Diagrams, Formalism, and Structural Homology in Beckett's *Come and Go*

Irit Degani-Raz

C.S. Peirce's definition of the iconic sign (within his second trichotomy of signs) has received special emphasis and widespread application in semiotic analysis of the theatre. However, one important type of icon, the diagram (Peirce subdivided icons into three types: images, diagrams, and metaphors), has received little attention in these studies and, to my knowledge, no attention at all as far as the message of the performance as a whole is concerned. In this essay I suggest a way of broadening the "classical" semiotics of theatre to include diagrams within the scope of application of the icon to this art. This is to be realized by emphasizing the explanatory power latent in diagrams to explicate the way the message of the performance as a whole is created and conveyed. In doing so, I attempt to address another lacuna in theatre semiotics concerning an important feature of the icon. Peirce emphasized the inherent ability of the icon to reveal new insights into its object, "for a great distinguishing property of the icon is that by the direct observation of it, other truths concerning the object can be discovered than those which suffice to determine its construction."[1] This property of the icon, which appears to have been neglected in semiotic analyses of theatre, is best exemplified in the functioning of diagrams. Accordingly, an analysis of the way diagrams function in this art may throw new light on the cognitive aspect of the theatrical enterprise. The performance of Beckett's play *Come and Go* (filmed as part of the *Beckett on Film* project[2]) will serve here as a representative of a class of theatrical works whose semiotic mechanism is based on diagrammatic iconicity.

According to Peirce, the resemblance between diagrams and their objects consists in structural homologies and not in "sensuous resemblance." The icon includes, suggests Peirce, "every diagram, even though there be no sensuous resemblance between it and its object, but only an analogy between the relations of the parts of each."[3] Elsewhere he indicates that "many diagrams resemble their objects not at all in looks; it is only in respect to the relations of their parts that their likeness consists."[4] Structural homology is, thus, a kind of similarity based on analogous relations and as such is different in kind from sensuous similarity and more abstract. As Nöth indicates in *Handbook of Semiotics,* "iconicity includes

Irit Degani-Raz lectures at Tel Aviv University. Her principal research interests lie in the semiotics of theatre, modern drama (Samuel Beckett in particular), and the philosophy of science. Her recent major published articles include "Possible Worlds and the Concept of 'Reference' in the Semiotics of Theater" (2003); "Theatrical Fictional Worlds, Counterfactuals, and Scientific Thought Experiments" (2005); and "The Spear of Telephus in *Krapp's Last Tape*" (2008).

similarity of abstract relations or structural homologies."[5] Peirce provides several examples of diagrams, such as the design an artist draws of a statue, a pictorial composition, an architectural elevation, a floor plan. Most important for this study is Peirce's analysis of the iconic character of mathematical formulae and especially his analysis of the functioning of mathematical diagrams as a tool for discovering new facts about supposed states of affairs:

> The reasoning of mathematicians will be found to turn chiefly upon the use of likenesses, which are the very hinges of the gates of their science. The utility of likenesses to mathematicians consists in their suggesting in a very precise way, new aspects of supposed states of things.[6]

The inherent ability of applied mathematics to yield unexpected truths is tightly connected, according to Peirce's perception of mathematics,[7] to its diagrammatic character.

The Role of Mathematical Diagrams in the Growth of Knowledge

In order to pinpoint where the advantage of diagrams in general lies, Peirce examines in "Prolegomena to an Apology for Pragmaticism" the advantage of the use of maps (which exemplify diagrammatic representation) during a military campaign. He emphasizes the advantage of maps even for generals who are thoroughly familiar with the countries that are represented by them. Operating upon maps, for example by marking each anticipated day's change in the situation of the two armies, may also reveal unanticipated changes, which must be taken into consideration when strategic decisions are made. Peirce extends this understanding and draws conclusions regarding the advantage of diagrams in general:

> [O]ne can make exact experiments upon uniform diagrams; and when one does so, one must keep a bright lookout for unintended and unexpected changes thereby brought about in the relations of different significant parts of the diagram to one another. *Such operations upon diagrams, whether external or imaginary, take the place of the experiments upon real things that one performs in chemical and physical research.*[8]

