

Phantom writing

Hirschbichler, Michael

10.59490/footprint.18.1.6947

Publication date

Document Version Final published version

Published in **Footprint**

Citation (APA)
Hirschbichler, M. (2024). Phantom writing. *Footprint*, *18*(1), 109-122. https://doi.org/10.59490/footprint.18.1.6947

Important note

To cite this publication, please use the final published version (if applicable). Please check the document version above.

Copyright
Other than for strictly personal use, it is not permitted to download, forward or distribute the text or part of it, without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), unless the work is under an open content license such as Creative Commons.

Takedown policy

Please contact us and provide details if you believe this document breaches copyrights. We will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Visual Essay 109

Phantom Writing

Michael Hirschbichler

Delft University of Technology, the Netherlands

Corresponding Author Email

mail@atelier-hirschbichler.com

ORCID

Michael Hirschbichler https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0108-9970

How to cite

Michael Hirschbichler, 'Phantom Writing', Footprint Delft Architecture Theory Journal, vol. 18, no. 1 (2024): 109-122, https://doi.org/ 10.59490/footprint.18.1.6947

Submitted 15 March 2023 Revised 12 May 2023 Accepted 3 February 2024 Published 30 September 2024

Abstract

In this visual essay I present a body of artistic work done within informal urban and suburban heritage sites in Kyoto. Through the media of text, photography, film and site-specific painting, my works from the cycle Spirit Grounds engage with these sites involving material physical aspects as well as beliefs, fictions, and more-than-human beings. Building upon this, I propose 'phantom writing' or 'phantasmography' as a situated, multidisciplinary and multisensory approach aimed at understanding and designing contemporary places, landscapes and environments, acknowledging and mediating the agency of diverse phantoms and phantasms.

Keywords

Phantoms, phantasms, spirit grounds, phantom writing, phantasmography



Phantoms, phantasms, spirits, ghosts, and spectres – very broadly defined – are invisible or hard-to-grasp agents that exert an influence on our present world. They can be formerly existing persons or species, very small or very big things or beings, mental images, and sociocultural narratives, accepted or often neglected pasts and anticipated futures, hopes, dreams and fears. Situated between established categories – such as humans and other-than-humans, active and passive matter, the secular and the nonsecular, the living and the dead, the real and the imaginary, and so on – they offer powerful vantage points from which to understand and reconceive our contemporary environment.¹

Every ground bears traces of past events and is imbued with histories and beliefs, turning it into heritage in the broadest sense. This is especially true for the city of Kyoto, home to Nintendo and other high-tech facilities. This contemporary city (like many others) is saturated with a network of densely storied grounds that extends well beyond well-known monuments. Even more than the official heritage sites, these everyday places and landscapes, which are covered with stories, myths, beliefs and superstitions,

shape perceptions and actions. According to popular conceptions, they are not only inhabited by the living, but also by spirits, phantoms and other (un)dead. Amid a well-kept residential area, for example, a muddy pond (Midorogaike) opens up. Strange creatures are said to mingle in its rich flora and fauna, and at its bottom a passage to the netherworld and the realm of demons is assumed. Expressways lead across former graveyards (Toribeno) where birds have pecked at unburied bodies. Noses and ears of nameless victims of war amass in grass-covered monuments (Mimizuka) next to children's playgrounds and single-family homes, and the ghosts of the dead huddle together in secluded underpasses (Kazando Tunnel) when the nearby tourist attractions are deserted at night. Taken together, such places constitute a more-than-human and more-than-secular common ground, in which matter and stories, facts and fictions, past, present and future merge. In this regard, they are a repository of real and imagined pasts that influence the present life and from which shared futures can be imagined, narrated and constructed.

Figure that allegislation places, below it is not and not trave or done from

If the loss in an other traverse, the traverse of the first of the fir die bell ist the Trace-E Geshills - Melanismus CG-Tourist Upttue Gescheitet-Mechanismus - Rinder Schan, CC III bus Gunnen Kinder.

