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MANIFESTO:

Uselessness as  
practise against  
System

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## Introduction

This essay tries to find consistency between my personal ethics and how I operate as an artist- as much as we would like to separate the personal and the artistic, they are both very much entangled. Central to this are the questions of production and consumption. How do I act as an artist and citizen in the age ecological catastrophe? Why should I consume more than needed, needed for mere survival?

This simple question raises more questions, particularly pertaining to value. What or whom dictates my idea of necessity? How and why do we value art? How does our participation in these value systems undermine our artistic or personal ethics, and sustain the value system that is, in part, responsible for our environmental crisis. These are huge ethical concerns and room enough for multiple in depth books (there are many). I do not pretend to be able to come close to answering any of them, as they are at their heart, ethical and unanswerable questions. However, I will go as far as I can to explain my thinking.

In chapter one, PARTICIPATION, I will outline what I call *System*, a globalised system of economic order (rooted in neoliberalism and globalised capital) and focus on production-consumption. I will outline the moral values it perpetuates, how art participates, as individual works and as an industrial mass, and its relation to environmental system, consumption and value.<sup>1</sup> In Chapter two, NON-PRODUCTION I will discuss an ongoing, three-part manifesto project, *Inactivism: A Manifesto for the Idle* and a process-based installation *Wait Don't Stop! The End is Forthcoming*. In the final chapter, UNPURITY, I will discuss other artists and their approach to similar topics, particularly the work of Ellie Harrison. Her recent work *The Glasgow Effect*<sup>2</sup> offers insight to how can we move forward artistically, academically and economically. How do we remain hopeful and pragmatic while remaining consistent?

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<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting the link all of these questions have to finitude. Moral questioning is in some way a frustrated longing for finality, and will always be unrequited. Globalised economics, in its attempts to standardise everything to one unit of measurement, tries to solve this and turn morality into a mathematical exercise.

<sup>2</sup> Harrison, E., 2017. *The Glasgow Effect*. [online] Available at: <https://www.ellieharrison.com/glasgoweffect/> [Accessed 26 November 2017]

## AN APPENDIX: **PARTICIPATION**

**be idle.** refuse production. Politely and civilly but vocally all the same.  
This will be taken as disobedience, and may fall foul of a rhetoric masquerading as economic truth, deeming you 'lazy', 'immoral' and 'selfish'.

non - production is not allowed. It is the most vilified state of being within an economic system of growth. To be idle is to be 'useless'. Embrace this.

**be present.** systems want to speak on your behalf, they want to generalise, to undermine, to simplify. Being present problematises. You can not be misheard.

non-participation is allowed by and reinforces neoliberalism and individualism. It is understandable to remove oneself from the things one does not agree with. It is a survival mechanism. It also removes your voice. Non-participation is an unclear message, ready to be wilfully misrepresented.

**be worthwhile.** production (including the production of revenue) is not a metric for the worth of any individual, a community or a nation. Build your worth outside of this, build your identity outside of this.

**be incremental.** radical acts do not lead to radical change. Lots of radical acts lead to an acceleration and a tipping point.

**be communitarian.** you are not alone. Work together.

**be careful.** do not sacrifice all of yourself. do not indulge all of yourself. do not reinforce the system you want to dismantle.

**be pragmatic.** do not be dogmatic.

# **INACTIVISM: A MANIFESTO FOR THE IDLE**

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<sup>3</sup> Figure 1. *Inactivism: A Manifesto for the Idle - An Appendix: Participation* (2017)

## PARTICIPATION: How do we participate in System?

As George Monbiot suggests, it is of great importance to give name to the organising principle within which we globally operate. Naming it, making it visible and defining how and why it has power is integral to understanding it, questioning and potentially undermining it<sup>4</sup>. In my recent practice, I have been using 'System' as a term to define this. This is in part due to the dual meaning in our lexicon of the word - system. It relates to physical interconnected parts, *natural* systems, that follow a set of physical laws and are thus amoral. It also refers to social and political networks that are human constructions and thus implicitly moral: morals being "a concern with the principles of right and wrong human behaviours"<sup>5</sup>, how we relate. What is of concern is how my conception of *System* – which is moral - presents itself as an amoral, *natural* system. But to do this we need to define what *System* is.