The advantage of diagrams lies in the possibility they present to make experiments on constructions that have structural homologies to their objects rather than on the objects themselves, and thereby to gain new insights concerning the objects as well. What enables this "substitution"? What guarantees that the results yielded by experiments upon a diagram will be valid for that diagram's object as well? The answer lies, according to Peirce, in the fact that the object of investigation

when experimenting upon diagrams is that of the interrelations obtaining between significant parts of the diagrams**.** Peirce terms this object of investigation *the form of relation*. Since the diagram and its object share the same form of relations (there is a structural homology between them), the result of any change in these relations in the diagram is valid for its object as well. As an illustration of this view, Peirce suggests an example concerning mathematical reasoning:

> let f1 and f2 be the two distances of the two foci of a lens from the lens. Then,
>
> 1/f1+1/f2=1/f0
>
> This equation is a diagram of the form of the relation between the two focal distances and the principal focal distance; and the conventions of algebra (and all diagrams, nay all pictures, depend on conventions) in conjunction with the writing of the equation, establish a relation between the very *letters* f1, f2, f0 regardless of their significance, the form of which relation is the *Very Same* as the form of relation between three focal distances that these letters denote. This is a truth quite beyond dispute. Thus, this algebraic Diagram presents to our observation the very, identical object of mathematical research, that is, the Form of the harmonic mean, which the equation aids one to study.[9]

As Hookway indicates, according to Peirce, "the ground of interpretation of a mathematical theory when it is applied is iconic: the theory itself is a relational structure the elements of which are indices; and the theory is applicable to states of affairs containing elements involved in a relational structure of the same form."[10] In other words, there is a structural homology between the mathematical formula and the actual state of affairs to which it is applied.

It can thus be concluded that mathematical diagrams are valuable, as far as the actual world is concerned, because experiments upon them and observations of them can replace experiments upon and observations of actual states of affairs. In the following I shall show that in *Come and Go* Beckett in fact visualizes in space a mathematic-like diagram. Relying on Peirce's analysis of the epistemological power latent in mathematical diagrams to reveal new aspects of their object, I contend that contemplation of the mathematic-like diagram that is sketched in the play can reveal basic structures of human reality.

"Mathematic" Order and the Reality of Disorder in *Come and Go*

Beckett's fascination with the clarity and structural order of mathematics and

his recognition of its importance in art are explicitly manifested in his critical writings on art and have already been noted by Beckett scholars. Most notable in our context is a quote from a letter written by Beckett to George Duthuit in 1948:

> I remember a painting at the Zwinger, a Saint Sebastien of Antonello of Messina, wonderful, wonderful. It was in the first room, it would grab me each time. Pure space of mathematical force, tiling, flagstones rather, black and white, with long foreshortenings enough to draw moans from you ..., all invaded, consumed by the human. Before such a work, such a victory over the reality of disorder, over the pettiness of heart and spirit, one nearly gets lost.[11]

In what sense should we understand Beckett's claim that this "mathematic" painting is "a victory over the reality of disorder?" Is he claiming here in a somewhat Cartesian spirit that this painting has the force to penetrate the disordered reality of the senses and represent truths beyond the reach of sense perception, an ordered reality that is described in "mathematic" terms?[12] It is unlikely. Beckett indeed seems to share here Descartes's admiration for mathematics, and yet his perception of reality is diametrically opposed to that of Descartes: Cartesian rationalism, as is well known, assumes the intelligible, orderly character of the world, and the mind's ability to discern such order. Beckett, as many of his critics have already indicated, assumes a chaotic universe, at least from the standpoint of human beings. When taking into account a chaotic reality, the above-mentioned question is even enhanced: how are we to understand Beckett's claim that the painting is a victory over the reality of disorder? The answer, I suggest, lies in the perception of mathematics that is implied in Beckett's words. Although the quotation is not very explicit, Beckett would appear to perceive mathematics here as a pure construction, hovering over the actual world in a pure space fulfilling the human need for order. With such a perception of mathematics one could interpret Beckett's words as claiming that the victory of the painting, like that of a mathematical construct, is a victory of the human spirit in constructing a pure, ordered universe in spite of the chaotic nature of actual reality.

