Chapter 17

Phenomenology
Of
International Images

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Abstract: This article comprises the first attempt to investigate “international image” phenomenologically. First a review and critique of current social scientific measurement of public opinion is demonstrated to be an essentially different phenomenon from “international image,” despite the popular confusion of the two. Then using Husserl’s analysis of “certitude,” international image is demonstrated to be essentially an expression of the natural attitude towards the “actual.” The logocentric aspect of television is explored as a major contributor to the blind faith in international images. Doxie sedimentation consisting in large part of a world constituted of video images is addressed as the source of international images and also of perspectival nationalism.

This is a phenomenological analysis of international images. To my knowledge there has never been an application of the phenomenological attitude and method to this very important, yet extremely difficult to discern phenomenon.

I. State of the Problem

Although the phrase is common in our lexicon, I could find only one systematic reflection in print about “international images.” Presumably, we all already know what this means. The one work that directly problemati-
judgement, the positivist in fact contradicts himself by attempting to measure images and defining them as verifiably false when compared to the researcher's own, presumably "accurate," image. Third, he does so from the basis of defining "international" and "image" operationally, and so, tautologically. Fourth, while using categorical language ("operational," "multivariance," "principle of verifiability," "regression towards the mean," etc. . . .) the positivist rejects as meaningless and a priori, any hope of generalizing abstraction from contingent cases—law.

It is my position that what positivistic researchers are measuring is precisely what they say they are measuring, operational definitions of "attitudes" and "opinions," not "image," even as operational definition. Images must be described, not measured. Hence the value of the phenomenological method for this area of investigation. Furthermore, "attitudes" and "opinions," presented as operational definitions, are tautologies, in that, for instance, an "attitude" is essentially whatever its definition says it is. Furthermore, even at the level of natural "ordinary" language (a la J. L. Austin), words like "attitude," and "opinion," presuppose (like "belief" and "faith") that what is believed is provisional and therefore susceptible to doubt. Critical reflection upon such prejudices is inherently impossible until the phenomenological epoché is performed.

The phenomenon of international image proves to be much more complex than the published operational definitions of attitude and opinion. International images, as they appear in the natural attitude, prior to reflection, are not available for doubt. On this basis, we find that not only is opinion and attitude research not applicable to a fundamental understanding of this phenomenon, but that these concepts themselves are in desperate need of reformulation from the ground up, as something other than operational variables. Attitudes and opinions do not appear to us as methodological constructions, with a sole ontic imperative based on a functional role defined by the instrumental biases of economy of explanation and operationalism.

The phenomenon of international images has the peculiar structure of givenness that it is often interpreted by positivistic social "scientists" as

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2 Edward Hall, unpublished manuscript.

3 Hence, research into attitudes and opinions, because they are, by definition, easily measured, raises a methodological issue. We recall Popper's famous adage "If I cannot measure it, it does not exist," to which Mannheim responded, "It exists because I measure it." Operational definitions of "attitude" and "opinion" are guided by, and fundamentally presuppose, measurability. Measurability, in turn presupposes not only instrumentality on the part of the investigator, but also something to measure, that is, the mode of consciousness characterized as measurement of . . . and an image to measure. Hence we have returned to the old (Cartesian) epistemological issue; is "international image" the creation of measurement, the result of operational definition, or does this phenomenon exist independently and prior to measurement? What is the ontological status of so called "international images?"


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illusion-fiction. In *Ideas* Husserl breaches this metaphysical issue when he explains the universal “epoché—abstention” leading to the “pure phenomenological situation.” He writes:

> It may be that phenomenology has also something to say concerning hallucinations, illusions, and deceptive perceptions generally, and it has perhaps a great deal to say about them; but it is evident that here, in the part they play in the natural setting, they fall away before the phenomenological suspension. Here . . . we have no such question to put as whether anything corresponds to it in ‘the’ real world.  

International images, are often presumed to be the causal consequences of deceptive and inaccurate propaganda, part and parcel of “false” consciousness. This logical positivist position presupposes that there is a truth “out there” to which propaganda does not, or will not, correspond. As this materialistic/sensational bias runs, images and imaginings are neither “real” nor sensible. At first glance, from this naturalistic, immanently metaphysical perspective, one might conclude that it will be difficult to problematize “false” consciousness. The non-phenomenological critic of international images typically doubts the veracity of the correspondence between the subject’s image and the “real world,” which he presumes to know with falsifiable validity. He does not however, suspend his belief in either the misrepresented fact-world nor the reality of the fictive image itself. This problematic is of course analogous to the issue of isomorphism, including the problem of identity, generally. International images are deeply rooted in the doxic beliefs in worlds “out there,” not merely metaphysically, but geographically, historically, and culturally.

