



Wet again

Perception and abstraction
of maintenance work in the rural



Introduction

As part of my ongoing interest in the terrain as a site of spatial politics and collective shaping processes, I conducted field research in the moor region around Malchin and Lake Kummerow in northern Germany. Over several weeks, I explored this unique area walking through the mire region, engaging with local residents, researchers, and land managers, and documenting how ecological dynamics intertwine with histories of control, conflict, maintenance, and care. This reader and installation brings together impressions, observations, and reflections from my time in the field, aiming to illuminate the complex layers of memory, use, and meaning that shape this special fabric of terrain.



Melloration workers creating drainage ditches at the end of the 1960s.

Photos provided by Frank Zimmermann, 'uns' lütt Museum' Dargun.



As part of a work camp organised by the FdJ 'Free German Youth', the communist youth association of the GDR, young people help to excavate earth.

let me turn
pages gently in
your moss wrapped
archive pollen
preserved
summers

What happens if the history of the mire region around Malchin is not seen merely as a sequence of past events, but as a network of traces, movements, and stories embedded in the landscape itself? Walking through this region, one encounters not only geological and ecological formations but also the imprints of past lives, narratives, and myths interwoven with the place.

Moors are striking examples of how landscapes preserve both stories and material memories. Due to their oxygen-poor, waterlogged environment, decomposition slows, allowing organic matter—plant remains, pollen, forgotten tools, and even animal carcasses—to be preserved for centuries or millennia. Drilling through five meters of intact mire ground means drilling through 5,000 years of preserved archive layers. This biophysical ability of moors to inscribe both life and death is reflected in the narratives surrounding them. In many determinations, moors are seen as threshold spaces. In Malchin, the moor was once a place of infertile soil, a poorly accessible territory as man invitation for unlawful collection of customs duties by two knight brothers, and even the site of a documented witchcraft execution. These stories are not merely mystified legends but expressions of the unique temporality and materiality of these grounds and how it has impacted its inhabitants.

The way I liked to engage with this surrounding draws inspiration from

Tim Ingold's 'The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill.'

Ingold, a British anthropologist, argues that people do not simply view the environment as a passive backdrop but actively live in it, shaping and being shaped by it through their actions and perceptions. His concept of the dwelling perspective contrasts with the building perspective: while the latter sees the environment as something external to be shaped, the former emphasizes an ongoing, reciprocal relationship between people and their surroundings. Ingold highlights that it happens through our bodily movement—walking, working, sensing—that we both perceive and form the landscape. The body's engagement with the land, its rhythms and gestures, leave traces and continuously reshape the environment. Throughout my fieldwork in the region around Malchin and the Kummerower See, I encountered perspectives ranging between 'dwelling' and 'building'—from people working the land, to non-human encounters, to managing institutions and their approaches. Through Ingold's lens, the moor becomes a vivid example of how landscapes are not only physical spaces but also living archives of stories.

perspectives, and memories' constantly shaped by, and shaping, those who dwell within them.

Following these narratives into the present, the moor reveals itself as a site of ongoing transformation and contestation. In the GDR era, FDJ youth camps undertook mellioration missions here. In the course of a major storm surge in the Baltic Sea in November 1995, a start was made on rewetting areas which serve as incredibly important sites for biodiversity and habitat. Today, the region hosted a pilot project for an ecological combined heat and power plant, , and is a focus of agricultural research by the University of Greifswald and the Greifswald Mire Centre on behalf of the European Union, particularly concerning the cultivation of paludiculture. Paludiculture refers to the sustainable cultivation of wetland crops' such as reeds, cattails, or sphagnum moss' on rewetted peat-lands. Unlike conventional agriculture, which requires draining the land and thus releases large amounts of stored carbon dioxide, paludiculture allows for productive use of the land while maintaining high water levels and preserving the peat, thereby significantly reducing greenhouse gas emissions. However, efforts to rewet and restore moorlands face significant obstacles. One major challenge is that current agricultural policy in Germany and the EU, especially area-based payments and subsidies for drained and conventionally farmed land. These financial incentives create economic dependencies for landowners and farmers and make the transition to rewetting and more sustainable land use more difficult. Therefore, even if the ecological and climatic benefits of rewetting are increasingly recognised, progress is often slowed down by entrenched economic structures and, as my presumption, the increasing abstraction of the perception of the environment.

Every moor remains a present-day contested space, where ecological, economic, and political interests intersect, and where the significance of the landscape continues to evolve in the face of climate change and human intervention. I like to understand a walk through the moor as turning the pages of a living archive' one that holds not only the material remains of the past but also the layered stories, perspectives, and struggles that continue to shape its future.

1. Stop, look, listen



University of Greifswald bog drilling from a depth of 5m on 'bog field day' in September 2023, preserved snail shells found are approx. 3500 years old.

