# Chapter Three
# Two Thousand Five Hundred Years of Modernity

There was no obelisk to Modernity in the Dome's Faith Zone, because Modernity was not thought to be a faith. Its authority came from science, logic and the observation of verifiable facts. A Modernist might have a faith as well, such as Christianity or Islam, which could influence his or her behaviour in non-objective ways, but Modernity was considered to be different from a religion in that it was based upon facts. If these were not available, it was honest enough to say so. If the missing facts were vital to form an opinion, it might institute a research programme or at least apply for research funding from the government, but the public could rest assured that the principles of science and accountability were being fully observed and that Modernity was not just a faith.

And yet in the eyes of many millions of people who were not brought up in the ways of Modernity, such claims were misleading or false. No less than other religions, Modernity depended upon assumptions that were unprovable, which revealed to its followers some aspects of reality that seemed so truthful and so appropriate for their needs that they responded in their hearts, "This is right!" The authority of Modernity grew over many generations. What began as a stimulating, philosophical proposal became a problem-solving and universal faith in its own right.

As its methods became better known, it attracted funding and political support, until it became institutionalised as the unacknowledged state religion of the West; and its influence spread further through normal empire building. It permeated the curricula at schools and universities, the agendas of the civil services and the feasibility studies at boardroom levels, until the doubters who questioned its validity ran the risk of becoming social outcasts. Too much was at stake to topple the house of cards by paying attention to the jokers in the bottom row. But the house might still topple.

Plato, the ancient Greek philosopher, whom medieval theologians treated with almost as much respect as if he had been a Christian, sowed the seeds of Modernity. In *The Republic*, Plato compared the state of

human knowledge to that of prisoners in a cave[1] who could only guess at what was really happening outside from the shadows cast upon their cavern walls, but Plato's reality did not mean the temporal world, which was but a passing phase, but the essential forms from which all material objects were derived. Human beings were just imperfect copies of the 'Ideal Being' in the mind of God. Christians interpreted this to mean that he had anticipated the presence of an 'Ideal Being', Jesus Christ, before Christ was born, but that as a pagan, he could only rely upon the "shadows" that indicated His presence. But Christians had the example of Christ to guide them, the ideal made flesh.

In his collection of post-critical reflections, *Myth and Modernity*, an American professor of philosophy and religion, Milton Scarborough, described the impact made by the re-discovery of Plato's *Timaeus* in the early fifteenth century. In this Socratic dialogue, Plato discussed the theories of Pythagoras, a mathematician and musician, who had lived in the previous century and was thus one of Socrates' founding fathers, an eminent philosopher known and respected throughout the Greek world. Pythagoras argued that the material world could be expressed in the language of numbers, which proved to Plato's satisfaction that the laws of mathematics were ideal, not temporal.

According to Scarborough, "Copernicus and Kepler were ardent Pythagoreans and shared with Galileo the belief that the universe was made of numbers. To know what was true of nature, one only had to discover what was true of mathematics".[2] This extension of Platonism was harder to reconcile with the teachings of the Church. It drew Copernicus towards the conclusion that the Sun was the centre of our universe and Galileo to his trial by the Inquisition in 1632, where he proved with his telescope (although he was forced to re-cant) that Copernicus was right. Such debates with the Christian Churches lasted for many centuries, each constructing and de-constructing the other, in a process that continues to shape the culture of the West.

At a time of religious wars, when the authority of the Roman Church was being attacked and defended across Europe, the reasoning of such thinkers held wide appeal. Without openly questioning articles of Christian faith, another way of understanding what we mean by 'Reality' came into being, which did not rely upon how the Bible was interpreted. Scarborough attributes the rise of Modernity as a faith to Descartes, the French mathematician, in whose work the division of reality into "inner experiences and outer world received its definitive philosophical expression".[3] Our understanding of reality could be divided into "subject

and object, private reality and public truth". Mathematics was the primary intellectual discipline with laws that could be studied to prove that some assertions were *objectively* true and not merely *subjective* intuitions.

Descartes, who died in 1650, was a pioneer in the practical developments that stemmed from the beliefs that came to bear his name, Cartesianism, that the material universe could be explained in terms of mathematical physics. He pursued the formal sequences of the scientific method: observation, mathematical analysis, testing and verification and conclusion. He developed analytical geometry and founded optical science. He influenced the generation of scientists, philosophers and mathematicians that included Leibniz in Mainz, Newton in Cambridge and Locke in Oxford – prophets of the Enlightenment, a pan-European movement. At the same time, what T.S. Eliot described as "the disassociation of sensibility"[4] took place that separated thought from emotion, observation from spiritual intuition, objectivity from subjectivity, and came to characterise the late seventeenth century and the Western epochs that lay ahead.

