

New app takes you out of the picture

February 26 2020, by Peter Grad



In a social media era where one can be "ghosted" or "canceled" at the tap of a key, it should come as no surprise that we can now be simply "erased." Call it: the "un-selfie."

A Google engineer has devised a webcam tool that removes people from video streams in real time.

Jason Mayes, senior developer advocate for research and [machine intelligence](#) at Google, designed the app using Javascript and TensorFlow, a comprehensive library of free tools and resources for [machine learning](#).

Dubbed 'Disappearing People,' the app works by first capturing images of an empty room. When someone enters the room, the app applies algorithms that detect the human form and then proceeds to erase those pixels. The gaps are replaced with stored pixels of the empty room.

In his sample video, Mayes moves almost seamlessly around the room undetected while the remaining elements of the room, including a laptop displaying moving images, appear unaffected. There are a few moments of pixelation on Mayes' moving contour, but for most of the clip, the effect is eerily precise.

You can obtain the free code here: github.com/jasonmayes/Real-Time-Person-Removal

If you want to see what you look like—or should we say what you don't look like—try the app out for yourself right now with a live demonstration. Be sure to wait a few moments for the app to completely load before starting: disappearing-people.glitch.me/

For those concerned about being spied upon by their own built-in webcams, pasting a piece of tape over the tiny camera lens is a simple fix. But Disappearing People, if a bit more sophisticated, should work just as well.

Disappearing People has obvious entertainment potential, too. Budding filmmakers will find endless opportunities for sight gags, gravity-defying scenes and spooky GIFS with an app that takes the actor out of the picture.

Cinemaphiles may recall early efforts by Hollywood to explore the notion of altering reality with video streaming. In 1994's "Speed," Keanu Reeves plays a police officer tasked with driving a bus that a madman rigged with explosives set to detonate if the speed dropped below 50 mph. After detecting a hidden video camera installed by the madman, played by Dennis Hopper, Reeves surreptitiously splices the tape of seated passengers into a loop and plays it while they escape undetected by Hopper.

In the largely panned "Hudson Hawk," (voted worst movie of 1991), Bruce Willis and Danny Aiello reprogram a museum security camera to play an earlier tape while they steal a sculpture by Leonardo DaVinci.

Keanu, Bruce and Danny would have been spared much grief if they had access to Disappearing People.

Coincidentally, a remake of the sci-fi horror movie inspired by the 19th century H.G. Wells novel "The Invisible Man" is slated to open in theaters February 28th.

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