To do this we must talk more specifically about Neoliberalism and its relationship to *System*. Neoliberalism refers to a multitude of contested understandings, and thus as a term does not refer to particularly fixed or agreed upon ideology. The Oxford English Dictionary defines it as 'relating to or denoting a modified form of liberalism tending to favour free-market Capitalism'<sup>6</sup>, which is typically vague. Kean Birch notes its historical basis in Hedonism and its evolution as response to European fascism after the Second World War. During the Cold-war period it gained further traction in opposition to Communism. He proposes that neoliberalism has never truly existed or been practiced in any of its complete ideological forms. To look at Birch's personal outline of processes typically associated with Neoliberalism:

“privatizing government services, industries and other assets; liberalizing international trade and investment; controlling inflation and supply-side dynamics rather than stimulating demand; deregulating to ‘release’ business from impediments and to enable individual's to become more entrepreneurial ; and the marketization of society through the introduction of markets and commodification throughout

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<sup>4</sup> Monbiot, G., 2016. *Neoliberalism – The Ideology at the root of all our problems*. The Guardian [online]. Available from: <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/apr/15/neoliberalism-ideology-problem-george-monbiot>> [Accessed 26 November 2017]

<sup>5</sup> "moral, adj.". *OED Online*. [online] 2017. Oxford University Press (UK). Available through: <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/122086>> [accessed November 27, 2017].

<sup>6</sup> "neo-liberal, adj. and n.". *OED Online*. [online] 2017. Oxford University Press (UK). Available through: <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/245592?redirectedFrom=neoliberal>> [accessed November 27, 2017]

society.”<sup>7</sup>

There is no national economy operating on these policies in the world. We can look at many global extra-national institutions that advocate for globalisation and liberal values – The world bank, the IMF, the UN, and the EU - which implement neoliberalist structures in the global south. However, they consistently do not uphold neoliberalism to the same extent at home. George Monbiot outlines in his book *The Age of Consent* <sup>8</sup> that policies implemented by these institutions consistently penalize developing nations as they have no pre-existing wealth. Decisions are made on their behalf, deregulation of trade is enforced, and domestic democratic procedures are undermined, while they operate highly protectionist policies at home (or in their circle of nations). The EU is an excellent example perpetuating itself through policies such as the Common Agricultural Policy, which overwhelmingly disadvantages external, majority-agricultural economies. Through this a particular circle of nations and individuals maintain their power, which brings us to Empire.

Negri and Hardt use the term Empire to qualify, not particular empires or imperialism, but to formulate the framework with which power is held. They state, "Empire is formed not on the basis of the capacity to present force" but "as being in the service of right and peace".<sup>9</sup> This is similar in part to Neoliberalism's heritage in opposition to Fascism. Their definition of Empire better captures the actions of these extra-national institutions and the global corporate giants, which do not operate freely or fairly in accordance with the tenets of neoliberalism. Empire implements neoliberal markets unevenly in powerless nations and regions; Empire enhances pre-existing power relationships and offer subsidies and tax breaks to its corporate benefactors - benefactors who reinforce the super-structure. Empire, in Negri and Hardt's eyes, furthers the uneven distribution and management of resources and the uneven social and environmental impacts of industrialization and Capitalism.

As suggested by Will Davies, the true power of neoliberalism is not in making markets to operate freely, but for every element of the world- governance, environment, social interaction and knowledge acquisition- to operate under a system of value as if it were a free-market. This is a key principle to my understanding of *System*.

" Once codified and seemingly emptied of its normative content, these same techniques can travel beyond the initial sphere of application, namely the market, and

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<sup>7</sup> p.11 Birch, K., 2014 *We Have Never Been Neoliberal*. Winchester: Zero Books

<sup>8</sup> Monbiot, G., 2004. *The Age of Consent: A manifesto for a new world order*. London: Harper Perennial.

<sup>9</sup> p.15. Hardt, M. and Negri, A., 2001. *Empire*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Cambridge: Harvard University Press

evaluate all activity as if it were oriented around price and exchange".<sup>10</sup>

Thus, *System* is totalizing. If everything can be exchanged on a market, then everything is commensurable. Everything can eventually be reduced to the same metric, one of price. This includes art, social relations, the environment and how we respond to crises involving them. The valuation is extrinsic, not recognizing anything that does not add capital. We can use the example of Carbon Credits as an example. Designed as a way to incentivise the reduction of the carbon footprints of nations and corporations by issuing certificates for carbon removed from the atmosphere and permits for carbon release/creation<sup>11</sup>. The system tries to use the logic that brought about the problem, as a solution to the problem. It directly places a price on the environment, and the price is dictated by the vagaries of a global market.

