Classic Segmentation with Python

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BoBiAC
Boston Bioimage Analysis Course | 2025

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Core for Imaging Technology & Education

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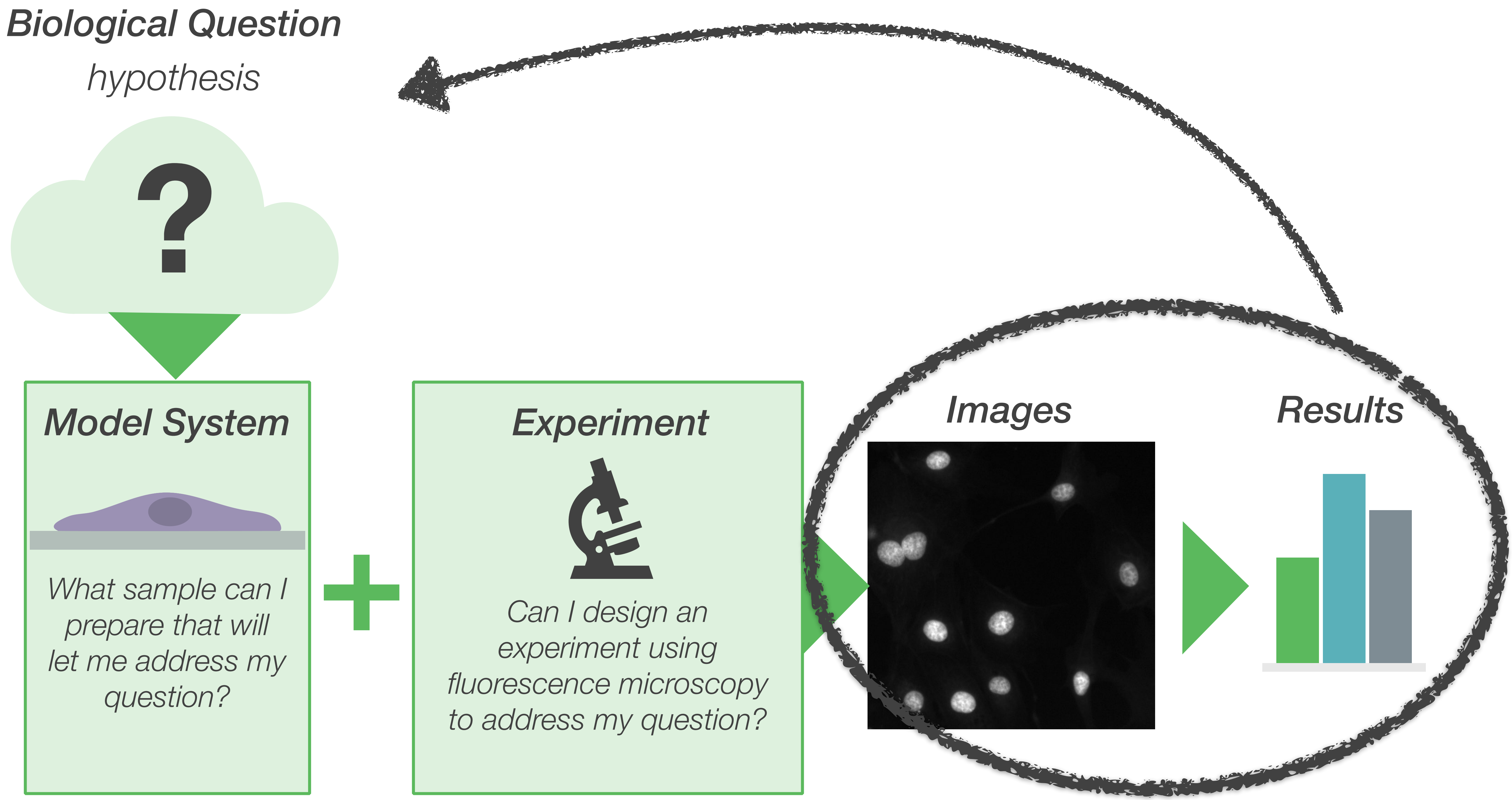
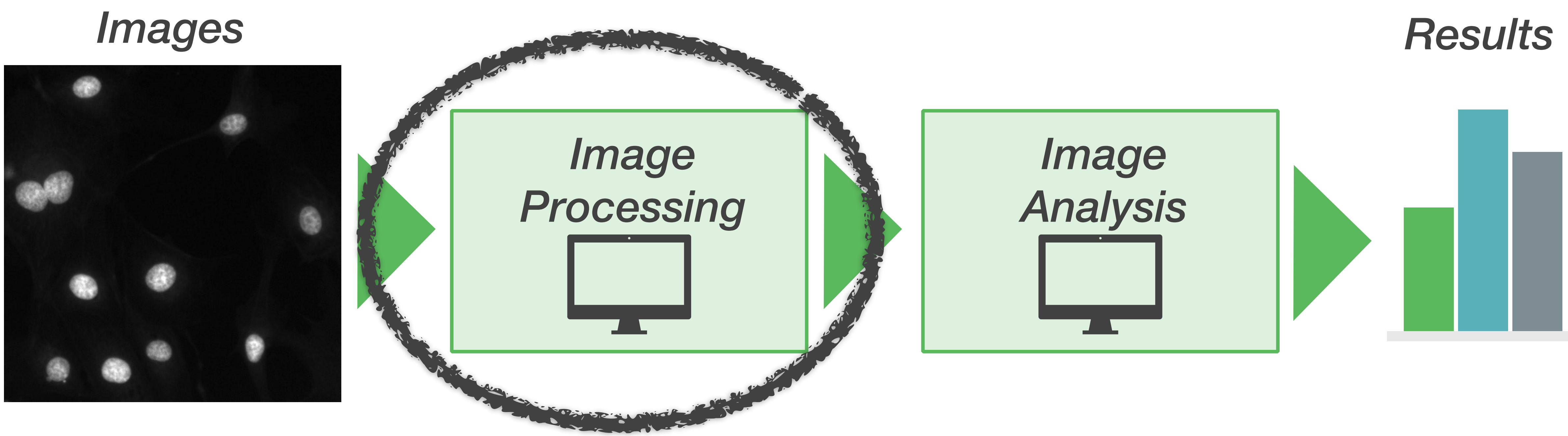

Biological Question
hypothesis
?
Model System
What sample can I prepare that will let me address my question?
Experiment
Can I design an experiment using fluorescence microscopy to address my question?
Images
Results



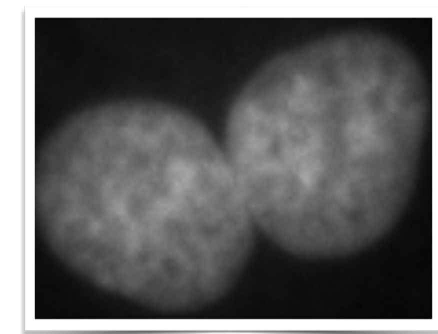
Today's Focus:

Analysis Goal: Make measurements on objects in images

Processing Goal: *Select* individual objects in images

Example Dataset

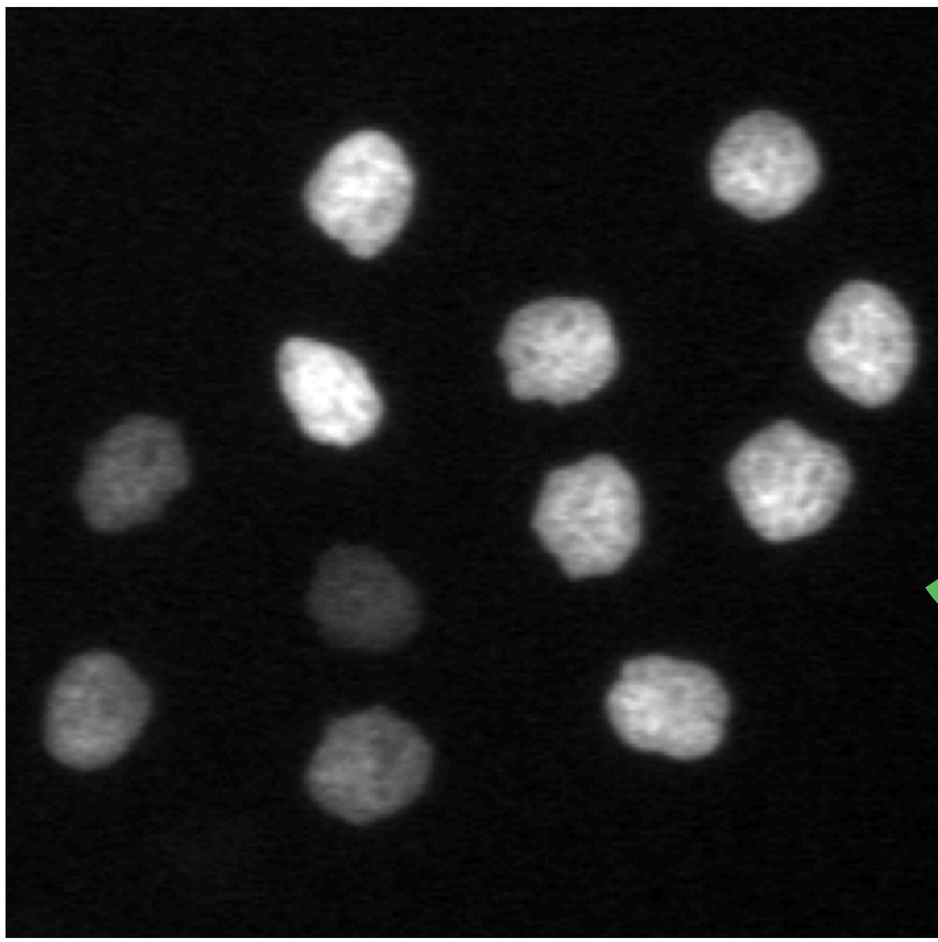
WHAT	Fluorescence images of mammalian cell monolayer
LABEL	DAPI: a fluorophore that binds to minor grooves of dsDNA
DATASET	Widefield fluorescence images



DAPI is a nuclear marker!

Analysis Goal: Make a measurement on images of nuclei

Original Image

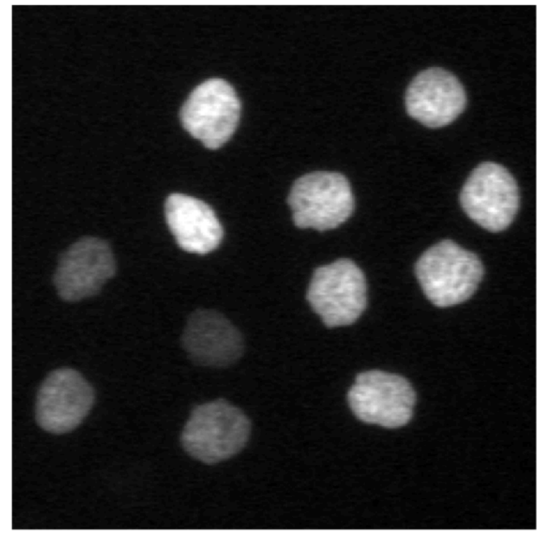


Segmented Image

To measure nuclei properties, we need to ***select*** each individual nucleus. This process is called ***image segmentation***.

2 types of segmentation: Semantic & Instance

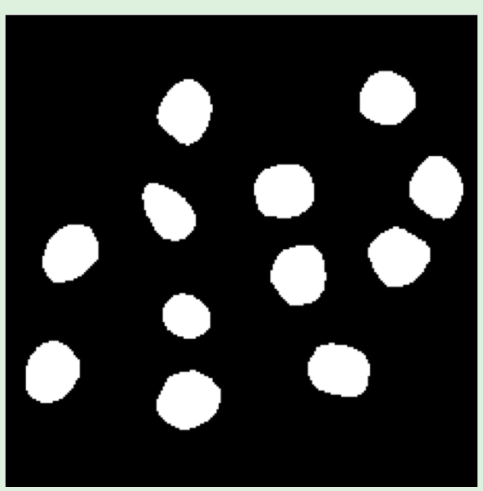
Raw Image



Semantic Segmentation

All objects treated as the same category

Example:



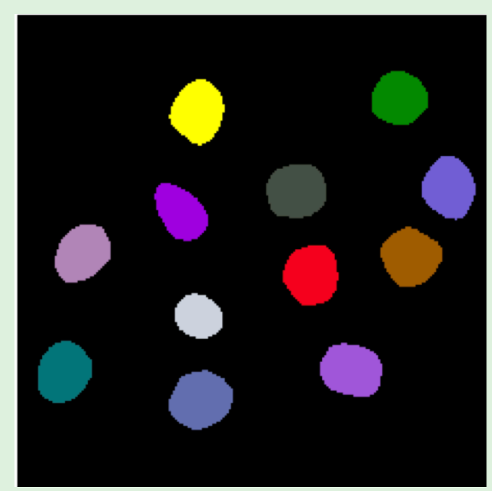
Categories:

Nucleus

Instance Segmentation

Each object is distinguished as separate and has a unique label

Example:



Categories:

Nucleus 1

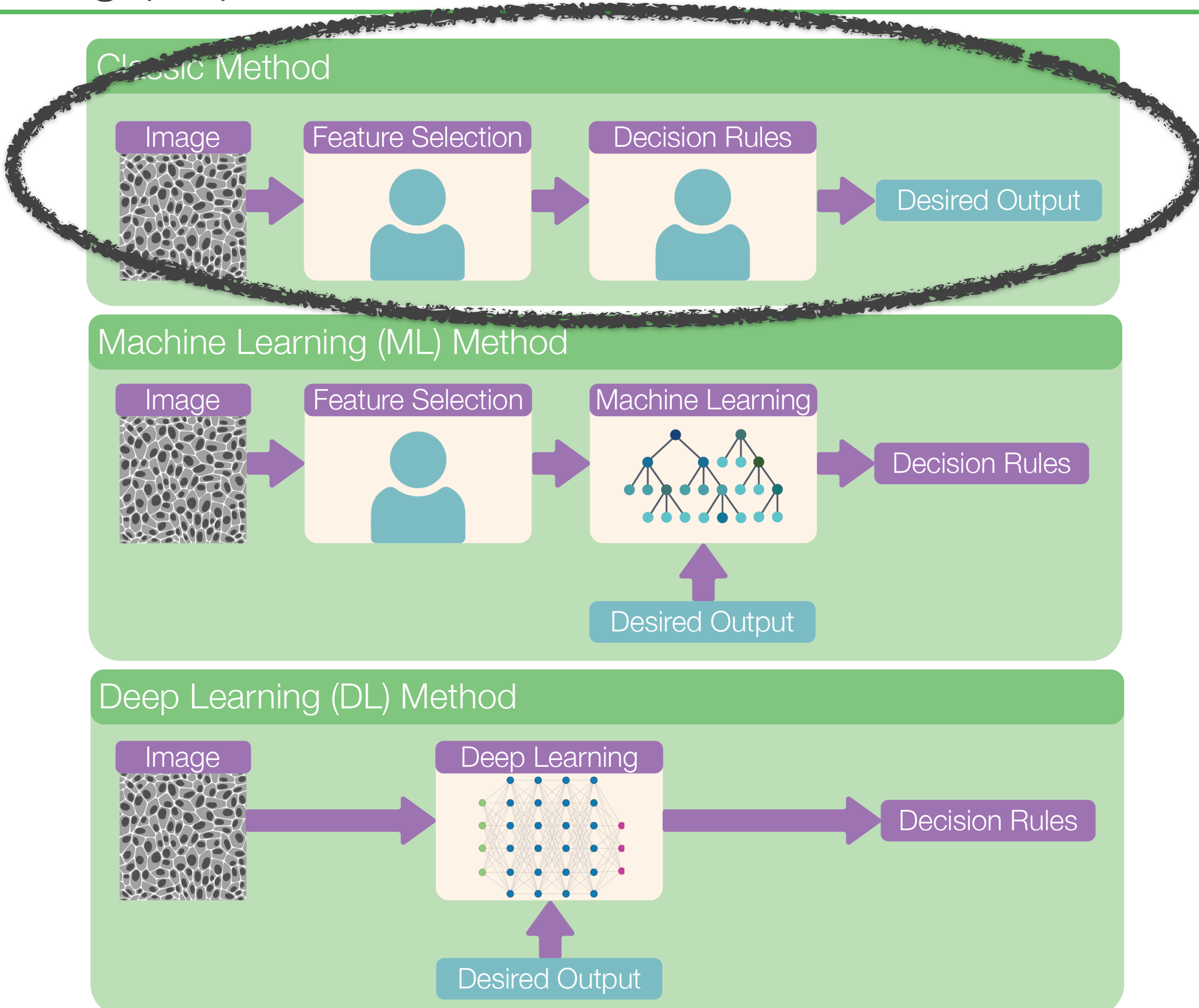
Nucleus 2

Nucleus 3

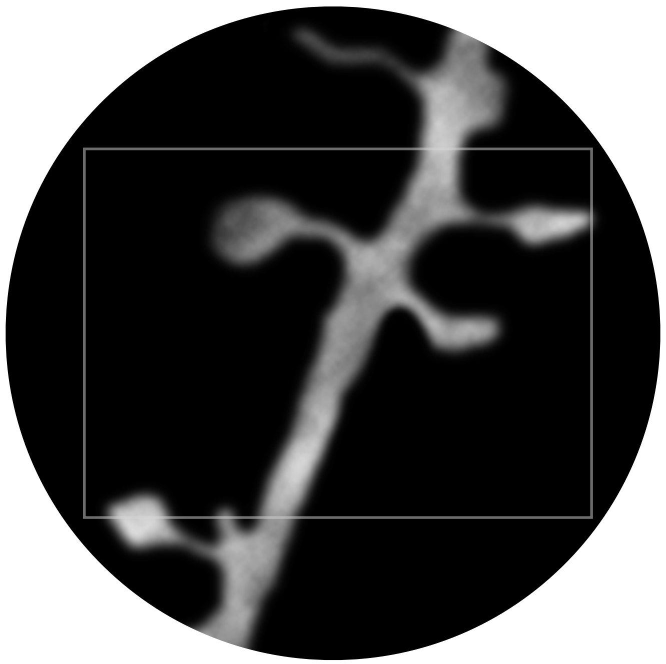
…

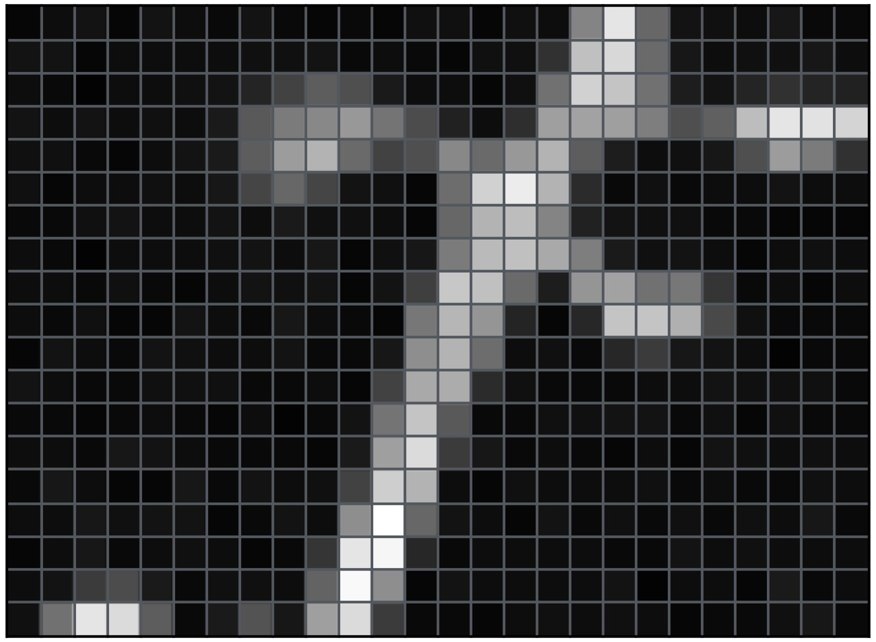
We can achieve either segmentation type with different ***pipelines***.

3 pipelines: Classic, Machine Learning (ML), & Deep Learning (DL)



The **classic pipeline** takes advantage of an image's spatial organization of intensity values





6	13	19	6	19	13	9	19	9	6	9	6	16	16	6	16	13	132	229	103	19	16	13	23	9	9
19	19	6	13	13	13	13	16	16	19	9	13	9	6	16	16	49	192	216	106	23	13	16	16	23	13
13	9	4	13	13	16	19	36	66	93	79	26	13	13	6	16	113	209	196	113	29	19	36	49	36	33
19	13	19	13	16	13	26	89	123	136	152	116	76	33	13	46	159	162	159	126	79	96	189	229	226	212
16	16	9	6	13	19	26	93	156	179	106	66	79	136	106	152	179	93	29	13	16	23	79	156	123	49
16	6	13	13	16	13	23	69	103	69	19	16	6	109	209	236	179	43	9	16	9	13	13	19	13	13
9	9	16	19	13	13	19	13	26	16	16	13	6	103	179	189	132	33	19	16	16	9	9	6	6	6
13	9	4	13	13	13	16	19	13	23	6	16	23	123	186	192	169	126	26	16	19	13	6	13	16	13
13	13	9	16	9	6	13	19	16	19	6	19	63	199	192	106	29	149	162	113	119	53	9	13	6	13
13	9	16	6	6	19	13	9	23	13	9	6	119	182	149	36	6	39	196	196	176	73	16	9	9	9
6	19	13	9	19	16	13	13	19	9	9	23	142	179	109	13	16	9	39	59	23	19	13	4	9	9
19	13	9	9	16	16	16	9	9	13	6	66	169	172	43	16	9	9	9	13	13	19	16	16	16	9
9	9	6	9	13	9	6	13	4	9	19	116	196	89	9	9	16	16	19	19	9	16	6	16	9	9
13	13	9	23	19	13	9	9	9	6	26	159	219	59	23	9	13	9	6	13	6	19	16	13	16	13
9	23	13	6	6	23	9	19	13	16	66	206	179	13	6	16	13	13	13	16	9	13	9	9	16	13
13	13	23	16	19	19	6	9	19	13	142	255	103	19	13	6	19	9	16	9	16	9	16	13	23	9
6	13	23	9	13	16	13	6	9	53	229	246	39	9	13	13	13	13	9	9	19	13	16	13	13	13
13	19	59	76	26	9	16	16	13	99	249	142	6	19	13	13	13	13	19	4	13	13	6	26	9	13
16	113	229	219	93	9	26	83	23	159	219	59	9	9	6	13	16	13	16	13	6	9	9	16	23	9

photons
optical image

intensity values
digital image

intensity values ≠ photons!!

classic segmentation with Python

classic segmentation with Python

thresholding

filtering

labeling a binary mask

refining a binary mask

classic segmentation with Python

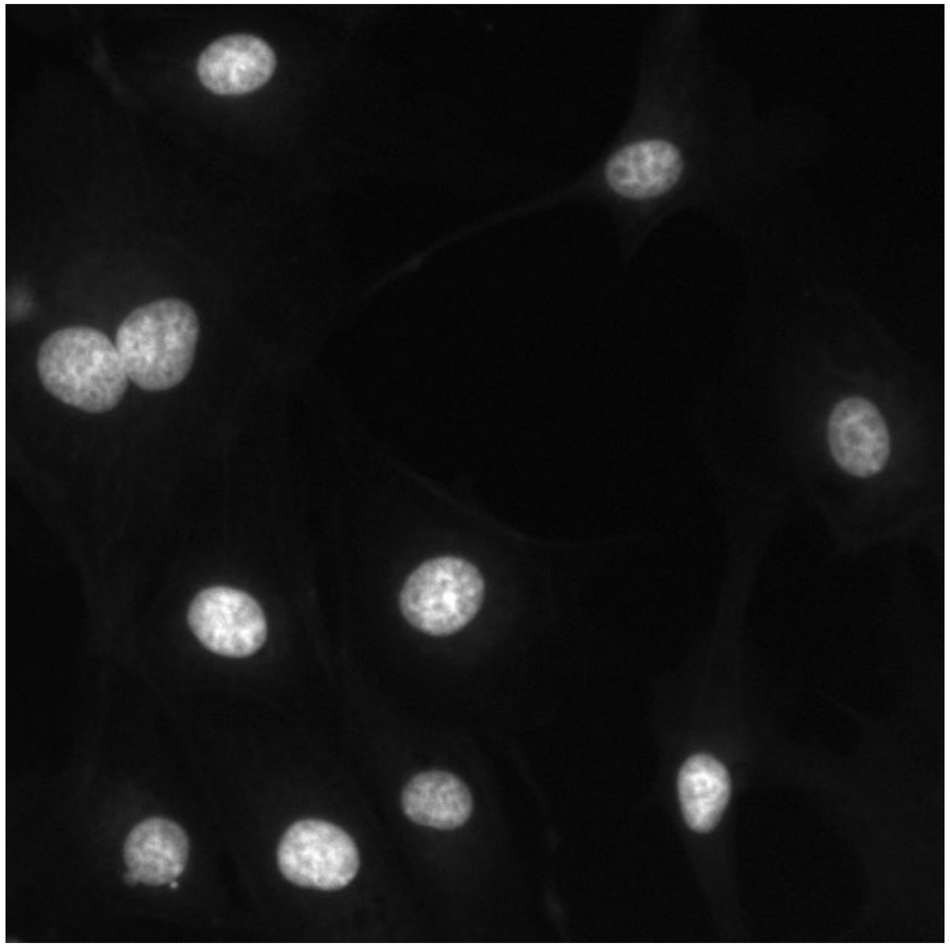
thresholding

filtering

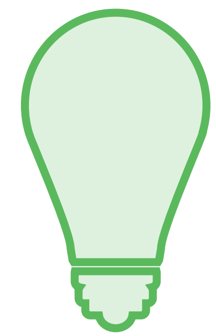
labeling a binary mask

refining a binary mask

Original Image



Nuclei regions have higher intensity values than non-nuclei regions in the image



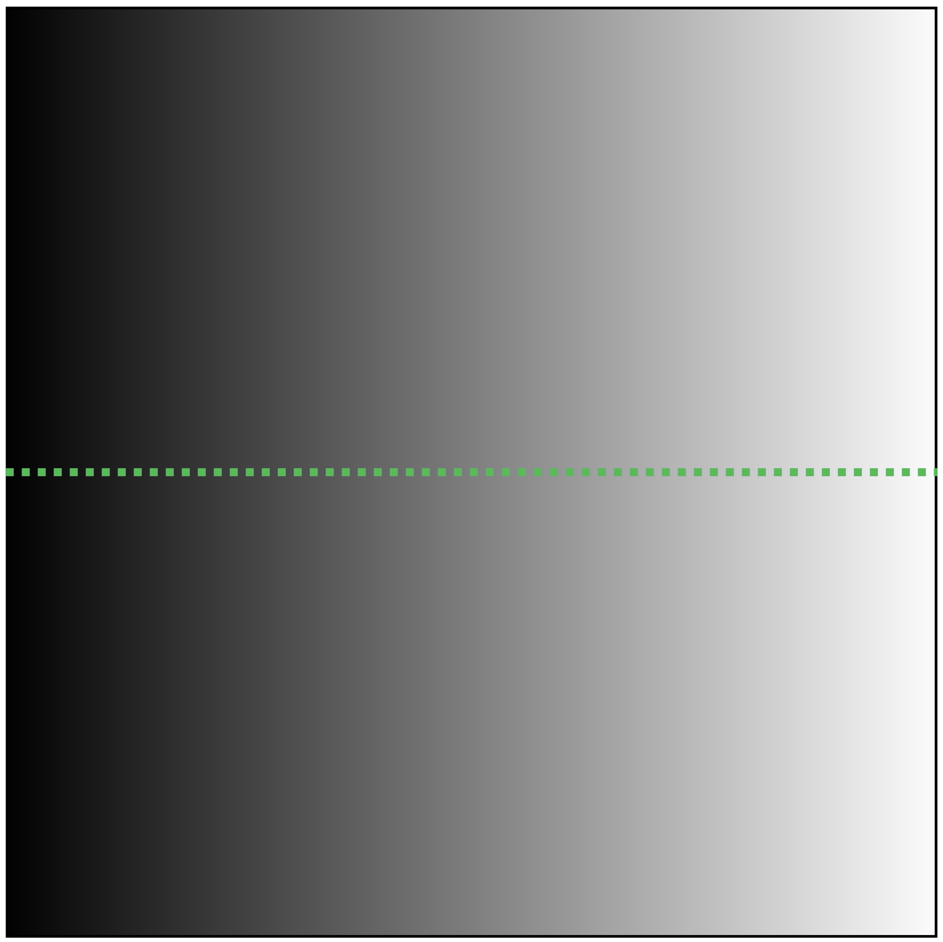
thresholding

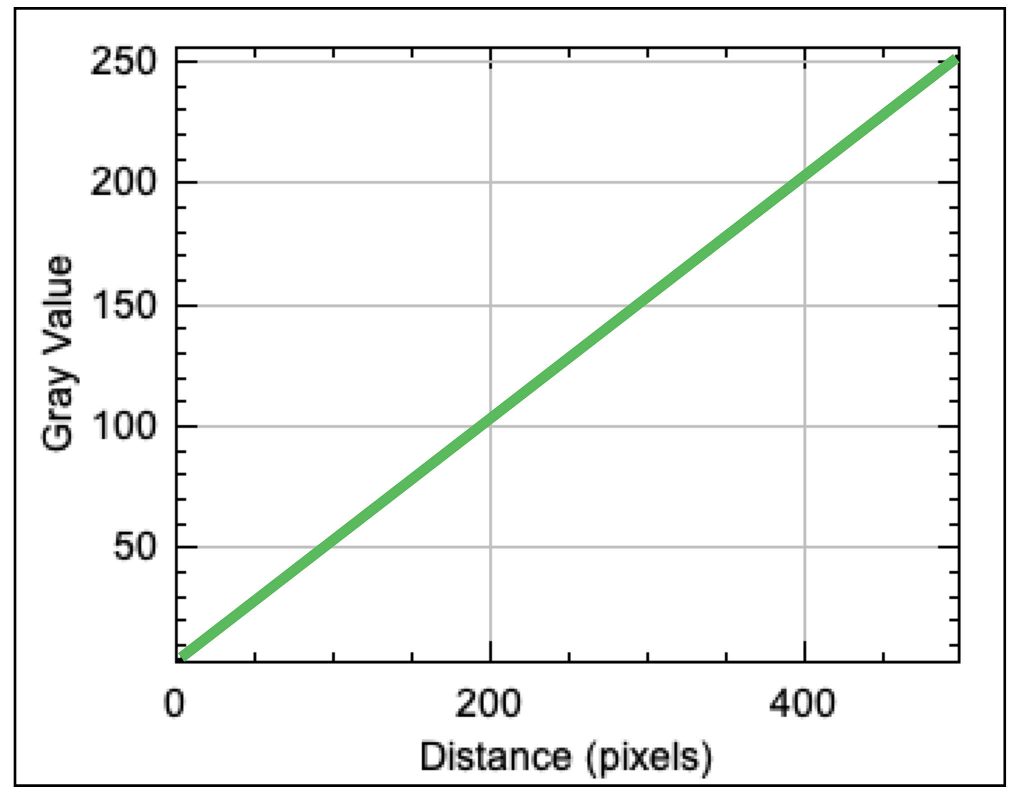
select a ***range*** of ***digital values*** in the image

thresholding

select a ***range*** of ***digital values*** in the image

8 bit image (0 - 255)*





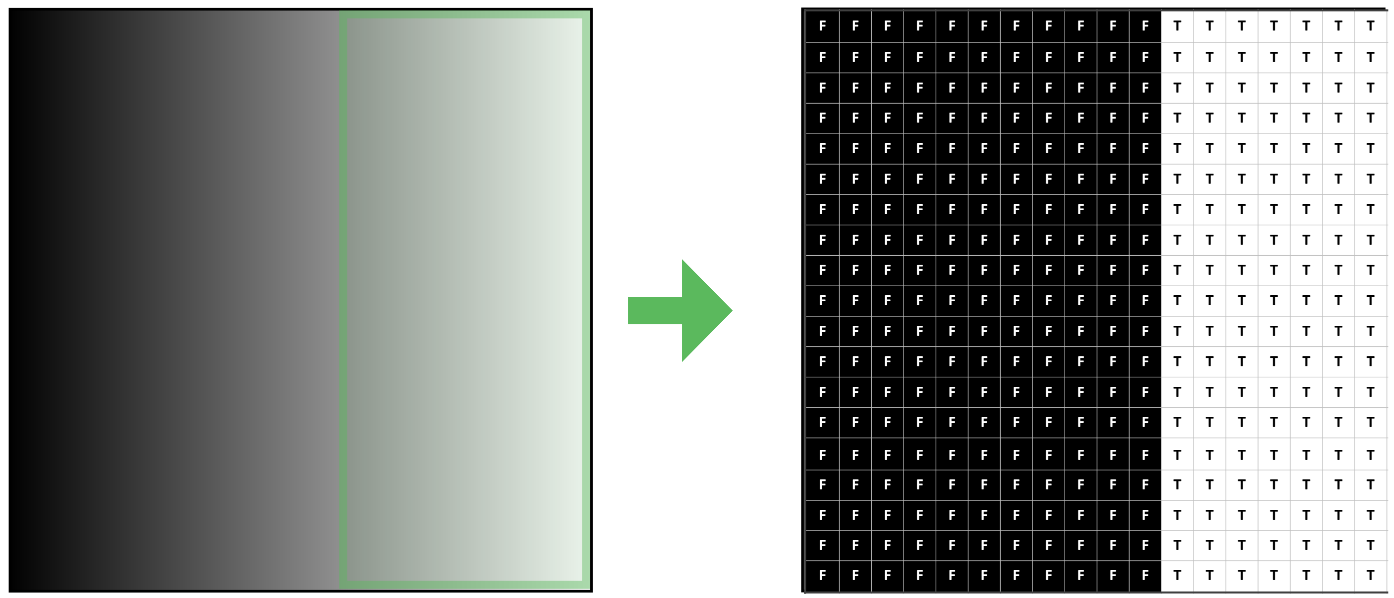
***8 bit** image = **each pixel** can have **2^8 grey values** = 256 grey values = **range 0-255**

