



# FORENSICS IN THE THEATRE

AN ANALYSIS OF THE USE OF FORENSIC ILLUSIONS IN  
*ALL MY SONS (AL MIJN ZONEN)* AND *HOW DID I DIE*

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## Summary

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In this analysis, I will discuss and compare the construction of truth in the performances *How Did I Die* and *All My Sons (All My Sons)*, respectively by Davy Pieters and a coproduction between De Toneelschuur and Theater Amsterdam. I will be answering the research question "How are spectators of the performances *All My Sons* and *How Did I Die* invited to take on a forensic perspective?". For this, I am using In order to argue how the 'truth' is constructed, I will most notably use a book by James Frieze, titled *Theatre and the Forensic Turn*. In this book, Frieze argues there are three illusions at work when regarding the forensic, or forensic sciences. Namely, the illusions of interiority, solvability, and transparency. All of these illusions are connected, in the sense that they all refer to the idea that there is one truth that can be found, or dug up, by the right people with the right skills. Once this truth is found it is clear and singular. These illusions are also used in mass media to stimulate consumption of them, such as television programs as *Crime Scene Investigation*, in which the mystery is solved by the professionals, just for another mystery to show up. Other theory that I will use includes the concepts of discrepant awareness, focalization, and reconstruction, to analyse how a forensic perspective can be invited in the spectator. I will argue that the construction of truth in *All My Sons* follows the first principle of the three illusions, while *How Did I Die*, inspired by mass media, follows a consumptive pattern, in the sense that the promise to solve the crime is never fulfilled. This difference between these functions could be derived from the context in which these performances were made. While *All My Sons* was made shortly after the Second World War, *How Did I Die* was made in 2014, it was therefore made in a later stage of capitalism, which is reflected in the way the performances engage with their audience.

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## Introduction

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The performance *All My Sons*, originally written by Arthur Miller in 1947, tells the story of the Keller family, consisting of mother Kate, father Joe and son Chris, in post-war America. They have lost their eldest son Larry in the war, leaving behind Chris as an only child. At the start of the performance, the opinions of the characters are divided over whether Larry is dead or merely missing. The performance starts around the time Ann, Larry's girlfriend before he disappeared, arrives at the family home. During her stay there, the characters reflect on what happened to Larry. When the characters start talking about the past, a discussion takes form, and information is revealed that allows them to put the pieces together. They are therefore reconstructing the timeline of what happened to cause Larry's disappearance, if not death. The truth that is constructed in this performance is therefore dug up by the characters attempting to find out what happened, even though characters as Kate attempt to cover up what happened, to cope with the situation. The version of the performed text that I will be using is made by Toneelgroep Amsterdam and de Toneelschuur in 2010, directed by Thibaud Delpeut.

The performance *How Did I Die*, made by Davy Pieters in 2014, also starts with the given that a character is dead. The structure of this performance, however, does not follow this pattern. The performers rather create a reconstruction for the audience to look at. They give a lot of possibilities, for example, in one scene the victim's death is performed several times, but the woman who is not committing the crime reacts in a different way every time it is relived. Yet it is never revealed what "actually" happened, leaving the audience to grasp at straws regarding the answer to the posed question. Pieters has stated in an interview that she is influenced by other types of media besides the theatre, such as film.<sup>1</sup> This can be found in the performance, in the sense that the physicality of the performers may remind the audience of a tape being rewound, tying into the medium of film.

Both performances are concerned with the circumstances surrounding the death of a character, and attempt to unearth what happened, this is done through the process of reconstruction, a type of forensic investigation. This search for what happened, or how truth is identified, seems to tie into the idea of the forensic turn. This idea of the forensic turn and its connection to the theatre is explored by James Frieze in his book *Theatrical Performance and the Forensic Turn*, which was published in 2019. In this book he states that, "we live in a forensic turn in which ideas of truth are increasingly tied to techniques

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<sup>1</sup> Theater Rotterdam, "Interview Davy Pieters," Youtube, accessed November 19, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hwATZxXhDEQ>.

