

OBSOLESCENCE AND EXTINCTION IN MIKE NELSON'S INSTALLATION
ARTWORKS

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Obsolescence and Extinction in Mike Nelson's Installation Artworks

Abstract

Obsolescence presents an opportunity to reflect on the impermanence of human presence. The ontological unpredictability of the obsolete means that objects relegated to social peripheries can unexpectedly solicit attention. Building off of a personal encounter with a discarded shoe sole jutting out of sand on the beach, this *Perspective* examines how the obsolete objects that appear in Mike Nelson's installation artworks are changed by their reappearance in his 2023 survey at the Hayward Gallery, a brutalist art gallery at the Southbank Centre in Central London. Nelson is a contemporary British installation artist who constructs large-scale dreamlike environments out of the very real detritus of post-industrial ruins. By forcing an encounter between trashed objects and spectators passing through gallery space, Nelson troubles the ocular habit that keeps waste out of sight (and out of institutional site). This *Perspective* traces Nelson's practice of forming and later reforming trash into sculptural installations, and considers how the obsolescence of his chosen materials can frustrate fixed categorizations of site, spectator, and sculpture.



Fig. 1: Artwork by the author

Prologue_The Sole

I was arrested by a sole (Fig. 2). The rubber had been worn smooth where the ball of a foot would rub against the ground. Were it not for the smooth surface that seemed to repel sand, the pale brown sandal may not have even drawn my gaze. Its ability to solicit my attention had to do with its past usage. It must have been well-worn to be so smooth—perhaps it once belonged to a favorite pair of shoes; perhaps it was

second-hand. The remaining grooves, which may have originally fostered information about the make or brand, were clogged with sand. After turning it over, the sole revealed itself to be just that: it was not a sandal anymore, save for a broken strap.

When something breaks or becomes outmoded, the tendency habituated in us as consumers is to throw the thing out. J.K. Gibson-Graham describes how hyper-separation from the nonhuman has caused humans to treat nature as “our dominion, our servant, our resource and receptacle.”¹ Although we create and engage with trash every day, waste is more often than not treated as out of sight and out of mind once it has been discarded. Timothy Morton theorizes that anthropogenic attitudes have caused the environment to be treated as a type of unconscious. While critically *expanding* what is meant by ‘nature’ in *Ecology Without Nature*, Morton very deliberately summarizes the book’s message using the *narrowing* metaphor of waste disposal: “When you think about where your waste goes, your world starts to shrink.”² Put otherwise, when waste flashes up from the background of our attention, the discomfoting interconnections between human and nonhuman bodies become legible, and the illusion of hyper-separation shatters.



Fig. 2: ‘Sandal,’ East Sands St. Andrews, April 2023, © Polly Bodgener

Industry is eating away at the tolerance margins of nature, the nonhuman-as-receptacle is overflowing, and trash is becoming harder to ignore. As Tim Edensor

notes, obsolete objects “draw attention to the unprecedented material destruction wrought by an accelerating capitalism.”³ No longer a sandal, the sole was ontologically unpredictable. It challenged rather than affirmed how I walked on the beach. Noticing it located me inside rather than outside of the receptacle. It forced me to notice the connections between myself, the nonhuman environment, waste production, and other humans. Babette Tischleder and Sarah Wasserman suggest that obsolescence makes a claim on us because its two dominant tendencies—*persistence* and *supersession*—seem to identify something essentially outmoded about the human condition.⁴ It is more than likely that the sole’s original owner has replaced it with a new pair of sandals, but the persistence of this sole on the beach suggests that our material histories cannot be so easily excised from the earth’s surface as they are from our view.

1_Matter Out of Storage

Describing an object as obsolete means that it has become unnecessary or useless, at which point it can be discarded. Mary Douglas’s well-worn aphorism that “dirt is matter out of place” suggests that the classification and rejection of certain bodies is a technique for maintaining social power.⁵ For Douglas, however, “rubbish is not dangerous” or even ambiguous because “it clearly belongs in a defined place, a rubbish heap of one kind or another.”⁶ Douglas’s certainty is surprising. Power can be maintained by suggesting places for disposal, but spillages and litter illustrate the ability of trash to escape. If the danger is contained by defined places, what happens if trash does not stay put?