The changes that stem from the Enlightenment have permeated our minds so deeply in the West that it is easy to forget that its assumptions are unprovable. There are no numbers carved or planted in the world's crust. We place them there. There is no physical division in our brains between 'subjectivity' and 'objectivity'. These are two very useful ways of interpreting reality, but are not part of that reality, nor do they provide a comprehensive account. There are many aspects of human experience that cannot be explained in the language of numbers, which may be one reason why so many prophets of the New World Order were rather bad at guessing what would happen next. Like the myths from other cultures, those of Pythagoras and Descartes revealed aspects of Reality with such clarity and precision that we were drawn to believe that they were real in themselves, but if we altered the myths, we saw a different Reality.

The Cartesian mythmakers placed objectivity and factual knowledge before the spiritual disciplines that, according to many other beliefs, should go with them. The ancient Greeks established the rule whereby all medical doctors should take the Hippocratic Oath. Those who were taught about medicines and poisons were supposed to be committed by a sacred pledge to the saving of life, but those who learnt about human biology just from *Gray's Anatomy* might turn out to be tyrants and murderers. Science, it has been said, is without a conscience.

The myths that divided 'objectivity' from 'subjectivity' and factual knowledge from intuitive wisdom, often helped the compromises that

had to be made with the Christian churches. Science and religion were both held to be authoritative, but in different spheres, one for fact, the other for morals and spirituality, following the lines of the Greek distinction between *logos* and *mŭthos*. Unfortunately, this separation diminished both causes. The churches could casually ignore the weight of experience and analysis that came from scientific research, sometimes (as in the case of AIDS) with appalling results. Their influence diminished as well. Even school biology classes could undermine the authority of a parish priest.

As religious thought became detached from factual knowledge, it lost much of its appeal for philosophers, but seemed to rejoice in its born-again innocence, as if too much mental reasoning might damage its spiritual integrity. Many Christian churches avoided awkward confrontations with the scientists by retreating towards the merely sentimental and by sticking to their old legends and parables, as if they alone were guides to good behaviour. The road to Hell is surely paved with *Thoughts for Today*.

The validity of the sciences, however, was also brought into question, for it is hard, if not impossible, to separate fact from myth. Even if we push our emotions and self-interest to one side, to study a phenomenon with an objectivity that satisfies our peer groups, we have still to choose the object of our research. If, as school-leavers, we decide to study medicine rather than physics, our choice will have been influenced by many unprovable factors, among them the extent to which we value life itself. If, in our minds, we elevate fact at the expense of myth, whatever we do is likely to rest upon arbitrary motives and shallow assumptions.

The main pitfall for Western science lay in its wishful thinking. It became so confident of its methods and results that it was tempted to create a model of reality, which conformed to its measurement systems, rather than the other way round. Life was expected to meet its targets and, if it did not, there must be something wrong with life. Plato's Idealism still casts a long shadow on the cavern walls of High Modernity, where earnest bureaucrats plot the next giant leap forward in human development.

The achievements of the Enlightenment thinkers transformed the societies in which they lived. They prepared the way for modern maps, publishing, dictionaries, encyclopaedias and the standardization of time. In 1676, the foundation stone was laid for the Greenwich Observatory, where an International Dateline came to be engraved. The features of

modern Western culture slowly became recognisable, if still vague, including the industrial revolution, the market economy and democratic government.

Among his other accomplishments, the philosopher and mathematician, G.W. Leibniz, was a librarian and student of languages. A Christian who sought to reconcile empirical sciences with the teachings of the Churches, he believed that there was one perfect Language before the confusions caused by the building of the Tower of Babel. The perfect language should be logical and contain a comprehensive vocabulary that provided a clear word or sign for each known object or experience. He made up such a language from his misreading of *I Ching*, The Book of Changes, written in the third century BC by the legendary Chinese poet, Fu Hsi, and brought to Europe by a Jesuit missionary, Father Joachim Bouvet, in 1697.