The result of the thresholding process is a ***binary mask***

A **binary mask** is an image that has only 2 pixel values

8 bit image (0 - 255)

binary_mask

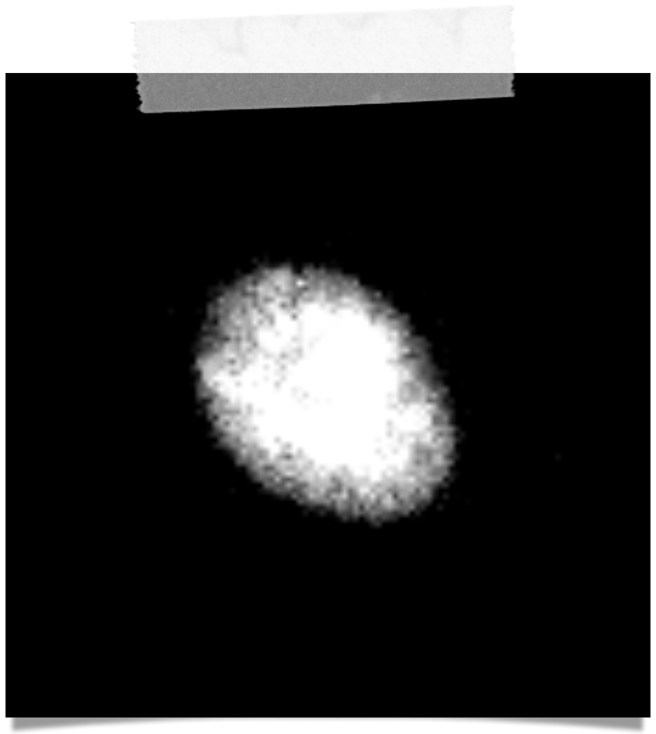


False: “discarded” pixels

True: selected pixels

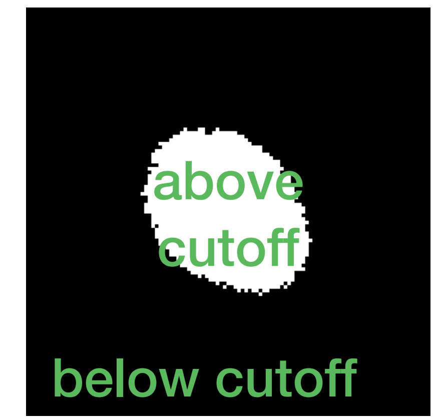
FIJI’s binary masks have 0 and 255 values.

2 ways to set a threshold



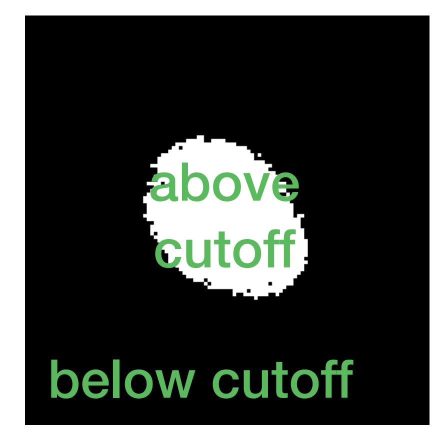
Thresholding by **manually** setting a min intensity count

Image Histogram



Thresholding by **automatically** setting a min intensity count using a thresholding algorithm

Image Histogram



Use thresholding algorithms so that thresholding will be reproducible across many images.

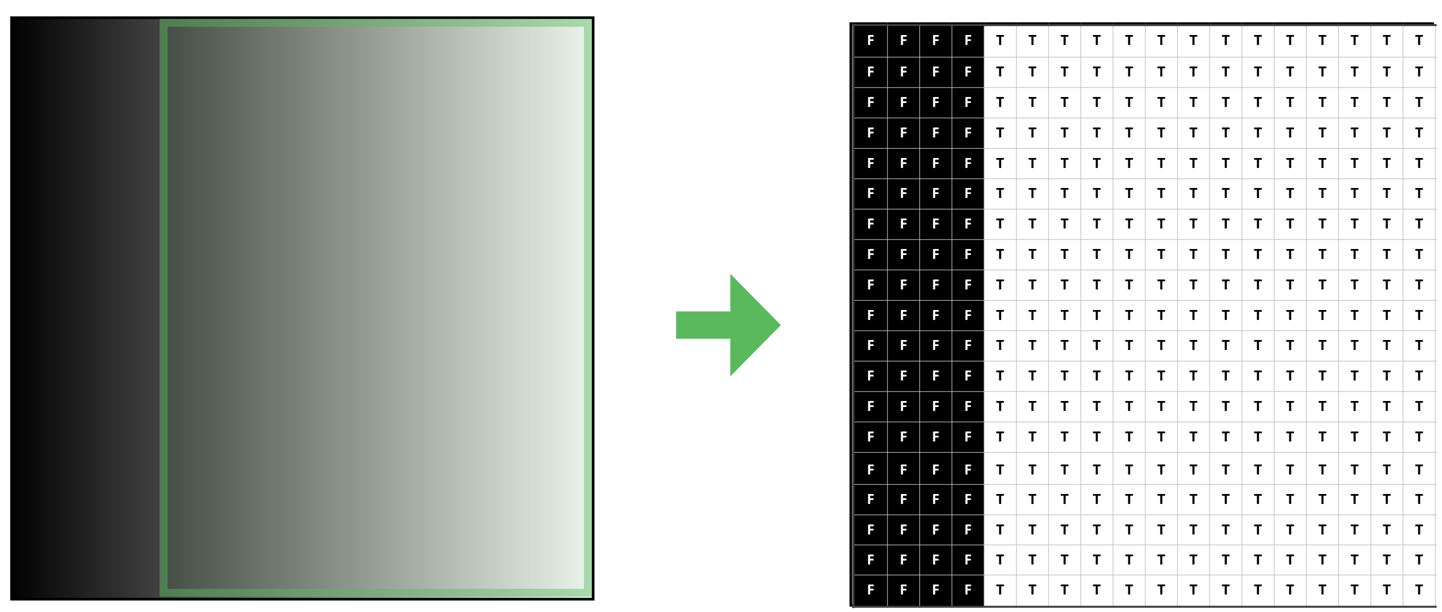
Thresholding in Python

Thresholding by **manually** setting a min intensity count

[1]:
```python
threshold = 50 # intensity value cutoff
binary_mask = raw_image > threshold
```

8 bit image (0 - 255)

binary_mask



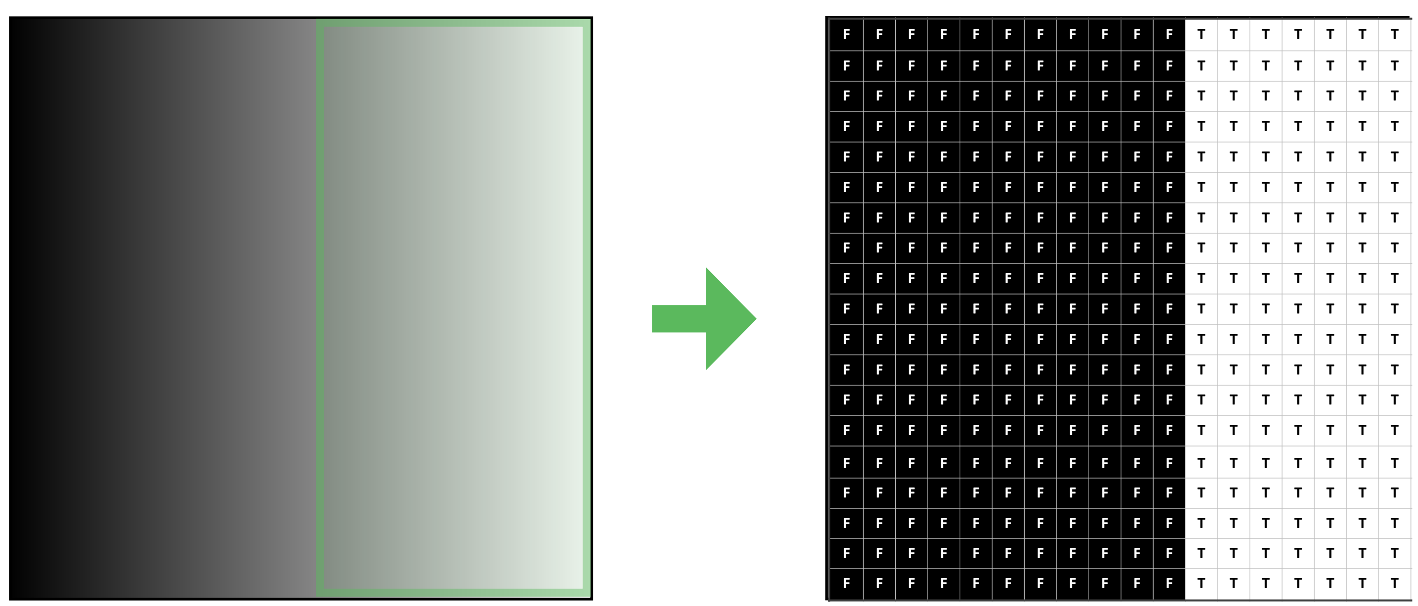
False: “discarded” pixels
True: selected pixels

Thresholding in Python

Thresholding by **manually** setting a min intensity count

```
[1]: threshold = 100 # intensity value cutoff
     binary_mask = raw_image > threshold
```

8 bit image (0 - 255)   binary_mask

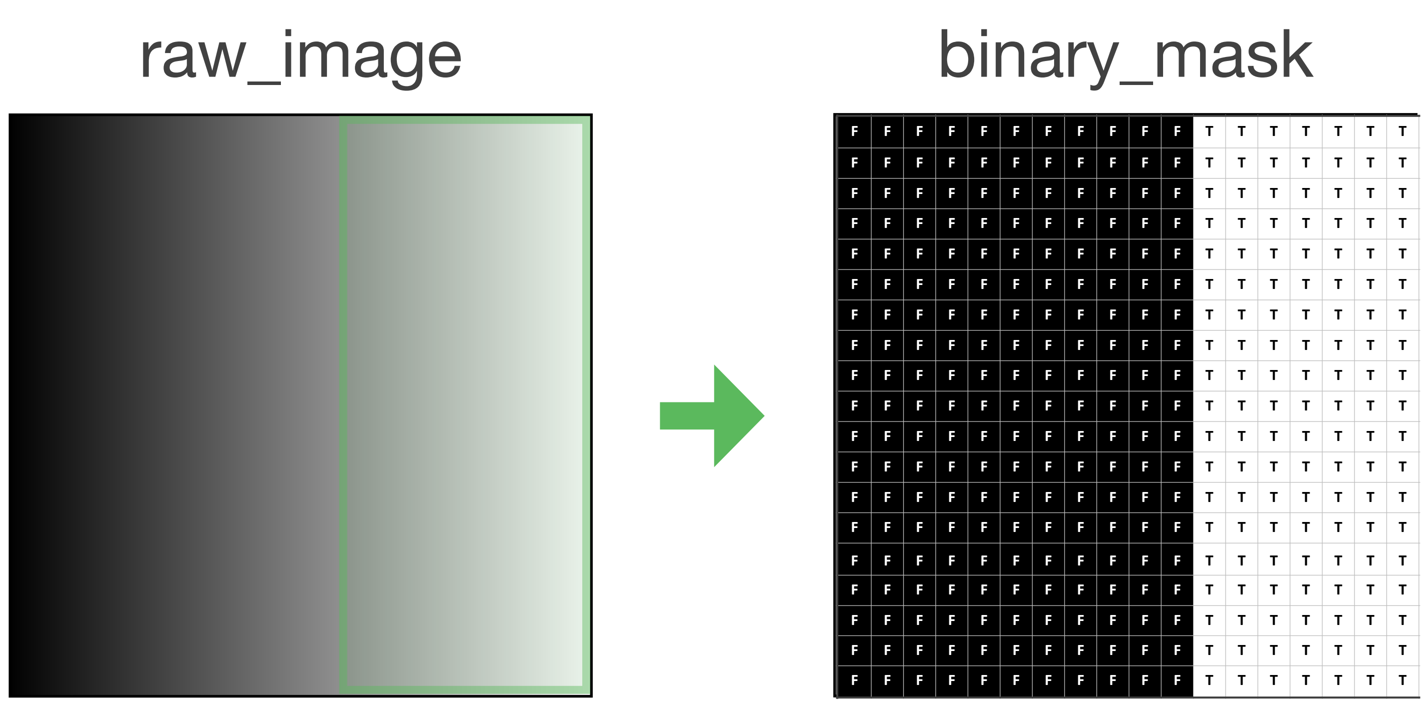


False: “discarded” pixels
True: selected pixels

Thresholding in Python

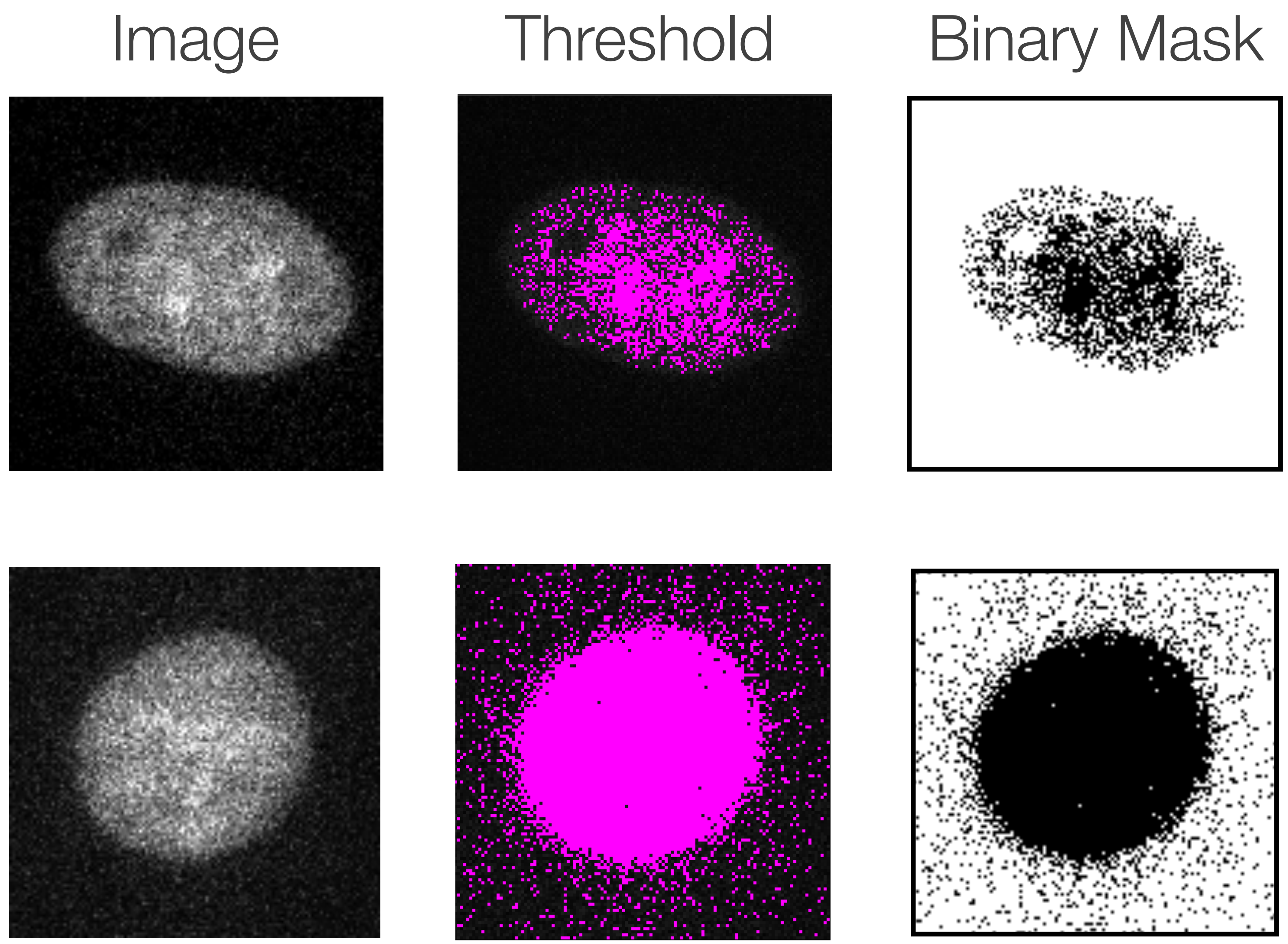
Thresholding by **automatically** setting a min intensity count using a thresholding algorithm

