



### How To Do Nothing

“I would prefer not to.”—Bartleby, the Scrivener

In today’s “rise and grind” world, amid the so-called attention economy, doing nothing can feel downright impossible. But what does it mean to do nothing, really? And how have people done nothing differently in different times and places? From the lived reality of chronic illness and disability to the existential absurdity of Samuel Beckett, this course will trace the many ways people have ‘done nothing’ across time.

And who gets to do nothing anyway? Are those who ‘quiet quit’ slackers, stoners, dropouts, burnouts? How do they get away with it? Do they really not care—or are they scared to try? Existentialists have confronted the absurdity of existence, arguing that there is nothing we *can* do that would give our lives meaning. Those interested in mindfulness or a slower pace of life have argued for the radical resistance of doing nothing, especially for marginalized identities.

In this class, we’ll take the day off with Ferris Bueller, try to sleep the year away with Ottessa Moshfegh, and prefer to do nothing with Bartleby. We’ll birdwatch with Jenny Odell and trace the origins of self-care to the radical politics of Audre Lorde. From leisure time to passive resistance, from the impersonal offices of Wall Street to the paralyzing bureaucracy of post-war Japan, we’ll consider the many faces of doing nothing and see if—in the end—it all adds up to something instead.

#### Texts (subject to change)

Samuel Beckett. *Waiting for Godot*.

John Hughes. *Ferris Bueller’s Day Off*.

Akira Kurosawa. *Ikiru*.

Audre Lorde. *The Selected Works*.

Herman Melville. *Bartleby the Scrivener: A Story of Wall-street*.

Ottessa Moshfegh. *My Year of Rest and Relaxation*.

Jenny Odell. *How to Do Nothing*.

E. Samuels. *Six Ways of Looking at Crip Time*.