

A longer version of this talk was presented at the Linguistisches Kolloquium der Sprach- und Literaturwissenschaftlichen Fakultät der Universität Bayreuth (28 avril 2015)

<https://www.academia.edu/12189196/>

# *Dynamiques de la construction du sens et élaboration sémiotique en contexte*

Languages, language...dynamics and  
relevance

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*DIVERSITY LINGUISTICS : RETROSPECT AND PROSPECT*

*1-3 mai 2015*

*Leipzig, Germany*

*Closing conference of the Department of Linguistics at the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology*

« **Semiotic dynamics** »  
(Dynamique sémiotique)...

What  
exactly does  
this mean?



I need an *example*, to explain what  
does this mean!...



Now, before present you an example, we need  
some « *tools* »...

and we have to identify some « *objects* ».



Tools are « *notions* »,

Objects are « *phenomena* » and

« *dynamics* ».

Some « *notions* »...

## First: *'communicational frame'*



I call *'communicational frame'* the space which the interactors *must share* for their communication to be effective...,

...and *in which the meaning is supposed to be passed without major distortion.*

# First: *'communicational frame'*



It can be *presupposed* or *posed*,

it can be established *de facto* or *de jure*;

it can *'go without saying'* or be *imposed*,

it can be *negotiated* or *not...*



First: *'communicational frame'*

It is always present.



## Second: *'contextualization'*



This is an essential and decisive concept... but it's also a well known concept (J. Gumperz, of course...)!

So, we can proceed to the next step.

### Third: *'historicity retention'*



*Historicity* is developed through our ordinary linguistic practice and is partly built from it (out of it)...

### Third: *'historicity retention'*



... Because it depends on human actors,  
it always *presupposes* a process of resetting and transforming  
the signs...

This is '*historicity retention*'.



... backed by an state prior whose *contextualization* is functionalized for the occasion.

a *'phenomenon'*:



*'communication, in general'...*

and a '*Dynamics*':



... the '*communicator activity*'.



**And what's it all for?**





*To try to understand the process of building signs...*

More precisely here,... to analyse the *emergence* of the *co-construction* of a *sign*.



So, now it is time to begin with my example...



...In fact, I decide to « *resume an older example* » that I have already used, because it seems to be very « *illustrative* »!

# The example.



*An excerpt of Marcel Proust's Swann's Way.*


“No **cattleya**, then, to-night?” he asked, “and I’ve been looking forward so to a nice little **cattleya**”.

But she was irresponsive; saying nervously: “No, dear, no **cattleya** tonight. Can’t you see, I’m not well?”

“It might have done you good, but I won't bother you.”

She begged him to put out the light before he went; he drew the curtains close round her bed and left her.

*Marcel Proust, Swann's Way.*



What particularly interests us, here,  
it is...

the *transformation process* of

'*cattleya 1*' (« the orchid »)

to '*cattleya 2*' (« to make love »).

The background of the slide features a soft-focus image of several pink flowers, likely peonies, with delicate petals and yellow centers. The flowers are scattered across the frame, creating a gentle, naturalistic backdrop for the text.

This *transformation process* requires **seven steps**.

1. Conjunction,
2. Presentation,
3. Re-presentation,
4. Thematization,
5. Representation,
6. Sign,
7. Trivialization.

## 1. The conjuncture.

She had in her hand a bunch of cattleyas, and Swann could see, beneath the film of lace that covered her head, more of the same flowers fastened to a swansdown plume. She was wearing, under her cloak, a flowing gown of black velvet, caught up on one side so as to reveal a large triangular patch of her white silk skirt, with an 'insertion,' also of white silk, in the cleft of her low-necked bodice, in which were fastened a few more cattleyas.