Let me read your
grounds, share
your time,





Gathering might be less about collecting in the usual sense, and more a practice of perception' one that goes beyond simply registering individual things.

It involves drawing together the relationships that unfold within a landscape. Perception doesn't happen in isolation, but as part of a fabric of traces,

movements, and sounds. This fabric feels ever-changing: the wind stirs the leaves,

footsteps mark the ground for a moment,

voices blend with the ambient hum of the surroundings. To gather is, perhaps, to be part of this

weave' not standing at a distance, but woven into the ongoing moment. It's not so much an accumulation of impressions, but a continual linking of threads that shapes the flow of experience.



Paths canal and waterways of the old peat cutting near Gorschenhof, following animal paths found in the wet meadow cultivation of the farmer Henning Voigt before mowing



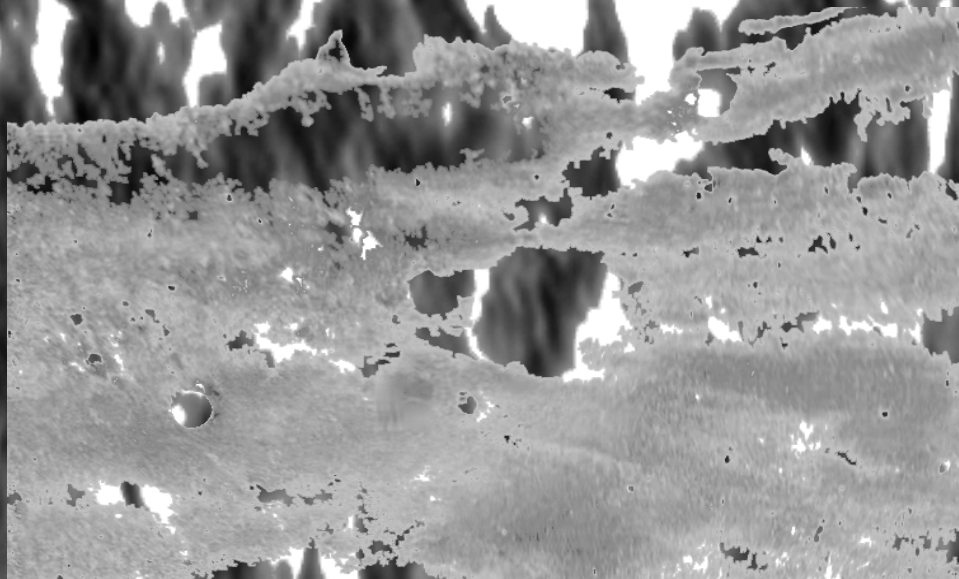
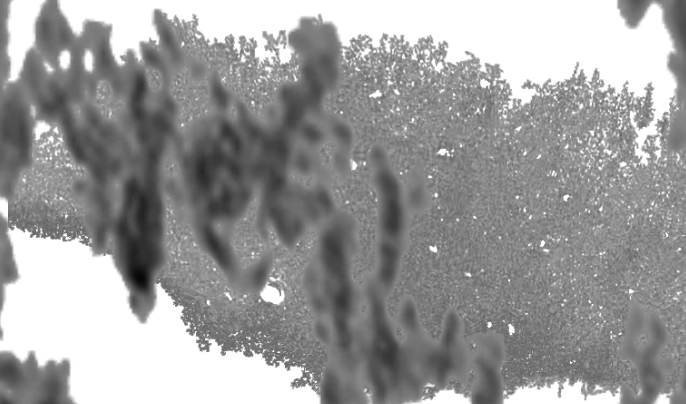


help me learn your
reeds whispers
as a language

3. The poetics of tooluse



Measurements on the test-field near Leikendorf for Typha 'bulrush' cultivation at the University of Greifswald. Methane, cobs number, growth density. The light seeds were sown using a drone equipped with seed balls rolled in starch so that they are heavy enough to be spread evenly.



Tool use may not be merely a technical act, but rather a process where material, movement, and perception become intertwined. The hand seems to register the resistance of the wood, the knife appears to follow the grain, there seems to be an immediate connection forming between tool, body, and material. This interplay feels dynamic: the body responds to the material even as the material is shaped through touch. Tool use doesn't quite seem like a one-sided act of control, but more like an event in which forces interact and mutually influence one another. And perception perhaps it doesn't arise from passive observation alone, but through direct, tactile engagement with the world.



let me work
your pace,
understand
your
texture



Harvesting for the European Union. A great deal of effort and abstract actions are taken to generate the first Typha harvest. Data from the biomass survey serve, not least, as information for possible subsidisation of areas with wet acidic cultivation, such as sedge reed grass and cattail.

