One could reasonably argue that a genuine understanding of Ferdinand de Saussure’s conception of linguistics began in 1996 with the “discovery” of his orangery manuscripts, made widely available in French in 2002 and published in English in 2006 under the title *Writings in General Linguistics* (*WGL*). One could just as easily claim that he was already well understood by many and that the discovery of these writings has only strengthened their arguments. Either way, the progressive discovery of his posthumous writings today—and the extensive philological and hermeneutic efforts that this involves—is currently permitting us to develop new hypotheses both on Saussure’s project and its incompletion (Rastier 2003a: 24). One of these developments is the progressive shift away from the *sign* as a unit of semiotic description in favor of the *passage*. The perspective presented here has been developed over the last few decades, primarily in the works of François Rastier.

Despite having published a huge corpus of linguistic studies from phonetics to German legends, Saussure is still mostly known for a book he never wrote, the *Cours de linguistique générale* (*CLG*) published in 1916. Having been transposed through three different textual genres (i.e., from lecture notes to oral lectures to student notes to the edited manuscript), it is essentially a “third-hand” work (Rastier 2003a: 5). It is therefore no wonder that the discovery of his writings in 1996, having removed these transpositions, has permitted us to better understand the kind of linguistics he was envisioning as well as the extent to which he has been misunderstood by so many.

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1 Saussure, Ferdinand de. *Écrits de linguistique générale*. Editions Gallimard, 2002. (*ELG*)

2 In response to a reviewer of this chapter, let me note that the main contribution of this essay is greater than the concept of “passage”. It is about the need to move away from the sign toward the notion of the passage, just as the title suggests. Therefore, it is essential that we re-visit and re-evaluate Saussure’s work, and introduce his de-ontological perspective in order to understand the notion of passage at all.

3 The online journal *Texto! Textes & Cultures* provides an excellent point of entry into this perspective: www.revue-texto.net/index.php.
of his critics and fans alike. In the *WGL*, we can see the full force of Saussure’s militant non-realism and his radical departure from long-held conceptions of language.

While the fragmentary nature of these writings already presents us with a philological and hermeneutic challenge, Saussure is especially difficult to understand because he breaks away from ancient *topoi* perpetuated through the philosophy of language, as Rastier summarizes:

> It is true that it requires some effort to understand a thought that carries out a definitive critique of the millenary *topoi* of western philosophy of language: reference, the substantialism that goes with it, the ontological definition of parts of discourse, the problem of truth, mentalism, the dualism that opposes thought to its expression, the etiological fantasy, mechanism, etc.4 (2009b: 5)

Saussure’s project was a search for a method, not a treatise on general linguistics: “Let us not speak of *axioms* or principles or theses. These are simply, and in the pure etymological sense, aphorisms, *delimitations*” (Saussure i.1891–1894b: 82).5 As Rastier also points out, it is odd that the success of the notion of “general linguistics”, often attributed to Saussure, has been accompanied by the tacit abandonment of historical and comparative linguistics, which he was criticizing and improving (2013: 12). On the one hand, we have this nonchalant iconization of Saussure as the father of modern linguistics; on the other hand, we see the swift dismissal of his conception of linguistics and semiotics as no longer viable. Both cases are largely based on a misunderstanding of his work, compounded by the apocryphal *CLG*.6

The collection of Saussure’s largely ignored published work and the re-discovered manuscripts provide us with an optimal philological and hermeneutic hierarchy for entering into Saussure’s corpus, i.e., published work à manuscripts à student notes à *CLG* (Rastier 2009b: 10). However, many scholars go in precisely the opposite direction, often stopping at the *CLG*. This becomes a significant obsta-

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4 My translation.

5 The English translation in *WGL* says “definitions” instead of “delimitations” (i.1891–1894b: 82), but I prefer the latter term.

6 Even if we set aside the question the authenticity of the *CLG*, we are already presented with an enormous interpretive challenge, “for what was said in the *CLG* included things that had never been said before, either in French or in any other language” (Harris 2003:13).

