... In which you will learn that art's seemingly subordinate relationship to "life" is not all bad; that, in fact art has a way of thinking through "bodies" created poetically. In a "starter exercise," Empedocles' system of four humors serves to introduce art's style of bodily thinking. The term "parasite" sums up art's relationship to life, as well as its habit of creating things side by side.

ANY STUDY OF ART, of any kind of art, suffers from a stigma which is, for some unknown reason, attached to art in this country as it is in no other. Imagine that moment in your life when, at some family gathering with lots of cousins and other accessories, you make the announcement that you intend to go to college. Faces are smiling, turned towards you with that kind of benevolent indulgence that the adult face can manage to hold for two minutes, max. The soundtrack for this scene brings up to audible volume a question from some anonymous source in the room.

“What do you want to study?” This question presumes that you have made some sort of rational, balanced comparison of turf management and aerospace engineering. “Art” you say . . . But, at this point the imagined scene breaks apart, for such a response belongs to science fiction, not social realism. “Art,” in comparison, say, to aerospace engineering, has a large, glowing zit on its nose. Let’s say, for the purpose of disinterested speculation, that you did say “art.” It is an amazing aspect of human behavior that, despite our cultural and individual differences, despite the infinite variety of genetic variation and the micro-managed variety engineering accomplished by pure chance, the two main responses to such an utterance are as fixed in stone as the Ten Commandments. Here is a formal summary:

(1) “How will you support a family?” This question demonstrates the enormous gulf that exists between various age-defined segments of the human race. There are few questions less important to the young. It is like asking Genghis Khan to contribute to the save-the-whales fund, or Neo-Nazis to provide security services for the Gay and Lesbian Alliance march. It is a question that demonstrates the depth of the gulf it cannot hope to cross.

(2) “You don’t go to college to study art.” Up to now, the greater portion of ridicule has fallen to the presumed “adult” side. In this second response, however, there is a small, glowing grain of truth. You don’t have to go to college to study art. Well, many do, but it has not been statistically established that artists who attend university do better than those who don’t. The reverse is more likely the case. There are conservatories for musicians that seem to exercise some kind of positive benefit. There are degree programs for professions such as architecture, where filtration rather than education is called for. But, for artists per se — by this I mean painters, writers, cooks, anyone really — the best training is “in the field,” as they say. One studies painting by painting, writing by writing, etc. The university is often a barrier to, rather than a means of doing, these things.

This last point brings us to the issue of why, in fact, you’re reading this. The study of art as art is not necessarily helpful for artists. Their training depends on practice, on highly specialized perception, on good hand-eye coordination. Artists can, it has been shown, be stupid and still function at the tops of their fields. There is no SAT or GRE exam for artists; their work is their proof. If you’re reading this and you’re an artist, you may wish to consult the section of your general instruction manual entitled “Reality.” If you’re not an artist, or if you’re an artist and you’ve completely disabled the devices that are set up to connect being an artist with attending a university, proceed.

Going back to the imaginary dinner table conversation with your assembled family members, disassociate the usual conflicts between the generations and the behaviors that can tell you something about art. First: that it does not constitute a means for making a living. Actually, this is false, since “art” is one of the major U. S. exports. Tourism, which is another way of saying that people will travel a long way to see...
art as long as it is someone else’s art, is the premier economic money-generator for at least a third of the world. It is hard to believe that art is actually lowering the national deficit, considering how many artists depend on their families for support, but the indicators do not lie. However, let’s take the folklore behind the view that art is a dead loss. It is believed that art is not profitable, or that when artists do make a profit they don’t really deserve it, because art in cultures of all kinds shares many of the aspects of play. Play is best when it is constrained only enough to allow progression and development. Too many rules, and play becomes work. The same thinking holds that too much profit introduces rules that make art not art. This is true in a certain deep sense.