Obsolete objects can startle us by coming back into view, but not as they once were. Superseded but still persisting, they upset the classificatory systems that structure the use and disposal of objects as linear. As Tischleder and Wasserman note, however, obsolescence is site-specific; an object that is obsolete in one context may appear very much current in another.⁷ Various twentieth-century art movements challenged the classification of what is and is not art by exhibiting abject or trashed objects. A genealogy can be traced down through the Dadaist readymade, assemblage, Surrealist *objet trouvé*, and *arte povera* to what Jo Anna Isaak calls “the art of waste management, recycling, reclamation and redemption.”⁸ By bringing trash into the viewing contexts of galleries, artists can stage the type of difficult phenomenological encounter I only experienced by accident with the sole.

Mike Nelson is a British installation artist who came to prominence in the 1990s, and who constructs large immersive sculptural environments using cultural and industrial detritus gleaned from car boot sales, charity shops, liquidation auctions, and junkyards. Nelson’s installations catch the obsolete between the background environment where trash is hidden and the politicized foreground from which it was initially removed. In 2023, Nelson staged a major survey where he rebuilt some of his earlier installations in the Hayward Gallery at the Southbank Centre, London, titled *Extinction Beckons*. By bringing matter out of storage and into the maintained space of the gallery, Nelson creates an apparatus for visitors to notice processes of obsolescence. Furthermore, relocating his installations for a survey enables Nelson to challenge the classifications of site, spectator, and sculpture in new ways.

This survey did not follow the standard procedure for retrospectives. As a reflection of the overwhelming size of many installations and the recursive nature of Nelson’s artistic practice, the survey could not recreate works precisely as they were originally exhibited. Yung Ma, the curator of *Extinction Beckons*, notes that they had to embrace how Nelson has continually repurposed materials from previous artworks to produce new work or reimagine earlier work.⁹ Despite how the installations might appear serialized by the various rooms of the gallery, spatial elements and materials from the referenced exhibitions spill into one another. What makes this palimpsestic approach possible is Nelson’s preoccupation with storage.

Extinction Beckons is choreographed so that visitors enter via the Southbank Centre’s old gift shop and arrive in a storage room that contains disassembled and

boxed-up remnants of *I, IMPOSTER* (2011), a large-scale installation originally staged for the British Pavilion at the Venice Biennale. Nelson observes that including his previous work in “its uninstalled, stored form is both a brave and slightly stupid thing to do, because it undermines the sovereign nature of each work.”¹⁰ The red light of the room also retreads the recurrent motif of red light that has appeared in Nelson’s work since *Agent Dickson at the Red Star Hotel* (1997), where Nelson lit a large spherical mass of wooden crates and boxes with red light in the basement of a South London gallery. Although a few of Nelson’s installation artworks have been purchased, such as *The Coral Reef* (2000), which was acquired by Tate Britain in 2008, many were not saleable because of their size and subject. According to Nelson, retaining his materials meant the installations were “more elastic in terms of how they [could] be reimagined” for the survey.¹¹

In a lexicon created for the *Extinction Beckons* catalogue, Helen Hughes describes how Nelson’s installations are “strongly imbued with a sense of obsolescence—of being out of date, or time-stamped by an earlier moment.”¹² The red light in the survey’s first room evokes an analogue age of photographic processing that was superseded by the same digital technologies that many visitors, myself included, used to record the exhibition (Fig. 3). The torn cardboard boxes, scratched wooden doors, and other miscellanies stored in the room only become discrete through concentration. Beginning with a storage room allows Nelson to blur the lines between exhibitions and explore how site consolidates objects as trash, matter, or sculpture:

That sense of being foregrounded in storage, [and] in matter, and that idea of when a work is constructed and becomes sculpture, at least consciously sculpture, and when a work is taken apart and becomes matter, and a pile—but of course no less sculptural in many ways—I think sets the scene for the whole exhibition.¹³

This lapsing between categories and sites complicates the specificity of when obsolescence starts or stops. “Where dirt is matter out of place,” Rachele Dini argues, “waste is matter out of time.”¹⁴ Dini’s clarification of Douglas’s aphorism suggests that while dirt is disturbing because of its spatial dislocation, what makes waste uncomfortable is its narrative relationship to production processes, its coming-from-somewhere.



