

SYNTHETIC THINKING

*An analysis concerning the visualisation of stringency and divergence
in the disparate fields of John Isaacs' works. by Margrit Brehm*

Uncanny they are; this is not only because of their size. It is because of the pale whiteness of the skin¹, - the most sensitive part. After only a short time out of the water its silky and soapy protective coat disintegrates. It breaks open and crumbles under one's fingers like an old newspaper. Here it is solid and dead like the thick subcutaneous layer of fat, positioned between epidermis and corium which protects the muscle tissue which is permeated by tendons and bones from the cold. Several pieces from the soft formed giant body were cut out in clean slices. Bloody petit fours to the carnivores of Brobdingnag².

For the people in the Circle-Line it is the most natural thing in the world to be transported below the seething metropolis, bathed in the never dimming neon lights, accelerated or slowed down in the arterial network of dark tunnels. They are travelling without moving. Their eyes do not see. They do not see the rhythm of the slightly curved metal struts which grow out of the central spine in the vaulted ceiling and the joints which make the segments of the body of steel mobile. Like busy ants they follow their fellow creatures, in and out, on and on and on. It is a perfect system. The areas of friction are minimised. The organisation has been taken over by computers. The objective is to eliminate »human error« but will there be no catastrophe as a result? What is a catastrophe?³ The remains will be sorted for a better future but until then we need some temporary storage. If you don't need to be there, don't go. Clowns are rather the exception. »An Incomplete History of Unknown Discovery« is a rebus with many knowns.

On one hand we have the interest in the natural sciences and in the always extending theories about how we arrived where we are now and where else we could arrive. On the other hand there are the images which are a treasure trove of set pieces from high and low, from art history and literature, from cinema and advertising. In the spaces between these elements the works of John Isaacs come into being, artificialities which seem strangely real, materialised hypotheses about the state of the human being at the end of the fastest century of all time. A panorama which places the spectator in the centre, creating the belief that human beings are able to see »all« isn't an appropriate setting anymore. In order to emphasise the complexity and impermeability of existing information, its fragmented and subjective perception by the individual, the artist utilizes an additive principle. Each of his »synthetic fields« (field research?), as I would call the three groups of his works which were produced in the last two years, is essentially about the »exploration« of a problem. The experiments are of an artistic nature; they explore the possibilities of how an often complex idea can be represented in sculpture, photography or video. The successive works »embody« different aspects of a problem. None of the groups is finished; a new piece can be added to the complex of works at any time. Some of the works can be positioned in more than one synthetic field. This specific methodology - itself an osmotic principle - on one hand refers to the continuity of specific interests while on the other revealing that the working strategy is the product of a complex matrix of disparate ideas of which the presentation is only the tip of the iceberg. The questions often overlap; fragments of theories, found objects and personal impressions are condensed to form a »Weltbild« (Conception of the world). For its rendering into art Isaacs searches and sometimes just finds the adequate shape. However, the amount and the type of information which the spectator actually sees depends -like always in iconological art - as much on the knowledge of the viewer as on their willingness to be open to »new« images.

John Isaacs stages the meeting of the object and the spectator with the same calculation he uses for planning his works. There is always something which creates curiosity and establishes the first access. In works like »Say it isn't so« (1994) featuring a scientist with a head modelled on a plucked chicken or »In Advance of the Institution« (1996) in which a seated figure bearing a potato head, it is the »human correspondent« catching the eye first. This »self-re-cognition« creates a relationship between the spectator and the object.⁴

Once this first level has been reached, the disillusionment sets in. In the beginning the difference of these »doppelgänger«⁵ is revealed with humour, curiosity is created through often comic-strip-like representations. The precision and the technical perfection which John Isaacs utilizes to produce his figures, enhance the fascination, unceasing even when we realise the »mistakes«, starting-points of our growing naïve desire for distance. Gene manipulation, inhuman research, unlimited scientific ambition - »say it isn't so«.