I would contend, however, that Beckett employs mathematics in his work in a different way, one that to some extent resembles that of Descartes's view of the important epistemological role of mathematics, i.e., mathematics as a tool for representing the actual world. This claim might sound paradoxical since, as we have seen, Beckett considers that reality is chaotic, and hence it is far from clear how mathematical structures might capture the nature of a disordered reality without imposing an order on a material that is chaotic in its very nature. Beckett himself emphasizes, in a widely-quoted passage, the need to find a new artistic form that

does not reduce the chaos to any kind of form:

> There will be a new form, and this form will be of such a type that it admits the chaos and does not try to say that the chaos is really something else. The form and the chaos remain separate. The latter is not reduced to the former. That is why the form itself becomes a preoccupation, because it exists as a problem separate from the material it accommodates. To find a form that accommodates the mess, that is the task of the artist now.[13]

The solution that Beckett finds to this complex artistic task is perfectly accomplished in *Come and Go*. The main line of thought of the following discussion is that Beckett suggests in this play a "mathematic" formula that, on the one hand, is "charged" with "mathematical force," an ordered relational structure that serves as a diagrammatic icon of basic formal structures of human reality; on the other hand, it includes chaos, an awareness of the inability to describe reality in rational terms, as part of the content of the formula itself. In this way Beckett indeed finds "a form that accommodates the mess"—a kind of dialectical tension between order and disorder, without reducing the latter to the former.

Formal Structures in *Come and Go*

The formal characteristics of *Come and Go* are explicitly manifested in Beckett's increasingly precise stage directions for the play. The *Beckett on Film* production takes advantage of filmic capabilities (such as the operations of fade and close-up) to enhance those formal elements. In this respect the filmic production follows Beckett's own perception of the play, expressed in a letter he wrote to the director Alan Schneider: "I see *Come and Go* very formal. Strictly identical attitude and movements. . . . Same toneless voices save for 'oh!'s."[14]

It is important to note that the directors of the *Beckett on Film Project* (each film was directed by a different director) were asked, on the one hand, to conceive the project as an adaptation of the plays to cinematic terms rather than documentation of a stage production,[15] while, on the other hand, to adhere to Beckett's highly detailed stage directions. Directing *Come and Go*—a piece of 121 words and stage directions almost twice as long—in the light of these confines definitely posed a complex challenge. The creative filmic solution arrived at by John Crowley, the director of *Come and Go*, was to film it, to use his words, "in a way that is suggestive of a hand tinted portrait photograph from the turn of the last century."[16] The result is a superb production that manages to not only adhere to the dramatic text (including stage directions) and foreground its formality and elegance, but also capture "Beckett's spirit" in general. By the latter I refer here to Beckett's tendency towards the basics, a tendency manifested in different levels of abstraction

(an idea that will be discussed later). The strength of the production is latent first and foremost in the above-mentioned cinematic solution that was employed as a means of adapting the play's stage directions to cinematic terms, and in the closely-related basic movements of the camera. (It is important to note that it is mainly the camera's lenses that move rather than the camera itself. The camera, except for one shot towards the end, remains stationary, center-front. For the sake of simplicity, however, I shall refer to the "camera's movement" whenever filmic techniques are involved in controlling the view). The rhythm of the camera's movements seems to be dictated by the implied rhythm of the dramatic text, resisting the temptation to use the camera's unique capabilities unnecessarily (for example, to control the perspective and vision of the audience by altering angles and focus). The latter are saved for those places in which the camera enables the stage directions to be better realized. As a result, the "strictly identical" movements of the camera reflect and foreground the formal aspects of the play. In a sense, as will be detailed in the following, the camera participates in both the dramatic action itself and the construction of the play's formal structure.