Fig. 3: First Room (*I, Imposter*), *Extinction Beckons*, Hayward Gallery, 2023, © Polly Bodgener

Nelson intensifies the non-linearity of his work by using the survey as an opportunity to inject new darkrooms into exhibitions that did not originally include them. For example, when he restages *The Woodshed* from *Triple Bluff Canyon* (2004) on the second floor of the Hayward Gallery, he interrupts the viewer's ability to proceed smoothly to the inside of the woodshed by adding a darkroom at the end of the corridor that leads into the woodshed from the main gallery space (Fig. 4). When visitors repeatedly enter the functionally obsolete darkrooms, they participate in the visual processing of the images and objects inside. As the knowledge and experience of obsolete spaces and technologies becomes increasingly obscure, however, the status of people in these places is problematized.

To clarify the temporal and spatial dimensions of Nelson's artworks, I am going to nuance obsolescence into two technological aspects: obsolescence as a *material condition* and a *material property*. As a material condition, obsolescence relates to the systemic cycling of particular bodies in and out of view, such as discarding something broken, or the Hayward Gallery's decision to bring Nelson's artworks out of storage between February 22 and May 7, 2023. Obsolescence as a material property, meanwhile, refers to how objects slowly shift towards non-functionality by breaking

or rusting. This property is complicated by the maintenance required for something to be safely displayed, as well as by uncertain factors like the duration and care taken during storage which may affect how an object looks, feels, or functions.

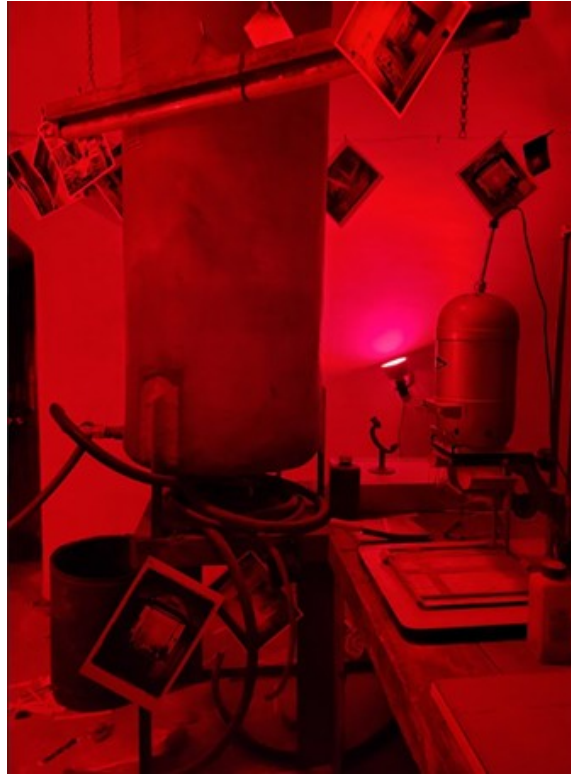


Fig. 4: Darkroom inside *The Woodshed (Triple Bluff Canyon)*, *Extinction Beckons*, Hayward Gallery, 2023, © Polly Bodgener

Even with a quantitative database, describing all of Nelson's materials would be nearly impossible. This *Perspective* restricts itself to how *Extinction Beckons* locates and dislocates two of Nelson's earlier installations, *Triple Bluff Canyon* (2004) and *The Asset Strippers* (2019), while allowing space for how materials irrupt unpredictably across the survey.

2_Relocating Robert Smithson in *Triple Bluff Canyon* (2004)

Although sand provides many valuable habitats for unique lifeforms, several of Nelson's installations invoke the more apocalyptic potential of sand. In *A Psychic Vacuum* (2007), Nelson transformed the abandoned and dilapidated interior of the old Essex Street Market in New York. The market had been drifting towards obsolescence since the supersession of many smaller vendors by supermarkets. Nelson filled one room almost entirely with sand, leaving the structural columns and

the chipped green paint on the walls exposed to the skylights. The interrelations between the sand, the confined space, and the viewer opened up new interpretive possibilities for the then-obsolete site. The installation, Helen Hughes argues, could evoke anything from an enclosed industrial silo to the desert landscape of Iraq (where military incursions were increasing at the time) to the symbolic connotation of “having one’s head in the sand.”¹⁵