The head is a pars pro toto for the whole human being. The reason for this is not only because our mechanisms of perception are directed to the face of the »other«⁶, be it to identify the individual or to read information from the facial expression, but also because in some languages - as German - »head« (Kopf) and »spirit« (Geist) are used synonymously. If someone hides his face behind a mask, they assume a different identity.⁷

The non-existence of a face, the absence of eyes, nose and mouth, not only de-individualises a person but extinguishes the living creature. In a new photographic work John Isaacs erased his own face by means of a Photo Shop manipulation.⁸ Over the »smoothed out« skin he projected some kind of Rorschach test.⁹ This »operation« accentuates the debate that was started in earlier figures. The issue here is not »only« the »image of the human being« in general, but also the »self-portrait as an artist«. Its programmatics of form manifested by tradition, more often than not are a tightrope walk between megalomania and despair. Now the traditional term »genius« is definitively redundant as shown by the substitution of the central sense organs with a random but symmetric scheme that contradicts the asymmetry of the human face. The indicator become pronounced subject of the research, the individual facial expression is substituted by a form which stems from »artistic« production, but is nevertheless coded. The various ways of reading this form can be analysed within a defined canon. However, through the congruence of method and subject, the perspective shifts and the recipient is moved to the centre.

This photo is (so far) the last part in the group of works with the title »Matrix of Amnesia«. It adds another aspect to the field research carried out in these works. Amnesia, memory loss, total oblivion, the lack of place in space and time, is represented here by stereotyping and imprisonment of the individual within themselves and the subsequent isolation. Similar to the windowless monad unable to make contact to the outside world, more and more the human being is alienated from his own self, from his origin and therefore from the context which allows him to feel part of the world. John Isaacs varies this increasing polarisation in other works of the complex synthetic field of »The Matrix of Amnesia«¹⁰. In the »fat man« it is pinpointed with an approach from the opposite side of the debate. The headless torso which was the beginning of the whole group, is basically the counterpart of the manipulated self-portrait, a slightly smaller-than-life wax figure of an extremely fat naked man lying face down. Between the shoulders where the base of the neck should be, there is simply a hole which allows a view into the partly hollow figure. Whereas Isaacs has previously tended to use mannequins from window displays and replace the head and hands with his own creations, the fat man was produced solely in his own studio. Using found photographs he modelled a clay figure. It was then moulded in wax and its surface was given a flesh-coloured powder make-up. The result is a convincing and yet artificial »dead« body.¹¹

This ambiguity and the fascination created by that is familiar from the tradition of Madame Tussaud's wax figures. However, the shocking torso of the fat man challenges the spectator much more; it simultaneously fills us with an uneasy feeling and a voyeuristic curiosity. We cannot help but look at the mountain of flesh which appears to have been poured out. The familiar, the human being, which we certainly detect in this figure, is suddenly experienced as alien, as threatening, because of its mutilation and its excessive bodily forms. One gets the impression that these fluid masses distort rather than form the body.

With the fat man John Isaacs engages with the artistic debate concerning the body which has peaked in the past ten years. He clearly takes the side of those who do not consider the body as the last resort of but as a symbolic expression of the threat to the self.¹² That sociological, medical and psychological questions are of a certain importance for Isaacs becomes obvious, since he confronts the fat, spineless body damaged by civilisation - and as such immobile (it is also »headless«, i.e. without orientation) - with the alter ego of the Running Man. The latter is a video which shows a »savage« taken from an imaginary diorama of our ancestors who ceaselessly runs through fields, meadows and woods. The unequal couple and the duplicated polarity of immobility (prosperity/stagnation/lethargy/death) and motion (progress/freedom/energy/hunter and hunted) in the media used, open up whole new areas of interpretation which impose - and also defeat - an iconological reading. John Isaacs layers the levels of meaning in such a manner that though alluded to the definitive can never be found. Each of the works is polyfocal and at the same time undergoes a shift of meaning imposed by the works in the same field. The question of the mutual impact of method and result, the spectator and the spectated is reflected in the art object itself. This opens up a path between art and natural sciences which reflects the current position of human kind. The paradox is the same - the ever increasing specialisation and the imprisonment in the system which is simultaneously the subject of research, make universal knowledge impossible.¹³ Despite the shattering of the world's solid theories and despite the new impulse in scientific thinking brought about by chaos theory and the butterfly effect, the

»uninitiated« still continue to believe in the authority of science, in the human being as the peak of creation and the zenith of evolution. This background is the point of entry for John Isaacs as he integrates elements of evolutionary biology into his works.¹⁴ He isn't interested in finding the forgotten origin or flattering the Darwinistic ideas of the »evolution of the species« or the »survival of the fittest" what he is looking for is a possible parallel between the present states of biological and technological »evolution«. In both cases the central question is the possibility of a self-generating system; might it be the beginnings of life on earth¹⁵ or the gathering momentum of the anti-utopia, the prognosticated technological progress.

