





The other one, the one called Borges, is the one things happen to. I walk through the streets of Buenos Aires and stop for a moment, perhaps mechanically now, to look at the arch of an entrance hall and the grillwork on the gate; I know of Borges from the mail and see his name on a list of professors or in a biographical dictionary. I like hourglasses, maps, eighteenth-century typography, the taste of coffee and the prose of Stevenson; he shares these preferences, but in a vain way that turns them into the attributes of an actor. It would be an exaggeration to say that ours is a hostile relationship; I live, let myself go on living, so that Borges may contrive his literature, and this literature justifies me. It is no effort for me to confess that he has achieved some valid pages, but those pages cannot save me, perhaps because what is good belongs to no one, not even to him, but rather to the language and to tradition. Besides, I am destined to perish, definitively, and only some instant of myself can survive in him. Little by little, I am giving over everything to him, though I am quite aware of his perverse custom of falsifying and magnifying things.

Spinoza knew that all things long to persist in their being; the stone eternally wants to be a stone and the tiger a tiger. I shall remain in Borges, not in myself (if it is true that I am someone), but I recognize myself less in his books than in many others or in the laborious strumming of a guitar. Years ago I tried to free myself from him and went from the mythologies of the suburbs to the games with time and infinity, but those games belong to Borges now and I shall have to imagine other things. Thus my life is a flight and I lose everything and everything belongs to oblivion, or to him.

I do not know which of us has written this page.

- Jorge Luis Borges, "Borges and I"

Sometimes you bend down to tie your shoe, and then you either tie your shoe or you don't; you either straighten up instantly or maybe you don't. Every choice begets at least two worlds of possibility, that is, one in which you do and one in which you don't; or very likely many more, one in which you do quickly, one in which you do slowly, one in which you don't, but hesitate, one in which you hesitate and frown, one in which you hesitate and sneeze, and so on. To carry this line of argument further, there must be an infinite number of possible universes (such is the fecundity of God) for there is no reason to imagine Nature as prejudiced in favor of human action. Every displacement of every molecule, every change in orbit of every electron, every quantum of light that strikes here and not there—each of these must somewhere have its alternative. It's possible, too, that there is no such thing as one clear line or strand of probability, and that we live on a sort of twisted braid, blurring from one to the other without even knowing it, as long as we keep within the limits of a set of variations that really make no difference to us.

- Joanna Russ, *The Female Man*



Considering A Novel: An Exhibition in the Subjunctive

My longstanding interest in the work of Anthony Discenza should come as no surprise to anyone. After all, we share the same name, as well as a number of personal attributes; we know the same people, read many of the same books, and even affect a similar mode of speech, according to some of our mutual friends. Nor could I deny the many common threads that link us personally and professionally, threads that drew me into his orbit so many years ago.

Looking back over my long acquaintance with Tony—I think he will allow me that familiarity—it seems inevitable that I would have eventually become enmeshed in his artistic practice, despite (or perhaps because of) the sporadic and inconsistent nature of his output. In the many years I have known him, I have watched the path of his artistic development, often with a degree of frustration that at times has bordered on despair, yet always with an awareness of some deep, never-quite realized potential that has kept my curiosity for this idiosyncratic artist's ideas and process alive. (I like to imagine this would have been the case, even had the two of us not already been so entangled in each other's existence.)

Of course, I will acknowledge that on some level, I experienced a certain vicarious pleasure from Tony's artistic exploits, for though he and I suffer from many of the same limitations of disposition, he has somehow quixotically continued on with his work—whether out of obstinacy, fear, or simply not knowing what else to do with himself—while I recognized many years ago the pedestrian nature of both my vision and abilities, and wisely retreated from the endless uncertainties of art-making to other, less anguished pursuits. But despite my decision to follow a different path, I continued to enjoy long conversations with Tony, in which we would frequently discuss his ideas and proposals for various projects. While it is hardly worth saying that the majority of these proposals were trite, derivative, or simply uninspired—this is the case, I think, for most artists, who must always struggle to separate meaningful ideas from the background noise of the imagination—there were always a handful that I felt showed real promise, and I sometimes found myself irritated by Tony's inability to follow the majority of these concepts through toward something even vaguely resembling completion. It would be too easy to say that this tendency was due to a lack of funds (Tony's imagination has always outstripped his means) or worse, to mere laziness; from my perspective, the real problem lay with a lack of confidence, combined with an almost pathological level of indecision and a deep-seated aversion to risk. I think that for Tony, simply *having* the ideas, and allowing endless variants and permutations of them to orbit the interior of his own mind, was always a more pleasurable and safer activity than actually producing anything. In his experience, physical production was expensive, time consuming, and fraught with endless headaches and uncertainties, and it always seemed to yield (for him) deeply unsatisfying results. (On the various occasions I had tried to point out the self-sabotaging nature of this attitude, Tony would typically sidestep the issue by making a flippant reference to Borges or withdrawing into a sullen, self-accusatory funk.)

Whatever the reasons behind it, the result was that many of the ideas which might have evolved into something of interest were doomed to expire in the pages of one of his innumerable notebooks, where they were slowly starved of light and thought. Though he managed to produce work and succeeded, largely in spite of himself, to build up a career over the years (at least within the confines of the Bay Area), there was always something that struck me as essentially rudderless about his progress, a restive quality that caused him to quickly tire of his ideas before they had ever really developed.

