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I am the Robot. Are You?

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**I am the Robot.
Are you?**

Union College
Bachelor of Arts

Rachel Michelle Feldman

2012

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Abstract

This thesis is dedicated to all the weird nerd girls like me. We are the exception to the rule.

I was originally inspired by a previous project in a 3D modeling class. For my final project, I designed two robots; male and female; who's naked bodied reflected the presence of technological communications in society and lack of face-to-face interactions. I displayed the robots in a variety of sexual positions, which appear cute or sweet to the viewer because of the toon-shader effect. The toon-shader effect makes the 3D models look like cartoons. I loved combining the idea of technology, robotics, and sex into one. To this day, the poster of the robots in my room always gets a response.

I took this idea and decided to expand upon it for my visual arts thesis by creating a more detailed female robot, which would embody my views on the perception of women in society and how I feel that I fit in to these perceptions. Aspects of the robot reflect my views on what I believe the perfect woman would be. In my mind she is strong yet feminine and delicate. She is powerful and takes charge of her own life. She is carefree and unaffected by the opinions of others. She is hardworking and street smart. These are all characteristics that I have and others I aspire to attain. The scenes I have created are parodies on gender roles, shared life experiences, controversial topics or genres, and otherwise taboo scenarios.

Proposal

I investigated social taboos in American society today. Taboo was once defined as a ban or exclusion resulting from social custom or emotional aversion. Currently, taboo is recognized as a social stigma, which is noticed, yet unaccepted in society. Taboo is found in relationships, sex, death, diets, social interactions, religion, and many other facets of life. Over time, some of the taboos pertaining to gossip, scandal, drugs, and food have lost their sting as society becomes more accepting and diverse. Such aforementioned taboos are seen but not heard because no one wants to discuss them. I will explore the social taboos of sex, gender roles, rudeness, racism and stereotypes, drugs, religion, beauty, violence, crime, and infidelity and what makes them each taboo.

The question I asked is what is so taboo about something that we all see and experience? I want to show taboo, stereotypes, and life experiences as seen through my eyes. I have been partly inspired by two pop singers, Kesha and Lady Gaga. "We are who we are" by Kesha discusses the taboo of partying and its positive and negative affects. Kesha sings that no matter how obscene and ridiculous we may be, we have nothing to be ashamed because "we are who we are." "Born this way" by Lady Gaga is an anthem for all people who differ from the social norm. Gaga speaks specifically to those who are homosexual, different races and ethnicities, in addition to a general self-conscious audience. She encourages listeners "don't hide yourself in regret//just love yourself and you're set." In society, taboos such as homosexuality and integration of races are considered abnormal. The song stresses that "there's nothin' wrong with lovin who you are," and "I'm beautiful in my way," to go against social taboos.

I have created 15 images relating to taboo social situations. There are overarching similarities and ideas that bring all the images together such as the role of the female in American society and the idea of the perfect woman. I have used the 3D modeling software, Cinema 4D, to model a photo-realistic robot that I then inserted into photographs I made. The robot represents me in the taboo scene. Since I am a female, the robot exhibits the struggle of a young female to feel powerful and beautiful in a predominantly male dominated society. The photographs feature models (students) in taboo situations, which comment on contradicting beliefs seen in society.

To further research the topic of taboo in American society today, I utilized the research tools available at the library, Internet searches, and other relevant media in addition to personal observations and experiences.

