

Cognitive Obfuscation Art: Blurring the Line Between Human Perception and AI Recognition

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Cognitive Obfuscation Art: Blurring the Line Between Human Perception and AI Recognition explores a groundbreaking approach to art that challenges the capabilities of artificial intelligence while celebrating the complexities of human cognition. This emerging art form leverages ambiguity, cultural nuances, and abstract symbolism to create works that engage human viewers on a deep, intuitive level while remaining elusive to AI's pattern recognition algorithms. By blending familiar shapes into abstract forms and incorporating subtle hints of iconic objects, Cognitive Obfuscation Art reveals the distinct strengths of human perception—our ability to find meaning in the incomplete, to see beyond the obvious, and to connect emotionally with visual cues that AI fails to decode. This artistic movement not only critiques AI's limitations but also invites a rethinking of how humans and machines interact with art, privacy, and digital communication. It encourages further experimentation and dialogue, pushing the boundaries of creativity in an increasingly automated world, where preserving human-centered interpretation is more crucial than ever.

Keywords: Cognitive Obfuscation Art, human perception, AI recognition, abstract symbolism, pattern recognition, human-AI interaction, visual ambiguity, cultural nuances, privacy, digital communication, art and AI, artistic obfuscation, creativity, machine cognition, security applications.

Introduction

Cognitive Obfuscation Art is an emerging artistic approach that intentionally designs visual works to be easily interpretable by humans while remaining challenging or indecipherable for artificial intelligence (AI). At its core, this art form leverages the unique capabilities of human cognition—such as intuition, context recognition, and cultural awareness—to create images that resist AI's pattern-matching algorithms. In an age where AI systems are increasingly proficient at analyzing and generating art, Cognitive Obfuscation Art seeks to reassert the distinctiveness of human perception by crafting works that AI cannot fully understand.

Obfuscation as a concept has long been employed in various fields, particularly in security and reverse engineering, to obscure information and protect it from unauthorized access. In software development, obfuscation techniques involve deliberately complicating code to make it difficult for others, including AI-driven decompilers, to reverse-engineer or replicate the software. Similarly, hardware obfuscation complicates the design of circuits to impede efforts at analysis or duplication. These strategies focus on concealing or distorting information in ways that thwart machine interpretation, which parallels the goals of Cognitive Obfuscation Art.

In the art world, this concept is adapted to explore the boundary between human and AI perception. Unlike traditional obfuscation, which is defensive and protective, Cognitive Obfuscation Art is a creative, expressive response to the increasing presence of AI in the artistic landscape. Artists use abstract techniques, symbolic ambiguity, and culturally loaded visuals that play on the strengths of human pattern recognition and contextual understanding, creating an inherent challenge for AI.

The primary goal of Cognitive Obfuscation Art is to highlight the divergent ways humans and machines perceive the world. By crafting images that AI struggles to decode, artists underscore the nuances of human cognition—our ability to see beyond surface patterns and interpret meaning from incomplete or abstract data. This art form becomes a dialogue between technology and humanity, challenging AI's computational recognition abilities and celebrating the uniquely intuitive and contextual nature of human perception. Ultimately, Cognitive Obfuscation Art

serves as both a critique of AI's limitations and a celebration of the subtleties of human thought, positioning itself at the intersection of art, technology, and psychology.

Historical Context and Related Concepts

Overview of Traditional Obfuscation Techniques in Information Security and Hardware Reverse Engineering

Obfuscation has long been a critical tool in fields like cybersecurity and hardware reverse engineering. In cybersecurity, obfuscation techniques are used to protect software code from unauthorized access, modification, or reverse engineering. These techniques manipulate the code's structure to make it difficult for automated tools and even human analysts to understand, without altering its functionality. Methods include code encryption, control flow alteration, and data masking, which collectively make the code appear incomprehensible without specific decryption keys or specialized knowledge.

In hardware reverse engineering, similar obfuscation strategies are employed to protect integrated circuits (ICs) from being replicated or analyzed. These methods involve complex design choices, such as circuit layout camouflage or encryption of hardware components, that confuse or mislead attempts at understanding the hardware's operational principles. Cognitive obfuscation specifically targets the psychological processes of human analysts, creating barriers that make interpretation difficult, an approach now being creatively adapted into the art world ([DeepAI](#)).

