Intro (00:01):

This session of the 2013 Adelaide festival of ideas was recorded by Radio Adelaide through the support of the vast mid library, University of Adelaide, the University of South Australia library and Flinders University library.

Julian Pierce (00:16):

My name is Julian Pierce. I'm delighted to be chairing this session this morning. I'm the executive director of Australian Dance Theater here in Adelaide. And I'm also the chair of the emerging and experimental arts panel of the Australia council. So welcome to this morning session, anxiety meets creativity and great to see a great crowd here. It's obviously a topic that's piqued your interest. None of you look that anxious this morning, so you look all sort of fresh, but maybe by it, maybe by the end of it, we, we we'll wait and see. So this morning I acknowledged that we are gathered on the traditional country of the Ghana people of the Adelaide Plains. We recognize and respect their cultural heritage, beliefs and relationships with the land. We acknowledge that they are of continuing importance to the garner people living today, and we respect their elders past and present.

Julian Pierce (01:11):

So just a little bit of housekeeping, please switch your mobile phone to silent during the session, but you're welcome to use your phone during the session and Twitter and all of that. So the hashtag is hashtag ADL FOI. So hopefully you won't be that anxious to, to not send out lots of Twitters from today, lots of tweets from today's session. And please note that unauthorized recordings of any kind are not permitted during this session. And today's session is being audio recorded by radio Adelaide for broadcast and future podcasts. So I asked her when, when we do do the Q and a towards the end of the session that you use the microphone just here to so that we can record your question. So two today's panel anxiety meets creativity. This has been sparked by some ideas by the philosopher Kierkegaard who argued that anxiety is essential for creativity as a dual force.

Julian Pierce (02:14):

It can be both destructive and generative depending on how we approach it. Our speakers today will discuss whether in an angst helps or hinders the creative process and how they channel their inner demons without assuming the fetal position. So in, as we know, anxiety is, is a modern condition know, there's, there's a lot of anxiety around us now. And you know, what does happen when anxiety meets creativity? And I, do they have a big hug? Do they get on, do they you know, have a polite handshake or do they start brawling immediately? You know, we are very aware that anxiety and create creativity is a very dynamic, but often tense relationship. And we look at the, of someone like Woody Allen, who's infamous for bearing all of his anxieties and phobias on the screen in a wonderful sort of outpouring of creativity.

Julian Pierce (03:08):

So in a case like Woody Allen, his anxiety is an incredible sort of dynamic force for, for his artistic output. I must admit to a bit of chair's anxiety myself with such a great panel this morning, but hopefully you'll see more anxiety, more creativity than anxiety from me this morning, but just to introduce the speakers to you now Gary Brent Greenberg, who's on the far right there is based in Connecticut. And he said to me today, how how wonderfully friendly everyone is in Adelaide. So it's got a big smile on his face, so he's loving it here. Even we are, even though we are in the bowels of the Masonic lodge. So Gary is a practicing psychotherapist and author of manufacturing, depression, and the noble life. Gary will talk

about the phenomenon of anxiety and how psychiatrists and psychologists have seen it over the years and how no matter the school of thought the tendency to pathologize anxiety conflicts with the artistic impulse and it Goldsworthy who many of you would know, I'm sure it's been very busy.

Julian Pierce (04:18):

This festival ideas, she's just come from a panel that I've been at a 50 shades of feminisms. So this is I hope this is going to be a, sort of another stimulating topic for you, Anna, but Anna is an award-winning pianist and writer, her best-selling memoir piano lessons when newcomer of the year at the Australian book industry wards awards. And we'll talk a little bit about the role of anxiety and obsession and obsession as a generator of her work, but also as a subject of her work there's an episode in her recent memoir, welcome to your new life, which is essentially a transcription of a panic attack. And Anna will talk about this and also read from it, which will be great. And also welcome to Peter drew. Who's recently returned from from Glasgow, where he was undertaking a research master's at the Glasgow school of art in working on street art. And that, what was the topic of your

Peter Drew (05:18):

Reset? The, it was straight out and graffiti, but that's why they don't fit within institutions. Yeah.

Julian Pierce (05:24):

So I think Peter's going to expand a bit on that today and and his problems with academia, I think who who, who else he says, ironically enough, his research at the school examined the tension between large institutions and urban art, but yet he was threatened with expulsion for, I dunno, what did he do? Graffiti the

Speaker 4 (05:43):

Provosts, there

Peter Drew (05:46):

Are places that are stuffed up and they, they liked them and then they didn't love them.

Julian Pierce (05:50):

Right. Okay. So, okay. That's a, that's a good start. So enough of me, and I'm going to hand it over to thank you. [inaudible]

Speaker 5 (06:05):

So despite

Gary Greenberg (06:08):

The overwhelming friendliness that I've encountered here in Australia, which actually for a while I was taking it personally, they really like me, but then I realized it's just, you know, sort of the cultural norm, but despite all of that the other day, I think two nights ago, I woke up at in, in, in bed and, and was possessed with this feeling of dread. And it was, I was nauseated. I was sweaty. I was frightened. I crawled across that three hectare bed that they supplied me with at the Hilton and looked at the clock and it was 2 27 in the morning. And I thought, well, one thing's for sure. I finally adjusted because that's about when I wake up at home with those feelings. And I hope you're feeling a little, sorry for me, I was

feeling a little sorry for myself, but the interesting thing that happens or happened that night, and I was more aware of it because I was thinking about this presentation was that I went through the whole like list.

