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Premises of an anthropology of the image in Arnold Gehlen

The essay examines the theoretical premises of Gehlen's image analysis, which is specifically developed in his volume *Zeit-Bilder*. Moving from a comparison with Erwin Panofsky's iconology, this essay shows the stratification of rationality which is inbuilt into iconic structures, and stresses how Gehlen emphasizes its anthropological basis assessing the function of *Darstellen* for the primordial *homo efficiens*. Image rationality is therefore described according to the dynamics of *Erscheinung*, between nature and culture. Gehlen's project of a sociology of modern painting, which encompasses the major outcomes of 20th century art, is also considered in connection to the underlying theory of perception. The virtual, illusory and artificial character of iconic structures plays accordingly a pivotal role, in particular when Gehlen considers contemporary «abstract» painting in relation with the hypertrophic consciousness expressed at the threshold of *post-histoire*.