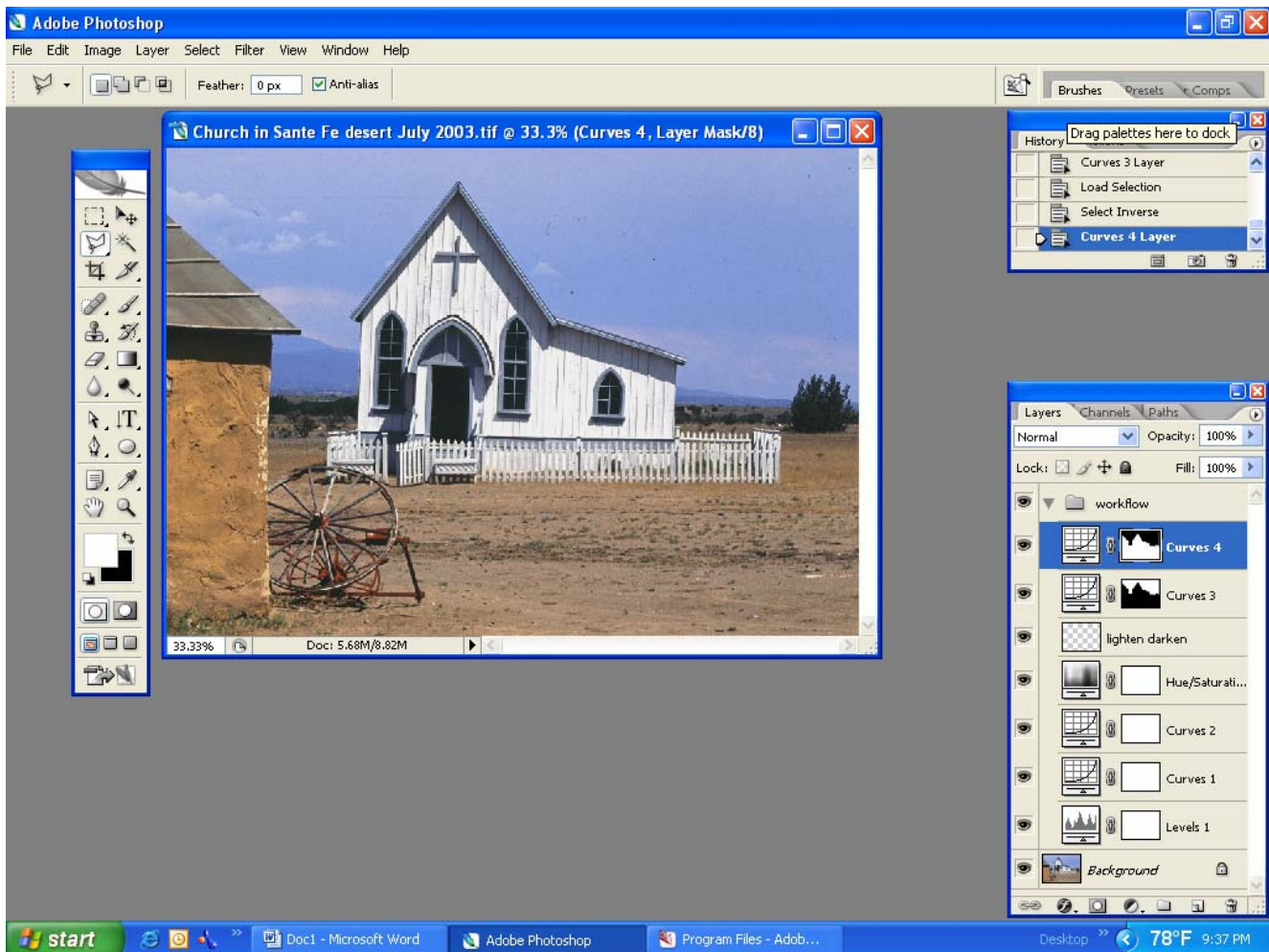


Layer Masks

by Richard Davidson

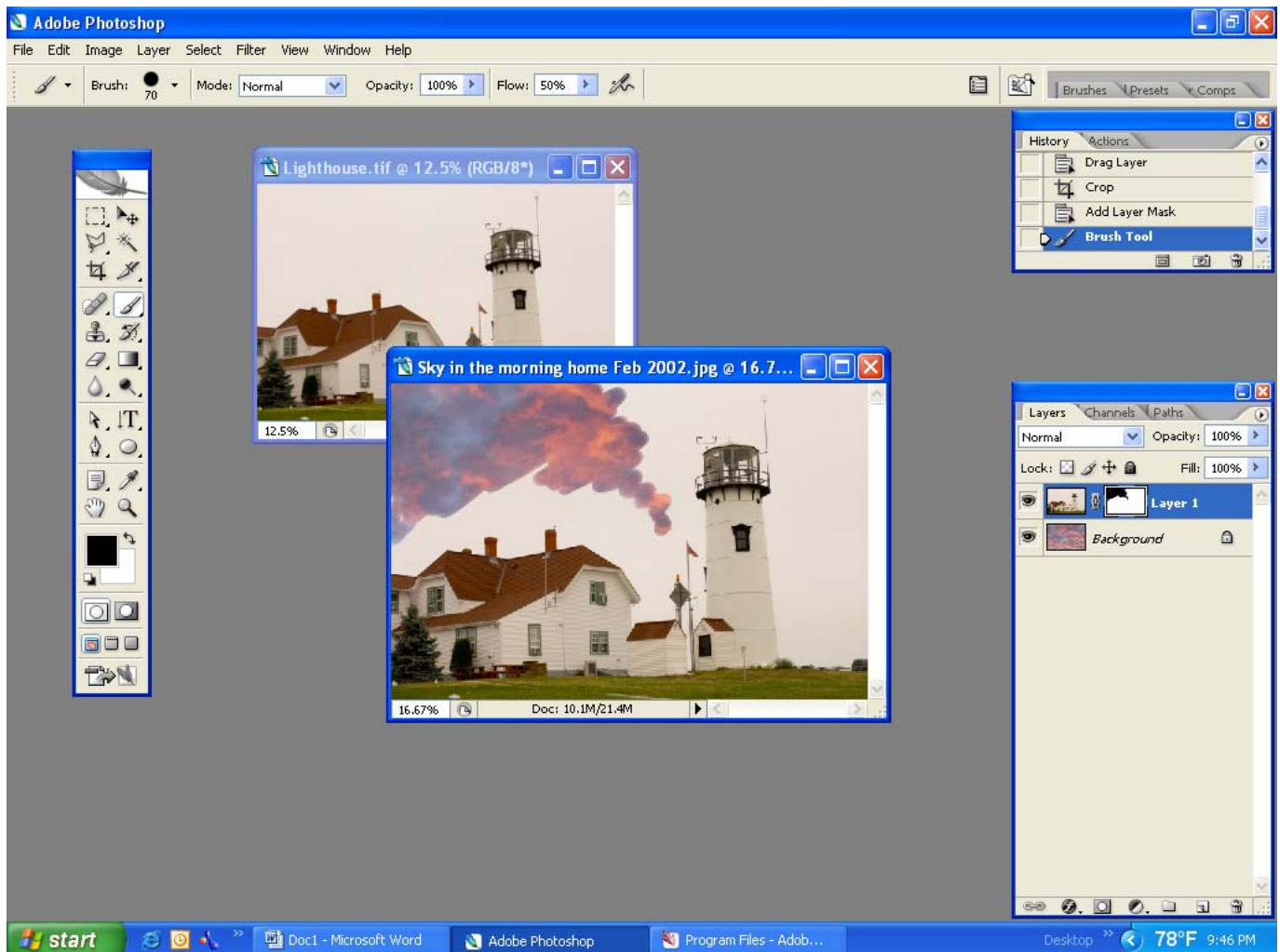
A. Layers in an Image

Images in **Photoshop** always include a background layer. They also can include a number of layers (shown in the layer palette), where each layer adds or subtracts from the appearance of the image. Each layer affects the pixels and the adjustments to the color, luminosity, sharpness, etc. of the resulting image. Each layer also can have a mask which can control what part of the image is affected by the adjustment or change in image shown on the layer. The layers below show several layer masks which are partially black and partially white. Black on a layer mask hides things below it, and white on the mask allows the effect to come through the mask:



