, creating a flare. Dew on the ground already evaporating—for now though, it's hydration that helps some species survive. My eyes following the arc of a migratory shorebird in flight, I feel the grace of a world of dynamic change. Nothing I could hold onto even if I tried. I am leaving this place soon, but each moment is a leaving in a world of flow and change.

Returning to *Mindfulness and the Moon*, I understand that the movements of act two—the protagonist's going forth; her mentorship by James Thornton and Yingiya Guyula; her

compassionate walking meditation at the river—were each essential for the protagonist to cross the threshold worthily (O'Donohue, 2008). Earlier in this reflection, I quoted a narration that, with a strike of a bell, identifies the beginning of what I've called act two: "Let me play you another mindfulness scrapbook recording, from 2009 during the *Millennium Drought* ... because I don't think I could have listened so closely to myself, and walked out the door like that, if this didn't happen first" (DeLys, 2018b,12:20).

When I wrote this narration the connection between leaving the ABC and this trip to *Ngarrindjeri* country was unclear to me.

Now I understand that mindfully contemplating death at the river the protagonist comes to understand that by abstracting herself from *direct* experiences of climate change and fear, she has kept herself from thriving. Her courage, in being permeable to experience, required a crossing into the unknown.

These insights open the door to act 3, and a new world of thriving in uncertainty.

4.4.4 Act 3 Lake: Thriving in uncertainty in artmaking, and an embodied mystery

"A sober and quiet mind is one in which the ego does not obstruct the fluency of the things that come in through our senses and up through our dreams. Our business in living is to become fluent with the life we are living, and art can help in this" (Cage 1991, p. 77).

4.4.4.1 Act 3 Narrative Overview

In what can be seen as act three, the resolution phase, the protagonist experiences a new and unhabituated art practice and sense of self. Having set the conditions by learning to tolerate uncertainty, the novelty of this unfamiliar experience is met with a sense of curiosity that enables her to participate in a great mystery. This mystery initiates her into a new way of being in the world—thriving in uncertainty. And yet she stumbles again as self-consciousness takes her out of direct experience.

4.4.4.2 Act 3 Narrative Arc

Act 3 begins with sounds of people pounding spices for breakfast as the birds and the gibbons are waking up and singing their morning calls (DeLys, 2018b, 21:25).

The protagonist states that she'd like to play a recording made at 5 am on a pontoon on a lake, in a rainforest in Thailand. She made the recording, she says, by simply turning on the recorder and walking away, to let it capture the sound of all the creatures in the rainforest waking up together while was on a different part of the large floating pontoon sitting and listening.

While *walking away* is used as a metaphor to describe, for a general audience, the practice of diminished self-processing while field recording, this statement mirrors my lived experience of finding a new unhabituated audio recording practice at this retreat.

The story of the protagonist's time at an insight meditation retreat in Thailand is autobiographical—a faithful account of my experience on a vipassana retreat in 2018.

While there is much that needs attending to in ordinary life, a vipassana retreat presents a rare opportunity to rest in a nondual form of awareness, using meditative technology for cultivating such states that has been developed over thousands of years. Working in a neurocognitive framework, Vago and Zeidan (2016) describe how advanced mindfulness practitioners may experience states of nondual awareness in which the self-other distinction is dissolved.

In such retreats mindfulness is often taught as a shifting interaction of concentration meditations in which one focuses on an object and becomes absorbed into it, and insight meditation in which the awareness broadens to include the arising and passing of all sensory and mental objects (Vago and Zeidan 2016).

In the frame of this retreat, I took the rainforest soundscape as my object of attention.⁴⁹ I used mindfulness as a heuristic for acts of field recording based in present-centred, intentional, affectionate, and curious awareness. More specifically, I used the construct of mindful uncertainty as a heuristic to investigate the possibility of dwelling in uncertainty in the process of field recording, and to examine ways that mindfulness might help me to remain in a state of not knowing without reaching for control.

Porous to the world through meditation, I practiced for 10 days simply staying with the senses while recording. I noticed, with curiosity and nonjudgment, attempts to hold onto experience

⁴⁹ While the breath is the most common object of meditation, concentration may be on any inner or outer sensory object, or temporal flows of objects, or a resting state, with no objects (Vago and Zeidan 2016).

as it flowed in my consciousness. Perceptions became more and more refined as the mind became gathered and still. As the days progressed, I was increasingly able to stay at the edge of the unknown, open to discovery, without urges to exercise professional control over my recording process. A balance of concentration and investigation began to underpin a new field recording practice.

