



fringe

A VIEW FROM THE PERIPHERY, or
death-wielding mimes from the sky

A few years ago, long before the Tun Wars, Joseph Nicholas stood akimbo in the middle of the Jubilee pub and charged me with the task of reviewing his legs for my TAFF report. On hearing this news, Michael Abbott had a writing fit at the Wrestlers, another pub. And so it went. More recently, and entirely outside the pub context, Joseph complained that I have inexplicably ignored him in the bits of my TAFF report thus far published. Somewhere in the middle, Alison Scott expostulated long and bitter on how rare it was that she wrote for anybody's fanzine but her own, so that it was doubly galling to write something for me only to have me bury it in the heat death of Widening Gyre. Well, fair enough. I am now prepared to dispense with all of these burdens and more, and thus, a fanzine.

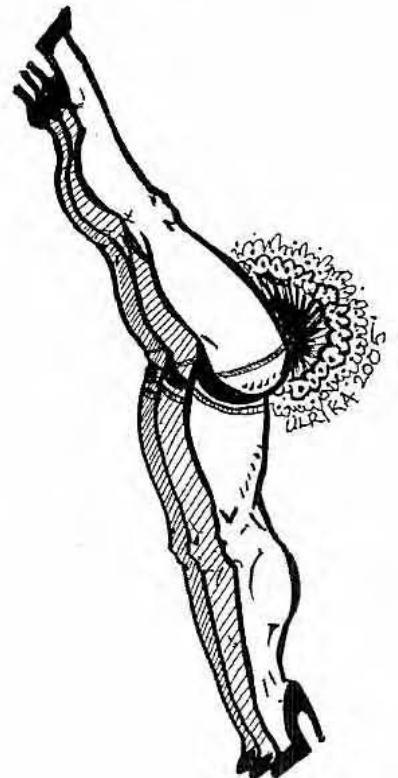
I have no way of telling whether there will be more like it — a little perzine of my very own, perhaps — but for now I should like to apologize to Greg Pickersgill, Jacques Derrida, Nigel Richardson, Paul Kincaid, Jean-François Lyotard, Joseph Nicholas, my parents, Ayn Rand, and God, for reasons that will become apparent all too soon.

The All-Singing, All-Dancing, All Joseph Nicholas Leg Revue

An author presents himself uncalled before the tribunal of criticism, and solicits fame at the hazard of disgrace
— Benjamin Johnson

The Role of Legs in the Margins of Postmodern Fanac

D. West tells us that Fanac is performance. None has taken that charge more seriously than Joseph Nicholas. Since its inception, Mr. Nicholas' fanac has engaged Britons in a liminal dialectic on performance art. His early work reified the interpenetration of creative roles at the margins of art, revealing the interchangeability of artist and canvas, audience and critic, spittle and corflu, passivity and active provocation, agent and insensate blob getting hauled off to the room by his wife. Who can forget Nicholas' ground-breaking untitled work, critically known as Oblivious Prat Walking About in Public with Things Drawn on His Face? Not least, this seminal piece in the juvenilia compels us with its narrative of seduction. We witness, indeed we embody, the remorseless devolution from innocent party-goer to complicit observer to guilty participant in the cruelty of the mob. Nicholas subtly juxtaposes our self-revulsion at the wrongness of pranks played on the comatose against the soothing certainty of mutual exploitation. If he did not want it, why would he keep offering himself up for more? And yet we feel unclean.



(Continued from p.1)

The brilliance of this early work lies in its incisive criticism of the very fandom it participates in. In Joseph Nicholas' ready drunkenness we perceive a sly prod at British social intercourse. His defenselessness highlights our guilt in the collective mean spirit which underpins British fandom. His lapse into catatonia portrays our alienation to postmodernity, while the disconnected and ephemeral quality of his dermal inscriptions indicate the fragmentary nature of our experiential totality. Against this ground, his self-presentation as living one-shot, produced sans fanzine fans, sans paper, and sans staples explodes the calcified conceptual structures of traditional fanac. He deconstructs the fanzine down to its most primitive parts: a fan, an eyebrow pencil, and something to write on.

During Mr. Nicholas' middle period, his imagery took a more esoteric turn. Working primarily with household materials, his installations explore the dehumanizing logic, antisocial scope, and geometrical complexity of pathological tidiness in the con-



Paul Kincaid Reviews Joseph Nicholas's Legs

While it has been fashionable lately to remark on Joseph Nicholas's legs, I must confess I do not understand what all the fuss is about. True, the basics -- ankles, calves, knees, thighs -- but where is the *joie de vivre*? Where is the exuberance? Comparing them to Mike Siddall's legs at Miscoon, I find Joseph's inferior in quality, enthusiasm, and content. I wish I could enjoy Joseph's legs; and yet, I pity those who do.

Michael Abbott

Nigel E Richardson Reviews Joseph Nicholas's Legs

April 16th

How I despise Thursdays in Leeds. Drizzle again, and my newspaper was soaked on the way to the station. Nothing interesting in the paper anyway; why no leather-clad babes? Could certainly do with something to brighten up the day. I was on time for the train, so it, with chilling inevitability, was eight minutes late. But still, I got the last seat. There are compensations in this life.

I opened my paper hurriedly, in case a woman was standing in front of me. Chivalry would demand that I give her my seat, and the cold slap of reality would demand that she show no interest in me in return. Why should men like me give up their seats for women who won't have sex with us?

Heard music coming from someone's Walkman. What else but the ubiquitous fucking Verve? These people have no style. Pined for fine Californian record shops - where in the UK am I going to get the new CDs from Impetigo and Radox?