What about the first objection: that being an artist is no way of supporting a family? I have no statistical evidence on this, apart from the inferential evidence from point one that suggests that art is, in fact, an excellent means of supporting a family, and a large one. The word on the street is that the ideal artist is young, single, carefree. Do you spot any negative associations here? Isn’t this simply a matter of an older generation, which missed grabbing its allotment of gusto as the carousel of life whizzed by them, sucking sour grapes? The connection between a carefree and/or romantic life and art is as old as it is riddled with contradictions. When the art-historian Vasari wrote his famous *Lives of the Artists*, he described a surprising number of them as free spirits. The reputation stuck, but from the artist’s point of view, this cliché is not all bad.

The customary condemnation of art as vocation is, for the many who overcome it, the main incentive. The thinking goes: if a certain kind of person is opposed to one becoming an artist, it must be the best kind of life in the world. Not too many people use this perverse logic, so there are hardly ever artists in the world who don’t want to be. Imagine if the same degree of job satisfaction held for the field of accounting. So much job satisfaction, however, backfires by making people think that art must not be worth much. People who have “real jobs” do them because they’re paid enough to forget their hate. After all, it takes five-hundred grand minimum to keep brain surgeons showing up for work.

So, the conclusion seems inevitable: art is second rate, at least as a profession. Let’s not try to defend the moral high ground here. What “second rate” means, in the face of the real evidence, is, obviously, not “inferior.” Something more perverse is going on. Whereas in Italy, France, and other older parts of the civilized West, artists are treated generally like the heroes they are, in our land they live a shadowed existence. The question is, what kind of shadow is it that conceals art as enterprise?

The only reason this question might have some interest or relevance is if we wanted to examine art as a whole, to understand its relationship to us, to ordinary life. Artists are not interested in this question outside the context of their own work, unless they have been tricked into attending a university. Only non-artists, who look at art and, without necessarily wishing to be artists, are curious about art’s successes (which they are in the habit of denying) and its unexplained survival.

The first question one asks before going further with this line of thinking is, are the “answers” going to be complicated or simple? It is the official position of this “new approach” (art 3) that the secrets of art’s long life in the human sphere are simple, and that simplicity is one of art’s survival tricks. Having said that, however, there is no guarantee that the “simplicity” that may have kept art alive all these centuries is related at all to the “simplifications” that we may have discovered. It is easy enough to reduce complexity to a simplified schema but remarkably difficult to get that schema to work in reality.

Here’s the argument for going ahead anyway. Art lives because it lives a secondary relationship to life, which is always marked as being “really real” and obviously important. Art can always be thrown out, along with artists. Art seems to be a parasite of life, an argument that many have, perhaps falsely, associated with Plato, whose dialogue, *The Republic*, advises would-be utopian leaders to escort all local rhapsodes to the city gates. Given that rhapsodes were itinerate to begin with, an escort would amount to a bit of an improvement over being simply turned out. Art is “second rate,” and this is the key to its survival. It lives in the shadow of the real, in the alleys off the main avenues.

The question about who is the parasite of whom is, however, not as simple as it may first seem. Who parasites whom is a question of perspective. Dependence is a question of appearances.
the parasite

There is a famous and very ancient question of whether art follows life or life follows art. Aristotelians go for the first choice, Romantics (Oscar Wilde would be a favorite) for the latter. Rather than try to decide between the two positions, it is more interesting to note that art and life are engaged in a parasitic relationship in the first place, and that art voluntarily takes what at first appears to be the back seat, that is to say, the parasite’s role.

Behind this interesting matter of parasites are the broader meanings of being a parasite: first, that it is a relationship of needing to eat to live; second, that it is logically difficult, if not impossible, to say whether life or art gets the “better deal.” Which is the real parasite? It is certain that art and life require some insulation between them, that art as a whole is segregated by custom, belief, attitude, etc. This relationship, which alternately casts one or the other into abject shadows, defines the essence of the human condition: to create, then to deny.