Over many decades, my recordings had become increasingly professionalised. But at this retreat, practicing in silence 18 hours a day, I rediscovered a freshness in recording that felt much like my early recording explorations. I set up the recorder—with its inbuilt microphone—without technique. I no longer conceived the recorder as a tool through which to assert control or to *capture* audio. Rather, as I plunged with beginner's mind into the dynamic soundscape the recorder served as something of a companion—a fellow witness to uncertainty. Mid-mornings, listening to the plaintive song of gibbons calling across vast rainforest territories, I felt *the both of us*—me (with my human sensory apparatus) and the recorder (with its sound processors)—to be witnesses to this expression of sociality. And in the afternoons as the calls of insects rose gradually until the penetrating square waves of cicadas crescendoed, taking over the entire soundscape, instead of tending to volume controls I attended to the relational qualities of the sounds, to their interdependence. Nor was perception fixing the sounds into conceptual categories as my professional training deemed. Instead the soundscape was unbounded, a moment-by-moment dynamic flow. The creatures—human, gibbon, insect—voiced their calls in a dynamic interplay, interdependent with the movements of the sun and the earth. The recorder and the recordist seemed undivided from this flow of emergent relationality. My sense was not one of recording the environment; it was as if I were singing to it and it were singing back to me. At some point, the separation between myself and the soundscape seemed to disappear entirely.

4.4.4.3 *Back to the Story*

Examining underlying themes of this first stage of act 3 in terms of the current research project, I see that this act finds the protagonist mindfully recording sound, much as I have just described my new recording practice, receptive to the unfolding soundscape with no sense of controlling. By act 3 of *Mindfulness and the Moon* then, the protagonist appears to have learned that if she approaches field recording armed with an unconscious array of professional habits and agendas, she diminishes the insights provided by experiential awareness. For example, in a more

habituated professional recording practice she would likely have deemed sounds of humans pounding spice to have ruined her recording. Approaching recording from a conceptual orientation, she would have classified human sounds as inappropriate to the category of a *dawn chorus*.⁵⁰ She would then have missed the beauty of a more inclusive ensemble of humans and jungle waking up together: a revelation that has been capacitated by experiential awareness in this story.

Instead, she practices mindfulness through field recording, and her audio recorder witnesses the ever-changing soundscape—the indeterminant interactions of cicadas, gibbons, humans, and other creatures of this jungle environment. Our protagonist simply listens, without asserting any professional habits of control. In finding this new approach to field recording, the protagonist breaks with habit in the same way she breaks with anxiety-related habits of control in act 1, through practices of mindfulness.

In investigating this story as a vivid reflection of ways mindful uncertainty has led also to flow in my artmaking, I note that the setting of act three, on a lake in the rain, embodies flow. This contrasts with act two, with its metaphor of an un-flowing river. I read this as an explicit representation of my implicit experience. Enabling me to be with the uncertainty of unfolding experience, mindful uncertainty has saved me from anxiety's *antiflow*.

4.4.4.4 *Beyond Flow, Flowing*

Towards the end of *Mindfulness and the Moon* the protagonist's capacity for mindful uncertainty matures. In the terms of my research then, mindfully receptive to the indeterminate soundscape with no efforts to control, the protagonist is thriving in uncertainty. But there is more; her release of control is so complete that an unusual experience of consciousness emerges. She describes slipping into a state in which "it seemed that I was the water" (DeLys, 2018b, 22:22).

The character slips into a transformative state of flowing experience that takes her beyond a conventional sense of self. She has experienced what, in terms of my research, can be described

⁵⁰ A dawn chorus is traditionally defined as birds singing together just before dawn.

as almost an ultimate form of beginner's mind. And yet she stumbles—grasping at the opportunity to write a poem (a form of self-consciousness) takes her out of this flowing.

“It lasted for just a moment, and then a thought, *wow I could write a poem about this!* And it was gone” (DeLys, 2018b, 23:07).

Attempting to understand what happened, she consults the final mentor in the piece, David Loy, a Zen meditation teacher.

4.4.4.5 *Nondual Concepts*

The protagonist tells Loy, “I was the water. I was the fluidity, the sound of those drops....There was no body. There was just the fluidity and the sound” (DeLys, 2018b, 23:05 – 23:18).

Loy tells her that Buddhist psychology suggests that our usual sense of a self, inside, experiencing something perceptual outside is delusive. (DeLys, 2018b, 23:18- 23:38). Importantly, he also conveys that “the sense of self inside is a construct that can be deconstructed, and reconstructed” (DeLys, 2018b, 00:23:40).

4.4.4.6 *Pause For Reflection*

Like our protagonist, as my experience at the Thai meditation retreat opened out into a new intimacy with the changing rhythms of experience I too drifted into a highly concentrated state. The movement of the water I was floating upon, and a sense of the fluidity of raindrops meshed with areas of the body that felt in flow. Not thinking about this conceptually, just staying with the felt senses, the state itself absorbed me. With my sense of self radically altered, I was in a state of deep uncertainty. Freed of reactions designed to avoid uncertainty, my experiential perception was one of undivided wholeness.

Reflecting on this story prompts me to revisit a journal note I wrote soon after experiencing this embodied mystery. Only metaphor felt adequate in pointing toward the ambiguity and uncountable magnitude of the experience.

If flow is a river that carries the artist in a timeless state of merging with the tasking at hand, this was the artist borne through mouth of that river as it empties into the ocean of awareness.

4.4.4.6.1 Flowing Beyond Flow

In the story Loy compares our protagonist's unusual experience with experiences of listening to music where, occasionally, the listener forgets themselves and becomes one with the music (DeLys, 2018b, 24:30). I sense that he references the popular construct of flow, often described colloquially in such terms. But I do not summarise mine as a flow experience. I understand it, not as an experience of flow, which is a term of science, but of flowing. I *was* water, briefly, but I still am flowing with this experience because it left me wondering. Its mysteries inspire me to explore further through artistic processes.

