James Helgeson

HARMONY, ANAMORPHOSIS AND THE "CONCEPTUAL SCHEME"

Une tache floue à l'horizon de la pensée
Terence Cave

I

In the opening chapter of his early study, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (1980), Steven Greenblatt included a now famous excursus on the subject of Hans Holbein's double portrait, *The Ambassadors* (1533), and the optical technique of *anamorphosis*. Hans Holbein's well known painting depicts two French envoys to Henry VIII of England, Georges de Selve and Jean de Dinteville, both young, wealthy aristocrats. Like most commentaries on Holbein's canvas, Greenblatt's discussion—a parenthesis in his chapter on Thomas More—places much emphasis on the distorted skull, which occupies much of the lower quarter of the image. Greenblatt offers an extended, acute reading of the Holbein portrait and of the interpretive unease triggered by the skull. Indeed the uncanny death's head serves to undermine, for Greenblatt, "the very concept of locatable reality upon which we conventionally rely in our mappings of the world, to subordinate the sign systems we so confidently use to a larger doubt."[1]

Greenblatt's reading makes extensive use of the notions of "incommensurability" and "incompatibility." Speaking of one of the figures portrayed in the painting, Jean de Dinteville, Greenblatt writes:

> The incommensurability [between ornament and *memento mori*] is confirmed by the fact that we must distort, and, in essence, efface the figures in order to see the skull. That this effacement is moving—that it is felt as a kind of death—is a function of Holbein's mastery of those representational techniques that pay tribute to the world, that glorify the surfaces and textures of things, that celebrate man's relatedness to the objects of his making.

1. Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980) 20-21.

The skull, "slashing across the pavement, intruding upon [its] complex har-
monies and disrupting them," (18) is for Greenblatt an analogue for the "dis-
quieting internal rupture" (23) he detects as well in More's *Utopia*. Greenblatt
continues:

> [The] sense within the general frame of work of incompatible per-
> spectives between which the reader restlessly moves—is mirrored
> at virtually every level of the text from its largest units of design
> to its smallest verbal details. [...] This restless shifting of perspec-
> tive is, I would suggest, the close equivalent at the verbal level to
> the technique of anamorphosis, whose etymology itself suggests
> a back-and-forth movement, a constant forming and reforming.
> (23)

Ultimately, for Greenblatt, "anamorphosis" will stand as an analogue of tex-
tual ambiguity and uncanny shifts of perspective evinced in texts and other
objects of cultural study.

In the broader critical discourse, anamorphosis has recently been very much
the province of readings informed by psychoanalytic theory. Greenblatt's read-
ing of Holbein's canvas, characteristically, does not draw directly on Jacques
Lacan's treatment of the same work in *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psy-
choanalysis* (Seminar XI).[2] Nonetheless, in recent years, anamorphosis has
often been exploited as an analogy for studying such conceptual networks as
"symbolic orders" or "conceptual schemes." Lacan's account of the skull as
"a gaze imagined by me in the field of the Other" [*"un regard par moi imaginé
au champ de l'Autre"*] (Lacan 1973: 79) has been enormously influential, all
the more so, perhaps, through Slavoj Žižek's rereading of Holbein and Lacan,
and his reformulation of anamorphosis as a theoretical paradigm for the study
of ideology and desire. Žižek emphasizes, after Lacan, the unreadable "blot"
of the skull as a necessarily absent object of interpretive desire intruding on the
inter-subjective symbolic order, both warping it and framing its possibility.[3]

In all three readings of the Holbein painting I have mentioned thus far, such
entities as "symbolic orders" or "sign systems" are essential to the critical
project. The purpose of this essay is to investigate the critical productivity of
the anamorphic paradigm and how it relates to the problem of "conceptual

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2. Lacan is cited, somewhat generally, in Greenblatt's closing discussion of Shake-
speare's *Othello* (Greenblatt 1980: 244–45). On anamorphosis, see Jacques Lacan,
Séminare XI: Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse (1964). Edited by
Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Seuil, 1973) 75–84.

3. Cf., for example, Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan
Through Popular Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), especially ch. 5, "The
Hitchcokian blot" (88–97).

schemes." The tenor of the argument is skeptical. Privileging the concept of anamorphosis, I have lodged a critical reading of several early modern French texts within a broader investigation of the critical usefulness of the concept itself; the essay is intended thus to be broadly methodological and textually specific. Moreover, I will bring to the discussion a body of philosophical work missing in the literary discussion of anamorphosis and conceptual schemes: the philosophy of Donald Davidson. Specifically, I would like to propose examining the omnipresent early modern trope of *cosmic harmony* while taking a critical look at the notion of "conceptual schemes," addressing theories of culture that rely on the metaphor of anamorphosis; I will turn to close readings of several early modern texts in order to study what is perhaps a characteristic tension in depictions of cosmic harmony, and to what extent that tension can be described anamorphically. In a concluding section, I will offer a second glance, *après coup*, at the theoretical assumptions behind the cultural theories of anamorphosis operative in this essay and in the theoretical literature, suggesting that the use of anamorphosis as an analytic tool may ultimately be too slippery to be of much help in cultural analysis. I will, however, suggest that more work needs to be done to evaluate the somewhat different analogy, suggested by Béroalde de Verville, between anamorphosis and "secret writing" or steganography.[4]

II

Sixteenth-century iconography and writing often reproduces, in more or less distorted versions, a familiar *topos*: the commonplace of the "harmony of the spheres" and the notion, omnipresent in the sixteenth century, that good behavior and beautiful art are both imitations of celestial music.[5] The defining characteristic of this "celestial music" is of course *harmony*. Harmony, *harmonia*, is etymologically a "joining" of diverse elements. It was not at first a musical term. *Harmonia* is used to indicate a relation between elements of a system and is thus at the same time 1) an "ontological" concept that describes the structures of beings and of the universe 2) a "political-ethical" concept representing the order of the ideal body, building or society, and 3) an epistemological concept used to describe natural phenomena, an assumption behind

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4. An excellent point of departure is of course Neil Kenny's book *The Palace of Secrets: Béroalde de Verville and Renaissance Conceptions of Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1991). See also Ilana Zinguer, *Le Roman stéganamorphique: le* Voyage des Princes fortunez *de Béroalde de Verville* (Paris: Champion, 1993) and Terence Cave, *Préhistoires: Textes troublés au seuil de la modernité* (Geneva: Droz, 1999), esp. 155–64.

5. *Videmus igitur musicam [...] quam oratores, poet[a]e, pictores, sculptores, architecti in suis operibus imitantur.* Marsile Ficin "De musica" in *Lettere: (Epistolarum familiarum liber I)*. Ed. S. Gentile. Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1990: 162.

the interpretation of impressions. In the medieval structure of the seven liberal arts, music is part of the quadrivium, the four mathematical arts: arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music. The mathematical arts are the arts of "measure." In neo-Platonic aesthetics, as in Aristotle, the excellent being, like the excellent work of art, is measured both in the mathematical sense (proportion) and the ethical one (moderation). Both "measures" suggest an analogy between excellence in the world and excellence in the heavens (though for Neoplatonists the analogy is based on a much closer formal resemblance than for Aristotelian philosophers). Harmony proved to be a productive working assumption for early modern science—Kepler's work, for example, owes much to the assumption of the existence of the "harmony of the world."

In Holbein's *The Ambassadors*, harmony is a central trope, explicitly linked, through the mathematics of the quadrivium, to the charting of the heavens and the earth. Prominently exhibited on the lower shelf between the two subjects is a lute with a broken string. In fact, Selve and Dinteville stand amidst an impressive collection of early modern paraphernalia connoting the four arts of the quadrivium. On the top shelf stand astronomical instruments—a sundial, an astrolabe—as well as a celestial globe, modeled on a real globe constructed by Johann Schöner only months before the painting was completed in 1533.[6] These astronomical tools evince a sophisticated understanding of the principles of geometry, also represented by the carpenter's square on the lower shelf, which holds as well Martin Behaim's 1492 terrestrial globe, a lute, an arithmetic book, flutes, and a Wittenberg edition of a Lutheran hymnbook, open to the tenor part of Luther's translation of the "Veni Creator Spiritus" as well as another hymn, "Mensch, wiltu leben seliglich" ("man wilt thou live blessedly") (Jardine 425-7).

