

ANDY ILACHINSKI

ANDY ILACHINSKI'S photographs have been exhibited in many juried solo and group shows, have earned him numerous awards, and have appeared in several publications, including *Lenswork*, *Black & White*, and a number of online magazines and blogs. His work also hangs in many galleries, businesses, and private homes. • Ilachinski won the international book contest sponsored by *UK Black + White Photography* in 2007. His blog, tao-of-digital-photography.blogspot.com, has been named one of the top one hundred photography blogs by Photography Colleges (www.photography-colleges.org). Ilachinski is a founding member of Lorton Arts Foundation's Photographic Society. • Along with his father, who was a lifelong artist, Ilachinski is most deeply inspired by the works of Ansel Adams, Minor White, Brett Weston, Carl Chiarenza, and Wynn Bullock.

"By training and profession, I am a physicist, specializing in nonlinear dynamics and complex adaptive systems. However, by temperament and inner muse, I am a photographer and have been for far longer than my Ph.D. gives me any right to claim ownership by physics. Photography became a lifelong pursuit for me the

moment my parents gave me a Polaroid Instamatic camera for my tenth birthday. I have been studying the mysterious relationship between inner experiences and outer realities ever since. • My creative process is very simple: I strive to record the subtle, interconnected web of energy that makes up what we call the world. For me, beauty permeates everything around us and appears in its most sublime state when form, color, pattern, and texture are all in harmony. In the same way as all "objects" in this world are fundamentally impermanent and essentially arbitrary, partitions of an otherwise continuous, unfragmented whole, I view photography as an almost mystical process whereby this illusion of fragmentation is momentarily lifted and the underlying essence of the universe revealed. To "see" the whole, one must first learn to see "parts" as mere illusions. • In simplest terms, I take pictures of what calms my soul. There may be other, more descriptive or poetic words that could be used to define the pattern that connects my images, but the simplest meta-pattern is this: I take snapshots of 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."

Meditations



“Our understanding of reality is fluid, imprecise, and forever incomplete; it owes more, much more, to subjective, context-dependent interpretations than most of us feel comfortable accepting.”

One of my favorite Zen koans is from the Paul Reps classic, *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones*, and is called “Trading Dialog for Lodging.” The story begins by reminding the reader of a Buddhist tradition in which a traveling monk can remain in a Zen temple provided he makes and wins an argument about Buddhism with anyone who lives there. We are then told of a temple in northern Japan

where two brothers live as monks: one, the elder; the other, stupid and possessing but one eye. A traveling monk finds his way to this temple and — rightfully — challenges the monks to a debate. The elder brother, too tired from a long day of studying to engage in the challenge, asks his younger brother to “go and request the dialogue in silence” in his stead.

— *Andy Olachinski*

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The young one-eyed monk and the wandering stranger go to the shrine and sit down. A short time later, the traveling monk goes to the elder brother to inform him that his brother has defeated him. Before leaving, the elder asks the monk to relate what happened. The monk recounts the challenge: "At first, I held up one finger, denoting Buddha, the enlightened one. So your brother held up two fingers, signifying Buddha and his teachings. I held up three fingers, representing Buddha, his teachings, and his followers living a harmonious life. Your brother then shook a clenched fist at me, showing me that all three come from the same, single realization. To this insight I had no answer. I thus lost the challenge."

As the traveling monk made his way back down the road away from the temple, the elder monk's brother appeared, breathless, before his brother. "Where is that monk?" he started.

"I'm going to beat him up!" Asked to explain his anger, the younger brother recounted what happened: "Why, the minute he saw me he insulted me by holding up one finger to laugh at my one eye. Since he was a stranger and in need of a place to stay, I decided to be kind and held up two fingers, congratulating him on having two eyes. Infuriatingly, he then held up three fingers, stubbornly reminding me that between the two of us we still have only three eyes. I couldn't contain my anger any longer and showed him my fist!"

