## **Sudden Stillness**



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http://www.sudden-stillness.com http://tao-of-digital-photography.blogspot.com



My creative process is very simple: I take pictures of what calms my soul.

There may be other, more poetic words that may be used to define the "pattern" that connects my images, but the simplest meta-pattern is this:

I capture moments in time and space in which a peace washes gently over me, and during which I sense a deep interconnectedness between my soul and the world.

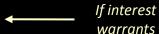
Not Cartier-Bresson's "Decisive Moment," but rather a...

Sudden Stillness

- Who am I?
- What is my approach?
- Three Portfolios: On the art of the unexpected
- Comparing my younger and older "eyes" / "I"s
- Two recent "experiments"
- "The Skies of Skye" & "The Ring o'Brodgar"
- Stages of growth in photography

If interest warrants

East / West / Complexity ... photography



- Concluding thoughts / sneak peek
- Questions?
- Sample "Blurbs" / Sample Prints

Who am I?

Short bio / recent photo vitae

#### Bio

Whatever I may know about light, tone, texture, form, and composition I learned by watching my dad.

He was not a photographer, But was an artist par excellence

- Born 1960 / Glen Cove, Long Island, NY
- First camera: 1970
   Polaroid instamatic / Christmas gift
   First picture: (abstract?) closeup of my right toe
- First "serious" camera: 1982 Canon AE-1
- Ph.D. Theoretical Physics, 1988
   Complex Adaptive Systems
- First digital camera: 1998
   Nikon Coolpix 950
- First "serious" DSLR: 2002 Canon D60
- First Solo Show: 2007
   Coral Gables, Florida
- First Lenswork portfolio: 2007
   DVD Edition #71 / July-August
- Joined first art co-op: 2008
   One of 14 founding members of Lorton Arts, VA

#### **Recent Photo Vitae**

- "Worlds Within Worlds" Exhibit (2009-2010)
   American Physics Center
- 1<sup>st</sup> Prize, Juried photo exhibit (2009)
   RoHo Photo Gallery, Cincinnati, OH
- Photography Workhouse Society, 2008/09 Lorton Arts, VA
- Featured photographer (*Lenswork* Magazine)
   LOOK3 Photo Festival, Charlotttesville, VA, 2009
- Wall calendar and datebook
   Change Your Mind, Change Your Life
   by Wayne Dyer (Amber Lotus Publishing, 2010)
- Featured Artist / After Words
   Northern Virginia magazine, August 2009
- "Micro Worlds" portfolio
   Lenswork magazine, Print & Extended Edition
   Issue #76 (May-June, 2008)
- Merit award, single-image contest Black & White magazine (2008)
- Semi-finalist, Photographer's Forum magazine Annual Contest, 2008
- Honorable mention
   Photo Techniques, portfolio contest, 2008

- Solo Exhibit (32 Photographs, 2007)
   Books & Books / Gallery, Coral Gables, FL
- Honorable Mention
   Photo Techniques, Portfolio Contest, 2007
- "Spirit & Light" portfolio
   Lenswork magazine, Extended Edition
   Issue #71 (July-August, 2007)
- Winner of book contest, 2007
   UK Black & White magazine and Envisage Books
- "Entropic Melodies Series" portfolio Focus Magazine, April 2006
- Merit of Excellence (Abstracts)
   2007 B&W Spider Awards
- Portfolio contest winner
   Black & White magazine, Feb 2006
- Merit award, Abstract Exposure
   Oct 2006 juried on-line exhibit
- Finalist, Photographer's Forum magazine Annual Contest, 2005
- Third Place, photo contest Sybex Publishing gallery contest, 2005

#### What is my approach?

From one of my most heavily commented Blog entries, August 26, 2007

Written in response to a sincere email from
a young photography student who asked:

"What advice do you have for someone trying to become a photographer?"

→ Seven core lessons (I've thus far learned)

1. Never stop taking pictures

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- 2. Forget about things and instead focus on processes and feelings

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- 3. Never take to heart what others tell you about your work; Keep taking the pictures that are important to <u>you</u>

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- 5. Never stop learning from the masters;
  Always keep looking over their images and those of traditional artists...
  ... take away what is most meaningful to <u>you</u>

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- 7. Always be mindful of Louis Pasteur's adage (and a favorite of Ansel Adams):

"Chance favors the prepared mind"

What is my approach?

Ten "epiphanous" photographs

In *Lenswork* Issue #63 (March-April, 2006), editor Brooks Jensen has a wonderful essay that begins with the question:

"If you were going to demonstrate to a non-photographer the nature of fine art photography and why you are so passionate about it, which ten photographs would you show them?"

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#1: Capitol Reef, Utah (1962)
Minor White

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#2: Monolith, The Face of Half Dome, Yosemite National Park, 1927 Ansel Adams

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#3: *Greece*, 1961
Henri Cartier-Bresson

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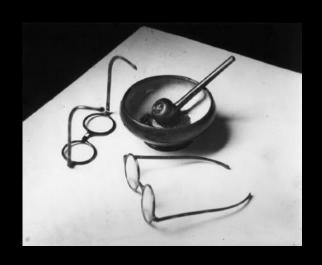
"If you were going to demonstrate to a non-photographer the nature of fine art photography and why you are so passionate about it, which ten photographs would you show them?"



#4: Pepper No. 30, 1930 Edward Weston

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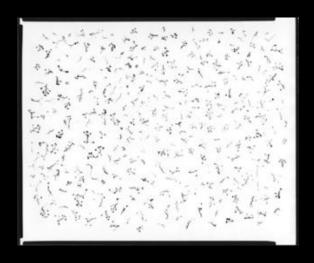
"If you were going to demonstrate to a non-photographer the nature of fine art photography and why you are so passionate about it, which ten photographs would you show them?"



#5: *Mondrian's Glasses and Pipe*, Paris, 1926 André Kertész

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#6: Ivy Tentacles on Glass, Chicago, 1952 Harry Callahan

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#7: Circular Chimney,
Antelope Canyon
Bruce Barnbaum

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#8: Rainbow over Potala Palace, Lhasa (Tibet, 1981) Galen Rowell

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#9: *Jerome* (Arizona, 1949)
Aaron Siskind

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#10: At the Janaceks (1948)
Josef Sudek

On the art of the unexpected

Portfolio 1: "Seeing the Light"

### National Cathedral ("Seeing the Light")





Participated in juried exhibition at the Washington National Cathedral (2002)

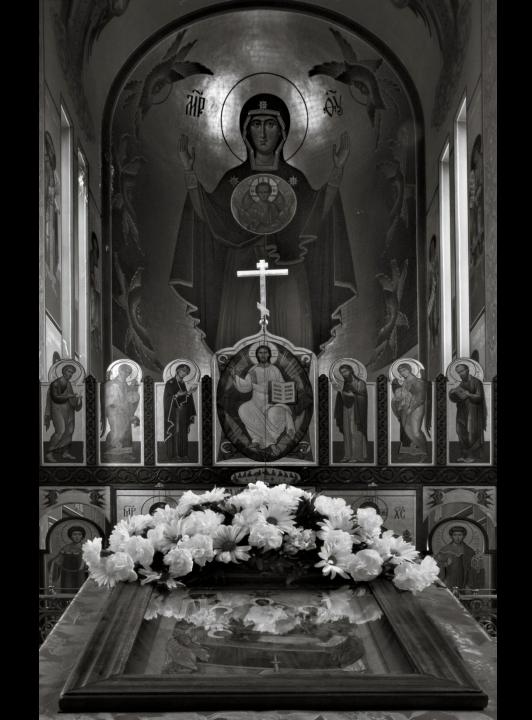
On my way to the National Cathedral, would always pass St. Nicholas, a Russian Orthodox church on Massachusetts Ave, NW

