

How to See Like a Machine: Images After AI

Trevor Paglen

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Exploring humanity's relationship with, and dependence upon, technology, Trevor Paglen's prescient science text *How to See Like a Machine*, which is written from an industry insider's perspective, overviews generative AI to expose its history of psychological manipulation.

Grounded in research and interviews on the evolution of early image recognition software and content-generating algorithms, the book ably ties generative AI's manipulative abilities to Cold War-era psychological warfare methods. An interview with retired US Air Force veteran Richard Doty reveals the lengths to which governments go to keep top-secret projects under wraps, including by inventing and encouraging the spread of stories about UFOs.

Further, as computers became ubiquitous, data began to be used against people, the book states. It raises concerns about the formation of a vast digital surveillance state, reliant on image recognition software and intrusive data collection. Such digital invasions now occur at scales hitherto unimaginable, the book says, infecting domains once private and intimate, including the bedroom. Biometric statistics are measured for the purposes of raising insurance rates, the book notes, and digital footprints are analyzed to make hiring decisions; indeed, privacy in the digital age is not a straightforward matter.

With startling clarity, the book addresses the alarming implications of evolving machine visions. To explain the scope and nuances of digital surveillance threats, it notes that machines have a different way of seeing than biological organisms. Color, shape, and form give way to subcategories and labels, built upon a trove of past data to decode what an image contains. Further, this past data is shaped by human biases, which machines inherit and reinforce.

How to See Like a Machine is an insightful, urgent science text that critiques the emergent technologies of image recognition and generative AI.

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