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 On Saussure's use of images

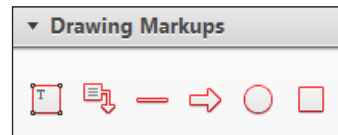Christensen, Hans Dam

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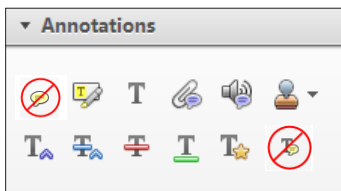

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'Plus de figures!' On Saussure's use of images
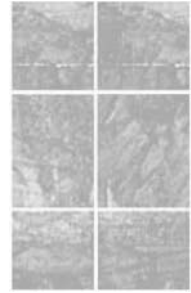
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ABSTRACT

In this article, the spotlight is directed towards one of the supposed modern sinners contributing to the maintenance of the hierarchy between word and image, the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913) and in particular his chief work *Cours de linguistique générale*, published in 1916. Saussure was not explicit about the relation between word and image, but his work became a cornerstone in the development of modern linguistics and semiotics as well as later in the breakthrough of structuralism in the late 1950s and early 1960s. This article shows that Saussure was not as hostile to images that posterity seems to deduce from the more or less internalized 'verbocentrism' of large parts of semiotics and structuralism. Moreover, and most important, the article makes a contribution to a multifaceted understanding of signifying processes. First, the article presents the origin of *Cours de linguistique générale*; almost simultaneously, another issue is introduced, namely the number of images in this work, which goes far beyond the few well-known illustrations. Secondly, these images are heuristically classified and, due to the origin of the book (primarily based on students' notes), the ownership and presence of these images are debated. Last, Saussure's semiotics is touched upon in light of the use of images in *Cours de linguistique générale*. The theoretical conclusions point to the fact that the making of knowledge is not embedded in language (or linguistics), but emerges in a play between several types of significations. In fact, as in everyday life and Saussure's lectures, communication is complex and the notion of abstracted sign systems ('language', etc.) from everyday communication is perhaps too reductive, as Saussure himself demonstrated by using images in his theory on linguistics as well as in his lectures.

KEYWORDS

Cours de linguistique générale • illustrations • image • knowledge production • Saussure • semiotics • signification

INTRODUCTION

The connection between words and images is complex. Even though notions of, for instance, gaze, visuality and image are unstable, they are often opposed to the also unstable cluster of words, text and writing. Historically speaking, the latter cluster mainly embraces enlightenment, education and knowledge, whereas the former cluster appeals to emotion, perception and affect. In practice, this dichotomy is over-simplified but in traditional as well as many newer theories on signs, languages, images and communication, this dichotomy, either unspoken or clearly observable, still surfaces. This is partly maintained by the historically founded view of the impact of language on civilization, culture and *Bildung* (Von Humboldt, 1836) – evolving further in the writings of, for instance, Boas (1889), Sapir (1929) and Whorf (1956) – and it is further upheld because vision has been 'denigrated' (Jay, 1993) or images have been considered seductive and dangerous (Mitchell, 2005).

Moreover, this dichotomy has also been supported because images, in contrast to verbal language, have been considered to belong to a universal language of humanity, often in the disguise of 'art'. When the implicit concept of 'image' is conceived as 'art' – and does not include the abundance of images outside the small arena of the visual arts – the dichotomy is still evident. Too often images have to be perceived visually, à la 'What do they look like' or 'What do I sense', before they are considered containers or mediators of information and knowledge; simultaneously, the visual aspect of reading as well as the lack of 'realism', or lack of sensuous appeal, in quite a lot of images, are typically ignored.

In this article, the making of knowledge and information is not embedded in language (or linguistics), but emerges in a play between several types of signification, or – in a traditional sense – sign systems; in related contexts, multimodality, modes, semiotic resources, etc. come to mind (e.g. Baldry and Thibault, 2006; Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2001). In the current context, however, the prevalent use of terms like 'sign system' or 'multimodality' is more or less avoided because it presupposes a variety of different types of sign systems and disassociated modalities. This is very convenient to theoretical reflections on signs as well as histories of writing (see, for example, Goody, 1986), but in real life communication matters are much more complicated; abstracted sign systems do not exist per se and each modality seldom works alone. If the term 'pragmatic semiotics' could be relieved of some – but not all – of its Peircian connotations, it might perhaps name a practice that did not care too much for theoretical differences between, for instance, semantics, semiotics, semiology and semiosis, or, even more pragmatically, between pre-existing visual, verbal and performative domains (Bucher and Nieman, 2012).

In the following pages, the spotlight is directed towards one of the supposed modern sinners contributing to the maintenance of this hierarchy between word and image, the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913) and in particular his chief work *Cours de linguistique générale*, published in

1916 (Bally and Séchehaye, 1995). Saussure was not explicit about the relation between word and image, but his work became a cornerstone in the development of modern linguistics and semiotics as well as later in the breakthrough of structuralism in the late 1950s and early 1960s. This article shows that Saussure was not as hostile to images that posterity seems to deduce from the more or less internalized 'verbocentrism' of large parts of semiotics and structuralism. This article also makes a contribution to a multifaceted understanding of signifying processes. First, the article presents the origin of *Cours de linguistique générale*; almost simultaneously, another issue is introduced, namely, the use of images in this work. The term 'image' is conceptualized in a broad sense, following Mitchell (1986). Among other things, the term includes diagrams, illustrations, drawings and glyphs as well as linguistic metaphors and analogies. In the 1916 volume and in a later publication of Saussure's texts, these images are named, for example, *figure schématique*, *schema*, *tableau*, *figure*, *symbole*, *figure visuel*, *signaux visuels*, *séme visuel* and *diagrammes* (Bally and Séchehaye, 1995: 66, 70, 72, 99; Bouquet and Engler, 2002a: 103, 110, 122, 131) Second, these images are heuristically classified and, due to the origin of the book, the issue of ownership and, in particular, presence of these images is debated. Last, Saussure's semiotics is touched upon in light of the use of images in *Cours de linguistique générale*.