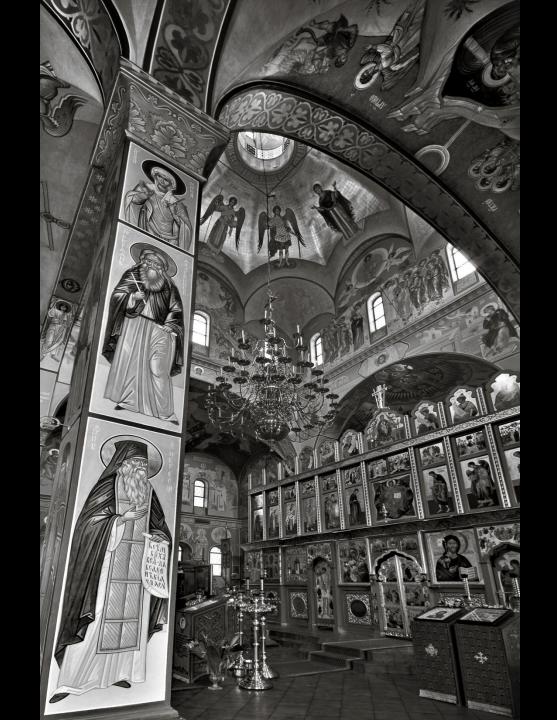
Years later, during a "lull" between projects, decided to visit St. Nicholas

That was the start of a 6 month project that took me to many Orthodox churches in the area, and back in NY

"Spirit & Light" portfolio Lenswork, Extended DVD Edition Issue #71 (July-August, 2007)











On the art of the unexpected

Portfolio 2: "Micro Worlds"

### A "planned" day of rocks & water variety



Came home from a long photo-safari at Great Falls, during which I took many soon-to-be-forgotten photos of the usual rocks-and-water variety

Sat down to dinner with my family

As my fork was about to pierce the skin of a potato, my wife nonchalantly placed two small acrylic candle holders with *trapped air bubbles inside* on the table

My "eye" was consumed for the next 4 months

"Micro Worlds" portfolio

Lenswork, Print & Extended DVD Editions
Issue #76 (May-June, 2008)











#### **Outline of Lecture**

On the art of the unexpected

Portfolio 3: "Elements of Order"

#### A "nothing happening" day on vacation



Went to Coral Gables, Florida to visit in-laws with the kids.

Everything was *right*, all the equipment worked, the lenses were clean, the camera bag had exactly what I needed, the light was right, the location was right, beautiful vistas were all around me, and ... *Nothing*. *Absolutely nothing*. No magic. No spark.

My wife suggested we go to a local park so the kids could feed the pelicans.

I almost refused to take the camera (!)

Solo show (30 prints)

Books & Books / Gallery

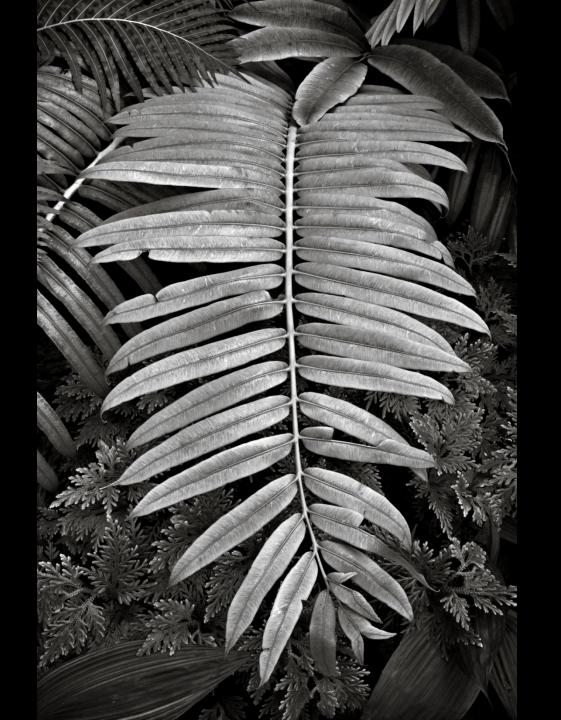
Coral Gables, Florida (Dec 2007)

First portfolio book (self-published)

Elements of Order (Blurb.com)













#### "Elements of Order"

## Elements of Order

### Imposed and Natural

Photographs by Andy Ilachinski



http://www.blurb.com/my/book/detail/170852

#### **Outline of Lecture**

Comparing my younger and older "eyes" / "I"s

Hawaii: 1980s vs. 2006

#### Hawaii: 1980s & 2006

- Made numerous trips before & during graduate school
- 1982 **–** 1987
- Canon AE-1 / color slide film



#### Hawaii: 1980s & 2006

- Went back for 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2006
- Canon D60 / 20D













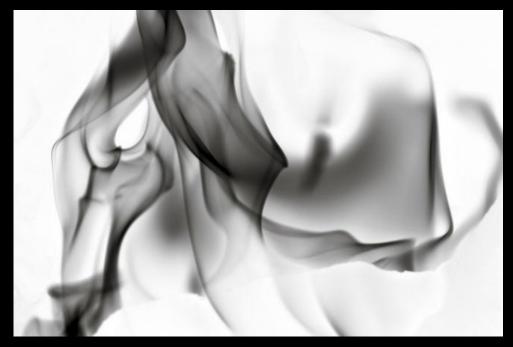
#### **Outline of Lecture**

Two recent "experiments"

Experiment #1: "Mystic Flame"

Experiment #2: "Swirls, Whorls, and Tendrils"

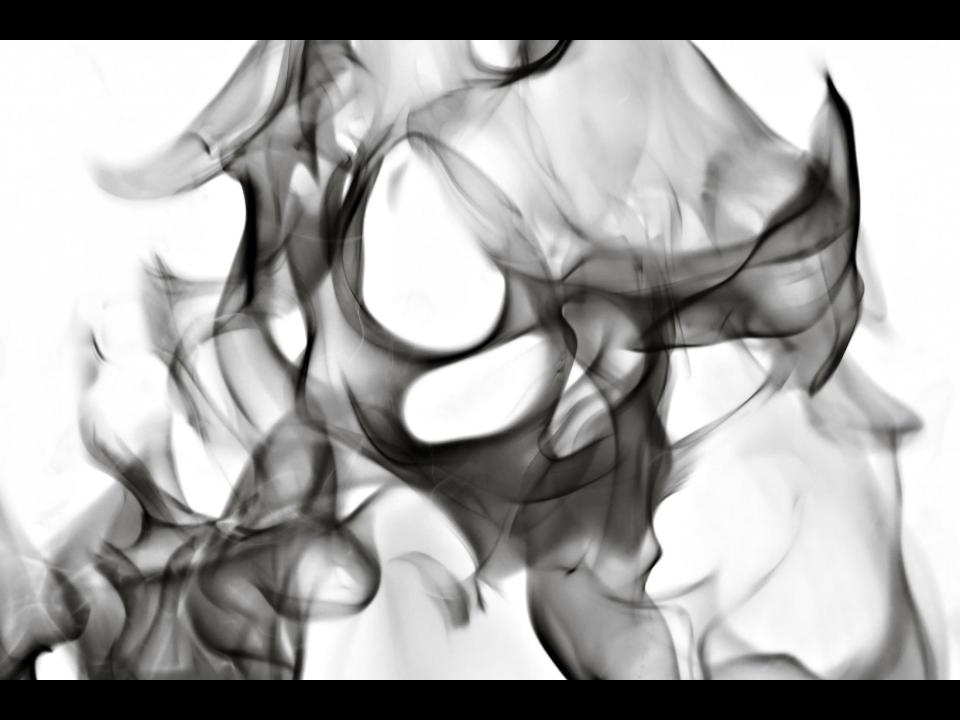
#### "Mystic Flame"

