

The Cure: working with separation and loss through song parody (lyric substitution)

Aline Giordano

Received April 2023; revised July 2023

Abstract

This paper describes a Gestalt experiment in song parody (lyric substitution). It demonstrates through a first-person narrative the healing impact of working with song parody on a process of separation and loss. Song parody is viewed through a particular Gestalt lens including a creative, experimental and dialogic process of inquiry. By weaving in the personal, the method and the therapeutic outcome in an evocative, and often haunting way, the paper lifts the theory of middle mode from its linguistic ground into the realms of experiencing; thus, furthering our understanding of it. Lastly, the paper illuminates the creative importance and significance of working with culture, making the case that culture, as a creative and artistic process, is a sine qua non in the therapeutic process and encounter, for it argues that the artistic creation of self is above all cultural.

Keywords

Gestalt experiment, middle mode, existentialism, song parody, creative writing, popular music, culture, adoption, Korea, The Cure.

‘You are a song being sung elsewhere
and resonating everywhere.’

(Cheetham, 2015, p. 33)

Introduction

My work around song parody stems from a research project I conducted as part of an MSc in Creative Writing for Therapeutic Purposes which I completed in 2022 at Metanoia Institute (UK). In this paper, I have purposely left behind the questions of method and methodology in order to focus on the process of writing for therapeutic purposes. This is a strategic decision of a practical nature (word count mainly), enabling me to carve out space to explore song parody as a Gestalt experiment. An experiment in Gestalt aims to support ‘awareness raising by exploring ongoing process’ and ‘anchors new learning, ways of being and change through dynamic experiencing in a safe and supportive context’ (Chidiac, 2018, p. 153).

I had read of Song Parody Technique as a music therapy intervention and was intrigued as to what would happen if I, a fan of English rock band The Cure and a Korean-born adoptee, entered the song parody process fully to explore the themes of separation and loss. I set out to give life to this experiment, through the Gestalt experimental attitude of the inquirer (me). The question ‘What would happen if?’ resided at the core of the Gestalt experimental focus: it would be the vehicle for novel experiences (Yontef & Schulz, 2016) encapsulated in the colloquial expression ‘try it out and see what happens’ of Perls, Hefferline and Goodman (1951, p. 262).

In the context of music therapy, a song parody intervention uses a song that clients relate to and can adapt in order to make it personally relevant in order to help client recovery (Baker, Kennelly & Tamplin, 2005). The process of re-writing lyrics for therapeutic purposes is known as song parody or lyric substitution. Wigram and Baker state that ‘the therapeutic effect [of song parody] is brought about through the client’s creation, performance and/or recording of his or her own song’ (Wigram & Baker, 2005, p. 14). Song Parody

Technique is a form of therapeutic songwriting, whereby patients re-write some, or all, the words of a song (Baker, 2005, 2015; Wigram & Baker, 2005).

The practice of parodying has a long literary heritage. It permits both continuity and change: 'Parody is both textual doubling (which unifies and reconciles) and differentiation (which foregrounds irreconcilable opposition between texts and between text and "world")' (Hutcheon, 2000, pp. 101-102). Literary scientist Lars Kleberg emphasises the dialogical dimension of parody, for parody is not a form but a function; i.e. a relation between texts (Kleberg, 1991).

On the backdrop of my birth trauma (i.e. separation from Korean mother at birth and subsequent cultural uprooting via transnational adoption), I immersed myself fully in what turned out to be an emergent, gruelling and fascinating process of self-discovery through my consumption of the music of The Cure, reading Korean novels and parodying lyrics of some of my favourite songs by The Cure. Then I reflected on how I had created for myself a process that was healing. Below is an example of song parody. The original lyrics are on the left and my lyric substitution on the right, in bold font.

A strange day (original lyrics)

Give me your eyes that I might see
The blind man kissing my hands
The sun is humming, my head turns to dust
As he prays on his knees

...

A sudden hush across the water
And we're here again

And the sand
And the sea grows
I close my eyes
Move slowly through the drowning waves
Going away on a strange day

My head falls back and the walls crash in
And the sky and the impossible explode
Held for one moment I remember a song
An impression of sound
And then everything is gone forever
A strange day

(Smith, Tolhurst and Gallup, 1982a)

Taken away on a strange day

Give me your **arms** that I might **feel**
The **white** man **crushing** my hands
My **chest is burning**, my head turns to **words**
As he prays on his knees

...

Mother's hush across the water
And we're here again

And the sand
And the sea grows
I close my eyes

Bent over you gave me a name
Taken away on a strange day

My head falls back and the walls crash in
And the sky and the impossible explode
Held for one moment **it all went wrong**
It's life and death
And then everything is gone forever
A strange day

Lyric substitution (**in bold**): Aline Giordano (2021)

Intention

This paper proposes theoretical reflection by first-person account, describing and discussing a Gestalt experiment which I developed into a method of work I now use in my practice as a coach. I view this experiment as a passionate illustration of a mode of dialogue which, as Gary Yontef writes, can be 'dancing, song, words, or any modality that expresses and moves the energy between or among the participants' (Yontef, 1993, p. 128) [italics my own].

I intend this paper as a vivid example and gentle exploration of the middle mode; that bit of Gestalt theory that has been remarkably left untouched in the

literature. It is my wish to show the Gestalt community how I have worked in the middle mode. It is also my hope that after reading this paper, you will go back to the writings of Perls, Hefferline and Goodman (1951), Joel Latner (1973, 2000), Jean-Marie Robine (1998) and Sally Denham-Vaughan (2005) on the middle mode with renewed interest.

Context

The Cure, Robert Smith and art

'The Cure are one of the greatest UK bands of the last 40 years' (Goddard, 2016, p. 6, quoting Sheehan). The music of The Cure has been described as 'an

astonishing vision of desolation' (Pattison, 2014, p. 24) and 'grim lyrical content and overall atmosphere of inevitable doom' (Watts, 2014, p. 30). However, as Robert Smith of The Cure states, 'there's always been an upbeat element to the group' (Smith, no date). Songs like *The Lovecats* (The Cure, 1983), *Just like Heaven* (The Cure, 1987) and *Friday I'm in Love* (The Cure, 1992) masterfully encapsulate the joyful side of The Cure.