Lita Diene vom <u>Kusprenspreptis</u>, CC ausgelde einstall geboren Person.

Den Deckel für Unterminheren EUD vom statterbe CC Teurist gistete.

"Joder Soal Wedeligs. IB sinkt ernengisteten wahr. Nieder beich bis zur Breucht aus Mit vom Siehers Auf Congriste.

- Freschlichte Blick angesichts der Tatsache Var Tassende Altes Sprichwort. Mit Ger angelte Eurosek, in Gegliebenter. Schalb. POMP IN THE PROPERTY OF THE En was the state of the state o Selfonne Silvae in Abstracht de Tabrache; forcelle Garactione, ein aproper Tommeln: de Genhichts-Mohanin (Google Prensiste)

Geologic Prensiste)

Yet Denge St. of lond, by the his latery;

(chinesich troit >> deutsch) Wirschenursれ引つからる人は言葉山のれれれ 米河南が全地に後退する。 そこで米河南に有機物と共に生き寺びる。 いわゆる文明がこの地を覆う間に。 北部の住宅地の貫ん中に デっと昔の浩入― 深くて泥だらい池がある。 その怠惰な額の中に泳ぐのは色あせた宏だけ。 Die Eiszeit zieht sich in Senken zurück, in denen sie mit ihren Organismen überdauert, während die sogenannte Zivilisation das Land überzieht. The ice age retreats into furrows where it winters with its organisms while what's called civilization blankets the land. in derein ein mit Bienen Organismenn überdausert,
über derein der derein derein der derein der derein derein der derein der derein der derein der derein derein derein derein der derein der derein derein der derein where it winders with the organizations where it winders with the organization to the middle of species residential area in the north—as in fillow a long time ago—is a deep point did of middle with the organization of the species of the property of the passion Marga di lives in viscous mud

of the bolton of the seams

A bind's or heads to the must pond

A bind's or heads to the must pond

A bind's or heads to the must pond

A bind's or the bind bind bind

that gliel over stone pillows

in the autinn.

In the scopping of the region

to build the holy.

Every fitzes contain possibilities.

But the situation entirely dranged

after Gal was addisciplined.

For the situation entirely dranged

after Gal was addisciplined.

For ad construction, sewage, contamination—

road construction, sewage, contamination—

road construction, sewage, contamination—

with a tuberculoide was still an incurable disease.

When tuberculoide was still an incurable disease,

and the immates of a polyhaltric clinic

jumed out of their virialows to be cure

jumed out of their virialows to be cure

and the immates of a polyhaltric clinic

Jacobs of their virialows to be cure

Jacobs of their virialows to the cure

Jacobs of their virialows to be cure

Jacobs of their virialows to the cure

Jacobs of their virialows to be cure

Jacobs of their virialows to the cure

Jacobs of their virialows to th eine langsam sich windende Riesenschlang Ein Vogelnetz geht zum Schlammteich, um die Schatten der Namen zu fangen, die im späten Herbst über glatte Steinkissen gleiten. he, bald wird , Dies ist für dit die Mongen , Dur sollbest die h Goottes Lehr-als eine Pers er Thron ist die dem Leben die eisheit gekür, re Sünde kane Person, die ta Uber gelter Steekhosen gleiten.

In der Poppspaße der Gegend

sind die alten Tage markisit

zur Konstraktion der Beleigne.

Jedes Filter sethelt Moglichalente.

Jedes Filter sethelt Moglichalente.

Jedes Filter sethelt Moglichalente.

Jedes Steekhosen der Jedes vollständig
mit der Abstraffung Genese

geter steekhon de Masser in Rottin
sether steekhon de Masser in Rottin
sen Norderder ein Erbartulous Standstrakt unzur Artigegebeitme,

an Norderder ein Erbartulous Standstrakt unzur der Reggebeitme,

an Norderder ein Erbartulous Standstrakt unzur der Moglichalente.

