



Samuel Phelps and Miss Wyatt, Sadler's Wells, 1853



Dream spaces=memory=emotions=what to do where=boundaries=other forms of life



What catches on, what flows: a rainy city assemblage
By Nia Davies



Retrofitting for the Future:
Nature Based Solutions for Climate Adaptation
Ôl-osod ar gyfer y dyfodol:
Datrysiaidau seiliedig ar Natur ar gyfer Addasu i'r Hinsawdd

"IMAGINE THE ANALOGY
PURITY
sps bored of the
mistakes happen,
but I have never taken this
in a back door
Speed/slowness/friction to
What if I listened to the
lucid dreaming
to do something later
theatre dra
over shot

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What catches on, what flows: a rainy city assemblage

This zine is a creative exploration of porous cities, water and drainage in Swansea in 2026. As a zine, it's a transdisciplinary work in progress, veering across forms and ideas.

Poet, artist and researcher, Nia Davies reflects on the concept of a Biophilic city, nature-based solutions for climate adaptation and how we can and do intervene in the local water cycle. Nia is a co-researcher on REPAIR: Retrofitting the Future: Nature-based solutions for climate adaptation. <https://biophilic.wales/>

Adapting to all this water

Why adapt? For Swansea, climate change means more flooding. More rain, higher tides, water, water everywhere... But it could also mean drought, food insecurity, high energy costs, poor expensive housing with damp and thermal discomfort, economic hardship and social strife. It could also mean sensory bombardment and ugliness, exhaustion, chronic health conditions, anxiety! Or could it mean the necessity of working together to make life more liveable for our community and all the beings who share it.

In the meantime, what can sustainable urban drainage / SUDs offer? Green roofs, rainscapes and rain gardens, swales, planters, urban gardens and more (what?) offer ~~an~~ interventions which serve a multiple purposes and aims. They can mitigate storm drainage and prevent flooding, clean up water and air and provide habitat for plants and insects and perhaps even birds and bats. They can even be thought of as mini gardens and living sculptures, places for us to gather around, offering sites, watering holes, places for beauty and sociality. What some call placemaking, others call urban acupuncture, the water cure or simply making our area better, more liveable for everyone.



rainy



surfaces+rain+ecology(human, plant, animal)

What is SUD? Is it a raingarden or a rainscape? There seems to be some confusion. Ethnographic researchers from the REPAIR project and from Urban Foundry and other projects have had some preliminary conversations with locals and others who live next to raingardens. It seems many people are unaware of what these new things in our city are. There is also a variety of understandings of how the water goes down, what flows where and how, what catches on.

The word 'garden' brings up particular cultural resonances (think lawns and manicured shrubs). There have been stories of people unhappy with a rain garden outside their house. Complaining that the plants look bushy and messy in winter, they try to plant roses in it instead. Or, seeing that rubbish catches in the ground level recesses in the street they say, 'that's not working, love'. Others still just see it as a 'weird green space'. Many haven't ever heard of the raingardens or SUDs. Trust in the powers that be – the ones who change the city year-in year out – is rather low. Since the Luftwaffe gutted the city's heart, the planners and builders have made a series of confusing concrete-based interventions. We are so often blocked to our sites of pleasure – that is the beach, the river, the park, the public space for strolling and chatting, protesting and re-creating.

Apparently, a considerable number of people are not aware of the water cycle: that what happens to rain upstream effects down stream water ways, that water flows into the sea, that pollution comes back to haunt us. What you wash out here, comes back here and enters your body.

But preliminary research ^{suggests} ~~does seem~~ the passion people have for their green square mile, for their local patch, their hill, their woods. Research with children shows a big concern about pollution and the future of green spaces to play and hang out. So many people care but don't seem to have the means to act or participate. Rain falls and falls on green and urban surfaces, where does it go?