7 We’ve had Godel’s *Sources manuscrits*... since 1959, but many linguists still conf-
cle when one considers the long list of shortcomings this book presents to us. The most important of these is the fact that the editors—who never attended Saussure’s course—inserted passages that are not found in any of the students’ notes and that misrepresent his arguments in fundamental ways. The editing of Saussure’s manuscripts by Engler and Bouquet is not without its own set of philological problems. On the one hand, the orangery manuscripts are extremely fragmented, improvised and scattered which makes their genre ambiguous and debatable. On the other hand, the edited and published version of these writings was never approved by Saussure himself. For example, each section corresponds to an envelope labeled by Saussure’s hand, but there was no indication of which order to put them in (Rastier 2013: 3). As Rastier puts it, Saussure signed it, but he didn’t give it his seal (2013: 4). Fortunately, however, we do have the “diplomatic” transcription loyal to original writings by Rudolph Engler (Saussure i.1891–1894) as well as the critical edition of René Amacker (Saussure i.1891–1894c).

Despite these setbacks, Saussure’s WGL clearly contradicts the CLG on many crucial points, and it surpasses it in many ways. Rastier sees it as having an intermediary position—like a missing link between the Mémoire and the Cours—for it cleanly formulates principles in CLG that were simplified by his students and over-manipulated by the editors (2013: 6). It also sheds light on Saussure’s interest in textual linguistics. Ultimately, the WGL, particularly the section titled On the Dual Essence of Language, offers us a much better point of entry into Saussure’s methodology (Rastier 2013: 6). In the wake of the resurging interest in Saussure’s work today, we are invited to reconsider his notion of semiotics, or semiology.

Today, many semioticians continue to think that the key concept is the sign and define semiotics as a “theory of signs” (Rastier 2000: 417). Contrary to this trend, semioticians working from a Saussurean perspective place the meaning at the very heart of semiotic theory and continue to place the CLG at the center of Saussure’s work, and as the point of entry into his corpus. (Rastier 2009b 2). Unfortunately, as Boris Gasparov notes, the gradual discovery and publication of Saussure’s unpublished work which began with Godel also coincided with a gradual rejection of Saussure. (2012: 5)

For a more detailed critique of the edition of the CLG, see Bouquet 2004, Harris 2003 & Rastier 2009b.

Gasparov gives a detailed description of this in Beyond Reason (46–52).

For a discussion of the challenge of determining its genre, see Rastier 2013 and Gasparov 2012: 50–52.
practice, opting instead for a praxeological perspective that integrates rhetorical and hermeneutic insights. *Meaning* is thus understood as a *practical action* and described in terms of interpretive paths rather than entities or relations. A sign is interpretation itself, never something to be interpreted:

From whichever side language is approached, it contains no objectively delimited and predetermined individual phenomena that necessarily stand out. (The moment one assumes the opposite, as is natural at first sight, one immediately realizes that some fact or other will have been arbitrarily and unsystematically isolated). (Saussure 1891–1894b: 11)

From this point of view, a *sign* could only be a simplified, decontextualized artifact of interpretation. Some semioticians, however, speak as though signs had an independent, pre-existing identity—or even that meaning itself pre-exists the experience of it! Saussure’s rejection of this stance makes it next to impossible to even compare the triadic sign model with the saussurean “sign”.

To even attempt to discuss Saussure in Peircian terms is doomed from the outset because the two projects are fundamentally different and incompatible. For example, in his critique of Saussure, John Deely offers this interpretation:

In Peircian terms, the Saussurean or, more generally, the semiological notion of sign on its broadest construal is hopelessly deficient, on several counts, for developing any general science (doctrine, rather) of signs. To begin with, the *signifiant* corresponds more or less to the sign-vehicle, but the *signifié* corresponds only partially to the notion of interpretant, and the notion of object signified is entirely wanting in the scheme. (Deely 2001: 682).

