

Unspeakable Illocutionary Silencing —Langton's Free Speech Argument Against Pornography

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Abstract

Famous anti-pornography feminists, Catharine MacKinnon and Rae Langton believe that pornography harms women in a very special and serious way: by silencing them or violating their civil right to freedom of speech. Langton believes that an analysis of the concept of speech acts shows that pornography silences women's voices. Therefore, pornography destroys political liberty and should not be allowed. Pornography may thus make potential speech acts unspeakable for women, not by preventing them from producing or distributing sounds and scrawls, but by preventing women from doing things with their words. In what follows, I will argue that Langton's view would impose a burdensome range of duties on individuals. This suggests that there are some powerful liberal reasons for thinking that the right to free speech should not include any minimal receptiveness requirement on the part of audiences.

Key Words: a right to pornography, speech-act theory, Catharine MacKinnon, Rae Langton, unspeakable illocutionary silencing