



Junction

Freeways are sort of a metaphor for life. There are bland stretches of road that go on for miles. There are complex interchanges where split-second decisions can send us in opposite directions. But the whole time, we just have to keep moving forward.

My goal was to capture where I am right now in life. Like many of my friends and classmates, I'm going to be graduating soon, and whatever comes next is going to be a change in direction. There's a well-defined path that points me somewhere, but I don't really know if I'm going to like where it leads. I've been looking at other options, but they seem so hard to reach from where I am.

I sometimes wonder if anything I do will make me truly happy. It seems like the only roads that most people consider are paved, policed, and driven by thousands of others. Maybe it's important to consider more unconventional alternatives. I'd like to say that's what the planes in this image represent, but I really put them there because the sky looked too empty.

Eugene Hsu



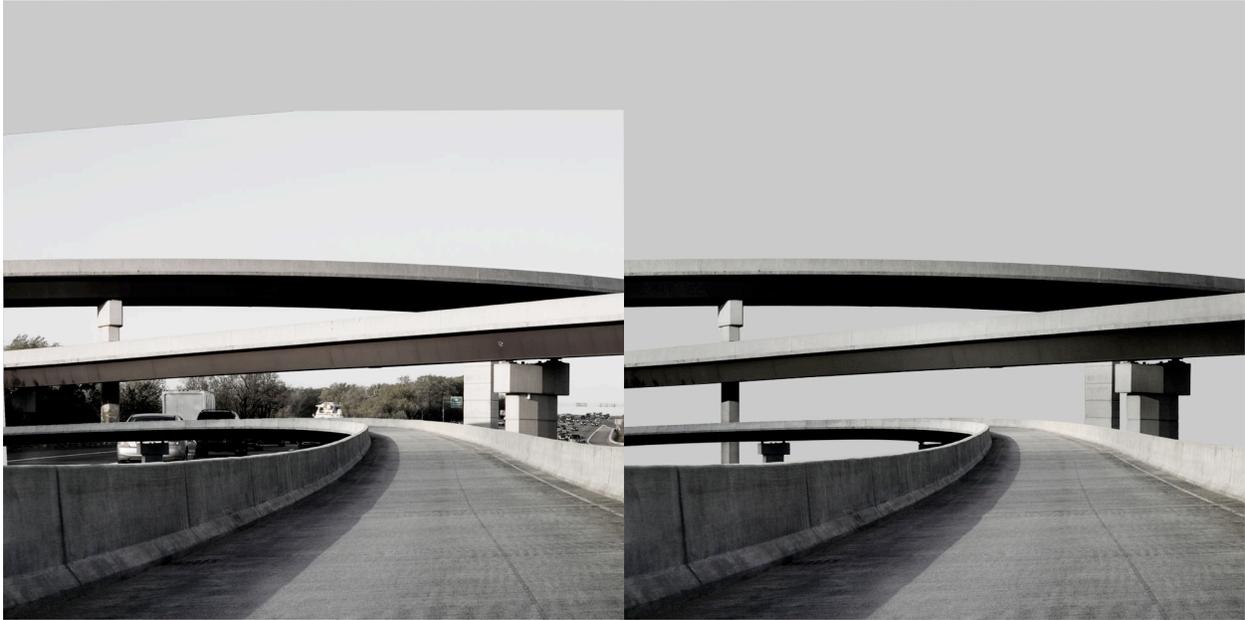
Sources

I drove around aimlessly for several hours and shot hundreds of photos. It's surprisingly difficult to get decent freeway shots because there's nowhere to stop. Usually, I shot blindly out of my sunroof while desperately trying to keep in the road. This was not easy with a Nikon 17-55mm f/2.8 mounted on my camera and a huge lens hood catching the wind.

Both freeway photos were shot on I-93 at exit 37. There is a huge Target store there that sells groceries. I went there to take a leak. However, the restrooms were behind the cash registers, so I felt obligated to purchase something. I think I ended up with a bottle of Coke, some deodorant, and some anti-itch ointment.

