

# Deep Neural Networks are Easily Fooled: High Confidence Predictions for Unrecognizable Images

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## Abstract

Deep neural networks (DNNs) have recently been achieving state-of-the-art performance on a variety of pattern-recognition tasks, most notably visual classification problems. Given that DNNs are now able to classify objects in images with near-human-level performance, questions naturally arise as to what differences remain between computer and human vision. A recent study [30] revealed that changing an image (e.g. of a lion) in a way imperceptible to humans can cause a DNN to label the image as something else entirely (e.g. mislabeling a lion a library). Here we show a related result: it is easy to produce images that are completely unrecognizable to humans, but that state-of-the-art DNNs believe to be recognizable objects with 99.99% confidence (e.g. labeling with certainty that white noise static is a lion). Specifically, we take convolutional neural networks trained to perform well on either the ImageNet or MNIST datasets and then find images with evolutionary algorithms or gradient ascent that DNNs label with high confidence as belonging to each dataset class. It is possible to produce images totally unrecognizable to human eyes that DNNs believe with near certainty are familiar objects, which we call “fooling images” (more generally, fooling examples). Our results shed light on interesting differences between human vision and current DNNs, and raise questions about the generality of DNN computer vision.

## 1. Introduction

Deep neural networks (DNNs) learn hierarchical layers of representation from sensory input in order to perform pattern recognition [2, 14]. Recently, these deep architectures have demonstrated impressive, state-of-the-art, and sometimes human-competitive results on many pattern recognition tasks, especially vision classification problems [16, 7, 31, 17]. Given the near-human ability of DNNs to classify visual objects, questions arise as to what differences remain between computer and human vision.

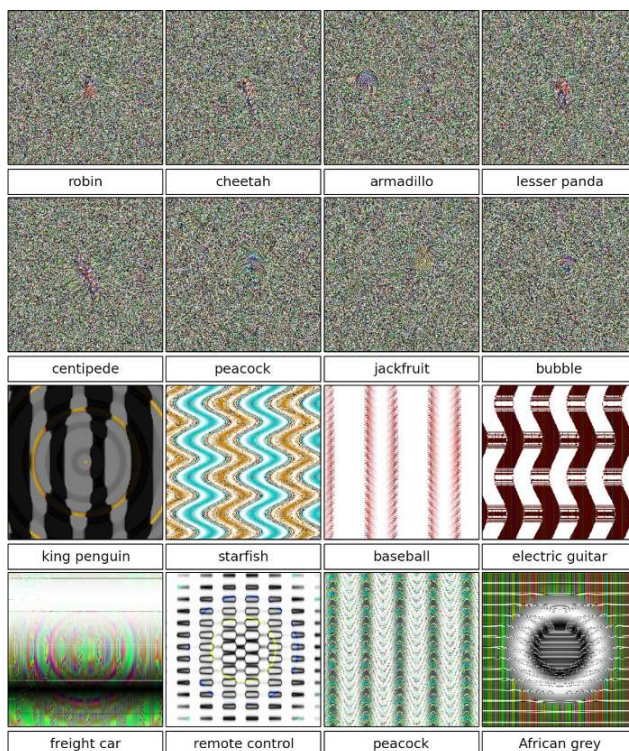


Figure 1. Evolved images that are unrecognizable to humans, but that state-of-the-art DNNs trained on ImageNet believe with  $\geq 99.6\%$  certainty to be a familiar object. This result highlights differences between how DNNs and humans recognize objects. Images are either directly (*top*) or indirectly (*bottom*) encoded.

A recent study revealed a major difference between DNN and human vision [30]. Changing an image, originally correctly classified (e.g. as a lion), in a way imperceptible to human eyes, can cause a DNN to label the image as something else entirely (e.g. mislabeling a lion a library).

In this paper, we show another way that DNN and human vision differ: It is easy to produce images that are completely unrecognizable to humans (Fig. 1), but that state-of-the-art DNNs believe to be recognizable objects with over 99% confidence (e.g. labeling with certainty that TV static

