

IN PRAISE OF THE FALLOWS

Short text commissioned for *Making Time* by RADAR Loughborough, in response to *In Praise of the Fallows*, a guided tour of Laxton, Nottinghamshire, organised by artist-duo FRAUD (Fran Gallardo and Audrey Samson).

Laxton is the last village in the U.K. collectively farmed according to the open-field farming system.

FALLOW 'fæləʊ

Noun

From the Middle English *falwe, falow, falowe*,
going back to the Old English *fealh, felg*,
going back to the West Germanic *falgō-, falgjōn-*,
from whence the Old Frisian *fallach*, the Middle Dutch *valge*, and the Old High German *felga*,

And going back to the dialectal Indo-European *polk'-eh*
from whence the Russian *polosá*,
from whence the Slovene *plása*,
from whence the Polish *plósa*.
going back...

We live in a time of mass production, of reification, of the rule of value.

It is 2pm, September the 10th, 2022, and the spot price of ammonium nitrate imports is running at £870 per tonne; granular urea is trading at £864 and muriate of potash has risen to a near-high of £760, while costs of diammonium phosphate and triple super phosphate have themselves tripled in the last three years.

Standing on the low hill above Laxton, the landscape stretches away across arable farmland, towards a bank of woodland, dark on the horizon. In the sunlight, everything looks ever so natural. Some twenty miles distant, the three bell-towers of Lincoln Cathedral, once the tallest building in the world, glow white in the early afternoon.

From this vantage point, the broad open fields are laid out somewhat like a map – the Mill Field, the South Field and the West Field; pale strips cut across their surface, some planted up with wheat, some with spring and winter crops, while one is left unsown and fallow, to rest and replenish - a pause in the relentless time of ploughing and productivity, the time of yields and acceleration and growth.

But what is the time of the fallow land? Here, from deep within the structure of the soil, potassium and phosphorous start to rise. As plants break out and break down, particles of carbon and nitrogen begin to return. Here is the slow time of earthworms and wireworms and millipedes and nematodes; of material passed through bodies and membranes; of process and construction and the quiet unceasing movement of matter - the recognition of natural limits, of rifts, of the laws of diminishing returns.

Following the path back down to the village below, a covey of grey partridge quickly scatter; the scratchy reel of a corn bunting sounds loud in the hedgerow; a small party of linnet flickers off, vanishing from sight.

The redbrick village appears quiet, frozen in time. And yet, this is no living museum. Just as the composition of soil changes year on year, so does the composition of the village. In the last eighteen months, property prices have spiraled; generations of farmers are increasingly priced out by commuters who supplement their income elsewhere. As corporate agribusinesses hunt for prime real estate, land becomes quantified and consolidated. Under this conditions, how can this landscape, and the three-year cycle of rotation mapped across its body, persist? How might this fallow land be thought as a moment of resistance and realignment? Will the time of the fallows manage to endure?