THE GENESIS OF A FAMOUS WORK

Cours de linguistique générale is a famous book in large parts of the humanities. Within linguistics circles, Louis Hjemslev, Roman Jakobson and Noam Chomsky come to mind as indications of the importance of this volume. Outside these narrow circles, probably only a few scholars have read the entire work which elevated Saussure to be one of the founding fathers of modern semiotics. Most have an indirect knowledge of the book, not least because of its impact on structuralism and semiotic thinking. This is foremost due to Saussure's elaboration of the distinctions between *signifiant* (signifier) and *signifié* (signified) and between *langue* (language) and *parole* (speech) as well as the conceptualization of the arbitrary relationship between the sign and its meaning. It is difficult to imagine the anthropology of Claude Lévi-Strauss, the cultural analysis of Roland Barthes, the film semiotics of Christian Metz and the psychoanalysis of Jacques Lacan without Saussure's thinking; moreover, from the late 1960s Saussure became the target for deconstruction, poststructuralism and the like.

When *Cours de linguistique générale* saw the light of day in 1916, the progenitor had been dead for three years; in fact, 'author' is too problematic a word in this context. Saussure's posthumous work is not based on an authentic manuscript from the master himself and only to a very little extent on genuine notes from his hands. On the contrary, very large parts are based on the notes of his pupils from three series of lectures at the University of Geneva

1907–1911; in these lectures Saussure presented what he named a theory on general linguistics. Two colleagues of Saussure, Charles Bally (1865–1947) and Albert Séchehaye (1870–1946), edited the notes, and even though the pupils apparently compared and discussed their notes after the lectures, it would be misleading to envisage a compilation of numerous notes. First, only a handful of pupils attended Saussure's lectures (Harris, 1987). Next, two of the series are primarily based on the notes from one witness – his name, Albert Riedlinger, appears on the front cover of the first edition of *Cours de linguistique générale* just below the names of the editors (Bally and Séchehaye, 1916) – whereas the third series of lectures is a compilation of the notes of three pupils. The editors chose to let the structure of this last series guide the arrangement of chapters in the 1916 book. So, it complicates the picture further that yet another set of notes, Émile Constantin's, surfaced in 1958 and perhaps even better presents coherence between the lectures in the third series in comparison with the existent structure based on the notes of the three pupils (Komatsu and Harris, 1993).

Even at this stage, it is possible to sense a range of possible readings of Saussure's lectures and, in fact, the editors invited multiple perspectives in their introductory remarks to the 1916 book where they asked whether it was possible to make a distinction between their interpretation and Saussure's original ideas (Bally and Séchehaye, 1995). Thus, the editors' version has been debated over and over. Of course, the editors' use of the pupils' notes according to their own understanding and self-interests matters. On the other hand, the pupils did not necessarily fully understand what Saussure lectured about. Moreover, a lecturer does not always present his ideas in a clear manner, perhaps he even improvises during the lecture and, as a trained lecturer, Saussure probably knew how to cover leaks in his argument (Harris, 1987).

Of course, these points, together with the absence of genuine authorship, have a titillating element inside them in terms of the theories of the death of the author, not least those proposed by Foucault (1969) and Barthes (1968), in the wake of the structuralist thinking that was inspired by *Cours de linguistique générale*. In this light, the question of authorship is futile as the meaning of the text is not limited to its own pages, but goes on in the successive readings of it. In addition, Saussure himself apparently had troubles in completing his texts and he published only a little in the period 1907–1911. By and large, Saussure did not publish a lot: 'despite the paucity of his publication (some 600 pages during his lifetime), Saussure's influence has been far reaching', as a translator remarked in 1960 (Baskin, 1960: xxvii). That is, the limited number of written pages has been subjected to numerous readings.

The history of Saussurean readings probably could have turned out more plain if, after the death of their colleague, Bally and Séchehaye had succeeded in searching for Saussure's notes during their visit to his widow – several times Saussure apparently referred to a work in progress. Already in 1891,

during his inaugural lecture at the University of Geneva, he indicated that a book was going to be published in the future and, as late as 1911, he hinted at it although his notes apparently were about to vanish in his drawers (Bouquet and Engler, 2002b). The two editors, however, had to recognize that almost nothing was left. By all accounts, Saussure threw away his lecture notes, and only a few surfaced in the drawers of his working chamber. Yet, this did not stop the process. As one Saussure scholar very prosaically states:

> His ultimate trump cards (premature death; fragmentary notes; failure to leave a manuscript), were bluntly overtrumped by his pupils and colleagues. It took them barely more than a couple of years to bring out the book that Saussure had managed to avoid writing for the previous twenty. (Harris, 1987: vii)

These remarks occurred in the second part of the 1980s. Thus, the scholar did not know that the two editors ought to have been more careful in their search during their visit. Considering the significance of the 1916 volume throughout the 20th century, it is not difficult, according to another translator, 'to imagine the excitement when in 1996 it was announced that some manuscripts in Saussure's hand had been found in the *orangerie* of the family home in Geneva' (Sanders, 2006: xix). Parts of these manuscripts were published as *Écrits de linguistique générale* in 2002 and translated into English in 2006 (Bouquet and Engler, 2006). Already in the introduction of the French edition, publication of the last part of the manuscripts was announced as *Leçons de linguistique générale* (Bouquet and Engler, 2002b); this publication has, however, not yet come to fruition.