Eventually looked up. There was a mini-skirt standing in front of me. Below it
(Continues p.3, col. 2)

(Continued from p.2 col.1)

text of everyday life. There is an excellent totally-non-revolving exhibition of these works in Tottenham, though the viewing public should note that use of tripods, flash photography, and little toy spacemen is strictly prohibited.

More recently, Mr. Nicholas has been investigating the ambiguity of gender roles in British fandom. Archetypes of masculinity and femininity wantonly commingle in his most recent performances. Unlike previous pioneers, Nicholas does not embrace the full metamorphosis from masculine to feminine, but courageously envisions entirely new bodies of desire, somewhere in the confused middle. (Thus the recurrent epiphany of the minimalist critic, Dop: "Bollocks," he exults. Bollocks, indeed. Or, so one presumes.) The shaven leg, the dangly earring, the brevity and pocketless, flirty impracticality of the skirt, are all markers of the feminine, while the flat, comfortable shoes, the oblivion to color- and style harmony, and the serene disregard for overall effect is purely masculine. It is this profound cognitive dissonance, this heightening of the contradictions, at which Joseph Nicholas excels: Men in Skirts, protecting the Earth with sartorial transfiguration of the commonplace.

But how do we rate it? The fearsome originality of this performance, revealing as it does the abject co-dependence of costume- and fanzine fandoms, leaves us a quandary for adequate response. Even classification becomes difficult: clearly the work is figural, but is it representational? And what of the legs themselves, the legs qua fanac? Again we must turn to D. West for our answer: are they witty, moreover are these legs the extension of conversations down at the pub? Unquestionably witty, the legs satirize all that is whimsical, contradictory, and self-consciously egotistical in the pursuit of the fannish limelight, and by the same token, many a disrupted pub conversation has been extended far beyond its natural span by their passing presence. An unfettered success, then, these legs, and the audience has but to endure the delicious anticipation of what Mr. Nicholas' next project will uncover.

Bravissim(o/a)?!

Ulrika O'Brien

*(Continued from p.2 col.2)*

was a devastating pair of legs. The day was getting better by the minute. Outside the train, the sun has started to shine. Looked at the legs some more. Long, very long. I spent the time before the next station imagining their owner. Not that there was any point speaking to her, oh no. When I meet real women for the first time in person, they always rebuff me. Not like you, oh my blonde, tanned, Internet chummies with perfect teeth, oh, no. But even you do not mostly have legs like this, I can assure you.

Finally I stole a quick look at the face of my leggy goddess. It was Joseph Nicholas.

So I went home and watched TV and ate a curry. There was nothing at all good on TV. And then bloody Demon wouldn't let me upload this.

Alison Scott

Two Vast and Trunkless Legs of Stone (Look on My Warts Ye Mighty and Despair)

Fandom came of age in the early '70s, acknowledging the life and interests of fans as the primary locus of fanwriting. Fanzines are their own creature, not an inferior imitation of professional writing. While some earlier fans realised this, they failed to deduce that if fanac is a valid artform, then we all have a duty to avoid the shoddy. There is never an excuse for poor workmanship, and fandom should not be a support network for the inept. Unless of course you write for apas, which are in any case utterly crap.

By way of contrast, the One Big Happy Family theory of fandom is a comforting illusion that is used to justify all manner of dubious practices. 'Cuddly' fans align themselves with cutesy little animals, which only shows what a pathetic fantasy world these fucking creeps are living in. And it's all so self-justifyingly second-rate, a friendly retreat from a big bad world where nobody understands them. God these

(Continued p.4, col. 1)

(Continued from p.3)

spotty-legged dregs of little people make me want to puke!

Which brings me to legs. You might say people can't help if their legs don't represent the acme of artistic expression, but now that 'the usual' encompasses showing a good leg, the issues are rather less clear. If a fanwriter bares his bloody soul with mind-searing honesty and courage, walking a dangerous tightrope between ecstatic egoboo and utter depression, then he expects an adequate response; the sight of some pale leprous sluglike appendages that look as if they've just crawled out from under a rock does not really signify. Where legs are offered as fanac, we expect that they should provide some form of stimulation for the intellect, or at least the loins.

And so on to Joseph Nicholas's legs, which he has seen fit to place in the public arena for fannish comment. Superficially they pass a basic quality standard - slim, tanned, and topped with a mini-skirt. In the right context one might almost be appreciative. But in fact they are merely the outward expression of an overly tidy mind, offering no real stimulation of any sort. They are essentially featureless and fundamentally tedious. Barbie doll legs on a bloke for heaven's sake!

Jesus Christ I'm looking at the bloody things now and I can't believe it. They're worthless. They give British fandom's bodily parts a bad name they hardly deserve, poor though they normally are. Every pair of similar legs ought to be hunted down and burned, with Nicholas securely roped down in the middle.

My fury knows no bounds.

Steven Cain



Extreme Pedal

Strange how fannish traditions die, like Joseph Nicholas donating his body to art by falling asleep at parties. My first acquaintance with his legs was a restrained '---CUT HERE---' inscribed around a shapely ankle (in the Ladies' loo, Brighton Metropole, 1979 - if you weren't there, don't ask).

So, how do the current legs stand up? They seem at least as functional, and even more shapely. But there's too much of them. Nothing hides the view until you get to a frighteningly brief mini-skirt. (Imagine an Arthur C. Clarke sarong minus several square yards.) And the legs still need the attention of a decent felt tip.

Paul Kincaid

fringe number 1 perpetrated by Ulrika O'Brien, based on an idea by Joseph Nicholas. contributors: Michael Abbott, Steven Cain, Paul Kincaid, Alison Scott. All art by the editor. Praise, derision, fanzines, and other forms of The Usual may be sent to:
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little plastic spacemen should be sent directly to Mr. Nicholas.