

An Intimate Encounter With an Other

Diane Greco
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In *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, the structure of Kumiko's encounters with Colin, her hand-held computer generated construct, provide an example of a human whose experience with technology approximates the cyborg model in a very conservative, transitional manner, without the shock of a bodily intrusion.

"You aren't real", she said sternly.

He shrugged. "Needn't speak out loud, miss. Fellow passengers might think you a bit odd, if you take my meaning. Subvocal's the way. I pick it all up through the skin". (4)

The issue of subvocal communication and information transfer by means of Colin-as-prosthesis brings Kumiko's experience with this technology somewhat closer to that of the powerful cyborg. Once Kumiko integrates Colin in to her self-conception as a particular other to whom she stands in connected relation, she harnesses a significant amount of power from that move. Manipulation is the key element here (it is significant that the device is hand-held, for the hand and the manipulator share similar origins and functions in linguistics and cybernetics), although it might be difficult to ascertain who is manipulating whom. Colin is an apparatus attached to her body through the palm of her hand that functions as a portable source of information and knowledge-enhancement. Kumiko also has the power to manipulate this device in order to listen and record speech when her father's orders prevent her inclusion in certain conversations. But she lacks the skill necessary to manipulate Colin into divulging all the information she needs; he is programmed by someone else according to what that faceless person (or machine) decides is good or useful for Kumiko to know.

That Kumiko can operate this machine at a touch, and that much of the communication is subvocal, also lends the machine a particularly sexual connotation, especially when one compares this mode of communication with all that can be (mis)communicated in a touch or a stroke, or with silence, and with the power dynamics at work between the toucher and the one who is touched. Because there is neither true speech nor writing here, their communication is nearly unmediated (yet Kumiko is not talking to herself), there is what Haraway calls "an intimate experience of boundaries" (181).

But Kumiko and Colin share only a partial access to the other's thoughts; their communication suggests only the sort of communication that would occur if both speakers avoid thinking about what they are saying and filtering it beforehand. There is an immediacy about this, but their consensual experience is not complete, because it is still very clear whose thoughts belong to whom. The communication approximates the dream of direct and unmediated communication (without even those things which mediate intrinsically -- words), but neither participant loses a sense of individual selfhood. Therefore, not only does the machine act as an argument for the inadequacy of the logos, but it answers the perceived failure of science to obtain for the subject unmediated access to the objectified world "out there".