Robert Smith and Laurence Tolhurst, co-founders of The Cure, were disaffected teenagers in a backdrop of conformity which they overtly rebelled against. That was Crawley (West Sussex, UK), mid-seventies, on the cusp of the punk movement. Laurence Tolhurst describes teenager Robert Smith's bedroom shelves as a:

'minimalist show of everyday ordinariness that spoke to the greater longing for escape from suburbia, where commonplace items could stand symbolically for our teenage angst and as an *absurdist counterpoint* to the innate, inexplicable violence waiting on every corner for us.'

(Tolhurst, 2016, p. 46) [italics my own]

These items were, of course, 'next to the existential tomes of Camus and Sartre' (ibid).

It was the novella *L'Étranger* ('The Stranger') by French existential philosopher Albert Camus (1942a) that inspired Robert Smith (e.g., Smith, 2019) to write the band's first single *Killing an Arab* (The Cure, 1978). It is this song that drew me into Camus' thinking on absurdism. From then on, I came to appreciate Camus' philosophical approach to love, *révolte*, art and altruism.

One of the most valuable readings I make of Robert Smith's work and work ethics has been his embodiment of Camus' approach to the arts. Art is political. For Camus (1913 – 1960), an artist must move and touch the heart of others; and their best creative work is their way of being in the world and portraying themselves to the world (Pourtois & Desmet, 2022). True to this existential stance, Robert Smith metamorphosed his existential wounds into art through the music and performances of The Cure.

Art and Gestalt therapy have always enjoyed a close kinship. Gestalt therapy is inscribed in an artistic perspective (e.g. Latner, 1973; Parlett, 2003; Robine, 1998; Zinker, 1977); its 'goal is to tap into dormant or unexpected expressive possibilities of a person

by engaging in the use of a wide range of methods' (Amendt-Lyon, 2001, p. 230).

Me

In the early to mid eighties, my brothers listened to British bands such as Siouxsie and the Banshees, Bauhaus, Joy Division and The Cure. I captured that era in my journal:

'These bands connected us, my brothers and me, through music and the vinyls, stacked on top of the tower speakers; and I assumed they'd always be there, as much as our house would always be our family home in Normandy. But they disappeared. We all did. The house got sold. We moved to the city. I went to university. My parents separated. My brother killed himself. Our dog died.'

(Giordano, 2021)

The music of The Cure is linked to my brother (the one who killed himself), who (unbeknown to him) *gifted* me his music by playing a taped cassette of the album *Seventeen Seconds* (The Cure, 1980a) in Mum's car on our way to school. It was like an invisible gift, unspoken of, an unconditional gift in lieu of love.

I quickly became enamoured of the music of The Cure, Robert Smith's lyrics and his persona. These Cure songs have accompanied me since I was a teenager. In those days, listening to The Cure enabled me to step into a world of my own. I needed that. I needed to carve for myself a world away from the tragedy that was unfolding in my family. In the voice of Robert Smith and the music of The Cure, I heard pain, I heard sorrow, I heard violence. It felt as if Robert Smith was singing to me the-experience-of-being-me – me, born in South Korea, put in an orphanage and adopted by a French family when I was eleven months old.

I regard The Cure and Robert Smith as my most cherished cultural factor of psychological resilience. Their music and lyrics have helped me recover from adversity at pivotal points in my life since teenagerhood.

My *fixation* with The Cure and Robert Smith was put out there in the therapy room from the outset. The theory of resilience, e.g. that a musician might become an implicit attachment figure, as formulated by French neuro-psychiatrist Boris Cyrulnik (2014), helped me along my emotional journey before I started Gestalt

psychotherapy in 2018, and it was good to make The Cure an integral part of it. Besides, my therapist always welcomed my bringing in poems and short stories I had written between sessions.

Process: what I did and how I did it

Choosing which songs to parody felt effortless, and perhaps even random. The act might have felt random but, as Parlett writes, from a field theory perspective, ‘what may appear random ... is in fact *organized*’ (Parlett, 1991, p. 71) [italics my own]. Choosing a song felt like I engaged in a (silent) dialogue with the songs. There was an immediate closeness and a sense of a good fit, a particular energetic pull to these five songs: *At Night* (The Cure, 1980b), *The Holy Hour* (The Cure, 1981), *One Hundred Years* (The Cure, 1982), *A Strange Day* (The Cure, 2019a), and *Pictures of You* (The Cure, 2019b).

The relevance of the songs was linked to my field conditions (all the influences that shaped me then). It was determined by the memory and affect associated with these songs and crystallising in the here-and-now via particular lyrics. Indeed, the choice was influenced by what was going on for me at the time, e.g. processing a recent EMDR session, the insight of a book or the impact of a poem I had just read. It felt like the narrative of the original songs, and thus Robert Smith’s field (all the influences that shaped him then) were already engaging my own. This process is an illustration of field theory, and in particular, understanding of emerging context, whereby ‘context and self are always emerging together’ (Denham-Vaughan, 2010, p. 36).

I listened to these songs over and over, for hours, every day, for several weeks – every live or demo version I could find.

In parallel, I felt *compelled* to read novels by Korean authors and books with Korean protagonists. I read poetry and essays by Korean American essayists and poets like Cathy Park Hong, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha and E. J. Koh. I read *Crying in H Mart*, the memoirs of American Korean Michelle Zauner (2021), founder of indie-rock band Japanese Breakfast. In most of these, I was moved by the subtext of intergenerational rupture. These authors brought to me in a vivid manner how it felt to be Korean. That newly acquired knowledge about Korea’s past, and how it affected women daily, which I read in these books completed the sparse (and very functional) story of my adoption as told to me by my French mother when I was growing up.