Unlike the protagonist, I did not seek David Loy's counsel. His presence in the story is a narrative device. I did not seek understanding at all. Instead, I felt much as our *Mindfulness and the Moon* protagonist describes: I was privy to a mystery, and will remain a committed student of that mystery (DeLys, 2018b, 00:25:45).

A sweeping review of literature that explores the human experience identifies self-transcendent experiences (STEs) as "transient mental states marked by decreased self-salience and increased feelings of connectedness" (Yaden et al., 2017, p.1).

In more common language, this common experience that often has positive effects on altruistic behaviour and well-being (Yaden et al., 2017) involves a sense of loss of individual self, and greater connectedness to others, which frequently extends to a sense of connectedness to everything, altogether.

If fitting my own fluid and porous experience into a construct were my aim, I would have many to choose from; elements of self-transcendent experience are described across many psychological constructs, including mindfulness, flow, peak experiences, mystical-type experiences, and some positive emotions such as love and awe (Yaden et al., 2017, p.1).⁵¹ Perhaps closest to what I felt is this expression of nondual awareness by the *13th century Zen* Buddhist priest and poet, Dogen. "I came to realize clearly that Mind is no other than mountains

⁵¹ Equally, one might imagine there was a strong shift to experiential awareness in which the world is experienced as a process, not a thing (McGilchrist, 2018b). The experience also easily evokes beginner's mind (Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Langer, 2006; Suzuki, 1973), and as discussed in earlier chapters, this might come about by not grasping at the object of attention to make it *for me* (Peacock, 2012). Indeed, Buddhist psychology describes a process of un-becoming (free from habits of becoming) attained through meditation practice (Carlisle, 2006). I also notice in my experience many of the qualities that are ascribed to *Samadhi* (absorptive concentration) in ancient texts. In the framework of insight meditation, my experience could be seen a stage of insight, while as the program reveals, Zen thought might label it a nondual experience.

and rivers and the great wide earth, the sun and the moon and the stars” (Dogen, n.d., as cited in Kapleau, 2013, p. 215).

But fitting my experience into any framework would rob it of its immediacy. As an artist I choose to foreground the *betweenness* of such constructs—just as there was a betweenness to this embodied mystery that made the separation between myself and the world more permeable. And reflecting on this mystery has been a salient reminder that uncertainty is key—not only as a topic, but also as an arts-based methodology. Perhaps it is the relationships between all these constructs that keeps me searching.

Extending this idea of relationality as a driver in artists’ quests, Neumark argues that such *witness* calls for “an ethical and political response, a moving with, researching with, writing with, thinking with” (Neumark, 2022, p. 206). In concluding this chapter in the following two sections, I will discuss ways in which such ethical researching, writing, and thinking within my practice-led project informs critical outcomes in this research.

4.4.4.7 Some Research Outcomes

In a personal sense as an arts-based researcher, I need test it only through lived experience. And I am committed to do so because I’ve already been rewarded by where it takes me. These are insights that I carry forward. These, and an overarching sense that I have thrived in uncertainty, in ways that reflect patterns of experience demonstrated through qualitative research conducted with my reference group.

Speaking of my reference group, an observable pattern that I have not yet discussed in this exegesis is these artists’ keen attention to a sense of self *coming and going*: in meditation; in daily life; and in artmaking. In discussing this Paul, the dancer, made a statement that to me sums up the reference group’s collective understanding of this as artists, including ways that the coming and going of self might mysteriously inform our work.

There's something about the arising and passing of identity in dancing. And even when self-consciousness comes in [Paul pauses in reflection here] there are ways that this can defeat me at times, but then there are other times where it's like *of course*, like coming up, a surfacing and then a restarting. So I'm

thinking of *a way of arisings and passings* [my emphasis]. I don't know if identity is the right word, but I'm really interested in that mix of this world of self and not self, and absorbing and letting things move through [he pauses in thought] and process (P. Matteson, personal communication, Feb 4, 2021).

But what does my sense of being a student of my uncertain, flowing and connected experience mean in the wider frame of this research project?

For one, in prioritising lived experience over abstract constructs, I have demonstrated arts-based research methodologies that “interrogate in a way that generates ... ambiguity, the miscegenation of categories, and an expanding discourse that proliferates possibility and seepages of alterity rather than reducing them” (Rolling, 2010, p. 108). As I have argued, this is a contribution to the mindfulness field, and I believe my argument is supported by Saron’s contention (Hasenkamp, 2021) that, given the complexity and ambiguity inherent in examining meditative experience, contemplative science researchers must keep an eye on mystery.

I would add that this openness to ambiguity forms a bulwark against risks in allowing the search for certainty to dominate research, at the cost of losing our sense of ourselves as interconnected with the world of which we are a part.

But let me focus sharply on two of the more direct consequences of the research— its generative effects, both on myself and on broader audiences for the research, for arts-based research methodologies suggest new ways of evaluating research success (Barone & Eisner, 2011).

