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# Editorial

It is hard to avoid the feeling these days that the future is behind us. It's not so much that time has stopped, but rather that the sense of promise and purpose that once drove historical progress has become impossible to sustain. On the one hand, the faith in modernist, nationalist, or universalist utopias continues to retreat, while on the other, a more immediate crisis of faith has accompanied the widespread sense of diminishing economic prospects felt in so many places. Not to mention the ascension of populist and sectarian orders that now mire many of the popular revolutions of 2011 in the Middle East. Things just don't seem to move. But as historical time comes to a standstill, lived time accelerates at a dizzying pace, leading one to wonder whether this frantic accumulation and acceleration on the level of working, social, and private life actually serves to compensate for the sense of drift and indeterminacy felt in public and political life.

Either way, this makes for a very peculiar temporality that we now inhabit – one in which looking into the past, the future, or the present seems somehow walled off. But why not play them all off against each other? Here it becomes interesting to consider Trevor Paglen's paradoxical *Last Pictures* project – discussed in this issue with Nato Thompson – in which he worked with materials scientists at MIT to develop an archival disc of images of life on earth for an alien audience in the future. After traveling into space on the television satellite EchoStar XVI, the images will orbit the earth for billions of years.

Techno-libertarians are often fond of citing Deleuze and Latour in suggesting that networked communications protocols have served to provide a de facto universalism that fulfills and exceeds the promises of modernity. But as the scale of the internet has grown exponentially in recent years, its frictionless and deterritorialized spaces of free and open communication have come to be increasingly redeployed by authoritarian nation-states and massive corporations as a tool to serve their own interests. In the first of a series of essays researching the paradigmatic shift in how our current conceptions of freedom find their material support, in this issue Metahaven begin their extensive probe into the metaphor of the cloud. Also in this issue, Lawrence Liang considers the promise of the shadow beneath the totalizing utopian ideal of the library:

> If the utopian ideal of the library was to bring together everything that we know of the world, then the length of its bookshelves was coterminous with the breadth of the world. But like its

predecessors in Alexandria and Babel the project is destined to be incomplete, haunted by what it necessarily leaves out and misses. The library as heterotopia reveals itself only through the interstices and lays bare the fiction of any possibility of a coherent ground on which a knowledge project can be built. Finally, there is the question of where we stand once the ground that we stand on has itself been dislodged.

**Art historian Amelia Groom revisits modern art's love affair with the blank slate in observing a series of works that use erasure and imageless images to shift the parameters of presence and absence. It is interesting to recall that Franco "Bifo" Berardi places the first declaration of the death of the future in punk rock, when Sid Vicious screamed "no future" in 1977, two years after Margaret Thatcher became head of the Conservative Party in the UK, and two years before she became Prime Minister. In this issue, Claire Tancons follows her influential essay from issue 30 on carnivalesque protest in Occupy Wall Street with a look at how the courageous punks of Pussy Riot have used the carnivalesque as protest strategy. Finally, Anton Vidokle and Brian Kuan Wood return to Duchamp's readymades, finding in them the unwitting prototype for the meta-system of institutional enclosure now known as contemporary art. The question of how a Duchampian contextual break could be possible today is also a way of asking how one might break the contract that underwrites the freedom of the artist, when that freedom can only be granted by authorized institutions of art.**