The frequency of imagination: auditory distress and aurality in contemporary music theatre
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Chapter 2
The Listener’s Response: Modes of Listening and Perspective

In chapter one, I argued that auditory distress is inherent to every auditory perception as a result of the necessary intervening and excessive nature of sound. This distress accounts for the urge of the listener to respond through listening. By referring to the ideas of Schafer (1977) and Truax (1984), I have introduced a cognitive mechanism in the listener’s aural competency that helps her or him to channel the auditory distress into desired intensities. Soundscape studies offer us further a conceptual framework for explaining a particular system of response to auditory distress in the listener: the modes of listening.

These modes or ‘modalities’ of listening materialise ideal ways of channelling the auditory stimuli as a result of our cognitive coping mechanism. In order to make this model operative for the analysis of the listener’s responses and meaningful auditory experiences in the theatre, a two-fold explanation is needed. On the one hand, it should encompass how the spectator feels addressed as listening subject by sound and its auditory distress in the theatrical situation, and on the other, why she or he feels compelled to make sense of this. What is particularly needed is a means to account for the listener’s position between the authoritative power of sound and the mechanisms of theatre that already imply certain positions in the process of signification.

In the present chapter, I will offer such an explanation through an understanding of the interplay between the listener’s ‘attention’ and the theatre’s ‘perspectives’ in the modes of listening. The modes of listening, as discussed in Soundscape studies, present us with a set of analytical tools to discuss the listener’s responses to auditory distress. These modes occur in our everyday auditory encounters and are perhaps uncommon to the music-theatrical context that purports a highly controlled listening situation. Nevertheless, I argue that these listening modes need to be questioned because of performance practices that make us aware of the ways we respond to auditory distress. Using The Wooster Group’s La Didone (2007) as my case study, I will demonstrate how a music theatre performance channels the auditory distress by itself, through its specific structure of address. In this address, the performance offers perspectives that manage the listener’s attention.

As a first step in the listener’s response to auditory distress, I will explain how the listening attention, directed by the theatre’s perspectives in listening, attributes to the way the listener relates to the sound or music in her or his listening modes. As a second step, I will argue that these modes involve a positioning of the listener, with which she or he makes the experience of sound or music meaningful. I will then show how this need for a meaningful experience is a result of the insufficiency that is inherent to the act of listening.
If, in the theatre, a perspective fails to provide a coherent structure or sufficient meaning to compensate for this insufficiency, the listener might become aware of the caused auditory distress, and of her or his role in responding to it. As such, this type of (music) theatre lays bare the positions and the concomitant signification processes in which the listener is actively engaged. Through the modes of listening, I then argue that in these signification processes the listener finds temporary stability as listening subject to the insufficiency or deficit of meaning.

Hence, in this chapter, I discuss the modes of listening as a means to understand how the listener deals with auditory distress in the theatre, and how music theatre can play upon this mechanism. As a departure point, I first take up the notion of the listening subject, as defined in the previous chapter, with which I propose a shift in my argument with regard to the listening modes from everyday soundscapes to the theatre. Central to this examination is how the listening modes are dependent on the listener’s attention, as suggested by Soundscape studies. Jonathan Crary (1999) provides me then with a general understanding of attention in relation to our modes of perception, including the listening modes. In order to make the shift to musical performance, I examine Ola Stockfelt’s (2004) argument, which claims that the modern listener generally holds an active but ‘idle’ attention towards music and sound. As a result, listening to music would necessitate certain ‘adequate’ modes of listening to respond to generic aspects in the musical performance.

After a critical examination of Stockfelt’s approach in comparison to Crary’s, I develop my notion of the culturally specific perspective that influences how the listener makes meaningful experiences of sound or music in the theatre as a result of an insufficiency in listening. I show how this insufficiency is foremost an effect of the listener’s attention moving between levels of unconscious hearing and conscious listening, which gives rise to a whole range of distinctions in the listening modes. Subsequently, I discuss acousmatic, reduced, causal, ambient, and semiotic listening modes, and relate them to the particular perspectives that theatre offers. Consequent to this discussion, I indicate the importance of such notions as the ‘auditory icon’ (Chion’s earcon), the ‘evenly hovering attention’ (Barthes’s psychoanalytical listening) and the ‘semiotic remainder’ (Turino’s semantic snowballing).

In order to consider the application of the modes as tools for analysis in the theatre, I offer one example of a perspective in La Didone: the ‘schizophonic’ listening situation, which is defined in line with the notion of acousmatisation by a disparity between sound and its source or visual embodiment. This disparity highlights the placeless, frameless and restless nature of sound. I argue that this particular perspective can urge the listener in the theatre to resolve the auditory distress by placing the sounds in relation to one’s auditory self through the listening modes and through the frames of reference that the performance gives to a certain limit.
1. **The Active Idle Listener:**

   **Shifting Attention from the Everyday to Music Theatre**

Central to my thesis is the listener who makes her or his auditory experiences meaningful. In the previous chapter, I introduced Steven Connor’s idea of the ‘auditory self’ as *taking part in* rather than *taking aim at* the world that surrounds the listener through sound and its sonorous envelope (Connor 1997: 219). I contend that this sense of ‘self’ manifests itself only indirectly in the subjective ways the listener relates and responds to the auditory distress caused by the sounds. Drawing on the theorisations of Kaja Silverman, I explained how this subjectivity in the listener’s way of relating implies a discursive positioning. Through such positioning towards sound, the listener ‘tunes into the frequencies’ of the socio-cultural network with which she or he can attribute meaning to the auditory experiences. By embedding her or himself in a culture and discourse, the listener takes part and engages in the sounding world. I contend here that to position oneself in relation to auditory distress, and thereby to engage with sound or music as in a theatre performance, depends on one’s listening attention.

In his study of the cultural practices of managing attention, Jonathan Crary (1999) introduces the idea that we necessarily steer our attention according to our everyday environments: “[…] we are in a dimension of contemporary experience that requires that we effectively cancel out or exclude from consciousness much of our immediate environment” (1). Although similar to the arguments in Soundscape studies on this matter, Crary’s definition of attention applies to a wider scope of perception. According to Crary, the capacity of ‘paying attention’ is defined by “a disengagement from a broader field of attraction, whether visual or auditory, for the sake of isolating or focusing on a reduced number of stimuli” (ibid.). His notion of attention substantiates the idea that with modernity the increase of industrial, urbanite and traffic noise in our acoustic horizons has considerably affected our regimes of perception. The auditory envelope in our modern lives has increased in terms of acoustic, sensory and semiotic overload. More than ever

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**Note:** Although Crary’s earlier work is predominantly concerned with the historical changes in the ideas about vision in the 19th century, his concept of attention — like his notion of ‘observer’ — applies to perception in general, and also by implication to listening. In *Suspensions of Perception* (1999), Crary explicitly surpasses the visual tropes of knowledge by stating that the modern problem of attention is not primarily an issue of visuality: “Perhaps most significantly, attention, as a constellation of texts and practices, is much more than a question of the gaze, of looking, of the subject only as a spectator. It allows the problem of perception to be extracted from an easy equation with questions of visuality, and I will argue that the modern problem of attention encompasses a set of terms and positions that cannot be construed simply as questions of opticality” (Crary 1999: 2). Crary’s notion of ‘attention’ is most useful to my study as it connects with issues of discourse, semiotics and the meaning-making subject.
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we are trained to channel and block out the unwanted sounds, which cause auditory distress, by means of our attention.

Crary’s notion of attention is, however, not merely a safety clutch that we can apply at will, such as Soundscape studies have suggested. Crary defines attention as a set of terms, practices and positions that pre-exist to the perceiver. This definition verifies the argument that the listener tunes into a cultural discourse in listening and uses that discourse as a filter that manages her or his attention. Our ways of paying attention are shaped by this discourse, and, likewise, we reflect the cultural discourse in the ways our attention is managed through the objects of perception we engage with. In Soundscape studies, R. Murray Schafer and Barry Truax describe a listener who actively and consciously makes use of aural competences to position her or his attention. They put forward the agency of an active listener in a range of listening modes, though they admit that we are not consciously aware of most of our listening habits and modes. Crary, on the contrary, emphasises the management of attention through the objects of experience we encounter, which diminishes the aspect of control and agency in the listener.

I want to take up Crary’s argument to suggest that the general unawareness of our modes and habits in listening stems from their pre-existence to our perception in the discourse that comes to us through our encounters with the sounding world. Crary’s notion of ‘attention’ can bear a perspective to Connor’s notion of the listener as ‘auditory self’ and the ‘listening modes’ as discussed by Soundscape studies. However, these concepts have been primarily formulated in a context of our everyday engagements with the environments of our sounding world. In order to extend these ideas to the perception of sound and music in a performative context such as the theatre, I propose to compare Crary’s argument to Ola Stockfelt’s approach to the modes of listening in musical performance. Stockfelt’s claims open up a way to conceptualise these notions in relation to each other for cultural objects such as music theatre.

Ola Stockfelt (2004) appears to confirm Crary’s argument to a certain extent, though with a specific emphasis on contextual aspects in the experience. She argues that the modes of listening imply a restriction, not only given by the listener’s personal abilities and competences, but also by the object of experience, its particular structure and historical context:

Which mode of listening the listener adopts in a given situation depends mainly on how the listener chooses to listen – that is, which mode of listening he or she chooses to develop or adopt. And yet this choice is neither totally free nor accidental. In part, every mode of listening demands a significant degree of competence on the part of the listener (and the competence will not be less by being shared by many), and no listener can have an infinite repertoire of modes of listening. The mode of listening a listener can adopt is in this way limited by the competences in modes of listening that he or she possesses or can develop in a
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given situation […] In part, not every mode of listening is in any immediate way adaptable to every type of sound structure or even to every type of musical work […] In part, different modes of listening are in different ways more or less firmly connected to specific listening situations (Stockfelt 2004: 89-90).

Stockfelt claims that the use of the modes of listening is restricted, not only by personal choice or competence, but also, more importantly, by the nature of the address of the listener, as contained by the specific sound structure, the type of music and the listening situation. In this way, Stockfelt confirms Crary’s argument by claiming that the exercise of the modes is to a large extent contained by the object of experience itself, in this case, the music or the sound. However, she emphasises the contiguity or dependence upon the context in which the music addresses the listener to adopt a particular listening mode.

In summary, Crary’s earlier argument helps me to claim that the structure of address is always contextually, culturally and historically dependent, as are the listening modes in retrospect. The listening mode that is adopted by the listener defines how and what the listener perceives from the auditory intensities as useful, desirable, relevant and meaningful within a specific listening situation. Stockfelt’s argument, in turn, emphasises the role of context in the listening situation.

Stockfelt specifically draws our attention to the application of ‘ideal’ or ‘adequate’ listening modes in relation to the particular, musico-historical genre of a work. According to her, each listening situation bears its own ideal relation between the music and the listener, as “presumed in the formation of the musical style – in the composing, the arranging, the performance, the programming of the music” (Stockfelt 2004: 91). Correspondingly, each genre calls upon a certain adequate mode of listening in relation to the social, cultural and genre-normative situation that specifies “the predominant socio-cultural conventions of the subculture to which the music belongs” (ibid.). Stockfelt indicates further that listening is related ideologically to “a set of opinions belonging to a social group about ideal relations between individuals, between individuals and cultural expression, and between the cultural expressions and the construction of society” (92). In so doing, she discloses the discursive mechanism in relation to which listening takes place.

The interdependence of the listening modes on a set of opinions, norms and conventions, shared by a social group, is in line with Crary’s argument. According to his argument, such a set is precisely what defines the attention in the observer’s perception. Consequently, depending on how the listening attention is managed, the listener connects to a social group in discursive ways. Listening attention then reflects what is defined as ‘meaningful’ within a specific context. Following Silverman’s argument on this matter in chapter one, the listening attention is produced in particular by the socio-cultural discourse in which both the meanings of sound and music, and the listener as
subject of these meanings are embedded. By implication, Stockfelt’s understanding of ‘adequate’ listening modes should already be rooted in and produced by the same discursive network, in which genre and context gain meaning.

However, Stockfelt’s ‘adequate’ listening modes suggests a normative attitude, which needs caution. She contends that her approach does not mean to imply that certain modes of listening are ‘more intellectual’ or ‘culturally superior’, but rather: “It means that one masters and develops the ability to listen for what is relevant to the genre in the music, for what is adequate to understanding according to the specific genre’s comprehensible context” (Stockfelt 2004: 91). This explanation reveals the discursive embeddings of the listener’s modes in function of the particular listening situation and a series of contextual, socio-cultural factors such as contained in genre. These regulative aspects surrounding musical experience are also relevant for an understanding of music theatre today. The genre of a particular piece of music could give the listener a frame of reference that defines how she or he can respond to auditory distress and channel what is relevant within that particular context.

Nevertheless, the kind of music theatre that I engage with in this study most often combines and blurs different genres, making the modes thus called upon either conflict with each other or making us question the importance of such sufficiency of ‘adequate’ modes for our understanding. Therefore, I propose to broaden the scope of Stockfelt’s argument. Rather than looking at genre as such, I suggest to look at a more general regulative mechanism in the theatre that has a similar contextually and culturally defined function as genre: the listening ‘perspective’. I regard this perspective in listening not merely as a spatial category but integrally as part of the particular dramaturgical principles the performance conveys. Just as theatre always suggests certain perspectives for vision, I argue that music theatre offers certain perspectives that channel the auditory distress and thereby structure the listener’s responses to it in defining ways. By definition, a perspective is a regulatory structure that defines and anchors a position for the spectator or listener to which she or he relates as subject. Perspective is then as much a regulative principle for the gaze as for the ear, which manages the positions the perceiver can take up through her or his modes of relating to the sounds or music.

Stockfelt, moreover, stresses the necessity of the listening modes as a way to gain conscious control over our auditory and musical experiences: “[…] we

As I problematised in the introduction, the music theatre I engage with tends to escape traditional genre distinctions and plays often with a multiplicity of musical genres. Still, in itself it belongs to a certain type or ‘genre’ of theatre, which has generally been characterised as post-dramatic theatre by Hans Thieß Lehmann, and which has also grown out of the artistic, idiosyncratic developments of the (music) theatre ensembles themselves. In a cultural-historical sense, this type of theatre brings along its own strategies that play upon the listener’s expectations and modes of perception.
must develop our own reflexive consciousness and competence as active ‘idle listeners’” (Stockfelt 2004: 93). In so doing, she confirms the general assumption in Soundscape studies that our ways of listening are generally marked by an alert laziness as habits and automatic responses. However, Stockfelt’s phrase of the ‘active idle listener’ does not mean that there is no attention at all or that we block everything out automatically. As I argued earlier, our modern soundscapes call for a multiple or constantly shifting attention that often works unnoticeably to our waking consciousness. I therefore contend that this ‘active idleness’ is part of the defence mechanisms of the modern listener to excessive auditory distress. It is the effect of the coping strategies, sedimented habits and regimes of attention that have been established over time in relation to various sound occurrences and occasions.

The same can be said about the theatre. As I stated in the introduction, new music theatre came about due to a general dissatisfaction with theatre and opera traditions. The conventional structures of theatre and opera in a dramatic tradition have made the spectators into idle, receptive listeners. The music theatre that I discuss in this study, however, tends to re-activate the listener and stimulate her or him to take up a more reflexive and conscious position towards one’s own, subjective perceptions. This type of theatre questions the listening modes that the listener has acquired over time, thereby marking their peculiarity and cultural contingency. As I intend to illustrate in this chapter, managing auditory distress in the theatre plays a significant role in making the listener’s active idleness productive and meaningful by making her or him aware of the shifts between different modes of attention that the regulative mechanism of perspective calls for.