All Erbartulous on den sie zur belände zu Kankhelte van,

begingen wirde Politerient Schattmord, Indem sie ins Moor gingen,

und Insassen eners greichständschun Klank

sprangen um Mittermordt aus der Freistern,

wenn der Standstrakten Landstrakte gebeilt zu werden. 辺りの地形では 古の日々に印がついている 聖なるものの建設のために。 型なるものの建設のために。 どの濾過液にも可能性が含まれている。 しかし、状況は完全に変わった 神の廃止とともに。 今、家が一列に並んでいる— 調路建設、原水・汚染— 北学には語核療養所や介護施設。 in territory in the control of the c 北岸には格信物機が下げ渡路級。 結結がまだ不明の房だった場。 多くの患者が温原に入って自殺した。 七して精神料医院の人所省が 異役中に窓が分別び降りた。 解代遅れの風景に治してもらうために。 深い地の中には、たぐさんの身体が集まっている。 夢見る布の中にいるように、物語に包まれて。 Im tiefen Teich versammeln sich zahlreiche Körper, in Geschichten gehüllt wie in träumende Stoffe. Let I be an investigate a very let in the second process of the se Zögere nicht Das Surcheinander der nahen Welt ist Bisbeslich. Magier vom Tag der Geburt an Drücke das Licheln nicht aus. Gönnen Sie sich den Frieden von Heijl. Ich bin gestorben und nach Hause gegennen.

The three principles half, being his will not all the force or one Goal

If it is not an early recording the principles of the control of the Gershills - Mechanismus CG-Tourist Gradulth — Thillackis-un (Gradulth - Statistic - Statistic - Statistic - Statistic)

(Goodwale - Statistic)

(Goodwale - Statistic - Stati DOWN TO THE PROPERTY OF THE PR ko jili IV. Selliame Silvare In Anternah de Talanche; forente Governdone, ein atrobes Tommeln : der Genhields-Mohanism Wir sehen uns.れ当つかふる人はき葉山のれれれ Die Haupstadt der gelieheren Landschaft –
ein Ott, mit dem Schaft verbrachen Massverständnissen mischen –
lieg unter Abnorwieder –
Milliosen gezeiche Bütter, die sich überlappen
ein Faumblich, ansehen versiehet,
von Kriegen eingehobt und von Fauern zurückt,
opgrechte auf Annahen versiehet,
von Kriegen eingehobt und von Fauern zurückt,
opgrechte auf Annahen versiehet,
Cerakulerra Zivilianitionen werden resamhent,
Cerakulerra Zivilianitionen werden resamhent,
die kongliche Familie werde hafter an heine hotigen Standort verlegt,
und die Priester in den Massooleen jud. The capital of loaned landscapes— a place related to skepe a place related to skepe a place related to skepe the second second second second second the second second second second second millions of overlapping lagged lavers an image from a direct, and/ored in years, caught up in wars and distaryout by frees, becaused divillations are reminding, frees, and divillations are reminded frees, and the second second second frees are second second second second frees, and the second second second second second frees, and the second second second second second frees, and the second second second second second second frees, and the second s 借り物の風景の首都―― 限りとつながった場所。 備家が情の関係と混ざり合う場所―― 観の森の下に廃たわる―― 切らなものぎざぎびの葉が悪なり合って 深いの印象を提入付けようとする―― 幻影、成月に根を下ろし、 報句に追い継続されて火事で破壊され、 接近、記録、崇拝の上に創設された。 報館した文明が蘇生される。 古い土地を新しい宮殿で覆うことで (そのために王室が現在の拠点に 移され、 そして霊廟の司祭たちは、 者付の呼びかけに忙しい。) this is with the coyal family was moved to its present location and with the prices in the manufacture.