Clearly, in a paper of this length we can only begin an exploration of the multifaceted sediments of meaning that comprise this phenomenon we call “international image.” All of the constituents of international images are part of the natural fact-world. To carry out a rigorous investigation of each would take volumes. We will at least sketch a

-course however, and briefly note the more essential landmarks along the way, investigating some theoretical concepts that currently enjoy academic fashion to see if they may help illuminate the “dark corners of consciousness.”

> Though such tests of correspondence are useful, they often fail to appreciate the fact that images need not correspond to anything else in order to be meaningful/influential in the sense of being powerfully effective. Witness image consultants in political and commercial product campaigns. Exaggerations, and other kinds of lies, do sell.

II. Epoché: Suspension of the Global Naturalistic Prejudice

To begin with, international images are a curious, almost complete microcosmic analogue of the general thesis of the natural attitude itself at one remove. This is so in the sense that I assume, on one level, and in an utterly blind, prejudicial (à la C. S. Peirce and later Gadamer) way, that my image of another country is of a place that really exists the way I “imagine”/utterly believe it to be. On another, equally, or perhaps more fundamentally blind presuppositional level, I act in accordance with my image.

So we have blind faith in the imaginary content, and blind faith in the formal image, which gives the content its unquestionable status. Even if we manage to achieve the most elementary suspension of faith and come to question the contents of our international image of, for instance Morocco, we typically do not doubt that we imagine. Here, at such a deep level of prejudice, the notion of belief in my “imaginings,” which presupposes the possibility of disbelief, is not yet possible to conceive. In other words, my “imaginings” are the truth of the world.

We are not even “about” the world here, or imagining, but living these faiths, opinions, attitudes and beliefs so completely that, strictly speaking, it is not appropriate to talk in terms of faith, opinion, valuation, and belief. This is so, because these concepts already connote a provisionalism, presupposing a transcendental posture which is characterized by a critical attitude. But, to reiterate, the experience of an image of another country, as part of the natural attitude, is not available for doubt until a reflective attitude is assumed.

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Even if I manage the most simple reflective posture, my international image itself remains real for me. But now it is characterized as being real fiction. A fiction we may describe as being realistic (mundane) or surrealistic (exotic), for instance, in its style of givenness (in Merleau-Ponty’s sense). Hence, my image may be open to some question on the basis of accuracy concerning the correspondence of it with the facts “out there.” But yet at this rudimentary level of reflection, my overall image is not put into metaphysical jeopardy, but rather, is simply seen in need of some minor adjustment to better conform with the new facts.

Having found current attitude and opinion research to be inadequate to the task of understanding international images, I suggest that we move on to our alternative approach. We must recognize that international images and opinions, are of the doxic realm. We must also realize that images occur at a deeper level than opinions, which presuppose some degree of reflection. We have opinions based upon our sense of the world, as it is given. Consequently, an important epistemic implication of performing the epoche, is that we may risk losing the essentially doxic nature of the phenomenon. As Husserl argues, “... I use the ‘phenomenological epoche’, which completely bars me from using any judgment that concerns spatio-temporal existence.” 6 International images presuppose a validity based on a place and a time. Furthermore, they are that to which judgments refer. Likewise, beliefs are beliefs always already about the world ..., attitudes are always already attitudes about ..., etc. Since international images are the prereflective ground (referent) of beliefs, attitudes, opinions, etc., if they are bracketed, then have we not lost the very essence of our phenomenon? Decidedly not. All that is bracketed is the metaphysical presumption that such doxic phenomenon are or are not “real” in the common sense of naive materialism.

The investigation of this complex can be aided by Husserl’s reflections on Descartes and Spinoza. Husserl discovered that the rivalry between their competing explanations of bias is based on a fundamental misunderstanding. While Descartes was concerned with genuine judgement, which is characterized by rationality and voluntarism, Spinoza was concerned with a much more insidious phenomenon, prejudicial belief which is characterized by a doxic dimension woven into the presentation itself. In other words, following Spinoza, we must say that fundamental images, which act as the contextual background (in the Schutzean sense) to particular events, remain prereflective, preinterpretive reflection. In fact, it is such contextualizing prejudices which predetermine selective perception and the interpretation of particular events. Hence, images present themselves as always already true, in the sense that Wittgenstein discusses naturalistic truth and world, “The world is all that is the case.” 10 This is the fait accompli of “fact,” a word which originally meant, “things already done.” Of course the confusion here is between facts and truth.

Can consciousness itself be false? The world, and its inherent linguistic nature, is prior to rational categorization. As Wittgenstein says of language, “The language game is so to say, something unpredictable. I mean, it is not based on grounds. It is not reasonable (or unreasonable). It is there—like our life.” 11 This is the level of prereflective, sub-human action/reaction—the realm of the “natural attitude.” Meanwhile it is the reflecting minds, such as Husserl and Nietzsche, that question the nature of mediated world itself, including the possibility of knowledge.