This leads him to conclude that Saussure’s “failure to bring this understanding under the rubric of a general theory of signs as he hoped might be possible, by contrast, is a historical failure” (Deely 2001: 686). This assessment of Saussure is misleading because Deely is essentially criticizing Saussure for not following the Poinso-Locke-Peirce-Sebeok tradition, when in fact, Saussure is explicitly breaking away from all realist, logic-based, referential, and ontological approaches to meaning. Saussure does not fail to conform to the a triangular model. He rejects it. Saussure’s semiotics of languages was never meant to be—nor should it be considered a part of—a general
theory of signs in the peircian sense, and even less a “doctrine” of signs. His signifiant does not correspond to representamen at all because it is the whole sign seen from a certain point of view. The signifié may partially correspond to the interpretant, but only if we separate it from the signifiant, which is exactly what Saussure says we should never do. Furthermore, Saussure explicitly distinguishes signifié from concept and completely excludes the “object signified” (or referent) from the sign. In no case whatsoever can a word be reduced to (i) the relation between a sign, a concept, and a thing (referent or object), (ii) the traditional aliquid stat pro aliquo. (Rastier 2003), nor even (iii) a relation of correspondence between two relations of “standing for” (Kockelman 2013: 51).

In order to continue developing Saussure’s semiotic project, we must abandon the representational conception of language that relies on a pre-formed ontology (Rastier 2003a: 28) in order to conceive of its creativity and its ability to present new ideas. As Saussure said, “the sentence is comparable to the activity of a composer of music (and not to that of a performer)” (Saussure 2006: 64). What we find in Saussure is the groundwork for a theory of action (see Rastier 2003a”: 28), for relations are always to be constructed, never given. These are fundamental methodological decisions that set him apart from other semiotic traditions, and that we will present below in relation to the notion of the passage.

The notion of point of view is fundamental to Saussure’s thinking. Meaning is made of differences that are qualified by and therefore dependent on the points of view that determine them (Rastier 2012a: 4). Saussure reiterates this point many times in his writings:

Let us remember in fact that the object in linguistics does not exist to start with, is not predetermined in its own right. Hence to speak of an object, to name an object, is nothing more than to invoke a particular point of view (i.1891–1894b: 8)

there is not the least trace of linguistic fact, not the slightest possibility of gaining sight of or defining a linguistic fact, without first adopting a point of view. (i.1891–1894b: 9)

where does the idea come from in the first place that there is a word which has then to be considered from different points of view? The idea is itself not arrived at except from a certain point of view, for it is impossible for me to see that a word, in the midst of all the uses made of it, is something given. (i.1891–1894b: 9)
From a saussurean perspective, linguistic “entities” are not empirically observable units nor are they “evidence” or “data”. They are only the momentary constructs of the interpretive action that assigns value to them (Rastier 2007: 27).

Traditional Western dualism separates the soul from the body, the intelligible from the sensible, and prevents us from acknowledging the autonomy of semiotic mediation, or *semiosis*, as an activity that is neither pure thought nor pure physical reality, but something else. By reducing meanings to representations and signs to physical objects, dualism compartmentalizes the signifier and the signified into separate entities. This allows some linguists to see language as an instrument of thought and supports the quest for universals based on the supposed universality of the physical world and the mind. However, it can never account for the irreducible diversity of languages as cultural formations (Rastier 2012: 1).

Contrary to the dualist tradition that makes the *signifié* a purely mental object and the *signifiant* a physical object, natural language is neither only material nor only mental (Rastier 2009b: 24–25), as Saussure clearly explains:

*Langue* has a physical side and a psychological side. But the unforgivable error which is found in every paragraph of the grammars is the belief that the psychological side is the *idea*, while the physical side is the *sound*, the *form*, the *word*. Things are rather more complicated than that. It is not true, indeed it is extremely false to imagine there to be a distinction between the sound and the idea. These are in fact inseparably one in our minds. (i.1891–1894b: 41)

Even though Saussure places both the signified and the signifier within the “psychic” domain\(^\text{11}\), he explicitly separates them from pure thought and places them in the semiotic “world”. While a *signifié* has its conceptual (mental) correlates, it belongs to language not to thought (i.1891–1894b: 25–26). The same can be said of the *signifiant* (signifier): it may correlate to salient physical forms, but it belongs to language.