As I see it the generativity of this research is demonstrated in its catalysing of a shift in my narrative stance, and through its potential to prompt audiences into deep reflection on vividly depicted research themes. I will explore these themes below.

4.4.4.8 Narrative Stance

In prioritising the specificity of lived experience as understood through my narrative account of a heightened sense of connectedness to the world, (rather than on constructs or psychological/neurobiological mechanisms underlying the experience) I focused on the

generativity its mysteriousness yields. My practice led reflection on a meditation experience charged with ambiguity has revealed that the experience prompted a narrative account that has further unleashed the power of uncertainty in my artistic practice.

More broadly, examining patterns in my own experience that correlate with accounts by my reference group, as cross-referenced with the literature, I contend that the practice-led research has demonstrated the utility and veracity of my third research proposal: practicing mindfulness can enable artists to authentically embrace uncertainty in their narratives, expanding their sense of what is possible in artmaking.

In describing the self as *the centre of narrative gravity*, philosopher Daniel Dennett (2014) suggests that though there may be no unified, independent, ongoing self, in *reality*, just like gravity, it is useful to have a narrative self.

In suggesting that the construct of *the centre of gravity* is more or less a theorist's fiction, yet one with a functional and *well-behaved* role within physics Dennett (2014) mirrors my sense of the role of artists' narratives.

As discussed throughout this thesis, the artists' self- narratives too have a well-behaved utility in our field. As an example, let's return to my mysterious experience. This self-transcendent/interconnected state was interrupted when a thought occurred. "I could write a poem about this", a voice in the head told me, and in an instant the magic of the flowing non-conceptual state was gone. The poem that I did write that day is but one heartfelt line:

supported by awareness, being lived by uncertainty

But on reflection, I realise that this entire thesis has been the poem I've written about this fluid way of paying attention to the world that offers access to uncertainty in all its generativity. And in this, the isolating and fixing conceptual mode has been my ally, even in making explicit this thesis, that has so prioritised the experiential.

In my initial reflections I understood my sudden jolt out of the mysterious experience as a stumble. Becoming *caught up* in the pleasant quality of the experience, a self-focused thought jettisoned me from it, suggesting my practice was too undeveloped to maintain a non-evaluative, non-attached equilibrium that results in a flowing beginner's mind.

But on reflecting further I see that this so-called stumble represents an equally important part of the artist's process. While the experiential mode enabled me to have a flowing experience, the conceptual mode equipped me to point to the experience and grapple with its use value—to my practice, to this thesis, and beyond. The conceptual mode's *ambush* of my nondual bliss enabled me to find a way of relating to the full bandwidth experiential mode and to bring the riches of beginner's mind back into the world.

The poet Ted Hughes described the discipline and courage required by the writer to engage with and capture their own thoughts and feelings. Describing the rich inner life as “the world of final reality” that “goes on all the time like the heartbeat”, Hughes (1967, p. 57) captures the critical role of the conceptual mode in making art and creating narrative.

“There is also the thinking process by which we break into that inner life [my emphasis] and capture answers and evidence to support the answers out of it. That process of raid, or persuasion, or ambush, or dogged hunting, or surrender, is the kind of thinking we have to learn and if we do not somehow learn it, then our minds lie in us like the fish in the pond of a man who cannot fish.” (Hughes, 1967, pp. 57-58).

I recognise the process of *dogged hunting*, and the *ambush* Hughes describes fits what happened in my nondual experience. Using terminology explored in my research, the conceptual mode grasps at experience. It re-presents aspects of the full-bandwidth experiential attention as somewhat stable, and certain, so that we can learn and to make things. This mode of understanding, upon which the ability to create narrative relies, has made this entire journey possible.

Whatever terms we use for it, the *ambush* jolted me out of a flowing experience, encouraging me to write a poem that I could share.

But at a deeper level still the poem I write is not the words on these pages; it is the way I'm living and making art. I will discuss the specifics and the consequences of this in the conclusion chapter, where I'll also examine how this entire research project has refreshed my narrative stance, and points toward future directions.

For now, a poem by another artist / seeker expresses the ambiguous movement in understanding that I have struck through examining the narrative of *Mindfulness and the Moon*.

Oceans

I have a feeling that my boat

Has struck, down there in the depths,

against a great thing.

And - nothing

Happens! Nothing.. .Silence.. .Waves...

--Nothing happens? Or has everything happened,

and we are standing now, quietly, in the new life?

Juan Ramon Jimenez (Lorca & Jimenez, 1997).

4.4.4.8.1 Widening the Story

But to further demonstrate the consequences and value of the practice-led research, I contend that this personal expansion of the power of uncertainty in my practice extends the reach of mindfulness research.

Using artists methods, I've grappled with ways to depict my research investigation for the radio medium, embracing uncertainty in the telling (even where it is inevitable that all words fail the experience). Here, the artwork that capacitates my reflection also shares, through the medium of radio, a relatable evocation of thriving in uncertainty. Barone & Eisner (2011) argue that an arts research work is capable of motivating audiences to profoundly reflect and act on vividly embodied issues. That the narrative mode is the most traditional repository of collective norms and mores (Bruner, 2020b) also supports my argument that, as a story that is widely available through broadcast and online, my creative research outcome *Mindfulness and the Moon* has enabled broad reflection on the role of mindfulness in assisting individuals to thrive in uncertainty.