IMAGE AND WRITING

As mentioned, in comparison with the abundance of people who are familiar with Saussure, structuralism and semiotics, probably only a few scholars have read the entire 1916 book. Moreover, without really noticing, if people have been introduced to his ideas and influence, many are more familiar with illustrations from Saussure's major work than his writings. This is because several images recur in presentations and introductions to his ideas, and they are eventually presented together with fragments of the original text. In particular, the famous diagram of the sign illustrating the arbitrary relation between signifier and signified is often introduced. In English versions, the French terms *image acoustique* and *arbre* are perhaps translated into 'sound pattern' and 'tree' (Figure 1). Another famous model is the figure illustrating the relation between *langue* and *parole* with a circle (encircling the word "langue") above a square (encompassing the "masse parlante"), but many more images are to be found in *Cours de linguistique générale*. As an additional example, one can refer to the drawing of a stem sliced up vertically and horizontally. The vertical cut metaphorizes the diachronic approach to linguistics whereas
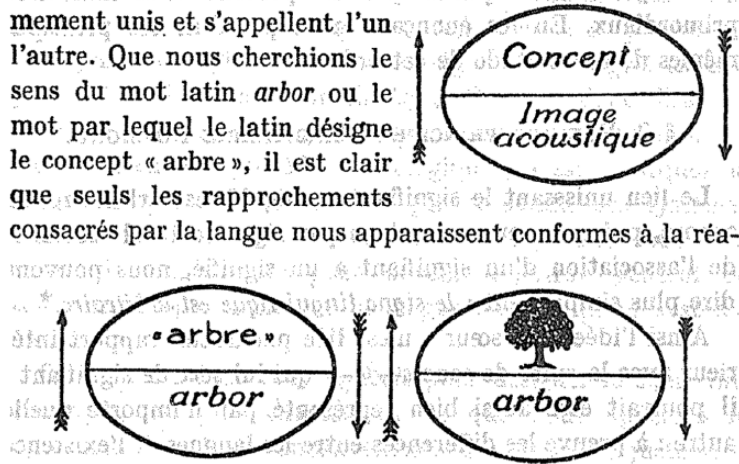
Figure 1. Detail, *Cours de linguistique générale* (Bally and Séchehaye, 1995[1916]: 99), 103 x 83 mm.

the horizontal cut metaphorizes the synchronic approach; the two surfaces, of course, look very different from each other (Figure 2). A nearby diagram with crossing lines and with the letters A, B, C and D at each end symbolizes the same dichotomy (Figure 3). Another figure consists of three different ways of writing the letter *t* in order to demonstrate that the value is identical regardless of the visual appearances (Figure 4).

In addition, an abundance of typographical symbols, glyphs, notations and diagrams (asterisks, braces, arrows, boxes, etc.) follows. So do verbal metaphors and analogies, for example, the bond between *signifiant* and *signifié* which is presented as similar to the relationship between two sides of a sheet of paper. Another example is Saussure's chess analogy, which, among other things, refers to the divided synchronic and diachronic approach to language. If a new player has to continue an ongoing game of chess from its present state, he does not need to know anything about the previous moves, but he has to know the rules of the game.

In the above-mentioned examples, the argument does not hold that all images from *Cours de linguistique générale* are equally famous, but it holds that some 'authentic' images are more known than the 'authentic' text and, moreover, that the number of images in the work far exceeds the few well-known images. Is this worth noticing? Considering the impact of the volume on structuralism, modern semiotics, etc., 'yes' must be a proper answer as these approaches privilege verbal language among a variety of sign systems. In *Cours de linguistique générale* the following is stated:
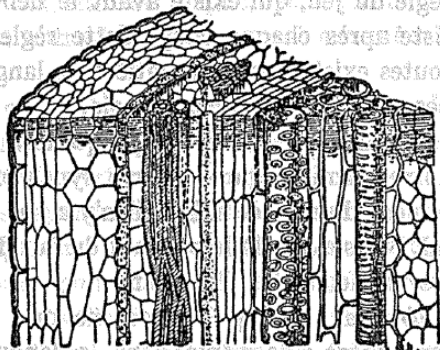
Figure 2. Detail, *Cours de linguistique générale* (Bally and Séchehaye, 1995[1916]: 125), 87 x 72mm.
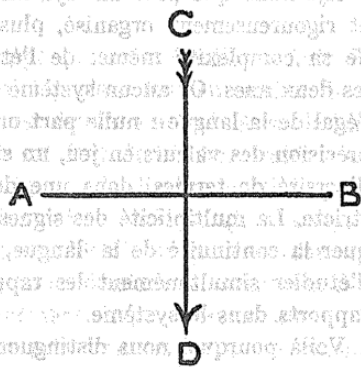

Figure 3. Detail, *Cours de linguistique générale* (Bally and Séchehaye, 1995[1916]: 115), 71 x 78mm.

> La langue est un système de signes exprimant des idées, et par là, comparable à l'écriture, à l'alphabet des sourds-muets, aux rites symboliques, aux formes de politesse, aux signaux militaires, etc., etc. Elle est seulement le plus important de ces systèmes. (Bally and Séchehaye, 1995: 33)

The purpose of Saussure's lectures was to put forward a science on the everyday life of signs, in which the system of language is enthroned as the most
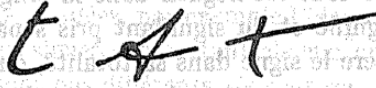
Figure 4. Detail, *Cours de linguistique générale* (Bally and Séchehaye, 1995[1916]: 165), 105 x 39mm.

important among sign systems. In the 1916 volume, this is phrased with modesty in the following famous sentence:

> On peut donc concevoir une science qui étudie la vie signes au sein de la vie sociale; elle formerait une partie de la psychologie sociale, et par conséquent de la psychologie générale; nous la nommerons sémiologie (du grec sémeîon, "signe") … La linguistique n'est qu'une partie de cette science générale. (Bally and Séchehaye, 1995: 33)

However, later the authors state:

> On peut donc dire que les signes entièrement arbitraires réalisent mieux que les autres l'idéal du procédé sémiologique; c'est pourquoi la langue, le plus complexe et le plus répandu des systèms d'expression, est aussi le plus caractéristique de tous; en ce sens la linguistique peut devenir le patron general de toute sémiologie, bien que la langue ne soit qu'un système particulier. (Bally and Séchehaye, 1995: 101)

With speech as a prime model, a system of signs is defined as a system with a double articulation which enables a semiotic code to arrange an infinite number of meaningful combinations (e.g. words/sentences) using a limited number of small units (e.g. phonemes). For instance, the French semiotician, Émile Benveniste (1902–1976), very much inspired by Saussure, thinks of words as pure signs that are present in every human action (Benveniste, 1971). As is well-known, it is difficult to define a visual sign system with a double articulation in this way.

In addition to the above-mentioned quotation, the relation between semiotics and linguistics is even reversed in the structuralist translation of Roland Barthes (1915–1980), also very much inspired by Saussure. Offhand, Barthes seems very sympathetic to visual semiotics in articles such as 'Le message photograpique' (1961) and the renowned 'Rhétorique de l'image' (1964a) and in the much later book *La chambre claire* (1980). All in all, he does acknowledge the pervasive existence of images in society. Nevertheless,

especially in his structuralist phase, he notes that semiotics is subject to linguistics. Barthes expresses this point of view in, for example, the 1964 introductory remarks to a special issue devoted to the state of semiotic research in the journal *Communications*: 'La linguistique n'est pas une partie, meme privilège, de la science générale des signes, c'est la sémiologie qui est une partie de la linguistique' (Barthes, 1964b). His opinion is withstanding throughout his structuralist writings. During the 1950s and 1960s, recurrent examples express this hierarchy between words and images: for example: ' nous sommes, bien plus qu'autrefois et en dépit l'envahissement des images, une civilisation de l'écriture … tout système sémiologique se mêle du langage' (Barthes, 1966). Even in his most explicit text on visual semiotics, the aforementioned 'Rhétorique de l'image' (1964a), the idea of 'une civilisation de l'écriture' surfaces.

In recent times, others – not least the French philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930–2004) – have named the sneaking logocentrism and phonocentrism of Saussure's thinking an 'impérialisme du logos' (Derrida, 1967: 12) which privileges the speech system in comparison with other sign systems and, in Derrida's close reading, writing in particular. With reference to Barthes' inversion of semiotics and linguistics, Derrida critically uses the word 'trans-linguistique' (p. 75). In terms of Saussure, Derrida argues that his tendency to consider writing as an expression of speech has led to the assumption that speech is closer than writing to the 'truth' or logos of meaning and representation. His critique is directed, among other things, towards Saussure's view of the weighty focus on writing in traditional linguistics. According to Saussure, the scientific study of traditional linguistics is writing, which is easier to handle than speech, which changes faster. Thus, he wants the aforementioned division between a diachronic and synchronic approach because writing is derived from the proper study of linguistics, i.e. speech. Saussure uses the metaphor of the relation between a portrait photo and the portrayed: in traditional linguistics, writing is comparable to the portrait, which, according to Saussure, only conveys a limited amount of information on the portrayed (Bally and Séchehaye, 1995). In Derrida's reading, this entails an understanding in which speech guarantees presence and authenticity, whereas writing as a graphical symbol represents artificiality and absence.

The presence of images in *Cours de linguistique générale* is also worth noticing because the possible impact on Saussure's theory of signs remains nearly untouched in Saussureana. Almost paradoxically, Derrida does not mention – with one exception – images, diagrams or glyphs in his, at times, idiosyncratic reflections (Harris, 2001) on the relationship between thought and speech in terms of Saussure. In discussing writing as graphical representation that is capable of producing meaning outside speech, Derrida (1967: 76, n 17) only refers to the above-mentioned *t*-figure. Jonathan Culler, who has introduced Derrida to an English reading audience several times, does not include the images in his book *Ferdinand de Saussure* (1976), and one of the

leading Saussure scholars in recent times, Roy Harris, is very reluctant as well. In his *Saussure and His Interpreters* (2001: 15) he notices a pause between two quotations in Riedlinger's notebook:

> There follows a little sketch (did Saussure draw it on the blackboard?) showing the schematic head of a speaker with a speech 'balloon' issuing forth from the mouth, as in the usual cartoon convention. The top half of the head is labeled 'sphère langue' and the inside of the balloon 's. parole'. The text then continues: …

Harris's parenthesis is remarkable because it almost mirrors a sudden impulse: where do the images in *Cours de linguistique générale* come from?

To do Harris justice, he does refer to Saussure's use of *diagrams* several times in *Reading Saussure* (1987), among other things the above-mentioned triple model of the sign. Besides the division in *concept* and *image acoustique* an image of a tree supplemented by the Latin *arbor* in a circle occurs in Harris's book (Figure 1). With reference to an older scholar (De Mauro, 1972), Harris points to the possibility that this version together with the arrows of all three circles is an insertion by the editors of the 1916 volume, and he further discusses its implications. In his verbocentric view, this insertion tends to create ' a rather naïve equation of concepts with pictorial images' (Harris, 1987: 59–61). He does not reflect further on the relationship between word and image, nor does he involve other types of images from *Cours de linguistique générale*.