From the very beginning, the film's formal characteristics are prominent: a picture of three female figures, virtually identical apart from the color differentiation of their costumes (dull violet—Ru, dull red—Vi, dull yellow—Flo), appears as if emerging from darkness and is gradually brought into focus. This arrival of the picture from darkness to light functions as an opening clue to the motif of "coming and going" from darkness to light and vice versa, which operates as a dominant formal constituent of the play's structure (as is implied in the play's very name). The elegance and formality of the women's costumes contribute to the formal atmosphere of the play; as the director himself indicates, his decision to film it to look like an old Victorian tinted photograph "was in response to the formality and elegance of the play and to Beckett's uncharacteristic use of bold colour in the costumes."[17] In other words, the cinematic idiom itself refers reflexively to the play's formal nature. The three women of the first picture are motionlessly sitting on/floating above a barely visible benchlike seat. The overall impression is that of a still photograph: all three sit facing front (from right to left: Flo, Vi, and Ru), hands clasped in laps. Silence. Light is concentrated on the playing area, while the background resembles a hand-tinted mix of dark colors; the rest of the stage is dark. The scene could appear realistic—a common view of three old women sitting on a bench—were it not situated in a surrealistic atmosphere that seems far removed from reality. Their costumes—full-length coats and hats that shade their faces—do not allow any intimate acqaintance with the characters, and as such further emphasize that what we are witnessing is a schematic sketch of a hypothetical state of affairs rather than an illusionistic representation of an actual one. What follows is a highly stylized presentation characterized by a stylized choreography of movement and strict pattern of dialogue. Three variants of a rigorously structured ritual of coming

and going take place. In each section one woman breaks the silence by alluding to a shared experience in the past: "when did we three last meet?"; "just sit together as we used to, in the playground at Miss Wade's"; "holding hands . . . that way"; "dreaming of . . . love." Each time, the character who occupies the center seat leaves the lit area, as if dissolving into the surrounding darkness. Here the filmic medium provides an exact frame into and out of which the figures presumably move, enabling a more precise and "natural" (in terms of the medium's language) realization of Beckett's stage directions—"The figures are not seen to go off stage. They should disappear a few steps from lit area"[18]—than would be possible by most stage productions. The camera concentrates for a few seconds on the remaining pair as if to allow the audience to absorb the sight of the new configuration: two women now separated by an empty space. One of the remaining pair then moves to occupy the now empty center seat and whispers in the other's ear a secret concerning the absent one. The camera approaches ("zoom in" to "medium shot") the whispering women as if to allow the audience (or perhaps itself?) to take part in the women's intimacy by hearing the content of the secret, only to "disappoint" the audience and thereby emphasize the idea that the words are not meant to be audible. The formal character or function of the secrets is thus underscored. The secrets stand for the negative or traumatic[19] aspect of human fate in general, as can be understood from the response of the listeners (each one in turn seems appalled and responds "Oh"). Each time, the Listener asks if the absent figure realizes her fate, and the answers are variants of the hope or prayer that she does not: "God grant not"; "God forbid"; "please God not." As Ruby Cohn has sensitively indicated, the word "not" figures in both question and prayer, and the dialogue is but one of several places in the play in which "interrogative and negatives dance together."[20] After each "Oh" the camera instantly "distances" itself ("cut" and "long shot") in order to capture the ghost-like reentrance of the absent woman (emerging from darkness to light). As she joins the other two women, they resume their frontal pose, with the trio now arranged in a new configuration. The women lapse into motionless silence for a few seconds, and the stage is set for the next section. When the third and final ritual of coming and going ends, the three women are seated in a mirror image of their initial position (Ru, Vi, Flo)—a picture that closes what looks like a series of still photographs in each of which the women are arranged in a different order. Vi then says: "May we not speak of the old days? [Silence] Of what came after? [Silence] Shall we hold hands in the old way?"[21] As the three begin to join hands, the camera sharply moves to a close up on the joined hands and pans from left to right (for the first time moving along a horizontal line, in contrast to its previous in and out movements) as if to allow the spectators a closer inspection of the hands. The camera then distances itself to reveal a full view of the three women holding hands ("in the old way"). Their hands are joined in a geometric pattern whose diagram is precisely depicted and described in the stage directions—a clear clue, if indeed

one is needed, of the formal order of the play. Flo says: "I can feel the rings," but, as the stage directions explicitly indicate, "no rings [are] apparent."[22] The camera's previous inspection of the hands has left no doubt that they are bare. Once again the production takes advantage of a filmic technique (close up) as a means to actualize the stage directions in a way that is not usually possible in theatre. The riddle of the absent rings ends the play, allowing the spectator a glimpse into the disorder that lies beneath the ordered surface. The three women dissolve into darkness, leaving the mystery of their coming and going for the audience to decipher.

