The frequency of imagination: auditory distress and aurality in contemporary music theatre

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Photo Yvonne Wiewel (left) and Jan Kuijken (right)
in *De Overstroming* © Patrick De Spiegelaere
In chapter two, I introduced the listening modes to explain how we respond to auditory distress. I showed how in music theatre the listener makes meaningful experiences of the distress through a continuous switching of listening modes. This process depends on how the perspectives, inherent to every theatrical performance, manage the individual listener’s attention. The theories surrounding the listening modes suggested that listening attention is a vehicle with which the listener channels the excess in listening in terms of what she or he judges and externalises as meaningful in relation to the implied perspectives.

However, the distinctions between the listening modes are not always as clear-cut as they may appear in theory. The mixed modes can lead to an impasse between experience (perception) and interpretation (signification) when the inexistence of a ‘sound frame’ does not provide the listener with enough contextual information about how to interpret, and, thereby, anchor auditory interventions. In this case, a semiotic remainder in one’s auditory perceptions can momentarily suspend interpretation by provoking an evenly hovering attention (Barthes/Lehmann) that allows for contradictory meanings. The impasse in listening gives rise to more questions about how we solve auditory distress through interpretation: How do we unravel the deadlock in the undecidability of where to focus, or how to interpret music? How do we come to a coherent understanding of what we hear or listen to in a performance, especially when a frame or certain logic is missing? Soundscape studies do not completely explain how we create structures in our interpretations within a semiotic mode of listening.

In the current chapter, I therefore propose narrativisation as a particular mode of semiotic listening in the listener’s search for stability in one’s auditory ‘self’, which structures meaning in a coherent way. Narrativity and narrativisation offer a temporary sense of coherence, which can be very dominant to our interpretations. I argue here that a music theatre performance can invite a narrative mode of listening, even if it does not provide us with a story in a conventional sense, or a representation of a narrative on stage. I dispute the idea that narrativisation in listening would only be activated by a narrative text (given in the performance or in a programme note). Rather, it could also be elicited by a context, an image, a gesture, a visual space or simply by listening itself. I then look at specific ‘impulses’ of the listener for narrative listening in terms of implied positions in the perspectives that the music theatre performance offers. I examine, in particular, when narrativisation becomes compelling as a specific response, which offers the listener temporary resolution to auditory distress.
In what follows, I propose narrativisation as an interpretative mode that can be activated in a music theatre performance through a text or through the listening situation itself. First, I introduce Monika Fludernik’s understanding of narrativisation as a departure point, the purpose of which is to examine how this notion can function to surpass the impasse between perception and interpretation in a more comprehensive sense. Then I relate this notion to the perception and interpretation of music in the theatre. I argue how narrativisation through listening is a specific response of the listener, which calls for a reconsideration of what narrative is with regard to music (and sound in a more general sense), and how it relates to the modes of interpretation I have discussed so far. In this context, I explain how narrativisation bears a new perspective on what ‘narrative’ and ‘narrativity’ means in relation to interpretative listening. In so doing, I define what is meant by a ‘story’, ‘narrative’ or ‘diegesis’ in relation to what one sees and hears in a music theatre performance.

I have selected two case studies, which I will use to illustrate the consequences of narrativisation in the listener’s responses to auditory distress, respectively De Overstroming (2002) by Het Net and LOD (formerly Het Muziek Lod), and De Helling van de Oude Wijven (2002) by Walpurgis. Through these case studies, I argue that the definitions of narrative and narrativity need revision in a context of musicalisation of the theatre stage in order to understand how music and sound can generate a sense of narrativity, rather than be a narrative. The performances help me to discuss some relevant moments that offer an ‘impulse’ for narrativisation in their address of the listener.

With regard to this address, I distinguish the potential of focalization or a ‘point of audition’ (Chion 1994) as a specific perspective in listening that invokes a sense of narrativity. I contend that focalization is decisive in inciting a narrative mode of listening in the listener, more than the presence of a narrator or a ‘narrative voice’. I distinguish the latter from the human voice, which I further conceptualise for its stimulation of narrativisation on the stage through a ‘voice-body’ or vocalic body (Connor 2000). Finally, I demonstrate how narrativisation casts new light on issues of authority and agency in meaning-making, which are significant to the discussion of narrative voice. In relation to these issues, narrativisation will prove to be useful in the discussion of certain dichotomies in the spectator’s modes of interpretation, which I will explain towards the end of the chapter: oral versus literate modes, and concert/recital versus representational modes. The notion of narrativisation then explains how these modes help the listener to read the voice-body in terms of a ‘vocal persona’ (a fictional character) within a

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108 I choose the spelling ‘focalization’ and ‘focalizer’ with z, besides ‘narrativisation’ with s, as suggested by the Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory (2005).
‘diegesis’ (a story world), while keeping her or his attention on the actual musical performance and regarding it as a performance.

1. Narrativisation in Music Theatre: Another Mode of Listening

In *Towards a ‘Natural’ Narratology* (1996), Monika Fludernik develops the notion of ‘narrativisation’ against the post-structuralist tradition in order to broaden the scope of narrative analysis. Earlier, in narrative psychology, narrativisation was introduced to explain how a narrative constitutes a cognitive mode of experiencing the self in relation to the surrounding world. This idea recognises particularly that our lives are intertwined and immersed with narratives (Paul John Eakin 1999; qtd. in Nünning & Nünning 2002: 1-2).

In the 1970s, the notion of narrativisation was taken up in the context of poststructuralist’s valorising of narrative indeterminacy and uncertainty, which included the role of the emancipated reader. In this context, narrative processing was initially theorised as hypothetical *gap-filling*. Fludernik (1996) partly follows the psychological and cognitive understandings of narrativisation, but carefully adapts them for the analysis of literary texts. Since her constructive approach to narrativisation stresses subjective experience and perception, I suggest reconsidering this emphasis as a way to unravel the impasse between perception and interpretation of music in theatre, which we encountered in the previous chapter. Ultimately, I propose to extend Fludernik’s argument and conceptualise narrativisation as a distinct mode of listening that can help the listener to relate to music theatre, even when a straightforward story is not given.

Fludernik’s notion of narrativisation questions the traditional boundaries of what ‘narrative’ and ‘narrativity’ can refer to. There are many different definitions, both ‘narrow’ and ‘broad’, according to the object one wishes to discuss in relation to these notions. For instance, in Stanzel’s established definition, narrativity came to denote the mediation of a *story*: “the degree to which one feels a story is being told or performed” (Abbott 2002: 193). In this definition, the presence of a narrator, an agency that initiates and performs the ‘narrating’ – as different to the author – is crucial. In his book *Discours du récit: essai de méthode* (1972), Gérard Genette has formulated the ‘premise’ that there can be no narration without a narrator. This principle is, however,

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110 Roland Barthes (1977) has formulated a similar definition of narrative in terms of communication: “In linguistic communication, *je* and *tu* (*I* and *you*) are absolutely presupposed by one another; similarly, there can be no narrative without a narrator and a listener (*or reader*)” (109). Barthes stresses the importance of an agent (agency) that addresses a listener in the act of narration. Building on Genette’s premise, Barthes’s argument supports Benveniste’s communicational model of the constitution of an ‘*I*’ in the linguistic relation to a ‘*you*’, which I
too narrow as a basis for a comprehensive understanding of narrative and narrativity. The limitation especially concerns contexts where there is no explicit 'story' or 'telling' in words, in verbal content, such as in the case of instrumental music in the theatre.

Structuralist narratology in the Genettean tradition is most often criticised for privileging the text for the development of its conceptual toolbox. This is one of the reasons why many scholars have argued that narratology does not apply well to music, despite specialised linguistic approaches in musicology that have included narratological terminology. According to those who oppose these approaches, narrative and narrativity would have been much too defined for the purpose of analysing literary texts. One argument against this criticism is that acclaimed structuralists such as Roland Barthes have consistently argued for an interdisciplinary approach to the analysis of narrative from the advent of the term 'la narratologie', coined by Tzvetan Todorov in 1969. Alternatively, many narrative approaches to music have been put under scrutiny in an attempt to surpass the considerable constraint, which Adorno formulated in a comment to Mahler, that music can only constitute "a narrative which relates to nothing" (Nattiez 1990: 245). However, Adorno’s comment appears to refer to a traditional definition of ‘narrative’ in the narrow sense of a ‘story’ told in words. Indeed, music as a nonverbal medium seems not to relate to anything outside itself. Yet this constraint does not mean that the music is devoid of narrativity and cannot be read in a narrative way.

introduced in chapter two. In this understanding, a narrative always presupposes certain subject positions in the way it addresses the listener or reader. Narratology was modelled after de Saussure’s structural linguistics, which comprised of semiology as part of a general psychology. In this theoretical framework, Roland Barthes originally searched for a descriptive model for the structural analysis of narrative, which was founded in linguistics and deductive from language. But the model he envisioned was intended to reach further than the analysis of literary texts or linguistic messages only. Barthes therefore focused on signification, not on the coding systems as such, since he did not want to restrict his analyses to the exchange of linguistic communication.

Many approaches towards music’s presupposed narrativity have been both formulated and criticised in musicology, music semiology, opera theory and most recently, in ‘post-classical’ narratology. The term ‘postclassical narratology’ has been coined by David Herman in order to highlight that contemporary narrative studies have moved away from the structuralist ‘Saussurean’ phase: “Postclassical narratology (which should not be conflated with poststructuralist theories of narrative) contains classical narratology as one of its ‘moments’ but is marked by a profusion of new methodologies and research hypotheses; the result is a host of new perspectives on the forms and functions of narrative itself. Further, in its postclassical phase, research on narrative does not just expose the limits but also exploits the possibilities of the older, structuralist models. In much the same way, postclassical physics does not simply discard classical, Newtonian models but rather rethinks their conceptual underpinnings and reassesses their scope of applicability” (Herman 1999: 2-3). Postclassical narratology is perhaps more a project within narratology than a real separate field of study. Its claims on interdisciplinarity are, however, not that very different from structuralist narratology, though it paves the way for alternative concepts and approaches, such as the concept and theory of ‘narrativisation’.
Therefore, another definition of narrativity is needed for the analysis of music in theatre. The concept of *narrativisation* as a mode of reading then accommodates to a broader understanding of narrative and narrativity than that Genette proposed.

Fludernik’s understanding of narrativisation helps us to relate the question of narrativity to the reader’s propensity to recognise or construct a narrative development in terms of fictionality (Fludernik 1996: 42). Fludernik defines *narrativity* as dependent on what she calls ‘experientality’; that is, the evocation of ‘real’ experiences, which, by recognition, offer the reader access to a text. She defines *narrativisation* then as a particular reading strategy with which the reader reads texts as narrative, constituting narrativity in the reading process (Fludernik 1996: 20). Her notion of narrativisation is primarily based on Jonathan Culler’s idea of ‘naturalization’:

In my reading, which is based on Culler’s process of naturalization, narrativization applies one specific macro-frame, namely that of *narrativity*, to a text. When readers are confronted with potentially unreadable narratives, texts that are radically inconsistent, they cast about for ways and means of recuperating these texts as narratives – motivated by the generic markers that go with the book. They therefore attempt to re-cognize what they find in the text in terms of the natural telling or experiencing or viewing parameters, or they try to recuperate the inconsistencies in terms of actions and event structures at the most minimal level. This process of narrativization, of making something a narrative by the sheer act of imposing narrativity on it, needs to be located in the dynamic reading process where such interpretative recuperations hold sway (Fludernik 1996: 34).

Fludernik’s contribution to the definition of the concept presents us with a shift of focus in the question of narrativity on the reader. According to this definition, narrativisation constitutes a way for the readers to solve the ‘inconsistencies’ in a text, which would otherwise be ‘unreadable’. Narrativity functions then as a (macro) frame to read and ‘recuperate’ a text as a narrative. This makes narrativity a question of agency exerted by the reader in her or his reading process, rather than a question of a narrator’s authority in the text (as in Genette’s premise). However, Fludernik’s understanding needs to be gauged critically in order to determine how narrativisation is called upon to make meaning, before considering it for the analysis of our listening experiences in music theatre.

I am aware that Fludernik’s notion of narrativisation does not completely suspend the idea of a narrator, though it is of another order than the discussion whether a narrator, explicitly or implied, is constitutive of a narrative, or not. I will come back at this issue at the end of this chapter, when I discuss the concept of narrative voice. However, it must be stressed that the focus of my investigation is not narratives as represented on stage, but narrativisation as a specific mode of interpretation.
In Fludernik’s argument, narrativity as a frame is called upon by the text and its so-called ‘generic markers’, i.e. the ‘natural’ constituents or categories in the text that generate this frame. Fludernik refers to Culler’s notion of ‘naturalization’ in order to indicate that the reader might recognize such constituents to establish a sense of ‘natural telling’ in terms of identifiable actions and event structures. In this way, narrativisation would help the reader to naturalise texts into stories by associating them with what she calls ‘natural stories’. These stories, in turn, call upon a certain degree of the reader’s ‘real’ experiences which are evoked by the text (‘experientiality’, in Fludernik’s terminology). However, the categorisation of natural stories is problematic by itself if it would imply certain universality in the way readers would read narratives into inconsistent texts. This would disregard cultural as much as personal differences. Fludernik, on the contrary, stresses the individual experiences of the reader as a horizon. Narrativising means to her, in essence, to recuperate the text by imposing narrativity as a frame according to what one recognises within the constituent events regarding one’s own lived experience.

Fludernik’s argument about narrativisation and lived experience hinges upon a much older debate about the relation between narrative and meaning. In his landmark essay “Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives” (1966), Roland Barthes stressed, for instance, the connection between narrative and how we make meaning by claiming narrative’s universality in life. Despite this problematic universality, Barthes’s argument can help us to comprehend how narratives respond to an urge for meaning-making in how we relate to the world:

Narration can only receive its meaning from the world which makes use of it: beyond the narrational level begins the world, other systems (social, economic, ideological) whose terms are no longer simply narratives but elements of a different substance (historical facts, determinations, behaviours, etc.). Just as linguistics stops at the sentence, so narrative analysis stops at discourse – from there it is necessary to shift to another semiotics (115-6).

