

I Am a Radio

Luke Wilkins

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Solitude Journal 5 *A Sound Was Heard!*

Author Luke Wilkins steps into the frequencies of self-discovery as his journey of realizing he is a radio unfolds. In this story, Wilkins recounts an experience he had during his fellowship at the Akademie Schloss Solitude, and intricately weaves together elements from Greek mythology, media theory, Sigmund Freud's *Totem and Taboo*, and the profound impact of maternal connections. He dives into the exploration of a consciousness that transcends conventional boundaries, resonating with the echoes of Klaus Theweleit's core theories on media, vibrational correspondence, »Das Mutterradio,« the »third body,« and the transformative potential of sound.

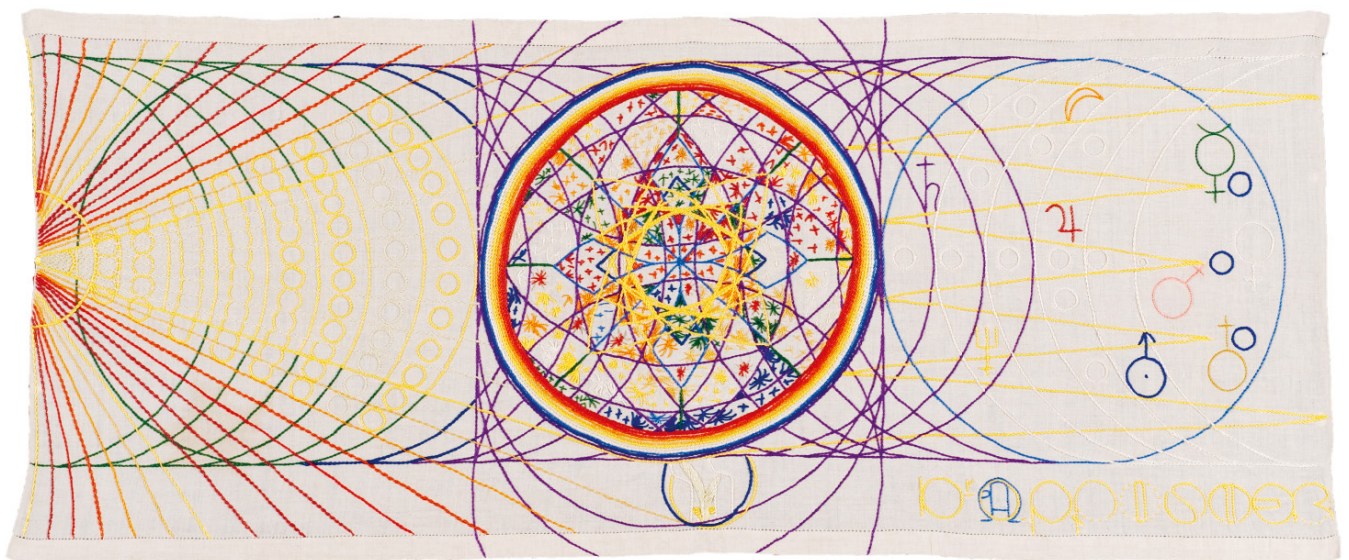
I first realized I was a radio during my fellowship at the Akademie Schloss Solitude (2018/2019), where I was writing a book on media theory. Now, I would like to explain how this self-awareness came about.