There was a seamless transition between my reading Korean literature and listening to The Cure songs. For example, during that period, I entered into imagined conversations with Young-sook, the female Korean protagonist in the novel *The Island of Sea Women* by Lisa See (2019). Young-sook’s losses (of her mother first, then husband and child) fused into my own lived experience as reader and orphan. Her losses resonated with mine, and in the moment, I conflated Young-sook and my birth mother in one imagined lived experience. I felt connected to my birth mother on several occasions. It reminded me of James Hillman’s writings:

‘To stay connected with you, I must stay imaginatively interested, not in the process of our relationship or in my feelings for you, but in my imagining of you. The connection through imagination yields an extraordinary closeness.’

(Hillman, 1999, p. 185)

By noticing my phenomenological responses to the songs via the Korean fiction stories, I was able to gain more clarity on what mattered: emotions such as anger and love were now in my awareness. I noticed that some of my feelings about my abandonment, like indignation, did not feel as intrusive. These moments felt fluid and energetic, enjoyable and painful altogether.

Song parody began as the writing of new lyrics out of the original ones. Indeed, I rewrote the lyrics; but not with pen and paper, rather by singing the songs *over and over, for hours, every day, for several weeks*. As I sang these songs, a new story of my birth emerged. Scraps of photographic images I had been impacted by in the past surfaced to my awareness. The story that I was bringing to life in the moment was being enriched by images I had seen during a recent EMDR session; images I had made for myself while reading these Korean (themed) writings, as well as places I had photographed when I visited South Korea with my adoptive mother in 2012, and short stories I had written as part of my therapeutic work.

But I had the feeling that the lyric *writing* itself was not enough. Thus, I remained open and attentive to what the situation demanded. I remained in a space of openness – being receptive, trusting that the right moment would carry enough energy to express what needed to be expressed.

One day, I decided to record my singing of the new lyrics alongside the original songs. I recorded all the songs, except for *At Night*. Then, I listened to, and sang along with, these song parodies *over and over, every morning, for several weeks*. I had made my own *cure* and I was giving it to myself. The experience was cathartic. I would weep, then kneel, holding onto the bed for support, rocking my upper body back and forth, and finally, drop to the floor. Unaware of time passing, I would eventually find myself on my back, arms spread or swept inward, breathing more evenly, my body yielding to the floor, the song parodies still playing through my earphones in a loop.

A few weeks later, I took these home-recorded song parodies to therapy. After listening to my version of *Pictures of You* – renamed *Pictures of You, Mother* – my Gestalt therapist said that the song had put her in touch with ‘an enormous sense of grief’ (Therapist, 2022a). Later on, she said: ‘I felt the gap into not knowing what happened to you’ (Therapist, 2022b). Her experiencing an overwhelm of grief brought my own grief into awareness. In so doing, I believe that she was showing me, unaware, *how* to grieve. As French philosopher Marc-Alain Ouaknin states, ‘often it is the voice of the other that energises our world and imparts emotions that we feel’ (Ouaknin, 1994, p. 16). To witness my therapist’s response was significant in that I felt there was a deep and meaningful existential encounter.

Pictures of you (original lyrics)

I’ve been looking so long at these pictures of you
That I almost believe that they’re real
I’ve been living so long with my pictures of you
That I almost believe that the pictures are all I can feel
...
Remembering you running soft through the night
You were bigger and brighter and wider than snow
And screamed at the make-believe, screamed at the sky
And you finally found all your courage to let it all go

(Smith, 1989)

Pictures of you, Mother

I’ve been **aching** so long for **some** pictures of you
That I almost believe that **you’re** real
I’ve been living so long **without** pictures of you
That I almost believe that the **truth** is all I can feel
...
Remembering you **feeling sore** through the night
You were bigger, and **sweeter** and **whiter** than snow
And screamed at the **enemy**, screamed at the sky
And you finally found all your courage to let **me** go

Lyric substitution (**in bold**): Aline Giordano (2021)

Reflections

Reflecting on what happened during that particular session one year on, my therapist and I discussed how the song parody *Pictures of You, Mother* was able to cut through the therapeutic dialoguing; as if the song required of us to use our senses differently. Indeed, the quality of contact had been tremendously profound and yet different.

I would like to suggest that the *cure* was so alive in me and encoded in the song parody (by the combination of my vocals and Robert Smith’s) that it moved my therapist to a point of overwhelm, perhaps emulating and channelling the felt sense of my birth mother (and her own overwhelm she felt when she had to let go of me). In other words, I had charged the ground and the song parody, and when we listened to it in my therapist’s office the field was ready to release.

Reading had a significant influence on my lyric substitution and journaling. The act of reading in

parallel to the song parody experiment enabled me to feel how it must have been for my mother in early-seventies Korea. The original text was offering itself to my creative act. In the act of reading there was an effacing of the self, and as Ouaknin (1994) argues, as we read, we imagine ourselves differently.

Korea and the not-knowing the circumstances around my birth had always found their way into my writings. Indeed, I used to write short stories of resistance and victimhood. Writing about abandonment and adoption using pen and paper invariably ended up a bitter rumination of the past with the same conclusion: my cultural uprooting was a sacrificial and abject act of violence from the white supremacists who inflicted an indelible wound on me, my People and the Korean land. Writing without pen and paper, by *just* singing, produced a more compassionate story as can be seen in the song parody of *One Hundred Years* (Smith, Tolhurst and Gallup, 1982b).

