

Abstract

This article focuses on three of Beat Furrer's works described as opera or music theatre: *Begehren* (2001), *FAMA* (2004/2005) and *Wüstenbuch* (2010). Each of these pieces sets texts from Roman, contemporary and historical authors in exploration of the liminal spaces between life and death, and the possible transitions between them. In *Wüstenbuch*, one such text is included from the Papyrus Berlin 3024, known as the source of the Ancient Egyptian philosophical text, 'The Dispute Between a Man and his *Ba*': a reflection on the meaning and value of life, and the transition between life and death. Furrer's compositional style does not offer a linear narrative on such questions but rather multiple perspectives and tableaux that each call the others and themselves into question. In order to explore this, and understand what the meeting and interchange between the different texts and authors offers within Furrer's music context, I outline a method of 'listening intertextually' in order to hear the liminal spaces not only within but between these compositions. I consider the hybrid and hypertexts that arise within the music, and the ways that they can be therefore considered—as in the subtitle often given to *FAMA*—a 'drama of listening'.

Keywords: music theatre, opera, intertextuality, listening.



In this article, I outline 'listening intertextually' as a method of discerning a theme of liminal spaces that emerge from compositional process in a number of Beat Furrer's music theatre works: encounters between life and death, memory and reality, sleeping and waking. The presence of *inbetweenness* is, of course, indicated by the narratives the three works I discuss (*Begehren*, 2001; *FAMA*, 2004-5 and *Wüstenbuch*, 2010), but I also consider this a theme that transcends individual works and can be read across them. Listening intertextually is therefore posed not as a means of discerning music-analytical detail about each of the operas, but rather as a process that is itself represented in Furrer's music theatre works. To understand this, I explore how the Julia Kristeva's concept of 'intertextuality' can be understood through a reading of her engagement with the Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin. Therefore I employ 'intertextuality' as a way of concurrently engaging with the multiple texts that make up the libretti of these operas, the way that themes and ideas are shared across them, and the parallel pasts and present moments that result from this. I aim to show that the representation of the internal world in each of these pieces is central to their narratives and therefore to their signification: of a particular ambiguity that evades definition even as it represents a central component of human experience.

Between Life and Death

Liminalities underpin the concept of the *Ba*, which appears in one of the texts chosen by Furrer for the libretto of *Wüstenbuch*. The term *Ba* is usually translated as 'soul' in English¹

¹ For example in this translation: University College London, *Egyptian Literary Compositions of the Middle Kingdom and Second Intermediate Period* (London: University College London, 2003), <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/museums-static/digitalegypt/literature/midegsummaries.html#soul>, accessed 28.06.2023.

and can be understood as, ‘signifying either the manifestation of the power of a being or a being whose power is manifest’, able to leave the body after death.² In the Ancient Egyptian philosophical text, ‘The Dispute between a Man and his *Ba*’, both the man and the *Ba* consider aspects of life and death: whether the living should have control over when to choose to enter the afterlife if life on earth is unbearable; how and when to endure difficulty in life in the knowledge of the future afterlife. While the man argues for death, the *Ba* does not so much make the case for life but rather for ambiguity, for patiently waiting for death in knowledge of an afterlife. This text is partially contained within a document now labelled as ‘Papyrus Berlin 3024’, which is how Furrer refers to it as a source for the libretto of *Wüstenbuch*. Such ambiguities and liminalities, however, also underpin the characterisation of the spaces between life and death that are explored in the three operas this article, and one example of the way that these spaces are signalled is the combining of texts from multiple authors in their libretti. Indeed, this meeting of texts characterises most of Furrer’s operas—music that he rather describes as *MusikTheater*.³

