KINETIC TYPOGRAPHY

ME

An informative kinetic typography short.
Communications Technology ISU

11 | 12

SingYu Lam


hi.

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GOAL

What did I accomplish?

0:22 Still from final product

Ten long weeks ago, on a bright cold day in April, my Grade 10 Communications Technology teacher walked into my class with some very important news. On that fateful day, we were assigned our ISU's. I did not yet know just how this assignment was going to change my life.

For my Grade 10 Independent Study Unit, my goal was to create an informative kinetic typography video. Kinetic typography is a form of animation that uses moving type in order to convey certain forms of information – most commonly; it is used to display lyrics. Although creativity is not a necessity in kinetic typography, it is important to hold a viewer's attention and to enhance the message it conveys. Kinetic typography usually makes use of heavy animation for text transitions and may include images as well. Instead of simply using the lyrics of song, I planned on doing a small short showing something about myself.

INSPIRATION

What made me want to do this?

A main source of my inspiration was from my time spent surfing the web. In the past, I've come across many kinetic typography videos.

I find I have this strange habit of looking at any piece of art and wondering if I could and if so, how could I do it? I look at advertisements and movie posters and wonder how I'd be able to achieve the same effects on Photoshop. This applies for animated clips as well. I try and pick apart the pieces and see how I can do the same on another program. Of course, I usually realize professionals have access to a winder degree of programs and much more powerful computers, but I still find these thoughts to be the first that race through my head when I see a new design.

I've always enjoyed the idea of an introspective study – breaking down my life into statistics and numbers that can be displayed graphically and visually. I was inspired mainly by a few videos, some were informative, and some were simply music videos. Regardless of their genre, they all had incredibly creative animations and differed greatly in terms of their respective art styles. The ones that were the most notable was the National Geographic informative short "7 Billion – Are you Typical?", Jonathan Coulton's music video "Shop Vac", Nike's corporate responsibility campaign "The Girl Effect", and Eric Hutchinson's music video "Ok, It's Alright With Me".

From top to bottom:
National Geographic "7 Billion – Are you Typical?", Jonathan Coulton - "Shop Vac", Nike "The Girl Effect", Eric Hutchinson - "Ok, It's Alright With Me"

EXPERIENCE AND TOOLS

What did I gain from doing this and how did I do it?

Left to right: working screens of VideoStudio, Flash Player, and Flash.

To produce my final product, I worked primarily in two programs – Adobe Flash CS4 and Corel VideoStudio X4. Although I'm no stranger to Flash, I have never before attempted such a large scale project or even tried to accomplish one within such a relatively small time frame. Working hard and fast with no distractions was a must for me to complete my project.