Doing away with traditional dualism means that expression (signifier) cannot be a neutral receptacle (e.g., a sign vehicle) of a pre-existing content (signified) and language cannot be a mere instrument of thought (Rastier 2012: 11), for it is first and foremost a culturally

\(^\text{11}\) Saussure calls the signifier and the signified “the two psychological sides of a sign” (Saussure i.1891–1894b: 208).
inherited system and process that mediates our relation to the world and each other. By adopting a non-dualist view, we recognize that languages are between us, not inside us, for even when we talk to ourselves or think in a language, it is still a socially sanctioned and codified activity\(^\text{12}\) (Rastier 2000: 441). Thus, by “repatriating” the signified to language, and by distinguishing it from the logical or psychological concept, the content of a “sign” can no longer be universal and must be relative to a specific language.

Classical semiotic theories would have us believe that the signifier brings to mind something else that it is not (Rastier 2012: 16), but for a semiotics of values, the signifier and signified are inseparably one “in our minds” and mutually definable. The two poles of this duality are not opposites, nor even “opposable” as Saussure (i.1891–1894b: 3) insists: “it is wrong(and impracticable) to oppose form and meaning.” They are not antonyms, nor are even dichotomies. They are merely methodologically distinguished variables that depend on points of view (see Rastier 2012: 27). Thus, we have a duality that is both inseparable and variable. This may seem paradoxical, but only if one ontologizes the sign and its “components” and denies the semiotic world its autonomy.

While Saussure radically criticized substantialism, fixism, and reference in order to conceive of the autonomy of the semiotic and to objectify it scientifically (Rastier 2013: 10), he also understood how tempting it is to “re-ontologize” his dualities and separate them into parts:

The only given is the diversity of signs inseparably combined with the diversity of ideas, in a high degree of complexity. These chaoses, when brought together, lead to order. There is nothing more vain than wanting to establish order by separating them. Nobody, as we know, would dream of radically separating them. All that can be done is to tease them apart and to take either one or the other one as a starting point, after having made one or the other into something which is meant to exist in itself. This is precisely what we call wanting to separate two chaoses and what we believe to be the fundamental vice of the grammatical approaches we are used to.\(^\text{13}\) (Saussure 2002: 51)

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\(^{12}\) Saussure explains: “Langue is social, or else does not exist. If the language system is to become established in an individual’s mind, it must first be accepted by the community.” (Saussure i.1891–1894b: 208).

\(^{13}\) My translation.
This is why Rastier believes that the perennity of ontology (Rastier 2004: 23) is possibly the biggest reason why Saussure is misunderstood and dismissed and proposes to de-ontologize language.

Let us examine a classic diagram of the Saussurean sign that most of us are familiar with (See Figure 1).

![Figure 1. The Saussurean sign based on the Cours (i.1906–19011a: 99)](image)

In his own writings, Saussure never places a solid line between the signifiant and the signifié. His intention was never to compartmentalize the signifier and the signified. In fact, Saussure struggles with his metaphors because they often lead to ontology. For example, he abandons the comparison of the sign to a piece of paper because it suggests that the correlation between the two sides of the papers are somehow “fixed and given in advance” (Harris 2003: 221). He makes this all very clear in the “Miscellany and Aphorisms” section of the WGL (see Figure 2):

![Figure 2. The sign in Writings in General Linguistics (Saussure i.1891–1894b: 68)](image)

The dotted line de-compartmentalizes the sensible and the intelligible, while the diagonal suggests graduality. It not just a relative distinction, but also a gradual one: we are more or less in the signified and we are more or less in the signifier (Rastier 2013b). There can be relative and variable degree of dominance between the signifier and the signified, the middle zone being where the signifier and signified are more or less equal. For example, the occurrence of a rhyme in poetry is a moment when the signifier may dominate one’s linguistics perception, while the anticipation of a certain content would be an
example where the signified is the dominant point of view. Rastier explains that in the duality content/expression, content is both known and in search of an expression, while expression is wanting to be assigned meaning. In the acts of enunciation and interpretation, their bond is always revisable. This is the critical nature of all semiosis (2012: 11).