One should not think “parasite” a lowly term. It is on the contrary a very interesting term as well as a fascinating phenomenon. In ancient Greece, poets were commonly called “parasites,” partly in our modern sense of a dependent organism. To make a living, poets crashed dinner parties and paid for the food they filched by entertaining guests, making jokes, playing the fool, inventing speeches and songs *ex tempore*, and by being, in general, social lubricants. These “artist-outsiders” were in common attendance. No one paid much attention to them. In practical terms, they kept trouble from happening by providing the official guests a common butt of jokes. With poets around, the guests didn’t abuse each other.

In modern technological French, the word parasite means “noise” as well as parasite. In comparison to society’s main messages — the messages that carry concern, alarm, warning, and admonition — art seems superfluous, frivolous, unnecessary. It is, quite literally, a “para-site,” a place beside the main site, a fairgrounds, park, a shaded wood, a highway overpass, a marginal space. When it annoys us, or when we simply cease to be entertained, it seems like noise, nothing else.

An entertainer, a fool, a dependent, a gate-crasher, a bit of noise, a marginal space, a hungry wit. All of these meanings lying behind “parasite” are suggestive nicknames for art. These are means of survival, to be sure, but survival of whom? Of what? To these unanswerable questions we nod in respect, hastening onto the more important questions: What are the “means” to these “ends”? How do they work?
the body of art

Where to begin? In the search for simple truths, which is easily misled by over-simplifications, it might be best to adopt an attitude that the methods of study be drawn from art’s own repertoire of tricks. In this way, at least we learn a few techniques, and at best we can see behind the techniques into art’s real nature. One of the first and main principles of art is that “ideas” are embodied in “bodies” and not just abstract.

If you’re thinking that this involves a lurid descent into sensualism, too bad. Body in our case means “physical, effective means” in the broadest sense — not the idea behind the joke but the way it elicits physical laughter; not the values or beliefs embedded in heroes, but the real tears they get us to shed. The body of art is what it takes to get art from its side of the frame or stage into our hearts. We focus on the intellectual part, our understanding and sympathy. Art likes it like that. The levers and pulleys work very quietly, and in the wings, art is eating.

“Body” for us is a specific form. It may sound complex rather than simple, but just look inside your medicine chest. Is your current idea of body simple? Things are relative. Ancient Greeks (other cultures had comparable systems) took the principal dimensions of their surroundings: heat, cold, moisture, and dryness. They combined them to get equally primary “elements.” Heat and moisture created air. Cold and dryness made earth. Fire was produced by heat and dryness; its opposite, water, by cold and moisture.

This system doesn’t sound brilliant if you are thinking of the modern concepts of thermodynamics. The Greeks were thinking in different terms. Fire was the ordinary phenomenon of fire as well as the sun and stars. It was also the substance of wit. And, more amazingly, it was the *ingenium* injected into all matter to make it live. Water was the substance of boundary. It mediated between death and life, the visible and invisible, the known and the unknown. Even the gods were required to swear by it, straddling for this purpose a special stream known as the Styx.

Air was, more accurately, “misty darkness.” It could be thought of as the uncertain atmosphere of human life as well as a metaphor for the afterworld, the realm of dead souls. Earth was the source and home of melancholy, a dangerous plutonium-like substance that, apart from being a poison, was the elixir of genius.

When physical substances became human rather than cosmic, they acquired the name of “humors.” We get our term “humor” from it, but have forgotten the exact science lying behind it. The humors were, among other things, human natures: choleric (quick to anger and energetic), phlegmatic (just the opposite), sanguine (friendly and lovable), and melancholic (reflective, given to depression). — Why is it that those with talent in the arts, sciences, letters, and so on are notorious melancholics? Aristotle once asked. Why, indeed. The key to genius lay in the understanding of the relation of this humor to the others, and to the way in which the humors connected the cosmos to the human body and mind. You might want to check out the most interesting book on this subject, *Saturn and Melancholy* by Fritz Saxl, Raymond Klibansky, and Erwin Panofsky.

For us to get over our modern prejudice that big things and small things, minds and bodies, rocks and emotions share no common features (this is not art’s view), we have to see the system of humors and substances
as one example of the way poetry “thinks.”