What I love about this simple story is how artfully it blends meaning, distortion, subjectivity, context, tradition, interpretation, and the recursive, self-referential nature of "true" objectivity and, ultimately, the nature of "reality" itself. As space-time (so far as we know) is finite yet unbounded, so too this story suggests that



reality is finite but unlimited in its interpretations.

This story also suggests that despite there obviously being a reality—two monks engaged in a Buddhist challenge—no one in the story experiences it fully. Certainly not the two monks with their dramatically different recollections of what happened, and not the elder brother, who ostensibly hears both sides of the “reality” but is not himself present when the “reality” occurs, and who does not reveal any of his own predilections and subjective interpretations of what he hears from two different people, one of whom is very close to him, the other a complete stranger. Just what does he make of these two stories? And what does the elder believe really happened? We might just as well wonder about a “more complete” reality that encompasses not just the two arguing monks but the two monks and the elder. What is to be made of the single “interpretation” we have of this system, which

is not, I remind you, that of the elder who is a mere listener in the story, but the interpretation of the whole story that you, kind reader, have yourself to offer? The telescoping levels are, of course, endless and “end” remains perpetually out of reach; the next one starts at “two monks *plus* elder *plus* Andy-the-photographer’s interpretation of the story.” What of my role in this, as I recount a favorite story of mine from memory, and do so fairly and honestly, but certainly not verbatim. What intentional and/or unintentional subjectivities do I introduce into the story that alter its “true” meaning? And so it goes.

What does all of this have to do with photography? Everything, or nothing, depending on what part of the story one resonates with most strongly. The experience of the wandering monk reminds us that just as all of us privileged observers sit at the center





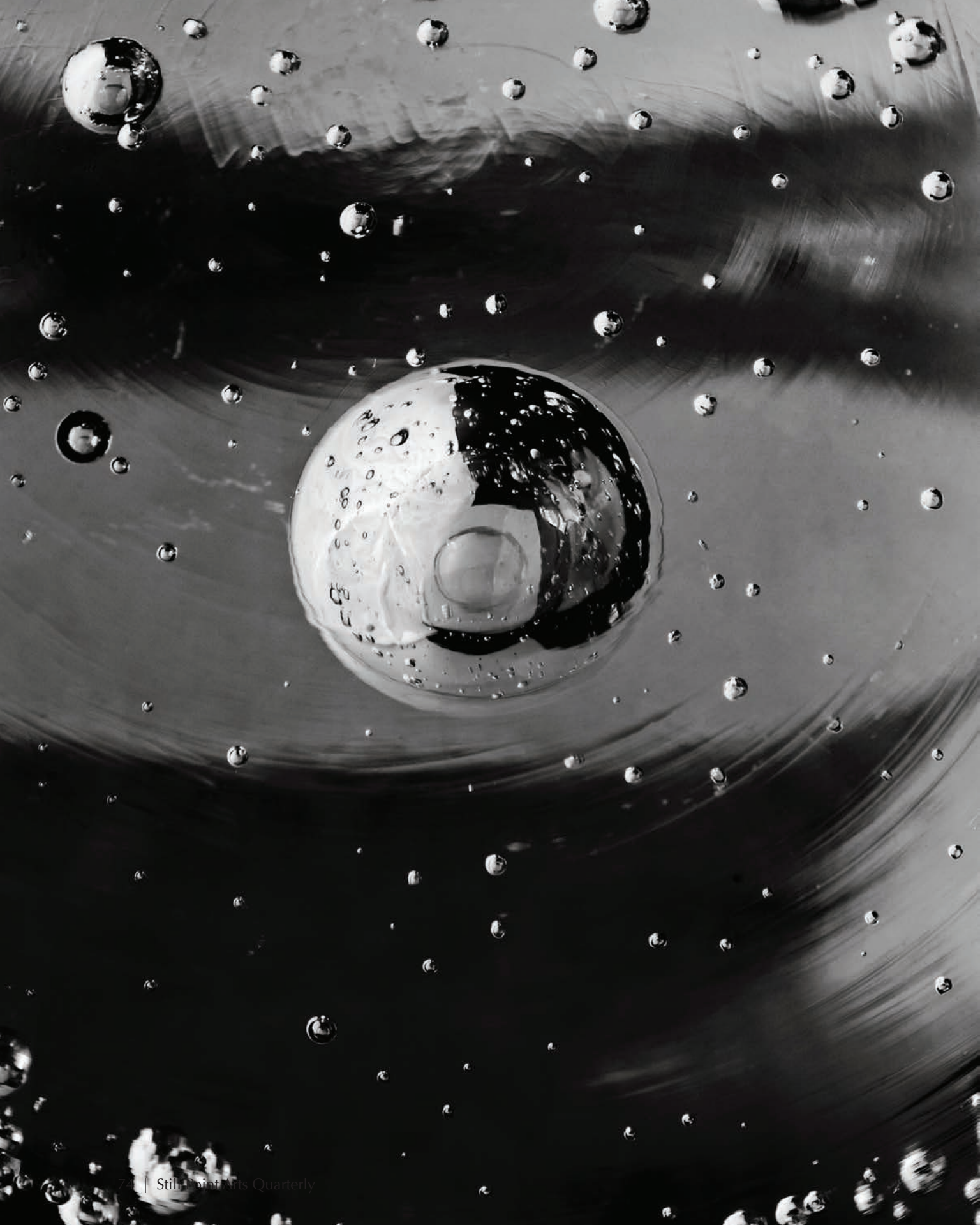
of a unique, and therefore uniquely limited, reality, the true nature of reality remains hidden, unknown in whole, and eludes even the mindful gaze of the wisest of wise observers. Our understanding of reality is fluid, imprecise, and forever incomplete; it owes more, much more, to subjective, context-dependent interpretations than most of us feel comfortable accepting. A photograph may depict two monks arguing and show one monk holding up one or two fingers or clenching a fist. But that is all a photograph can ever show. And once it is created and the reality to which it points has ceased to be, the truth of a photograph is forever fixed as a sort of vestigial