The consequence of Barthes’s argument is that narrativity answers to a fundamental need for meaning in our relation to the world or to any object for that matter. Barthes, moreover, places our inclinations towards meaning in relation to what can be known from life and from the world. He thereby anchors the propensity to make or read a narrative in discourse. Meaning-making by means of narratives or narration is contained in the cultural discourse that both enables and restrains the way we attribute meaning to our lives and the world we live in.

H. Porter Abbott (2002) extends Barthes’s argument to stress the importance of narratives in our urge to make meaning of our perceptions in general:
[W]herever we look in this world, we seek to grasp what we see not just in space but in time as well. Narrative gives us this understanding [...]. Accordingly, our narrative perception stands ready to be activated in order to give us a frame or context for even the most static and uneventful scenes. And without understanding the narrative, we often feel we don’t understand what we see. We cannot find the meaning. Meaning and narrative understanding are very closely connected (11).

The close connection between narrative and meaning explains how humans have an indispensable urge to grasp and make sense of their experiences. This should not suggest that meaning and narrative are identical. On the contrary, narrativity here is regarded as a specific strategy for coming to terms with experience. As such, this understanding could offer an answer to the impasse between experience and interpretation. It stresses that narrativisation as a mode of interpreting always implies a relation between the perceiver and the world.

As a particular mode of reading, narrativisation can account for a sense of narrativity in our perception of music to the extent that the urge to interpret calls upon the listener’s world of experience. Fludernik’s concept of narrativisation explains how the listener makes meaning in relation to her or his familiarity with certain elements in a text that call upon narrativity as a reference frame. In the context of music theatre, however, the question is to what extent we can distinguish comparable elements as objects of our experience that call upon our familiarity and ‘real’ experiences outside the music. To answer this question, I propose to relate the notion of narrativisation to the arguments of specifically two scholars, Jean-Jacques Nattiez and Werner Wolf, who have broadened its scope specifically for the analysis of music. Among other scholars, I develop their perspectives further in the analysis of my case studies.

Jean-Jacques Nattiez (1990) claims a relationality of music to other constituents or ‘objects’ that call for a narrative reading, which he argues for at first in most general terms: “An object of any kind takes on meaning for an individual apprehending that object, as soon as that individual places the object in relation to areas of his lived experience – that is, in relation to a collection of other objects that belong to his or her experience of the world” (9). Nattiez emphasises the role of ‘other objects’ as part of the perceiver’s life experience. This would imply that, for the purpose of music theatre, we should look at how the music takes on meaning in correspondence with other elements in the performance. Familiarity and experience, thereby, do not diminish the importance of the object’s immediate context for narrativisation, or in this case the context of the music performance.

Werner Wolf (2002) agrees with Nattiez and Fludernik that experience is an essential condition in the way the listener narrativises music: “In this way, namely, the music opens up a space, which each listener can fill in narratively
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according to [her or] his realm of experience” (83; my translation, PV). However, Wolf emphasises the space that the music creates on its own by calling upon its connection to the world of the listener’s personal experience, rather than by relating it to other objects. He thereby stresses the role of the listener, who turns raw sensations into structures through narrativisation, which depends on her or his earlier experiences.

If we relate both these arguments to Fludernik’s position, we can tentatively conclude that narrativisation of music can be conceptualised as a mode of interpretation that necessitates both the engagement of a listener and inherent aspects in the music or the theatre performance that generate this mode. Hence, I propose to examine narrativisation as a category of perception that suggests a connection with the modes of listening I have discussed so far. In doing so, I analyse to what extent the perspectives in music theatre fulfil a similar function as, what Fludernik calls, the ‘generic’ markers that attune the listener through familiarity, expectation and recognition into a narrative mode of listening.

The notion of narrativisation helps me further to demonstrate how listening modes, as ways of relating to music theatre, involve processes of signification that make use of idiosyncratic experiences as well as discursive structures. As we have seen, these modes of relating can be implied as subject positions in the performance that are generated and managed through perspectives. The causal listening mode, for instance, helps the listener to trace back the sounds spatially and interpret the information they may contain, according to her or his experiences with proximity, density, movement, texture. However, causal listening in itself does not explain what the sound does to the listener and why it does so. Rather than looking for causes or origins in a certain listening environment, the listener looks for relations guided by the question: What does the sound mean to me? Causal listening relates the sound in an immediate environment to the listener, which in turn affects her or his sense of self. Narrativisation, as a very specific listening mode, could, likewise, explain how we appropriate sound or music by anchoring each in a narrative that provides a meaningful structure to this relation between ourselves and the sound or the music.

Seen this way, narrativisation appears to provide temporary resolution, a sense of ‘closure’ to the listener in coping with the inconsistencies, disruptions or insufficiencies in her or his auditory experiences. As I have already introduced, these gaps in listening materialise in a semiotic ‘remainder’, which

114 German original: “Damit nämlich eröffnet die Musik Projektionsflächen, die jeder Hörer nach Maßgabe seiner eigenen Erfahrungswelt narrativ auffüllen kann” (Wolf 2002: 83). The psychological term ‘projection surfaces’ is not common as a concept in English. It suggests a spatial understanding of narrative interpretation in terms of the ‘projection’ of subjective associations, and thereby, of the self. The listener’s ‘world’ of experiences also suggests this spatial aspect of interpreting music as narrative.
causes auditory distress. Narrativisation then brings a structure and temporary closure to the semiotic remainder. Narrative closure conveys a particular feeling of satisfaction to desire, relief to suspense and clarity to confusion (Abbott 2002: 60). However, the narrative structure or coherence that the listener subjectively creates by means of the process of narrativisation is not identical to the closure that it brings to auditory distress. Narrative closure does not necessarily mean to close up any new meanings that the performance can evoke in the listener through burgeoning on a semiotic remainder.

In chapter two, I introduced Kramer’s idea that semiotic listening should not smooth out the excess, nor exhaust the musical remainder in endless conceptualisations. In the current chapter, I contend that narrativisation as a specific semiotic mode of listening fulfils a similar function. The auditory distress caused by music invites the listener to take up a position that provokes a connection with both a cultural discourse and personal, lived experiences. Narrativisation, then, offers a way for the listener to find structure and resolution in order to make the auditory distress meaningful by connecting the music (or any sound, for that matter) to other constituents in the performance and to aspects of her or his realm of experience. Here, I intend to show how the perspective of focalization – an ‘implied listener’ as a particular subject position – plays upon these extra-musical relations and references within a music theatre performance.

In what follows, I will develop my argument about narrativity and narrativisation of music in the theatre further through a case study, De Overstroming (2002), directed by Peter Van Kraaij for LOD (formerly Het Muziek Lod) and Het Net. The performance aims at bringing music, text and imagery together as three separate parts or versions of what could be called a ‘narrative’. I argue that through the juxtaposition of music and text, an excess of meaning is produced, which is channelled through the perspective of focalization. This perspective is given through a verbal, narrative text, which provokes the listener to apply a narrative reading onto the music pieces by Jan Kuijken. The music then cultivates a semiotic remainder in relation to the text: it creates an excess, which makes the meaning of a musical narrative more ambiguous. Using several aspects from De Overstroming, I illustrate how one can analyse the ‘impulses’ in the listener to narrativise the acoustic events in response to auditory distress. This can be achieved through the specific structure of address in the perspectives that a text or the listening situation itself provides. I thereby regard narrativisation as an interpretative strategy that helps the listener to process the auditory intensities and create

115 Besides an earlier version in 2000, the performance of De Overstroming that I discuss here premiered on 7 February 2002 in the Bottelarij (Brussels), where I also enjoyed the opportunity of seeing it. The production had a relatively short tour, with performances in Amsterdam and Tilburg in March 2002.
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meaning by filling in the gaps and bringing the musical sounds in relation to a context, a lived experience and ultimately, a cultural discourse.

2. De Overstroming: An Excess of Narratives in Text and Music

The motto to De Overstroming in the programme folder reads: “Do you see the story? Do you see anything?” taken from Joseph Conrad’s Heart of Darkness. As intertextual reference, this epigraph asks for a careful examining ‘eye’ in relation to what one can perceive as narrative in the performance. It preludes the self-reflexivity of the performance towards its address on the listener that aims to activate a highly focused mode of listening-in-search of a story of some kind to some degree. It is to be expected that these questions cause a narrative mode of interpreting the music theatre performance, but not without scepticism. The query moreover explicitly addresses a ‘you’, implying a listener or reader as addressee. As a specific response to this address, I propose narrativisation as a compelling mode of listening with which the listener can position her or himself in relation to what she or he sees, or rather, does not see in the performance. In doing so, I propose De Overstroming as an illustration of how narrativisation helps the listener to make the auditory distress meaningful.

As for the question Do you see anything?, the performance does not offer as much for the eye as to the ear. The setting for the unfolding story (or stories) is an abstract, black-box theatre. Angled mirrors hang down in the background of the dimly lit stage, reflecting squares of bright light onto the floor. Gradually, the squares turn into blurred image projections of natural elements (by Erik Nerinckx). Actress Yvonne Wiewel moves silently between those reflections and shadows, and awaits her cue to begin her monologue. Sounding somewhat agitated, though in a detached way, she recounts as if she is trying to remember the words that are not her own. Throughout the performance, musician and composer Jan Kuijken sits in a dark corner on the right side of the stage, where he plays the cello in front of a minimally lit music stand. He improvises along with pre-composed and pre-recorded musical materials, distributed across eight loudspeakers, which are also visible to the audience. At times, Kuijken’s music overlays or disrupts the actress’s speech, while his visual presence resides in the background as much as possible. This context, visually deprived in part, sets the stage for enhancing the listener’s auditory distress caused by Jan Kuijken’s music. I want to argue that, in such a context, any musical narrative can only materialise in the listener when the performance offers perspectives that stimulate for a narrative way of listening. Kuijken’s live performance on the cello ‘musicalises’ the stage in such a way as to obscure a clear, coherent story or narrative in the listener.
Despite this, the performance employs a text that casts a perspective and plays upon the expectations of the listener to narrativise the acoustic events: Die Überschwemmung (1963), a short story by the Austrian author Peter Handke. This text plays upon the question *Do you see the story?* On the surface, the story recounts two brothers standing by the side of a river. One brother is blind and the other tells what he sees in the first person (I-narrator). The blind brother listens carefully and considers what he is told, which is the only access to ‘reality’ he has. Gradually, as the description develops, the images grow out of proportion: a dead gnat appears to be swimming in the water; a dead pig floats by; two children appear to be clutching to a stone and are screaming as the river rises continually. *De Overstroming*, then, illustrates how a narrator can offer distrustful metaphors of perception, and how one narrative account can produce many different, subjective readings. The descriptions of the seeing brother call for a comparison of what is probable in our everyday reality and what deviates from what we (can) accept in relation to the cultural discourse and knowledge of our world. In doing so, *De Overstroming* plays with the reliability of narrating and the possibility of imagining what is being told by means of mental representations of the world. Looking and listening become gradually opposed to each other, as the blind brother does not believe what the seeing brother describes.

The scepticism towards what gradually becomes a narrative in the text is already evident from the beginning:

> A man stands in the river, says I. He stands in the midst of scree and holds his head lowered; his arms hang down by his sides. Apparently he has climbed from the bank on which we sit, into the riverbed, and slowly walked over the stones to the water; because we are so far away from him, he appears to stand directly in front of the waves: with one step he would be up to his knees in water, with another the river would tear him away. He certainly isn’t standing as near as that, however, rather a couple [of] meters farther back; so he ought to be able to hear me. He won’t hear you, my brother [says]. Call him. No, [says] I. Is he looking at something? he [asks]. I don’t know, [says] I. I only see him from behind. The outline of his face is so light in the sun that I can’t tell a thing. Perhaps his eyes are closed. He has walked over the stones and stands there and dozes on the riverbend. You’re lying, my brother [says]. There isn’t any man in the river at all (Handke, trans. Lance Olsen 1979: 5; my alterations, PV).

As the accumulation of descriptions starts to ‘flood’, the listener (or reader) begins to doubt the truth-value of the narrated events. Barthes (1966) has claimed that every single element has a signifying function in the narrative,

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116 Peter Handke’s *Überschwemmung* was translated as “The Flood” by Lance Olsen in *Chicago Review* 31:1 (Summer 1979) to which I will refer with some minor changes. A Dutch translation, entitled *De Overstroming* by Gerrit Bussink, was used in the performance; hence the title.
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even the unnecessary events (Barthes’s so-called ‘supplementary events’ for the sake of the story). Gradually these unnecessary and rather imaginative descriptions start to ‘flood’. The rising river in the title then becomes a metaphor for the imagination going astray, propelled by a narration of an ‘unreliable’ narrator. In the same vein, the title ‘the flood’ suggests an accumulation that ends in excess. This idea could be extended to the main thesis of my research, namely that sound and music cause auditory distress to the listener through an excess of intensities, urging the listener to respond. This response can as much help to solve the auditory distress as to imbue the listener with scepticism.

