



The Story of Intrusion: Time, Life/Death, Affirmation, and Representation in Ted Chiang’s “Story of Your Life” and Jean-Luc Nancy’s *L’Intrus*

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Abstract: Bringing Ted Chiang’s SF novella “Story of Your Life” (1998) into conversation with Jean-Luc Nancy’s autobiographical philosophical text *L’Intrus* (2002) sheds new light on both of these texts’ central concerns. This enables three arguments: 1) Nancy’s central notion of “intrusion” can be critically expanded by considering Chiang’s simultaneous time perception, 2) this expanded notion can help to reevaluate Nancy’s original sombre conceptualisation of life/death, as instantiated in some scenes of “Story of Your Life”, and 3) “Story of Your Life” is therefore a literary representation of intrusion, something that Nancy believed to be impossible. These three points show how speculative philosophy and science fiction can inform, enhance, and represent each other, going beyond what these fields can do separately.

Keywords: Ted Chiang, Jean-Luc Nancy, time perception, affirmation, representation, posthumanism

“From the beginning I knew my destination, and I chose my route accordingly.”

Chiang 172

1. Introduction

In 2002's *L'Intrus*, French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy relates his experience of receiving a heart transplant and the medical and philosophical complications that arose alongside that procedure. Central to his experience is the notion of "intrusion", not only the intrusion of the transplant, but also of his "own" heart, death, the immune system, medication, the resulting cancer, previously dormant shingles and cytomegalovirus, and more. He ultimately concludes that "it is thus myself who becomes my own *intrus* in all these combined and opposing ways" (10), later extending himself to humankind generally: "the *intrus* is no other than me, my self; none other than man himself" (13). These sorts of considerations make *L'Intrus* both an "intimate" (Adamek) autobiographical work and a text of speculative philosophy postulating intrusion as a speculative critical tool with which to deconstruct a multitude of binaries, such as healthy/unhealthy, life/death, and self/other. For if many of these things intrude upon one another, what does that mean for the self?

In their 2009 essay on *L'Intrus*, historian of ideas Stefanos Geroulanos and medical anthropologist Todd Meyers claim that "it is imperative to read *L'Intrus* as an intervention in recent debates regarding the medical positioning of the body" (83); yet, I maintain that intrusion's implications reach farther than that. I am not alone in this: intrusion has been put to work in relation to many other fields. Most famously in relation to "touch" by Jacques Derrida, but also in relation to, for example, political communities (Blacker), Neill Blomkamp's 2009 SF film *District 9* (Harbaš), and nursing practices (Wynn). That is not to say that Geroulanos and Meyers' reading is incorrect, only that little-analysed aspects of *L'Intrus* can help to expand the speculative power of its key concept far beyond the scope of the medical positioning of the body. This article will analyse exactly such an aspect: temporality.

Temporality is a central theme in Ted Chiang's 1998 SF novella, "Story of Your Life". Chiang has been trained as a computer scientist at Brown University, and his Nebula and Theodore Sturgeon Award winning novella incorporates fundamentally posthumanist themes, such as the decentring of anthropocentrism and the questioning of the divide between the self and the other (Shang). "Story of Your Life" is narrated by linguist Louise Banks, who simultaneously recounts the past, when aliens visited the Earth and she deciphered their language; the present, in which she conceives her daughter (Chiang 111, 172); and the future, in which she raises her daughter, who ultimately dies young in a mountain climbing accident. Louise's gradual understanding of the aliens' language leads her to start perceiving time as the aliens do: simultaneously, rather than sequentially. This simultaneous temporality has major consequences for epistemology, ethics, and, as this article will argue, Nancy's concept of intrusion. Bringing *L'Intrus* into conversation with "Story of Your Life" might seem arbitrary at first, but they actually share an affinity which goes far beyond mere surface similarities.