Further, I argue that *Mindfulness and the Moon* demonstrates ways that artists' narrative embrace of uncertainty facilitates new horizons of possibility for not only the artist, but for their audiences as well. In the programs final moments its protagonist expresses a curious eagerness to continue her quest, building on new understandings that have been made possible through the practice of mindful uncertainty and to share them with others. She names her embrace of mystery and interrelatedness as a spur to her further research.

Then addressing the audience directly, she asks:

But what would we do if we really knew, as Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh said, that we're here to awaken from the illusion of our separateness—or what Einstein called an optical delusion of our consciousness? (DeLys, 2018b, 26:41). She goes on to suggest that the listener: hold the question, even repeat it over and over. But don't be too quick to believe anything the mind says in return (DeLys, 2018b, 26:55).

Barone & Eisner (2011) argue that art as research, especially when suffused with ambiguity, can invite audience members to imaginatively enter the work as active participants in knowledge-making, and can create opportunities for further questioning. Reflecting knowledge that I gained through practice-led research, the critical questions addressed directly to the listener—questions that highlight our interconnections—might prompt listeners to consider such questions as: “how might I best spend my time at this moment in history?”. But whatever ways listeners engage with their experiences of *Mindfulness and the Moon*, they will potentially continue to wonder about topics, methods, and concepts that formed the basis of this research. In as much, I contend that my practice-led research has expanded the potentials of mindfulness research, taking the research to new audiences, and multiplying its outcomes.

Chapter 5 Conclusion



Figure 10. Young, K.S (2022) Detail from Arhats of Daily Introspection. Five Hundred Arhats from Changnyeongsa temple. Powerhouse Museum, Ultimo NSW, Australia. <https://www.maas.museum/event/five-hundred-arhats/> Image taken by Sherre DeLys

It is sometimes said that a PhD is the undoing of self to redo the self. The path I travelled has taken me not only beyond representative consciousness, but also outside of settled territories in the mindfulness research field. I was accompanied by arts-based research methods and mindfulness itself, both of which continually equipped me to step out of habitual narratives, and to make explicit lived experience.

5.1 Primary Findings

This thesis aimed to explore the question: To what extent and in what ways can practicing mindfulness assist artists to tolerate and thrive in uncertainty in ways that enrich the process of artmaking? The research demonstrated patterns of lived experience that respond to the question and illuminate avenues of future exploration.

The research also achieved its aims to insert arts-based methods and discourse into the arena of mindfulness research. New concepts and metaphors were introduced. In this, it contributes to mindfulness research, to artistic research, and to my own research practice.

5.1.1 Benefits of Mindful Uncertainty to the Artist's Work:

Examining patterns in artists' accounts, as cross-referenced with relevant literature, the research demonstrated ways that mindful uncertainty offers artists access to the generative potentials of uncertainty.

As artists use mindfulness to notice and attune, with kindness, to difficult emotions, sensations, and thoughts, they can learn to *tolerate* uncertainty in artmaking.

Examining notions of *thriving* prompted findings that mindful uncertainty:

- equips artists to avoid the *antiflow* of anxiety in artmaking
- enables artists access to beginner's mind, demonstrated to be a willingness and a capacity to meet the present anew, seeing everything as if for the first time
- provokes and shapes authentic narratives of lived experience that embrace uncertainty and can keep the artist in touch with mystery in the service of ongoing artistic growth

Reframing contemplative science research to address artists' working processes, I demonstrated that my conclusions are consistent with recent literature that demonstrates ways that mindfulness enhances human behavioural functioning.

5.1.2 New Concepts, Metaphors and Methods Introduced

The exchange of ideas from multiple research paradigms enabled the arising of useful new concepts, metaphors, insights, and methodologies.

The research introduces:

- the dance-informed metaphor *dynamic stillness*—to communicate a key mechanism of mindfulness (the pause) in a way that invites engagement through its use of ambiguity
- the term *mindful uncertainty*—to describe mindfulness as an embodied methodology for attaining ease with uncertainty

5.1.3 Emergent Methods:

The methodologies I've created, along with my analysis and vision as to how these are, and might be, positioned within the broader context, offer important contributions to the field.

5.1.3.1 Interdisciplinary Approach to Creating Knowledge

This arts-based research brings the creative impulse to bear in carefully weaving artistic research and scientific findings. It triangulates observations gained through qualitative research, and those revealed through engaging in artmaking as a way of knowing, with psychological studies and contemplative neuroscience findings, in the interests of cross-validation and cross-fertilisation.

5.1.3.2 Self-reflexivity

Self-reflexive methods were employed throughout, as I developed an iterative reflective approach to all aspects of the research.

I commenced by undertaking a self-reflexive exegetical account that identified the origins of the research question in my experience working in a hospital setting.

In chapter two, my reflections made explicit the intersecting streams of understanding within which my knowledge was situated at the outset of this project.

