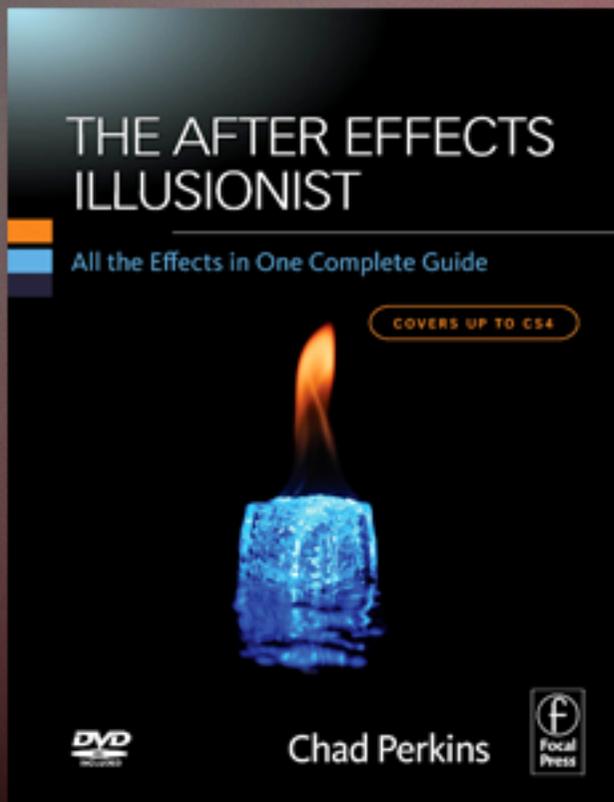


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**The After Effects Illusionist
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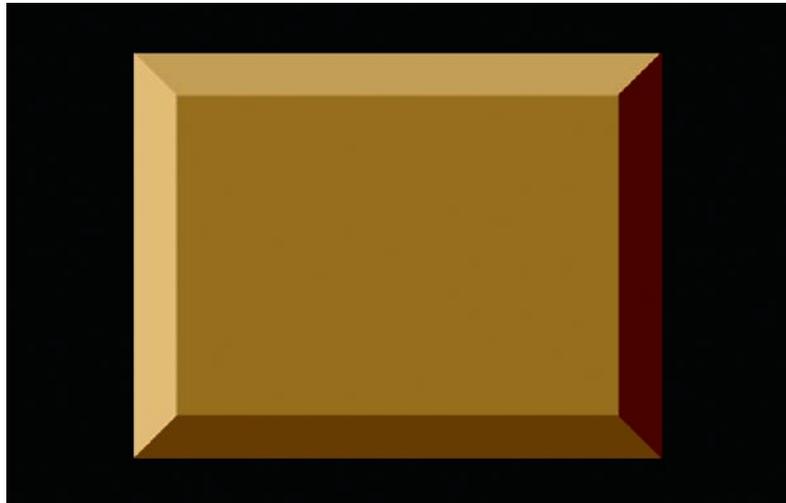


Figure 15.8 A simple rectangle with the Bevel Edges effect applied to it.



Figure 15.9 Bevel Edges applies a bevel effect around the edges of the entire layer.

The Drop Shadow Effect

If there was a Hollywood Walk of Fame for overused effects, the first effect to win the honor would, without a doubt, be Drop Shadow, followed closely by Lens Flare. The Drop Shadow effect adds a shadow to an object (typically underneath it) to create the illusion that the object is floating off the surface. Drop shadows in general help an object to stand out from its background.

If you'd like some practice, you can open up the project Drop Shadow.aep from the Chapter 15 folder. Basically we have some green text on a light gray background. These colors are making this text harder to read than it should be (Fig. 15.10).

So we're going to take this text and drop shadow it like it's hot. Apply the Drop Shadow effect to the Drop it ... Outlines layer. Notice how it instantly makes the text stand out from the background layer (Fig. 15.11).

Differences Between Layer Styles and Effects

In almost every instance, layer styles are significantly more powerful than effects are. So, what are the differences between Drop Shadow, the layer style, and Drop Shadow, the effect? The Drop Shadow layer style adds more blending options, gives you the ability to use Global Lighting, adjust Spread independently of the blur of the shadow, and the ability to add noise to the shadow. However, the Drop Shadow effect gives you the option to view the shadow only. This allows you to duplicate a layer and have its drop shadow as a separate, autonomous layer. You can then apply warp effects to the Drop Shadow layer to give the illusion that the shadow of the main object is being cast onto a more complex surface.