In *Wüstenbuch*, a translation into German of the text of ‘Papyrus Berlin 3024’ by Jan Assmann is combined with extracts from the fragmented text by Ingeborg Bachmann, extracts from the Spanish poet Antonio Machado and the Roman poet Lucretius, and further text by the Austrian librettist Händl Klaus. *Wüstenbuch* is not the first of Furrer’s operatic works to draw together texts from multiple authors. *FAMA* and *Begehren* also draw on texts from Roman poets: both from Ovid, and *Begehren* additionally from Virgil. Similarly to *Wüstenbuch*, both also incorporate modernist texts, with *FAMA* using Arthur Schnitzler’s writing and *Begehren* taking from novelist Cesare Pavese and Günter Eich. Evident throughout is the recurring combination of the mythological and the realist, the intrigue of the historical and the asceticism of modernist story-telling, the meeting of the present with the memory of things that are not within living memory. These combinations of (mostly) absent librettists—and of texts from multiple sources that create new, hybrid texts—also hint at something of the aesthetics of Furrer’s music that is heard in combination with them: that his music further articulates readings, positions, or memories through a kaleidoscope that proposes many more possible examples of these things.

Begehren (Desire) is, of the three works under discussion, the most recognisable story as it stages the Orpheus myth. The opera centres on Orpheus’ journey out of the underworld, followed by Eurydice, during which he should not turn to look at her or else send her back again from the world of the living. The synopsis of the opera describes the two characters searching for each other and themselves on the level of memory rather than in space and time. The famous moment of the Orpheus myth, in which Eurydice’s fate is decided, in fact

² Louis V. Zabkar, *A Study of the Ba Concept in Ancient Egyptian Texts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), pp. 161–2.

³ The designation ‘music theatre’ unfortunately recalls ‘musical theatre’ in English, creating the potential for confusion as to the musical style itself rather than a clarification that the dramatic elements of the work can be found in the music. In the score for *FAMA*, Furrer also uses the designation ‘Hörtheater’ (theatre of listening) whereas in *Begehren* and *Wüstenbuch* he uses ‘MusikTheater’, which suggests that ‘MusikTheater’ is the more likely genre designation, while ‘Hörtheatre’ refers more directly to the plot of *FAMA*.

occurs in the first scene of the work: ‘this moment becomes almost frozen in several repetitions’.⁴ This is represented in the libretto in the text assigned to Orpheus:

was war / was gewesen ist / wieder / Leere / durchquert / Es sei zu Ende
(what was / what has been / again / vacuum / crossed / it’s over).⁵

From this single moment, the scenes of the opera explore some of the many ways of understanding this event, represented visually by the distance of the characters from each other on stage and musically by the relative spoken and sung content of the vocal parts.

This image serves as a parallel for the other works I describe. In *FAMA*, a young woman, Else, is forced into prostitution to pay off her father’s debts. Again, the opera is staged in what Furrer describes as a ‘single moment’. The echoes of the voices in Fama’s (Rumour’s) mythical house reverberate through the voices and ensemble within the piece, interrogating Else’s visions of herself: ‘[w]hat occurs in a place for the exchange of feelings or sounds, as in Else’s head or in Fama’s house, can hardly even be summarised.’⁶ Of this, musicologist Daniel Ender writes that Ovid’s account of Fama’s house ‘does not distinguish where a sound comes from, does not ask what it is, accepts everything that comes to it, and allows it to reverberate within, transformed into a gentle resonance.’⁷ This reverberation of sound is what is characterised by the sometimes-subtitle given to the piece: ‘the drama of listening’.⁸

Martin Iddon considers the idea of listening—read through Jean-Luc Nancy and Gaston Bachelard—in the differences in the accounts of Fama’s house of Ovid and Virgil. He writes, ‘listening is always a memory or an echo’,⁹ a description which serves the listening encounters in Furrer’s operatic worlds. Iddon’s interpretation sides with Ovid, as does Furrer, describing Fama as ‘an accurate witness of what she has heard’,¹⁰ considering further that ‘the aural turns inward before it turns outward’.¹¹ Similarly, Else in Furrer’s *FAMA* considers images of herself within a mirror (scene 6), and within her own mind (scene 7), as well as in the voices of others (scene 8). In scene 3, Else performs what Furrer describes as a ‘virtuoso speech

⁴ Beat Furrer, *Begehren*: synopsis, trans. by Martin Iddon (Vienna: Kairos, 2006), 0012432KAI, liner notes, p. 18, <https://www.kairos-music.com/sites/default/files/downloads/0012432KAI.pdf>, accessed 28.06.2023.