One hundred years (original lyrics)

Stroking your hair as the patriots are shot
 Fighting for freedom on the television
 Sharing the world with slaughtered pigs
 Have we got everything?
 She struggles to get away
 The pain and the creeping feeling
 A little black-haired girl
 Waiting for Saturday
 The death of her father pushing her
 Pushing her white face into the mirror
 Aching inside me and turn me round
 Just like the old days

Over and over we die one after the other

(Smith, Tolhurst and Gallup, 1982b)

One hundred years of Korean women

Turn to myself as the soldiers are shot
Feeling the love and all the depravation
Seeing the world with frightening dreams
We are human beings
Such that we gave you away
 The pain and the creeping feeling
 A little **Korean** girl
 Waiting for **softness**
 The **thought of a family crushing** her
 Pushing her **whiteness** into the mirror
 Aching inside me **as I tried to be kind**
 Just like the old **rage**

Over and over we **write about one another**

Lyric substitution (**in bold**): Aline Giordano (2021)

When singing alongside my song parodies, I allowed myself to stay with the experience of being emotionally impacted by my own imaginal world. I lost myself, wholly. I also felt immense sadness and distress in the moment. The shift between Robert Smith's voice and mine, the overlap of different words and meaning from both sets of lyrics and the coexistence of both occasionally felt confusing and led me to sing the 'wrong' lyrics. But in the next breath, I could also feel a sense of joy brought about by a lyric, an associated image or an odd phrase borne out of the synchronous vocals. In those moments of confusion and joy, a new space opened: a space for newness, a space for awareness.

Song parodying was an act of creativity. Was it an act of survival? By immersing myself in the immediacy of the experience, and true to a Gestalt experiment, my experience came 'to its natural resting place' (Polster & Polster, 1974, p. 284), or indeed a moment I like to call the yielding moment of the newborn, when 'we are giving ourselves over to the other (person or object) and simultaneously receiving support and stability and a basic sense of orientation' (Frank & La Barre, 2011, p. 25).

Discussion

A song, Cyrulnik argues, 'metamorphoses reality and makes it bearable' (2019, p. 10). Indeed, music is 'a device or resource to which people turn in order to regulate themselves as aesthetic agents, as feeling,

thinking and acting beings in their day-to-day lives' (DeNora, 2000, p. 62).

Listening to music can function as a reconfiguring of the self, Tia DeNora, Professor in sociology of music, argues. We tacitly know *which* music we need to hear, *when*. This is an important self-regulating function of music (ibid). 'Music is an active ingredient in the organisation of self, the shifting of mood, energy level ... and engagement with the world' (ibid p. 61).

Song parody was a 'presentation of self to self', a process of 'memory retrieval (which is simultaneously, memory construction)' (ibid, pp. 62-63). It was therapeutic work and, thus, a construction of self (Robine, 1998). The song parody process not only restored my 'creative capacity' (Robine, 1998, p. 41) but magnified it to the point where I was able to create a new relationship to my primal wound.

I traded knowledge and truth for experience, felt sense and presence. I drew on the affective power of music which comes from 'its co-presence with other things – people, events', co-presence that is always situated in the context in which music is heard (DeNora, 2000, p. 66). I metamorphosed my primal wound into art. I stopped being formulaic and mechanistic about my relationship to the past. I became creative about it; and repetition was a vital driving force.

Former professor in popular music Anahid Kassabian gives a moving account of listening to Armenian music to explore her 'Diasporan Identities'.

She writes:

‘... affective listening can do its most important work, offering ways *in* to new experiences and perspectives and events and processes that open up a whole new world of possibilities.’

(Kassabian, 2013, p. 83) [italics in original text]

Through the repetitive listening of music I experienced myself in a ‘process that comes into being through listening’ (ibid). This also applies to the process of singing alongside my parodies.

French poet Antonin Artaud (1896 – 1948), in his work entitled *Les nouvelles révélations de L'ÊTRE* (1937), obsessively asks: ‘Qu’est ce que cela veut dire?’ (‘What does this mean?’). The work was published without Artaud’s name; and it would be his last before enforced psychiatric internment (Ouaknin, 1994).

I remind myself of Cyrulnik’s argument that we all benefit from the artistic function of resilience and that works of art are autobiographical confessions. (Cyrulnik, 2018)

At night (original lyrics)

Sunk deep in the night
I sink in the night
Standing alone underneath the sky
I feel the chill of ice
On my face
I watch the hours go by
The hours go by

(Smith et al., 1980)

‘Qu’est ce que cela veut dire?’

‘Révolte’

French psychologist Toby Nathan writes that ‘adoption produces, as if by essence, political beings’ (Nathan, 2017, p. 156). My song parody endeavour was inscribed in a politically engaged *Camuesque* lineage. Song parody was for me a political act, a *révolte*, which the *Cure fan* in me helped bring to completion. My song parody process was a transgression of the text for a transformation of the self. That is ‘*what*’ I did. What I didn’t do is kill myself (unlike my brother).

In his reflections on suicide, English philosopher Simon Critchley (2015) reminds us that for Camus in ‘Le mythe de Sisyphe’ (‘The Myth of Sisyphus’) (1942b), artistic creation is the legitimate response to the absurd, not suicide. I argue that this ‘absurd creation’ (ibid, pp. 283-304) is what sparked Robert Smith to start The Cure. As for me, my song parody was my artistic creation in an absurd world that commodified and traded hundreds of thousands of Korean infants (like me) to white nations from the late fifties to the mid-eighties (Hübinette, 2007).

At night the horrors fight back

Sunk deep in the night
I feel it at night
Dreaming alone underneath the sky
I see the destroyed lives
On **your** face
I watch the **horrors fight back**
The **horrors fight back**

Lyric substitution (**in bold**): Aline Giordano (2021)

L'Etranger by Camus (1942a) is an exploration of truth and difference in how one chooses to be truthful about their own experience in the face of society — to accept to die for truth and difference (Camus, 1962, pp. 215-216). Meursault, the novella’s protagonist, refuses to lie about his feelings (e.g. to feign grief following the death of his mother). In so doing, he rejects the reducing of life to a series of lies about his experience (ibid). My process of lyric substitution was to *substitute* the experience of not knowing with the experience of feeling. It was akin to a process of social integration, which Iranian-French novelist Négar Djavadi movingly writes about in *Disoriental*:

‘... to really integrate into a culture, I can tell you that you have to *disintegrate* first, at least partially, from your own. You have to separate, detach, dissociate. No one who demands that immigrants make “an effort at integration” would dare look them in the face and ask them to start by making the necessary “effort at disintegration”. They are asking people to stand atop the mountain without climbing up it first.’