First, "Story of Your Life" can be read as an instantiation of *L'Intrus*' theoretical concerns. For Nancy, intruders are the likes of transplants, medication, and death; for Chiang, intruders are the likes of aliens, language, and time (amongst others). Viewing the aliens – or heptapods, after their seven limbs (Chiang 117) – as intruders is uncomplicated: they could have come to invade, after all. Nancy's very first formulation of intrusion could be an apt

description of alien arrival on Earth: “the intruder [*l'intrus*] enters by force, through surprise or ruse, in any case without the right and without having first been admitted” (1). Simultaneous time perception is a bit more troublesome to interpret in this way, but it can be conceptualised as the past and the future intruding on the present. The way in which this perception is transmitted is an intrusion of non-human language on human language. This article will explore these instantiations of intrusion in “The Story of Your Life”. This will not only show literature’s power to represent theory in imaginative and affective ways, but also controverts Nancy himself, who deems intrusion unrepresentable (Geroulanos and Meyers 92; Nancy 3, 4, 7). In this way, literature goes beyond the surface similarities, not only instantiating difficult concepts theorised in a poststructuralist text, but also expanding the scope and possibilities of that text by doing what the text’s author presumed to be impossible. Hence, bringing speculative philosophy into conversation with speculative fiction can demonstrate the former’s claims in ways non-fiction itself cannot.

Second, “Story of Your Life” not only instantiates and represents issues presented in *L’Intrus*, but the latter’s central concept – intrusion – can also be expanded by incorporating the novella’s central concept of simultaneous temporality. This expanded understanding of intrusion can then be used to re-explore Nancy’s exploration of life/death, shedding new light on it. Rosi Braidotti’s seminal work on posthuman subjectivity and affirmative ethics (2010; 2018) will help to rethink life/death. That is, when viewed through the expanded notion of intrusion that incorporates simultaneous temporality, the embrace of life/death can be reframed in an affirmative manner. This is in stark contrast to Nancy’s own, rather sombre (Fynsk 32) view on the matter. Yet, I maintain that Chiang shows us how literature can transform an apparent tragedy into a life-affirming practice. This affects the reading of “Story of Your Life” in turn, too: simultaneous time perception is expanded in a similar way.

It is important to note that both Nancy and Chiang work on a posthumanist basis. Nancy’s text radically decentres humanist binary demarcations; deconstructing self/other, healthy/unhealthy, and man/machine are fundamentally posthumanist concerns (Herbrechter 8–9). His “becoming like a science-fiction android” (13) refers much more to Donna Haraway’s cyborg (7) than to the classic science fiction trope. Chiang’s central themes of non-human/human interaction and the decentring of the human speak volumes to posthumanist thought, but I maintain that the exploration of simultaneous time is where an unthinking of humanist time perception takes place and, hence, where the posthumanist potential of “Story of Your Life” shines most strongly. Sequential time is concerned with classical humanist notions, such as progress and causality; Louise’s gradual rejection of this time can thus be read as discarding “the traditional self as the center ... as an illusion, a product of old time” (Shang 67). It is at the intersection of both of these texts’ posthumanist concerns where my inquiry begins. It is from this intersection that Nancy and Chiang diverge into different directions: the former in the direction of speculative philosophy, the latter into science fiction. I aim to bring these two directions together again.

Hence, this article’s main concern is postulating an expanded notion of intrusion incorporating simultaneous time perception to envision alternative, speculative, posthuman ways of thinking about topics such as life/death. It is no coincidence that I borrow from Braidotti, a posthumanist scholar, to

conceptualise these issues. Her work on posthuman subjectivity postulates an affirmative approach to suffering and even death. Inspired by Spinoza and Deleuze (Thiele 26–8), affirmative critique initiates a “belief in the world, as it is” (Deleuze 172), that is, a refusal to look “beyond” for answers and solutions, and a radical insistence that “we are in *this* mess all together” (Braidotti, *Posthuman* 141)¹. I maintain that this insistence on the world as is enables an affirmative, life-embracing, ethical response to intrusion and the trauma of losing one’s daughter.

By bringing *L’Intrus* and “Story of Your Life” into conversation, I argue three distinct but entangled points: 1) “Story of Your Life” shows how the notion of intrusion can be expanded by considering simultaneous temporal perception, 2) this expanded notion of intrusion leads, by way of Rosi Braidotti’s work, to a less sombre re-evaluation of Nancy’s conceptualisation of life/death, as envisioned in “Story of Your Life”, and 3) “Story of Your Life” successfully represents intrusion, something that Nancy himself struggles with in *L’Intrus*. This last point shows how science fiction, as “high-intensity realism” (Chu 74), can be brought into conversation with speculative philosophy in order to go beyond the representative possibilities of philosophy itself.