Performance Analysis: The Three Women as Indexical Signs

In the following discussion the underlying concept of a "fictional world" (described by the theatrical text) relies on a theoretical explanatory framework called "possible worlds," borrowed from logical semantics. In its intuitive sense, a theatrical possible world can be defined as "a way things could have been," described partially by the "here and now" of the performance, and ultimately created by the spectator (relying on his or her knowledge of the actual world) during the performance itself.[23]

As we have seen, the theatrical text of *Come and Go* offers minimal information for the spectator. It offers nothing that might enable identification of the three women in positive terms, i.e., there is no specific information about any *inherent* characteristic of any of them (be it morphological, psychological, or even historical) that might function as an identifying property. What is offered instead is color differentiation and three given names. Outwardly, this restriction to color and name differences alone could be described in Saussurian terms as figures (or signifieds) that have a purely relational identity. Like words in a language, "their most precise characteristic is in being what the others are not."[24] In fact, however, there is a crucial difference between the kind of differentiation that we encounter in the representation of *Come and Go* and that which characterizes the differential quality of language. In explicating his claim that in language there are only differences, Saussure emphasizes, in his celebrated passage from the *Course*, the peculiar character of "difference" in language:

> [A] difference generally implies positive terms between which the difference is set up; but in language there are only differences *without positive terms*. Whether we take the signified or the signifier, language has neither ideas nor sounds that existed before the linguistic system, but only conceptual and phonic differences that have issued from the system.[25]

It is important to understand that the kind of "difference" that we encounter in the presentation of *Come and Go* is the former. In other words, the spectator does

not encounter three figures that have no intrinsic characteristics, but rather three distinct women. Though the theatrical text of *Come and Go* does not provide explicit information regarding any inherent characteristics of the women, it does offer the spectators implicit information regarding the very existence of such properties (for example, the three different "Ohs" that imply three different personal histories), albeit without specifying them. Through this lack of information, I contend, the main focus of the play becomes the relational structure that obtains among the three women, rather than the three women themselves. With the women's specific characteristics stripped away, they function as three *distinct representatives* of the group "human beings." In this respect their semiotic function can be described in Peirce's terms as "degenerate indices:"

> The ordinary letters of algebra that present no peculiarities are indices. So also are letters A, B, C, etc., attached to a geometrical figure. Lawyers and others who have to state a complicated affair with precision have recourse to letters to distinguish individuals. *Letters so used are merely improved relative pronouns*. Thus, while demonstrative and personal pronouns are, as ordinarily used, "genuine indices", relative pronouns are "degenerate indices."[26]

A more precise description of the semiotic function of the three women demands a differentiation between three axes:

> 1. A vertical axis—that represents the referential function of signs of the theatrical text, which connects a sign (in the theatrical text) and its referent in the fictional possible world.
>
> 2. A horizontal axis – that represents the structural relations that are embedded in the fictional possible world.
>
> 3. A second vertical axis – that represents the referential function from the theatrical possible world to the actual world, based on structural homologies between the two worlds.

Before going into a more detailed description, it is important to emphasize that in this signifying mechanism, the fictional world mediates between the performance as a macro-sign and actual reality**.**

The Semiotic Function of the Three Women: A Theatrical Representation of Mathematical Relations

1. The first vertical axis—With regard to this axis the three actresses on stage are *icons* of the three women in the fictional world. In this respect they function in a "classical" theatrical iconicity in which a human being represents another human being. At the same time, they also function as *indices* (the three types of Peirce's second trichotomy are not mutually exclusive) in that the actresses represent no individual women or peculiar types of women. In the latter respect they could be represented by the letters A, B, C, like ordinary letters of an algebraic formula.

2. The horizontal axis—Turning to the horizontal axis, it is important to see that we move here from an atomistic point of view towards a holistic one. The former involves isolating the figures from other elements of the performance. In the latter, however, the semiotic function of the three abstract women is examined as part of the interdependent whole of the theatrical possible world. Here, the main focus of the play becomes that of a relational structure—*a mathematic-like diagram whose elements are the three women that, like ordinary letters of algebra that present no peculiarities, function as indices*.