In such vested areas of research as artificial intelligence, these two disciplines meet in »bio-technology«. The system created by man becomes independent, is out of control, making its own decisions, - is not just science fiction anymore. Human beings become the stooges of a system they do not comprehend and most of all they cannot master.¹⁶

The increasing discrepancy between the individual perception of the world and the scientific explanations of it - combined with unstoppable technological progress - make the term »reality« seem antiquated. What is still real? What measure, what tool do we apply when we talk about realism? King Kong and the tyrannosaurus rex¹⁷ cannot be realistic enough for us. The current simulation of virtual realities has made realism in its traditional connotation obsolete for art. When John Isaacs models the excessive bulges of the fat man as realistically as possible, he is not interested in a fake »reality« but he targets directly our perception, our concept of reality. »A second type of realism comes into play, a realism that does not uncover >how it is< but that creates a short cut between spectator and object so that an impact on the conditioned reflexes of viewing is created. The symbolised object (or content) is not in the foreground, but rather experiments with the stimulations of the ways of seeing.«¹⁸

In revealing its own nature as fake, the work of art denies the possibility of constituting »truth«. This is the reason why it regains an enlightening power which now is no longer an inherent part of the work, but actualises itself in the site of perception.

»The relationship - however tenuous - between >things< interests me intensely, in the terms of one's externalised experiences but also how these connections are made not just from what is presented as stimulus but also its route to interpretation, i.e. the history of each separate individual viewing the work. This then is a move towards the artworks as both universal signifiers and personal performances...«¹⁹ This is how John Isaacs explains the interaction between knowledge and seeing which for him bears importance both regarding the production and the reception of an object. Similar to field research, the task is to analyse the elements that constitute reality. »It is the pattern of a culture which determines what the territory individuals move on looks like.«²⁰ In the search for models to express his unease and fascination with the multiplicity of our civilisation he utilises peripheral thinking. Only through this process can we make a connection of two disparate opponents; we can eavesdrop on the stroke of the butterfly's wings and recognise it in a tornado. Once we start combining instead of isolating, once we abandon our desperate search for a linear principle of cause and effect, the indefinite evolves as the starting point for new possibilities - »showing something and revealing something else«.²¹

What do we see when we stand before the (seemingly) blood drenched massive pieces of flesh? Or rather, who sees what? Our perception trained in comparative seeing is stirred up – blood/fragments of bodies = revulsion, curiosity, voyeurism, catastrophe tourism, reality TV, medicine, Körperwelten +++ We are in an ARTexhibition! = The fragment of the body as a reference to the destruction of the individual, wound, transformation, metamorphosis, Paul Thek, Kiki Smith, (are there any butterflies here?), Robert Gober.- no +++ size/form of fins/eye = whale: Save the Whales. Greenpeace, Free Willy²² +++ White = The Great White Shark (but this is about whales!) The white whale, Moby Dick, Captain Ahab, Gregory Peck, tell me, when was this film made? Jack Nicholson gradually also becomes a candidate for this role... or in a rather reflected version with Harvey Keitel as Dennis Hopper... And within seconds we have reached a point we never wanted to reach. Play it again - the whale is the biggest and probably also the oldest of all animals. A whale isn't a fish.²³

Apart from the snake, it is the one animal which most frequently features in mythic thought. Claude Levi-Strauss wrote that in »savage thought« the classification of animals serves to classify the world.²⁴ The mythic animals not only give an explanation for the mysteries of the world, the beginning and the end, but they also denominate the fear of the unknown, of the incomprehensible and of powers that are stronger than human beings.²⁵ Whales are the only animals mentioned in Genesis. Both the narrative of the »big fish« as a whale in whose stomach Jonah spends three days and nights and also

early descriptions of the leviathan - one of the personifications of the devil- as a whale, can be related to both the threatening size of the animal and to the failure to catch it.²⁶