2. The past and the future as intrusions on the present

Over the course of “Story of Your Life”, Louise becomes more fluent in Heptapod B, the aliens’ calligraphy-like writing. Its semasiographic² nature enables it to be a simultaneous, teleological language; it has no sequential understanding of time, just like the heptapods themselves. Following the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (Hojjer 92–105), as Louise comes to understand more of the language, “Heptapod B [started] changing the way I thought As I grew more fluent, semasiographic designs would appear fully formed, articulating even complex ideas all at once” (Chiang 151). As such, she starts to perceive time simultaneously, like the aliens she is conversing with.

It is important to note that non-humans teach Louise to think differently; because of this, the posthumanist concerns of Chiang’s story can be activated. One of the central concerns of posthumanist thought is the critique of anthropocentric humanism (Herbrechter 9), often brought up while opening an inquiry into non-human life (Ferrando, “Towards” 9). The heptapods teaching Louise their language and, accordingly, their perception of time, enables the story to represent a decidedly non-human way of thinking through a human character. This could be seen as a posthumanist attempt at rethinking anthropocentric notions of being – in this case, human language and sequential time perception. This is starkly contrasted by the approach the United States military takes: they refuse to view the heptapods as potentially embodying – and, most importantly, thinking as – something other than strictly human (Chiang 115, 123, 152–53, 165–66). This blocks their posthumanist

¹ This strand of thought has many similarities to Haraway’s notion of “staying with the trouble”, signaling another connection to Haraway’s thoughts, besides posthumanism and the cyborg.

² Meaning it is only written, not spoken. Chiang never elucidates the heptapods’ spoken language, if they have one (Sampson 29).

understanding of the heptapods on their own terms, leading to faulty communication and misinterpretation of the heptapods' intentions. A representative of the State Department, Hossner, cannot help but believe the heptapods must have reasons akin to those of humans: "they must have had some reason for coming all this way" (152).

The degree to which Louise embodies a posthumanist ideal is nuanced, however. Louise's "mind was cast in the mold of human, sequential languages, and no amount of immersion in an alien language can completely reshape it" (Chiang 166). This means that her "worldview is an amalgam of human and heptapod" (166), which is important to my argument in two respects. First, as an "amalgam", Louise represents a being that is neither human nor heptapod, but perhaps more tellingly human/heptapod. This is in line with posthumanist thinking, which deals more often with entangled categories and flattened ontologies than with becoming something completely different from human (Pettman 5).³ It is also in line with Nancy's thought: the *intrusion* of Heptapod B on Louise's perception of time, or on her "worldview", makes her realise that she is of no singular species, neither essentially human nor essentially heptapod. Instead, this amalgam is her "self", and the intrusion of Heptapod B on her human perception makes that intrusion fundamental to her subjectivity. Therefore, Louise's self is "one of *polymorphic* and interlinked states of being, rather than a unitary, bound one" (Nayar), a fundamentally posthuman subject. Second, a *complete* immersion in Heptapod B would entail inhabiting the other extreme of the human/heptapod binary, instead of the intruded amalgam:

But occasionally I [Louise] have glimpses when Heptapod B truly reigns, and I experience past and future all at once; my consciousness becomes a half-century-long ember burning outside of time. I perceive during those glimpses that entire epoch as a simultaneity. (Chiang 167)

This would be *contra* Nancy's understanding of the self – or, in this case, perception and worldview – as "disrupted singularity" (Geroulanos and Meyers 83). This would close off a reading of the past and the future as intruding on the present; Louise's amalgamation, however, makes her still perceive the present as the seat of consciousness, which enables such a reading. The present as an anchor point from which to perceive simultaneous temporality is hence only enabled by Louise's becoming a posthumanist amalgam, instead of a transhuman or non-human entity. This enables the posthumanist potential of Chiang's story to shine, and the theoretical power of the concept of intrusion to expand.