In chapter three, reflection on a group-derived approach to knowledge creation informed the qualitative research process.

However, this accounting for the situated nature of knowledge acquisition culminated when, in the final phase of the research, I employed practice-led methods. Chapter four demonstrated that the explicit driving proposals created at the outset of the research were derived from my hitherto tacit knowledge of learning to tolerate and thrive in uncertainty.

5.1.3.3 Methods Suggesting the Generalisable Within Situated Knowledge

These same practice-led methods also generated data that effectively responds to my research question.

Meeting another of its stated aims, the research demonstrated the use of radio art and field recording as forms to examine the research question. The personal knowledge made explicit in this practice-led work identified ways that artists can use mindfulness to tolerate and thrive in uncertainty in artmaking. Having earlier taken account of consistent qualitative findings from a reference group of artists, I was equipped to articulate knowledge which both accounts for individual experiences and yet points robustly toward the general. (To confirm the generalisability of these findings in the terms of science, my studies would need to be subjected to refinement, larger sample size, and validation.)

Further, through the broadcast radio work, I demonstrated potentials to convey the research in ways capable of extending its reach and engaging audiences in reflection and action.

5.2 Contribution to the Mindfulness Field

This project eloquently offers several contributions to the mindfulness research field.

5.2.1 A Heuristic for the Use of Arts-based Methods

The research provides a vision, and a heuristic for the use of arts-based methods in the field of mindfulness research.

Examining methodological limitations identified from within the contemplative science community, this research demonstrates plausible and elegant arts-based methodological

extensions. In this way, this research points toward potentials for retooling mindfulness research methodologies in ways that simultaneously assist with identified problems and expand upon common understandings of research and knowledge in the field.

For example, one innovation of the research was the melding of contemplative science research with artists' perspectives. Integrating concerns and methods of arts-based research with findings from contemplative science, my research suggests potentials to build interdisciplinary models of research. While the use of science in this research is limited to inclusion of existing findings, the heuristic model of interdisciplinary mindfulness research I provide is available for evaluation and extension. This approach is also suggestive of artists' inclusion on multidisciplinary teams of investigators. Some benefits of interdisciplinary teams and approaches have been mentioned. Others include potentials to optimise research applications, multiply expressions of research significance and audiences; and extend the evidential base to new research domains.

5.2.2 Complementarity of Science and Arts

Science and arts are often considered to be polarised. I've asserted that embracing an interdisciplinary approach we can create a stronger mindfulness research field. It would, paradoxically, be a field that is both more and less certain of what it knows—and able to use the best of each towards producing rich, complex, and utilisable understandings.

5.3 Contribution to Arts Research and Practice

The evidence-based benefits of mindfulness are promoted widely and yet artists' perspectives are barely represented in the field. This research project has begun to address that dearth.

My research offers the capacity to generate further explorations of mindful uncertainty. As researchers build upon this project's findings, I look forward to further extensions of knowledge as to ways flexibility in the face of uncertainty might manifest in individual artists' experience, and by extension, in the broader society in uncertain times.

Findings here suggest that training in mindful uncertainty may be an important factor in artists' education. Such training promises to extend artmaking horizons by enabling artists to overcome

potentially paralysing effects of uncertainty inherent to artists' work, and to harvest generative potentials of not knowing.

I recommend a next stage of research that presents a theoretical rationale for such a training.

More broadly, as a beacon for arts-based, and other, researchers, this project should stimulate and serve as a model for further mindfulness research by artists. I recommend that research be undertaken to ascertain additional benefits that mindfulness brings to artists in the course of their creative work. My analysis has focused on skills and benefits related to artists' ability to tolerate and thrive within uncertainty. But, on the face of it, the research suggests that many other aspects of artists work can be enhanced through adoption of mindfulness.

On a personal note, I hope this project has given individual artists inspiration to think about mindfulness as a pillar of their creative practice.

5.4 Future Directions for My Work

The research has deeply impacted my sense of authority as an arts-based researcher, while electrifying potentials in my arts practice.

Studying other artists experiences alongside my own practice-led research, I have found a new and profound relationship to uncertainty. I've learned to tap into the freshness of beginner's mind, flow, and the potentials of narratives that embrace uncertainty. Deconstructing the researcher's sense of self, I've learned how to make more art, less artist.

My narrative stance is suffused with an embrace of uncertainty. One might say my narrative stance has changed to a narrative dance, it is so flexible and dynamic. This offers potential.

5.4.1 Future of My Art Practice and Arts-Based Research

5.4.1.1 This American Life Commissioned Abstract

During the writing of this exegesis, I was invited by the radio editorial team at *This American Life* to submit a commissioned abstract for a performed essay on the Australian bushfires of 2019. Demands of the research prevented me from making a work for the show at that time; my curiosity however would not allow me to sidestep the idea to write a short abstract.

I'm glad I followed this instinct, as doing so offers a last brief opportunity for practice-led reflection. It also offers a handy way of examining how this entire research project has refreshed my narrative stance, and points toward storying as an exquisite instrument for conveying the research.