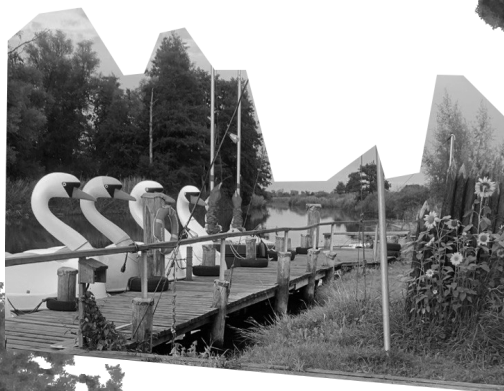
4. On weaving a basket and building a nest

A bird likely does not build its nest according to a fixed plan, but in direct exchange with its materials. Twigs, fibers, and blades of grass are gathered, tested, placed not through rigid construction, but by responding to tensions, bends, and resistance. Likewise, a basket does not arise from a predetermined shape, but from the interplay of hand, material, and movement.

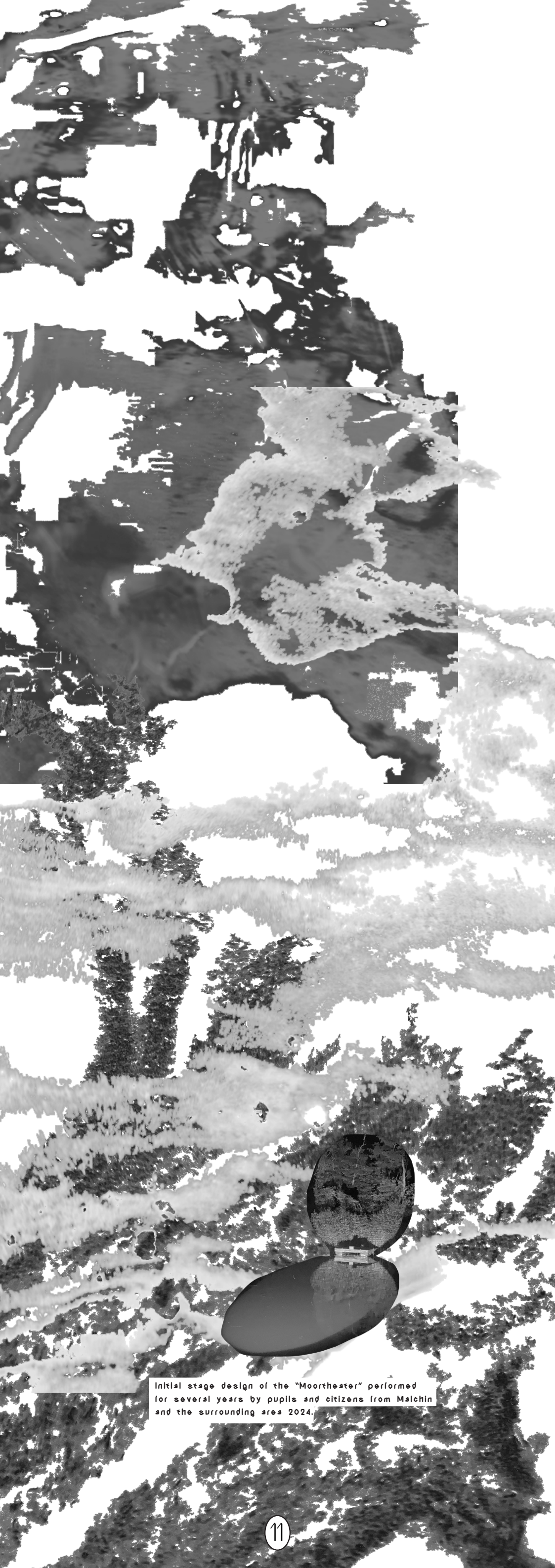
This structure feels alive. Each twig in the nest, each fiber in the basket seems to find its place not through calculation, but by fitting into an emerging whole. The bird probes, presses, shifts; the hands weaving a basket follow the resistance of the material. Nest building and basket

weaving appear less like mechanical assembly and more like processes in which perception, action, and material are inseparably intertwined.

Form does not arise through control, but through a quiet attunement to the forces already present in the world.



The environmental scientist Uta Berghöfer and her family and friends run a cultural economy with regional cuisine and many environment-related events for 3 months in the summer. The owners' association has taken over the former Moorbauer pub on a peat island in the middle of the moor, which can only be reached by five swan boat.