The broken lute string suggests a flaw in the harmony of the world. Sixteenth-century emblems commonly represent kings playing the instrument of state, often minus a string. In the Holbein canvas, the broken string, here figures the discord of two contemporary schisms: that, imminent, between England and the continental Catholic Church, and that, already well established, between Lutheran reformers and Catholics. (Anne Boleyn, for example, was a Lutheran sympathizer.) The hymnbook also refers to this disunity, and perhaps suggests Holbein's sympathies in the matter. Indeed, both Jean de Dinteville and Georges de Selve were involved in the negotiations between Pope Clement VII and King Henry VIII of England regarding the latter's divorce from Catherine of Aragon. Here, neither Dinteville nor Selve looks terribly happy; Lisa Jardine tells how much Jean de Dinteville loathed England, writing to his brother that it would be the end of him (Jardine 430).

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6. I owe some of these details to Lisa Jardine's recent history of the Renaissance, *Worldly Goods* (New York/London: W. F. Norton, 1996) though the reading of the painting is my own.

The mathematical processes that permit the mapping of the cosmos, underlying music and commerce as well, make possible the representation of the skull—a traditional emblem of the *vanitas* of earthly life. The death's head is of course the large object, like a piece of driftwood, stretching diagonally across the bottom centre of the painting. Its form is echoed in the badge on Jean de Dinteville's cap. Once again, the mathematics of the quadrivium, represented by the objects on the shelves, is the techne of this distorted image. The distortion of the skull is, in principle, similar to what happens when the spherical surface of a globe is transposed to a flat surface —similar also to the perspective exemplified by the painting itself. In the Holbein portrait, mathematics only just contains the terror of death, which otherwise would overwhelm the composition and the viewer. The painting underscores the tension between an organizing mathematical principle, under severe strain, and a heterogeneous collection of unruly things threatening to fly apart into chaos.

The readings of Lacan and Žižek have a tendency to reduce the painting to the anamorphic skull—they tend to turn the canvas into what I would call an "on-off switch," in which the skull is seen as effacing, *après coup*, the portraits and the surrounding objects. The readings, in essence, reduce the painting to the idealization of a position from which a second sense, a new framework for seeing, or the outline of a framing ideology, comes into focus. At this particular point, the suddenly intelligible stain, previously illegible, saturates the image with a surplus of meaning. Such readings suggest, in a Lacanian vein, that the painting is structured around an excluded point, a structuring inconsistency in the symbolic order. The readings depend strongly on a temporal paradigm—the *après coup*—and on the mutual exclusion of positions: "incommensurability."

The assumption that the painting presents a nexus of radical mutual illegibility, an "either-or" place is, I would argue, misleading insofar as it simplifies Holbein's painting by fashioning a theoretical construct. An easy thought experiment would be to imagine Holbein's painting without the anamorphic skull: without it, the symbolic world of the image would still be saturated with signs that point to an anxiety, a suspicion that all is not what it should be—Greenblatt's reading, in this regard, is considerably more nuanced than the psychoanalytic readings. The painting cannot be reduced to the ineluctable stain of death in the foreground; it also points to a whole gamut of attendant horrors connoted by such politically charged objects as the half-hidden crucifix, the hymnal and the broken lute string. In short, the skull is not, strictly speaking, necessary to throw suspicion on the scene *après coup*: the hymnal and broken lute string are already infuse a sense of unease into the world of the sitters. More importantly, I would suggest (despite a long string of assertions to the contrary in the literature) that the side view does not entirely obliterate the sitters or the paraphernalia surrounding them, and that both images remain largely intelligible in the intermediate stages of the continuum

between the optimal viewing points.[7] It is this *continuum* that I would like to emphasize here, and which I see as obscured in the psychoanalytic reading of the image. Even if the painting is viewed from the optimal position for the skull, there is a continuity subtending two supposedly mutually unintelligible views—an image and a subtending distortion—and this field of shifting commonality is emphasized by the inclusion of the skull badge on Dinteville's cap. In short, neither picture is entirely alien to the other; the painting is not structured around radical incommensurability, but rather around an uneasy slippage between a series of opposing, but simultaneously intelligible, points of view. The point—the "blot"—at which these discordant images come together is the unease about whether schemes, conceptual or mathematical, can order and domesticate unruly things.

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The psychoanalytic model of anamorphosis examined thus far draws a strong link between a particular anamorphic position and an ideologically infused fantasy perspective that skews, in a particular way, the life of the symbolic according to a subject position determined by tacit assumptions and unspoken exclusions. The anamorphic position thus represents a particular entry into the "symbolic," a framework that defines the position of the subject in relation to a necessarily incomplete symbolic order. The model's disadvantage, as I have suggested, is that it places the skull and the image it contaminates in a relationship of incommensurability, postulating a binary switching between the image and a nonetheless idealized underlying principle of distortion, excluding the sliding scale of perspectives that lie between image and subtending framework, between perception and distorting scheme.

An alternative angle for examining the idea of the "conceptual scheme" and its relationship to anamorphosis is provided by the philosopher Donald Davidson, in an article from 1974 entitled "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme."[8] Davidson is a strong skeptic of such notions as "symbolic orders" and "conceptual schemes"; his argument is intended to demonstrate that the notion of a "conceptual scheme" is fundamentally incoherent. Like the arguments examined thus far, Davidson's line of reasoning revolves around the key idea of "incommensurability" (184), of which he offers a trenchant critique. Evoking the work of Benjamin Whorf and Thomas Kuhn, Davidson makes the following observation:

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7. I would also suggest that the *après coup* view is in fact simply a theoretical construct. The little viewer's dance—three steps to the right—repeated hundreds of times daily in London's National Gallery, is recognizable precisely because the immediate context within which the viewing takes place structures the way the painting is seen "for the first time," programming any *après coup* sighting of the skull.

8. Donald Davidson, "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme." Reprinted in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford UP) 183–198.

> Whorf, wanting to demonstrate that Hopi incorporates an ontology so alien to ours that Hopi and English cannot, as he puts it, be calibrated, uses English to convey the contents of sample Hopi sentences. Kuhn is brilliant at saying at what things were like before the revolution using—what else?—our post-revolutionary idiom. (183)

Davidson initially argues, in terms that strongly recall, in their reliance on the plotting of points in "coordinate systems," the geometry of anamorphic projection.

> The dominant metaphor of conceptual relativism that of differing points of view, seems to betray an underlying paradox. Different points of view make sense, but only if there is a common coordinate system on which to plot them; yet the existence of a common system belies the claim of dramatic incomparability. (183)

Ultimately, Davidson argues that the idea of a "conceptual scheme" is fundamentally incoherent, if "conceptual scheme" is defined as:

> A way of organizing experience, [...] systems of categories from which individual cultures, or periods survey the passing scene. There may be no translating from one scheme to another, in which case the beliefs, desires, hopes, and bits of knowledge that characterize one person have no true counterparts for the subscriber to another scheme. Reality itself is relative to a scheme: what counts as real in one system may not be in another. (Davidson 1984, 184)

As he recognizes the widespread appeal of the "scheme" idea, Davidson also suggests that:

> Even those thinkers who are certain there is only one conceptual scheme are in the sway of the scheme concept; even monotheists have religion. And when someone sets out to describe "our conceptual scheme," his homey task assumes, if we take him literally, that there might be rival systems. (183)

Davidson asks whether an object of interpretation could be, in principle, so distant from an interpreter's perspective that it would be inherently beyond comprehension; his answer to this question is in the negative: for Davidson, infinite otherness is inconceivable. The proposition that a conceptual scheme (a term Davidson assimilates, rather quickly, to a "language") could be, in principle, absolutely opaque to another would also be untenable. Provided, then, that we accept Davidson's substitution of "language" for "scheme,"

partial failures in translation can be taken care of by more-or-less elaborate paraphrase and word-substitution (what Davidson calls "systematic malapropism"). Partial puzzlement does not, therefore, signal the existence of different "schemes" of concepts.