Seen this way, I propose to read *De Overstroming* as a metaphor for the excess that underlies not only any listening experience, but also any *act* or *event* of storytelling. This excess materialises in a semiotic remainder, which in turn urges the listener to respond and channel the excess in her or his modes of interpretation. Through *De Overstroming*, I will demonstrate how narrativisation is one specific mode that enables the listener to regain control over the excess in listening and, consequently, the semiotic remainder. I introduced the latter concept in the previous chapter to explain why our responses in listening are also imbued with and propelled by a search for meaning in an endless commutability of signifieds that fill in the gaps of our perceptions. According to Hubert Damisch, the remainder is ambiguous or least to say, paradoxical: “always both gap and excess, lack and substance, it is a positive kernel of non-sense that keeps us coming back to the artwork” (Kramer 2002: 171). Though, as Kramer suggests, this mechanism lies at the heart of making sense of a musical artwork; it also suggests a specific boundary to music in its claims on narrativity. Comparable to the open ending of Handke’s text at the moment when the flooding reaches its highest peak, music’s semiotic remainder necessitates an endless commutability of the signified, as described by Silverman, with “the assumption that the play of meaning has no necessary closure, no transcendental justification” (Silverman 1983: 41). The excess of narratives between text and music leaves the listener or reader with an unresolved feeling of an incomplete ending.

Consequently, the performance of Handke’s text could be read as a demonstration of how a narrative comes into existence through the process of an explorative and imaginative mode of listening, a *listening-in-search*, to the point that it questions itself. It thereby demonstrates that any musical ‘récit’ is always in a state of crisis due to its underlying excess to any meaning or narrativisation that it might evoke. This crisis materialises in a sense of scepticism in the listener surrounding – and yet inherent to – the narrativisation of music. As such, the case study illustrates both the function and the limits of narrativising music.

The scepticism towards narrativising music is set by Handke’s short story: despite the apparent narrative development, the ambiguity of the events
described by the I-narrator question the validity of the story through the eyes of the seeing brother. In the performance, the text provides the framework (like a ‘paratext’ in the Genettian sense) for comparison and application of a narrative reading to Kuijken’s music, depending on the listener’s expectations. The accumulation of narrative events in Handke’s text can create the expectation in the listener to read the music subsequently as an applied narrative with a comparable accumulation of events, that is to say, musical or auditory events. After a semi-dramatic recitation of the short story by the actress, Kuijken’s partly improvised, partly pre-recorded composition – a suite for eight speakers – produces auditory events that can produce a similar effect of a flood as in the story. The music seems to start off from an empty page like Handke’s writing, and gradually establish motives, gestures and phrases in a ‘free play’ of musical ideas. In a perceptual sense, the music could cause an excess of auditory intensities which challenges a semiotic mode of listening, as the narrative of the text does not completely apply to the listening experience in order to resolve the caused auditory distress. Do you see the story? Do you see anything? These initial questions prefigure the discussion on narrativity of music and sound in theatre. In the following paragraphs, I begin by explaining how narrativisation can help to discuss a music theatre performance such as De Overstroming, which at first sight appears to disrupt and question its own narrative development in its use of verbal texts. I then show how through its perspectives, the performance manages the listener’s attention to such an extent that it cannot evoke anything but a narrative reading of the music. For this purpose, I propose to critically assess the field of narratology as a conceptual toolbox for the analysis of our auditory experiences in music theatre as complementary to the modes of listening. Within this toolbox, I focus on three concepts: narrative impulse, focalization and narrative space. In relation to these concepts, I demonstrate how narrativisation as a mode of listening is incited as an ‘impulse’ in the listener by certain perspectives in the text, the music and the performance. I then explain how this narrative impulse is especially instigated by focalization, which can serve as a particular perspective or ‘point’ in listening that presupposes narrativity in terms of an implied subject position for the listener to take up. Finally, I conceptualise this subject position in spatial terms by showing how focalization can generate a frame that helps the listener to distinguish the physical, presentational space of the stage and the music performance from representational spaces, including narrative space.

The term ‘paratext’ was coined by Gérard Genette in his Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation (1987; 1997). The notion, by definition, contains the additional elements or textual materials that are needed to frame and understand the narrative (Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory 2005; 2008: 419). Traditionally in novels, these elements include the titles, epigraphs, prefaces, afterwords, etc. In De Overstroming, Handke’s text could be regarded as a preface to Kuijken’s music, giving rise to comparison and application of the former’s narrative.
2.1. The Narrative Impulse

In the staging of Peter Handke’s short story in *De Overstroming*, the text does not only demonstrate how a narrative comes about. It also creates a framework for the listener to apply the narrative to Kuijken’s music. The frame for narrativisation is already prepared in the opening scene by means of another text in English, preceding Handke’s narrative text: the poem *Musée des Beaux-Arts* (1938; first published 1940) by W.H. Auden.

Auden’s poetic text could be understood as having meta-textual relevance within the narrative context of *De Overstroming*. The poem reveals a narrative reading of Pieter Brueghel’s painting *The Fall of Icarus* (ca.1558). Through the reading of the detail of Icarus falling into the water, the story begins to appear in the painting. In the context of the performance, the poem could create the anticipation to read also the music with a keen and imaginative ear that narrativises them. The story of the falling Icarus in the painting of the old Flemish master then discloses an intertextual map for reading the music performance narratively. Auden’s poem evokes the first impulse in the attentive listener to read a narrative into Kuijken’s music composition, which becomes a hypertext in the accumulation of texts.

The opening scene illustrates how a text can address the listener in such a way that it invites her or him to read narrative content into nonverbal expressions, such as in a painting. This suggests that a narrative reading can also be applied to a piece of music. Simultaneous to Yvonne Wiewel’s recitation of the poem, Jan Kuijken plays the cello with an accompanying, acousmatic music piece for loudspeakers with increasing volume. The music, however, disrupts the narrative reading in the poem, engulfing the words. Apart from its connotative function of raising attention similar to a musical ‘overture’, the music functions here literally as a sound wall with escalating levels of auditory distress as it aims to gradually disturb both the reading and the listener’s pursuit of making sense of the poem. The music creates an excess of auditory intensities that overflows the linguistic text and drowns the actress’s voice. One could claim that the listener’s attention to the poem is disrupted by this excess in the simultaneity of text (voice) and music. This

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118 Eero Tarasti (2004) discusses a dynamic between two paradigms in time, memory and expectation: “In the time dimension, again, two paradigms come into play: the paradigm of memory, which means the accumulation of musical events in the memory of a listener, and the paradigm of expectations, which of course reach their high point at the beginning of the piece” (294-5). In the overture to *De Overstroming*, the listener is gradually prepared to bring these paradigms in connection with one another by relating the text of the poem and the short story – that trigger certain expectations – to the accumulation of musical events as a memorial trace. Kuijken’s music could then be understood as a hypertext, in the Genettean sense: “[...] a text that builds on or contains traces of an earlier text, the hypotext” (Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory 2005; 2008: 229). While searching for meaning in listening to Kuijken’s semi-improvised music, the listener could make associations with Auden’s poem and Handke’s short story in an applied sense.
excess is, moreover, heightened by the emptiness and darkness of the stage, thus creating a situation of partial visual deprivation.

Gradually, the visually deprived performance space is filled with suggestive images. One sequence of images represents a cinematic countdown projected on the surface of the stage, as if marking the beginning of a silent (or ‘mute’) movie. In this way, text and image invite the listener to apply narrative elements to the music as a way to read it, perhaps as a soundtrack to the text, which slowly moves to the foreground. Following the recital of Auden’s poem, the music piece is immediately repeated in its entirety, thereby receiving full attention. The first time the music plays, the listener most likely feels overwhelmed by the simultaneity of music and text, which could evoke a rather dispersed mode of listening. On this second hearing, she or he is able to focus more on the music piece. The listener might connect the auditory input recursively to bits and pieces of Auden’s poem, the title ‘De Overstroming’, the projected images, or the epigraph in the programme brochure. In an applied sense, following an old musical code of baroque music drama, one could suddenly hear the fall of Icarus reflected mimetically in the descending tonal scale from the high notes to the lower tones in the sounding cello score. Nonetheless, one could question whether the music can really instigate narrativisation by itself, as it receives its meaning in relation to other elements, such as imagery and text.

The issue of narrativity with regard to music has always been problematic. There is and has been a great deal of scepticism about methodologies that try to capture music’s narrativity by expanding the definition of narrative that would locate it in the music itself. One of the main objections is that music is not genuinely semantic in the way language is; thus, music can never generate a narrative in a straightforward manner. John Neubauer (1997), for instance, has expressed his scholarly doubt about music’s claims on narrativity precisely because of his insistence on language. His perspective, however, could cast a light on both the possibilities and limitations of narrativity in instrumental music:

Though instrumental music is incapable of narrating, it can enact stories: it can show even if it cannot tell, it can suggest plot, for instance in terms of themes and thematic development. Its most common verbal and rhetorical metaphor, namely voice, suggests that it can also enact metaphorical dialogues between instruments (Neubauer qtd. in Wolf 2002: 80).

Neubauer refers to the concept of a ‘musical voice’ in line with Carolyn Abbate’s Unsung Voices (1996) as an unrealised voice in music, appropriating the human voice without words. Neubauer’s idea of narrating depends rather on a narrow sense of the word, namely as telling in language. He models narrativity of instrumental music on the way literary texts and verbal languages narrate. Consequently, music would never really tell anything
specific. Neubauer’s assertion of language as the basis for narration leads him to conclude that music is not narrative in itself. He does, however, acknowledge music’s ability to suggest or provoke a sense of narrativity in terms of plot, which he locates in the musical development. As such, music can give the suggestion that it enacts or performs a story, though it cannot tell a story of its own.

As *De Overstroming* demonstrates, because music cannot tell as verbal narratives like Handke’s text do, the assumed narratives that the music would perform as such can always be questioned. Kuijken’s music pieces illustrate such self-questioning of narrativity in music. As is common to musical counterpoint, the suite gives an impression of dialogues between voices, between the ‘voice’ of the cello and the recorded ‘voices’ of other instruments. In the context of the recording, the attentive listener could feel an urge to retrace the instrumental sources in a mode of causal listening (like a piano, a violin, a trumpet, a clarinet, etc.). In a narrative mode of listening, yet, she or he reflects on their meaning within the structure of the performance. Due to the acousmatic listening situation, the sound of the instruments also becomes more abstract, producing metaphorical ‘absent’ voices that try to tell something, complete each other’s phrases or musical sentences, or enact dialogues. The performance of the music piece could dissolve in the background in favour of a sense of narrativity, addressing the listener. The music thus unfolds as a performance of narrativity without really telling anything directly, but inviting the listener to narrativise.  

However, by shifting the question of narrativity to the narrativising efforts of the listener, the definition of narrative can be detached from language, while retaining its relation to signification. According to Lawrence Kramer (2002), the fact that music does not communicate as an initially nonsemantic medium in as straightforward a manner as verbal language does not imply that its products cannot engage or evoke meaning (146). Since narrativity gives way to meaning, it does not simply follow from the above criticisms that music cannot engage in narrativity or narrative meaning. Narrativity, on the contrary, encloses a way for the reader to make meaningful relations, coherence and structure. The music pieces in *De Overstroming*, then, do not merely present us with music’s insufficiency to tell a comprehensible story.

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119 Cone suggests that even in the ‘wordless’ musical voices we can infer words in relation to an absent human singing voice: “Only our deliberate effort supplies the melody with words. Only our imagination turns the instrumental line into a singing voice that wishes to remain wordless. If we are willing to let the words go, if we can forget the singing voice, we listen in a different way, and what we hear is different” (Cone 1974: 78). I return to the latter aspect later in this chapter, when I deal with oral and literate modes of listening. However, these suggestions to fill in words in our imagination only apply when words are usually expected. In *De Overstroming* the instrumental voices could reflect the voices of the brothers in Handke’s story, though it is unsure what they are saying, if not irrelevant. As I pointed out earlier in this chapter, verbalisation is not obligatory for having a sense of narrativity when listening to and imagining musical voices.
Rather, the fundamental insufficiency invites the listener to imbue the musical experience with narrative meaning as a response, aimed at resolving the sense of insufficiency. In so doing, music could give the listener the suggestion to look for meanings in relation to other objects of experience, such as texts and images, which also always exceed those meanings because of the semiotic remainder that music constitutes. Music thereby plays upon the listener’s urge to interpret and thereby give a sense of coherence as a way to cope with the insufficiency for which narrativisation can give temporary solace.

This idea of an urge for interpretation helps Nattiez (1990) to formulate the narrative impulse in the listener in terms of an ‘incitement’ that can be invoked by the music:

*Human beings are symbolic animals; confronted with a trace they will seek to interpret it, to give it meaning. We ascribe meaning by grasping the traces we find, artworks that ensue from a creative act. This is exactly what happens with music. Music is not a narrative, but an incitement to make a narrative, to comment, to analyze (128).*

The incitement gives way to a narrative impulse in the listener, which Nattiez conceptualises as a ‘trace’ in the work itself. However, he emphasises the role of the listener who feels addressed to respond. For Nattiez, music’s inclinations towards narrativity therefore constitute an *inferred* narrativity (Nattiez 1990: 245; Wolf 2002: 94), depending on the listener’s response:

*If the listener, in hearing music, experiences the susions of what I would like to call the narrative impulse, this is because he or she hears (on the level of strictly musical discourse) recollections, expectations, and resolutions, but does not know what is expected, what resolved. The listener will be seized by a desire to complete, in words, what music does not say, because music is incapable of saying it (Nattiez 1990: 128).*

Despite music’s inability to tell a story in the way a verbal text does, it can *bring about* an impulse in the listener to narrativise. Thus, one should differentiate between *being* a narrative and *generating* a sense of narrativity as a way to respond to an excess and insufficiency in listening. The latter calls for narrativisation as a semiotic mode of listening, a *listening-in-search* for meaning.