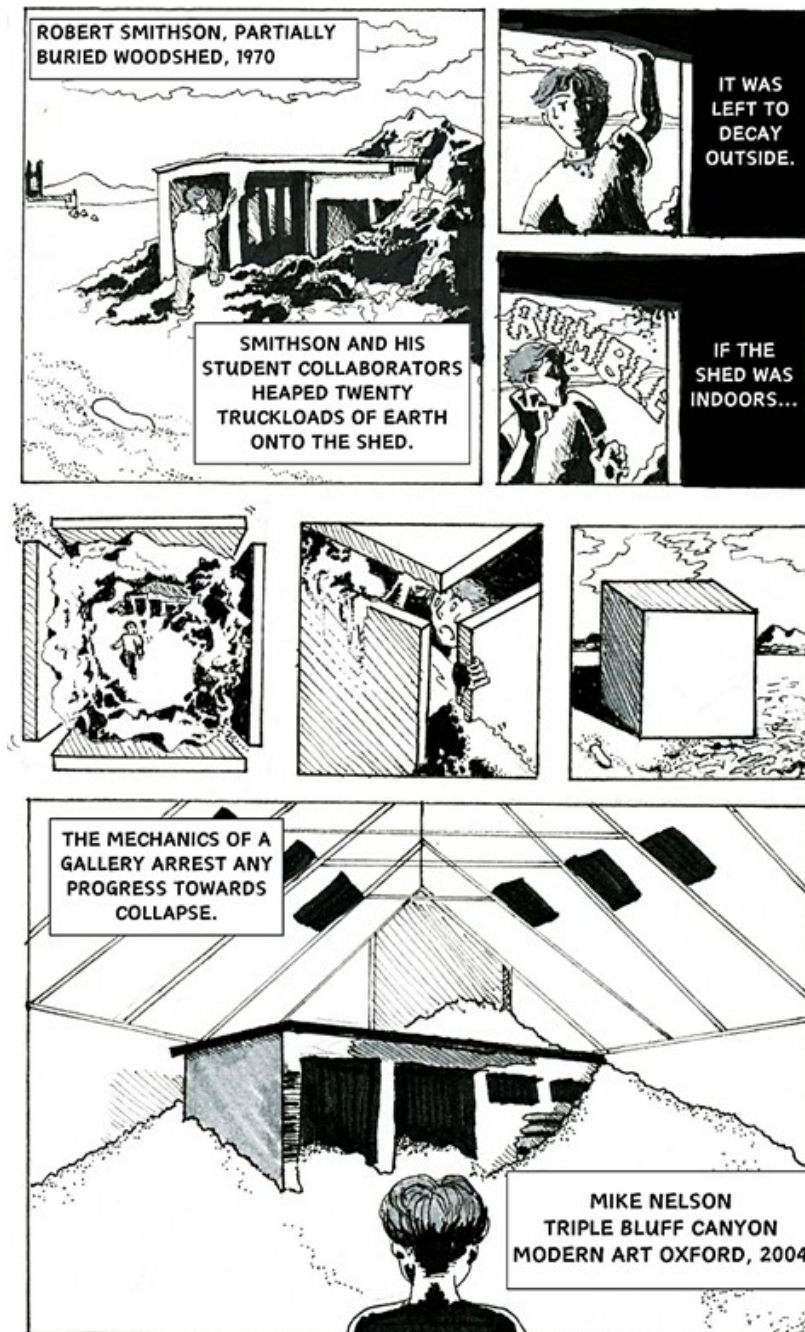


Fig. 5: Artwork by the author

Nelson first incorporated sand into his installations in *Triple Bluff Canyon* (2004) at Modern Art Oxford, where he paid homage to Robert Smithson's *Partially Buried Woodshed* (1970). The silhouette and premise of piling sediment onto a woodshed are near identical between the two, but located practices of seeing are called into question by setting Nelson's work inside Modern Art Oxford and Smithson's work outdoors on the campus of Kent State University, Ohio. Where the decay of Smithson's shed enabled new meanings to expand the shed's original uses, Nelson's shed remained intact despite the sand piled on top of it.

In *A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey*, Smithson describes entropy using the metaphor of a child running clockwise in a sandbox filled half with black sand and half with white. The result of then running counterclockwise is not the restoration of distinct halves, but greyness and further entropy.¹⁶ Sand's diffusiveness is used to show how the loss of distinct physical properties over time could create meaning. During sedimentation, materials are slowly broken down into smaller pieces. Similarly, obsolescence reflects the sudden or gradual breakdown of an object's form and value. Nelson's sand-filled ruins imagine a future moment when the organizing information encoded into space by living and working has been worn away. The place persists with new connotations, but the things that originally made sense of it have begun to disappear.