Ultimately, Davidson will go on to suggest that the notion of a "common co-ordinate system" he proposed initially is incoherent as well, concluding in the following way:

> It would be wrong to summarize by saying we have shown how communication is possible between people who have different schemes, a way that works without need of what there cannot be, namely a neutral ground, or a common co-ordinate system. For we have found no intelligible basis on which it can be said that schemes are different. It would be equally wrong to announce the glorious news that all mankind—all speakers of language—share a common scheme and ontology. For if we cannot intelligibly say that schemes are different, neither can we intelligibly say that they are one.[9] (198)

The point, still a controversial one, is that there is no such thing as a conceptual scheme distinct from its perceptual content. A linguist, for example, has no scheme, either "at home" or "in the field"; Davidson will even go so far as to deny that he or she has a language:[10] "radical translation" begins at home. Un-

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9. In his response to Davidson's essay, W. V. Quine (whose use of the term "conceptual schemes" in what is perhaps his most famous essay, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," Davidson is querying) concedes that talk of "conceptual schemes" is at best very loose. Quine writes:

> In conclusion, then, let me clarify the status of the phrase. I inherited it some forty-five years ago through L. J. Henderson from Pareto, and I have meant it as ordinary language, serving no technical function. It is not, as architects say, a supporting member. A triad—conceptual scheme, language and world—is not what I envisage. I think rather, like Davidson, in terms of language and the world. I scout the *tertium quid* as a myth of a museum of labeled ideas. Where I have spoken of a conceptual scheme I could have spoken of a language. Where I have spoken of a very alien conceptual scheme I would have been content, Davidson will be glad to know, to speak of a language awkward or baffling to translate. W. V. Quine, "On the Very Idea of a Third Dogma," in *Theories and Things* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1981) 41.

For Quine, a conceptual scheme simply *is* not, in any rigorous sense. Though Quine takes issue with Davidson's christening of the "scheme/content" distinction as a "third dogma of empiricism," he seems fundamentally in agreement that the "conceptual scheme" is a fictitious object. Note that neither Davidson nor Quine would subscribe to the view that language is the world, constituting a vast text enfolding both the subject and what it sees.

10. See, in particular, Davidson's essay "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs" in E. Lepore, ed. *Truth and Interpretation: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986).

familiar words, puzzling objects—both are situated on a continuum between total familiarity and total strangeness. Yet for Davidson, such a continuum in no way suggests that there is, in addition to the experience of strangeness or familiarity, one underlying scheme, or many underlying schemes, structuring any particular experience. For Davidson, the term "conceptual scheme" is a prime candidate for Ockham's razor. A conceptual scheme does not shape or underlie language or perception, it is not a scrim between speakers and the world. It is an *ens praeter necessitatem*, an ontological prodigality.

Neither the psychoanalytic model of anamorphosis presented above nor the Davidsonian model presented here seems entirely up to the task of justifying anamorphosis as a conceptual tool. Just as the psychoanalytic interpretation is vulnerable to the criticism that it relies too strongly on idealized models and on a radical incommensurability between a viewpoint and what it extrudes, so Davidson's essay on conceptual schemes, though obviously pertinent to the theory of cultural anamorphosis, is vulnerable to charges of political in-genuousness. Indeed the "principle of charity"[11] Davidson puts forward has been understood as a condescending denial of the essential difference between

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11. Donald Davidson on charity: "the method [for understanding the behavior of others] is not designed to eliminate disagreement, nor can it; its purpose is to make meaningful disagreement possible, and this depends entirely on a foundation—some foundation—in agreement. The agreement may take the form of widespread sharing of sentences held true by speakers of 'the same language,' or agreement in the large mediated by a theory of truth contrived by an interpreter for speakers of another language. Since charity is not an option, but a condition of having a workable theory, it is meaningless to suggest we might fall into massive error by endorsing it. [...] Charity is forced on us; whether we like it or not, if we want to understand others, we must count them right in most matters." "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme" in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1984) 196–97.

Note the strong resemblance between what Davidson calls "charity" and what Hans-Georg Gadamer, in *Truth and Method*, calls a "common understanding." Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Continuum, 1989), especially 291–307. Gadamer mentions Davidson specifically in a note on 295 (quoted in the final footnote of this article). Indeed there has been some exchange between the two thinkers: Davidson contributed an essay, "Gadamer and Plato's *Philebus*," to a recent general volume on the German philosopher, edited by Lewis Edwin Hahn, *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer* (La Salle: Open Court, 1997); we also have Gadamer's reply (chapters 21–22, 421–35). Gadamer writes: "The style of Donald Davidson's study is especially exciting and suspenseful. What characterizes both of our scholarly paths is no more nor less than a mutual overtaking of each other" (433). In the following pages Gadamer goes on to emphasize the differences between their respective conceptions of Plato and of philosophy.

On the relationship between the two philosophers, see also *Gadamer's Century: Essays in Honor of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, ed. Jeff Malpas, Ulrich Arnswald, and Jens Kertscher (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002). This collection contains two useful chapters on the Davidson/Gadamer convergence by Jeff Malpas and John McDowell as well as an essay by Charles Taylor on Gadamer and "conceptual schemes."

interlocutors.[12] Davidson leaves himself open to this attack, though he does not trivialize the very real problems of power differentials and vast cultural variation involved in communicating across what are often called, erroneously, in his view, "conceptual schemes." His point, it would seem, is not to deny difference, or to suggest that one "scheme" can or should colonize all the variety of experience in the world. Rather, he is making a point about the ontological status of theoretical objects: such things as "schemes," "mentalities" or "dominant paradigms" do not exist. If he is right, they cannot be necessary tools for theorizing cultural difference.

Nevertheless, the question of whether "anamorphosis" has a useful function as a theoretical construct remains open. In both cases examined thus far, it seems clear that "anamorphosis" is intimately connected to the idea of "conceptual schemes," or "symbolic orders" seen as structuring, or containing, particular symbolic worlds or particular ideological constructs. It is to this notion of "containment" that I would like to turn now.

III

The philosophical jury is still out on whether Davidson is right, as an ontological principle, to claim that there is no such thing as a conceptual scheme—that is, to claim that talk of such entities as "mentalities" (Febvre), "dominant paradigms" (Kuhn), and "epistemes" (Foucault) is, insofar as ontological commitment is concerned, on a par with talk about unicorns.[13] Quentin Skin-

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12. The strongest critique of Davidson's article to date is to my mind an article by Michael N. Forste "On the Very Idea of Denying the Existence of Radically Different Conceptual Schemes," *Inquiry*, 41:2 (1998) 135–85. For a useful overview of Davidson's "principle of charity" and its philosophical reception (including the notion of a "principle of humanity") see Jane Heal's article "Radical Interpretation," in the *Blackwell Companion to the Philosophy of Language*, ed. B. Hale and C. Wright (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997) 175–96, especially section 4. Davidson now tends to talk in terms of the creation of "understanding," rather than "charity": "What is created in dialogue is not a common language but understanding; each partner comes to understand the other. And it also seems wrong to me to say agreement concerning an object demands that a common language first be worked out. I would say: it is only in the presence of shared objects that understanding can come about. Coming to an agreement about an object and coming to understand each other's speech are not independent moments but part of the same interpersonal process of triangulating the world." Davidson, "Gadamer on Plato's *Philebus*," 432.

13. To group these three terms together is no doubt tendentious, though it not to say that in every situation they are interchangeable—though in many cases in the literature the terms are used more or less interchangeably—but rather to suggest that they all reach toward the following common assumption: thought and speech, and notably truth claims, at place w at a given time t occur within an underlying, tacit system or framework characteristic for place w at time t. The different models diverge particularly in explaining anomalous thoughts—marginal and/or "epoch-making" ones. This is a subject for a much larger essay, in preparation. See also Linda Martín Alcoff, *Real Knowing: New Versions of the Coherence Theory* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1996), which contains chapters on Gadamer, Davidson, Foucault and Putnam.

ner, for one, has recently written in favor of "conceptual schemes," though at other points he seems more congenial to Davidson's position.[14] The question will not be resolved in this essay. As Davidson suggests, it is convenient, and no doubt comforting, to assume that a historical period is defined by a particular "scheme," or set of mental tools, without examining the status both of periods and "schemes." In one sense, the crux of the problem is the ontological status of schemes;[15] in another, it is the comfort provided by the controlling gesture of imposing a scheme. As *grilles de lecture*, such reassuring mental constructions are indeed, to borrow a famous phrase from Quine, "man-made fabric[s] which impinge on experience only at the edges."[16] In the warp and woof of the "fabric," ideological commitments intertwine. Such efforts to impose comforting schemes are highly troubled and troubling, but I would suggest that we do not need logic of the *après coup* embedded in psychoanalytic readings to make sense of this "trouble."