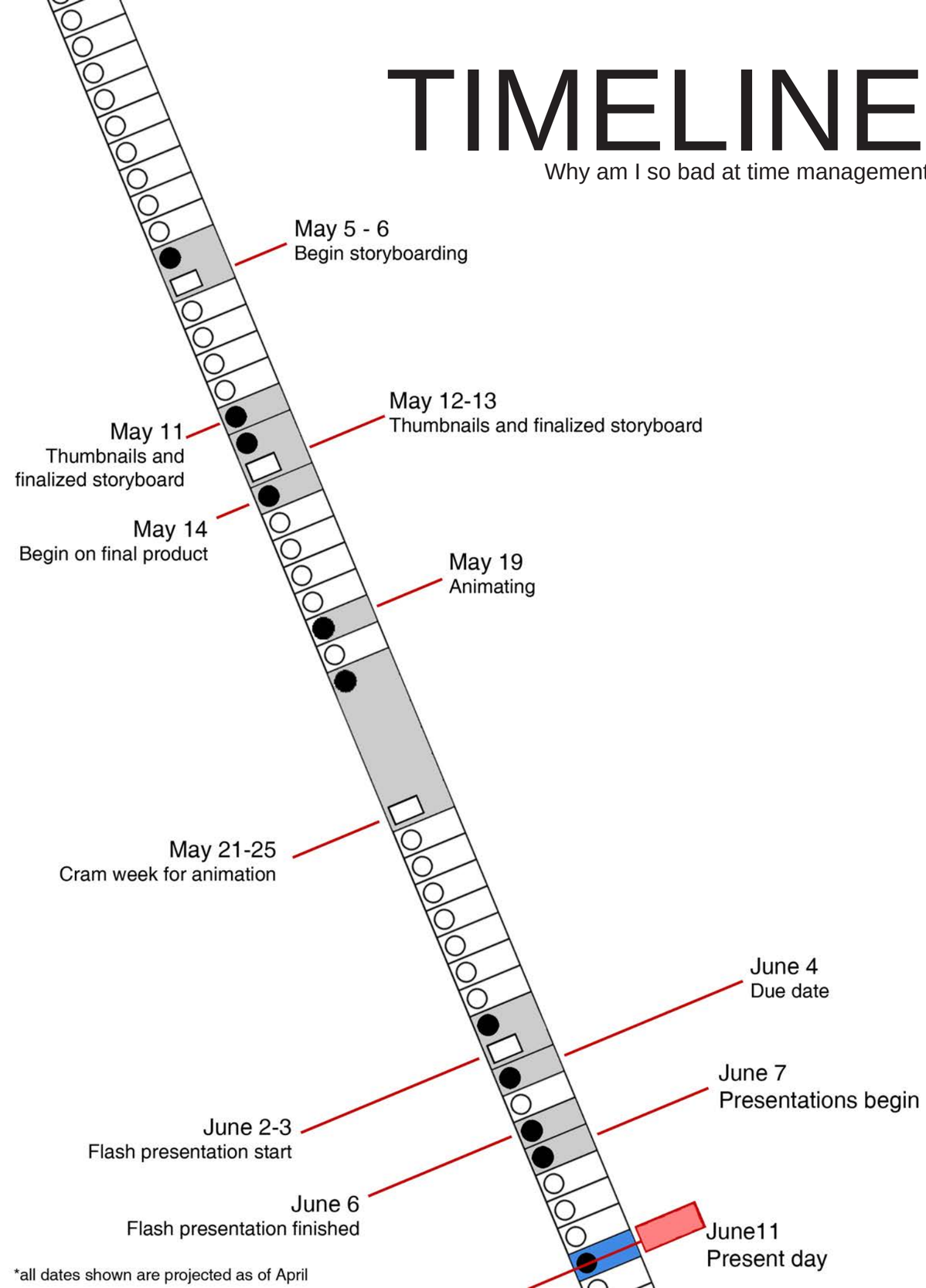
I watched a lot of kinetic typography videos to get associated with frame transitions and text transformations.

As a video editing program, VideoStudio allowed me to work with video and audio much better than Flash ever could. I used VideoStudio for my post-processing and to export my final video.

An important thing with the video was to sync it with audio, a feat I found to be made significantly easier with VideoStudio. This helped me structure a smooth workflow between the two programs and as an end result, a much more seamless final product.

TIMELINE

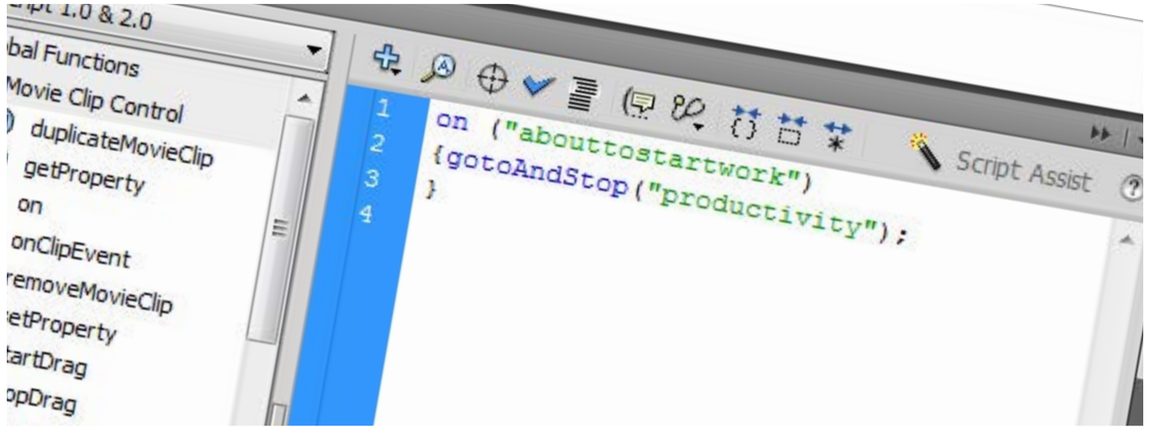
Why am I so bad at time management?