In 1703, Leibniz published his *Explication de l'Arithmétique Binaire* in which he explained how a system composed of binary numbers, 0 and 1, could be extended to infinity to provide a symbolic language in which all knowledge could be listed and categorised. Unfortunately, as Umberto Eco has pointed out, it was socially unusable. This language was "no longer a practical social instrument but rather a tool for logical calculation."[5] It was nothing more than a form of cataloguing, but its future eventually lay in the machine language of computers, which allows them to be programmed in languages that we *can* understand; and this was, in itself, no small achievement.

Leibniz's binary language illustrated one limitation of Cartesian myths. They could become detached from normal life, but still sound very convincing, so that they could unsettle without being useful, an example of what Giddens called "dis-embedding". Those who were used to getting up with the sun and going to bed with the moon now regularised their lives by the arithmetic of the town clock. Dictionaries were standardised to provide a 'correct' spelling of words, pronunciation and grammar. They sought to offer a 'denotative' (rather than 'connotative') vocabulary, which connected a sign with what it was supposed to signify. Words were provided with one definition or several definitions, instead of letting them drift with imprecise meanings, as in the varied, allusive, many-layered and colloquial language of such pre-Enlightenment writers as William Shakespeare.

But the Enlightenment was not exactly Modern. "Enlightenment thinkers," according to Roy Porter, "felt driven to address the dynamics of change ultimately in terms of overarching visions of progress".[6] What

the prophets of the Enlightenment held in common with Modernity was the assumption that the human species could be examined objectively, as if we could step out of the prison of our senses to see ourselves as we really were. The cutting up of dead bodies might frighten the superstitious, but it was the first step in scientific research for an anatomist. There was a nerve-tingling tension between felt knowledge, such as the fear of the dead, and analytical knowledge, such as a study of anatomy, which was one of the attractions of blood-bath melodramas and their modern equivalent, the Horror Channel.

The most formidable barrier for the Enlightenment scientists to cross, and a supreme example of "disembedding", came in 1859 with the publication of Charles Darwin's *The Origin of the Species*. Most previous thinkers had sought to reconcile their discoveries with Christianity, so that an orderly universe, which obeyed mathematical laws, was proof of a rational God, who favoured mankind, but the theory that human beings had evolved from other species challenged the biblical account of creation and the role of man in the divine plan. At what point did the apes cease to be apes and become humans with souls that possessed an intuition of God? Had God directly intervened? Or was this an old wives' tale that science had displaced with its superior knowledge?

What kind of consolation could the prophets of evolution offer those who were convinced by the logic of Darwin's theory but regretted the loss of the soul and the promise of redemption in an after-life? For some, it might be possible to keep science and Christianity in different parts of the mind, but others found this kind of co-habitation hard to handle. Thomas Huxley, "Darwin's Bulldog", invented the word, *agnosticism*, to describe the point of view of those (like him) who kept an open mind about God. But for those who threw aside their Christian faith, evolutionary theory offered a large compensation. By observing how animals evolved without divine intervention, a scientist could speculate on how the human species might have developed, if it had behaved differently. We could change our evolutionary path, and unchain Prometheus from the rock where the Gods had condemned him to suffer. Mankind may have lost its unique place within a divine plan, but it had gained a greater degree of influence over its destiny. It faced a future that, in some ways, it was better able to control.

Modernity was born from the marriage between Cartesianism and Darwinism; and rose to its maturity during the second half of the nineteenth century. Its youthful prime was in the 1890s, when the prospect of a new century and the challenge of the New World in the

Americas stimulated the imagination. This was a time for science fiction, colonial adventure stories, histories of the future, fantasies of space travel and giant schemes for the Betterment of Mankind, including socialism itself. In his preface to *The Golden Bough* (1890), Sir James Frazer, father of modern anthropology, described how mankind had evolved from magic and witchcraft, to religion, and on to science, which scattered other faiths in its wake. He expressed the mood of the age, the *zeitgeist* of Modernity, which was bold and competitive, but had not lost touch, as yet, with the open-ended spirit of enquiry in which it had been conceived. It was still flexing its muscles and wondering what new astonishment the exploration of the universe might bring.

Some cultures looked back to a Golden Age that they try to recreate. Others turned to Holy Scripture. European Classicism evoked the ages of ancient Greece and Rome. But Modernity always looked towards the present and the future. The past represented lower rungs on the evolutionary ladder. The peak of this process was always today, with the future as the goal to which it aspired. To balance this optimism, Modernity offered some awful warnings. A species could become extinct. It could fail to adapt or be defeated by alien beings in a war between the species. The survival of the fittest was the first law of nature. Humans had to obey that principle or suffer the fate of the dinosaurs, dodos and other lost or vanquished species.

