The relation between *allegory* and *art* in modernity is not obvious, not relaxed.

In 1648 Carlo Ridolfi described the picture by Titian in the Borghese collection in Rome simply as "due donne vicine a una fonte" (Abb. 1). But since 1693 the painting has borne the title *Amor divino e Amor profano*, or something like it.\(^1\) Nearly everyone who comments on the work, which was painted around 1515, also interprets the work. The interpreter translates the picture's mysterious appeal into a verbal formula often resembling a maxim about human nature or human aspirations. Such an interpreter assumes that the picture communicates, even if in a veiled fashion. Interaction between a clothed woman and a nude woman seated at either end of a fountain is not an episode often met with in ordinary experience, and must therefore be strongly motivated. It is assumed that some intelligence must have disposed these figures in just this way in order to tell us something we don’t already know. The very improbability of the scene signals that there is more here than meets the eye. The sensed presence of an invisible motivation hiding behind the mere "surface of signs" has sufficed to qualify this painting as an "allegory."

An allegory (from the Greek ἀλληγορεω, "to speak otherwise") is properly a doubling of discourse. An allegory is a text that when read in a certain way, perhaps after deciphering with the help of a key, is revealed to say something other than it seemed to at a first reading. The text says one thing but also another. It is not clear, however, that a picture can be an allegory at all, since pictures don’t tell, but only show. The term "allegory" was not routinely

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applied to paintings in the Renaissance, if at all. Vasari never once used the word. 2 Titian's painting shows us an image of two women seated outdoors near a fountain; it doesn't tell us anything. Still, we might try to "read" the picture, after a fashion, by matching the figures and other elements to words or concepts and so discover that the picture does after all "tell" us something in addition to showing us something. The painting may be attempting to "write with pictures."

"Picture-writing" is an ancient and prestigious practice associated with the very most significant messages. The picture is employed as a disguise for concepts by ancient priests, by prophets, by the gods themselves when they send messages by way of dreams. According to Moses Maimonides, "most prophecies are given in images, for this is the characteristic of the imaginative faculty, the organ of prophecy." 3 The prophetic image or the dream has a layered, doubled structure. Behind an innocent or unintelligible surface hides a message of great importance. The unwary recipient of prophecy or dream will mistake it for a merely strange or beautiful image. The sage interpreter learns to surpass this superficial reception of the image with a more penetrating reading strategy. The doubled or staggered reception that the image invites brings it into legitimate alignment with the textual allegory. In this way, a painting such as *Sacred and Profane Love*, whose surface is strange like a dream, came to be characterized as an allegory.

Although many people seem to believe that Titian's picture is trying to say something, there is little agreement about what it is trying to say. More interesting still, not every modern commentator agrees that it matters what the picture is saying. Edgar Wind, who included a chapter on this painting in his *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance*, believed that it did matter. Indeed, Wind believed that "aesthetically speaking, there can be no doubt that the presence of unresolved residues of meaning is an obstacle to the enjoyment of art." Until the message of the picture has been delivered, the beholder "is plagued by a suspicion that there is more

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in the painting than meets the eye." It is easy to imagine another beholder who intuits a painting's inaccessible plenitude but is not at all "plagued" by the sensation. Such a beholder, for example Sydney Freedberg, a formalist, is content to leave the theme of the picture resting at a high degree of generality. *Sacred and Profane Love*, in Freedberg's account, offers basically the "classicizing idea of mutually responsive part and counterpart, using not only the form and meaning of the figures to his end but all the elements of setting. The clothed and unclothed figures make two competing yet related radiances." "The effect of art," Freedberg adds, "is supported further by the poetic theme." An ideologically-oriented critic, finally, might attribute the painting's celebrity not so much to its immanent qualities, as to its position as a token within a system of social relations ultimately designed to manage property and power in this world but sustained by myths about "real" meanings that are found elsewhere. For Rona Goffen, for example, the classical subject matter of Titian's painting is "overridden" by the picture's commentary on contemporary marriage mores. "*Sacred and Profane Love*, according to Goffen, "is primarily concerned with the reality and ideality of women in marriage." "Works of art" in such a system are sites whose supply is artificially limited by the fiction of "genius," sites where one might hope to find and decipher, if equipped with the right password, such value-conferring meanings.

Only the first of these three commentators, the iconographer, approaches the deciphering of the painting's meaning as a sacred duty. He feels that he cannot commence his experience of the painting until he has spelled out its message. But once the picture has yielded its meaning, in Edgar Wind's scenario, its allegorical work is over. Thus Wind, too, like the formalist and the political realist, considers the allegorical nature of Titian's picture to be merely accidental to its identity, not essential.

All three of these commentators are heirs to a powerful tradition of Romantic thought that doubts whether the aims of art are ever compatible with the aims of allegory, on the grounds

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7 Wind, *Pagan Mysteries* (wie Anm. 4), S. 188, is not interested in mere "sphinx-like" symbols which die when their secret is revealed. The "great" symbol, he argues, is the opposite: it is more alive when its riddle is deciphered. He does not explain why this would be so.
that any suspicion on the part of the recipient (reader, beholder) that meaning has been too carefully contrived will undermine the artwork's original brief, which was to reconcile us with a god, a nature, or a self that we have lost contact with. For Aby Warburg, the pioneering late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century art historian, the allegorical work was suspect because it invited decoding by reason. Any preoccupation with allegorical ciphers, according to Warburg, entrenches us only deeper in our alienation from the true sources of meaning in archaic passions, reverberations of which are felt only in a few potent images whose dynamic forms make the past immediately present for us again. The work laden with allegorical personifications—Warburg took as his example a late sixteenth-century opera, but if he had dared he might have taken on Titian—will quickly outstrip its beholders' erudition and shared repertoire of associations, and so fall into solipsistic irrelevancy.8

Such a critique of allegory is hard to square with the conviction that Italian Renaissance art was the matrix of modern art, and with a narrative of Renaissance art that assigns a privileged role to the pictorial allegory. For if the allegorical painting, misguidedly modelling itself perhaps on poetry, perhaps on Neoplatonic mystical thought, perhaps on Egyptian hieroglyphics misunderstood as a pre-conventional or divine writing, succeeds only in baffling its beholders, exposing their ignorance, or teasing them with hints of a meaningfulness that never emerges, then a work such as Sacred and Profane Love must be seen not as a celebration of the art of painting's new freedom, but rather as a disastrous wrong turn that led to three centuries of pretentious, exclusionary academicism. Romantic poets and critics who rejected allegory and instead embraced the symbol in its promise of a more replete experience of truth were turning their backs on exactly that academic tradition.