*all dates shown are projected as of April

RESOURCES

Did I need help while working on this project?



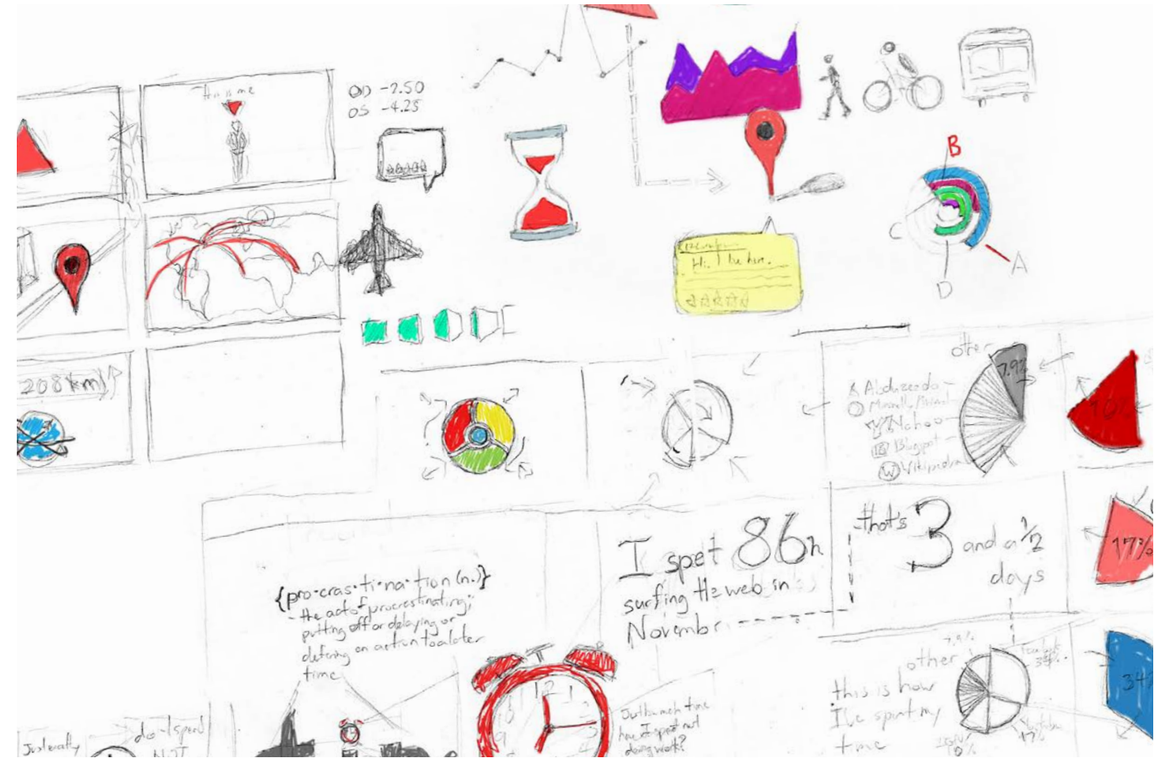
I was my own worst enemy when it came to finishing this project.

While researching, I found out there were two main types of kinetic typography – fluid and motion typography. Fluid is the morphing of word forms from one to the next, while motion is the one most people are familiar with, where text moves on a 2D or 3D plane and interacts with other text in a certain fashion.