This notion of duality is one of the keys to understanding Saussure. At one point, he even refers to it as the “law of Duality” (i.1891–1894b: 208). Because the sign is “already double given the internal association it bears” (i.e., signifiant/signifié) and “double by its existence in two systems” (i.e., langue/parole), it is “subject to double manipulation” (i.1891–1894b: 208). In this way, Saussure accounts for linguistic complexity without having to break language into separate parts. By observing the interaction of these dualities in a given act of interpretation, the opposition matter/mind gives way to the opposition simple/complex (Rastier 2012a: 7), for the signifier and the signified are not isomorphic: a compact expression (signifier) can correspond to a diffused content (signified) and vice versa. Thus, every interpretive trajectory is complex insofar as the poles of these dualities always intervene (2012a: 7). Saussure applies this methodology to semiotics as a whole when he declares: “Semiology = morphology, grammar, syntax, synonymy, rhetoric, stylistics, lexicology, etc., all of which are inseparable.” (i.1891–1894b: 26). All of these “domains” of linguistic inquiry are in fact different points of view from which to appreciate and describe the complexity of languages¹⁴ as well as other semiotic performances.

In order to understand how the notion of passage follows this line of thinking, we will now turn to Saussure’s brief presentation of the kenome and the associative seme (Saussure i.1891–1894b: 63). It is here that we find a clear understanding of the linguistic sign as a moment of interpretation instead of as an ontological entity or relation:

We mistakenly believe [there to be]

(1) a word such as voir for example which exists in its own right.

(2) a meaning, which is the thing associated with this word.

But..., in other words it is the association itself which makes the word, and without it there is nothing.

The best proof of this is that voir, in another language, would have another meaning: is therefore nothing itself: and thus is

¹⁴ From this perspective, the tripartition of semiotics and linguistics into syntax, semantics, and pragmatics and the subsequent search for “interfaces” between them seems unnecessary.
only a word insofar as it evokes a meaning. But, once this is clear, it becomes obvious that you can no longer divide things up, putting the word on one side, and its meaning on the other. The two things make a whole.

All that one can do is to assert the existence of the kenome $\cap$ and the associative seme $\mathcal{X}$.

The kenome and the associative seme lead us to a contextual model of the sign (Rastier 2003a: 34). The graphic representation of the kenome does not separate signifier from signified; they form a whole (Rastier 2003a: 34 & 2005). It also suggests an onomasiological perspective: the signified opens towards undetermined signifiers. With the addition of the associative semes, the monadic sign is destroyed, for it represents the sign as contextually defined (Rastier 2003a: 34) and also gives it a temporal orientation. The up/down distinction gives way to a left/right opposition that brings in the preceding and following context. According to Rastier, Saussure’s use of concave forms instead of convex ones represents a negative ontology of differences that breaks away from the round forms of identitary ontology of the parmenidian tradition. (2003a: 4).

Because languages depend “fundamentally on differences” and not on “positive values” (Saussure i.1891–1894b: 47), Saussure rejects any ontological conception of language founded on identity. Rastier explains that “linguistic objects are neither identical to themselves, nor homogeneous, nor discrete, nor stable. They are taken up by continuous transformations that make each occurrence into a hapax”\textsuperscript{15} (2013: 9). Because the entire situation and context in which a word is uttered is never reproducible, its meaning can never rely merely on its reference to something other than itself, nor on a typical form, but rather first and foremost on its participation in a text understood as a contextual action. So, when language loses its ontological “anchoring”, its units get their meaning, not from the world, but from and through texts (Rastier 2009b: 23).

In the 19th century, it was commonplace for linguists to study myths and other texts as part of their linguistic projects. For Saussure, the study of textual units and the study of words are both part of semiology and subject to the same principles at different scales of complexity. He even compared elementary units of expression like runes to macrosemantic structures like a characters. (2009b: 23). Because the instability of language is a result of textual creativity, the

\textsuperscript{15} My translation.
fundamental unit of language is the text, not the sign. On the one hand, an isolated sign is only a methodological decision and cannot be empirically observed (Rastier 2003). On the other hand, many textual units are not made up of signs, such as themes or narrative functions (Rastier 2006: 3), and they may be the result of linguistic norms beyond the grammar (i.e., genres) as well as other social norms.