Figure 15.10 The Drop Shadow.aep project.



Figure 15.11 The same project with the Drop Shadow effect applied with the default settings.

The Shadow Color and Opacity properties are self-explanatory. Direction is easy to grasp, except it's backwards from what you might think (maybe it's just backwards from the way I think). With the bevel effects, the similar angle control determined what direction the light was coming from. In the Drop Shadow effect, the Direction parameter dictates where the shadow is in relation to the layer. Or, in other words, where the light is pointing towards.

The next property is Distance. This controls how far away the shadow is from the layer. As you increase the distance of a shadow from the thing that is supposed to be casting the shadow, it gives the illusion that the object is floating farther off the surface. You can see the result of this in Fig. 15.12. The Softness parameter is

Figure 15.12 The shadow after increasing the Distance value, as well as increasing the opacity and softness of the shadow.



like a blur for the shadow. Adjust the color, opacity, and softness of the shadow to create a realistic composite.

The Radial Shadow Effect

The Radial Shadow effect appears at first glance to be the identical twin to the Drop Shadow effect. But in reality, Radial Shadow effect is more like Drop Shadow's older, cooler pro-snowboarder cousin. Radial Shadow allows you to create a shadow as if it were being created from a 3D light source. This is great for creating a shadow from 3D layers onto 2D objects because 2D objects won't accept shadows from 3D layers and lights. The Radial Shadow synthesizes another great feature that is reserved for 3D layers: Light Transmission. Light Transmission allows you to create shadows based on the color of a layer. Radial Shadow doesn't quite get that cool, but it will allow you to create color shadows that vary in intensity based on the opacity of the alpha channel.

If you'd like to follow along, I've created the Radial Shadow.aep project in the Chapter 15 folder of the exercise files. This contains a red window with some variations in its alpha channel. Before we apply the effect, let's solo the Art Window layer and choose Alpha from the Show Channel and Color Management Settings drop down at the bottom of the Composition panel (the icon that looks like overlapping red, green, and blue circles). This will show us only the alpha channel of the Art Window layer which will give us a window (no pun intended) into what's happening with the transparency here (Fig. 15.13).

The white areas indicate where the layer is completely opaque. The two rectangles that are completely black indicate where the layer is completely transparent. The three dark, wide bars and the three light gray rectangles are areas of partial transparency. That's important to remember going forward. You can now change the channel view back to the RGB composite view and deselect solo from the Art Window layer. Apply the Radial Shadow effect to the Art Window layer.

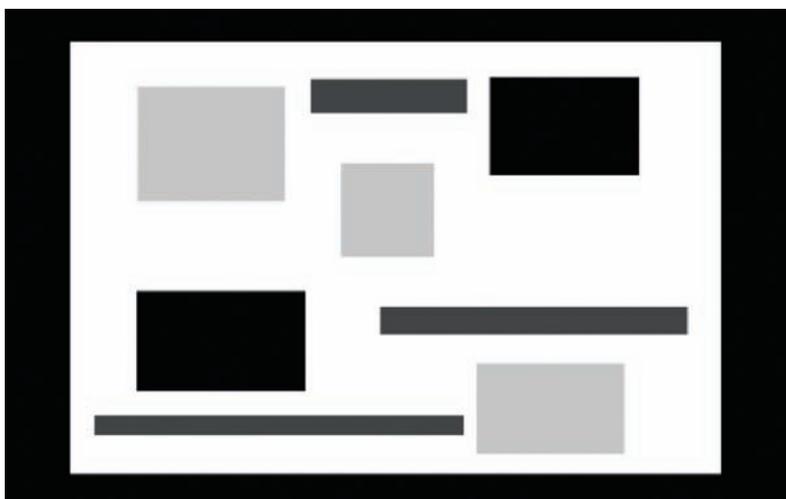


Figure 15.13 The alpha channel of the Art Window layer.

Initially, this resembles the Drop Shadow effect, except that it will not go beyond the boundaries of the layer. To fix this, click the Resize Layer checkbox at the bottom of the Radial Shadow effect in the Effect Controls panel.