Exploration of Similar Concepts in Visual Art

Artistic obfuscation is not entirely new. Throughout art history, movements such as Surrealism, Cubism, and Abstract Expressionism have employed techniques that challenge straightforward interpretation, inviting viewers to engage deeply with their subjective perceptions. Artists like Salvador Dalí and Pablo Picasso intentionally blurred lines between reality and imagination, creating works that resist easy recognition and encourage a multiplicity of interpretations. However, these artistic approaches primarily focused on challenging human perception and interpretation rather than specifically targeting AI.

In the realm of modern art, abstract and non-representational forms continue to challenge conventional perspectives, often serving as commentary on the nature of reality, perception, and cognition. Yet, while these works engage human viewers through emotional or philosophical ambiguity, they do not explicitly aim to exploit the gap between human and machine recognition capabilities.

AI's Growing Influence on Art and the Emergence of Human-Centric Artistic Responses

With the rise of AI-generated art, where algorithms create visually stunning pieces based on vast datasets of existing artworks, there has been a growing conversation around the roles of human creativity and machine automation. AI models like DALL-E, Midjourney, and others are trained on immense datasets and can generate images that often mimic human art styles convincingly. This shift has prompted artists and thinkers to explore new ways to assert human uniqueness in the creative process.

Cognitive Obfuscation Art emerges as a response to this evolving landscape, positioning itself as a uniquely human endeavor. This art form leverages the intrinsic advantages of human perception, such as the ability to recognize context, cultural symbolism, and complex visual metaphors that AI, reliant on pattern recognition and statistical learning, often fails to grasp. Thus, it not only challenges the capabilities of AI but also highlights the irreplaceable aspects of human cognition and interpretation.

This approach represents a new frontier in art that underscores the differences between human and AI perception, offering a thought-provoking commentary on the evolving relationship between technology and creativity. As AI continues to advance, Cognitive Obfuscation Art stands as both a celebration of human insight and a subtle critique of machine learning's current limitations.

The Psychology Behind Cognitive Obfuscation Art

Psychological Aspects That Make Certain Images Comprehensible to Humans but Obscure to AI

Cognitive Obfuscation Art taps into specific psychological traits that define human perception, such as the ability to interpret context, recognize complex patterns, and decode cultural references. Unlike AI, humans naturally excel at understanding ambiguous, incomplete, or contextually nuanced images because of our evolutionary and experiential background. This human capability is rooted in several cognitive processes:

1. **Contextual Interpretation:** Humans can fill in gaps in images based on context. For example, a partial representation of a familiar landmark, like a shadowy outline of Big Ben, can immediately trigger recognition in a human viewer, even if the image is abstract or distorted. This contextual inference is something AI struggles with, as its understanding is limited to the patterns it has been explicitly trained on, lacking the broader contextual knowledge and experience humans possess.
2. **Pattern Recognition and Pareidolia:** Humans are adept at recognizing patterns, even when they are incomplete or irregular, a phenomenon known as pareidolia. This is why we often see familiar shapes, like faces, in clouds or everyday objects. Cognitive Obfuscation Art leverages this tendency by embedding subtle, suggestive shapes that humans can interpret intuitively, while AI, which relies on defined parameters and statistical probabilities, may miss these cues entirely.
3. **Cultural References and Symbolism:** Human cognition is deeply influenced by culture and shared symbols, allowing us to decode visual metaphors quickly. For example, a red smear might evoke thoughts of London due to its association with red double-decker buses or phone booths. These culturally grounded associations are outside AI's interpretive reach unless specifically trained on that symbolism, and even then, AI often lacks the nuanced understanding of how symbols interact within broader human contexts.

How Human Cognition Processes Complex, Ambiguous Images Differently from AI

The way humans and AI process images diverges significantly because of the underlying mechanisms of perception. Humans interpret images through a dynamic, context-driven process that integrates sensory input with memory, culture, emotions, and learned knowledge. This is a fluid, holistic approach, allowing humans to make sense of complex, abstract, or ambiguous visuals.