A note: “poetry,” from now on, means about the same thing as art. Alexander Pope compared all art to a “poem,” and it wasn’t such a bad idea. An image is in an important sense “a poem in brief,” just as a poem is very like a “verbal image” (the doctrine of ut pictura poiesis). In the arts, the phenomenon of “synesthesia” — the free mixture and sometimes confusion of the various separate senses — is the rule rather than the exception. Sound can easily become color, words can become rocks. When Ovid wrote his Metamorphosis, an account of the ways in which various mythological characters changed form in the course of their fabled histories, he was in part writing an account of art. Literature, painting, music, architecture, theater, and so on so freely share structures, motifs, and techniques, that we might as well generalize the work of art into a “poem.”

Back to “poetic thought.” Poetic thought is a “thought through things.” But, to balance the issue, the “things” poetry thinks through are, in advance, ideas. Not ideas in the sense of “concepts” that are neat shorthand mental insights but ideas in the more primitive and ancient sense of demons, that is, the forces that “make things go.” The history of the word “idea” (again, a Greek term) is interesting but too involved to take up here. Ideas are more like complete packages, experiences that are whole in themselves. They are not so much opposites of things as they are the means by which bodies and minds intersect — a matter of nuance.

So, things can think. Poetry (art) uses them like atoms and molecules for its own peculiar neurophysiology. But, not to worry. We have the blueprint of this material thought in the system of humors. The humors show how art can displace whole forms of things into other forms of things. Our only problem is that what is “air” to us is not exactly “air” in this system; nor are any of the other elements. We need a translator to understand how displacement is art’s First Big Trick.

a humorous translator

The thing that we first notice about the system of humors is its general universality. Because it is partially derived from weather conditions, it is a system of meteorology. It not only represents the major forces active in the Mediterranean, it extends them into a map of the seasons. It’s good as long as you don’t go too far north, south, or east. From meteorology it’s a short hop to the cosmos, where the sequence of water, earth, air, and fire pretty much describe the process of origins. Voilà, cosmography. And, because cosmography is pretty much the business of religion, you can tag on a theology whose gods and goddesses correspond in a main way. Saturn, for example, is the god of melancholy and earth. Apollo is, if anyone is, fire. Diana (the moon) regulates water. Air (ær, “misty darkness”) is the underworld, the domain of Pluto; the god who handles one-way tours to the area is Hermes/Mercury. Theology was, by 600 b.c.e., associated with the “stars,” by which the Greeks meant also the planets. As they translated existing godly entities to the heavens, so went their corresponding humors. Now, the humoristic system covered astronomy and astrophysics as well.

The ancients regarded the birth of the soul and the death of the body as something regulated by the planets. Astrology was fundamentally an account
of the passage of the newborn soul through the concentrically contained spheres of each of the planetary gods. As the soul passed through, the good, bad, or indifferent property of each planet was acquired. Knowing the exact moment of birth was important because, like a combination lock, the universe had its good and bad positions. Now we add two other items to the list, astrology and psychology.

With fate added to meteorology, astronomy, and religion, it was time to indulge in a little “profit-taking,” as they say on Wall Street. Returning to the original system, the pattern was clear. Seasons mirrored the progress of human life. Just as spring, summer, and winter lead through a cycle of heat, moisture, drought, and cold, youth is fiery and moist, and old age dry and cold. Spring is “hopeful,” summer “successful,” and winter naturally tragic. This worked not only for the life cycle but for events and stories. Comedy begins in late winter and ends up in spring or summer. Tragedy leaps out in the spring or summer and falls in — as you might expect — fall. Irony and satire make a permanent home in winter’s nest of thorns. In romance, it is always summer; one is always playing volleyball on some beach.

Seasons, gods, fates, possibilities of human action, categories of poetic form add to an already long list: meteorology, geography, climatology, astronomy and astrology, theology, eschatology (the doctrine of death) and — ah, yes — the original psychology, anatomy, physiology, and pathology. Simple, no?