Casting Chart

| THEME | LOCATION | MODELS | PROPS |
|---|---|-------------------------------------|---|
| Driving multi-tasking | CPH parking lot. NEED MOVEMENT. | Ali Littlefield | Mascara |
| Stress and Pills | Green house study room-offering pills. | AJAY | Books, laptop, pills |
| Female etiquette- sitting in skirts | PROCTORS | ROBYN | |
| Exercise peeking (looking at status on elyptical) | Alumni gym OR YMCA? | Jen, Amanda librot, Rachel steiner, | Dress in workout attire. |
| 3 some | chi psi A bedroom with a large bed | Quinn RHODA & Seth roberts | A large bed. |
| SHOWER POO | BATHROOM | ANNA? | SITTING ON TOILET WHILE PERSON IN SHOWER. |
| coke in class | A CLASSROOM | AMY CERINI | FAKE COKE, DOLLAR BILL |
| Abort mission | PLANNED PARENTHOOD Eiline 3745353 x268 | JEN | PLANNED PARENTHOOD |
| Death | Funeral home. Person inside coffin and robot on side drinking. | BOBBY | |
| Catch the elevator | YMCA hallway | RYAN | Brief cases and suites |
| Violence/crime | ROBOT AT GUNPOINT | Jafar Johnson | Fake gun, ski mask. |
| EATING DISORDER | A KITCHEN | MEREDITH L. | PIZZA BOXES, PIZZA, FOOD |
| date SPILL WINE- COVER PHOTO | OUTSIDE BACK OF REAMER | N/a | FLOWERS, FOOD, SILVERWARE, RED WINE, WINE GLASSES |
| DRAGQUEEN and king | Man dressed up as woman making breakfast and robot reading newspaper at table | n/a | |
| MASTURBATION | my room | robot | VIBRATOR, LUBE |

Creating the Robot

I spent a majority of the ten-week fall term modeling and rigging my female robot. I experimented with many robot styles (which can be seen on my blog) and ultimately arrived at a mixture of complex joints coupled with simple limbs. The first thing that I thought of was the waistline and torso of the robot. It had to be curvy and sexy but durable enough to pass for a robotic torso that would hypothetically hold wires and hardware inside it. I researched cartoon characters such as Harley Quinn, Super Girl, Cat Woman, etc. and began to create 3D models of them. As I worked, I realized that not only were these women visually pleasing to me, but I also felt a connection to their strong and independent characters. Because of my identification with these characters, I wanted to leave some aspects about the robot as ambiguous such as her name, origin, orifices, etc.

I originally aspired to create a realistic face with a head full of wires but realized that I don't have the skill or time to create such an intricate model. I researched helmets and ultimately created mine with inspiration from the daft punk helmet based on its simplicity and interesting curves.

For the face, I decided it would be interesting to omit a mouth and nose, thus making the robot less human and more mechanical. I gave her a set of eyes, which is an extruded glowing pink beam on the face. The ambiguity of the face helps highlight the more interesting parts of the body while maintaining the overall simplicity of the robot herself.

The torso was the most important part of the robot and I knew exactly how I wanted it to look. I wanted the curves of a woman but the strength of a machine. I think the shape I created carries this message effectively. The neck, similar to the limbs, is simple and slender, reflecting the delicate nature of the robot. The breasts not only had to stand out significantly on her chest but they also had to be realistic. To achieve this I modeled two perfectly round breasts with screws as nipples. To give a sense of internal hardware, I created wires that I inserted into the robot's empty stomach area. For the hips, I didn't want them to detract from any of the other body parts and therefore decided to make a very basic hip model to which the torso wires and hip joints would connect.

The joints are the most intricate part of the model. I wanted the joints to actually work. At first, the model for my arm joint functioned but I soon abandoned that idea because it wasn't aesthetically pleasing to me. I decided to use a round object as the elbow joint,

which looks very nice but constantly changes position and requires adjusting when posing the robot. The knee joints are absolutely perfect and functioning and I'm very proud of my work on them. The hands and feet were the two things I had the most trouble with. I wanted them to be realistic so I started modeling a full five-fingered hand and a multicolored high heel space shoe. My professor helped me realize that a five-fingered hand would be too ambitious and too complex in comparison with the simple robot structure.