Stockfelt offers me the focus of my investigation and analysis in the current chapter: “An analysis must therefore begin from such shifts between modes of listening […] Hence we must develop our competence reflexively to control the use of, and the shifts between, different modes of listening to different types of sound events” (Stockfelt 2004: 92). In this chapter, I question Stockfelt’s claim about the listener’s (self-)conscious management of the modes of listening. Crary’s idea of managing attention through perspective then helps to nuance the agency of the listener. He argues that our modes of perception always depend on the perspectives that are historically and culturally embedded in the discourse through which our perceptions, in turn, become meaningful. I therefore argue, based on Crary’s argument, that the choice of the listening modes is not restricted to generic definitions, preconceptions, expectations that stem from a performance tradition, context, type or intent of the musical work as such. Rather, the modes of listening should be understood in relation to the discourse that works as an interpretive safety net in response to the auditory distress caused by the sound or the music. Aural competence then involves not as much a reflexive use of the modes of listening that helps the listener to respond ‘adequately’ to a certain
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type of sound events, which Stockfelt purports. On the contrary, it involves a set of responses that necessarily shift our attention in accordance to our signification processes, which are guided by the regulative mechanisms as materialised in perspective. The consequence of my argument is that aural competency manifests itself in the listener’s responses to auditory distress that mark the positions the listener takes up. However, rather than claiming the agency of the listener in her or his competences, I argue that these positions are always already discursively inscribed by the perspectives of a given (music) theatre performance to which the listener relates through the modes of listening.

The Wooster Group’s La Didone provides me with a case study to demonstrate how the modes of listening can be used to cope with auditory distress. In this way, the performance serves to illustrate how the listening modes can be used as tools to analyse how we deal with auditory distress in the theatre. As I will show, the hybrid construction of the performance particularly offers a structure to our perceptions that creates shifts between our modes of listening. This structure is constituted by the perspectives that manage the attention in listening. La Didone, however, also demonstrates the limits to our modes of listening in response to these listening perspectives. As I will argue, the performance brings the idea of an ‘adequate’ way of listening in jeopardy due to a multiplicity of rapidly shifting modes and the lack of a proper ‘sound frame’ that can pin down all the sounds. As a result, the listener is presented with an excess of intensities that are not immediately coherent and meaningful. This excess highlights an insufficiency in the act of listening that is productive for the way the listener makes meaningful experiences of the sounds in relation to a cultural discourse. Both Crary and Stockfelt then ask us to look at the listener in relation to her or his competences and the regulative mechanisms that manage her or his attention to what is meaningful. I argue that because of a lack of stability in the perspectives and frames of a performance such as La Didone, the listener is given an active role in disclosing the veil of her or his idle attention and to productively shift between listening modes in relation to the perspectives. As a result of these constant shifts, the listening act is marked as an act of relating to the sounds and the music that stems from an inherent instability in the auditory self. Discourse, in this particular sense, does not mean to serve signification in the first place, but to confirm and stabilise the self, which defines the listening subject.

2. The Modes of Listening as Response

There is a longstanding tradition that distinguishes sound from music, predominantly based on the idea that music presumes some kind of organisation or arrangement of sound (objects and events), or the subjective
acknowledgement of a structure in listening as music.\footnote{Modern compositions (dodecaphonic, atonal music) often attempt to debunk the myth that the inherent structure of music is a homogenising system, contained by the ‘work’. Rather, the listener composes the music in listening through her or his experiences.} Music, in this sense, would receive its stability from its inner structure, which implies some type of arrangement of the auditory intensities, like a temporal (horizontal) and/or timbral (vertical) organisation. Sound in general would lack such an arrangement, which needs to be compensated by our perceptual mechanisms. However, due to auditory distress in every auditory perception no matter sound or music, the stability of an ‘inherent’ structure in music is debunked as much as for sound, which is commonly regarded as more incidental and semiotically arbitrary.\footnote{Historically, the conceptual parchment of music and sound was debunked in the musique concrète.} Moreover, most sounds in theatre and music theatre are perceived as intentional and as part of a certain structure, with or without our subjective acknowledgment of musical properties. Sound and music therefore always imply an arrangement within their relation with the theatre performance that limits the ways in which we (are ‘afforded’ to) listen to them. This is what I call, a listening perspective, which is as much embedded in the sound objects and events as in their (re)presentation in the listening context.

Previously in chapter one, I discussed the connections between Silverman’s ‘subject of semiotics’ and Connor’s psychoanalytically inspired concept of the ‘auditory self’ to conceptualise the listener as listening subject. I argued that the listening subject should be understood as a result of discursive positions with which the listener relates to sound or music in meaningful ways. In the following, I introduce how such a discursive position is inscribed by a perspective within the object of experience. I discuss how the listener mediates between the discursive positions implied by the perspectives and her or his own positions by focusing her or his attention.

Hence, I consider the modes of listening as a set of tools to analyse the listener’s responses to an excess in listening that causes auditory distress. I explain what these modes ‘do’ in relation to auditory distress. As the latter is a general aspect of listening, I consider the applicability of the listening modes for our experiences in the theatre. I then contend that the theatre can play upon these modes in a specific way through its perspectives that manage the listening attention. Using examples from La Didone, I illustrate further how these modes can help the listener to respond to auditory distress by creating meaning. As such, La Didone showcases vital aspects of listening through the modes of listening it calls upon. It thereby also exemplifies how the listener makes her or his auditory experiences meaningful in relation to oneself through these modes.
2.1. Modes and Perspectives in Listening

Soundscape and Acoustic Communication studies have proposed a range of listening modes as analytical tools to discuss our engagement with the everyday auditory environment. A mode of listening is, by definition, a way to process the acoustic intensities as information to our brains. It involves a cognitive processing and filtering of the sounds that are meaningful to us. In so doing, the modes of listening help us to protect the sensitive auditory system against an excess of intensities, semiotic overload and, therefore, distress.

Contrary to the everyday soundscapes, theatre always compensates for the auditory distress through the perspectives it offers. The term ‘perspective’ implies in the first place a spatial position, which influences the way the listener perceives. A perspective can also be discursively and communicatively relevant, but it always posits a restriction in terms of a set of relations between the listener and what is to be heard. It defines how the listener will interpret the sounds and relate cognitively to a particular listening context. Pierre Schaeffer pointed out through his idea of ‘objects musicaux’ (1966) that the work as ‘musical object’ already has a relationship between subject and object inscribed in it, which the listener must accept in order to grasp it (Nattiez 1990: 98). A perspective expresses in this sense the subject-position of the listener from within the structure of address or construct of the musical performance or (re)production. I contend that in the theatre a perspective is always implied in listening to a sound or music in the way it is performed, produced and communicated to a listener. As such, it absorbs and produces the responses of the listener in often unconscious ways.

A helpful example of the regulatory function of perspective in listening is the recent phenomenon of MP3. As Jonathan Sterne (2006) suggests, MP3 is not only a conversion format but also a cultural artefact in the way it literally ‘plays’ upon its listeners. The basic idea behind MP3 is: discard data which we do not (want to) hear anyway. For the purpose of shrinking the size of virtual memory an audio file takes on a computer or any digital audio device and thereby increasing its portability, MP3 follows psychoacoustic rules about

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60 Perspective is foremost a visual trope. Nevertheless, the concept can be extended to the realm of listening as long as it does not impose a visual episteme and blur conceptual differences. According to Theo van Leeuwen (1999), musical perspective was invented in conjunction with visual perspective and the picture frame in the Renaissance. Musical perspective was then mostly realised by means of dynamics. However, van Leeuwen also points out that perspective can be realised by the relative loudness of simultaneous sounds, which represents distinctions of figure and background, “regardless of whether this results from the levels of the sounds themselves, from the relative distance of the people or objects that produce them, or from the way a soundtrack is mixed” (van Leeuwen 1999: 23). Van Leeuwen, however, also acknowledges that silent sounds like a breathy whisper on close miking can catch our attention in the foreground, enhancing a sense of close presence to the sound source (van Leeuwen 1999: 25-6 & 28).
what we perceive and what we filter out in our auditory perception. Therefore, MP3 restricts our listening experiences and responses to a norm in the way it offers a highly regulative principle as ‘perspective’ on how we are (considered) to be listening. This perspective influences us on what to focus our listening attention. One could critique the normative effects of the way the listener perceives music through an MP3. Yet, as Sterne suggests, we are generally not aware of the differences with the original sounds of the recording or with the same recording on a compact disc, since we most often listen rather distractedly to the MP3 in noisy environments through headphones or poor quality speakers, or when a high-bit rate was used to make the MP3 (Sterne 2006: 339). Hence, digital audio such as MP3 should be understood in its circulation and listening contexts.

Though very different in its context and the listening attention it calls for, music theatre does something comparable to the MP3 in terms of our modes of listening: it always offers a perspective that already channels the auditory distress and manages the listener’s attention. The difference with MP3 is that music theatre’s regulative mechanisms are generally not only implied within the sound object, nor its modes of (re)production. Rather, the theatre adds other spatial, external dimensions to the perspectives in listening.

Soundscape studies stress the spatial aspect of a perspective in a sound or soundscape. In R. Murray Schafer’s approach to perspective, the listener generally distinguishes between a foreground (figure), a background (ground) and a context (field) in the listening space. Following on from Schafer, Theo van Leeuwen (1999) explains how the listener makes these spatial categories in relation to her or his listening attention, which constitutes a ‘three-stage plan’:

[A.E.] Beeby had ‘Immediate’, ‘Support’ and ‘Background’, [Walter] Murch ‘foreground’, ‘mid-ground’ and ‘background. Murray Schafer (1977: 157) uses yet another set of terms and definitions. He defines ‘Figure’ as ‘the focus of interest, the sound ‘signal’, ‘Ground’ as the setting or context, the ‘keynote sound’, and ‘Field’ as ‘the place where the observation takes place, the soundscape’. The ideas, however, are essentially the same. The ‘three-stage plan’ means dividing the sounds which are heard simultaneously into three groups and then hierarchizing these groups, treating some as more important than others (16).

Schafer’s distinction depends not only on the prominence of the sound (its volume or distinctiveness), but also on how the listener’s private, subjective and selective focus is embedded in a spatial organisation of how one is stimulated to listen. Listening attention, as van Leeuwen argues, therefore

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70 According to van Leeuwen, the three-stage plan is “a typical ‘schema’ which can be realised in different types of sound environments and soundtracks” (van Leeuwen 1999: 19). It can therefore also apply to our spatial experiences in music theatre.
hierarchises and prioritises what we want to hear in relation to how it is presented by means of a certain restrictive perspective. The sound which is foregrounded in our attention (the ‘figure’) mutually defines the background in the soundscape (‘field’). This, in turn, could serve as an acoustic context (‘ground’) for the listener to locate, connect and understand the foregrounded sounds. The interrelation between foreground and background in our auditory experiences depends much on the perspective contained in the sound. Such a sound perspective assists us in establishing a spatial hierarchy that influences which sounds will catch and receive our attention.

Van Leeuwen shows how the notion of perspective expresses foremost spatial positionings of the (implied) listener that result from her or his relations towards sound (van Leeuwen 1999: 12-3). The perspective influences the listener’s position towards the sound, as van Leeuwen suggests: “In all this we should also remember that sound is dynamic: it can move us towards or away from a certain position, it can change our relation to what we hear” (18). Van Leeuwen concludes: “The semiotic system of aural perspective divides simultaneous sounds into groups, and places these groups at different distances from the listener, so as to make the listener relate to them in different ways” (22). Hence, sound does not always have to give the impression that it travels physically through space by means of spatialisation over loudspeakers. Its inherent hierarchising aural perspectives suffice to give us imaginatively a sense of movement in our perception.71

Hearing spatial distinctions in sound demonstrates how perspective regulates the way we listen to sound in relation to a listening space. Aural perspective then manages the way we process the sounds in relation to ourselves, our sense of self in terms of distance and hierarchy. However, the above examples of spatial perspective do not account for the specific mode of listening that makes us hear these spatial distinctions. Moreover, we are not always consciously aware of our spatial distance to the sound events in our auditory experiences. Van Leeuwen therefore distinguishes perspective from ‘immersion’:

71 In chapter four, I will take this idea further to argue that spatialisation can be regarded as a result of the way the listener responds and positions oneself to auditory distress, rather than an inherent quality of the sound, its mediation and representation. Aural perspectives assist in this positioning.

The opposite of perspective is immersion, wrap-around sound. Low frequency sounds (bass) are especially important here. They carry further (think of the foghorn) and fill spaces more completely. They are also harder to tie to a particular spot and seem to come from everywhere at once (van Leeuwen 1999: 28).

Immersion, in van Leeuwen’s understanding, pushes everything to the background of our conscious attention. He regards immersion in relation to
wrap-around sound, i.e. the sonorous envelope, which masks any other acoustic intrusion. However, as I illustrated in chapter one, the sonorous envelope also creates auditory distress. Depending on its presentation (like in Ruhe), the envelope could paradoxically make the listener alert to its manipulative tendencies, and therefore, to a concealed perspective that aims to make the listener forget about its regulatory function. Immersion, as an unconscious effect on the listener, is then rather the result of a strongly manipulative perspective than an assumed perspectiveless, ‘immersive’ auditory environment. Immersion is not the opposite of perspective, as Van Leeuwen argues, though it does obliterate any conscious spatial anchoring by the listener in terms of spatial distance.

Though van Leeuwen’s discussion demonstrates how aural perspective moves the listener’s attention in a spatial sense, his understanding is limited to a mode of listening that focuses on spatial relations in the first place. I want to argue that, although our ways of responding to auditory distress through our listening modes incorporate a spatial relation to what is heard, the perspective does not merely affect a sense of space. I therefore suggest diverging from this exclusive emphasis on spatiality to examine how a listening perspective suggests discursive positions for the listener to engage with, which results in different listening modes. In what follows, I discuss how a perspective can give rise to correlated modes of listening by means of a tension between what is given in the performance and how the listener relates to it through her or his attention. I then demonstrate how the listener’s position depends on how the perspective manages her or his attention, resulting in particular modes of listening. Consequently, I present an overview of the different listening modes in relation to the listener’s attention – as originally defined for daily experiences with sound – before re-ordering and analysing them for the purpose of music theatre.

2.2. Hearing versus Listening: Managing Listening Attention

Soundscape studies have put great stress on ‘attention’ as an instrument with which we channel the perceived auditory stimuli. Attention is an effect of the correlations between the modern environment and the listening subject. As I introduced in chapter one, we are used to being surrounded by our excessive, ‘messy’ and distracting soundscapes. Their permeability has made us on the alert most of the time. We choose to direct our attention to parts in the constant stream of sound. However, our attention frequently moves in unconscious ways in relation to (hidden) perspectives in the sounds. It is in this dynamic of consciousness and unconsciousness in our attention that listening can be distinguished from hearing in order to understand the listener’s response to a perspective in sound or music.
Based on Schafer’s earlier distinctions, Traux argues for the important role of attention levels in our auditory perception. He offers us an essential distinction between hearing and listening on the basis of attention. Traux also claims that hearing involves capturing a sound and analysing the physical vibration in terms of its frequency, its intensity (the energy distribution or the ‘spectrum’ of the sound), its physical orientation and modification in the environment (Traux 1984: 4; 15-16). Yet this happens in most unconscious ways. We do not perceive these acoustic parameters consciously as such, as they most often go unnoticed. Hearing is therefore rather an unconscious sensitivity with automatic responses. This is the main reason why Traux regards hearing as ‘passive’ when compared to listening. In line with information theory, he defines listening as the “processing of sonic information that is usable and potentially meaningful to the brain” (9). This implies blocking out the redundancies of information depending on a degree of repetitiveness and predictability (16). Listening in this definition suggests an active involvement in the hunt for information. Roland Barthes makes a similar clear distinction in his essay “Listening” (1976): “Hearing is a physiological phenomenon; listening is a psychological act” (1991: 245). The former involves autonomous processes of perception that pertain to the physicality of our auditory apparatus, the latter to a rather psychoacoustic act of volition in our attention. The total lack of listening attention in hearing Traux calls ‘subliminal perception’, which works in most unconscious ways and can therefore be easily manipulated.