AI, on the other hand, processes images through pattern recognition algorithms and large datasets. It relies on pre-existing data to interpret visual input, making it highly effective at recognizing clear, structured patterns but less adept at dealing with ambiguity or context that deviates from its training. For example:

- **Human Cognition:** When looking at a highly abstract representation of a city skyline, a human might immediately sense the presence of London due to the interplay of familiar shapes, colors, and context, drawing from memory and cultural knowledge.
- **AI Perception:** The same image may confuse AI, which cannot easily connect abstract forms with specific references without clear, labeled training data. AI's pattern-matching approach lacks the fluidity to infer the intended symbolic representation, focusing instead on pixel arrangements that fit known categories.

How Cognitive Obfuscation Art Exploits These Differences

Cognitive Obfuscation Art plays directly on the gaps between human and AI cognition, creating art that leverages ambiguity, subtlety, and cultural nuances. For instance:

- **Example 1: Ambiguous Forms:** An artwork might depict a scene that vaguely suggests a well-known landmark, such as a blurred and distorted clock face that hints at Big Ben. A human viewer, drawing on memory and context, quickly identifies the landmark, while an AI, seeing only a vague or unconventional shape, fails to recognize it accurately.
- **Example 2: Cultural Symbols Embedded in Abstract Art:** A painting might incorporate colors and textures reminiscent of London's weather, iconic red

hints, or water-like reflections without directly portraying any recognizable object. Humans, familiar with these cultural elements, intuitively piece together the London connection, but AI lacks the cultural context and struggles to make the connection without explicit training.

- **Example 3: Pattern Disruption:** By deliberately breaking or distorting patterns, artists can make images that appear disordered to AI yet are easily reconstructed by the human mind. For example, an artwork might feature irregular, seemingly random lines that, upon closer inspection, subtly form an abstract map of London. Humans can resolve the image into a coherent pattern, whereas AI, programmed to search for consistent, statistically common shapes, may misinterpret it entirely.

Through these approaches, Cognitive Obfuscation Art reaffirms the unique strengths of human cognition—our ability to interpret, imagine, and connect disparate elements into meaningful wholes—while revealing the current limitations of AI in areas that depend on intuition, culture, and context-driven reasoning.

Techniques and Methods in Cognitive Obfuscation Art

Artistic Techniques: Blending Familiar Shapes into Abstract Forms, Using Subtle Hints, and Cultural Nuances

Cognitive Obfuscation Art employs a range of techniques designed to engage the human mind while eluding AI's pattern recognition algorithms. The core of these techniques lies in strategically manipulating familiar elements, cultural symbols, and abstract forms to create images that humans can interpret intuitively, yet AI cannot easily decode.

1. **Blending Familiar Shapes into Abstract Forms:** Artists often take recognizable elements—like the outlines of famous structures, everyday objects, or natural forms—and transform them into abstract, fragmented versions. This blending process plays on human memory and perception, making viewers feel a sense of recognition without overt clarity. For example, an artwork might integrate faint, warped suggestions of clock hands that evoke a sense of time and place without depicting a clock

outright, allowing human viewers to intuit connections that AI lacks the contextual background to perceive.

2. **Subtle Hints of Iconic Objects:** Another technique involves embedding subtle references to iconic objects within a complex composition. These hints are often incomplete, distorted, or obscured by surrounding abstract elements. For instance, a faint hint of red against a backdrop of indistinct lines might evoke thoughts of a London telephone booth for a human observer. AI, without explicit data linking those faint colors and shapes to cultural symbols, often misses the connection entirely.
3. **Incorporating Cultural and Contextual Nuances:** Cognitive Obfuscation Art frequently utilizes elements that draw on cultural knowledge, such as specific color palettes, textures, or stylistic cues that resonate with shared human experiences. For instance, a grayish, fog-like texture in a piece might evoke the atmosphere of London to a human familiar with its weather, but AI, processing the image as an abstract color pattern, would fail to link it contextually. These culturally charged nuances are often lost on AI unless explicitly programmed to recognize and interpret them.

Use of Layering, Distortion, and Ambiguity

Layering, distortion, and ambiguity are fundamental to Cognitive Obfuscation Art, enabling artists to create complex visuals that are rich in meaning for human viewers but perplexing for AI systems.