The twentieth century, however, developed a powerful counter-critique that cast doubt on the Romantic confidence in the symbol and rediscovered the virtues of allegory. This tradition is associated with Walter Benjamin, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Paul de Man.9

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According to these thinkers, the allegorically structured poem indeed fails, just as its Romantic detractors had claimed, to deliver what it promises. But it is the very nature of language, the new allegorists point out, to fall short of connecting to reality. Language never puts us in the presence of anything. And it is the special calling of poetic language, according to Benjamin, Gadamer, and de Man, to reflect upon, perhaps lament, perhaps defy, but in any case point to the breakdown of reference that interferes with all linguistic communication. Allegory signals resignation to the alienation of the signifier from its own origin in reality, and to the temporal gap or difference intrinsic to signification. To this extent the allegorical mode appears not so much deluded as disillusioned, and in fact in its skepticism and philosophical acuity may be considered the poetical mode most proper to modernity. Allegory consoles the disillusioned consciousness by teaching the self not to seek naïve identification with things, or to seek such union in art, but rather to seek, and seek to construct, meanings from within an ungrounded web of signs borrowed from texts and endlessly recombined. The ramifying, staggered, decentered movement of sign-to-sign relays, dangerously unhinged from political authority, is the very rhythm of modern society, whether liberal, revolutionary or post-revolutionary.

In this new tradition of thought, the concept of allegory expands, embracing every polysemous reading practice until in the end allegory is coextensive with reading itself. It becomes hard to grasp why there might be any tension between "allegory" and "art," because here allegory is conceived as the true form of art. Art emerges as a place where the open-ended movement of allegorical signification is staged; and as an institution through which society signals its deep awareness of the paradoxes of reference, even as it goes about its practical business as if nothing was the matter, as if language really did link up with the real.

This line of thinking about the allegorical structure of all poetic constructs, perhaps of all art, has not been much developed since de Man. We experience today a pause in the tradition of reflection on allegory. This is perhaps because with time the Romantic adherents of the symbol and the post-Romantic advocates of allegory appear more and more to be essentially in agreement on the terms of debate: for they all agree that allegory is a disillusioned mode.

and symbol is a naïve mode. In the end, it is simply a question of whether one lives with disillusionment, or whether one lunges forward despite it all and tries to embrace the phantom "presence." The apparent conceptual impasse represented by "allegory versus symbol" is revealed to be nothing other than an existential choice, a religious choice. This is perhaps a signal that it is time to change the terms of the debate.

In our present context of art historical argument, the relevant point is the following: once allegory expands to embrace all modes of artistic expression, then the special category of poem or painting called "allegory" loses its contours. If all artworks are allegorical, then the explicitly allegorical picture, even Titian's suave \textit{Sacred and Profane Love}, will come to look clumsy, redundant. Walter Benjamin, it is true, made the unwieldy allegorical machine of the late Renaissance the basis of his theory of allegory. He argued that the "tragic dramas" of the German seventeenth century, overloaded with personifications to the point of absurdity, were in their arbitrariness and fragmentation revealing the embeddedness of artistic expression in historicity to be, finally, a predicament. In its lucidity about the impossibility of effective symbolization, according to Benjamin, the self-identified allegory of the late Renaissance points forward to the new conditions of art-making in modernity. It would be interesting to push Benjamin's argument backwards in history and attempt to match it to the allegorical paintings (or poems or plays) of the early Renaissance, but to my knowledge no one has done this. Instead, the allegorical paintings of the Renaissance, like the emblems designed by humanist scholars, ingenious diagrams of timeless wisdom, are left to look simply awkward, and not especially prescient about modernity. The pictorial allegories of the years around 1500 have a paratactic, aggregate structure. I am referring, for example, to the five small allegorical panels by Bellini in the Accademia in Venice (1490s), the \textit{Tempest} by Giorgione, also in the Accademia (c. 1505), and the \textit{Allegory} by Lotto in the National Gallery of Art, Washington (1505), as well as to prints like the so-called \textit{Dream of Raphael}, or \textit{Dream}, by Marcantonio Raimondi (c. 1508) (Abb. 2). In each of these pictures, bodies and objects are juxtaposed in unexpected ways. The figures and things are elements that might make perfect sense in one context, but baffle when transferred to an unexpected context. Titian's \textit{Sacred and Profane Love} is a sleeker, more nuanced version of this kind of composition.

These pictures are essentially different from those pictures that illustrated well-known myths,
for example Ovidian stories. "Myth-pictures" delivered ready-made packages of allegorical meaning: allegories already structured as narratives, or narratives that everyone was in the habit of reading allegorically. An example is Titian's *Bacchus and Ariadne* (National Gallery, 1520-23). Such paintings are not really themselves "allegories": they are only pictorial renderings of narrative texts understood to invite allegorical reading. Another kind of picture that falls short of being itself an allegory is the picture that enframes an allegorical image as a dream, like the small panel in the National Gallery in London (c. 1504) by Raphael representing a sleeping soldier flanked by two female figures. This is usually understood to be a pictorialization of an episode from ancient history involving a dream by Scipio Africanus, a military hero of the Roman Republic. The characters in Scipio's dream, personifications of Virtue and Vice, leave the dream and enter the naturalistic space that surrounds Scipio's body. The picture is able to make this happen. But the picture itself is not strictly an allegory. It is the narration of a dream whose content asks for an allegorical reading. Such dreams are the *models* for allegorical pictures.