(Djavadi, 2018, p. 112) [italics in original text]

Following straight after, is Djavadi's recollection of The Cure's album *Disintegration* (The Cure, 1989), the lyrics of which she spent hours translating. Ouaknin writes of the therapeutic nature of literary translation and relates the case of Antonin Artaud who, while in psychiatric internment (where he was subjected to electroshock treatment), translated Lewis Carroll and, in doing so, found his literary voice again and his freedom. Translation is the paradoxical process of 'coming back to self through the other' (Ouaknin, 1994, p. 168, citing J-M. Rey, 1991).

I found that the process of re-working someone else's words is a process of listening to someone else's voice until you are open to hearing your own. This comes at a cost: I must injure, upset, take out, ravage, disrupt, deface and break the original text to break through with my own voice, to pass through the not knowing, and the (futile) 'why?' and 'why me?'. But the prize is putting an end to objectifying myself with my own words.

I moved the past into the present. I brought context to the event in an act of imagination. In so doing, the song parody process enabled me to step into the middle mode. I tapped into the phenomenal field, noticing it and writing it down in my journal, in the form of a monologue or dialogue, often with my birth mother.

Of course, I am condensing into few paragraphs many, many hours of singing and listening, and many, many journal pages. But I could not describe the process any better than Joel Latner does when he writes about the middle mode:

'It is what we experience when activity and passivity are balanced, when we let go and give ourselves over to an activity we care about and are deeply involved in.'

(Latner, 2000, p. 43)

Paraphrasing Latner, I gave myself over to the experience: channelling and keeping in touch with both my id and ego functions; stepping in and out of both as well as being in both. Being in the middle mode allowed me to experience being closer to my birth mother.

I focused on the felt experience and observed the phenomenon of the experience. I was so engrossed in the music and the singing that I forgot my socially constructed reality about not-knowing. My focus shifted from what I wanted to remember (but could not) to 'the [actual] experience and awareness of remembering' (ibid, p. 17).

In the act of parodying songs, I transformed the painful longing to know the unknown and the equally challenging experience of not knowing into an experience of *being-with* the unknown, as I firmly resided in the middle mode. In the middle mode, I listened to songs, I read, I sang, I created new lyrics, I journalled. In other words, I constructed a new cultural field around my birth, my birth mother and birth country; I constructed a new reality for myself and contacted it – it: that 'cultural ground' (Wheeler, 2005, p. 110).

I felt the reparation in this newly created field, which turned out to be both a feeding of (cultural) ground and a resourcing of self. It was process, and indeed 'process of discovery' (Yontef, 1993, p. 89), safe container and output.

In the song parodies, I heard myself as other. In the moment of creativity, I felt more present. Then, I understood I had a choice; I could stop fixating on the unknowable details of my birth. I understood that longing for the mother is innate and that longing for truth is cultural. I cherished the former and let go of the latter, for: 'in one moment, my own words ... seem to be the direct bequest of truth. In the next moment, they are ashes in my mouth' (Schoen, 1994, p. 13).

The imagined past became alive to the song parody soundtrack; and true to their core function, the original songs acted as 'mediator of future existence' (DeNora, 2000, p. 63). I emerged a more relational being, in fuller awareness of my political being.

That was my *révolte*.

'*Qu'est ce que cela veut dire?*'

'*Han.*'

In the face of the intangible factors of explicit and implicit power dynamics conferred by the field (Chidiac & Denham-Vaughan, 2020), I believe that the songs were instrumental in this creative and artistic process, enabling me to represent for myself *han*, which Korean American poet E. J. Koh describes as:

'an almost unimaginable grief ... a national characteristic of the Korean people ... it's a pain that is generational. It's passed down ... it's a collective suffering ... it's the gap in which something can never be closed, can never be resolved or repaired.'

(Koh, 2020)

The song parody process as described herein – being in the middle mode – led, on the surface, to an autobiographical story. However, I believe that the strength and therapeutic power of *what I did and how I did it* lies in the cultural ground that I created for myself through the song parody. I was, as Robine states when describing the middle mode: both ‘*acteur*’ (agent) and ‘*bénéficiaire*’ (recipient) (Robine, 1998, p. 44). Indeed, didn’t I write above: I had made my own *cure* and I was giving it to myself? I called upon culture (in the form of popular music and literature) to transform the primal wound into ‘primal creation’ (*création primale*) (ibid, p. 41).

According to Wheeler:

‘Culture is the completion of our biological development, which is left incomplete at birth to allow for that maximum adaptability to different environmental conditions — the fundamental human survival strategy of human nature itself.’

(Wheeler, 2005, p. 108)

In the middle mode, I experienced the intangibility of culture and what we take for granted: that ‘culture starts with mother’s milk’ (Chidiac, 2022).

I contend that the artistic creation of self, the *sine qua non* of Gestalt therapy, is necessarily, if not above all, cultural: ‘*créer sa vie comme [le sujet] créerait une oeuvre*’ (‘to create one’s life like one would create one’s artwork’) (Robine, 1998, p. 41).

The holy hour (original lyrics)

I stand and hear my voice cry out
A wordless scream at ancient power
It breaks against stone
I softly leave you crying
I cannot hold what you devour
The sacrifice of penance
In the holy hour

(Smith, Tolhurst & Gallup, 1981)

Burning the holy hour

I stand and hear my voice cry out
A wordless scream at ancient power
It breaks **all my bones**
I softly **shake my body**
I cannot hold **the orphan’s vow**
The sacrifice of **severance**
In the holy hour

Lyric substitution (**in bold**): Aline Giordano (2021)

In the middle mode, I transcended my reality – that ontological uprooting; I softened the absurd, gave it flesh and breath. In the middle mode, I softened history, gave it flesh and breath.

‘Qu’est ce que cela veut dire?’

Recently, while preparing for a talk on rehumanising the racial narrative, I reminded myself of Korean American scholar Cathy Park Hong’s seminal book *Minor Feelings: a reckoning on race and the Asian condition* (Hong, 2020). I would find on page eighteen the gap I had sought to close for myself at the beginning of this piece of research:

‘Patiently educating a clueless white person about race is draining. It takes all your powers of persuasion. Because it’s more than a chat about race. It’s ontological. It’s like explaining to a person why you exist, or why you feel pain, or why your reality is distinct from their reality.’