In the summer of 2015, casting about yet again for a new direction for his work, and perhaps looking for a way to expand upon the more literary turn he had explored in his last major project (a collaboration with the horror novelist Peter Straub), Tony struck upon the idea of using Lane Hobbs's 1969 art-world satire *The Disappointments* as the point of departure for an exhibition. This obscure book was the only novel ever produced by Hobbs, a young artist and critic who pursued a marginally successful career in New York before her untimely death in 1974. Tony had learned of *The Disappointments* existence only recently, from an offhand reference to the novel in an essay by critic John Clute. Intrigued by Clute's description of the book as "a surreal exercise in sub-junctivity," he somehow managed to track down a copy (long out of print, the book is virtually impossible to find). He was particularly struck, he told me, by the way the book's many depictions of fictive artworks spoke to aspects of his own practice, which has, over the past five years, increasingly relied on ekphrastic devices to implicate visual and narrative scenarios that are absent or withheld in some fashion (or which in fact do not exist at all).

The highly experimental, even fantastical nature of *The Disappointments* was no doubt a significant component of the book's appeal, given Tony's love of speculative and metafictional literature. Something of an anti-novel in the style of the French *Nouveau Roman*, the book is a dreamlike exercise in non-linearity, unreliable narration, and repetition that follows ill-fated artist Albert Drubble through his attempts to navigate the labyrinthine art scene of late 1960s New York. Albert's tragicomic story is narrated by Greta Drubble, also an aspiring artist and writer (Greta is clearly a proxy for Hobbs herself). As Tony noted in an unfinished essay (an excerpt of which I have included in this exhibition), foremost among the novel's many structural peculiarities is the fog of ambiguity that hovers over Greta and Albert's relationship: at times she seems to be his wife or lover; at other times his younger sister; in other instances there is the suggestion that Albert is simply a surrogate for Greta herself, a projection of her own identity onto a fictionalized male persona that allows her a degree of critical distance from her own narrative. Further amplifying the novel's sense of irreality is the way certain events seem to repeat themselves in subtly varied ways, as though the narrative were continually revising itself as it progressed. Albert's demise is depicted multiple times, under divergent conditions; by the novel's end, it is not clear which of these is his "real" death, or if he has actually died at all. In the book's logic, each of Albert's different

fates are equally true, in that they represent different aspects of the multiform set of experiences and perceptions we call "reality." (This sense of a narrative playing out different variations of itself may have been an influence on J.G. Ballard's *Atrocity Exhibition*, an even more radical literary experiment that also features depictions of impossible artistic creations, a book Tony has described to me on more than one occasion as a referent for his own work.)

Given both its peculiarity and its relation to such a rich period in contemporary art's development, *The Disappointments* seemed fertile source material on which to base an exhibition—and timely, I thought, in light of the recent resurgence of interest in the culture of late '60s New York, and the continuing influence of that period in so much current art. As writers such as Camiel van Winkel have observed, for the past several decades a significant portion of contemporary art production has languished in the backwash of the conceptual and minimalist practices of the '60s and early '70s; presciently, Hobbs's novel was already satirizing those tendencies in the very moment in which they began to take hold. Tony was very much aware of this; in some ways I think he saw the book as a needed indictment of his own practice, which, like so much contemporary art, owes a significant debt to the kind of work *The Disappointments* mocks. (Of course, though he never expressed the thought directly, I suspect Tony also saw, in the various failures and humiliations that Albert suffers, a thematic structure he could appropriate as a stage for his own steadily increasing ambivalence and uncertainty about the course of his practice.)

Though he was enormously excited by the possibilities of using *The Disappointments* as a kind of invisible scaffolding upon which to construct *A Novel*, as he referred to his project, Tony struggled to find a coherent approach to the project, a means of synthesizing the book's motifs with his own work. He was deeply concerned that the exhibition not read as mere illustration; rather, he wanted it to be clear that Hobbs' novel was only an inception point, a launching pad from which he could perform an interrogation into his relationship with both his own practice and contemporary art in general. Through this, he believed he could offer himself up as a kind of proxy for the sense of alienation so many of us grapple with, that treacherous space we all must navigate between our interior narratives and the fragmented identities we precipitate around ourselves as we move through the world.

Although I was enthusiastic about the project, this seemed a tall order indeed, laudable in its intention but extremely difficult to make legible in the context of a gallery exhibition. I became concerned that Tony was entering into an arena in which he would be working at a serious disadvantage: To me, his conceit was essentially literary in nature; and though he had been using text extensively in his work since 2010, I did not consider him terribly experienced as a writer.

As I feared, the synthesis Tony sought to create with *A Novel* proved highly elusive. Gradually, in a manner that suggested uncomfortable parallels with the unfortunate Alfred Drubble (who, in one of *The Disappointments'* many risible passages, quite

literally paints himself into a corner in a futile effort to emulate the work of his friend and nemesis, the wildly successful artist Andre Karlsen), Tony found himself increasingly bogged down in his own speculative conceit, mired in endlessly multiplying potentialities that he seemed unable to make cohere, even as his aspirations for the project became ever greater. It was as though everything connected to the project had become surrounded by clouds of quotation marks—nothing could really be taken at face value; there was always the possibility that any given gesture might be just another layer in some labyrinthine fiction, or part of an elaborate joke—though, if it were a joke, it was never clear to me who it was directed towards: the audience, the project of contemporary art itself, or his simply own impossible ambitions. It was only a matter of time, I sensed, before these irreconcilable trajectories would be stretched past the breaking point.