It is the "superabundance of content" and "lack of harmony between form and meaning," according to the Romantic theorist Friedrich Creuzer, signalling the symbol's own "sacred discontent," that makes a symbol really significant. One can see how the paratactic pictures by Bellini, Giorgione, Lotto, and Marcantonio, insofar as they evade semantic closure by virtue of their "ungrammatical" structures, might figure in genealogies of modern art. But they don't, at least not as dramatically as they might.

Is the pictorial allegory of the Italian Renaissance a category with any integrity, or any historical distinctiveness? Many older Christian paintings employed picture-writing. Objects such as crosses, fountains, and wine-presses were understood by beholders of Christian paintings to refer to concepts. How are Marcantonio's *Dream* or Titian's *Sacred and Profane Love* different from medieval Christian allegories? They are different mainly in that their contents are new or invented rather than conventional. No one had ever seen anything like these configurations before, and no one could readily turn to other pictures, other contexts, to find the key, the set of correspondences that would unlock the code. Such paintings

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relied on conventions—they had to, to some extent, to have any hope of being legible—but they combined conventional elements in unanticipated ways. Their creators, like poets, had arrogated a licence to invent.

Giorgione's, Lotto's, Marcantonio's and Titian's allegories provide no internal keys, in the form of labels, that might guide the viewer. In this way they differ from the public allegorical mural painted by Ambrogio Lorenzetti in the Palazzo Pubblico in Siena in the late 1330s, the *Allegory of Bad Government*. Here the painter used images of bodies to compose a message about the perils of a poorly-ordered commonwealth. Leon Battista Alberti, when he chose an allegory as an example of an ingenious pictorial invention, was also thinking about picture-writing as the basis for the art of painting's public, edifying function for. In Book Three of his treatise *Della pittura*, Alberti described a lost painting of Apelles, preserved in a description by Lucian, involving personifications of Calumny and other abstract concepts. The subject was later chosen to adorn the wall of the Town Hall of Nuremberg; Albrecht Dürer delivered the design. The message delivered by Titian's *Sacred and Profane Love*, whatever it is, seems less weighty, not a matter of public concern. Such a public message would have been out of place in the painting's original context, a private dwelling. The message would have taken up too much psychic space. Bellini and Giorgione and Titian were populating a new field of painting marked by a visible effort to "write" with pictorial signifiers (to compose propositions out of words or meaning-units corresponding more or less to human or animal figures); a category relatively independent from conventional expectations and from public responsibilities (cultic, political). This new field of painting symbolized, by the very fact of its existence, by its availability as an option for artists, that the place of art in life had shifted. In that light, it can be no surprise that the specific content of an allegorical picture so often fails to hold the interest of the historian or commentator, for if allegory is just one of the shapes that art assumes in order to signal its own freedom, alongside "landscape" or "still life," then there is no reason to treat it differently from those pictures. The recipient attuned to art *per se* will want to find a mode of reception that works for *all* works of art, a common reading strategy—"formalism," perhaps, or "social history," or simply "aesthetics." This entails reading the picture against itself, looking through its

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11 Dürer's drawing is preserved in the Albertina; Friedrich Winkler, *Die Zeichnungen Albrecht Dürers*, 4 Bde., Berlin 1936-37, Nr. 922. The mural was executed by Georg Pencz.
content to some deeper level of meaningfulness, such as style, structure, or aesthetic beauty. Reluctance on the part of many beholders to read pictures on their own terms was more disastrous for allegories than for other kinds of pictures, because it seemed to disrespect the picture's own communicative ambitions. It is responsible for the disrepute that the category fell into.

This paper, rather than focusing on the non-allegorical attributes that the paintings share with other paintings and so assigning them some alternative, non-allegorical identity (such as work of art or historical document), will instead test the proposition that there might still be some profit in thinking about the allegorical machinery of Bellini's or Titian's paintings. It will do this by comparing the Venetian allegorical painting to another category of allegorical picture, one kept distinct from "art," then and now: the prophetic image, or image that encodes, in picture-writing, a vision of the future. Such images became a topic of intense public interest precisely in Venice at the beginning of the sixteenth century. The people, the diarist Marino Sanudo reported in 1509, the "mob" or "crowd" (la briga' = la brigata), expected much from prophecies, and were studying the enigmatic mosaics of San Marco for clues to contemporary politics. The poet and historian Jean Lemaire de Belges wrote, also in 1509, that three years earlier, when in Venice, he was shown a mosaic image of two lions in the pavement of San Marco (Abb. 3). The one lion, healthy, floating on the waves but with two paws on land, represented Venice the naval power; the other lion, entirely on land but enfeebled, represented Venice that had foolishly attempted to extend its domain to the terraferma. Lemaire was told that this warning was encoded in the pavement by the Calabrian monk and mystical theologian Joachim of Fiore (c. 1135-1202), who according to Venetian lore had lived in Venice at one point, indeed at San Marco itself. Joachim had supposedly lived in a cell and furnished the decorators of the basilica with images predicting the future. Otto Demus believes there might really be Joachimite elements in the program at San

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12 *Diarii di Marino Sanudo*, hg. von Rinaldo Fulin et al., Bd. 8, Venice 1882, col. 326 (30 Mai 1509): "...la briga' al presente atende molto a prophetie et vano in chiesa di San Marco, vedando prophetie di musaicho, qual fece far l'abate Joachim..."