of verification.”<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, in the same paragraph he states that contemporary theatre is obsessed with processing evidence, and that contemporary theatre makers have moved away from the question of what is true and are instead concerning themselves with the question of how truth is identified.<sup>3</sup> Since both performances concern themselves, to a certain degree, with the question of what happened, and how they can be sure what happened, the main question in this research is, “How are spectators of the performances *All My Sons* and *How Did I Die* invited to take on a forensic perspective?”. In order to answer this question, I will first discuss what a forensic perspective can entail. In the book *Theatrical Performance and the Forensic Turn*, Frieze discusses among other things, three illusions that he finds in the forensic turn. These three illusions revolve around the same idea, namely that the truth is something unambiguous that can be found by the right people with the right skill set. This question can help me understand how an unambiguous idea of the truth can be constructed. These illusions are not the only concepts that I will use in the analysis. The next sub question that I will answer therefore is, “How can the concepts of reconstruction, focalization, and discrepant awareness be useful in analysing how a forensic perspective is formed?”. I will be combining the idea of reconstruction, as explained by Brent Turvey and Jerry Chisum in the book *Crime Reconstruction*, published in 2006, with the idea of archaeology, as explained by Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks in their book *Theatre/Archaeology* from 2005, because both of these pairs of authors argue for a better understanding of who is constructing the knowledge, and what can influence the one who is looking. The concept of discrepant awareness is described by Manfred Pfister in his book from 1988, *The Theory and Analysis of Drama*. The last of these concepts is focalization, which Maaïke Bleeker explains in her book *Visuality in the Theatre: the Locus of Looking*, first published in 2008, I will briefly compare this concept to the idea of perspective, to point out their differences. These three concepts will be useful in the analysis, because they will bring the focus to the way the spectators are addressed, or invited to take on a perspective. The analysis of the performances itself with the use of the previously mentioned concepts will take place in chapter three. This will be done through a dramaturgical analysis, with a focus on the composition of the performances, the spectators, and the context in which it was performed. The concepts I have described above will function as supporting tools for analysis.

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<sup>2</sup> James Frieze, *Theatrical Performance and the Forensic Turn* (New York and London: Routledge, 2019), 1.

<sup>3</sup> Frieze, *Theatrical Performance and the Forensic Turn*, 1.

## Chapter 1: Forensics and...

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In this chapter I will answer the question “What can a forensic perspective entail?” For this I will use the book *Theatrical Performance and the Forensic Turn*, written by James Frieze. In his book he coins three illusions concerning forensics, of which the main line of thought can be summarized by the idea that the ‘truth’ is not something singular that can be dug up by the right people with the right skills, although it is often framed this way. An issue akin to this, is the idea that forensics are inherently objective. This is disproved by Jerry Chisum and Brent Turvey, in the book *Crime Reconstruction* by criminologist Brent Turvey and attorney Craig Cooley. Since this book was written from a different scientific background, they talk of the forensic investigator, instead of an audience or a spectator. However, I can see many similarities in the ways the person who is looking is talked about. Lastly, I will discuss how the three illusions by Frieze can work in a consumptive pattern, as a mechanism of capitalism.

### Objectivity

Attorney Cooley and criminologist Turvey describe in their book *Crime Reconstruction* the role of the forensic examiner, in the solving of a case. This is the construction of an order of events surrounding the commission and execution of a crime.<sup>4</sup> The reconstructionist can use several sources of information in order to arrive at this order. These can include witness statements, confessions, and evidence found at the crime scene.<sup>5</sup> Since the forensics are concerned with bringing the right people to justice, it is imperative that the guilty party be found in an objective way, so that no mistakes are made in the process. Forensics therefore positions itself as an objective party, that uses technical means and the practical skills of the forensic investigator. However, in forensics, there is always the aspect of interpretation. Not even the data produced by the technological means can be free of bias, because the technology is produced and interpreted by people. One example of this is facial recognition software, as explained in an article posted by *The Guardian* in 2017.

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<sup>4</sup> Jerry W. Chisum and Brent E. Turvey, *Crime Reconstruction* (Burlington: Elsevier Science and Technology, 2006), 2.

<sup>5</sup> Chisum and Turvey, *Crime Reconstruction*, 2.

