Seven Stories of Threatening Speech: Women's Suffrage Meets Machine Code

Ruth A. Miller

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Ruth A. Miller demonstrates the potential of taking nonhuman linguistic activity—such as the running of machine code—as an analytical model. Via a lively discussion of 19th-century pro- and antisuffragists, Miller tells a new computational story in which language becomes a thing that executes physically or mechanically through systems, networks, and environments, rather than a form for human recognition or representation. Language might be better understood as something that operates but never communicates, that sorts, stores, or reproduces information but never transmits meaning.

Miller makes a compelling case that the work that speech has historically done is in need of reevaluation. She severs the link between language and human as well as nonhuman agency, between speech acts and embodiment, and she demonstrates that current theories of electoral politics have missed a key issue: the nonhuman, informational character of threatening linguistic activity.

This book thus represents a radical methodological initiative not just for scholars of history and language but for specialists in law, political theory, political science, gender studies, semiotics, and science and technology studies. It takes posthumanist scholarship to an exciting and essential, if sometimes troubling, conclusion.

"It is an erudite work by a scholar of enormous talent, who advances a thesis that is richly insightful and deeply provocative."
—Mary Hawkesworth, Rutgers University

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