Perhaps the idea might be to talk up The ~~S~~ponge City. Can we creatively design porous surfaces in street, roof and garden which people love to be in and take care of? So if people are still learning, what do we call it, this sponge city? Names matter. What do we call this hole in the ground or grassy roof? Some of ideas from the rain-storm, a preliminary play



Names Enwau

Nature-based anti-flood intervention

street filter – hidlwr yr heol

Raincleaner pond

Filter pond

Something new for something old Green drainage

A big storm bowl bant y nant

A play space, a clam space A slowscape living streets and swales Nutrient reservoir

Anti-pollutant street feature slow(grow)the flow

Eye, nose and ear soother

Mini beast watering hole

Home dry comfort creator stopo/arafu'r lifo

Gurgling urban brook Brogafa

Dyfroedd bwy – ysbyrd o'r fynnon San Helen

Urban water cure golchi pwll tro / pwll bo / pwll

water-in-the-right-places-at-the-right time

Trickle-round economy

Catchy pond slow-the-flow pool

Urban sinuosity amplifier Glawfa, lle afanc, (ble mae'r madfallod dŵr?)

Flood sponge frog-attractor

Future dreamt landscape

Damp and rot blocker

Water cure circulator rain sponge water feature



rainy city ass sage Davies



Future fountain

(moist) pocket of resilience

Modern watercooler moment

'dysglau plannu dwr' yw yr geiriau cyngor Abertawe, beth am gerddi glaw?

>>>>>But I'd like ask the children at St Helens primary, recently in receipt of a rain-garden streetscape, for their ideas.

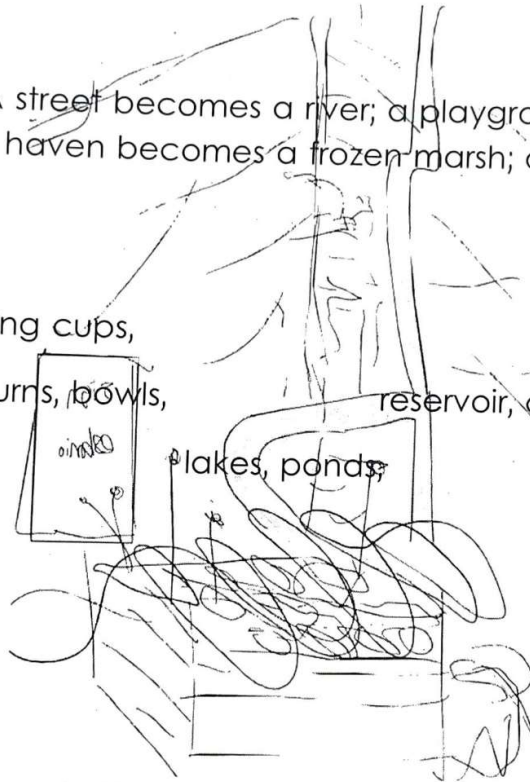
In a rainscape... A street becomes a river; a playground becomes a polluted pond; a warm dry haven becomes a frozen marsh; a language becomes an atmosphere;

These are living cups,

urns, bowls,

reservoir, cronfa, gors

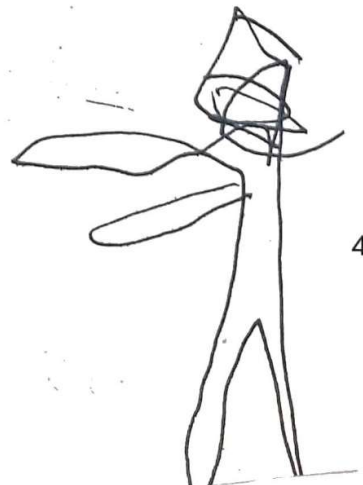
lakes, ponds



Can raingardens be a shelter? a nest by the water – can we be beavers for beavers, becoming better ecosystem engineers?

Perhaps we see these sites as pockets of resilience instead of massive projects to complete.

Rainscape is also a sculptural act, an installation, scenography. The planters at Llys Glas are collaborating with nature and creating new scenographies with colour, texture, moisture. Mosses bloom and small plants are growing where the water is in the old wall of the circular library





Methodology: dabbler, drifter, collagist

I usually start with poetry. I am a poet and I do poetics – a thinking through poetry. But nowadays, like most of us, I have to go outside ~~my~~ ^{my} comfort zone and try my hand at everything else and learn from others. When faced with rising waters and the direction the wind is blowing, we all need to be dabblers and trespassers. My method encompasses:

drift, walk, veer, sense, draw, collage, write, dream, write, chat, doodle, listen, gossip, dance, trudge, repeat, puzzle, eat, cook, photograph, turn up, offer, sniff, touch, remember, list, run, write again, edit, publish, discuss, translate, adapt...