Well, that is the interesting question. How could such a “simple” structure lie beneath so many phenomena? Perhaps because its particular simplicity was, at the same time, complex. The logic of the four humors is metaphoric rather than rational. It is impossible to define any one element without engaging the others, and impossible to speak of one application, say anatomy, without including cosmography, astrology, and so on.

So one proof that the theory of the humors is the key to poetic thought, a “thought through things,” is that it was at one time the key to everything. And, while the more scientific applications were later sophisticated beyond recognition, the humanistic/poetic ones never did really change very much. In fact, Michael Foucault, the late French philosopher, demonstrated quite successfully that the standard diagnoses and treatments of modern psychiatry are derived, almost unconsciously, from the original humoristic maladies: mania, melancholy, depression. Even in the case of the sciences and social sciences, some have found lingering patterns of influence. Hayden White has argued that historians tend to tell four kinds of stories about human events, and that these reflect the theory of the humors. Karl Mannheim has found four basic motives of political attitude. And, Stephen Pepper asserts that in science there are four fundamental kinds of assumptions to make about the universe.

So, whatever the actual threads connecting modern scientific thought with this ancient four-sided paradigm, poetic thought continues to go back to this primordial resource. The nice thing about this practice is that it keeps art in touch with a broad range of phenomena — not only the things close to it, such as fate, magic, theology, and eschatology, but things usually regarded as non-art: the human body, the earth, the stars. What, you may be mentally asking at this point, could art/poetry possibly contribute to astronomy? Well, early in the 20th century, it was painters who first grasped the implications of the “4th dimension.” Physicists were close behind, and prepared to argue their points with mathematics. But, artists had made the
point. Just when you think art is irrelevant, it comes up with something original. The parasite at the party turns out to be the best guest.

from square to circle

One of the attributes of the original system of humors that makes it so applicable to other phenomena is that it is not static. Air, fire, earth, and water suggested, to most Greeks at least, the cycle of seasons in the Mediterranean. The temporalized cycle opened up the road for comparisons to organic growth and decline: of nature, of human individuals, and of nations at large. With these parallels in place, the relation to fate was a short hop. The connection to the cosmic series of spheres controlled by gods was a simple extrapolation. Presto-chango, the theological, cosmological, and astrological connections were in place. With feedback oozing everywhere, the original substances were themselves layered. Earth was a substance, a disease, a state of mind, a god, a planet, a stage of birth, a turn of fate. So were the other elements.

Perhaps the most important detail of this process of conflation is the transition from the “square,” fixed logical opposition of the elements to the circular motion temporalized as seasons, drama, and fate. This transition allows the system of humors to be static and dynamic at the same time. This cute trick bears some looking into.

A circle is in itself not a simple figure. As easy as it is to draw with a compass, this instrument demonstrates the first “problem.” One arm of the compass is fixed on a single point, the other rotates about this point, creating the smooth, closed curve. Early geometers saw a philosophical insight here. By virtue of a lack of dimension (the point) and motion (the circumference), perfect motion and dimension is created. The point is “present” in the circumference, because it was its cause. St. Augustine of Hippo, on the basis of this evidence, compared the circle to God, noting that in God “the same” and “the different” were similarly embodied. Some centuries later, theologians compared God to a circle “whose circumference is nowhere and whose center is everywhere.” As mystic as this sounded, it was not long before scientists developing the theory of relativity found the same metaphor to be an accurate description of the physical universe: unbounded, closed, curved, it too had “no circumference” and, technically, any point was surrounded by an equal mass in all directions.