⁵ *Begehren*: Libretto, 0012432KAI, liner notes, pp. 12–17.

⁶ Beat Furrer, *FAMA*: Synopsis, trans. by Martin Iddon (Vienna: Kairos, 2006), 0012562KAI, liner notes, p.20 <https://www.kairos-music.com/sites/default/files/downloads/0012562KAI.pdf>, accessed 28.06.2023.

⁷ Daniel Ender, ‘Messages from inside sound: Traces of Beat Furrer’s compositional hearing’, in *FAMA*, liner notes, pp. 16–18; p. 16.

⁸ For example, this subtitle was given to the work in the London Sinfonietta’s presentation of *FAMA* in 2016 <https://londonsinfonietta.org.uk/whats-on/beat-furrer-fama>. This subtitle is also used to evoke Furrer’s entire *oeuvre* in the essay: Marie Luise Maintz, ‘The Drama of Listening: A Portrait of Beat Furrer’, trans. by Elizabeth Robinson (Kassel: Bärenreiter-Verlag, 2016), <https://www.baerenreiter.com/en/catalogue/20th21st-century-music/beat-furrer/more/essay/#content>. This subtitle does not appear in the score, although could be considered a loose translation of the term ‘Hörtheater’.

⁹ Martin Iddon, ‘Inside Fama’s House: listening, intimacy, and the noises of the body’, in *Noise in and as Music*, ed. by Aaron Cassidy and Aaron Einbond (Huddersfield: University of Huddersfield Press, 2013), pp. 99–117; p. 104.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

aria’—an extended passage for the unsung voice—only part-way through which she only comes to recognise herself in the sound of her voice returning to her from outside of her body.¹² This could perhaps be understood as a musical representation of the understanding listening as a component of subjectivity. Iddon reflects Bachelard’s understanding of this, remarking on ‘being in the resonant chamber of the self that is constituted in selfhood only by the recurring echo of the self itself’.¹³ On a number of occasions in *FAMA*, Else fails to immediately recognise herself in her own voice or appearance, only to come to recognition of her reflection, or echo.¹⁴

Returning to *Wüstenbuch*, the opera presents a journey into the desert. In what could be thought of as 12 vignettes along the journey, Furrer states that the characters of the opera ‘encounter their own desert in the form of an absence of memory, the phantasmagoria of their own memories and ultimately, in the final scene, on a very elementary level: a reflection of a utopia of human existence, a just society.’¹⁵ In each scene, the quoted texts in their original languages (except the Egyptian text) are framed or reflected upon by texts from Händl Klaus, which function as streams of consciousness. In this way the ‘historical’ or remembered, and the search for this, are more clearly signalled than in the other two works. In each scene where such texts meet, spoken and sung text also meet each other as the articulation of structural elements (which follow the spoken texts) and instrumental sounds (which follow the sung elements of the libretto). These meetings open up spaces of memory, reflection, and possibility. Of this, the Berliner Festspiele writes that,

In Egyptian mythology, the desert is a metaphor for the foreign and at the same time for death. There, but also in the European tradition (cf. the ice deserts of Caspar David Friedrich or the civilization deserts of abandoned industrial plants), the desert functions as a projection surface for the fear of losing memories, of emptiness and the stranger.¹⁶

The theoretical emptiness and resonance of the desert in *Wüstenbuch* might also be the domain of the *Ba*. It is also an analogue of Fama’s house, where resonance is the echo through which the internal self is re-encountered as other; in the desert there is only the other: nothing returns to the self. The liminality of each of these spaces is amplified by the meeting of the multiple texts in each libretto. This is expressed in one of Klaus’s texts that appears in section XI:

unausweichlich alles
kam mir

*inevitably everything
came to me*

¹² Beat Furrer, *FAMA: Hörtheater für großes Ensemble, acht Stimmen und Schauspieler:in* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2005), Score, p. 72.

¹³ Iddon, p. 117.