[1]:
```python
# use Otsu thresholding algorithm
from skimage.filters import threshold_otsu
binary_mask = raw_image >
              threshold_otsu(raw_image)
```



False: “discarded” pixels
True: selected pixels

Usually if you apply thresholding to the original image, you won't precisely select all or only pixels of interest



Many factors can contribute to variance in pixel values:

- fluorescence label (e.g. DAPI)
- background (uneven illumination, out of focus light, aberration)
- detector offset
- noise (detector read noise, poisson noise, etc.)

classic segmentation with Python

thresholding

~~filtering~~

labeling a binary mask

refining a binary mask

classic segmentation with Python

filtering

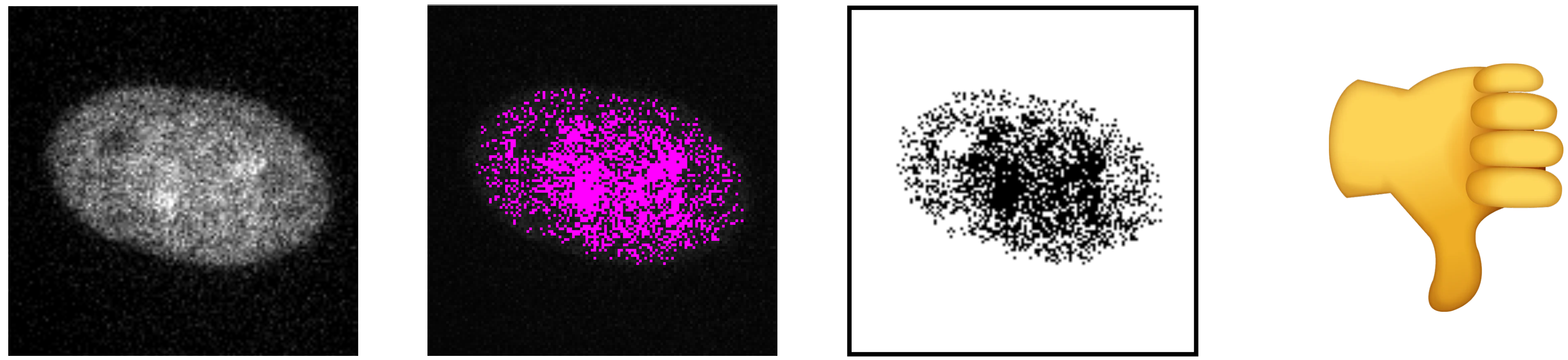
thresholding

~~filtering~~

labeling a binary mask

refining a binary mask

Image | Threshold | Binary Mask



What if we apply an image filter before thresholding?

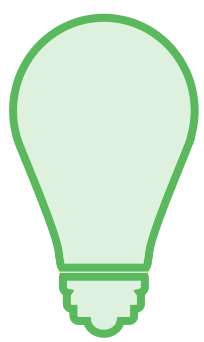
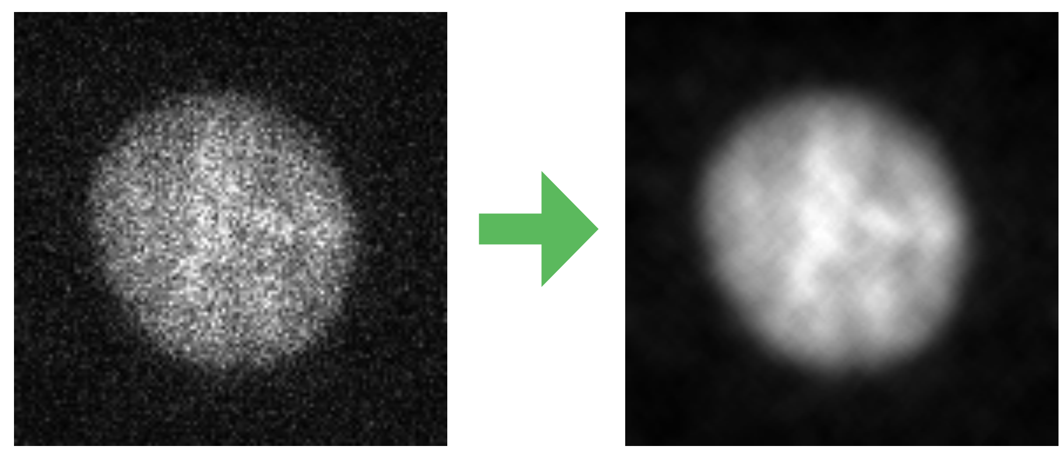


Image | Filtered Image



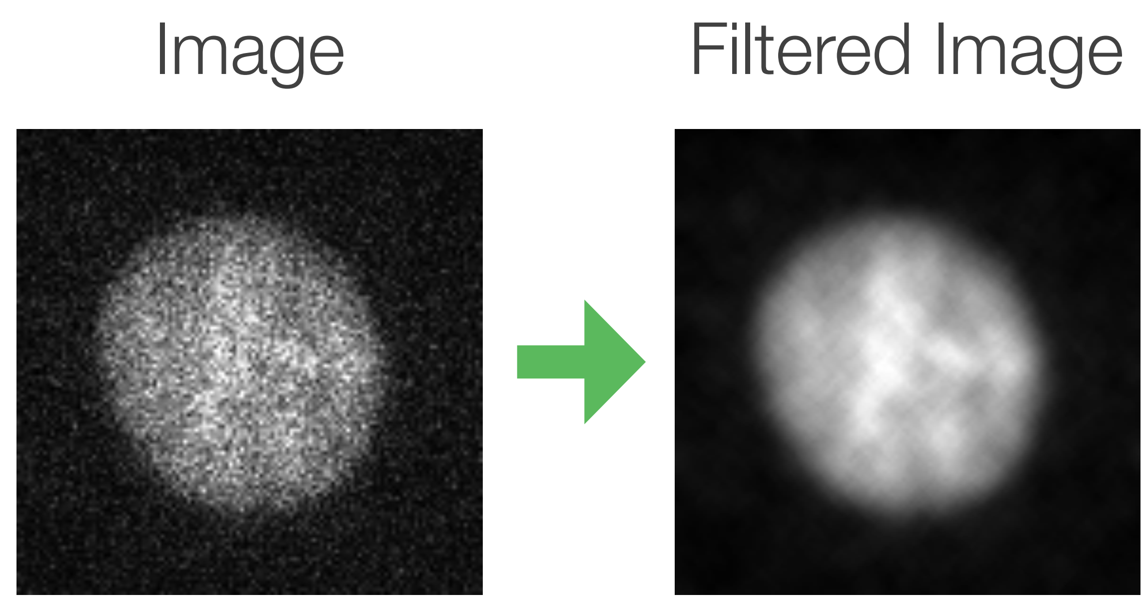
filtering

Change image pixel values using a ***mathematical operation*** to smooth and reduce noise from images.

filtering

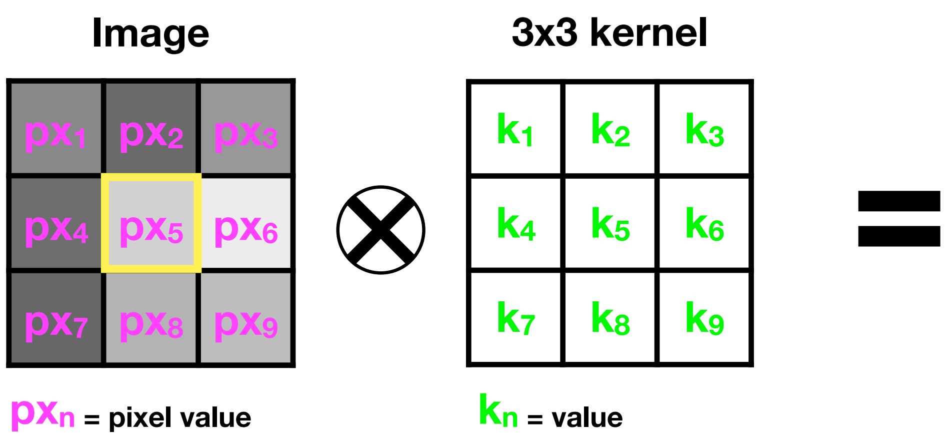
Change image pixel values using a ***mathematical operation*** to smooth and reduce noise from images.

we are mathematically changing this image's pixel values when we apply a filter.



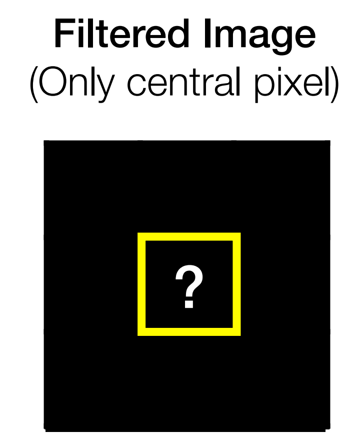
How most filters work mathematically

Convolve an image with a ***3x3 kernel***

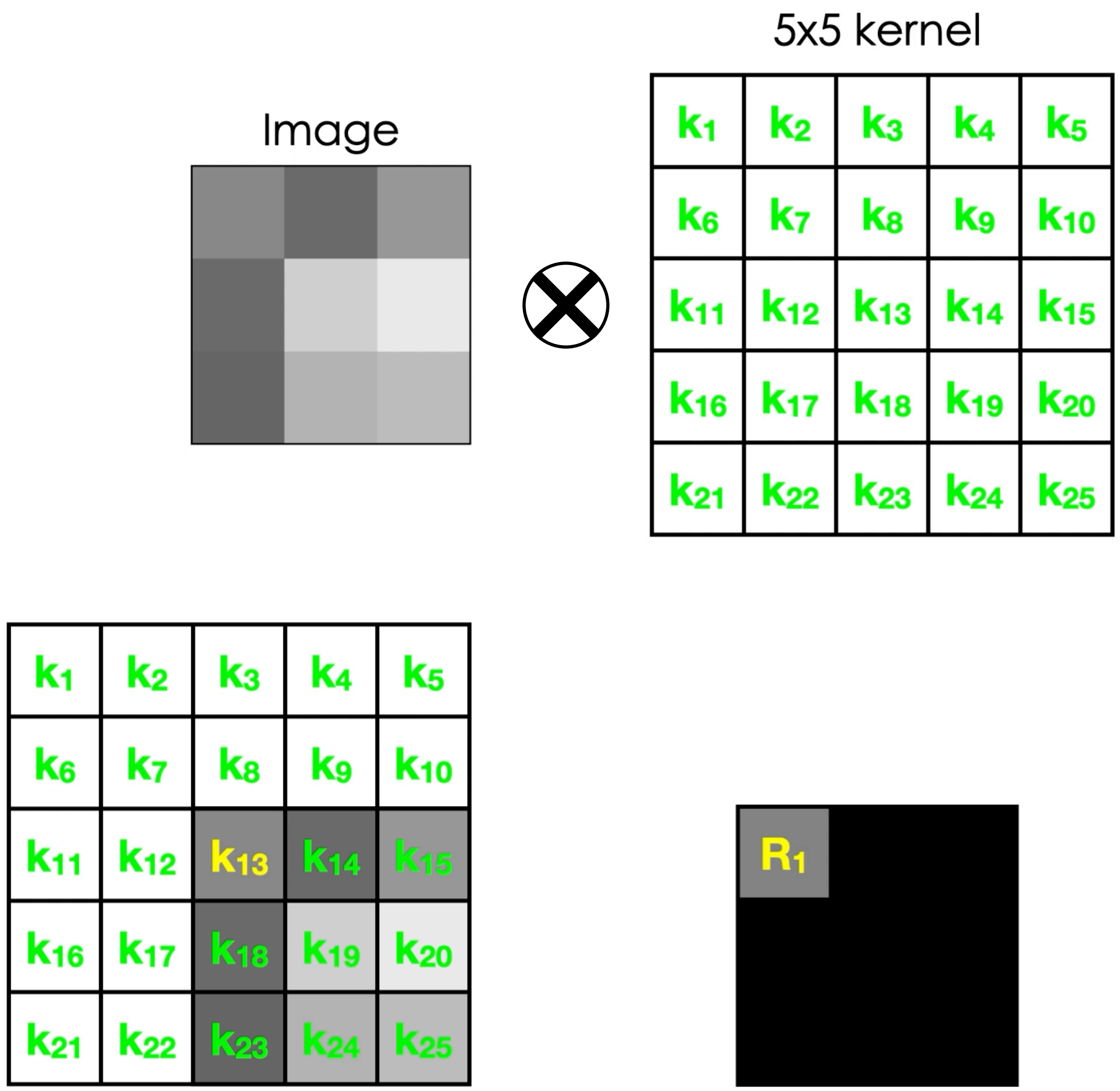


$$
\begin{aligned}
& px_1 * (k_1/k_{sum}) = r_1 \\
+\ & px_2 * (k_2/k_{sum}) = r_2 \\
+\ & px_3 * (k_3/k_{sum}) = r_3 \\
+\ & px_4 * (k_4/k_{sum}) = r_4 \\
+\ & px_5 * (k_5/k_{sum}) = r_5 \\
+\ & px_6 * (k_6/k_{sum}) = r_6 \\
+\ & px_7 * (k_7/k_{sum}) = r_7 \\
+\ & px_8 * (k_8/k_{sum}) = r_8 \\
+\ & px_9 * (k_9/k_{sum}) = \underline{r_9} \\
& \qquad\qquad\qquad\quad \mathbf{R}
\end{aligned}
$$

k_{sum} = sum of k_n ($k_1 + k_2 + k_3 + \ldots$)



Convolve an image with a ***5x5 kernel***



When you apply a filter, you can specify the kernel size you are convolving with.

examples of filters good at reducing noise

mean filter

Gaussian blur filter

median filter

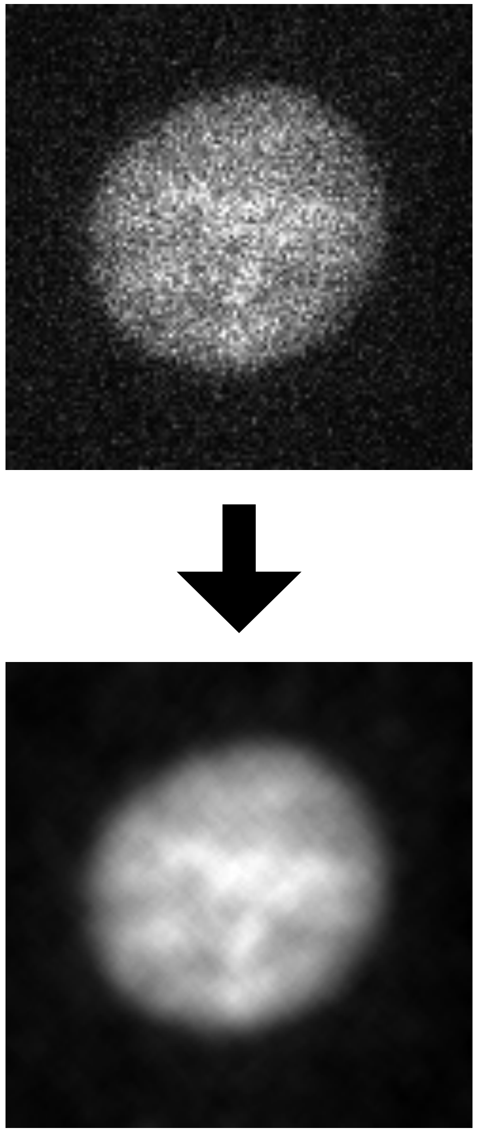
mean filter

sum values in a list and then divide by total number of values

Footprint refers to the kernel size.