In late winter 2015, Tony abruptly abandoned his plans for the exhibition. In a tersely worded email, he informed his gallery that, due to personal issues, he was unable to proceed and that the show would have to be postponed indefinitely. Such a move was unprecedented, in my experience; despite his perpetual doubts about his work, Tony had never canceled a show. To me, this was a stark indication of the degree of ambivalence he had reached in his own practice, the extent of his internal paralysis.

When Tony originally shared his plans for a show based on Lane Hobbs’ novel, I had hoped that the

project would represent a significant shift in the evolution of his practice—one that might allow him to situate his literary impulses squarely within the context of visual art. I was therefore saddened (and not a little angry) to see him fall prey yet again to his own indecision, and to give up on a premise which had possessed such potential to weave together the many disparate strands of his interests. At the same time, I sensed within the situation, however unfortunate, the spark of an interesting opportunity. I had long been privy to Tony’s many ideas, and frustrated by his tendency to abandon them; what if this phenomenon—this peculiar species of artistic failure—was itself to become the basis for the exhibition Tony had given up on?

At the time he abandoned his plans for *A Novel*, Tony had already produced a substantive body of notes and sketches for possible works. (This sort of compulsive accumulation of potential material has always been a fundamental part of Tony’s practice—one might even be tempted to say that this activity is, in some sense, his true medium.) The notes and sketches for *A Novel*, which now sit piled about my apartment, range from short one-sentence comments to fairly developed concepts for major projects, and in their thinking run the gamut from sophomoric to sophisticated. Though the likelihood that any of these concepts would have ever found physical form was slim, even if the show had gone forward, it seemed possible to me to construct something out of that very circumstance: an exhibition

about an exhibition that had never happened—not *A Novel*, but something that might contain the spirit of *A Novel* within it.

Not unexpectedly, Tony responded with characteristic uncertainty when I first approached him with the concept of an exhibition based on one of his unrealized ideas. Though I was certain the speculative nature of the project strongly appealed to his sensibilities, he was deeply uneasy about my proposal: in particular, I think he worried that it would put too much of a spotlight on himself, something he had always aggressively avoided in his work. (He also, I recall, rather bluntly expressed the opinion that the whole thing felt dreadfully contrived.) When I stressed that I intended the project not as an act of portraiture or biography, but rather envisioned it as a speculative inquiry into the often-conflicted nature of the artistic process itself, he reluctantly consented to let me proceed, with the caveat that he would avoid any direct involvement in the project. After a great deal of discussion and negotiation, we agreed that he would turn over to me the various materials that he had produced in developing the plans for *A Novel*, and that I would be free to make such use of these as I saw fit.

In conceiving this exhibition, I decided to focus upon the time just prior to *A Novel*’s unraveling and subsequent abandonment. My plan was to carefully select a small amount of material drawn from Tony’s notes, and present this along with the handful of works that Tony had actually (or nearly) completed. In order to provide a deeper layer of context, I also planned to intersperse comments and quotes taken from Tony’s writing throughout the exhibition, along with some of my own research, and observations about his practice provided by several curators and writers with whom Tony had worked with in the past. (I had also very much hoped to include some excerpts from *The Disappointments*, though in the end this proved unfeasible due to the complex issues surrounding Hobbs’ estate. I suspect, however, that Tony will feel that the book’s absence is somehow completely appropriate.)

