Pace, Space and the Other in the Making of Fiction

Siri Hustvedt

Weil Cornell Medical College

Abstract

The turn toward an embodied understanding of human thought in the cognitive sciences and other disciplines has reconfigured the idea that narrative is a purely linguistic phenomenon. I am convinced that human narrative ability is rooted in the pre-linguistic, motor-sensory, emotionally charged dialogical experiences of timing in infancy and that late term pre-natal experience may also be involved, particularly the rhythmic sounds and motions of the maternal body, but I argue against researchers who treat the fetus in isolation from the fetal environment. I argue that the narrative imagination depends on the movement from the constructed patterns of timing in real space with a real other to the represented time and space of imaginary others in fiction, a development that depends on the emergence of autobiographical memory. Analysis of Virginia Woolf’s comments on rhythm and writing and her drawing of the form of To the Lighthouse provide a door to thinking through the many unanswered questions about how fictional stories are generated.

Keywords: narrative; rhythm; intentionality; sensory-motor synchronization.