

The internet in its Web 2.0 format has been instrumental in shaping modern culture. Social media has exposed us to a more diverse range of voices which has shifted our collective belief around gender identity, sexuality, race, disability and more. But the ideas and knowledge that are shared are rarely free, open, or safe. Our 'feeds' are personalized by an algorithm we had no say in creating. The leadership behind Web 2.0 is white and male and to have a fair shot at success you must abide by the rules of their algorithm otherwise your voice falls into the abyss. Web 2.0 has been built in the image of Western ideals of community and intelligence, while other cultures fight to be heard. These algorithms are built on historical data and the future that they create upholds historical power structures.

Everything designed becomes part of our collective being, we are shaped by the world that we create. The designer shapes the object or tool, which shapes the user, which shapes the world. Design then, holds power (Willis, 2006). To design a metaverse that is free, open, and safe that power must include representation from everyone who will be using it and especially those who are typically overlooked – BIPOC, LGBTQIA+ and the Disability community. The creation of the metaverse cannot be decided by a small group of wealthy corporations, it must be created by the communities who will inhabit it. The metaverse should be allowed to naturally evolve to fit each group's needs rather than them having to mold themselves to fit the metaverse.

To be free, open, and safe the metaverse needs to be representative of diverse cultures and races. Unlike Twitter or Instagram where users must shape content to fit the limitations of the design, the metaverse should be more expansive, inclusive, and organic. Designed for the people, by the people, it should include options for people to truly represent who they are in the world. Everyone should have a fair shot at gaining from the economic opportunities that the metaverse offers. This will require access to affordable hardware, software, and digital literacy skills. The hardware that is required to enter the metaverse must be uncomplicated and designed with an accessibility first mindset. It should be open source so anyone who wants to take part is not locked out by economic circumstance. The UI must be designed to WCAG standards and should use simple languages that anyone can understand. Skills should be taught for free to anyone who wants to take part.

VR and AR technology can track so much of a person's body, movements, and place in the world. The monitoring of harmful behavior does not mean that companies should own user's data. That data should be owned by the user and not available for resale to third parties. While using the metaverse, people should have the right to express themselves without fear of prejudice, violence, or harm. Communities must be able to shape and nurture their individual spaces as if they were their homes, villages, and civic spaces. Safety controls must be included that prevent unverified users from engaging if they are being harmful and allow individuals to set their own boundaries.

Building a world that is free, open, and safe is not an easy feat. As social media, the internet and real life become increasingly intertwined, it is important to understand whose imagined future we are living in. For better or worse, social media and the internet is a large part of our everyday experience. But that everyday experience is limited by the people who designed it. For every future that is designed, another is not given room to be created and opportunities for alternative ways of being are removed (Fry, 2001). For the metaverse to be free, open, and safe the power needs to be redistributed. One group of companies cannot oversee the creation of a new world. That power should be held by anyone that wants it.