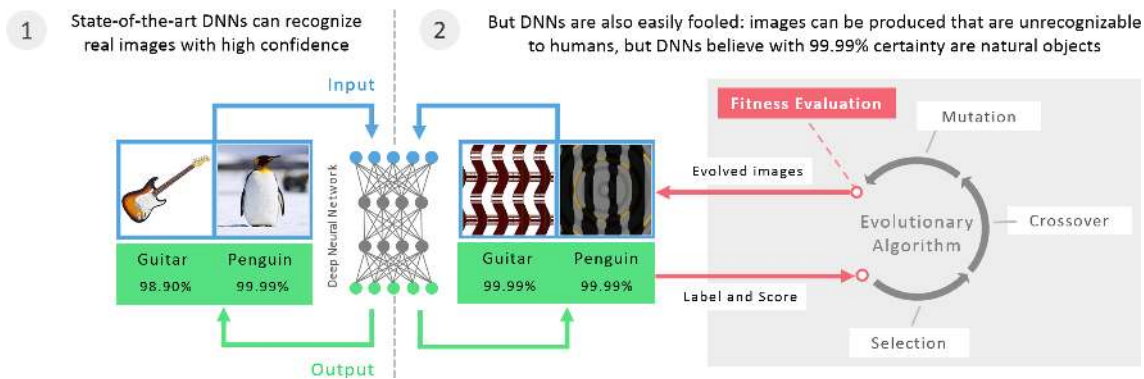


Figure 2. Although state-of-the-art deep neural networks can increasingly recognize natural images (*left panel*), they also are easily fooled into declaring with near-certainty that unrecognizable images are familiar objects (*center*). Images that fool DNNs are produced by evolutionary algorithms (*right panel*) that optimize images to generate high-confidence DNN predictions for each class in the dataset the DNN is trained on (here, ImageNet).

is a motorcycle). Specifically, we use evolutionary algorithms or gradient ascent to generate images that are given high prediction scores by convolutional neural networks (convnets) [16, 18]. These DNN models have been shown to perform well on both the ImageNet [10] and MNIST [19] datasets. We also find that, for MNIST DNNs, it is not easy to prevent the DNNs from being fooled by retraining them with fooling images labeled as such. While retrained DNNs learn to classify the negative examples as fooling images, a new batch of fooling images can be produced that fool these new networks, even after many retraining iterations.

Our findings shed light on current differences between human vision and DNN-based computer vision. They also raise questions about how DNNs perform in general across different types of images than the ones they have been trained and traditionally tested on.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Deep neural network models

To test whether DNNs might give false positives for unrecognizable images, we need a DNN trained to near state-of-the-art performance. We choose the well-known “AlexNet” architecture from [16], which is a convnet trained on the 1.3-million-image ILSVRC 2012 ImageNet dataset [10, 24]. Specifically, we use the already-trained AlexNet DNN provided by the Caffe software package [15]. It obtains 42.6% top-1 error rate, similar to the 40.7% reported by Krizhevsky 2012 [16]. While the Caffe-provided DNN has some small differences from Krizhevsky 2012 [16], we do not believe our results would be qualitatively changed by small architectural and optimization differences or their resulting small performance improvements. Similarly, while recent papers have improved upon Krizhevsky 2012, those differences are unlikely to change our results. We chose AlexNet because it is widely known and a trained

DNN similar to it is publicly available. In this paper, we refer to this model as “ImageNet DNN”.

To test that our results hold for other DNN architectures and datasets, we also conduct experiments with the Caffe-provided LeNet model [18] trained on the MNIST dataset [19]. The Caffe version has a minor difference from the original architecture in [18] in that its neural activation functions are rectified linear units (ReLU) [22] instead of sigmoids. This model obtains 0.94% error rate, similar to the 0.8% of LeNet-5 [18]. We refer to this model as “MNIST DNN”.

### 2.2. Generating images with evolution

The novel images we test DNNs on are produced by evolutionary algorithms (EAs) [12]. EAs are optimization algorithms inspired by Darwinian evolution. They contain a population of “organisms” (here, images) that alternately face selection (keeping the best) and then random perturbation (mutation and/or crossover). Which organisms are selected depends on the *fitness function*, which in these experiments is the highest prediction value a DNN makes for that image belonging to a class (Fig. 2).

Traditional EAs optimize solutions to perform well on one objective, or on all of a small set of objectives [12] (e.g. evolving images to match a single ImageNet class). We instead use a new algorithm called the multi-dimensional archive of phenotypic elites MAP-Elites [6], which enables us to simultaneously evolve a population that contains individuals that score well on many classes (e.g. all 1000 ImageNet classes). Our results are unaffected by using the more computationally efficient MAP-Elites over single-target evolution (data not shown). MAP-Elites works by keeping the best individual found so far for each objective. Each iteration, it chooses a random organism from the population, mutates it randomly, and replaces the current champion for any objective if the new individual has higher fit-

ness on that objective. Here, fitness is determined by showing the image to the DNN; if the image generates a higher prediction score for any class than has been seen before, the newly generated individual becomes the champion in the archive for that class.

We test EAs with two different *encodings* [29, 5], meaning how an image is represented as a genome. The first has a *direct encoding*, which has one grayscale integer for each of  $28 \times 28$  pixels for MNIST, and three integers (H, S, V) for each of  $256 \times 256$  pixels for ImageNet. Each pixel value is initialized with uniform random noise within the  $[0, 255]$  range. Those numbers are independently mutated; first by determining which numbers are mutated, via a rate that starts at 0.1 (each number has a 10% chance of being chosen to be mutated) and drops by half every 1000 generations. The numbers chosen to be mutated are then altered via the polynomial mutation operator [8] with a fixed mutation strength of 15. The second EA has an *indirect encoding*, which is more likely to produce *regular* images, meaning images that contain compressible patterns (e.g. symmetry and repetition) [20]. Indirectly encoded images tend to be regular because elements in the genome can affect multiple parts of the image [28]. Specifically, the indirect encoding here is a compositional pattern-producing network (CPPN), which can evolve complex, regular images that resemble natural and man-made objects [25, 28, 1].