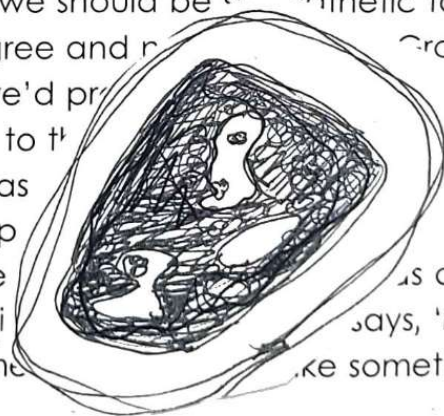
some examples of how I've drifted and veered in my thinking in the last few months...

- On the Biophilic city drift with ~~J [redacted]~~, after Simon Whitehead's score, J points out a puddle in the wall – a wall with a great view of the city, which a woman in the street tells us, is lovely when ~~the~~ all lit up at night. The puddle has a number of red insects crawling around it. It's a mini sk beast watering hole. Could a raingarden be a medium-sized beast watering hole? B O R

- To the art workshop I take along one of two books fished out of the skip of my agoraphobic hoarder neighbour Graham's house. The woman sitting next to me wants to use the botany book's images of plants too. She makes a lovely collage which for some reason she is unhappy about. I tell her where I got the book from and it seems to evoke a reflection on hoarding and how we should be sympathetic to those people who suffer from that. I agree and ~~note~~ Graham's story provokes sympathy when they we'd ~~pr~~ or horror.

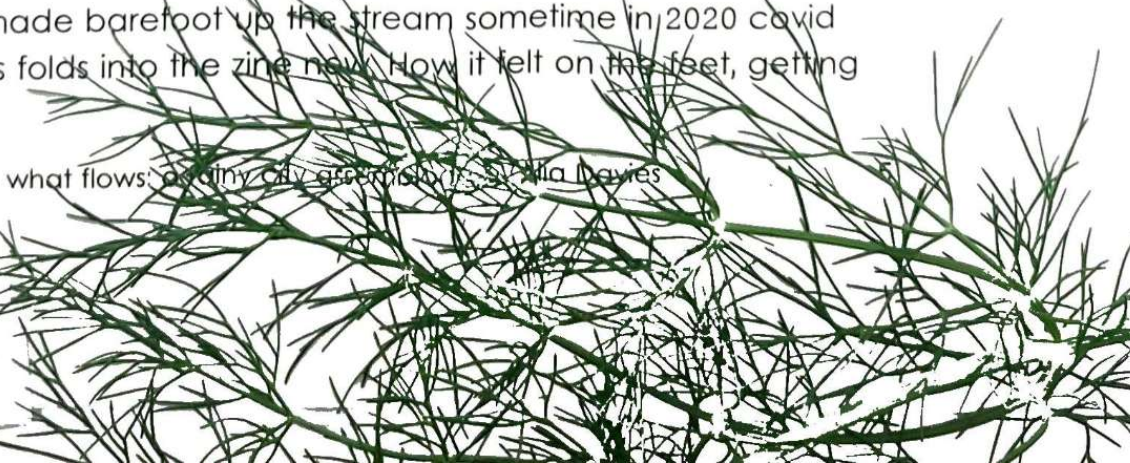
- None of the service users comes to the workshop but the woman who has ordinator enjoys very much the sp illbeing arts nter co- and natural forms. One of the leaves reminds as a child me of a beautiful forest behind says, 'really made which had a beautiful forest behind like something/ do me want to start setting some time something I wouldn't usually do.'