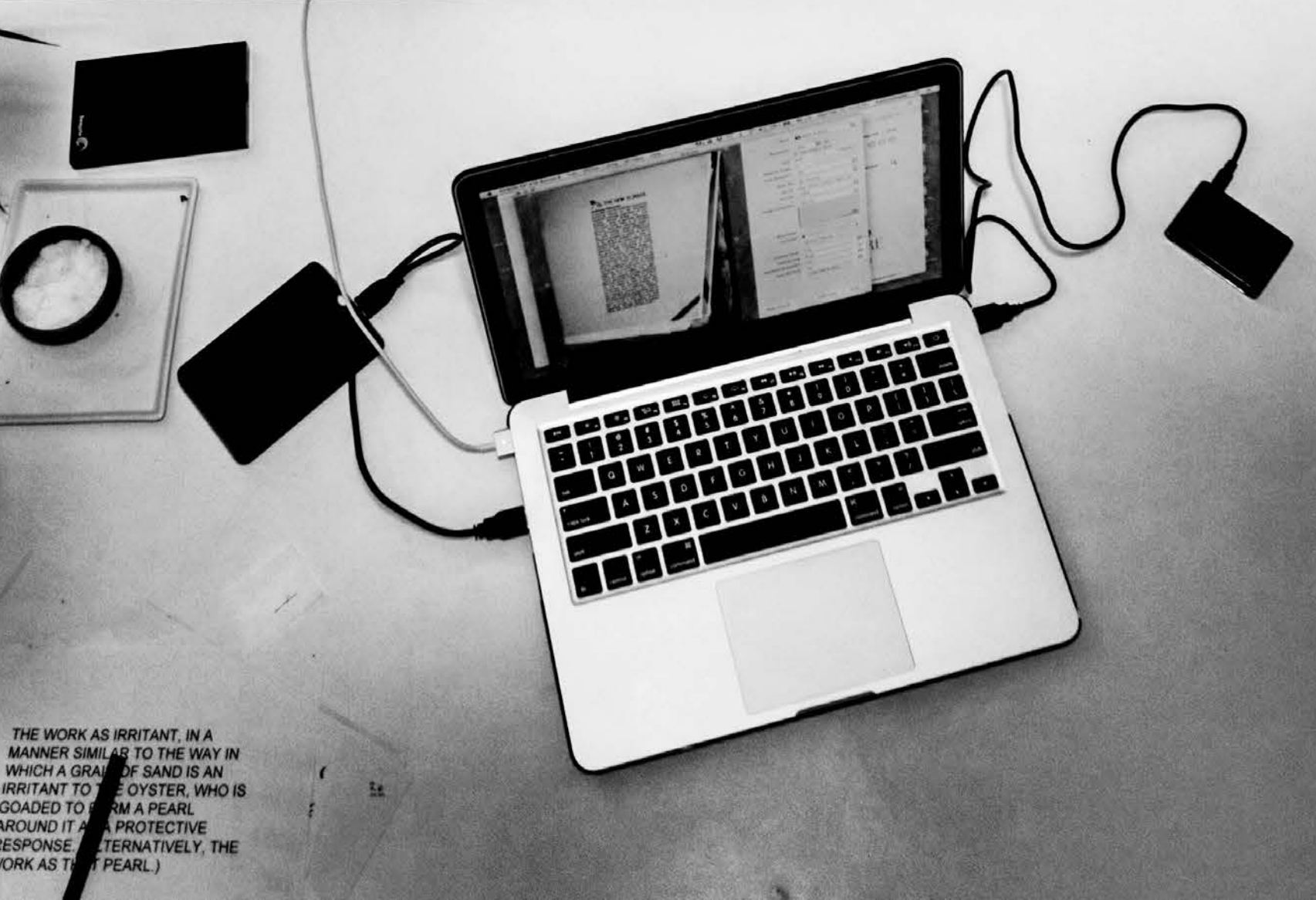
With these objectives in mind, I’ve attempted to tease out certain threads of inquiry that seem most representative of Tony’s thought processes, and which I felt might yield a satisfying exhibition—even if it is not the one either of us originally envisioned. I have also tried (with only partial success, I’m afraid) to avoid making use of the type of document-heavy display vernaculars typically seen in exhibitions that explore histories, but rather to create an exhibition that at least vaguely resembles something Tony himself might produce. While I have taken some liberties with his aesthetic sensibility, these seemed necessary in order to adequately represent the divergent lines of his thinking.

Throughout this investigation, my goal has been to provide a kind of a case study of an artist struggling to re-articulate himself at a transitional moment in his development. Inevitably, I knew that despite my assurances to Tony, this exhibition could not help but become a kind of portrait; but I hoped it would ultimately be evaluated not as a project about an individual artist, but instead as a rueful meditation upon those strange and circuitous lacunae into which the creative process so often falls.

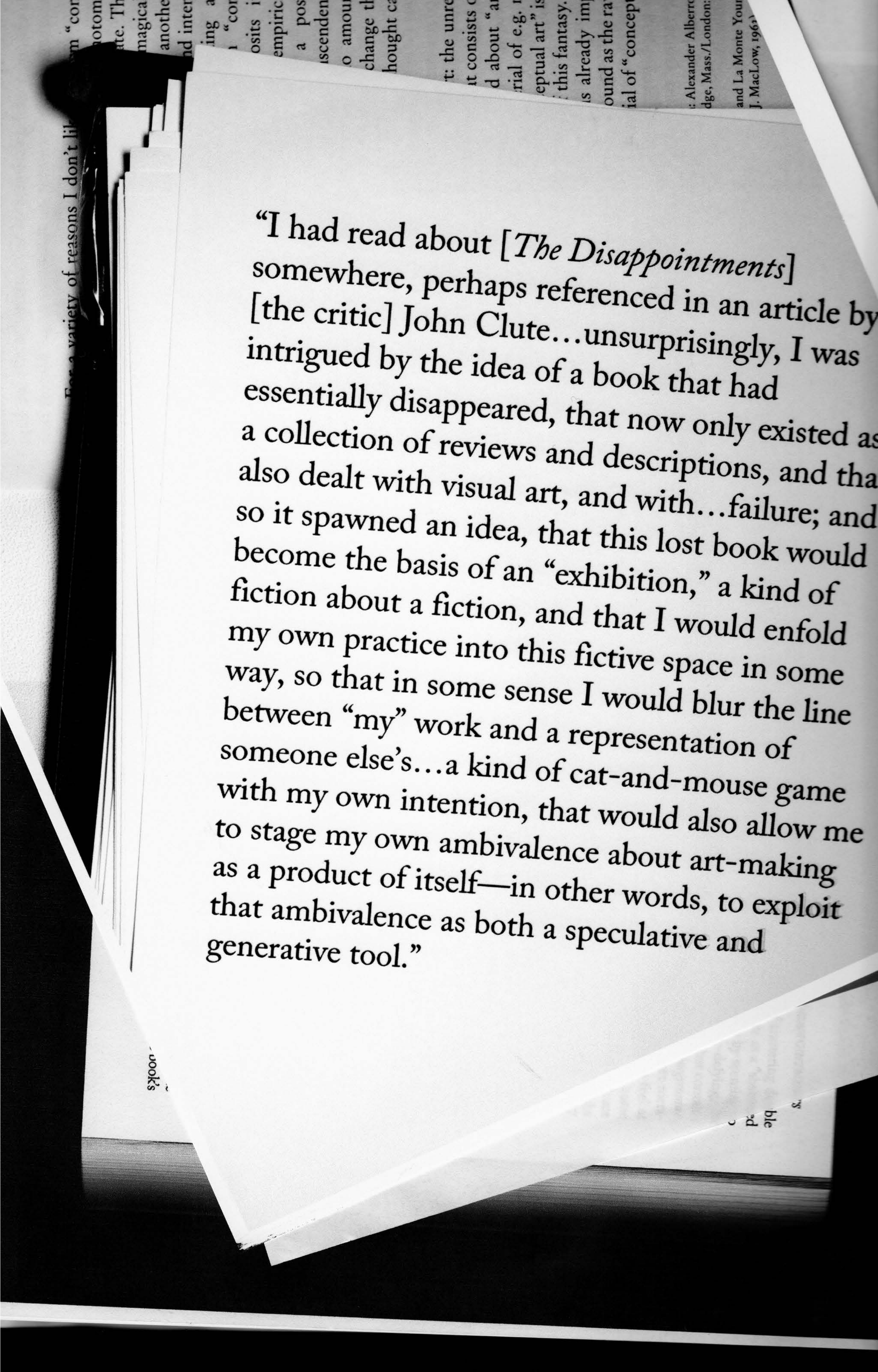
Yet now, as I look back upon the convoluted path that has led to this exhibition, it seems to me that perhaps, through my immersion in his thoughts and ideas, some of Tony’s inveterate uncertainty has seeped into me. Though unlike his ill-starred plans for *A Novel*, this exhibition has been realized, I wonder if I have accomplished anything through this exercise—whether I have contributed in some meaningful way to a larger dialogue, or whether, like my poor friend, I have unwittingly fallen prey to the over-ambitions of my conceit, mistaking incoherence for profundity, and mere complexity for illumination. I thought that perhaps I could distance myself from my own difficulties by conducting an interrogation of his. But I now begin to realize that his problems are, in some fundamental way, my own.