The incompleteness of both concepts make it too easy to dismiss critique. Neoliberalism defines an ideology which has never fully been put into practice, whereas Empire as a conceptual apparatus, as defined by Negri and Hardt, describes contemporary power relations but not the way Empire confers value. *System* looks to encompass both to describe this moral system as it actually operates.

How we think about necessity is linked to how things are useful. *System*, as shown above, values everything by measurement, which disadvantages things that cannot be measured, priced and exchanged - and renders them *unnecessary*. An example of this can be seen discussed in my *Inactivism* manifesto, a call to arms to be useless. Alternatively, *System* tries to pull the non-quantifiable within the realm of the commodity by stripping and perverting them; acts of love, sociality, generosity are sucked into *System's* orbit by these means. What is deemed as necessary comes attached to a series of moral positions on class, status, power, ethnicity and wealth. Who is it that dictates our needs? It is *System*.

Consumption and necessity are linked. When we consider my question, why should I consume more than I need, in the line of necessary energy (literally what I need for mere survival). The problem with my question is that it ignores the unmeasurable realm of human relations. Still, art can seem like a frivolous expenditure of energy, particularly when also considering other ethical concerns, such as care for the environment. If that is *the* concern of our time, why not spend that energy more directly combatting climate change? This issue of use and need is what my work *Inactivism: A Manifesto For The Idle* tries to problematise.

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<sup>10</sup> p.21. Davies, W., 2014. *The limits of Neoliberalism*. London: Sage Publications

<sup>11</sup> Bullis, K., 2009. Why Carbon Credits Don't Work. *MIT Technology Review*, [online] 22 April. Available from: <<https://www.technologyreview.com/s/410009/why-carbon-credits-dont-work/>> [Accessed 26 November 2017]

Industrially art participates in this system. It operates by perpetuating the values of *System* through the commodity art market, but also through the vast chain of biennials, private and public funding, arts criticism, institutionalized practice and research and urban regenerative capacity. Where artistic practices and technologies have tried to dissent from capitalist valuation they have often been subsumed by their position within art. The introduction of cheap forms of mass re-production, ephemeral performance, and infinite digital reproduction could potentially undermine scarcity as a driving principle of exchange value and undermine ideas of traditional propriety, by either being copied and mass-owned, or by being immaterial i.e. not ownable at all. However the concretization and enforcement of intellectual property rights within both the arts and academia is an example of how *System* expands its field to include even those that oppose it. An example of this can be seen in how the Fluxus movement's general stance *against* art has been subsumed. Founder George Maciunas attempted to frame art as part of everyday experience and not something which needed legitimized or separated through an 'arts' context<sup>12</sup>. However, The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Archives became privately owned and latterly donated to MOMA<sup>13</sup>, "one of the world's largest museums devoted to modern and contemporary art"<sup>14</sup>. Performers have often sold performance works by way of the documentation to collections and galleries, and more recently, even the rights to the performance itself<sup>15</sup>. This shatters the ephemeral and therefore anti-capitalist capacities of performance Art; although not unique in its problem of being re-appropriated by Capital, it none the less feels the most disheartening triumph of *System* over the way Art can operate critically.

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<sup>12</sup> Proctor, J, 2011. George Maciunas's Politics of Aesthetics. In: J, Bass, ed. 2011. *Fluxus and the Essential Questions of Life*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. Ch.3.

<sup>13</sup> MOMA. 2013. *The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Archives* [online] Available from: <<https://www.moma.org/learn/resources/archives/EAD/Fluxusb.html>> [Accessed 26 November 2017]

<sup>14</sup> MOMA, 2017. *Who we are* [online] Available from: <<https://www.moma.org/about/who-we-are/moma>> [Accessed 26 November 2017]

<sup>15</sup> Kino, C., 2010. *A Rebel Gains Favor. Fights Ensue*. The New York Times [online] Available from: <<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/14/arts/design/14performance.html>> [Accessed 26 November 2017]





AN APPENDIX:  
**NON-PRODUCTION**

DO  
NOTHING  
COLLECTIVELY

- one. do not produce content
- two. do not produce "knowledge"
- three. do not produce objects.
- four. do not produce revenue
- five. do not produce solutions
- six. do not produce development
- seven. do not produce art

***INACTIVISM:  
A MANIFESTO FOR  
THE IDLE***

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<sup>16</sup> Figure 2. *Inactivism: A Manifesto for the Idle – An Appendix: Non-Production (2017)*

