An artist, working in ‘collaboration’ with the US Department of Homeland Security, generates randomized juxtapositions of text and image culled from government websites and surveillance cameras.

An audience gathers to watch surveillance imagery of the inside of a car wash projected onto the surrounding parking lot walls.

An artist wanders randomly through the city, his moves determined through the roll of the dice, each step monitored by cameras strapped to his body.

A huge piece of building-top art is constructed, visible only to the eye of Google Earth.

A couple is monitored by surveillance cameras as positions change, angles shift, and the script captures the spaces between their interactions.

The works of new media art and performance introduced and analysed in this edition of *Surveillance & Society* are provocative, delightful and often very funny. As befits the multi-disciplinary nature of the edition and the journal, some of these articles are written by the artists themselves, using the space of academic debate to ask themselves questions and to provide the reader with background thinking, others come from theorists, exploring a range of artistic examples to develop their theses. Some of the writers might consider themselves primarily activists, engaging with the power dynamics of surveillance in a way that focuses on politics, policy, and tangible results.

What they provide overall is a healthy, if inevitably partial, overview of the ways in which art is responding to surveillance now. In a decade which has seen our response to surveillance move from Orwellian dread, through the giddy pornography of Big Brother reality fests, to the googlization of everything, art has had to move quickly to respond in a perceptive, provocative way to our surveyed world. What we have in this collection is a series of propositions as to how an art that is engaged with today’s surveillance reality might look and feel. When everything is seen, sampled, remixed and presented to us on a laptop browser, surveillance is no longer a specialist theme for artists, nor a singular, focussed political argument, it is a core characteristic of our society and lives. The questions of ‘surveillance art’, an ‘aesthetics of surveillance’, and ‘artveillance’ are posed directly and by implication in many of these essays: is there a particular body of work, or maybe even a genre, which could describe itself as inherently
of and about surveillance? Or is surveillance now so prevalent as to make its use as an artistic category as meaningless as the terms ‘figurative art’ or ‘urban art’.

For several of the theorists writing here, art about or using surveillance highlights the ways in which surveillance, particularly in its consumer-friendly ‘google’ forms naturalises artificial and sometimes vicious power structures. Indeed, the structuring of contemporary ‘omniveillance’ by military and economic power systems and the elision of this structuring into the thrill of seeing everything is perhaps the key theme of this collection.

This troubling theme accompanies descriptions of works of art which are very often energetic and engaging. As Drucker (2005) suggests, many contemporary art works in complicit arrangements with the culture industries that were held in opposition by the 20th century avant-garde. As such, if there is a ‘surveillance art’ it is perhaps not an art which just uses surveillance technology, nor just takes surveillance as a theme, but one which, in line with the fundamental shift towards interactivity in much of our 21st century cultural production, allows us to act upon our surveyed/surveying world in a way which, however momentarily and playfully, destabilises binary forms of power and control.

As Hayles (1999) has theorized, digital technologies have shifted binary notions related to presence and absence in literature, science, and at the level of the individual body. Many of the essays in this collection utilize strategies that incorporate random chance and ludic interaction, flickering between pattern and randomness. In his description and contextualisation of his own work Artist, Robert Ladislas Derr uses die rolls and cameras to map his walk through cities worldwide Derr presents work which is fundamentally interactive – his walks through the city dressed in his deliberately cumbersome outfit of cameras and mirrors is determined by random audience dice throws. Derr inserts unpredictability into the omniveillant world, or rather demonstrates the unpredictability that always lies beneath the surface of our screens. Likewise the ‘shakiness’ of our constructs – his cameras reveal the bumps and turns of his surveillant city wanderings.

In another artist project, Robert Spahr presents a series of images that, in his words are a “collaboration with the Department of Homeland Security.” The images in the Panopticon Cruft series, generated at random from online CCTV cameras, are combined with text from the Department of Homeland Security website, creating mischievous mashups that act as advertisements for the post 9-11 surveillance society. Exploring the slippages in digital forms of representation, Spahr’s work is conceptually related to the Surrealist Exquisite Corpse, in that the subject matter is drawn from cultural areas that represent control and inspire fear. Unlike artists such as Derr, Spahr’s playfulness is limited to his choice of codes; the resultant work, if playful, is merely a matter of chance. “It is a reminder that someone is always watching, so we should consider carefully our behavior because we are always seen, observed and considered.”

In their fascinating Trialogue, Seda Gürses, Manu Luksch and Michelle Teran dig in depth into the relationship and gap between art and activism. Their work demonstrates, in very differing ways, how political analysis, theoretical perspectives, and artistic practise can inform each other within the framing discourse of surveillance. And again we see the many ways in which the agency and trace of the audience, or the ‘public’, structure and open up the art work produced.