According to Rastier, Saussure can be considered as a preparatory instruction and introduction to the sciences of the text. (2009b: 14). For example, in the CLG, Saussure makes it clear that “in a sign, what matters more than any idea or sound associated with it is what other signs surround it” (Saussure i.1906–19011b: 118), for a language is a system in which “the value of any one element depends on the simultaneous coexistence of all the others” (1983: 113). Émile Constantin’s notes from the third course (Saussure i.1910–1911: 89a) illustrate this principle of contextuality (Figure 3).

![Figure 3. The principle of contextuality based on the notes of Emile Constantin](image1)

When two signs (or kenomes) enter into relation (via associative semes), they are inseparably one and never isolated. At the same time, the signifié and the signifiant of any given sign can be associated with any signifiant or signifié of another sign, as we see in Saussure’s own hand (Figure 4).

![Figure 4. (Saussure i.1891–1894a: 290)](image2)

This indicates that the context of a unit of expression (signifier) can be a unit of content (signified), and reciprocally.

Today, this can be “mapped out” in the form of interpretive paths
as we see in the elementary enunciative and interpretive trajectories proposed by Rastier (2003a: 38) in Figure 5.

![Figure 5. Elementary enunciative and interpretive trajectories](image)

These interpretive paths also permit us to speak of heteroplanar (Sé ←→ Sa) and homoplanar (Sé ←→ Sé; Sa ←→ Sa) contextualizations. The trajectory of signifieds is inseparable from that of signifiers because all their relations mutually condition each other (Rastier 2003a: 39). However, the signifier is never the point of departure for it must itself be recognized first\(^\text{16}\). A signifier never imposes itself in the form of *evidence* (in the logical positivist sense) or *data*, for semiosis can only be fixed as the result if an interpretation. (Rastier 2012: 13). By applying the differential principle to the syntagmatic trajectory of interpretation, we have a sort of “horizontal” semiosis, essentially that of a linguistics of *parole*.

Following through with the saussurean perspective, we can also say that the text (as a cultural object) and the practice that produces it are inseparably one, a duality, “for a text is produced by a constant activity of rewriting” that guarantees its cohesion” (Rastier 2009a: 14). As opposed to a compositional approach, we cannot identify the “building blocks” of a text without first considering the entire text and the genre. Saussure’s notion of *value* “excludes an atomistic definition of the sign” and “prohibits the compositional definition of meaning, because as a structural principle it argues that the local phenomena are determined by the global ones.” (Rastier 2002: 36).

By treating contextualized meaning as an inseparable oneness emerging solely from differences—or “action-values” (Bouquet 2002: 27) –, the *kenome* and the *associative semes* provide the groundwork for the current notion of the *passage*. Rastier offers the following hypothesis: since *parole* “commands” *langue*, the sign is first and foremost a *segment of parole* (2005). This point of view is clearly supported by Saussure himself when he uses the expression “sign of *parole*” and

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\(^{16}\) Identifying signifiers may be a point of entry into a text or semiotic performance, but it is “preceded by expectations and presumptions that define the contract proper to the textual genre of the practice in progress; it also seems to be a point of return.” [my translation] (Rastier 2012: 13).
not “sign of langue” (2002: 265). Conceiving of the “sign” in this way permits us to restore it to the text from which it came and where it is in fact reconfigured with each use (Rastier 2007: 32). Rastier therefore proposes to replace the monadic sign presented in CLG by reformulating the ancient notion of the passage as both a place in a text and a moment of interpretation that chooses and isolates it.

The passage is of variable breadth and enclosure and it has no fixed borders, for its scope depends on the point of view that determines its selection. It could be a word, which is already a syntagm, or even a whole text insofar as it points toward an intertext (Rastier 2003a: 48). Because a passage is a purely relational and contextual unit, its relative “closure” can only be identified when relations within a passage are stronger than relations between passages (Rastier 2009a: 13). Rastier notes that this is less paradoxical that it sounds. After all this situation is common to all cultural sciences: data — les données (the “givens”) — are what we give ourselves, for nothing imposes them on us and we always choose them (Rastier 2003a: 36). He proposes an elementary diagram of the passage (Figure 6).