Yet for devotees of the conceptual scheme or the episteme, the sixteenth century provides a fertile field for reflection; indeed it is largely with reference to Renaissance[17] that Michel Foucault, in *Les Mots et les choses* (1966), elucidates his notion of "episteme."[18] And with cause: the late Renaissance is indeed characterized by a proliferation of attempts to classify knowledge and to present it a significant order characterized by harmony and correspondence. Many have taken this classificatory tendency as an essential element of a late Renaissance mindset. Neil Kenny, for one, has argued that such attempts are

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14. "[W]henever we report our beliefs, we inevitably employ some particular classificatory scheme. [...] [A]s Thomas Kuhn has especially emphasised, the fact that different schemes divide the world up in different ways means that none of them can ever be uncontentiously employed to report indisputable facts. "Interpretation, Rationality, and Truth" in *Visions of Politics: Regarding Method* (Vol. 1) (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002) 45.

15. Hilary Putnam would suggest that I am wrong to be too concerned about the "ontological status" of schemes; he sees Quine's influence with regard to "ontology" as pernicious. See H. Putnam, *Ethics without Ontology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2004).

16. W. V. Quine, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," in *From a Logical Point of View*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1953, reissued 1980) 53.

17. My occasional use of the term "Renaissance" implies no belief in rebirth, or in the singularity of a period called the "Renaissance," but simply reflects a will to avoid such awkward formulations as "late early modern" and the like. It should be taken entirely in this spirit. It here denotes, as far as France is concerned, roughly the period between 1470 and 1600.

18. See Michel Foucault, *Les Mots et les choses; une archéologie des sciences humaines* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966)—on Foucault's reading of the sixteenth century, see especially chapter 2, "La prose du monde"—and *L'Archéologie du savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969).

characteristic of a late Renaissance "mentality" and has expertly traced the
tension, in the final years of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the
seventeenth, between "encyclopedism" and its opposite: the denial that there
exists a significant order which might contain the whole of significant knowl-
edge.[19] The prevailing Renaissance idea of the "encyclopedia" (the "circle
of learning") is a cosmological picture whose central trope is harmony. An
early sixteenth-century Latin example of the genre, Francesco Giorgio's *De
Harmonia mundi* of 1525, explicitly connects the structure of the heavens to
the ring of erudition. Both the heavens and the encyclopedia are conceived,
according to neo-Platonic principles, as harmonies; the latter is thought to
reflect the former. The Latin word *encyclopaedia*, borrowed from Greek, is
already present in fifteenth-century humanistic writing. In French, the term
"encyclopédie" appears in the Rabelais's *Pantagruel* (1532), though this is
not its first appearance: Guillaume Budé has already used the term some ten
years previously, in a manuscript revision of his *Institution du prince* (Kenny
15). In his *Solitaire second, ou prose de la* Musique of 1555, Pontus de Tyard
evokes the encyclopedia in musical terms:

> [L]a Musique, estimée par la moins recusable troupe des sages con-
> tenir en soi toute perfection de symmetrie et retenue pour image de
> toute l'Encyclopedie.[20]

Indeed, Frances Yates has suggested that Tyard's assertion and his vulgarizing
treatises of the 1550s underlie the essentially musical encyclopedism of Jean-
Antoine de Baïf's Academy of Poetry and Music, founded in 1570 under the
auspices of Charles IX, and its successor, the Palace Academy of Henri III.
Harmony, I would suggest, can be considered a reassuring *grille de lecture*, a
key element in early modern attempts to order the cosmos and the earth.[21]

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19. Kenny 1991, esp. 1-3. Kenny uses the terms "mentality" "outillage mental" and
"episteme."

20. Pontus de Tyard, *Solitaire second*. Ed. C. Yandell. (Genève: Droz, 1981) 71. Cf.
Yates 1947 (Ch 4 : "Music and Poetry and the Encyclopedia").

21. "There are good grounds for relying on Pontus de Tyard as the philosophical
theorist of the sixteenth-century French academies. As a poet of the Pléiade and as a
musical humanist related to Baïf's Academy, he knew the movement from the inside
at both these stages of its development, and of course in the course of his long life
he was also in touch with its later phases in the reign of Henri III. Tyard thus covers
the whole ground. No one could have been better equipped than he to expound the
relationship of poetry and music to the encyclopaedia, and fortunately he did so."
Frances Yates, *The French Academies of the Sixteenth Century* (London: Warburg
Institute, 1947) 77.

Much has been made of the competing ideas of "encyclopedism" and anti-encyclopedism in the late sixteenth century.[22] Instead of going back over the story of the tension between totalizing gestures and their non-totalizing counterparts, what I would like to propose here is a slightly different focus: I would like to explore the essential trope of "harmony" in the context of what I have already said about the relation between "anamorphosis" and the comfort provided by the "conceptual scheme." What I would like to suggest is that this pivotal trope of "harmony" is itself a highly contested one, one laden with half-hidden violence and the threat of irretrievable discord.

The analysis of "harmony" as a conceptual scheme offered here is necessarily partial, there is not room in this essay to treat the topic exhaustively, and the examples chosen are intended to point in the direction of a problem in early modern epistemology and esthetics, a blind spot both in the texts themselves and in the critical literature. Through the close reading of several early modern texts, I will continue my examination of the methodological usefulness of anamorphosis as a critical construct, a particularly useful one when such schemes strain and crack at the edges of the experience they are expected to contain. Thus, as a point of departure into these much broader issues, I will begin here by offering a close reading of a short poem that exhibits, on a small scale, many of the tensions inherent to the notion of "harmony" that I would like to illustrate. The work of the mid-sixteenth century Lyonnese poet, Maurice Scève (c. 1500–c. 1562) vividly illustrates the tension between idealized evocation of cosmic order and the barely contained violence inherent in "harmony." Scève was the mentor and friend of Pontus de Tyard, the French writer to whom the early modern French academies are most indebted; he is author of what is often considered the first Petrarchan cycle in France, *Délie: Objet de plus haulte vertu*, as well as one of the more striking examples of encyclopedic poetry, his *Microcosme* (pub. 1562). A deep unease about the strength of harmony as a containing force is at play the following epigram from *Délie*.

> Ceincte en ce point et le col, et le corps
> Avec les bras, te denote estre prise

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22. See, in addition to Yates 1947 and Kenny 1991, R. Collinson, *Encyclopaedias: Their History throughout the Ages; a Bibliographical Guide with Extensive Historical Notes to the General Encyclopaedias Issued throughout the World from 350 B.C. to the Present Day* (New York: Hafner, 1964); W. Schmidt-Biggemann, *Topica universalis: eine Modellgeschichte humanistischer und barocker Wissenschaft* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1983); P. Sharratt and A. J. Steele, *French Renaissance Studies, 1540–1570. Humanism and the Encyclopedia* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1976). On Renaissance theories of knowledge, see Quentin Skinner, ed., *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988), especially sections VI, XI and XII.