To support my contention that this play sketches in space a "mathematic" diagram, I shall show that it deals not only with three abstract women, A, B, and C, but also with abstract mathematical relations. In order to define abstract relations in theatrical terms, Beckett develops a mechanism in which successive states of affairs that unfold solely in time are stripped of their dependence on time, and instead their spatial configuration in the theatrical fictional world is underscored. Time in this restricted sense serves here, to use Wittgenstein's metaphor, as a ladder that can be discarded once we have reached a new level of abstraction. It is on this new level that the mathematical relations that dominate the structure of the fictional world are exposed. This mechanism is best exemplified by the successive positions of Vi, Flo, and Ru during the presentation itself. The series of "still photograph-like" pictures focuses the audience's attention on transitions in space rather than movement in time. A partial visual illustration of this process is provided by Beckett's own diagram of these successive states of affairs, offered in his stage directions for the play:

Successive positions:

1.	Flo	Vi	Ru
2.	Flo		Ru
		Flo	Ru
3.	Vi	Flo	Ru
4.	Vi		Ru

	Vi	Ru	
5.	Vi	Ru	Flo
6.	Vi		Flo
		Vi	Flo
7.	Ru	Vi	Flo [27]

The diagram, which can be read as the cumulative knowledge of the spectator concerning the structure of the fictional world, is itself a relational structure whose elements are the three women that function as indices. As can be seen, this diagram in fact offers a spatial presentation that is substituted for succession in time. This substitution provides a clear view of two interconnected mathematical relations—*permutation and symmetry*—that emerge as dominating the structure of the fictional possible world. To use Peirce's terms, the diagrammatic construction instantiates these relations and exhibits them in perceptible terms, enabling them to be investigated by the spectators by means of their senses. Contemplating this diagram, in conjunction with the structure of the three dialogues, reveals that the spatial construction defines, in fact, the formal relations that prevail among the three women's fates. In other words, these relations reflect the idea that the three women's distinct fates are subject to a deforming action of time according to the rule of permutation, i.e., each of them in turn suffers an unconscious deformation caused by time, as realized by the other pair.

3. Diagrammatic iconicity: **the second vertical axis—**The relational structure embedded in the fictional world serves as an iconic sign of the reality of human beings in the actual world. The structural homology between the two worlds (the fictional and the actual one) enables the spectators to gain a new understanding concerning their own situation, an understanding that can be revealed by studying the diagram. In more specific terms, the spatial diagram can serve, for example, as a geometrical model of what Bert O. States describes with regard to *Waiting for Godot* as the existence "of a grand democratic principle in nature wherein all things are subject to the same gains and losses, the same invisible laws that have to do only coincidentally with human designs."[28] In this respect it might be claimed that *Come and Go* can be perceived as an economical representation (stemming from the mathematical characteristics of its form) of certain aspects of the content of *Waiting for Godot*.

A broader insight that is gained from the performance stems from piecing together the above-mentioned understanding with the minimal information the performance suggests regarding the women's histories. Though the spectators encounter three distinct individuals with assumed distinct personal histories, the theatrical text only outlines certain basic elements that are common to their fates, while ignoring any individual differences. The play implicitly claims that there

are several basic elements whose variants can be found in the history of any three human beings, though their individual personalities and histories may be very different. In formal terms this might be described in the following way: given three elements A, B, C, such that A, B, C are human beings each of which has a distinct set of predicates, there are some predicates—*a,b,c,d*—that belong to the set of their intersection. To use Peirce's terms: the above-mentioned form of relations that obtains among the three women's fates in the fictional world is the very same form of relations that obtains among any three human beings in the actual world, which the theatrical diagram helps the spectator to understand. Specifically, the spectator, understanding the shared elements in these three human beings' fates as constituents or variables of a basic formula defining the human condition, also understands that the play articulates this formula spatially.