Importantly, images evolved with CPPNs can be recognized by DNNs (Fig. 3), providing an existence proof that a CPPN-encoded EA can produce images that both humans and DNNs can recognize. These images were produced on PicBreeder.org [25], a site where users serve as the fitness function in an evolutionary algorithm by selecting images they like, which become the parents of the next generation.

CPPNs are similar to artificial neural networks (ANNs). A CPPN takes in the  $(x, y)$  position of a pixel as input, and outputs a grayscale value (MNIST) or tuple of HSV color values (ImageNet) for that pixel. Like a neural network, the function the CPPN computes depends on the number of neurons in the CPPN, how they are connected, and the weights between neurons. Each CPPN node can be one of a set of activation functions (here: sine, sigmoid, Gaussian and linear), which can provide geometric regularities to the image. For example, passing the  $x$  input into a Gaussian function will provide left-right symmetry, and passing the  $y$  input into a sine function provides top-bottom repetition. Evolution determines the topology, weights, and activation functions of each CPPN network in the population.

As is custom, and was done for the images in Fig. 3, CPPN networks start with no hidden nodes, and nodes are added over time, encouraging evolution to first search for simple, regular images before adding complexity [27]. Our experiments are implemented in the Sferes evolutionary computation framework [21]. Our code and parameters are

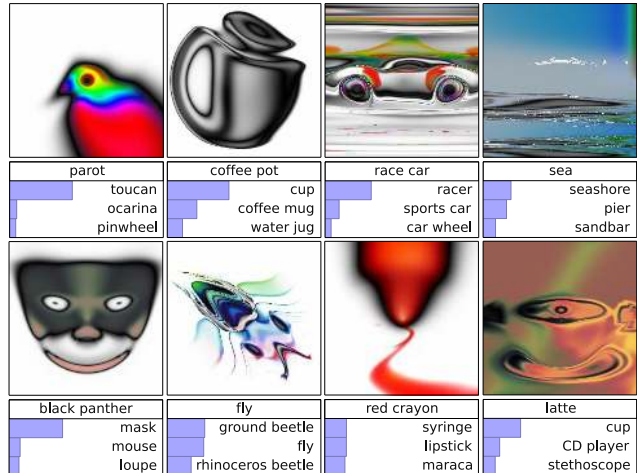


Figure 3. Evolved, CPPN-encoded images produced with humans performing selection on PicBreeder.org. Human image breeders named each object (centered text). Blue bars show the top three classifications made by a DNN trained on ImageNet (size indicates confidence). Often the first classification relates to the human breeder’s label, showing that CPPN-encoded evolution can produce images that humans and DNNs can recognize.

available at <http://EvolvingAI.org/fooling>.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Evolving irregular images to match MNIST

We first evolve directly encoded images to be confidently declared by LeNet to be digits 0 thru 9 (recall that LeNet is trained to recognize digits from the MNIST dataset). Multiple, independent runs of evolution repeatedly produce images that MNIST DNNs believe with 99.99% confidence to be digits, but are unrecognizable as such (Fig. 4). In less than 50 generations, each run of evolution repeatedly produces unrecognizable images of each digit type classified by MNIST DNNs with  $\geq 99.99\%$  confidence. By 200 generations, median confidence is 99.99%. Given the DNN’s near-certainty, one might expect these images to resemble handwritten digits. On the contrary, the generated images look nothing like the handwritten digits in the MNIST dataset.

#### 3.2. Evolving regular images to match MNIST

Because CPPN encodings can evolve recognizable images (Fig. 3), we tested whether this more capable, regular encoding might produce more recognizable images than the irregular white-noise static of the direct encoding. The result, while containing more strokes and other regularities, still led to MNIST DNNs labeling unrecognizable images as digits with 99.99% confidence (Fig. 5) after only a few generations. By 200 generations, median confidence is 99.99%.

Certain patterns repeatedly evolve in some digit classes that appear indicative of that digit (Fig. 5). Images classi-



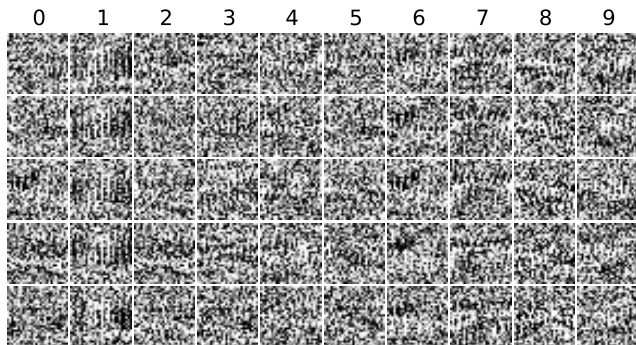


Figure 4. Directly encoded, thus irregular, images that MNIST DNNs believe with 99.99% confidence are digits 0-9. Each column is a digit class, and each row is the result after 200 generations of a randomly selected, independent run of evolution.