*Marcel Proust, Swann's Way.*



## 2. The presentation.

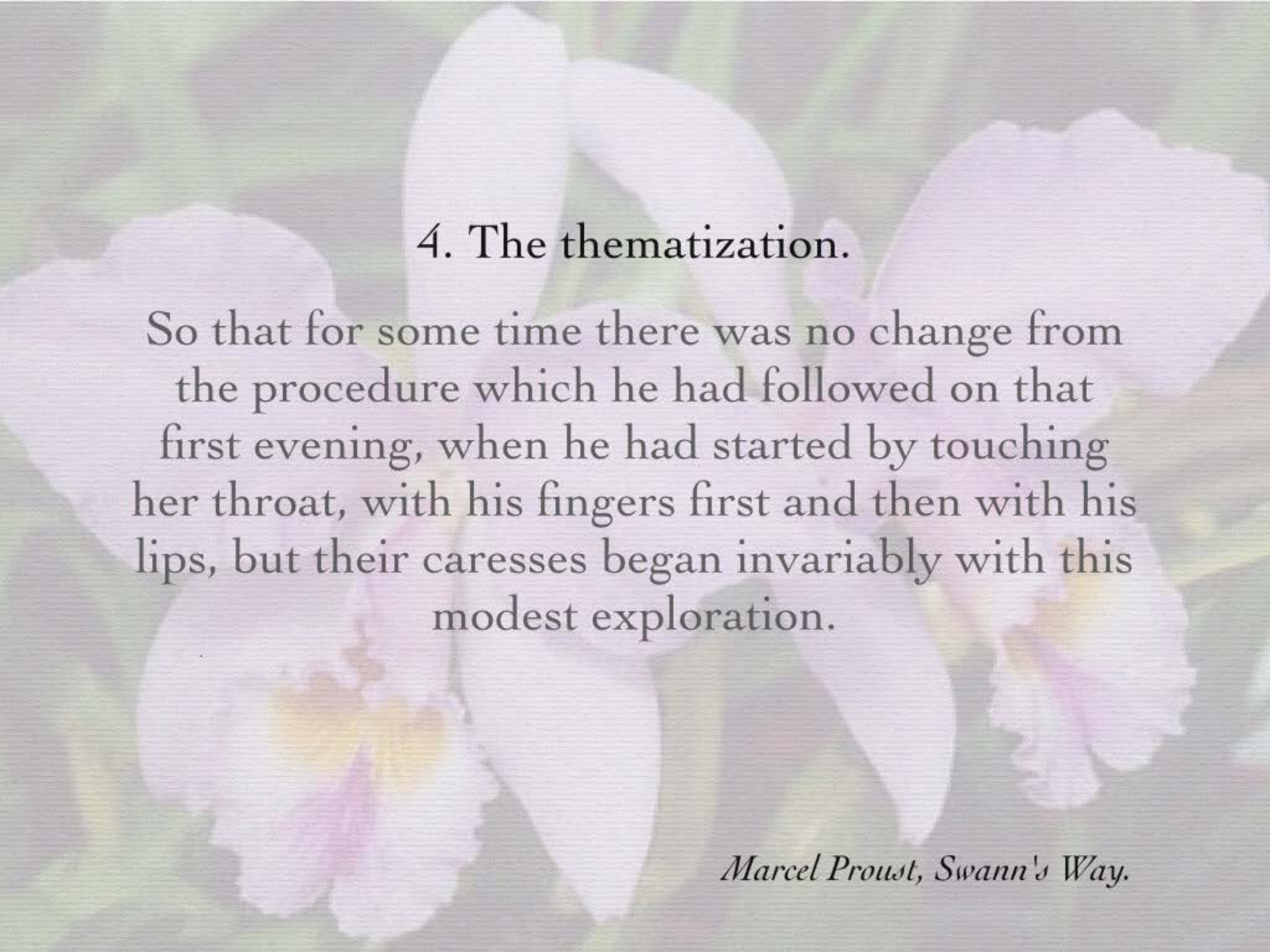
But he was so shy in approaching her that, after this evening which had begun by his arranging her cattleyas and had ended in her complete surrender, whether from fear of chilling her, or from reluctance to appear, even retrospectively, to have lied, or perhaps because he lacked the audacity to formulate a more urgent requirement than this (which could always be repeated, since it had not annoyed her on the first occasion),...

*Marcel Proust, Swann's Way.*

### 3. The re-presentation.

...he resorted to the same pretext on the following days. If she had any cattleyas pinned to her bodice, he would say: "It is most unfortunate; the cattleyas don't need tucking in this evening; they've not been disturbed as they were the other night; I think, though, that this one isn't quite straight. May I see if they have more scent than the others?" Or else, if she had none: "Oh! no cattleyas this evening; then there's nothing for me to arrange."

