

The Avatar Manifesto

Future Realities Summit



Image generated with Midjourney

The Avatar Manifesto

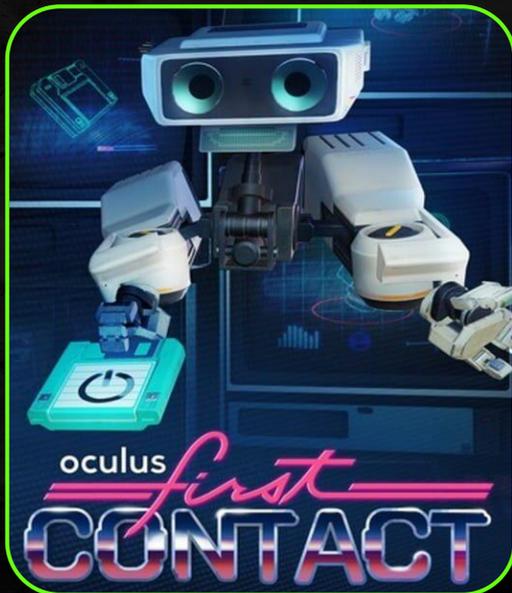
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Introduction - **Dino Ignacio**



UI Director
at EA Visceral (2007-2015)



Design Lead / Manager
at Oculus (2015-2021)

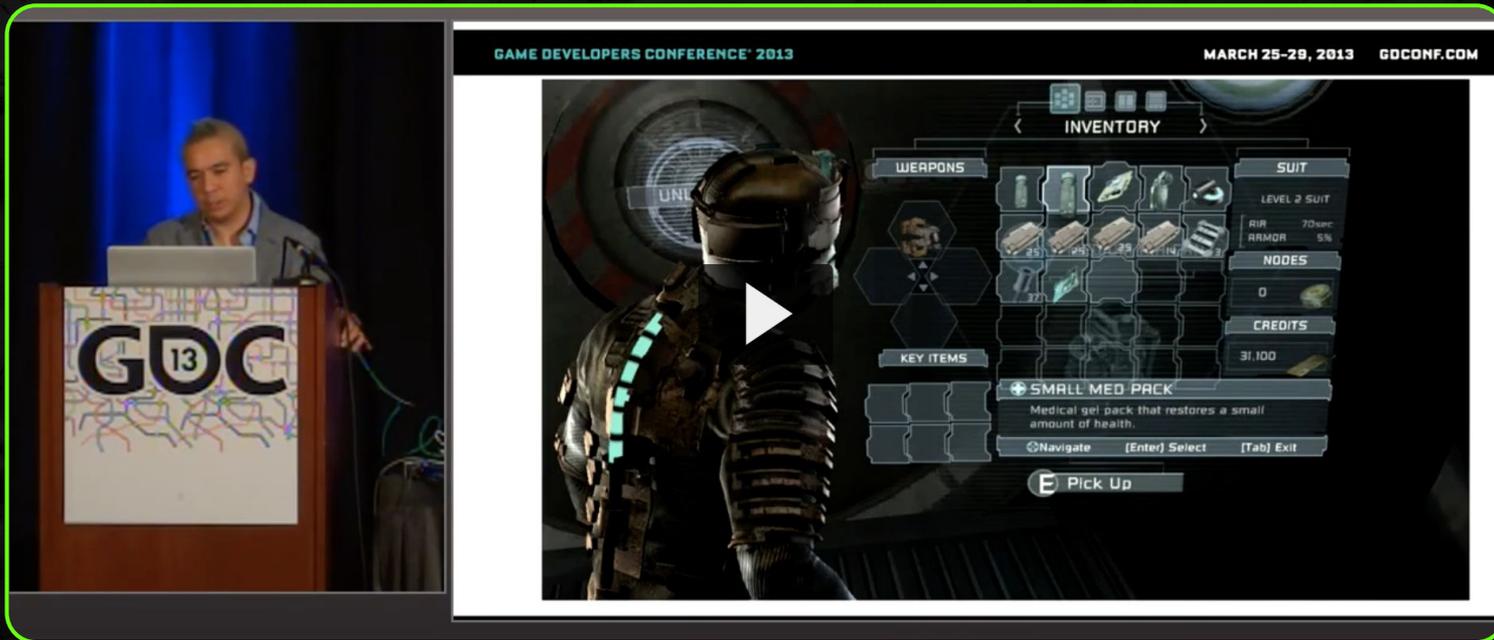


Senior Design Manager
at Roblox (2021-now)