But it was not easy to modernise. It meant making sacrifices for the good of the tribe or the species. Even the last General Secretary of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, is said to have believed that the massacre of the kulaks in the 1930s, which equalled the Holocaust in its senseless slaughter, was a necessary phase in the modernisation of Russia. Since the process was as ongoing and continual as evolution itself, it meant that life was a constant struggle to become something else. There was always a risk that, without such a struggle, other living organisms would take over and the world would become less under our control. Modernity was stressful. It was prepared to sacrifice the daily pleasures of life for the greater glory ahead, but sometimes those transitory joys included life itself.

For true Modernists, the progress of science and technology was irresistible, which was why Giddens called it a juggernaut. We all had to learn how to climb on board or perish beneath its wheels. It came to include such areas of study as the social sciences, economics and business management, which did not conform to the logical procedures that we associate with ‘science’, but had successfully imitated the

outward forms of a science. But when Modernity seemed at its most unstoppable, it started to behave more like an old-fashioned religion, High Modernity. It could be dogmatic. Like any other faith, it gave the impression that it knew what reality was, and how to interpret it, and its followers were very puzzled and alarmed, as well as intrigued, when they discovered a detail that did not fit its general picture. It predicted the future. It wanted to make converts and, like the muscular Christians of a previous age, it was ready to intervene by force, if necessary, to correct the heretics and non-believers. It was bemused by other faiths, and tried to steer clear of them, but when it was confronted by myths that were not of its own making, it fell into a sad confusion. When it met with resistance, it tried to re-shape the world in its own image. In short, it turned fundamentalist.

Even in its prime, Modernity showed signs of its coming obsolescence. Early in the twentieth century, the Enlightenment myths upon which it was based came under scrutiny. In 1903, Bertrand Russell published *The Principles of Mathematics* where he set out to prove that mathematics was objectively true, but he came to the conclusion that it was only a branch of logic, a man-made invention. In 1906, Albert Einstein produced his *Theory of Relativity*, questioning the laws of the Newtonian universe. In Vienna, Siegmund Freud cast doubt upon the power of the rational mind to over-rule the greater strength of the libido, man's instinctive self, so that dreams were thought to be a better guide to human behaviour than manifestos.

He was supported by wave after wave of *avant-garde* artists, from Alfred Jarry in Paris and the Polish architect and dramatist, "Witkacy", in the 1890s to the Dadaists, Surrealists and the Theatre of the Absurd, each of which left their mark upon the billboards and the advertising screens. They all rebelled in their own ways against Thomas Huxley's "organised common sense", which was how he described the scientific process. Ferdinand de Saussure, the Austrian founder of Structuralism, dismissed the possibility that language itself was anything more than a game, like chess, which was driven more by its own conventions than by any direct contact with real life.

These sceptical views were important, but they were not, on a practical level, very useful. Bank tellers could still count, apples still fell from trees and it was still possible, despite Saussure, to accuse someone of lying, but the philosophical issues that they raised became more pressing when, after half a century of wars, revolutions, social change and yet

more triumphs of technology, some people started to question whether Modernity was such a good thing. Most twentieth century Utopias were Modernist in inspiration, but they had an indifferent record of success. If Soviet Communism and National Socialism were discounted as aberrations of the Modernist spirit, this still left the welfare state and social democracy among its achievements. The tower blocks and concrete jungles might be eyesores, but, with the advances in scientific knowledge, the hospitals were better equipped and in the West, we were more prosperous and lived longer.

These extremities of triumphs and disasters pointed to the flaw in Modernity, the elevation of fact at the expense of myth, so that all the scientific achievements were unevenly matched with the casual notions as to how human beings should think and behave. We lived in an age of space travel and mass labour camps, with Silicon Valley on one side and Dead Man's Gulch on the other. In the depths of the Cold War, during the 1960s, the spirit of Post-Modernity stirred, whose sceptical eye surveyed the scene; and took the East and the West alike to task for pretending that its political systems were more reliable than they were and based upon principles that appeared to be immutable laws, but turned out to be nothing of the kind.

As its name suggests, Post-Modernity was not exactly against Modernity. It simply came after Modernity and accepted that the futuristic myths were man-made and fallible. It offered no alternative. Indeed, it could not do so, without falling into the same trap that had snared the Modernists, by claiming a super-human authority that it did not possess. To those who insisted that the future was something that they "can, and must, control", it could only respond with a sceptical smile, as if to say, "If you think you can, you might be able to do so!" Its skills mainly lay in taking apart or de-constructing the myths that other people had invented. It was good at de-mystifying language. By a kind of lip-o-suction that removed anything that sounded too abstract or philosophical from its vocabulary, language itself was changed to stress the idea that man was the measure of all things.