Readers of works by the culture, fascism, and media theorist Klaus Theweleit are all too familiar with the core theory that underpins his writing (which is most clearly laid out in his *Buch der Könige – Orpheus und Eurydike*). The notion of female sacrifice represented a pivotal founding act of the modern and media age. Upon his ascent from Hades, Orpheus turns around to look at Eurydice, half-consciously and half-unconsciously, in order to lose her once and for all and use her soul to install an »antenna« in the kingdom of the dead. And to enable him to fully blossom as a singer, drawing on his grief translated into musical beauty. This is a dream pursued both by the media and also many artistic processes: Finding a way to communicate with the dead. This is why Freud wrote in *Totem and Taboo* that appeasing the spirit of a loved one who has just passed away is a basic ritualistic form observed within many Indigenous communities. The spirit of the dead, which regularly haunts those in mourning, is appeased through songs and ritual practices until it becomes calmer and wanes. The grieving process comes to an end as soon as the spirit ceases to return. Freud sees this as a way of dealing with the psychic energy that underlies every separation and every parting, and that also encompasses the most important themes of modern psychology. According to Freud, modern forms of media have become a substitute for the ritual practices of Indigenous people. They act as prostheses or amplifiers of our sensory perceptions, aiding communication with spirits. Now something rather uncanny has happened to me. While I was researching, contemplating, studying, writing about and even psychoanalyzing these things, my mother died. It was as if I had known it would happen. As if I had known as a child that she would leave me too soon. As if I had dreamed as a child about her death, about her becoming a spirit, while I was sitting in the branches of the trees behind our house. As if I had heard something about it whispered in the voices of the wind. As if I had searched as a child for a stable line, a frequency to her and her absence, while playing the violin, particularly when improvising alongside other musicians and when experiencing the subtle ecstasy and the virtually telepathic awareness of those around me, creating one piece together that sometimes stops abruptly and everyone sees it coming. Could you call that

swarm intelligence? Or social intelligence, something almost ant-like? I believe that it is this conscious state, as a dream, that also forms the basis of telecommunication. Perhaps it was no coincidence that a telephone was installed in Freud's house on Vienna's Berggasse just as he was on the cusp of developing his psychoanalytic theory and the notion of »psychic apparatus«? And what led the rigorous empiricist Freud to become ever more fascinated by telepathy during the course of his life's research? This bears a strong resemblance to Swiss artist Johanna N. Wintsch, who considered the »spiritual« side of radio waves in her embroidery entitled *Je suis radio* just as the radio network began to spread across the globe. Her susceptibility to these waves could have been part of the reason why the artist, who had a very delicate and vulnerable nervous system, was admitted to a psychiatric ward, where she was classified by many doctors as an incurable schizophrenic (which was a gross misdiagnosis).

Charged with similar radiation, I had already infected those around me back when I was a high school student. One morning, I took the Intercity Express from Freiburg im Breisgau to Cologne, where I made a beeline for the office of Ferdi Roth, the editor-in-chief at the WDR training department. I told him that I would like to work for his radio station, that I was on a mission to save my mother, and that it had to happen fast. That must have made sense to him, and I became a radio broadcast journalist. I later graduated to being an actor in German soap opera *Verbotene Liebe*, then in the family series *Nesthocker*, followed by starring roles in some Rosamunde Pilcher adaptations, and finally a part on the big screen in a racing car film, which had me careering around the streets in a Porsche looking everywhere for my mother. At some point, I packed all that in and began to write and think about media, artistic modes of production, and transference techniques. I also studied the print-to-digital shift, as Marshall McLuhan called it. This consciousness that, as Tim Leary hoped, enables the »global society« to merge together the central nervous systems of every single person using media technology and drug-induced states of ecstasy.

In his essay exploring various forms of mergers, Theweleit coined the umbrella term »third body.« Third bodies can be a small group (two lovers, analyst and patient, a group of people meditating), or a large group (an orchestra), or an enormous one (a television audience, people connected to the same network), or even a nation, the way Germans were welded



Johanna N. Wintsch, *Je suis radio*, 1924, embroidery on linen.
Courtesy Staatsarchiv Zürich