As the coder constructs the algorithms, they focus on facial features that may be more visible in one race, but not another. These considerations can stem from previous research on facial recognition techniques and practices, which may have its own biases, or the engineer's own experiences and understanding. The code that results is geared to focus on white faces, and mostly tested on white subjects.<sup>6</sup>

Another news outlet that talks about this is The Atlantic, in which it is stated that, "Depending on how algorithms are trained, they could be significantly more accurate when identifying white faces than African American ones."<sup>7</sup> The technology of facial recognition software therefore has an inherent, built-in bias. The knowledge it produces can therefore not be seen separate from the creators of the technology itself. Furthermore, the selection of physical pieces of evidence is already a subjective process, because the examiner has to decide what "qualifies" as evidence, or what fits into the story of what happened. All of these unconscious subjective theories and thoughts that undermine the "objective" ideal of forensics called the 'observer effect', which consists of covert biases that tend to go unnoticed.<sup>8</sup> As Chisum and Turvey state, this effect is governed by the subconscious needs and expectations of the forensic investigator, which shapes both the perception and interpretation of a crime scene.<sup>9</sup> The idea that forensics are objective, can therefore not be true, because forensic sciences are exclusively practiced by, and dealing with the behaviour of people. The science and its technology can therefore never ascend above the level of the human. The forensic investigator, or the spectator for that matter, can never look at something 'objectively' for this reason. We are always dealing with the process of interpretation, which is always subjective. The idea that 'objective' facts can be dug up is addressed by Frieze, who proposes to understand this idea in the form of three illusions.

### Frieze's three illusions

James Frieze describes three illusions, these are the illusions of interiority, solvability, and transparency. How I understand it, these three illusions describe the same phenomenon, except they all highlight a specific aspect of it. The underlying idea of the illusions is that there is a clear truth, which is buried within the characters or the performance, and can

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<sup>6</sup> Ali Breland, "How White Engineers Built Racist Code – and Why It's Dangerous for Black People," *Guardian*, December 4, 2017, accessed January 13, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/dec/04/racist-facial-recognition-white-coders-black-people-police>

<sup>7</sup> Clare Garvie and Jonathan Frankle, "Facial-Recognition Software Might Have a Racial Bias Problem," *Atlantic*, April 7, 2016, accessed January 13, 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2016/04/the-underlying-bias-of-facial-recognition-systems/476991/>

<sup>8</sup> Chisum and Turvey, *Crime Reconstruction*, 54.

<sup>9</sup> Chisum and Turvey, *Crime Reconstruction*, 58.

only be dug up by the right people with the right tools and expertise. The first of these illusions, the interiority illusion, holds that the truth is something that is buried, it can be found inside. Or, as Frieze states, "there is a kernel of truth waiting to be discovered".<sup>10</sup> This implies that the truth is something that can be found in the first place, and secondly, that this truth will become clear once it is actually dug up by the right people. The solvability illusion describes how the truth that is hidden can be found by the right people with the right knowledge and materials. It can be seen as a problem that needs solving, and this solving is done by the "right expertise and kit".<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, this illusion implies that any crime scene, or any problem, can be solved. The transparency illusion holds that the truth, once it is found, is clear and transparent, there is no doubt about what happened anymore.<sup>12</sup> It cannot be ambiguous, and is therefore singular. These illusions imply that the truth can just be 'found'. However, as Frieze states, the truth is not 'found', it is actively shaped by the people trying to make sense of it, it is constructed.<sup>13</sup>

Institutions that have to do with the forensic sciences, the police for example, often have a stake in keeping up the appearance of being an impartial authority, since deviating from this ideal will mean a lapse in credibility. This calls for the idea that the people investigating can reveal what 'truly' happened, playing into the illusions. This validates the work being done by the police and other institutions that 'solve' crimes. Their reputations of being objective institutions benefit their work, because this way their biases stay out of the picture.

## Capitalism

The three illusions depend on one another; there is an investigation into the kernel of truth, once it is found it will be transparent, and it can be found by the right expertise. The illusion of interiority is crucial to a powerful mechanism, or strategy, of capitalism. Frieze explains that forensic aesthetics make use of these illusions to stimulate the audience, while never actually satisfying them. He uses "aesthetic" here to question and challenge the objective front the forensic sciences put forth. This way, it is exposed as a set of ideals, rather than taken as an inherent characteristic.<sup>14</sup>

The stimulation of a need for ownership that must never entirely be satisfied. Forensic aesthetics makes the execution of this strategy a priority. Undiscovered truth-objects, whether

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<sup>10</sup> Frieze, *Theatrical Performance and the Forensic Turn*, 15.

<sup>11</sup> Frieze, *Theatrical Performance and the Forensic Turn*, 15.

<sup>12</sup> Frieze, *Theatrical Performance and the Forensic Turn*, 176.

<sup>13</sup> Frieze, *Theatrical Performance and the Forensic Turn*, 17, 93.