*Marcel Proust, Swann's Way.*



#### 4. The thematization.

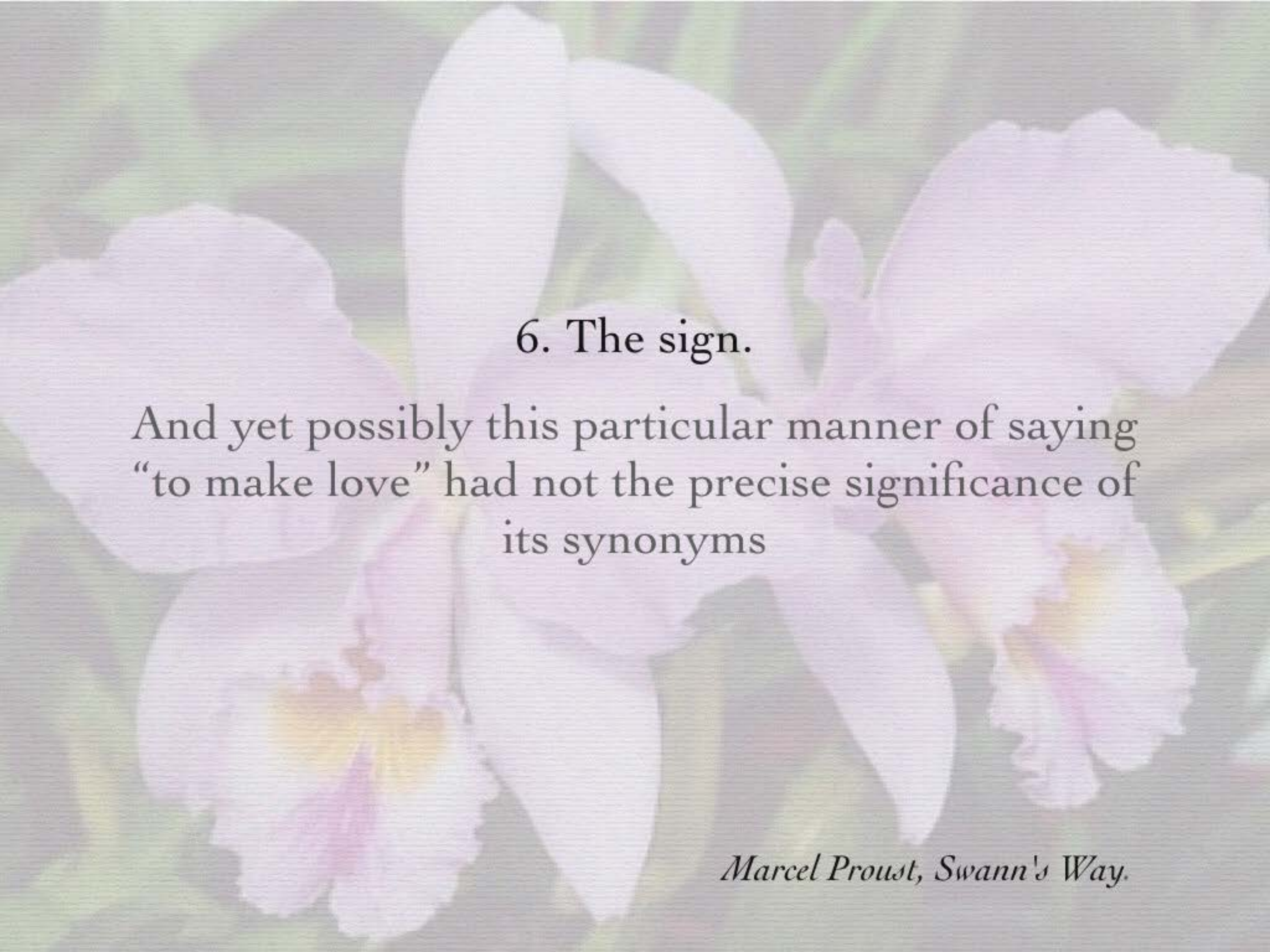
So that for some time there was no change from the procedure which he had followed on that first evening, when he had started by touching her throat, with his fingers first and then with his lips, but their caresses began invariably with this modest exploration.

*Marcel Proust, Swann's Way.*

## 5. The representation.

And long afterwards, when the arrangement (or, rather, the ritual pretence of an arrangement) of her cattleyas had quite fallen into desuetude, the metaphor “Do a cattleya,” transmuted into a simple verb which they would employ without a thought of its original meaning when they wished to refer to the act of physical possession [...] survived to commemorate in their vocabulary the long forgotten custom from which it sprang