## NON-PRODUCTION: Approaches to Practise

*Inactivism: A Manifesto For the Idle* was initiated through conversations with Artist and Curator James S. Lee and led to a collaborative project in January of 2017. We each wrote manifestos and tried to implement some of our thinking through work in a small project room and broadcasting a live podcast together. We read the manifestos and discussed the positions from which we were coming from, framing them within the political and arts-industrial-context within which we were both coming from in Scotland. An edited version of my manifesto became the first part, *An Appendix: Participation*<sup>17</sup> of my larger three part manifesto project, of the same name *Inactivism: A manifesto for the Idle*. During this first manifesto, I found myself struggling to extricate the line between competing personal interests. Those of an everyday context – eating, paid employment, being sociable, paying bills - and those as an artist/maker/producer in an industry, as well as a political actor/activist. This entanglement felt inescapable. On one hand, I would like to perpetuate my ethics in the world by living them, but the needs of the everyday result in speaking from an inconsistent position? For example, advocating for environmental veganism while having paid employment in McDonalds.

A few days previous to our podcast, artist Ellie Harrison held a public lecture at the end of her one year, Creative Scotland funded project, *The Glasgow Effect*, 2016. She received a huge amount of criticism in the media for the project, where she received £15000 of public funding. The proposal was to not leave the city of Glasgow for a year, not using any transport, other than her bike, reducing her carbon footprint to zero. She produced a heat map of her travels within the city limits and documented her reduction of heating and food budget, turning the mechanism of how she lived into the art work. To fulfill the project she took a sabbatical from her job as a tutor<sup>18</sup>, as it was in another city and instead spent the year participating in local activism, screenings and public discussions. Harrison defines it as "Part psychological experiment, part protest, part strike".<sup>19</sup> By refusing to produce under *Systems*

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<sup>17</sup> Figure. 1. *Inactivism: A Manifesto for the Idle – An Appendix : Participation*

<sup>18</sup> Applying for this funding, was a necessary condition of her role at DJCAD, University of Dundee, dictated by the University.

<sup>19</sup> Harrison, E., 2017. *The Glasgow Effect*. [online] Available at: <https://www.ellieharrison.com/glasgoweffect/> [Accessed 26 November 2017]

terms *The Glasgow Effect* denounces standardised measures as being an acceptable, or illuminating, way to value art and social relation. Much of what she garnered abuse for was the fact she did not make anything of 'use' to justify the funds. Similarly to my own concerns, she was publicly and artistically struggling with the inconsistency of the artists message of environmentalism, and the environmentally damaging trajectory of the arts industry that brings work to a public.

*Inactivism: A Manifesto for the Idle* consists of three parts. *An Appendix: Participation*, is suggestions for activism in the every day. *An Appendix: Non-Production*, is rules for anti-System art actions. *An Appendix: Unpurity* is a world view that tries to make consistent the position of the Inactivist as artist, activist and human, without negating the contradictions. They will be distributed digitally and anonymously, but at the time of writing I have not yet resolved how.

*Inactivism* critiques *System* by challenging its central tenet of useful production. Utilitarianist ideas of optimisation, and quantifiable happiness, resulted in the principle of economic usefulness as the only universal means of measurement.<sup>20</sup> This leaves us with a means of valuation which places economic production at the centre of everything we do, including our 'leisure' time.

Consumption is a mode of revenue production and thus perpetuates production. When our social, human, personal value or worth is thus equated with our economic 'usefulness', production and consumption reach out to occupy every element of our lives. When we are not actively producing (objects, content, paperwork etc) or 'at work' in a social sense (as opposed to scientific sense) we consume (and thus produce revenue).<sup>21</sup>

I am trying to highlight how *System* pervades our actions, innocuously and invisibly, how our social, political and environmental thinking is cumulative and becomes powerful at a *mass* level. *System* perpetuates the notion that our value is linked to our production. We act on this individually, subconsciously, and if we all do it through globalised markets, they have a massive weight, far and above our local political power, thus reinforcing this narrative. So even if we undertake political action (eg voting, creative protest, marching, letter-writing), if the cumulative effect of all of our other actions still perpetuate a grander idea that our personal, social (or environmental) value stems from our economic usefulness, then it will be overshadowed.

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<sup>20</sup> Davies, W., 2015. *The Happiness Industry*. London: Verso Books

<sup>21</sup> This has the contemporary addition of 'prosumerism', the existence of technological platforms, such as Facebook, where the user is also the content producer and we are engaged in the project simultaneously.