3x3 kernel

1	1	1
1	1	1
1	1	1



Larger Footprint = Bigger Kernel = Higher Blur

examples of filters good at reducing noise

mean filter

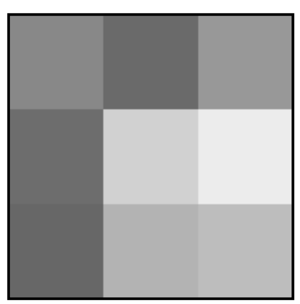
Gaussian blur filter

median filter

Gaussian blur filter

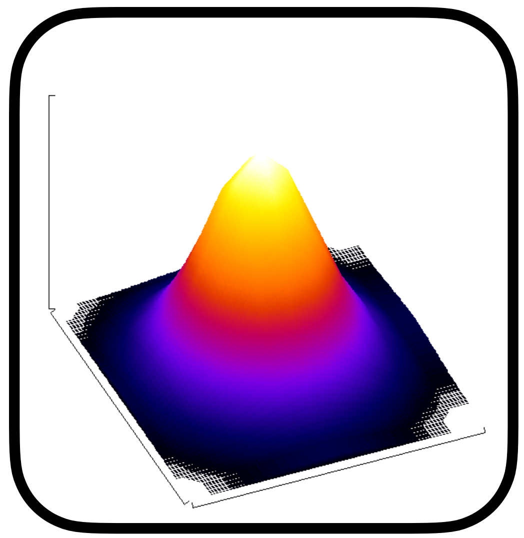
multiply each value by Gaussian profile weighting, then divide by total number of values

Image



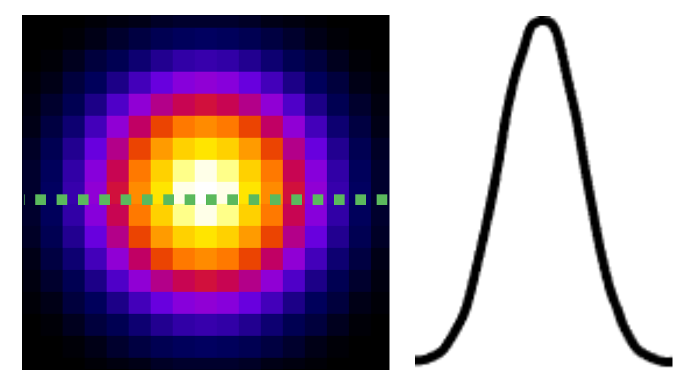
⊗

Gaussian Function



→

2D top view of Gaussian Function



Sigma refers to the kernel size.

Sigma 1 = 5x5 kernel

	1	4	7	4	1
	4	16	26	16	4
273	7	26	41	26	7
	4	16	26	16	4
	1	4	7	4	1

How is a ***mean filter*** different from a ***Gaussian blur filter***?

mean filter

In a **Mean Filter**, the **kernel values** are all the **same**

average: all pixels are given the same weight.

25

1	1	1	1	1
1	1	1	1	1
1	1	1	1	1
1	1	1	1	1
1	1	1	1	1

5x5 kernel

VS.

Gaussian blur filter

In a **Gaussian Blur Filter**, the **kernel values** follow a **Gaussian profile**

weighted average: pixels nearest the center of the kernel are given more weight than those far away from the center.

273

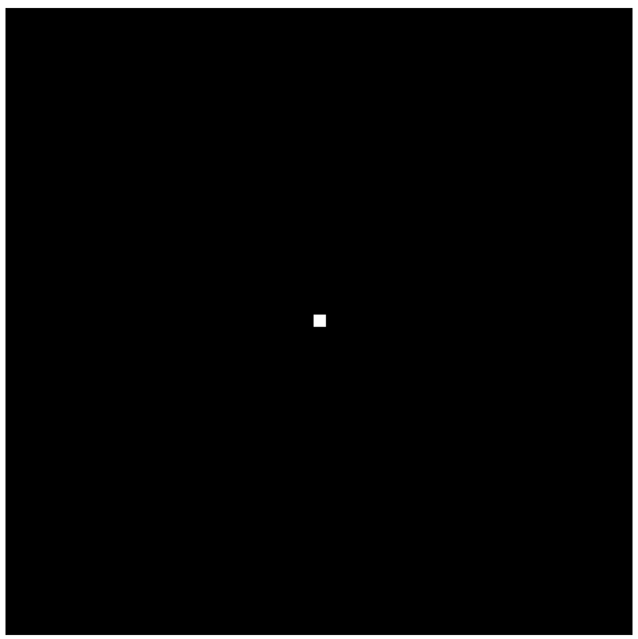
1	4	7	4	1
4	16	26	16	4
7	26	41	26	7
4	16	26	16	4
1	4	7	4	1

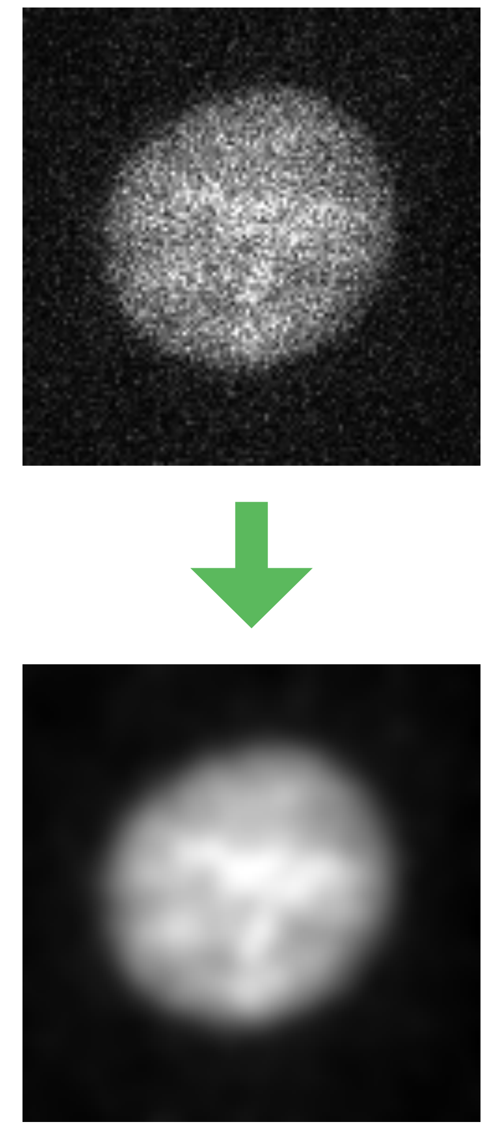
sigma = 1 **5x5 kernel**

gaussian blur filter

multiply each value by gaussian profile weighting, then divide by total number of values

Image





Higher Sigma = Bigger Kernel = Higher Blur

examples of filters good at reducing noise

- mean filter
- Gaussian blur filter
- median filter

median filter

take the middle number in a sorted list of numbers

Footprint refers to the kernel size.

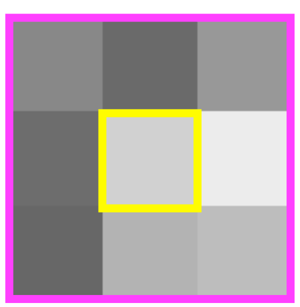
3x3 kernel

1	1	1
1	1	1
1	1	1

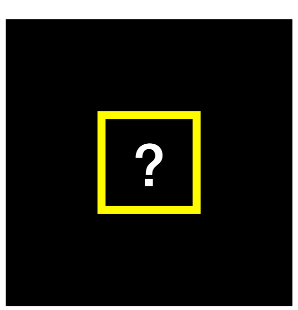
Default = 3x3 kernel

Apply a median filter with 3x3 kernel.

What is the value of the central pixel in the filtered image?



136	106	152
109	209	236
103	179	189



	?	

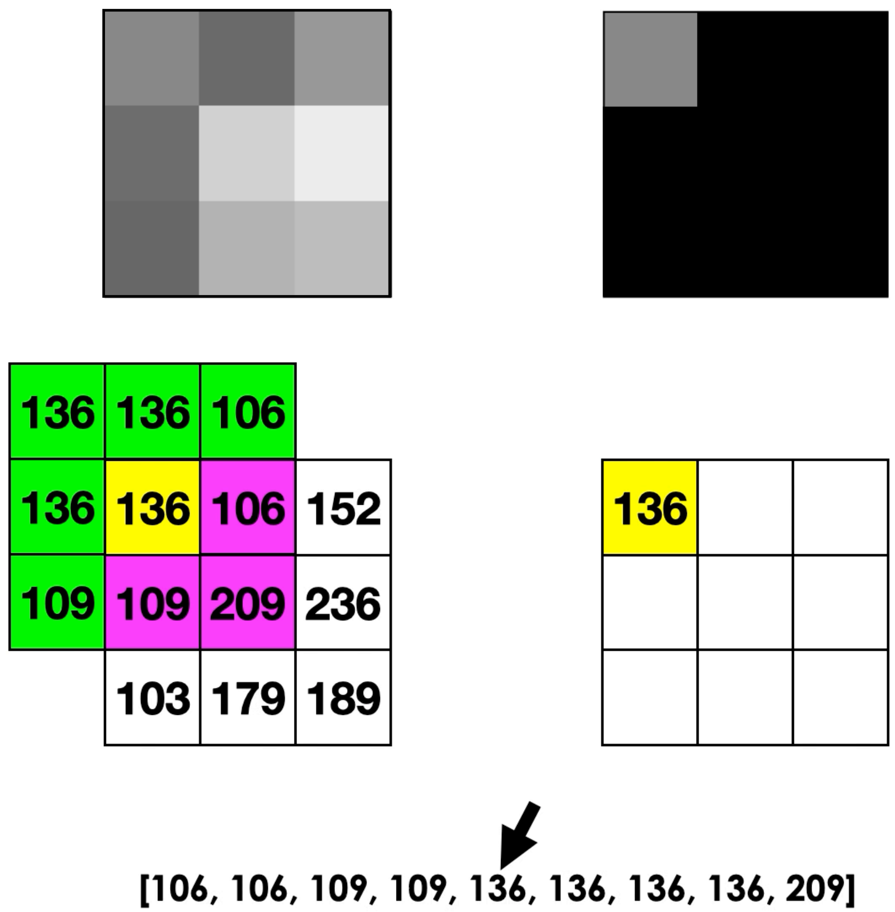
Look at all of the numbers in this kernel size and find the middle value

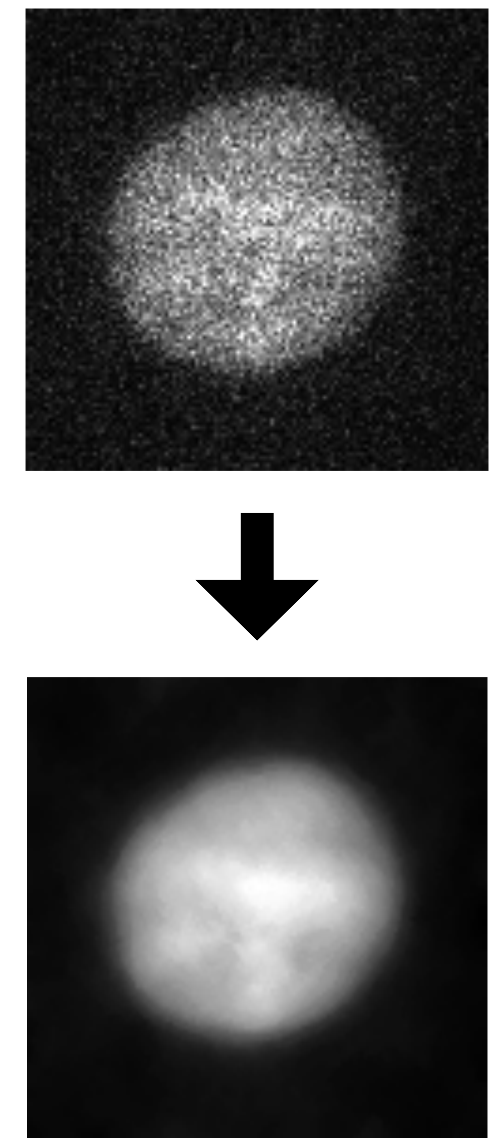
[103, 106, 109, 136, **152**, 179, 189, 209, 236]