Gary Greenberg (07:21):

Will w what, what is it what's going on here? You know, there's this whole thing in the Bible about God calling out to Abraham and Abraham responding here I am, you know, and this is, was the character guardian view about anxiety was that it was a call. So the question was, well, who's calling me, what is this about? And so I went through the list, you know did I leave the iron on at home? Did I am I, am I having a heart attack and about to die? What's going to happen with my kid as he gets older you know, does my wife still loved me, even though I've been away for two weeks and left her alone with him, you know, and, and on and on. And, and, and, and what occurred to me later after I went back to sleep and woke up, not feeling this anymore, was that when we feel a feeling like that, and perhaps everybody in this room has felt something like that that, that anxiety feeling the dread we're compelled to find a story to tell ourselves about why do we feel this way now?

Gary Greenberg (08:26):

I don't know if that's a modern thing. I mean, obviously this is the only time I've ever lived that I know of. And so, but I do know that that is the modern, that both of these are the modern condition. Anxiety is the modern condition. It's how most of us most of us dip into at one time or another, and telling the story is also a modern condition. We, we tell stories and sometimes increasingly we know that they're only stories. Now my my racket, the psychotherapy is really a storytelling racket. And what we do is we have different ways of telling that story from the one about how it's biology, you know, I just got bad chemicals and they're, they're, they're making me a 2 27 in the morning, have this feeling, and it's probably got something to do with low blood sugar.

Gary Greenberg (09:11):

And it's the emergency you know, I wish we had idiot lights instead of pain, but I, I, that, that, that would be intelligent design. But you know, the, the story is that there's something gone wrong in my body. There's a story told about behavior that certain behaviors are associated with a certain feeling. And then when you encounter that behavior, when you're encountered that stimulus again, you have the feeling, maybe it's because I'm alone in a big city that I, don't not familiar with. There's the cognitive behavioral story that I'm telling myself a, a, a, a I I've got bad thoughts, you know, and I'm being pessimistic and really I'm not going to die, so why should I feel bad? And there's the Freudian story that anxiety is about sort of unsettled in intra-psychic conflict. And all of these stories have the same effect act.

Gary Greenberg (10:07):

And this is something I need to apologize for, I think, and apologize in the sense of saying, sorry. Which is that in my field, what we do is we tend to take anxiety as a symptom of vanillas and something that's bad. Now there's no question that it's uncomfortable, but the question is, is it sick? We don't really know how to answer that question. We can look at it in terms of disability. If the anxiety is so bad, you can't function. Then there must be something wrong with it. But I think we've done the world a disservice, because I think that it is true that if I think about the writing, I've done that the anxiety, when it, isn't making me curl up into a fetal position on my enormous bed in the Hilton is useful. And here's why, because I think that underneath with all of this stuff that we do with our stories and our, our lives and our making money and all of that underneath all of that is this current raw presence.

Gary Greenberg (11:02):

And that current, if you can dip into it out of that comes art, whatever the art is out of that comes inspiration. So in my experience, these moments like the one in the Hilton have been the fount in some way, if not directly then indirectly an indication that I'm about to, to that something is about to happen. And to dismiss this as sickness is a bad idea, but what we're not very good at. And there's one school of psychotherapy that I think takes care of this, which is the existentialist school of psychotherapy, which has encouraged us to look at our anxiety. And what it really does is it encourages us to strengthen our ability to do that. We don't learn this well enough as children and as grownups too, to tolerate our negative feelings. And if there's one thing that I think is really important to be able to do, to get on in life, that a life that seems to offer all sorts of opportunities for a heart to tolerate feelings is to learn to tolerate them because when you do that, and this has been my experience anyway, when I do that, then I'm able to dip in and get beyond the world of everyday appearances and find something else, find something that's worth writing about that's worth talking about.

Gary Greenberg (12:23):

And that's what I'm hoping I've done with the experience that I had at the Hilton.

Speaker 5 (12:35):

[Inaudible] Perhaps we can just

Julian Pierce (12:36):

Explore a little bit more this idea of anxiety as a sickness, and I'm just wondering what your thoughts would be on. You know, the more anxious you are does that make you a better artist or it's, you know, where, at what point does anxiety stop being a sickness that makes us feel, you know, I mean, there's, there's so many of us on sort of antidepressants and, you know, at what point do we use that, take that anxiety and turn it into something else.

Gary Greenberg (13:06):

Yeah, I don't, and I think it's, I hesitate to make a universal statement about that, because as much as it might sound like I'm weaseling out of answering the question, it really does depend on the individual. I mean, what we have here is first of all, we have temperaments. Some of us are more prone to feeling what we call anxiety than others, and that's just across the board. And so those people are saddled with more of it. But the, and some people, when they take the drugs, whether it's Xanax or Valium or antidepressants or marijuana or alcohol which by the way, is the greatest. Anti-Anxiety not that I'm recommending it, but it is a tremendous anti-anxiety drugs. Yes, it does. And, and, and, you know, before the age of modern medicine that people drank they still drink, especially here, I've noticed.

Speaker 7 (13:54):

But everyone looks so happy that's it I've made the connection. Now. I thought it was the lithium in the water, but

Gary Greenberg (14:04):

But, but everybody has their response to the drugs as well as to the anxiety. So the question is really a question about cultivation, given your own baseline, given your own level of anxiety, tendency to anxiety, what can you do to cultivate it? Some people in order to do that, I have to maybe have to take

drugs. So there's no way to say that the more anxious you are, the more artistic you are, where if you take drugs, you're not going to be able to be creative, but what you don't want to lose fact sight of is that in that anxiety is the inspiration somewhere buried in there. And for some of us it's harder to get at than others. Some of us are lucky. We have anxiety all the time.

Speaker 7 (14:47):

Let me just do

Julian Pierce (14:48):

Just one more quick question for me is why is the middle of the night that you wake up

Gary Greenberg (14:53):

With that? So something about done any recent, something about serotonin. I think it's, you know, I, it did because the middle of the night is when everything is quiet, it's when you're, you can't, and you're, you're in a, you're in a, you're in a defenseless state. And the reality of mortality, which is, you know, this is the great thing about humans. We're the only animals that seem to have a sense of mortality. Isn't that wonderful. You know, if you didn't know you were going to die, it wouldn't be such a problem. And so, you know, you just live your life thinking, of course, we all do that. Right. We have that myth we're not going to, but I think that it's when it sneaks up on you.

