If (Robot == Human)

A game about questioning what it means to be human.
By Nick Grinstead
Inspired by *Dark Reflection* and *Living Memories in the Forgetting Place*

Introduction

It is the future. Artificially-intelligent humanoid robots are a ground-breaking new technology, but there's just one problem. We can build their bodies, but they must be taught how to be human. Researchers aim to teach these electronic minds by bringing in human volunteers throughout the production process. During three interview segments, the robots will slowly become more and more human-like as they learn from the volunteers. But what does it mean to be human?

Content and Safety

This is a game about inequality, enforced societal roles, and dehumanization. The humans in this game see the robots as something less than human and try to force them into a specific role serving human society. Please check in with each other before playing to discuss subjects to avoid. The "lines and veils" method is used to delineate these topics. Additionally, this game uses the "X-card" to allow players to moderate the experience while playing.

Requirements

- 2 or more players split into groups of 2-4
- Can be played in person or over a video call
- X-cards for each player

Roles

- Robots (1-2 players)
- Humans (1-2 players)

Play Structure

The game takes place across three interview segments happening at different points in the robots' development. The goal of the human players in these interviews is to aid the robots in developing human-like personalities through their questioning while also ensuring that the robots are ready to fulfill their assigned functions in human society. The goal of the robot players is to use the answers they provide, as well as the general mannerisms of the humans to develop their own personality and wants over time.

Phase 1: Robotic Introductions

At this stage of development, the robots have no body and are just a computer with a speaker. Interviewing begins with the humans situated across from the robots. The humans should initiate the interview by introducing themselves before confirming the designation and intended function of the robots. The robot players can veto a name or function, but it's the humans who get to make this choice. After all, the robots are being built to serve humans.

At this stage of the interview, the humans are attempting to gather some baseline information about the robots. This could mean asking the robots about what they're capable of, what they know of the world so far, or how it feels to still be under construction. Your goal here is to establish the foundations of the robot characters while also reinforcing their intended role in society. If a human player wants a direct answer from a robot, they can point at them and ask a yes or no question. The robot must answer this question succinctly and directly.

Without a body, the robot players can only speak. They cannot communicate with the human players using facial expressions or gestures. Here you are being informed of your purpose. You are programmed to answer questions but haven't yet developed the ability to engage in a 2-sided conversation with humans. As you answer questions, think about how your robot feels about your given role in society. How do you feel about being forced into a certain role? What's something that you want to do with your life that doesn't fit into the humans' plans for you?

Once the human players feel they have enough information, they declare that the first round of interviewing has come to an end.

Phase 2: Personality Software Development

Time has passed and the robots now have partially complete bodies. The robot players may now move and make gestures in a limited capacity. These movements should be robotic and unrefined as your motor functions are still developing.

In this second interview, the humans shift into asking more complicated questions. Examples of this could be asking about the robots' feelings, their relationships with humans, or their opinions about their assigned function. Consider asking follow-up questions to steer the conversation back to the robots' intended functions in society if the conversation moves away from that topic.

Robots should continue developing their own mannerisms and personalities. As you answer questions, try to push back against the role the humans have placed you in in small ways. Your answers to questions should get more complex as well. You're encouraged to elaborate on your answers.

The human players still hold the power to force robots to answer yes or no questions by pointing at them. However, the robots have learned that this method can be used to get a direct answer. This interview section ends once a robot points to a human and asks them a yes or no question. This question should relate to humanity and/or the role of robots in human society.

Phase 3: If Robot is Human
This is the final interview segment and the robots' bodies are now fully constructed. The robot players have full freedom of movement and expression. They should use this to demonstrate their robot's newfound personality.

Regardless of their feelings about their assigned function, the robots want to be human. Your goal in this section is to ask questions to learn more about your human interviewers and humanity at large. Try to act as your own person, even if that contradicts the role the humans built you for.

As a human player, think about how your character's view of the robots has changed throughout the interview process. Do you see a machine sitting in front of you or a person? These feelings should influence the way you interact with the robots. Answer their questions about humanity to help them understand what it means to be human to the best of your ability.

All players can point to another player and ask a yes or no question to receive a direct response. The interview concludes once a robot points to a human and asks "Am I human?"

Golden Cobra Inspirations
Dark Reflection
The three-part interview structure of this game draws from the gameplay structure of *Dark Reflection.* I primarily took inspiration from the way power shifts from The Real player to The Reflection player as who's mimicking who changes throughout that game. I wanted to create a similar gameplay flow but in a different context with robots learning from humans. Here the main difference is that the robots seek to develop as their own person, rather than primarily mimicking the other players. Creating

a gradual shift in the conversation aids in easing players into heavier conversation topics in the later portion of this game.

Living Memories in the Forgetting Place

I got the idea for the interviewing process from the core mechanic of asking yes or no questions to regain memories in *Living Memories in the Forgetting Place.* The core of that game involved constructing your own story using your answers to other players' questions. I wanted to do something similar with the robots in this game but with more structure as to what the questions are about. Additionally, the pointing mechanic in this game was inspired by this. Having the robots slowly gain access to this mechanic as the game progresses helps demonstrate them pushing back against the roles humans see them in.