As several examples demonstrate, Saussure's use of verbal metaphors and analogies is more obvious to highlight, e.g. Loïc Depecker's *Comprendre Saussure* (2009: 73 ff) which dedicates an entire chapter to 'L'image de la "feuille de papier"' and also refers to the chess metaphor on several occasions.

IMAGES IN *COURS DE LINGUISTIQUE GÉNÉRALE*

Several interesting aspects are worthy of tracking down now: first, the possibility of outlining, at least heuristically, the types of images presented in *Cours de linguistique générale*. Next, the philological or rather, in disguise of the connoisseur, the art historical question: is Saussure the creator of these images since he cannot simply be accredited with, or attributed, the authorship of *Cours de linguistique générale*? Or, perhaps more accurately: are all of these images from Saussure's hand? Finally, as indicated, does the use of images, whoever made them, have an impact on Saussure's theory of signs?

Offhand, the first aspect is relatively easy to handle: without too much dwelling on details and overlap, it is a matter of classification, partly between the images, partly between image and writing in Saussure's text. However, since the last-mentioned relation can very quickly complicate matters, the following sticks to a rather tentative classification. Roughly speaking, four or, perhaps, five groups that partly overlap are detectable: (1) diagrams or the like; (2a) 'realistic' or 'figurative' visualizations of notions and concepts in the text;
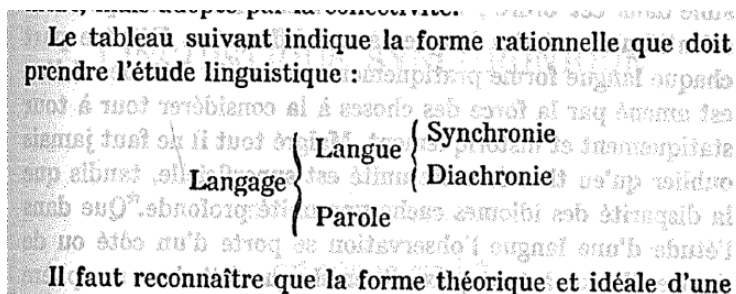
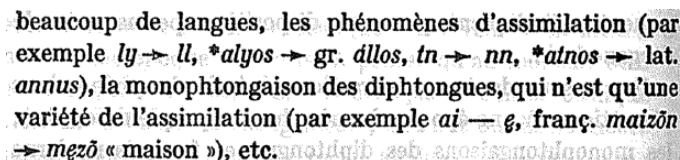Figure 5. Detail, *Cours de linguistique générale* (Bally and Séchehaye, 1995[1916]: 139), 107 x 41 mm.

Figure 6. Detail, *Cours de linguistique générale* (Bally and Séchehaye, 1995[1916]: 204), 104 x 24 mm.

(2b) 'graphical' visualizations of notions and concepts in the text; (3) mutually dependent writing and image à la Roland Barthes' *relais* (relay); and (4) images as integrated parts of the development of theory. Each of the groups will be discussed in more detail below.

(1) The major part of images in *Cours de linguistique générale* consists of diagrams and notations that combine, for example, braces, asterisks, equal signs, lines, boxes, arrows, and words and letters. This is not a uniform group. Some belong to the class of formal glyphs from the sciences of linguistics and logics; others are visually organizing arrows, boxes and lines (in Figure 3 a line and, specifically, an arrow crosses in organizing the letters a, b, c and d, in Figure 5 "Language" is divided in "Langue" and "Parole", and Langue", again, separated in "Synchronie" and Diachronie" by way of curly brackets, and in Figure 6 small temporal-logical arrows are combined with asterisks).

(2a) and (2b) Visualizations of notions and concepts in the text give rise to 'realistic' illustrations, e.g. the above mentioned visualizations of metaphors and analogies. The metaphor of the stem is an example, but also the drawing of a moraine in the 1996 volume can do as an illustration. In other cases, one can point to the use of integrated 'realistic' elements in diagrams such as 'a tree' and 'a horse'. These visualizations can also have a pure graphical content although they look like something recognizable – for instance, the two times two plates that, according to Saussure, symbolize respectively an erroneous and a correct understanding of the geographical development of language; or they can look like clouds or a landscape although they foremost symbolize the relationship between

bouche il est essentiel de distinguer les lèvres
angue β — γ (β désignant la pointe et γ tout le
dents supé-
le palais,
une partie
osseuse et
t une partie
molle et
voile du pa-
la luette δ.
es grecques
les organes
l'articula-
tres latines
assives.
ε, formée
scles paral-
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e ferme par
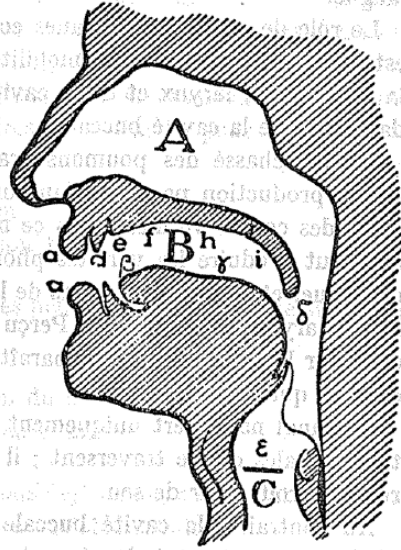ment. La fermeture complète n'entre pour ainsi

A

B

ε
C

Figure 7. Detail, *Cours de linguistique générale* (Bally and Séchehaye, 1995[1916]: 67), 86 x 104 mm.

speech and thought (respectively Bally and Séchehaye, 1995[1916]: 273 and 156).