Julian Pierce (15:34):

I know Peter, did you want to respond to

Speaker 8 (15:40):

Us gonna wait?

Julian Pierce (15:40):

Okay. Okay. Well I think Gary's laid sort of a very rich groundwork for you know, for a, for a conversation. So just sort of hand over to Anna now.

Anna Goldsworthy (15:52):

Yeah. Thank you. Look, I'm, I'm intrigued by this notion that inspiration lies with an anxiety. And I suspect I can, I guess I can really only speak from my case, but I suspect it is at least partly true. I do think though that there's probably in the sort of optimal quantity of anxiety, that's super productive for me. And that beyond that it actually becomes sort of paralyzing. And I might sort of start by talking about my own experiences as a musician, as a pianist. And I think anxiety plays into that. A number of ways. I know when I was a child, I could only go to sleep at night. If my father was playing the piano in the adjacent room, it was supremely reassuring. And, and I've read somewhere. It's been said that the ear is the organ of fear, and there's something really primal about music.

Anna Goldsworthy (16:32):

I think that it, you know, it does it's, it suits us. And so perhaps part of my attraction to music as a, as a slightly anxious person, or occasionally an extremely anxious person is arises from that. But beyond that if you are a pianist, a performing musician, you know, if you're forced to practice for long hours every day. And I think perhaps if you don't have an obsessive temperament, which, which I may be wrong, but

I suspect is in some ways connected to, into an anxious temperament. I mean, certainly for me, my anxiety at times, it's felt like just another form of my obsessiveness. It'd be difficult to, to put in the requisite hours, you know, five, six hours a day practicing when you're growing up. And, and if there wasn't the spectrum of these sort of terrible possibilities for public humiliation in the form of concerts on the horizon, perhaps one would be less inclined to practice.

Anna Goldsworthy (17:19):

So, so anxiety in that sense is a useful motivating factor. But then beyond that, we get to the whole issue of performance of, of stepping on stage now in my first memoir, which is piano lessons, which sort of charts my, my own musical upbringing, I think in retrospect, what I was seeking to do was to dispel some of the mistakes that we cultivate when we're on stage. You know, we like to give the impression as, as performance that everything's under control when that were these terribly serene beings that are somehow just able to access these these master. And yet behind that, there's a tremendous amount of work clearly, but also probably certainly in my case panic. And what part, part of what that book is, I guess, is a transcription of the anxiety of being a performer. And after it was published, my very first interview was with the novelist Andrea Goldsmith.

Anna Goldsworthy (18:08):

And she said to me, I think you've written a definitive book about anxiety and how ironic that is an anxious person. You were attracted to this particular sphere of work in which anxiety I suppose is, is a large component of performance. Now I was intrigued when I heard Gary say that one of the ways we respond to anxiety is by constructing stories. And when I think of the way my mind acts when I'm on stage, and this is what I mean about, you want a sort of optimal amount of anxiety, I think before you go on stage, if you're not feeling it a slight adrenaline rush, then you're in trouble because you just don't care. And that adrenaline can be terrifically powerful. You can harness it for good as well as for evil. And it can actually make you perform at your very, very best if it gets, if it gets a little bit too much, then it can be debilitating and then it can actually stop you from performing.

Anna Goldsworthy (18:55):

And in my case, certainly growing up, I think it was the stories that resulted from that anxiety that would cause me trouble on the stage because it's when, when a performance is not going well, that's when the chattering is going on in your head. And the chattering usually takes the form of, Hey, wouldn't it be kind of funny if I had a memory lapse on the, on the next page, do it, do I really know this piece or imagine if this were to happen? And what I did find riding this particular memoir was, it was much, much easier for me to write about bad performances than it was about good performances. And I think the reason was that good performances were largely silent in terms of that chattering anxiety provoking voice suggests you do actually inhabit someplace, very sporadically of grace, where you just in the moment, but when you're not in the moment, that's when there's that little demon in your shoulder doing all that talking now, that's not useful to me, particularly as a pianist on stage it's, it's fabulous for the, for the, for the practice studio, because it's, it's what allows you to second guess your art and, and improve.

Anna Goldsworthy (19:54):

It is quite useful though. I think as a writer and I think probably a literary sensibility does have to be obsessive in that way. Then I had children and I found that a lot of my anxiety just shifted from my concert life to my children. And in a curious way, that was quite liberating to me professionally. And I

feel I've actually done my, probably my best, my best work as a performer, since I've been a little bit less anxious about it, still sufficiently anxious to care, but not, not to that really paralyzing extent. But I did find that I had this wonderful new source of anxiety. I wrote another memoir and I'm not consciously right. Memorized with anxiety. I guess I'm just writing memoirs of what's obsessing at the time. And for a long time, that was music. And over the past four and a half years, it's been my kids.

Anna Goldsworthy (20:42):

And so I thought I might actually read an excerpt from this book it's called welcome to your new. And it's, it's about that first sort of delirious year when you can't even really think straight. And when you have this thing, this new thing in your life that causes you to panic. And this is about when we had a, I think a two month old baby, we decided to try to take a holiday, not yet realizing that holidays are no longer possible. And I, it's the cost of this, this little excerpt to my partner, Nicholas and my child, my son, who I just referred to as you. And so we arrive at this holiday house in Apollo bay on the great ocean road. The house is spacious immaculate as a magazine spread with light flooding in, from all sides, there are wide decks, forest vistas, smooth linen, and find crockery and a large table of distressed wood on which I can write.

