

Cultural Daily

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A Case Against New Year's Resolutions

Melina Young · Wednesday, January 13th, 2021

I've been doing a lot of online Pilates workouts lately. Not because I set a resolution to do so. My virtual instructor (a blissed-out woman who uses the phrase "human experiment" with compelling sincerity) would suggest that, "Life is the process of finding balance. Life isn't balance itself." I understand her to mean that the business of life dwells in our attempts. Failure and success are perhaps irrelevant. So why am I so resolution averse? After all, New Year's resolutions are just seasonal attempts at achieving balance. Aren't they?

New Year's resolutions make me itch. They irritate me the way some people (me) are irritated by other people's chewing. My aversion is simple and threefold.

First, I hate New Year's resolutions because they purport that resolution-setters are in control. They aren't.

Your resolution may be small. Say you want to lose five pounds. This is a common one. Many New Year's resolutions bring into relief our collective and constant battles with our bodies. You may lose five pounds. You may not. You may lose more. You may discover authors like [Aubrey Gordon](#) doing work to undo our biases against fat people. You may awaken to your own efforts to maintain and normalize the systemic oppression of fat people. You may become an activist against anti-fat bias. Who's to say what will shape you? We're not in control.

Maybe you want to finish your novel. This one's a little bigger. Godspeed. I wish you all the best. Be forewarned, you may be derailed by a global pandemic the likes of which may just make the idea of writing far less appealing than drinking bleach. And too many of us this year have actually tried the bleach!

Second, I hate New Year's resolutions because they're a stain on the Deadline's good name and reputation. Listen, I love a schedule. I love routine. I love deadlines. I crave them. I need them. This past year has taught me that as much as I love vacation, I need to know that my vacation will end in order to enjoy it.

That said, the New Year's resolution prepares resolution-setters for disappointment. As I've already established, we're not in control of anything. We certainly aren't in control of *when* we'll achieve our goals.

Third, I hate New Year's Resolutions because they're predicated on the idea that resolution-setters are in some way insufficient. They probably are. And who needs to be reminded of that?

As an actor (an aspiring actor, a wannabe, whatever), I've felt a constant sense that I could always be doing more, that I'm never doing enough. The truth is, I could be and I'm not. Indulging that stress, experiencing it viscerally in my body, is paralyzing. It makes me want to give up before I start. And therefore (here we go anti-capitalists) it's unproductive.

One lesson that I've taken away from this past year is that productivity is not sacrosanct. I'm learning to be gentler with myself. It follows that, with this new understanding, I should forgo productivity in favor of higher values. Whatever those are.

So, since I'm forgoing productivity or at least acknowledging its diminished importance in my life, am I setting a New Year's resolution?

Looks like it.

Photograph by Elise Alexander

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