Marco. But as far as is known Joachim of Fiore was never actually in Venice. It is not clear how the stories about San Marco's prophetic mosaics originated. Already in the thirteenth century it was said of Joachim that he used to paint images on the walls of his cubicle, and that he had painted an image of St. Francis. A Franciscan text of 1367, the earliest to connect Joachim to San Marco, reported that the prophet had planted two unlabelled images of monks predicting the foundation of the mendicant orders a few decades later by Francis and Dominic. In fact, these mosaic images, which can be found under the arch before the door of the Sacristy in the south transept of the basilica, represent Francis and Benedict (Abb. 4). The connection of the mosaics to contemporary Venetian politics does not seem to predate 1500. Another image in the pavement, a cock pecking the eyes of a fox, was interpreted for Lemaire as a prognostication that the Republic of Venice would come to ruin at the hands of the King of France (Abb. 5). Venice lost a key battle to Louis XII of France in 1509. Another image represented the "Last Pope," still another a bound wolf (Ludovico Sforza) carried on a pole by two chickens (Charles VIII and Louis XII). The conviction that Joachim's prophetic visions were enciphered in the stones of the basilica, in plain view and awaiting exegesis, was repeated constantly into the seventeenth century, resistant to the mild skepticism of Lemaire and other commentators. Travellers, for example the French scholar Guillaume Postel, were shown the images. Orders were given not to destroy any mosaic without copying it. "Some doubted Joachim's direct involvement in the S. Marco images," according to Marjorie Reeves, "but many believed that his prophecies were encoded in the images." Many theologians of the early sixteenth century, including Protestant reformers, as Aby

17 Demus, *Mosaics of San Marco* (wie Anm. 15), Bd. 1, figs. 90, 91.
19 Niccoli, "'Prophetie di Musaicho'" (wie Anm. 18), S. 204, points out that this mosaic in fact represents an eagle capturing a rabbit. She also remarks that the image was restored or even replaced in 1610, according to a document; indeed all the San Marco basilicas have been continually renewed over the course of time. The image she reproduces (her fig. 5), however, does not seem to be the same as the one reproduced by Boito (my Abb. 5).
20 Niccoli, "'Prophetie di Musaicho'" (wie Anm. 18), fig. 6.
22 Reeves, *Influence of Prophecy* (wie Anm. 16), S. 96-99.
Warburg noted with surprise, looked to the heavens and to natural wonders—comets, monstrous births—for clues to the present and the future. How much easier it was to decipher images already filtered, as the San Marco mosaics were, through a human imagination. For the prophet Joachim of Fiore was functioning simply as a channel for divine messages. The reformer Andreas Osiander found, in the library of a monastery in Nuremberg, a recent illustrated Italian edition of Joachim's prophecies. Osiander saw in some of these strange rebuses prophecies of the Protestant Reformation, and prepared a new edition with woodcut copies of the images (1527). Albrecht Dürer, meanwhile, published a woodcut in 1525 that claimed to reproduce an allegory depicted on a hundred-year old tapestry predicting contemporary events. That mysterious image, like the allegories at San Marco, involved active animals, including several birds and a fox.

The perusal of ancient images, whose iconographies had been forgotten or whose forms were obscure enough to permit creative projection, in hopes of seeing glimpses of a present confirmed or a future foretold, was possibly much more widespread in this period than we realize. The Doge of Venice, Leonardo Loredan, was looking beyond San Marco: he announced in 1509 that he had been instructed not to go to war against the Germans by an old relief sculpture at the church of S. Giacomo di Rialto. Paracelsus, travelling in the South Tyrol in 1538, misidentified an inscription and a head carved on the portal of a thirteenth-century church as a prophetic image of Martin Luther. There were plenty of precedents in ancient texts. Suetonius wrote of soothsayers who were inspired to excavate a sacred site at Tegea in Arcadia, "where a hoard of very ancient vases was discovered, all painted with a striking likeness of Vespasian."
Such prophetic images, a species of picture-writing, had several features in common with the allegorical pictures of Bellini, Lotto, Giorgione, Marcantonio, and Titian. First, they invited interpretation by violating expectations, for example by inexplicable juxtapositions of figures. Second, the violations of convention, signalling difference from a notional "ordinary run" of images produced by tradition, invited the hypothesis of a designing, meaning-constructing intelligence. Third, the prophetic image and the allegorical artwork proposed a temporal framework for interpretation, whereby the image yields meaning only after a delay.

The prophetic image also differed from the allegorical painting in two important respects. First, the prophetic image, once deciphered, delivers a single coherent message. Once that hidden meaning surfaces, the initially apparent meaning is simply discarded. The hidden meanings of the artwork, by contrast, continue to unfold throughout the work's existence; the surface is never dispensed with. Second, the prophetic image is not beautiful, or not especially beautiful, whereas the allegorical image was often on remarkably good terms with beauty, for reasons which will become clearer later in this argument.

But let us first reflect on the similarities between these two categories of image, categories suddenly so conspicuous, it would seem, in the first years of the sixteenth century in Venice and in Germany. The Joachimite mosaics at San Marco, the ones singled out among the acres of storiated surface, were the mosaics whose strange subject matter provoked puzzlement. The cock pecking at the fox, the captured wolf, and the contrasting pair of lions were not Christian subjects and seemed not to belong. No texts could be matched to them. They depicted absurd events never met with in ordinary experience. The same can be said of the Joachimite pictograms found by Andreas Osiander, and of the allegorical tapestry reproduced by Dürer. The absurdity of the scenes is a label saying, "Read Me." The shock to expectations is read as a surplus of meaning even before the content of the message is grasped. The images of holy men, meanwhile, interpreted as Joachimite anticipations of the mendicants Francis and Dominic, identified themselves as prophecies by the absence of labels. Only the likenesses—Francis's stigmata were an aspect of bodily likeness—anchored the portraits to their referents. But the likenesses of the two saints, like the portraits of Vespasian on the archaic vases, could not be read as likenesses at all, as referential images, until history was ready for them. They are images whose origin-point lay in the future. The
allegories of Bellini and the others also signalled their difference from other pictures by absurdities and impossibilities that read as overdetermination and invited exegetical attention. The literal sense of the depictions—a pair of nude women sleeping on a river bank before a burning city, a nude woman and a clothed woman conversing at a fountain—could not be matched to other pictures, to texts, or to experience. The violation of expectations on the level of pictorial composition reads as patternlessness. But this very quality is the signal that the picture does comply with some hidden pattern that might yet be discovered.