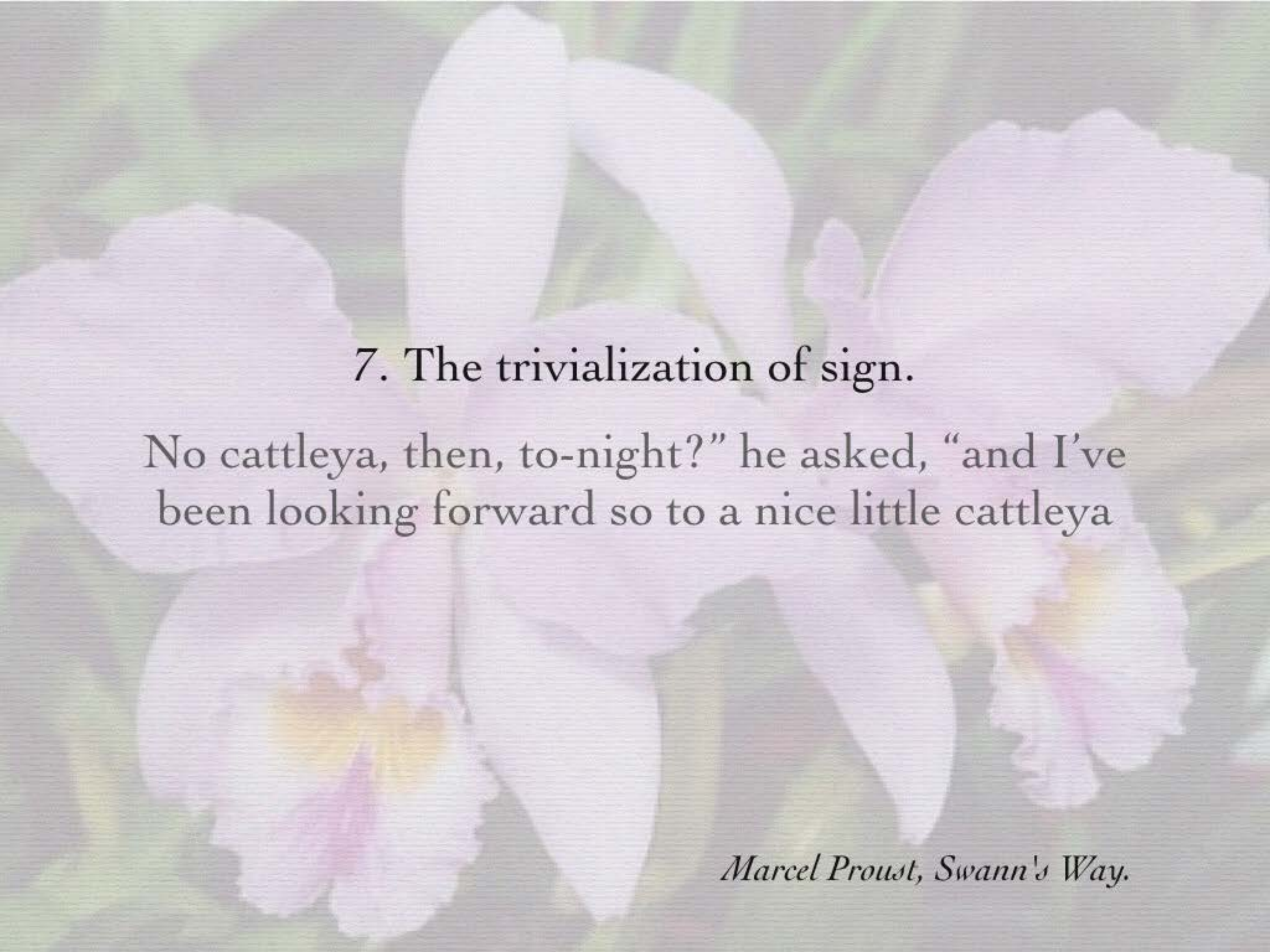
*Marcel Proust, Swann's Way.*



6. The sign.

And yet possibly this particular manner of saying  
“to make love” had not the precise significance of  
its synonyms

*Marcel Proust, Swann's Way.*



7. The trivialization of sign.

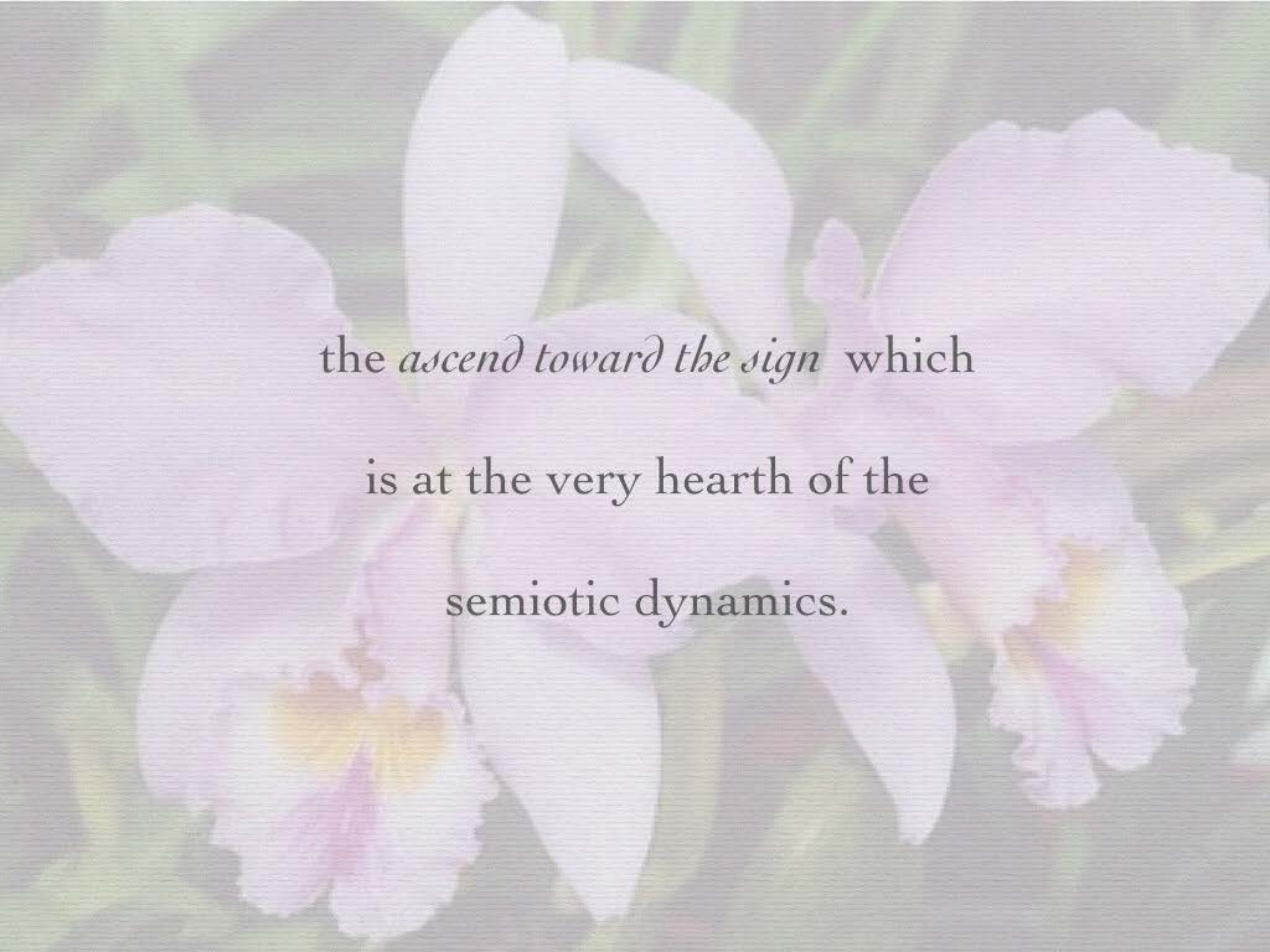
No cattleya, then, to-night?" he asked, "and I've been looking forward so to a nice little cattleya

*Marcel Proust, Swann's Way.*



*With a little hindsight: to what the  
example refers to?*

In any case, what is observable here is a *dynamic process*,  
conducted by *actors of the communication*; and it has to do  
with...



the *ascend toward the sign* which  
is at the very hearth of the  
semiotic dynamics.