De l'harmonie en celestes accordz,
Où le hault Ciel de tes vertus se prise.
        Fortuné fut celuy, qui telle prise
Peut (Dieux beningz) à son heur rencontrer.
Car te voulant, tant soit peu, demonstrer
D'espoir ainsi envers moy accoustrée,
Non moindre gloire est à me veoir oultrer,
Que te congnoistre a mon vouloir oultrée.
                          (D173)[23]

A traditional, neo-Platonic reading of this epigram would no doubt privi-
lege the word "harmony." From a certain point of view, the frequency of
cosmological vocabulary in the collection as a whole suggests the pertinence of
a sublimating, neo-Platonic reading of desire in Scève—it is hardly surprising
that an "object of highest virtue" should be "harmonious." Yet in reading the
epigram two words jump out immediately: "ceinte," placed so forcefully in
the opening line that it is quite difficult to situate it syntactically; and "prise,"
repeated at the end of lines 2, 4, and 5. In Scève's time, the verb "ceindre"
possessed the connotations of the Latin *cingo*: "encircle," "surround, "bind,"
as well as the vestimentary sense of "putting around the body."[24] This last
meaning is associated with ceremonial sashes imparting authority as well as
a combative stance. "Ceindre" thus suggests a comparison between Délie's
beauty, her clothes, and a harmonic power of celestial origins. Indeed, epigram
173 recalls another poem, epigram 131, in which Délie is compared with Delia
(Diana) the huntress (a poem which also begins "Delia ceincte").
    The insistent repetition of the word "prise" in epigram 173 suggests, how-
ever, a less positive sense of the word "ceincte." "Prise" has a number of
meanings in the sixteenth century: the "action of receiving" or "recompense
for a victory" (like the English *prize*), *épris* (taken with), as well as the sex-
ual connotation of the past particple. How then must we interpret "prise/
de l'harmonie" (v. 3-4)? Is the beloved "prise"—taken from, extracted from
cosmic harmony? Is she rather the "prise" (*prize*) of harmony—that is, the
recompense of a quest for harmony? Is she the "prise" in the sense of "point
of access" to divine harmony, a point at which one might "avoir prise" (get a
grip on) harmony as if to appropriate it. Scève cultivates the ambiguity. It is
not resolved in line 3: "en celestes accordz" can mean both "in the context of

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23. All dizains from *Délie* are quoted from Gérard Defaux's edition, *Délie, object de
plus haulte vertu* (Geneva: Droz, 2004). I have made similar comments on this dizain in
my book *Harmonie divine et subjectivité poétique chez Maurice Scève* (Geneva: Droz,
2001), esp. the introduction and ch. 3.

24. Definitions drawn from E. Huguet, *Dictionnaire de la langue française du seizième
siècle*. (Paris: E. Champion/Didier, 1925–1973.)

harmony" or "through the action of celestial concord." And does "se prise" mean "est appréciée" ("is appreciated"), "values itself" or "aprises itself of?" Keeping in mind these ambiguities, a possible rendering of the first quatrain might be "[If] you are girded thus at the neck, on the body and on the arms, this means that your origin is in harmony, in celestial concords—whence even high Heaven congratulates itself." There would seem to be something else going on here besides a placid, neo-Platonic evocation of cosmic harmony and its imitation in verse.

The second half of the poem also presents serious problems of interpretation. The syntax of the last quatrain is extremely complex. It is based on a Latin ablative absolute construction (*te volente* ...), and might be translated as follows: "However, though you wanted to show yourself to me it such a way as to inspire hope—if only a little—it is no less a glory to see myself transgress than to know that you are wounded[25] according to my desire." Note that the second-person pronoun never appears as the subject of the sentence—and that the "te" constructions in the first and last quatrains function similarly to subordinate the "tu" grammatically. Scève's acrobatic syntax seems to reign in the second person by making sure that, though it is the subject of the poem, it is never the subject of a sentence. The "tu" is tied up in a violent circumscription announced at the very beginning of the epigram ("Ceincte...") and taken up structurally in the twisted syntax that follows.

Keeping these observations in mind for the moment, let us now look at the epigram in its immediate context. Epigrams 172 and 173 exhibit obvious connections. D172 seems at first to present a somewhat conventional idealization of the beloved:

> Blanc Alebastre en son droit rond poly,
> Que maint chaynon superbement coronne:
> Yvoire pur en union joly,
> Où maint esmail mainte joye se donne.
>   O quand ie voy, que ce ceinct t'environne,
> Estant au corps, et au bras cordonnée
> De la vertu au bleu abandonnée,
> Dont Amour est et hautain, et vainqueur
> Je suis lors seur, Creature bien née,
> Que fermeté est la clef de ton cœur.[26]

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25. "Outrer" = wound, pierce, wrong, transgress. ("Plus outre" was Charles V's motto.) Also to be "outré d'amour" is to be pierced with Love's arrow.

26. "Union" from Latin unio (m.) = large pearl." McFarlane suggests "en" = "linked with." Line 3 might be rendered "In a beautiful pearl, pure ivory [color]" or perhaps "Pure ivory, beautiful in union," if "ioly" is taken as modifying "yuoire."

Here, Délie is presented covered with jewels appropriate to her exalted status; she wears the blue sash associated with the Virgin Mary in early modern iconography. However, we see the same ambivalence between praise and constraint, harmony and "ceincture," between what we might call the "ceincte" and the "sainte." The semantic field of "roundness," with its astronomical connotations ("rond," "coronne" "ceinct" "environne," and especially the pearl, the "union," recalling the moon so often associated with Délie in the collection) joins in the poem with that of particularly restrictive jewelry ("chainon," "*abandon*ée, *cordon*née). The "ceinture" traces the limits of the surrounded body's materiality, whose "vertu" is expressed in concrete terms in certain number of hard substances ("yvoire," "email," "alebastre"). Simply put, harmony in *Délie* becomes a desire for fixity, even for the violent constraint of the other whose immobility is desired. To borrow a phrase from Ronsard's "Hymne à l'Eternite" (1556), Délie the beloved, like *Délie* the cycle, should be "celle qui jamais pour les ans ne se change."[27] The desire for closure is instantiated in a structure, both abstract and material, resistant like "ivory" or "enamel," or "hard Epigrams" ("dures Epygrammes"). It is precisely this closure which embodies the aspiration of a poetic voice in search of form-making limits for the subject and for Délie (desired object)/*Délie* (the book).

In epigram 173, line 5, there is a sudden, puzzling insurgence of a third party, to whom the possibility of mastering harmony, otherwise so problematic in the poem, is consigned. If there is such a thing, I would call this the anamorphic moment of the poem. Here "prise," both aesthetic and sexual, is relegated to a perspective entirely outside of the "je-tu" opposition, that an absent other, who melds the "je" and "tu" together in a secure, material object, a monument to a past, absent unity which had been able, at one point, to join successfully the two principles of "subject" and "object" into a solidified, monumental harmony-as-"prise":

> Fortuné fut celuy, qui telle prise
> Peut (Dieux beningz) à son heur rencontrer.

Yet this ideal of perfect completeness, relegated to the past of the *passé simple*, is constantly juxtaposed in Scève with the fear of shattering rupture. Epigrams 172 and 173 are half-way between emblems 19 and 20, depicting, respectively, Actaeon and Orpheus–key Ovidian figures in the collection—and not the least because they die in a similar way. Actaeon and Orpheus are of course both dismembered, Actaeon by his own dogs, transformed into a stag for having gazed on Diana, Orpheus for having gazed on Eurydice, and for rejecting the advances of the Thracian women. In the particular logic of the

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27. Pierre de Ronsard, *Œuvres*. (Paris: Ed. P. Laumonier/Didier[STFM], 1928–1974) VIII; 246, line 6.

reflection in Scève and in Ovid, it is as if the water of the fountain of Diana/Narcissus, water both metallic in appearance and dangerous in its motion, had undermined the stony harmony of a beloved who is, to use Baudelaire's phrase, "belle comme un rêve de pierre," thus revealing the peril of the dismemberment both of the subject and of the phantasm of the other that subtends the desire for fixed harmonic order. Cosmic music, whose "prise" the other possesses, is a way to exercise *power*—literally to move mountains, or trees and boulders—or at least tie people up. It is this power that the lyric subject in *Délie* lacks; another epigram, D316, explicitly establishes an unfavorable comparison between Orpheus' powers and those of the lyric "I." Just as epigram 173 is about tying the other up with the circles of harmony, so the cycle, the "I" is traversed by an anxiety of never being "in himself", "en soy"—that is, an anxiety that the lyric subject might never be at the centre of a ring of reverberation, like Orpheus with his lyre, surrounded by stones, trees and animals—a ring which would consecrate the poet as an interiority, or which would establish the other of desire as an "object de plus haulte vertu."