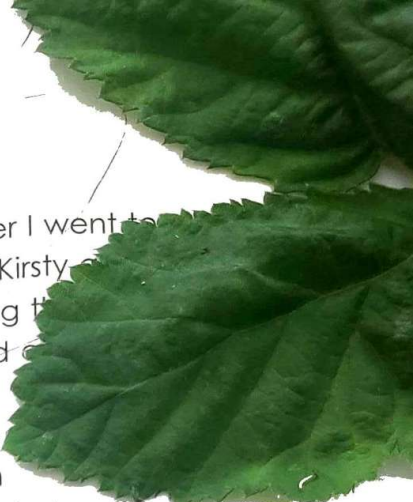

- The walk I made barefoot up the stream sometime in 2020 covid summer. This folds into the zine now. How it felt on the feet, getting



what flows: healthy city greenness by Stella Davies

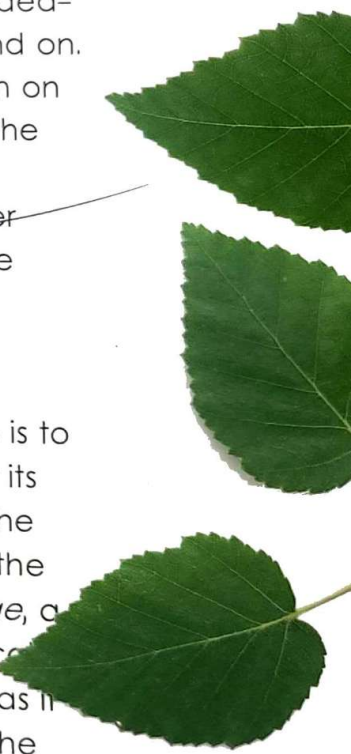

basis of life





tangled, thinking about how the river had been changed. Later I went to the river workshop and heard about river ecology with Simon, Kirsty and Nathan. I remember another earlier Locator workshop, following the sounds of the brook through the woods. When finally we pulled away from the sound of running water we felt bereft.

- I have a dream about palliative care which reminds me to be compassionate. I have another dream about a pink hotel with labyrinthine corridors and locked door behind which someone is shouting angrily. I record my dreams. I often return to the same places over and over. It is dreams that remind me that the future is ours to mould and flourish in.
- I make a lot of collages. In this work I am finding that layering up ideas and creations in many forms, a way in collage as a way in (and out). Layering up and layering down, projecting and absorbing psychic imagery (stories, dreams, memories) onto place. Via Taussig (fieldwork collage and writing thinking shaping) I come again return to Benjamin. Isn't writing fidgeting? (Isn't collage fidgeting?). Coming to a new idea-word: Colportage, rainscapes, friction – a word to love and expand on. But here is also where things can get sticky (a 45 minute discussion on words, e.g. we are also nature, so can we use the word nature?); the need to remain flexible. Collage of collage = assemblage? In the Arcades Project, Convolute L, 'dream house, museum, spa'. Walter Benjamin seems to understand these raingarden promises and the drifter's collaging



Think of the arcade as watering place. What we would like is to stumble upon an arcade myth, with a legendary source at its centre—an asphalt wellspring arising at the heart of Paris. The tavern advertising beer "on tap" still draws on this myth of the waters. And to the extent to which healing is a *rite de passage*, a transition experience, becomes vividly clear in those classic corridors where the sick and ailing turn into their recovery, as it were. Those halls, too, are arcades. Compare fountains in the vestibule. [Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, Convolute L: L2,6]

the rite de passage

6

aftermath are around us, shaping and confining how we move about spaces and streets. But other eras have shaped Swansea: in the so-called dark ages Viking rowers made stopovers here on their way up the Bristol Channel, they made a medieval river town. Welsh rebels attacked the marcher lords and so walls and more fortified buildings went up. Early industry happened here in the meeting place between coal and copper. The *Aber* of Abertawe, a joining, a confluence. The city formed unconcerned with watery landscape aesthetics or leisure. The old course of the river is now the abysmal 'parc tawe' area. Aerial bombardment by the Luftwaffe followed by postwar hasty build up - vision or lack thereof. There are many causes for why Swansea is ill-equipped to deal with the coming climate catastrophes and the needs of people in a new era. There are so many blockages to our sites of pleasure, but are there easy and green ways to ^{make} ~~lead~~ a path through or create a pocket of animate resilience in a raingarden.

