

Lilli Thompson

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Senior Design Engineer

Designer and engineer turned product leader. Builds research-driven software with firsthand understanding of creative workflows — from 3D animation and VR filmmaking to large-scale tooling and platform strategy. Background in character animation informs a precise sensibility for motion, timing, and interaction feel.

Skills: XR/VR | C# | Python | Javascript | Typescript | React | 3D Modeling | Animation | Audio & Video Editing | Photoshop | Figma | Unity | AI-Assisted Development

Professional Experience

Meta

2018–Present

Senior Staff Product Designer 2020–Present

Led multidisciplinary research into how people interact with emerging technologies, with a focus on interfaces that prioritize capability over engagement.

- Influenced cross-organizational research strategy to focus on new opportunities in sonification, haptic feedback, and multisensory systems.
- Prototyped agentic smart home systems demonstrating that AI features could preserve full user privacy without sacrificing capability — findings that shaped trust strategy and go-to-market for multiple teams.
- Built and shipped infrastructure for prototyping nonvisual interfaces designed to deliver capability without the attentional costs of screen-based computing (nvc-platform.com).
- Invented novel hardware devices to test hypotheses about how information could be communicated, paired with interactive software to validate whether users could understand the resulting interfaces.
- Built academic partnerships with six research institutions to establish a cross-institution research community around Nonvisual Computing.
- Built experimental demos and prototypes reused by 6 internal teams as the basis for their research.
- Mentored 20+ designers and established best practices for planning and communicating results in complex interdisciplinary projects, now standard practice across the research design organization.

Product Manager 2018–2020

Product leader in charge of growing Quill from a VR animation tool to a community of artists.

- Shipped Quill 2.0, centered on Theater Elsewhere, an interactive application allowing creators to share and explore each other's work.
- Commissioned 5 original short films from professional film studios. Managed budget and production.
- Introduced data-driven development to a team with no prior instrumentation: built data pipelines from scratch, partnered with data science to interpret results, and used findings to drive subsequent feature decisions.
- Led experimentation to define what storytelling formats work in VR, shipping multiple short-form experiments including place-based narratives, greeting cards, and meme-style content.

Ampersand

2015–2018

VP Product

One of the first employees at an a16z-backed startup; grew with the company from the first Design Engineer to VP Product as it scaled to 25 people.

- Defined product vision and led execution for a double-sided marketplace connecting professional authors to readers, spanning enterprise writing tools, analytics, and a consumer social reading app.
- Designed manuscript collaboration tools enabling authors to A/B test drafts with early readers, merge feedback across versions, and surface anonymized engagement data inline in the manuscript.
- Built a social reading experience with inline reactions, annotations, and author-reader conversations, creating a feedback loop between readers and authors.

Yahoo

2014–2015

Senior Software Engineer

Hybrid engineer/partner role bridging game studios and platform development.

- Built platform features and APIs for Yahoo Games, translating partner needs to shipped functionality.
- Conducted outreach with external game studios to gather requirements and support integration.

Cloud Party

2012–2014

Software Engineer (Acquired by Yahoo, 2014)

Full-stack developer at a browser-based virtual world startup built by game industry veterans.

- Built character animation, avatar, and costume systems for a real-time 3D platform running entirely in the browser.
- Created tutorials, demos, and community-facing content to drive user adoption of the platform's creative tools.

Google

2008–2012

Developer Advocate 2011–2012

- Drove industry adoption of HTML5, WebGL, and modern web technologies among game developers; spoke at conferences, represented Google in standards discussions, created demos, and ran developer trainings and meetups.

Technical Lead / Software Engineer 2008–2011

- Built video editing and processing tools for Google Video; work was folded into YouTube's video editing suite after Google Video was shuttered.
- Led team hiring, technical architecture, and project planning for large-scale media systems.

Earlier Engineering & Creative Roles

Sega Studios | Sony Computer Entertainment R&D | Pandemic Studios | Perpetual Entertainment | Realtime Associates

- Led or contributed to teams building game engines, as well as large-scale asset management, world-building, and content creation tools.
- Shipped multiple AAA titles for Xbox and Playstation.
- Designed and implemented data pipelines, level editors, and shader systems.
- Contributed to the COLLADA (.dae) file format specification, standardized through the Khronos Group and still widely supported across game engines and 3D tools.

Education

California Institute of Technology (Caltech), Pasadena California — Bachelor's of Science (B.S.) Engineering and Applied Science

Animation Mentor — Character Animation Program