# The enlargement.



- A leap into '*ethnomethodology*'...

What is  
ethnomethodology  
?



## In short...

*“Ethnomethodological studies analyze everyday activities as members’ methods for making those same activities visibly-rational-and-reportable-for-all-practical-purposes, i.e., “accountable,” as organizations of commonplace everyday activities.” ...*

*...“Their study is directed to the tasks of learning how members’ actual, ordinary activities consist of methods to make practical actions, practical circumstances, common sense knowledge of social structures, and practical sociological reasoning analyzable; and of discovering the formal properties of commonplace, practical common sense actions, “from within” actual settings, as ongoing accomplishments of those settings. (Garfinkel, 1967: VII-VIII).”*





What does this move show?



*Still « notions », « phenomena » and « dynamics »...*



... very similar to those that are relevant for the study of '*semiotic dynamics*'.

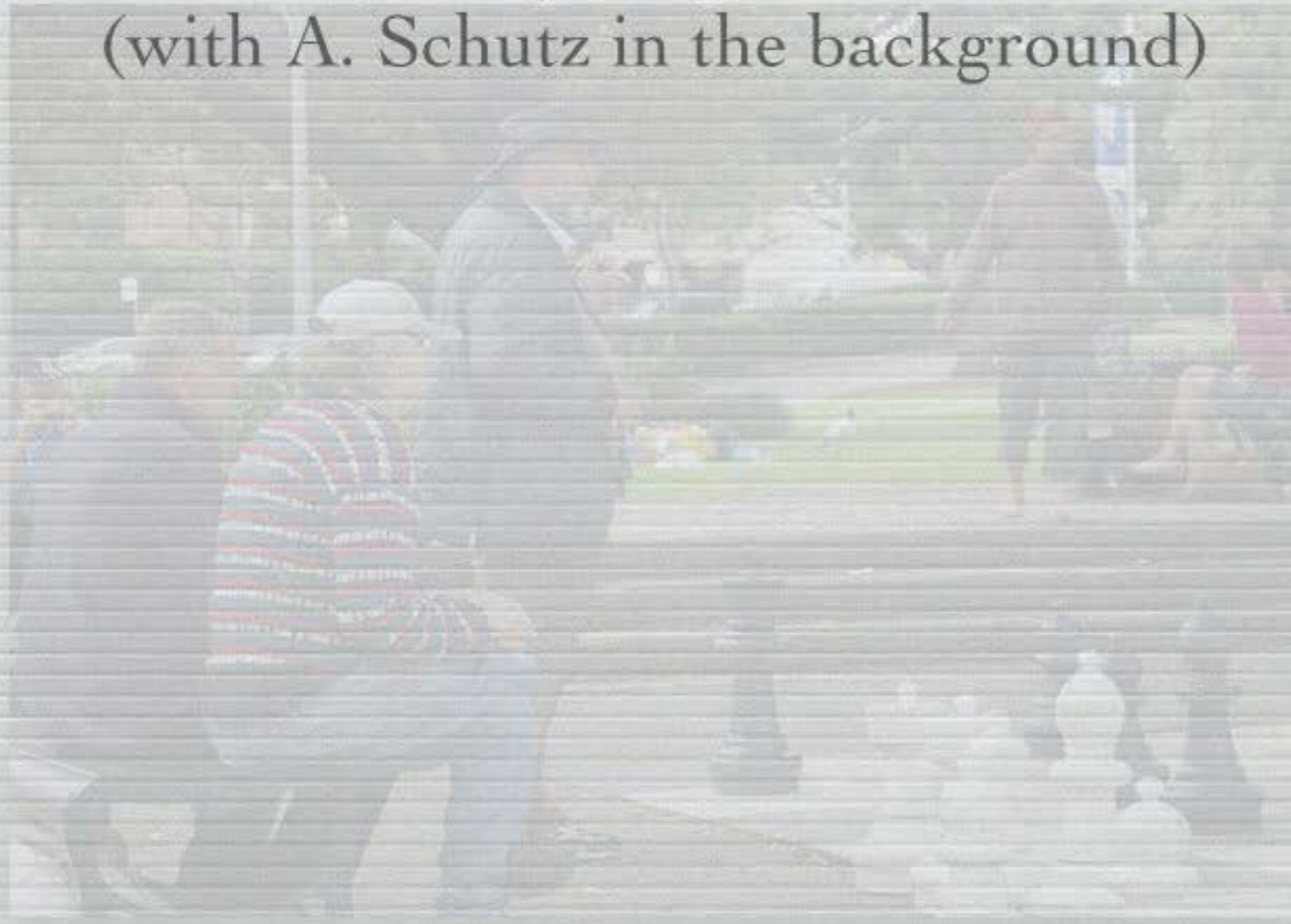
Some « *ethnomethodological 'notions'* »:



*'taken for granted',* *'setting',*  
*'indexicality'.*

# *'taken for granted'*

(with A. Schutz in the background)



*“All interpretation of this world is based on a stock of previous experiences of it, our own or those handed down to us by parents or teachers, which experiences in the form of ‘knowledge at hand’ function as a scheme of reference.”* (Schütz, 1953: 4)



*'indexicality'*  
(according to Garfinkel...)