(3) It is tempting to ask whether images actually figure as the Barthesian *relais*: that is, in a reciprocal relation with the text, in that each contributes its own part of the overall message (Barthes, 1964a). In fact, in the *Cours de linguistique générale* this includes, among other things, the abundance of diagrams and the like, where the visual elements are integrated in the message but also, on a bigger scale, the illustration of the human vocal apparatus and its functioning. For example, a drawing of a face, cut through in profile, with Greek and Latin letters positioned in the pharynx indicating active and passive elements respectively during the functioning of the vocal apparatus, is integrated in the surrounding text without further references than a very general description (Figure 7).

(4) The above-mentioned triple rendering of the letter *t* is also close to this *relais*. In addition, however, to a greater extent this illustration indicates that imagery is part of Saussure's thinking. Without the visual variety of the letter *t*, Saussure's point would be meaningless: the letter can look different, but the value is identical. In a similar way, 'tree', with the distinction between the image of a tree and the word *arbor* is a necessary component in Saussure's diagram of the sign in order to show the arbitrary relationship between the concept (the image of) 'tree' and the sound image (the word) 'tree'. The very sign, with the dividing line,

circle and arrows, whether it is an original 'Saussure' or not, questions this arbitrary bond between *signifié* and *signifiant* according to Mitchell (and in contrast to Harris's [1987: 59–61] above-mentioned remark on a 'rather naïve equation of concepts with pictorial images':

> The picture of the tree in the diagram is consistently 'overlooked' (in every sense of the word). It is taken to be a mere place-holder or token for an ideal entity, its pictoriality a merely accidental or conveniently illustrative feature. But the rendering of the signified concept as picture or what Saussure calls a 'symbol' constitutes a fundamental erosion in the Saussurean claim that 'the linguistic sign is arbitrary' … (That is, the linguistic sign is 'empty', 'unmotivated', and without any 'natural bond' between signifier and signified) … (Mitchell, 1996: 54)

Probably, Mitchell traces Saussure's term *symbole* in the same chapter of *Cours de linguistique générale* in which the diagram shows up. Here, Saussure opposes the naming of a linguistic term as *symbole*, because this is not an arbitrary sign: 'il n'est pas vide, il y a un rudiment de lien naturel entre le signifiant et le signifié' (Bally and Séchehaye, 1995: 101). In other words, the bond between the image of a tree and a tree is not as simple as the arbitrary bond between the word 'tree' and a tree. In this context, the American philosopher CS Peirce (1839–1914), a contemporary of Saussure, presents a more nuanced model with distinctions between icon, index and symbol for the possible bonds between the sign and the signified.

As mentioned, the Saussure-expert, Roy Harris, questions whether this diagram encircled in arrows actually is Saussure's own. This does not need to be settled here, but it should be noted that without a doubt, the circle, the dividing line and the distinction between *concept* and *image acoustique* are from the hand of Saussure (as Harris also notices, the arrows also occur later on in *Cours de linguistique générale*) (Figure 8). An identical diagram also occurs in preserved fragments of Saussure's manuscripts in which he questions the rigid nomenclature relationship between 'tree' and the latin word *arbos* as well as 'horse' and *equus* (Figures 9 and 10). A similar diagram is to be found in Émile Constantin's notes from the third series of lectures, and even though Constantin's published drawings probably have been subjected to a finishing treatment in comparison with the authentic notes, it seems very reasonable to suggest that Saussure did draw similar diagrams and models on the chalkboard during his lectures (Figure 11). One can argue that the horse does not look like a horse, but rather a sheep. However, in another, and more curious, context, Saussure delivers a proof of his skills in drawing horses. In a letter to his sons Jacques and Raymond he has sketched their aunt Albertine's small gray horse, 'Brigitte' (Figure 12).

On other occasions it seems more reasonable to question the illustrations in *Cours de linguistique générale*. The drawing of a stem in Figure 3 is very meticulously executed in the 1916 volume, and upon closer inspection a
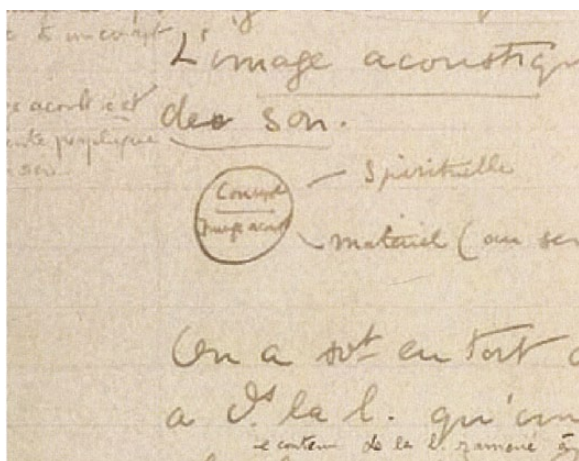
Figure 8. Detail, ms fr. 3572 f. 278, Bibliothèque de Genève. Departement des manuscrits, 98 x 77mm.
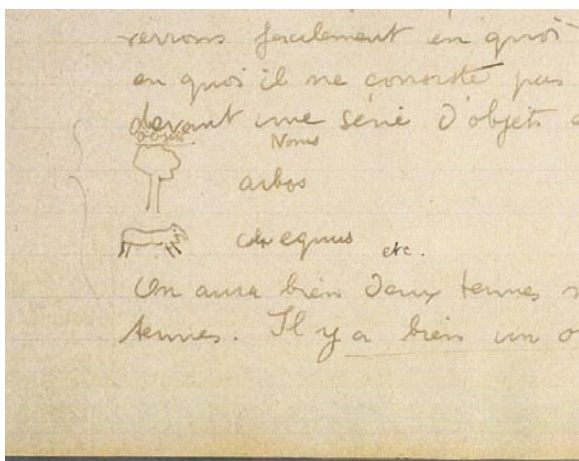

Figure 9. Detail, ms fr. 3972 f. 278, Bibliothèque de Genève, département des manuscrits, 137 x 113 mm.

signature appears, even though it is hard to identify. The similar drawing and signature recur in, for example, the English translation, which was published for the first time in 1960 (Figure 13). However, in Émile Constantin's notebook, which was published in 1958, the drawing of the two-sliced stem looks quite different. As mentioned, the drawing has probably been subjected to a finishing treatment before publishing but, nevertheless, it seems more reasonable that this more simple drawing is closer to what Saussure actually drew on the chalkboard than the detailed illustration from the 1916 publication (Figure 14).