*Inactivism: A Manifesto For the Idle* attempts to reckon with this problem of resistance, opposition and dissent from *System*. There is a near impossible capacity to imagine an 'outside' to it, when we consider the extraordinary environmental and social connectedness *System* has. *System* quantifies goods and services, as we would traditionally think, but also draws in broader intangible abstracts such as identity, and aesthetics for example waste, which I will discuss further down. This renders the production of the artist, my production, as a reinforcer for *System*. The Manifesto tries, by advocating doing nothing, to problematise this. It celebrates uselessness as an act of resistance against *System*.

*Wait Don't Stop! The End Is Forthcoming...* (2017)<sup>22</sup>, was a process based installation, initiated in response to a workshop with Thomas Hirschhorn, *Assuming Public Space*. It tried to be non-productive but did not function due to an overly complicated, under-resolved idea, manifesting ungenerously, and overly literally. I deliberately took no photographic documentation of the installation, so it could not 'produce' as an artwork beyond the week it was installed. What documentation I have is the description below and the logs of my time spent working on the project. I used the funding for the project as 'universal basic income'<sup>23</sup>, and these logs looked to dismantle life/work/capital separation.

*WDS!* Was a make-shift bus shelter in the corner space of a carpark in Tromsø, Norway. It looked onto a road (Frederick Nansens Plass), but not taking space on the pedestrian pavement between the parking space and the road. This was not an operational bus route, however publicly-run buses occasionally came down the street and waited between shifts, making use of the 24h petrol station which sat recessed opposite. The attached shop is one of few open 24 hours in Tromsø. Parking tickets were purchased daily and stuck to the shelters side.

This Bus Shelter was approximately 3000mm long, 1200mm wide, and 2100mm high, made of 5 panels: three along the back and two on each side. A roof pitched backwards, elevating the front a further 450mm and the back 150mm. The entire structure was made from timber, with clear plastic and cellophane stretched over the panels as 'glass'. Where advertising-boards typically sit, I placed a 'chalkboard' of stretched fibreglass, hardened with a bioplastic of starch and vinegar. There was a duster and chalk underneath.

Other more decorative elements of the bus shelter included a short, tilted bench, which

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<sup>22</sup> I will refer to this as *WDS!* for ease from here on.

<sup>23</sup> "A basic income is a periodic cash payment unconditionally delivered to all on an individual basis, without means-test or work requirement" - BIEN, 2017. *What is Basic Income?* [online] Available from: <<http://basicincome.org/basic-income/>> [Accessed 26 November 2017]

you could not sit or lean on, a rotatable, cardboard sign, modelled on LED digital displays, reading the words 'DUE', 'IMMINENT' and 'FORTHCOMING' in green, plastic squares. The final prop was a cardboard bin fastened to the outer post, coloured black with felt-pen and reading 'WASTE' across the lid. It had no bottom to it. All of the materials used were second-hand: either taken from containers, bins or occasionally purchased.

These material elements distracted from the performative aspects attached to the non-making, acting and maintaining public space in line with non-production, participation, collectivisation and being present, as in the first manifesto. The problem was - how do you produce art without being productive? Three streams of thought are within the work, *Wait*, *Work and Waste*, all interconnected and topics previously touched on in my practise. The attempt to foreground all of them within one installation was due to an unresolved relationship with the problems of producing, both environmentally and economically, resulted in a work that ignored or forgot the public's role in the discussion. It revealed a personal fear of being useless or non-productive in public space and necessitated a development in practise where I embrace it.

*Waste* - The production consumption cycle was central to *WDS!*'s materialisation through a consideration of the circular economy<sup>24</sup>. As pragmatic (and useful) as this is, it does not deal with the problems of finitude at the heart of Neoliberalism's growth paradigm: eventually we will run out of matter, space and/or energy. Moves towards renewables and recycling in conjunction with increased efficiencies in energy capture, storage and distribution (whether as electricity or plants) will slow the point we reach carrying capacity, but it still requires energy, food and biomaterial requires land, water and nutrition. The circular economy renders waste economically incentivized. The waste industry that builds up within a growth economy of supply and demand has an existential interest in maintaining and expanding the production of waste (or end-of-life products). There is a market demand for waste. As artists we participate in this whenever we aestheticize something, or render it valuable through its surface qualities. When we use waste materials, we frame waste as valuable and give it economic purpose. On one hand, this is positive as we show that material value can be retained, or changed, and lead a way for upcycling and the other benefits of the circular economy. On the other, by framing something as valuable aesthetically, we increase

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<sup>24</sup> The cycling of materials and products through a long recycling/repurposing cycle to reduce waste and retain value. Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2017. *What is a circular economy?* [online]. Available from: <<https://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/circular-economy>> [Accessed 26 November 2017]

the commodity value of the materials and aesthetic, it becomes more financially lucrative and the 'look' of waste becomes an aesthetic that can be used to signal values. It doesn't even need to be waste once the social value in the aesthetic is detached from its environmental value. New objects (which can be mass manufactured and often financially cost less) can be distressed or designed to make them *seem* second hand or recycled.