¹⁴ These considerations of listening are found in Furrer’s ideal staging of the work: the audience inside and the performers outside a box-structure that has rotating sound-absorbent and –reflective panels. This has never been realised, but rather only staged with the performers inside the box, only emphasising internalised listening.

¹⁵ Beat Furrer quoted in Maerz Musik, *Wüstenbuch: Programme Note* (Berlin: Berliner Festspiele, 2010) https://www.berlinerfestspiele.de/en/berliner-festspiele/programm/bfs-gesamtprogramm/programmdetail_14342.html, accessed 28.06.2023.

¹⁶ Berliner Festspiele, *Beat Furrer: Wüstenbuch* (Berlin: Kultur Stiftung des Bundes, n.d.) https://www.kulturstiftung-des-bundes.de/de/projekte/musik_und_klang/detail/beat_furrer_wuestenbuch.html.

in die Quere
das nicht mehr zu sehen
und darum
schlagartig
unberechenbar
geworden und

*in the way
that one no longer sees
and therefore
suddenly
became unpredictable
and...*¹⁷

Intertextuality in and as music

These three brief introductions to the operas and their liminal spaces also highlight intertextualities hinted at in the introduction. Intertextuality suggests itself as an approach through which to analyse and understand Furrer's operas by the amalgamation of texts from multiple authors in each of these works. However, these texts are not themselves the totality of the pieces and can be considered intertextually in light of the multiple additional 'texts'—music, vocality, staging—that intersect and overlap with them in the experience of the music. While the term 'intertextuality' has become familiar in artistic criticism, it bears tracing its origin to draw out its relevance to Furrer's music.

The term intertextuality was first used in Julia Kristeva's 1966 essay *Word, Dialogue and Novel*.¹⁸ She proposes the phrase as one that advances the discussion of the meeting of different positions, ideologies, ideas and worldviews in written forms, and also as one that might supersede the term *intersubjectivity* that indicates such meetings between the authors of texts rather than the texts themselves; as she writes: '...any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another'.¹⁹ More than just a frequently-cited sentence, this quotation also demonstrates intertextuality, reflected in Roland Barthes' claim that, 'the text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture'.²⁰ But in addition, Kristeva's claim also reflects her reading of Bakhtin, who writes of 'language conceived as ideologically saturated, language as a worldview'.²¹ This is part of his conception of the dialogic nature of language as 'a struggle among socio-linguistic points of view'.²² This struggle finds its meeting-place within the text, which is characterised by Bakhtin as heteroglossic:

at any given moment of its historical existence, language is heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological

¹⁷ Beat Furrer, *Wüstenbuch: Libretto* (Vienna: Kairos, 2014), 0013312KAI, liner notes, pp. 16–25; p24, <https://www.kairos-music.com/sites/default/files/downloads/0013312KAI.pdf>, accessed 28.06.2023, (English my translation).

¹⁸ Julia Kristeva, 'Word, Dialogue and Novel', in *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. by L. S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), pp. 64–91 and in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. by Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986) pp. 34–61; my page numbers are all from the latter edition.

¹⁹ Kristeva, 1986, p. 37.

²⁰ Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), pp. 142–148; p. 146.

²¹ Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel', in *The Dialogic Imagination* ed. by Michael Holquist, trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 269–422; p. 271.

²² Bakhtin (1981), p. 273.

groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles, and so forth, all given bodily form.”²³

To listen to intertextuality as represented by such heteroglossia is therefore to listen to all of these elements concurrently. Such ‘languages’ can further be subject to ‘re-accentuation’²⁴ which may involve a translation of medium (such as of poetic images into prosaic ones²⁵). Following Bakhtin and in conjunction with Barthes, Kristeva views this struggle as evident between multiple texts that are not limited to written and spoken language.

Of clear relevance to Furrer’s work are the meeting of different ‘languages’ (which in this case includes music), and the interface between the past and the present within the text. Not all of the ‘languages’ present are in their original form: many have been translated into German. Nevertheless, the heteroglossia of these languages as individual worldviews remains, even refracted through the work of the translator. In the case of the ‘Dispute between a Man and his *Ba*’, the original language is not accessible; nevertheless the meeting of different viewpoints, as described in the quotation from Bakhtin, still takes place between the sources of the libretti, augmented by their meeting in and as music as a ‘mosaic’ or a ‘tissue of quotations’.

