



# DIJ WORKSHOP AND ROUND-TABLE DISCUSSION THE DEVELOPMENT OF (SOCIAL) ROBOTS FOR HEALTH CARE SCENARIOS: HOPES, CONCERNS AND LIMITS

DR. DIEGO COMPAGNA  
TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY BERLIN

## DO SOCIAL ROBOTS QUALIFIES FOR ELDER- AND CHILDCARE?

In the development of social robots, their ability to be sensitive and/or sensible is of paramount importance. An autoethnographic approach was taken within the setting of a fabrication laboratory dedicated to the study of human-robot interaction, and focus group interviews were conducted with both engineers and (the presumed) target groups for social robots. The data shows a clear distinction between the concepts of being sensitive and being sensible. To work out the striking difference between sensible (humans) and sensitive (robots), it is helpful to focus three possible domains of social robots: housework, elderly care and childcare. The analysis of the data shows a clear distinction between homework, elderly care and childcare for both groups, engineers and target users. In respect to the development of social robots for childcare, the assertion of gender stereotypes is very evident, especially towards the role of motherhood. The analysis of the term “being sensible” is also very interesting. It was often used to engender a topography that defined legitimate social actors as humans, as opposed to (social) robots. To be “sensitive” is attributed to both an organic, living entity (childcare) and a highly functional robot (homework as well as elderly care). Being sensible, however, is restricted to humans as “animate being”, rather than to be linked to the assumption of “having a soul”. These findings are on the one hand supporting Giorgio Agamben’s differentiation of “bios” and “zoë” as well as biopolitical theories in general and on the other hand also pointing towards the peculiarity of new interactive technologies – as well as such with the potential of increasing the rate of cyborgization – endangering humans’ status in modern societies as the sole social actors.