

Weird Stories: Interiority

British novelist David Lodge once wrote that “literature is a record of human consciousness, the richest and most comprehensive we have.” Indeed, while film and television are arguably the dominant narrative forms of our era, literature remains the go-to medium for describing the shape of our thoughts.

Most novels and stories take the form of a third-person-limited narration in the free indirect style, in which a narrator/author creates the illusion of a cogent and artful train of thought; or a first-person narrative, which masquerades a personal account, straight from the person who experienced the events in question. But even these traditional modes are deeply, interestingly problematic: the third person, even at its simplest, is a highly opportunistic melding of the author’s and characters’ cognitive modes; and the first person, often thought to be more “direct” or “authentic,” is in fact highly duplicitous, obscuring authorial intent and, at times, even the intent of the character the author is inhabiting.

Think of the alternating first and third persons of Don DeLillo’s *Cosmopolis*, with their baffling layers of consciousness, self-consciousness, and selfconsciousness-consciousness; the careful, even pedantic inventions of Lydia Davis; the circularity, borne of cognitive dysfunction, that comprises Tom McCarthy’s *Remainder*. You can show characters thinking, and you can show them thinking about thinking, and you can show them thinking about that. Indeed, you can let anything think, even a machine or man-machine hybrid: the feminist, posthumanist critic Donna Haraway describes “cyborg politics” as “the struggle for language and the struggle against perfect communication, against the one code that translates all meaning perfectly.” Indeed, the invariable

imperfection of fictional consciousness is part of what excites us about it: it can only ever approximate.

With all that in mind, write a short narrative that consists entirely of:

- 1) the data passing between two artificial intelligences, the only survivors of an extraterrestrial colonizing mission in the year 2414
- 2) a ghost's thoughts as it struggles to get out of a woodshed, and away from the body it used to occupy
- 3) a first-person account, from the point of view of a bee, as it tries to escape a house through a closed window
- 4) a third-person transcription of the thoughts of the cat that is watching the bee
- 5) the thoughts of the omniscient narrator of a horror novel after the novel has just ended
- 6) a close third-limited description of a businessman's day, as rendered by a four-year-old narrator
- 7) attempts by a Mars Exploration Rover to mentally occupy itself after it no longer has enough power remaining to move
- 8) what Dom DeLuise was really thinking during the final episode of his eponymous cooking show
- 9) the questions that a computer, programmed to generate dreams, privately asks itself when it isn't generating dreams
- 10) the thoughts, in court, of a gangster who, in having faked insanity as a defense against his crimes, has in fact driven himself insane