Except it’s even trickier than that. Because the person has all of Western history, politics, literature, and mass culture on their side, proving that you don’t exist.’

(Hong, 2020, p. 18)

What this means is that, in the experience of being simultaneously cultural agent and recipient, I proved to myself that I exist.

Conclusion

Engaging in song parody has the power to open up exciting possibilities for therapeutic purposes. I have positioned song parody as a Gestalt experiment. As such, its value is dependent ‘on the skills and sensitivity with which it is employed’ (Polster & Polster, 1974, p. 284).

I contend that the song parody becomes a powerful carrier of culture. But let us not forget that the song in its original form is also a powerful carrier of culture in its own right. Indeed, the ubiquitous and timeless song *Stand by Me* (King, Leiber & Stoller, 1961) performed by Ben E. King was originally inspired by a Gospel tune and passages from the Bible, and turned protest song in the sixties USA (Rodgers, no date), while *What a Wonderful World* (Weiss & Thiele, 1967) sung by Louis Armstrong was written to the backdrop of racial tensions and over the years came to be associated with ‘less-than-cheerful imagery’ around the world (BBC, 2011). Listening to a song with the *other*, in the moment, needs to be done sensitively, otherwise, this:

‘... would force one’s experience onto someone else, reduce their lived experience into a subservient narrative. And now the other would carry their experience and relationship with their song like a Sisyphean burden, condemned to hear it as a mere object, weakened by the other’s interference — simplified by cultural arrogance.’
(Giordano, 2022)

Song parody is not an isolated phenomenon; rather, it is the result of the interrelated cultural complexities of self and environment. In this paper, I have invited you to experience the popular music song as a cultural factor of psychological resilience. This latter point is the most enduring figure that arose from this experiment and still holds strongly in my lived experience. I now invite you to view culture (epitomised by the song) not just as *context*, but as a critical and often overlooked factor in the therapeutic process and encounter.

Lastly, in this paper, my writings have travelled through two layers of discourse: the personal experience manifested in the first-person narrative and the scholarly discourse anchored in Gestalt therapy, Relational Organisational Gestalt and popular music literature. Some may have found the close proximity of both discourses discordant, others harmonious. This paper was also an invitation for you to experience creative writing: song parody as creative writing fulfilling the function of awareness raising, but also creative writing as a means to anchor the new learning and ways of being (Chidiac, 2018). I have meticulously crafted this paper as a creative non-fiction therapeutic story that is neither memoir nor autobiography, but the imagined story of the felt presence of an imaginary Asian woman: my birth mother.

‘For once a story is told, it cannot be called back. Once told, it is loose in the world.’

(King, 2003, p. 10)

At this point, you might like to take a breath.

Secret song

It is not unusual for artists to hide a secret song (a hidden track) at the end of their records (Golsen, 2021). I remember Nirvana’s *Endless Nameless* (Nirvana, 1991) hidden track which, once ended, left me altogether battered, provoked and curious. What follows is the equivalent of my secret song.

I agree with Wheeler in that ‘culture is never static’ and thus ‘every person belongs to many different cultural or subcultural groupings’ (Wheeler, 2005, p. 126). However, I have always found it difficult to ‘belong’: how can I hold my own cultural differences when half of them are buried in the ancestral lineage and the other half controlled by the engine of the totalising societies?

With this Gestalt experiment in song parody I have addressed the inter-cultural gap in which I had found myself. In so doing, I was able to step back into my humanness, the very place that the trauma expelled me from (Cyrulnik, 2012). Indeed, being severed from family does not just mean no-longer-belonging-to-family or cultural displacement; it means being excluded from the family of human beings or, indeed, from humanity itself. I have found that working with culture in this way – via song parody – is an unfolding process of learning about self; and as I work with clients using the song parody process, more learning about the cultural self in relation to power and structure emerges.

In a world that relentlessly seeks to de-culture and de-humanise us with consumerism, scientific dogma and technological fundamentalism (amongst other means), I proclaim that song parody, as a Gestalt experiment, and the wider creative writing process can help individuals reconnect with their humanness.

Holding true Wheeler’s assertion about culture, now more than ever, we must actively support our and our clients’ expressive, creative and artistic possibilities to help create culture in order to navigate the dominant epistemological framework whose prevailing language is that of market economy. We must do this in order to save humanity from this (not so) new form of colonisation of men.

Note

All the translations from the French language into English are the author's and solely for the purpose of this paper.

Acknowledgements

- I wish to acknowledge with deep gratitude my therapist's permission to take this private therapeutic experience outside of her office via this paper.
- My heartfelt thanks go to Marie-Anne Chidiac for her support and generous comments on early and later versions of this paper.