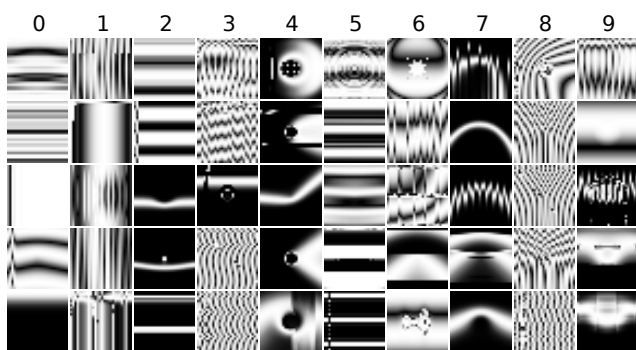


Figure 5. Indirectly encoded, thus regular, images that MNIST DNNs believe with 99.99% confidence are digits 0-9. The column and row descriptions are the same as for Fig. 4.

fied as a 1 tend to have vertical bars, while images classified as a 2 tend to have a horizontal bar in the lower part of the image. Qualitatively similar discriminative features are observed in 50 other runs as well (supplementary material). This result suggests that the EA exploits specific discriminative features corresponding to the handwritten digits learned by MNIST DNNs.

### 3.3. Evolving irregular images to match ImageNet

We hypothesized that MNIST DNNs might be easily fooled because they are trained on a small dataset that could allow for overfitting (MNIST has only 60,000 training images). To test this hypothesis that a larger dataset might prevent the pathology, we evolved directly encoded images to be classified confidently by a convolutional DNN [16] trained on the ImageNet 2012 dataset, which has 1.3 million natural images in 1000 classes [9]. Confidence scores for images were averaged over 10 crops (1 center, 4 corners and 5 mirrors) of size  $227 \times 227$ .

The directly encoded EA was less successful at producing high-confidence images in this case. Even after 20,000 generations, evolution failed to produce high-confidence images for many categories (Fig. 6, median confidence

21.59%). However, evolution did manage to produce images for 45 classes that are classified with  $\geq 99\%$  confidence to be natural images (Fig. 1). While in some cases one might discern features of the target class in the image if told the class, humans without such priming would not recognize the image as belonging to that class.

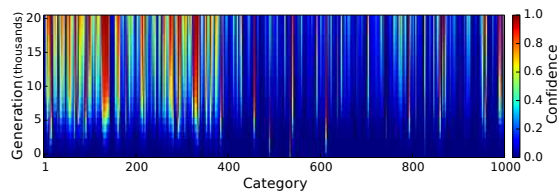


Figure 6. Median confidence scores from 5 runs of directly encoded, evolved images for all 1000 ImageNet classes. Though rare, evolution can produce images that the DNN believes with over 99% confidence to be in a natural, ImageNet class.

### 3.4. Evolving regular images to match ImageNet

Once again, we test whether the CPPN encoding, which has previously evolved images that both humans and DNNs recognize similarly (Fig. 3), might produce more recognizable images than the direct encoding. The hypothesis is that the larger ImageNet dataset and more powerful DNN architecture may interact with the CPPN encoding to finally produce recognizable images.

In five independent runs, evolution produces many images with DNN confidence scores  $\geq 99.99\%$ , but that are unrecognizable (Fig. 1 bottom). After 5000 generations, the median confidence score reaches 88.11%, similar to that for natural images (supplementary material) and significantly higher than the 21.59% for the direct encoding (Fig. 12,  $p < 0.0001$  via Mann-Whitney U test), which was given 4-fold more generations. High-confidence images are found in most categories (Fig. 7).

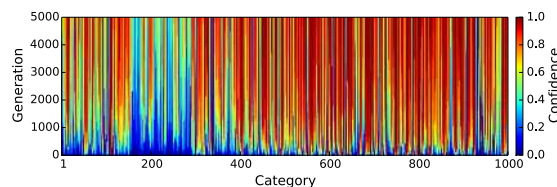


Figure 7. Median confidence scores from 5 runs of CPPN-encoded, evolved images for all 1000 ImageNet classes. Evolution can produce many images that the DNN believes with over 99% confidence to belong to ImageNet classes.

While a human not given the class labels for CPPN images would not label them as belonging to that class, the generated images do often contain some features of the target class. For example, in Fig. 1, the starfish image contains the blue of water and the orange of a starfish, the baseball has red stitching on a white background, the remote control