<sup>14</sup> Frieze, *Theatrical Performance and the Forensic Turn*, 8.

these consist of new knowledge, hidden talent, or hitherto undetected deceit, must appear to be hard to access, lying in wait to be rescued from invisibility.<sup>15</sup>

I interpret this quote to mean that the buried knowledge can only be found and explained by the people with the right expertise and technical means. This means that the people without these means are forced to go to the people who can explain it. This phenomenon is especially successful in forms of mass media, such as a lot of detective television, e.g. *Crime Scene Investigation*, or *CSI* for short, in which a crime or mystery is solved by a team of experts. Furthermore, Frieze states that these types of media stimulate uncertainty by overwhelming its audiences with information and conflicting viewpoints, because of this there is an overwhelming relativity. The event therefore becomes dispersed, and as "organs of (late) capitalism, media *stimulate* uncertainty, creating a moral vacuum while promising to fill it."<sup>16</sup> The audiences are thus stimulated with the need to know what happened, while this promise is never fulfilled.

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<sup>15</sup> Frieze, *Theatrical Performance and the Forensic Turn*, 16.

<sup>16</sup> Frieze, *Theatrical Performance and the Forensic Turn*, 17.

## Chapter 2: Further concepts of analysis

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In this chapter, I will be discussing the three concepts that I will use, besides Frieze's three illusions, in the analysis of *All My Sons* and *How Did I Die*. The question that I will answer in here is thus "How can the concepts of reconstruction, focalization, and discrepant awareness be useful in analysing how a forensic perspective is formed?"

### Reconstruction

I am borrowing the term "reconstruction" from the forensic sciences, to immediately connect the theatrical and the forensic components of the performances. According to Chisum and Turvey, the term reconstruction in a forensic context refers to "the determination of the actions and events surrounding the commission of a crime."<sup>17</sup> A reconstruction can be made through several means such as statements of witnesses or victims, a suspect's confession, or by the interpretation of physical evidence. Reconstructionists are thus concerned with generating an order of events, based on evidence and statements, of a crime.<sup>18</sup> So, in this line of work, there seems to be one true order of events, that can be constructed by the people with the right skill set. It therefore shows many similarities with Frieze's three illusions. This attempt to piece together a timeline around the commission of a crime could be considered similar to the aim of archaeology. Michael Shanks and Mike Pearson themselves draw a parallel between archaeology and forensics in their book *Theatre/Archaeology* by using the crime scene as a metaphor for documentary efforts.

When we extend this metaphor to include Frieze's three illusions, it still holds up. The interiority illusion is about the truth, or in this case the past, being literally buried. The solvability illusion applies in the sense that the past can only be recovered by people with the right skills, i.e. archaeologists. Lastly, the transparency illusion can extend to this other metaphor, because a 'chain' of events implies a clear-cut order, and is therefore not opaque. Furthermore, Pearson and Shanks describe that the objective ideal of archaeology is often not questioned, just as Turvey and Chisum do for forensic sciences. Pearson and Shanks argue that, "we are encouraged to see scientific disciplines as communities and moral orders inseparable from the construction of knowledge. Indeed, people and their politics and morality are the medium for the construction of knowledge."<sup>19</sup> Additionally, they state that machines in laboratories that yield results are taken as natural, and are

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<sup>17</sup> Chisum and Turvey, *Crime Reconstruction*, 2.

<sup>18</sup> Chisum and Turvey, *Crime Reconstruction*, 2.

<sup>19</sup> Pearson and Shanks, *Theatre/Archaeology*, 48.

believed to be objectively representing facts.<sup>20</sup> They also argue that one cannot objectively represent the past, or let it speak for itself, because investigation into the past means that it is immediately represented by the one investigating it.<sup>21</sup> The methodology is thus conveyed as objective, and people creating knowledge and their interests are made invisible. It is for these reasons that the public, or audience, is discouraged from seeing who exactly is constructing the knowledge.