With regard to a proclaimed difference between conscious and unconscious responses in our auditory experiences, Connor (2005) discloses an intricate knot between the phenomenal sense of hearing and listening within the modern listening subject as appears through the spatial experience of sound. According to Connor, the spatiality of sound insists that we are never completely passive towards it:

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72 Kaja Silverman’s (1983) subject notion confirms the influence of consciousness. She claims that subjectivity is a product of two signifying activities: on the one hand, unconscious and on the other hand, preconscious or conscious processes (Silverman 1983: 72). When we bring Silverman’s approach to bear on a notion of hearing, auditory perception is generally regarded as pre-discursive and pre-conscious as many of the auditory stimuli are discursively not interpreted, but filtered out by not paying attention. Listening could then be defined in terms of its pursuit of interpreting the sonorous stream that surrounds the listener in more conscious ways than hearing.

73 Most auditory perception research is based on information theory and signifying processes like Traux’s approach. As Michael Forrester (2000) points out, these theories are dominated by an idea of sound as ‘abstracted information’ in the sense of information processing through cognition (Forrester 2000: 36). I am however more inclined to approach auditory perception, in line with Connor and Crary, from a discursive point of view.

74 A similar argument holds for ambient listening, which I discuss later in this chapter.
We never merely hear sound, we are always also listening to it, which is to say selecting certain significant sounds and isolating them from the background noise which continuously rumbles and rattles, continually on the qui vive for patterns of resemblance or recurrence. As with sight, and following Wordsworth, the ear ‘half-creates’ what it thinks it hears. This language of sound is spatial. Why does the increase in frequency of a sound suggest that it is getting ‘higher’? In other words, the spatiality of sound is a reflex, formed by the projective, imagining ear, the ear commandeering the eye to make out the space it finds itself in. It is in this sense that ears may be said to have walls (Connor 2005: 53).

Earliest, in chapter one, I referred to Connor’s article in order to argue that the sonorous envelope creates a comparable wall in our ears. Yet here, Connor seems to suggest that the walls in our ears are inherent to our ‘imagining ear’. He argues that the modern listener is not just passively receptive, but that she or he is continuously selecting and imagining, ‘commandeering the eye’. Auditory perception is therefore never passively ‘hearing’ alone. It is constantly on the qui vive. Connor argues that attention in our auditory perception co-creates space, which is an effect of the workings of our imagining ear, filtering – or in phenomenological terms, ‘bracketing’ – our perception. Hearing and listening are therefore continuously intertwined. Connor also offers the example of the Doppler-effect, that is, the psycho-acoustic effect of an increase in frequency when a moving object approaches the perceiver. Rather than a perceptual truth, he illustrates that this acoustic phenomenon is discursively produced through our expectations and habituations in listening that make us recognise the increase of frequency in the intensities of sound as coming closer.76 Discourse produces the connection between the increase of frequency and the sense of pitch, and in this case, distance and movement. Our imagining ear – or ‘auditory imagination’ as I call it in chapter four – recreates what we hear in relation to our ‘selves’. As an effect of the filtering activity of our attention, this projection can sometimes

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75 Through an analogy with Warren McCulloch’s essay “What the Frog’s Eye Tells the Frog’s Brain”, Brian Eno describes how his experience of listening to Reich’s loop piece It’s Gonna Rain with several tape players steered his attention like frog eyes being constantly alert to small changes: “A frog’s eyes don’t work like ours […]. [A] frog fixes its eyes on a scene and leaves them there. It stops seeing all the static parts of the environment, which become invisible, but as soon as one element moves [usually its next potential meal! […] It is in very high contrast to the rest of the environment […]. I realised that what happens with the Reich piece is that our ears behave like a frog’s eyes […]. The creative operation is listening” (Eno, qtd. in Shaw-Miller 2002: 231). Similar to Connor’s argument above, Eno describes how our imagining ears are directly connected to our listening attention.

76 In a similar way, music can create spatial experiences through the discursive connections we make in listening, as Nattiez points out: “a progressive rise in tonal register, and crescendos of volume combine to engender a sense of space” (Francès 1958: 312-13; qtd. in Nattiez 1990: 123). So the sense of space is engendered by how we give meaning to the tonal system and volume (or intensity), as contained and enabled by discourse.
The Frequency of Imagination

work as a ‘wall’ against the excess of stimuli, rendering us necessarily ‘idle’ to cope with the excess.

Connor’s statement above, that listening attention defines in spatial terms what we (think) we hear, makes me conclude that our attention works as a vehicle, as a ‘tentacle’ with which we try to gain a cognitive grip on the listening space. Space is then created, not only in relation to the physical, acoustic space, but also as a response by the listener to auditory distress. This is an important aspect of listening that also applies to our auditory perceptions in the theatre. Depending on one’s aural competences, listening attention offers a fine-tuned means that enables the listener to zoom in on what she or he wants to or needs to hear. Following Connor’s argument, we need to question why it is that we ‘half-create’ only what we ‘think’ we hear in our active but often idle state of attention.

Paul Rodaway (1994) offers a provisional answer in his phenomenological approach for which he adopts Truax’s theory of ‘Acoustic Communication’. According to Rodaway, we compose the sounds ourselves by creating a hi-fi environment with discrete sounds depending on what we subjectively define as meaningful through our listening attention:

When we try to identify more precise composed elements, such as the melody, rhythm or key of a soundscape, we are composing the sounds ourselves, that is, making sense of what we hear. The sense or meaning of sound is therefore both relative to a possible source/activity and in relation to other sounds. More generally, sense or meaning is derived from previous experience of the same or similar sound and from the context of our experience, activity or intensity. The environment itself also structures what we hear (Rodaway 1994: 88).

Rodaway explains that much of how we make sense through listening depends on how we relate to sounds; how we relate what we hear to what we see, or even not see. This capacity to relate depends on previous experiences. In addition, Rodaway includes the role of context, the environment and the listening situation itself in the way the listener creates meaning and structure to her or his auditory experiences.

Forrester (2000) paraphrases Rodaway’s above argument by claiming that listening “implies active attentiveness to auditory information and the very act of listening draws attention to our desire to establish or mark out meaning” (Forrester 2000: 39). What is meant by ‘meaning’, however, is ambiguous to say the least. In Soundscape studies, sound is analysed in terms of its ‘information’, which Forrester’s claim also supports: acoustic data that often indicate environmental characteristics. In this sense, it can be understood that the environment literally lends structure to our auditory experiences. From a phenomenological point of view, however, Rodaway acknowledges the role and agency of the listener in this structuring activity as inherent to listening.
Rodaway seems to acknowledge a much older argument in musicology that by listening to music, whether in a concert hall, an opera or a private listening situation, the listener composes her or his own listening experiences. This argument is supported by the idea that there is no music without a listener. Music receives its structure in relation to the listener who tries to make her or his musical experiences meaningful. Meaning, in this context, refers to musical understanding and interpretation, which assumes certain musical or aural competences in the listener. This competency can manifest itself in structural listening, whereby the listener creates a sense of coherency in the musical experiences.

Auditory experience in the theatre follows a similar logic when auditory distress stimulates the listener to respond. Conceivably more compelling than in a concert situation, the theatre context often urges the listener to respond by searching for meaning. What is more, the type of music theatre that I discuss plays specifically on the listener and her or his insistence to take hold of the auditory space by making sense. By not giving any immediate, straightforward meanings or structure, theatre can give rise to a self-critical outlook, highlighting the listener’s efforts to (partially) compose her or his own listening experiences. Meaning is then marked as the gap that needs to be filled by the listener. It is not so much acoustic information, but a structure, a set of meaningful relations to which the listener can position oneself, which would give a sense of coherency.

As Schafer and Truax initially suggested, the general disparity between hearing as a passive or unconscious sensation and listening as an attentive and active enterprise also influences the way meaning is called for and produced because of an inner dependence. Soundscape studies have suggested that this disparity holds for all of our auditory experiences. Connor (1997) suggests then that this unsteady relation between hearing and listening contributes to a sense of insufficiency in the listener to make sense of what she or he hears. According to him, this insufficiency stems from the problem that sound and hearing can hardly be considered ‘autonomous’. The instability between hearing and listening contributes to an urge in the listener to complement the auditory experiences with more stable meanings that can materialise in visual images, associations, memories, structures, contexts that place the sounds in relation to oneself. Connor argues that this act of relating in our auditory perceptions is guided by questions: “We ask of a sound ‘What was that?’; meaning ‘Who was that?’, or ‘Where did that come from?’ We do not naturally ask for an image ‘What sound does it make?’” (Connor 1997: 213). Making sense of our auditory experiences then means that we relate the sounds to our ‘selves’, which always implies foremost a position. This positioning as a way to make the auditory experiences meaningful is required because of the lack or insufficiency that is inherent to hearing and listening.
When I relate this idea of a ‘messy’ intertwining of hearing and listening to Silverman’s theory of subject formation, I tentatively conclude that the disparity can cause a crisis in meaning, affecting the listener as subject. The type of music theatre that I discuss appears to emphasise particular aspects of this crisis in the way it makes us position ourselves by not offering us sufficient meanings. In the focused situation of the theatre, our auditory experiences equally adhere to this crisis of meaning due to the intertwining of hearing and listening. Auditory distress in the theatre can highlight this crisis by making us aware of our role in channelling the auditory stimuli as guided by the particular perspectives that help us to make the experiences meaningful. When these perspectives are at stake, it makes us alert to the crisis in meaning. As a general response to this latent crisis, we could feel an urge to confirm and thereby stabilise our sense of coherent selves as listening subjects through signification. This idea of a constant crisis that both produces and affects the subject is supported by Kaja Silverman (1985), who claims that subjectivity is defined and thereby stabilised through the intervention of signification (196-7). The creation of signification should then be understood in terms of the meaningful experiences that result from the listener’s way of relating to what she or he hears. The position that the listener adopts in this process of relating materialises the signifying intervention of listening.

Following Silverman’s approach on the matter of signification, the positions that the listener takes up by moving her or his listening attention to the sounds or music can be understood as culturally discursive. The discourse enables any signifying activity in listening, and therefore also the way listening attention is managed in the theatre. The necessity of managing attention stems from this latent ‘crisis’ of the listening subject caused by the unstable relation with the sounding environment and the caused auditory distress. Attention then serves as a cognitive means that protects the listener as subject by the stabilising process of signification in concord with the discourse. Listening is then inscribed in terms of the discursive positions the theatre offers through its perspectives.

In contrast to the receptive listener in our modern environments, contemporary music theatre calls for an active involvement from the listener in taking part as listening subject by taking up positions and making the listening experiences meaningful. The particular structure of address in the performance has an important triggering role in creating a listening situation that breaks through the active ‘idleness’ of our listening habits and defence mechanisms against the always latent auditory distress and insufficiency in listening. In this particular listening situation that music theatre creates, the listener feels encouraged to ‘hunt’ for meaningful experiences by means of her or his attention, though always in relation to the given perspectives.
2.3. The Listening Modes as Analytical Tools

As a result of our relation to the sounds according to how much attention we give them, we can distinguish between different modes of listening. Soundscape studies have brought to light a whole array of listening modes. Truax (1984) gives a simplified but coherent systematisation of Schafer’s (1977) distinctions, which in turn are partly based on Schaeffer’s Recherche musicale (1966) in the French language. I will begin with Truax’s simplified model to conceptualise the listening modes as analytical tools before elaborating on these modes for the purpose of listening in the theatre. At a later stage, I will complement his model with some necessary annexes by referring to Barthes (1991) and Chion (1994).

Truax distinguishes the following modes of listening, which he places on a scale of consciousness, depending on the acuity of the listening attention:

1. distracted or background-listening as the least conscious by merely being aware of the ambience;
2. listening-in-readiness as a mode of listening in which we are only aware of specific, mostly indexical sounds (associations with sounds that are built up over time);
3. and analytical listening or listening-in-search when we most attentively and actively probe an acoustic environment with our ears in search of information.

(See Truax 1984: 19-24)

Connor’s ‘modern’ auditory subject applies best to the first degree in listening attention: distracted listening, which also includes a high probability of immersion. Within this mode of attention, Truax further differentiates background and/or ambient listening. Though this type of listening can be functional in certain theatre plays today, it seems quite incongruous with the focused listening situations of music theatre. Nonetheless, I will show using La Didone that this mode of listening can be highly relevant to make sense of sound and music in the theatre. R. Murray Schafer calls this mode a rather naive mode of perceiving sound occurrences. He refers to it with Schaeffer’s term in French: ouïr (i.e. ‘to hear’ by merely paying attention).

The second degree of attention in the listening modes in Truax’s distinction involves listening-in-readiness. This mode sustains Stockfelled’s active ‘idle listener’. More active than the first one, this mode seems to be the most adequate, basic mode the modern listener uses as a survival strategy.

Ambience and ambient ways of listening occur for instance in most of the theatre performances by Toneelgroep Amsterdam (directed by Ivo van Hove): music is often playing the background to the onstage events with the similar effect of a radio playing in a bar or a shop (see later 3.2. on ‘muzak’).
against the auditory distress of our volatile, urbanite surroundings when perspectives are not immediately given. Most of the time, the modern listener perceives in a state of continued being on the alert for auditory interventions that indicate danger or that phatically call for our immediate attention.  

In relation to this ‘ready’ mode of listening, which Connor calls being on the qui vive, Schafer has proposed a further distinction between two specifically related modes: a reduced and an indexical mode of listening. The first notion, coined by the French composer Pierre Schaeffer in the context of the musique concrète, is a deprived mode that focuses the attention on specific qualities of a sound without reference to its source or meaning. Schaeffer refers to this mode using the French verb entendre (the common word for ‘hearing’ in the French language). The second, indexical mode of listening is concerned with causal listening. This mode explains why we always seem to ascribe causes to indexical sounds: we relate sounds to ourselves for survival purposes. Listening-in-readiness generally causes then affective, automatic responses in the listener’s active ‘idle’ attention. Schaeffer refers to this mode in French as écouter (the most general word for ‘listening’).  

The third degree of listening attention involves a set of modes of an analytical or exploring nature, like ‘echo-location’ with which we receive information about a certain space through its echo or reverberation time. Schaefer goes even further to describe the probing for information in this mode of listening-in-search as reading in a symbolic, semiotic or semantic mode of listening. In Schaefer’s approach, this mode involves decoding or deciphering the transient and endlessly commuting relationship of sounds as signifiers to signifieds (auditory icons and sound indexes) by referring to sound objects and events in terms of a code. According to Michel Chion, this mode is often attached to a narrative. Schaeffer calls this mode in French, comprendre (‘to comprehend, understand’). 

In the remainder of this chapter, I continue to discuss these modes of listening as analytical tools using my case study, the music theatre performance La Didone (2007) by The Wooster Group. The purpose of this is not to demonstrate the above model. Rather, my case study illustrates how sound and music in music theatre become meaningful to the listener in relation to the perspectives the theatre offers, which resolve the jumbled shifts of attention in the disparity between hearing and listening. I argue that perspectives in listening mediate between the particular sound or music and the listener’s attention, which influences her or his position towards it. This results in continuous shifts between different modes of listening as to make sense of what one hears. I thereby do not want to imply that listening is

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78 Later in this chapter, I will connect this alert state of listening to indexical sound signals.
79 As I will argue later in this chapter, Chion points out that both modes can come about as a result of ‘acousmatic listening’, caused by a disparity of sound and the visual embodiment of its source.
identical to meaning-making, though they are interrelated in view of the latent crisis of the listening subject and the insufficiency in hearing and listening. Using examples from La Didone, I then demonstrate how attention serves as an ‘imaginary tentacle’ with which we can appropriate the listening space depending on what is given as perspective and to what we choose to attend to (or to turn our attention away from) in order to achieve a certain level of control over the auditory distress.

