

Truth and image

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Iâ??ve reviewed my post of 11 January 2014 #178 Architectural pragmatics. In that post I rehearsed the argument that architectural theorists and practitioners need worry less about whether a particular philosophical position is correct than what difference its adherence makes to oneâ??s actions.

Iâ??m thinking of Freud on concepts of the unconscious, Derrida on the indeterminacy of meaning, Frege on the primacy of calculable logic, and other fields of inquiry, including their conclusions, variations, adherents, differences and detractors.

Once we (non-philosophers) accept the cultural applicability and authority of a particular position and its genre of inquiry then we might as well leave it to others to argue its position in the realms of truth and falsity. In other words, I argued for a pragmatic orientation to knowledge.

In that I drew on the authority of writers such as Richard Rorty (a self-declared philosophical pragmatist) and other scholars of interpretation and hermeneutics. Iâ??ve elaborated on my thinking on this subject elsewhere, including posts: Whatâ??s wrong with pluralism, Stupid postmodernism, Armchair postmodernism. Truth really matters, as do the narratives within which we justify, construct and disseminate it.

What photography does

If discourses in spoken and written language are consequential in the realms of action, then something similar applies to images. To help me transition towards the truth status of pictures, I observed that my post from 2014 shows a picture of a Sherman tank. That image hints that visual artefacts themselves participate in this pragmatics: they do not merely illustrate verbal arguments, they do work â?? pragmatically.

Though that post started with a discussion of WW1, the image relates to WW2. Itâ??s actually a vivid memorial on a beach front in â??â•¨Slapton Leyâ•©, â•¨South Devon.â•© For that post I converted the picture to black and white. I wanted to evoke a bit of non-specific war history to go with my text. I also wanted to make the commemorative wreath mounted at the front of the tank less conspicuous.

Contrary to the cultural entailments of black and white, thereâ??s a fashion at the moment to bring old photographs to life. So, I called on AI to re-introduce colour and to animate the image.

I prompted the AI video platform RunwayLM: â??I took this photograph a long time ago of a Sherman tank in a memorial setting. I had converted it to black and white. Gradually shade it in full colour as the camera pulls back to show the tank moving under fire in a battle setting.â•©â•© â?¦ Please remove the commemorative wreath from the front of the tank.â?• The platform followed my prompt (though the wreath is still in place).



For further contemplation, ChatGPT helped me with a few interesting insights relating truth and pictures based on my texts thus far:

â??Visual truth claims are enacted rather than asserted. AI-generated video becomes a pragmatic instrument. Its force lies in how quickly it recruits familiar visual tropesâ??mud, smoke, uniforms, slow motion, desaturated colour gradingâ??to trigger recognition and affect. The question then becomes not â??â??â??is this an accurate representation of WWII?â?? but â??what does this representation do?â??â?•

This insight mirrors the pragmatic shift in my 2014 post: from â??is it true?â?• to â??what difference does it make?â?• This shift may be helpful as the proliferation of AI-generated and modified imagery leads us to the initial assumption that any and all photographic imagery is synthesised, or *fake*. In this case, â??what does it do?â?• supplants â??is it accurate?â?•

Bibliography

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