In this way, "Story of Your Life" shows us how the understanding of time as simultaneous, instead of sequential, can expand Nancy's notion of intrusion to also be applied to time. The heptapods – and by extension, Louise – perceive time not as sequential, causal, and linear, but instead, as boundaryless, open-ended, and non-sequential. Nancy's description of "his" body and self now become analogous to temporality: simultaneous time is best described as "a

³ This marks an important distinction between posthumanist and transhumanist thought and, consequently, demarcates "Story of Your Life"'s speculation as a critical gesture concerned as much with the now as with a utopian, yet intangible, future. This, in turn, shows Chiang's connection to Braidotti's affirmative ethics, which also insists on the now in this world. See also Ferrando's "The Body".

void already open [*déjà ouvert*]” (Nancy 3). Simultaneous time has no beginning and no end, just like Nancy’s self. When replacing Nancy *himself* in *L’Intrus* with simultaneous time, the analogy readily shows itself:

The *intrus* is no other than [simultaneous temporality] No other than the one, the same, always identical to itself and yet that is never done with altering itself ... intruding upon the world and upon itself: a disquieting upsurge of the strange, *conatus* of an infinite excrescence. (Nancy 13)

If anything, the more the analogy shows, the stranger it seems that Nancy himself does not tackle the temporal aspects of intrusion more comprehensively. This is where this article makes an intervention, by incorporating temporality in Nancy’s notion of intrusion.

There are some passages in which Nancy hints toward an understanding of time as intrusion. He makes a special note of the specific historical moment in which his heart transplant takes place: “here personal contingency crosses with contingency in the history of technology. Had I lived earlier, I would be dead; later, I would be surviving in a different manner” (2–3). Geroulanos and Meyers call this a “play[ing] on problems of timelessness” (92), but I maintain the opposite in light of simultaneous time perception: Nancy’s understanding of life/death is fundamentally sequential, and “Story of Your Life” can show us how to conceptualise it differently, leading to a less sombre interpretation than Nancy’s.

3. Life/death in simultaneous temporality

Considering intrusion, Nancy sees himself becoming “living-dead” (Nancy 13), expanding on Derrida’s notion of “life death”.⁴ Nancy asserts his “life” is intruded on by death, “or rather, life/death, a suspension of the continuum of being, a scansion wherein ‘I’ has/have little to do” (Nancy 7). Because his singular body is at stake, life/death is a more productive view on his “life” than the idea of death entailing the end of the body: intrusion leads to “an undoing of the finitude and ends that define the discourse of ‘embodied death’” (Geroulanos and Meyers 92). Herein lies an implicit understanding of temporality, an extension of Nancy’s life/death between distinct historical moments, as briefly discussed at the end of the previous section. What has not been considered yet, however, is the understanding of life/death in the light of this article’s expanded notion of intrusion.

The notion of “a suspension of the continuum of being” (Nancy 7) takes on a different meaning in the context of simultaneous temporality. Life is nothing *but* a continuum of being when perceived in simultaneous time; it is simply that the concept of “continuum” changes. Continuum in this sense, albeit experienced from the present, simultaneously includes its beginning in the “past” and end in the “future”. Or, as Shang Wanqi notes, “there is no cause and effect, the cause and effect are already present at the same time at the beginning of its emergence, or the concept of beginning does not exist at all” (69). This leads to a far more intuitive understanding of life/death, which

⁴ First posited in Derrida’s seminar “La vie la mort” in 1975–76 (McCance).

becomes hard to envision only as either “life” or “death” in simultaneous time. In simultaneous temporality, one is already simultaneously alive, dead, and alive/dead. Thus, Nancy’s somewhat obscure “living-dead” (13) becomes the only way of properly understanding life/death in simultaneous time. His articulation of life/death – “life cannot but impel life; but life also moves toward death” (6) – also takes on an essentially different meaning because “moving toward” becomes fundamentally different; it is no longer sequential. This more intuitive understanding of “continuum”, “living-dead”, and “life/death” is the first instantiation of “Story of Your Life” representing and making imaginable concepts that are hard to grasp by the way of *L’Intrus* alone, and this is something on which the following section will expand further. But first, an exploration of the implications of life/death in simultaneous time perception is in order.

The story of Louise and her daughter is a tragic one, though perhaps only from the point of view of sequential understanding of time. “Story of Your Life” revolves around Louise deciding to have a baby, despite knowing, due to Heptapod B, that her daughter will die at the early age of 25. However, her understanding of life/death in simultaneous time changes this story from tragic – from a story “mov[ing] toward death” (Nancy 6) – to life-affirming instead. Or, perhaps more accurately, it is life/death-affirming. Louise notes how the heptapods, because of their being in simultaneous temporality, “act to create the future, to enact chronology” (Chiang 163). This notion of action, enaction, or performativity is central to understanding life/death in simultaneous time: heptapods live *to die*, and Louise must have her baby to *enact* the chronology of her daughter’s life/death.