Rotoscoping seemed easy at first when I rotoscoped a simple sphere into a scene, but proved difficult when using a more complex polygonal model with more complex lighting. At first I measured the distance of the lights in the actual room with the intention of placing them in correlating spots in Cinema 4D. Unfortunately, I learned that doing this didn't always create the same lighting as I had originally shot. Therefore, I had to experiment with the placement of lights and their intensities. After having shot two scenes, I learned that I needed to be shooting in camera raw instead of normal JPEG images. This meant that I had to re-shoot the elevator scene but I was able to make the car scene work. This was my first time working with raw images.

Once the robot was rigged and modeled, I was able to enjoy dressing her with colors and textures. First was the color scheme. What colors are associated with females? What is my favorite color? The answer to both was clear: hot pink. I immediately knew that pink would be too strong a color to use for the main parts so I decided to apply it to accent areas of the robot. I originally had coupled the pink accent with gray and black colors to cover the rest of the robot but eventually switched to just gray and pink since I ran into a few problems with black. I added a reflective layer to the materials in hopes of creating a realistic robot/metallic texture. Unfortunately, I learned that my textures and the robot as a whole didn't seem realistic. This is when I turned to the toon-shader. From the beginning of the project I had thought of using toon shader but wasn't sure. But once I saw how it transformed my robot into a more believable character there was no turning back.

Scenes

For each scene I needed a human model. I started the casting process by type casting people I knew in specific roles. I sent an e-mail to a group of people saying the following:

“Hello friends and strangers,

If you don't know me, my name is Rachel Feldman and I am a senior working on a digital art/photography thesis. My thesis focuses on taboo in society today and how most taboos that have become accepted as normal are still scrutinized and questioned. I have modeled a 3D robot, which will represent me and how I view taboos. The robot will be photo-shopped into photographs I take of people in taboo scenes.

THIS IS WHERE I NEED YOUR HELP!

I need models to be in the scenes with the robot! This will all be very easy on your end. All you have to do is let me know your schedule and we can schedule a time to do a photo shoot. I will let you know which "scene" you'll be in. At the end of the project I will give you a copy of the photo for you to keep. All photos will be photo shopped and show everyone in their best light. NO NUDITY! (Unless you're comfortable with it)

Feel free to contact me if you have any questions or concerns OR if you are interested.

I literally CAN'T do this thesis without your help. If you're not interested, PLEASE TELL YOUR FRIENDS!”

Unfortunately, the people I had wanted didn't always agree. I had to nix a couple scenes because I couldn't get the models to agree to pose for me. In the end this was no problem since I had replaced the scenes with better ones. However, I was lucky enough to enlist some of my close friends and strangers to participate in various scenes. Some of the scenes are ironic to me on a personal level because of the people I cast.

For the threesome scene, I needed two attractive and muscular guys, whom I found at a fraternity. The abortion scene required a young innocent looking girl, so I chose one of my sophomore volunteers to play the part. I knew of a friend who would have the perfect facial expressions for the car scene and whose blond hair would contrast nicely against a dark interior. I decided to use my innocent looking freckle faced best friend to do cocaine in a classroom. My cynical friend agreed to lie in a casket and play dead. My actor friend gave a mischievous snicker as the asshole in the elevator. I perpetuated racial stereotypes, casting an African American friend of mine as the robber of a convenience store. My short and adorable neighbor agreed to get wet and sodded up for a quick bathroom shot. I used a beautiful young actress friend to sit and spread her legs, displaying lack of etiquette. My straightedge pre-med friend carelessly offered pills to my robot to aid in studying. Four

beautiful athletic girls got their sweat on the elliptical while trying to see how the robot faired against them. Overall, I am pleased with my choice of models and execution of scene direction.

Abort Mission

Hopefully this will have been the first and last time I step foot into Planned Parenthood. I believe that every woman has the right to choose if she is ready and willing to have a baby. Originally, I had wanted to have my model in an examination chair, waiting to abort her baby. Unfortunately, I was not granted access to examination rooms but Planned Parenthood in Schenectady was willing to allow me and my model come for a shoot after hours. I grabbed pamphlets that were lying around and experimented with how each one looked in the hand of my model. I wanted my model to look scared and worried about what was going to happen to her next. Next to her, I placed the robot that was more concerned with her upset stomach. Once the picture was shot I moved on to photo editing and placed a significant blur on the background to allow the model and robot to pop in the photo.

