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Editorial

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Celebrating the arrival of 2013 on New Year's Eve, many people must have wondered why they still existed. Wasn't the world supposed to end on December 21 with the Mayan apocalypse?

You don't have to be a new age spiritualist to believe that the end of the world could have improved your circumstances. If you thought you were nearing a fiscal cliff, or if you really were entering hell itself with an Islamist soft coup, a well-placed apocalypse carries the promise of voiding all debts, so to speak: Rip up all the contracts and let's start over! This is why the Mayan prediction was welcomed by so many who thought the apocalypse would actually redeem the world by giving some concrete form or recognition to an already existing state of collapse. While you might think you have a lot to lose when the world ends, you might have even more to gain.

But in the days after December 21, with the world still there and looking exactly the same, we saw the apocalypse shrink into a proverb: apparently the Mayan calendar only predicted the end of the world as we know it – a new beginning. But this makes some sense: the apocalypse is not always synonymous with death and annihilation, as Hollywood likes to have it. The term apocalypse actually means "revelation" and "clarity" – literally "un-covering" (ἀπό, apo, or "away from," and καλύπτω, kalupto, or "to cover"). And this suggests that, rather than the end of time as such, the apocalypse actually reveals a new time, a new world.

As Hito Steyerl wrote in the April 2011 issue of e-flux journal, while you are in free fall, whole societies around you may be falling just as you are, and it may feel like perfect stasis – as if history and time have ended and you can't even remember that time ever moved forward. And the sense that everything is collapsing under you may in fact come from the laws of gravity in the new world the Mayans predicted. And all of these disparate nosedives into oblivion will be revealed as having a totality, a clarity, and a face – even if there is no ground. I've already fallen off the fiscal cliff and I've never felt better – I'm finally free! After all, what are worlds made of, if not gravity and consciousness? A tiny rearrangement in their logic can be transformative. It can be apocalyptic.