In a poignant passage taking place during the heptapods’ visit on Earth, Louise comes across a salad bowl in a gourmet shop, which she knows will hurt her daughter in the future:

My gaze wandered over the shelves ... and stopped on a wooden salad bowl. When you [Louise’s daughter] are three, you’ll pull a dishtowel off the kitchen counter and bring that salad bowl down on top of you. I’ll make a grab for it, but I’ll miss. The edge of the bowl will leave you with a cut, on the upper edge of your forehead, that will require a single stitch. (Chiang 158)

Most would not hurt their own child willingly. If you knew *your* purchase would lead to your child getting hurt, would you buy it? Not in sequential time perception: you would be the *cause* of your child’s hurt. Yet, in simultaneous time, with its teleological experience of reality, you *would*, because you “create the future, to enact chronology” (163). Hence, you would not be the cause of your child’s hurt, but you would need to purchase the bowl in order to make sure there is a future at all, a future which entails your child getting hurt. Thus, Louise purchases the bowl:

I reached out and took the bowl from the shelf. The motion didn’t feel like something I was forced to do. Instead it seemed just as urgent as my rushing to catch the bowl when it falls on you: an instinct that I felt right in following. (Chiang 158)

Louise’s feeling of urgency and the “instinct that I felt right in following” bring us back to Nancy’s intrusion as “*conatus* of an infinite excrescence” (13) and his

notion that “life cannot but impel life” (6), only reread into simultaneous life/death. Urgency, instinct, *conatus*, impelling, all point toward “creat[ing] the future, to enact chronology” (Chiang 163) in simultaneous temporality. In this way, Nancy’s phrase can be reread as “time cannot but impel time”: purchasing the salad bowl is an act of *actualisation* of the future in which Louise’s child gets hurt, but it is not the *cause* of her child getting hurt.

Yet, the salad bowl only leads to a cut and a stitch, which is obviously different from death. Can the logic described above also lead to an understanding of the death of Louise’s daughter? Yes, it can, as a comparison to the heptapods’ language will demonstrate. Because “if the heptapods already knew everything that they would ever say or hear, what was the point of their using language at all?” (Chiang 164). Or, following the comparison, why give birth – bring life – only for it to die? Louise retorts: “a reasonable question. But language wasn’t only for communication: it was also a form of action” (164). Hence, life/death becomes affirmative: in contrast to Nancy’s somber understanding of life/death as “a suspension” (7), life/death is now reframed to be about action, enaction, and affirmation, about embracing life.

The falling away of binaries, caused by the embracing of simultaneous temporality and the resulting revaluation of life/death, can be postulated to lead to what Rosi Braidotti has dubbed an “ethics of joy” (“Ethics” 221). According to Braidotti, the falling away of differences – differences coded as “different from” or “less than” – can lead to an ethics that “does not postulate subjectivity along the binary oppositional axes ... On the contrary, [this] subjectivity is nomadic, distributed, relational and process-oriented” (221). The subjectivity of which Braidotti speaks sounds familiar: nomadic, or perhaps “displac[ing] and reorganiz[ing]” (Geroulanos and Meyers 83); distributed, or perhaps simultaneous; relational, or perhaps “exteriority and excessivity ... infinite exposition” (Nancy 13); process-oriented, or perhaps “a form of action” (Chiang 164). According to Braidotti, this posthuman subjectivity allows for a negation of negativity because it revalues difference.

In this way, “negative relations and passions can be transformed through an engagement in collective practices of change. This implies a dynamic view of passions and affects, even those that freeze us in pain, horror or mourning” (“Ethics” 222). Thus, coming back to “Story of Your Life” by the way of Louise’s simultaneous perception of temporality – and her consequent revaluation of life/death – she enables the action to create and affirm by enacting the future. In this way, “new ways of dying” (Braidotti, “New Ways”) are possible, but they are fundamentally different from those envisioned by Nancy.