In a similar manner, Paola Baretto LeBlanc explores (and explode) the relationship between CCTV and theatre, in From the Closed Circuit Television to the Open Network of Live Cinema. Documenting a number of live performances that utilize surveillance technologies and engaged audiences, the authors point to moments when the public becomes the work and the watcher becomes the watched, creating folds in the gaze in a Deleuzian manner.
Furthering the exploration of the public gaze, Jordan Crandall invites the reader to take on numerous positions behind the camera lens in *Homefront*. Using the medium of the screenplay, Crandall interjects the gaze of the director in a linguistic form that is unique to film. This Lynchian appropriation of film language is shocking for what it omits, while simultaneously drawing the reader into the narrative through the artifice of the screenplay. Crandall reminds the reader of the architecture of the film apparatus, how each scene is planned and prepared, even in those cases where action seems spontaneous. The filmic gaze of the CCTV camera is only an extension of this vocabulary, which has been incorporated into the operations of much new media work (Manovich, 1999). It is Manovich who reminds us that the space of the film theatre is, in many ways, the space of the Panopticon. Crandall's director plays the part of the prison guard: offstage, disembodied, omnipervious.

Where Spahr repurposes the text of the Department of Homeland Security as poetry, Crandall uses the carefully constructed screenplay to draw out possibilities in visual interpretation. This approach finds commonalities in the work of the Surveillance Camera Players, as well as the CCTV filmmaking of Manu Luksch as discussed in *Trialogue*, and analyzed in *Artveillance: At the Crossroads of Art and Surveillance*. In this essay, Andrea 'Mubi' Brighenti theorizes on the interdependent nature of art and surveillance. The term ‘artveillance,’ for Brighenti, “invites us to consider art as ‘technological’, in the sense that art is always tied to a technology of production and a technology of mediation (and remediaion).” She identifies three paradigms of visibility, dealing with the dynamics of recognition, of control, and of spectacle. Basing these paradigms on the work of sociologists Simmel and Goffman, Brighenti expands the notion of recognition to include four types: categorical, individual, personal, and spectacular. It is from these types that she provides an overview of artistic strategies related to surveillance technologies and theories.

Providing the reader with a number of relevant examples of surveillance art, Brighenti identifies an ‘aesthetics of surveillance.’ This is not aesthetics of the modernist mould; it is, rather, akin to Borriault’s (1998) *Relational Aesthetics*, which may not be termed aesthetics in the classical sense. Framing her discussion through the work of relevant sociologists, philosophers, and art historians, Brighenti asks the reader to consider the complexities of the surveillant gaze, and how these networks of vision and visibility contribute to our current understanding of identity.

Renata Marquez and Wellington Coelho present the reader with Global Safari, a video piece that works as a mashup of Google Earth and The Eames’ classic film Powers of Ten. In *Myopia Index*, the essay that accompanies the piece, Marquez and Coelho problematize the post-military repurposing of GPS technologies, allowing for a nuanced understanding of the power of the surveillant gaze; perhaps, in this case, to be dubbed the ‘Google gaze.’ This is remediation in the sense that Brighenti uses the term, but it is not without the layering of power and control that comes with the branding of personal and public space in an era of social media.

Raul Gshrey has branded himself as an artist who has interrogated the technologies of surveillance throughout his career. In *Contemporary Closed Circuits – Subversive Dialogues: Artistic Strategies against Surveillance*, Gshrey provides an overview of his artistic interventions in and around the urban areas located throughout Germany. Through his use of networked technologies, Gshrey’s work extends beyond the walls of the gallery space, allowing for increased interaction and intervention. Presenting his interventions into social space as a game, particularly in works such as *Closed Circuit Conversation*, Gshrey’s tactics can be seen as relating to the walks of Derr, with both blurring the boundaries between gallery and street. Both also employ humour in order to address the very serious issues of civil liberties and social responsibilities.
In closing, Gshrey offers the reader a position for future research and production, situating his artistic activities in ethical terms. As surveillance technologies and strategies continue to expand and evolve, so too should the tactics of artists and theorists working to disrupt and dissect the surveillant gaze. The wide variety of approaches contained within this volume should register with all artists, regardless of their relationship with the mechanisms of surveillance. In fact, these projects, in many cases, point to the moments when the formal histories of art fade into the landscape of contemporary visual culture, where the technologies of new media become an extension of daily activities, and the theatricality of performance is doubled by the embodied practices of the everyday.

References