The bible, Melville's *Moby Dick* and John Isaacs' *Whale Pieces* are all centered around one issue, that is, the hubris of human beings, the obsessive fight for power and domination, as well as the failure which is predetermined by such arrogance. Referring to *Moby Dick* John Isaacs' approach is not determined by christian morality, it is more a result of the rationalistic pragmatism with which he views the world. The story of the fight against the white whale is utilised as a metaphor of the uninhibited exploration of nature, its exploitation and the ignorance towards the subsequent downfall. »Moby Dick, the object of Ahab's obsession is the embodiment of the power of nature man seeks to control, but ultimately Ahab is dragged to a watery grave, strapped by his own tools to the side of the whale. And even in death the obsessive beckons the others to follow him down - the story is clearly a prophecy shrouded in the language of its time to take the reader away from the present, pull them out of apathy to look into their own aspirations and wonder how far removed from the monstrous Ahab they are - and sometimes I can't help I but wonder«.²⁷

The fragmentation of the body of the whale into single, desolate parts demonstrates not only the destruction which has already taken place, but also opens up the dissected view into an internal life, a model of the layers »between meat and rock«. The »whale pieces« like the »fat man« are simultaneously figures and »living landscapes«²⁸, a reference to a developed organism with skin, muscles and organs, an operating system with innumerable complex interactions, themselves the result of millions of years of evolution. This development was based on the laws of nature in the microcosm and also in the universe, in whales and also in human beings. »In nature there is nothing but measures, numbers and fluctuations. Everything results from divisions or connections of these.«²⁹ What remains is the question concerning perspective. John Isaacs asks this question again and again in every work of his synthetic field »The Incomplete History of Unknown Discovery«. If the recipient is willing to adapt their vision to see common denominators where at first sight there are only rigid breaks, then the way from the whale to the underground train is suddenly paved. It goes via Jonah the prophet in the stomach of the whale to the structure of the train compartment which resembles a rib cage, and it touches on the question whether the prison underground is for punishment or for protection.³⁰

And finally it »dives« into the underworld. »A Mobile Hell« is how John Isaacs calls the tube system and so moves the leviathan back to centre stage. But it is not just the »sea beast« anymore, God's antagonist, at least since 1651 it is inseparably connected to the »Matter, Forme, and Power of a Common-Wealth Ecclesiastical and Civil«, following the subtitle of Thomas Hobbes' book on the theory of the state. In the introduction the author writes, »for by Art is created that great leviathan called a commonwealth, or a state, (in latin civitas) which is but an Artificial Man«.³¹ The synthetic fields link up, the »fat man« enters the picture again followed by the self-portrait with the Rorschach test, when Ahab says to Starbuck on the second day of the chase »but in this matter of the whale, be the front of thy face to me as the palm of this hand - a lipless, unfeatured blank.« And while Ahab is still speaking our eyes wander towards »The Theory of an Idea«. We follow the look of the hermit into the Caspar-David-Friedrichlike landscape - »Ahab is for ever Ahab, man. This whole act's immutably decreed. 'Twas rehearsed by thee and me a billion years before this ocean rolled.«³²

The novel *Moby-Dick* starts with the words »Call me Ishmael«. The choice of this name and this form of address determines the perspective from which the following story will be narrated. Ishmael in the bible is the prototype of the outcast rejected from the community with God. For Melville, Ishmael is a free individual without any history or visible connection to other people. He is the only one to survive the catastrophe, floating on the »lifesaving coffin« and exposed to the forces of nature - »the sea over all«. A clown is an outcast from society as well, lacking specific features he is a generic catalyst for action. In the role of imbecile he is subjugated to the action and in the role of Diogenes he instigates the action. John Isaacs' panorama photograph shows a clown with drooping shoulders, dirty, exhausted, in front of a scrap heap which exceeds the borders of the picture. - Has Sisyphus given up his struggle? Did the clown ever start the momentum? Among the numerous clowns in the history of art, John Isaacs has probably studied those of Bruce Nauman most carefully. They are self righting tumblers who incessantly perform their one man show. Isaacs doesn't reflect on a cliché, he reflects on its artistic treatment.³³ As a result, it is not important that his clown steps into action; the endless loops are all too familiar. Isaacs just adds the final plate, the tired and exhausted clown. There is nothing more to do. However, without the play there isn't a protagonist. The impoverished creature is removed from the centre of the image. He is pushed aside by the remainders of the »brave new world«. There is no emergency exit, no heaven - only the shabby detritus and a threadbare masquerade. »All visible objects, man, are but as pasteboard masks. But in each event - in the

living act, the undoubted deed there, some unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth the mouldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask. If man will strike, strike through the mask! How can the prisoner reach outside except by thrusting through the wall?« asks Ahab.³⁴ His life and his actions are determined and justified by his obsessive revenge.³⁵