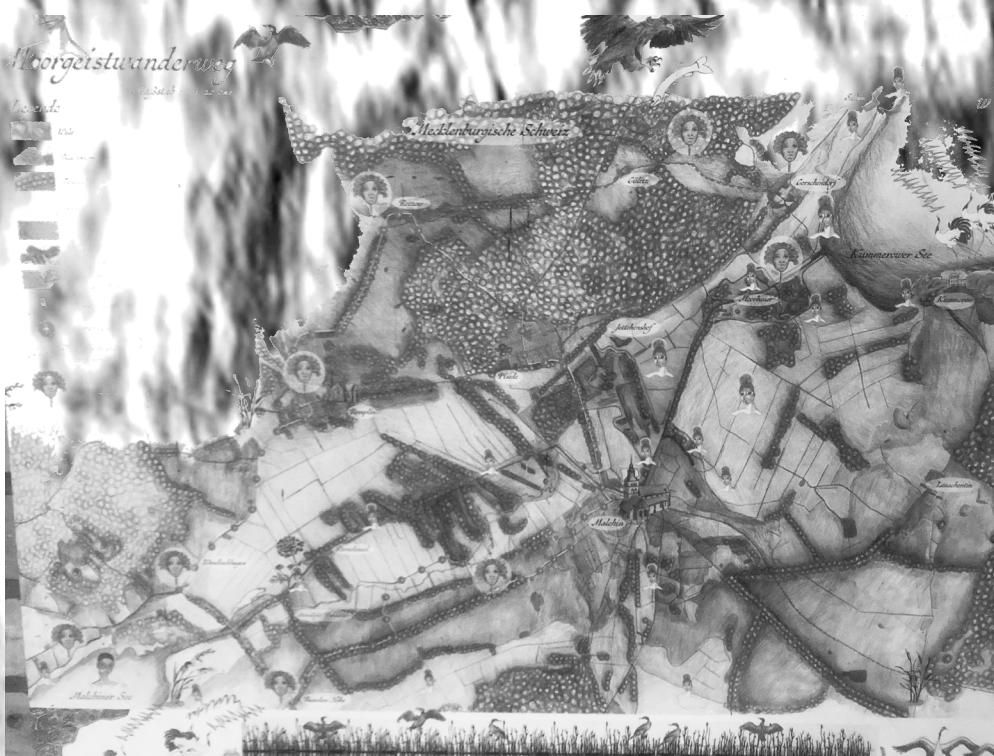
Initial stage design of the "Moortheater" performed for several years by pupils and citizens from Malchin and the surrounding area 2024.



Handwritten water level measurements of the meadows on the 'Grosser Rosin' in the 1960s.

A path may not come from a map, but through the act of walking. Navigation relies on fixed markers and abstract coordinates, while wayfinding seems to take shape in the moment through a direct relationship with the landscape. A bird in flight, a person on a trail doesn't follow a rigid grid, but responds to traces, to slight shifts in the terrain, to the rhythm of movement. What unfolds here isn't a fixed system, but perhaps something more fluid, a shifting field of relation that adjusts as one moves. The body adapts to inclines, senses the wind, feels the ground's firmness. Orientation seems less like a calculated act and more like something embodied, something felt. Maps hold the world at a distance; wayfinding, by contrast, moves within it, step by step, as part of a relationship that cannot be fully planned in advance, but is shaped through the act of moving.

Tell me
what maps do
your streams
draw when
no one
watches



Drawing of the 'Moorgeist map' by sculptor Kathrin Wetzel with paths to various peat fields.

Dr Uta Berghofer, Dr Joachim Börner Martina Zienert from Projekthof Karnitz, Nora Köhn from University Greifswald, Dr Ulf Schielebein from Ministry for Climate Protection, Agriculture, Rural Areas and the Environment Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania Tobias Dahms from thermal drones GmbH, Richard Hurding from Zello Technology GmbH, the paludi farmers Ludwig Bork and Henning Voigt,

Frank Zimmermann from "Uns lüft Museum" Dargun and sculptor Kathrin Wetzel for their time and willingness to show themselves, interesting and realizing conversations, the opportunity for a bird's eye view and 150 kilograms of sedge cane grass Tim Ingolds for loaning captions and providing impulses for thoughts and perceptions.

Celine Condorelli, Jaya Demmer, Lina Determann, Mascha Dilger, Benjamin Elsele, Constanze Fischbeck, Hanna Franke, Vera Gärtner, Marlene-, Michael-, Birgit- and Michaela Haak, Mira Hirtz, Franka Kampmeyer, Alexander Knopplig, Hanne König, Christian Lübben, Leonie Mühlen, Wiebke Müller, Leonie Müller, Laura Morcillo and ZeitBildLab, Luise Peschko, Nis Petersen, Sebastian Schäfer, Susanne Schmitt, Josefine Scheu, Phillip Schell, Arthur Schuman, Henriette Schwabe, Claud Teichmann, Alexander Thelen, Johannes Thimm, Lea Walz for countless support, the best of times, carrying hands, attentive eyes and continuous inquiries and Paulina Mimberg for the most splendid graphic.