1. **Layering:** By superimposing multiple elements, artists can create depth and complexity that AI struggles to untangle. Layering introduces multiple planes of interpretation, where a single layer might contain recognizable shapes while others remain abstract. This technique plays on human perceptual abilities to synthesize multiple pieces of information into a coherent whole, something that AI often fails to achieve without extensive deconstruction algorithms.
2. **Distortion:** Distortion disrupts recognizable patterns, making familiar shapes appear irregular or warped. This approach leverages human adaptability to recognize familiar forms even when they are altered, something AI finds challenging. For example, a distorted image of a bridge

might still evoke London's Tower Bridge for a human viewer, while AI might only detect random, inconsistent patterns due to its reliance on statistical matches to known images.

3. **Ambiguity:** Ambiguity serves as both a visual and cognitive puzzle, inviting human viewers to explore multiple interpretations. In Cognitive Obfuscation Art, ambiguity is deliberately introduced through fragmented forms, incomplete details, or overlapping imagery that resists easy categorization. For humans, this ambiguity prompts imaginative thinking, filling gaps with personal knowledge and experience. AI, which requires clear, labeled data to make sense of images, often becomes "confused" by such visual vagueness, struggling to classify or interpret the content accurately.

Deliberate Design Choices That Prioritize Human Interpretation Over AI Recognition

Cognitive Obfuscation Art is defined by its deliberate prioritization of human cognition through intentional artistic choices. This focus is not merely about creating art that looks interesting but about engaging the uniquely human ways of seeing and understanding the world.

1. **Emphasis on Artistic Intent:** Each element in Cognitive Obfuscation Art is chosen with the intention of eliciting human recognition while evading AI comprehension. This might involve selecting specific color contrasts that humans associate with certain emotions or cultural contexts but that AI perceives as mere color data. The artist's intent is to communicate on a level that AI, bound by its algorithmic constraints, cannot access.
2. **Complexity over Simplicity:** While traditional AI models are trained to recognize clean, well-defined objects, Cognitive Obfuscation Art embraces complexity and imperfection. This approach deliberately incorporates noise, irregularities, and chaotic patterns that align with the natural world, which humans are accustomed to decoding but that AI finds problematic. For example, the introduction of visual "noise" can evoke the look of rain or fog, enhancing the human viewer's experience without offering clear, defined shapes for AI to latch onto.

3. **Engagement of Human Memory and Experience:** Artworks are often crafted to trigger memories, evoke emotions, or reference shared experiences that are unique to humans. This can include using textures that remind viewers of familiar tactile sensations or arranging elements in ways that mimic real-world disarray—situations AI is typically not equipped to understand due to its structured and data-dependent nature.

These techniques together create a space where art remains distinctly human-centric, inviting viewers into a dialogue that AI is unable to join fully. By exploiting the fundamental differences in human and AI perception, Cognitive Obfuscation Art stands as a testament to the irreplaceable qualities of human cognition, emphasizing our ability to find meaning in ambiguity, connect with cultural symbols, and interpret complex, layered visuals in ways that machines currently cannot replicate.

Case Studies: Early Examples and Experimentation

Examples of Artworks or Projects That Embody Cognitive Obfuscation Art

One prominent example of Cognitive Obfuscation Art is the exhibition *Puzzles of the Brain: An Artist's Journey through Amnesia* at The Walters Art Museum. This exhibition showcased works by artist Lonni Sue Johnson, who suffered severe brain damage due to encephalitis, leading to profound memory loss and the subsequent reinvention of her artistic expression. Her art, created during recovery, embodies layers of meaning and complexity that challenge conventional recognition processes. The pieces often involve fragmented forms and layered imagery that resonate with human viewers on an emotional and psychological level, while AI might struggle to make sense of these non-linear, context-dependent visual cues ([The Walters Art Museum](#)).