Kristeva develops the concept of intertextuality to consider: ‘a permutation of texts [...] in the space of a given text, several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another’.²⁶ To introduce the concept of desire into semiotics she proposes the terms *genotext* and *phenotext*; while *phenotext* explores the symbolic components of language, the *genotext* denotes those aspects of signification that are beyond spoken and written language communication, that relate to the body and the internal world. A comparison can be made with Barthes’ conception of the ‘grain of the voice’: ‘the body in the voice as it sings’.²⁷ Instrumental music, too, can be understood in terms of its ‘grain’ which signifies not through language but ‘the certainty of the body’²⁸—which is communicated to through the act of listening.

In *Word, Dialogue and Novel*, Kristeva had already developed the term ‘ambivalence’ which can be compared to the paradigmatic axis of meaning in semiotics. This is a further reading from Bakhtin, and she claims: ‘the term ‘ambivalence’ implies the insertion of history (society) into a text and of this text into history; for the writer, they are one and the same’,²⁹ and later that, ‘everything written today unveils either the possibility or impossibility of reading and rewriting history’.³⁰ This further makes a case for the relevance and suitability of these concepts for exploring the phenomena of intertextuality, re-accentuation, genotextual meaning and ambivalence in Furrer’s work: indeed these concepts intersect each other as a

²³ Ibid., p. 291.

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 419–422.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 421.

²⁶ Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), p. 36

²⁷ Roland Barthes, ‘The Grain of the Voice’, in *Image-Music-Text* (1977), pp. 179–189; p. 188.

²⁸ Ibid. p. 189.

²⁹ Kristeva, 1986, p. 41.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 56.

musical intertextuality and as intertextuality in and as music: the kaleidoscope of perspectives on the scenes presented by Furrer is refracted through precisely this meeting point.

Listening Intertextually

While these ideas of intertextuality can be explored in every scene of each of these works, here I listen to just one scene of each opera to consider which of their aspects can be compared, contrasted, and read through this Kristevan theoretical lens. I have selected these scenes because liminal spaces are represented in each of them: the moments between life and death, dreaming and waking, and memory and reality respectively. In each of these scenes there is also a prominent tension between speech and singing—a feature of Furrer’s compositional approach in his operatic works. In each short example, I consider the texts that are heard (or, in the case of *FAMA*, echoed or resonated), the roles of speech and singing, and the use of music to articulate the meeting points and interstices of the operas’ worldviews. While staging can also form part of these considerations, by focusing on listening to the music I also give space to the ‘drama of listening’—an indication of the genotextual component of Furrer’s idea of *MusikTheater*.

Begehren, scene IV

The opening sound and word of *Begehren* is *Schatten* (shadows). The unvoiced vocal sound ‘sch’ invites an explosion of pointillistic sound from the ensemble: repeated, quick and fragmented gestures that create a canvas over which Orpheus speaks the text of the libretto, describing the journey out of the underworld. All instrumental sound in the piece, and arguably the entire opera, comes from this sound. There is a direct link between this moment and the music in scene IV. This scene begins with another such explosion of activity; spoken and sung voices that mingle with the instrumental sound. In this scene the chorus comprise all of the voices that are heard; the text is mostly spoken and moves in the libretto from German to Latin, while in the music these languages are layered with vocalised sounds and with sudden sung syllables (for example, in bb. 35–38).³¹ These multiple contrasts layered in the chorus are then further refracted in the instrumental parts, which in each part comprise micro-repetitions that echo the murmuring and whispering qualities of the choral parts. The negotiated journey between life and death undertaken by the main characters is thus reified as a musical push and pull between elements that emerge from the ensemble as quickly as they disappear. The tension between death and life is evidenced as one between speech and singing—which are juxtaposed throughout the opera—but also the role of the voice in this texture of constant movement as there is a further tension between its emergence from the ensemble sound and its submergence beneath it.