Husserl argues that there has existed a confusion between belief and judgement. The critical moment that separates the doxa from the judgement is denial, which conceals, and not affirmation which emphasizes. This is the thetic, or positional character which, if reflexively pondered, can be grasped and neutralized. Believing is a credence, a crediting prior to the judgement properly so called, which takes a position with respect to truth and falsehood. The modality of being, which the doxa confers on actuality, is antecedent to the operation of the “yes” which emphasizes and refers to the believing and also to the operation of the “no” that cancels it. For this reason, belief, as C. S. Peirce reformulates, is very difficult to reflect upon.

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6 Husserl, Idear, 100.

10 Wittgenstein, 1971, 41.: Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, 1.0.

In *Ideas I*, Husserl offers a schema for unpacking the relationship between the noetic and noematic dimensions of the natural attitude which includes living images/myths.

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<td>Modalities of Believing</td>
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What Husserl has observed is that the level of utter blindness, the doxic prereflective state, is characterized by “certitude.” What correlates with the act of being certain is the natural attitude, that is, the common senseness of the “actual.” International images reside precisely at this level of prereflective “Reality.” They are not yet available for genuine judgement. Before the image can be posited as an image, and not “Reality” (thereby becoming problematized), it must occur to the social agent that his sense of the world can be doubted, questioned. In fact, it must occur to him that his sense of reality can not only be legitimately questioned, but that the senses of reliability and legitimacy presuppose the reflexive act of problematization. Dogmatism (prereflective certitude) depends on blindness. Genuine authority depends, as Gadamer has demonstrated, on doubt. Without a crisis in belief, genuine judgement cannot commence. Without genuine judgement, one is left with blind prejudice. Prejudice means pre-judgement in rational terms, and is the antithesis of the critical attitude as first demonstrated by Socrates.

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12 See Chapter 10 of *Ideas* ("Theory of the Noetic-Noematic Structures: Elaboration of the Problems") especially subheadings 103, 104 and 105.

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Television creates a virtual space and time. It also manifest the universal polarity between the modern individual subject and the premodern collective which Gebser traces. Formally television is consumed by individuals in private psychic and physical spaces, such as living rooms. Since both the form of the technology and its contents are civilizational expressions of the same perspectival consciousness structure, each dimension emphasizes individualism. So in terms of contents, Newcomb, Arlen, and others have noted that commercials and shows formally speak to individuals about individualism.\textsuperscript{14}

At the same time that the audience is atomized, the audience is surveyed as a collective in order to help image producers create routinized, normalizing symbols. Once symbols become formally habituated, then they shift in their most fundamental function to become signals activating prereflexive emotional (unperspectival emotive) responses (Durkheim’s work concerning the power of national symbols is instructive here\textsuperscript{15}). Thus routinization leads to intolerant normalization on a mass scale. International images are often shared and totally pre-rational. Symbols for the mass mentality of \textit{das Man}, take on a signalic function, which means that the agent degenerates from the posture of a reflexive being, to a state of nonthinking stimulus/responsive behavior. An example is the nearly involuntary emotional response to a national anthem or flag.

Because they are generally toxic in nature, that is, prereflexive, signalic signals are often constituted by repetition, which begins at a very early age. Hence, highly organized youth movements are commonly found in fascist social systems from the state of Stalin to that of Hitler. Magical ritual is also often present in such prereflexive conditions. Strictly speaking, this is not communication, but rather conditioning. Flags, national anthems, totemic animals, etc., elicit emotional responses on a mythic level. Television fosters this process of shifting the sign from being symbolic to being signalic via repetition and false presence—pseudo


\textsuperscript{16} This is what the anthropologist Jules Henry calls the “pecuniary truth” of commercial broadcasting.\textsuperscript{16} What is true is what sells.

The images held by a collectivity, or atomized audience (as opposed to a genuine community), are routinized. This is a process of sedimentation via video traces that gain status conferral due to mass exposure. Thus, television presents a seamless flowing of images that enhances permanence. Permanence enhancement is a key consequence of television. Although the contents of television change at ever-increasing rates, television itself, like the notion of progress, has become a permanent expression of the modern mentality. The same consciousness structure that is manifest by the logical positivism of Ernst Mach and August Comte, is manifest in the logocentric, metaphysical bias that is reflected in poll after poll, survey after survey that indicate people are ascribing greater credibility to television news than print media. Younger audiences are abandoning newspapers in alarming numbers, which is forcing their editors, in a competitive market, to make newspapers more visually appealing with graphic “gingerbread” and colors. This encourages nonlinear, prelogical magic and mythic modes of consciousness—tribalism.