Most Post-Modernists despised notions of 'high' and 'low' art, the outmoded canons of taste that were based, in their view, upon ancient and corrupt hierarchies. Whole literatures were studied for the signs of gender, racial and class discrimination. University courses in what used to be known as the Humanities became attached to the Social Sciences. Morality became political correctness. Artists became cultural workers. History became 'heritage', that is, the kind of history that made people

feel good or bad about themselves. In the US, many information officers now called themselves "perception managers". Rhetoric, the ancient art of persuasion, was vastly simplified, as slogans and iconic images turned out to be equally effective in changing people's minds. Even literary critics, I am sorry to say, abandoned the skills of their 2500-year-old trade, in favour of saying simply that they liked this or that in a sincere tone of voice, as if any loftier opinions might be thought to be politically incorrect.

Deconstruction was not just a tool in literary criticism. It was an analytical process with many applications, as much in the fields of fashion, life-styles and design, as in verbal languages. It could examine the nuances in inflected societies to get rid of many of them and standardise social practices in a way that went far beyond Microsoft's downgrading of the passive mood. The French Post-Modernist, Jean-Francois Lyotard, put forward the theory that societies were held together by 'meta-narratives' that gave priority to certain events,[7] but ignored others. The alternative histories of the French- and Anglo-Canadians (or the Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland) were examples, but so too were the legends that held political parties together, alumni associations and football teams.

But, according to Lyotard, in advanced capitalist societies, these 'narratives of national identity' were breaking down. They had been undermined by the free flow of trade and information across national borders – and by the need to accommodate many different faiths and ethnicities within the boundaries of the state. In the West, we were living in a Post-Modern world, whether we liked it or not, and a forward-looking government should acknowledge that fact. It should stay neutral, if possible, in the old-fashioned patriotic rivalries, but seek to construct a different kind of narrative, one more appropriate for an open society, which could bond with similar societies through a common belief in human rights, democracy and free speech.

Post-Modernity paved the way for Bobbitt's "virtuous circles", the Peace Process in Northern Ireland, the new EU Constitution and Blair's New Labour, but in getting rid of the old myths and inventing new ones, Post-Modernity was at a disadvantage. It could not claim that its ideas were 'true' in an old-fashioned sense. It was not a theory of knowledge, but of perception. If enough people believed that something was 'true', then it could be accepted as such and, if helpful, used as a touchstone for reality. If it conflicted, however, with the views of the government, or some other influential body, it could be easily discredited.

Language was prized more by what it did than what it supposed to mean. Advertising led the way. An image of a moon, a calm sea at night and a naked woman riding on horseback across a lonely beach may not seem a logical way to sell life insurance, but, on the level of the collective unconscious, its mixture of serenity and adventure might do the trick. Of course, an advertising campaign should never exactly lie. There were laws against misleading factual claims and it was bad publicity to be caught fibbing, but there was, and could be, no moral obligation to "tell the truth", as our parents and grand-parents might have wished. No language was capable of being "truthful". It was a social game, nothing more.

But it was a game that (after Post-Modernity) was being played to somewhat different rules. The skilled market analyst could find out, often by using focus groups, what words or signs triggered positive or negative reactions among the public or within a particular target community. By using the positive images rather than the negative ones, he/she could sell a product more efficiently.

Sometimes the product was a manifesto or a political party. When Blair came to power in Britain, he was supported by his team of special advisers, including Philip Gould, an expert on opinion polls, and Alistair Campbell, a former journalist for *The Mirror* who became his Director of Communications and Strategy in his government. They brought new marketing skills to the Labour Party that they had learnt by studying President Clinton's campaigns for the Democrats in the United States. They acquired the Democrats' latest software, Excalibur, to analyse trends; and borrowed many ideas from the Clinton style, his instant rebuttals, his ambiguous statements and his selective use of statistics.

