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SP. 757
Final Project

America's consumer society

For my final project in SP 757, I decided to depict the evidence of a consumer society in the US. The original pictures were taken with my Kodak digital camera, at a 3.1 Mpixels resolution. These include pictures taken all over the Cambridge-Boston area, as well as a picture taken in Manhattan during thanksgiving break.

My initial goal was to include the different expressions used to attract the consumer ("Hot prices!", "Sizzling sales!", "as seen on TV!"...) and use Photoshop to combine them with other pictures relevant to the subject (fast food restaurants, products of mass consumption...). To this end, I went around the Boston-Cambridge, focusing on advertisement panels. Unfortunately I didn't find that many flashy attractive lines. I did, however, find an "As seen on TV!" sign, as well as a "CHEAPO RECORDS" sign. On my way, I also took pictures from the McDonald's/Burger King trademark emblems, as well as other pictures I ended up not using for my project.

Back to my dorm room, I arranged all the soda cans I found into a pyramid and took several B&W pictures of it. I then went to the hall kitchen and took a couple of shots of the different products that were stacked there.

Having all my pictures taken (these pictures can be found in the "original pictures" folder of the final project CD), I then started editing them in Photoshop. First of all, I adjusted the levels in all pictures, and ran the Auto-color function to remove any color cast. I then adjusted the contrast and brightness in some of the pictures.

With the exception of the background, my task was relatively easy, and was limited to selecting the area of the snapshot I wanted to use.

Therefore, picture 4 (see "original pictures" folder) needed only some cropping to select the word "Cheap", while picture 3 necessitated the use of the magic eraser tool as well.

Picture 1 was edited by using the elliptical marquee tool (to get a somewhat smoother shape) then deleting the inverse selection (right click → select inverse), and finally using the magic eraser tool. Pictures 2 and 7 were edited in the same manner, except the initial selection was made with the magnetic lasso tool (for picture 7 I used the Alt key when selecting the inside of McDonald's "M", in order to subtract it from the final selection), after what the inverse selection was deleted and the magic eraser was used. Both Picture 1 and 2 were then resized and rotated using the Free Transform tool.

Picture 6 was edited in the same manner, but I first rotated the canvas to the portrait position (after what I used the magnetic lasso, deleted the inverse selection, and used the magic eraser).

Picture 5 was a little more delicate to edit, since it was a photography of an old ad panel, and there were consequently some wrinkles on the area I wanted to use. Therefore, after

cropping and selecting with the magnetic lasso tool, deleting the inverse selection and using the magic eraser, I had to use the healing brush tool in order to correct the wrinkles.

At this point I had all the pictures of the project ready for use. The only thing I still needed was a background picture, and since my topic was America's consumer society, I thought a view of Times Square in Manhattan, New York (taken during the thanksgiving break) would be perfectly representative. I had a whole array of pictures of Times Square to choose from and I finally decided to choose one with plenty of lights, ads, and movement (Picture B.jpg in the original pictures). I then applied the liquefy filter (with parallel horizontal strokes on the lower part of the image and parallel vertical strokes on the upper part), followed by the fresco and the mosaic tiles filters. I was very satisfied with the result, but it was very rich and couldn't be used as a background. I had to desaturate the colors (especially the red on the upper left), which I did, using the sponge tool in desaturating mode, with a 60% flow. However, the background was still too rich and removed the focus from the other seven pictures (the pictures 1 to 7 edited earlier). That's why I used the Dodge tool, with a 15% exposure to shadows, and a large brush. The background now looked almost like a watermark and was suitable for my project.

I combined all 8 pictures to get the final 9-layer project, which I flattened for CMY printing in the lab.