Recently one night, as I sat reviewing my notes for this essay (as I had so often watched Tony do), I received an email from him in which he wondered whether, among all of humanity’s many self-indulgences, certainty should not be considered the most dangerous, since from it flowed so much of the misery that our unhappy species has inflicted upon itself. “Maybe we ought to make doubt one of the cardinal virtues,” he wrote. Perhaps in some sense, he has a point, though I wonder now, as I did then, if the same can be said for ambivalence. In this way as well, I suppose, he and I are not so different.

Anthony Discenza, February 2016



THE WORK AS IRRITANT, IN A MANNER SIMILAR TO THE WAY IN WHICH A GRAIN OF SAND IS AN IRRITANT TO THE OYSTER, WHO IS GOADED TO FORM A PEARL AROUND IT AS A PROTECTIVE RESPONSE. (ALTERNATIVELY, THE WORK AS THE PEARL.)



Notes on the Work

Through the fall of 2015, Tony generated a significant amount of material in preparation for *A Novel*. A complete inventory would be unwieldy; I will merely try to identify several of the main threads that emerged from my investigation, and which became the basis for this exhibition.

A large portion of the material relates in some manner to contemporary art production. Given that *The Disappointments*, which was to have formed the underlying basis for the exhibition, was intended as a satire of the art world, this is unsurprising; though one can also see in this somewhat mordant focus on contemporary art a clear reflection of Tony's increasingly uneasy relationship to his own artistic practice.

The *Contemporary Composition* series represents the most fully realized of the works Tony produced in connection with *A Novel* (possibly along with the *Materials Lists*, which manage to fuse Tony's interest in score-like textual works, wry commentary on contemporary art's current fetish for exotic materials, and a rueful acknowledgment of his own inability to finish projects.) *The Compositions* evolved from Tony's compulsive trolling of *Contemporary Art Daily*, a website devoted to showcasing exhibitions by contemporary art galleries around the world. (CAD's popularity and highly selective curation has made it synonymous with rise of a somewhat homogenized, conceptually-driven aesthetic, one that could also be associated with higher-echelon art fairs such as Frieze and Art Basel.) The *Compositions* were a series of digitally generated works created by averaging together photos found through the site's "Random Exhibition" link, which arbitrarily selects an exhibition from CAD's extensive archive. The moody, strangely old-fashioned images that emerged from this process are visually distinct from any of Tony's prior work—though in them we can discern the same tendency to reconcile disparate information by distilling or fusing it into a unified visual or experiential field that has driven so much of his output, from his older video work through his Google-sourced voiceover pieces.

When we venture beyond the *Contemporary Compositions*, however, we find ourselves entering the deeper and more puzzling regions of Tony's process. For example, though he has never seemed to have much interest in (nor aptitude for) sculpture, I noted a curious preponderance of research on physical objects in the materials he provided to me. In particular, various framing structures or forms of support stood out. His cellphone camera folder from this period is full of photos of construction sites (of which there were no shortage in the Bay Area) and during a visit to his studio I noted that his browser window was awash with dozens of tabs opened to sites that sold scaffolding and other similar items. I also encountered numerous sketches of odd arrangements of these materials, occasionally combined in unlikely ways with other found or readymade objects. Though I recall pointing out the over-use of exactly these sorts of materials in a great deal of contemporary art (an assessment that Tony did not dispute), he continued to research temporary fencing, crowd-control barriers, and, more enigmatically, parking barriers and other obstacles. Eventually he went so far as to purchase several hundred dollars' worth of recycled rubber wheel chocks of varying shapes and sizes, which he took to arranging in different configurations on his studio floor.