*“Wherever studies of practical action and practical reasoning are concerned, [this] consist of the following: **the unsatisfied programmatic distinction between and substitutability of objective (context free) for indexical expressions.**”* (Garfinkel, 1967: 4)

# *'setting'*



*“With respect to the problematic character of practical actions and to the practical adequacy of their inquiries, members take for granted that a member must at the outset “know” the settings in which he is to operate if his practices are to serve as measures to bring particular, located features of these settings to recognizable account.” (Garfinkel, 1967: 8)*

An « *ethnomethodological 'phenomenon'* »:



*'the everyday life'!...*

*'the everyday life'!...*



*“I use the term “**ethnomethodology**” to refer to the investigation of the rational properties of indexical expressions and other practical actions as contingent ongoing accomplishments of organized artful practices of everyday life.”* (Garfinkel, 1967: 11)


An « *ethnomethodological 'dynamics'* »:




*'the practical action and practical reasoning'*.



All this to show what?!...

A photograph of a public square or park. In the foreground, a man in a blue jacket and a hat is talking to another man in a striped sweater and a cap who is sitting on a bench. To the right, a man in a brown jacket and red cap is walking. In the background, there are trees, a white fence, and a blue sign. In the lower right foreground, a chess set is visible on a paved area. A green text box is overlaid in the center of the image.

*« The contingent ongoing accomplishments of organized artful practices of everyday life »...*



*...who is correlative of  
the building process of the signs...*





Well!... After that, what else can we  
say / do, now?



Look around us, and put these issues in perspective between yesterday, today, and tomorrow... may be a good idea!

Retrospect, in short...

# The time of yesterday.



**Philipp Wegener,**

1848 - 1916.

Philologist, linguist.

Exposition,

Prädicat,

**Situation...**

1885.

*Untersuchungen auf  
die Grundfragen des  
Sprachlebens.*



Retrospect, in short...

# The time of yesterday.



The *situation* is the basis, the environment, for the appearance of the fact of the fact, or thing. It is also the temporal precondition from which an activity originates.

The activity we have designated as the *predicate* and the naming of the person to whom the notice is directed, also part of the *situation*. (Wegener, translation Abse: 135).

*Die Situation ist der Boden, die Umgebung, auf der eine Thatsache, ein Ding u. s. f. in die Erscheinung tritt, doch auch das zeitlich Vorausliegende, aus dem heraus eine Thätigkeit entsprungen ist, nemlich die Thätigkeit, welche wir als Prädicat aussagen, und ebenso gehört zur Situation die Angabe der Person, an welche die Mitteilung gerichtet ist. (Wegener, 1885: 21).*

Retrospect, in short...

# The time of yesterday.



... In speech the *situation* is not determined merely by words, but more usually and extensively by the surrounding relationships themselves, by the immediately preceding facts, and by the presence of the person with whom we are speaking.

The *situation*, given by the surrounding relationships and the presence of the addressed person, comes to consciousness through perception [*Anschauung*]. (Wegener, translation Abse: 135).

... Die **Situation** wird bei der sprachlichen Mitteilung nicht blos durch Worte bestimmt, viel gewöhnlicher und ausgedehnter durch die umgebenden Verhältnisse selbst, durch die unmittelbar vorhergegangenen Thatsachen und die Gegenwart der Person, mit der wir sprechen. Die durch die umgebenden Verhältnisse und die Gegenwart der angeredeten Person gegebene **Situation** kommt uns durch die Anschauung zum Bewusstsein. (Wegener, 1885: 21)

Retrospect, even shorter!...

# The time of yesterday.



**Alan H. Gardiner,**

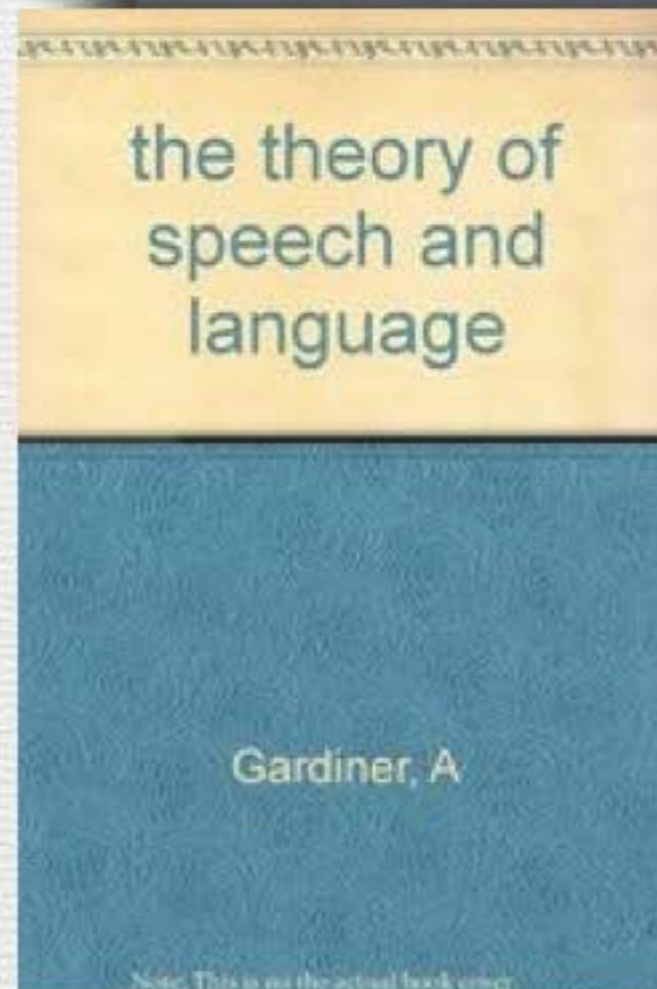
1879 - 1963.

