

XV LANGTON: UNSPEAKABLE ACTS

Background: MacKinnon's claim that pornography is subordination, and that it is silencing.

Subordination

Subordination may be a perlocutionary act: by making various judgments or rulings certain people may come to be subordinate. But might it also be an illocutionary act? Certainly we have no formulation 'I hereby subordinate'. But then there are other clearly illocutionary acts that have no corresponding form of words ('I hereby threaten you?') Langton argues that it is. She classes it with other verdictives ('Fault!') and exercitives (orderings, authorizations etc.): it *ranks* women and *legitimizes* certain behavior towards them. A crucial issue here: what authority does pornography have?

Compare pornography with advertising.

Silencing

Silencing again may be locutionary (a gag), or perlocutionary (no one listens). But might it be illocutionary? Certain words simply might not count. For instance, blacks in apartheid South Africa; the participants in a gay marriage ceremony in a state in which gay marriage is not allowed; a woman saying 'no' to unwanted sex.

Presuppositional Accommodation

Accommodation seems to be a device whereby claims go into the background in order to make sense of what is said. Is it more effective than straight out assertion? The boot example. People misunderstanding their own responses. Is this peculiar to sexual responses? Consider advertising again.

Truth in Fiction

We take from fiction various lessons about how things actually are. What kind of things can be falsified in fiction? Laws of physics seem more easily broken than rules of morality. Does that mean that, if there is an implicit moral stance in a piece of literature, we are more likely to see it as endorsed by the writer?