

Big Brother No, Smart Camera Yes

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By Ida Seitter

We have all seen the security camera in the neighborhood convenience store or at our local bank, but what would happen if there were cameras all around us, recording our movement all the time? It sounds like a bad plot to some Keanu Reeves movie, but it is a reality program in the making- well sort of.. Like any inventor perfecting his craft, many computer scientists and engineers are in the process of trying to create programs that enhance the ability of computers constantly. Some try to enhance our music sharing programs; others are interested in developing robots. Assistant professor Jim Davis, of Ohio State University's Department of Computer Science and Engineering, is making a security system that will beat out all other security programs.

It's called the Smart Camera and is unlike your typical surveillance system because this program does the work. Instead of just a few cameras set up to record a limited area on videotape, the Smart Camera system is made up of many cameras that take snapshots from every direction and combine them into one seamless representation of space and time. Although it looks like a crazy, magnified fish bowl, Davis said in a recent interview with OSU, that it is actually quite user-friendly and even boasts touch-screen capability. These cameras could hypothetically link with other smart camera programs; allowing for large areas to be under 'surveillance.' Although many European countries have implemented city-wide security cameras, the United States has been reluctant to follow suit.

Before you start freaking out and screaming about your right to privacy, you might want to know what these cameras are actually looking for. Instead of trying to detect the identity of the person on camera, they are trying to detect the presence of people and their activities. Davis said "any camera surveillance system could use commercially-available software for face-recognition," but this program stresses trends. Instead of looking at one day of footage, Davis' group is using this computer system to observe an area for months or even years. By using thermal cameras and visual learning recognition, they are able to create trends for the area; the computer will know instantly when someone has entered the area.

This type of security system has many possibilities, especially in the effort to watch our borders, as well as homeland security and search-and-rescue missions. This type of computer system may seem expensive, but Davis assures me it really isn't, because "the advantage of [the] system is that it is software, and that it is meant to

work with existing surveillance camera infrastructure.” As such, it would be fairly easy and cheap to implement because there are no specialty parts. This type of program would also alleviate some of the pressure placed on “security personnel trying to watch hundreds of video streams by developing computer algorithms, to help filter-out video that needn’t be currently examined.” Doing this allows security personnel, and the video footage itself, to be more useful in identifying and fixing problems.

Although it serves a totally different purpose than to spy on you, I did find that many OSU students are still reluctant at the prospect of cameras everywhere. Laura Schaffer said, “It would make me feel like I was being watched all the time.” Ben Warren, another OSU student said, “I like the idea that the system could help in search-and-rescue missions, and anything that would promote American welfare”. But the final consensus is that if this system expanded to such a huge area, such as a whole city, there would have to be restrictions of some kind to ensure the privacy of Americans. Regardless, you might want to watch what wall you pee on while you are drunk, because in the near future you may find yourself being recorded!

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