Classroom Cocaine

Where is the worst possible place to do drugs? This was a question I asked after a conversation with my professor. I had asked if there was anything he could do to get fired (now that he has tenure). His first response was no but he then mused on a scenario in which he would do drugs with a student and then get fired. That made me think, if I was going to do drugs with a professor, where would be the most optimal and inappropriate place? A classroom. But for this scene it couldn't be just any classroom. It had to be a typical college classroom with lots of chair desks and space. I decided to use a large classroom in the basement of the Humanities building which I had Psychology 101 in my freshman year. The irony was tenuous. I used salt as cocaine and rolled up a dollar bill for my friend to stick in her nose. I still have that dollar bill and haven't touched it since the day of the shoot. I had my model (with the dollar bill up her nose) pretend to snort the fake cocaine. I found that the scene looked best when she didn't have the bill directly in her nose and with a tilt in her head turning to the robot. Once the picture was shot I moved on to photo editing. I changed the color of my model's shirt, the color of the classroom walls, and adjusted the color tone of the whole image.

Death

Funerals are sad and this was definitely the most fun I'll ever have at a funeral home. I called at least seven funerals in the Schenectady area and they all shot me down. Finally, I called Jones' Funeral and was given the green light to shoot there and have my model play dead in a casket. We arrived at the funeral home and I was given a variety of caskets to choose from. I saw a pink casket and exercised extreme self-control to not chose it for the shoot. I ended up settling on a rich mahogany wood, which worked perfectly in the space provided. I told the man in charge (I can't remember his name) that I wanted it to look like a real funeral so he allowed me to use the ceremony room where services are held. I adjusted the lighting and nearby podium, playing with angles and composition. Finally, I settled on a generic frontal composition (which I then discarded and used a more interesting angle). Once the picture was shot I moved on to photo editing. I changed the color of the curtains, got rid of a door, changed the color of the carpet, increased the contrast of the casket, and removed blemishes from my model's face.

Drag Royalty

Men who like to play dress up are known as drag queens but what about women who like to dress up as men? So it's sexy for two lesbians to make out, gross for two men to make out, gross if a woman dresses manly, and trendy if a man dresses feminine? I don't understand. Society calls them lesbians or dykes but I call them drag kings. This image is a parody of the gender roles and discusses the equality and inequality of the sexes. Crowns denote royalty and the rouge suggests foul play in the kingdom. By this I mean the king has something/someone extra on the side.

Driving

Commercials about the dangers of texting and driving have popped up all over the place. But what about multi-tasking and driving? In middle school, my best friend's mom would drive with her left foot perched on the side of the steering wheel while she pressed her cell phone to her ear. With up to 3 children in a car, this kind of multi-tasking and relaxation never once got us into an accident but definitely worried me. As a young adult, I've now noticed that women, such as myself, sometimes rush to get ready in the morning,

leaving some things to be completed during transit. I have seen women put their faces on in a car, on the bus, and on the subway. I too am guilty of applying makeup while driving. When I was in high school I was on my way to a party and rear-ended a van because I was applying mascara. The damage done to my vehicle ended up costing me a small fortune (as a seventeen year old) but at least I looked good when the cops arrived at the scene.