However, Nattiez’s argument above still assumes a dependence on language or words as a basis for narrativisation. In his view, the narrative impulse involves a desire to translate into words which would assist in conceptualising and grasping music’s appeal to narrativity: “Thus I have a wish to complete through words what the music does not say because it is not in its semiological nature to say it to me” (Nattiez 1990: 244-45). Due to music’s semantic insufficiency, the interpretation of it would compel such a
The Frequency of Imagination

verbalisation, which generally impels metaphors in the analysis and communication of narrative meanings that the music might invoke. Elsewhere Nattiez abandons the necessity of this idea and underscores that such verbal translation and fixation of music’s potential meanings in metaphors should not be a basis for grasping music’s narrativity. Methodologically, narrative analysis may require that we remain specific by translating our perceptions and interpretations into words. Yet meaning should not be confused with verbalisation, as Nattiez argues: they are two different types of symbolisation (Nattiez 1990: 124). A verbal translation that is produced in an analysis does not necessarily verify music’s claims on narrativity in our listening experiences, and vice versa. In addition, the difficulty of creating a specific verbal description holds for every attempt to interpret an auditory experience. When we want to communicate our experience, we inevitably turn to metaphors. Yet that does not explain the sense of narrativity in the interpretation of music as such.

Nattiez’s concept of the narrative impulse is useful to describe the listener’s role in narrativisation. At the same time, it locates a sense of narrativity as a trace in the specific address of music to the listener (which would suggest that certain music is more likely to address narrative interpretations than others). The sense of narrativity in music relies on the impulse in the listener to respond to an excess of intensities and a lack of meaning that music evokes. Seen this way, narrativity in music should be understood as an implied position, which the listener can choose to take up. The narrative impulse implies a subject position that stimulates the listener to interpret the music narratively. Yet, as I explained in the previous chapter, the listener does not have to be consciously aware of the implied positions in the music or its performance, which make the listener respond in a certain way. Therefore, one could question to what degree the music really generates a narrative mode of listening in the listener as a response, and to what degree the listener independently chooses ‘narrative activity’ (Newcomb 1987) as a way to make sense.

De Overstroming offers a demonstration of how narrativity of music can be questioned in relation to the listener’s impulse to engage with the music in a narrative interpretation. The self-awareness that the performance evokes thereby also affects the role of the listener, who feels addressed to listen acutely and to look for meanings in relation to the textual narrative of Peter Handke’s short story. By placing the story at the centre, the performance demonstrates one essential aspect of the listener’s impulse to narrativise the events: it is less the narrator (the seeing brother), but rather the focalizer, who constitutes the impulse by revealing a point-of-view on what is to be seen and believed in the narrative (the blind brother). The text thereby shifts from being a narrative to evoking narrativity, which puts any narrativisation under scrutiny.
In the following subsections, I engage further with De Overstroming to discuss how the narratological concept of focalization can contribute as a tool to analyse the impulses for narrativisation in the listener in her or his engagement with a music theatre performance. I first propose to extend the traditional narratological definition of focalization for the purpose of the theatre. I then relate this notion to Chion’s ‘point of listening’ or ‘point of audition’ in order to show how focalization could be conceptualised as an implied listening position that invites the listener to interpret a musical performance in a narrative way. Ultimately, I focus on how the spatial aspect of focalization can serve as a specific perspective in the theatre, contributing to a sense of narrative space (including fictional and diegetic spaces).

2.2. The Blind Perspective: Focalization as Point of Listening

In chapter two, I argued how a perspective manages the listener’s attention in terms of an implied, discursive position. A perspective channels the way the listener makes meaningful experiences by allowing her or him to position her or himself to the auditory distress. I also suggested that a perspective can imply an ‘ideal’ point of listening for the listener. Such a perspective suggests an ‘implied listener’ in terms of a subject position to which the listener can relate. In narrative theory, however, a similar position for the reader has been theorised in terms of focalisation. I propose to relate this notion here to explain how a sense of narrativity can be embedded in the music theatre performance in terms of an implied position for the listener to take up. I argue that such an implied position is indispensible for the listener’s impulse to narrativise music.

In narrative theory, focalization traditionally assumes a visual perspective, a point of view, that determines the way the narrative is presented to the reader. Mieke Bal (1985) defines it in terms of ‘vision’:

Focalization is the relationship between the ‘vision,’ the agent that sees, and that which is seen. This relationship is a component of the story part, of the content of the narrative text: A says that B sees what C is doing. Sometimes that difference is void, e.g. when the reader is presented with a vision as directly as possible. The different agents then cannot be isolated, they coincide (104).

In this definition, focalization reveals the way in which the elements of a story are presented, which in narratology is generally defined as the ‘fabula’.120

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120 In line with the Russian Formalists, Tzvetan Todorov has distinguished in a narrative a ‘fabula’ (fable, story, plot, histoire) and a ‘discourse’ (récit or syuzhet), or in Barthes’s formulation: “story (the argument), comprising a logic of actions and a ‘syntax’ of characters, and discourse, comprising the tenses, aspects and modes of the narrative” (Barthes 1966: 86-7). Fabula is often regarded as not really identical to the ‘story’, whereas fabula is its underlying narrative system: a series of chronologically (and sometimes logically) related events caused...
According to Bal, focalization is the “vision of the fabula” (Bal 1985: 100). It often introduces a subject or agent, a focalizer, as the point from which the represented elements (objects, events, characters) in a narrative text are viewed (104). The focalizer is embedded in the narrative content of the text. It is an image of the implied reader, an agent through which perspective the reader sees the unfolding of the events.

In the recitation of Handke’s short story in De Overstroming, the spectator becomes an ‘overhearer’ who identifies with the blind brother by engaging with the narrative discourse of the text. The listener (or reader) could be said to be implied in the text through the figure of the blind brother, who, in narratological terms, is the focalizer. Following the above definition, one might first be tempted to believe that in the story, the focalizer is the seeing brother, since it is literally through his eyes that the events unfold. However, the story plays with a discrepancy between what one sees and what one hears through the two brothers. The seeing brother describes to the blind brother what is to be seen. Yet the sceptical perspective of the blind brother triggers doubts in the reader’s and, by implication, the listener’s ear. Through the blind brother’s point of view, the narrative communication slowly turns into disbelief as he distances himself from what is described by the seeing brother as his ‘direct vision’. This creates a shifting focalization between the I-narrator and narratee (that is, the narrator’s audience), which explains the confusion about whom we should trust. This mechanism is generally referred to in narrative theory as ‘unreliable narrator’ and ‘narrative irony’.

The context of the black-box theatre where an actress recites the story adds another layer to this shifting focalization. The actress recites Handke’s narrative text in a distant way, which adds a perspective of estrangement to the recounted events. Her ‘distressed’ recitation as a narrator disrupts an engaged way of storytelling, which highlights not only her narration but also the focalizer of the story. In so doing, the performance shows how perspectives can influence the way we see and hear the events. In this context, the ‘blind brother’ who, deprived of vision, retains a sceptical ear is a useful metaphor for the listener in music theatre. His critical attitude towards the vivid descriptions of his seeing brother also applies to the listener in the audience.

and experienced by actors, i.e. agents that perform actions (Bal 1985: 18). Umberto Eco defines it as “the fundamental schema of narration, the logic of actions and the syntax of the characters, the course of events ordered temporally” (Umberto Eco, Lector in Fabula, 1979; qtd. in Pavis 1996: 256). Whereas the fabula answers to the question ‘what’, narrative discourse defines the ‘how’ of a narrative: everything that pertains to the presentation. The story is ultimately the fabula but presented in a certain way (in the narrative discourse). The way how something is presented in sound, music or voice could be regarded on the level of narrative discourse too, when it is imbued with narrative properties as a result of narrative impulse in the listener. According to Mieke Bal, however, a distinction should be made between, “on the one hand, the vision through which the elements are presented and, on the other, the identity of the voice that is verbalizing that vision” (Bal 1985: 100-1). The latter pertains to the authority of the narrative voice, which I discuss later in this chapter.
The Narrative Response: Narrativisation and Focalization

Like the blind brother, the spectator’s imagination depends on the way the perspectives of the theatre channel what is to be seen and heard, and how she or he interprets it all. However, in this type of music theatre, like most post-dramatic theatre performance, the uncertainty about the regulative mechanisms of the perspectives is enhanced. This scepticism can be extended to the narrativisation of the music.

Through the focalization of the blind brother, *De Overstroming* demonstrates how an implied reader’s position in a text can generate a narrative impulse for the implied listener. Rather than producing a point of view, the performance shows specifically how focalization can generate a point of listening, which stimulates the listener to narrativise the auditory experiences in relation to other elements in the performance. Michel Chion has developed the idea of a point of listening for film sound in terms of a point of audition. This notion pertains to sound in cinema in the first place. However, I want to reconsider it here for the purposes of analysing our experiences of sound and music in the theatre.

Chion (1994) coins the term point of audition specifically as a correlate to point of view. He infers two meanings to his notion, which are not always necessarily related:

1. A spatial sense: from where do I hear, from what point in the space represented on the screen or on the soundtrack?

Chion’s two-fold definition confirms that our relation to sound in film is interdependent with the ways the sounds are presented, bringing a spatial or a subjective perspective to our auditory experiences and listening attention. As such, Chion’s point of audition offers a concept of listening, which stands in a direct relation to the visual image in cinema.122

For the theatre, the application of Chion’s concept needs caution as sound and music stand in a more direct relation to images than in cinema. In cinema, camera positions and microphones generally mediate a point of audition, which necessarily must be obliterated from the observer’s mental representation (Chion 1994: 93) in order to secure the illusion and a homogeneous story world. In theatre, however, a point of listening as perspective is always implied in the way the acoustic events are presented.123

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122 According to Chion, the subjective sense of point of listening demonstrates the intricate relation to the visual image: “In the second, subjective sense of point of audition, we find the same phenomenon as that which operates for vision. It is the visual representation of a character in close-up that, in simultaneous association with the hearing of sound, identifies this sound as being heard by the character shown” (Chion 1994: 91).

123 That is, when no *cinematisation* of the theatre stage is intended through embedding the medium of, for instance, film projections.
Showing the processes of mediation in the theatre (such as loudspeakers, a musician on the stage) does not make narrativisation of the auditory experience unattainable, though they might evoke a more conscious perception. This illustrates that a perspective in listening should primarily be located in the music or sound in relational terms with the (implied) listener, for which the representational function is only secondary.

As for a spatial relation, in the first sense, the point from where the listener is listening in the auditorium is most often fixed throughout the whole performance. Spatialisation of sound or music conveys a certain (re)production of space that influences the way the listener perceives it. Yet a spatial sense is always conveyed in the sounds or music, which does not require electroacoustical manipulation at all. As for the subjective relation, in the second sense, the point of audition reveals our position in a story world through a character. Though instrumental music could ‘enact’ a sense of virtual voices in a narrative mode of listening, it is difficult to regard a proper narrative perspective in these voices in terms of focalization. If one can distinguish characters as virtual personae in instrumental music, it would still be very difficult, if possible at all, to state that they listen to what we hear. A different interpretation might be when we are dealing with vocal personae as characters or ‘actors’, as I discuss later in this chapter. Nonetheless, the subjective point of listening establishes an iconic relation between what one sees and what one hears, creating a frame in which to interpret the sounds or the music.

Both the subjective and the spatial sense play a significant role in focalization when it concerns our auditory experiences in the theatre. As narrative theory has suggested, focalization manages how we perceive what is represented in the narrative, which implies a spatial as well as a culturally specific perspective through which we are invited to identify ourselves with. In the theatre, the spatial aspect implies the role of the theatrical frame. The latter also affects the way we perceive the space where the narrativisation takes place, giving us clues about what to focus on in looking and listening. As a result of this framing, as I propose to discuss next, the spectator produces different spaces depending on her or his narrativisations in order to contain the music or the sounds. This production of a ‘narrative space’ could then be understood in relation to an implied subject position contained by focalization.

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124 Bal argues for a similar function of narrative space as a place where the action takes place; however, she also points out that it might be the ‘acting place’ itself (Bal 1985: 95). Hence, for the purpose of my study, I make a distinction between the actual performance space, the space of the narrating (fictional space) and the space where the narration takes place (diegetic space).
2.3. Framing Narrative Space

In her research on theatrical space as ‘Bedeutungsraum’ (Peter Handke), Gay McAuley (1999) distinguishes the ways in which we perceive space in the theatre in terms of a physical or ‘presentational’ space (of the stage) and the fictional space. McAuley proposes the following traditional schema in theatre theory to explain how presentational space can create a fictional universe through vocal and physical action:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{presentational} & \quad \text{verbal/vocal} \\
\text{physical action} & \quad \rightarrow \quad \text{fictional}
\end{align*}
\]

(McAuley 1999: 128)

Following this schema, drama commonly immerses the reader in a fictional world, without narrational mediation but through the presentational system of the theatre. Drama assists then in creating fictional spaces, not only through vocal and/or verbal action of the voice but also through physical gestures, including vocal gestures, actions and movements made by the performers. Among the fictional spaces, we can also take into account the story world in the case of diegesis.

For the purpose of the present study, we should include sound and music among the nonverbal gestures that create space. Schafer’s soundscape notion has pointed out that sound is always space, which creates either an acoustic horizon (background, ambience) or gives spatial presence to sounds (stimulating an indexical or causal listening). Using McAuley’s model we can consider to what extent these acoustic spaces can contribute to (the representation of) fictional or narrative spaces. The acoustic space should therefore be split into a physical and a representational space, the latter containing the possibility to produce a narrative space (McAuley 1999: 128). Following McAuley, we could then consider three categories of the spectator’s spatial experience in the theatre:

- The physical space that constitutes a frame and contextual clues;
- The mimetic space, or the space of representation;
- The diegetic or narrative space (which also includes the fictional space).

All three spatial categories can be alternately activated in the spectator’s attention. This schema is rudimentary as it focuses on traditional drama,
though McAuley also refers to many other spatial categories such as the energised space between bodies. Her model does, however, not embrace sounds and music for the representation of space (mimetic or diegetic space), or the physical, acoustic space. Nor does it explain how these different kinds of spaces relate to one another: how they can disrupt each other or be present simultaneously. As sound is by nature ‘placeless’, the listening space is much more volatile than McAuley’s model argues.