So, circles are weird. Artists knew this from the beginning. Parasites that they were, the early poets realized the circle was just the kind of plot device that enabled them to sell the same old stuff to whole new crowds of paying clients. It couldn’t be used “raw,” but with some important poetic modifications, it was as handy as a Bopiel Pocket Fisherman. The basics of this poetic tool were (1) a spoke wrench for tuning the relationships between opposite points on the wheel; (2) a set of gears for keeping the wheel spinning with other wheels spinning inside it; (3) a drive train; and (4) a hub device for stability and motility. Sophisticated readers will excuse these crude mechanical metaphors. Actually, taking art to its lowest denominator has the benefit of showing us how many things that work in art work because they are simple, sturdy, technically trustworthy devices. They have no value, in and of themselves. They are empty and open, just like tools. Our approach to them should be practical.

The most important thing to note in the transition from the “logical” model to the “temporal” model is that the order of humor shifts. The problem was not just Mediterranean, where spring and fall are “wet,” but for all cultures which regard water as the boundary of life. When you’re up top, you’re born, you live, you die. When you’re below (in the earth, metaphorically and/or literally), you’re dead or like the dead. This is the place of melancholy.

So, follow this closely. The temporal order is air (misty darkness, also the boundary between darkness and
light), fire (full daylight), water (the sun sinks in the western sea), and earth (life takes a break in a dark cave, or we notice that where we’ve been hanging out is metaphorically cave-like).

It’s also important to note at this time that the wheel suggests that there are more forms of time than our familiar clock time. This involves an idea we’ll go into later on, but this is as good a time as any to introduce it. The wheel has three kinds of motion, therefore three kinds of “times.” The time of the spinning rim is the one most familiar to us. We chase life, or fate/death chases us — your choice of terms. We run around from one state to another, tragedy with its frown, comedy its smile. The name of this time is “venatic,” taken from the adjective that means “of the hunt.” Venus is the source of this word, because Venus presided over the hunt as the goddess-of-record.

The second form of time belongs to the spokes of the wheel. The spoke connects the rim with the hub: the changing with the unchanging, the mutable with the eternal. The spoke is therefore a means of finding out how the appearances of the world are connected to the fixed, unchanging rules. This kind of time involves looking at clues, searching for reasons, etc. It is called “forensic,” because it is like the time in the courtroom: turned backwards to the events of the past.

The final form of time, the time associated with the hub of the wheel, is well known to most of us fun-lovers: Party Time, officially known as “Festal time.” Festal time is, properly, the time that contains the other times of art. Plays, concerts, and other art experiences occur by definition within a time of celebration or, at least, recreation. Artworks can intensify this time by having, within their own structure, a festal part. In festal time, elements can combine, themes can mix, identities can get confused. The general term is “contamination.” The circle, which normally keeps things separate and spinning, collapses on its own center. Centripetal forces pull elements together into a poetic blender. Everything gets joined. The result is, putting it Biblically, apocalyptic. In the movies, these scenes involve large, noisy explosions; in music, the loud parts at the end.

The three forms of time, venatic, forensic, and festal, give art full access to the system of humors and its variants. Most of all, they enable art to animate the divides of the double, travel through time, stories within stories, and contamination. These four are, according to the Argentine short-story writer Jorge Luis Borges, the only ones required by the imagination to suspend itself between the real and the impossible. That’s all? It sounds like a trick.

It is a trick.

The thing to remember is that a simple system goes a long way. With only two kinds of opposition (wet/dry and warm/cold) we have four ways of tricking audiences, three kinds of time, a way of explaining almost all physical, mental, and social phenomena, and a theology of causes lying behind the human world. The important thing is to note the switch between the logical order and the temporal order.

Nothing makes sense unless you realize just how the temporalized humors establish a rhythm of human motive and action. Water takes up a position opposite air, and earth is both bottom and center.

**the infinitely expandable**

The long list of “derivatives” of the system of humors may not offer any insight into the original schema, but it does suggest that the value of this “poetic logic” is its portability. It has enough meaning to cover its original objective, whatever that might have been, with enough ambiguity to allow it to extend to almost any other domain of human concern.

