Ferdinand de Saussure (November 26, 1857 – February 22, 1913)
“The Nature of the Linguistic Sign”

I. Language is a cleanly defined unit that is separate and detached from speech.
   a. “Language, […] is a self-contained whole and a principle of classification” (22).

II. The act of speaking with another person constitutes a “speaking-circuit.”
   a. Units of a “speaking-circuit”
      i. Concepts
      ii. Sound-images
      iii. Two people capable of processing concepts and sound-images
   b. Short example
      i. David: “Hey Amy! Did you see the new tree that was planted near the vending machines at Kuykendall Hall?”
         1. David thought of the tree object which initiated a psychological response in his brain. He linked the word, tree to a sound-image in his brain of the tree, outside Kuykendall Hall.
         2. His brain sent a signal to his mouth to make the correct vocal sounds to express the image of the tree to his friend, Amy. Saussure calls this a physiological process.
         3. A physical process takes place as the sound David produced, travels to Amy’s ears.
   c. Foreign languages
      i. When we hear speech in another language, we can process the sound but nothing else is possible because we don’t understand the language.
   d. Language and speaking can be thought of in separate ways.
      i. “In separating language from speaking we are at the same time separating:
         (1) what is social from what is individual; and
         (2) what is essential from what is accessory and more or less accidental” (24).

III. Speech as an accessory. Which came first, the chicken or the egg?
   a. “[L]anguage is necessary if speaking is to be intelligible and produce all its effects; but speaking is necessary for the establishment of language […]” (24).
      i. Speech is the tool to express language, but without speech, language cannot be learned in the first place.
IV. Linguistic Sign
   a. Saussure, defines the linguistic sign as, “a two sided psychological entity […]” (26).
      i. Side 1: Concept or signified
      ii. Side 2: Sound-image or signifier
         1. Side 1 is defined by Side 2.

   b. Explanation of the linguistic sign
      i. In the previous example, the word, tree (which was uttered by David)
         was the signifier or Side 2.

      ii. The concept: tree.

   c. The linguistic sign is static.
      i. The relationship between the signifier and the signified is static as a whole.

   d. Or is it?
      i. The linguistic sign can change over time.
         1. The word tree might be associated with other types of trees over time.