

MAPPING T.H.E. (UN)FAMILIAR

Margaret Rodgers and Pam Patterson

Bowmanville: Visual Arts Centre of Clarington, 1994; 40 pp.

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MAPPING T.H.E. (UN)FAMILIAR is a singular work. It is the record of a "journey" to artists' studios shared by artists Margaret Rodgers and Pam Patterson. Their reactions are interspersed with images on mylar. The narrators' writings are placed side by side on opposite pages, with the images between. Thus while the voices are given equal presentation, one text is obfuscated by the image. Rather than being distracting however, this technique provides a success "channel" for the other text to stay present in the unconscious mind of the reader. When the mylar page is flipped, the process is reversed. Thus one voice never has superiority over the other. Likewise, the images and the text become an intermingled work, without one dominating the other. They both contribute to the final effect and reinforce the shared but distinct experiences of the authors. Further, the visuals create a "pause" which allows for the reader's perceptions to be swirled around and savoured before proceeding to the next section.

Although the authors have successfully synthesized their experiences, it is almost impossible to speak about the work without separating them. Margaret Rodgers begins her section with a title: "The Concept." In it she maps out for the reader the adventure that she and Pam are about to begin. Rodgers becomes, in effect, the director or guide, who acknowledges that, "we both...bring our own intellectual baggage, and our own ideas about what we might find" to the process. She pragmatically describes the events that occur, and only hints at a few things that might be developed later on. Her tone might be described as scientifically empirical – and the nature of the "journey" is rather an experiment – what will happen when? if? with whom? She reports her observations but doesn't seem to try to guide or interpret for the reader. This is a strength and reinforces the nature of the work: she is a cartographer of experience, without telling the reader what s/he must feel. It is left to us.

In particular, when she describes the visits to the artists' studios, Rodgers contextualizes the artists via their locale and their work within art historical terms. There is no "criticism" or even a feeling of like or dislike. She is giving us information. In the same way she gives us guides or indicators of the artists' personalities without imposing any of her own feelings on them.

Pam Patterson's writings, which comprise most of the book, are of a very different tone. She begins her section of the book with "Afterward" – a counterpoint, no doubt to Rodger's concept, but also a continuation, or the natural step after the "concept." Where Rodger's voice is objective, however, Patterson's is unmistakably subjective. She is an artist for whom art and experience are indivisible. Patterson doesn't compartmentalize experiences but often has them overlapping (as seen especially in her visit at Scott and Clint Griffin's studio.)

We are told by Patterson what is important to her as an artist. She speaks often about feeling apprehensive or worried, and there is an anticipation of rejection and a tone of vulnerability which permeates much of her writing. In this initial state of nervousness she – as a scholar – calls upon Maria Lugones, Henry Giroux and Julia Kristeva. Citing their writings as backup she thereby allows herself to feel "safe" and less vulnerable.

Yet in contrast to this academicism, when Patterson lets go and relaxes, her writing voice is lyrically poetic and engaging. In an interesting subversion, Patterson states that she feels very much "the other," "the outsider," and not being a part of the familiarity which she recognizes in Rodgers' relationship with the artists. However, she then states that being in this other location, being an outsider, has liberated her from her usual city-persona of "anti-racist-conflict-resolution-feminist-political-theory-radical-informed-self and (I) begin to understand the value of art making again!" Instead of worrying about theory, Patterson feels free to respond to experience.

Her visits to the artists' studios are described atmospherically. Her context for experience relies on what is happening at the time of the visit. For Patterson, the incidental becomes increasingly important. Place is of primary interest, as is the process of journey and arrival – and we see that once again, with Patterson, one event cannot be separated from the context of others that happen before or afterwards. Her reaction to the artists themselves becomes her reaction to the combined experience of their personalities, their drive to get there, the appearance of their studio and their artwork, rather than to the work alone. She writes episodically, giving us only hints, snatches of conversations which she admits might be incorrect, and frequently gets distracted by memories and daydreams.

MAPPING T.H.E. (UN)FAMILIAR was, from the outset, an investigation into collaboration between artists. The authors obviously had their premise, as to why they were interested in pursuing this project. They were also confident enough to let the project unfold as it did – naturally – rather than trying to force the experiences to fit a predetermined thesis. In their collaborative, and mutually supportive roles, Rodgers acted very much as a guide rather than as a "translator" of the experience. Patterson became the traveller, rather than the tourist. The book's unusual presentation of two viewpoints (three if you include the visuals as a separate component) works like an elegant dance, with one voice flowing naturally around and into the other. Rodgers and Patterson produced a work which is an evocative recre-

ation of their experience, rather than a literal recording of it. This unique collaboration is non-hierarchical in form, with the integrity and validity of both women's experiences being respected.

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