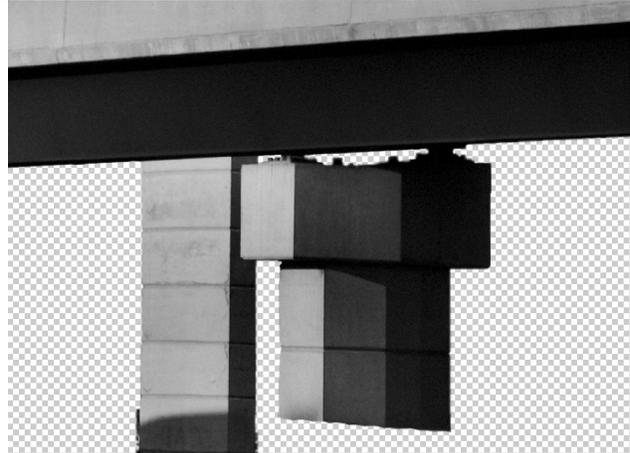
The sky images were taken the following day on the MIT campus. I was looking for some good clouds, and there was a lot of air traffic. Below are satellite photos of the locations, ripped off of Google Maps.





Construction

To assemble the photos, I had to adjust the color, contrast, and perspective so that they matched. I also did some retouching to clean things up. For the foreground freeway, I removed the sign and removed some spots on the pavement. For the background freeway, I extended the support columns using the clone brush. The noise properties of the two images differed, so I added some grittiness to the background image to compensate. Finally, I deleted the backgrounds in both photos using what seemed like every single masking and selection tool in Photoshop. This was also the first time that I've seriously used CS3, so it was quite a learning experience.

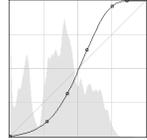




Polishing

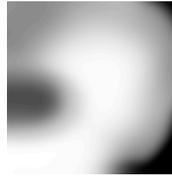
I placed the sky image in the background and adjusted its position so that the clouds were placed nicely. I then added the contrail and airplane images. It took me a while to figure out the proper placement, and I'm honestly still not sure if I like it this way.

The image looked a bit flat to me, so I used the curves control to boost the overall contrast. I'm a little nuts about contrast. In Adobe Lightroom or Camera Raw, I always have it jacked up to the maximum, and I'm a fan of the 4 and 5 multi-grade filters in the traditional darkroom.



The resulting image is shown at the bottom left of this page. I felt that there was something off about it, but I wasn't sure what. After playing around for a while, I figured it out.

First, the freeways almost looked too neutral considering that they're illuminated by blue skylight. To remedy this, I applied a slight cooling filter to the entire image.



Second, the brightest parts of the images were located at the edges, which seemed to pull the eye out of the frame. I compensated for this by darkening selected parts of the image (mostly along the edges). The layer mask shown here was used along with a levels adjustment.

Printing

What a nightmare. It's a good thing the digital room doesn't have a window, because I would have jumped out of it. I'm used to posting my pictures on the Internet, and I have very little experience with inkjet printing. In fact, as I type this sentence, I'm worrying about how I'm going to produce a hardcopy of this report that doesn't look like shit.

The main issue that came up was color accuracy. My monitor isn't calibrated, so I wasn't really expecting the image to print exactly how it looked on screen. But the first result that I got was really off enough that the sky looked cyan instead of blue. Disgusting.

I went through the trouble of installing the proper drivers on my laptop and getting the ICC profiles for the Brilliant Glossy that was loaded up in the Epson 7800. Things started to look a bit better, but I think my final print leaves a bit to be desired. I didn't feel like using up all of the ink and leaving the other people in my class without a functional printer.

I tried a few different sizes for the print. The final image is 2824 pixels square, which would produce a 9.4 inch square print at 300 dpi. That looked a bit small to me, so I went to a 14 inch square print at 200 dpi. It looked sharp enough to me. I suppose I could have gone larger, but I liked how the photo looked with a huge white border (and I didn't feel like cutting mattes).