The modes of listening appear to sustain a promise of control and stability of the listener as subject. I want to emphasise here that ‘music theatre’, such as La Didone, makes us aware of the illusion of control as listening subjects by disrupting our signification processes with an overload of intensities. Consequently, the overload forces the listener to constantly shift between different modes of listening. This overexposure jeopardises, at certain instances, the channelling of the listener’s position through multiple perspectives, when its perspectival multiplicity prevents the establishment of a stable frame. The constant switching then shows that the listening modes are not as distinct as they may first appear as in Schafer’s or Truax’s models. Rather, these shifts are necessary for any meaningful experience to substantiate. As such, my arguments surrounding La Didone also imply a critique on the theories of the modes of listening.

By re-evaluating the modes of listening for the purpose of music theatre, I imply a discursive relation between the modern sounding world and music theatre. La Didone specifically bears on this relation in its structures of address and response. To illustrate my argumentation about how our responses to auditory distress depend on the performance’s perspectives, I first discuss how the perspective of a schizophrenic listening situation gives rise to acousmatic, reduced and causal listening modes. I will explain how these modes come about in relation to how our attention shifts between states of listening-in-readiness and analytical modes of listening. I will then discuss the modes of listening in relation to an ambience or a background as an effect of acousmatisation. I argue that ambient listening as an alert type of background-listening could develop into an ‘evenly hovering’ attention. Finally, I add another mode, which is perhaps the most important for the context of music theatre: a semiotic mode of listening as a specific type of listening-in-search for creating discursive structures. La Didone constantly makes the listener search for a stabilising frame and a hierarchising perspective. In so doing, the performance brings the listener’s ability to consciously control her or his attention as a defence mechanism against auditory distress to a border where the idle attention is at stake and meanings start to shift.
3. *La Didone*: Listening Modes in Response to a Schizophrenic Listening Situation

The Wooster Group reworked *La Didone* from the original baroque opera under the same title from 1641 by composer Francesco Cavalli and librettist Giovanni Francesco Busenello. La Didone represents the first opera staging by director Elizabeth LeCompte and The Wooster Group, who are known for their ‘post-dramatic’ stagings of text-based theatre. The term ‘opera’ applies, however, somewhat anachronistically to this version of Cavalli’s *dramma per musica* due to the post-dramatic context of its staging. The Wooster Group’s performance is, as is common to their highly ‘mediatised’ or ‘hypermedial’ theatrical language which they have developed over the years, a meticulous dramaturgical experiment that combines image, text and sound in most inventive ways that are foreign to traditional, dramatic modes of opera staging. Rather, this constellation constantly disrupts coherence in fragmentation, simultaneity and deconstruction of the original baroque opera.

Peculiar to the structure of The Wooster Group’s staging is the combination of the antique, epic story of Dido from Virgil (Publius Vergilius Maro) with the cult science-fiction film *Terrore Nello Spazio* (1965) by Mario Bava, better known under its English title as *Planet of the Vampires*. In addition, and barely recognisable as such, footage of *Queen of Outer Space* (Edward Bernds, 1958) has also been edited into the screening, which is projected in the centre of the background on a large screen (set design by Ruud van den Akker). By means of this unusual combination, The Wooster Group deconstructs the classic narrative and Busenello’s libretto in order to seek confrontations, hidden similarities and unavoidable clashes. This results in a bombardment of visual and auditory stimuli on the audience’s perception, playing upon its perceptive modes, attitudes and expectations in reading for signification through looking and listening.

I chose this performance as my case study because its hybrid construct manages the audience’s attention in ways that highlight the workings of the listening modes in response to given perspectives. The hybridity lies not only in the different media channels (a video screen, text projections, amplification technology) and the multiplicity of senses that are addressed through a bombardment of stimuli. It also specifically involves an unusual combination

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80 The Wooster Group is located in Brooklyn, New York. The project initially came into being in return to an invitation of the KunstenFESTIVALdesArts in Brussels to stage works from Busenello. The performance was staged in Brussels from 19 to 24 May 2007. Following this, the production began its tour through Europe and was to be seen, among others, in Rotterdam at the opera festival, the ‘Operadagen Rotterdam’. At this festival, I had the opportunity to see *La Didone* on 30 May 2007 in the Stadsschouwburg Rotterdam.

81 As contemporary to the father of music drama, Claudio Monteverdi who died in 1643, the original work by Cavalli and Busenello can be designated within the same tradition of *dramma per musica* in its early developments towards modern opera.
in the performance of Cavalli’s music on both acoustic and electronic instruments with voice amplification (music direction by Bruce Odland), and sound effects reproducing the sounds of crashing space ships and cosmic battles from Bava’s cult movie (sound montage by Matt Schloss). Setting the theorbo alongside the electric guitar and the electronic harpsichord sounds, the mixture of historical performance practice with popular sound idioms could sensitively pull a string in the listener, underscoring a tension between certain modes, attitudes and expectations in listening that are rather subjective.

My focus here is on the implications of the particular, spatial construct; namely, on how it always bears a perspective and thereby calls for the modes of listening. Though not my primary concern, I do not want to exclude the significant role that images and texts play in the ways they attribute to the perspectives and make the shifts in our attention meaningful. Precisely due to the juxtaposition of texts, images and sounds, this hybrid construct causes effects of doubling and splitting in the observer’s perception, which correspond to the two perspectives delivered by the narratives of Dido and the Planet of the Vampires.

On a narrative level, the juxtaposition of the two stories creates a meeting of two diegetic worlds. Virgil’s epic Aeneid (Book IV, circa 19 BC) recounts the arrival of Aeneas on the shores of Carthage, where the chaste Dido reigns as queen. In Bava’s 1965 cult movie, a spaceship with the Greek-sounding name ‘Argos’ crashes on the planet Aurora, and its crew gets caught in a frightening battle with zombies over a mysterious, all-powerful ‘meteor rejector’. The combination, so to speak, drops Aeneas’s ships onto the terrestrial landscape where an invisible danger plants fear into the hearts of the crew. The continuous attempts to escape from the zombie attacks that slowly eat the space crusaders one by one are also in close resemblance with Aeneas’s flee from the clutches of Dido, who is desperate to keep Aeneas on shore. The end of Busenello’s libretto diverges from Virgil’s version in that Dido marries her limping suitor Iarbas (added to the story) instead of killing herself. In the performance, this act of vengeance by the spurned lover, which was meant as a triumph of reason over love, contrasts ironically to the cartoonesque struggling gestures of the space crew members against the imperceptible...
forces on the planet. At this tragic ending, it is as if Aeneas and the crew have both been struck by the same gravitational force, fearing they will lose control. In the end, the space crusaders lose their individuality one by one by becoming zombies, guided by one mastermind.

On an acoustic level, the juxtaposition of classical and electronic musical instruments creates an unconventional listening situation, blending the baroque acoustic space with the modern electronic space. For the listener, this unremitting fusion of two auditory spaces creates a listening situation in which the constant spill-over of sound causes disturbances in each space that call for an active response from the listener. By following the two ‘tracks’ of baroque music and sci-fi sounds, the listener can trace the two narratives, connect to the projected images on the screen and the texts above the stage, and decide how to make sense of the connections that are offered. In this way, R. Murray Schafer’s term ‘schizophrenic’ (from Greek *schizo* ‘split’ and *phone* ‘voice, sound’) applies well to the space created here; it suggests a split listening situation, caused by removing and reassembling the sounds and their original sources. The splitting of sound is generally an effect of its enclosure in a recorded or transmitted medium.

With the term ‘schizophrenic’, Schafer refers to the process of splitting in a rather depreciatory way. His resistance towards divorcing sounds from their original context through their electroacoustic reproduction involves specifically the long-term effects of such a split on our (modern) ways of listening and perceiving. Through most common recording and communication devices – to which the Walkman, mobile phone and most recently, the iPod have contributed increasingly – schizophrenic sound has become part and parcel of our modern aural experiences with its common effects of temporal and spatial dislocation. Schafer clarifies that he picked this rather ’nervous’ term “in order to dramatise the aberrational effect of this twentieth-century development” (Schafer 1977: 273). Schafer’s criticism comes forth from an idealistic and reactionary audio ‘puritanism’ in relation to our (post-)modern, fragmentary auditory experiences under the influence of sound’s electronic reproduction. In Schafer’s idea, the schizophrenic effects of electroacoustic reproduction can cause *sound phobia*, that is, a fear or dislike caused by the sound in the listener for a particular reason. In the case of electroacoustic reproduction, the newly reproduced sound replaces the old, familiar sound.

In *La Didone*, the sounds from the movie and from the amplified voices of the actors are ripped from their original contexts, while the musicians play in the left corner on the stage in half-darkness. In contrast to our general indifference to cinema’s inherence in splitting sound from image through

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loudspeakers, the schizophrenic listening situation in the visually deprived context of the theatre creates a rather triggering effect. It does so, not so much because of some ‘sound phobia’ for a displaced sense of sounds, but because divorcing the sounds from their specific contexts and stitching them to another space makes the listener in the theatre alert. La Didone then demonstrates how through its recuperating, reproducing and deconstructing strategies of sound – in relation to its disembodiment of visual sources – auditory distress plays a significant role in activating the listener’s attention. This, in turn, produces the perceptual glue between the many auditory and visual impressions.

I now propose to study how in La Didone this attention is managed by a schizophrenic perspective, resulting in specific listening modes. The modes of listening help me to make distinctions in the auditory perception, which contributes to the way the listener makes sense of sound and music. I illustrate specifically how the modes of listening can be used as analytical tools to explain the listener’s responses to auditory distress in the theatre, as it becomes apparent in the schizophrenic perspective.

In what follows, I use Truax’s rising scale in listening attention as the guiding thread for the development of my argumentation. First, at the lowest degree of our conscious attention, I critically assess ambient or ‘background’ listening as a consequence of the excess in the split perceptions, which brings me to two related notions: Chion’s auditory icon and Barthes’s evenly hovering attention (also called ‘psycho-analytical listening’). Then, I move on to the second level of attention in Truax’s distinction with a comparison of the modes that are related to listening-in-readiness: acousmatic, reduced and causal listening. I show how in music theatre like La Didone, these modes are inherently related and even entangled in the listener’s responses to the split perspectives. As a result, I argue that this ‘alert’ listening attention constantly shifts between these modes in order to make sense in the first place instead of always an (imagined) cause or index. Finally, I discuss a third related mode at the presumed highest level of conscious attention: a semiotic mode of listening. I demonstrate how this mode intersects with the previous ones as they all work together in the listener’s interpretative efforts as a continuous response or ‘free play’ with a ‘semiotic remainder’ in sound and music.

3.1. Ambient and Causal Listening:
Auditory Icons, Evenly Hovering Attention

The schizophrenic listening situation in La Didone divides sound from the visual image on the screen or from the gestures of the musical performance on the stage. The auditory space thus created has implications for the listener

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84 With regard to this awareness, I account for the differences in the use and effects of ‘acousmatic sound’ in film and theatre with regard to our listening modes and attention.
who attempts to grasp the listening situation through her or his attention. Schafer’s rather negatively formulated concept of schizophonia manifests itself in the performance as a strategy that calls upon the listener’s active attention, switching between conscious and unconscious levels of auditory perception. In our (post-)modern audio culture, we are used to the experience that sound is most often detached from its originating body or source and does not co-occur in vision at the same time in the same space. This dislocation is anchored broadly in our modern soundscapes due to all recording, play-back and transmissive, mediating technologies (subsumed under the so-called ‘phonographic’ tradition).

In *La Didone* the schizophonic listening situation gives rise to shifting perspectives that manage the listener’s attention and perception. These perspectives elicit at times Truax’s first mode of attention: a distracted way of listening, which manifests itself as background-listening as a consequence of an excess of information. Through my case study I intend to show how this mode can easily shift into a mode of listening-in-readiness, an alert listening mode triggered by indexical and iconic signals. Listening-in-readiness is in all probability the *modus audendi* of the modern listener, upon which the performances by The Wooster Group also play. The schizophonic perspective in *La Didone* plays upon the shift between a distracted and an alert way of listening, which reflects our everyday auditory experiences, by making distinctions between foreground and background of sound in the listener’s attention as managed by the given perspectives. Most of the auditory events in the performance therefore also have an iconic function. I argue that, in the theatre, such iconic sounds have a decisive function in either supporting or stirring the listener’s ‘idle’ attention. They make the listener attentive in her or his rather lingering mode of attention to infer connections, and as such, to create meaningful auditory experiences.

When the schizophonic perspective causes auditory distress through excess, I contend that causal listening fulfils a human need for temporary satisfaction in grasping hold of the auditory space. Causal listening is one of the most dominant manifestations of listening-in-readiness in Schafer’s and Truax’s tools of analysis. It answers to the most prevailing urge in the modern listener, namely to search for a stability in meaningful relations to the sound or music. Finding a cause, even when we cannot immediately locate it visually and imagine one, is, however, not identical to finding meaning. In causal listening we place a sound in relation to ourselves. Through its distance, this place indicates what the sound does or means to us in a particular situation. One practical example is our reactions in urban traffic: we obviously cannot pay attention to each sound in this particular volatile listening situation, and as a defence mechanism towards the auditory distress, we cancel out most of the intensities that are not of immediate importance to safely arrive at our destination. In this situation, *listening-in-readiness* rather makes us only pay
attention to those sounds that alert indexically an approaching danger, or as Barthes formulated it in his essay mentioned earlier:

[Listening is that preliminary attention which permits intercepting whatever might disturb the territorial system; it is a mode of defence against surprise; its object (what it is oriented toward) is menace or, conversely, need; the raw material of listening is the index, because it either reveals danger or promises the satisfaction of need (Barthes 1991: 247).]

The sound’s cause serves as an index of a threat. In Charles S. Peirce’s semiotic theory, an *index* expresses the relation between a sign and its object (or meaning) through its co-occurrence in an actual experience (Turino 1999: 227). Sound indexes, similarly, call for associations through co-occurrence with the objects and/or the cultural network of ‘interpreants’ (aka *signifieds*, objects or referents) in a specific context, situation or place. This also explains how we can recognise sounds as known categories that engender imagining the cause of a sound by means of causal listening. Once the association is established, co-occurrence no longer has to take place in order to trigger the association. As a result of our defence mechanism, however, we move those unnecessary sounds to the background or mask them from our attention. In this way, the schizophrenic perspective can also trigger another mode of listening of very low conscious attention as a defence mechanism against the auditory distress: *environmental* or *ambient* listening, or what Schafer and Truax also denote as *background-listening*. In this mode, sound is put to the background of the listener’s attention and serves merely as an ambience, colouring a space in terms of its atmosphere. Most indexical sounds are not even realised as such when they sediment with the ambience. Background and foreground reinforce each other in this mode, resulting in constant shifts of attention.

*La Didone* demonstrates the applicability of Schafer’s and Truax’s concepts as tools to make distinctions in listening and understand how we make meaningful experiences. However, the performance also illustrates the

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85 Schafer’s soundscape studies have a semiotic underpinning, which could be brought home to the Peircian triadic schema of semiosis: it consists of a sign vehicle or representamen (i.e. association of signifier with the signified), an object or referent (i.e. the thing to which the sign refers); and an interpretant or sense (i.e. the meaning made of the sign by the subject). On the level of the relations between sign and object, Peirce further distinguishes three categories: *icon*, *index* and *symbol*.