Although Nancy does not fall into the trap of “taking mortality or finitude as the transhistorical horizon for discussions of ‘life’” (Braidotti, “Politics” 211) – as evidenced by his notion of life/death – he still holds a rather sombre view. He wonders “why, and how, is there no longer for us ... a ‘right’ [*juste*] time to die?” (Nancy 5). Although this is a very valid question, it is sombrely answered by the way of life/death as a “suspension of being” (7), which has led Christopher Fynsk to call *L’Intrus* a “testimony to suffering” and “a protest” (32). Indeed, Nancy’s vocabulary includes the likes of “unwelcome” (1), “break[ing] in” (2), “my feeble, winded life” (7), and, of course, “intrusion” itself; it does not feel very positive. Yet, Nancy’s questions remain valid: “What does it mean ‘to survive’? Is it even a suitable term?” (5).

“Story of Your Life” answers these questions in the affirmative, and so, it provides an instantiation of, but also a positive alternative to, *L’Intrus*’ conundrums. The “right” time to die is irrelevant when perceiving time as “*déjà ouvert*” (Nancy 3); one simply enacts chronology. Hence, it is *always* the right time to die. “To survive” is *not* a suitable term, nor is “to die” or “to live”; under simultaneous temporality, life/death is the answer, the affirmative, joyful answer. Perhaps it is best to let Louise’s daughter explain for herself. When Louise reads “Goldilocks” to her when she is still a child, she catches Louise reading it wrong. “You have to read it the right way ... That’s not how the story goes”, the girl says, causing Louise to respond, “well if you already know how the story goes, why do you need me to read it to you?”, to which her daughter life-affirmingly responds: “cause I wanna hear it!” (Chiang 164). There is no “right” way of hearing it, nor a “right” time; there is only the actualisation of the future in the present, a life-affirming actualisation. Louise’s daughter already knows what the heptapods do, and the actualisation of her life/death is Louise’s ultimate life-affirming embrace of simultaneous temporality.

4. Representing the unrepresentable

I have shown how Louise’s life-affirming choice instantiates theories brought to the fore in *L’Intrus*. Yet, this is only one example of the capacity of “Story of Your Life” to represent the complex matters of intrusion and then go beyond them. Nancy appears to consider intrusion primarily impossible to represent. On multiple occasions, he notes that intrusion “exceeds my capacity to represent it” (7), or that “there is nothing to know, nothing to understand, nothing to feel” (4). As demonstrated above, “Story of Your Life” shows us the opposite, but there are even more instances of “Story of Your Life” succeeding in representing intrusion where *L’Intrus* cannot.

Ted Chiang must have found himself in a difficult predicament when he decided to tell a simultaneous story in a sequential medium, but a careful reading of “Story of Your Life” reveals certain passages that can be interpreted as meta-commentaries on this problematic. The key to circumventing the problem of medium is the semasiographic nature of Heptapod B:

I [Louise] understood why the heptapods had evolved a semasiographic writing system like Heptapod B; it was better suited for a species with a simultaneous mode of consciousness. For them, speech was a bottleneck because it required that one word follow another sequentially. With writing, on the other hand, every mark on a page was visible simultaneously [like in “Story of Your Life” itself] Semasiographic writing naturally took advantage of the page’s two-dimensionality; instead of doling out morphemes one at a time, it offered an entire page full of them all at once. (Chiang 161)

Although we humans, unlike Louise, still read sequentially, this meta-commentary reflects on an attempt to produce a simultaneous text for a sequential species. I argue that Chiang mostly succeeds, primarily because of two techniques, incorporating his own meta-commentary in the process.

First, Chiang juggles grammatical tenses throughout the story, primarily in the scenes where the “future” is interspersed amidst the main narrative about the heptapods’ visit. As such, “Chiang deliberately depicts the linguist’s

memories as not chronological, [depicting the] present the past and the future in a seemingly equal way, to mimic the mindset of an alien as well as leave a hint for readers” (Wanqi 69). When Louise addresses her unborn daughter, constructions such as “I remember one afternoon when you are five years old” (Chiang 121) or “I remember one day during the summer when you are sixteen” (125) are commonplace. Note that the moment where these utterances take place in the storyline is *before* the birth of Louise’s daughter. There is also a moment in which Louise is “remembering” something she will say in the “future”, reminiscing: “I’m actually going to say that, aren’t I?” (155). During these grammatical tense-juggles, the past and the future of the story intrude on the present of reading. As such, they do not create a sense of timelessness, but an approximation of a simultaneous perception of temporality.