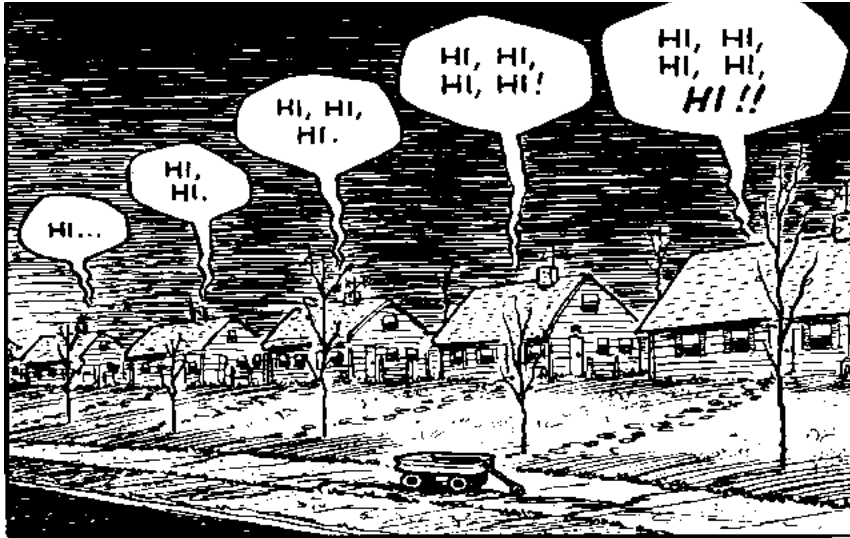


Image from Klaus Theweleit's
Buch der Könige – Orpheus und Eurydike, p. 382

together to form a *Völkskörper* (national body) by the propaganda of the Nazi era. According to Theweleit, the state of ecstasy that is a prerequisite for the formation of third-body phenomena is particularly easy to create through music. People making music, or even a group of listeners such as a concert audience, fall into a state of »vibrational correspondence« particularly quickly (through the sounds, the melodies, the beat, the musical energy) and sense an energy field emerging that feels like a body capable of uniting everyone. Theweleit claims, in reference to insights gained through prenatal psychoanalytical research, that this is because listening plays a central role in the process of becoming a cultural being and consequently forming a community. The cochlea part of the inner ear is already fully developed after five months in the womb and, as such, grants a person's first sensory access to the world. According to Theweleit, the fetus's relationship to the mother's voice and the sounds in the womb in particular help it to gain a sense of self, a phenomenon that psychoanalysts call a »self-awareness as a sound envelope.« Theweleit views this feeling of being held, called »amniotic fluid paradise« by Pier Paolo Pasolini, as the primeval form of all states of ecstasy that we never stop searching for after birth, as a child, and as an

adult: in love or in aesthetic beauty. My favorite part of Theweleit's entire work, which also most clearly articulates the meaning and liberating effect of his theories on fascism and the media, is a chapter entitled »Mutterradio.« Within that chapter, I discovered an awareness that I had been lacking, an awareness that would allow me to actually find something resembling a connection to my mother that outlasted death. A connection that also turned my love for her into a solid connection to the world, based loosely on the words of analyst Anne Dufourmantelle. For our entire lives, we cannot get over having been carried for nine months. Does this not apply to one of our simplest, and at the same time most challenging, tasks? That of developing a form of love that does not depend on those who taught us what love is? Theweleit was born in 1942 to a Nazi father, and a mother who was also somehow implicated in the regime. A mother who, for instance, after the war tried to downplay the extermination of the Jews. But one of Theweleit's most important childhood memories is his mother's song, which filled the house from morning to night, when she was cooking, doing the laundry, or mending children's clothes using the pedal sewing machine. He recalls: »In the words of Melanie Klein, she filled the room with a >good



Cover of *Der Radioamateur*, Issue 3, March 1924.

The image was found in the book *Airloom*, published by the Prinzhorn Collection

presence<; the ›good,< the ›not haunting,< the ›nurturing< breast, from which other ›not haunting< objects derived and could be found ›in reality,< floated on in the form of music. I say also ›radio,< because she did not do that *to me as a mother* to her child. She did that herself; and just like the media, that scatter their good deeds and their atrocities without any regard for the person on the receiving end (and it always reaches them, sooner or later).«

Anyone who has heard Theweleit's voice during one of his lectures knows what sort of dimension he conjures up. The mother radio has transferred to his voice and resonates with the rhythm of his sentences. Like a maternal trace, or a vocal gold thread, that runs through his entire work. I believe these matrilinear lines of inheritance imply a form of very healthy media, a mediumistic form of the transference of feelings, thoughts, and memories based on a nonviolent way of loving. If we were to discover that the mother radio frequency was the basis of all the primary forms of media that connect us all – that have shaped our perceptual spaces ever more powerfully since the invention of the letterpress, print media, telegraphy, the radio, the telephone, music stereos, TV, cinema, computers, the internet, and smartphones – and if we could recognize