86 A sound index could also be established by the cultural discourse without actual co-occurrence as well. For example, no matter how politically incorrect it may sound today, the harsh sounds of the German language after the Holocaust and WWII might still trigger feelings of anxiety and associations with the past to people of the second generation who did not experience the war time at all. The sounds have become part of the cultural memory, which takes part in the post-trauma of the 20th century. Sound indexes can therefore operate in most unconscious ways as part of our understanding the world.
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interdependency of these distinctions. The index appears on the fringe of blocking out the ‘harmful’, distressing intensities in the environment or ambience and an alert consciousness of these auditory interventions that catch our attention. The index, as Barthes proposes, explains how we make associations with objects or sources in our environment to make sense in relation to our ‘selves’ in terms of a menace or a need. In this way, as La Didone shows, a mode of background listening can easily shift into listening-in-readiness through perspective when it appeals to our attention by creating a distinction between foreground (figure) and background (ground). In its sound design (by Matt Schloss), the sound effects of Bava’s film are sometimes placed in the background, as if someone switches and zooms in on the sonorous world of the baroque opera on the audio board. At another instance, Dido’s heartbreaking lament, while Aeneas flees, ironically serves as background music to the battle of the space crew against the invisible terrestrial forces of gravity. The irony resides in the observation that Dido’s words no longer matter much and are lost in the naive ‘violence’ of the phoney space battle. In so doing, the switching between foreground and background in the schizophrenic listening situation plays upon a sense of menace and a need that cannot be fulfilled. The baroque music also bears a dramatic touch in a double sense, because it cannot escape our cognition even if our distracted listening places the sound in the background. Even the background music emphatically calls to be heard. However, our affective response becomes unremitting emotion when the music again bursts through the loudspeakers and drowns all cries for help. This dramatic moment could effect goose bumps when the music ensemble, playing from one of the dark corners of the stage, merges to the foreground in our auditory perception.

Historically, background music stems from the idea of a ‘musique d’aménagement’, coined and practiced by Erik Satie in 1920, and often translated as ‘musical tapestry’. This type of music would occupy social space as furniture, namely as functional but not primarily intended for artistic contemplation. In the 20th century, the term ‘ambient music’ emerged, for which Brian Eno is usually accredited as the founder and first composer. Ambient music is a type of environmental music that is atmospheric in nature. In his ambient compositions, Brian Eno has a sub-audio approach to it. He recounts the story of how the idea of ambient music came to his mind by an accident. After being hit by a taxi, he was hospitalised with a suspected skull fracture. A friend of his, Judy Nylon, brought him a gift a record of eighteenth-century harp music. After she left, he put the record on, but only when he was back in bed did he realise that the volume was not adjusted properly. Too weak to readjust it, he was annoyed at first, but gradually he started to listen to the quiet music mingling with the sounds of rain outside his window, while darkness of the day’s end set in (see Prendergast 2000: 2003: 119). David Toop comments on this pivotal moment: “As he did so, an alternative mode of hearing unfolded. Rather than standing out from its environment, like a ship on an ocean, the music became part of that ocean, alongside all the other transient effects of
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listener’s behaviour in most unconscious and immersive ways. Schafer and especially Truax have often warned of the manipulative and commercial use of this type of music when it affects us in our most unconscious modes of listening. In its pejorative meaning, they use the terms ‘Muzak’ (or as Schafer also calls it, ‘Moosak’), generally known as elevator music. In the specific modes of listening that it triggers, ambient music socially restricts and defines a location in terms of mass behaviour and target audience. As such, it exerts the power of the unnoticed.

La Didone demonstrates how ambience in the schizophonic perspective manipulates the listener’s modes of perception spatially. However, it does not need to lead to the aforementioned negative effects. The ambient mode of listening in La Didone rather draws the listener’s attention to the physical space that sounds inhabit. As I mentioned in chapter one, Chion has stressed the gas-like properties of sound: “In the case of ambient sounds, which are often the product of multiple specific and local sources . . . what is important is the space inhabited and defined by the sound, more than its multisource origin” (Chion 1994: 79). By calling upon an ambient mode of listening, La Didone demonstrates how we create territories in our ways of listening and how music always composes and (re)produces space. The background sounds capitalise on our understanding of space, creating two simultaneous diegetic worlds of the vampire planet and Dido’s palace, which are at times colliding as two ‘parallel worlds’. As such, the ambience elicits an environmental way of listening with which we attempt to grab the auditory space as an imaginary tentacle in favour of the representation or the narrative. The territories thus created in our minds compensate for the latent crisis of the listening subject, offering it a temporary space of security.

One way to give sound this space of security, is through indexical listening, which simultaneously reinforces background listening. Michel Chion (1994) refers to another, comparable notion that explains how we treat ambient sounds in our modes of listening: we read them as ‘earcons’ (or ear-icons). In Chion’s definition, an earcon is an auditory reference that implies a static, non-narrative and referential context, often juxtaposed to narrative light, shade, colour, scent, taste and sound. So ambient was born, in its present definition at least: music that we hear but don’t hear; sounds which exist to enable us better to hear silence; sound which rests us from our intense compulsion to focus, to analyse, to frame, to categorise, to isolate” (Toop 1995; 2001: 139-40).

Jonathan Sterne (2005) refers to Muzak in terms of a ‘non-aggressive music deterrent’, not just because it has been applied to commercially advertise detergents, but it has been also used to control space by scaring potential malicious youngsters away from parking lots, walkways, doorways, gas stations, parks and stores (6-7).

A parallel world or universe (aka alternative reality) is a narrative strategy most common to science-fiction literature. It creates two diegetic worlds or ‘realities’ that are very similar and co-existing but that are also dissimilar in a number of aspects, usually within the character of the twin agents that live on both sides, or in alternate histories that stem from the same historical event.
functions. Ambience usually serves as a ‘mood-trigger’ in a direct, ‘unmediated’ way. However, as an auditory icon, the earcon relates generally to the image in a direct relationship or comes to represent a specific event, action or object. As the icon to the eye, the earcon implies an immediate affective response to the ear.\textsuperscript{90} It appeals to our referential sensitivity of making meaning in most automatic, unconscious ways. The function of the earcon further depends on an ‘archive’ of contexts or auditory environments typified by certain situations or scenes. Conventions and codes in listening play a crucial role in this type of signification, which inheres in the cultural discourse in similar ways to the sound index.\textsuperscript{91}

Though Chion has coined his notion of the earcon in the context of the sonic ambience in cinema, I suggest that it is not particular to the cinematic context alone and can also be considered for sound in (music) theatre such as in \textit{La Didone}. In the theatre, ambience is not necessarily imbued with narrativity. However, it does tune the mood for the audience in most direct ways. In \textit{La Didone}, the iconic use of the sound effects is recycled from the film and given another life on the stage. For instance, the sound of the Theremin has built up iconic value over time when it came to denote the tacky sounds of old sci-fi B-movies. Even so, when Dido’s lament serves as the background track to the re-enactment of the events of the movie on stage, it appeals to our attention in most affective and emotional ways. Cavalli’s music becomes referential in giving us a message beyond its lyrics: love ‘gravitates’ us as a universal force and drives us towards annihilation. The song in the background affects us, while, ironically, the crew acts as if it is fighting against the terrestrial force. In this way, the earcons elicit an affective response, while at the same time they call upon our capacity to make linkages between the double narrative and the different, parallel worlds of the movie and the baroque opera.

As such, the ambience in \textit{La Didone} is highly layered and detailed to minuscule proportions. It creates a constant acoustic horizon against which all actions and events are interpreted. In order for the listener to build up associations with the sound indexes and earcons it incorporates, she or he has to be in a mode of \textit{listening-in-readiness} at all times. However, as I

\textsuperscript{90} In the Peircian definition, an \textit{icon} is related to its object through resemblance or perceived similarity (Turino 1999: 226), and is therefore much related to an idea of ‘sound mimesis’. There are three types of icons according to Peirce: the image (i.e. a trace or a quote), the diagram (for instance, a map) and the metaphor. Imaginative listening to sound and music could provoke metaphors, as Thomas Turino (1999) suggests, but it could also involve sound images and musical quotes.

\textsuperscript{91} Like the sound index, the earcon reveals something of the discursive system in which it receives its interpretation and stability. Kaja Silverman states the relation of the icon and its discourse: “The history of perspective, Impressionist painting, Oriental lithographs, narrative norms, not to mention the examples always cited by Peirce – graphs and algebraic equations – show that we need to be schooled in systems of representation before certain signifiers will reveal their iconicity to us” (Silverman 1983: 24).
introduced at the beginning of this chapter, the modern listener is, by necessity, actively idle due to her or his defence mechanisms. This lazy attention is also culturally specific in our attitudes towards ambience that we spatially locate in the background. The above examples of the earcons in *La Didone* demonstrate that, even when we are not paying attention to these sounds but are rather distracted, there are always sounds that suddenly stir and appeal to our waking attention.\(^2\) The earcons or auditory icons in the ambience can have this effect in the schizophonic listening situation of the performance, while at the same time spatially marking the atmosphere or mood within the narrative, in which we find ourselves immersed to a certain extent.

In *La Didone*, the earcons help me to indicate the movement of the listener’s attention between background listening and a mode of listening-in-readiness. These modes seem to predicate the instable relation between (unconscious) hearing and (conscious) listening, which are often entangled. It is only when a particular sound reaches out of the acoustic horizon of the ambience and appeals to our ears that we feel tempted to find temporary coherence in it through causal or indexical listening. Sigmund Freud coined the term for a category of listening that vacillates comparably between unconscious and conscious modes of auditory perception, which he conceptualised as ideal for the practice of psychoanalysis: ‘gleichschwebende Aufmerksamkeit’, or in English, *evenly hovering attention*. This type of attention allows the excess – and therefore the possible levels of auditory distress – in listening in most productive ways for our interpreting efforts. In this mode, the ear does not realise earcons or auditory indexes as such, but allows the sounds to ‘be themselves’, much like John Cage recommended the ‘panaural’ attitude by giving up the desire to control them (Cage 1961: 10).

Roland Barthes describes evenly hovering attention as a particular mode of ‘psychoanalytical listening’ by citing Freud’s 1912 essay “Recommendations for Physicians on the Psychoanalytic Method of Treatment”:

> ‘The analyst must bend his own unconscious […] like a receptive organ toward the emerging unconscious of the patient, must be as the receiver of the telephone to the disc. As the receiver transmutes the electric vibrations induced by the sound waves back again into sound waves, so is the physician’s unconscious mind able to reconstruct the patient’s unconscious which has directed his associations, from the communications derived from it.’ […] It is, in effect, from unconscious to unconscious that psychoanalytic listening functions, from a speaking unconscious to another which is presumed to hear. What is thus spoken emanates from an unconscious knowledge transferred to another subject, whose knowledge is presumed (Barthes 1991: 252).

\(^2\) Another example would be the involuntary but embarrassing moment when a mobile phone goes off in the audience. The sound triggers an immediate, affective reaction to the owner of the phone, and rouses her or him to switch off the phone.
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Like the psycho-analyst ‘tuning into the frequency’ of the patient, the listener in *La Didone* needs to tune into the associations and linkages that the detailed soundscapes give way to when she or he listens in an open way, from ‘unconscious to unconscious’ as it were. This requires a certain level of openness in our expectations towards sound and music.\(^9\)

For Barthes, this mode of listening constitutes a modern way of listening, which is no longer an applied, semantic listening in search of fixed meanings, but rather a way of listening that allows for many contradictory meanings to emerge:

First of all, whereas for centuries listening could be defined as an intentional act of audition (to listen is to *want* to hear, in all conscience), today it is granted the power (and virtually the function) of playing over unknown space: listening includes in its field not only the unconscious in the topical sense of the term, but also, so to speak, its lay forms: the implicit, the indirect, the supplementary, the delayed: listening grants access to all forms of polysemy, of overdetermination, of superimposition, there is a disintegration of the Law which prescribes direct, unique listening; by definition, listening was *applied*; today we ask listening to *release*; we thereby return, but at another loop of the historical spiral, to the conception of a *panic* listening, as the Greeks, or at least as the Dionysians, had conceived it (Barthes 1991: 258).

Barthes suggests here that it is through the haphazard, spontaneous nature of psychoanalytical listening that true auditory events are able to appear. This mode ‘releases’ listening, thereby turning it into an event. It allows for auditory distress without the imposition of selection, sedimented meanings, and a known, secure auditory space. Rather than implying agency, intentions and control to the act of listening, psychoanalytic listening grants back authority and power to the sound. This would enable us to explore and play over our listening spaces through listening, to allow for many disintegrating experiences that can be meaningful at once. This mode also breaks with the idea of an applied and unique way of listening of the audiophile, the connoisseur, the musicologist. Allowing the auditory distress brings in a mode of ‘panic listening’ that reinforces over-interpretations, overdeterminations, and as a result of that, ‘too much’ meaning.

Hans-Thies Lehmann (2006) also describes this mode of listening as a specific perceptual strategy in ‘post-dramatic’ theatre: “Rather one’s perception has to remain open for connections, correspondences and clues at completely unexpected moments, perhaps casting what was said earlier in a completely new light. Thus, meaning remains in principle postponed” (87).

As listening mode in the theatre, psychoanalytical listening requires a willingness to be on the alert and not immediately interpret everything, but be

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\(^9\) Douglas Kahn (2001) formulates this idea through the Cagean notion of *panaurality* (see chapter one).
open to unconscious associations. If not exclusively for the modern listener and post-dramatic theatre, this is perhaps also the most essential mode of listening for the theatre of The Wooster Group and more specifically, *La Didone*.

However, listening through evenly hovering attention presents us at this point with an indispensable paradox in the theatre. In chapter one, I argued how auditory distress is necessary for sound to come to existence, to surpass an acoustic horizon and to catch our fleeting attention. Here, I discuss how our attention is activated to respond through different modes of listening that arise by means of the ways we move our listening attention in relation to the listening perspectives in the theatre. This listening attention serves as a vehicle to manage the levels of auditory distress and (re)gain cognitive control over the auditory space in terms of indexes, icons, signifying events, etc. However, in particular the mode of attention that affects a spatial sense, in terms of foreground and background (ambience), calls for an open attitude not to be selective and controlling of our listening attention, as Barthes further suggests:

> For as soon as attention is deliberately concentrated in a certain degree, one begins to select from the material before one; one point will be fixed in the mind with particular clearness and some other consequently disregarded, and in this selection one’s expectations or one’s inclinations will be followed. This is just what must not be done; if one’s expectations are followed in this selection, there is the danger of never finding anything but what is already known, and if one follows one’s inclinations, anything which is to be perceived will most certainly be falsified. It must not be forgotten that the meaning of the things one hears, at all events for the most part, is only recognizable later on (Freud, qtd. in Barthes 1991: 253).

Contrary to psychoanalytical listening, the modes of listening as discussed by Soundscape studies imply selection and control which are necessary for the listener to gain control as subject over the auditory distress. Paradoxically, this sense of control will never make us flee from our subjective expectations and pre-knowledge. Barthes, however, stresses through Freud’s concept that this control needs to be lost in order to truly listen and find meanings that are not yet known to us in our personal and cultural discourse. However, listening always involves a sense of being personally addressed by the acoustic intervention, which annihilates the auditory sense of self, and thereby the urge to create a meaningful experience to whatever extent, impossible.

As I intend to show in the following paragraph, this paradox needs not to lead to a deadlock in our modes of listening. Rather, *La Didone* demonstrates that the latent impasse in an excess of meaning is productive in making us constantly and necessarily switch between our modes of listening in order to search for meaningful experiences that have not yet materialised. An evenly
hovering attention then marks a listening situation where we have not yet solidified our experiences into meaningful relations according to what deserves our attention and what remains in the background. Ambient, environmental, or background listening thereby does not exclude a mode of *listening-in-readiness*, vigilant for meanings that can emerge according to the shifting perspectives.

### 3.2. Shifting Modes: Acousmatic and Reduced Listening

Central to the listening perspectives in *La Didone* is the schizophonic listening situation. Schafer connects this type of perspective with ‘acousmatic’ listening. Acousmatic sound and acousmatisation are most common to the cinematic apparatus. With the help of *La Didone*, I propose to rethink this process for the theatre in relation to the modes of listening it elicits. In this way, I demonstrate in which way we can apply the concept of acousmatic listening and its consequences to understand how we make sense of sound and music in the theatre.