median filter

take the middle number in a sorted list of numbers

3x3 kernel



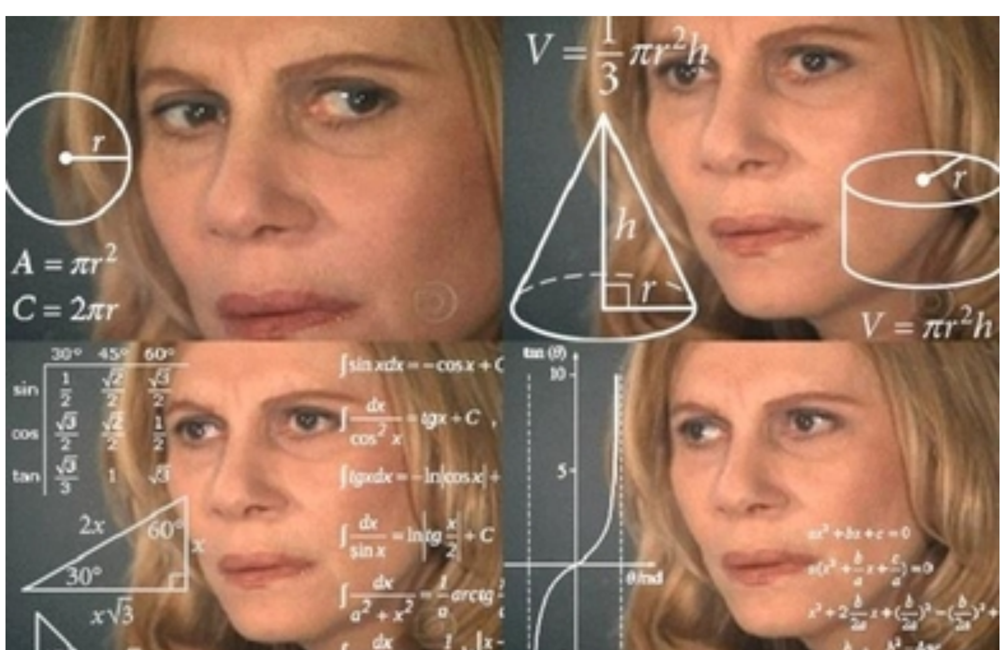


Bigger Kernel = Higher Blur

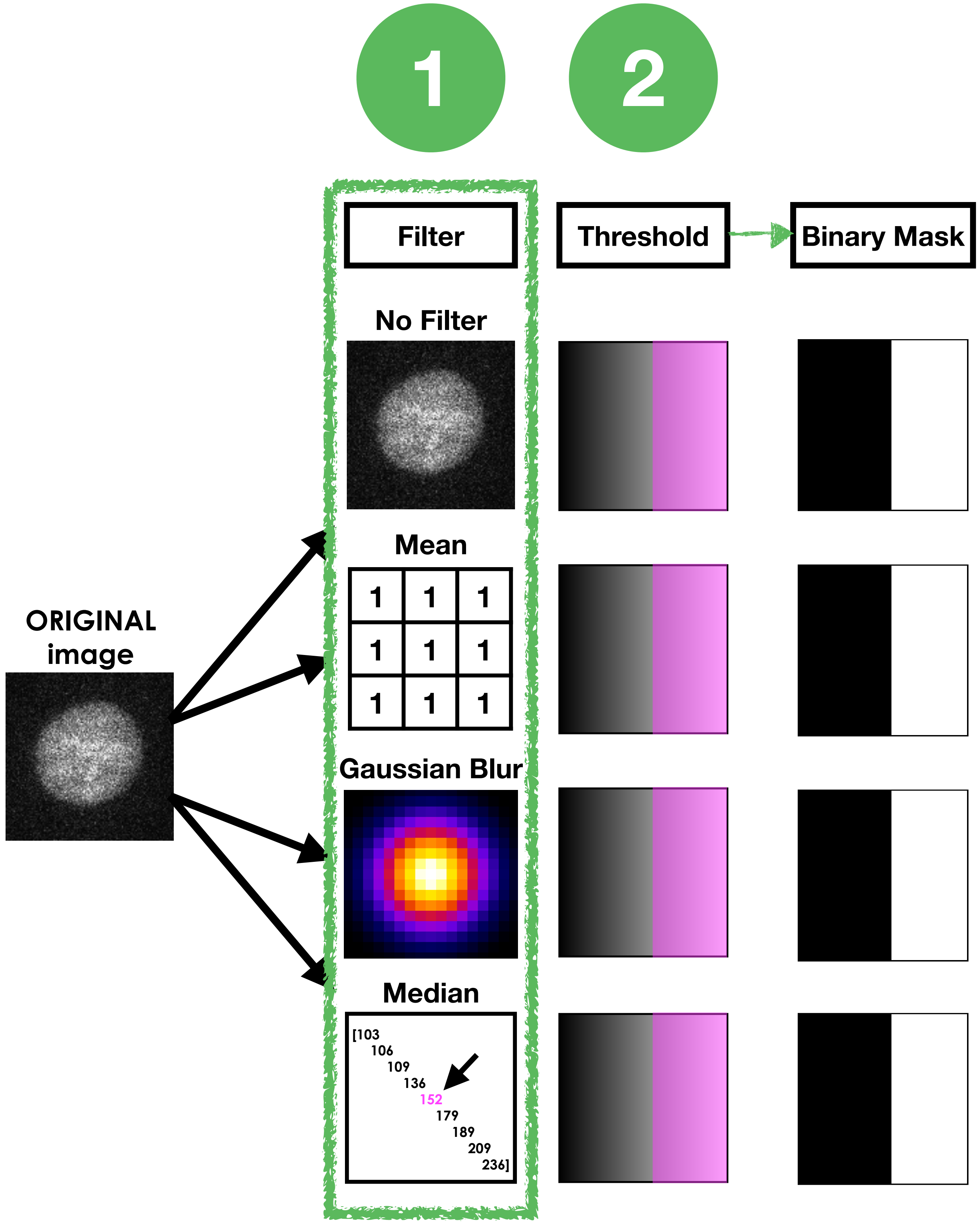
Median filters don’t use convolution!

examples of filters good at reducing noise

- mean filter
- Gaussian blur filter
- median filter



Thinking about filter math can take some time to get used to.



Which filter should you choose?

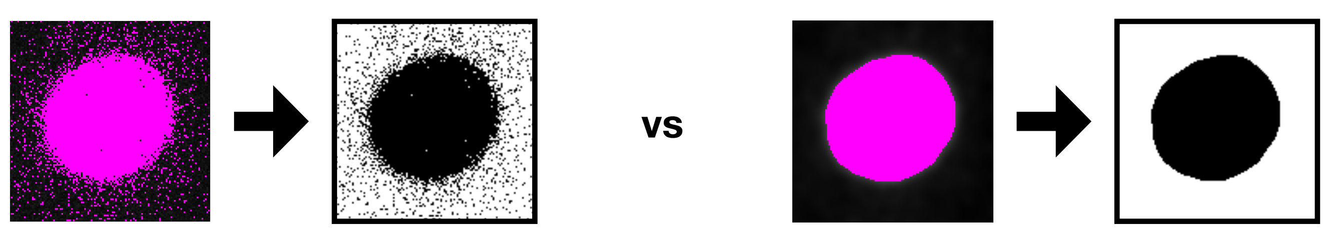
Choose the filter parameters that give you the best binary mask result

test different filters

- mean filter
- gaussian blur filter
- median filter

…and different kernel sizes

choose the combination that gives you the best binary mask result



Filtering in Python

Gaussian blur filter

[1]:
```python
# use Gaussian blur filter
from skimage.filters import gaussian
filtered_image = gaussian(raw_image)
```

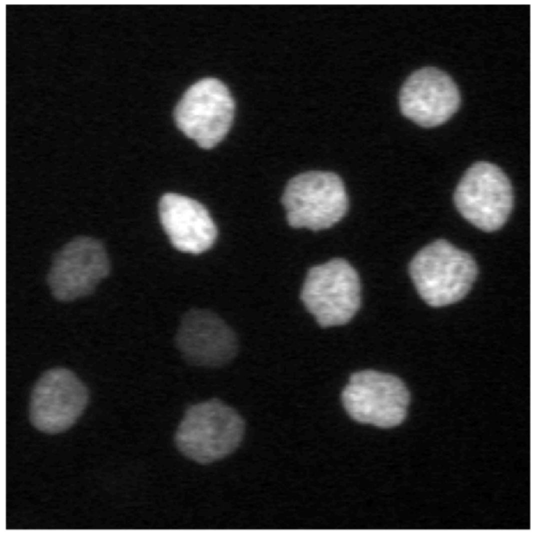
thresholding algorithm

[ ]:
```python
# use Otsu thresholding algorithm
binary_mask = filtered_image >
              threshold_otsu(filtered_image)
```

Now what do we do with the binary mask?

2 types of segmentation: Semantic & Instance

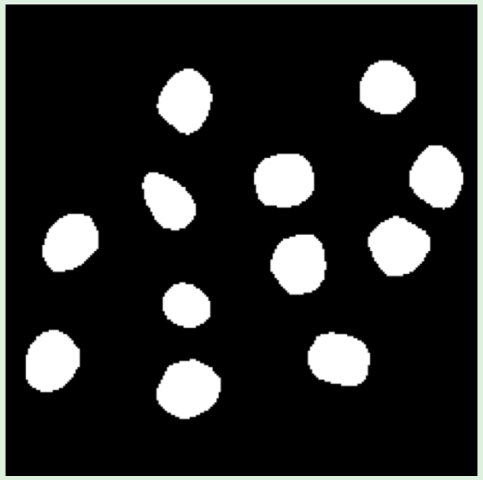
Raw Image



Semantic Segmentation

All objects treated as the same category

Example:



Categories:

Nuclei

Instance Segmentation

Each object is distinguished as separate and has a unique label

Example:

Categories:

Nucleus 1

Nucleus 2

Nucleus 3

...

We need to do another step to accomplish this.

classic segmentation with Python

filtering

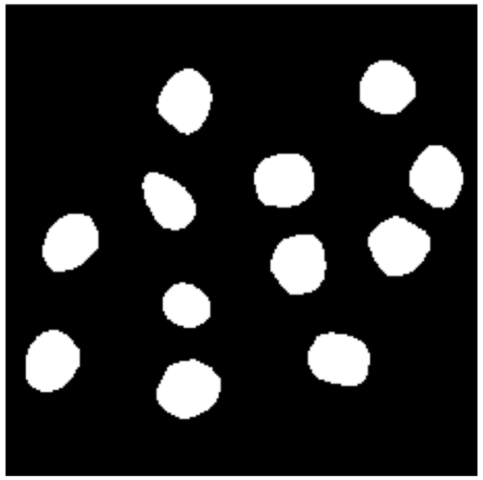
thresholding

~~filtering~~

labeling a binary mask

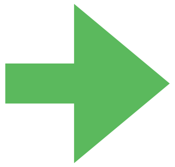
refining a binary mask

Now that we have a binary mask, we need a way to ***distinguish individual objects of interest*** in the mask



Categories:

Nucleus



Categories:

Nucleus 1

Nucleus 2

Nucleus 3

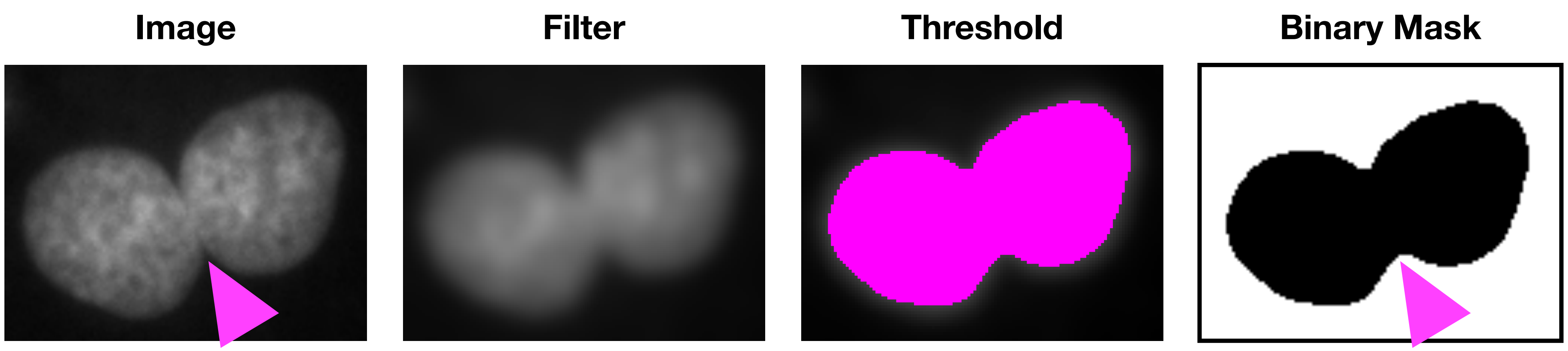
…

Labeling a mask in Python

labeling a mask

```
[ ]: from skimage.measure import label
     labeled_image = label(binary_mask)
```

What if the binary mask isn't perfect?



2 or more nuclei in the binary mask image are touching each other, resulting in them being considered as a single object.

classic segmentation with Python

filtering

thresholding

~~filtering~~

labeling a binary mask

refining a binary mask

Sometimes binary masks need to be ***refined***

mask refinement: additional processing steps applied to a binary mask to more accurately match the image foreground.

common problems:

miscellaneous schmutz

holes inside objects

touching objects

Morphological operations: a family of algorithms that are helpful for modifying object shapes

Watershed Algorithm: useful for separating touching objects.

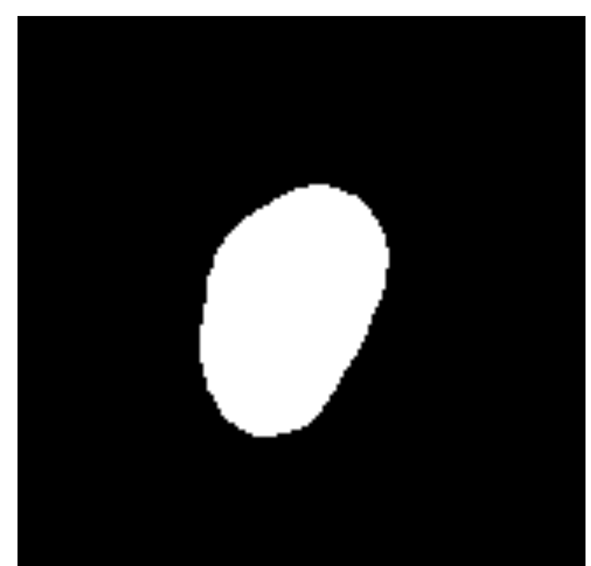
miscellaneous schmutz

Morphological operations: a family of algorithms that are helpful for modifying object shapes

opening

~ removes small objects from foreground

[ ]:
```
from skimage.morphology import remove_small_objects
binary_mask_sized = remove_small_objects(
                                binary_mask,minsize=10)
```



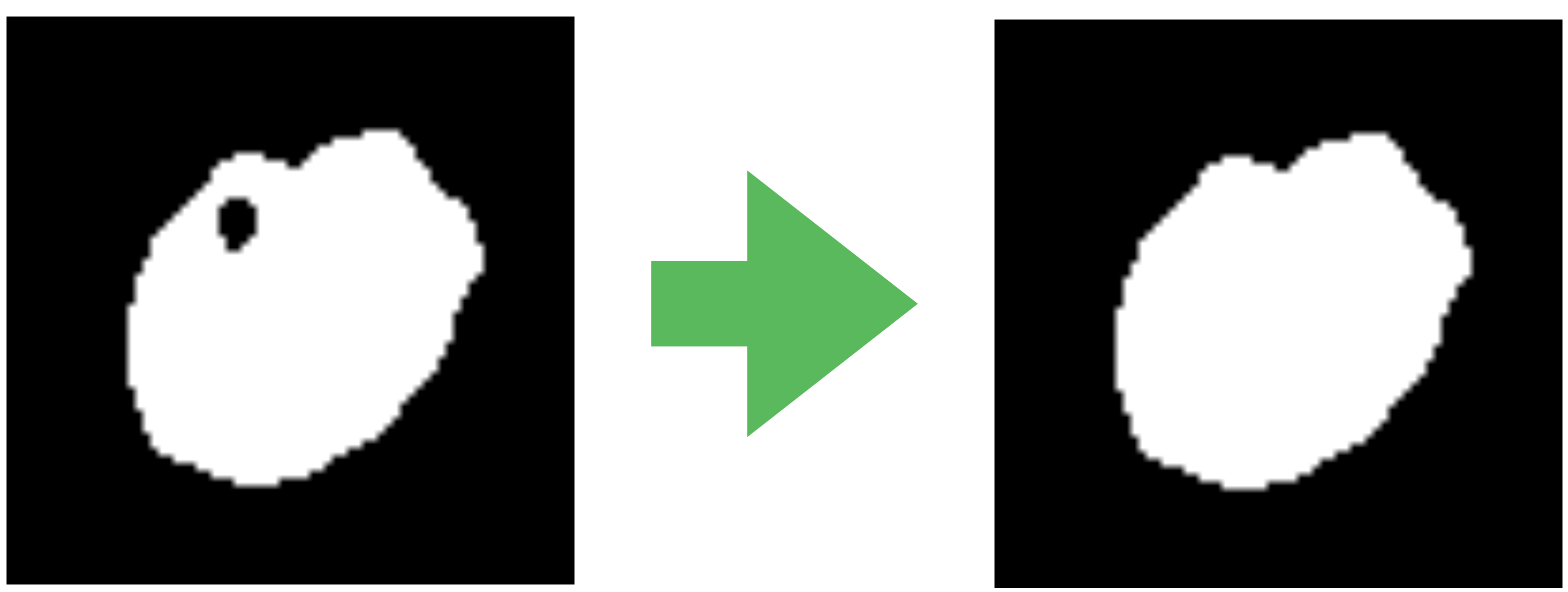
holes inside objects

Morphological operations: a family of algorithms that are helpful for modifying object shapes

closing

~ fills small holes in foreground

```
[ ]: from skimage.morphology import binary_closing, disk
     binary_mask_sized = binary_closing(binary_mask,
                                        disk(1))
```

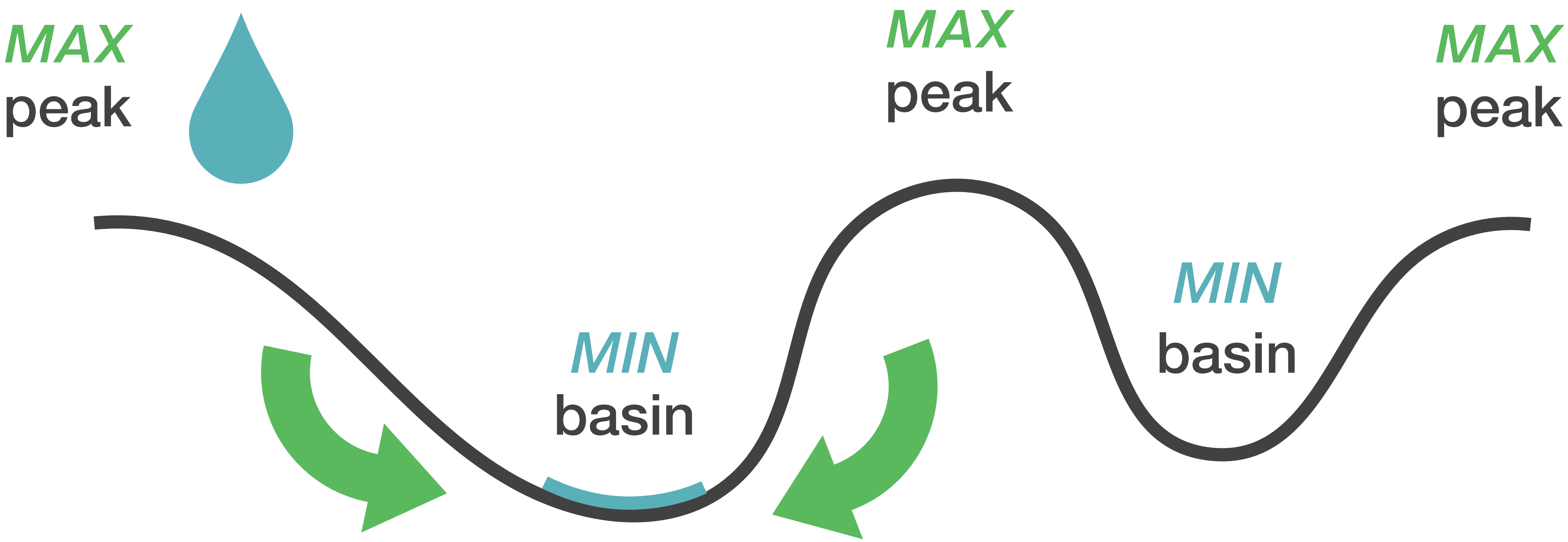


touching objects

Watershed Algorithm: useful for separating touching objects.