Though his notes are mute on the impetus behind this work (if it is in fact a work), it's likely that Tony imagined it as a possible response to various artworks depicted in *The Disappointments*—in particular, the work of the artist Virgil Jessup, a for-bidding, Ancient Mariner-like figure who occasionally functions within the narrative as a kind of one-man Greek chorus. Shrouded in a threadbare military greatcoat, Jessup haunts the margins of the highways encircling Manhattan, collecting the shattered and inchoate fragments of debris from car collisions, which he assembles into vast, complex patterns in a derelict warehouse on the waterfront.

While I suspect that Tony also intended his wheel-chock arrangement as a sardonic commentary on the over-used exhibition trope of placing objects directly on gallery floors, I see in the work something quite different: a profoundly physicalized metaphor for his mental state at this time. The work posits the impossibility of movement in any direction; an accumulation of cancelled vectors manifested in chunks of dark, obdurate matter. It's worth noting that Tony

only selected chocks made of recycled rubber: not only is the function of these objects to forestall motion, but the very material they are composed from enfolds within its physical memory a multitude of spent directional energies.

On another level, Tony's fixation with these materials reflected an awareness of a larger crisis. During the period leading up to the initial development of *A Novel*, the San Francisco Bay Area was in the midst of a violent transformation, triggered in part by a massive second wave of tech industry speculation and decades of corrupt or shortsighted planning by local government. By late 2015, San Francisco had become a morass of frenzied construction, perpetual traffic, and garbage. Amidst seas of hastily and cheaply built "luxury condos"—their slipshod construction virtually ensuring their destiny as future tenements—sprawled ever-growing encampments of the destitute and homeless. As the disparity between affluence and impoverishment became more and more extreme, the city came increasingly to resemble the setting of some dystopian sci-fi novel.

For Tony, this transformation served as another point of connection between his environment and the world of *The Disappointments*. During the period the novel was written, New York City was mired in economic decline, deep racial tensions, and profound anxiety about the Vietnam War. Despite its satiric tone, these tensions are omnipresent in the text, producing a continual background hum of unease. Throughout the book, characters make continual, almost offhand references to "the war," though the conflict is never identified or its nature explained. The effect of this is to reveal the war not as some transitory occurrence, but as a fundamental and permanent aspect of reality itself.

Even more prominent is the motif of deterioration and alienation, manifested most directly in the physical environment itself. Hobbs portrays New York in an oppressive, almost hostile state of urban decay, a massive, rotting structure barely fit for human existence (though the characters themselves seem largely insensible to this circumstance). It is perhaps this aspect of *The Disappointments* more than any other that lends it an air of the fantastical. In one unsettling passage, Albert finds himself semi-trapped in the studio of Ulst Vermer, a former painter of elegant abstractions who has descended into madness following a catastrophic affair and now spends all his time attempting to construct bizarre clock-like structures designed to see into other dimensions. Vermer expounds at length to a bewildered Albert his theory that the city has actually been constructed by beings that are not completely human—an implication that is subtly reinforced at several other points throughout the book.

In fact, the structure of *The Disappointments* appears deeply informed by the notion of alternate or parallel realities, though at no point does it ever present this idea in an expository sense. Rather, in its endless repetitions and shifting viewpoints, the entire book feels like a textual performance of the premise that multiple realities exist side by side with each other, and even interpenetrate at various points. (Interestingly, the theory that we do in fact exist in a continuum of intersecting realities has recently received much greater support in scientific

Visually cryptic, the *Surface Studies* seem to hover between physical object and mental artifact; in them, we can catch an uneasy glimpse of the incomprehensible nature of the world we have constructed around ourselves.

circles, and to a certain extent has been validated by actual research.)