In the rediscovered text fragments, which were published in 2002 as *Écrits de linguistique générale*, a good many illustrations, more than likely from

Saussure's hand, are to be found, even though the editors, Bouquet and Engler, do not draw attention to them, nor do they make any references. In fact, the questions of which drawings are authentic, which are deviates and which are additions in *Cours de linguistique générale* require a very close comparative labor between its different sources and are not easy to handle without the existence of an original manuscript as neither the editors Bally and Séchehaye, nor Saussure's students (or the publishers of their notes) took the effort to comment on the drawings. Moreover, in the context of this article, it seems that the answers are not important except from a philological point of view as it should be without doubt that images were a vital element in Saussure's way of expressing himself. In other words, he combined his written notes with images, and he integrated images in his lectures, and these images were partly visualizations of his ideas, partly integrated in his theories on the social life of signs in which he nevertheless privileged language as the prime model.

FLUCTUATING SIGNIFICATION

On the one hand, the image might, in a traditional sense, be considered a supplement to text and language in order to visualize points and metaphors; in addition, as a graphic symbol the image can facilitate communication. On the other hand, the image can act as a dangerous supplement in the Derridean sense as it is capable of undermining the theory of the precedence of language. That is, returning to Saussure's phrasings on the 'vie des signes au sein de la vie sociale' and the language as 'le plus important de ces systèmes' – so important that Barthes reverses the hierarchy between semiotics and linguistics – one has to realize that this is a very idealized structuralist notion that presupposes closed sign systems, which are, nevertheless, theoretical models condensed from everyday practice and recycled, tautologically, to analyze everyday communication. In everyday communication, matters are, however, more complicated.

Thus, Saussure's use as well as Bally and Séchehaye's reuse of drawings, figures, etc. become a dangerous supplement that plays down the precedence of language because their usage paves the way for dynamic processes of signification in which, in the traditional sense, different sign systems are at play simultaneously. From a pragmatic point of view, however, practices of signification cannot be reduced to the processes of separated and isolated sign systems outside time and space if one is to understand the complexity of communication. Already, the aforementioned pictorial elements in the sign model, the *image acoustique* and the visualization of *concept*, demonstrate difficulties in keeping things apart. Even in his structuralist phase, Roland Barthes uses pictorial elements. In his highly structuralist book *Systéme de la mode*, Barthes (1967: 12) defines a register of graphical symbols which are applied in the text (à la '/…/ : le mot comme signifiant', ') (: Relation de double implication ou solidarité', '• : relation de simple combination', etc.). He builds an ideographic

st une nomenclature, c'est-à-dire une liste
pondant à autant de choses.*Par exemple : |
ion est cri-
des égards.
des idées
préexistant : *ARBOR*
ce point,
155) ; elle
s si le nom
cale ou psy-
r peut être : *EQUOS*
s l'un ou
enfin elle   etc.   etc.
que le lien
à une chose est une opération toute simple,
oin d'être vrai. Cependant cette vue simpliste
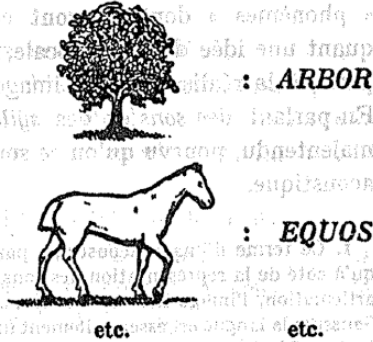ocher de la vérité, en nous montrant que

Figure 10. Detail, *Cours de linguistique générale* ((Bally and Séchehaye, 1995[1916]: 97), 78 x 99 mm.

nomenclature in order to facilitate reading, where he replaces text fragments with images. In later works, for example, *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* (1975), the author more explicitly touches on matters that cannot be expressed in verbal language. Family photos and other photos are combined with small notes, in some Barthes is present as 'child', 'student', or 'professor', in others his presence is mediated through photos of handwritten notes, his hospital case sheet or places where he once lived.

Moreover, it is easy to imagine that the lecturer Saussure more or less consciously expressed himself by way of other signs as well, in particular gesticulation, word stress and syllables, dress and so on in order to invoke, for instance, the dignity of a professor (and perhaps even cover leaks in his argumentation?). The production of signification arises by way of a dynamic use of (still in the traditional sense) different sign systems or separated visual, verbal and performative domains (Bucher and Nieman, 2012). In other words, verbal language (speech and writing) is not a privileged sign system in and of itself as much as it is always applied in context. In certain contexts, verbal language is even a hindrance for communication; it is not without good reasons that road signs, safety on board-flyers and warnings on cigarette packages nowadays are or are becoming dominated by images in one form or another, although they were considerable more dominated by text in earlier days.