Introduction - **Dino Ignacio**



Introduction - Dino Ignacio



Crafting Destruction: The Evolution of the Dead Space User Interface, GDC 2013

The evolution of **embodiment**

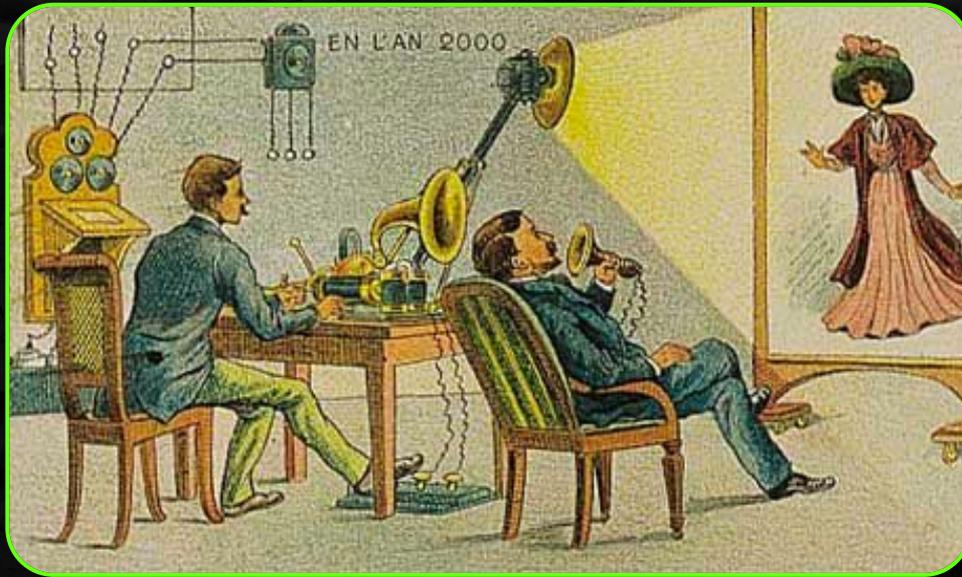
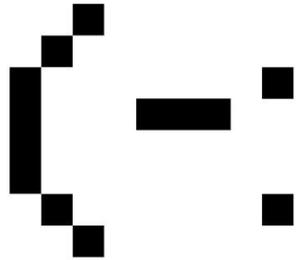


Illustration by Jean-Marc Côté (1899)

- We have found ways to personify ourselves in the many tools we use to communicate
- From adding illuminations to manuscripts to the invention of moving pictures and television
- We defy distance by finding ways to 'feel' there when we can't 'be' there

The evolution of **embodiment**



Avatars from Bitmoji and Roblox

ASCII



EMOJI



STICKERS



AVATARS

The evolution of **embodiment**



Avatars from Roblox

Avatar technology has been commonplace in video games for decades. The technology has evolved from users personifying themselves as pixels on screen, or words on a MUD or chat, to the full-on representations we see today.

What is an **avatar**?

Avatar (Sanskrit: अवतार, avatāra; pronounced [əvətaːrə]) is a concept within Hinduism that in Sanskrit literally means "descent". It signifies the material appearance or incarnation of a powerful deity, goddess or spirit on Earth.



Image from Wikipedia

What is an **avatar**?

An Avatar is an **embodied** manifestation of the **self**
in **digital form**.

What is **NOT** an avatar?



Playable Characters



Non-playable Characters

Why a **manifesto**?



Image generated with Midjourney

As avatars evolve to become more accurate digital representations of ourselves, there is a need to create guidelines and best practices on how we create and operate them.

Disclaimer

- These were written **aspirationally**.
- I did not write these with my employer's specific context in mind.
- I wrote these guidelines knowing that there are some aspects of these that we already do really well and some that we are still working on.