What *is* the watershed algorithm?

The name **watershed** is inspired by how a drop of water falls along a surface

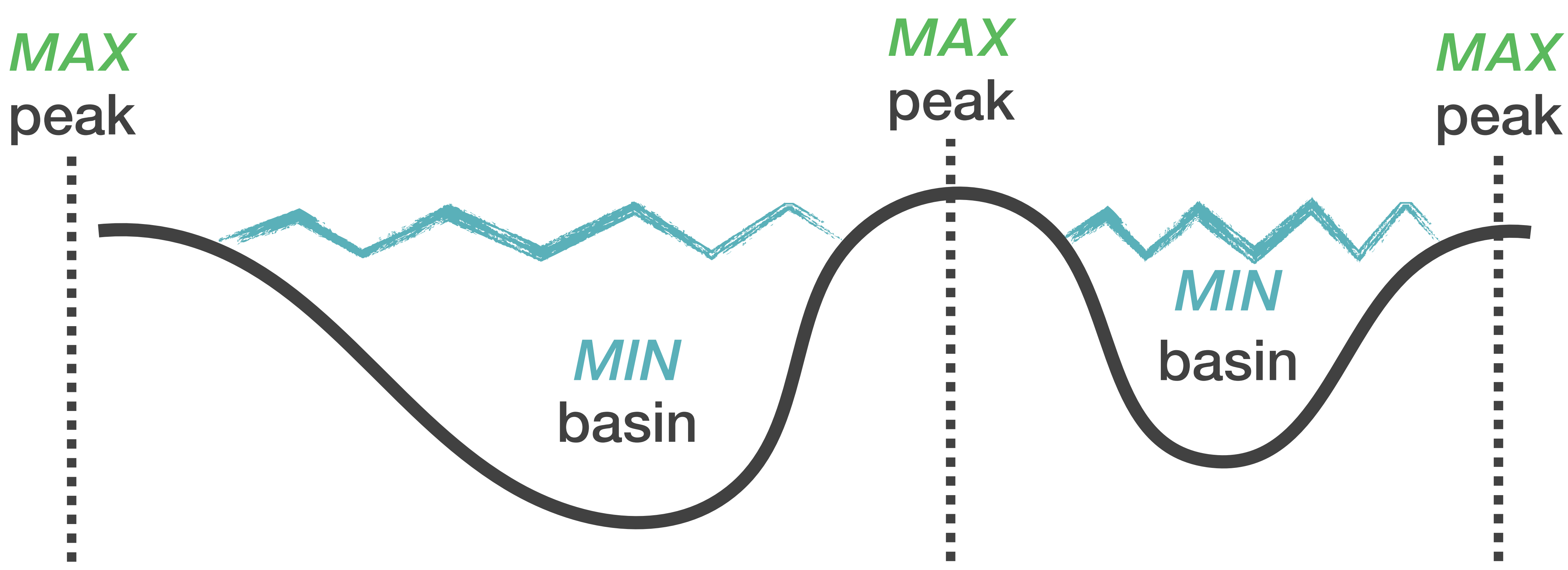


the drop flows to the nearest low point, called a **basin**

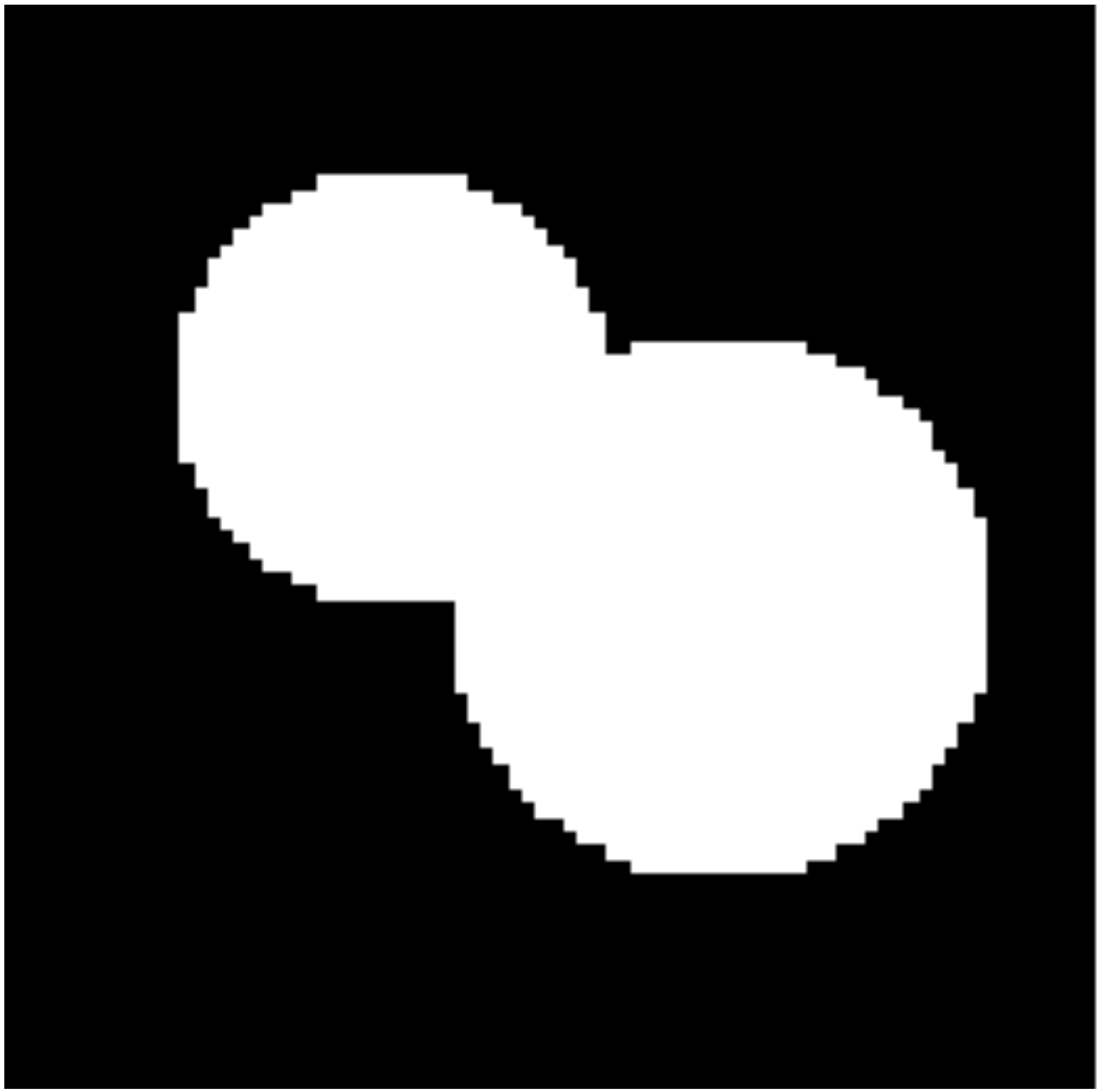
What *is* the watershed algorithm?

The name **watershed** is inspired by how a drop of water falls along a surface

the **watershed line** separates
which basin the water will go to

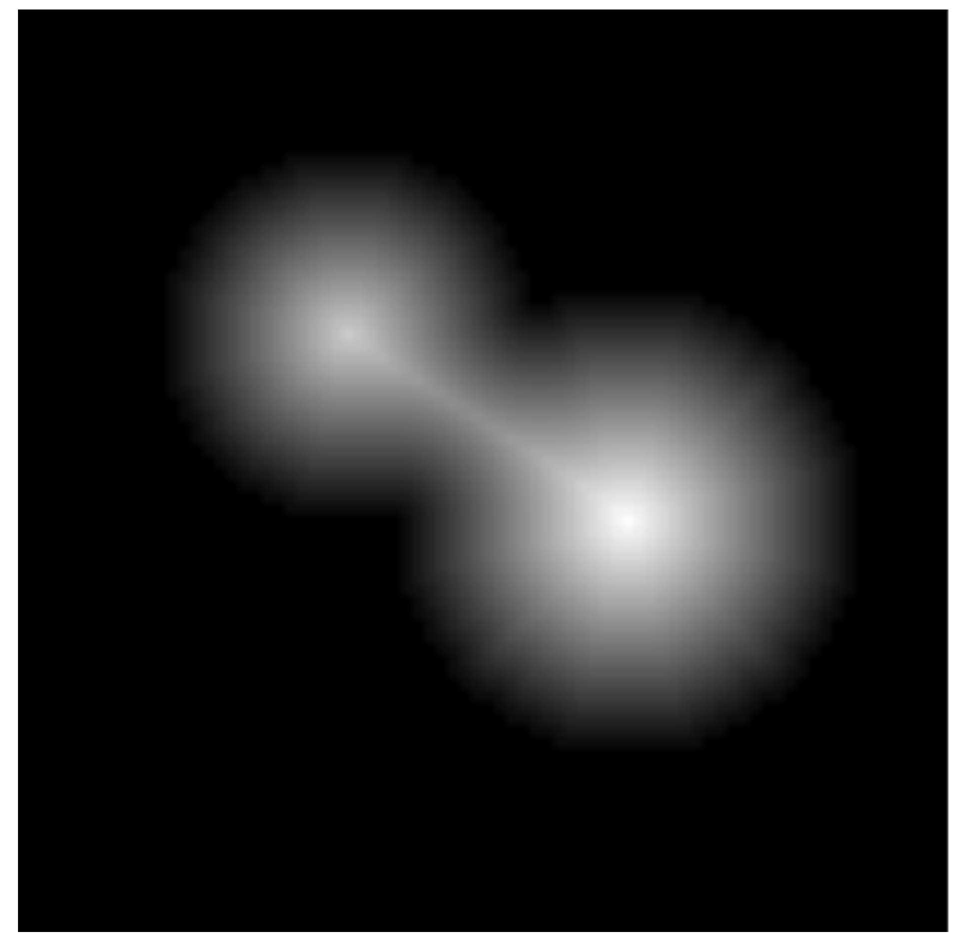


What *is* the watershed algorithm?



from scikit-image.org

Calculate how far each white pixel is from the nearest black pixel



the resulting image is called a ***distance transform***

What *is* the watershed algorithm?

Let's study this distance transform…

The largest distance values are in the ***centers*** of the 2 objects

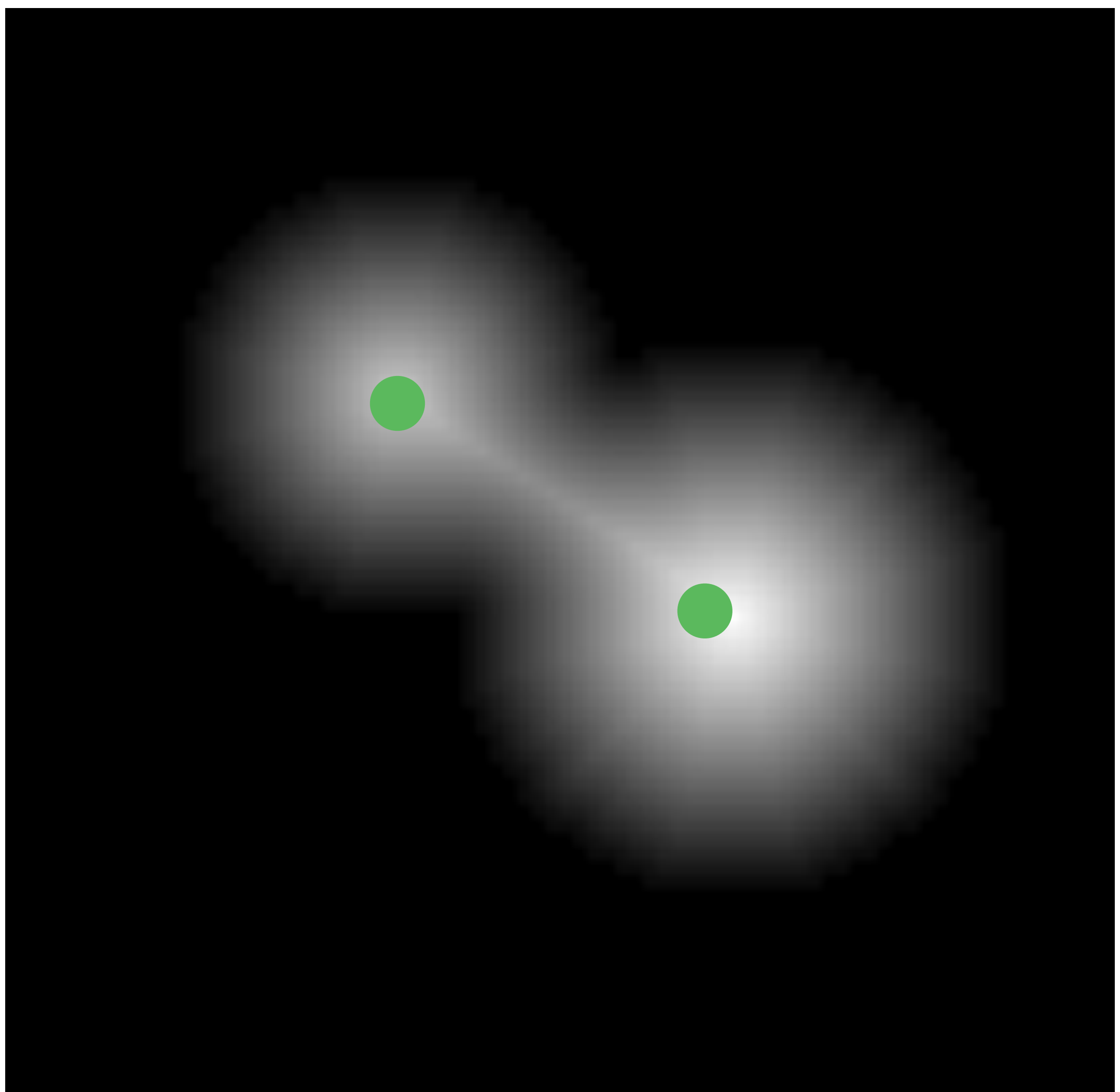
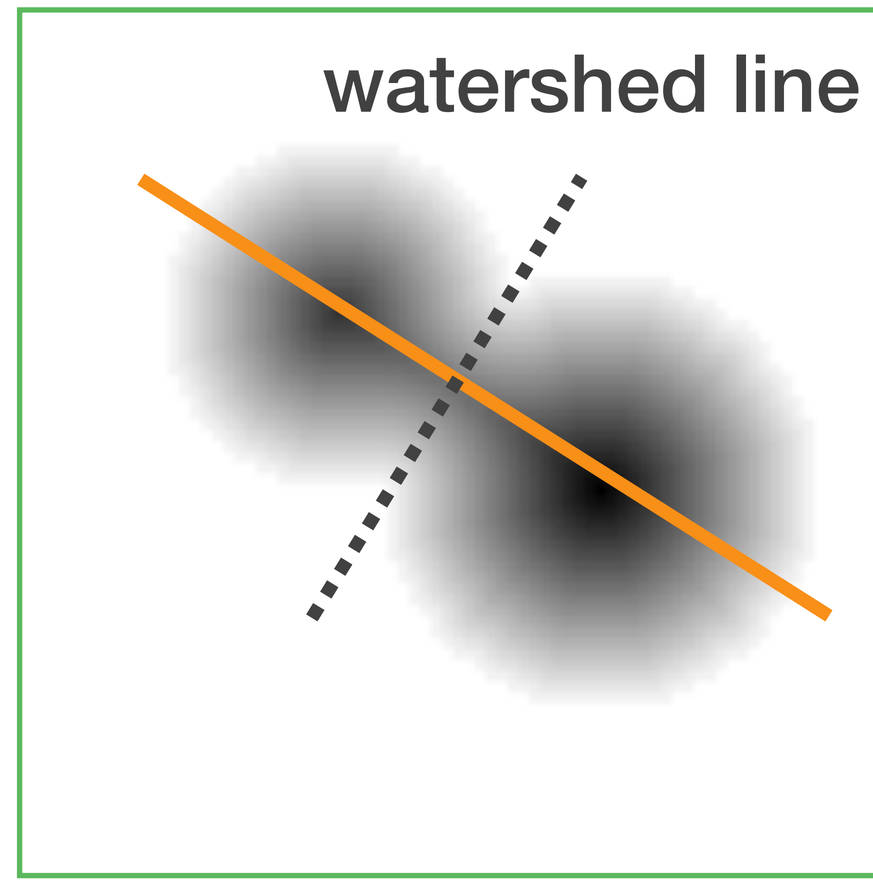
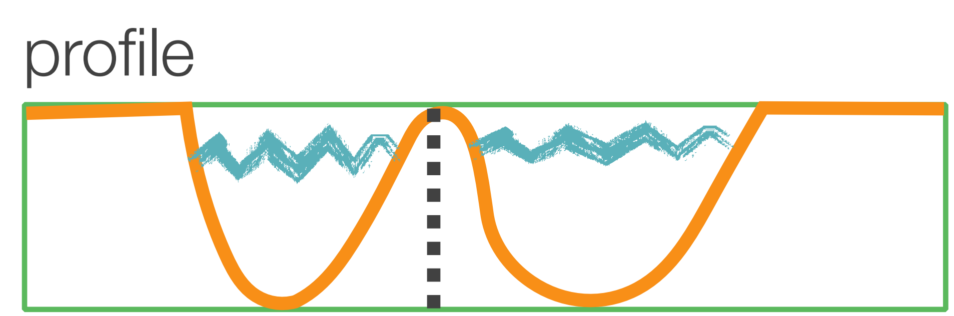