Thus, after my brief introduction below, I invite you to read a short section of the longer commissioned abstract: *Smoke Beyond Belief*. Afterwards I'll discuss a few key points that, on reflection, demonstrate that everything I had learned through the doctoral research at the time of writing was applied in this creative response.

5.4.2 Commissioned Abstract

After establishing, through imagistic reflections, a sense of despair and uncertainty as the climate crisis changed from an intellectual idea to a sensual assault (and joking that it seems my PhD is coming to life), the abstract goes on to offer:

These days it's easy to hear plenty of certainties— not just the certainties of deniers, but increasingly of those certain of our impending demise. But the truth is *we don't know exactly what's coming, nor when*. The essay will focus on my story of learning to dwell in that uncomfortable space, and of finding there a tenderness I didn't know I possessed. I'm alert to the realities, but this essay is about a different kind of extinction— a death of one way of being that is at the same time a birth into another. *Smoke Beyond Belief* grapples with how we might make meaning and find a workable balance between fear and hope, even as we speak together honestly about the mess we're in. But different to a spate of essays addressing the broad philosophical, political, and moral challenges we face, *Smoke* is a small story of finding my place in the wake of fires that have been termed a wake-up call to the world.

In a similar spirit to David Sedaris' TAL essay *Ashes*, and Scott Carrier's *The Test, Smoke* chronicles a wandering in strange territory after a seismic event. Over the course of the piece, with several missteps, I find a foothold in the groundless ground of uncertainty. Perhaps small details will reveal larger truths. With the now-widespread recognition of climate change, I suspect eventually we'll all need to reconcile ourselves with uncertainty. But here and now, in this story shaped essay, I'll look to the small details of conversations with friends and working with my mind to find my way there.

So how do we learn to hold the questions?

I teach mindfulness and practice deep listening to others as performance. I could write the essay from this perspective. So, I'm the main character, a latte sipping, woke Sydneysider. And questions could be something like: What happens to my mindfulness when daily meditation becomes awareness of breathing smoke? And what follows when being mindful means turning to face the impossible? In other words, this could be a story of suddenly finding myself asked to seriously walk the walk, of my journey to learn the hard-core value of *don't know mind*. Most listeners probably have an idea of mindfulness as something like *being awake in this moment* or *being present to the world as it touches the heart*. And at its simplest that's really what the essay's about— being woken up, frightened, and disoriented and then, after some trials and setbacks, choosing to take up residence in the unknown. And it turns out uncertainty

is a gift, offering hope and connection, and inviting me to care about a hurting world.

I have first thoughts about structure and scenes.... <snip>

Reading this extract now, I see several passages indicating that knowledge produced through the doctoral-research process was applied.

For example, take the early line “but truth is we don’t know exactly what’s coming, nor when, and my essay will focus on my story of learning to dwell in that uncomfortable space”. This to me expresses beginner’s mind, while acknowledging the tensions of tolerating uncertainty. The extract goes on to indicate that over the course of the piece, with several missteps, I (the character in the essay) will “find a foothold in the groundless ground of uncertainty.” This to me spells learning to thrive in uncertainty. The knowledge that I (the character) have this potential was generated through the practice-led portion of this research project. And calling upon experiences made explicit through my autoethnographic reflections, a phrase follows soon after: “a death of one way of being that is at the very same time a birth into another”. This suggests to me the PhD’s undoing of the self to remake the self.

The writing refers to the social context. “With the now widespread recognition of climate change”, it offers, “I suspect eventually we’ll all need to reconcile ourselves with uncertainty.” The line refers to processes of social adaptation and resilience building. This exegesis has presented my view of the urgency of applying knowledge produced by the thesis to these processes of adaptation and resilience.

Yet I also read in the *This American Life* abstract a healthy doubt. The abstract enumerates questions that might drive the radio piece. It then clarifies the focus of the driving questions: “In other words, this could be a story of suddenly finding myself asked to seriously walk the walk; of my journey to learn the hard-core value of don’t know mind.” Viewing the abstract now, this section suggests my sense of challenge in moving beyond the research setting to apply the knowledge gained. My character seems to be wondering if indeed she is capable of tolerating and thriving in uncertainty in the applied setting.

Finally, as if answering the question, the abstract offers:

And that's really what the essay's about— being woken up, frightened and disoriented and then, after trials and setbacks, choosing to take up residence in the unknown. And it turns out uncertainty is a gift, offering hope and connection, and inviting me to care about a hurting world.

The ring of this expression of the difficult passage in learning to tolerate uncertainty is now familiar. It conveys the knowledge, derived through the research, that this crossing to the other side has enabled me to thrive in uncertainty. And harvesting the generative potentials of uncertainty (in this instance, hope in the recognition of social interconnectedness, compassion, and empathy), the character appears to have achieved the ability to apply the knowledge produced in the doctoral dissertation.

Though not included here, the abstract goes on to suggest scenes—for example, one based on my experience of a meditation hall while on a bush retreat at the beginning of the crisis, where the contemplative silence was punctuated with sounds of meditators choking on smoke. The context of a meditation retreat, I specify to the *TAL* editors, makes it easy to suggest the ability to be with bare experience, with neither denial nor stories of apocalypse—a display of beginner's mind.