### Discrepant awareness

The term “discrepant awareness” is explained by Manfred Pfister in his book *The Theory and Analysis of Drama*. It refers to the different levels of awareness of dramatic figures, and that of the audience.<sup>22</sup> Pfister states that there can be discrepant awareness between two or more characters. Additionally, the relationship between the characters and the audience can be discrepant as well. It can thus be used to refer to two different types of relationships. Pfister distinguishes three different levels of discrepant awareness. The first of these is superior (audience) awareness, which means that the audience knows more than the various dramatic figures. The audience can recognise the levels of awareness in different dramatic figures, therefore they are aware of ambiguities and the characters’ judgement of the situation.<sup>23</sup> The second type of discrepant awareness is inferior audience awareness, which according to Pfister means that the audience knows less than the dramatic figures.<sup>24</sup> This kind of awareness can have two functions. The first one is arousing suspense, inviting them to form hypotheses about the situation. The second of these is to make the audience identify with a character. The third type of discrepant awareness is, according to Pfister, congruent awareness, which means that the audience and the characters have the same amount of knowledge, the amount of discrepancy amounts to zero.<sup>25</sup> This concept will be useful in mapping out the amount of knowledge the audience has during the course of the performances. Related to the concept of discrepant awareness is the term dramatic irony. Pfister limits the term to refer to “the ironic contradictions that are created when the internal and external communication systems conflict with each other.”<sup>26</sup> Discrepant awareness could also influence the amount of identification the audience has with a certain character. For example, if one character holds the same

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<sup>20</sup> Pearson and Shanks, *Theatre/Archaeology*, 47.

<sup>21</sup> Pearson and Shanks, *Theatre/Archaeology*, 50.

<sup>22</sup> Manfred Pfister, *The Theory and Analysis of Drama*, trans. John Halliday (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 50.

<sup>23</sup> Pfister, *The Theory and Analysis of Drama*, 51.

<sup>24</sup> Pfister, *The Theory and Analysis of Drama*, 53.

<sup>25</sup> Pfister, *The Theory and Analysis of Drama*, 54.

<sup>26</sup> Pfister, *The Theory and Analysis of Drama*, 56.

amount of information as the audience, the audience would be more inclined to identify with that character, instead of another with less or other information.

## Focalization

The next concept that I will be using to analyse the performances is focalization, as described by Maaïke Bleeker in the book *Visuality in the Theatre: The Locus of Looking*. This concept will be used as a tool to analyse how a forensic perspective is invited in the audiences of both performances. Focalization, according to Bleeker, describes the process of mediation in the relationship between the audience and that which is seen. This perspective could be invited in the audience because of inferior (audience) awareness. The spectator can, for example, take on the perspective of a character on stage. This could happen because the amount of discrepancy in the awareness between the audience and the character could be zero, while another character could have more knowledge. The audience is therefore more likely to identify with the character that has the same amount of information as them, and take on their perspective. Bleeker does differentiate between the concepts of perspective and focalization. The difference between a perspective and focalization is that focalization describes the relationship between what is seen and the position from which it is seen, while perspective only tends to focus on that which is seen.<sup>27</sup> The position from where it is seen therefore is made invisible in the concept of perspective, while the concept of focalization purposefully points out the relationship between the two, instead of obscuring it. The focalizers, the agents through whose eyes the audience can see the performance, thus invite the spectator to take on a certain position. It can therefore be a useful concept in the analysis of how the audience is invited to take on a forensic perspective.

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<sup>27</sup> Maaïke Bleeker, *Visuality in the Theatre: the Locus of Looking*, (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 27.

## Chapter 3: Analyses of *How Did I Die* and *All My Sons*

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In this chapter, I will be comparing the performances *All My Sons* and *How Did I Die*. The question that I will answer in this section is 'How does a forensic perspective take shape in the performances *All My Sons* and *How Did I Die*?' I will first analyse these performances with the concepts of discrepant awareness, focalization, and reconstruction. In the second part of this analysis I will place the focus on the three illusions to conclude what the implications of these results are, since these three illusions are the overarching theme of the analysis.

For the analysis of *All My Sons*, I will be focusing on the scenes following George's (Ann's brother) entrance, since these are the scenes that confirm Joe's guilt. For *How Did I Die*, I will be taking a look at the last scene of the performance, which is similar to the first scene, in the sense that in both of these scenes the victim is lying down on the floor while the other two performers walk in circles around the stage space.