I salvaged most of the material for *WDS!* from containers in Tromsø. I looked for what I needed at night, occasionally with a friend. Sometimes I went home empty handed, or things of unknown value. I would strap them together and walk it to my studio through the streets of Tromsø. Occasionally strangers offered to help. At the end of the project, some of the timber which wasn't used was donated to other artists, or returned to the containers. Some of it has been used to create my new studio. When it is dismantled, it will all return to the containers. This was a performative cycling of the waste. Removing from the economic system is a theft, the act of returning it decriminalises and disrupts.

*Work* – The use of my funding as Universal Basic Income was an attempt to separate economic production from the worth of an art work, or an individual. It tried to highlight the egalitarian potential, although there is room for criticism, within the UBI system in response to art and as one part of a structural decoupling from *System*. If we are not dependent on paid employment to exist, our worth, artistically, individually, environmentally can stem from how we live, not how much we produce/consume.

*Wait* – The wait is anti-work. Anti-production. One might argue that leisure time is defined by its opposition to employment. It is allocated time, impinged and encroached upon as much as possible by capitalist values. John Maynard Keynes was an advocate of increasing leisure time. This would mean longer away from work with more time to spend money, consume and keep the economy cycling which is our real job, as suggested by Documentarian Adam Curtis<sup>25</sup>. Waiting has no productive value under *System*. In contemporary society it sits outwith work/leisure shifts. It is transitional and we often dismiss or are frustrated by it. Efficiency technologies try to reduced it, we are advertised to so we receive productive messaging and the introduction of mobile technology means we can produce/consume at all times. None of which are inherently bad, the arguments for efficiency and optimization are powerful because they speak to our comfort, convenience and understanding of scarcity. It is,

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<sup>25</sup> *Century of the Self*, 2002. [DVD] British Broadcasting Corporation

however, an extension of the premise that every moment must be productively optimised. It repeats that our worth comes from our productivity.

Waiting is a performative act of resistance. It is an act of non-production. This is where my practice will be focused going forward.



AN APPENDIX:  
**UNPURITY**

# LIVE IN DIRT

the human condition is one of dirtiness.  
we are compromising and compromised.

utopia- purity- is stasis. it is heat death. it is an eventuality.  
it is un-moveable and fixed and definite. it is the grand narrative that  
says it is only. it is the singular and the final.  
it is the story that absorbs all other stories as its own.  
it is System.

un-purity acknowledges the impossibility of extremes,  
but also the momentary sparks of passion that ignite them.

un-purity is not impurity, or a disregard for morality.  
it is not an elevation of contemporary cynicism but a call for greek Cynicism.  
it is an acknowledgement that morality and ethics can not be proceduralized,  
that it can not be removed from the flawed human that participates in it.  
it upholds the unfixd and changing process of questioning and upholds  
the paradoxes of being human

un-purity is both for and against finitude. it acknowledges a universal  
and malthusian finitude, but elevates internal infinities,  
conceptual infinities, imaginative infinities.

un-purity upholds the conception of free-will and the universal of determinism.

unpurity acknowledges that when you are in a reaction,  
there is no pre- and no post- only process.  
there is no canon behind you and no career in front.

un-purity is contradiction and hypocrisy

un-purity is not a get out clause.

# **INACTIVISM:** **A MANIFESTO FOR** **THE IDLE**

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<sup>26</sup> Figure 3. *Inactivism: A Manifesto For The Idle – An Appendix: Unpurity* (2017)

Unpurity: Can we find a consistent position?

Pretending that there is somehow a place from which to stand, both personally, and artistically, that is outside of the machinations, quantifications and value metrics of *System* is to misunderstand the problem. It is a longing for top-down purity and finitude that denies both humanity's intrinsic connectedness and ethical muddiness. Simon Sheikh argues how totalising capital (*System*) is in his introduction to *Capitalism (It fails us Now)*, by quoting Ray Brassier ;

"Far from being threatened by it's contradictions, capitalism thrives on them. It is an open system, an aleatory axiomatic, continually redefining its own structural boundaries, perpetually living off its own impossible limit".<sup>27</sup>

Even if one, as an individual or a group, chose not to participate directly in it, through say disavowal of capitalism or a move to a mountain top, because of its complete impact on our environment, we are still within *System*.