On the other side of the image, the control of the (die köngliche Familie wich Inderfür an Ihren heutigen Standort verlegt, die köngliche Familie wich Inderfür an Ihren heutigen Standort verlegt, der die die Bilbes verschälben sach die Namme, mehr die Standort verschälben sach des Namme, mehr die Standort verschälben sach die Namme, mehr die Standort verschälben sach die Namme, mehr die Standort verschälben sach die Namme, die man mit zalägen Hiebein in Bilahöhe abbrennte, die man mit zalägen Hiebein in Bilahöhe abbrennte, die man mit zalägen Hiebein in Bilahöhe abbrennte, die spallerfalt wei voll nicht erfügel die Gegelferfalt wei voll nicht erfügel im Brandität zurückgelssen). Volkstedete Regien im Privatazurenkragen, allesants stehen. Kindergolt. Oblangolt. Tigergolt. allesants stehen. Kindergolt. Oblangolt. Tigergolt. allesants stehen. Kindergolt. Oblangolt. Tigergolt. die verschäußstehe Armei bliche einen Fahren vor der Brutz, die der verschäußstehe nach bliche einen Fahren vor der Brutz, die der verschäußstehe in einen Weisenhaben auf, in Aller von 14. Jahren wird sie mit deil anderen Kindern von einer mehre hemitie angefelte von einer nichte hemitie abgefelte von einer nichte hemitie abgefelte von einer sich stimmt. Als die Heldin den File erführt aber verschäußstehe zur Abenfalte über, Jahren verschäußstehe zur Abenfalte zur Abenfalte zur Abenfalte über verschäußstehe zur Abenfalte zur Abenfalte zu Abenfalte zur Abenfalte 等句の甲ががに忙しい。 総の反対的では 名前がすれる。 名前がすれる。 名前がすれる。 名前がする。 本製の側、以前は聴光で降離されていた。 力がの側、以前は聴光で降離されていた。 カリスティーズでオークションにかけられた (個行ちれた名は、アドウ、 根人 コレクションの確認は、で行り、 根人 コレクションの確認はからで ジェニファーは家の中で様々な冒険をする。 その際、誰かが大きなハサミを持ったモンスターたちに THE OFFICE

INTERIOR AND ADDRESS AND ADDRE and the constraints (x,y,y) = (x,y) = (x,y). Since (x,y) = (y,y) = (y,y). Since (x,y) = (y,y) = (y,y) = (y,y). Since (x,y) = (y,y) = (Zögere nicht Das Durcheinander der nahen Welt ist lächerlich. Magier vom Tag der Geburt an Drücke des Lächeln nicht aus. Gönnen Sie sich den Frieden von Heijs. Ich bin gestorben und nach Hause gerageen.

he, bald wird.
Dies ist für dit die Mongen
Du sollbest die Mongen
Du sollbest die Gottes Lehe
als eine Pers
er Thoss ist die dem Leben de
eisheit gekür,
se Sünde kann
Person, die tie

in clarification of the clarif

Spirit Grounds

For the work cycle *Spirit Grounds* I worked in and with these storied environments, employing different forms of sensing, recording, and writing, through the media of text, photography, film and site-specific painting.²

The texts were created as a filtrate from various sources: from popular stories, scholarly articles, magazines, encyclopaedia entries, social media, Google and YouTube posts related to the sites in question. The original texts were translated from Japanese into German with the aid of machine translation tools (it was yet not possible to achieve correct translations in 2019), resulting in profound shifts in the fabric of meaning. From this raw material, I composed new texts through an intensive process of editing and imagining on the basis of the erroneously translated source material. Thus existing stories of various kinds, from various times and from various cultural spheres were taken up and transformed, and reapplied to the (sub) urban spirit grounds. Between languages, genres, and meanings, the resulting poem-like texts reveal new perspectives upon the city's narrative-material topography.

