

From ‘taking’ network pictures to ‘making’ network pictures: A new metaphorical manifesto for industrial marketing research

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Abstract

Wood (2002) proposes that cinema is the most appropriate metaphor for interpretation of contemporary life and organizations. This paper adopts this enthusiasm for the cinema metaphor and explores the implications for industrial marketing and business networks, with particular reference to IMP (Industrial Marketing & Purchasing) Group research. We outline the Cartesian picture theory of the early Wittgenstein and the comparable ‘pictures agenda’ within the IMP. We then outline the post-Cartesian ‘language gaming’ approach adopted by the later Wittgenstein and associate it with our agenda to introduce a more ‘cinematographic’ approach, introducing issues within the ‘linguistic turn’ to the study of business networks.

The transformation of our contemporary ‘post –Cartesian’ culture from ‘written’ to ‘visual’ was not fully appreciated until the invention and mass appeal of cinema and the concomitants of a visual culture became more apparent. In the notion of the ‘spectacle’, Debord (1967) was amongst the first to show us that the postmodern visual culture was one where social relations are dominated by commodified images. The images that prevail, from this critical viewpoint, are ‘social opiates’ masquerading as progress that control actors through addictive consumption and acquisition by spectator-consumers. In this context, business to business relationships are about how these image-based addictions are maintained within business cultures.

The adoption of a cinematographic metaphor would, as a result, appear to be a pertinent development of understanding of business network relationships. The advantage of a cinematographic metaphor over other, less visual, metaphors is that cinema is more visually sophisticated and entirely embedded in cultures dominated by commodified images. It is appropriate, therefore, that visual literacy, realities as increasingly ‘image-dominated’ and ‘virtual’ business networks are better understood through the lens of a cinematographic metaphor.