In film theory, acousmatisation is generally defined as an effect of the mediation that marks the absence in ostension of an immediate connection between sound and its source. When looking at film we are generally unaware of the audio-visual split in the technical reproduction of sound and image due to its conventional, medium-specific strategies that neutralise auditory distress. These strategies have become conventions that make us ‘read’ sounds as originally and immediately connected to what we see or think we see in a causal way. In *La Didone*, acousmatisation also appears as a medial effect inherent to both the cinematic apparatus (of the film projections) and the operatic tradition, highlighting their convergences and differences in the ways they address the listener. The life performance of Cavalli’s music from the hidden corner, comparable to Wagner’s orchestra pit, is, however very different from what is generally understood as ‘acousmatic music’; the latter is comparable to ambient music due to its expansive claims on auditory space.⁹⁴ Acousmatic and ambient music are often interchangeable for that matter.

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⁹⁴ Chion (1994) describes how the term ‘acousmatic’ has been applied “to designate concert music that is made for a recorded medium, intentionally eliminating the possibility of seeing the sounds’ initial causes” (72). There is, however, also a special type of electroacoustic music played through loudspeakers, which is often called ‘acousmatic music’. In 1974, Francois Bayle introduced the expression ‘Acousmatic Music’ while director of the Groupe Recherches Musicales in Paris, employing it to denote a specific kind of music: “This term designates a music of images that is ‘shot and developed in the studio, and projected in a hall, like a film’, and is presented at a subsequent date” (Dhomont 1996: 24). Though the imaginative and narrative properties have been theorised in studies of the acousmatic medium for the last decade, which I do not wish to reproduce here, it suffices to say that the deprived context stimulates the listener in the theatre to use the imagination as a response to the lack of visual stimuli. See for recent studies, for instance, the perceptual approach to acousmatic music in Windsor 1995; or the study on the personal stereo (Sony’s Walkman ®) in Bull 2000.
Regarding its effects, acousmatic music has been theorised and often uncritically idealised for its property to ‘free’ associative ‘mental images’ due to its liberation of its immediate visual context, and due to its deficiency of logocentric, ‘explanatory’ or semantic ways of listening. The acousmatic context would assist the listener in gaining access to more unconscious levels of sensation and emotion. However, there is also a great impulse for narrativisation as it draws on a cinematic experience. ‘Acousmatic music’ has therefore been referred to as ‘cinema for the ears’ by the French composer Francis Dhomont: “Acousmatic art is the art of mental representation triggered by sound” (Dhomont 1996: 25).

Although not composed as ambient or acousmatic music as such, through the use of microphones and loudspeakers the acousmatised sounds of Bava’s film and the musical sounds of Cavalli’s baroque opera could call upon such mental representations in the listener’s mind. Though associations and mental images are never excluded, the acousmatisation in La Didone rather supports the doubling and splitting of the visual representation in the cinematic images on the screen and the actor’s gestures on stage, which resists any attempt of a homogenising imagination. In other words, when the theatre explicitly incorporates temporal and spatial dislocations between sound and its source, acousmatisation can have the opposite effect than in cinema. Since sound and body are usually present together in the theatre, splitting them sharpens the listening attention. In relation to the acousmatic listening situation, a plethora of listening modalities have been theoretically proposed, which I discuss here to show how the listener in La Didone responds with her or his attention to these so-called ‘disembodied’ sounds.

The origins of the word ‘acousmatic’ trace back to 1955, at the beginning of the musique concrète, when the poet Jérôme Peignot coined the French adjective ‘acousmatique’ from Greek akousma meaning auditive perception, or literally ‘what is heard’. The Greek word has an ancient reference to the Pythagorean venues (6th century BC) where the Master taught his pupils orally from behind a curtain – like an oracle – as to not let his physical appearance and presence distract their focus from the spoken word, and thus the content of his message (Restivo 1999: 137). The Larousse dictionary refers to Diogenes

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55 ‘Cinema for the Ears’ was also the title of a concert series organised by Birmingham University (UK) in the 1990’s, and it was used for the title of Ulli Aumüller’s documentary My Cinema for the Ears (2002) about the world of ideas and works of Francis Dhomont and Paul Lansky. Additionally, Robert Normandeau contributed extensively to the development of the term.

56 Peignot actually borrowed the term from the dictionary and referred to it in a radio programme: “Quels mots pourraient désigner cette distance qui sépare les sons de leur origine… Bruit acousmatique se dit (dans le dictionnaire) d’un son que l’on entend sans en déceler les causes. Eh bien! la voilà la définition même de l’objet sonore, cet élément de base de la musique concrète, musique la plus générale qui soit, de qui… la tête au ciel était voisine, et dont les pieds touchaient à l’empire des morts ” (In Musique animée, broadcast of the ‘Groupe de musique concrète’, 1955).
Laertius (VIII, 10) of the 3rd century AD: “[His pupils] were silent for the period of five years and only listened to the speeches without seeing Pythagoras, until they proved themselves worthy of it” (qtd. in Dolar 2006: 61). Pythagoras' disciples thereby valorised the voice of a speaker over its visual presence, lending it their pure focus.  

After Peignot picked up the term ‘acousmatic’ from a dictionary and reintroduced it, Schaeffer chose the concept to designate the ‘objet sonore’ (the sonorous object) as developed in his *Traité des objets musicaux* (1966). Through Peignot and Schaeffer, the term ‘acousmatic’ came to designate “sounds one hears without seeing their originating cause” (Chion 1994: 71). Schaeffer’s sonorous object can be regarded as the sonic equivalent of a photograph: “pieces of time torn from the cosmos” (qtd. in Toop 2004: 67). R. Murray Schafer (1977) discusses acousmatic listening in terms of – what he translates from Schaeffer as – the ‘sound object’, meaning a sound that we can hear without knowing its cause by obscuring, behind the impassivity of a playback apparatus and a loudspeaker, any visual associations it may convey.  

After Schafer, it was chiefly Michel Chion who made most important contributions to theorise the concept further within film theory. He clearly defines acousmatic listening in terms of “a situation wherein one hears a sound without seeing its cause” (Chion 1994: 32). However, he stresses that acousmatisation and de-acousmatisation can both occur as cinematic processes in relation to one another. Although acousmatisation affects principally our auditory perception, it is defined in terms of its reliance on *visuality* in the first place: ‘acousmatic listening’ refers to perceiving a sound without ‘seeing’ its source or cause. De-acousmatisation brings the source or cause of a sound (back) into the image frame.  

As *La Didone* shows, acousmatic sound in the theatre has, however, a different effect than in the cinema. To conceptualise its effect to listening in music theatre, I want to connect it to the concept of the auditory gaze, which I introduced in chapter one. The notion of ‘auditory gazing’ demonstrates how a sudden new perspective ‘frames’ our attitude of listening. Jean-Paul Sartre’s description of how a peeping Tom all of a sudden feels caught by an invisible sound of footsteps in the background illustrates how acousmatic sound foremost marks the presence of objects spatially in the absence of their cause by obscuring, behind the impassivity of a playback apparatus and a loudspeaker, any visual associations it may convey.

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97 Mladen Dolar (2006) explains how the curtain in the Pythagorean venues connects philosophy with theatrical performance: “The advantage of this mechanism was obvious: the students, the followers, were confined to ‘their Master’s voice,’ not distracted by his looks or quirks of behavior, by visual forms, the spectacle of presentation, the theatrical effects which always pertain to lecturing; they had to concentrate merely on the voice and the meaning emanating from it. It appears that at its origin philosophy depends on a theatrical coup de force: there is the simple minimal device which defines the theatre, the curtain which serves as a screen, but a curtain not to be raised, not for many years – philosophy appears as the art of an actor behind the curtain” (Dolar 2006: 61). Seen this way, acousmatic listening actually originates from the theatre before it was picked up to describe electroacoustic music or cinema in the 20th century.
or body. In Sartre’s example, the sudden sound disrupts the focused attention of the observer while looking through the keyhole, and brings to attention the surroundings as a new frame with a troublesome perspective: an invisible sound is approaching. Similarly, acousmatic listening invests in ‘virtuality’ as a fiction of presence, in which the listener ‘eavesdrops’ from an outside but feels addressed inside the auditory space by the sounds that are not (yet) framed. Sartre’s illustration certifies how sound bears its own perspectives on how and what to listen to. This perspective in sound pulls the listener into the auditory space, while the frame helps her or him to make sense of it. I contend that music theatre works, equally, through particular structures of address on the listener. The acousmaticisation of sound in La Didone makes this structure visible by managing the listener’s auditory gaze and continuously switching between different perspectives that change the modes of listening respectively.

To conceptualise the effects of acousmaticisation on the modes of listening, I follow Chion’s argumentation which makes claims about sound in film and in general. I then re-evaluate the application of Chion’s ideas in the context of the theatre. Chion initially compares the concept of acousmatic sound to Schaeffer’s notion of reduced listening (‘l’écoute réduite’), that is, listening to sound for its own sake as in recordings. Schaeffer’s reduced listening is closely related to the acousmatic listening situation. As Chion (1994) explains, reduced listening operates as a phenomenological reduction because it consists of stripping the auditory perception of everything that is not ‘it’ in itself so that we could hear the sound only in its own materiality, substance and perceivable dimensions. This mode of listening requires a listening attention that is highly focused and that targets the sound as contained in itself without reference, association, meaning, cause or context.

The act of removing all references and values that may be suggested is a voluntary though highly artificial act for the sake of analysis (analytical listening, in Truax’s tripartite). It allows us to clarify certain phenomena in our perception. David Toop (2004) comments:

Michel Chion describes Schaeffer’s concept of ‘reduced listening’ [...] as an enterprise ‘that disrupts lazy habits and opens up a world of previously unimagined questions for those who hear it [...] reduced listening has the enormous advantage of opening up our ears and sharpening our power of listening’ (67).

According to Chion and Toop, reduced listening is the key to unlock the ‘lazy habits’, which supports Stockfelt’s earlier argument about the development of

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98 Marking the presence of objects in film is a typical Foley-effect (named after Jack Foley, one of the earliest practitioners in Hollywood), that is realised by sound artists artificially re-enacting similar, everyday, often indexical or enhanced sounds in an audio studio with a recording engineer and editing them together with the respective images in post-production.
The Frequency of Imagination

a reflexive consciousness surrounding the active ‘idle’ listener at the beginning of this chapter. This is also the reason why Schaeffer’s reduced listening and sonorous object bear initial importance to Schafer’s ear-cleaning exercises:

Deliberately forgetting every reference to instrumental causes or preexisting musical significations, we then seek to devote ourselves entirely and exclusively to listening, to discover the instinctive paths that lead from the purely ‘sonorous’ to the purely ‘musical.’ Such is the suggestion of acousmatics: to deny the instrument and cultural conditioning, to put in front of us the sonorous and its musical ‘possibility’ (Schaeffer 2004: 81).

In this sense, it can be understood why the acousmatic listening situation in La Didone bears important implications on the listener’s attention: both the interventions of the sci-fi sounds and the musical sounds from the musicians in the dark corner create a focused attention for the sonorous environment and its musical qualities. This effect is confirmed by Chion (1994) when he states that reduced listening causes the listener to “separate oneself from causes or effects in favour of consciously attending to sonic textures, masses, and velocities” (32).

In La Didone the reduction in listening by visual deprivation also concerns sharpening the attention. However, this ‘reduced’ listening situation in the theatre differs from Schaeffer’s reduced listening, which pertains specifically to a laboratory environment where recorded sounds can be listened to and analysed as specimens, time and again. Chion explains: “Technically, this must be done in a relatively dead sound environment that is well isolated from outside noises – conditions which must be carefully arranged” (Chion 1994: 188). Reduced listening draws attention to the sound itself giving it a certain degree of autonomy. Jean-Jacques Nattiez (1991) concludes that reduced listening therefore only relevance for analysing sound’s morphology: “[t]he acousmatic dictates that a sound be described less in terms of its origin than in terms of its heard morphological qualities (form, mass, profile, and so forth)” (92). The acousmatic sounds in La Didone do not aim at such context-free ‘morphological’ analysis as such, but rather elicit new homogenising relations with the auditory space, context and narrative. Rather, they highlight the new connections between sound and image, specifically in relation to its cultural associations.

Hence, criticism towards the relevance and applicability of Schaeffer’s notion of reduced listening can be understood in the theatrical framework. Schafer criticises the notion of the sonorous object as pure sound in that it cannot exist without the recording and play-back situation: “If there is a sonorous object, it is only insofar as there is a blind listening [écoute] to sonorous effects and contents: the sonorous object is never revealed clearly
except in the acousmatic experience” (Schafer 1977: 79). Schafer suggests here that the sonorous object is only specific to the acousmatic ‘laboratory’ situation. Similarly, Forrester contests that in our daily auditory experiences we do not phenomenally ‘hear’ pure sounds as signals or waves as such, nor its intrinsic characteristics expressed in acoustic parameters (like pitch, amplitude, colour, texture, etc.); we hear events (Forrester 2000: 33). In the theatre, as La Didone demonstrates, the acousmatic sounds make us aware of the acoustic events and their relatability as far as our attention allows.

Reduced listening, moreover, has an effect of what John Corbett (1990) has termed, ‘fetishistic audiophilia’, which refers to the desire and fetishisation of autonomous sound as a result of the audio-visual split (Burston 1998: 210). The acousmatic listening situation in La Didone, however, demonstrates that the split does not need to fetishise sound for its own sake to the detriment of our subjectivity in signification. On the contrary, instances of acousmatic listening in La Didone make our subjectivity in switching our attention and tracing linkages even more acute. I conclude here that acousmatic sounds in the theatre do not induce reduced listening in the Schaefferian sense, but most often they stimulate us to make homogeneous connections in our interpretations.

Chion (1994) supports that the acousmatic situation does not merely inhere in reduced listening by claiming that another, more fundamental mode of listening necessarily comes to the fore:

[T]he acousmatic situation intensifies causal listening in taking away the aid of sight. Confronted with a sound from a loudspeaker that is presenting itself without a visual calling card, the listener is led all the more intently to ask, ‘What’s that?’ (i.e., ‘What is causing this sound?’) and to be attuned to the minutest clues (often interpreted wrong anyway) that might help to identify the cause (32).

Acousmatic listening can leave us with an unfulfilled satisfaction to know where the sounds come from. In this sense, the sound’s inherent auditory distress comes to the fore as the visual absence of a source urges us to look for its source through our attention so that we could regain control over the

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99 The necessary reduction has, however, made the sound object into a laboratory specimen that lends its ‘body’ to electroacoustic media for cutting and slicing (but also for artistic alteration) in a dead sound environment with an artificially arranged acoustic horizon. Schafer goes on to suggest that the sonorous object is perhaps based on an impossibility, when he states: “To avoid confusing it with its physical cause or a ‘stimulus,’ we seemed to have grounded the sonorous object on our subjectivity. But – our last remarks already indicate this – the sonorous object is not modified for all that, neither with the variations in listening from one individual to another, nor with the incessant variations in our attention and our sensibility” (Schafer 1977: 2004: 81). Schafer seems to hint here that reduced listening would require cancelling out our subjectivity and the changeability of our attention. In its most extreme shape, the sonorous object exists then outside perception, which is then rather a philosophical concept if not an aporia.
auditory space. As Chion suggests, questioning the source can turn into a listening-in-search mode for the purpose of gaining information about the sound source. In this mode of listening, our attention in *La Didone* could carry us away to the dark corner of the stage where musicians play Cavalli’s music on unusual instruments, like the electric guitar, the electronic keyboard or the accordion. However, as I already noted earlier, causal listening (aka sound source recognition or identification) occurs most of the time as a mode of listening-in-readiness that ascribes immediate indexical meanings to the sounds in relation to ourselves.