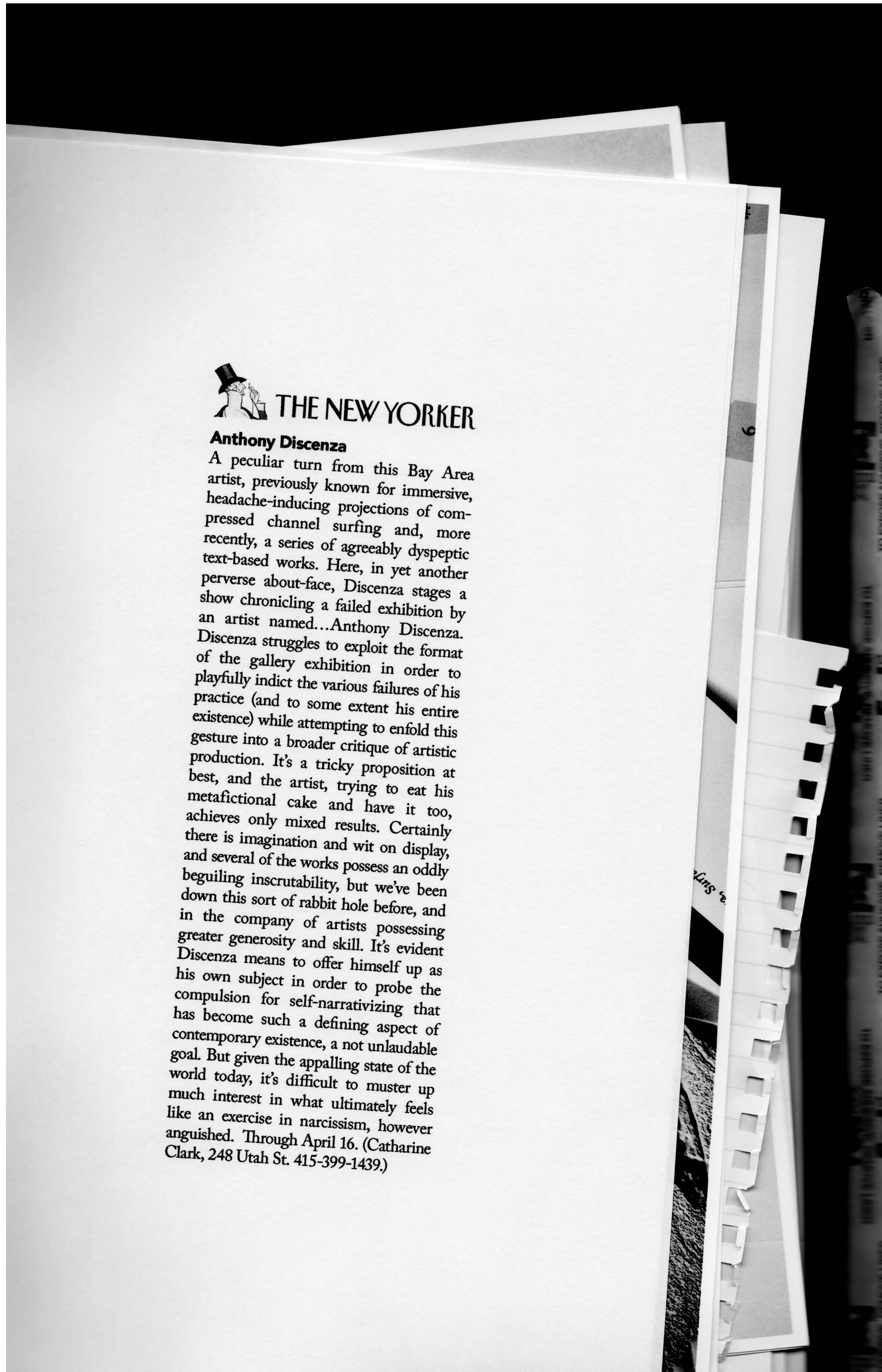
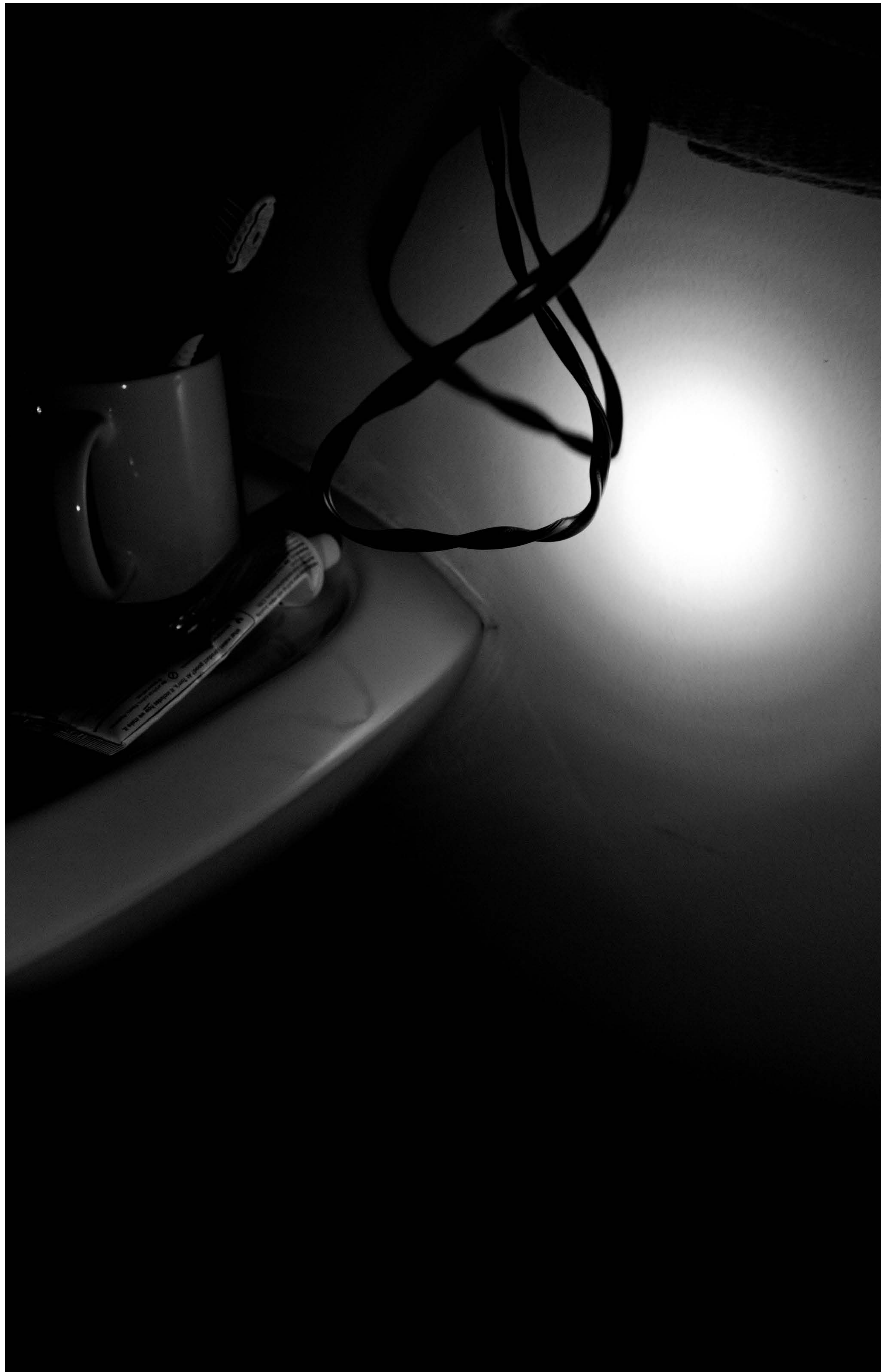
As his notes show, Tony was fascinated by the way Hobbs wove these speculative notions into *The Disappointments'* surreal fabric. Out of his associative connections between these elements and other works of fantastic fiction spiraled endless lines of inquiry for works he thought could be inserted into *A Novel's* structure. Among these are the *Surface Studies*, a small suite of digitally generated images that appear to be 3D models of strange, fossil-like objects. Though I frankly had difficulty understanding Tony's explanation of how he produced these works, I do know that they make use of images of various objects—anything from an automotive frame to a male chastity device—collected from online searches (his default method of gathering material). The images were composited and then processed with tools typically employed to simulate 3D textures within computer games. Visually cryptic, the *Surface Studies* seem to hover between physical object and mental artifact; in them, we can catch an uneasy glimpse of the incomprehensible nature of the world we have constructed around ourselves.