In *On Beckett*, Alain Badiou describes Beckett's work as "a fundamental tendency towards the *generic*." He understands "generic" desire as "the reduction of the complexity of experience to a few principal functions, the treatment in writing of that which alone constitutes an essential determination." I contend that, though *Come and Go* indeed exemplifies Beckett's aim to extract from the complexity of human experience "a few principal functions," it does not fall under the definition of what Badiou calls Beckett's generic desire, in which Badiou identifies a method of *subtraction* as characterizing Beckett's writing process: "It is necessary to subtract—more and more—everything that figures as circumstantial ornament, all peripheral distraction, in order to exhibit or to *detach* those rare functions to which writing can and should restrict itself, if its destiny is to say generic humanity."[29] In *Come and Go* we encounter a different process: one that uses a series of diagrams at different levels of abstraction—from the more concrete diagrams instantiated in the theatrical text to the ultimate abstract diagram of the "mathematic" formula—as a method of articulating principal functions of human experience. This process involves moving from one level of abstraction (according to the degree of abstraction of the diagram) to another, higher level.

From the above analysis, one might be tempted to claim that, though Beckett defined the artistic task as finding a form that does not reduce chaos to form, in practice he offers a very organized and rigorous structure that does the exact opposite. In order to perceive how Beckett accomplishes his task, it is important to bear in mind that the chaotic aspects of the characters' lives are visible throughout the entire performance: the void that surrounds the playing area, into which each character "evaporates" in turn, metaphorically represents the inability to fully represent those characters and their fates in rational terms. In fact the absent woman is represented in negative terms: by the empty space that is delineated between the two other women; she is represented by her absence. Beckett gives us a clear expression of the idea that the only way to cope with the apparent chaos of the modern world is by indicating its existence, without adding any further detailed

characteristics. Any attempt to use a positive term to describe chaos is doomed from the beginning, since this would involve an act of imposing human categories on a material that rejects such categories by its very nature. It is important to see that Beckett's artistic means in the play, i.e., void and empty space, does not describe the chaos of modern life but rather the epistemological limitations of our efforts to come to terms with it. The very existence of the chaotic aspect, nevertheless, as is clearly visualized by the permutation of the empty space in the women's successive positions, functions as an element of the spatial diagram. In this way Beckett uses, on the one hand, the order of mathematical relations to indicate the very existence of mess as a permanent constituent of human life, while, on the other hand, he leaves the mess itself untouched: order and disorder remain separate.

At a higher level of abstraction Beckett simultaneously interrogates the minimal conditions sufficient for a performance at large to reveal new insights into the actual world. The intertextuality of the theatrical enterprise itself becomes one of the subjects of the play's interrogation. As Ruby Cohn indicates: "The opening tableau (of *Come and Go*) is shadowed by female trios in art and legend: the three graces, the three fates, the three sisters of folktales and Chekhov."[30] The list is even broader if we consider the fact that the first line of dialogue, as scholars have already indicated, echoes the witches of *Macbeth*. In this sense it might be claimed that the entire theatrical enterprise, of which these works are prominent representatives, is evoked here and becomes the subject of self-reflexive cross examination. This metatheatrical probing results in the exposure of a basic formal vocabulary (repetition, permutation and symmetries, circles and rings, to and fro movements, presence and absence, order and disorder, movement and stillness), the syntactic arrangement of which constitutes an iconic diagram of the basic axioms of the geometry of human life.

In conclusion, the signifying function of diagrams, as suggested by Peirce, would seem to encapsulate a compelling account of the signifying mechanism in *Come and Go*. Elsewhere I have suggested that theatrical texts at large can be understood as a kind of thought experiment (divisible into different classes) that provides new insights concerning reality.[31] The epistemological mechanism that was proposed there hinges on the notion of "overall similarity between worlds." The mechanism of structural homology between worlds or diagrammatic iconicity proposed here can be understood as exemplifying one kind of overall similarity between worlds. *Come and Go* can hence be understood as a representative of a special kind of theatrical thought experiment whose overall similarity is based on diagrammatic iconicity.

Notes

1. Charles Sanders Peirce, *Collected Papers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U P, 1965-1967) 2.278. [Editor's note: The *Collected Papers* are cited customarily by volume and paragraph.]

