

2014-08-01 the disquiet talk

Dena asked us to quote 3-5 lines of something disquieting from a favorite piece of literature. While I was thinking about what to choose, since there is so much disquieting literature to choose from genres as US Southern or Russian, I ran across the perfect piece.

Assume the literature category of US Patent Application Publication. (Or contemporary science humor,). I present to you: number 20130322706.

Yes. On March 22, 2013 there was a patent granted for

“A method and apparatus (to: sic) to allow an individual to disrupt recognition of facial characteristics of the individual by facial recognition system.”

I find this profoundly disturbing. Disquieting.

What this means is that, as citizens of the Bay Area circa 2014, we find ourselves in a rapacious imaging environment. Computers are “recognizing” images all over the place: from car-mounted license plate readers to photo-tagging on Facebook. Many of these uses are patented, licensed, and proprietary.

And now, an option to opt out has been privatized. With this patent and others soon to follow, we see the complete privatization of our own public image and likeness, with companies like Google, Facebook, and Apple holding image-recognition system patents to identify, and on the other side we see other interests claiming the patents on the system de-identify, for anonymity.

As all sides try to monetize recognition and detection. I wonder about machine vision, and object recognition in a broader sense. Instead of using this technology for alarming purposes, for security and enforcement, for prohibition and punishment.

Can we imagine a use for these tools that is not punitive?