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{fragment of content} & \subseteq \text{extract of expression} \\
\end{align*}
\]

Figure 6. The passage (Rastier 2011: 62)

On the plane of expression (signifier), “the passage is an extract (e.g., in between two blanks, a minimal character sequence; in between two pauses or punctuation marks, a period” [Rastier 2009a: 12]). On the plane of content, “the passage is a fragment pointing at its left and right, near and distant contexts.” (Rastier 2009a: 12). The associated context can be described in terms of “correlate fragments” and “co-occurent extracts” (Rastier 2011: 63). To account for the effects one passage may have on other passages, he proposes the terms portée du fragment (impact or reach of a fragment) and incidence de l’extrait (incidence or repercussion of an extract) (2011: 62–63). The reticular nature of the passage is further complexified through the distinction between form and background (fond) on both the semantic (signified) and expressive (signifier) planes (see Rastier 2009a)\(^\text{18}\). Depending on

\(^{17}\) The English translation by Carol Sanders and Matthew Pires says, “the speech signs which make up language” (Saussure i.1891–1894b: 190).

\(^{18}\) This is developed in detail in Rastier 2009a.
the passage, its internal structure may be compact or diffused throughout the text, while its correlates and co-occurrents may be near or far from it. In an anagram, for example, a compact semantic unit can be signified in a diffused manner by disseminated phonemes, e.g., isophony (Rastier 2009b: 25).

Extracting a passage, necessarily decontextualizes it, so our task is to determine what qualifies it as “detachable” while still acknowledging it’s connection to the text from which it came. To address the problem of qualifying a passage as a datum, Rastier introduces a new duality, which he calls point of view/guarantee (2009a: 13):

The passage comes under the general model of textual datum, defined by four posts...namely: a signifier, or the extract; a signified, or the fragment; a point of view, which rules over the description or application process; a guarantee (made possible by the setting up of the text and the constitution of the corpus).

The duality signified/signifier is thus regulated by a duality at a superior level between point of view and guarantee. A point of view is an instance determined by a practice and an individual or collective agent. It is not simply a point of observation: for example, in data processing, it depends on the application. (Rastier 2012: 28). Guarantee is the instance of validation that founds the evaluation of the studied unity: this instance is a social norm that can be juridical, scientific, religious or simply endoxale. This englobing duality calls upon the philological, rhetorical, and hermeneutic traditions (Rastier 2000: 438) concerned with questions of legitimacy (hermeneutics) (Rastier 2012: 28); ethos (rhetoric); and signature and authentication (philology) (Rastier 2000: 438). In short, the point of view determines the object (i.e., semiosis) and the guarantee legitimizes it (Rastier 2014: 36).

Because Hjelmslev’s terms expression and content can lead to confusion (i.e., content implies that something is “contained”, while expression could imply that something pre-existed it’s expression [Rastier 2003a: 49]), Rastier proposes the terms value (instead of signified or content) and phore (instead of signifier or expression), as we see in his elementary model of the cultural object (2011: 54), in Fig.7.

Figure 7. The Elementary Semiotic Model of the Cultural Object
While *phore* and *value* constitute *semiosis*, *point of view* and *guarantee* constitute *ethesis* (Rastier 2010: 18). In this way, we can define the border between *internal linguistics*, in the relations between the two planes of language (*semiosis*), and *external linguistics*, in the agreement between the point of view and the guarantee (*ethesis*). Rastier uses Saussure’s *CLG* to illustrate the notions of *point of view* and *guarantee*: the *CLG* reflects the point of view of its editors Bally et Séchehaye and, on several decisive points, it opposes the point of view assumed by Saussure in his published and unpublished writings. At the same time, the diffusion and notoriety of this work among linguists gives it a certain guarantee. The result is a precarious and questionable solidarity between the point of view and the guarantee. (2012: 31).