I want to argue here that, rather than having been prearranged, these spaces depend on our listening modes as being managed by the perspectives or points of listening. What’s more, I wish to illustrate that focalization, as a specific, subjective perspective, is indispensable for activating a narrative way of listening in music theatre. Both the spatial and subjective points of listening in De Overstroming ‘channel’ the listener’s modes of interpretation, depending on how her or his attention is focused on these different spaces. By functioning as a ‘channel’ or a ‘filter’, focalization then offers an implied listener’s position to connect these spaces, which manages the way the actual listener responds to the auditory distress.

De Overstroming demonstrates how focalization in the text, and in the performance of the text, influences the way the listener interprets the music pieces in relation to both spatial and subjective perspectives. In addition, McAuley’s distinctions help us to differentiate between physical and representational spaces in music. Kuijken’s music includes an element of ‘spatialisation’ by means of its distribution over eight loudspeakers: the partly acousmatized, partly de-acousmatized composition plays on different representations of space. Within this spatialisation, an idea resides of how and from what spatial perspective one listens and perceives the representational space in the recorded music. The sense of space conveyed in the recording can however be disrupted at any time by Jan Kuijken’s live improvisations, when

125 Peter Rabinowitz (2004) emphasises the listener’s role in narrativity as a propensity to create fictionality in music: “[l]ike fictional narrative, musical fictionality is not a quality found in the text itself but is, rather, a perspective brought to bear on the music by the listener. That is, in literature there are no formal markers that define fictionality in the way that certain formal markers define a poem as a sonnet; rather fictionality, with its characteristic split between authorial and narrative audience, is a way of reading” (Rabinowitz 2004: 318). According to Rabinowitz, it depends on the listener (or ‘type’ of audience) that fictionality is produced as a mode of interpretation. However, I contend that the listener’s perspective is implied as a subject position through focalization to which the listener is invited to relate oneself.

I am greatly indebted to an e-mail conversation with Seymour Chatman (11 August 2007) on the Narrative-L list (at Georgetown University) about the possible connotations of focalization as ‘filter’. He drew my attention to the fact that the term ‘filter’ was earlier used in narratological (and pre-narratological) discussion of what has come to be called focalization. Other terms are ‘post of observation’, ‘centre’ or ‘vessel of consciousness’. According to Chatman, ‘filter’ does not suggest any negative connotations of prejudice as does, for instance, ‘slant’. The latter implies an overtone of bias, which would make it more appropriate to describe unreliable narration.
it pulls back the listener unwillingly into the physical space. Hence, the listener’s point of listening depends heavily on the listening attention and accordingly, the modes of listening.

Chion, however, problematises the spatial aspect of the point of audition, in line with his argument that there is no sound frame in itself that can contain all the sounds:

[...] the specific nature of aural perception prevents us, in most cases, from inferring a point of audition in space based on one or more sounds. This is because of the omnidirectional nature of sound (which, unlike light, travels in many directions) and also of listening (which picks up sounds in the round), as well as of phenomena involving sound reflection (Chion 1994: 90).

Music theatre often even highlights the omnidirectionality of sound and auditory perception, as much as it incorporates the acousmatic nature of sound. The acousmatic composition in De Overstroming highlights this by creating auditory distress. It presents us with the all-pervasive nature of sound that thrives on collisions and intrusions, a constant jumble of sound that, upon first hearing, lacks one spatial perspective. Chion’s conclusion is highly relevant for the theatre too: “So it is not often possible to speak of a point of audition in the sense of a precise position in space, but rather of a place of audition, or even a zone of audition” (Chion 1994: 91). The acousmatised musical instruments in Kuijken’s suite can make the listener aware of their seemingly a-topicality, their ventriloquist nature, which urges her or him to link the sounds to a place or a ‘zone’ of listening.

This mechanism of placing the sounds is, in turn, channelled by the perspectives offered, implying positions for the listener to engage in. Both spatial and subjective perspectives in listening can bring temporary coherence to the restlessness of sound, including musical sounds. As I argued earlier, this is related to one’s listening self. A spatial perspective could be realised in terms of a differentiation between foreground and background. Such a perspective suggests a frame that contains and places the sounds, when the listener positions her or himself by discerning certain musical sounds as more frontal in relation to an acoustic background.

Handke’s short story offers the listener a particular point of listening, in the subjective sense. The focalization of the blind brother in the story can metonymically contribute to a fictional space in the music. The ‘eyes’ of the blind brother, so to speak, could become the focalizer for reading the music narratively. In so doing, one could imagine Jan Kuijken as the narrator of his own musical narrative, taking upon the role of the seeing brother in relation to the musical voices of his improvisations. Yet his presence as a potential narrator is not further motivated or significant for narrativisation to materialise as a response to the music. Rather, through comparison and relation with
Handke’s text, the composition generates a narrative impulse in the listener in order to resolve the musical remainder and excess in listening. Seen this way, Handke’s narrative text is not just a prologue or a paratext that offers a frame to narrativise the musical events. It offers the listener a perspective through focalization in terms of a ‘search light’ with which she or he can read the music in a narrative way. In this reading, however, it remains an open question what belongs and does not belong to the story. As such, Handke’s text presents us with an undeniable narrative about narrating. It opens the listener’s ears to listen critically and question her or his own narrativisations, like the blind brother in the story.

Kuijken’s suite is, however, purely instrumental, thus imposing restraints on the notion of narrativisation in relation to its musical remainder. Consequently, I propose a second case study in which narrativisation is inherently part of the auditory experience and its modes of listening in relation to vocal music: De Helling van de Oude Wijven (2002) by Walpurgis. Walpurgis, based in Mortsel/Antwerp (Belgium), has been creating small-scale music theatre productions since 1989, with a focus on the singing performer. In De Helling van de Oude Wijven, text plays a slightly different role in the process of narrativisation than in De Overstroming.

In the following case study, I first discuss how a variety of texts obfuscates an apparent narrative or plot. I argue that the listener is inclined to respond to this ambiguity through narrativisation as a proper mode of listening, invited by a minimal exposure to a narrative from a novel, which served as an inspiration to the performance. Textual fragments from the novel only serve as an atmosphere that could frame some of the musical events. The narrative impulse is reinforced by the musicalisation and the multiplicity of songs, in which verbal language has only little or no contribution. I then examine how texts (lyrics) and gestures by the performers (the ‘voice-body’) can contribute to the constitution of a fictional character or ‘vocal persona’, as an equivalent to the concept of ‘narrative voice’. Related to this examination, I distinguish two related pairs of interpretative modes, which we have not come across so far, respectively a concert/recital mode versus a representational mode, and an oral mode versus a literate mode of listening. Through these modes, I contend that vocal music on stage, such as in De Helling van de Oude Wijven, can give

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127 Meelberg (2006) similarly concludes in his study of atonal music that narrativisation gives rise to a ‘narrative on narrativity’, not only as a side-effect of his analysis but as a necessary awareness in the listener called upon by the music. This awareness foregrounds narrativisation as one of the modalities to process atonal music in terms of musical narratives. Atonal music then demonstrates the mechanisms of a narrative as a ‘metanarrative’; “a story about the principles of narrativity” (Meelberg 2006: 209).
shape to fictional characters as part of a diegesis (the story world) without diminishing the perception of the actual musical performance. In doing so, narrativisation helps me to push the discussion of these seemingly oppositional pairs further.

3. **De Helling van de Oude Wijven: Raining Narrative Voices**

*De Helling van de Oude Wijven* (‘The Slope of the Old Women’) is a music theatre performance, based on a multiplicity of songs and texts. Most of the songs are poems set to music, performed by two female singers: soprano Judith Vindevogel and mezzo-soprano Gerrie de Vries. The whole performance is structured around these vocal works as a dramatised or semi-scenic concert.

The title of the performance might refer to a Dutch saying “het regent oude wijven” (literally, ‘it is raining old women’, meaning *it is raining cats and dogs*). It also refers to the epigraph to the performance in the programme brochure, “il pleut des voix de femmes” (‘it is raining voices of women’). This sentence is the first line of a poem by Guillaume Apollinaire, which is set to music twice by Rob Zuidam and Kaija Saariaho. Both vocal works are performed in *De Helling van de Oude Wijven*, along with four compositions by dramaturge and composer Klaas de Vries, based on texts by the Mexican poet Jaime Sabines, and a short composition by Claude Vivier, which is fragmentarily repeated throughout the performance.

The idea of ‘raining voices’ illustrates the main dramaturgical concept: the singing women present us with a ‘shower’ of voices, the voices of old women that disclose some kind of story in a plurality of songs. This idea is realised through the musicalisation of the stage (Lehmann 1999) by means of the songs as well as a soundscape of bell sounds and pre-recorded voices of the women in the background (edited by Jean-Marc Sullon). In contrast to *De Overstroming*, the shower of voices and songs does not offer one point of listening through a text, nor one straightforward narrative that could be ‘applied’ to interpret the musical performance. On the contrary, the diffusion of voices, languages and songs disrupts a tendency towards any narrative construction in the play. Despite this, I contend that narrativisation as a mode of listening is called upon through an implied subject position in the music.

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128 *De Helling van de Oude Wijven* premiered on 17 March 2002 in Düsseldorf (Germany), after which it had its Belgian premiere at the Kunstencentrum Vooruit in Ghent on 26 March 2002, and its Dutch premiere at the Rotterdamsche Schouwburg on 27 April 2002. I attended the performance in its third season in October 2003 at Zuidpool Theater in Antwerp.

129 The compositions by Rob Zuidam and Klaas de Vries were commissioned by the ‘Fonds voor de Scheppende Toonkunst’ and Walpurgis. The latter composer and the singer of this performance, Gerrie de Vries, still continue making small-scale music theatre performances in the Netherlands. The name of their company suggests an interesting connection: Muziektheater De Helling (subsidiary of the Ministerie van OC&W between 2005 and 2008).
The Frequency of Imagination

performance and its staging, which incites the (implied) listener to solve the ambiguity.

Furthermore, the multiplicity of texts in the vocal performance by the two singers disseminates the presence of a single narrative voice or ‘narrator’. This dissemination makes it rather difficult to place the voice, thus urging the listener to make meaningful connections in relation to what she or he hears and sees. An important distinction should be made here between the human voice in the theatre and a narrative voice. Voice in narratology commonly refers to the “question of who it is we ‘hear’ doing the narrating” (Abbott 2002: 64). When used for the analysis of a theatre performance, we have to distinguish the physical voice that we hear from the narratological notion of the narrative voice. Besides the double meaning of the phrase “voix narrative” in French, which like in English also suggests modality in a linguistic sense, the German word Erzählinstanz highlights that narrative voice is an agent in an abstract sense, literally an ‘agency’, an ‘authority’. Narrative voice is then the authority ‘who speaks’, which ultimately makes up the narrative (in Genette’s premise).

Though the idea of music generating narrativity is of a different order than the Genettian one that is preoccupied with the issue of being a narrative, I will expand on the traditional notion of narrative voice. Due to my focus on narrativisation as a mode of interpreting, I move away from the traditional idea of a narrator or narrative voice as the basis for a narrative. Rather, I will address the issue of narrative voice to discuss how a singer can suggest a narrative authority through voice in order to give a sense of a fictional character on stage. I contend that the sense of such an authoritative voice in vocal music generates the narrative impulse for the listener to distinguish virtual characters in fictional and diegetic worlds. I thereby transfer the issue of narrative voice in music to that of fictional character, which I will discuss through Edward T. Cone’s concept of ‘persona’. Nonetheless, we should be cautious not to simply equate narrative voices with physical voices on stage when analysing characters in music theatre performances. The former can also be produced as part of narrativisation by the listener in a context where vocal and musical voices tend to make any narrative development in music ambiguous, such as De Helling van de Oude Wijven.

Using this case study, I demonstrate that the human singing voice can appeal to a vococentric attention that seeks narrativisation without establishing an overt narrative voice that ‘speaks’ on stage. That is, the physical voice does not need to narrate verbally in order to suggest possible narrativisations. However, the singing voice always poses a boundary to narrativisation in its musical remainder, a vocal excess that exceeds signification. I will examine this through one example in the performance: a scene where Gerrie de Vries seemingly talks gibberish in vehement vocal gestures that become gradually musical. I will show how, with the help of focalization, the vocal gestures
produce a ‘voice-body’ (Connor 2000 & 2004) that can stimulate a narrative mode of listening in the listener as a response to the vocal excess and its distress.

Photo Gerrie de Vries (left) and Judith Vindevogel (right)
in De Helling van de Oude Wijven © Raymond Mallentjer
3.1. Musicalisation of Text and Voice: The Voice-Body

The voices in *De Helling van de Oude Wijven* musicalise the stage and the theatrical experience to the extent that they urge for interpretation. Hans-Thies Lehmann (1999) discusses musicalisation as an essential dramaturgical principle in ‘post-dramatic theatre’, as I explained in the general introduction to this study. Lehmann adopts the term *musicalisation* from a lecture by Helene Varopoulou (1998), who uses the notion to describe music as an independent theatrical structure that gives rise to the metaphor of ‘theater as music’, beyond the evident use of music in theatre or music theatre. Musicalisation is then defined by a wide-ranging application of and sensibility for music and rhythms in the theatre, which are as much influenced by classical, modern as popular music idioms. Lehmann takes this notion further and regards musicalisation as an integral part of a larger project in contemporary theatre.

According to Lehmann, ‘musicalisation’ expands to other elements in the performance, or even to its whole organisation. Following Varopoulou’s suggestions, he recognises in this notion a different way of structuring theatrical communication. It purposefully disconnects the elements and confuses any linear, goal-oriented or ‘teleological’ structure, which would render a traditional definition of narrative on the stage impossible. As such, it can ambiguate the meaning-making processes of the theatre, though due to the musical remainder it produces, musicalisation does not move away from meaning, nor possible narrative meanings.