I didn't need to do much research in order to complete my project. I do in fact, own a "Flash CS4 for Dummies" book, but I soon realized that an animation without much scripting involved meant that the only challenge for me would've been any limitations my hardware might impose on Flash. Luckily, in this case, my computer ran flawlessly while I was working on the duration of the project. The most amount of scripting I ended up doing was adding stop commands at the end of movie clips to ensure they didn't loop. While working on my project, I showed some people early animations and the overall look of the video, but in the end I never needed to ask for help and definitely did not have a mentor for this project. I was the only contributor to my ISU.

PROCESS

Tentative first steps



Thumbnail sketches and early storyboard.

One of the first things I did was to search for music to use. I wanted something cheerful and upbeat, without lyrics. After searching on the internet to no avail, I found a track I had already that fit perfectly. "Oi Oi" from Suzumiya Haruhi, had a strong beat and a distinct happy feel to it, so that became my final choice. I used VideoStudio to mark down locations where I could transition to the beat.

I started to plan a storyboard of clips I wanted to include. Many of them did not make the final cut, due to time constraints of the music, such as a hours of sleep per day, time spent commuting each day, and my height since 2001.

Adding markers in VideoStudio to help sync the animation.

PROCESS

Animating on Flash

Animating this short on Flash saw use of Classic, Motion, and Shape Tweens, numerous instances of frame by frame animation, and a v-cam in every scene. The workflow on Flash is not a process easily captured in a still image, as each frame shows a different result, regardless of time. This is unlike a program like Photoshop, where changes to the overall image can be seen building up over time. I will be narrating my process to help understand the images better.

Trying out more dynamic text transitions.

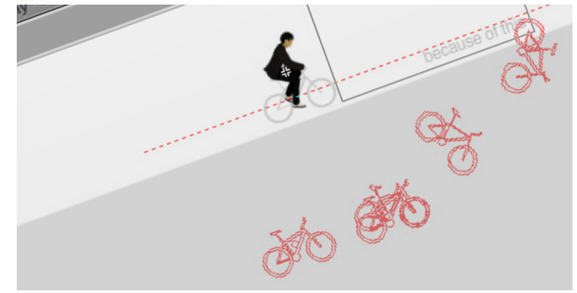
A new transformation I had not tried out much was the imitation of 3D perspective with text on individual places of a rotating block. Although I was working on Flash CS4, which comes with a 3D transform tool, it is unable to interact with ActionScript 2.0, which was the version I was using while animating this short. I instead relied on shape tweening and the “Distort“ transformation to mimic the effect.

3D perspective effect. Alot is obviously one word.

One particularly useful feature I learned was the use of “Shape Hints“, which are markers that can be placed within a Shape Tween to help the computer recognize what kind of transformation you want.

A useful feature which actually indirectly influenced my choosing of this particular ISU was V-Cam. This movie clip symbol which had functionality bordering on witchcraft allowed camera like effects and transitions to be applied within the animation - most notably the ability to zoom in and out and pan around. The symbol’s magical ActionScript constrained the viewing proportions of the exported .swf to be that of the symbol size and position itself. Without this symbol, many transitions would have been incredibly difficult to do.

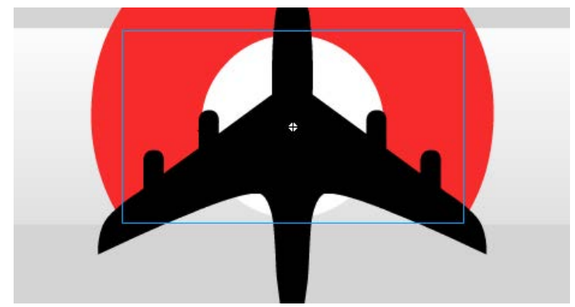
I can’t imagine what it might have been like without V-Cam.
Above was my work window. The black rectangle was my V-Cam.



Classic tweens within movie clips.

In order to have an animated object move all its parts in relation to the rest of the stage, Movie Clip symbols had to be used.