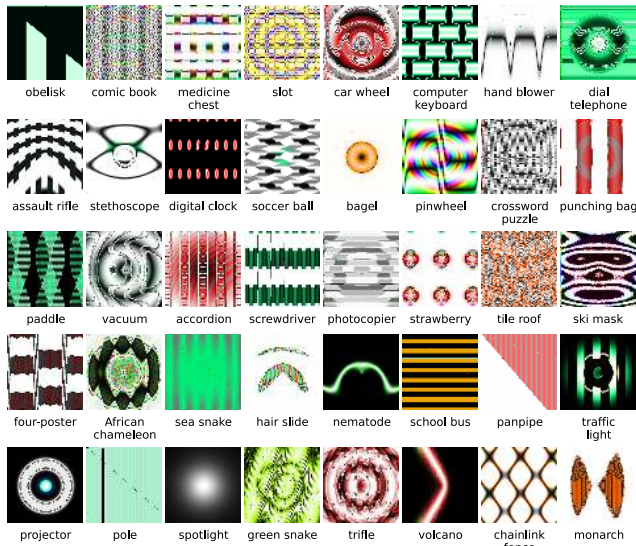


Figure 8. Evolving images to match DNN classes produces a tremendous diversity of images. Shown are images selected to showcase diversity from 5 evolutionary runs. The diversity suggests that the images are non-random, but that instead evolutions producing discriminative features of each target class. The mean DNN confidence scores for these images is 99.12%.

has a grid of buttons, etc. For many of the produced images, one can begin to identify why the DNN believes the image is of that class once given the class label. This is because evolution need only to produce features that are unique to, or *discriminative* for, a class, rather than produce an image that contains all of the typical features of a class.

The pressure to create these discriminative features led to a surprising amount of diversity in the images produced (Fig. 8). That diversity is especially noteworthy because (1) it has been shown that imperceptible changes to an image can change a DNN’s class label [30], so it could have been the case that evolution produced very similar, high-confidence images for all classes, and (2) many of the images are related to each other phylogenetically, which leads evolution to produce similar images for closely related categories (Fig. 9). For example, one image type receives high confidence scores for three types of lizards, and a different image type receives high confidence scores for three types of small, fluffy dogs. Different runs of evolution, however, produce different image types for these related categories, revealing that there are different discriminative features per class that evolution exploits. That suggests that there are many different ways to fool the same DNN for each class.

Many of the CPPN images feature a pattern repeated many times. To test whether that repetition improves the confidence score a DNN gives an image, or whether the repetition stems solely from the fact that CPPNs tend to produce regular images [28, 5], we ablated (i.e. removed) some of the repeated elements to see if the DNN confidence score

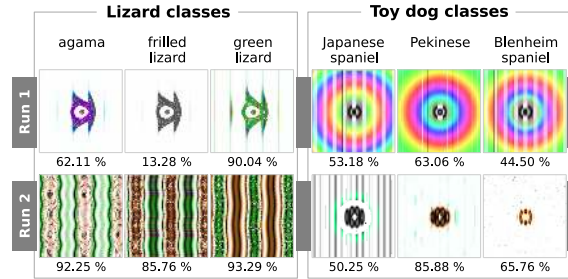


Figure 9. Images from the same evolutionary run that fool closely related classes are similar. Shown are the top images evolution generated for three classes that belong to the “lizard” parent class, and for three classes that belong to “toy dog” parent class. The top and bottom rows show images from independent runs of evolution.

for that image drops. Psychologists use the same ablation technique to learn which image features humans use to recognize objects [4]. In many images, ablating extra copies of the repeated element did lead to a performance drop, albeit a small one (Fig 10), meaning that the extra copies make the DNN more confident that the image belongs to the target class. This result is in line with a previous paper [26] that produced images to maximize DNN confidence scores (discussed below in Section 3.9), which also saw the emergence of features (e.g. a fox’s ears) repeated throughout an image. These results suggest that DNNs tend to learn low- and middle-level features rather than the global structure of objects. If DNNs were properly learning global structure, images should receive lower DNN confidence scores if they contain repetitions of object subcomponents that rarely appear in natural images, such as many pairs of fox ears or endless remote buttons (Fig. 1).

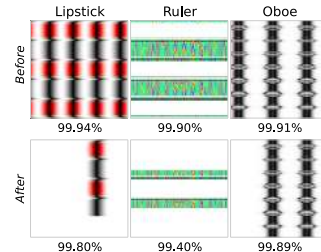


Figure 10. *Before*: CPPN-encoded images with repeated patterns. *After*: Manually removing repeated elements suggests that such repetition increases confidence scores.

The low-performing band of classes in Fig. 7 (class numbers 157-286) are dogs and cats, which are overrepresented in the ImageNet dataset (i.e. there are many more classes of cats than classes of cars). One possible explanation for why images in this band receive low confidence scores is that the network is tuned to identify many specific types of dogs and cats. Therefore, it ends up having more units dedicated to this image type than others. In other words, the size of the dataset of cats and dogs it has been trained on is larger than

for other categories, meaning it is less overfit, and thus more difficult to fool. If true, this explanation means that larger datasets are a way to ameliorate the problem of DNNs being easily fooled. An alternate, though not mutually exclusive, explanation is that, because there are more cat and dog classes, the EA had difficulty finding an image that scores high in a specific dog category (e.g. Japanese spaniel), but low in any other related categories (e.g. Blenheim spaniel), which is necessary to produce a high confidence given that the final DNN layer is softmax. This explanation suggests that datasets with more classes can help ameliorate fooling.