In the end, Scève's verdict on "cosmic harmony" and "music" is a pessimistic one. Cosmic music serves ultimately to show how far the world has fallen; and does not seem to open up the possibility of return. The drama of this loss seems to have everything to do with modern poetry's lack of efficacy, yet Scève does not attempt to cover up this lack with calls for linking music and poetry, as other early modern poets, such as Ronsard, Pontus de Tyard, and Jean-Antoine de Baïf do. Scève writes a remarkably diffident liminary sonnet for the publication of Pontus de Tyard's study on music, the *Solitaire second, ou prose de la musique* of 1555. In his sonnet, Scève seems to be suggesting that Tyard's work is not much comfort; it is only useful as a palliative, sufficient because it has to be, but poor sustenance for the modern soul stuck in earthly cares. In the end, it is hard not to feel that these cosmological *topoi* in Scève are a kind of wishful thinking—whenever the ideas of the powers of music are evoked, they are undercut by a deep and abiding pessimism about their efficacy and perhaps even their reality. There is always a sense that there is something missing from poetry which will prevent it from ever becoming whole—and that what is missing cannot be replaced by the simple addition of music to poetry.

Yet the enduring skepticism is not just about the inefficacy of harmony, it also draws attention to the double status of harmony as both a grasping of perfect order and a desperate strategy of containment. What I would suggest here is that "harmony" here is simultaneously available as both grasping and containing, and that, again, neither perspective is radically alien to the other: the vocabulary of sublimation entails also the violence latent beneath the perfect "ceinture" of cosmic concord. In epigram 173, the two perspectives are played out through the introduction, at the center of the poem, of a hypothetical third party for whose gaze the "ceinture" would not be problematic,

one who is ambiguously both radically past ("peut" is usually read as *passé simple*) and entirely present (there is no reason this verb could not be read as the present "peult" as well).

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In Maurice Scève, as in the Holbein painting, we detected a tension between imposition of a totalizing structure and doubts about its efficacy. In Holbein's work, the mathematics of mapping heaven and earth were put at the service of containing death and political schism. In Scève, the rhetoric of cosmic harmony supported the painful delimiting of subjects and objects of desire; the epigrams themselves seemed to stand as an anamorphic distortion of harmony, a twisting of harmony into bondage.

The tensions between harmony and constraint, exhibited on a small scale in Scève's epigram, can also be detected in texts with much larger containing ambitions. Perhaps the most striking examples of a link between power, constraint and cosmic harmony in sixteenth-century France is in the work of the political philosopher Jean Bodin. In the final chapter of the last book of his *Six Books of the Republic* (1576), Bodin provides a mathematical justification for a strong centralized monarchy, using the proportions of musical intervals, and the numbers 1-4 (the Pythagorean *tetrachys*) as the foundation of his theory. Bodin writes:

> En quoy faisant le sage Prince accordera ses subjects les uns aux autres, et tous ensemble avec soy, toute ainsi comme on peut voire es quatre premiers nombres, que Dieu a disposez par proportion Harmonique : pour nous monstrer que l'estat Royal est Harmonique, et qu'il se doit gouverner Harmoniquement : car 2 à 3 fait la quinte, 3 à 4 la quarte, deux à quatre l'octave et derechef, un à deux faict l'octave, I à 3 la douzième, tenant la quinte et l'octave, et I à 4 la double octave, qui contient l'entier systeme de tous les tons et accords de musique : et qui voudra passer à 5 il fera un discord insupportable.[28]

Earlier in the treatise, Bodin has already identified the King and the three estates with these first four whole numbers and with four types of wisdom.[29] In

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28. Jean Bodin, *Les six Livres de la Republique*. Ed. C. Fremont, M.-D. Couzinet, H. Rochais (Paris, Fayard, 1986) II; 306.

29. Cf. Kate van Orden, *Music, Discipline, and Arms in Early Modern France* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, forthcoming).

Bodin's schema, the King is represented by the number one, the first estate by the number two, the second estate, three, and the third estate, four. Thus, the well-tempered King, according to Bodin's theory, forms an octave (1:2) with the first estate, a twelfth with the second (1:3), and a double octave with the third (1:4). The first and second estates are in the proportion of a fifth (2:3), and so on. Bodin offers a lengthy discussion of Geometric and Arithmetic governance and proportion in book six as well; these three alternate systems are ultimately not as good—they cannot make sweet harmony, as they do not correspond so neatly to the proportions defining musical intervals. God, of course, stands as the eternal tuner and maker of the system; the King's power indeed comes from the grasping of the principles of harmony—to paraphrase Scève: "fortunate he who—God willing—could hit upon, happily, such an understanding."

Such a link between royal power and cosmic harmony is operative as well in the foundation of an important sixteenth century predecessor of the *Académie française*, the Academy of Poetry and Music, in 1570, founded under the auspices of Charles IX by Jean-Antoine de Baïf and the composer Thibaut de Courville. As Frances Yates has shown, music, in Baïf's academy, becomes the focal point of a movement with truly encyclopedic ambitions. For Baïf, poetry and music are profoundly political. For Baïf, a member of the Pléiade—the prestigious group of poets grouped around Pierre de Ronsard, to use harmony is to exercise a kind of power, common to poets and kings, a power rooted in natural law. The person, king and poet, who manipulates harmony correctly can deploy, in his own interest and perhaps that of the kingdom, a colossal magical power: the power of Orpheus to gather rocks, trees and animals, of Amphion to build the walls of Thebes.

In November 1570, when the letters patent of the academy were signed, the brutal religious wars between Catholics and Protestants were well underway. During this particularly nasty time, Baïf and Courville, the latter a composer, petitioned Charles IX for permission to start an Academy of Poetry and Music, in order (according to the academy statues)

> Afin de remettre en vsage la Musique selon sa perfection, qui est de representer la parole en chant accomply de son harmonie & melodie, qui consistent au choix, regle des voix, sons & accords bien accommodez pour faire l'effet selon que le sens de la lettre le requiert, ou resserrant, ou desserrant, ou accroissant l'esprit, re-nouuellant aussi l'ancienne façon de composer Vers mesurez pour y accommoder le chant pareillement mesuré selon l'Art Metrique. Afin aussi que par ce moyen les esprits des Auditeurs accoustumez & dressez à la Musique par forme de ses membres, se composent pour estre capables de plus haulte connoissance, aprés qu"ils se-ront repurgez de ce qui pourroit leur rester de la barbarie, sous le

> bon-plaisir du Roy nostre souuerain Seigneur, nous auons conuenu
> dersser vne Academie ou Compagnie composée de Musisiens &
> Auditeurs.[30]

The purpose of the academy is to resurrect the musical effects of antiquity,
especially those effects described in famous passages in Plato about the role of
music in forming the ideal citizen of the city-state. For Plato, musical training
is intended to give the pupil a sense of the harmony of the world of which
he or she is a part. In Plato, the key verb for what music is supposed to do is
"*rhythmizein*," which means something like "to form," "to mold," both in
the sense of "to educate" and "to shape." The city state and, *a fortiori*, the
increasingly centralized monarchy of "le Roy nostre souuerain Seigneur" must
at all costs maintain aesthetic laws based as closely as possible on the eternal
harmonies. This is the context for the phrase "accoustumez & dressez à la
Musique," and especially of this word "dressez," which evokes nothing else if
not animal trainers in search of charms to soothe the savage French.

In an epistle Baïf addressed to Charles IX about three months after the
signing of the Academy's statutes, that is, in early 1571, Baïf asks for royal
protection against his enemies in the Sorbonne, who are unhappy about the
potential power of Baïf's new foundation. Baïf begins by filling the king in on
what has happened in the meetings he has missed while the king finishes his
dinner. But suddenly the dogs under the table begin to growl, and Charles IX
grabs a "baston" from the serving master, leaps up, and silences them:

> [...] Là finit mon propos
> Des chiens entrerompu. Vous gaillard et dispos
> Avecque le baston, qu'entre les mains vous pristes
> Du maistre qui servoit, cesser alheure fistes
> Le gronder de ces chiens, qui sans plus rechigner
> En repos et en paix vous laisserent disner.
>   Sire, ce di-j'en moy, Tout à mon avantage
> A l'honeur de mon Roy je prens ce bon presage.
> Les chiens s'entregrondans ce sont mes envieux
> Qui jettent devant vous des abbois ennuieux
> A vostre Magesté contre mon entreprise
> Qu'en vostre sauvegarde, ô bon Prince, avez prise.
> Le baston avec pris : le baston vous prendrez
> Et contre le malin la vertu deffendrez.
> Soudain les menassant vous les avez fait taire:

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30. Preamble to the Statues of Baïf's Academy [Nov. 1570]. Transcribed Yates 320.