Movie clips allowed for a series of frames nested within a certain “symbol”. What these frames did were unseen while being played on the timeline, but once exported in a .swf they would play accordingly. This made it difficult to position them correctly, but it also allowed for entire groups of animations to be moved, a feature I used very often.



Plane transitions.

My kinetic typography video not only made used of moving text, but a variety of icons and symbols as well. This allowed for some interesting transitions, such as the use of plane icons to pass over the screen, allowing for a slide transition between two scenes. This was used twice in my final product.

It’s mini me!

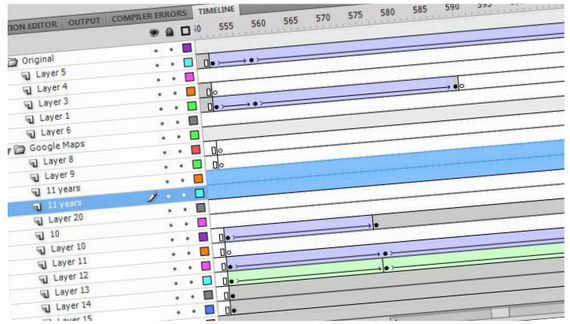
One part of the video I enjoyed making was playing around with a mini avatar of myself - in one scene I get unrealistically into the air after crashing a bike. While talking about my past, I used an interesting transformation where I de-aged myself and turned myself into an incredibly stylish 6 year-old that wore white Converse, black jeans, and a cardigan. I was disappointed in knowing I had no concept of a fashion sense back then.

PROCESS

Animating on Flash

While animating, I usually only work on four or five layers - this allows for one mid-ground layer, where all my main events take place, and a few layers behind and in front to create a sense of depth when other objects are introduced.

However, I ended up animating my Google Maps themed scene in a separate Flash file, and when I copied the frames over I ended up with a ton that I grouped colloquially into a “Google Maps“ folder. I used this set of layers to animate the rest of my short, which got completely incomprehensible near the completion of my video.



The timeline got pretty messy.

I tried to keep my animation simple with a frequent use of tweens, and the “Ease” feature helped out a great deal. Ease, which allows a tween to have the appearance of being sped up or slowed down near the ends or beginning of the animation allowed for more fluid looking transitions, where symbols would slow down or speed up as the move along their motion path. However, there were still numerous instances where I resorted to frame by frame animation.

A lot of the text required frame by frame animation.

One notable case for this is text - my sentences and phrases appeared letter by latter, which I did my manually changing the sentences frame by frame. This was true also to the writing of my Chinese name - the characters appear to be hand drawn, stroke by stroke, which was also achieved by utilizing frame by frame animation.

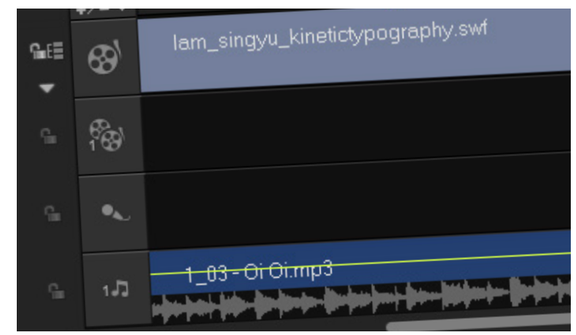
These characters had to be animated frame by frame.

PROCESS

Post-production on VideoStudio

Once imported into VideoStudio, .swf updates live.

I worked with just two files in VideoStudio - the .mp3 audio track, and the .swf video. An important thing with the video was to sync it with audio, a feat I found to be made significantly easier with VideoStudio, with the ability to place small markers onto the timeline. I used the time frames from these markers and turned them into frame values that I could use in Flash.



Editing the audio on VideoStudio is much easier than on Flash.

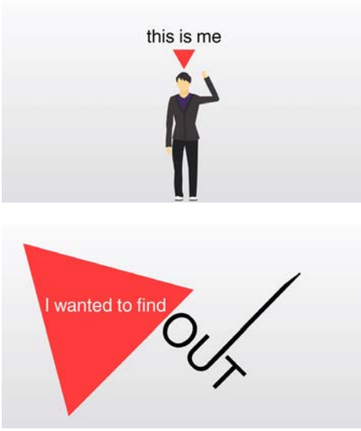
Originally I was not sure whether or not to use the full link of the audio track, and I made versions that were 50 seconds and a minute and a half long. In the end, I found I underestimated the amount of time it would take to convey the information in each scene, and I ended up using the full length of the track, and even then I had to omit some scenes.