How do we move forward? Is there a space for art, specifically for myself to make art? I have outlined the issues underpinning the problem in the first chapter, and how so far I have been trying to address the problem artistically.

Artists such as Meirle Laderman Ukeles and Richard Layzell approach many of these themes through performative acts of maintenance and cleaning. As a subversion of art-capitalist legitimisation and value, Layzell's performative *International Cleaning*, 2000 -<sup>28</sup>, operates by multilayering different use - the right to be civic, to be of use to a community, while questioning what we deem useful. The act, whereby he discretely cleaned public spaces and monuments, did not need an act of mediation through criticism or documentation to find an audience. In the removal of dirt, there is a negation of natural processes and draws focus to how we consider the nature-human relation as one of dominance, but does so without the addition of material. The act of cleaning will always be undone by the forces of nature, as dirt returns to the site of cleaning and so reasserts itself and rendering the act as 'useless'.

As previously mentioned contemporary artist Ellie Harrison, practise makes the act of

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<sup>27</sup> p.24. Sheikh, S., 2006. Dominant, Competition and Exploitation: An Introduction to the Socialization of Capital(and How It Fails Us). In. S. Sheikh, ed. 2006. *Capital (It Fails Us Now)*. Berlin: B\_Books. pp.13-28

<sup>28</sup> ResCen, 2000 *International Cleaning*

[http://www.rescen.net/Richard\\_Layzell/intcleaning/intclean.html#.WhvYcIWt5IU](http://www.rescen.net/Richard_Layzell/intcleaning/intclean.html#.WhvYcIWt5IU)

living the art work. *The Glasgow Effect* (2016) where her personal consumption became activism of deliberate resistance, an attempt as an artist to make and operate both pragmatically and un-hypocritically. It problematises public funding as still being within *System*.

Another option is non-making as art practise. Lee Lozano's final art work *'Drop Out Piece'* where the artist's final work was to drop out of the industry completely and stop making work. It only functions as long as she remained non-making. However, would it work, would it be as compelling a piece of conceptual art if she had not already been renowned to start with? Would it matter or would the statement have power if an unknown artist did the same?

Maria Eichhorn in her 2016 work *5 weeks, 25 days, 175 hours* closed the Chisenhale Gallery to the public and stipulated that the salaried staff stay home on full salaries for the period. This too layers questions of labour, necessity, capital and worth through refusing productivity, but perhaps falls into its own trap of necessitating participation in the arts under *Sytem* and more directly, neglecting to draw include the galleries precarious workers in the project.

Tehching Hsieh in his one year durational performance *Cage Piece* didn't leave a wooden cell in his studio, and had no stimulus in the form of media, reading or writing. He made art during *Thirteen Year Plan* but showed no-one, and ended the work with a written note "I kept myself alive. I passed the December 31<sup>st</sup>, 1999."<sup>29</sup> Both works, even though he was not particularly renowned in his earlier careers, necessitated a mediation through an art lens, our access to them only through a documentation and presentation in an art context. His other durational works however, exist in the public and to an extent, defy the documentation. They offer room to either not-produce as a work, or don't rely on arts legitimisation or mediation to bring them to a public.

There are also potential solutions politically and socially to *System*, for example UBI as already mentioned. Also rebuilding around de-growth principles, which potentially including cooperatives matrix structures and community projects that decentralize and build models based on democratically decided values (social, artistic, environmental) rather than market value and profit incentive.

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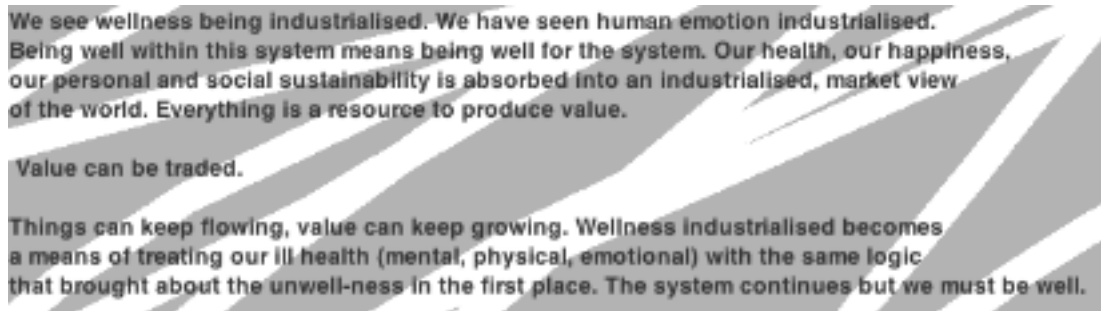
<sup>29</sup> Tehching Hsieh, 2008. *Tehching Hsieh* [online]. Available from: <<http://tehchingsieh.com/>> [Accessed 26 November 2017]