Aussi nos envieux (car vous le pouvez faire)
Ferez taire tout coy, quand les menasserez[.][31]

In this poem, Baïf's project is clearly his own—"mon entreprise"—and the good omen is both "tout à mon avantage" and "à l'honeur de mon Roy." The enemies whom the king is called upon to silence with his "baston" are dogs who intend to do whatever possible to prevent the success of Baïf's noble new project. "Rhytmizein"—the pedagogic manifestation of cosmic order intended to inspire unruly subjects and placate them, is here perversely transmuted into the manic beating of enemies with a stick. Menacing rhythm is intended to silence critics and to confirm the powerful mastery both of the poet and of his sovereign; the blows become audible even in the insistently hammering prosody. Ultimately, the king must silence Baïf's rivals so that he alone can exercise the kind of musical power that poetry allows. Baïf's texts consistently betray this ambition to be the one who calls the tune. The synergy between harmony and power finds clear expression.

I would argue that the real interest of these texts surrounding the foundation of the academy is in making the tools of musical manipulation available to both the king and the poet. Both end up in conceptually similar, centralized positions. Ultimately, both Jean Bodin and Jean-Antoine de Baïf reflect a desire to rationalize and control behavior through the manipulation of harmonic laws, just as the lyric subject in Scève's *Délie*, in a much more conflicted and self-defeating way, tries to tie up, harmonically, an object of desire whose very name means "untie" ("delier"). Philosophy, specifically Florentine neo-Platonism, provides a useful justification for centralized political and aesthetic power, on the basis of "natural law." Repression of the unruly subjectivity in Scève bears a family resemblance to the management of unruly subjects in Bodin and Baïf. Bodin and Baïf share what I would call a "harmonic formalism" that affirms far more forcefully, perhaps precisely because it is imminently threatened, a mimetic link between the structure of the cosmos, that of the *polis* and, in Baïf's case, that of the artistic artifact, as well the belief in the efficacy of this imitation within the world of public life.

We return to the early modern "conceptual scheme" and the extent to which "harmony" is one of its basic components. The major twentieth-century historian of the French Academies of late Renaissance France was undoubtedly Frances Yates; indeed, during the icy London winter of 1940–41, in the Warburg Institute unheated because of the Blitz, Yates gave a series of lectures on the Palace Academies under Charles IX and Henri III, published after the

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31. Jean-Antoine de Baïf, "Au Roy," from the *Cinquième livre des poèmes. Evvres en rime*, Ed. Jean Vignes et al. (Paris: Champion, 2002) I; 313–14. The poem is cited, from the Marty-Laveaux edition (Paris: Lemerre, 1883), by Yates 27n, 60.

Second World War as *The French Academies of the Sixteenth Century*. Yates's study, as significant as it is, could be said to have a significant blind spot, a "fuzzy patch." There is an implicit nostalgia, in Yates' writing, for aesthetic and political theories, largely neo-Platonic in inspiration, based on the idea of harmony, an undercurrent suggesting that what it is really about, ultimately, is "European civilization" and what seems to her one of its nobler foundations: *concordia discors*, the coincidence of opposing elements in a harmonious truce. Yates writes, in her preface: "it might be difficult to recapture the atmosphere in which the French Academies of the sixteenth century first presented themselves as a steadying subject for contemplation in a disintegrating world" (Yates, vii). *Concordia discors* had been betrayed, both in war-shattered late sixteenth-century France and also in twentieth-century Europe. Such a sentiment is no doubt understandable in someone living in London in 1940. It is perhaps not surprising that Yates systematically omits the more sinister political implications of harmony.

I have suggested that Yates's wistful comment in her preface is all the more apposite in that "harmony" stands as a "steadying subject" for early modern writers as well, who also live in a world beset by the uncertainty of schism and random violence. But "harmony" can stand as "a steadying subject" in several ways. On the one hand, "harmony" can seem as something to be aspired to, an ideal projected onto an inaccessible elsewhere from a point in which chaos and fragmentation are the rule (for example, the sub-lunar world of traditional cosmology). On the other hand, order can be taken as the first term, and chaos as an inopportune intrusion of disintegration into an *ex hypothesi* perfect cosmos and its emanations on earth (such as the divinely legitimate monarchy). In both cases, harmony is taken as the perfect order. What is important is where the viewer stands in relationship to this perfect order, the viewpoint taken when looking onto this order. "Cosmic harmony" would seem here to function as a "scheme" imposed on the empirical world, a scrim filtering its perception and structuring assumptions about its form.

So what seems missing in Yates' study is some recognition of the control exercised by the imposition of schemes on an unruly world, that the "steadying subject" which harmony represents can also be read as a violent impulse to impose a scheme onto objects in the world. Indeed, the historian Denis Crouzet has read the ideological charge of "harmony" in the latter half of the sixteenth century very much in this way.[32] This is not to say that the imposition of such a harmonic scheme was not methodologically productive in the late sixteenth century. Yet what is particularly striking about the texts I have

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32. On the relationship between ideologies of harmony, violence and political repression see Denis Crouzet, *La nuit de la Saint-Barthélemy : un rêve perdu de la Renaissance* (Paris: Fayard, 1994) and *Les guerriers de Dieu : la violence au temps des troubles de religion, vers 1525-vers 1610* (Seyssel : Champ Vallon, c1990).

examined here is the way the general structure of harmony can be read in two different fashions—both as a philosophical ideal and as a strategy of containment. In the representation of cosmic order, there is no node of unease that throws awry the view of the whole; rather, the imposed schema itself seems to offer the possibility of being read awry in its entirety, as both "perfection" (Baïf) and repression.

IV

In his recent study, *Pré-Histoires*, Terence Cave has written the following on the subject "textual disturbances" or "troubles textuels":

> Les objets qu'on appelle littéraires sont souvent des objets troublés ou troublants: au seizième siècle, comme aujourd'hui et comme au temps de Platon, un soupçon plane sur ces objets; ils s'entourent de précautions apologétiques ou de gloses rectificatrices. Mon propos ici est de lire un ensemble de perturbations textuelles comme l'indice d'une incertitude épistémologique, d'une angoisse ontologique ou axiologique. Le dépistage d'un « trouble » permet de localiser une région problématique de la perception, de retrouver une sorte de fêlure dont l'auteur et ses contemporains ne sont peut-être pas pleinement conscients, mais qu'ils ressentent comme une malaise, une tache floue à l'horizon de la pensée. En mesurant le plus exactement possible l'emplacement de cette singularité, nous aurons des chances d'esquisser une topographie —toujours provisoire, toujours partielle—de ce pays étrange qu'est le passé.[33]

Cave's two-volume study of these "problematic regions of perception" is remarkable in its textual insight. The emphasis on "topography," rather than "cosmography," with its implicit echo of Montaigne ("De Democritus et Heraclitus", *Essais*, I, 50), announces the modest, fragmentary nature of his investigation; his evocation of the "fuzzy patches on the horizon of thought," with its emphasis on an almost unfelt disturbance in the periphery of conscious perception, cannot help but evoke the theory of anamorphosis which has been the topic of this essay. In particular, it suggests a reading of anamorphosis potentially independent of the totalizing ontological claims of "conceptual schemes."

Thus, in conclusion, I would like to ask two questions: (a) in the examples I have looked at here, does the evocation of "cosmic harmony" suggest a "fuzzy patch on the horizon of thought" and "the indication of an epistemological uncertainty, an ontological or axiological anxiety?" I would argue that it does, but that—in this I would follow Davidson and ultimately no doubt

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33. Cave 1999, 15.

