Saussure

Ferdinand de Saussure

- 1857–1913
- Swiss linguist and semiotician
- taught linguistics of ancient languages at the University of Geneva
- “Course of General Linguistics” is the beginning of semiotics

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Signifier

The idealized form that sign takes

Signifier

a sound image

Signified

The concept that the sign represents

Signified

a concept, not a thing

Saussure's "Course in General Linguistics"

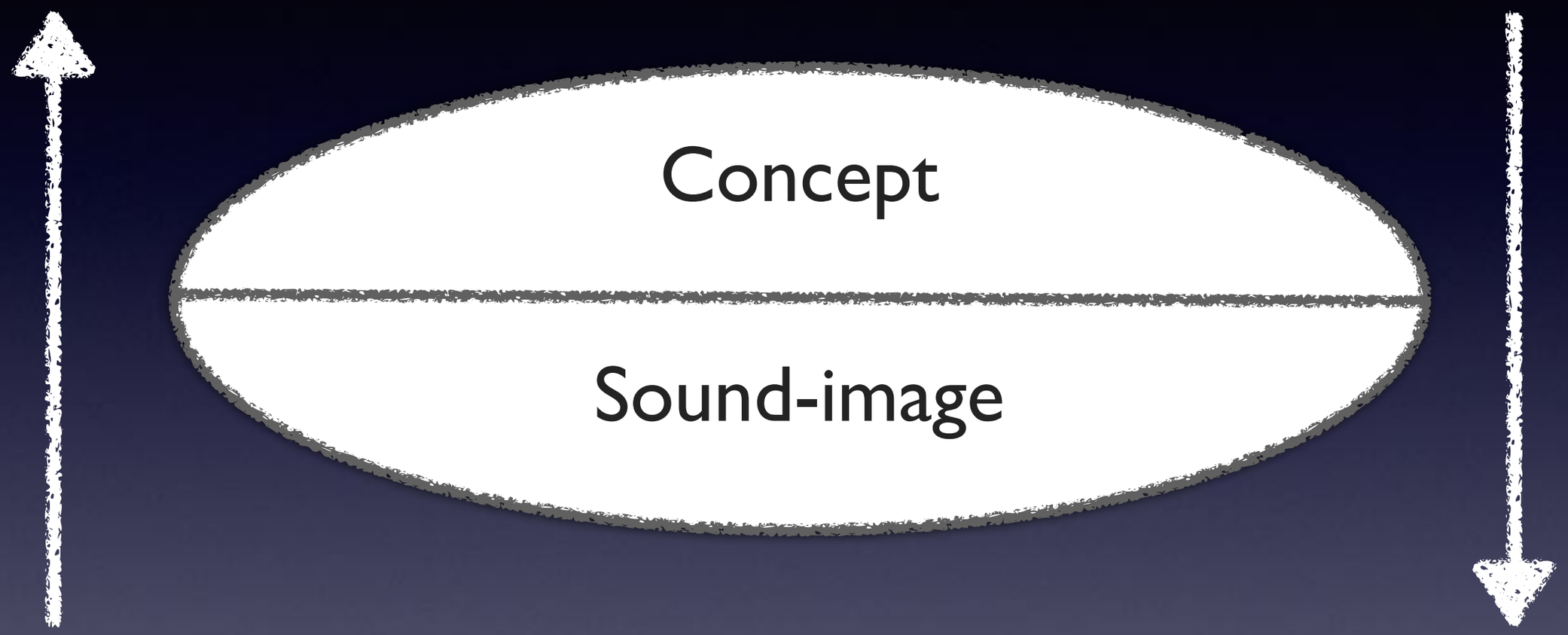
- One of the foundations of semiotics
- Linguistic perspective
- Human language as the ultimate system of signs

Signifier + Signified

To Saussure, the sign is the combination of signifier and signified

The connection between the *signifier* and the *signified* is an *arbitrary* one

The Sign



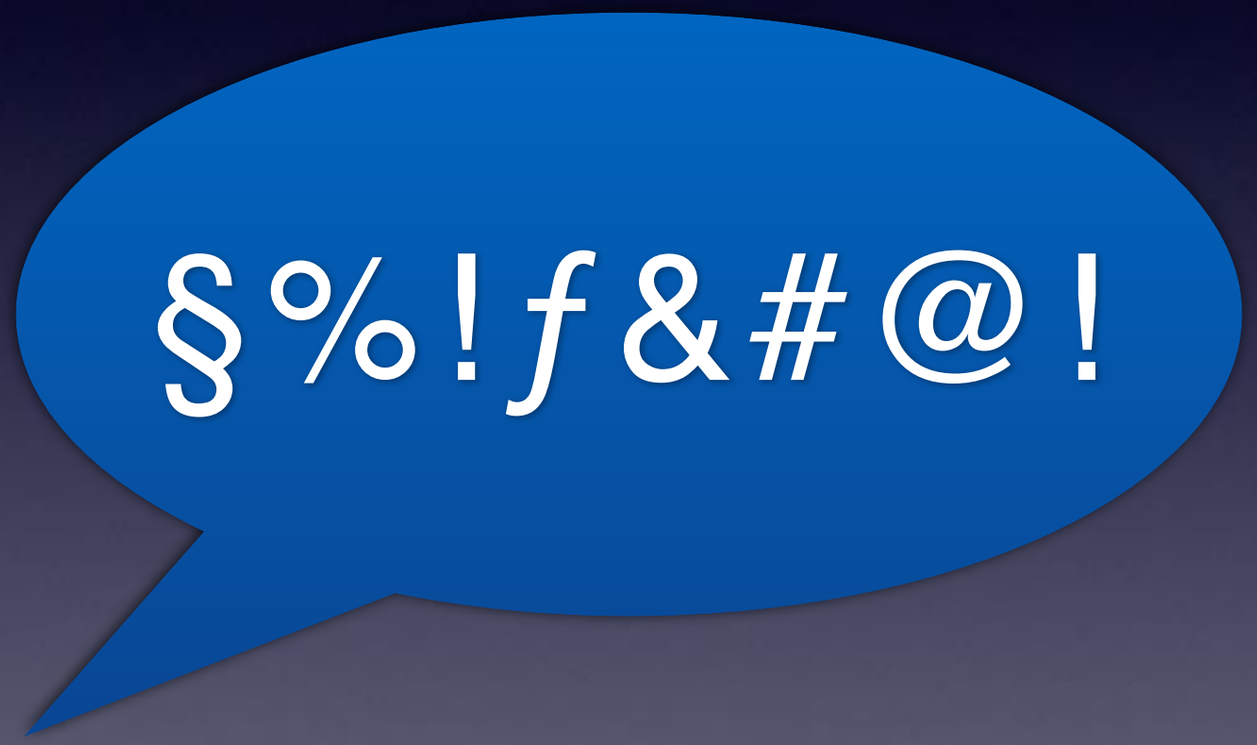
Language is a system of arbitrary connections

A problem

Saussure focusses almost entirely on language - both spoken and written.

Onomatopoeia

Interjections



Another problem

Are signifier and signified real things? Or are they mental constructs?

langue vs. *parole*

The rules vs. the implementation

diachronic vs. *synchronic*

diachronic - evolution over time
synchronic - a description of a particular state

relations

concepts are defined by their relation to other concepts

[bracketing]

Excluding the “referential object”
There are no “things” in Saussure - only signs.

meaning is *differential*

We understand things by what they are not, rather than what they are.

Semiosis

The process of using signs