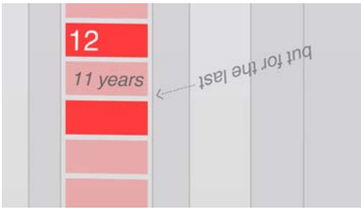
Pre-render quality is not always the greatest.

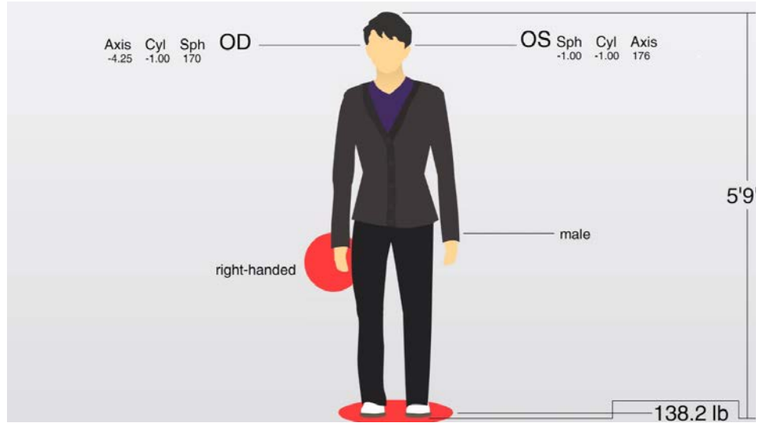
VideoStudio had the ability to instantly update every time I exported a .swf, so I was saved the hassle of having to watch my entire animation up to the point I had changed it. This pre-render system allowed me to see the overall feel of the video and also how to better structure or restructure it as I was animating on Flash.