Eating Disorders

Staying skinny and full is hard to do. Young women today are ruining their health, metabolism, and lifestyles by resorting to an eating disorder. Unfortunately, the media continues to use unrealistically fit and beautiful women to deliver the news, model in advertisements, and act as spokespeople for brands. As someone who once struggled with and eventually overcame an eating disorder, I can relate to the young women who feel the only way to becoming thin is through bingeing and purging or starvation. I loved how my jeans got a little too big on me and when some bones stuck out. Now I think that look is gross and I label it as hungry and emaciated instead of skinny or beautiful. There is buzz on the Internet saying that fit is the new thin. For the past four years I have ascribed to this belief. I channeled my once compulsive eating and purging habits into compulsive exercise and eating healthy. I know my obsession with health and fitness is above average but I wouldn't trade it for the years of insecurity and self-mutilation when I struggled with anorexia and bulimia. I hope that thinspiration helps other women realize that starvation is not the answer.

Elevator Problems

Have you even been running late for a meeting and just about to catch the elevator when that asshole inside decides to not hold the doors for you? That's the worst. My friends make fun of me but I once said, "do unto others as you wish undone to you." By this I mean, treat others as you wish to be treated. That said, I always hold doors for people, say please and thank you, and try to respect people I come across on a daily basis. Karma is everywhere and if you do mean things or send out negative vibes, they will come back to bite you in the ass. Maybe that guy in the elevator is just returning some of your negative karma.

Female Etiquette

As an unusual female, I constantly struggle with my manly mannerisms. I sit with my legs open, I spit, I say fuck a lot, I can appreciate the female figure and I would burp if I knew how. I am a self-admitted unladylike girl. There are norms and expectations of females imposed by society that they should be pretty and proper. We are expected to sit properly with our legs crossed and back erect, but let's be honest, that isn't always comfortable. The problem is, when wearing a dress or skirt; one *must* cross her legs unless she wants to put her lady parts on display. Celebrities such as Britney Spears have been unfairly caught going commando in compromising situations. It's not easy to exit a car in a tight dress and heels. These things take skill. In this image, I display the juxtaposition of females: proper and improper. I made sure the skirt would adequately cover all downstairs lady parts and that the model shows that she is comfortable and not worried about how she appears. In contrast, the robot sits with her legs and arms crossed, displaying both a lady like position and protesting the position of her neighbor.

Pills with Thrills

As a person with severe ADD, I praise Adderall and all other drugs of its nature. It is my (prescribed) drug of choice. This scene presents the issue of non-prescribed people taking prescription drugs to enhance performance. I swear, this stuff really works. It's similar to drinking an energy drink or coffee since physically, your heart rate increases. In Argentina, the people drink an herb called mate instead of coffee. The drug cocaine comes from a similar strain of the plant (I think). So what's wrong with something that enhances your performance? They already make the sex drug and birth control, so what could be so bad about a work-enhancing pill?

Masturbation Nation

Masturbation is a completely normal human activity. I don't know why any parent would tell their child that it seals their fate in hell. It's your body, you're exploring yourself, and that's totally normal. Everyone has sexual drives. It's what makes us human. Our animal instincts drive us to act. Sexual activity, whether it is alone, with a partner, or in a group, is a great way to blow off steam and release built up stress. It can be used by teens as an

escape or alternative to drug use or unprotected sex. This image is most near and dear to my heart because it was shot in my senior college room. This image is homage to my room and the design techniques I implemented.

Red Alert

A great date can go horribly wrong with one spill of red wine. Depending on the outfit you're wearing and how ruined it is post spill, there's no coming back from that. This has happened to me a couple of times but I was lucky enough to be doused in beer instead of red wine. My date and I were engaged in conversation, as I watched in slow motion as his arm met with my tall glass of beer, and that beer landed in my lap. We were outside at a restaurant so naturally all the surrounding customers looked over empathetically. I passed it off as if it was no big deal. I mean, in the grand scheme of things it wasn't a very big deal. My clothes weren't ruined and I hadn't made a fool of myself. On the other hand, I was all dolled up and covered in wet beer, which would eventually dry into a sticky layer on my clothing and skin. I just wanted to move on and forget about the incident. The rest of the night, my date apologetically tried to make up for spilling beer all over me. In the end, I came across as the cool confident chick that I am, with a guy desperate to prove that he was more than just a klutz.