They were not just selling a party. They were modernising democratic practices in Britain. It was effective campaigning, but was it (to use an old-fashioned word) very honest? Like George W. Bush, Blair was an avowed Christian. He was a member of the Christian Socialist Movement, with others in his cabinet, including his first Minister for Culture, Media and Sport, Chris Smith. When he was once asked by the BBC journalist, Jeremy Paxman, whether Bush and he ever prayed together, Campbell intervened to say briefly, "We don't do God!" Why not? Blair's faith might be expected to influence his views on many issues, but openly to talk about it on television risked negative publicity. He might alienate the Moslems, Hindus and Jews in a multi-cultural society, as well as losing the votes of atheists and agnostics. Faith was temporarily sacrificed for the television image.

In another age, Blair's Christianity might have been the first plank on his political platform. Instead, Modernity took pride of place. In the past, or so it was said, Britain had been an old-fashioned country that New Labour was set to "modernise". "I never said modernising the country was going to be easy," Blair wrote in his 1998 New Year's message to the readers of *The Mirror*, and many other papers at the same time, but in his early months in office, he often made it seem so. He sprang to the task of governing with the same zeal that he had shown in transforming the Labour Party.

But with his large majority in the House of Commons and a dispirited opposition, he looked less like a radical reformer and more like the leader of one of those task forces, to be seen nightly on television in do-it-yourself programmes, who could landscape a garden or convert the awkward little space under the eaves into a fourth bedroom in hours and come back next week with another set of bright but inexpensive ideas. Like them, Blair had a check list of promises, his strict budgets and timetables, his harmless old gaffer who could chip in with a tip from the days of yore (Michael Meacher, the Minister for the Environment in his first government) and his mandate for change, which kept the electorate, like the couples who drew the short straws in the *Changing Rooms* series, blindfold until the end, so that they could eventually gasp at the improvements to their lives, and marvel at the shades of lilac and magenta on the living room walls, before enquiring where exactly were the photos that used to be on the piano, and, come to that, where was the piano?

Culture was supposed to be a central feature of their modernising programme, if the arts and the media stayed (according to the minister for culture, Chris Smith) within New Labour's "overall agenda". That, however, was a big "if". If it simply meant that arts companies should obey the law and stay solvent, there was nothing too sinister about such a statement, but if it implied that the arts should accept, and conform to, the mixture of High Modernity and muscular Christianity that brought New Labour to power, it could become an intolerable restriction and lead to officious meddling.

Such a policy could mean that the mistakes of the Dome were repeated on an even grander scale. Or it might mean something like perception management. Like those medieval churches that painted visions of heaven and hell across their high roofs and lofty arches, Western airwaves might become dominated by the flowcharts, news flashes, polls and other measurement systems of High Modernity, each detail re-enforcing

its beliefs. But it could be even worse than perception management. It could mean the construction of something like a state-sponsored virtual reality machine, which the late French Post-Modernist philosopher, Jean Baudrillard, might have called a 'simulacrum'. It might be convincing and, within its own terms, logical, but if you looked closely, you could see how the animated clones, which passed for people, responded to a limited numbers of commands and had little free will of their own.

Indeed, there was no shortage of apocalyptic visions, but at the heart of them all, there lay a paradox. Objectively, there might be little connection between the sign and what it was meant to signify. To that extent, language was nothing more than a game, but, subjectively, our aims in playing that game might be to tell the truth, however imperfectly, and to communicate that truth to others. Just as you cannot fully separate facts from myths, or objectivity from subjectivity, so you cannot detach the word from the motives of the speaker or the listener. All communication rests upon the assumption of good faith, even lying.

If we assume that language is merely a social game, whose only purpose is to manipulate public opinion or, worse still, to impose authority, it starts to deteriorate. We do not bother to speak it well or to listen to it carefully, except under threat. The slogan and the mission statement become literary genres in their own right. The jargon of business management buries its intentions beneath the crust of its defence mechanisms. Academics write to impress their peers in terms which only they can understand. We lose the mental discipline of language and, finally, the necessary links that connect words with what they are supposed to mean, crack and break, to expose great gaps in our efforts to understand the outside world, a process which, if taken to an extreme, would be the biggest "disembedding" of them all.

## Notes

1. Plato: *The Republic*, Part VII
2. Milton Scarborough: *Myth and Modernity* (State University of New York Press, 1994), p. 11
3. Ibid., p. 10
4. In his essay on *Metaphysical Poetry*
5. Umberto Eco: *The Search for the Perfect Language* (Blackwell, 1995), p. 287
6. Roy Porter: *Enlightenment*, (Penguin Books, 2000), p. 230
7. See *The Post-Modern Condition*, a report for the Quebec Government, published in English by the Minnesota University Press (1979)