Smithson's entanglement of site and artwork reflects the changing conditions of art production in the sixties and seventies. Rosalind Krauss describes how sculpture in the early twentieth century arrived at a "negative condition, [...] an absolute loss of place."¹⁷ By assimilating the base and excluding its surroundings, modernist sculpture was conceptually and materially nomadic. Rather than consider sculpture as not-architecture and not-landscape, land artists broke from modernism by treating sculpture as both landscape *and* architecture. With the creation of *Partially Buried Woodshed*, Krauss argues that Smithson began to occupy the axis between landscape and architecture that she calls "*site construction*."¹⁸

The gradual rewilding and architectural collapse of *Partially Buried Woodshed* allowed it to attain various countercultural meanings for the students at Kent State University, including as a space for illicit activities and, more importantly, as a metaphorical corollary for violence perpetrated against student protestors. On May 4, 1970, just a few months after Smithson finished heaping earth onto the woodshed, a

non-violent protest against involvement in the Vietnam War was held on the Kent State campus.¹⁹ After failing to disperse the crowd, soldiers from the National Guard shot at the students, killing four and wounding nine. The words “MAY 4 KENT 70” were anonymously painted on the buckling central beam of *Partially Buried Woodshed* to commemorate the event. The tag connected the woodshed’s collapse to a cultural tipping point in the anti-war movement, which escalated in the wake of the shootings. Although the woodshed was demolished in 1984, it lasted longer than Nelson’s, which decries its placelessness when it moves from sculpture to storage.

Modern Art Oxford’s main gallery was refashioned into a container for the centrifugal force of the sand. Sand was compacted against the white brick walls and the glass around the entry staircase. The dune’s solidity was maintained by separation. It was prohibited to walk on the dune, and the shed’s interior was accessed through the adjacent gallery. The path, however, had no barrier and the dominant symbolism of deserts as expanding wastelands was intensified by the likelihood that visitors would leave with sand on their shoes and participate in the dune’s dispersal.



Fig. 6: Interior view of *The Woodshed (Triple Bluff Canyon)*, *Extinction Beckons*, Hayward Gallery, 2023, © Polly Bodgener

Unlike the vague demarcation between installation and viewer at Modern Art Oxford, *Extinction Beckons* hems in the restaged dune with debris. Half buried by the

sand, wood and tires repurposed from previous exhibitions corroborate the positioning of trash on social peripheries. The burst tires imply their supersession by new tires and the undated breakages that led to Nelson's acquisition of them. The space is further pressurized by its location in the brutalist Southbank Centre. The low metal ceiling compresses the space further than was possible at Modern Art Oxford, but the durable and inorganic matter upon which modernist architecture is predicated seems just as insufficient to contain it.

Viewers can enter the woodshed via a long corridor. As the light dims, viewers are thrown into what feels like another dimension inside the woodshed: another darkroom (Fig. 4). The red light, rusty boiler, and dangling photographs juxtapose the organic materials of the woodshed and heighten the strangeness of the darkroom. By proceeding through a small opening, viewers finally reach the inside of the woodshed, where pale artificial light filters through the woodshed's empty windows onto sand and half-buried oil drums (Fig. 6). Unlike the outside of the dune, the sand is scattered on the floor. When the viewer returns to the gallery space, they carry with them fugitive grains of sand.

By rebuilding his homage to Smithson's woodshed, Nelson's woodshed suggests that remembrance involves a degree of reinterpretation and change. Lisa LeFeuvre, the director of the Holt-Smithson Foundation, an organization created to preserve information about the legacies of Nancy Holt and Robert Smithson, has even argued that one measure of the foundation's success will be its obsolescence.²⁰ The Foundation's intended dissolution in 2038 suggests a mythical quality of land art where matter might endure through memory. Nelson's homage allows Smithson's work to survive by proxy, but by untethering the artwork from its dependence on site and introducing the problematics of storage, maintenance, and exhibition, Nelson's woodshed achieves the quality of a liminal space. In the context of its recreation for *Extinction Beckons*, the woodshed becomes like a memory in itself.