Through their difference, such images gave an impression of having been authored, whether by God, or by Joachim de Fiore, or by Titian, or by some intellect who had devised a new program. They seemed not have been produced by tradition as the majority of pictures were. The portrait of the saint or founder, the Biblical narrative, the depiction of the pagan god were understood by default to have emerged out of long sequences of images, all more or less faithful copies of one another. One image of the saint had to be ready to serve as an effective substitute for any another, or else the whole system of coordinated belief would collapse into idiosyncrasy. The temporality of the cult image or the civic icon was stable. Such an image had no author, for an author is a maker who sets himself as a founder (auctor), as one who initiates, who introduces into the world. Under a substitutional paradigm of image production, the artist is simply an enabler who transmits stable content from image to image. The prophecies and the allegories, by contrast, were invented.

The prophecies and the allegorical cabinet pictures differ from one another in that the former were visible to all and the latter were made for private audiences. But this difference should not mask the essential homology of the two categories, namely, that they are pictures that await interpretation. They propose a temporal rather than a spatial model of polysemy. The true meaning of the allegory and the prophecy does not lie behind or inside the apparent meaning. We often grasp ambiguity through spatial metaphors: the true meaning lies behind the surface; it is "latent." We discover an "implicit" meaning "folded" inside the text. But the prophetic image and the allegorical cabinet picture offer meaning-making as an operation distended across time. Difficulty of interpretation is understood as a temporal problem, as simply a matter of being premature. Time will activate the image and reveal its
meaning. Biblical typology works the same way. Typology reads an event as an image, in the sense that it identifies a pattern immanent in the event that then finds its formal rhyme in another event later in time. The later event, the antitype that completes the type, is not really a separate event: the two events are the same, but appear different from human, time-bound perspective.

Here the social context of interpretation becomes relevant. The private sphere, the private chamber of the elite, is a refuge from the rhythms of business and politics. The chamber provides a measure of *otium*, leisure, a span of unstructured time that permits meaning to emerge. In private, one has time to work out the meaning. With time, one discovers that there is meaning here after all, against expectations. Although the prophetic riddle on the floor of San Marco is public, and the painted riddle by Giorgione is private, both submit themselves to the passage of time. The one picture waits for history to catch up with it. The other picture withdraws from history and creates its own temporal shelter where minds can be free to wander forward in hopes of meeting meaning.

Leisure and freedom from care are thematized in many painted allegories of the Renaissance. Allegory is a mode associated with pleasure, idleness, and sensuality. When it stages its riddles in fictive settings connoting pleasure and leisure—the pastoral landscape, the garden—the allegory points to the temporal distension that is the very medium of interpretation. This helps explain one marked contrast, already noted, between the prophetic and the allegorical image: the prophetic image is often ugly, in the sense that it juxtaposes units of meaning paratactically, without concern for their compliance with any overall formal principle; whereas the allegorical image, because it mirrors the ideal state of well-being that is its own projected context of interpretation, is often beautiful. It is notable that the allegorical image of the decades around 1500 often combines beauty and ugliness in unexpected ways, for example juxtaposing very beautiful with very ugly figures; see Botticelli’s *Calumny of Apelles* in the Uffizi (c. 1495) or Mantegna’s *Pallas Expelling the Vices from the Garden of Virtue* in the Louvre (1502), as well as Marcantonio’s *Dream*. The independent painted allegory emerged out of the fresco cycles and painted furnishings that
enveloped everyday life. The painted chests or cassoni, for example, were a key source. The horizontal format of *Sacred and Profane Love* clearly refers to the origins of the allusive, allegorical mode in cassoni. So recently serving as the mere supplements to domesticity, privacy, the body, and desire, such paintings had to prove themselves. The legitimacy of the private allegory was not assured.

When, for once, the private allegorical mode was shifted into the Venetian public sphere, it was a disaster. Giorgione's frescoes on the Fondaco dei Tedeschi, according to Vasari, were already incomprehensible a generation later. Vasari reported that he could not find anyone in Venice who could explain the allegory to him. He also implied that the meanings had never been very clear in the first place, and that Giorgione's aim had been merely to demonstrate his own powers of imagination. Yet these images were no more enigmatic than Giorgione's private paintings. Why was Vasari so ill-tempered about them? Because the shift in venue entailed a shift in the time-frame. In exposing themselves to the public eye, Giorgione's murals were re-entering history and were supposed thereby to fall into the rhythms of public life, like the Joachimite images or the civic allegories of the Palazzo Pubblico in Siena. The same images, in a private setting, would have been permitted to live a quieter, more ruminative life without pressure to deliver definitive messages. This recalls the other main difference between the allegorical and prophetic image, listed above, namely, that the allegorical image is not exhausted when its prophecy has been "met" by time, but rather lives on in time delivering further prophecies, indefinitely.

Both kinds of image, prophetic and allegorical, broke with the normal substitutional image, produced by the anonymous machinery of tradition, in that they were authored, that is, they had clear origin-points in history. But whereas the prophecy also had a clear historical destination, allegory did not, unfolding instead into an infinity of plural readings. The prophetic image is the double of the allegorical artwork, a reduced double; perhaps something like a parody.

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But the prophetic image might equally be understood as a homeopathic remedy for the infinite play of interpretation, which is politically unacceptable. The prophetic image reveals a gap between the signifier and its signified, but only for the purpose of finally closing the gap. Such an image acknowledges the temporal predicament of the reader; it takes account of the interval between the sending and the receiving of the message, but only then to collapse it forever. Time must pass before the image is understood, but once it is understood, the non-reality of time is revealed and history is stabilized. The prophetic image seeks to diminish the element of contingency and choice in politics: it places politics under the sign of necessity. Success in politics means: the successful assertion of one's own superiority over time. Your own temporal existence is permanent, whereas your enemies are merely accidental apparitions in history. Political marginality is disclosed as the condition of having been left out of a total historical plan; success means that you were factored in already centuries before you were born. The contrast is clear with modern liberal politics, which amounts to an acknowledgement of the contemporaneity of the other. The interest in the prophetic image around 1500 was political. The prophetic image came into focus whenever it was in someone's interest to deny that politics are really about contemporaneity.