The white whale will not just become his fate. it will also personify all the things that are beyond his comprehension and therefore threaten him.³⁶

Immersed in the chase, the activity itself, however pointless it may be. Ahab feels in control and in his hubris he even elevates himself to being the master of the universe.³⁷

He ignores that he is a prisoner of a system because his unquestionable authority does not want to know. It is a system which he thinks he can master, however in reality he is subjected to this system. Ishmael is the chronicler who, as an uninvolved observer, will not be burdened with blame. Salvation is his prerogative, doubts about the possibility of this position or rather about the hope for a ship to come to save the desolate, are represented by John Isaacs in the »lost« clown.

»The objective of every de-conditioning is to view things without a pre-determined and predictable reaction (such a behaviour is called »cool« in American). De-conditioning is the liberation of random engrams of past histories with which we have not yet come to terms with. These engramatic traces determine behaviour which ignores logic and rational cognition.«³⁸ In other words, we can but recognise apriori the same in everything we see. Only irritation which forces us to abandon rigid structures and create new connections can make us transcend this condition. It is decisive that it is not only about taking on board a »message«, but about constituting a possibility which can - and has to - be revised at any time. The artwork which dare to explore these new areas of field research has to fulfill two conditions. It has, to a certain extent at least, to be spectacular and it has to be up to date. This means that it must not toy with »eternal truths«, but be produced precisely into the environment of perception so that the strategies of de-contextualisation will be apprehended with virulence.

John Isaacs strives to pinpoint this roller coaster method in his art. Some old acquaintances who have already taken a seat help us upon entering the car. There is a colourful mix of high and low, art and science, fully up to date. The beginning is slow, we go up the slanted ramp, we have time to look around, hardly noticing the ever increasing vertiginous distance from the ground. It is just the perspective that changes. And suddenly it starts, downwards with incredible speed, down, down, down. The images fly past. Passengers blur into one another as they »melt« into the plastic coach. The faces turn chalk white or glow red, a hand clutches the safety bar - a screeching scream - a cry of joy lingers in the air.

From "John Isaacs, Theories of Forgetting: The Incomplete History of Unknown Discovery, Volume 1 The Matrix of Amnesia", 1998 The english version is based on a translation by Annette Stehle.

Notes

1 Skin (greek derma, latin cutis), tissue system which closes off multicellular creatures to the outside world and simultaneously functions as the link to the outside world.

2 The inhabitants of Brobdingnag seldom fish »from the sea, because the sea-fish are of the same size with those in Europe, and consequently not worth catching... However, now and then they take a whale that happens to be dashed against the rocks... These whales I have known so large that a man could hardly carry one upon his shoulders; and sometimes for curiosity they are brought in hampers to Lbrbulgrud: I saw one of them in a dish at the King's tabl, which passed for a rarity, but I did not observe he was fond of it.« Jonathan Swift, Gulliver's Travels, London, 1726, part II, chapter 4, quoted from the Penguin edition, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1967, p. 150.

3. Adapted from the greek word katastraphe (with the original meaning of »return« or »turn«) katastréphein (»returning« or »turning«), stréphein (»to turn«) and kata(»down«).

4 The reactions to the surprisingly »real« figures which Duane Hanson and John de Andrea created since the sixties show the readiness (and the desire) to detect a living fellow-being in the »hyperrealistic« figure. Coloured and clothed figures were before then only used in the context of trivial culture (Madame Tussaud's), the interface of art and science (»artificial human beings« automatic dolls etc.) and in folk art (e.g. procession figures of villagers). Hanson and Andrea transformed these figures into high culture for the museum which only Degas had attempted before with his Little Dancer with a real tutu. This »new realism« with the intent to use artificiality as a stylistic means can only be understood on the basis of Abstract art and to some extent as its dialectic reversal. Like many other varieties of Pop art these »post human representations« were taken up again and radicalised by a young generation of artists in the nineties. Young British Art especially features plenty of variations on that theme like, for example, the pornographic mutants of Jake & Dinos Chapman or Gavin Turk's Pop Idol.