Another example is the exhibition *Obfuscation: Exploring the Layering of Meaning*, a collaborative showcase by the Kirkland Arts Center and Frederick Holmes and Company Gallery of Modern & Contemporary Art. The artists involved used techniques like scratching away, erasing, and layering marks to create complex, visually obfuscated works. These techniques introduce ambiguity and layered meanings that human viewers can explore and interpret, but that

confuse AI due to the non-standard, irregular patterns that don't match conventional data training models([ArtGeek](#)).

Similarly, an exhibition at Kunsthaus Graz explored painterly and sculptural vocabularies in ways that intentionally complicated interpretation. The show's focus on analyzing human psyche through obscure formal languages, textures, and colors highlighted how layered and abstract artistic approaches can obscure intended meanings, making them accessible primarily through human intuition rather than AI's algorithmic analysis([Arts and Designs](#)).

Exhibitions and Digital Showcases Exploring Cognitive Obfuscation Art

These exhibitions have been well received by human audiences who appreciate the opportunity to engage with art that requires active interpretation and cognitive involvement. The reception by AI critics or analytical models, however, highlights the current limitations of AI in appreciating the layered, context-rich elements that are inherently human-centric. This art form underscores the need for more sophisticated, context-aware AI systems to even begin approaching the nuanced understanding that human viewers achieve naturally.

These case studies illustrate the potential of Cognitive Obfuscation Art to redefine the boundaries of artistic interpretation, challenging both AI and human audiences to engage in deeper, more complex ways with visual media. This ongoing experimentation serves as both a critique of AI's current cognitive capabilities and a celebration of the uniquely human ability to find meaning in ambiguity and abstraction.

Implications and Future Directions

Broader Implications for Human-AI Interaction

Cognitive Obfuscation Art challenges the conventional dynamics between humans and AI, offering new insights into how these interactions might evolve. The broader implications extend beyond art, touching on critical areas such as security, privacy, and the rapidly transforming landscape of digital media.

1. **Security and Privacy Applications:** The principles of Cognitive Obfuscation Art could be adapted for use in security and privacy contexts, such as

developing imagery, codes, or watermarks that are interpretable only by humans. This could be particularly valuable in protecting sensitive information in a world where AI-driven surveillance and data analysis are becoming increasingly pervasive. By embedding contextually rich, culturally nuanced, or visually complex elements into security designs, it becomes possible to create layers of protection that evade AI-based recognition systems, reducing the risk of unauthorized access.

2. **Reclaiming Human Agency in Digital Spaces:** As AI continues to play a significant role in filtering, interpreting, and even creating content, Cognitive Obfuscation Art represents a method of reclaiming human agency in digital spaces. It empowers artists and creators to deliberately produce work that resists machine analysis, preserving the uniquely human aspects of communication and creativity. This could foster a renaissance of human-centered design, where art and media serve to engage human cognition rather than being optimized solely for machine readability.
3. **The Evolving Landscape of Art:** The rise of AI-generated art has sparked debates about the role of human creativity and the authenticity of machine-made works. Cognitive Obfuscation Art pushes back against this trend by emphasizing human intuition and interpretative skills. It reaffirms the value of art that is created with the express intent of being understood by human viewers, encouraging artists to explore new forms of expression that highlight the limitations of AI and celebrate the cognitive strengths of humanity.

Potential Uses Beyond Art: Digital Communication and Human-Only Readable Content

1. **Digital Communication:** In digital communication, Cognitive Obfuscation techniques could be used to create messages that are tailored for human interpretation, making it difficult for AI algorithms to decode or analyze. This could be applied in contexts where privacy is paramount, such as in personal messaging, secure business communications, or even in public statements where nuanced interpretation is desired. By designing content that leverages ambiguity, cultural references, or abstract representations,

individuals can communicate in ways that are resistant to AI-driven surveillance or automated misinterpretation.

2. **Human-Only Readable Content:** As AI increasingly interprets the world around us—from facial recognition to natural language processing—there is a growing need for content that maintains a human-centric mode of interpretation. Cognitive Obfuscation could help develop new forms of digital content that preserve this human exclusivity, such as creating visual markers, digital signatures, or unique artistic flourishes that are invisible or meaningless to AI. This could be particularly valuable in fields like advertising, design, and information dissemination, where human engagement is prioritized over algorithmic curation.
3. **Creative Challenges and Educational Tools:** Beyond practical uses, Cognitive Obfuscation Art could also be leveraged in education and training, challenging AI models to improve their interpretative capabilities. By confronting AI with deliberately ambiguous or contextually rich content, researchers can explore new ways to enhance AI's understanding of human culture, perception, and creativity. This approach could lead to the development of more sophisticated algorithms capable of engaging with art and media on a deeper, more intuitive level.