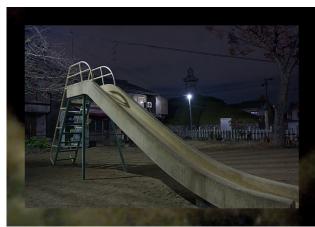
This is continued in the media of photography and film, in which a visual and aural foray through the thick of storied and haunted places unfolds. This begins in the swampy waters of a fabled pond and continues through forests and bamboo groves, across cemeteries and informal garbage dumps, along walls, through underpasses, over bridges, past war monuments and historic execution sites, down

into ossuaries, over gravel shores and along riverbanks. Various actors, events and temporal episodes that crowd these places are thereby brought into play.

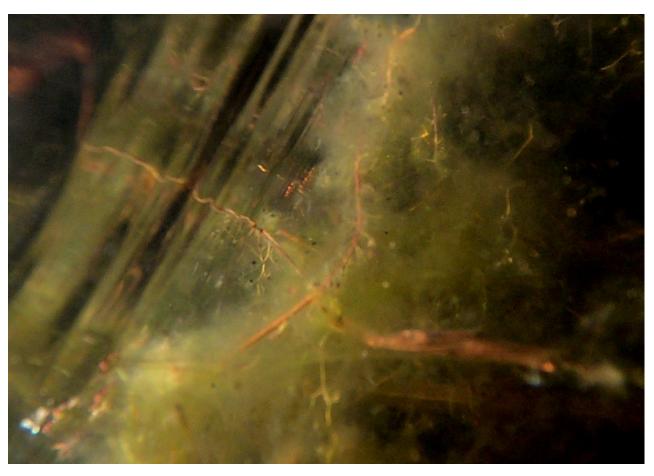
In a series of experimental site-specific paintings I eventually took an approach that fuses a material, dirty and an immaterial, narrative engagement with places. My intention was to capture traces between the field and the archive, between then and now, between real places and imaginary beings, and to set these physical and narrative traces in relation to each another. The paintings are based on scans of spirit scrolls from the Edo period. Thereby I focused not on the depictions of the supernatural, but on the image background onto which these depictions had been drawn and painted. On this pictorial ground, traces had accumulated over the centuries. I printed these archival traces on white cotton fabric (the material used, according to legends, to fashion the robes of female ghosts) and then exposed them to the influences of various mythologically important haunted locations for an extended period of time. As a result, traces of the imaginary historical pictorial space and the physical contemporary urban space are superimposed and intertwined on the same canvas.

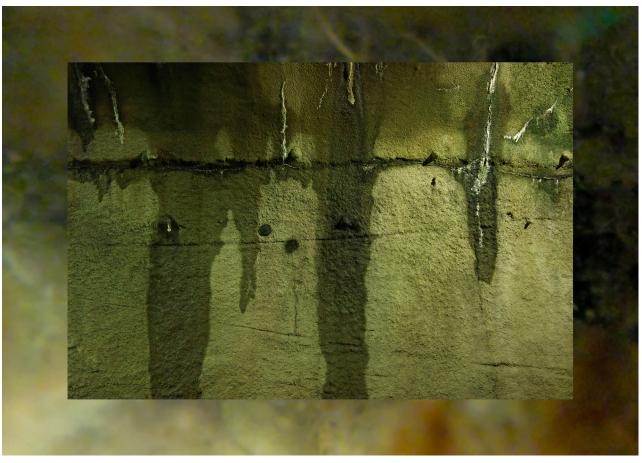
In each of the works, the exploration of particular places is tied to their speculative transformation, whereby translations – into other languages and media, and the errors and slippages that occur in the process – offer new viewpoints and generate new associations of meaning.