### 3.5. Images that fool one DNN generalize to others

The results of the previous section suggest that there are discriminative features of a class of images that DNNs learn and evolution exploits. One question is whether different DNNs learn the same features for each class, or whether each trained DNN learns different discriminative features. One way to shed light on that question is to see if images that fool one DNN also fool another. To test that, we evolved CPPN-encoded images with one DNN ( $DNN_A$ ) and then input these images to another DNN ( $DNN_B$ ). We tested two cases: (1)  $DNN_A$  and  $DNN_B$  have identical architectures and training, and differ only in their randomized initializations; and (2)  $DNN_A$  and  $DNN_B$  have different DNN architectures, but are trained on the same dataset. We performed this test for both MNIST and ImageNet DNNs.

Images were evolved that are given  $\geq 99.99\%$  confidence scores by both  $DNN_A$  and  $DNN_B$ . Thus, some general properties of the DNNs are exploited by the CPPN-encoded EA. However, there are also images specifically fine-tuned to score high on  $DNN_A$ , but not on  $DNN_B$ . See the supplementary material for more detail and data.

### 3.6. Training networks to recognize fooling images

One might respond to the result that DNNs are easily fooled by saying that, while DNNs are easily fooled when images are optimized to produce high DNN confidence scores, the problem could be solved by simply changing the training regimen to include negative examples. In other words, a network could be retrained and told that the images that previously fooled it should not be considered members of any of the original classes, but instead should be recognized as a new “fooling images” class.

We tested that hypothesis with CPPN-encoded images on both MNIST and ImageNet DNNs. The process is as follows: We train  $DNN_1$  on a dataset (e.g. ImageNet), then evolve CPPN images that produce a high confidence score for  $DNN_1$  for the  $n$  classes in the dataset, then we take those images and add them to the dataset in a new class  $n + 1$ ; then we train  $DNN_2$  on this enlarged “+1” dataset; (optional) we repeat the process, but put the images that evolved for  $DNN_2$  in the  $n + 1$  category (a  $n + 2$  cate-

gory is unnecessary because any images that fool a DNN are “fooling images” and can thus go in the  $n + 1$  category). Specifically, to represent different types of images, each iteration we add to this  $n + 1$  category  $m$  images randomly sampled from both the first and last generations of multiple runs of evolution that produce high confidence images for  $DNN_i$ . Each evolution run on MNIST or ImageNet produces 20 and 2000 images respectively, with half from the first generation and half from the last. Error-rates for trained  $DNN_i$  are similar to  $DNN_1$  (supplementary material).

### 3.7. Training MNIST DNNs with fooling images

To make the  $n + 1$  class have the same number of images as other MNIST classes, the first iteration we add 6000 images to the training set (taken from 300 evolutionary runs). For each additional iteration, we add 1000 new images to the training set. The immunity of LeNet is not boosted by retraining it with fooling images as negative examples. Evolution still produces many unrecognizable images for  $DNN_2$  with confidence scores of 99.99%. Moreover, repeating the process for 15 iterations does not help (Fig. 11), even though  $DNN_{15}$ 's overrepresented 11th “fooling image class” contains 25% of the training set images.

### 3.8. Training ImageNet DNNs with fooling images

The original ILSVRC 2012 training dataset was extended with a 1001<sup>st</sup> class, to which we added 9000 images

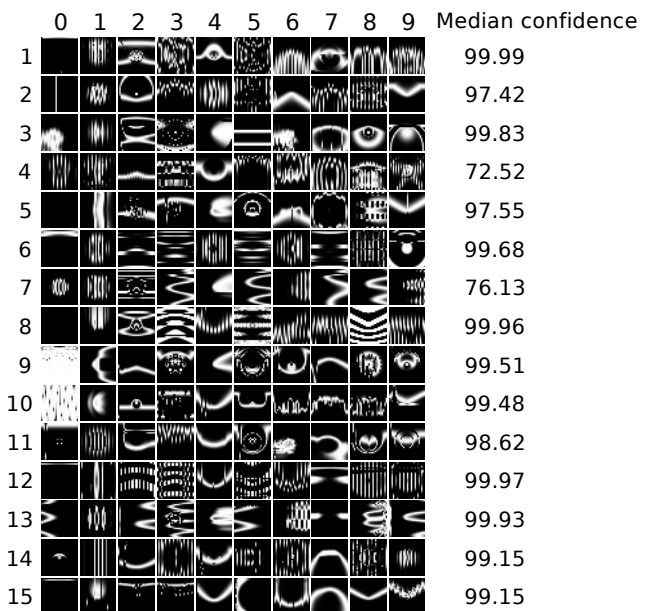


Figure 11. Training MNIST  $DNN_i$  with images that fooled MNIST  $DNN_1$  through  $DNN_{i-1}$  does not prevent evolution from finding new fooling images for  $DNN_i$ . Columns are digits. Rows are  $DNN_i$  for  $i = 1...15$ . Each row shows the 10 final, evolved images from one randomly selected run (of 30) per iteration. Medians are taken from images from all 30 runs.



that fooled  $DNN_1$ . That 7-fold increase over the 1300 images per ImageNet class is to emphasize the fooling images in training. Without this imbalance, training with negative examples did not prevent fooling; MNIST retraining did not benefit from over representing the fooling image class.