Just as the political desideratum of the community or the nation is to be written into history, so too will the artist seek to dominate time. The allegorical cabinet picture and the prophetic image which reckon with their own delayed activation (Nachträglichkeit) predicted a conception of the artwork as prophecy first articulated three centuries later, by Romantic poets, from Blake to Novalis. The idea that an original poet actually "arrives from the future" (Heidegger), or the idea that artists show the way, that they serve society as a "lookout" or "advance guard," are different ways of expressing the artist's own sense of being out of rhythm with normal time. The break with conventions performed by the true work of art is so violent that the work can only be perceived in historical perspective. The original artist, like a prophet, is only revealed as original much later. Every text, according to Northrop Frye, is the "type" of its own readings: the text itself is a mere prefiguration, umbra et figura in the theological language of typology, whereas its future readings are fully real.32 The "dialectical image," for Walter Benjamin, is properly read only when society is ready to

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Ernst Gombrich grasped this inner affinity between the allegorical image of the Renaissance and the mysterious prophetic symbols devised by the Romantic artists, calling attention to their diagram-like nature. Here he turned inside out the standard modern narrative, associated with the Romantics themselves, of sterile Baroque allegory superseded by the vivid symbolic language of the Romantics. In Gombrich's schema, the early Renaissance allegory and the Romantic symbol shared a contrived, cerebral quality which limited their power as artworks. He also would have agreed that the Renaissance allegory had something in common with the diagrammatic prophetic mosaics at San Marco. Gombrich contrasted all these devices to the richly evocative allegorical paintings of the Baroque era, the ceilings of Austrian churches and palaces that he knew from childhood, personifications of Platonic ideas which to his eyes "looked anything but bloodless." These images did not merely point to an ideal reality but became it. In this way, Gombrich refused to fall into step with either of the two competing theories of allegory outlined earlier: he could not subscribe to the anti-Romantic rehabilitation of allegory because he did not see how interpretation understood as a temporal predicament could serve as the basis for art. And he would not accept the Romantic disparagement of academic or Baroque allegory because he felt that the Romantics misunderstood the true nature of that allegory, which once perfected in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries actually did succeed in dominating time by creating powerful fictions of presence.

In contrast to the intensely present allegories of the Baroque, which involved no temporal displacement, the prophetic image was a message from outside of history that told those trapped within history what it all looked like from the outside. Such an image is a reassurance that time does after all have an overall pattern; for to live inside time, on the path to death and entropy, without a clear sense of what it all amounts to, despite all the

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34 Gombrich, "Icones symbolicae" (wie Anm. 10), S. 187-89.
35 Gombrich, "Icones symbolicae" (wie. Anm. 10), S. 123.
promises of salvational theology, is terrifying. For the person seeking an assurance that history does have a plan, the specific content of the prophetic image, its commentary on current events, is perhaps not so important. More important is the sense conveyed by the prognosticating image that everything does in the end have a pattern. It may equally be true that the specific content of the artistic allegory is not so crucial—just as our triad of art historical commentators intuited. What matters rather is the possibility of the allegorical image, an image that does not reveal the state of things, once and for all, but rather awaits its own readings. The beholder invited to become a reader might well feel that reading images is its own reward, and might well expect no recompense at the end. This helps account for the apparent paradox that significant works of art often convey banal messages.

The prophetic image and the allegorical artwork found two different ways of escaping the time of ordinary experience: the one entered the mystical suprahuman plan of cosmic history, the other entered the bracketed time of leisure and interpretation. Both broke with the substitutional model of image-production by which the image evades time altogether by repetition and compliance with type. The affinity between the two types of image, prophetic and allegorical-aesthetic, was sensed by the many artists around 1500 who had developed strong senses of their own authority as creators—their independence from the ordinary time of ordinary experience—and yet were drawn to emblematics, hieroglyphics, or prophetic images, all images that seemed mysteriously to "trap" a temporality lying beyond mere experience. The strong artist will want to inhabit this time, even at price of occluding his own authority. Dürer, although deeply intrigued by the prognosticating tapestry at Castle Michelfeld, did not associate the image with his own artistic project: the reproductive woodcut he published bears no monogram. Yet the prophetic image is related to his overall project, for Dürer ultimately did want to clear out a space for art beyond politics; he did not aspire to mere contemporaneity. Although the Michelfeldt tapestry comments on current events, it does so from a vantage point outside of day-to-day politics. Its designers saw the whole plan of history. That is the vantage point—with respect to the whole plan of art history—that the artist will want to occupy.

Artists quickly understood that to be allegorical in the deeper sense of discovering a temporality out of rhythm with ordinary experience does not necessarily involve the picture-
category "allegory" in the narrow sense, the image that "writes" through personifications. Already Titian's *Sacred and Profane Love* escapes the category "allegory" even as it appears to embrace it.

The identifying marker of the allegorical image—the label reading "Read Me"—was the implausibility of the surface. Why would anyone imagine that *Sacred and Profane Love* is an allegory? The landscape setting resonates with real experience. It is an idealized local landscape. This is an orderly world: in the background, the dog chases the rabbit, not the other way around, as one might have found it on the pavement of San Marco. Such a fountain, perhaps fashioned from an ancient sarcophagus, might well have been located in a modern Venetian garden or courtyard. But one was not likely to come across that fountain in an open, wild landscape. The woman on the left is splendidly but plausibly dressed in modern costume. She sits not quite on the edge of the fountain but perhaps on a low support before it. The woman on the right resembles the other but is completely nude except for a veil flung over the loins and a red cloak that conceals only her upper part of her left arm and her right foot. She holds aloft a small lamp. The asymmetry of the composition signals that the painting is something other than a mere expository diagram. The nudity of the woman on the right, however, signals that the picture is after all trying to say something and not simply show something. So too, obviously, does the winged putto dipping his arm into the fountain. More subtly, the nude's woman mildly remonstrating appeal to the clothed woman reverses the image of the clothed woman, personifying Virtue, chastising the sensuous nude, familiar from Dürer's *Hercules* engraving (B. 73).36 In Titian's painting, in effect, just as in the San Marco mosaic, it is the bird who pecks at the fox.