2. The *Beckett on Film Project* (London: Blue Angel, 2001), produced by the artistic director of

the Gate Theatre, Michael Colgan, and Irish film and television producer Alan Moloney, is the realization (during 2000-2001) of Colgan's vision of turning all nineteen of Beckett's stage plays into films. *Come and Go* was filmed at Ardmore Studios, December 2000, directed by John Crowley. The characters (Flo, Vi, and Ru) are played by Paola Dionisotti, Anna Massey, and Sian Phillips.

3. Peirce, *Collected Papers* 2.279.

4. 2.282.

5. Winifried Nöth, *Handbook of Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana U P, 1990) 122.

6. Peirce, *Collected Papers* 2.281.

7. Peirce's mathematical concerns are too broad to encompass here. For an enlightening explication of Peirce's philosophy of mathematics, see Christopher Hookway, *Peirce* (London: Routledge, 1992) 181-203.

8. Peirce, *Collected Papers* 4.530, emphasis added.

9. 4.531.

10. Hookway 191.

11. Quoted in Lois Oppenheim, *The Painted Word: Samuel Beckett's Dialogue with Art* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2000) 69. The quotation is suggested by Lois Oppenheim in support of Casanova Pascal's claim in *Beckett l'abstracteur: Anatomie d'une revolution litteraire* that Beckett's admiration for the paintings of Van Velde derives from the mathematic-like achievement of art that is the successful refinement of form.

12. Descartes gives special attention to mathematical methodology.

13. Dougald McMillan and Martha Fehsenfeld, *Beckett in the Theater* (London: John Calder, 1988) 14.

14. Maurice Harmon, ed., *No Author Better Served: The Correspondence of Samuel Beckett and Alan Schneider* (Cambridge: Harvard U P, 1998) 417.

15. For reflections on the aesthetic, material, theoretical, and practical issues raised by the film adaptations of Beckett's plays, see Everett C. Frost and Anna McMullan, "The Blue Angel *Beckett on Film Project:* Questions of Adaptation, Aesthetics, and Audience in Filming Samuel Beckett's Theatrical Canon," *Drawing on Beckett: Portraits, Performances, and Cultural Contexts,* ed. Linda Ben-Zvi (Tel-Aviv: Assaph Book Series, 2003). See also in this context Eli Rozik's claim that "a feature film is a recording of a fictional world formulated in the medium of theater." In "Back to 'cinema is filmed theater'." *Semiotica* 157.1-4 (2005): 169.

16. John Crowley, souvenir book from the *Beckett on Film Project* (London: Blue Angel, 2001) 17.

17. 17.

18. Samuel Beckett, *Come and Go, The Collected Shorter Plays of Samuel Beckett* (New York: Grove P, 1984) 196.

19. Or any kind of deformation caused by time. To use Beckett's words in *Proust*: "There is no escape from yesterday because yesterday has deformed us, or been deformed by us." *The Collected Works of Samuel Beckett* (New York: Grove P, 1970) 2.

20. Ruby Cohn, *A Beckett Canon* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2001) 291.

21. Beckett, *Come and Go* 195.

22. 196.

23. See Umberto Eco, "Lector in Fabula," *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (Bloomington: Indiana U P, 1979); Keir Elam, "Dramatic Logic," *Semiotics of Theater and Drama* (London: Methuen P, 1980); Irit Degani-Raz, "Possible Worlds and the Concept of 'Reference' in the Semiotics of Theater" *Semiotica* 147.1-4 (2003): 307-29, and "Theatrical Fictional Worlds, Counterfactuals, and Scientific Thought Experiments." *Semiotica* 157. 1-4 (2005): 353-75.

24. Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (London: Fontana, 1974) 117.

25. 120.

26. Peirce, 2.305, emphasis added.

27. Beckett, *Come and Go* 196.

28. Bert O. States, *The Shape of Paradox: An Essay on Waiting for Godot*. (Berkeley: U of California P, 1978) 106.

29. Alain Badiou, *On Beckett,* eds. and tr. Alberto Toscano and Nina Power (Manchester: Clinamen P, 2003) 3.

30. Cohn 290.

31. See Degani-Raz, "Theatrical Fictional Worlds."