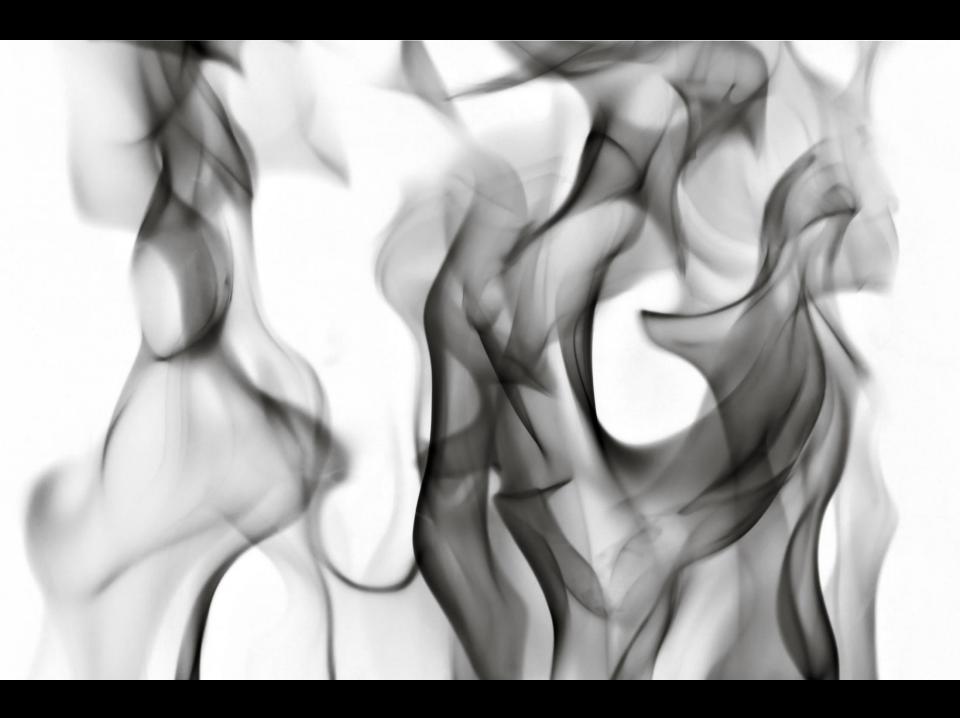


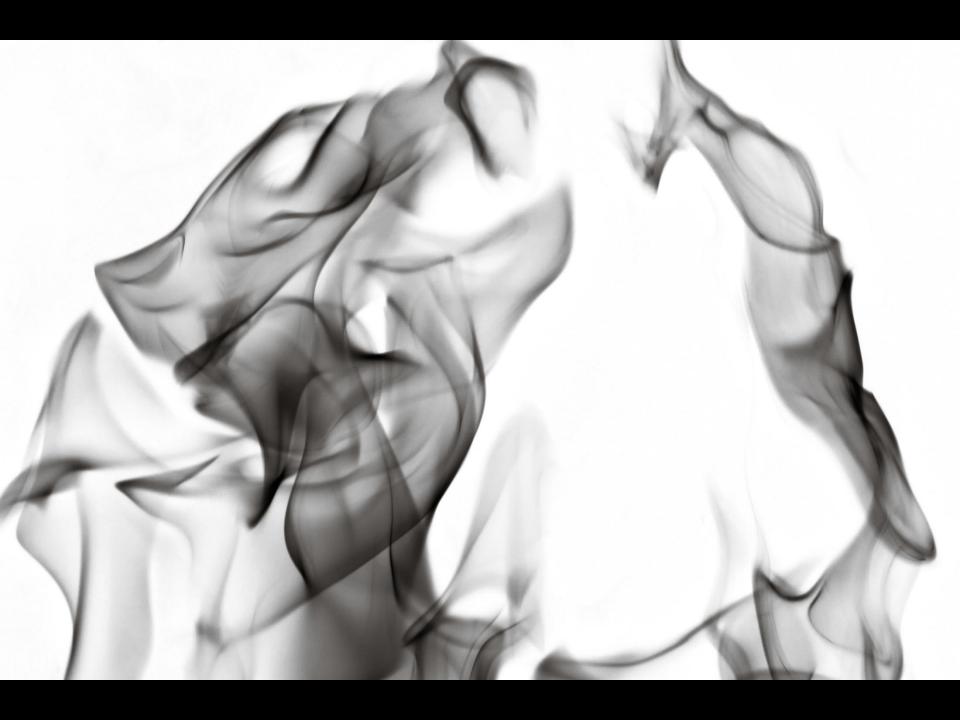
My wife bought a fire-pit for our kids to have fun with in the backyard while we barbeque

I noticed an interesting pattern ...

"Mystic Flame" portfolio (Dec 2008)







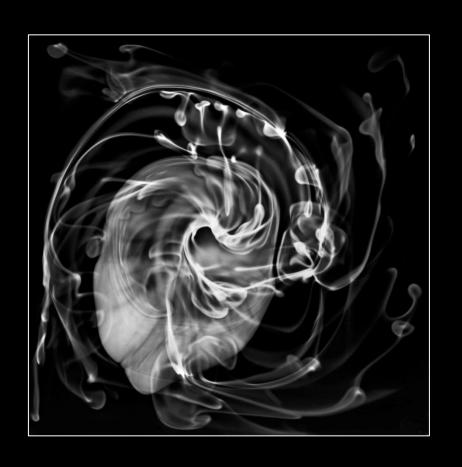
#### "Swirls, Whorls, and Tendrils"



My younger son (Josh, 7) accidentally dropped a newspaper that I had written something on with a fountain pen into the sink

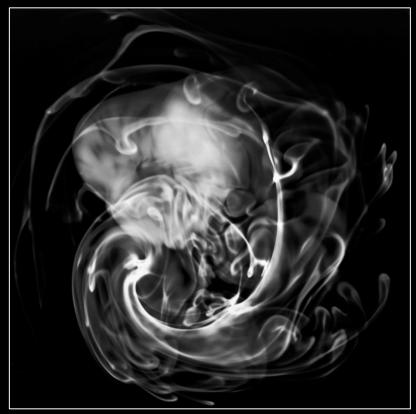
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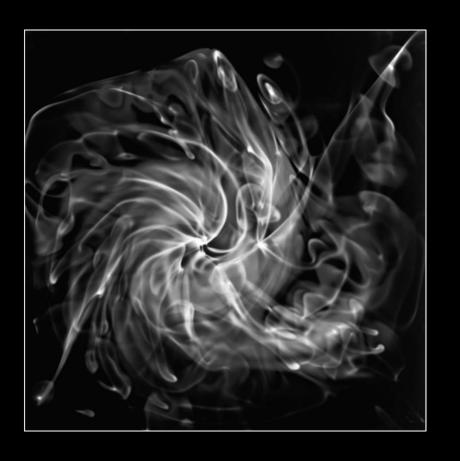
"Swirls, Whorls, and Tendrils" portfolio (March 2009)