References

- Amendt-Lyon, N. (2001). Art and creativity in Gestalt therapy. *Gestalt Review*, 5(4), pp. 225-248.
- Artaud, A. (1937). *Les nouvelles révélations de L'ÊTRE*. Saint Clément De Rivière: Fata Morgana, 2019.
- Baker, F. A. (2005). 'Working with impairments in pragmatics through songwriting following traumatic brain injury', in Baker, F. A. and Wigram, T. (eds.) *Songwriting: Methods, techniques and clinical applications for music therapy clinicians, educators and students*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, pp. 134-153.
- Baker, F. A. (2015). *Therapeutic songwriting: development in theory, methods, and practice*. Basingstoke: Pallgrave Macmillan.
- Baker, F., Kennelly, J. & Tamplin, J. (2005). 'Songwriting to explore identity change and sense of self-concept following traumatic brain injury', in Baker, F. and Wigram, T. (eds.) *Songwriting: methods, techniques and clinical applications for music therapy clinicians, educators and students*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, pp. 116-133.
- BBC (no date) *Smashed hits: how political is What a Wonderful World?*. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-16118157> (Accessed: 22 July 2023).
- Camus, A. (1942a). 'L'Etranger', in *Œuvres complètes I: 1931-1944*. Paris: Gallimard, 2006, pp. 139-213.
- Camus, A. (1942b). 'Le mythe de Sisyphe', in *Œuvres complètes I: 1931-1944*. Paris: Gallimard, 2006, pp. 217-304.
- Camus, A. (1962). 'Appendice (L'Etranger): Préface à l'édition universitaire américaine', in *Œuvres complètes I: 1931-1944*. Paris: Gallimard, 2006, pp. 215-216.
- Cheetham, T. (2015). *Imaginal love: the meaning of imagination in Henry Corbin and James Hillman*. Thompson: Spring publications.
- Chidiac, M-A. & Denham-Vaughan, S. (2020). 'Gestalt, the Good and the concept of Ethical Presence', *British Gestalt Journal*, 29(1), 21-29.
- Chidiac, M-A. (2018). *Relational Organisational Gestalt: an emergent approach to organisational development*. London: Routledge.
- Chidiac, M-A. (2022). Zoom conversation with Marie-Anne Chidiac, 10 May.
- Critchley, S. (2015). *Notes on suicide*. London: Fitzcarraldo editions, 2019.
- Cyrulnik, B. (2012). 'Pourquoi la résilience?', in Cyrulnik, B. and Jorland, G. (eds.) *Résilience: connaissances de base*. Paris: Odile Jacobs, pp. 7-17.
- Cyrulnik, B. (2014). 'Pourquoi la résilience?', in Anault, M. and Cyrulnik, B. (eds.) *Résilience. De la recherche à la pratique: 1er congrès mondial sur la résilience*. Paris: Odile Jacobs, pp. 7-21.
- Cyrulnik, B. (2018). *V.O. Complète. Résilience: la douleur est inévitable, la souffrance est incertaine*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O9ugzdoc5JQ> (Accessed: 29 March 2023).
- Cyrulnik, B. (2019). *La nuit j'écrirai des soleils*. Paris: Odile Jacobs.
- Denham-Vaughan, S. (2005). 'Will and Grace: an integrative dialectic central to Gestalt psychotherapy', *British Gestalt Journal*, 14(1), 5-14.
- Denham-Vaughan, S. (2010). 'The liminal space and twelve action practices for gracious living', *British Gestalt Journal*, 19(2), 34-45.
- DeNora, T. (2000). *Music in everyday life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Djavadi, N. (2018). *Disoriental. Translated from the French by T. Kover*. New York: Europa Editions.
- Frank, R. & La Barre, F. (2011). *The first year and the rest of your life: movement, development and psychotherapeutic change*. New York: Routledge.
- Giordano, A. (2021). Personal journal. Unpublished.
- Giordano, A. (2022). *Mending the world one song at a time: listening as a creative process*. Available at: <https://ukagp.org.uk/mending-the-world-one-song-at-a-time-listening-as-a-creative-process/> (Accessed: 22 July 2023).
- Goddard, S. (2016). 'Tom Sheehan', in Sheehan, T. (compiler and photographer) *In between days: The Cure in photographs 1982-2005* by Tom Sheehan. London: Flood Gallery Publishing.
- Golsen, T. (2021). *The story behind Nirvana's secret song at the end of 'Nevermind'*. Available at: <https://faroutmagazine.co.uk/nirvana-secret-song-end-of-nevermind/> (Accessed: 29 March 2023).
- Hillman, J. (1999). *The force of character and the lasting life*. New York: Ballentine Books.
- Hong C. P. (2020). *Minor feelings: a reckoning on race and the Asian condition*. London: Profile Books, 2021.
- Hübinette, T. (2007). 'Asian bodies out of control: examining the adopted Korean existence', in Parreñas, R. S. and Siu, L. C. D. (eds.) *Asian diaspora: new formations, new conceptions*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, pp. 177-200.
- Hutcheon, L. (2000). *A theory of parody: the teachings of twentieth-century art forms*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