Contrary to the result in the previous section, for ImageNet models, evolution was less able to evolve high confidence images for  $DNN_2$  than  $DNN_1$ . The median confidence score significantly decreased from 88.1% for  $DNN_1$  to 11.7% for  $DNN_2$  (Fig. 12,  $p < 0.0001$  via Mann-Whitney U test). We suspect that ImageNet DNNs were better inoculated against being fooled than MNIST DNNs when trained with negative examples because it is easier to learn to tell CPPN images apart from natural images than it is to tell CPPN images from MNIST digits.

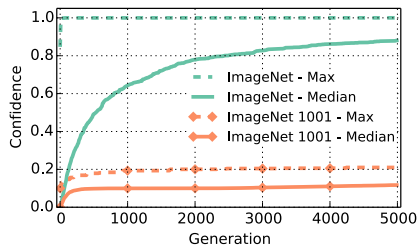


Figure 12. Training a new ImageNet DNN ( $DNN_2$ ) with images that fooled a previous DNN ( $DNN_1$ ) makes it significantly more difficult for evolution to produce high confidence images.

To see whether this  $DNN_2$  had learned features specific to the CPPN images that fooled  $DNN_1$ , or whether  $DNN_2$  learned features general to all CPPN images, even recognizable ones, we input recognizable CPPN images from PicBreeder.org to  $DNN_2$ .  $DNN_2$  correctly labeled 45 of 70 (64%, top-1 prediction) PicBreeder images as CPPN images, despite having never seen CPPN images like them before. The retrained model thus learned features generic to CPPN images, helping to explain why producing new images that fool  $DNN_2$  is more difficult.

### 3.9. Producing fooling images via gradient ascent

A different way to produce high confidence, yet mostly unrecognizable images is by using gradient ascent in pixel space [11, 26, 30]. We calculate the gradient of the posterior probability for a specific class — here, a softmax output unit of the DNN — with respect to the input image using backprop, and then we follow the gradient to increase a chosen unit’s activation. This technique follows [26], but whereas we aim to find images that produce high confidence classifications, they sought visually recognizable “class appearance models.” By employing L2-regularization, they produced images with some recognizable features of classes (e.g. dog faces, fox ears, and cup handles). However, their confidence values are not reported, so to determine the degree to which DNNs are fooled by these backpropagated

images, we replicated their work (with some minor changes, see supplementary material) and found that images can be made that are also classified by DNNs with 99.99% confidence, despite them being mostly unrecognizable (Fig. 13). These optimized images reveal a third method of fooling DNNs that produces qualitatively different examples than the two evolutionary methods in this paper.

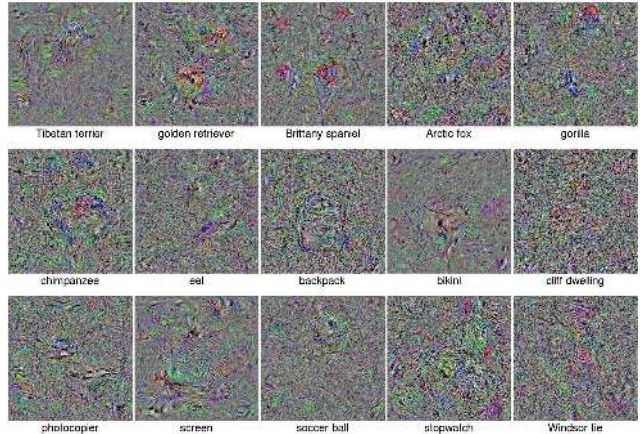


Figure 13. Images found by maximizing the softmax output for classes via gradient ascent [11, 26]. Optimization begins at the ImageNet mean (plus small Gaussian noise to break symmetry) and continues until the DNN confidence for the target class reaches 99.99%. Images are shown with the mean subtracted. Adding regularization makes images more recognizable but results in slightly lower confidence scores (see supplementary material).

## 4. Discussion

Our experiments could have led to very different results. One might have expected evolution to produce *very similar*, high confidence images for all classes, given that [30] recently showed that imperceptible changes to an image can cause a DNN to switch from classifying it as class A to class B (Fig. 14). Instead, evolution produced a tremendous diversity of images (Figs. 1, 8, 10, 15). Alternately, one might have predicted that evolution would produce *recognizable* images for each class given that, at least with the CPPN encoding, recognizable images have been evolved (Fig. 3). We note that we did not set out to produce unrecognizable images that fool DNNs. Instead, we had hoped the resultant images would be recognizable. A different prediction could have been that evolution would fail to produce high confidence scores at all because of local optima. It could also have been the case that unrecognizable images would have been given mostly low confidences across all classes instead of a very high confidence for one class.