5 Tastendes Konstruieren- Die Doppelgänger Probe 1 (1993) is the title for a collection of 60 portraits by John Isaacs. The »models« for the »international authorities in scientific research« were tiny plastic figures, like a cross-section of the population of a model train world. As a result of the enlargement, the faces which bore hardly any features became blurred. The figure is »de-personalised«; it is a stereotype. The Doppelgänger Probe 1

plays on a mind game based on the theory of relativity - twins are at least from a genetic standpoint »identical« doppelgänger. They would lose their »natural« parallelism, if one of them existed outside the time-space-continuum, and as a result the twins would not be subjected to the linear process of ageing. From the Space Odyssey (the baby in the last scene - still in 1998 cannot be neglected) back to earth and back to morals. The most famous doppelgänger test that failed was without doubt narrated in Robert Louis Stevensons novel *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886). It is intriguing that the good Dr. Jekyll and the bad Mr. Hyde do not only look physically different after the successful dissociation, but also that the ugly Mr. Hyde is much younger than Dr. Jekyll in the beginning because there is much less evil than good in his nature. As the power of Hyde over Jekyll increases, he also becomes physically superior. The risk never to be able to go back to the »good self« forces Jekyll to finally destroy both identities in order to rid the world of a monster.

6 The series of hypotheses to establish connections between the physiognomy and the character stretches from Johann Kaspar Lavater to Cesare Lombroso.

7 The play with masks and the »wolf in sheep's clothing« is the subject of John Isaacs' figure »What Makes Certain« (1995). The seemingly »evil« and brutal face of the »masquerader« does not leave any room for doubt. Even if he puts the Bugs Bunny mask back all again, we call eliminate the possibility of a »transformation« into this funny and ironic rabbit. The mask has the function of an »instrument for action« without any impact on the identity of the person behind the mask. The only question is, which of the faces is the mask?

8 The artists Aziz and Cucher have also eliminated the primary characteristics of faces and made a contribution to the debate about Body Art in recent years. (see *Kunstforum* 132, 1996, p. 172).

9 This psychological test for diagnostic purposes was developed by Hermann Rorschach in 1918. It involves ten plates with a symmetric, sometimes coloured ink blot (»Klecksographie«). The objective of the test is to match memory images (engrams) with current feelings. On this basis one can draw conclusions about the structure of the individual's personality.

10 The photograph of the spray-painted words »I love« are primarily a sign of all interrupted action, but it can also indicate the absence of the »beloved«. Another interpretation is that »loving as such« as a narcissistic action of self gratification is given more importance than the other person who only functions as stand-in.

11 Mike Kelly quotes E. Jentsch in his essay »Playing with Dead Things«.

Jentsch describes »the Uncanny«, which is also a title of a lecture by Sigmund Freud from 1919, »as doubts whether an apparently animate being is really alive; or conversely, whether a lifeless object might not in fact be animate«. Jentsch gives examples for things that can stir up "uncanny« feelings - »wax-work figures, artificial dolls, and automatons, as well as epileptic seizures and the manifestations of insanity«. Mike Kelly writes that "I was struck by Jentsch's list and how much it corresponded to a recent sculpture trend - what has come to be popularly known as »mannequin art«.

12 See also Margrit Brehm, »The Body and its Surrogates«, Cindy Sherman, exhibition catalogue, Rotterdam, 1996, p.98-125.

13 "Yet if there is a complete unified theory, it would also presumably determine our actions. And so the theory itself would determine the outcome of our search for it... Might it not equally well determine that we draw the wrong conclusion? Or no conclusion at all?" Stephen Hawking, *A Brief History of Time*, 1988.

14 For example the »Tree of Evolution« by Darwin (in a horizontal position) is drawn on the Matrix of Amnesia field.

15 The primary example for an experiment which demonstrates such a »leap« in evolution is a test carried out by Stanley Miller. In 1954 he managed for the first time to abiotically create the decisive biochemical components for the beginning of life in the laboratory. He subjected anorganic substances presumed to have existed in the original atmosphere (hydrogen, ammonia, steam, methane, hydrogen and acetylene) to the consumptive energy sources of UV rays, radio activity and electricity in thunderstorms that were originally present. After seven days he could prove the development of amino acids, glucose and purines of the primordial soup. Later, once the blue-green algae had developed (the first known structured organism with a semipermeable membrane to the outside world from about three thousand million years ago), everything else proceeded relatively fast.

