Editors
Editorial

The word "data" comes from the Latin *dare*, which means "give." This evolves into *datum*, which signifies something given. Data is what is given; Big Data, many given somethings. Gifts are given, too, but it's hard to think of data as a gift – and nearly impossible to think of Big Data as a Big Gift, though it certainly appears that way to some.

But then the history of gifts is more equivocal and ambivalent than market society can easily recall. To give a big gift is also to place the recipient in your debt, to transform that person into a subject of the giving regime. For centuries, many communities were organized around the distribution of favors as the matrix of subjectivity. The spoils of war, rights to land, or even just piles of glistening loot can all be seen as examples of Big Givens before the era of Big Data. And, like its predecessors, Big Data also seems constitutive of lordship and bondage alike, securing some limited liberty only when we accept it as something beyond our control, as something given. Under Big Data, for example, advertisements have become more specific and helpful. Also, a drone can kill you anytime, anywhere, and for any reason, irrespective of territory, citizenship, or responsibility for whatever television show the Americans are fighting about this week. Maybe technology has always made things worse before we get together and make them better again?

For example, it is probably a result of collective action by international antiwar organizations that the United States has substituted the Reaper drone for the B-52. About ten thousand people have been killed by drones in the past decade, a number matched during a slow month in Cambodia in 1970 or in two minutes in Tokyo on the night of March 9, 1945. The drone can see better than the bomber could, and that matters when pilots can't be counted on to tell a child from a threat any more effectively today than they could in the middle of the last century. Big Data giveth and Big Data taketh away.

In other words, just because it's possible to see what couldn't be seen before, it still doesn't mean that what we see is actually there. Hito Steyerl, in "A Sea of Data," considers how the relationship between data technology and drone technology is figured; that is, how individuals are discerned amidst this tidal wave of givens. Not very well, it turns out, though this doesn't stop people from seeing terrorists everywhere.

The problem of figuring from data is a proper art historical problem, in the sense that it concerns representation, something artists are particularly equipped to discuss. Yates McKee reminds us of what art was like before Occupy, when it often felt necessary to recall that

politics was possible, though today it is hard to imagine that we ever forgot.

In "Drone Form," Nathan K. Hensley compares mediations of liberal violence from the Victorian era to contemporary records of neoliberal killing, examining a clutch of drone novels to show how the irreciprocity of unmanned bombing impacts our understanding of ourselves as subjects.

We often register this impact, Lindsay Caplan avers, but stop short of drawing the full conclusions. Lev Manovich's Selfiecity is Caplan's example of a project that utilizes Big Data only halfway, leaving the big questions unrecognized and unanswered. Orit Gat considers wall text to show how authority is always generated as an interaction between image and text within the visual field, while Benjamin Bratton imagines the role of a cargo-cult messiah in the construction of a megastructure in the South China Sea.

And Ana Teixeira Pinto examines the history of misunderstanding the fourth dimension as a kind of space rather than a kind of time. What other kind of space would we like to live in, beyond the ones we have already?