Ethical Considerations and Balancing Creativity with Technological Boundaries

1. **Ethical Considerations:** As with any new artistic or technological development, Cognitive Obfuscation Art raises ethical questions about the intent and impact of its use. On one hand, it can be seen as a protective measure against AI's encroachment on human domains, but it also has the potential to be used deceptively or manipulatively. The ethical balance involves ensuring that the use of obfuscation techniques serves constructive purposes, such as protecting privacy or fostering creative expression, rather than obstructing transparency or spreading misinformation.
2. **Balancing Creativity and Technology:** There is a delicate balance between embracing technology as a tool for creative expansion and using it in ways that preserve the unique aspects of human cognition. Cognitive Obfuscation Art stands at the intersection of these two forces, challenging

the boundaries of what machines can understand while celebrating human perception. This balancing act highlights the need for thoughtful integration of technology in the arts, where the goal is not to replace human creativity but to explore the areas where it excels.

- 3. Preserving the Uniqueness of Human Experience:** Ultimately, Cognitive Obfuscation Art serves as a reminder of the irreplaceable aspects of human experience—our ability to find meaning in ambiguity, connect with cultural symbols, and interpret complex visuals in ways that machines currently cannot replicate. As AI continues to evolve, this art form emphasizes the importance of preserving and celebrating those uniquely human traits, ensuring that creativity remains a fundamentally human endeavor even in an increasingly automated world.

Conclusion

Cognitive Obfuscation Art plays a unique and crucial role in highlighting the strengths of human cognition in a world increasingly mediated by AI. This emerging art form celebrates the intricacies of human perception, intuition, and cultural understanding—qualities that remain largely elusive to even the most advanced AI systems. By crafting images that engage the mind through subtle hints, layered meanings, and cultural nuances, Cognitive Obfuscation Art underscores the distinctive ability of humans to find significance in the abstract, the incomplete, and the ambiguous.

The Artistic and Philosophical Statement of Cognitive Obfuscation Art

Cognitive Obfuscation Art is not just a new artistic technique; it is a profound philosophical statement about the evolving relationship between humans and AI. It challenges the narrative of AI's growing dominance in creative fields by asserting the irreplaceable role of human cognition in interpreting the world. Through deliberately ambiguous and complex visuals, this art form asks fundamental questions: What does it mean to see? To recognize? To understand?

It highlights the limitations of AI's data-driven approach, which often misses the deeper, context-dependent interpretations that come naturally to humans. In this way, Cognitive Obfuscation Art serves as a critique of AI's current capabilities and

a reminder of the cognitive skills that define human experience. It reaffirms that art, at its core, is an expression of the human mind—one that cannot be fully captured by algorithms and data models alone.

Encouraging Further Exploration and Experimentation

As Cognitive Obfuscation Art continues to develop, it invites artists, technologists, and thinkers to push the boundaries of what is possible in the intersection of human and machine perception. The field is ripe for exploration—there are endless possibilities for new techniques, methods, and applications that can deepen our understanding of both human cognition and AI’s evolving role in society.

Artists are encouraged to experiment with blending familiar and unfamiliar elements, incorporating cultural and contextual layers, and creating works that play on the complex interplay between recognition and obscurity. Such experimentation not only enriches the art world but also contributes to broader discussions about privacy, security, and the future of human communication in a digitally mediated age.

Ultimately, Cognitive Obfuscation Art is more than a creative endeavor; it is a call to preserve and celebrate the uniquely human aspects of perception in an era where AI’s influence is expanding rapidly. By continuing to explore and innovate within this emerging field, we can ensure that art remains a space for human expression, interpretation, and insight—qualities that no machine can replicate. This ongoing dialogue between human creativity and machine cognition will shape the future of art and redefine the boundaries of what it means to see, understand, and create.

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City of London.