In his article “From Logos to Landscape” (1997), Lehmann mentions the issue of narration in the sideline of musicalisation:

> Theatre was and is searching for and constructing spaces and discourses liberated as far as possible from the restraints of goals (*telos*), hierarchy and causal logic. This search may terminate in *scenic poems, meandering narration, fragmentation* and other procedures – the longing for such space, a space beyond *telos* is there (56).

According to Lehmann, post-dramatic theatre responds to a desire for a space, a universe or a ‘landscape’ that is not controlled by a hierarchical structure. This desire does not abide by the traditional definition of narrative, which presupposes a well-defined structure. He expresses thereby how musicalisation tries to go beyond narration in a traditional sense, or even oppose it. Still, he refers to a ‘meandering narration’: a sense of narration that is oblique or indirect. This notion could prove to be very helpful to consider the connection between music and narrativisation in music theatre that does not follow any logical, causal or dramatic structure, such as *De Helling van de Oude Wijven*. 
Through musicalisation, Lehmann argues that sound can produce an auditory landscape that activates the spectator: “An auditive space is opened, which calls upon the spectator/audience to synthesise the elements presented” (Lehmann 1997: 57). In this way, musicalisation can create an auditory landscape beyond ‘telos’; that is, a space beyond any orientation on a goal, a point to which the dramatic development converges. Correspondingly, the verbal text loses its privileged position in the theatre as the source of meaning and communication. In post-dramatic theatre, the development of the events no longer drives to one focal point or goal (like, for instance, a climax or catharsis). Rather, musicalisation gives rise to fragmentation, ambiguity, and excess that urges the listener to make meaningful connections her or himself subjectively.

Significantly, post-dramatic theatre does not turn away from narration completely, as Lehmann claims above. ‘Meandering narration’ calls for a different sense of narrative from that we have thus far encountered: a narrative that can wander off in many, perhaps contradictory directions according to the attention of the spectator who tries to synthesise the elements. It is an indirect narration, produced by the process of narrativisation in the spectator’s mind. Narrativisation offers a way to structure and connect the experiences. It appeals to the human urge to interpret and make sense of the fragmentary perceptions.

De Helling van de Oude Wijven illustrates the implications of musicalisation. In this performance, the songs give the impression of a concert, enriched by poetic texts in various languages. In the programme booklet, dramaturge Klaas de Vries calls it a ‘theatrical and musical poem’. Though the free play with songs and poems would highlight lyrical expression at surface level, the performance includes undeniable tendencies towards narrativisation. Among these tendencies are the references to the renowned novel Pedro Páramo (1955) by Juan Rulfo. This symbolist and untimely post-modern novel served as a main inspiration for the performance. It creates a dream world of voices, in which the protagonist converses with the voices of ghosts on his return to Comala, the deserted town of his deceased mother, in search of his father Pedro Páramo. At one point in the performance, the

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130 Especially with the general acceptance of audio technology in the theatre, the possibilities to create soundscapes have become almost unlimited: “In electronic music it has become possible to manipulate the parameters of sound as desired and thus open up whole new areas for the musicalisation of voices and sounds in theatre” (Lehmann 2006: 92). Lehmann thereby stresses the instrumentalisation and control of sound to create desired auditory landscapes. However, I want to pose against this that musicalisation brings along a great deal of uncontrollability by means of the interventions of sound and the auditory distress it creates. This uncontrollability would mean that the fragmentation and the ‘space beyond telos’ as a result of musicalisation is less intentional than Lehmann would assume.

131 Pedro Páramo had a great influence on magic realism in literature. Its play with unnamed narrative voices in a macabre atmosphere inspired Thérèse Cornips to translate the novel into a Hörspiel (an audio drama) in Dutch, directed by Léon Povel, and broadcasted by the KRO in the
women whisper fragments of the novel in Dutch. In the programme brochure, one can read the following two excerpts:

Sounds. Voices. Murmurs. Distant singing: My sweetheart gave me a lace-bordered handkerchief to dry my tears... High voices. As if it were women singing. Laughter.

In the middle of a village square. The chiming began with the big bell. Afterwards, the others followed. The sounding of the bells lasted longer than usual. A neighbouring church sets in; the others follow. It became a big mourning chime. A cacophony of bells. The people had to shout to make themselves heard. Some bells are bursting and sound hoarse. Nobody knew where they came from, but at a certain moment circus artists appeared.

(Taken from Pedro Páramo by Juan Rulfo, programme brochure p.2; my translation based on Margaret Sayers Peden 1994)

Though these references to the novel are rather wavering, taken out of context, they powerfully stimulate a narrative mode of reading the music theatre performance. The programme note could thereby influence the listener’s responses to the fragmentation and the excess caused by the musicalisation in the performance, as audiences have been trained to use the programme as a guide toward the understanding of a performance. The programme then becomes a paratext for the listener suggesting a way of reading in dealing with the auditory distress.

As a response, the listener could feel an urge to solidify the possible connections in a narrative way, guided by the information she or he receives besides and within the performance. The programme note sets a scene for the action or event to take place in the middle of a village square. The fragment refers, in a first-person narrative voice, to a person (“my girl”) and ambiguously to “the others” and “the people”. In this way, the fragments give a frame for the stage, the characters, the actions and the acoustic events in De Helling van de Oude Wijven. The text, moreover, offers a perspective through an unnamed focalizer, though it is detached from the original context of the novel. The onset of narrativisation through these textual fragments offers the attentive listener a way to deal with the excess of the musicalisation and the multiple voices that exceed verbal content. Similarities between the textual fragments and the performance are suggested, which insist that the listener make the connection with the threads of a narrative: the sound of a ‘rumour’.


132 On this matter, I want to thank Prof. Dr. David Herman for his helpful comments on an earlier paper on this topic, which I presented during the Media in Transition 4 conference The Work of Stories at MIT in Boston, Massachusetts (6-8 May 2005).
Comparable to *De Overstroming*, noise plays an essential role in offering an impulse to narrativisation. The performance starts with silence, which is suddenly disrupted by loud noise when the women briskly empty two buckets filled with pieces of metal onto the floor, as if throwing out the garbage. After this vehement acoustic intervention, follows the first composition, *Passaba Rumbosa*. During this piece, the women gradually develop bodily gestures into uttering percussive syllables. Little by little, these phonetic sounds become words and sentences, as if forcing themselves onto the bodies of the performers. Suddenly, a tone sets off. The singers repeat what another sings until an articulated song comes to existence, though no real language is achieved. The music seems to develop out of vocal noises and gestures, musicalising linguistic materials before becoming text, language and music (a musical score). This development draws the listener’s attention to the musical qualities of language in a *voco*centric rather than *logo*centric pursuit. The first real song, a fragment of Claude Vivier’s *Kopernikus*, sets off with the words: “Nous entendons l’appel” (i.e., *we hear the appeal, the call*), and it ends by repeating the word “écoutez!!” (*listen!*). Hence, the voice addresses the listener as subject in reciprocal terms: it literally calls the listener to listen carefully to its call. The song is repeated, and it travels through the performance as a spectre of a voice with a strong appeal of the ear.

Apart from the high concentration on voice, the attention of the listener is drawn to the music as a *gesture*, both vocally and bodily. In this context, I want to introduce a new notion: the ‘voice-body’. Steven Connor has coined this term: “For voice is not simply an emission of the body; it is also the imaginary production of a secondary body, a body double: a ‘voice-body’” (Connor 2004: 158; see also Connor 2000: 35-42). Connor distinguishes the voice-body most significantly from the voice *in* the body, as the former also incorporates the entire gestures that accompany the voice such as facial expression, movements of the shoulders, hands, arms:

> The voice also induces and is taken up into the movements of the body. The face is part of the voice’s apparatus, as are the hands. The shaping of the air effected by the mouth, hands and shoulders marks out the lineaments of the voice-body (which is to be distinguished from the voice in the body). When one clicks one’s fingers for emphasis, claps one’s hands, or slaps one’s thigh, the work of gesture is being taken over into sound, and voice has migrated into the fingers (Connor 2004: 163).

The voice, in its gestures, produces a second body beyond the singer’s body on stage, which speaks to us, addresses us in our imaginations, phantasms of a
vocalic body. The opening scene of *De Helling van de Oude Wijven* demonstrates how such a voice-body slowly comes about in the auditive space, as Connor describes above.

I want to suggest here a connection between the concept of the voice-body and narrativisation as a response to musicalisation. The voice-body could pose a discrepancy with narrative voice in narratology. I will demonstrate how the voice-body contributes to an understanding of narrativisation in a context where musicalisation diffuses the line between theatre and musical performance. In this context, narrativisation could offer a solution for the listener to negotiate between the two realms of experience.

According to Connor (2000), the voice gives rise to a second, imaginary body, which is not only an effect of an intentional acousmatisation (or ‘ventriloquism’):

> In fact, so strong is the embodying power of the voice, that this process occurs not only in the case of voices that seem separated from their obvious or natural sources, but also in voices, or patterned vocal inflections, or postures, that have a clearly identifiable source, but seem in various ways excessive to that source. This voice then conjures for itself a different kind of body; an imaginary body which may contradict, compete with, replace, or even reshape the actual, visible body of the speaker. […] The leading characteristic of the voice-body is to be a body-in-invention, an impossible, imaginary body in the course of being found and formed. But it is possible to isolate some of the contours, functions, and postures by means of which vocalic bodies come into being (36).

The imaginary body that the voice invokes is based on an excess in relation to its physical, visually identifiable source body, which marks the voice’s inherent placelessness. Connor seems then to suggest a connection between this excess and the listener’s imaginary production – ‘invocation’, so to speak – of the voice-body, which includes certain postures, gestures, movements, ways of expression. In relation to my case study, I want to argue that it is through this voice-body that the listener narrativises what she or he hears and sees. In this respect, I contend that the excess of the voice, being the reason of the creation of the voice-body, is a vital part of the narrative response to auditory distress. The voice-body then becomes the vehicle in the listener’s response to the necessity of coping with the distress that is caused by the voice’s excess in listening, its musical remainder.

The workings of the voice-body is exemplified in *De Helling van de Oude Wijven* by literally showing how music comes into existence through vocal stresses, plosives, postures and gestures. Suddenly a tone sets off in the soprano’s voice, as if capturing the body, ‘precipitating itself as object’ as Connor would formulate it, giving the illusion as if the voice is acting upon it (*ibid.*). Gradually the vocal performers step into the fiction of their vocalic bodies, as a diegesis begins to emerge in a mode of narrativisation. Therefore,
we look for focalizers and perspectives that can help us imagine these bodies as characters.

In the following subsection, I introduce Edward T. Cone’s concept of ‘vocal persona’ to explain how the voice-body of the performer can stimulate the spectator to imagine a character in a story as part of narrativising the music. *De Helling van de Oude Wijven* illustrates how shifts between modes of perception call the listener to reinterpret the voice-bodies, resulting in constant metamorphoses of virtual personae or characters in the fictional and diegetic spaces. This metamorphosis opens the way for many possible, concurrent narrativisations, which illustrates that narrativisation does not need to imply *narration* of a particular story as such.

Narrativisation as a mode of listening helps me further to understand two sets of modes that have thus far not been theorised: oral/literate modes and concert/representational modes. Both sets of modes could explain different ways of listening to the singing voice. Though these modes are not immediately theorised in relation to narrativisation, they share certain considerations for the constitution of narrativity and narrativisation in relation to vocal music and the voice-body. Among these considerations is the interplay between the listener’s attention, the music performance, the words, the gestures by the performer and the staging. Through my case study, I illustrate that narrativisation is relevant for understanding these modes in their mutual contribution to the listener’s interpretation of vocal-musical events and the production of vocal bodies in music theatre. As such, I argue that these constrastive modes can contribute to narrativisation as supporting modes in listening and understanding depending on the listener’s object of attention.

The first set involves whether one chooses to pay attention to the words (literate listening) or to the voice as sound and its vocal gestures (oral listening). With regard to the second set of modes, I argue that the opacity of voice and its excess plays a significant role in the listener’s perception. Depending on the perspectives in the theatre, the listener will either focus on the vocal performance as a performance (concert/recital mode) or as a representation of speech of a character in a fictional world (representational mode). Both do not exclude one another when the listener narrativises the musical performance. Narrativisation of the voice in listening reveals that these modes should not be seen as oppositional to each other, leading to paradox between perception and interpretation. Rather, they reinforce each other in their mutual contribution to narrativisation as a most dominant mode of listening, which does not only pertain to a reading of words. I argue that this shared contribution materialises in the positions they imply towards the voice-body as conveyed through the performance of vocal music, its musical remainder and the voice’s opacity in listening.
3.2. In Search of a Vocal Persona: Oral and Literate Modes

*De Helling van de Oude Wijven* plays upon the listener’s urge to locate the voice and place it in a coherent structure as a way to resolve the ambiguity in the multiple narrative threads and fragments of meaning. I contend that this ambiguity is shaped in the first place through the listener’s attention, which shifts between the vocal-body, the lyrics and the textual fragments. The diversity of texts obstructs one coherent narrative unfolding. Nevertheless, the vocal events, props and gestures transform the singers into multiple characters, depending on the listener’s narrativisations. The metamorphosis thereby challenges the listener’s interpretative competencies, as these characters emerge not as stable constructs of signifiers and signifieds, but rather change continuously in relation to the way the attention activates different modes of listening. Therefore, I contend that the production of fictional characters depends on the implied subject positions that focalization provides for the listener to engage in.