B. Blending Parts of Two Images Together

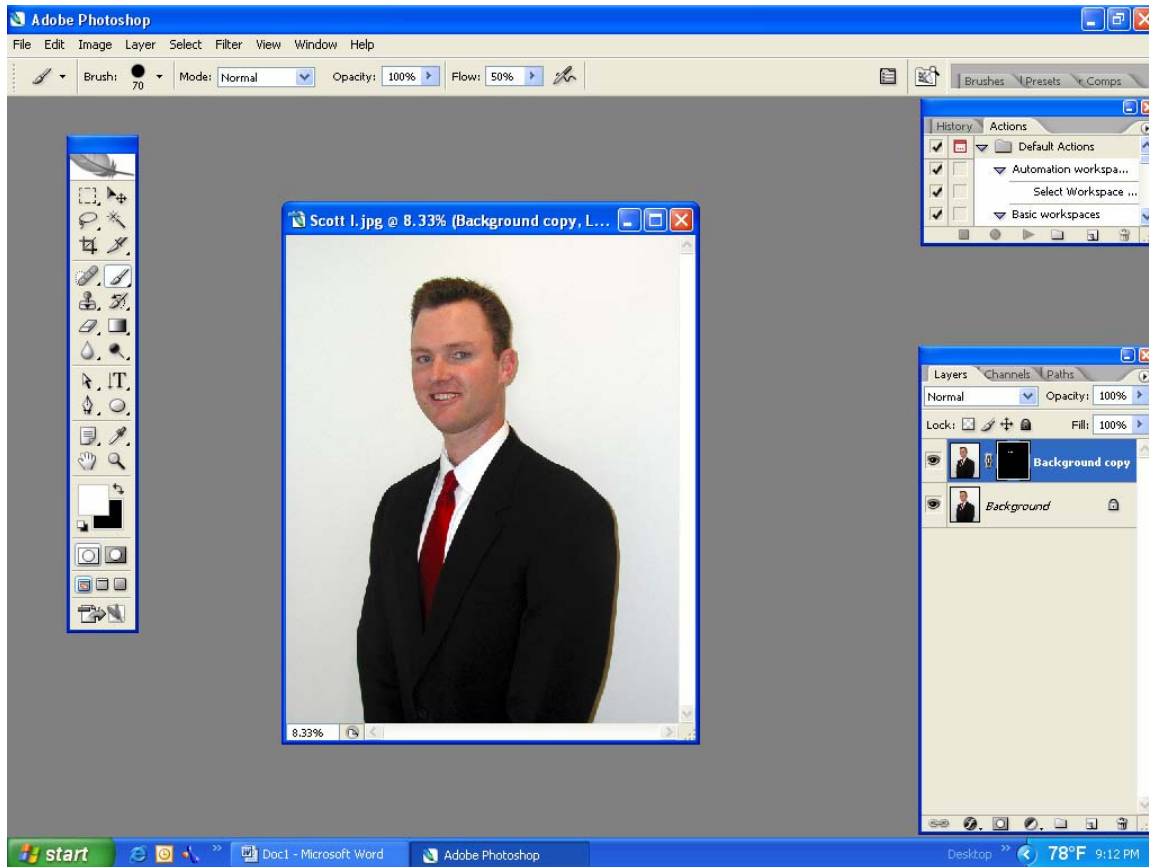
The use of layer masks can be used to blend parts of two pictures together. For example, take the image of the lighthouse below which has a very dull sky. Add to it the more exciting sky in the second picture, replacing the dull sky. To do this, use the Move Tool to move the lighthouse picture into the sky image and create a mask on the lighthouse layer. By using the paintbrush and painting black on the white mask, parts of the dull sky will be replaced with the more exciting sky from the second image:



C. Using a Layer Mask to Sharpen Selected Parts of an Image

This same masking technique can be used in reverse with a black mask to sharpen only selected parts of an image. For example, in a portrait, one may wish to keep a certain amount of softness on the skin of the face but have the eyes and mouth look sharp. This can be completed by taking a portrait, leaving the background layer soft, and adding a black mask to a duplicate background layer which is sharpened. To do this process, duplicate the background layer by sliding the layer into the "new layer" icon at the bottom of the Layer