### Reconstruction

In both performances, the characters attempt to create a reconstruction of what happened, though this is done in different ways. In *All My Sons*, the characters create a timeline for the audience through conversation and revealing the letter. The stage decoration of this production of *All My Sons* is quite minimalistic. The floor is divided into four parts and the only pieces of décor are a chair and a tree that is toppled over lying in the sand, of which the audience is told that it was planted for Larry. At this point in the performance, it has been established that 21 pilots had met their end, due to Steve's, Ann and George's father and Joe's business partner, misconduct regarding the cylinder heads. This is because Joe was unable to go to work that day, leaving Steve as the one solely responsible. At the beginning, Chris is still convinced that his father is not the guilty party. Shortly after George arrives, he starts talking to Kate, who reveals that Joe had not been ill in the last couple of years. This does not sit well with him, so he accuses Joe of covering up his own responsibility in what happened years before. Namely, if Joe had not been ill the day the cylinder heads were shipped out, why was George and Ann's father declared guilty? During this entire process, the characters reveal new information, which changes how they interpret the actions surrounding the shipping of the cylinder heads, and ultimately Larry's disappearance. If Kate had not revealed that Joe had not been ill, his involvement would not have come to light, which makes him guilty. This leads to a confrontation between several of the characters, which ends when Ann reveals she had received a letter from Larry, which he wrote right before he disappeared. She shows this letter to Kate, who collapses under the knowledge of what happened. From this point it is

clear that Joe is the one responsible for his son's, and the other 21 pilots' deaths. Chris then starts arguing with his father, while water starts raining down from the ceiling, turning the sand on the stage into mud. The argument then turns into a physical fight, and Chris buries his father with the mud that has formed underneath Larry's tree. This covers him entirely in what remains of Larry, he cannot wash it off. Another aspect of reconstruction is the interpretation of physical evidence, with the reveal of the letter, Joe's guilt is confirmed. The mud is yet another layer of complicity clinging to him.

In *How Did I Die*, on the other hand, the characters create a reconstruction through movement rather than conversation. The specific physicality of the performers allows them to create a reconstruction through movement. This is because their movements are almost cinematic, in the sense that they will change the direction of their movement depending on whether they are going forwards or backwards in time. Furthermore, their backwards movements seem more stylized, in the sense that it is more than merely walking backwards, the movements are exaggerated. Walking forwards therefore becomes equal to time passing normally, while walking backwards signifies the time being rewound. Ominous sounds can be heard as the two front curtains are reeled in, leaving just the curtain with the forest print. The victim can be seen lying on the floor, while the dark-haired woman is still sat down. She stands up and starts walking, which turns into running. After a few laps around the stage, the man runs across the stage, breaking up the circle they usually move on. He is wearing a tracksuit, and she is surprised to see him. She then sees the victim and stops moving. She runs to the body and shakes her shoulders and presses her ear to the victim's chest. She stands up, screams, runs away, runs backwards, so the direction of movement changes, then she screams without making any noise and reaches with her hands towards the body. This entire sequence then happens twice again, so the directions of the movement changes four times. It ends when she goes to sit next to the body and presses her ear to her chest again, the direction of movement is thus backwards again. She shakes the victim, stands up and runs backwards. We are now at the point that she sees the victim, except in reverse. She walks backwards in a circle and the man is walking backwards as well, except in another direction, so they cross paths and they make eye contact. This is different from the first time we saw her walking at this point on the route, when she was going forwards. The man is a new element that was not present in the first round. *How Did I Die* therefore presents its audience with a new possibility that could have been derived from the recurring idea that the man was responsible for the death of the woman. She leaves the stage, while he runs backwards in the direction of the body. The movement is still in reverse. He goes to the body and sits next to her. He lifts her head and gets his leg and arm under her, while his other leg goes over. He then chokes her, so she starts struggling more and more, because the movement is still in reverse. She then struggles less, so the time seems to be going forward again.

He starts to move away, except her arm follows his. He then moves to choke her again, which suggests that the time is going backwards, she struggles for a few seconds, after which she goes limp. He starts moving away, so time is going forwards, by lifting his leg off of her, and moves his leg from under her, so it is done in the same way as when he approached her before the choking started. He does not move his arm from under her head, and he moves to put his leg over her again, reversing the movement. All of these reversed movements allow the performers to show different possibilities. When they rewind their movements, they go back to a previous moment, after which they make a variation in what happens after that. These are the possibilities, they reconstruct what could have happened and show the audience some options. He goes to choke her again, except she moves away from under his leg and stands up. He still goes through with the choking motion, even though there is now no one to choke. While he is doing this, the forest curtain moves away and she walks off the stage behind this. This could arguably even question if there even was a murder in the first place, because if there is no body we cannot be certain that she is actually dead. He moves away and sits for a moment. Then, he stands up and walks through the black background curtain, leaving the stage empty. All of these variations are thus an investigation of the circumstances around the execution of the murder, although there is never any definitive evidence shown, physical or otherwise. This makes it unclear for the spectator who is constructing the ideas that are shown. The victim always dies of strangulation, yet the audience is never shown how this is 'proven'. It is presented as natural, while the spectators are never presented with definitive evidence.