According to Chion, the mode of causal listening makes the listener actively and intently “attuned to the minutest clues (often interpreted wrongly anyway) that might help to identify the cause” (Chion 1994: 32). This corresponds with the claims in Soundscape studies that the human perceptual system hunts for information, even when it leads to a wrong interpretation. Connor acknowledges this urge and concludes that there is no proper ‘disembodied’ sound as acousmatisation would make us believe: “[…] sounds, though always on the move, are hungry to come to rest, hungry to be lodged in a local habitation that they can be said to have come from. Sounds are always embodied, though not always in the kind of bodies made known to vision” (Connor 2005: 54). So despite sound’s omnidirectionality, causal listening would place sound back to a defined space or body, even if the sound’s original source cannot be identified. In the latter case, we might even imagine a source, similar to what I claimed in chapter one with respect to visual deprivation (Cytowic): when we do not see the immediate cause or source of a sound we often instantly imagine one fictitiously, whether we recognise it directly as an icon or an index for the real source or not.

Yet acousmatic listening presents us with a major difference between film and theatre: conventional film strategies depend on fitting sight to hearing, as a consequence of cinema’s technical limitations. Theatre generally does not depend on such a split, but rather on the opposite of simultaneous presence. My thesis that auditory distress is inherent to every sound could therefore shed new light on Chion’s theory about acousmatic listening: in offering connections between sound and image, while hiding the real source (the loudspeakers), cinema solves or neutralises the auditory distress in the mediation. The image gives a perspective and a frame that helps to channel the sounds. In the visually deprived context of the theatre, such a frame contained in an image is generally not present, nor relevant. But when no strategy or perspective is given, we look for a cause or an association in our mind to solve the distress. In this way, tracing a sound source is a necessary but subjective and imaginative enterprise that gives temporary balance to the listening subject, depending on context and the listener’s cultural repertoire of imaginable sounds. Forrester (2000) denotes: “a great deal of our knowledge comes from the available cultural discourses about sounds and their causes”
Acousmatic and causal listening are thus not only contingent to the listener’s sound memories. These modes are also culturally contingent and discursive in the sense that they bear a perspective on sound perception, namely a relation and position of the listener towards the acousmatic sounds. The reduced listening mode, on the contrary, would defy such discursivity and signifying activity.

The acousmatic listening situation in *La Didone* challenges the listener’s causal listening. By suddenly switching between different perspectives, the de-acousmatising effect of causal listening is at stake. An example of this is when the actors on stage double the gestures of the actors in the movie and move their lips to the voices on the soundtrack. And vice versa, the dubbed voices are sometimes subdued and superimposed by the amplified voices of the actors. These displaced sources of the voice give rise to the uncanny effects of lip sinking and ventriloquism. The actors appear to speak in some sort of double voice and confuse the listener constantly about its precise location and origin. This confusion creates the impression that the characters can easily be exchanged between cinema and theatre, and between the respective narratives. It also questions the very basis of causal listening: can we really pin down a sound to a source?

Mladen Dolar (2006) takes up this question to claim that the acousmatic is part of every sound – he calls it the ‘ventriloquist’ nature of sound – and not only an effect of its electroacoustic mediation as Chion would make us believe. He refers to the atopicality of the human voice: “The fact that we see the aperture does not demystify the voice; on the contrary, it enhances the enigma” (Dolar 2006: 70). This makes him paradoxically conclude that “there is no such thing as disacousmatization” (ibid.). In the context of *La Didone*, Dolar’s conclusion applies to the voices as objects that are mediated between the performers and the film but do not exactly fit either of them. This also has further reaching implications for sound as ‘object’ in the theatre in general. Connor challenges the notion of the sound object by arguing that because the sound’s embodiment is most ambiguous, there is no such thing as a proper sound object in the way we use it for its referential propensity in language. He sees this reflected in sound art:

If some of sound art is concerned with what Pierre Schaeffer has called the ‘acousmatic’ dimensions of sound, namely sound produced without visible or even definable source, other kinds of sound art are interested in the ambiguous

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100 Dolar uses the term ‘disacousmatisation’, though ‘de-acousmatisation’ is referred to in Chion’s work. For the remainder of this chapter, I will use both terms depending on the author I refer to.

101 Dolar (2006) concludes: “So the voice as the object appears precisely with the impossibility of disacousmatisation. It is not the haunting voice impossible to pin down to a source; rather, it appears in the void from which it is supposed to stem but which it does not fit, an effect without a proper cause” (70).
embodiments or fixations of sound. Ambiguous because, despite all our instincts to the contrary, there are no sound objects. We say, hearing a sound, that is a siren, or, that is the sea, but objects are only the occasions for sound, never their origins. And there is no sound that is the sound of one object alone. All sounds are the result of collisions, abrasions, impingements or minglings of objects (Connor 2005: 54).

According to Connor, there are only ‘occasions’ of sound, which should not be conflated with the origins or sources they embody in our mind or language. In this way, Connor concludes that there is no such thing as a proper ‘sound object’ (in the Schaefferian sense): there are only events as a result of constant collisions between objects. Earlier Connor stated that “[…] sounds, though always on the move, are hungry to come to rest […]” (54). The acousmatic listening situation rather gives the so-called ‘disembodied’ sounds a new body where they can come to rest. However, this body is never a homogeneous one: it exists through these collisions and mingling of sounds, which retains sound’s uncertain spatial anchoring.

In my view, La Didone reflects Connor’s argument about the non-existence of a sound as a proper ‘object’ on many levels. On the one hand, the acousmatic sounds in the performance comprise all the prototypical sound effects of a sci-fi movie like bleeps, crashes, lasers, or even the wavering sound of a Theremin. On the other hand, acousmatisation affects the musical sounds from Cavalli’s baroque opera, causing an unheard blend of Baroque, Romantic and Modern instruments, like the theorbo and baroque guitar (played by Hank Heijink), the tambourine, recorder, and accordion (Kamala Senkaram), the electric guitar (Harvey Valdes) and keyboard (Jennifer Griesbach). The collisions between these sounds make the listener at times trace back her or his originating bodies in memory, outside of the double narrative and representation of the play. However, they can also come to rest within the narratives, making two diegetic universes collide.

The ‘sound object’ (l’object sonore) as formulated by Pierre Schaeffer has been often scrutinised and led to a conceptual messiness. Schaeffer’s notion of the sonorous object (1959; 1966) was originally meant to describe sound as object for human perception. Schaeffer’s sound objects were in reality recorded sounds. Schafer (1977) picked up on the notion to discern “the smallest self-contained particle” of the soundscape as defined by the human ears, which can be analysed by its characteristics (spectrum, loudness and envelope). As Soundscape studies proclaims, the sound object as an object of study can only reveal information about its multisource formation by a trained ear in an analytical or reduced mode of listening. However, it would be an illusion to think that the acousmatic situation does not affect the sound in our perception of it, even in reduced listening. The confusion about the term ‘sound object’ further resides in how we call sounds in language by means of their origin. This confusion is reflected in Christian Metz’s definition of the aural object (1980). Contrary to Schaeffer’s concept, Metz’s aural object is indeed the aural source, namely the visible object that emitted the sound. In this sense, Metz points out that the sound proper is regarded as a ‘characteristic’, an ‘attribute’ and therefore a ‘non-object’ linked to the visible object which is the sound’s corresponding substance (Metz 1980: 26).
Moreover, the intrinsic qualities of the sounds resort a relation with the listener. In this relation, sound has a certain amount of ‘power’ to resist or interrupt the attention of the listener. By isolating sound from its original body, source or listening context, reduced listening, however, sets the boundaries between sound as object and the listener as subject. Consequently, this would leave the relation between them undecided or at least change the relation through the new listening situation. Reduced listening as analytical mode in this sense always obtrudes in this relation. On the contrary, in _La Didone_, reduced listening as heightening the listening attention does not obtrude in the relation between listener and sound (as object), but rather reinforces it. The collisions of sound – outmoded sound effects and musical sounds of different temporalities, textures and colours – create new, hybrid bodies of sound in the listener’s attentive ear, purposely confusing its explorations for their original sources.

The consequence of the inexistence of a proper sound ‘object’ and the constant confusion about the original sound ‘source’ is that Soundscape studies overrate the mode of causal listening. Instead of always looking for a source to stabilise the crisis and insufficiency of listening caused by auditory distress, we rather look for the _meaning_ of the sound in relation to our auditory selves. Hence the urge to find linkages between sound and image should be regarded in terms of a crisis of meaning, rather than a need to know what caused the sound. The crisis of a stable, meaningful coherence in the elusive, placeless and abrasive effect of acousmatisation could, moreover, give rise to an uncanny feeling in the listener. Connor argues, by referring to Chion and Hull, that this effect of acousmatisation assumes a power relation with the listener:

Michel Chion has pointed to an odd convention about invisible sources of sound in cinema, namely that they are usually thought of as having the power to see other characters who cannot see them (Chion 129-30). This is perhaps because divinity is associated with invisible or sourceless sound, while mortality is associated with the condition of visible audition. As John Hull has so crisply put it: ‘When we say that the divine being is invisible, we mean that we do not have power over it. To say that the divine was inaudible, however, would be to claim that it had no power over us’ (Hull 1991: 127; qtd. in Connor 2005: 56).

Chion speaks in the context of this power relation of an _acousmêtre_, literally the master (maître) or a being (être) behind the sound, similar to the function of the curtain in the Pythagorean venues. Chion (1994) refers to three

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103 The word _acousmêtre_, as Chion explains in his _La Voix au cinéma_ (1982: 25-33), is actually a portmanteau word based on the French words _acousmatique_ and _être_ (being). Chion often refers to the figure of the Wizard of Oz as the _acousmêtre_ par excellence in early cinema. Another figure would be the Phantom of the Opera, the disfigured maestro of Gaston Leroux’s novel, whose speech from behind a mask or a curtain states his power through constant fear of
powers: “First, the acousmêtre has the power of seeing all; second, the power of omniscience; and third, the omnipotence to act on the situation. Let us add that in many cases there is also a gift of ubiquity – the acousmêtre seems to be able to be anywhere he or she wishes” (129-30). The acousmêtre, however, is a distinct figure both within and outside/above the narrative with powers that have an uncanny effect. This figure is not, in the first place, the source of sound, but rather constitutes a power over the process of signification. Dis- or de-acousmatisation, according to Chion, is then the process of dissipating the mystery and thereby, weakening the acousmêtre’s omnipotent power: when the voice gets attached to a body, it turns out to be rather banal, like in The Wizard of Oz (Dolar 2006: 67).

In La Didone, the acousmatisation of sound also creates an alienating, chimeral effect that makes the danger of some invisible force in the space more tangible. This effect is in line with the double diegesis. The mixed auditory interventions of sound effects and baroque music often make us wonder about their location in the narrative: Are they part of the spaceship on the planet of the vampires or are they belonging to Dido’s palace in ancient Carthage? The images on the screen from Bava’s movie make the linkages between eye and ear even more palatable, forming some sort of perceptual glue that helps us identify the sounds with its source and location. However, the linkages are progressively disrupted, making the sounds stand alone as irritating disruptions to our listening attention, creating similar effects to what I have discussed as ‘auditory gaze’ in chapter one. The sounds become signals for an irretraceable, god-like presence, an acousmêtre behind the sound, the ‘other’ that metaphorically stares at us – a gaze on our shoulders like in Sartre’s description of the auditory gaze – while we listen to the reproduced sounds. In this way, causal listening helps to demystify this unknown, authoritarian power that imposes auditory distress on us. La Didone shows how reduced and acousmatic listening are intertwined, constantly moving our attention between the modes of listening-in-readiness and listening-in-search. In the theatre, the reduced context focuses our attention on the musical qualities of the auditory events. The schizophrenic situation forces us to look for linkages in the stories ourselves: one is the story of Dido who is spurned in love and in its absence marries out of reason; the other is a story of an invisible force that pulls the crew of a space shuttle and turns them into empty-headed zombies who tune into a collective mind. Sound and music are used in the performance to give shape to the feeling of

the unknowable horror of his faceless face. The ‘power’ of the hidden master apparently also affected the first acousmêtre Pythagoras, as Dolar explains: “Pythagoras became the object of a cult in his lifetime; he was revered as a divinity (Diogenes Laertius, VIII, 11), and no doubt this was not unrelated to that device” (Dolar 2006: 62).

Dolar (2006) refers further to Chion’s comparison of disacousmatisation to a striptease: “it can be a process of several stages, the veils can be lifted one after another…” (68).
absence as a fatal desire in love on the one hand, and to oblivion as an unknown threat to reason and individuality on the other. In this absence, as the central theme of both narratives, I recognise a crisis of meaning and representation, which the listener tries to resolve through listening.

3.3. Listening to a Remainder of Meaning: ‘Free’ Play in Semiotic Listening

La Didone presents the listener with an excess of perspectives through its perceptual splits and a schizophonic listening situation that activates different modes of listening, between which grey zones exist. As I discussed in chapter one, Soundscape studies and Acoustic Communication studies suggest that due to sound’s redundancy of intensities, the listener needs to consciously channel the auditory stimuli in terms of abstracted information. I argued through the concept of visual deprivation – the carrier of the acousmatic listening situation – how listening in itself is always insufficient because of a lack of meaning. I also discussed how the sonorous envelope can produce both sensations of stability (comfort) and instability (discomfort) because of a sensory excess.

Earlier in this chapter, I argued that there is an essential instability between hearing and listening, causing a crisis in the listener as subject. In this context, Connor (1997) questions the modern auditory subject in terms of such insufficiency in hearing and listening: “The sense of the insufficiency and insubstantiality of hearing makes the definition of the self through it a problem. How can the modern psyche be said to be organised around an ontology which is so regularly defined as the deficit of ontology?” (213). Because of this ontological deficit, the modern auditory ‘self’ feels compelled to stabilise its subjectivity through signification, which brings temporary coherence and stability.\(^\text{105}\)

The insufficiency implies that the listener as subject is always in a state of instability. In response, we position our attention in order to create sense of what we hear (or want to hear), which could give coherence, pleasure or some kind of gratification to the listening subject. This search for meaningful auditory experiences is generally described in Soundscape studies as a semiotic or semantic mode of listening, which treats sound as a language or a

\(^\text{105}\) Earlier, I discussed the address and response system of our auditory perception in semiotic terms through Benveniste’s communicative model. Kaja Silverman comments on its influence on subject formation: “Within this semiotic model the viewer does not have a stable and continuous subjectivity, but one which is activated intermittently, within discourse” (Silverman 1983: 48). Silverman applies this idea of instability to the analysis of the cinematic text in relation to the viewer (inscribed as the ‘subject of vision’). I suggest that music theatre presents us with a similar instability in the listener as listening subject. An ‘illusion’ of stability, coherence and continuity is created to the extent that in our modes of listening towards the auditory events we conform to dominant cultural standards, listening habits and regimes of perception that are activated within discourse.
Roland Barthes (1991) has explained a similar idea of listening for the sake of meaning in terms of ‘decoding’:

Listening is henceforth linked (in a thousand varied, indirect forms) to a hermeneutics: to listen is to adopt an attitude of decoding what is obscure, blurred, or mute, in order to make available to consciousness the ‘underside’ of meaning (what is experienced, postulated, intentionalized as hidden) (249).

According to Barthes, listening involves making sense of something, as if cracking a code. This attitude of decoding closely depends on our competences of choosing the modes of listening in relation to the given perspectives. Therefore, rather than regarding this attitude as singular and independent, I argue that we can make use of all of the aforementioned modes in the theatre, consciously or not, to hunt for discursive information and reveal ‘hidden’ meanings in sound. In this way, causal and indexical modes of listening could also be adopted in an attitude of decoding: rather than looking for an index or cause, our ears explore discursive meanings as part of a code. As such, they help us to respond to the insufficiency in listening by filling in the gaps and tracing a source, even when imagined, through looking and auditory gazing. Similarly, in recognising earcons or auditory icons through ambient listening, we establish a comparable sense of stability in relation to the auditory space.