## CONCLUSION

It strikes me that, not only are we driven to make art, art itself is well placed (particularly conceptual art) to help us deal with the issue of paradoxical states and help us understand how to navigate them. Paradoxes are incredibly tricky to manifest, however, we are more than capable of conceptualizing them in allegorical or metaphorical ways. We cannot describe how they operate directly, but we can look at them peripherally. The works of the painter Escher are good examples of this.<sup>30</sup> However, the arts industry is perhaps less capable to self-critique, to conceptualise and challenge its own paradoxical position. Discussing environmentalism or *System* from within the arts industry can make the contradictions of that act apparent, but does not do anything to dismantle them. It is still ultimately upholding the extrinsic values that *System* imposes. It says ‘I can use travel, use materials, make, explore, speak because the message that I disseminate balances out, or is worth more, than all of those things’. It is still, even with the best of intentions, parsed in a utilitarian, economic logic. It pulls the environmental (and thereby the social) impact of what one is doing into a mathematical formula against personal benefit, career aspiration, capital and social outcome (how many people see your anti-*system* statement or act on it). While this is a description of the micro moral decision-making we do on an everyday basis, when it is enacted at an industrial, national, transnational level, the end result of the decision is amplified and removed from a feedback by those who are impacted. It falls prey to a ‘for the greater good’ mentality. It is disempowering and reinforces the ills incurred by *System*. It says, ‘x’ lives can be equated with ‘x’ trees and ‘x’ tons of carbon and ‘x’ iPhones. The linkage between capital, life and art feels unresolvable in this regard. They are interdependent, and even the public funding of art, still feeds into *System* in its need for targets, trajectories and experience, as Ellie Harrison highlights.

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<sup>30</sup> Hofstadter, D.R., 1999. *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid*. London: Basic Books.



31

This leaves us where? Above I include a screenshot from a zine, *There Is No Outside – Camomile* (2017), which I made as part of an exhibition last year, trying to capture my dilemma. I still need to live. I am biased towards this and the survival of those closest to me. And I am biased towards my species. I am, irrationally, invested in our continued existence, even though I know it cannot infinitely continue. But because I can conceptualise the suffering that may come with extinction I long to push it into a distant future where it becomes an abstract. Our sustenance is dependent on expunging other life forms. These are necessary costs for survival. However what we define as necessary has changed. If I consume more than I need, it cannot come at the cost of existence of others; people, species, or different social groupings in the face of global ecological catastrophe.

"The whole world will be intelligent, educated, and co-operating; things will move faster and faster towards the subjugation of Nature. In the end, wisely and carefully we shall readjust the balance of animal and vegetable life to suit our human needs."<sup>32</sup>

As in the quote above by H.G. Wells, in *The Time Machine*, should our relationship to the non-human world be one that values it only in relation to human purpose, or can we recognize it as having intrinsic value? Do people, social interactions and relationships have intrinsic value? Do moments, events, concepts have value in and of themselves, defined within their own terms and not commensurable in one standardised measure? Arts value can be that it is useless. Life, similarly, doesn't fall into an easily defined meaning, as Nihilism points out, it is seemingly purposeless. Camus's essay *The Myth of Sisyphus*<sup>33</sup>, finds not the pessimism in the pointless acts of Sisyphus, but embraces the ridiculous and useless nature of it, finds joy in its humanness. Art by upholding its uselessness, not capitulating to measurable models of relation, stimulus, economic impact or value creation, can be a resistance. Do nothing, reject purpose, embrace uselessness. Uselessness is Unpurity. It is a rejection of the 'greater good'

<sup>31</sup> Figure. 4. *There is No Outside – Camomile*. (2017) Excerpt from zine.

<sup>32</sup> p.28. Wells, H.G., 1995. *The Time Machine*. London: Everyman

<sup>33</sup> Camus, A., 1991. *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*. London: Vintage

mentality, one of totalitarian purity. It is a pragmatic position and an attempt towards the unhypocritical. It is a means to an end.

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