

AI creatives play with scary music, zany costume ideas as part of Halloween

October 31 2018, by Nancy Owano



Credit: Matt Reed

Oh, the boo and eek of it all. Artificial intelligence is at the head table thanks to technology creatives who want to make Halloween 2018 rather special.

AI is being unleashed for Halloween-centric purposes and one of them is the use of AI to create scary—and some are very scary—[masks](#).

Yes, software was used to create mask designs. An ad agency creative Matt Reed is behind the software. How? A neural network was supplied with 5,000 images of popular masks from movies, said *Daily Mail*. The algorithm, in no more than 24 hours, delivered "terrifying monsters," said [Annie Palmer](#).

The AI used a general adversarial network, a type of algorithm in automated machine learning software. By pitting two networks against each other, they keep improving. It teaches itself how to make itself better. Reed said the longer it runs, the smarter it gets.

Palmer: "One-half of the neural network gives the other examples of Halloween masks and the 'discriminator' will tell it how well it did and give it ways it can improve. It then goes back and tries again, doing this numerous times as a way to improve. " Leave the network running overnight and things get more interesting, Reed said.

New Scientist quoted him describing the masks' most unsettling feature of all. "What's so scary or unsettling about it is that it's not so detailed that it shows you everything. It leaves just enough [open](#) for your imagination to connect the dots."

A neural network meanwhile was put to work elsewhere for those celebrating Halloween. A research scientist posed a question to get started: what happens when a neural network is the costume designer? "The Spongebob" and "Sexy Lamp" to "Shower Witch" and "Frankenstein" were some contributions as a result. This time the AI Halloween spotlight was on a [research](#) scientist in optics, Janelle Shane.

Popular Mechanics reported on the costume idea story. She used a dataset that was crowdsourced for network training. The results were "bizarre, absurd mash-up [costumes](#) that make little sense but are hilarious to imagine."

Here is more of a sampling of what the machine delivered: "Statue of Pizza, Lady Garbage."

Thing is, don't expect Shane to be ashamed of the zany outcomes. She does this kind of stuff for real. Her intent in working with [neural network](#) training is "to write unintentional humor." After all, she said, "The neural networks are just doing their best to [understand](#) what's going on."

A third treat on the AI research smorgasbord turns to at-home party celebrations that need sensory stimuli to get everyone in a proper Halloween mood. Music? Of course. What kind of music? Pinar Yanardag and team [worked](#) on AI while she was a postdoctoral associate at MIT Media Lab and *Motherboard* told her story. The goal was scary songs for Halloween. Yanardag said they primed the AI with 5 to 10 seconds of horror movie soundtracks and had it generate new melodies in response.

Kaleigh Rogers, *Motherboard*, said that's not all. They will move on to more explorations. Rogers said the researchers "will collect user-generated songs, and will use them to teach the AI to auto-generate better, more authentically scary songs."

Their interest in getting involved in all this was not just for a fun application for but for learning more about "what makes a song scary or not." Yanardag is asking good questions.

"Is there a right combination of scary sound effects that appeals to a large audience, or do people usually have distinct tastes when it comes to scary music? If so, can we generate personalized horror movie soundtracks with such a [dataset](#)?"

Last but not least at the AI scare table is story time with Botnik, which is

a community of writers, artists and developers building and machine tools "to remix and transform language." [Botnik](#) is telling people to give yourselves goofbumps where you click to open and choose from different scary endings.

Joey Cosco, *Digg's* Social and Branded Content Editor: "We've written about Botnik Studios a handful of times, but they've really outdone themselves this time. This isn't just a goofy data set carefully curated down to only the funniest entries. 'Welcome To Sand Hands' uses the spooky/unsettling feel of AI-written text to its advantage to create a creepy [world](#) you can actually explore."

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