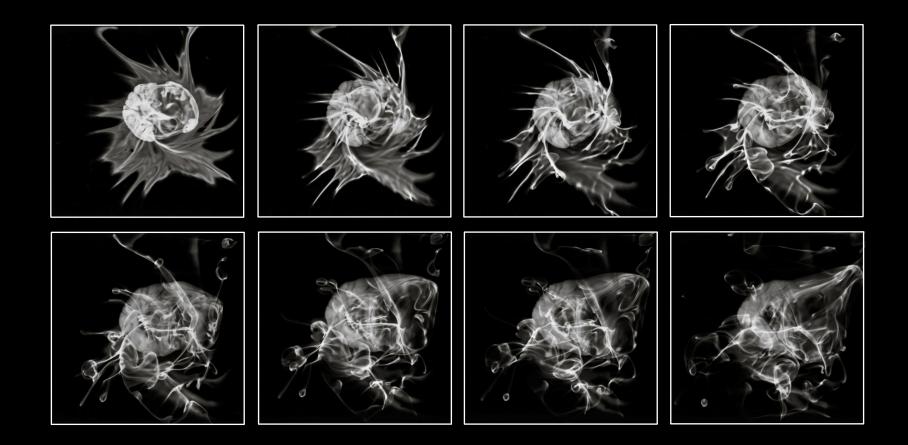


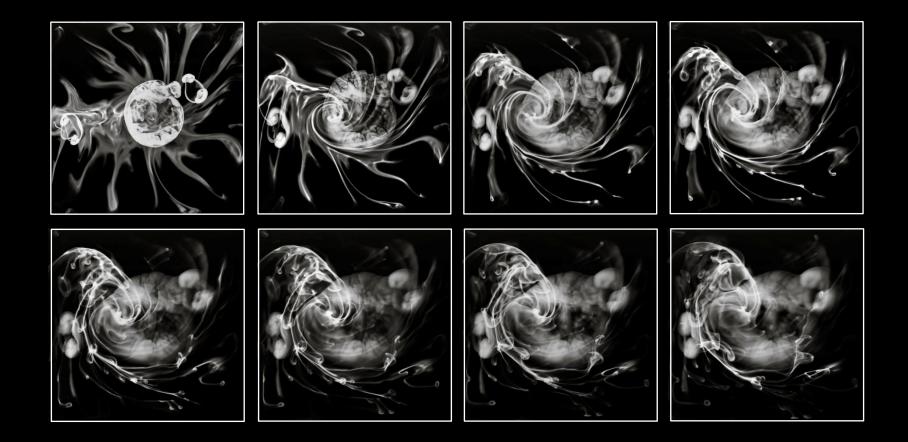












#### "Swirls, Whorls, and Tendrils"

# Swirls, Whorls, and Tendrils

Ephemeral Unfoldin

Andy Ilachinski



http://www.blurb.com/my/book/detail/874142

#### Recent Portfolios (Sep/Oct 09)



"The Ring o'Brodgar"



"The Skies of Skye"





















# **Outline of Lecture**

Stages of growth in photography

# Stage 1: Joyful snapshots of anything and everything

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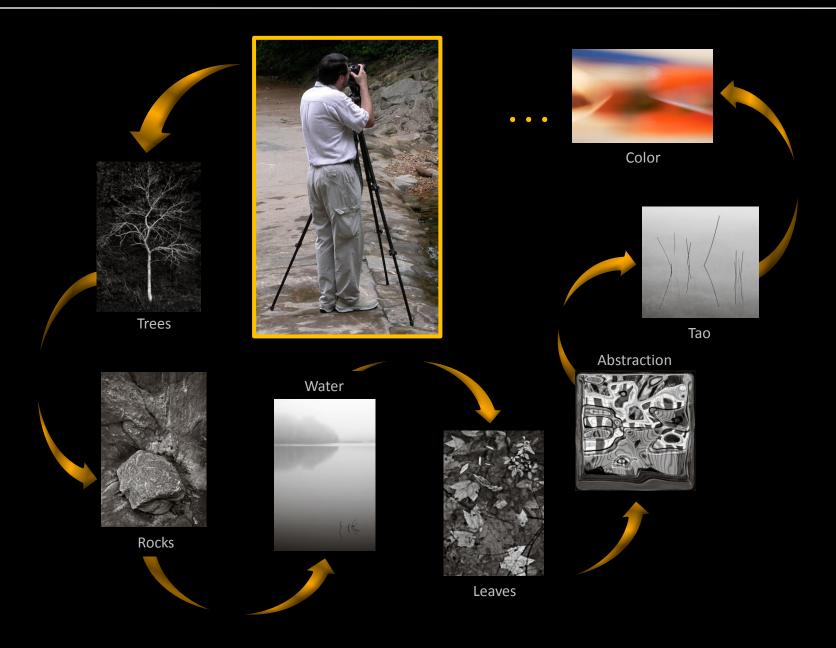
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## At first, the *photographer* finds the *picture*...

### **Physicist** Poet Light, Romance, Entropy, History, Geometry Culture Photographer A Photographer C Photographer B Textures, Tones, Landscape Dilapidated door, **Forms**

Contrast

## Then, the *pictures* discover a *path*...



### Eventually, the path defines the photographer



"Through the years, a man peoples a space with images of provinces, kingdoms, mountains, bays, ships, islands, fishes, rooms, tools, stars, horses and people.

Shortly before his death, he discovers that the patient labyrinth of lines traces the image of his own face."

- Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986)

# **Outline of Lecture**

East / West / Complexity ... photography

### Ching-te Ch'uan Teng-lu ("Transmission of the Lamp")

"Before I had studied Zen for thirty years, I saw mountains as mountains, and waters as waters...

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When I arrived at a more intimate knowledge, I came to the point where I saw that mountains are not mountains, and waters are not waters.

### Ching-te Ch'uan Teng-lu ("Transmission of the Lamp")

"Before I had studied Zen for thirty years,

I saw mountains as mountains, and waters as waters...

When I arrived at a more intimate knowledge, I came to the point where I saw that mountains are not mountains, and waters are not waters.

But now that I have got its very substance I am at rest. For it's just that I see mountains once again as mountains, and waters once again as waters."

## A Lesson From Art: East vs. West



Hung-jen, 1658



Gao Yang, 1608



William Bennett, Niagara Falls, 1840



Edward Hopper, American Landscape, 1920



Albert Bierstadt, Lake Lucerne, 1858

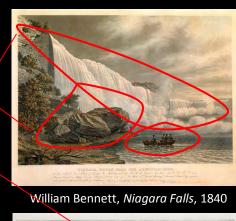
### A Lesson From Art: East vs. West



Focus on <u>things</u> Parts, wholes, and landscapes - yes but the eye is made to wander

from *thing* 

to **thing** 



Edward Hopper, American Landscape, 1920



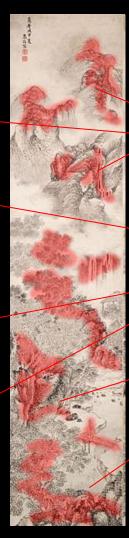
Albert Bierstadt, Lake Lucerne, 1858

Gao Yang, 1608

Hung-jen, 1658

### A Lesson From Art: East vs. West





Focus on harmony
The eye is never anchored on any one thing;
Distinction between part/whole;