- Kassabian, A. (2013). *Ubiquitous listening: affect, attention and distributed subjectivity*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- King, T. (2003). *The truth about stories: a native narrative*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- King, B. E., Leiber, J. & Stoller, M. (1961). *Stand by me*. New York: Sony/ATV Music Publishing LLC.
- Kleberg L. (1991). 'Parody and double-voiced discourse: on the language philosophy of Mikhail Bakhtin', in Göransson, B. and Florin, M. (eds.) *Dialogue and technology: art and knowledge. The Springer series on artificial intelligence and society*. London: Springer, pp. 95-102.
- Koh, E. J. (2020). *A practice of care: E.J. Koh on distance, broken English, and writing poems that forgive*. Available at: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/podcasts/154566/a-practice-of-care> (Accessed: 29 March 2023).
- Latner, J. (1973). *The Gestalt therapy book*. Gouldsboro: The Gestalt Journal Press, 1986.
- Latner, J. (2000). 'The theory of Gestalt therapy', in Nevis, E. C. (ed.) *Gestalt therapy: perspectives and applications*. London: Routledge.
- Nathan, T. (2017). *Les âmes errantes*. Paris: L'Iconoclaste.
- Nirvana (1991). 'Endless Nameless', *Nevermind*. Santa Monica: DGC records.
- Ouaknin, M-A. (1994). *Bibliothérapie: lire, c'est guérir*. Paris: Editions du Seuil.
- Parlett, M. (1991). Reflections on field theory, *British Gestalt Journal*, 6(1), 69-81.
- Parlett, M. (2003). 'Creative abilities and the art of living well.' In: M. Spagnuolo Lobb and N. Amendt-Lyon, (Eds.) *Creative license: the art of Gestalt therapy*, pp. 51-62. New York: Springer-Verlag Wien.
- Pattison, L. (2014). 'Faith', in Jones, A. (ed.) *UNCUT: The Cure - the ultimate music guide*. London: IPC, pp. 24-27.
- Perls, F. S., Hefferline, R. & Goodman, P. (1951). *Gestalt therapy: excitement and growth in the human personality*. Gouldsboro: The Gestalt Journal Press (1994).
- Polster, E. & Polster, M. (1974). *Gestalt therapy integrated: contours of theory & practice*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Pourtois, J-P. & Desmet, H. (2022). *Au coeur de la résilience: quinze approches conceptuelles*. Paris: Odile Jacob.
- Robine, J-M. (1998) *Gestalt-thérapie: la construction du soi*. Paris: L'Harmattan.
- Rodgers, A. (no date) 'Stand by Me'—Ben E. King (1961). Available at: <https://www.loc.gov/static/programs/national-recording-preservation-board/documents/StandByMe.pdf> (Accessed: 22 July 2023).
- Schoen, S. (1994). *Presence of mind: literary and philosophical roots of a wise psychotherapy*. Gouldsboro: The Gestalt Journal Press.
- See, L. (2009). *The island of sea women*. New York: Scribner.
- Smith, R. (no date) *The Cure Galore promo*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=HXzj8jptAQc> (Accessed: 29 March 2023).
- Smith, R. (1989). *'Pictures of you', The Cure: Songwords 1978-1989*, London: Fiction Omnibus Press.
- Smith, R. (2019). Interviewed by Kory Grow. *The Cure's Robert Smith looks back: 'I've never thought about legacy'* 18 October. Available at: <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-features/cure-band-robert-smith-interview-40-live-893005/> (Accessed: 29 March 2023).
- Smith, R. et al. (1980). 'At night', *The Cure: Songwords 1978-1989*, London: Fiction Omnibus Press.
- Smith, R., Tolhurst, L. & Gallup, S. (1981). 'The holy hour', *The Cure: Songwords 1978-1989*, London: Fiction Omnibus Press.
- Smith, R., Tolhurst, L. & Gallup, S. (1982a). 'A strange day', *The Cure: Songwords 1978-1989*, London: Fiction Omnibus Press.
- Smith, R., Tolhurst, L. & Gallup, S. (1982b). 'One hundred years', *The Cure: Songwords 1978-1989*, London: Fiction Omnibus Press.
- The Cure (1978). 'Killing an Arab', *The Cure. Staring at the sea. The singles* [CD, 829239-2]. London: Polydor/Polygram, 1986.
- The Cure (1980a). *Seventeen seconds: deluxe edition* [CD 1: 982 183-2]. London: Universal, 2005.
- The Cure (1980b). 'At night', *Seventeen seconds: deluxe edition* [CD 1: 982 183-2]. London: Universal, 2005.
- The Cure (1981). 'The holy hour', *Faith: deluxe Edition* [CD 1, 982 183-5]. London: Fiction Records Ltd, 2005.
- The Cure (1982). 'One hundred years', *Pornography: deluxe Edition* [CD 1, 982 183-8]. London: Fiction Records Ltd, 2005.
- The Cure (1983). 'The lovecats', *The Cure. Staring at the sea. The singles* [CD, 829239-2]. London: Polydor/Polygram, 1986.
- The Cure (1987). 'Just like heaven', *The Cure: greatest hits* [CD, FIXCD32/589]. London: Fiction/Polydor, 2001.
- The Cure (1989). *Disintegration: deluxe edition* [CD, 532 456-8]. London: Fiction records Ltd, 2010.
- The Cure (1992). 'Friday I'm in love', *The Cure: greatest hits* [CD, FIXCD32/589]. London: Fiction/Polydor, 2001.
- The Cure (2019a). 'A strange day', *40 LIVE THE CURE CURÆTION - 25 + ANNIVERSARY: CURÆTION - 25: FROM THERE TO HERE | FROM HERE TO THERE*. Santa Monica: Universal Music Group.
- The Cure (2019b). 'Pictures of you', *40 LIVE THE CURE CURÆTION - 25 + ANNIVERSARY: CURÆTION - 25: FROM THERE TO HERE | FROM HERE TO THERE*. Santa Monica: Universal Music Group.

- [Therapist] (2022a). *Psychotherapy session*, 3 February.
- [Therapist] (2022b). *Psychotherapy session*, 16 February.
- Tolhurst, L. (2016). *Cured: the tale of two imaginary boys*. London: Quercus.
- Watts, P. (2014). 'Pornography', in Jones, A. (ed.) *UNCUT: The Cure - the ultimate music guide*. London: IPC, pp. 28-31.
- Weiss, G. D. & Thiele, B. (1967). *What a wonderful world*. New York: Concord Music Publishing LLC.
- Wheeler, G. (2005). 'Culture, self and field: a Gestalt guide to the age of complexity', *Gestalt Review*, 9(1), 91-128.
- Wigram, T. & Baker F. (2005). 'Introduction: songwriting as therapy', in Baker, F. and Wigram, T. (eds.) *Songwriting: methods, techniques and clinical applications for music therapy clinicians, educators and students*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, pp. 11-23.
- Yontef, G. M. (1993). *Awareness, dialogue & process: essays on Gestalt therapy*. Gouldsboro: The Gestalt Journal Press.
- Yontef, G. & Schulz, F. (2016). 'Dialogue and experiment', *British Gestalt Journal*, 25(1), 9-21.
- Zauner, M. (2021). *Crying in H Mart: a memoir*. London: Picador.
- Zinker, J. (1977). *Creative process in Gestalt therapy*. New York: Vintage, 1978.

Aline Giordano is a Gestalt coach, organisational consultant and trainer. She holds several masters degrees, including an MSc in Creative Writing for Therapeutic Purposes from Metanoia Institute/Middlesex University and a French Diplome d'Etudes Approfondies (DEA) for which she wrote a dissertation on Irish rock bands and the social and political conflict in Northern Ireland. Aline also studied at Schumacher College (UK) and trained with the Gross National Happiness (GNH) Centre in the Kingdom of Bhutan. She is a photographer and her live music photography has been internationally exhibited. In addition to her coaching work, Aline specialises in the design and delivery of projects centred around wellbeing and inclusion in organisations. She is a Relational Organisational Gestalt (ROG) Associate Faculty member at Relational Change.

Address for correspondence:
aline4rl@gmail.com