### **Discrepant awareness**

In the beginning of *All My Sons*, there almost seems to be a discrepancy of zero in the relationship between the characters, and in the relationship of the characters and the audience. The audience is soon made aware of the fact that Larry is missing, if not dead. However, the characters on stage do not seem to be aware of how this happened. A point of contempt is that Kate does not want to accept that her oldest son may be dead, while Chris has accepted that Larry will not come back. In the meantime, it is made clear that Steve is locked up in prison due to his involvement of the shipping of malfunctioning cylinder head, which shifts the awareness in favour of the characters. Then George enters, and he reveals what his father's role was in the affair. This shows the audience that there is more to the story than what has previously been told. Furthermore, this reveals that Chris is the one with inferior awareness, since he seems surprised and does not want to accept this. George and Kate start talking again and she says that Joe had not been ill in the last couple of years, while George was under the impression that his father is in jail

specifically because Joe could not come to the factory because he was too ill to get out of bed. Joe quickly tries to correct this slip of the tongue, but the damage is already done. The awareness now is in favour of Kate and Joe, who seem to know why he truly was not there that fateful day. At this point, Chris is still the character who has the least amount of awareness. The audience finds out about this at the same time as him, so it is easier to identify with him instead of with the other character. In the meantime, characters such as Kate and Joe deliberately hide information and know more than the audience know. Then there is Ann, who is hiding Larry's letter to her. The way these characters start debating one another allows the audience to process the information that is given, they are catching up to what the characters were already aware of. At the beginning it seems that the discrepancy is zero between the characters and the audience, since the audience is exposed to the fact that Larry is missing, if not dead. The characters on stage do not seem to know anything about how it could have happened. This changes when events of the past are mentioned, which shows that some of them know more than they let on. The discrepancy in the awareness therefore, at first, seems to be almost zero, it later shifts in favour of the characters, and when all is revealed, the discrepancy is zero again.

In *How Did I Die*, the amount of discrepancy never gets to zero, because there is no definitive "solution" to what took place. In the sequence described above, there is no moment in which the audience can know for certain that one of the characters knows more than the other, or that the characters know more than them. Between the characters there is no clear discrepancy, and it is also never solved in the relationship between the characters and the audience. Arguably the only time the audience has superior awareness is right before she is choked, since they have just seen that happen in reverse. Furthermore, at the end of the performance, the audience might even question whether there has been a murder at all, because at the end the man is still making the motions of choking someone, but the woman who has been the victim all the time is standing behind him and looking at him choking the air. The tension is therefore never solved and the audience is only left with questions.

## **Focalization**

In *All My Sons*, due to the discrepancy in awareness, the audience is invited to identify with Chris. The other characters namely reveal information that both the audience and Chris were not aware of, which brings them almost to an equal level of knowledge. Chris therefore becomes the most familiar point of reference, since the other characters have become more distanced due to their superior awareness. However, after Chris has received all the information, Kate asks, "begrijp je het nu" (translated: "do you understand it now?"), inviting us to see what she considers the truth. She is therefore putting a definitive

end to questioning what happened, she has already made up her mind. Everything fits into the narrative they have constructed. Notably, the character of Steve is not discussed anymore after this, which suggests that he is entirely not to blame for what happened. He did ship out those cylinder heads, though, but the characters are conveniently forgetting that. All of this adds up to invite the audience to see Joe as the sole culprit.

In *How Did I Die*, the question of what happened is already posed in the title, which already invites the audience to contemplate on what happened, even before the performance itself starts. Furthermore, the physicality of the performers allows the audience to figuratively take a step back, so they can look at it from a more distanced point of view. This is done through the exaggerated backwards movements, which shows the audience that what they are seeing is a construction. Another effect this might have, is that the cinematic character of the movements can remind the spectators of looking at screens, further removing them from the action. The focalization is therefore realised more through the form of the performance, rather than the world of the characters. The audience might look at the reconstruction like a forensic examiner might, searching for the narrative surrounding the crime, yet never finding it.