near/far invisible



William Bennett, Niagara Falls, 1840



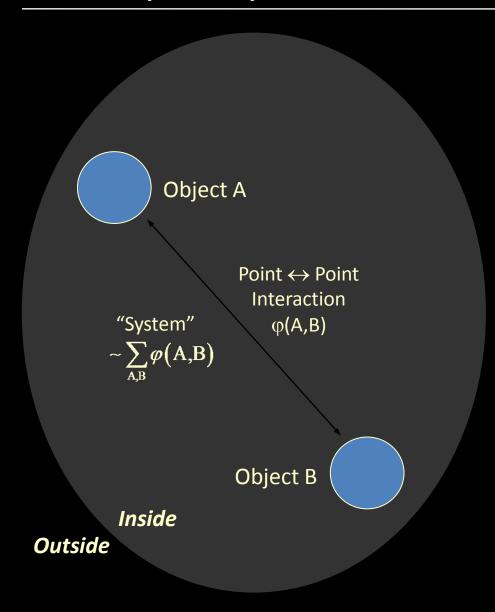
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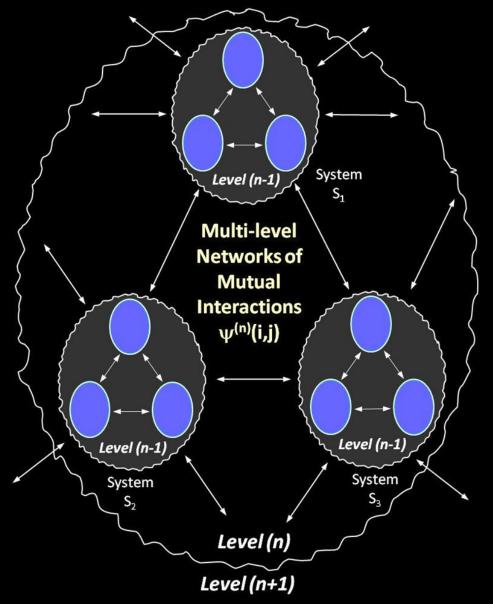
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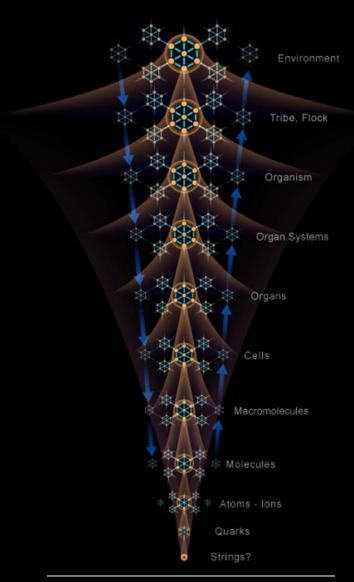


- Static
- Linear
- Homogeneous
- In Equilibrium
- Stable
- Predictable
- Reductionist
- "Closed System"
- Autonomous

- Dynamic
- Nonlinear
- Heterogeneous
- Far from Equilibrium
- Poised near Edge-of-Chaos
- Unpredictable
- Holistic
- "Open System"
- Interconnected
- Universal Behaviors?

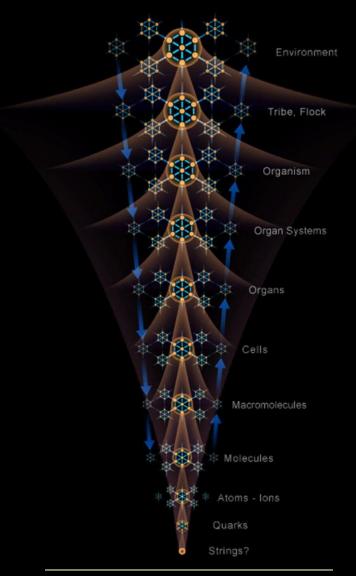


How Complex Systems Theory "Sees" the World...



### **Properties**

- Diverse heterogeneity
  - → Components defined by many properties and behaviors
- Nonlinear interactions
  - → Small perturbations may cause a large effect
- Local information processing / decentralized
  - → Components only know a small "part" of the system
- Relationships contain feedback loops
  - $\rightarrow$  Both negative (damping) and positive (amplifying) feedback
- Multiple simultaneous scales of resolution
  - → Agents, meta-agents, .... system
- Self-organization & phase transitions
- Emergent behavior
  - → Global patterns cannot be deduced from local behavior
- Open to the environment
  - → Nonequilibrium patterns & order; boundaries difficult to define
- Adaptive
  - → Prior states influence present states; learning
- Understanding requires both analysis & synthesis
  - → Components may themselves be "complex systems"



#### **Examples**

- Biological cells, organisms
- Global climate patterns (Lovelock, ~1970s)
- Human culture (Luhmann, 1984)
- Natural ecosystems (Sigmund 1993)
- Gene-regulatory networks (Kauffman, 1993)
- Social networks (Wasserman & Faust, 1994)
- Economics / financial markets (Arthur, 1994)
- Natural evolution (Smith & Szamary, 1995)
- Biosphere (Levin, 1998)
- Insect colonies (Bonabeau, 1999)
- Brain / nervous system (Kandel & Squire, 2000)
- Information flow on the internet
- Immune system (Segel, 2000)
- Pedestrian / vehicular flow (Still, 2000)
- Communication networks (Barabasi, 2000)
- Warfare (Ilachinski/CNA, 2000)
- Terrorist networks (Ilachinski/CNA, 2007)

Using very simple "agents" (building blocks) to generate complexity...

• Consider a one-dimensional row of cells:



Using very simple "agents" (building blocks) to generate complexity...

• Consider a one-dimensional row of cells:



• Suppose each cell is either on ( ) or off ( )

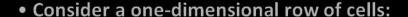
Using very simple "agents" (building blocks) to generate complexity...

Consider a one-dimensional row of cells:



- Suppose each cell is either on ( ) or off ( )
- Suppose each cell turns on or off depending on whether it was on or off before and whether its left and right neighbors were on or off

Using very simple "agents" (building blocks) to generate complexity...



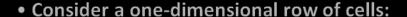


- Suppose each cell is either *on* ( ) or *off* ( )
- Suppose each cell turns on or off depending on whether it was on or off before and whether its left and right neighbors were on or off
- Choose a specific rule for this (out of a total of 28=256 possible rules):



### 1-Dimensional Cellular Automata

Using very simple "agents" (building blocks) to generate complexity...





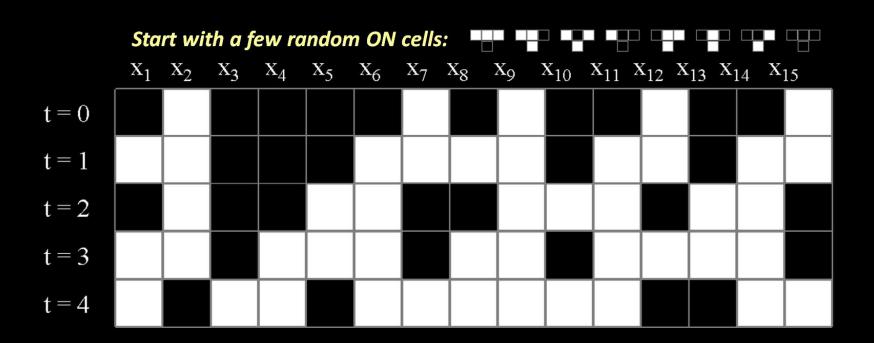
- Suppose each cell is either on ( ) or off ( )
- Suppose each cell turns on or off depending on whether it was on or off before and whether its left and right neighbors were on or off
- Choose a specific rule for this (out of a total of 28=256 possible rules):



Pretty simple!

But, what happens after a row of random cells "evolves" in time?