At this point, as became apparent through ambient listening and evenly hovering attention, the multilayered soundscapes of La Didone demonstrate that a conscious channelling and active interpreting as way to respond to the auditory distress and semiotic excess is not always possible. Rather, the address in sound creates polysemic, indirect, hidden and sometimes ambiguous meanings if only we allow for this ‘too much’ to play upon our senses, despite the rather dominant attitude of listening-in-search for signification. I want to argue here that this overload again causes auditory distress that is necessary to push our attention and interpreting efforts. As a result of the semiotic insufficiency in listening, sound and music are rather ‘poor’ signifiers, always creating a semiotic surplus. This surplus affects in us a sense of open-endedness, which can be as pleasurable as it is distressing.

The surplus of meaning – that which cannot be immediately conceptualised – is what Lawrence Kramer (2002) calls the ‘musical remainder’ in the context of music. In relation to this remainder, Kramer contends that interpretation never emerges “to close the gap or smooth out the excess; interpretation preserves these non-congruities in order to continue the production of meaning just as fantasy maintains a distance from its objects in order to continue the production of desire” (Kramer 2002: 170-1). Semiotic listening could in this way be said to secure the production of desire by allowing the auditory excess within its interpretative, cognitive mechanisms. Moreover, as Kramer suggests, the incongruities are necessary to maintain the
production of meaning. Behind this idea of a semiotic ‘remainder’ in music is a notion of open-endedness in our signifying processes, which Barthes (1991) also describes, specifically in the context of perceiving art and music:

In the third place, what is listening to here and there (chiefly in the field of art, whose function is often utopian) is not the advent of a signified, object of a recognition or of a deciphering, but the very dispersion, the shimmering of signifiers, ceaselessly restored to a listening which ceaselessly produces new ones from them without ever arresting their meaning: this phenomenon of shimmering is called signifying [significance] as distinct from signification: ‘listening’ to a piece of classical music, the listener is called upon to ‘decipher’ this piece, i.e., to recognize (by his culture, his application, his sensibility) its construction, quite as coded (predetermined) as that of a palace at a certain period; but ‘listening’ to a composition (taking this word here in its etymological sense) by John Cage, is it each sound one after the next that I listen to, not in its syntagmatic extension, but in its raw and as though vertical signifying: by deconstructing itself, listening is externalized, it compels the subject to renounce his ‘inwardness’ (259).

The example of listening to a musical piece by John Cage would perhaps give the false impression that our signifying processes work in most linear ways from signifier to signifier. On the contrary, what Barthes appears to convey here is that our deciphering attitude in listening thrives on a dispersion of signifiers, or what he calls: “the shimmering of signifiers, ceaselessly restored to a listening which ceaselessly produces new ones from them without ever arresting their meaning” (ibid.).

La Didone, similarly, aims at such a shimmering through an overload of signifiers in our split perceptions of sounds, music, texts and images. Through this overload, the performance brackets or deconstructs listening as an event, which, in its call for a hermeneutic pursuit, stimulates us to put back together the sounds in different constellations and linkages that are unusual and continuously open to alteration. Due to this open-endedness, we constantly shift our modes of listening. Jean-François Augoyard (with Henri Torgue, 1995) coined the term ‘metabolic effect’ for this continuous switching movement. The interpreting listener is stimulated to move through the possible signifieds that sound seems to convey and adapt her or his mode of listening accordingly.

Barthes suggests that listening is taken out from its inward privileged position in the listener and externalised into the shimmering and open-ended play of signification. Jacques Derrida takes further Barthes’s idea of ‘the shimmering of signifiers’, similar to Kramer’s concept of the ‘musical remainder’, in his notion of ‘supplementarity’, which is inherent to signification due to constant slippage or displacement of ‘supplements’: “[…] there have never been anything but supplements, substitutive significations which could only come forth in a chain of differential references, the ‘real’
supervening, and being added only while taking on meaning from a trace and from an invocation of the supplement” (Derrida, qtd. in Silverman 1983: 37).

Regarding Barthes’s and Derrida’s approach towards the open-endedness of our signifying processes in conjunction, I conclude that in listening, the listener’s quest for coherence involves endless chains of signification. Auditory distress and the semiotic remainder in listening are then a necessary basis for meaningful auditory experiences. Correspondingly, the signified in listening is endlessly ‘commutable’ (cf. Peirce, Eco, Barthes). The insufficiency of listening enables ‘semantic snowballing’ (Turino 1999). Umberto Eco refers to this idea in terms of series of successive signifieds (or ‘interpretants’) *ad finitum* (‘unlimited semiosis’). According to Silverman (1983), this idea is also similar to what Derrida has referred to as ‘free play’: one signified always leads to another, which in turn functions as a signifier (Silverman 1983: 37-8). The idea of free play is based on this endless commutability of the signified and “the assumption that the play of meaning has no necessary closure, no transcendental justification” (41). Evenly hovering attention in psychoanalytical listening particularly reinforces this free play of an endless commutability of rather poor signs without solidifying their direct meaning. However, it is not the only listening attitude or mode that bears on it. Rather, the endless commutability or supplementarity is the basis for any semiotic or interpretative mode of listening as an effect of auditory distress in both the perception of sound and music.

In *La Didone*, the excess in listening gives rise to an ambivalent way of listening that either short-circuits the listener’s attention and renders her or him idle, or makes her or him acutely alert to hidden meanings in the connections one might infer, even when they lead to temporary contradictions. In this way, listening is externalised and turned towards itself: it makes the listener aware of her or his role as listening subject. The listener can experience flashes of awareness when the positioning of one’s attention is marked by the clashes between the listening modes and the inability to make sense of them. However, this does not go without the pleasure of suspending immediate meanings in an evenly hovering attention in order to be open for ‘new’ or at least alternative meanings to emerge. Auditory distress therefore plays a significant role in the interplay between perspectives and modes of listening in the listener. The listening modes help the listener to make sense of what one hears and listens to in relation to the perspectives. However, a continuous semiotic remainder retains the promise of meaningful experiences that have

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106 In line with Peirce’s semiotic model for the purpose of music semiology, Thomas Turino (1999) uses Derrida’s idea of transmutability to claim that ‘musical indices’ can take on new meanings over time with the connections they make: “indices continually take on new layers of meaning while potentially also carrying along former associations – a kind of semantic snowballing” (Turino 1999: 235). With the concept of ‘semantic snowballing’, Turino confirms the idea of an endless commutability of signifieds in music.
not yet materialised and escaped a frame. I conclude this chapter with the framing aspect of the perspectives, which La Didone consciously disrupts.

4. The Discursive Response of the Listening Modes: Limits to Framing in Listening

In this chapter, I have demonstrated how the modes of listening structure our ways of dealing with auditory distress. Theatre can play upon these modes through the perspectives it offers in the juxtaposition of sound and image, as I showed by discussing the consequences of the schizophonic listening situation on the listener in La Didone. I illustrated how, in response to auditory distress, the listener tries to find stability in such regulative perspectives, as reference points, to relate the sound or music to an image, a narrative, a context. La Didone plays specifically with the switching between listening modes, thus leaving the listener with an excess of intensities and information. At the end, the performance thus creates an unresolved semiotic remainder that escapes a frame of understanding.

With regard to the framing properties, Michel Chion (1994) has argued, with respect to sound in film, that there is no such thing as a proper sound frame:

For sound there is neither frame nor preexisting container. We can pile up as many sounds on the soundtrack as we wish without reaching a limit. Further, these sounds can be situated at different narrative levels, such as conventional background music (nondiegetic) and synch dialogue (diegetic) – while visual elements can hardly ever be located at more than one of these levels at once. So there is no auditory container for film sounds, nothing analogous to this visual container of the images that is the frame (67-8).

By arguing that there is no pre-existing sound frame in film, Chion concludes that “there is no soundtrack” (68). By this he means that there is no fixed place or container – like the visual frame of the film screen that contains all visual images – for the sounds. Cinema offers a visual frame through the screen that delineates the way the sounds are perceived.¹⁰⁷ Theatre, in this respect, is different since it does not share the necessity with cinema to join sound with an image despite a technical separation. In theatre, sound generally originates from various sources and sound bodies (performers, loudspeakers, musical instruments, amplified voices, etc.), and travels through auditory space in various directions. Therefore, the perspectives create a frame that connects the dispersed sounds to a listening zone, a narrative, a text, an image, an object, a character, a gesture on the stage or in the

¹⁰⁷ On this issue, theatre inheres in a different relation to auditory distress and the necessity of a sound frame than cinema, of which its perspectives in sound are much more stabilised by the image and its optical frame.
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representational space. But as Chion suggests, sounds can stick to many different levels at once. In this way, cinema and theatre share a fundamental lack of a proper sound frame constituted in the sound itself. As a response, the listener creates a frame in relation to the given perspectives, with which she or he can resolve the auditory distress.

In listening, perspective and frame therefore mutually depend on each other. Erving Goffman (1974) has formulated this relation in his Frame theory through his notion of the 'multiple-channel effect' in the organisation of experience. This notion describes a similar effect as the seemingly frameless space for sound as described above:

When an individual is an immediate witness to an actual scene, events tend to present themselves through multiple channels, the focus of the participant shifting from moment to moment from one channel to another. Further, these channels can function as they do because of the special role of sight. What is heard, felt, or smelled attracts the eye, and it is the seeing of the source of these stimuli that allows for a quick identification and definition – a quick framing – of what has occurred (Goffman 1974: 146).

Goffman’s idea of frame and framing explains the need for anchoring the sounds in a listening space or zone. Although sounds in both theatre and film are not ‘contained’ as such, they do call for such stable frames which are given in the perspectives that function as channels to our attention. The ‘multiple-channel’ effect explains further how sound’s multi-directionality creates multiple perspectives as channels that shift the listener’s attention from moment to moment. Goffman suggests that sight has a stabilising function in visually tracing back a source for the intensities, which would support causal listening. He claims that the recognition of the source in an image gives a ‘quick framing’.

Using La Didone I argued that in theatre such quick framing by looking for a visual cause is not needed in order to interpret sounds meaningfully. Rather, the framing aspect of the perspective helps the listener to make sense in relation to one’s auditory self and the discourse within which one interprets the sounds or music.

Goffman’s theory of the frame seems to suggest Stockfelt’s ‘active idle attention’ when applied to auditory perception in (music) theatre. On the organisation of experience in ‘dramatic interaction’, Goffman claims: “[…] nothing that occurs will be unportentous or insignificant. Which implies, incidentally, that the audience need not select what to attend to: whatever is made available can be taken as present for a good reason” (Goffman 1974: 143). Goffman appears to trust the ‘exhaustive’ content of the theatrical sign. His claims, however, substantiate a passive attitude of a spectator that soaks up information as an ear witness in the audience that is immersed and distant towards the represented events. Goffman’s suggestion that the audience ‘need
not select what to attend to’ implies that the listener sits back and merely takes in what is offered to her or him. The role of the perspectives on our attention in theatre could indeed be given too much meaning, thus rendering the listener rather inactive.

However, Goffman’s stance does not take into account our constant need to select and channel the auditory intensities ourselves due to its implications of auditory distress. As I demonstrated in this chapter, sound and music need selection because they are insufficient or ‘poor’ signifiers in themselves. Moreover, the unstable relation between hearing and listening makes the framing function of the perspectives necessary but never completely ‘adequate’ in managing the modes of listening. Contrary to Goffman’s excessive stress on the frame as a container for all signifiers in the theatre, sound and music can play upon the listener’s necessary ways of selecting and reading in listening by always leaving a semiotic remainder.

La Didone specifically plays upon the listener’s interpretative abilities in listening by constantly splitting and reassembling sounds from its original bodies. This schizophonic listening situation presents us with the splits and cracks of perception and signification in our relations to sound. Looking for sources or images to embody the sounds is only one way to bring them to a rest temporarily. As I illustrated through the concept of acousmatisation, a gap within the sounds themselves always remains, making them constantly on the move, never really fitting a body or a signified. This movement and event-like nature of sound propels signification into an endless commutability of signifieds for us to fill in the gaps of our perception. I do not want to imply that listening always involves hunting for meaning as Truax argues, nor that semiotic listening fully resolves a lack of meaning in sound or music. Most listening modes in our everyday experiences are not involved in signification processes per se. Moreover, through La Didone I have demonstrated how these modes are not independent of each other, but have rather grey zones between them. Only in the focused context of the theatre do these modes receive specific significance in the listener’s urge to engage with the sounds or music in interpretative ways in order to resolve the gaping auditory distress.

As such, the response of the listening modes to this auditory distress is discursive. According to Rodaway (1994), the gap in our perception exists in the first place between sensation and recognition of sound as a potentially ‘meaningful’ event, for which sound constantly ‘leaks’ into the other sense modalities and carriers of meaning. Forrester (2000) recognises in this gap the important role of discursivity in listening: “Within this gap we have inserted discourses of sound, and thus a ‘sound as sign’ can only be understood with respect to the cultural discourses within which the sound is embedded” (49). La Didone, similarly, marks how our ways of listening with its distinctive modes are not only influenced by our personal attitudes and aural competences, but are embedded in a culture of listening, a discourse.
This embeddedness gives stability to the listener as subject. However subjective the individual listener’s interpretations may be, Jonathan Crary states that the signifying system that makes up the listening act as discursive practice pre-exists the listener: both perspective and listening mode are discursively produced.

I have discussed how the listener feels a need to make sense of her or his experiences through the performance’s perspectives. The sound source is one response to satisfying this need, the sound index and auditory icon are others. Yet behind these responses remains the urge to relate the sounds or music to oneself through anchoring them in discourse and signification. The framing function of the perspective assists in this anchoring. However, *La Didone* presents us with shifting perspectives that challenge the listener’s interpretative ways of listening to such a degree that the modes cannot resolve the excess. An appropriate frame that contains the excess in listening is lacking. There is always a semiotic remainder that plays upon the listener to (co-)create meaningful relations that can be incompatible or that can be suspended temporarily by an evenly hovering attention. Characteristic of post-dramatic theatre, of which *La Didone* is an example, is then that it often turns perception from the inside out and onto itself, making the listener aware of her or his own interpretative mechanisms. This awareness turns the attention on the endless ‘shimmering’ of signifieds in our perception that are constantly subject to scrutiny.

The constant auditory interventions in *La Didone* seize a self-critical and meta-theatrical function, which brings our listening competences and participation in signification at stake. The constant confusions and abrasions of sound in *La Didone* call into question the listener’s responses through the modes of listening in relation to discourse and signification. The discursivity of these modes anchors both the listener as listening subject and the meaningful relations she or he produces within a historically contingent and socio-cultural discourse. Yet *La Didone* draws our attention to the limits of the listening modes as a discursive response to resolving auditory distress. Rather, moments of unframeability in reading through listening still leave some questions unresolved. Therefore, I propose to look at one specific type of discourse that has not been discussed so far but that is highly relevant to the listener’s semiotic modes of listening in music theatre: narrative discourse, and its related signifying process, *narrativisation*.

In the following chapter, I propose the notion of a narrative mode of listening as one particular discursive response in music theatre to auditory distress and the listening perspectives in its particular structure of address. In the specific context of music theatre’s call on narrativity, I elaborate on the listening perspective further in terms of focalization. I argue that narrativisation and focalization present us with a very compelling mode of interpretative listening in relation to the ones discussed up to this point. In this
way, I aim to answer the short-comings in the theory of the listening modes in relation to signification, namely how these modes, in turn, create meaningful structures in the listener as a way to resolve the auditory distress in music theatre.