The abstract discusses music options to be used in the finished program:

<snip> Talk about beginner's mind. Never thought I'd hear myself say this, but I might suggest we include that used-to-death piece *Gymnopédie* (Satie). I heard this on a mixtape at yoga class this week. With the fresh ears the smoke's brought the beauty of this quizzical piece was near heartbreaking, and its cheesy status only added to the tenderness. It sent me into a reverie: 'If human extinction occurred this piece would be lost.' I could use this moment as a cipher for a kind of breaking apart that's gone on and how one finds motivation, even in that groundless ground, to want to protect the

humanity and civilization we cherish. But *Gynmopedie* would just be a feature moment. For music throughout the piece I'd suggest other quizzical music like Morton Feldman (*Music for Philip Guston* or *Triadic Memories* for example) and | or solo piano music from Chris Abrahams, pianist in *The Necks*. Both these musics involve a kind of textural stasis that doesn't resolve so much as float you into another way of being, a kind of resting in the unknown. <snip>

Suggesting further sonic potentials the abstract also mentions *the magpie that imitates a siren*, referring to a poignant viral video recording of a magpie on a suburban fence during the fires that appeared to imitate the sounds of emergency vehicles in the street.

The thrust of the entire abstract suggests a desire to convey the uncertainties involved in processes of adaptation, and a flexibility in harvesting what is generative in uncertainty.

I believe this abstract suggests at least some ways that, in future, I will build on the work of this thesis. After all, my practice-led research revealed ways that embracing uncertainty in my narratives has recursively productive potentials. And as discussed in the thesis, narrative is a fundamental tool for collectively making sense of existence. Thus, narratives such as *Smoke Beyond Belief* suggest how, as a radio artist, I might apply the knowledge produced in the thesis in the social context.

But my practice is interdisciplinary, and I see the research's more immediate contribution in the way it will guide further development of *The Listening Room* performative work.

5.4.2.1 *The Listening Room 2*

As I write, I notice sensations of excitement. I sense that there is further potential in *The Listening Room* to exemplify arts-based research that creates a space in which artists and audience participants create and enact knowledge that is vital to the social context. Based on findings in the doctoral research I will reiterate *The Listening Room* for current social conditions. Patterns I detected as I journaled my experience in its first iteration suggested

transformative potentials of *The Listening Room*. An aim to ground that potential in findings from this doctoral dissertation raises new questions. And this is where the Covid-19 and this exegetical account of artists' mindful uncertainty unexpectedly meet in something of a circle dance. The global pandemic has emphasised the fact that our lives are biologically, environmentally, and socially contingent. As discussed, it also offers a moment to reframe, and reimagine our worlds, and to transform the way health is delivered. *The Listening Room 2* will examine and stimulate understandings of how we might reset individually and as a society. At the same time, it will offer the ear of listening that can make the difference between despair and resilience.

I will briefly elaborate two potential research questions to be applied within the frame of the knowledge produced in this dissertation.

The research would explore the question: Can mindful uncertainty be shared with participants in a performative artwork? Drawing upon emotional contagion theory and findings, I hypothesise a positive relationship between an artist's mindful uncertainty and the experience of mindful uncertainty among participants in the creative work.

A second research question is: Can *The Listening Room* serve as a safe framework to imagine and explore futures in a *post-Covid* world? Engaging in the free fall of silent listening with mindful uncertainty, my role would be as a facilitator of reflection for others, and a holder of those reflections. I will use the looser, more contextual understanding of identity gained within this doctorate to develop performative constructs of self in the situation. Knowledge about the role of narratives that embrace uncertainty will imbue a new work that capitalises upon the acknowledged uncertainties in the social context. Having gained knowledge of the power of threshold experiences in this dissertation, I will invite participants to leave at the door the shoes that brought them to *The Listening Room*. *The Listening Room 2* will be an open space for talking, or not talking, for play, presence, or for confronting some of the invisible costs incurred in this moment in history.

5.4.2.2 *A Culminating and Emergent Nondual Methodology*

Finally while methods emerged from the needs of the research as I progressed one methodological shift warrants special focus, as I sense that there exists in it something important for the future of my research. In reflecting on my mysterious experience recording sound at the

lake in Thailand, a decision emerged. Rather than look for specific psychological or neurobiological mechanisms that might underly the experience, practice-led research identified a nondual method of utilising data that emphasises a betweenness in place of determined categorisation. This method was chosen to preserve and reflect complexity, while still offering actionable strategies. In addition, briefly canvassing options from the extant literature that might explain the experience (before I chose to prioritise the specificity of lived experience) revealed that the give and take from disparate knowledge domains provides circumstances for the unfolding of new methods for understanding aspects of cognition that might be impacted by mindfulness.

My understanding of this nondual method is still at almost a tacit stage. Harvesting the riches that I sense in this method will require further research.

5.5 Final Thoughts

Undertaking this PhD has enabled me to integrate a narrative of my embodied understanding within knowledge systems that at times heave against one another like restive subsurface currents. It has been a vital experience, and I thank you for your time in share it with me

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