Secondly, the turning point where Louise realises the effect that Heptapod B has on her – and realises she can use this mode of consciousness – is an effective way of representing the expanded notion of intrusion incorporating simultaneous temporality. In the “future” – “I remember when you’re fourteen” (Chiang 149) – Louise’s daughter asks her for help with her homework; she needs the term “non-zero-sum-game” for a social studies report. Louise cannot remember. A bit later in the story, the term is mentioned during the time when Louise is investigating the aliens (152–53), about sixteen years before the homework situation. Once she hears it in “that” time, Louise “remembers” the term sixteen years later, and can now help her daughter by suggesting the term “non-zero-sum-game”. She smugly tells her daughter she “just remembered” (153).

This moment of temporal simultaneity does not only occur in the narrative, but also on the page. Chiang deftly jumps from “past” to “present” to “future”, all on the same page. In this way, a sense of temporal simultaneity is also achieved in the literary medium. In addition, this is a clever, oblique reference to Chiang’s own meta-commentary later in the story: “semasiographic writing naturally took advantage of the page’s two-dimensionality” (Chiang 161). Here we are, with Louise’s eureka-moment presented in a two-dimensional medium: a moment of the intrusion of the past and the future on the present, of temporal simultaneity successfully represented to a sequential reader. As such, Chiang employs “conceptual and narrative recursivity” (Glazier and Beck 268), representing simultaneous time both in-story and meta-narratively “outside” the story.

Hence, “Story of Your Life” succeeds in representing something Nancy did not consider possible to represent. A last, subjective argument for the proceeding thesis is that “Story of Your Life” succeeds in upholding its narrative tension despite the reader knowing what will happen; the reader is in on the simultaneity after all, as explained above. Yet, the story remains gripping until the very end, where Louise and Gary walk inside “to make love, to make you [Louise’s daughter]” (172). The reader already knows from the first page that Louise’s daughter will die, yet this moment retains its full affective impact. Again, this argument is subjective, but as Louise herself says, “sometimes it’s good to wait”, even if one already knows the “ending” in a simultaneous story, because “the anticipation makes it more fun when you get there” (134).

5. Conclusion

“Story of Your Life” stands as a shining example of science fiction not only representing but also expanding on complicated posthumanist and poststructuralist theory. This process also transforms itself, and as such, bringing “Story of Your Life” and *L’Intrus* into conversation is a speculative critical endeavor, which produces something more than what its parts are separately capable of. Not only do both works shed new light on each other, but they complement each other in ways that both broaden and deepen the scope of both, and one succeeds in representation where the other expects representation to fail.

Nancy astutely remarks that “to isolate death from life, not leaving each one intimately woven into the other, with each one intruding upon the other’s core [*coeur*], this is what one must never do” (Nancy 6), and *L’Intrus* is a more or less successful demonstration of this. Yet, when brought into conversation with “Story of Your Life”, Nancy’s life/death – by the way of considering simultaneous temporal perception as an intrusion of the past and the future on the present – is transformed into an affirmative, potentially even joyful notion. Although speculative theory – *L’Intrus* in this case – highlights and theorises extremely important issues, it can become stuck in a quagmire of sombre deconstruction. Bringing it into conversation with speculative literature, however, shows the possibilities of reconstructing (Huber) this negativity in an affirmative way.

Shang notes how “as a literary genre, science fiction often forms an extension of contemporary humanities” (68), but I hope to have shown how science fiction can go *beyond* that, too, as I have postulated that “Story of Your Life” is not only an extension of *L’Intrus*, but the relationship works the other way around as well. As such, I maintain that it is at the *intersection* of the two where the conversation between science fiction and contemporary humanities is at its most productive. Literature, as a site of knowledge production, acts as representation. Science fiction, as “high-intensity realism” (Chu 74), can represent the unrepresentable, as it often has. The posthumanist basis of “Story of Your Life” “force[s] us to reconceptualize the place of the human being in the world and in reality” (Shang 68), which makes it such a tantalizing counterpart to *L’Intrus*. Speculative philosophy and speculative fiction alike can and will show us alternate ways of being: “Story of Your Life”’s conversation with *L’Intrus* does not only demonstrate this excellently, but also goes beyond.

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