In order to address the issue of a fictional character in music, Edward T. Cone (1974) has coined the terms *vocal persona*, in the case of a singing voice, and *musical persona*, to describe purely instrumental music. Both constitute narrative voices in music. Cone defines a vocal persona as a projection of a vocal performer, an embodiment of a character or a narrator. The term *musical persona* respectively denotes a vehicle of the composer’s message, in Cone’s definition. With regard to these notions, Cone warns us not to confuse the composer with the persona: “This locution also reminds us that the persona is by no means identical with the composer; it is a projection of his musical intelligence, constituting the mind, so to speak, of the composition in question” (57). Cone’s musical persona constitutes what narratology has conceptualised as the ‘implied author’, meaning an image of the author by the reader in the process of reading. In this way, he suggests that narrative meanings could be experienced as intended and generated by an implied author through musical voices that project the composer’s voice in the music (that is, a ‘complete’ musical persona). However, I would like to dispute the intentionality of such a projection by the composer in the way music can generate a narrative impulse in the listener. Neither is the projection of the composer’s ‘intelligence’ as implied author by the listener constitutive of a narrative response.

In *De Helling van de Oude Wijven*, the vocal persona coincides with the musical persona, as Cone would agree, since accompaniment is most of the

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133 According to the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory* (2005), the implied author is defined as “a ‘voiceless’ and depersonified phenomenon (Diengott 1993: 73), which is neither speaker, voice, subject, nor participant in the narrative communication situation” (240). The ‘implied’ or inferred author is a concept introduced by Wayne C. Booth (1961; 1983) to denote an image of the author as constructed by the reader in the process of reading the narrative.
The Narrative Response: Narrativisation and Focalization

time lacking (Cone 1974: 57). The pre-recorded and pre-composed soundscapes create an atmosphere for the voices to produce personae in terms of virtual agents and fictional characters of a story that are ambiguous, to say the least. The partly acousmatised listening situation and the smooth passage between the diverse musical pieces also obliterate a musical persona as an image of an author or composer, who would stand in a triadic relation to the musical and vocal personae (17-8). On the contrary, one might even consider many authorial voices behind the music compositions (the composer, the lyricist) and the representations on stage (the director, the scenographer, the actors themselves), none of which are responsible for the narrative impulse in the listener. Instead, the impulse to narrativise is generated by the combination of text fragments, musicalisation and gestures of the performers, which contributes to a sense of characters in the narrative voices that are thus produced to contain the multiplicity. An implied authorial voice is not at all obligatory in music in order to generate a sense of narrativity.

The concept of vocal persona further calls for an examination of how language and text (lyrics) play a role in the listener’s production of fictional characters. In *De Helling van de Oude Wijven*, both whispered fragments of Juan Rulfo’s *Pedro Páramo* and lyrics of the songs produce a sense of textual excess. If narrativisation of music were to strictly suture a relation to text, one could question whether the sense of a vocal persona implied in the voice-body depends on our attention to verbal content or also to the musical qualities of the voice. In this context, narrativisation of vocal personae can be critically gauged against Derrick de Kerckhove’s (1997) distinction between an oral and a literate mode of listening:

The basic difference between the two modes is that oral listening tends to be global and comprehensive, while literate listening is specialized and selective. One is attending to concrete situations and to persons, whereas the other is interested in words and verbal meanings. One is context-bound, the other is relatively context-free. The first is cosmo-centric and spatial, the latter is linear, temporal and logocentric (104).\(^\text{134}\)

In de Kerckhove’s account, oral and literate listening are defined in terms of contrastive but related pairs. Oral listening pertains to the whole experience, where meanings are all-inclusive and concern context or person-bound

\(^{134}\) De Kerckhove’s distinction is inspired by Jacques Attali’s *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, Walter Ong’s *Orality and Literacy* and McLuhan’s *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, though the latter might be based on a misunderstanding of McLuhan’s discussion of oral and literate spaces in relation to the far-reaching historical implications of the written and printed word. He foremost bases his distinction on Walter Ong’s research of the comparison between oral and literate minds, suggesting several features in a ‘psychodynamics of orality’: “Each feature may correspond to a characteristic attitude in listening, namely what to listen for, how to listen, who to listen to and how to store or remember what has been heard” (de Kerckhove 1997: 106-7).
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situations. It is comprehensive, attending to the space between the voice and myself – the ‘interlocutors’ – within an emphatic address of the singer’s performance, saying: ‘listen to me’. In oral listening, the listener does not pay much attention to the actual word, but rather to the sounding and musical qualities of the voice as body, which Barthes (1977) called the ‘grain’ in the voice. One could compare it to the reduced listening mode when focusing on concrete sounds. However, it might as well include ambient or background listening in its global scope.

Literate listening, as the word suggests, calls for literacy in a specific sense, according to de Kerckhove: it involves reading through listening in a way that is specialised, selective, linear, temporal, ‘logocentric’, context-free. One could include ‘narrative’ in this list. Literate listening is realised when we focus our attention on words and verbal meanings. Seen this way, it favours the discursive content of what a singer communicates within the diegesis of the song or play, the poetic or dramatic content. Literate listening would assist in transforming the vocalic body into a proper vocal persona. Disregarding the listener’s pre-knowledge of the lyrics, a literate mode of listening makes the listener pay attention to the verbal content. The interested listener could read the lyrics in the programme booklet of De Helling van de Oude Wijven prior to or after the performance. During the actual performance, the textual content seems only secondary. The musicalisation in the performance invites one to listen orally, with special attention to the vocal music in the first place.

However, de Kerckhove’s distinction between oral and literate listening, based on literacy, is highly problematic. His dichotomy does not include that every listening experience always suggests competency, as I discussed in chapter two. De Kerckhove’s understanding is based on a narrow definition of literacy, in terms of written words that give structure and meaning to our experiences. Narrativisation, on the contrary, demonstrates that language does not have to be realised and communicated in actual words in order to structure our auditory experiences, despite our predilection for language as a basis for understanding narrative and narrativisation.

As I explained earlier in this chapter, narrativisation is a way of making meaningful relations in our experiences. It does not need verbalisation, but it does presuppose certain competences. In de Kerckhove’s dichotomy, narrativisation cannot be subscribed to the structuring and semantic tendencies.

De Kerckhove makes the dubious conclusion that we close our ears in order to be able to ‘read’: “While reading the body is stilled, almost as that of someone asleep. The reader is either in silence, or has made sufficient reservations in his or her mind to turn the ambient noise into silence. That kind of control, by the way, bears witness to the power of literacy over our hearing. When we read, we literally ‘shut our ears’ as if we had ‘earlids’. (de Kerckhove 1997: 111). Such claims are very similar to the model of listening that n-Cha(n)t by David Rokeby conveys, where reading means shutting out or filtering the auditory distress. An overgeneralisation of this idea would suggest that we cannot read while we are (in) listening at all, which would render literate listening impossible.
of literate listening only. Rather, it negotiates between oral and literate modes of understanding. This is made clear in the implication that the literate and oral modes also depend on the listener’s predilection:

As people whose attitudes are ruled by literacy, we tend to listen for the meaning of words, rather than for the substance of an argument or for the intention of the speaker. This may not necessarily be the case for the oral listener (de Kerckhove 1997: 106).

Oral listening would then imply a more inclusive and comprehensive way of making sense through an emphatic engagement that goes beyond the particular meanings of words:

Oral listening searches for images rather than concepts, persons rather than names. Sense is made and organized around vivid images acting in context. The oral discourse is built around narratives and, as Havelock demonstrates in his analysis of early Greek literature, prefers verbs of action over predicates […] the oral listener will favor dynamic drama over static descriptions. Again, this tendency corroborates the suggestion that we first learn and make sense by body imitation (de Kerckhove 1997: 108-9).

Oral discourse makes use of narratives as mnemonic devices. Narrativisation then has a function in learning about the world through mimesis in language. It includes competences that stem from body imitation rather than from words. Oral listening thereby does not exclude language. Nevertheless, it calls for a different attention to the ‘drama’, the performance and the sound of words, reminding us that listening is always embodied experience in the first place. As a primary way to respond in our bodies, we use and produce images in our minds that are closely connected to how we perceive the world. Oral listening then pertains to narrative in order to store, communicate and structure images that stem from lived experiences and oral discourse.

The concept of narrativisation suggests that there is no strict opposition between oral and literate modes of listening. De Kerckhove’s distinction places narrative both in a tradition of oral discourse and literacy. I conclude that the two modes can function in interplay in narrativisation. As an example that challenges de Kerckhove’s dichotomy between oral and literate modes of listening, De Helling van de Oude Wijven presents us with a scene where the vocal-body of one of the performers could disrupt the listener’s assumed ‘literate’ mode of listening. In this scene, mezzo-soprano Gerrie de Vries takes a seat on the edge of the stage and opens a lunch box.

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136 In the following chapter, I will develop this idea further by comparing narrativisation to auditory imagination.

137 I am grateful to Sybille Moser who drew my attention to de Kerckhove’s theory, on the occasion of the ASCA Sonic Interventions conference in Amsterdam (29-31 March 2005).
She starts mumbling while putting food in her mouth. Gradually, her inarticulate ‘babbling’ begins increasing in fervour, producing an excess of voice that could be described as *vocal distress*. Despite the comic effect, by imitating a vehement conversation without articulating it in words, the vocal performance makes the listener aware that every communicative act with the voice is based on such distress.

Gerrie de Vries’s overacting looks as if she is speaking *old wives’ tales* (referring to the title of the play). From her gestures one can tell that she is an embittered woman and that she is agitated by her story. She gives the impression of narrating something while a character of her own narrative universe. Yet there is no narrative closure. The rattle and burlesque exaggeration in the vocal body becomes rhythmic and blends in with the soundscape of sounding bells, spatialised through the loudspeakers. At the same time, soprano Judith Vindevogel is fervently running *in situ* facing the wall in the background. Her shadow is reflected in the copper surface of the massive wall (set design by Stef Depover). The bell sounds eventually drown the woman’s *sound and fury*. The loudness intensifies auditory distress. The babbling woman then moves to the background and joins her company in haphazardly jumping and running. The simultaneity of the acoustic events and the distressed body gestures leaves room for subjective narrativisations: Are they running on a slope? Where are they running to or are they running away from something?

The vocal distress of the babbling woman implies also a connection to auditory distress. Mladen Dolar (2006) connects both kinds of distress to a surplus in exposure and experience:

> So both hearing and emitting a voice present an excess, a surplus of authority on the one hand and a surplus of exposure on the other. There is a too-much of the voice in the exterior because of the direct transition into the interior, without defenses; and there is a too-much of the voice stemming from the inside – it brings out more, and other things, than one would intend. *One is too exposed to the voice and the voice exposes too much*, one incorporates and one expels too much (81).

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138 I regard the metaphor of ‘vocal distress’ as a concept that highlights some crucial aspects in the discussion of narrativising the voice. In its most literal sense, vocal distress would symptomatically signal a disorder of the vocal chords, caused by stress or anxiety. In a physical sense, stress and strain on the vocal chords are constitutive for every vocal utterance. Steven Connor (2004) explains this necessary stress in voice: “T[he seeming naturalness and irrepressibility of the voice’s exuberations should not prevent us noticing that voice is produced through a process that necessarily creates stress, as air is directed under pressure through the larynx and then out through the mouth” (159). In mimetic terms, vocal stress would show an overload of strain. But as the scene in *De Helling van de Oude Wijven* demonstrates, overstimulation of the voice can also pretend to *tell* us something, depending on a narrative response in the listener to the vocal excess.
The performance of vocal distress demonstrates this surplus of exposure and authority of the voice in the listener’s perception. Musicalisation of voice highlights this excess, the semiotic remainder of voice in listening. The voice-body equally indulges in this surplus. The excess compels the listener to respond by means of the listening modes. Narrativisation of the voice and voice-body as vocal persona then offers a solution to the auditory distress: it gives coherence and a place to the sounds.

The scene of the babbling woman demonstrates that even in a context of wordless communication, it is still possible to have a sense that something is being ‘narrated’, here by means of bodily mimesis, in the voice-body. The question is not what is precisely narrated, but how our modes of listening give meaningful shape to our experiences by means of narrativisation. Cone supports this idea by claiming that the voice has a ‘vococentric’ supremacy that does not require logocentric or verbal meaning to create a sense of character: “The fact that only the human voice can adequately embody a protagonist or character is due to this natural supremacy, more than to its ability to verbalise. For, as we have seen, words are not necessary so long as the voice is there” (Cone 1974: 79).

De Helling van de Oude Wijven shows us that focalization as a point of listening is indispensable for us to narrativise the voice and to recognise in it a fictional, vocal persona. Focalizers are embedded in both text and music performance. On the one hand, the fragments of the novel Pedro Páramo offer a frame that places certain sounds in a narrative structure. For example, throughout the performance the bells chime at different instances, hunting the women as a ghostly memory. This echoes with the story of Pedro Páramo. However, this story is fragmented in itself, both textually in the programme brochure and auditively in the whispers on stage. On the other hand, the musical performance could contribute its own points of listening. In the vocal distress of the babbling woman, a change in spatial perspective makes our attention shift, nearly cinematically, from an external perspective on the woman into an internal space of her incomprehensible telling. This is supported by the bell sounds, which at that point could be recognised as a ‘sound mark’ of her inner world. In an oral mode of listening, the bells receive meaning in a global sense of the performance. The gestures of the voice-body could be read in mimetic, bodily terms of distress. By means of a literate mode of listening, the listener could respond to the auditory distress by filling in words to the woman’s babbling in order for a story to emerge.

De Helling van de Oude Wijven demonstrates how listening to a voice stimulates both oral and literate ways of listening through its surplus of authority and exposure. Both modes necessitate aural competences that enable the listener to respond to the auditory distress caused by the excess. Narrativising vocal, musical and, therefore, auditory events does not imply an exclusive focus on words in a literate mode of listening. Rather, the implied
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points of listening are responsible for activating either mode in our narrativisations. In the following paragraph, I will discuss how the voice in its relation to the voice-body could also pose a limit to narrativisation, when our attention is drawn rather to the actual performance. This could cause a continuous switching between the modes that make us distinguish the physical from the representational spaces. I will argue that both modes do not exclude narrativisation, but rather enhance it.