16 "We are to become the unwitting reproductive organs of technology, and surely like uninformed termites we rush around assembling seemingly innocent components of a whole beyond each individual's comprehension.« John Isaacs, letter to the author, 27 August 1998.

17 The transposition of socially conformist and hierarchal thinking into names is evident both in science and films, in the use of the term »king« to denominate power and physical superiority. Furthermore, in an early version King Kong was called »Kongo-King«...

18 »Our contemporaries are mostly moving within an image that is »intact«

(but nowadays we would have to add increasingly less so). It is constituted by an opportunist tinge and by omission. The issue is to destroy this image, to extend it and to open it up to the actual situation.«

Jürgen Ploog, *Straßen des Zufalls*, on W.S. Burroughs, Berlin, 1998, S. 67.

19 John Isaacs in a letter to the author, dated 27 August 1998.

20 Jürgen Ploog, see footnote 18, p.66.

21 John Isaacs in a conversation with the author, July 1998.

22 The world empathizes with the return transport of Free Willy. Kids send

e-mails to Keiko the »killer whale« via the internet. »I hope you are going to like it in Iceland and hopefully you will meet your family again« writes a girl from Florida. In the evening the hero from the Hollywood film *Free Willy* was heaved from the water with a crane. Then he was flown to Iceland by the US Airforce. It was a ten hour journey into his childhood.« (*BILD Zeitung*, 10 September 1998) The humanisation of Hollywood animal stars has a tradition. Flipper and Fury, Lassie of course, but also Judy and Clarence spring to mind. These animals staged not only for children, personify the Good as such, the life saviour- they are the better human being.

23 Carl van Linné in his book *System of Nature* (1735) separates the whales from the fish »on account of their warm bilocular heart, their lungs, their movable eyelids, their hollow ears, penem intrantem feminam mammis lactantem«. Quoted from Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick or The Whale*, first ed. London 1851; cited in the following from the Penguin edition (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1992), p. 147.

24 See Jan Kott, »Der neue Jona«, *Lettre* 33.1996, p. 72 ff.

25 The things that can be named lose their power over the person who speaks their name (like Rumpelstiltskin's »oh, how good it is knowing that no-one knows my name...«). But the unmentionable must not be called by its »proper« name because one would summon it (»God be with us«).

26 »And once more, from the midst of a whirlwind, the Lord gave Job his answer... Or Leviathan, wilt thou ring a hook that will draw him to land, a line that will hold his tongue fast? Canst thou ring him, or pierce his jaw with a clasp? ... Is that skin a spoil for the net, that head for the fishermen's cabins? Do but try conclusions with him, and see if the memory of the combat does not keep thee dumb!« *The Book of Job*, 40, verse 1, 20, 21, 26, 27.

27 John Isaacs in a letter to the author, dated 27 August 1998.

28 »There Leviathan, / Hugest of living creatures, on the deep Stretched like a promontory sleeps or swims, / And seems a moving land; and at

his gills / Draws in, and at his trunk spouts out a sea.« John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, first edition London, 1667. This excerpt is cited in the frontispiece of the first edition of *Moby-Dick*.

29 Rudolf Kapellner, »Mind Machines: Die Schaffung von Resonanzfeldern, mit denen sich das Bewußtsein ansprechen läßt«, *Kunstforum*, vol. 124, 1993, p. 172.

30 »Mountains I must plumb, the very bars of earth my unrelenting prison... And now, at the Lord's bidding, the sea-beast cast Jonas up again...« *The Prophecy of Jonas*, 2, verse 7 and 11.

31 Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, London, 1651; cited from the Penguin edition, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1985, p. 81.

32 Melville, see footnote 23, p. 611.

33 The same method of ironic artistic treatment can already be found in John Isaacs' photographic work »Ah Donald Judd, my favourite « dating from 1991.

34 Melville, see footnote 23, p. 178ff.

35 »To me, the white whale is that wall, shoved near to me. Sometimes I think there's naught beyond. But 'tis enough. He tasks me; he heaps me; I see in him outrageous strength, with an inscrutable malice sinewing it.« *Ibid*.

36 »That inscrutable thing is chiefly what I hate; and be the white whale agent, or be the white whale principal, I will wreak that hate upon him.« *Ibid*.

37 »I'd strike the sun if it insulted me. For could the sun do that, then could I do the other.« *Ibid*.

38 Jürgen Ploog, see footnote 18, p. 56.