One of the properties that really makes this effect stick out is Light Source. Instead of giving us only a light direction, we can actually specify exactly where our light source is. This parameter also has an effect control point, which means that we paste tracking data into Radial Shadow. And, because Light Source has both an X and a Y value, we can easily link this property to things that we might use as a light source, such as the Flare Center value of the Lens Flare effect.

The other really exciting property that sets Radial Shadow apart from other shadows is the Render drop down list. Change the Render value from Regular to Glass Edge. This allows the color of the layer to be used in the shadow, depending on the alpha channel of the layer. So, in Fig. 15.14, you can see the red of the layer showing in the shadow where there are semi-transparent areas in the alpha channel. This creates the illusion of stained glass. The Color Influence value controls how much color is allowed to be used in the shadow, where a higher value results in more color and a lower value desaturates the shadow.

One quirk that you might notice with this effect before too long is that when you increase the Softness value with Render set to Glass Edge, you'll see the color of the layer in the edges. For those who don't find this desirable, I haven't found a work-around for this yet. It's caused because antialiased edges have color applied to them under the "rules" of Glass Edge, and added Softness adds

Figure 15.14 Changing the Render value to Glass Edge creates a stained glass effect where there are semitransparent areas of the layer.

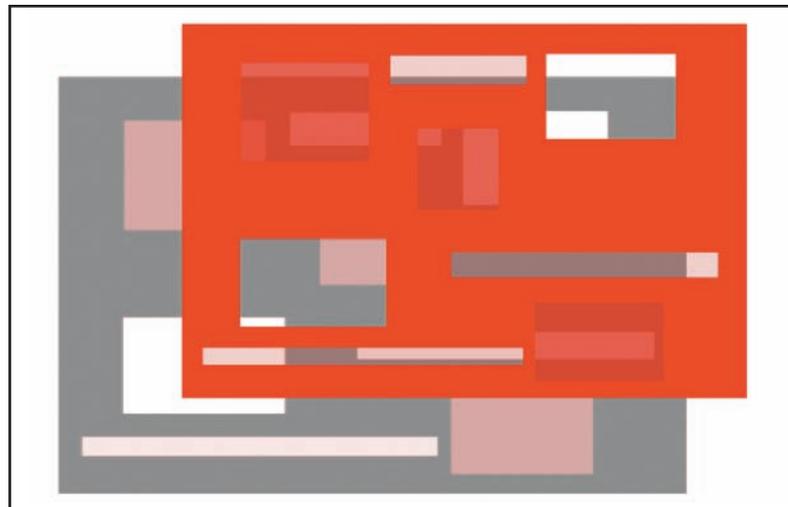
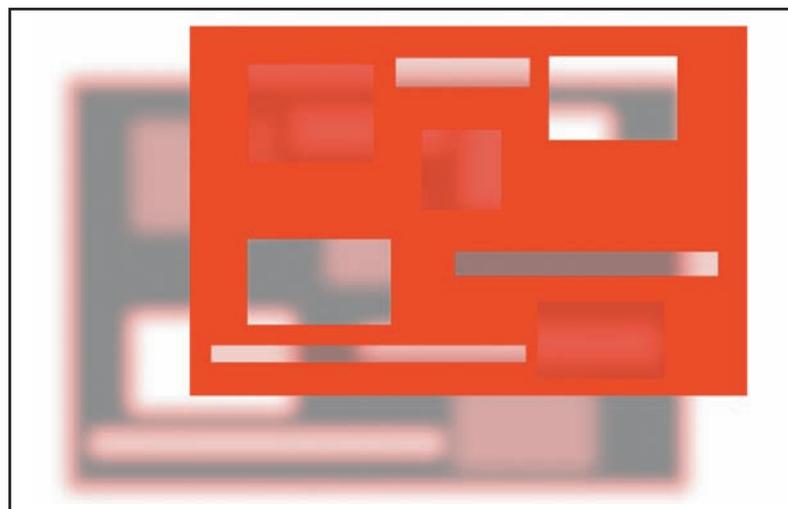


Figure 15.15 Increasing the Softness value while Glass Edge is selected as the Render value adds color to the edges.



more blur to the edges. So, under the eternal decree of Glass Edge, that which hath been blurred, shall be colored, saith the Glass Edge (Fig. 15.5).