

MORAL MACHINES?

ETHICS AND POLITICS OF THE DIGITAL WORLD

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KEYNOTE ABSTRACT

Cognitive Assemblages and Their Implications for Ethics

N. Katherine Hayles

Duke University, United States

What would an ethics look like that includes technical actors and takes into account the full complexities of human-technical systems? Bruno Latour has pointed out that technical devices are not simply passive recipients of human intentions but rather active agents that change the landscape within which human choices are formulated and carried out. For the most part, Latour uses as examples technologies that are either non-cognitive or minimally cognitive, such as speed bumps and automatic door closers. Once the technologies of networked and programmable machines are added to the picture, the ethical implications change dramatically. These can be explored through the notion of cognitive assemblages, in which the scope and power of human intentions are amplified by cognitive technologies such as computational media. This talk will consider why a view of technology as simply a “tool” that can be used for good or ill is inadequate, why computational media may act as ethical agents, and how a cognitive assemblage approach opens onto a more robust and nuanced view of ethics that enhances human flourishing without abdicating human responsibility.