The power of material to evoke different memories and contexts arises across interactions with Nelson's work. For instance, the oil drums inside *Triple Bluff Canyon* refer to fuel conflicts during the Iraq War, which took place when the woodshed was first exhibited at Modern Art Oxford in 2004.²¹ These allusions, however, rely on a viewer's memory of the oil conflicts. Without this knowledge, or with awareness of it eroded between the woodshed's exhibition in 2004 and its

reintroduction in the 2023 survey, the woodshed becomes reactive to new contexts. Nelson suspected that the rebuilt woodshed and oil drums at the Hayward Gallery would “be read far more in relation to the environment than it was originally,” particularly with the addition of the rubber tires.²² Similarly, while walking through the labyrinthine recreation of *The Deliverance and the Patience* (2001), a sprawling maze of creaking doors and small rooms that open into disparate times and spaces, a particular visitor—my mother—was arrested by a sign advertising low-cost flights (Fig. 7). It was the only thing in the survey she insisted I photograph, as it transported her to the now-defunct travel agencies in Whitechapel that she visited in her twenties. Its reappearance created the opportunity for her to tell me stories that survived the travel agency’s obsolescence.



Fig. 7: Wooden travel sign from *The Deliverance and the Patience* (2011), reinstalled in *Extinction Beckons* (2023), Hayward Gallery, © Polly Bodgener

3_Restaging *The Asset Strippers* (2019)

The Asset Strippers (2019) was created for an annual commission at Tate Britain, London, which invited artists to respond to the particular space of the Duveen Galleries. Nelson’s artwork is comprised of several industrial readymade sculptures

and assemblages, and marks a point where his work shifted from architectural installations toward sculpture. The Duveen Galleries opened in 1937 at a point when modernist sculpture was beginning to develop in Britain. By installing defunct technologies inside these neo-classical galleries, Nelson gestures to how the metaphorical qualities of sculpture are mixed up with practical processes of material, supersession, and labor.

The institutional siting of art not only distinguishes economic value but, according to Miwon Kwon, also reproduces historically located and culturally determined forms of knowledge.²³ In Tate's exhibition leaflet, Nelson explained that he wanted to present "artefacts cannibalized from the last days of the industrial era in place of the treasures of empire that would normally adorn such halls."²⁴ Amongst these artefacts was a rusty pillar drill. Nelson seems to follow Smithson's belief that valuing steel over rust is a technological value, not an artistic one.²⁵ Rust makes the material properties of obsolescence legible because it testifies to a reaction between the metal and the environment. A blue sticker on the side of the drill directs the laborer to use protective eyewear: while this instruction's primary imperative is obsolete, it presents an ironic commentary on how galleries neutralize the danger of trash. The drill and the other sculptures were all raised off the ground by low marble plinths, through which the Duveen Gallery began to assimilate the equipment as monumental art. Many objects exhibited at Tate Britain, including the pillar drill, did not reappear for the survey at the Southbank Centre. The objects that did return feel more closely aligned to the modular architecture of the Hayward Gallery, but low plinths still temporarily privilege the decommissioned technologies as untouchable sculptures.

Both the Duveen Gallery and the Hayward Gallery allow viewers to walk around each object inside Nelson's industrial montage. This dispersed arrangement comments ironically on the previously fixed positions of such objects in industrial space. Production, Edensor notes, is "a circular process [where] things become obsolete, are thrown away, recycled or replaced in pursuit of the always new."²⁶ The supersession once enabled by factory products is countered by the persistence of these obsolete forms. In both exhibitions, the production line is visually disassembled. What, then, can be made from them? The original exhibition made meaning through the deliberate juxtaposition of the Duveen Gallery and salvaged industrial materials that Nelson considered to be "remaining vestiges of what made these grand museums

possible.”²⁷ The site-specific commentary on the ties of empire to industry and the material breakdown of imperial power is not so clearly reproduced in the Hayward Gallery.

Much of the material for *The Asset Strippers* came from liquidation auctions.²⁸ Reclaiming cement mixers, lathes, and industrial sewing machines allows Nelson to connect the material obsolescence of the factories to the outmoding of workforces. The friction between the industrial remnants and the digital auctions introduces the historical dynamics of mechanization and digitization that continue to make workforces obsolete. Material properties like rust and the failed signification of instructional stickers connect too intimately to the precarious condition of human bodies.