Egyptologist.

## **Situation**

**1932.**

***The Theory of Speech  
and Language.***



Retrospect, even shorter!...

# The time of yesterday.



## *The situation?*

*Not a factor of speech, but the **setting** in which speech can alone become effective, is what is here termed 'the **situation**'.*

*[...] Of far greater importance is the concept of '**situation** as applied to the things spoken about. Potentially every word that is uttered might refer to the whole universe.*

***But words are chosen with a shrewd calculation of their intelligibility ; the more remote the thing spoken about, the more clues must be offered in order that it may be identified.***



Retrospect, even shorter!...

# The time of yesterday.



*I cannot insist too often upon the facts that **words are only clues**, that most words are ambiguous in their meaning, and that in every case **the thing-meant has to be discovered in the situation by the listener's alert and active intelligence.***





Prospect...

# The time of today.

- and now, what is the work schedule?
- In this perspective: trying to untangle the « tangled web » of the *construction of meaning...*



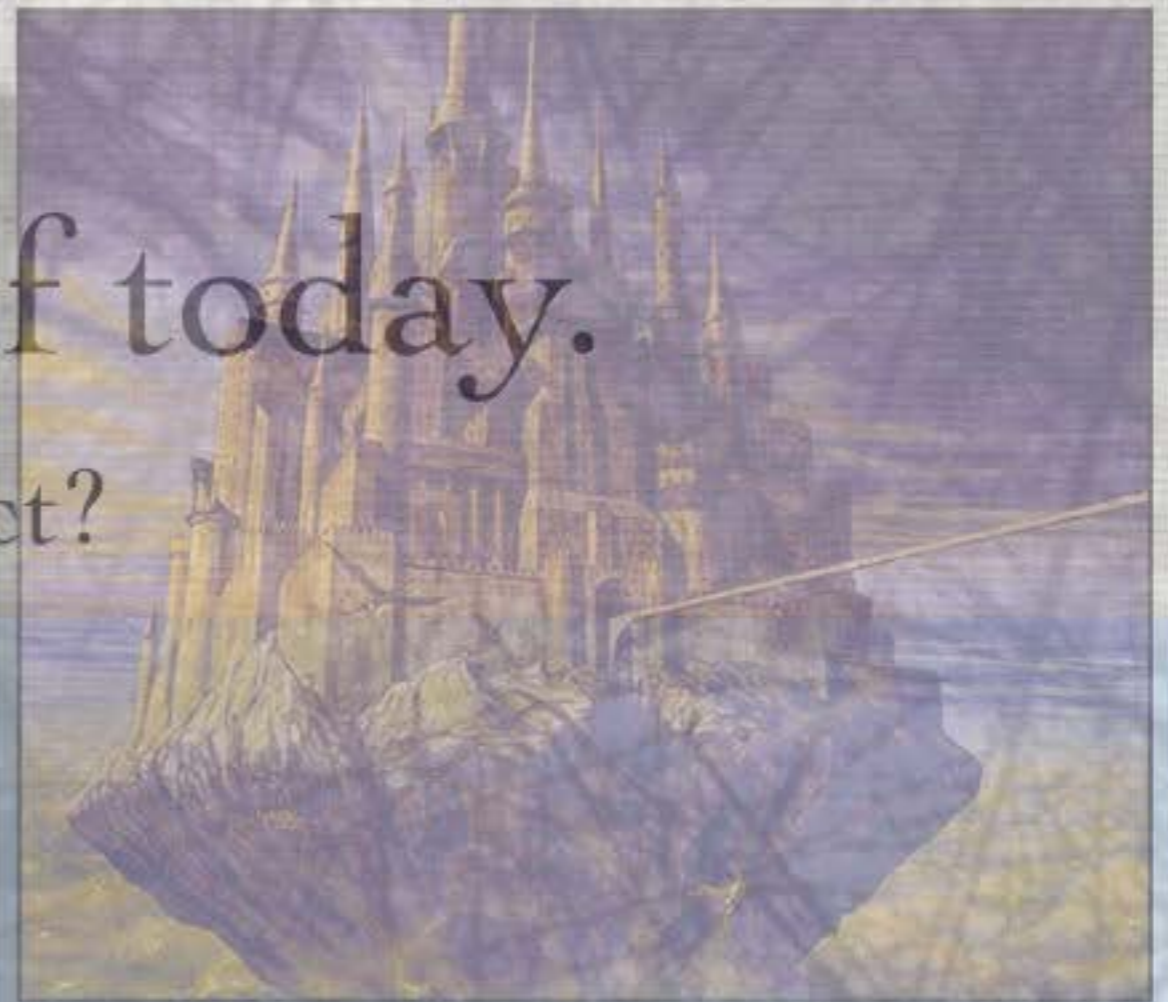
Prospect...