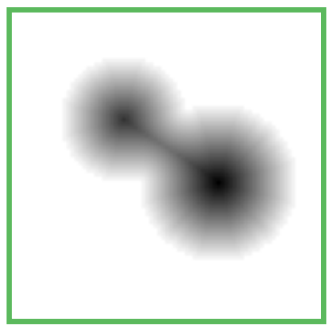
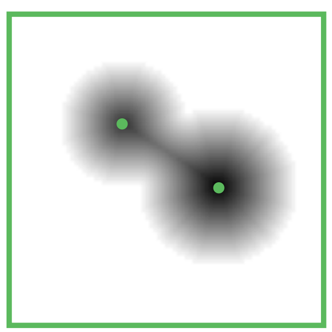
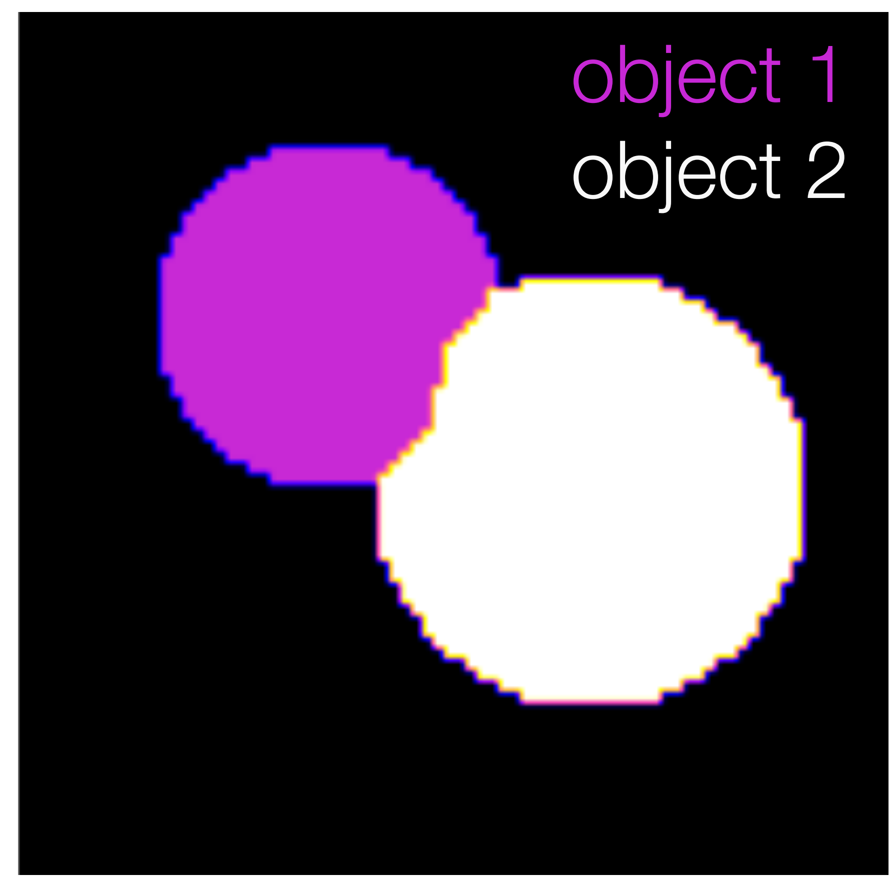
image of ***inverted distances***





What *is* the watershed algorithm?

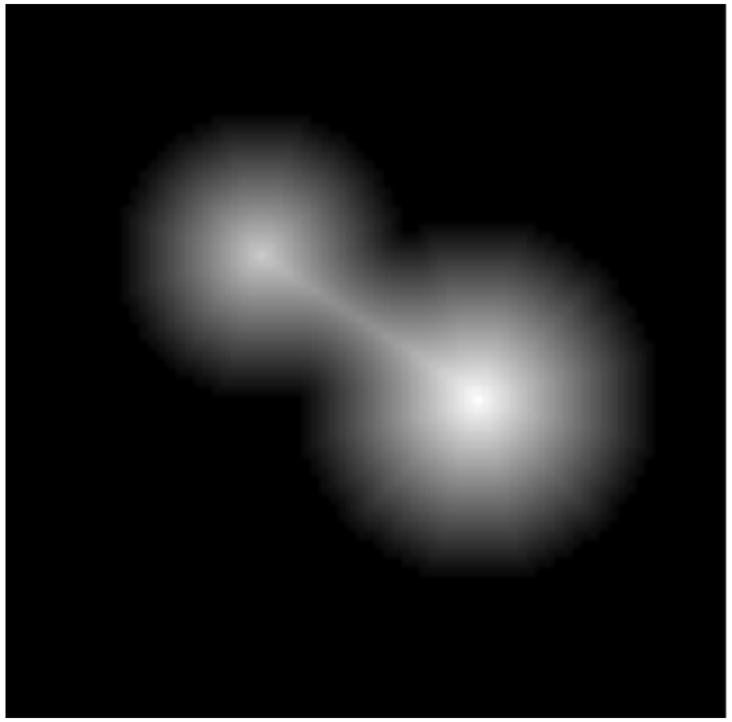
the **watershed algorithm**, in summary:

inputs		**output**
-distance transform		labeled image with separated objects
labeled peaks (seeds)		
binary mask		

Watershed in Python

calculate the distance transform

[1]:
```python
# calculate distance transform
from scipy.ndimage import distance_transform_edt
distance_transform =
                distance_transform_edt(binary_image)
```



Watershed in Python

find the peak coordinates in the distance transform

[ ]:

```python
# find the peak distances in distance_transform
from skimage.feature import peak_local_max
import numpy as np
peak_coords = peak_local_max(distance_transform,
                             footprint=np.ones((25,25)),
                             min_distance=10)
```

Watershed in Python

create a labeled image with the peaks

[ ]:

```python
# create img that's same size as binary_mask
local_maxima_image = np.zeros_like(
                         binary_mask, dtype=bool)
# add peak_coords to img
local_maxima_image[
        tuple(local_maxima_coords.T)] = True
```

Watershed in Python

label the image with the peaks to create seeds

[ ]:
```python
# label local_maxima_image
seeds = label(local_maxima_image)
```

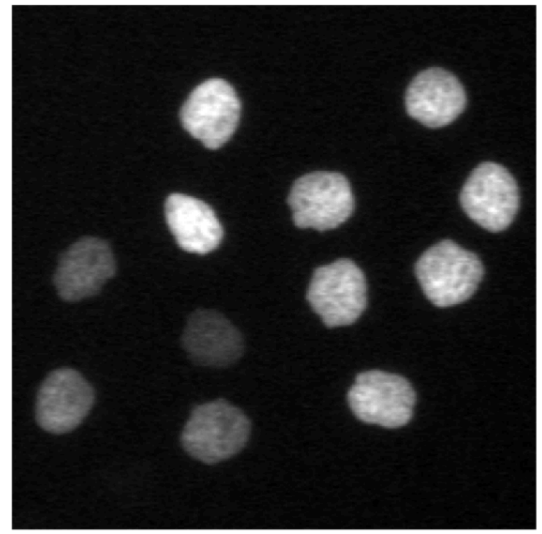
Watershed in Python

give the watershed algorithm the distance transform, the seeds, and the binary mask

[ ]:
```python
# perform watershed
from skimage.segmentation import watershed
labeled_image = watershed(
                          -distance_transform,
                           seeds,
                           mask = binary_mask)
```

2 types of segmentation: Semantic & Instance

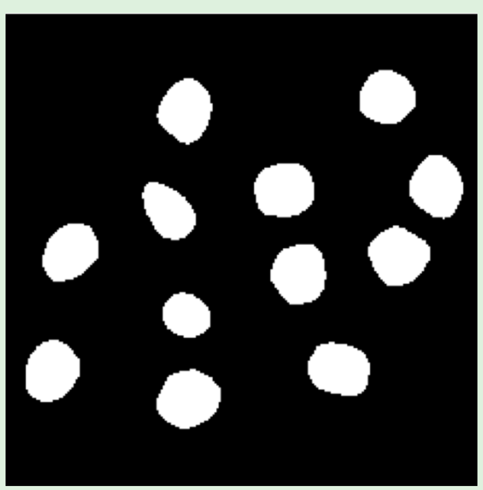
Raw Image



Semantic Segmentation

All objects treated as the same category

Example:



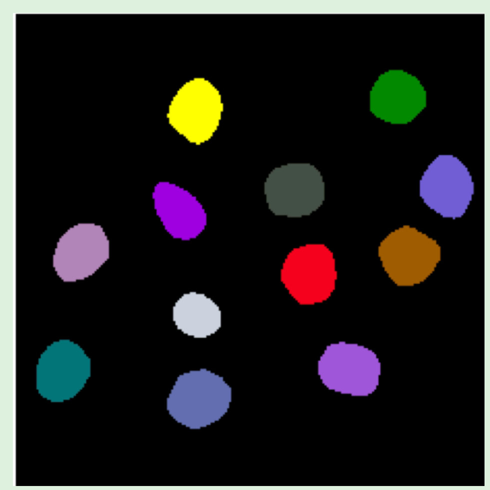
Categories:

Nuclei

Instance Segmentation

Each object is distinguished as separate and has a unique label

Example:



Categories:

Nucleus 1

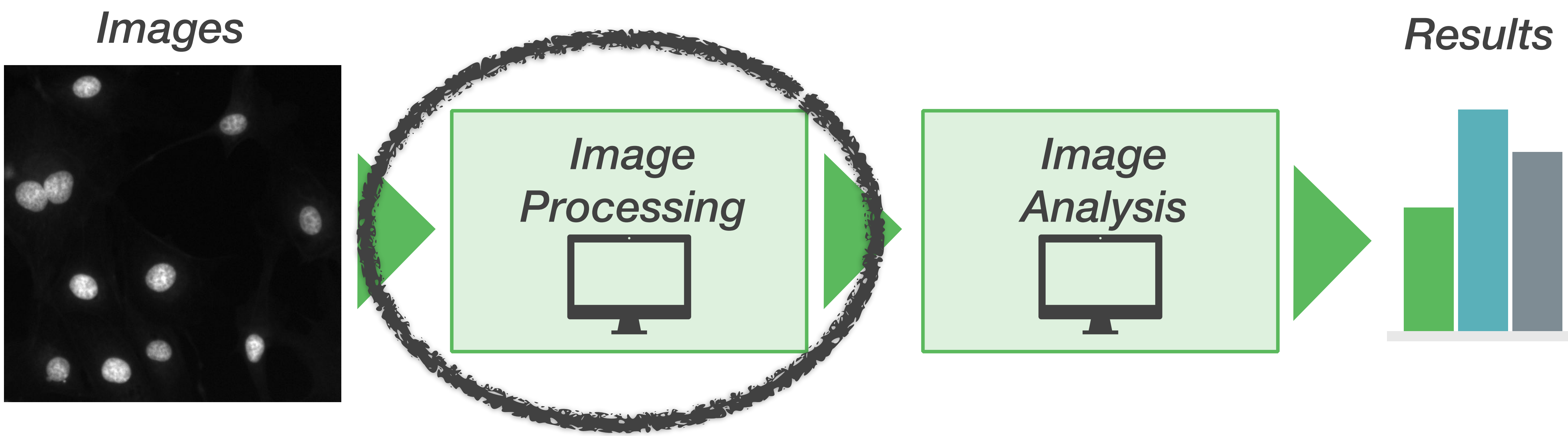
Nucleus 2

Nucleus 3

…

Lab:

Classic Segmentation Notebook, Steps 0-5



Statistically relevant & ***reproducible*** measurements come from analyzing ***many fluorescence images.***

We need to analyze enough images to represent an entire cell population

25 widefield images to analyze

classic segmentation with Python

processing many images

Processing many images in Python

We use a for loop to run same processing steps
on each image!

Processing many images in Python

Organize all images to process in 1 folder.

Use a **for** loop to loop through image paths.

[ ]:

```
# loop through image paths to get each image
from pathlib import Path
folder_dir = Path(“/Users/edelase/bobiac”)
for image_path in folder_dir.iterdir():
    # do classic processing steps
```

Processing many images in Python

Use a **`for`** loop to loop through ***only tif*** image paths in a folder.

[ ]:

```
# loop through only tif image paths
from pathlib import Path
import glob
folder_dir = Path(“/Users/edelase/bobiac”)
for image_path in folder_dir.glob(“*.tif”):
    # do classic processing steps
```

what about saving images?

Saving images in Python

Use a `tifffile.imwrite()` to save output images.

[ ]:

```
# save an image
import tifffile
from pathlib import Path
output_dir = Path(“/Users/edelase/output”)
output_filepath = output_dir /
                  “output_file.tif”
tifffile.imwrite(output_filepath,
                 image.astype(“uint32”))
```

Why ***won’t*** this work in our image paths for loop?

Saving images in Python

Use **f"{image_path.stem}_.tif"** to automatically generate file names for each loop

[ ]:

```
# save an image
import tifffile
from pathlib import Path
import glob
input_dir = Path("/Users/edelase/input")
output_dir = Path("/Users/edelase/output")
for image_path in input_dir.glob("*.tif"):
   output_filepath = output_dir /
                        f"{image_path.stem}_.tif"
   tifffile.imwrite(output_filepath,
                        image.astype("uint32"))
```

Lab:

Classic Segmentation Notebook, Step 6

We made it!

classic segmentation with Python

processing many images


Now what?

General resources

Documentation

scikit-image
image processing in python

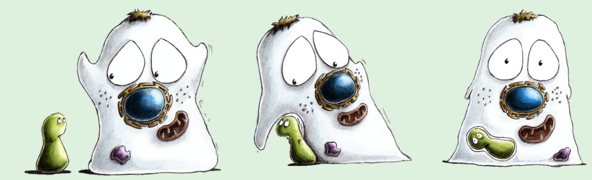
scikit-image.org

Image Analysis Forum

image.sc

https://forum.image.sc/

Learning Resource



https://bioimagebook.github.io/index.html

Questions?