The picture hints that it is trying to say something, but offers neither textual labels, which in this painting would have struck an archaic note, nor clinching conventional attributes. Is the nude woman Venus? a personification of an abstract concept? or a nymph? Is she the sleeping "nymph at the spring" known from a pseudo-classical inscription and the poems

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36 The landscape and castle, the putto, and the drapery that covers the left shoulder and clusters at the feet, as well as the scenes of sexual violence carved in relief on the sarcophagus, all seem to point back to Dürer's famous print of the late 1490s.
and fountains fashioned after it, who has perhaps woken up? Is the clothed woman also a personification, or is she the portrait of a real person (or both)? Likeness to a living person is a quality that would have been visible to some of the painters' beholders but not all. (Her resemblance to women in other paintings by Titian actually suggests that she is not a portrait.) Like the figures of Sts. Francis and Dominic at San Marco, the two women await identification.

The painter's ability to depict a plausible sensation of an outdoor scene, to double perception, means that he only need introduce a simple clue to signal "meaningfulness": the woman's nudity is enough. Her nudity is a relatively subtle clue because it violates no laws of the physical universe. Nudity violates only social convention. Titian, to signal "meaningfulness," had no need to create a bizarre diagram (the illustrations to the Joachimite texts), or an absurd narrative that turns the laws of nature upside down (the bound wolf, or the cock attacking the fox). In a fictional but plausible picture of the world such as those that Titian (but not the San Marco mosaicist) was capable of making, the presence of an argument imposed upon the fictional world can be signalled by a slight disturbance of expectations. When the painting is naturalistic, when it describes the way things look, then the interpretation-inviting absurdity can be keyed downward. This was the basis of the double-coding device developed by fifteenth-century Netherlandish painters and identified by art historians as "disguised symbolism," whereby objects that carry symbolic meaning in a Christian picture-language (lilies, washing basin) are introduced into a plausible domestic interior where they threaten to disappear among the other, non-meaningful household objects. The imported objects read as violations of expectations only to those beholders already alert to and versed in Christian symbolism. If the violation of expectations is keyed up—if full-dress absurdity is depicted in a realistic mode—the results will be truly strange and will signal some gross disturbance in the cosmos; this was Hieronymus Bosch's device.

The potential problem is that the presentational mode of a painting such as *Sacred and Profane*...
Love, powerfully convincing, is by nature demystifying. The painting basically re-produces sensations, even if in idealized or intensified form. In this way the painting affirms the basic validity of sensory experience and thus distracts from any beyond-pointing message, especially one that asks its recipients to locate the ultimate sources of meaning beyond bodily experience. That competitiveness between the content of the message and the bearer of the message is obvious to theologians. The very imaginative faculty that according to Maimonides makes prophecy possible, also undermines it.

The paradox of "allegory" in painting, which allegorical poetry does not suffer from, is that the content of most allegories, finally, is the proposition that behind mere historical, temporal existence hides stable Being. But it is the sensuous simulacrum of experience generated by the surface of the picture, at least in European painting since the fifteenth century, that most effectively symbolizes Being in all its plenitude. Such simulacra may actually put us in the presence of Being. The surface defies the painting's own admonishment to ignore surface, hinting that nature and the body might be Being itself, and not merely its shadows.

The mosaic image or the woodcut diagram offered no such simulacrum of experience. The surface of the mosaic was splendid and costly; the surface of the woodcut was humble and inexpensive. But these two surfaces had this in common: they did not pretend to sufficiency. The glinting facets of the mosaic surface produced an enchanting analogon of a supernatural reality—a reality located elsewhere, far from ordinary experience. The rude linear language of the woodcut delivered a packet of information, efficiently and without much ado—information fetched from elsewhere. The oil painting, by contrast, was its own reality, here and now, a powerful fiction of presence that cunningly proposed itself as a presence. The surface of the painting in its simple presence is by no means asking to be discarded or discounted. Such a painting as Titian's is the ancestor of the contemporary image classified by Jacques Rancière as the ostensive image: the image that "asserts its power as that of sheer presence, without signification" but does so—unlike, say, the documentary photograph—"in the name of art." "Facing the spectator, the obtuse power of the image as being-there-without-reason becomes the radiance of a face, conceived on the model of the icon, as the gaze of divine transcendence." Rancière is speaking of a recent exhibition that
dramatized this quality of the artwork-as-image: "The works of the artists...are isolated in their sheer haecity....The works are so many icons attesting to a singular mode of material presence, removed from the other ways in which ideas and intentions organize the data of sense experience. 'Me voici,' 'Nous voici,' 'Vous voici,'—the three rubrics of the exhibition—make them witness to an original co-presence of people and things, of things between themselves, and of people between themselves."40 The ostensive image—and Titian's *Sacred and Profane Love* is surely a sample of this class—can never really be allegorical in the de Manian, temporal, infinitely elusive sense, or in the sense developed by Petrarch and the early Renaissance theorists of meaning, because it beckons presence more effectively than words do. Nor can it court meaning in the temporally extended fields of typology or prophecy because its experience-doubling surface keeps it anchored in a permanently renewed present tense.

There is a way to rein in this line of thinking, which threatens to lead to a naïve or neo-theological conception of the artwork as a real presence, and that would be to grasp the painting as a site where presentational and writerly models of art are thematized. Titian's painting, according to this version, does not choose "presentation" over "writing," but rather sets them, two modes of being, in tension with one another. The painting is then about the gap between presentation and writing. Its "spatial-presentational" quality is embedded within a "temporal-readerly" identity.41

The picture might well be understood, consistent with this line of thinking, as an allegory that undermines itself by being too present, or too beautiful. It might also be understood as just the opposite: an image that produces presence in a straightforward way, and then mixes in an element of allegory in order to recover a margin of mystery. For mimetic painting does threaten to put an end to polysemy and to mystery. The "meaning" of a picture like Titian's is so obviously just what you see. That liberating possibility hovers unspoken over all interpretations of the picture. The winged putto, who is without speech (*infans*), in this...