# The time of today.

So, how can we see this project?

- as an '*ideal fortress*' that we have to protect jealously? ...

- like a besieged building...



Prospect...

# The time of today.

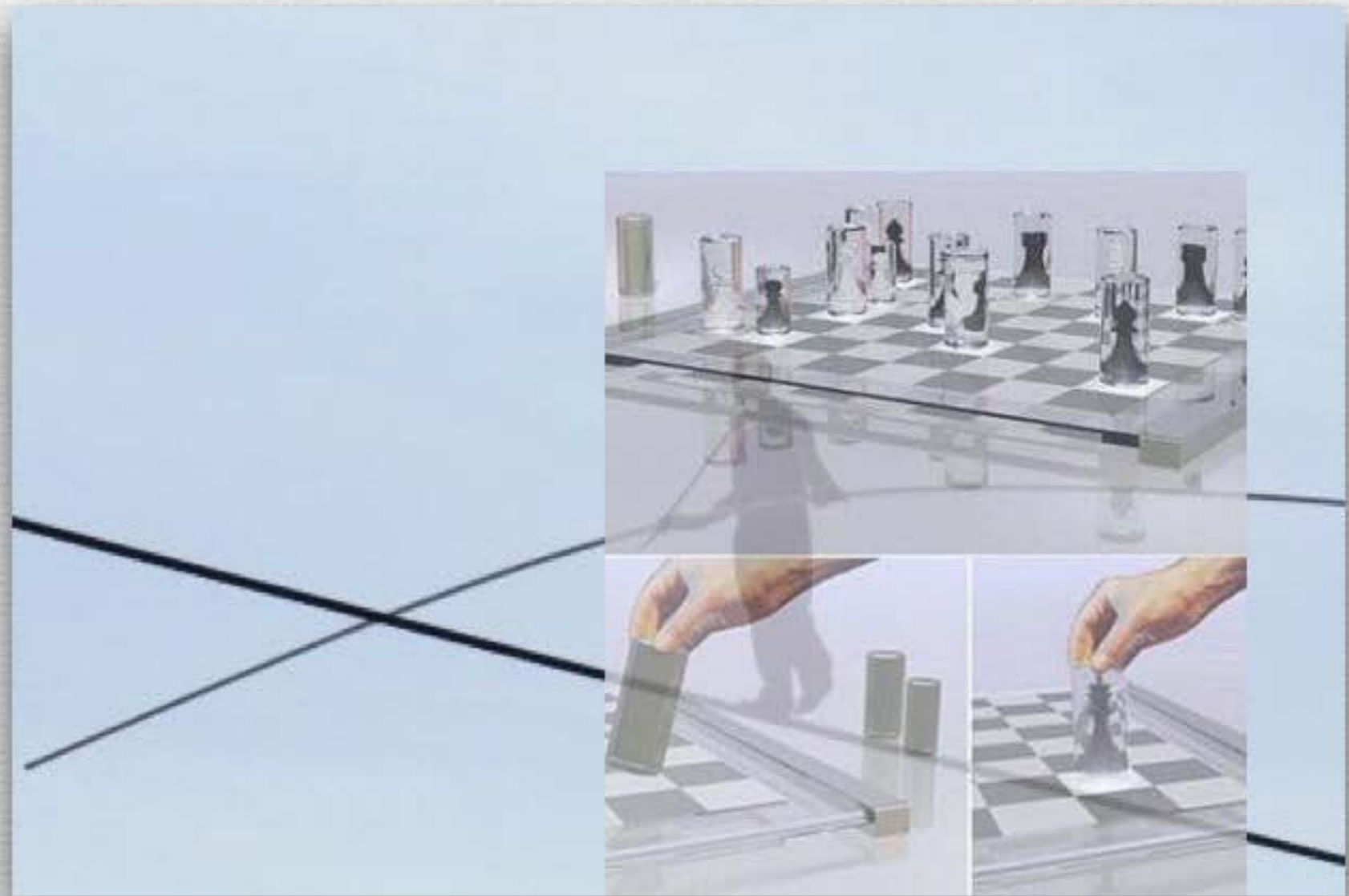
- ...or as a '*glass house*'?
- like an open space and a place for debate...



Prospect...

# The time of tomorrow.

- Perhaps, a  
« *renewed*  
*anthropology* » ...  
...configured  
within an open  
disciplinary space,  
is coming into  
sight!



More precisely (and in a « code-switched » language!):

Une perspective ayant intégré notre subjectivité et qui  
pointe vers un univers objectivé dans lequel nous  
(re)partons « *each another next first time* » (*according  
to Garfinkel!*)...

pour (re)construire du sens... en transformant,  
accessoirement/nécessairement (!), les formes et les  
structures des langues.

*with or without //cattleya//.*



*Τα Πάντα ῥεῖ*  
(« *Everything flows* ». *Heraclitus, probably*)



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Héraclite,  
Hendrick ter Brugghen, 1628