4_Conclusion: Extinction

In a video where he describes the process behind *Extinction Beckons*, Nelson recollects a radio broadcast:

I remember some years ago a radio presenter casually sort of saying that all large mammals within a certain number of years would be extinct if we carried on at the same rate that we're heading. And it did strike me that the presenter seemed to sort of not acknowledge the fact that he was a large mammal as well.²⁹

How Nelson remembers the presenter's warning is framed in terms of a direction towards extinction. Using the word 'beckons' in the artwork title, in contrast to 'carried on' or 'heading,' implies that Nelson has identified something about this extinction event that pulls or lures. The vagueness of dating the broadcast 'some years ago' encapsulates the temporal difficulty of Nelson's work. Although many objects act as timestamps in people's memories, such as the travel agent's sign, the survey intensifies the feeling of dislocation and waste's position out of time. In many ways, the installations feel like futuristic ruins that confront viewers with the outcome of carrying on 'at the same rate we're heading.'

Nelson's practice of reuse and recontextualization is encoded into the survey's title. "Extinction Beckons" comes from a sticker on a helmet that Nelson originally used in *Masters of Reality* (1997), an exhibition centered around a fictional biker gang called "The Amnesiacs." Nelson imagined the Amnesiacs to be veterans of twentieth-century conflicts, suffering from post-traumatic memory loss. Their minds, Hughes suggests, "throw up random images with no context or apparent provenance,"

which Nelson uses as an artistic apparatus for making new work out of old matter.³⁰ The survey functions in a similar way. Although Nelson is consciously rebuilding parts of his previous exhibitions and therefore working within the constraints that the installations should be recognizable, inaccuracies in recollection are emboldened by the change in site. Neither *Triple Bluff Canyon* nor *The Asset Strippers* could be recreated exactly. The new incorporation of tires into *Triple Bluff Canyon* and the absence of pieces like the drill from *The Asset Strippers* demonstrate the malleability of memory, but perhaps also the failure of storage to preserve the distinctions between matter and sculpture.

Storing and then reusing his previous exhibition materials in new ways means that, in a strange way, the materials that Nelson valued artistically for their obsolescence never truly become obsolete. Even as their material properties change and matter migrates between artworks, the works remain provocative. Nelson claims the specific works he chose to display were “rearticulated for the moment in which we exist.”³¹ The objects reintroduced in the survey are activated by the diverse knowledges, anxieties, and nostalgias of spectators. In my case, as someone concerned about the scale of anthropogenic climate change, the survey acted to narrow the breadth of ecological catastrophe down to the confrontation between viewer and nonhuman materials. At the same time as the artworks achieve new significance, the passage of human bodies in and out of the survey actualizes the impermanence of viewing positions.

The disposability of humans under current production models is suggested by Nelson’s emphasis on technological desolation. Nelson’s acquisition of materials depends partly on the closure of factories and the supersession of workforces. While Nelson’s collection and installation of broken, obsolete, or trashed objects connect seemingly hermetic galleries to the wider desolation of post-industrial landscapes, his work also suggests the belatedness of our ability to look at the implications of trash for human life on Earth. Declaring the Anthropocene to be a real series of crises will require corporations and consumers alike to recognize the fallacy of total disposability built into production models. Installations like Nelson’s can provide the framework to make waste visible. His use and reuse of the trash shows that although our material residues are undergoing obsolescence, change, and breakdown at various

rates, they never vanish altogether. The most strenuous part of reconciling the human to the nonhuman will be recognizing our continuing closeness to what we cast off.