the possibility of a living transmission and receiving process, we could help pave the way for a media age that no longer needs the victim Eurydice to lay a line to Hades. And is that not tantamount to the dawning of a new era? An era of ›telepathic< connection between everyone, which, according to Leary, must stem from the age of electric consciousness? By writing about these connections during my fellowship, I delved ever deeper into a state of awareness of my own, via which my inner receiving center – and I only realize that in retrospect – was searching for the mother radio frequency. One night, I woke up and felt like I was ›receiving.< Perhaps this was the very state that Johanna N. Wintsch translated as radio waves in her work. I felt like I was floating ten centimeters above my bed and receiving frequencies, still connected to my dream consciousness. To put it more succinctly, I felt like my subconscious corresponded to the subconsciouses of all the other thirty-five or so artists present at, and for the most part sleeping and dreaming at, Akademie Schloss Solitude. It was as if I were a receiver of frequencies coming from a dreaming collective. The evening prior, I had played music with Jewish musician Yuval Shenhar. He had his electric guitar and a notebook, and I had my violin, which was connected

to his computer via a cable that enabled him to cut, loop, and manipulate my sound. We had also smoked a small joint beforehand, which clearly enhanced our ability to reach a state of ecstasy. Through the sound, we felt like we were each slipping into the body and soul of the other, essentially becoming each other, dissolving into a transpersonal world of sound. We formed a Theweleit-esque third body, with the help of music, electricity, media connection, and drugs. It seemed rather hippieish, akin to the 500,000 »flower children« in Woodstock. Did they not also have a third body, a »group mind,« formed from electronic music, drugs, and peaceful collectiveness?

Somewhat dazed, I stumbled through the Akademie's corridors back to my studio. I felt that I was close to being in a long sought-after conscious state. But it was only during the night, waking from my dream, that I saw it clearly. I had reached the end of my quest for a new form of communication, a quest I had begun as a child and that had become even more important since my mother's death. My sounds were a kind of umbilical cord that I had used to communicate with Juval – no detour via words was necessary – and to share across subconscious frequencies. Perhaps this is the form of communication that connects us to our mothers when we are fetuses in utero. A transmission on the mother radio frequency, via waves coming not from cognitive reason, but from the amygdala; a form of communication that I had also experienced on LSD trips during raves. Moments when suddenly everyone and everything becomes connected, leading to psychedelic bliss. Being out of it. So I lay there, enveloped in a cloud of happiness substances and felt an inner eye opening up. Just like Johanna N. Wintsch with *Je suis radio*, I had the feeling of becoming one with the radio frequencies that were pulsing through me. Yet I did not feel like I was on drugs, but a sense of extreme

clarity. The waves' materiality made it feel like something very concrete was at work and I understood why Freud had thought about whether, in the same vein as sound waves or X-rays, a »physical equivalent« for these »frequencies of the subconscious« could be lying there waiting to be discovered.

Something else about that experience is important and could indeed be the blueprint for a transformative development in media technology that could make it possible to tune all our transmitters to receive the mother radio. The key realization was that I, in this moment, had the feeling that I was finally severing the umbilical cord to my mother, and that this cut had actually cleared the line for the mother radio frequency. A separation as a prerequisite of connection. A successful grieving process. A step in a successful psychoanalytic healing process – in the context of the transference of childhood feelings onto the analyst via the cable of free word association – that leads to freeing from the Oedipal entanglement with our first love objects. And, to those who depend upon it, it is exactly this entanglement that also means that love can only be felt through dependencies and projections, that quickly lead to a propensity to violence. If, however, we could carry out this step of severing the umbilical cord on a media technology level, the line could be cleared for the mother radio telecommunication, which is based on a form of love free from illusion. Societal networking via a new primary medium would edge that bit closer to becoming real and the libidinous tangles that, according to Theweleit, formed the foundations of German fascism, would be dissolved in a media age where we merge together to form a third body. This third body forms a worldwide network using the mother radio frequency that connects us to the underworld and the ancestral line via a media-driven relationship, instead of via the soul of a lover sacrificed time and again.

Luke Wilkins works as a writer and musician and develops transdisciplinary performances. He received his bachelor's degree from the Swiss Literature Institute at Bern University of Arts, Switzerland and a master's degree in free improvisation by Fred Frith and Alfred Zimmerlin from the School of Music Basel, Switzerland. In 2018, his first novel *Jeff* was published by the publishing house Derk Janßen and his »media-theory-book« *Auf den Flügeln dieser Lieder* will be published in autumn 2024 by the publishing house Telegramme Verlag.