A good example of how passages are identified, combined and transformed can be found in what Justin Wishne and Bryan Nicolas call “the most versatile joke on earth” (2011: iii) in which the expression “That’s what she said” is used “to inject sexual innuendo into otherwise innocent, everyday conversations” (xii). For example, one person trying to fit a large object into a small bag says, “I can’t fit it in, it’s too big”. Someone else follows by saying, “That’s what she said” (TWSS). Here are three more examples:

- My girlfriend was on her way to pick me up and my sweatshirt was damp, so my mom gestured to the dryer and said, “Stick it in and keep it in ’til she comes!” TWSS. (Wishne & Nichols 2011: 92)

- I did a PowerPoint presentation and a couple of days later I got my grade back. As my teacher handed it to me, she said, “Everything was great, but your oral presentation didn’t satisfy me enough.” TWSS. (2011: 21)

- Today, during a trombone feature, our band director told the trombone section, “More! Keep giving me more until I beg you to stop!” TWSS. (2011: 19)

The addition of “TWSS” re-orient the interpretation of the previous text as though it were something that a woman said during sexual activity, thereby actualizing a /sexual/ isotopy that re-organizes the semantic structure (e.g., “comes” becomes an orgasm; “oral presentation” becomes “oral sex”; etc.). The segment of text on the left (e.g., “Keep giving me more until I beg you to stop!”) is already part of a passage about another activity (e.g., directing a trombone sec-
tion), but the addition of “TWSS” isolates it and integrates it into a new passage. The passage on the right retroactively re-directs the interpretation of the passage on the left giving rise to a new passage. This transformation involves metatopy (a change of semantic background, e.g., /musical activity/ to /sexual activity) and metamorphism (a change in semantic form, e.g., “sticking a sweatshirt in the dryer” to “sexual penetration”). When we have a change in the relations between form and background, it is called transposition (Rastier 2007: 45–46).

As a transposable topos, “TWSS” acquires a certain autonomy, much like a proverb or saying, yet it is never the same, for it always integrates itself inseparably into the passage that precedes it, resulting in a unique construction. In that moment, the relations within this new passage become “stronger” than those that connect it to context on the left or right. It would be mistake to think that one could explain this kind of humor by identifying pre-existing “signs” or “meanings”, for it is always to be constructed. Furthermore, grammatical rules alone cannot account for their construction because it also involves other social norms, i.e., the norms of this joke as social practice and a genre. These norms serve as conditions, constraints, and licenses that determine how we can construct these passages, and thereby give us a set of expectations and even anticipations that also participate in their construction (i.e., semiosis). Familiarity with this social practice will predisposes us toward a sexual interpretation, while someone unfamiliar with it might be taken aback or confused (at first). In other words, the point of view constructs the sexual theme while the guarantee legitimizes it. It is also in this relation of ethesis that the practice of this joke also becomes an ethical question. Teenage boys, for example, will most likely generate a different guarantee than adult women.

As a unit of meaning, the passage is both open to and inseparably one with its immediate linguistic context and the social practice that articulates it. At no time can we say that a passage or its meaning pre-exists its construction, for even its anticipation is part of an interpretation in progress. Its full understanding relies entirely on a situated interpretative action. Replacing the sign model with the passage leads us to a praxeology and allows us to see how zones of local, stabilized meaning result from the global context (Rastier 2014: 121). Because it is concerned with values constructed though differences, it helps us understand the localized and creative character of all activities of knowing (Rastier 2001: 344). Overall, the passage is better equipped than the monadic sign for describing complexities of linguistic inter-
interpretation as well as the qualitative inequalities that result from each interpretation, for the meaning of a passage changes every time it is (re)constructed.

The passage also promises better results because it does not postulate the identity of units in and of themselves while still admitting discrete units or even absent units by contrasting sections or texts belonging to the same corpus (Rastier 2013: 19). Just as a word is only understood in contrast to its neighbors both paradigmatically and syntagmatically, a text is also understood in comparison to other texts of the same genre (Rastier 2014: 55). Because a text is a cultural object that interacts with other texts and non-linguistic semiotic performances, an entire text can also be treated as a semiotic passage, whether in a social practice, a corpus or an intertext. In this way, the notion of passage lends itself well to the comparative and differential methods of the cultural sciences in general. As Rastier explains, these are sciences of values, not facts; of conditions, not causes; of individuals, not universals; of processes, not beings; of occurrences, not types; of praxeologies, not ontologies (Rastier 2012a: 8). From this point of view, cultures can only be defined by comparison to other cultures, through their differences as well as through their interaction. Perhaps we should qualify cultures as passages too.

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