Anna Goldsworthy (21:36):

It is a holiday house that promises everything, including the opportunity to reclaim myself. Why was it such a bargain? Nicholas takes out his camera to document the house, to confirm its existence. No idea. I feed and change. You has the dog rushes outside to caper on the lawns. Afterwards. I place you on the day bed by the window where you make celebrators noises and then abruptly fall asleep. That there's no air conditioning. Nicholas says coming in from the deck. Oh, once we open it up, there'll be a gully breeze. A golly breeds on top of a hill. I moved through the house, flinging doors and windows open. Of course, it's only when I go to the toilet that I discovered a floor in this paradise, there was a sign. This is a composting toilet. Please drop in a scoop of sawdust mixture. After every use, I opened the lid to an underground sea of, yawning back at me afterwards, there was not the closure of a flush, only a scoop of sawdust into its greedy.

Anna Goldsworthy (22:41):

More quickly. I closed the lid, but it is too late. I have seen how you would fall that moment in which clumsiness takes over into disaster, the dense plummet of your body, the viscous splash the two small hole through which I could never follow you. It is yet another of these vortices, the sink holes. And even after I've run from the room and slammed the door, I feel it's sinister, gravitational pool. What's wrong. Asks Nicholas jiggling you on his lap in the living room. There's a long drop toilet. He stands to investigate and I snatch you from his arms. The baby must never go in there.

Anna Goldsworthy (23:29):

I take you into the dining room and close the door. I don't think you should be scared of the toilet. And he says, coming in, what if the baby fell in? How would he get in there? He's incapable of locomotion. One of us might take him in so we won't take him in. But our holiday house has been exposed as a fraud, as a front for the composting toilet, with it's diabolical appetites in the kitchen, that the moment arises to 45 degrees. And the dog unravels another inch of pink tongue at dusk, a plague of insects descends upon the house. And we run from room to room closing windows so that the insects thud against the glass, I put you to bed and we sit down to watch the Sopranos. There are still no sign of a golly breeze. Always. I'm aware of the composting toilet of its patient waiting.

Anna Goldsworthy (24:27):

It is too hot to be awake. And when we go to bed, it is too hot to be asleep. Even lying naked is an exertion. Nicholas falls asleep regardless. While my heart rate accelerates, I try to slow it with logic. You are in capable of locomotion. The only people capable of taking you into the composting toilet are me and Nicholas. I repeat these statements in my head as though counting sheep, you are in capable of locomotion. The only people capable of taking you into the composting toilet are me and Nicholas. I will not take you into the composting toilet. Therefore, the person who will take you into the composting toilet it's Nicholas. I knew it it's incontestable was a mathematical proof, but I turned it around further in my head searching for fallacies. Even though Nicholas has said, he will not take you in. He does not properly appreciate the threat. There is a danger that he will forget and take you anyway, and then accidentally drop you in. And there's the additional danger that he might take you in his sleep. It is important that I remain awake to prevent

Speaker 7 (25:37):

This, but

Anna Goldsworthy (25:39):

If I stay awake now I might fall asleep tomorrow, leaving you alone with Nicholas and at greater risk, I get out of bed and arrange a small pile of suitcases by his side of the bed. So that if he gets up in the night, he will trip, alert me, climb back into bed and wrap my arms around him. My leaking breasts, adhering to his back. It's too hot. He tries to shake me off, but I classed my hands more tightly until his body slackens with sleep. You are incapable of locomotion. The only people capable of taking you in the composting toilet and me and Nicholas sometime around midnight, a baby mouse scurries into the room. And I shoot it with my hunting gun. Why did I have to do this? Who would have thought a small mouse could contain so much blood what's wrong? Nicholas asks, I just had the most terrible nightmare. He turns over what happened. I can scarcely talk through disorientation and terror. I tramped. I shot a mouse for a moment. He is still, but then his belly trembles laughter and he heaves himself up in bed. Where are you to the toilet before he's climbed out of bed. I've rushed to your room to stand century at your door. There a loud thud from the master bedroom. What the?

Anna Goldsworthy (27:08):

I'm just checking on the baby. I explained as he limps by I'm still loitering by your door. When he returns. There's something you should know. He says taking my hands in his, I'm not planning to take the baby out of bed in order to drop him down the composite. I never thought you were. We returned to bed where he falls asleep in diversity. In my calculations, the only people have taken you into the composting toilet are me and Nicholas. I will not take you into the composting toilet. I sense a flaw in my logic, the dawning of a new possibility. What if I were to carry you there in my sleep? This is a Knight's move checkmate. If I cannot trust myself with you, whom can I trust tears, forming my eyes and try immediately in the heat. My pulse thoughts in my ears. As I lie there, paralyzed by fear of myself.

Anna Goldsworthy (28:04):

Another sound starts in cross rhythm. A sound that part of me always knew was coming the urgent squeal of the smoke alarm. And then the smoke alarm goes off. And it looks as if we may be in the middle of a bushfire, which really added to my feeling of relaxation. And so I take the baby outside. I do not wish to return inside into that parody of shelter. If I'm holding you, I can monitor you for signs of dehydration. If I'm holding you, Nicolas cannot drop you into the composting toilet. If I remain awake, I

will not be surprised by fire. I sit and wait, held, taught by my triangulated fears. How foolish to imagine we could escape the heat or exhaustion or our anxiety beneath my Palm. I feel the busy work if your digestion and I glanced down at the great dome of your sleeping head at your champagne, your nose at the beak of your upper lip, bringing a child into this world is exposing it to danger.

