

ROTH AND CELEBRITY



biographer, or even the very concept of capturing his entire life in print, and it provides further grist for the kind of gossip, whispers, innuendoes, and conjectures that have largely surrounded Roth's status as a literary celebrity.

This was not the only recent effort of Roth attempting to control his own narratives, if, indeed, that is what was behind the puzzlement surrounding *Notes for My Biographer*. In March 2012, artist Bryan Zanisnik began a five-week engagement at the Abrons Arts Center, entitled *Every Inch a Man*. It was a site-specific performance and installation where, according to the press release, the artist read Philip Roth's *The Great American Novel* within a life-size, specially-designed Plexiglas container, while fans blow old baseball cards and outdated currency into the air around him. However, in early April the online magazine *Artnet* reported that Roth and his lawyer had served Zanisnik, along with the Abrons Art Center, with a letter of cease and desist a mere thirty minutes after the show's premier.¹⁷ According to the article, the gallery staff were shocked by Roth's demand, although they went on to say that they were "not very concerned because we think the grounds of the cease and desist are erroneous. We're not reading anything out loud or reproducing anything—there's no chance here of copyright infringement" ("Philip Roth Tells Artist"). Zanisnik responded by photocopying the cease and desist letter and strewing the pages around his installation, where it became part of the debris, littering the stage with items from the center's storage facilities and Zanisnik's childhood. The underground arts website, *AnimalNewYork*, was one of several in the art community that pondered this legal move: "Is this the new age of Thought Copyright Police or did the lawyers just make an oops? Why's the Abrons Art Center site down? Uh-oh." (Galperina). By his own admission not even a big fan of Philip Roth, Zanisnik told *Artnet* that "It's funny. The installation has nothing literally to do with Roth, but now it almost feels as if this absurdity is out of a Roth novel" ("Philip Roth Tells Artist"). Once again, in the media surrounding Philip Roth, fiction and reality—or the written and unwritten worlds—collide in unpredictable and unlikely ways.

It would be wonderful if one could speculate with any kind of certainty on the potential links between these popular culture phenomena and machinations of the author. With incidences such as those surrounding *Notes for My Biographer*, one might assume that Roth has had some hand in the events, but in others, such as the Carmen Callil uproar or the "Jewish Shout Mix 3," the publicity remained outside of, and outpacing, his grasp. Much like in the *Wizard of Oz*, it would be useful to be able to pull back the screen surrounding these dramas and reveal the man behind the curtain, Roth himself, pulling the strings and levers of these performances. This would make sense, given the fact that we're discussing a novelist who has made a reputation of speaking out of both sides of his mouth, telling us his "true" intentions while at the same time performing the opposite in his fiction. He has done it before in