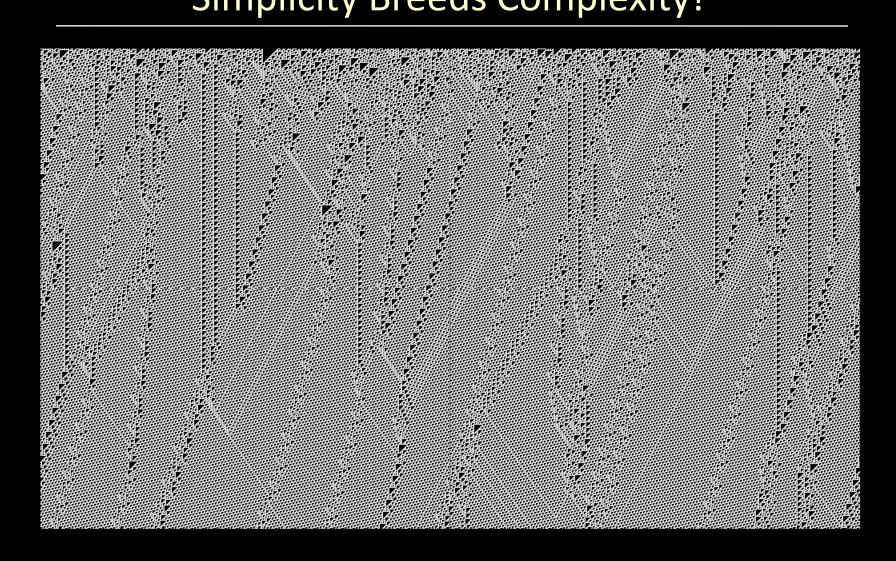
### Let's Look at a Few Steps ...



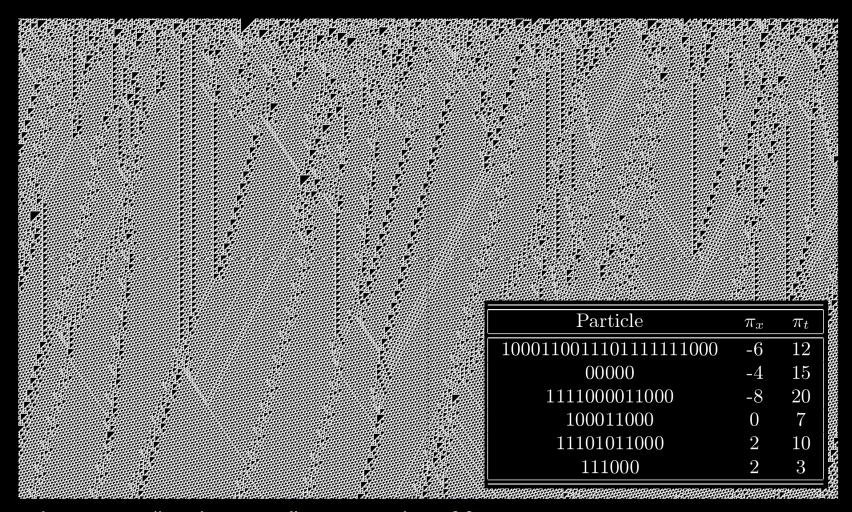
Still pretty simple..nothing interesting yet!

What if we look at many cells evolving for longer times?

### Simplicity Breeds Complexity!



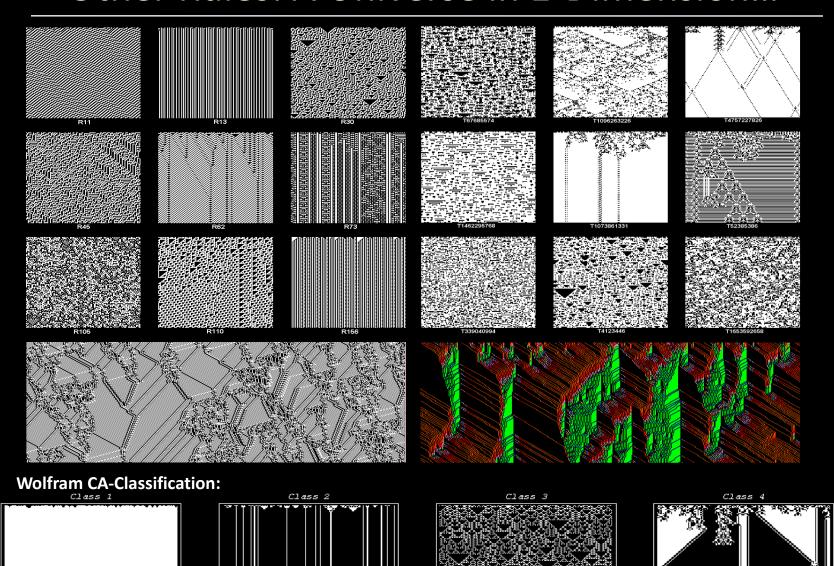
## Simplicity Breeds Complexity!



Alternative "explanation"  $\rightarrow$  Particles of form...

 $\cdots$  BBBB**P**BB  $\cdots$  BB  $\cdots$  BBB**P**'BB  $\cdots$  BBB**P**"BBB  $\cdots$ 

### Other Rules: A Universe in 1-Dimension...



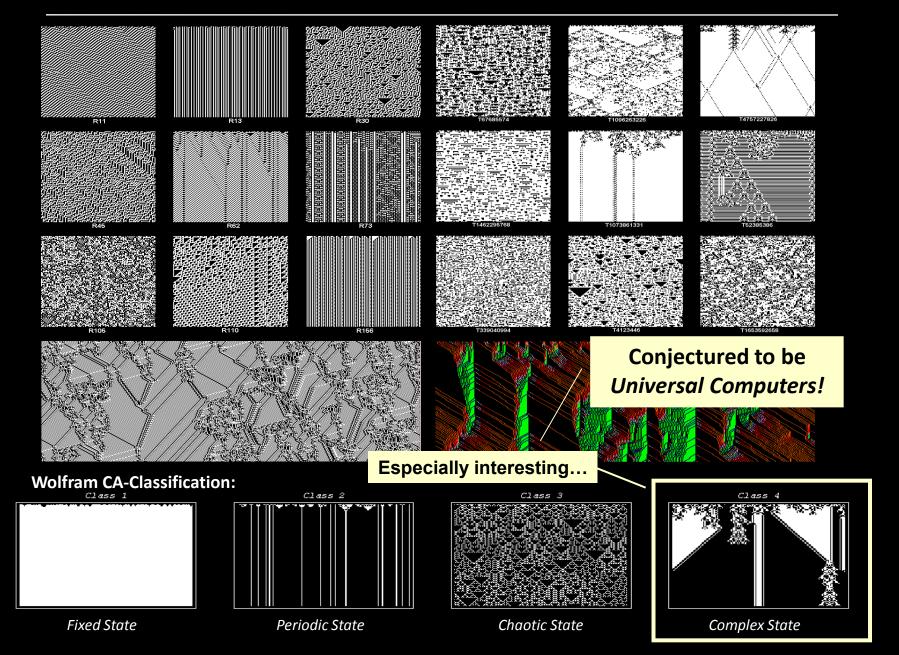
Fixed State

Periodic State

Chaotic State

Complex State

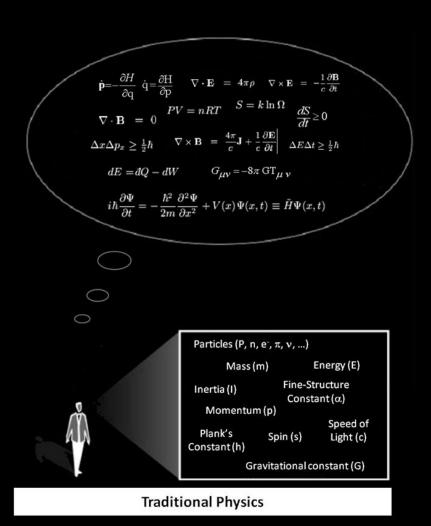
### Other Rules: A Universe in 1-Dimension...

