CHAPTER 8

A VISION OF DIFFERENCE: A GENOGRAM OF FLIGHT

While in the throes of trying to describe what it is that I do when people come to consult with me; while I’m trying to tease apart what a therapeutic conversation might look like; while I’m trying to formulate a way to describe a family system via a line of flight and attempting to include the transformative possibilities of each family member living or dead, I take a break to go to Buffalo to a museum with some friends. We are there to see a particular artist named Petah Coyne. Her work is mesmerizing, ethereal, mystical, and spiritual. Her pieces use unusual mediums that attract and repulse, yet fit skillfully into her desire to communicate the contradictions of the human condition. She makes use of an unusual assortment of materials including wax, wire, car parts, religious statues, taxidermy, hair, and cast off or recycled objects. The effect of her work is beautiful and disturbing and seems to speak of the tragedy, complexity, and exquisiteness of life and death all at once. Many of the sculptures in this exhibit are Madonnas hidden beneath layers of wax flowers, ribbons, beads, twigs, wax covered leaves, and hair with the tiniest fragment of a face peering through as though refusing to be fully consumed by her circumstances. In other pieces, taxidermied birds lie buried under thickly webbed areas and, like the Madonna’s faces, are barely visible. They seem to be captured in that moment of transition between life and death like the Phoenix that had been caught just before bursting into flames. The exhibit seemed to compel one to meditate on the ephemeral moments of our own lives and contemplate our own transformations, mystical or otherwise.

The piece that caught my breath was Coyne’s family tree that she created after the untimely death of her brother. The piece is created
out of braided horsehair that is frayed at the ends giving the effect of
infinitude, of pointing toward endless possibilities in every which
direction. The “tree” is flattened against the wall horizontally and the
dark hair appears to be in flight while also resembling a rhizomatic
configuration. The rhizomes attach themselves to various “nests,”
and in each nest rests a taxidermied bird. One nest is eerily empty
and one can assume that it is that of her deceased brother. The empty
nest is sad, yet also hopeful in that it remains a part of the rhizome
and therefore continues to hold promise for the whole of the
rhizomatic structure.

TOWARD A GENOGRAM OF FLIGHT

I have proposed the possibility of a new genogram that allows for
a mapping (not a tracing) of power as creative force that pools or
collects within bodies as sets of capacities that can only be expressed
in the collision with other bodies that sets these capacities into flight
in all directions at once. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) posit the form
of the rhizome against the arborescent structure of the tree. They
state that “…unlike trees or their roots, the rhizome connects any
point with any other point, and none of its features necessarily refers
to features of the same kind…” (p. 47). In other words the rhizome is
not a binary structure, nor is it teleological. The rhizome according to
Deleuze and Guattari (1987) runs under the surface and connects to
all points at once. It “doesn’t allow itself to be reduced to the one or
the many” (p. 47). It is continuous and extensive, a multiplicity that
goes in all directions at once.

If we are to think about a new form of genogram, which allows us
to map the lived experience of women and other subjugated groups, I
would argue that it is necessary to step aside from the old patriarchal
tracings of linear hierarchy. As therapists it would be helpful to have
maps that acknowledge the ongoing creative and complex
interconnections between our lives, the lives we encounter in our
work, and ourselves. Through new mappings, we may be able to find
a way to flee our own rigid conceptions of the people we encounter
as unities or predictable hierarchies of force. In other words, we