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The mathematical community has in these last years allowed itself to be led astray by ill-considered promises. There has been talk of a 'revolution in mathematics' and assertions that, thanks to new syllabuses and new methods, the most average pupil would be able to complete his secondary studies in mathematics. It is time to stop these utterances which border on deception. What was responsible for the birth of this modernist movement? I should venture to suggest the following hypothesis - with certain obvious reservations : there was without any doubt a feeling of relative frustration in the mathematics community during the years 1950-60 : jealousy with regard to physicists, favoured financially by the development of nuclear energy (and devices); jealousy with regard to Biologists, made famous by the discovery of DNA and the genetic code. During these same years, mathematics was making very great advances, notably in algebraic geometry and algebraic topology, but these advances did not arouse the interest of the general public.

The launching of Satellites (1957-60) drew public attention anew to mathematical techniques (and notably to the computer). It was in order to revive this declining interest that recourse was made to 'modern mathematics'. If this hypothesis has the ring of truth, it would be well to remind our colleagues that it is a law of our Society that the important things in it are never those of which one speaks; in our time, even more than in the time of Nietzsche, new ideas arrive on the feet of doves.

René Thom (1923-)