Anna Goldsworthy (29:06):

I thought I understood this, that I had read the fine print blithely. I signed my name on the dotted line, but not being able to keep you safe is intolerable. Even if I succeed in shooting you from bushfire, from composting toilets, from intestinal spillage, from all the wormholes of daily existence, both natural and manmade, there is still the danger that you might suddenly die in the night for no reason at all. What cosmic sadist in Vince, such a system designed to torment parents and then throw sleep deprivation into the mix. And even if we managed to duck and weave the perils of infant hood than childhood and adolescence and make it through to adulthood, who was to say, you will not move to London and be struck down by hemorrhage during a routine operation. So, you know, speaking about anxiety attacks in the, in the way, small hours of the night, I'm sort of terribly I'm terribly prone to them. Yeah. And having children has just added this extra sort of extra element of, of night, night terror which is slightly, slightly less pronounced than it was a couple of years ago, but it's still very much, very much part of my life. Thank you, Anna. [inaudible],

Julian Pierce (30:26):

It's quite a raw experience, very well described. I think you've left us all with a very strong image of sort of death by compost toilet as well. So so I'm sure there'll be questions for Anna, but I'm pleased to hand over to Peter Drew now. Thanks.

Peter Drew (30:46):

I think, yeah, that was a great story. I think I'd say it's, I think we're all very familiar that anxiety is a terrific topic for comedy. But and anxiety does all sorts of different things. I mean, I feel a little bit anxious now, but it's, I don't think it's necessarily going to make me a better speaker. You you might have some anxiety later when you're looking for your car, trying to remember where you've parked at, but it's not necessarily going to make you better at fine again. I think that there are lots of different types of things already, but the, the top that we're really talking about today, or at least the top of that I think you is talking about is the sort of existential angst the type of anxiety about that Anna also touched on in the story about, about death about being aware that we are going to pass away and that everything that gives our life meaning will disappear as well.

Peter Drew (31:46):

And I think that's when art does touch on those things that, sorry, that's very it's a, it's very powerful, but that's not everything that art does. Art can do all kinds of different things. And I don't think you need to feel anxiety to make great art. One thing I did want to speak about in particular is that it's a, it's a modern idea that this connection between anxiety and creativity, it's not something we associate with Renaissance artists. For instance, if you've read viscera and the the laws of great artists they are described as geniuses and their genius is about inspiration in terms of through religion and God. The, so Kiki OD mid 19th century talking about the relationship between creativity and anxiety is really the decline of arts relationship with religion. And then art needing to find some other way of filling that gap of saying that art can still bring spiritual truth excepted.

Peter Drew (32:53):

It doesn't necessarily have to come through religion is coming through the individual's ability to feel a sort of mental stress anxiety going close to the point of insanity. I mean, it's sort of departing from what is the normal everyday sort of experience of the world. It's that waking up in the middle of the night and sort of having that, that feeling. And so you get artists like van Gogh who are like sort of a Messiah of that idea. He sort of, it actually destroyed him and the entire sort of sort of narrative that surrounds his life is one sort of struggling with anxiety to the point of insanity. But that's at a point when that idea was still somewhat fresh. It's the beginning of the modern era, then midway through the modern era, you get artists like Salvador Dali and surrealism, which is a, a sort of a method for drawing out mental stress.

Peter Drew (33:48):

And it becomes a performance. I mean, anyone that is familiar with Dali's work, I mean, I like it as much as the next person, but you have to admit that he's aware that he's acting a little bit crazy and that has a sort of a performative aspect to it. So, and then in the contemporary era, it seems that the idea is less and less fashionable to be crazy or to have anxiety. And that, that sort of personal hardship is what you use to imbue your art with value. I think that there are the sort of work that I like to make. I, I hope that I, there there's times when it does sort of require some sort of personal anxiety and that's in the work and I, and I love art that shows that you can see that the artist has somehow suffered, or at least that they're aware of some sort of personal suffering, but I'm very interested in work, which is more collaborative.

Peter Drew (34:46):

And it's much more about explaining things out in the world. I mean, art, which is a sort of politically focused doesn't, you didn't necessarily care whether the artist had a tough upbringing and they can't sleep at night. If they, if they are saying something profound about how we can get along, get along better as a society. So I can do all sorts of different things. I'd say that definitely anxiety does help out, but it is not necessary. And I think we should be very skeptical of the idea that artists feeling anxiety is the only way that you can give some spiritual worth or some existential worth to, to art. In, in terms of my own work what I actually look for and the thing that I sort of focus on rather than focusing on my own anxiety, I on conflict between different people, myself and institutions myself and other artists.

Peter Drew (35:45):

And I think that's, that's how I find value that take, for example, what happened with the school I was studying at the Glasgow school of art, and they accepted me on the basis of my street art, which was the vast majority of which was illegal. And then halfway through the course, they decided to kick me out, not saying I kicked me out, but to stop me from doing that or kick me out. And I was given the choice of stop the illegal work, or we'll kick you out of the school. And, and I sort of, I thought this is the conflict. This is, this is an interesting thing. It's sort of, it's going to give more meaning to what I'm doing. I didn't want to sort of I don't think it really had very much to do with the fact that I was going to die or anything like that.

Peter Drew (36:31):

And it was more that when people have disagreements because they have different values, should explore those and, and draw out the conflict in know, in a mature way. And it mostly emotionally was mature. But I'm glad that it all sort of turned out well in the end and it, and it did definitely give that sort of I guess what that's, what anxiety does as well. And any conflict, it puts things under enormous

pressure. You sort of feel the stress and the weight of everything and that conflict really yeah. Putting on a great deal of pressure. Now I can look back and, and just sort of laugh about it, but at the time it was going to get kicked out and, and sent home. So it was it wasn't much fun, but I think it helped in the end. So,

Speaker 8 (37:15):

Yeah, I think

Julian Pierce (37:17):

Perhaps just be interesting to talk a little bit about that experience at Glasgow, because art was used to be a place that sort of nurtured anxiety and and I guess really nurtured that sort of expression from students. And, but it seems that art schools themselves are full of anxiety into, and setting rules and boundaries. And, you know, for you as an artist to be supported, to create a body of work, that then they, they sort of stop you from, from doing that by their rules. I mean, how was, I mean, how was that for you being in an art school? Cause I think there is this whole shift and I mean, you alluded to that, that the role that how art is being created is shifting and, you know, because there isn't that anxiety or that political sort of pressure that the art schools are embracing that as well as a model for learning.