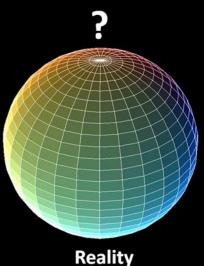


"If patterns of ones and zeroes were
'like' patterns of human lives and deaths,
if everything about an individual could be
represented in a computer record
by a long string of ones and zeroes,
then what kind of creature could be
represented by a long string of lives and deaths?"

— Thomas Pynchon, Vineland

#### What do Physics & Complexity have to do with Art & Photography?





Reality

**Parts** (Conceptual Building Blocks)

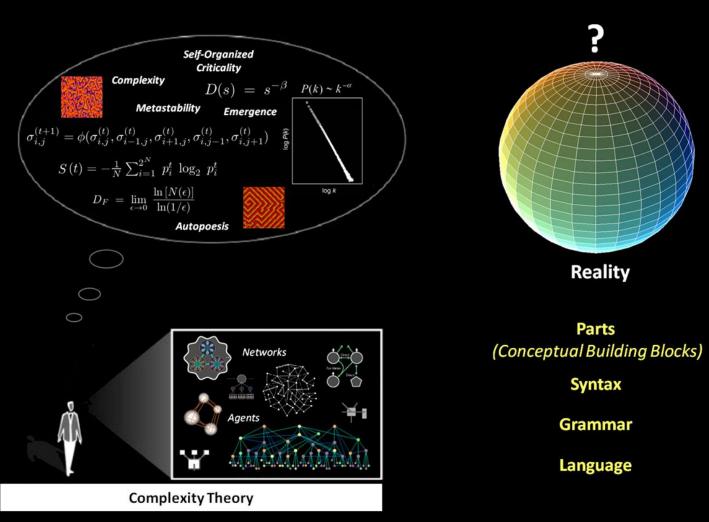
**Syntax** 

Grammar

Language

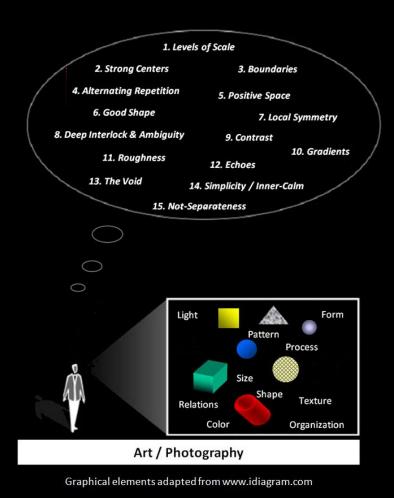
Graphical elements adapted from www.idiagram.com

#### What do Physics & Complexity have to do with Art & Photography?



Graphical elements adapted from www.idiagram.com

#### What do Physics & Complexity have to do with Art & Photography?



Reality

**Parts** (Conceptual Building Blocks)

**Syntax** 

Grammar

Language

Laws of Beauty?

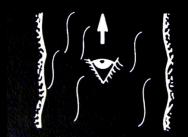
Christopher Alexander, *Nature of Order* Center for Environmental Structure, 2003 "Photography is a *language...* 

...the concept underlying this phrase is a very important one...

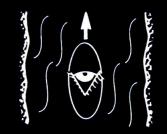
Just as in the media of the written word we have poems, essays, scientific and journalistic reports, novels, dramas and catalogues, so with photography we touch the domains of science, illustration, documentation and expressive art."

Ansel Adams

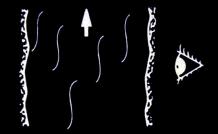
### Complexity Theory & Photography



The observer <u>is</u> the stream (Complexity / Systems theory)



The observer attempts to steer a canoe in the stream (Quantum physics)



The observer is <u>outside</u> the stream (Newtonian physics)

# Level 3: Lose distinction between "inside" and "outside"

- Forget about *things*...
- Forget about conventional categories...
- Forget about boundaries...
- Use the lens to find the "I" behind the lens!

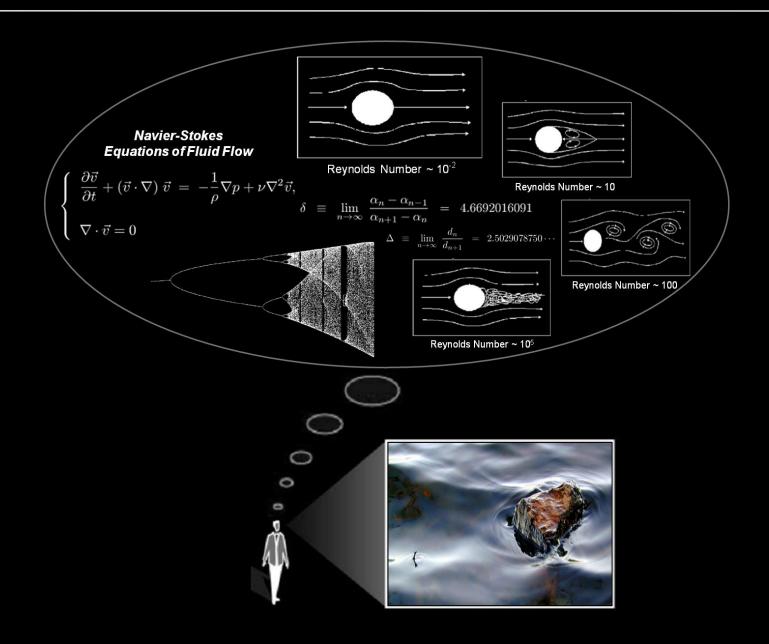
# Level 2: Use photography to create *self-organized pattern*

• Use *light*, *color*, *form*, *texture*, and *pattern* as primitive building blocks out of which to create "mini-worlds"

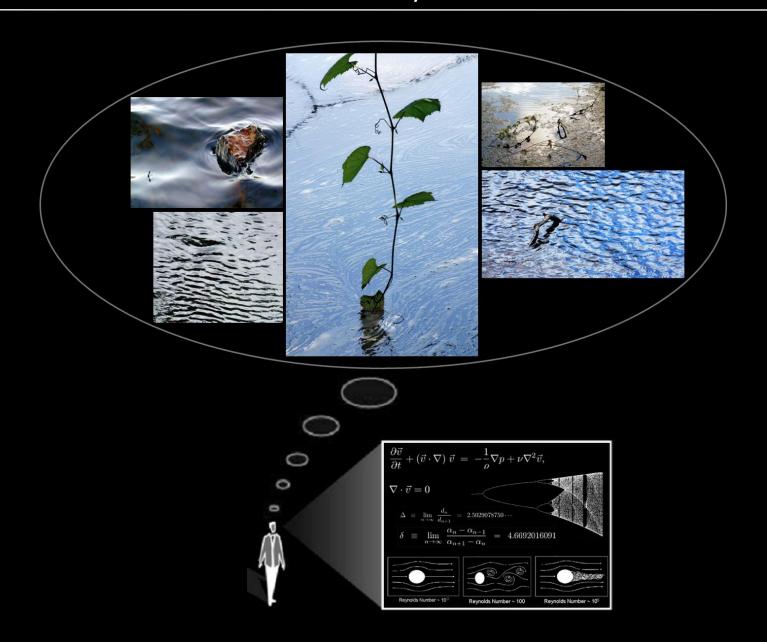
#### Level 1: Use complexity to steer your camera

• Fractals, dynamics, symmetry, order, pattern, ...

