‘From (since) rock to (until) water, the *pré*.’ 19 January 1961

Images

*Kind Yarrow Meadow Treasure*, Jessica Potter. Black and white reversal film. Crundale Downs, 2022.

Words

John Berger, *Field* (1971) in *About Looking*, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2009.

Francis Ponge, *The Making of the Pré*, translated by Lee Fahnestock, University of Missouri Press, 1979.

Prompts devised by Jess Potter, Matterlurgy and Sara Trillo.

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This notebook has been made as a gift to share and celebrate ideas developed during a series of workshops that took place in the Kent Downs in the Summer 2025 through which time was spent in the chalk grasslands attending to and learning about the life that can be found there.

The meadows of the Kent Downs thrive on poor chalk soil and the complexity of the periglacial coombes that run along the ridge from the peaks of the downs towards the English Channel. The chalk was formed in the Cretaceous era. It is made of the skeletons of tiny plankton called *Coccolithophores* which sank to the bottom of the seabed and compressed. It took 1000 years to make 1 cm of chalk. This land has resisted large-scale agricultural farming. *Gavelkind*, the means of passing down land to all male children rather than to the oldest child, has left a legacy of small parcels of land surrounded by hedges that has enabled bird and insect life to thrive. These qualities mark the Kent Downs and it is important to celebrate and protect them. To do this we need to pay attention, notice and cherish the sights and sounds of the diversity of life forms that they support. Meadows are hopeful — they show us what diversity looks and feels like.

Meadows enable the experience of things in formation and the opening of a dynamic set of forces and unfoldings. Through different light and seasons, textures, sounds and interactions are continually unfolding, forming and expressing life. Hooves, feet, claws, wings, blades of grass all become notes, forms of articulation, across a horizontal surface. Words gallop, marks stamp on the page.

*Making of a Meadow* aims to make space and time for these things.

*Making of a Meadow* takes its name from the English translation of Francis Ponge’s 1971 extended prose poem and notebook: *La Fabrique du Pré*. On the pages of his books, he exposes a deep care for the material world and for the ways in which humans exist within it. Francis Ponge (1899–1988) is our guide in this notebook. Through its pages you will find fragments from Francis Ponge’s meadow journal. They are there to interact with your sensing in the here and now.

Ponge developed intentionally uncertain, unfinished and carefully plotted, expansive reveries on the *pré* (meadow). Ponge’s *pré* can be found near Chambon sur Lignon, in France. The *Pré* provides a home for Ponge’s other writings such as *The Pebble*, *The Notebook of the Pine Woods*, alongside major moments in the unfolding of his life, such as a visit with his wife where he has a vision of his daughter dancing in the meadow. Chambon Sur Lignon is a place that has historically welcomed refugees and writers, a place of hospitality and care. This is an inspiration and aspiration for the chalk grasslands of the North Downs in Kent where, during the high Summer of 2022 in a grazing meadow in Crundale, the photographic series *Kind Yarrow Meadow Treasure*, running through the entirety of this notebook, was made.

Yarrow (*Achillea Millefolium*) is a plant that has been used to heal wounds since ancient times. Yarrow is sometimes used by birds to line their nests. It is a kind flower, reminiscent of a constellation and of the planetary that Francis Ponge invokes when writing of the life force of the meadow — it is with these flowers of kindness and a call to look with care that I mark the opening of this notebook.