Peter Drew (38:12):

Yeah. Well, I definitely didn't expect to find the content that I did. I expected to find a nurturing environment in which I'd be sort of a, well, not mighty cold, but sort of a taken care of, and, but had my ideas challenge. But I think I was really surprised to find as much insecurity as, as I, as I did. Something that I remember when I studied I did my undergraduate degree in psychology and Adelaide university. And one of the most interesting things I remember learning about the way that academics sort of carry themselves is that just the way that there's a tendency amongst the mathematicians and academics that of a discipline, which is quantifiable and you can easily show the value of what you're doing such as mathematicians. You can either solve the equation where you can't, they have a way of sort of letting themselves go physically or sort of not, I mean, in terms of their parents, you know, it happens to all of us, but the, the, the, the point I'm making is that they they they don't they can, like, everyone knows how good they are.

Peter Drew (39:22):

They don't have to show off in a way, whereas when the things are not so quantifiable, very subjective things like visual art or anything in the arts people there's, there's a lot more affectation in terms of how people sort of display and externalize their status because there's no way for them to actually prove it. Sorry, I just realized, I'm not sure how it got onto it, but I mean,

Gary Greenberg (39:50):

That's, that's a really interesting point because if you think about the way the institutions, this is probably maybe too much parochial, but the institutions that we work in, whether it's the art institutions or the writing institutions, they're set up to create maximum anxiety for us content providers. Sure. You know, there's a, there's a way in which that insecurity that you're describing is what the business side of it thrives on. They, you know, keeping us guessing about where the next money is coming from, where the next approval is coming from the whole criticism business. I mean, it's, it's true that it's if, if artists, if a anxiety's wellspring of art, then they're doing a really good job of cultivating it for us. Yeah.

Anna Goldsworthy (40:34):

I think I agree. And I think in a musical setting, you also have international music competitions, which are just designed to torture people. You know, I heard a commentator say that the sort of irony is what you're seeking in these, in these, in these fora is artists who have these incredibly sensitive souls. And yet at the same time, you have to have the height of a rhinoceros now who can reconcile these two things. But you can only really, I suppose, when an international piano competition, if you somehow, paradoxically managed to have both. And likewise masterclass is a very large part of, of growing up as a musician, which is essentially sort of a gladiatorial forum in which you're just subject to public humiliation.

Speaker 7 (41:10):

So yeah, they, they're doing a great job. What is it, what does it tell you makes you stronger? Yeah,

Julian Pierce (41:16):

We've got about 15 minutes for, for questions, please. Don't be shy. We've covered a lot of ground here and, you know, we're really keen for you to contribute as well.

Anna Goldsworthy (41:31):

Hi, I've just got a question. Just something that Gary mentioned right at the beginning was talking about training for dealing with negative emotions now if you're training children to be in this, you know, 21st century world would you subject a, not, it's just a hypothetical idea to a concert where there, they actually have to make mistakes and they're going to be criticized and stuff like that to make them stronger, or like like trying to deal with these negative emotions, like they're going to happen. But if you have a child that's just had lots and lots of praise from the beginning is the, you know what do you suggest if you're a for teachers or for people even adults to do with negative emotions or if they have anxiety? Well, I,

Gary Greenberg (42:20):

I, I personally don't think we've done our children, any great service by focusing so much on what's great about them. And or by, and I'm not sure I fully understand the shift, the cultural shift whereby whereby this has happened. The idea that we, we protect them from suffering, it's sort of like the idea that we protect them from germs, which we've also done a good job at, and that's seems to be where a lot of the asthma is coming from. It's it you know, it, I, I think that when it comes to parenting, the important distinction regarding anxiety is whether it's about us or about them. And I think a lot of the times when we're trying to protect our children from suffering, we're protecting ourselves because we feel it so intensely and watching your child suffer or bearing the consequences of their suffering is really a hard thing to do. But sometimes it's what you have to do. Adam Phillips, who's a brilliant psychoanalyst in England wrote that the biggest job of parenting is learning how to let your children hate you. And it's absolutely true. And that means that you have to be able to tolerate that feeling. And it also conveys to them that they can tolerate the feeling of whatever it is they're feeling. You know, you don't jump in to rescue them from it. So,

Anna Goldsworthy (43:39):

So would you think exposing them to more to negative situations? We should just beat him

Julian Pierce (43:49):

The second time of her that came up in your, okay. This is a question more of a Anna, you said so eloquently

Gary Greenberg (43:59):

When you describe the anxiety that comes from your performance and the sort of compulsive nature of being a performer, I was just wondering when you get to that point where your performance and music is the source of that sort of paralytic style anxiety, how has you resolve that and potentially even use that to be able to perform despite it?

Anna Goldsworthy (44:18):

Yeah, I think he developed a fitness for probably, and it's about being exposed to that anxiety over many years and you develop strategies to, for, for dealing with it, which is not just that, you know, any of us, any, any performance is subject to occasionally being ambushed by paralyzing anxiety, you know, violinists speak about just getting the bow shakes out of nowhere. And I mean, for me, there's an aspect of surrender that has allowed me to, if you prepared and you get up on stage, and then you just sort of it's, it's in the, it's in the hands of the angels and it's a kind of leap of faith, but that's something that's sort of helped me help me get through it. I also think the more you practice my teacher, my piano teacher always set the stage must be like another room in your house. It's not, it's not quite that for me yet, but it's certainly a much less terrifying place than it. Once was any other tips for young musicians? Oh gosh, there's a book load of them. It's called piano lessons.