3.3. Opacity of a Vocal Remainder: Concert/Recital and Representational Modes

The performance of vocal distress in *De Helling van de Oude Wijven* presents us with a voice-body that poses an element of resistance to our interpretations. The voice retains a boundary to our efforts of placing it in relation to what we can understand in a literate mode, and thereby, in relation to ourselves. Steven Connor (2000) traces this boundary in the voice itself: “In all instancings and picturings of the vocalic body, the voice secretes a fantasy of a body in its relations to itself, in what it does to the fabric of the very sound it produces. The voice makes itself solid by its self-relation” (37). In this relation to itself, the voice marks its own, distinct physicality through sound. This creates a limit to the listener’s imagination of a voice-body, an imaginary body that is always bound to the materiality of the voice. I want to discuss how this discrepancy between the physical voice and the imaginary body in voice stimulates listening modes that constantly move between the voice in its self-relation and the listener’s narrativisations through the voice-body.

Peter Kivy (1994) has conceptualised this self-relation in terms of the ‘opacity’ of the medium voice. He reminds us that the voice as medium is never really eliminable, never vaporised into pure content (66). He explains that we only become aware of the medium interposed between us and its content when “it has received the impress of the artist’s hand” (67). He goes on to argue that the medium of voice can obtrude in our musical experience. What we hear is the medium, in which we are totally involved: “we are listening to singing” (67). This awareness is produced by the opacity of the medium to which the presence of an author (‘the artist’s hand’) in the music would draw our attention.

Kivy bases his argument on Cone’s earlier discussed distinction between a (complete) musical persona and a vocal persona (fictional character):

The complete musical persona is telling us about the characters, and their parts should be thought of as if within quotation marks. On the stage the singer does not portray a dramatic character directly but represents a character in a narrative. He is enacting the musical persona’s conception of the character; that is, he is quoting rather than talking (Cone 1974: 13).
Cone argues that characters in opera are constituted in singing as if by quoting in the third person (indirect narrative discourse) in relation to an implied authorial voice in the music, i.e. the ‘complete musical persona’. According to Kivy, however, such a voice behind the characters is not necessary for producing a sense of narrativity. Kivy argues against Cone’s claims in a perceptual sense by focusing on the listener’s modes of listening when attending to a singer on stage:

[W]e are in a mode of attention that is both – and very strongly both – one of attending to a singer giving a ‘performance’ (remember how the action comes to a full stop for the applause!), and attending to a character in a drama making an expressive utterance (Kivy 1994: 68).

Kivy acknowledges the role of the listener and her or his attention. The mode of attention decides if the voice refers to itself (its performance, voice as body) or to the expression of a character (its voice-body, an imaginary body in the listener’s mind). In the latter, Kivy transfers the issue of authorial voice to the characters themselves by comparing singing in the fictional world to speaking in the ‘real’ world: “[W]e hear, I would suggest, a world in which the character is a ‘composer’ of her vocal expression, as, in my world, I am the ‘author’ of mine” (ibid.). Seen this way, a vocal persona generates in the listener’s narrativisation a fictional character who is also the narrator of her or his own expressions.

Kivy’s argument helps me to explain how the songs and gestures by the singers in De Helling van de Oude Wijven produce characters in a narrative universe in which they are the authors of their own expressions, while we are aware of the singers performing. According to Kivy, this double attention depends on the modes of interpretation. He distinguishes a recital or concert mode from a representational one. The former implies that we listen to a performance as a concert, a musical performance: singing as singing. The latter includes the production of a narrative, characters and a narrative space through listening: singing as speech. In music theatre, these modes co-occur in the listener.

As a result of this split perception, the space of the diegesis is not homogeneous. In narratology, one traditionally makes a distinction between homodiegetic (voices playing a role in the diegesis) and extradiegetic narration (voices that are situated outside the action). The singing voice on stage, however, always draws attention to itself, its act of singing, and therefore, the physical space of the stage. The listener sometimes regards the singing as that of a singer within the diegesis, heard by other characters (homodiegetically). Yet at another instance, one could also interpret the singing as speaking in quotation marks (extradiegetically). Due to the lack of an unambiguous narrative and focalization, the issue of whether the singing occurs in or outside
the diegesis becomes ambivalent. It depends entirely on the listener’s narrativisations as to how she or he deals with the ambivalence.

For example, when one of the women uses a tuning fork to find the right initial tone for the song, the listener might regard the music performance as a concert. However, the gesture might as well belong to the diegesis, if we are to narrativise the vocal bodies as characters singing a song within the story world. Extradigetic and homodiegetic references are constantly competing with one another, depending on how we narrativise the events.

In *De Helling van de Oude Wijven*, we are no longer listening to speech represented by music. Nonetheless, we could hear and imagine the characters expressing themselves through the music, even if no words or lyrics are involved. The spontaneity with which the singers perform the songs and establish dynamic vocal bodies can give the impression that they are ‘composing’ their own songs in free improvisation, giving free reign to the ambiguity, musical remainder and surplus of exposure in the voice.

Kivy’s argument gives way to make a correlation between the level of opacity of the musical performance and narrativisation. If auditory distress urges the listener to respond, then narrativisation offers resolution to a certain degree among the listening modes. This does not exclusively depend on the listener’s aural competences or willingness to draw her or his attention to find meaningful relations. Rather, the performance offers listening perspectives and focalizations that manage the listener’s attention.

In this type of music theatre, auditory distress creates the conditions for musical meaning and pushes the listener to listen for alternative interpretations. Narrativisation is then a compelling mode of listening that gives structure and coherence to our experiences. Yet it depends on the implied points of listening that urge us to take position through our attention and its respective modes of listening. I follow the line of argument by Peter Rabinowitz (2004) on this matter, which states that

[…] fictional music can invite the listener to occupy several different listening positions simultaneously. The multiplicity, analogous to certain techniques central to purely verbal narrative (especially fiction) allows the music not merely to ‘represent’ various states but also to manipulate the listener into taking a position with respect to them (307).

Through listening, the listener can take up different positions in relation to the perspectives in a performance. As the interplay between concert/recital and representational modes suggests, some of these positions can collide; for instance, when the listener attends to the music performance as concert, while narrativising the voice-bodies in relation to the representations of characters in a diegetic world. Or the positions can shift our attention, unnoticeably, as between oral and literate modes of listening that mutually contribute to narrativisation of vocal music. These positions help the listener to create
coherence to her or his auditory experiences and disambiguate the excess of the voice in listening and looking to music theatre.

4. Listening in the Space of Narrative Discourse

We can conclude from this chapter that, among the listening modes, narrativisation constitutes a particular mode of interpretation, which the listener can apply to make her or his auditory experiences meaningful and coherent. The listener’s impulse to narrativise the auditory events depends on the implied positions given by focalization, subjective and spatial points of listening that are embedded in the performance, the music or the sounds themselves. In the music theatre I discuss, these perspectives are highlighted because of a general lack of a clear-cut dramatic or narrative development. Rather, the performances offer fragmented meanings through texts, images, projections, lights, etc. I introduced narrativisation as a particular form of semiotic listening in the listener who is searching for and exploring meaningful relations between the elements presented.

In this specific sense, narrativisation exceeds ‘telling’ and ‘narrative’ in a narrow definition. It presents us with a particular way of interpreting and structuring auditory events, giving them salience, coherence, meaning and relative ‘closure’. The case studies I have discussed, however, challenge this closure, questioning the interpreting efforts of the listener.

_De Overstroming_ demonstrates how narrativisation can be generated by a text, in this case, a short story by Peter Handke that offers a perspective and frame for the auditory experiences. Narrativisation is then rather the result of an applied narrativity, where narrative meanings are instigated or implied by the text. The textual narrative, moreover, plays with what is ‘true’ within the story world, which questioned the borders of what one can imagine and accept in narrative fiction. When applied to music, narrativisation presents us with similar restrictions as to what we can imagine as a narrative. Narrativity in music gives rise to scepticism, since any narrative produced by the listener is subjective and depends on her or his impulse to narrativise. Handke’s story and other paratextual references could then make the listener aware of this construction as a narrative about narrativity.

In _De Overstroming_, the incitement to produce a narrative primarily resided in the encounter with a short story, enhanced by the juxtaposition of text, image and music. My analysis was also restricted to the narrativity of instrumental music. I therefore discussed a second case study, which activated strong impulses for narrativisation in the listener through a multiplicity of songs and fragmented texts.

_De Helling van de Oude Wijven_ shows us how narrativisation could be a self-sufficient mode of listening that helps the listener to interpret the vocal events. I illustrated how the singing voice introduces voice-bodies with its
gestures which, through narrativisation, can be transformed into vocal personae or characters of a diegetic world. This necessitates a distinction between the human, physical voice and the concept of narrative voice. I then showed how, through focalization, a transformation of voices into imaginary bodies can produce multiple vocal personae, depending on the discursive positions the listener takes up in listening. Narrativisation can help the listener to place the voice not always to an identifiable source (causal listening), but in a meaningful relation. Words are not necessary to activate a narrative way of listening. Yet the voice always keeps retention or a certain level of opacity towards being vaporised entirely into a narrative voice.

The final example of ‘vocal distress’ discloses the voice as a space in itself, but never as a clear, identifiable object. The distress underscores that the voice has no defined space in itself. Because of its inherent a-topicality (the ventriloquist effect, according to Dolar 2006), it moves between different spaces: physical, representational and diegetic spaces. The excess of voice underlying the distress is opposed to any final fixing or framing of its source, which creates a space of its own. Doris Kolesch (2003) comments on this vocal space: “The voice is not a definable object; it is not a thing, but rather a tangible, spatially expansive acoustic event” (274, my trans. PV).

In musical theatre, the voice can produce an energised space, an auditory landscape (in Lehmann’s sense) that is not controlled by a hierarchical structure or a text. We are familiar with the space a voice can create around us from our experiences of the first sonorous envelope in early infancy. In theatre, the enveloping sound of a voice can create a physical space that addresses and affects the listener, who in turn relates to that space through the listening modes. In chapter two, I suggested that the modes of listening offer ways for the listener to regain control over the listening space in response to the auditory distress. When narrative discourse and focalization are involved, the listener can produce diegetic spaces as a response to regaining control through narrativisation. In relation to the sounding environment of a voice, the listener can feel addressed by a character (a vocal persona). As I have argued, the presence of an implied authorial voice in the music is not constitutive for characters to come to life in the listener’s mind. At the same time, a singer always performs the music as performance, while delivering textual content of which the character becomes the author in her or his diegetic world. The opacity of the voice, or music as both media, does not disturb a narrative way of listening. Rather, narrativisation is driven by a constant switching of positions materialised by the listening modes (oral/literate, concert/representational).

As Kivy (1994) pointed out, a fictional character in song and music is never a holistic being. In De Overstroming, the musical voices that enact
some sense of dialogue are under constant scrutiny, prompted by the blind brother’s sceptic perspective in the short story. “Do you see the story? Do you see anything?” We might as well ask: Do you see the characters? Do you see the protagonists of the story? The instrumental music in De Overstroming alone does not offer much solace to these questions. De Helling van de Oude Wijven shows us a continuous metamorphosis of voices as character-narrators, constantly moving and challenging the interpretations. We could ask ourselves then: Are these old women living on a slope? Are they really women? Do they really exist? Or are they ghosts? The metamorphosis of characters in our personal narrativisations questions the ontological status of the fictional worlds that these characters would inhabit. Narrative discourse proves, therefore, to be foremost spatial in creating different, sometimes opposing worlds. Discourse presents us with a space of contestation in our meaning-making efforts towards the stage and our own, private narrativisations.

The spatial aspect of narrative discourse materialises in the sonorous space of the voice. De Helling van de Oude Wijven demonstrates that the fictional world can transform continuously according to how the listener perceives the characters through their songs and vocal gestures. Hence, perspective is of crucial importance in the linear and spatial expansion of narrativisation. Just like the modes of listening, narrativisation becomes a vehicle for the listener to inhibit the uncontrollability of sonorous space as an effect of auditory distress. Narrative discourse, as it were, stimulates an interpretative mode of listening-in-search in the listener, exploring the space for meaningful relations that fit the temporary narrative interpretation. However, the metamorphosis of voices and spaces also leaves room for contradiction and friction between them.

In this chapter, I have focused on how narrativisation as a particular mode of listening can be generated by focalization as an implied subject position in a text, an image or a piece of music, which can serve as a solution to auditory distress. Narrativisation applies a rather rigorous structure, based on the way we create narratives in language, though textual input is not mandatory. It is thereby possible that one performance allows for many subjective narratives to occur. While analysing the production of space through narrativisation, I came across incompatible spaces that are not contained completely in the narrative discourse of the particular performance. Narrativisation does not account entirely for all the spaces that emerge as a response to auditory distress through different modes of listening.

Consequently, in the following chapter, I discuss ‘auditory imagination’ as a third way to respond to auditory distress, besides the listening modes and narrativisation. As a departure point, I will focus on the issue of an imaginary space that we could produce in relation to voice, sound or music. In the discussion of oral and literate modes, I already suggested that we create images in our minds as a means to respond to sounds. I want to examine
further how we produce images of spaces in relation to the sonorous envelope of voice. It will therefore be necessary to define the role of ‘imagination’ in the context of auditory experiences. I will then question whether auditory imagination is in contrast to narrativisation, or, rather, is mutually dependent upon the human urge to make sense. In addition, I will investigate the role of texts and images, what W.J.T. Mitchell (1986) calls the ‘imagetext’ in one word. I will relate this concept to the imaginary production of spaces in sound and music, which I will discuss as ‘spatialisation’. Finally, I will examine how aural competences help our imagination to find alternative meanings in response to auditory distress.