

Technology, Parole, and Truth – A Review of *Duck Duck Goose*, A Production of 2021 Dublin Theatre Festival

Fishamble: The New Play Company. Draíocht
Blanchardstown, Dublin. Oct 8, 2021.

Chengyun Zhao

TECH NOLOGY

From September to October 2021, Duck Duck Goose, written by Caitríona and directed by Jim Culleton, premièred at Dublin Theatre Festival. The drama, based on the notorious Irish “rugby rape trial” (Feb. 2018), explores the psychological injury suffered by the people involved in this event by restoring the memories of a witness, Chris Quinn, aiming at amplifying the discussion to the contemplation of the relationships among technology, parole, and truth.

PAROLE

AND

TRUTH

Editor's Note:

Chengyun Zhao is doing his PhD programme in Drama at Trinity College Dublin, thus I invited him to write a performance review for *Ying Ming Theater*. When we watched the play *Duck Duck Goose*, premiering in last year's Dublin Theatre Festival, we encountered our supervisor Brian Singleton, who told us that the playwright Caitríona Daly also graduated from Trinity's the Lir Academy, which indicates some connection between the review and the play. Daly is also a graduate from the Royal Court Theatre's Young Playwright programme in London. Apart from Dublin, her plays have also been produced in England and Scotland. I hope that this review would offer a chance for readers to know about the style of Dublin's young (female) playwrights growing out of drama academy.

Chaomei Chen




Image © Ste Murray

An Irish rugby player, who was in charge of sexually assaulting a young female on the “rugby rape trial”, was released due to insufficient evidence. However, the result did not appease the citizens’ rage but rather stimulated it, leading to disbelief in gender relations as well as in the judicial system. The plotline of *Duck Duck Goose* paralleled this case to a large extent. It began with the recollection of the morning, next to the occurrence of the case, when Jane Scully asked Chris if he knew the phone number of a rugby player, Davey. She argued that Davey raped her and sent the photos to a WhatsApp group while the truth was kept unknown due to the quick deletion. Subsequently, Chris brought this question to his friend Davey and another rugby player Andy who insisted on their innocence in this case. What followed was the dramatic conflicts that Chris, trusting in his friends, publicly clarified for his friends online and soon received a constellation of verbal abuse or even physical harm. Angry people intruded into his father’s family-owned company to splash paint. The host in a radio interview constantly questioned his standpoint by throwing linguistic traps. The lady kept interrogating relevant evidence during their date. Even his sister persuaded him several times to apologize in front of the public so as to avoid further attack. All of these consequences were attributed to his online clarification. Overwhelmed by these fragments of memory, Chris suffered from long-term depression. Meanwhile, Davey was still accused of rape by a large number of citizens and escaped to another country despite that he had been found innocent for the lack of evidence.

The playwright and director by no means stood for either side involved in this case as no spectator was capable of acquiring the truth of the case, but the case itself and the subsequent events left indelible traumas to every character involved and even the witnesses. The culprit of this tragedy is arguably the modifiability of social media, or, more specifically, the unreliability of techno-media. The stage was surrounded by five

two-metre-high screens among which the central one displayed the process of the messages posted and deleted on WhatsApp that night with running texts, while the other four functioned as the mirrors reflecting the mind’s eye of Chris’s. Moreover, he confessed to the mirrors his confusion about the missing texts or the dilemma caught between the beliefs, aroused by such confusion, in the words of Jane and Davey. In other words, technology, which should have provided evidence for uncovering cases and avoiding the concealment of truth, tend to create distortion and misunderstanding given its modifiability. A deleted text at once allowed Jane and other netizens to attack the rugby players involved in the rape trial, and also provided the rugby players and Chris with the excuses of innocence. At the same time when technology reduces the possibility of misjudgment, it imbues the cases with more mysteries and delays the revelation of truth as well, which will probably traumatize the figures involved in a more profound way.



The discussion on uncovering the truth in Duck Duck Goose shall not be restricted to the field of contemporary technology, but rather delves deeply into the unknowability of truth exposed from the perspectives of parole and even human nature itself.

We could, by interpreting two dialogues embodied in Chris's memory, discover the limitation of human cognition and the concealment of truth resulting from overconfidence. Humans tend to accept what they want and to believe what they are satisfied with, so they adopt parole to tamper with the truth. First, in a radio interview, in order to produce hotspots for his programme, the host Leo deliberately changed the theme from "the corporation of Chris's father being illegally invaded" to "Chris being involved or witnessing the rape trial". He strove to distort the description of the case so as to convict those rugby players, Davey for example.

The second followed as a date in a café when his dating mate Marie was sensitive to any issues related to sexual attacks, which was caused by a previous experience of being bodily molested. She insisted on the guilt of those rugby players, deploying a series of rhetorical questions to strengthen Chris's belief in her arguments as well as his feeling of guilt.

Hence, parole, a semiotic system closely connected to human bodies, still obscures the ways of comprehending truth even if reducing the disruption of technology, just as the similar arguments illustrated by the distinguished Irish playwright, Samuel Beckett, in his production, *Waiting for Godot*, Human beings will never be able to understand truth by means of parole or any other exterior behaviour, so to speak, even the parole uttered by another subject cannot be fully comprehended. As the extensions of the body, the media such as parole or technology do not differ from each other essentially to a large extent in that all of them undertake the same function of expressing human nature.

Image © Ste Murray

Humans are inclined to distort or conceal the truth because of the subjectivity and limitation inherent in human nature. As taking advantage of the modifiability of media benefits themselves and stakeholders, their own “correctness” is convinced only at the sacrifice of others’ interests. As Leo conveyed, “[N]ine times out of ten, if it talks like a duck, it’s a duck.” This idiom is not only a resonance to the title of the play, but also a satire pointing out the distorted “post-truth” exerted by such media as parole and technology. They attempt to claim the discursive dominance in this information era. In this regard, the production is also a contemporary elaboration of traditional Chinese allegories such as “calling a stag a horse” and “three liars make a tiger”. ■

Image © Ste Murray