Peter Drew (45:13):

Peter, you you mentioned

Gary Greenberg (45:16):

That you, or you expressed skepticism that anxiety is required or that anxiety is a driving force behind a lot of art. And then you went on to say that you conflict drives a lot of your work isn't that essentially then feeding on the audience's own anxieties in response to that conflict. And therefore, actually you still your, that the perception of your aunt's still requiring the anxiety. Just not from you, it's from the other side, inflicting it. Yeah, yeah.

Peter Drew (45:57):

Thought of it that way. That's quite, that's quite a funny funny way of putting it. I mean, I guess it depends on how broad you want to make the the definition of anxiety. I really just wanted to make the point that I mean, there's the anxiety that you are meant to feel because, you know, you're going to, you're going to die and that becoming into creating work. It's the that existential angst. I think that all art must have anxiety in it. If someone made art without any any sort of grain of anxiety, then that would,

Gary Greenberg (46:33):

Yeah, no, it looks like oil Elvis on oil painting, oil painting on velvet, you know,

Peter Drew (46:39):

Well, I mean, it's, it's, it's actually, I mean, it's look, there are contemporary artists now that sort of claim to not feel it. I mean, Jeff Koons is a good example. He even sort of claims that he doesn't feel any sort of anxiety in his work. It's like a deliberate pose to sort of go against the the, like the modernist requirements of being an artist. You have to be tortured and and it's so difficult to make it, so he sort of says, I don't feel any anxiety. And it turns out these sort of a serene shiny dogs. I mean, it's, it doesn't, it does much opposers as as it is to be crazy and sort of ought to be, to anxiety written. So I think that it's, it's anxiety is optional, I guess, is what I'd say. Yeah.

Gary Greenberg (47:21):

Can I come in on that com I thought I was really intrigued by that comment also. And, and I, and the example you said was, was the Renaissance. And what's interesting about that is that prior to the Renaissance, and really just at the end of the Renaissance, there, wasn't really very much of an idea of inner life. You know, this, this idea that our inner life is important, and we should pay attention to it. If at least if you weren't an aristocrat, and even then that's why the confessions of Saint Augustine are so incredible for their time. And it's why Shakespeare is so sort of the beginning of this idea of introspection. And so I think that it's, it's a really, I've never really made that connection before, but that is a really interesting difference between art prior to the age of the modern self and what we have now. Sure. Yeah. That's

Speaker 10 (48:10):

In fact, I was reading a book talking about that just last night, which is great, and the idea too, that you know, genius, wasn't something you own Janie. The Janie's lived in the wall and they came out and, and you weren't responsible for your book. It was if you had good luck of bad luck, whether the Janie's who lived in your house, work with good writers or not having thought about the middle of the night, quite a lot, being an anxious person, sorry, this is a very convoluted, it's a very convoluted question. A couple of things come to mind when it's the Chinese thing about your different organs processing things at different times, and it's like, okay, four o'clock it's your liver. So if you've had too much to drink or meaning heavy food, it's, that's delivering anxiety. But there's another, I was reading a little while ago about the idea of the middle of the night.

Speaker 10 (49:06):

Once upon a time, we all got up in the middle of the night there was the middle of the night prayers, the middle of the night poetry. You could visit other people in the middle of the night and that human beings are actually in a different state of sleep. So that today's idea of modern anxiety. It was actually that time of awakeness in the middle of the night was actually a time of meditation, of creativity, of prayer, of connection, of self, of connection of others in a really quiet way that we've really lost these days. So that's not a question either. What do you think of that? But I guess my question is speaking a minute ago about Jeff Koons. I know for myself as a creative person, we're not been incredibly happy. I've been going, what the hell do I make art about? What the hell do I write about how can I be happy and flowery and bright and joyful. And

Anna Goldsworthy (50:05):

There is that cliche, you know, happiness writes white. It doesn't necessarily have any meaning on the page. I don't know if it's entirely true. I mean, it's sort of sad to think that we have to cultivate angst in order to create, and yet it can be a, you can be useful, I guess it's sort of like the oyster making a pill and

in the shell, it's the irritant, isn't it an and trying to work away out of it, or is sometimes the way to make something beautiful. And is that a bad thing?

Speaker 10 (50:28):

I mean, why is anxiety uncomfortable? Why, you know, Keats and Byron, and, you know, the melancholy poets, we wouldn't have had that poetry, if they'd all be on any depressants. Well,

Anna Goldsworthy (50:43):

Let's this notion too. And I think, you know, Gary sort of touched on this, are we designed to be happy 24 7? I don't think we are. I think we're designed to exist with a degree of discomfort and do we medicate our way out of that? Do we try to cure us? But sometimes the process of trying to deal with that, I think actually ends up being the creative creative process. At least for me,

Julian Pierce (51:02):

I also think there are some very inherent, and I think this idea of anxiety and creativity as a modern phenomenon or creativity coming out of anxiety, because a lot of what I think you've been talking about your, about your experience of masterclasses and concerts is this whole flight or fright, you know, and it's like, your compulsion is to run and leave the room, but you know, you stay and you, you, you play the music and know, I think there is some very, you know, I don't want to sound a central, but there, you know, in built into us is this sort of capacity to overcome that and go, okay, I'm going to sit here at the piano. And and I'm just, I mean, what would be your response to that perhaps Peter, that I'm just interested to flat out this, you know, in the few minutes we've got left. I mean, why is it such a modern concept? Oh, and there are a couple of questions. So

Peter Drew (51:53):

So why this such a modern concept that anxiety and creativity connect together? Well, I think, I think that it's actually less and less than fashion. I think that irony is so much more in fashion in creative fields and that doesn't really require any in fact requires sort of a denial of anxiety in a way. Well, I don't, I mean, to me, irony is a good way of curing anxiety. It's, it's, it's laughing it off. It's realizing that the world's pretty absurd. We're going to die. We're here, we've got all these meetings surrounding us and, but you know what, and it's all going to go and that's, that's kind of ironic.