Technologically, television’s pre-constituted images do not lead to the onto- and philogenesis of multiple realities, as Alfred Schütz might suggest.\textsuperscript{17} Rather television offers a shared reality that leads to homogenization.\textsuperscript{18}

Reactive punitive sanctions are legitimated via the authoritarian process of definition. Difference, in such a restrictive discourse, becomes social deviance. At best, it is merely tolerated. The power to define (as for example, the word “liberal” in the 1989 United States Presidential election) proves globally (from ontogenetic origin) restrictive. Fascism, which is predominated by magical and mythic modes of consciousness,
abhors ambiguity. Consequently, it sets sanctionable limits on the accepted sense of the world.

The state of predetermination is a consequence of prereflexive prejudices. It is the realm of belief in the certitude of the appearing—doxa. Reification is permanence enhancing. The doxic is characterized as a process that is always already complete; as a state of, rather than a process of, reification. This gives imagistic beliefs, which have no spacial aspect, and which are ironically also atemporal, the sense of the essential. Herein lies their power to be beyond doubt. This is the power of the “real,” the blinding inertia of ontological “truth.”

This power legitimizes signalic violence that is characterized by a shifting from symbol, which requires reflexive attention, to signal, which is behavioristically, prereflexively subliminal, and belligerent in illocutionary force. The former requires active interpretation, and encourages attention to intentions. The latter stimulates reaction, and cuts short any investigation of intentionality as a so-called subjective state—a fallacy. The status of signalic claims for the reactionary are therefore, undoubtable. Telepathic preconstituted images present a primitive Weltanschauung characterized by being pre-logical (Levy-Bruhl), totemic social (Levi-Strauss), animated (Fenbruck), with the phylogenetic priority going to the animated universe (Scheler).

Via the simultaneous processes of interpellation and appellation, television creates a fragmented collectivity of isolated individuals by the way it, as a technological form, communicates to them. Meanwhile, commercial contents, along with the technology itself, express hyper-perspectivity by teaching the aggregated audience members that they deserve to possess everything.

Television's mode of communication is characterized by the stasis of Mitwelt (contemporaneous yet absent world). This is in opposition to the Umwelt which is characterized by Buber, Schutz, and Litt as the realm of mutual thou orientation, the authentic social world of mutual recognition manifest as the reciprocity of perspectives between two human beings. In short, televisual communication lacks such a reciprocity since one party is a human and the other is a machine. Therefore, there does not exist any social bond. Contrary to McLuhan's optimism about the global village, the atomized televisual audience is a collectivity, not a human community. The images it propagates are reifications, and routinized signals which function on a prereflexive doxic level. Such images, including those on news programs, maintain perspectival biases along local, state, and nationalistic sentiments, each of which promotes, on various levels of allegiance, the oppositional in-group, out-group individualistic world view (i.e. any civil war). In this way, security and insecurity, as a fundamental perspectival polarity, is manifest as "vital interest" worthy of the title "news" (often promoted with an appeal to logocentric certainty by reference to a title such as "See It Now" or the generic "Eye Witness News," and logos like the CBS eye).

Mechanical telepathy is entertaining, but neither profound, nor reciprocal. It is a case of a causal relationship, which is unidirectionally dominant. Consequently, the machine/viewer relationship is one of Ich und Sache (I and it), as opposed to the world of human motivation, the Ich und Du (I and you) world of reciprocity and recognition. Where there is dialogue there is intelligence. Neither computers nor televisions can be said to communicate, to dialogically reflect, interpret, act. Consequently, images propagated through passive mechanical means are not available for dialogue, for question. The text is simply given, and ambiguity is limited by the combination of a logocentric audience, and a logocentric technology with its iconic visual emphasis. Little is left to the imagination or to debate. In its power of artificial presentation, its permanence enhancement, and creation of virtual (transcendental) space and time, television is a technological expression of logocentrism. Herein lies its deceptive power to confer the status of an essential truth onto the images it creates. Realism, as Lukács and others have demonstrated time and again, is a form of fiction. Herein lies television's role in international image formation and maintenance. In so far as international images are doxic in nature, they are part and parcel of the natural attitude. Television is a taken-for-granted weaver of prereflexive certainty about the "actual" world.

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IV. Conclusion

I have shown the limitations of the most prominent and promising explorations of international images. Much work remains to be done. It is in large measure an unexplored terrain. If time would permit, I would like to introduce you further to what I believe is the best available approach to this phenomenon. I am referring here to Jean Gebser’s investigation of our present state of ego hypertrophy, which is accompanied by all sorts of intolerances, competitions, and divisions in our spacial/temporal manifold including, but certainly not limited to; the emergence of the nation-states of Europe, the often brutal acquisition of the Americas by Europeans, the East/West, and North/South global splits along vital interests.20