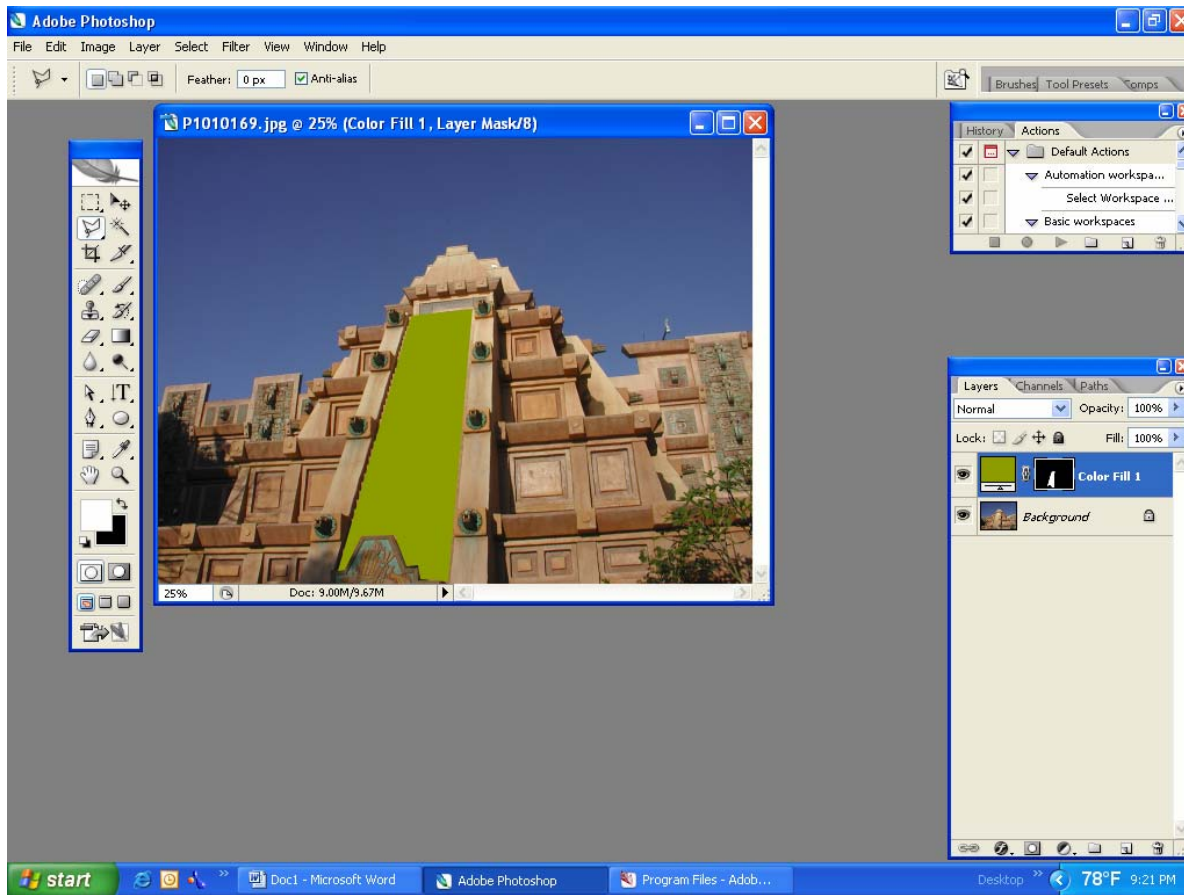
Palette. Next, use one of the sharpening tools to sharpen the duplicate layer. Add a black mask to the sharpened duplicate layer by clicking on “new mask” at the bottom of the Layer Palette while pressing the alt key on the PC, or control key on the Mac. While the mask is highlighted as the selected layer, paint with “white” around the eyes and the mouth, creating “holes” in the mask and allowing the sharpening effect to show through the mask.



The effect coming through the mask can be modified in intensity by using the Fade control.

D. Using a Selection Tool to Select Part of a Image.

By using a selection tool to select part of an image, that part selected will become the opening in the mask and will be affected by the subsequent Adjustment Layer. For example, in the image below, one side of the wall of the building was selected with the Magic Wand tool, and when an Adjustment Layer was created, the selected area became the opening in the mask formed for that layer. Any adjustment now only affects the selected area because of the screening effect of the mask.



Conclusion

Many effects to an image can result from using layers with masks. It allows very selective use of image adjustments and compositing effects. The painting of black and white on the masks can be modified in many ways, including graduated color changes with the Gradient Tool or the softening of edges of the mask by using the Blur Filter. The masks themselves can be modified with the various Image Adjustments by applying the adjustments directly to the mask. This entire added dimension adds greatly to the diversity of your artistic pursuits.

Additional Source: Eismann, Katrin. Photoshop Masking & Compositing. New Riders. Copyright 2005