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41 This account of the allegorical mode seems to me compatible with Klaus Krüger, *Das Bild als Schleier des Unsichtbaren: ästhetische Illusion in der Kunst der frühen Neuzeit in Italien*, Munich 2001. Krüger's complex re-narration of the history of Italian Renaissance painting involves a series of "vertical" or non-temporal readings of painterly meaning: the surfaces of pictures conceal meanings, or thematize the concealment of meanings.
painting and in all the ceilings of the Austrian churches and places that so impressed the youthful Gombrich, stands for the unspeakable possibility that the painting simply is what it appears to be: a making-present of two women in a landscape. "Allegory," then, would be painting's way of escaping the fate of such simple-minded directness. The function of "allegory" in art emerges as the production of mystery against the demystifying tendency of mimesis.

Titian's painting is best understood not as a message, but instead as the crystallization of a complex of real forces which in turn activates a new force-field involving a permanent oscillation between "experiential" and "meaningful" readings of the work, that is, between an image that recreates the presence of two women in a landscape, and a reading that points away from the two women. The painting is a ratio between, on the one hand, writerliness (the predicament of temporality) and, on the other hand, experience. The surface meaning and the hidden meaning both remain in play. Beauty has to stay in place in order to keep the beholder's attention fastened on the picture. The discarding of the surface meaning in favor of the hidden meaning is exactly what is discouraged by art. Early modern art thus did not so much perform allegory, as stage allegory as a possibility without either embracing or rejecting it. Allegory is not so much the form of this work as its content. Artworks marked their own freedom by staging allegorical challenges which were not really serious. The point was not really to guide the beholder to a true, latent meaning, but rather to invite the beholder to reflect on the gap between an allegorical (pointing away from surface) and a non-allegorical (non-pointing) reading of the image.

The paratactic allegories by Bellini, Lotto, and Giorgione were already allegories of allegory in this sense. Allegory had been a major framework for thinking about poetic meaning, and by tentative extension, pictorial meaning at least since Petrarch. "Allegory," in the account of Anne Dunlop, "placed a new and positive stress on the fictive nature of painting; further, it opened a space between sign and referent to be bridged by the operation of mind and memory, and from this space a new need for active viewer interpretation."42 The Venetian pictures were reflections on the possibility of pictorial allegory that marked a moment of

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42 Anne Dunlop, " Allegory, Painting and Petrarch," in: Word and Image 24 (2008), S. 77-91, hier S. 77. See also Dunlop, Painted Palaces (wie Anm. 30), S. 120-21, 156-58.
institutional emancipation (autonomization) for the art of painting. Titian's *Sacred and Profane Love* took the thematization of the paradox of pictorial allegory (i.e., the pull between the appealing picture surface *here* and the edifying meaning *there*) to another level of sophistication. Here the uncoded mimetic fiction threatens the essentially temporal and displacing nature of allegory itself—and in an "allegorical" painting! The supposed content of the work—something to do with love—is just a decoy. The work proposes a latency that never emerges, but rather remains in a state of potentiality. To identify *Sacred and Profane Love* with some proposition about love would be to reduce the work to its historical circumstances and remove it from its true medium, time.

*Sacred and Profane Love* is an allegory of allegory. This doubled structure is dramatized by the embedded scenes on the face of the sarcophagus, pale, shadowy images that reveal not the real meaning of the encounter taking place in the vivid, colorful world that the sarcophagus occupies, but rather point to the receding significance (to the art of painting) of a literary, temporal model of allegory, whereby stories are told only in order to point beyond themselves. Perhaps the true medium of allegory is not time, after all. The painting employs an allegorical device, in this case, the displacing device of the mise-en-abyme or self-diagnosing analogon of the work embedded inside the work. But the painting employs allegory only to indicate a model of meaningfulness that painting as an art will increasingly do without. This is not so easy to see. Over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with the rise of the academies, allegory was installed as a principal device, one of the ways painting claimed parity with the art of poetry. Gombrich's intuition of the vital, anything-but-abstract Platonic presences on the painted Baroque ceilings, however, his opening gambit in his essay on symbolic images, suggests rather that there have been no paintings in the European tradition less allegorical than "allegorical" paintings.

Venetians flocked to the allegorical images at San Marco not only to learn about current events, but also because they thought that in the presence of such images they might enter into the presence of Being itself. It was the equivalent of visiting a miracle-working image at a Marian shrine. The magic of the political prophecies, like that of the miracle-working

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images, could be measured in a human time-scale. They gave greater satisfaction than many ordinary Christian images simply because the ordinary images depicted events that either had already happened, or would not happen for a very long time, such as the Last Judgment. The real interest in the prophetic images, just as in the case of the sites associated with miracles, was not the particular information they imparted, but the possibility of coming into contact with an object, a place, or a person (e.g., Joachim of Fiore) associated with the reception of a message or a prophecy sent from another sphere. Joachim, in receiving his instructions from God, was initiated into a private set of conventions, closed to other mortals for years to come.

Allegorical painting offered another kind of appeal, likewise not a matter of a particular content, but a matter rather of allegory's new function as the shelter for the boldest experiments in modern painting, whereby the pure presence of body and nature, the capture of real forces, could be proposed as the basis for the work's whole appeal. It was an idea so simple that it seemed to require framing, re-mystification, then and now, by an allegorical intention; and by the figure of the creative individual, an artist who, if he did not, like Joachim, receive instructions directly from God, at least appeared to be working according to a private set of conventions closed to others. Both "allegory" as a picture-category and the idea of the divine artist, and later the Romantic idea of the artist as prophet, were re-mystifications of an art of painting which more and more seemed to be offering pure presence. Painting as an art thus parted company with the Joachimite images, which, by virtue of having been handed down directly by God, were among the last European images to require no re-mystification.
List of illustrations /captions


5. "*Hen and Fox*" mosaic, pavement, Basilica of San Marco, Venice. Camillo Boito, *La basilica di San Marco* (Venice: Ongania, 1893), tav. IX. 43, fig. 12.