Wittgenstein as well—that such an anxiety can exist without a "scheme" of whose incompleteness it would be a symptom. (b) Is "anamorphosis" a sufficient conceptual tool for theorizing a tension such as that which I have located in the ideology of "harmony." I would argue that it is not, but that thinking about the ways it is insufficient might well help to get a clearer picture of what is at stake both in the early modern treatment of harmony and in the philosophy of "conceptual schemes." Indeed, I would argue that the "troubles" represented by harmony in early modern texts and the philosophy of "conceptual schemes" are closely related.

I would suggest that there are at least four different strands of thought in what has been said so far in this essay about anamorphosis:

(1) Anamorphosis can be considered in itself as a painterly technique—the expression of the perspectival virtuosity that Hans Holbein shares, for example, with such artists as Jan van Eyck, Albrecht Dürer or Parmigianino;

(2) Anamorphosis can stand as a theoretical paradigm for the "symbolic" and conceptual schemes. According to this paradigm, the anamorphic blot stains the scheme, and throws the familiar scene into a new perspective; such a blot betrays the incompleteness of the symbolic, the non-existence of the "big Other"

(3) Anamorphosis is a way of figuring skewed, but mutually intelligible, or intertranslatable, perspectives. Here the movement between perspectives, the continuum between the familiar and the unfamiliar, is emphasized.

(4) Anamorphosis is a way of figuring the tension between an imposed scheme or theoretical paradigm and material it is unable to contain.

To these, we might add a fifth:

(5) Anamorphosis is an analogue for textual codes, steganographical techniques, and for more or less obscure forms of allegory.

In response to the first of my questions above, (a), I would answer that the examples I have given here seem to fit definition (4); that is to say that they do seem display the tensions inherent in the project of mapping harmony onto things in the world. In all the cases I have treated here, the "trouble textuel" arises from the imposition of smooth, harmonious order on the recalcitrant experience. This imposition is not a well-founded, ultimately reassuring and efficacious one. The mapping that produced the terrestrial and celestial globes so prominently displayed behind the sitters in *The Ambassadors* will not, I would suggest, be sufficient to allay "epistemological or axiological anxiety" in any of these texts. I would add that the "anxiety of harmony" is a particularly rich field of examples of the sustained assault, in the early modern period, on ancient assumptions about the structures of heaven and earth. Yet I have

argued against privileging a particular point, an "ananamorphic view" or an inadequacy in the symbolic, in the manner of (2), but have clearly preferred (3) a continuum between clashing, but not mutually unintelligible, viewpoints.

But this brings us back to the second question (b) I asked above: is anamorphosis an adequate theoretical tool? It seems to me to be rather a blunt instrument: in this essay I have confronted several models, most importantly (2) and (3): a psychoanalytic model in which "anamorphosis" stands as a radical blot, a singularity that throws suspicion on the totality of perception *après coup*, and a hermeneutical projection, borrowed from Davidson and Gadamer, in which strangeness exists on a continuum between the familiar and the strange. I would argue that both (2) and (3) are ultimately metaphorical—they arise out of a false picture: a "conceptual scheme" is like a geometric field whose network can be bent askew, like Holbein's skull. Indeed, in almost all cases where "anamorphosis" is used as a theoretical term, it functions as a metaphorical shorthand for unease that arises when looking at scenes, texts, or cultural artifacts—my readings of Scève, Baïf and Bodin here certainly share this metaphorical temptation with those of Greenblatt and Žižek.[34]

There remain, then (1) and (5); that is to say, there remains to be seen if there is any relationship between anamorphosis as a painterly technique and anamorphosis as an analogue for steganography. Terence Cave would suggest that there is such a relationship. Towards the end of *Pré-histoires*, Cave considers the paradigm of anamorphosis in reference to Béroalde de Verville's *Voyage des Princes fortunez* (1610). Verville refers quite specifically to anamorphosis in the preface to the *Voyage*, defining steganography in terms of the painterly technique of distorsion:

> Ce qui est practiqué en peinture quand on met en veuë quelque païsage ou port, ou autre pourtrait qui cependant musse sous soy quelque autre figure que l'on discere quand on regard par un certain endroit que le maistre a designé.[35]

For Cave, "like allegory, and like the [rhetorical] *ordo artificialis*, anamorphosis presents itself as a global, totalizing structure, and not at all as a game of chance where the author might ask the reader to find meaning at leisure"

34.· Early modern dance would seem to be a field in which one can apply the term "anamorphosis" rather precisely. Dancers often trace patters that could be seen, ideally, only from above, and that are taken to be metaphysically significant. The normal position of the spectator would then be an anamorphic one, a side view rather than a "God's-eye view." See Mark Franko, *Dance as Text: Ideologies of the Baroque Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993). I am indebted to Mallika Keister for this suggestion.

35. (Cited Cave 1999, 161). Cf *Le Voyage des Princes Fortunez. Œuvre steganographique, receuilli [sic] par Beroalde* (Paris: Claude Guerin, 1610) fol. a iii v.

(161). Cave goes on to suggest that "anamorphosis [...] creates an expectation in the reader that the true meaning of the narrative is to offer itself globally, as if in a glance [...] [T]he author a landscape or a voyage, inviting the reader to find a point of view from which the text allows itself to be decrypted, showing a different face." Cave finds in Verville's manipulations of the *ordo artificialis* a strong analogue of the optical technique. Yet, as he ultimately points out, the narrative only offers "promises of anamorphosis," "partial anamorphoses," but no "definitive anamorphosis" (163). For Cave, the sign for this incomplete anamorphosis is the "presence, in the narrative, of a character who seems still to be searching for his own anamorphosis" (163).

The question of this analogy between anamorphosis and steganography needs further unpacking. As a partial conclusion, I have suggested, with regards to one particular commonplace, that of "cosmic harmony," that this figure of the sought-for point of view seems indicative of the tension implicit in the schematizing gesture itself, and that the metaphor of "anamorphosis" is only partially adequate, even in cases of steganography as explicit and extreme as Verville's. Indeed the relationship between secret writing and its anamorphic decoding is metaphorical and remains tenuous even in such extreme cases. In such cases "anamorphosis" figures, if anything, the desire for a cosmography drawn by "le maistre" from a particular point, when ultimately only a topography will do.

Thus, the force, and the weakness, of the discourse of anamorphosis seems to be the way that it serves as a convenient shorthand for suspicion and unease arising from a "problematic region of perception, [...] a malaise, [...] a fuzzy patch on the horizon of thought,"—or perhaps even indeed from the hermeneutic gaze itself, as a kernel of strangeness embedded in a way of looking. But it is important not to forget that "anamorphosis" is just shorthand. In the end, the "anamorphic" moment arises from the metaphorical picture of a scheme in which artifacts are consigned to their respective "homes." Thus, given that "anamorphosis" is virtually always used metaphorically in literary theory, I would tend to lean more in the direction of the hermeneutic application of the concept, one that allows for a continuous line of estrangement between

the inaccessible limits of the infinitely strange and the infinitely familiar and which does not rely strongly on the theoretical crutch of a totalizing glance or the *après coup*.[36]

Columbia University

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36. In this light, the conjunction of Gadamer and Davidson would seem a particularly fruitful one. Note, for example, footnote 224 on page 294 of Gadamer's *Truth and Method*, where the German philosopher explicitly draws such a connection. "There is one exception to this anticipation of completeness, namely the case of writing that is presenting something in disguise, e.g., a *roman à clef*. This presents one of the most difficult hermeneutical problems (cf. the interesting remarks by Leo Strauss in *Persecution and the Art of Writing*). This exception hermeneutical case is of special significance, in that it goes beyond interpretation of meaning in the same way as when historical source criticism goes back behind the tradition. Although the task here is not a historical, but a hermeneutical one, it can be performed only by using understanding of the subject matter as a key to discover what is behind the disguise—just as in conversation we understand irony to the extent to which we are in agreement with the other person on the subject matter. Thus the apparent exception confirms that understanding involves agreement. [I doubt that Strauss is right in the way he carries out his theory, for instance in his discussion of Spinoza. Dissembling meaning implies a high degree of consciousness. Accommodation, conforming and so on do not have to occur consciously. In my view, Strauss did not sufficiently see this. See op. cit., pp. 223ff. and my "Hermeneutics and Historicism," Supplement I below. These problems have meanwhile been much disputed, in my view, on too narrowly semantic a basis. See Donald Davidson, *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford, 1984).]"