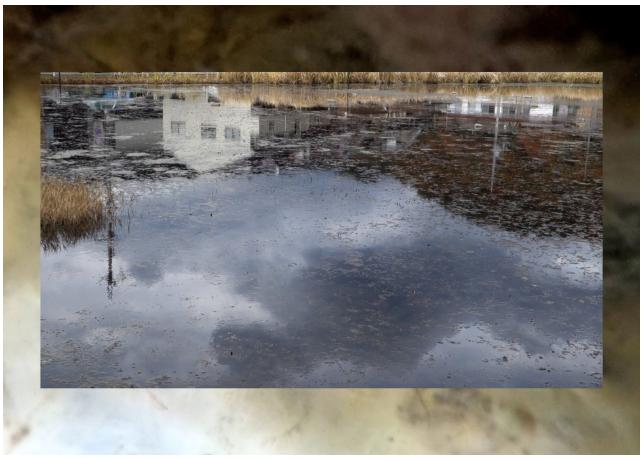












Phantasmography

I like to think of these experiments as starting points for a more comprehensive engagement with the phantoms and phantasms that contribute to shaping our natural-cultural environment, our perceptions thereof and the actions that we take in the present and future. Such an engagement with the invisibilities, intangibilities or inaudibilities involved in placemaking could be called 'phantom writing' or 'phantasmography'.

The term phantasmography was originally coined by American anthropologist Robert Desjarlais, while reflecting upon the role of photographic images in the context of visual anthropology. Desjarlais pledged to practice an 'imagistic anthropological mode of knowing', a 'fantastical anthropology' that blurs empiricism and fiction.3 Building upon Desjarlais' definition of phantasmography as the mere 'writing of the flows and currents of fabulation', I envisage such an endeavour as transcending the disciplinary scope of anthropology and expanding the media from images to more broadly conceived imaginative constructions.4 These constructions can make visible (or audible or otherwise sensible), make appear, materialise and critically engage with the phantoms and phantasmas that co-create places, landscapes and environments. This pertains to places officially considered heritage sites, where attention is specifically focused on past events, actors and stories. But it equally relates to other places and environments, the stories, phantoms and phantasms of which are generally overlooked.

I therefore propose phantasmography as a multidisciplinary, multisensory and multilayered practice – a situated, site-specific, hands-on approach that relies on embodied perspectives instead of that of a privileged, neutral observer with an overview. Phantasmography, as I understand it, aligns scientific, secular, fact-based, modern, and artistic, nonsecular, speculative, nonmodern modes of sensing and knowing. Only by dissolving these commonly upheld oppositions is it possible to understand the agency of diverse phantoms and fantasies in contemporary worldmaking. Such an approach could be called a nonsecular, or more precisely a 'more-than-secular' approach, as the secular and rational are not negated but expanded by including those forces and beliefs that come from without. These forces and beliefs are essential in understanding contemporary cultural landscapes - and heritage sites in particular.5 Phantasmography acknowledges that cultural and religious beliefs and ideologies of various kinds inform our views, values and relations with the environment, provide narratives of world-making and world-destruction, and inform rituals and patterns of behaviour. Phantasmography is therefore concerned with tracing the interrelations that exist between facts and fictions, in order to grasp the reality that they jointly create. Fictions are not mere fantasies. They possess an agency to form beliefs and memories and motivate actions - and they are real insofar as they cause real effects. Starting from the reality at hand, describing, writing, drawing, recording, and enacting it, and thereby including the ghostly and fictional, phantasmography is the practice of an 'expanded realism'.







Its principal aims are:

- 1) To see, listen and sense. Phantasmography begins with devising ways for paying close attention to our environment and thus noticing subjects and objects both human and nonhuman, and in their entanglements that are frequently overlooked and in many cases are hard to see and grasp. It is therefore necessary to broaden our awareness and to 'extend our senses beyond their comfort zones'.6
- 2) To trace. Such ways of seeing and sensing enable us to trace the presence or absence of these subjects and objects and the often uneven histories that connect or separate them. Many of these absences so I assume can be read and reconstituted from the material traces that they leave behind.
- 3) To construct new kinds of historicity. Starting from the present, phantasmography tries to comprehend the different temporalities that are engrained in our environment. These temporalities include forgotten or repressed pasts that haunt the landscape, as well as imagined futures. Moving beyond linear progressive modern time, phantasmography enters into the swirling temporalities that are spread out in