### **The three illusions**

*All My Sons* plays into the illusions described by Frieze, in the sense that the "solution" to what happened is dug up, unambiguous, and done by the right people. To start off, the truth of what happened could only have been found out by the characters and the information they had at their disposal. If George had not been there, the comment about Joe's health would not have been made, in which case the discussion that ultimately lead to the reveal of his involvement would not have happened. During this discussion, the letter Ann has kept to herself is revealed. The truth of what happened could therefore only have been revealed by these characters, making them complicit to the illusion of solvability; they are the right, if not the only, people with the right knowledge (and skills) to solve the question of what has happened. The truth is dug up through the process of discussion/arguing, which plays into the illusion of interiority, the truth is found the combined knowledge of the characters. The last of the illusions that is used in this performance is the illusion of transparency. Once it is revealed that Joe was responsible for sending out the cylinder heads, it is solely his fault, there is no more doubt about what happened. This is emphasized by Kate telling Chris "nu snap je het" (Now you get it). The truth is therefore singular and unambiguous.

In *How Did I Die*, the three illusions of interiority, solvability, and transparency are promised to the audience, but the promise to get to the bottom of what happened is never

fulfilled. The spectators are stimulated with conflicted images, activating their need to know what happened. These three illusions are therefore promised to be implemented, but the answer to the posed question, 'how did I die?', is never answered, leaving the audience unsatisfied, in the sense . The spectators are rather overwhelmed with so many conflicting ideas it is impossible to tell what actually happened. This can be considered an overwhelming relativism, dispersing the event, which is a technique of (late) capitalism.

So while *All My Sons* relies on the three illusions to provide an answer, *How Did I Die* uses these to keep stimulating their audience. The illusions are therefore used with a different goal in mind. These uses of the forensic can be linked to the economics of the time in which the performances were produced. *How Did I Die* was made in a time already full of mass media, and is influenced by this. The answer to what happened is not given definitively, which is a mechanism that can be found in other forms of mass media, such as television programs like *CSI*, in which the episode might end on a cliff-hanger to convince the audience to watch the next episode. *All My Sons*, on the other hand, was made right after the Second World War, when mass media were not as omnipresent as they are these days. The answer to what happened in *All My Sons* is transparent and singular, it could therefore imply something about the time it was made in. Furthermore, at the end of the performance, none of the characters speak of Steve, who may not have been the main culprit, but he did play a part in what happened.

## Conclusion

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The spectators of the performances *All My Sons* and *How Did I Die* are thus invited to take on a forensic perspective due to the use of Frieze's three illusions, even though these are used with different ends in mind. The performers of both performances create reconstructions of the event before the eyes of the spectators, while the way the knowledge of the characters is presented defines the way they are invited to take on a position in relation to the performance. For *All My Sons*, the audiences will be more emotionally invested, because they may identify with the way Chris discovers what happened. The position the audience might find themselves in will be more distanced in *How Did I Die*, because they are mostly overwhelmed with possibilities, without ever knowing anything about the characters. Furthermore, the questions posed in *How Did I Die* are never answered, therefore not releasing the audience of their stimulated needs.

During the process of analysing these performances, there were some thoughts that could not leave me alone. First of all, it is interesting to note that in this analysis I talk a lot about finding a 'buried' truth, in light of that I also suggest another reading of the moment Chris buries his father. In the analysis I argue that the mud is physical evidence of Joe's wrongdoing, he is so guilty that it stains him. Another interpretation could contain the idea of Chris covering Joe with mud, so the truth stays buried, which would be more in line with Kate's insistence that Larry will return at the beginning of the performance.

The books that I have used in this research are full of information, and for future investigations it would be interesting to use other concepts they contain. Bleeker, for example, talks about many more things besides focalization, such as theatricality and absorption. These concepts could also be useful for this analysis, because they describe whether or not the audience can accept that what they are seeing. Another interesting tool for analysis could be the concept of dialectics, because the clash of the thesis and antithesis is something I can recognise in both of these performances. Namely, if X did not happen, then what did?

This is a useful perspective in the field of theatre and performance studies, because it allows the analyst to explain who is creating the knowledge that is (re)presented on stage, or what ideals this knowledge can imply. A performance such as *How Did I Die* could probably not have been made in a time before widespread television, since it follows a very consumptive pattern in its address of the spectator. Another interesting point a discussion around this subject could yield, is the question of who is constructing the knowledge we consume.

It also would be interesting to see how someone else would interpret these performances because now I am the one constructing the knowledge, and we have established that one is always influenced by certain factors when looking at something. Ideally, we would let the knowledge in these performances speak for itself, but they are inherently represented by the both people constructing, and the people trying to make sense of them.

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# Plagiaatverklaring

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