

## **Final Project: Modular Avatar/Character System**

This is a group project to be completed in a group (or individually with special permission).

Using a technology such as Flash or Processing, create an interactive system for users to design avatars/characters. Alternately, you could make a physically realized system (e.g. paper puppets) using digital tools such as Photoshop or Illustrator and present documentation of your work via digital means (e.g., blogs, etc.). Various elements of the avatar/character design should be modular and independently manipulable. For example, you could change facial features, head shapes, body types, etc. However, you are encouraged to think beyond anthropomorphic avatars. Could you construct an “avatar” that is a person’s room, a set of interests, or some other modular way to convey social identity? The avatars/characters do not need to be “playable” within another system.

Additionally, you should take into account some limitation of current avatar/character generation systems and try to do better. For example, does your favorite avatar creation system propagate a sexist ideology? Is it limited in the imaginative range of characters or subculture it is targeted at? Let your assignment be motivated by addressing such limitations. You should not be afraid to be creative and experimental with the assignment. Your final version should exhibit a professional degree of refinement.

Examples are given below in the “Additional Information” section of this document.

### **Assignment Requirements:**

You must:

0) Choose your groups and indicate your group members on the wiki on the course site. Decide what type of system you want to create and come up with some preliminary design sketches, and a description of how your system goes beyond current avatar/character creation systems. Create a low-fidelity prototype either out of paper or in digital media. This should be very well thought out and should have already gone through several iterations. Also turn in a document indicating the contributions of each group member. Every member must contribute to the graphic design of the final project (i.e. no one can simply do planning, writing, or back-end coding – you must do visual design work!). This material is due **May 8<sup>th</sup>**.

2) Create a final version of your project. This is your final course project so it should incorporate the theory as well as the Flash and Photoshop skills from your previous assignments. Your group will be allotted time to present your work to the class on **May 15<sup>th</sup>**.

### **Additional Information:**

Modular avatar/character creation systems are nothing new. Puppets, paper dolls, and many toys share features with such digital systems. For example, Balinese shadow puppets (see **Figure 1**) are constructed in a modular fashion and used to enact dramatic performances.



**Figure 1: A Balinese shadow puppet**

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Department store catalogues used to be primary purveyors of paper dolls. Such toys, in part marketing mechanisms, allow for characters to be dressed using modular clothing elements. An example of an old-fashioned paper doll system is shown in **Figure 2**.



**Figure 2: A paper doll system**

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Computer games, especially role-playing games, are well known for their character creation systems. Many allow you nuanced selection of physical characteristics of player characters. Bethesda's *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* (see **Figure 3**) is a good example.



**Figure 3: Character creation in a popular computer role-playing game**

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Finally, such representations are making their way into popular media more generally. The German clothing chain H&M allows users to create customized “models” to outfit in the fashions that they sell. Interestingly, the models/avatars allow for a range of physical types to be represented (see Figure 4).



**Figure 4: H&M model creation site**

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Remember, once again, to be creative in what your group collectively decides to implement. Your job is to go beyond the status quo. This should be a consolidation of all that you have explored through the class: basic elements of design, psychological issues of design and layout, typography, and information design.

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