In the process of extension, a good deal of layering occurs. One system of meaning gets infected by the others, although there may otherwise seem to be no connection between the individual items. For example, the system of literary form (comedy, tragedy, romance, and irony/satire) is only circumstantially connected to the seasons. But, for other reasons, we think of comedy as a springtime affair, romance as a summer for the imagination, winter in terms of the kind of depressingly stark realism that is ruled by irony. The tragic hero seems to rise and fall with the sun and its seasonal adventures. This, of course, was the well publicized theory of Max Müller. Whether or not Müller’s theory was true in every detail, artists...
have always behaved as if it were. In a play or story, for example, action at one level can be supplemented or reinforced by action at another. In Shakespeare’s *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, there is the main level of the play, a demonically confused romance among four people. This is just for starters. There is a parallel story about a romance between Oberon and Titania, who are in their theological duties the counterparts of the Duke and Duchess of Athens, who preside over the human end of things. Then, there is a group of “mechanicals” (read, “blue-collar workers”) who retreat to the woods to practice a play to be presented as a Ducal entertainment. As this play-within-a-play is rehearsed, one of the actors, Bottom, gets separated and enchanted by the mischievous Puck, agent of Oberon. Transformed into an ass, he becomes the object of Titania’s abject affection. Lousy blind date, it turns out. Bottom’s name suggests we may be near the end of this multi-storied building, but there are levels within the language and gestures of the play that add more, enabling the audience to move from nature to culture, from large things to small, from big ideas to local jokes.

Creating layers is a practical strategy. With one layer only, the artist puts all eggs into a basket that may not be popular with a given audience. At best, some in the audience will like it, others will not. Layers permit several works to coexist within the single work; “art for U,” if you will. And, if every person of the audience feels that the work was especially for him or her, the work connects and gains a large following. Better still, it is able to survive the vicissitudes of audiences over time. When tastes change, when jokes grow stale, or when expressions and references are no longer understood, a work of art can continue to survive if it contains levels independent from some or all of these dangers. It is art’s way of “diversifying” its “poetic portfolio.”

By creating more meaning than it needs, art ensures its survival. But, this process of producing surpluses cannot be undertaken willy-nilly. Surpluses must be managed. The general management scheme is layers. Here, vertical direction is the theme. On the surface, everyone sees the same simple plot, the same patches of color, the same themes and devices. Almost everyone, however, will be able to see beneath these thin artifices and find a “deeper level of reality.” There is hardly any work of art with only one level. Anything that is a level implies other levels. But, with only one plane of interaction, life in art would be pretty dull. Two levels provide the minimum needs for surprise and discovery. To build in layers of meaning (“polysemy” is the technical term) that insure that everyone in the audience will have something to call his or her own, a deeper construction is required. And, like a tall office building, lots of levels require elevators.

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**endnote: medieval ideas of layering**

Preaching in the Middle Ages was not a simple matter, for the congregation was variously educated. Most could not read and depended on memory of stories from the Bible, supplemented by images in the church’s architecture, icons, and murals. Some could read, but since access to books was limited (paper was not yet manufactured in Europe), references had to be kept to a minimum. The only truly “literate” people present were the clergy and the rich with a taste for reading, or professional scholars with access to libraries. Sermons were, therefore, divided into four parts, a strategy known as “quadrigia,” after a four-horse chariot. The first horse, or part, was the literal; presuming that those awake heard the sermon, all got to this level. The second level was “moral,” a level that was the direct object of the sermon. The third level was, for those with good memories and some reading under their belt, the analogical. Through analogy, one could compare a Biblical story with a contemporary political situation, or could see behind the simple moral a series of levels, some of them ambiguous. The final level was “anagogical,” and could be reached only with the help of God’s grace. This was the real goal of the sermon, but it was not within the power of the priest to force its occurrence. Analog delay has since come to stand for that state that James Joyce called “epiphany”—an artistic/poetic apprehension of the Whole, based on accident, grace, or what have you. For Joyce’s description of epiphany, read *Stephen Hero* or *Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man*. For a detailed description of quadrigia, see Harry Caplan, *Of Eloquence*. 