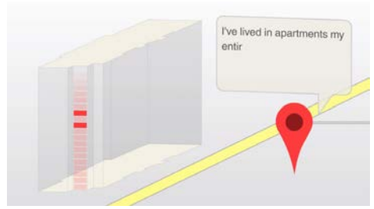
FINAL

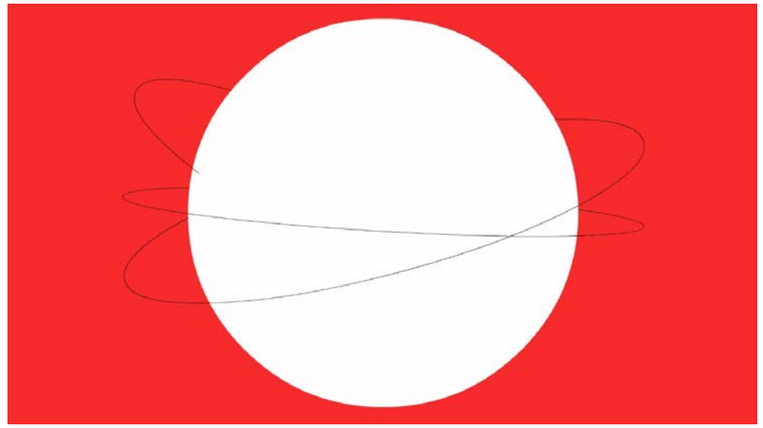
ME - A Kinetic Typography short



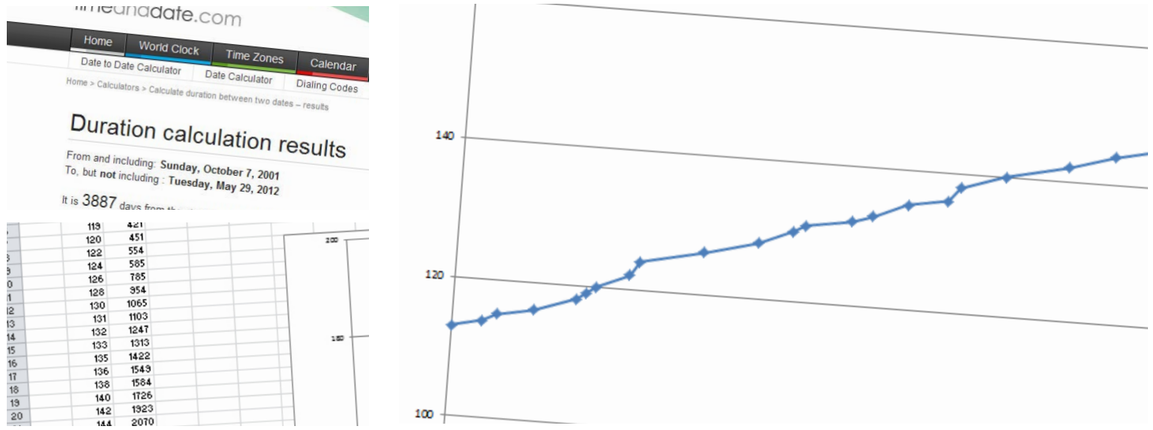




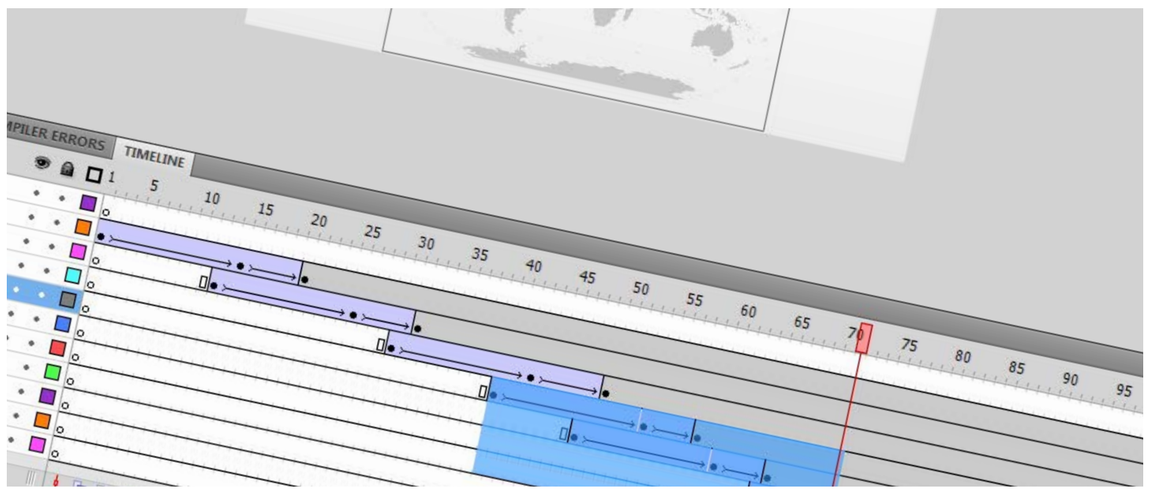




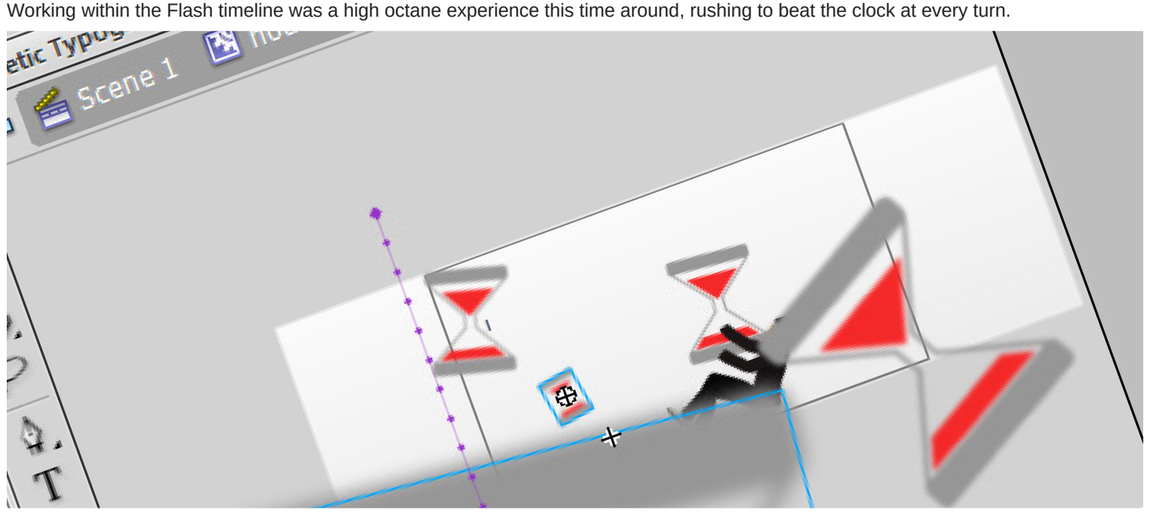
My final product is a two-minute animated short showcasing interesting facts and figures about myself. From bits and pieces of my life story and random facts, this video covers the things I've done for the last 15 years of my life.



My family kept track of my height ever since we've moved to Canada. I covered the dates recorded into the amount of days past since the starting date to graph them on Excel. The final data results were never used.



Working within the Flash timeline was a high octane experience this time around, rushing to beat the clock at every turn.



Bad time management as shown in the video itself.

REFLECTION

Would I have done anything differently?

I did not end up encountering many of the problems I expected to be facing while working with Flash. Perhaps this was because I was aiming to keep my animation simple yet still visually creative, but I never lost any progress from a crash (although it did crash 4 or 5 times – I've developed a habit of obsessively tapping Ctrl + S to save all my work), and never once did I encounter a rendering error in the exported .swf file (like I encountered in my Art History Presentation), or a failure to create a .swf at all (my Digital Portfolio).

My main trial would've been the time constraints I needlessly applied on myself seeing how we had more than adequate enough time to finish the project. My solution of course, negatively impacted my sleep, as it was simply to work through the night. Effects such as wondering why I had been doing just what I was doing, feeling all around miserable, and spending an unnecessary extra 10 km on the bus because I had fallen asleep could've all been avoided if I managed my time better.