The use of images is, however, not just limited to *mediation* and *communication* of information and knowledge, nor just illustrating strings of texts; images are at the same time incorporated in the production of knowledge and information. In structuralist semiotics, the problem of images is foremost
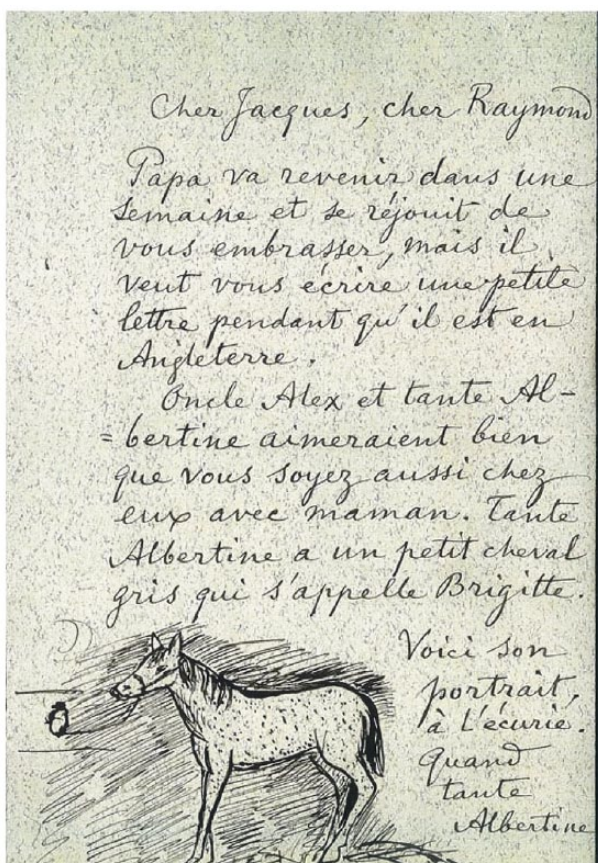
Figure 11. Detail, Archives de Saussure 398 f. 20. Bibliothèque de Genève, département des manuscrits, 210 x 297 mm.

encircled as the problem of the lack of the double articulation in comparison with, for example, language. Thus, images cannot be defined as an independent sign system. The lack of the double articulation is of course revealing the verbocentrism of structuralist semiotics, but at the same time it reproduces language and image as separate sign systems. In terms of the premises of this article, it might overshadow the important understanding of the fluctuating processes of signification between, for instance, word and images as well as the dynamic play with other signs in the production of meaning (Elkins, 1999).

In the text fragments of *Écrits de linguistique générale*, Saussure does reflect on how images might be used in certain contexts (see Bouquet and Engler, 2002a). In the fragment '[Sur les difficulties de la terminologie en linguistique ("Plus de figures!")]', which has motivated the title of the present article, Saussure ironically comments on the nomenclatural understanding of the relation between the object and its name: 'Plus de figures! Ainsi rien que les expressions répondant aux absolues réalités du langage? Beau programme

ne linguistique et en quoi il ne consiste pas. On se place
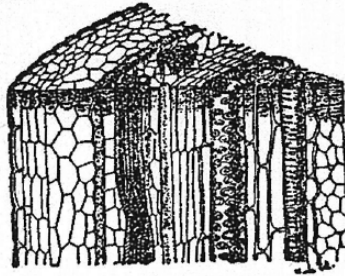érie d'objets et une série de noms:

Objets   Noms

arbos

equus

etc.

Figure 12. Detail, Komatsu and Harris (1993: 74), 93 x 61 mm.

ween the fibers—relations that we could never grasp by viewing
he longitudinal plane.

But of all comparisons that might be imagined, the most friutful
s the one that might be drawn between the functioning of language
nd a game of chess. In both instances we are confronted with a

Figure 13. Detail (Bally and Séchehaye, 1960: 125), 100 x 68 mm.

…' (p. 234). In continuation, he imagines how laid back the practice of the science of linguistics then could be. It might be added that thought, just as speech, is not nomenclaturally translatable word for word; rather, it is impossible to conceive it as a linear development from point A to point B. Often, written text follows this line, but thought develops in a hybrid use of different sign forms, in which images, for example, in the form of mind maps, perhaps better visualize how signification comes to mind. It should be noted that in Saussure's fragment, the use of *figures* refers to verbal metaphors, but as the previous discussion suggests, the 'image' is a dangerous supplement to verbal language in *Cours de linguistique générale* because – according to Derrida (1967: 208) – ' le supplément supplé. Il ne s'ajoute que pour remplacer.' Even in Saussure's chief volume, with such a huge impact on the 'imperialisme du logos' of the 20th century, signification emerges in a play between visual and verbal figures.
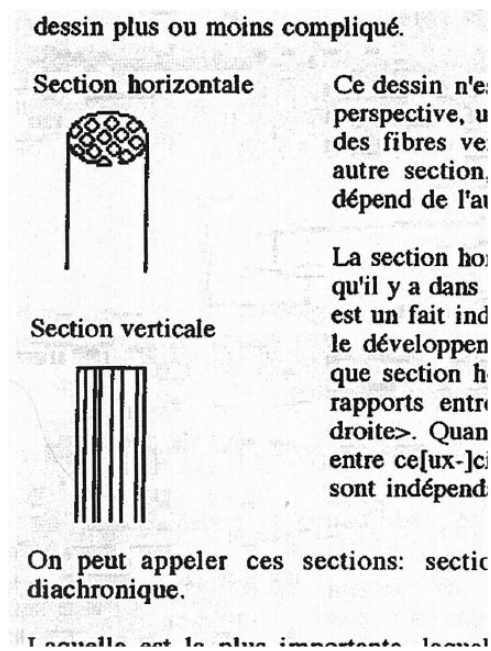
dessin plus ou moins compliqué.

Section horizontale

Ce dessin n'e
perspective, u
des fibres ve
autre section,
dépend de l'au

La section ho
qu'il y a dans
est un fait ind
le développen
que section h
rapports entr
droite>. Quan
entre ce[ux-]ci
sont indépend

Section verticale

On peut appeler ces sections: sectic
diachronique.

Laquelle est la plus importante, laquel

Figure 14. Detail, Komatsu and Harris (1993: 124), 84 x 92 mm.

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