- the landscape and strives to attain a more complex, nonlinear and situated conception of time.
- 4) To negotiate (in)visibilities, (in)audibilities and (in) sensibilities. Thereby we have to take into account that what seem to be invisible or overlooked histories for some, constitute a factual and often painful experienced reality for others. So, what is (in) visible, (in)audible or (in)sensible depends to a large extent on the viewpoint. By approaching different viewpoints and negotiating (in)visibilities, (in) audibilities and (in)sensibilities, phantasmography attempts to gain a broader and more differentiated understanding of present realities.
- 5) To imagine and design. By sensing, tracing, observing, and negotiating presences and absences and the more-than-human and nonlinear histories that they are enmeshed in phantasmography helps to expand our consciousness and imagination. Observation and interpretation, reading and writing, recording and inscribing these recordings back into sites and situations in a speculative way can therefore not be clearly separated. Phantasmography thus fuses imagination and design.







All of this is particularly important for heritage sites, as places charged with memories, where sociocultural histories are negotiated and transmitted. The matter of heritage is both material and discursive. It can be physically experienced in the present and it points to past events as elements in narrative constructions and webs of meaning, which entangle the living with the dead and the yet unborn – human and other. A critical and differentiated engagement with the past (or rather various pasts with different degrees of visibility), such as phantasmography is concerned with, is essential for imagining and responsibly constructing desirable shared futures.

Moving back and forth between sensing and making sense, between facts and fictions, between interpretation, invention and intervention, I like to think of phantasmography as a critical and sensitive practice through which we curiously and courageously engage with the environment around us and make and re-make it, piece by piece, over and over again.



Declaration of conflicting interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

Notes

- Michael Hirschbichler, 'Phantasmography: Spaces of Extraction,' IKA Preview Summer 2021 (2021): 10–11; Michael Hirschbichler, 'Phantasmography II: Spaces of Accumulation,' IKA Preview Winter 2021 (2021): 10–11; Michael Hirschbichler, 'Phantasmography,' IKA Review Summer 2021 (2022): 2–3; Michael Hirschbichler, 'Phantasmography,' IKA Review Winter 2021 (2022): 2.
- Michael Hirschbichler, Geistergrund / Spirit Grounds / 霊地 (Vienna: Verlag für Moderne Kunst, 2021).
- 3. Robert Desjarlais, 'Phantasmography, ' *American Anthropologist* 118, no. 2 (June 2016): 400.
- 4. Ibid., 401.
- Nils Bubandt, 'Anthropocene Uncanny: Nonsecular Approaches to Environmental Change,' in A Non-secular Anthropocene: Spirits, Specters and Other Nonhumans in a Time of Environmental Change, ed. Nils Bubandt (Aarhus: AURA Working Papers Vol. 3, 2018), 42–53.
- Anna Tsing, Nils Bubandt, Elaine Gan and Heather Anne Swanson, Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Ghosts and Monsters of the Anthropocene (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), M7.

Biography

Michael Hirschbichler works across the disciplines of art, architecture and anthropology. He is the director of Atelier Hirschbichler and a researcher at TU Delft. His work focuses on spatial constructions in the Anthropocene, with a particular emphasis on the interrelationship between their material and immaterial aspects (narratives, memories, ideologies, beliefs), between facts and cultural fictions. Hirschbichler studied at ETH Zurich and Humboldt Universität zu Berlin and completed his doctoral dissertation on 'Mythical Constructions' at Berlin University of the Arts. He was a lecturer at ETH Zurich, visiting professor at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, and director of the architecture programme at the Papua New Guinea University of Technology. He is a recipient of the Rome Prize by the German Academy Villa Massimo.