In fact, none of these outcomes resulted. Instead, evolution produced high-confidence, yet unrecognizable images. Why? Our leading hypothesis centers around the difference between *discriminative models* and *generative models*. Dis-

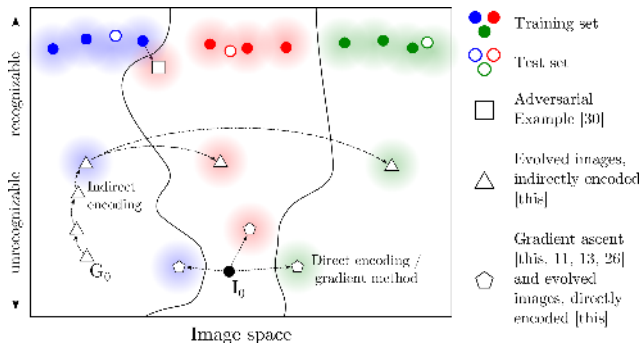


Figure 14. Interpreting our results and related research. (1) [30] found that an imperceptible change to a correctly classified natural image (blue dot) can result in an image (square) that a DNN classifies as an entirely different class (crossing the decision boundary). The difference between the original image and the modified one is imperceptible to human eyes. (2) It is possible to find high-confidence images (pentagon) using our directly encoded EA or gradient ascent optimization starting from a random or blank image ( $I_0$ ) [11, 13, 26]. These images have blurry, discriminative features of the represented classes, but do not look like images in the training set. (3) We found that indirectly encoded EAs can find high-confidence, regular images (triangles) that have discriminative features for a class, but are still far from the training set.

criminative models — or models that learn  $p(y|X)$  for a label vector  $y$  and input example  $X$  — like the models in this study, create decision boundaries that partition data into classification regions. In a high-dimensional input space, the area a discriminative model allocates to a class may be much larger than the area occupied by training examples for that class (see lower 80% of Fig. 14). Synthetic images far from the decision boundary and deep into a classification region may produce high confidence predictions even though they are far from the natural images in the class. This perspective is confirmed and further investigated by a related study [13] that shows large regions of high confidence exist in certain discriminative models due to a combination of their locally linear nature and high-dimensional input space.

In contrast, a generative model that represents the complete joint density  $p(y, X)$  would enable computing not only  $p(y|X)$ , but also  $p(X)$ . Such models may be more difficult to fool because fooling images could be recognized by their low marginal probability  $p(X)$ , and the DNN’s confidence in a label prediction for such images could be discounted when  $p(X)$  is low. Unfortunately, current generative models do not scale well [3] to the high-dimensionality of datasets like ImageNet, so testing to what extent they may be fooled must wait for advances in generative models.

In this paper we focus on the fact that there exist images that DNNs declare with near-certainty to be of a class, but are unrecognizable as such. However, it is also interesting that some generated images are recognizable as members of their target class once the class label is known. Fig. 15 juxtaposes examples with natural images from the target class.

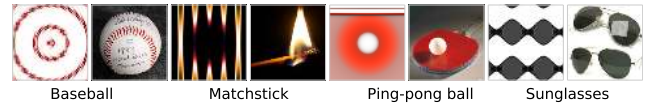


Figure 15. Some evolved images do resemble their target class. In each pair, an evolved, CPPN-encoded image (*left*) is shown with a training set image from the target class (*right*).

Other examples include the chain-link fence, computer keyboard, digital clock, bagel, strawberry, ski mask, spotlight, and monarch butterfly of Fig. 8. To test whether these images might be accepted as art, we submitted them to a selective art competition at the University of Wyoming Art Museum, where they were accepted and displayed (supplementary material). A companion paper explores how these successes suggest combining DNNs with evolutionary algorithms to make open-ended, creative search algorithms [23].

The CPPN EA presented can also be considered a novel technique to visualize the features learned by DNNs. The diversity of patterns generated for the same class over different runs (Fig. 9) indicates the diversity of features learned for that class. Such feature-visualization tools help researchers understand what DNNs have learned and whether features can be transferred to other tasks [32].

One interesting implication of the fact that DNNs are easily fooled is that such false positives could be exploited wherever DNNs are deployed for recognizing images or other types of data. For example, one can imagine a security camera that relies on face or voice recognition being compromised. Swapping white-noise for a face, fingerprints, or a voice might be especially pernicious since other humans nearby might not recognize that someone is attempting to compromise the system. Another area of concern could be image-based search engine rankings: background patterns that a visitor does not notice could fool a DNN-driven search engine into thinking a page is about an altogether different topic. The fact that DNNs are increasingly used in a wide variety of industries, including safety-critical ones such as driverless cars, raises the possibility of costly exploits via techniques that generate fooling images.

## 5. Conclusion

We have demonstrated that discriminative DNN models are easily fooled in that they classify many unrecognizable images with near-certainty as members of a recognizable class. Two different ways of encoding evolutionary algorithms produce two qualitatively different types of unrecognizable “fooling images”, and gradient ascent produces a third. That DNNs see these objects as near-perfect examples of recognizable images sheds light on remaining differences between the way DNNs and humans recognize objects, raising questions about the true generalization capabilities of DNNs and the potential for costly exploits of solutions that use DNNs.



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