One thing I really gained from this project would be pushing the limits of myself and the programs I was using to work at their maximum capacity – utilizing the fastest and most effective means to reach my goal. The naming system I had set up for symbols created a hierarchy that allowed me to navigate and find which ones I needed to use faster and more efficiently.

If I were to have a second chance to redo this project, I would try and include some of the data I had painstakingly collected and graphed for this project, such as my height since February 7, 2001 to the present day, the amount of sleep I've had for the last two weeks, a list of my priorities, and much more. I might also have extended the track to allow for more time or find a more suitable track for a longer time frame.

Originally I was split over whether to use Flash or Adobe AfterEffects, but although the potential of AfterEffects was so much greater than what I could hope to achieve with Flash, it's learning curve and amount of time dedicated into running it, let alone hardware limitations, led me to choose Flash instead. One day, if I have a better computer and more time, I wouldn't mind trying to recreate something like this on AfterEffects instead.

I am satisfied with the overall result with my ISU, although a few tweaks here and there would obviously make it a better product, as with all end results, changes can always be made. Seeing how much I accomplished, I am fairly proud of the video I had produced and I am thinking of maybe redoing one of these every year or over some other time frame, seeing how I've already done it once. There are a lot of things I've yet to explore and many things that I left out in the final version of this video, which just means more material to put into another.

I can see a video like this with music that I might one day hope to originally create to be an excellent capstone in my Grade 12 year, summarizing my life into a short 5 or so minute video that's both entertaining, fun to watch, and informative. It's small projects like this that I hope to accomplish on my own time.

I'd like to thank the CyberArts program and Ms. Matheson for assigning this project and providing the motivation in order to complete it.