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### **TITLE:** Conceptualizing Robotic Agency. Social Robots in Elder Care in Contemporary Japan

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#### **ABSTRACT (up to 300 words)**

Japan is a hyper-aging society, and its government is encouraging robotic solutions to address elder care labor shortage. Therefore, authorities have adopted an agenda of introducing social robots. However, increasing numbers of people in Japan are becoming emotionally attached to anthropomorphic machines, and their introduction into elder care may thus be perceived as contentious. By exploring human engagement with social robots in the care context, this presentation argues that rapid technological advances in the twenty-first century will see robots achieve some level of agency, contributing to human society by carving out unique roles for themselves and by bonding with humans. Nevertheless, the questions remain of whether there should be a difference between humans attributing agency to a being and those beings having the inherent ability to produce agency and how we might understand that difference if unable to access the minds of other humans, let alone nonhumans, some of which are not even alive in the classical sense. Using the example of an interaction between an elderly woman and a social robot, we engage with these questions; discuss linguistic, attributed, and inherent agencies; and suggest that a processual type of agency might be most appropriate for understanding human-robot interaction.

#### **BIOGRAPHY (up to 200 words)**

Anne Aronsson is an anthropologist of Japan and obtained her PhD in socio-cultural anthropology from Yale University. She was a postdoctoral fellow with a Suslowa-Postdoc-Fellowship grant at the University of Zurich in Switzerland where she taught a seminar course "Global Processes in East Asia." At Yale she continued her work on her postdoctoral project on elder care in Japan and the use of robotic care devices, with a focus on social robots and emerging emotional technologies as well as taught four courses in the Department of Anthropology. Anne has authored several publications, including "An Anthropology of Social Robots: Ontological Indefinity and Subjective Experience of Robots in Elder Care" in *Anthropological Theory*, "Bio-politics and the State-Doctor Relationship in Japan after COVID-19," in the special issue "Medical Politics in East Asia" for journal *Medical Anthropology*; "Social Robots in Elderly Care: The Turn Toward Machines in Contemporary Japan," in the special issue "Relations, Entanglements, and Enmeshments of Humans and Things: A Materiality Perspective" in *Japanese Review of Cultural Anthropology*; "Conceptualizing Robotic Agency: Social Robots in Elder Care in Contemporary Japan" and introductory chapter in the special issue "Finding Agency in Nonhumans" published in *Relations: Beyond Anthropocentrism*; "Multispecies Entanglements in the Virosphere: Rethinking the Anthropocene in Light of the 2019 Coronavirus Outbreak," co-authored with Fynn and published in *The Anthropocene Review*; and her monograph *Career Women in Contemporary Japan: Pursuing Identities, Fashioning Lives* published with Routledge Contemporary Japan Series.

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