



From Sickness to Light(ness) – I Must Find a Cure

by Michael Winkler, Dresden/Germany, May 2007, re-edited February/March 2008

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It was Jan Anderson who gave me the No. 5 issue of the “Blether” journal at the 8th World Congress for People Who Stutter in the Cavtat, near Dubrovnik (Croatia) in May 2007. I browsed through it, and sort of stumbled over an article of Frank Geoghegan-Quinn. In his “*Am I bovvered?*” he was mentioning words like “cure” and my teenage-idol Robert Smith. Dealing with one of my former favourite pop groups and their songs somehow revealed parts of my own life and “my way” with stuttering.

“Stammering is not an illness and therefore does not require to be cured – by therapy, by drug or by device. It may require to be managed, accommodated, reconstructed or made room for using any number of techniques, methods or therapies but attempting a cure can only lead, in my opinion, to a cul-de-sac of frustration, anxiety and missed opportunity. It is far better in my view to think and talk about ‘healing’.”, Frank wrote in this article, and in particular these lines reminded me of a conversation I had with Norbert Lieckfeldt some days before at a conference about stuttering¹ in Dortmund (Germany). Sure, the topic of stuttering is quite a controversial one, and I think the problems start with the definitions. If one considers stuttering only a physical disorder eventually leading to repetitions of syllables and words etc., then I think that there is no cure. Cure – in contrast to ‘healing’ – may even sound a bit absolute as if there would be just black and white. As it is with everything the interesting thing starts with the grey values or colours. The grey values might be the emotions we have while stuttering, the pain and embarrassing feelings or the joy we feel when we conquer our fears.

Anyway, let me get back to “The Cure”. I came in touch when Mastermind Robert Smith and his compañeros accomplished their commercially most successful album “*Disintegration*”. During 1989 and 1990 I was also sort of disintegrating. Well, not really myself but my home-country, the German Democratic Republic, mostly known as “East-Germany”. When something – such as states – dies it has tremendous effects on its inhabitants. It was “*Lullaby*” which made me a “Cure-fan”, and in Autumn 1990 I even tried to look like Robert Smith. Well, at least the hair looked similar, but he had no opportunity to wear a fancy GDR model of glasses, and I did not like Smith’s make-up. I started to collect their

records and found the 1982 album entitled “*Pornography*” quite soon. Smith, aged 23 then, wrote a set of 8 songs, and I would be joking to call these songs happy and easy-listening. Titles like “*A Thousand Years*”, including positive lines such as “*It doesn’t matter if we all die*”, or the weird “*Pornography*” itself may take the listener to a place where she or he doesn’t really want to go to. Maybe, maybe not. Almost 17 years later, it looks like a cure to my own stuttering. The name of another song, “*Siamese Twins*”, could be related to the relationship between me and my stuttering. “*Cold*” and “*A Strange Day*” were my favourite ones, and the already mentioned song “*Pornography*” – the last one of the album – contains the line “*I must fight this sickness, I must find a cure*” at the end.



Robert Smith in 1984



Smith-Look-Alike in 1990

Later I often wondered how a 23 year old man could write songs like this. Well, it was and still is sort of a self-therapy for him. This therapy of 1982 seemed to be successful since at the end of 1982 and in particular 1983 Smith (he wrote all songs and lyrics) came back completely changed. Songs like “*Let’s go to Bed*”, “*The Lovecats*” or “*The Walk*” (from their 1983 album “*The Japanese Whisper*”) seemed to be from Smith’s Siamese twin

brother who tries to enjoy life. It was pure pop, colourful and with a trace of self-irony. No-one would have thought that Smith admitted later that he was thinking about suicide just some months before.

Well, let's take a step ahead in time. At the beginning of the new millennium, in 2000, I purchased my last Cure CD. I realised I had enough of *this cure*. Smith's and his group's music gave me a lot but it was time to let them go. I realised that only much later. The Cure helped me to see music from a different angle, to get a bit out of the mass movement of the people around me, although in the former GDR the so-called "Grufties"² formed almost a mass movement themselves. In some way it almost seemed to me that Robert Smith must have gone through similar experiences as I did with my stuttering. Perhaps it is even a need to go down to the very bottom of one-self's being to find one's soul. Helplessness, depressions and the deep wish to have a change in one's life might be the basis for real happiness and contentment eventually.

Sure, it does not necessarily need to be The Cure to find your path through your own history of stuttering. It could be anyone or any other group as well. What's important is to get aware of the various links in your life and to see life as big network, a big puzzle with everything in place ... every moment, every picture, every colour. It also means that one is well advised to get away from black-and-white-thinking. The first step might be a grey-value-thinking, the next step a thinking in colours. Sooner or later we may even recognise the millions of pastels, bright and neon tones. And yes, there are water, oil colours and dozens more. Everyday is a new composition of colours and stuttering might be our brush. It is on us whether and how we use it.

After all we may even realise that there has never been a sickness in stuttering, and sure, where's no sickness, there's also no need for a cure. It only needs the will to see the light behind the shadows.

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Last but not least, I shall not forget to thank Robert Smith and The Cure for sharing their music. And yes ... after all these years I still like the song "Fight" from "Kiss Me, ..." (1987) most.

N.B.

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¹ I prefer to use the American term "stuttering" since it is – linguistically – closer to the German word "stottern". "Stammering" which is used in British English sounds like the German word "stammeln" that in my opinion is a rather misleading term. "Stammeln" sounds like being unsure what to say, even not even knowing what to say. It can be referred the very nice German term of "Wortfindungsschwierigkeiten", meaning difficulties to find the proper words to express what one wants to say. Regarding this I would consider stuttering as a psychic and stammering as a mental challenge.

² "Gruft" means "vault" or "crypt" in English. So, the "Grufties" were/are people who like human beings living in dark vaults. The "Gruftie" movement were somehow the roots of the "Gothic movement" later on. Another big group during the 1980s were the "Depechies" or "Mode-Fans", named after another famous pop group at that time, Depeche Mode. Most probably these kinds of mass movements were an answer to the less political private way of living in the GDR. The official life (school, job, etc.) was political enough, so people looked for compensation. Interestingly, The Cure as well Depeche Mode became somehow linking elements between different musical directions. Whereas The Cure started as Punks and mixed pop, rock as well as electronic music later on, Depeche Mode started as synthie-pop band and combined rock and techno elements from the 1990s on.