The principles

A

Equity

over Exclusivity

- + We will aspire to create opportunities for representation and inclusion
- + We will bias for making things available to all users

B

Agency

over Automation

- + We will focus on translation instead of simulation
- + A user should always feel in control

C

Clarity

over Efficiency

- + We want the user to always know what's happening
- + Even if it means it the flow has friction points

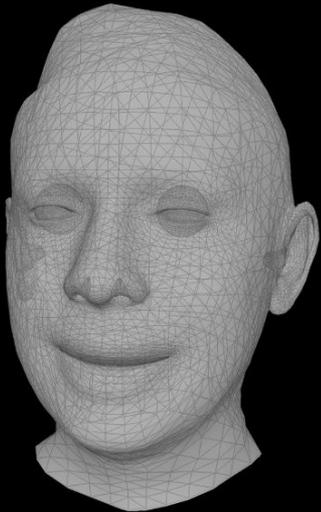
The guidelines



1

Avatars should always be driven by a user's intent.

The avatar cannot be used, embodied, or operated by others without the consent of the owner. Avatars should only do things intended by the user. This can be done using sensors, controls, triggers or embodiment in VR. Autonomic or superfluous actions like breathing, subtle idles and reactions to physics simulation are exempt from this guideline.



The guidelines



2

Avatars should have a way of indicating when they are asynchronous.

When playing back an Avatar message or when the user is AFK (away from controls), it should be clearly indicated that the Avatar's owner is not currently operating it.

Other users should not be able to affect an asynchronous Avatar.
(See guideline 1.)



Star Trek: The Next Generation, Paramount / CBS

The guidelines



3

A user must always have a choice over using tracking features when using their Avatar.

The user must always be made aware when a device is being used to track and record their IRL actions and movements to drive their Avatar.

A user should never be required to use sensitive sensors (camera, mic, etc.) and should never be surprised that their camera/mic/capture device is enabled.



Full Body Tracking, Roblox

The guidelines



4

When a user starts to build an avatar, the default should not bias toward a specific gender or ethnicity.

It is important that we do not impose a specific gender or race when a user creates their digital representation. We need to make sure the Avatar creation process is inclusive and open to diversity.

We should present more choices beyond the binary.

PASSPORT SERVICES SELECTING YOUR GENDER MARKER



Select the gender you would like on your passport

It does **NOT** need to match your ID or citizenship documents.

3. Gender (Read Instruction Page 3)
M F X Changing gender marker?
 Yes

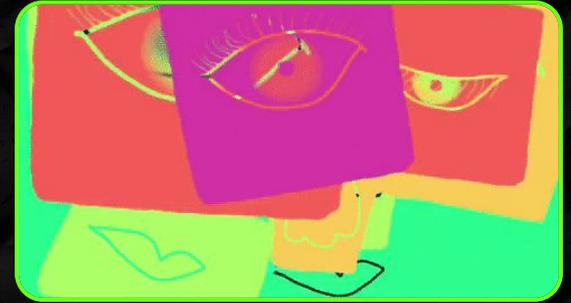
Changing the gender on your passport?

Only check "yes" if you are changing the gender on your passport. No additional documents are needed.

We are committed to treating all of our customers with dignity and respect.

<http://travel.state.gov/gender>

The guidelines



5

Features that allow a user to create authentic self-representation, like skin color or basic eye shapes, should always be equitable.

A user must be able to build something that represents their genetic self without being charged more for being from a minority group.



Image from Hair Love, Sony Pictures Animation



Image from Soul, Pixar Animation

By the numbers

Metaverse Fashion Trends 2022 - Roblox x Parsons

Half of Gen Z Users say they change their avatar's clothing **at least every week**.

Dressing their avatars allows them to **express their individuality** (47%)
and **feel good about themselves** (43%)

2 in 5 respondents said expressing themselves with clothing and accessories in the digital world is **MORE** important than expressing themselves in the physical world

Respondents noted the importance of having a full range of **skin tones** (said 70%)
and a full range of **body shapes** (64%), along with a full range of **hair** colors, textures
and styles (70%).

Behavioral data collected from the Roblox platform from January through September 2022.
Self-reported survey data collected from 1,000 Gen Z users between the ages of 14 and 24 living in US

Closing story



Images and Avatars shared with permission and consent from Harley Ignacio

Thank **you**s

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Alexander Weiss
Aaron Koressel
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Eric Kabisch
Kim Centeno
Sam Spielman
Thomas Galang
Nina Ignacio
Harley Ignacio

Dino Ignacio

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