Once this thread of the fantastic—the idea of some alien order underlying reality, hidden but immanent—has been identified, we can begin to see that it winds its way throughout much of Tony's vision for *A Novel*. Possibly he saw it as a way of framing his metafictional premise, though I wonder now if something else was at work. Certainly the most puzzling manifestation of this impulse is the collection of missing cat flyers that Tony had slowly accumulated since relocating to Berkeley in the summer of 2014. (Like much of the material in this exhibition, it is hard to say whether these represent artworks in any normative sense.) In an effort to incorporate some form of physical activity into his routine—if for no other reason than to dispel his constant anxiety—Tony had fallen into the habit of taking long walks through southwest Berkeley, in the course of which he began to take note of the many lost-pet flyers that one inevitably sees in residential neighborhoods. For reasons that are still not clear to me, Tony became oddly fixated on these, in particular the ones seeking missing cats. Over time, he amassed several dozen. He envisioned that these forlorn, weather-stained documents would function as a major component of *A Novel*, a notion that struck me as bizarre. When pressed, he claimed he discerned in the flyers some strange and indefinable quality, a faint "whisper of the void" as he described it to me during a conversation we had in late October 2015. In his mind, the pathos of the flyers contained a sinister note that was connected to some elusive aspect of *The Disappointments*, though he could not seem to articulate the nature of this link.

It was at this point that I became acutely aware that Tony had begun to lose his way with *A Novel*. His natural tendency toward anxiety and depression had been exacerbated by the mounting expectations he was placing on himself with respect to the exhibition, and I perceived in him a growing sense of disconnection, not only from his original vision for the project, but with his day-to-day existence. The lost cat flyers seemed to be a product of this, an unsettling *idée fixe*. He continually entertained peculiar speculations about their origins; at one point he even suggested to me that their presence might represent a secret form of communication employed in the service of some occult conspiracy. Even now, I can't tell if he was serious or whether the whole thing was intended as some sort of private and very complicated joke, though I was certain the idea had been spawned by a sci-fi or horror novel he had read at some point and that had germinated in his subconscious for years.

Ironically, I found myself compelled to include the lost cat flyers in this exhibition, if for no other reason than I feel their enigmatic presence conveys something significant about the incomplete trajectories that comprise the history of *A Novel's* development, and about Tony's state of mind during that process. Certainly, they speak quite literally of loss and uncertainty, themes that lie close to the heart of both *The Disappointments* and *A Novel*, and, I suppose, to this exhibition as well. Through all three projects stalks the restless specter of failure, the threat or promise of which sits ever-attendant upon the creative impulse: fueling its hopeful flight, perhaps, but also bringing it crashing to earth.





THE NEW YORKER

Anthony Discenza

A peculiar turn from this Bay Area artist, previously known for immersive, headache-inducing projections of compressed channel surfing and, more recently, a series of agreeably dyspeptic text-based works. Here, in yet another perverse about-face, Discenza stages a show chronicling a failed exhibition by an artist named...Anthony Discenza. Discenza struggles to exploit the format of the gallery exhibition in order to playfully indict the various failures of his practice (and to some extent his entire existence) while attempting to enfold this gesture into a broader critique of artistic production. It's a tricky proposition at best, and the artist, trying to eat his metafictional cake and have it too, achieves only mixed results. Certainly there is imagination and wit on display, and several of the works possess an oddly beguiling inscrutability, but we've been down this sort of rabbit hole before, and in the company of artists possessing greater generosity and skill. It's evident Discenza means to offer himself up as his own subject in order to probe the compulsion for self-narrativizing that has become such a defining aspect of contemporary existence, a not unlaudable goal. But given the appalling state of the world today, it's difficult to muster up much interest in what ultimately feels like an exercise in narcissism, however anguished. Through April 16. (Catharine Clark, 248 Utah St. 415-399-1439.)



Mask Study (Front and Back Composite), 2015