Moments of almost-stasis interrupt this cacophony, such as in b. 211 where ‘air’ sound takes over the voices and instruments. These moments are not so much pauses as punctuations in the activity: a dying away or moving away in terms of the musical space, from which the mosaic of elements—led by the voices—re-emerges. The beginning of such a moment of re-emergence is described by Furrer in a performance direction to the choir in b. 216 where he writes: ‘always allow the sound to emerge from the breath-sound and then end as a breath-

³¹ Beat Furrer, *Begehren: Musiktheater nach texten von Cesare Pavese, Günther Eich, Ovid and Virgil* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2001), score, p. 107 for Scene IV.

sound. always as *dal niente*. almost breathing ‘as a choir’ (sic).³² The space articulated in these moments is therefore a space of memory: it is unclear whether the sound that emerges from this breath—just as from the word *Schatten*—is representative of a real state beyond breathing, or a memory of life that is no longer accessible. This is further articulated in the German text that opens the scene in the soprano and tenor voices:

<i>so rief sie, entschwand Plötzlich</i>	so she cried out, suddenly
<i>nach der anderen Seite dem Blick</i>	disappearing
<i>wie dünner Rauch wirbelnd in die Lüfte verfliegt</i>	to the other side of the view
<i>und sah ihn, der vergebens nach Schatten griff</i>	like thin smoke swirling into the air
	and saw him reaching for shadows in
	vain
<i>und so viel noch sagen wollte</i>	and wanted still so much to say
<i>nicht wieder</i>	not again ³³

The space of memory is here the space between the world and the underworld. The aspects of repetition in this scene emphasise the way in which Eurydice lives and re-lives this singular moment; sung tones never truly break out from vocalised speech, the ‘empty’ space is filled with the sound of breath and wind; even the ensemble seem thus trapped in a cycle of recurrence between frenetic, repetitive activity, and stasis, from which there is no eventual resolution: not again.

FAMA, scene 5

In scene 5 of *FAMA*, Else sees a vision in which she imagines herself dead. At first she imagines it is dark, or night-time outside of the hotel. She asks ‘*Wer wird weinen wenn ich tot bin?*’ (who will cry when I am dead?), to then see herself lying dead surrounded by candles. Looking out of the window, she sees a regatta taking place, which also has the characteristics of a burial at sea for her body. The scene begins with two flutes who perform alternating whistle tones, *dal niente*, and who are given the instruction: ‘*bewegen sich langsam in der raum*’ (move slowly about the room);³⁴ in the intended staging this therefore creates the opening and closing of space and distance between the listener and the sound, as well as the effect of fading in and out. These tones are therefore heard as if from a distance. Onto this sound other instruments are layered who perform quiet and fragmented interjections which coalesce together so that larger gestures emerge, only to return to the high and quiet backdrop of the flute tones. Here, the impression is of reaching for something that is on the edge of sound and also on the edge of memory; like waking from a dream. The quiet tones themselves are ‘reaching’, on the edge of audibility and stability, and as more instruments join the texture the music ‘reaches’ for a texture that feels promised and then abruptly cut-off. As this ‘dream’, or texture, comes into view, the music is building a repertoire of ideas, sounds and gestures. As in the scene from *Begehren* described above, these are micro-repetitions, they are not regulated but rather create the experience is of moving around a space in which one encounters and re-encounters these musical ideas.

³² ‘*klang immer aus dem atemgeräusch entstehen lassen und wieder als atemgeräusch enden lassen. immer als dal niente. quasi “chorish” atmen*’ (my translation). *Begehren*, score, p. 143.

³³ *Begehren*: Libretto, liner notes, p. 14

³⁴ *FAMA*, score, p. 166.

Else's voice enters as whispering and then speaking as these micro-repetitions emerge. From this musical tapestry further emerges a duet between two bass clarinets that articulate interlocking patterns against the texture of the flutes and strings who, when the bass clarinets are speaking, respond mostly with notes in a very high tessitura and with harmonics. These extremes of register and moments of repetition are cold, fragile, and otherworldly. They invite description by some of the terms used by Orpheus to describe the underworld in the first scene of *Begeheren*: 'flüchtig...kalt...leer...starr'. Thus one can imagine in these moments the emptiness of the space in which they resonate—an emptiness of human activity, which can only be glimpsed from the window—and therefore also perhaps the feeling that grounds Else's longing for the death that she has experienced in her vision. At the end of the scene, percussive sounds in the strings almost invoke—or can be interpreted as—footsteps, as she wakes from this vision. These sounds reflect the literal footsteps of the flautists whose sounds and movement opened the scene.