collective memory of possible interpretations that live on in the mind of the photographer as well as those who look at the photograph.

And the lesson for photographers? It is simply this: forget about capturing any definitive truths with your camera. Focus instead on communicating your experiences of ephemeral realities.

This portfolio represents my own humble meditations on the ineffability of truth.

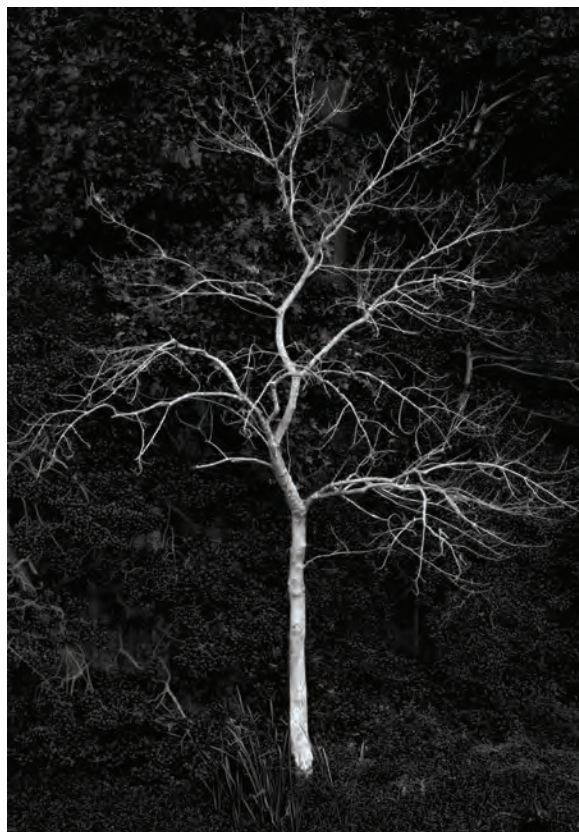
Meditation reveals that the obvious place to begin is not in some other place, it's right here.
— Angel Williams







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