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Editorial

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What if history actually *did* end with the fall of communism and the end of the cold war, as Fukuyama claimed, and we are now enjoying some kind paradise of liberal democracy with no better political framework to strive towards? Or, what if a recognition of exploitation and social inequities actually *is* leading to a massive workers' revolution that *will* reclaim the means of production and lead to a more equal distribution of resources and power – whether Marxist, democratic, or otherwise? Indeed, we are unsure whether we are still inside of an idea of progressive social emancipation and human self-realization that defined the modern era, or whether we have truly, actually surpassed these questions. The popular uprisings of 2011 only complicate the issue further with their ability to mobilize massive social movements with a near-total absence of political ideology in any traditional sense. It almost seems as if the entire world got the gist of all the postmodern and postcolonial ideas that came after 1968 to theorize an era of dreary political prospects.

What is clear is that, in spite of an enormous amount of action and movement, we remain unable to think in terms of totality – whether collectively, socially, or ontologically. And it remains hard to say whether this is because we choose not to, for fear of authoritarian implications, or because something much larger has seized us and rendered us too frightened or simply incapable of thinking and dreaming on such a scale. In her essay in this issue of *e-flux journal*, Elizabeth Povinelli advances a fascinating proposal that, because we are all “trapped in an enclosure” of a single system now more than ever before, any sensuous modes of being to be found within this system are tied precisely to negotiating its horizon. Furthermore, in this issue Boris Groys interrogates the contemporary artist's reliance on critical theory to explain what is to be done, how to do it, and why, and he relates this to a privileging of action hardwired within the ethos of critical theory itself. In place of philosophical contemplation, theory animates life and performs the fact that one is alive and full of energy. In place of a rationality that could extend beyond the self to become total and universal, theory confronts us with the finiteness of our lives, and thus with a paradoxical urgency to act now, before it is too late.