Peter Drew (52:32):

That's and that's the way I like to create as well. I mean, that's, I, I slightly distrust any art that doesn't have at least some sort of element of wit or, or irony in there. If it's too, I mean, I, yeah, I do love seeing work that is obviously the the artist has, has suffered and and the anxiety is there, but but it's sort of, it's, there's an element of vanity to that as well. That sort of, that person's inner inspiration is so important. It is. It's nice to sort of to see that they, they don't take themselves too seriously as well. So I like, I like irony if

Gary Greenberg (53:12):

You, if you think about that fight and flight thing that you've just mentioned as an old, you know, evolutionarily developed thing for one, whatever we were doing a hundred thousand years ago, and then you put it into the modern world. What you create is the grounds feeling an incur, an intense feeling and not knowing whether to believe it, the anxiety demands to be believed in it demands to be

disbelieved at the same time. And that conflict, I think, creates a space. And that space is where this creativity comes from. If, to the extent that it's going to inform your creativity, that's where it comes from. It's this conflict between us being animals running around on the Savannah and us living in a world that's like this. Okay. Another couple of questions

Anna Goldsworthy (53:57):

Before we finish. My question there's with the discussion has been a lot about death and add anxiety, but historically looking back at before the Renaissance, the whole idea that humans are the only animals that can recognize death. I think from my understanding that's where religion has come from. So we're, we're aware that we're going to die. So we've created a life after death. And I think in the Renaissance, all of those artists and those thinkers, they had religion to back them up. They had that to dispel their anxiety. So there wasn't so much anxiety in their work because there was religion to help that. And then I guess through more modern tires along came science. And, you know, even when you were speaking about all those poets that had all that accent and that anx from German at that Germany in that specific time of the 19th and 20th centuries, religion was taking a back step to science. So there was more anxiety to take care of our fears than religion to take care of our fears. So through the discussions today, I'm hearing anxiety and fear and death, but I just want to know what delineates, anxiety and fear, well, if there's a rational fear or being anxious about something that's about to happen or just fear in general.

Anna Goldsworthy (55:22):

Yeah,

Gary Greenberg (55:23):

I would, I would just say that the distinction I just made is probably the, the one help, helpful way to think about it. You know, anxiety in some ways, just the psychologist station. If I can use that word of fear, it's, it's this idea that it's a psychological state that doesn't have much to do necessarily with the material reality. On the other hand, it is terrifying in some ways to get up in front of people and play the piano. It's, it is really frightening to wake up in the middle of the night and death is frightening. So I wouldn't go too far with it, but I think it's somewhere in that neighborhood of whether or not the material conditions at the moment are really the inspiration for the fear.

Anna Goldsworthy (56:01):

Yeah. I mean, even with Jeff Koons having no anxiety, does that mean he just has my fear. Maybe he has a lot of valley of, I don't know, he just does whatever he wants because he doesn't have that, that questioning perhaps. And I think, you know, through art education and writing and music, you're always questioning everything and that's what can breathe the anxiety because once you start questioning or contradicting ideas and that's what you do in these arts, that's, that's a part of the creativity process. So with that, that would create anxiety, I guess, I quite like your distinction. I quite like your characterization of anxiety as being something that demands to be believed and was that what it was and distillate at the same time. And I think that speaks to a distinction, but probably very simplistically between our thinking and our feeling selves. And I think that's a very useful sort of locus for welfare, for irony amongst other sort of modes of artistic expression. That's, that's, that's the place where that that can exist.

Julian Pierce (57:00):

So we've just got one more question. I'll have to be quite quick. I'm afraid.

Speaker 4 (57:06):

I believe Peter differentiated between religious inspiration and anxiety is inspiration source yesterday. Gary, you were talking about this history of crazy and how I'd gone from a religious diagnosis. If you like to this medical disease. I was just wondering whether you think that perhaps it's just a change of label, their religious inspiration is the same thing. It's anxiety.

Gary Greenberg (57:33):

Well, I think when you change the label, you change the nature of the experience. So they're not exactly the same thing. I mean, in broad terms probably, but what we're really talking about is impossible to get at the raw phenomenon without language. At least that's what I believe and the language does its best to approximate it, but we're stuck with the concepts that we that we inherit, you know, that's why, that's why Peter's common was so interesting about the Renaissance. I mean, it's, you know, once you see it as, oh yeah. The whole idea of what art is supposed to do may have changed. I mean, I guess that seems totally banal at this point. I don't know why I never thought that before, but it it's, it's such a profound change that it no longer makes much sense to talk about whether or not they're the same thing because they can't be in some essential way.

Julian Pierce (58:26):

Okay. thanks for your questions and my phone, we do have to wrap up now, but before we finish, I wanted to remind you that there's a festival bookshop and Kapha and the Freeman's at Freemasons hold for upstairs. And I'm sure I think your book is up there, Anna. So if you'd like

Speaker 7 (58:41):

To go home with Peter, any books out there, if you'd like

Julian Pierce (58:47):

To go home with them and his anxiety tonight and and please stay up to date on the Festival of Ideas website, sign up to the newsletter, but thank you to our speakers [inaudible]

Intro (59:09):

This session of the 2013 Adelaide Festival of Ideas was recorded by Radio Adelaide through the support of the vast myth library, University of Adelaide, the University of south Australia library and Flinders University library.