Robbery

Why guns? Guns act as exterior muscle for an already terrifying individual. But why do people use guns to kill? The act of murder challenges and defies the theory of survival of the fittest because it eventually comes down to survival of the most resourceful; and thus dangerous and illegal activity. People use guns for all sorts of stupid things: robbing banks, robbing stores, protecting their drugs, the list goes on. So why does the constitution allow it? The right to bear arms is such a southern thing. They were all about hunting and farming and therefore had to kill innocent unsuspecting animals or protect their property. The television programs I watch and Hollywood have given me the impression that any idiot can have a gun. This needs to change! I have yet to hold a real gun in my hands and shoot it. I know that

I'll love it but I also know that I neither need nor should have a gun at this point in my life. No 22 year old should feel the need to hold a gun and it makes me sad that some do.

If I was robbed I would give them whatever they wanted, they would get away with it, and I would be somewhat traumatized but eventually move on. To a woman this can be similar to rape in the sense that she has no control over what is happening (because lets be honest, how many cashiers happen to know sick moves to change their odds? I think the odds are against it.) Also, they violated the rules, the law, by robbing any establishment in the first place. I hope this is never me.

Shower Time

Showering is a time of relaxation and clean fun. When I shower, I enjoy my alone time and take advantage of the opportunity to let my mind wander as the water flows over me. I never worry about anything because I have everything I need and nothing I don't. When I'm in the shower I don't have my phone. I'm completely disconnected from the world. I do the same thing while I'm at the barn. Those are my special more simple times. But an invasion of this special time by someone or something is not warranted. It's gross; it's an invasion of privacy, and GET OUT!

Threesome

The threesome photo is one of my personal favorites because of the subject matter and the uncomfortable situation I put those two boys in. when people think of threesomes, they typically think of two girls and one lucky guy, but why? What is so strange about a threesome with one lucky woman and two men? If two women can have a sexual interaction with each other and a man, then why can't it go both ways? These were a few of the many questions I asked myself when developing the photograph concept. I wanted the boys to show how uncomfortable they were in the presence of each other and a strong confident female. Although the scene takes place on the male's turf, the female dominates the image, seated in between the two boys, consoling one. It was my goal to leave the viewer surprised and smirking at the possibility of the scene coming to fruition. At the moment, a threesome of any sort would not be my cup of tea.

Unwritten Rules of Exercise

I know it's rude but I am guilty of peeking at my neighbor's exercise machine status while working on my fitness. I believe it's an unwritten rule that you can check on your neighbor, as long as you don't get caught. If you do get caught, I suggest you congratulate them on their hard work. I scheduled my models to meet me during normal gym hours. I gave them all 5 minutes to warm up on the elliptical so that their faces would be flushed and to get their blood pumping. Once I was ready to shoot, I instructed them to peer over at the unoccupied elliptical to see it's screen while they were mid workout. This provided for some interesting shots. I decided to tell them to freeze and look instead, which gave a more realistic look of being mid-workout. I chose these girls solely based on their appearances. They are all tan and beautiful, representing the unrealistic pressures put on women to be physically fit and beautiful reflected through advertising. Imagine the skinny to fat celebrity ratio. I think this is because women are typically more emotional than men. Damn hormones. Once the picture was shot I moved on to photo editing and changed the colors of the girl's shoe-laces (because they were pink) and changed the color of one model's top since the color didn't flow with the composition.

Conclusion

I have learned that I relate to strong, powerful, no nonsense women who know what they want because I feel that I reflect those qualities. I enjoy creating provocative images that make people both think and feel a way they hadn't previously felt.

In conclusion, my thesis has taught me many things about production, 3D modeling, compositing an image...and about myself. I want to thank the Visual Arts Department of Union College for funding this work of art.

This project has been a self-exploration and coming of age. I created images that reflect my views on certain situations and my explanations demonstrate the reasoning behind them.

Primary Robot Inspiration