This scene perhaps has the most in common with an echo—or the most prominent qualities of an echo—of any in the opera. There are some resonances of the other scenes in the work where the music beyond the text is the focus, such as scene 3, in which Else only recognises her spoken reflections as her own voice part-way through speaking them. In this scene, she eventually recognises her vision as a dream, stating '*Es hat sich doch gar nichts geändert und mir ist wohler*' (nothing has changed at all and I feel better).³⁵ The echoes present are not only the resonances of Fama's house (the hotel in which Else is staying) but within her memory. In this scene, one might also hear an echo or a refraction of that from *Begeheren*, described above: the space between life and death, and the echoes of the wind and breath in that space between the world and the underworld are also encountered here in Else's vision.

Wüstenbuch, scene VIII–IX

Scene IX of *Wüstenbuch* is the scene in which the text from the 'Dispute between a man and his *Ba*' is encountered, although it opens with text from Klaus describing the bodily experience of waking from a dream, which links this scene to both the previous scene of this opera (VIII) and also that of *FAMA*, described above. Scene VIII opens with a regular, pulsed, breathy tone in one flute part, interjected by *sfz* gestures from another flute; these gestures are eventually also expanded into the piano, percussion and strings. After a time, the flute pulse no longer returns, replaced by the voices who sing a series of tones together, dying away to leave only the ensemble gestures: again, here, a series of small repetitions that fit together irregularly. The voices return, their regular rhythm and the harmonies created between them in direct contrast to the ensemble gestures, and a moment of unity. This wholeness is the act of the body waking, whereupon memory of the dream before is lost. This is the moment at the beginning of scene IX where, in the desert, the characters confront the loss of memory along with the concept of time, leaving only the contemplation of the possibility of death and what might lie beyond it.

Here is where the Egyptian text is heard, clearly spoken and foregrounded much more than any other text in the libretto. The contrast between the vocal ensemble tones and the spoken text is therefore heightened in this moment. Rather than the activity that follows Scene VIII—

³⁵ *FAMA*: Libretto, liner notes, p. 14

waking from a dream to contemplate death—this is a recurring contemplation of death in sound that was always just below the surface: the liminal space has become a musical space. Again, a series of sounds that are high, fragile, and distant open the instrumental music: in this scene emanating first from the sound of bowed percussion. The instrumental language of Scene VIII is revisited rather as an echo, the instrumental gestures much quieter and here connected not through pulses but moments of quiet sustain. The repetition of the text, *Der Tod steht heute vor mir* (death stands before me today), is reflected in the repetition of these ensemble gestures, the rhythm or periodicity of the scene moving between spoken text and instrumental gesture in slow cycles. Rather than exact repetitions, these are also breaths: moving between activity and imperfect stasis, creating the impression of a moment to which one returns and will return again. The link established across all of these scenes between sound, voice, text and form further emphasises how within these operas these ideas meet in an extended musical moment. The operas themselves *are* that moment, although they also propose that there are many more such moments that have passed and are yet to be imagined and experienced. In listening, the audience experience the meeting of the texts that form the librettos, their musical expression, and the ideas of the past and the present, memory and experience, that are refracted through them. Life and death become a concurrent past, present and future that are at once both known and unknown. This is articulated by Eurydice in scene IX of *Begehren*:

nie erreichbar / was ersehnt / nicht hier / nirgendwo / deine Einsamkeit / verdoppelt die
meine
(never attainable / what's longed for / not here / nowhere / your isolation / doubles
mine)³⁶