Endnotes

- ¹ J.K. Gibson-Graham, “A Feminist Project of Belonging for the Anthropocene,” *Gender, Place & Culture* 18, no. 1 (2011): 1–21, here: 2. Doi: [10.1080/0966369X.2011.535295](https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2011.535295). The term ‘hyper-separation’ comes from ecofeminist philosopher Val Plumwood, who theorized that patriarchal society had subordinated ‘nature’ (a category which included nonhumans, women, and indigenous peoples) to such an extent that it had begun to think of itself as separate. See Val Plumwood, “A Review of Deborah Bird Rose’s *Reports from a Wild Country: Ethics of Decolonisation*,” *Australian Humanities Review* 42 (2007): 1–4. The high energy use engendered by this separation is leading us towards ecological collapse. I use J.K. Gibson-Graham’s reinterpretation of this term to emphasize the way nature is treated not just as something from which resources are taken but as a passive receptacle into which people can pour waste without consequences.
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- ³ Tim Edensor, “Waste Matter – The Debris of Industrial Ruins and the Disordering of the Material World,” *Journal of Material Culture* 10, no. 3 (2005): 311–332, here: 316. Doi: [10.1177/13591835050573](https://doi.org/10.1177/13591835050573).
- ⁴ Babette Bärbel Tischleder and Sarah L. Wasserman, eds., *Cultures of Obsolescence: History, Materiality, and the Digital Age* (Houndmills/New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 2.
- ⁵ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 2003), 36.
- ⁶ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 160.
- ⁷ Tischleder and Wasserman, *Cultures of Obsolescence*, 9.
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- ⁹ Yung Ma, “The Remembered and the Forgotten,” in *Extinction Beckons – Mike Nelson* (London: Hayward Gallery Publishing, 2023), 7–12, here: 8.
- ¹⁰ “A Conversation between Mike Nelson and Kate Guggenheim,” in *Extinction Beckons – Mike Nelson* (London: Hayward Gallery Publishing, 2023), 21–41, here: 21.
- ¹¹ “A Conversation between Mike Nelson and Kate Guggenheim,” 21.
- ¹² Helen Hughes, “Mike Nelson: A Lexicon of Phenomena and Information Association,” in *Extinction Beckons – Mike Nelson* (London: Hayward Gallery Publishing, 2023), 193–235, here: 214.
- ¹³ Southbank Centre, “Artist, Mike Nelson on His Exhibition, Extinction Beckons,” YouTube, May 3, 2023, 01:05, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z5hOAUZIRuE>>.
- ¹⁴ Rachele Dini, *Consumerism, Waste, and Re-Use in Twentieth-Century Fiction: Legacies of the Avant-Garde* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2016), 5.
- ¹⁵ Mike Nelson, quoted in Hughes, “Mike Nelson: A Lexicon of Phenomena and Information Association,” 219.

- ¹⁶ Robert Smithson, “A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey,” in *The Collected Writings of Robert Smithson*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 68–74.
- ¹⁷ Rosalind E. Krauss, “Sculpture in the Expanded Field (1978),” in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, ed. Rosalind E. Krauss (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010), 280.
- ¹⁸ Krauss, “Sculpture in the Expanded Field,” 287.
- ¹⁹ “Robert Smithson, *Partially Buried Woodshed*, Ohio, USA 1970,” Archive of Destruction (blog), accessed April 2, 2024, <<https://archiveofdestruction.com/artwork/partially-buried-woodshed/>>.
- ²⁰ Janet Abrams, “Building the Legacy of Nancy Holt and Robert Smithson,” in *Southwest Contemporary*, July 30, 2019, <<https://southwestcontemporary.com/building-the-legacy-of-nancy-holt-and-robert-smithson/>>.
- ²¹ “A Conversation between Mike Nelson and Kate Guggenheim,” 27.
- ²² “A Conversation between Mike Nelson and Kate Guggenheim,” 27.
- ²³ Miwon Kwon, “One Place After Another: Notes on Site Specificity,” in *Theory in Contemporary Art Since 1985*, eds. Zoya Kocur and Simon Leung (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2005), 34–55, here: 34.
- ²⁴ “Mike Nelson: The Asset Strippers – Press Release,” Tate Britain, March 18, 2019, <<https://www.tate.org.uk/press/press-releases/mike-nelson-asset-strippers>>.
- ²⁵ Robert Smithson, “A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects, 1968,” in *Materiality*, ed. Petra Lange-Berndt (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2015), 149–152, here: 151.
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- ²⁷ Mike Nelson, “The Asset Strippers,” in *Extinction Beckons – Mike Nelson* (London: Hayward Gallery Publishing, 2023), 186–192, here: 187.
- ²⁸ Nelson, “The Asset Strippers,” 187.
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- ³⁰ Hughes, “Mike Nelson: A Lexicon of Phenomena and Information Association,” 194.
- ³¹ Southbank Centre, “Artist, Mike Nelson on His Exhibition, Extinction Beckons,” 02:49.