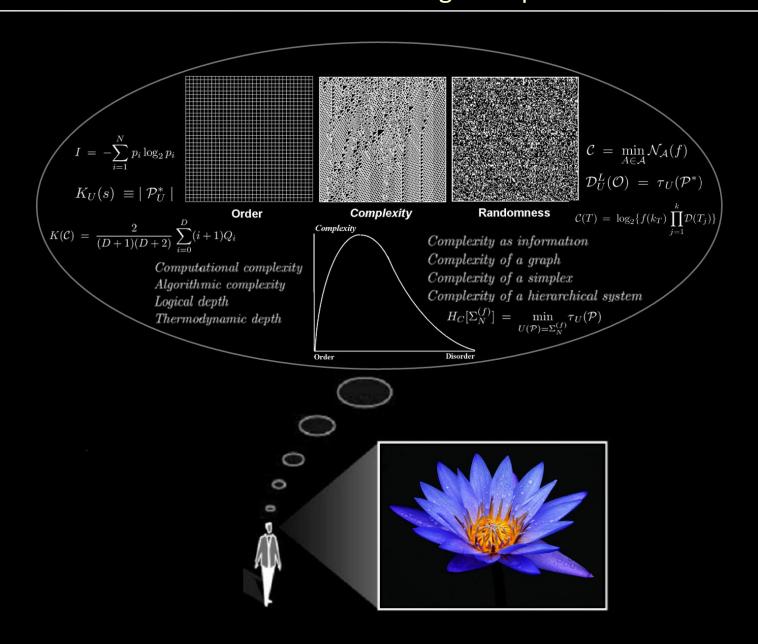
# What a *Complexicologist* thinks about when he sees a stream of water...



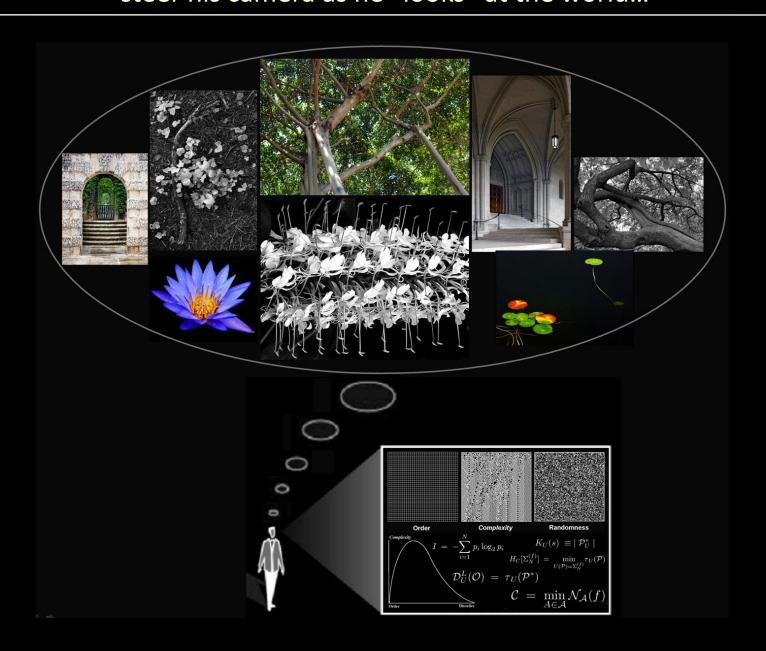
# How a *Photographer* uses his understanding of chaos to guide his camera as he walks by the same stream...



# What a *Complexicologist* thinks about when he sees something "complex"...



# How a Photographer uses complexity to steer his camera as he "looks" at the world...



### No Conclusion, But...

Here are two secrets of applying complexity to photography (or art)...

### Secret #1

### Capture process, not disconnected things

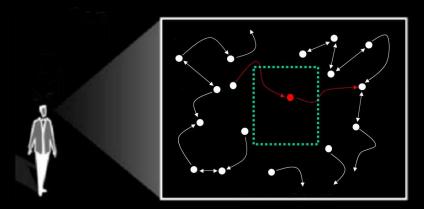
Decisive Moment = "The simultaneous recognition, in a fraction of a second, of the significance of an event as well as the precise organization of forms which gives that event its proper expression."

"Above all, I craved to seize the whole essence, in the confines of one single photograph, of some situation that was in the process of unrolling itself before my eyes."

— Henri Cartier Bresson (1908 - 2004)

#### How to take a *snapshot*...

- Focus on a thing(s)
- Wait for all "distractions" to disappear
- Click the shutter



#### Secret #1

#### Capture process, not disconnected things

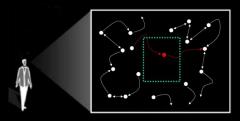
Decisive Moment = "The simultaneous recognition, in a fraction of a second, of the significance of an event as well as the precise organization of forms which gives that event its proper expression."

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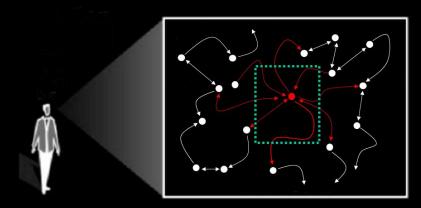
How to take a *snapshot*...

- Focus on a thing(s)
- Wait for all "distractions" to disappear
- · Click the shutter



How to take a *photograph*...

- Focus on what is happening
- Wait for all the interconnections to become clear
- Click the shutter

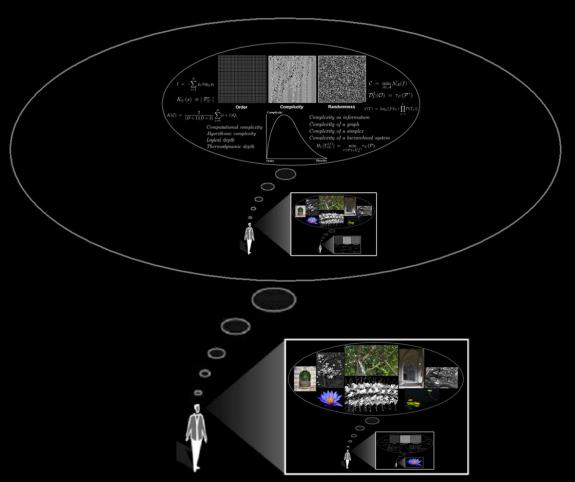


### Secret #2

### Search for the "I" behind the "eye" of the camera

[Art is a process] "...in which we give ourselves so deeply to our seeing that we take things right into ourselves and then give forth a new version of them from inside, tinted by all of the possibilities within us, transformed the way an oyster takes grit and makes a pearl."

— Sean Kernan, Photographer (Lenswork, May 2004)



# Please visit my website...

http://www.sudden-stillness.com

ome gallery

older portfolios

hooks

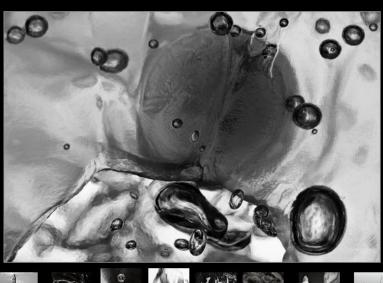
links

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#### **Sudden Stillness**

Fine-Art Photography by Andy Ilachinski



















PORTFOLIOS | FEATURED PORTFOLIO | BLOG | SOUND

## Sneak Peek: Work in Progress ...



A set of *Nambe*-like metallic salt and pepper shakers (w/shiny reflecting metallic surfaces), assorted pots and pans and formal serving trays, patterned table cloths and colored paper, and the backdrop of our dining room...

...creates wonderful "abstract landscapes"

http://tao-of-digital-photography.blogspot.com/2009/12/blurred-distinctions.html



# Questions?