The imperfect unions that mark the moments of stasis in Scene IX of *Wüstenbuch* further return in Scene XI which begins with close pitch relationships between the sung voices and instruments that weave above and below each other. Yet here, these are followed by a chorus of a mixture of spoken, sung and whispered tones that also produce a collage of sound reminiscent of the cacophony of voices heard in the space between the world and the underworld in the scene from *Begehren*. Repeated short upward rising and downward falling gestures create textures of micro-repetitions that are shattered by moments of punctuation from the voices and the ensemble. This repetitious element is emphasised more here than in the two previous scenes described, orchestrated for the ensemble as a whole rather than only within individual parts. The musical texture of voices and instruments is similarly emphasised and can be heard as a development of such textures in both *Begehren* and in *FAMA*. This echo and development of the compositional approach of the previous works can then be heard through the music of Scene IX: where the space between the world and the underworld was previously articulated as an imaginary, or otherworldly, space, in *Wüstenbuch* it has now made its way into the world where it is encountered in the desert. Rather than as an encounter with an echo or resonance, the voices of the opera may announce: *Der Tod steht heute vor mir*.

Some conclusions: listening to liminal spaces

³⁶ *Begehren*, libretto, p. 16.

Life and death, negotiated in the dispute of the man with and his *Ba*, are here encountered as a musical space that has been articulated by Furrer across these three works. The repetitious and heterophonic use of small and fragmented the ensemble writing themselves form part of an overall structure of blurred repetition and heterophony: meso-structures within macro-structures that create an overall stasis; cycling between different spheres and ideas of activity but never developing and moving beyond them. Sung moments that punctuate these textures guide the instruments who follow these as starting points for trajectories of different facets of musical sound, while speech guides the overall structure in terms of the operas themselves. This music can be experienced as a kind of pointillism that is itself a description of a single point; on listening to *Wüstenbuch*, this can also be heard as an articulation of a point that was encountered from different directions in the preceding two operas.

While life and death, their perception, and the spaces they occupy, are depicted explicitly in these three scenes, the liminality of these spaces is also established compositionally in Furrer's work. I have described this as a listening experience in this way to demonstrate how this is not only a case of the articulation of a narrative programme in relation to the theme of just one of these operas, nor a setting of the texts chosen from the multiple authors whom Furrer takes as his librettists, but the establishment of a musical space in which the ideas of life and death reverberate as genotextual meaning. The relationship between speech and singing is just one such facet of this relationship: Furrer consistently connects sung and voiced tones to instrumental sound within each scene, and spoken and unvoiced sounds to the structural elements that signify changes of pace, of scene and of viewpoints in the operas.

This, then, relates back to the *Ba*, which is a concept that has been defined and is also undefinable; a genotextual meaning. There are other genotextual meanings that are comparable across the other operas too: the distance of memory, and the tension involved in bringing it to expression; this is a process that is repeatedly shown to straddle what is in and beyond the world. The tension between speech and singing is again just one such example of this. The intertextuality of the operas is therefore not only to do with the textual sources but the interconnectedness of these compositional elements. This is rather a part of the texture of experience that Furrer is able to represent on the stage: resonance of and within the self. In this way, intertextuality is shown to be a productive and creative compositional strategy that achieves more than the sum of its parts: each of these operas is, to use Bakhtin's term, a re-accentuation of meaning from historical texts. This is of course linked to the change of medium from prose and poetry to opera, but also present in their re-making not as narratives of the past, or of events that have already passed, but rather as present moments that are made and re-made, lived and re-lived. This, further, is the process of ambivalence: in so doing, Furrer inserts each of these moments into a worldview (after Bakhtin) that belongs to his present moment.

I am listening for a kaleidoscope of references, and hearing the panoply of Furrer's work as a further instance of this phantasmagoria. But this also has to do with Furrer's rethinking of what *MusikTheater* is and what it represents—the 'drama of listening'. The internal conflict between inside/outside, known/unknown, life/death, familiar/strange is staged by Furrer across these three operas: his compositional style does not offer linear narratives but concurrent multiple perspectives and tableaux that each call the others and themselves into

question even as they advance their own arguments and perspectives. In such music there are no conclusions, only the proposition of spaces beyond even those that are unfolding in the moment.