Historically, landing into Swansea took you straight into the heart of the city, today's Strand. The heart was where the river met the street. Where do we land now? Maybe we can land in similar meeting points between water and human-animal ecologies?

i gyrrau Abertawe
 aeth William fardd mewn dagra;
 Wrth wrthio'i glun i ddyfroedd byw
 Fe gafodd fwy hyd Clama

A triban for the holy well at St Helens from around 1850. (From The Holy Wells of Wales, Francis Jones, 1954)



on, what the a rainy city assemblage by Nia Davie

8.



i ddyfroedd byw

Like William fardd we drift towards water. The water cure draws us near. Is this an ancient yearning for a cure, for the stream that trickles through us, the sounds of healing. Are we after a new, adapted and clever, wellspring?

I am thinking of spas, water features, holy wells, gushing fountains and even today's new wave of interest in eco-sauna cold water therapy and swimming, but also a return to the bog, to gardening in a wet climate... perhaps rainscapes are part of healing environments as we look to ways to adapt and flourish. Can sites like this bring us closer, not just to the waters, but to other beings in our environment?

(or something else?)

Wild!

Can Swansea become a place we 'take the waters'?

where

There is some connection between the history and future in the enchantment around the gushing spring.



dodgy?

But they could also be sites of projection and utopia. Remember, water cure was also a name for water torture. Is there something inherently healing about our blue-green spaces? Or do we just need a bit of a seaside holiday. What about sewers, equally life-giving, as well as holy springs?

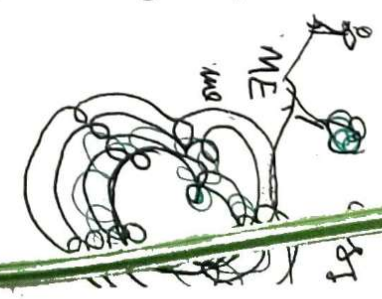
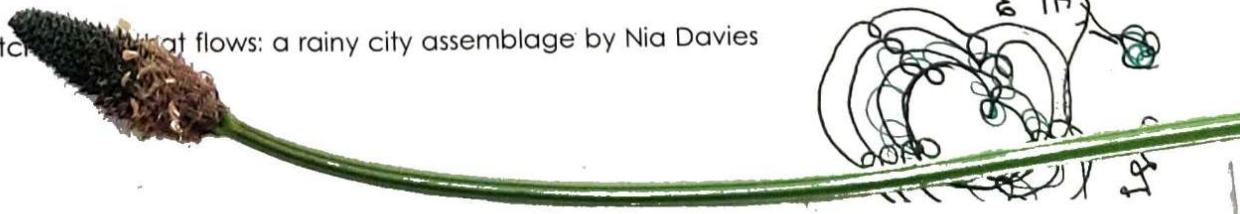
Streams and rivers have become a point of activism in the UK in recent years. They are points in landscapes that reveal how connected and entangled we are to the cycle of water in the catchment and the hydrology and watery ecosystems. Perhaps waterways offer a point of focus in an otherwise overwhelming urge to give up in the face of the immiseration of global capitalism. In the face of ~~the~~ agribusiness and development, corporate actors polluting soils with shit and chemicals, paving over our paradises, the global food political economy's bottom line, we attempt to come to our river and our blue communities. As children we used jump from a rope swing and pond dip, but nowadays the water is literally full of shit.

+ ecovite

but it was then too ...

But the local river and watersides offer up a possibility of change ~~is~~ within the grasp our community. Zoom in, zoom out and then zoom in again. We can read critically and creatively in world of theory and approach our local crux. *Everything is connected* they say, the river is alive... but does that idea overwhelm us or offer us a medium sized task to be cracking on with? Watery places are sites of possibility of collective arts, for being with nature in ingenuity.

What catches what flows: a rainy city assemblage by Nia Davies



Fornature Gardens where now
they can discover subburn, contagion
waterborne nuptures, brownhides
You have to hold the beauty in
the keniphenal, so as not to target
the Subject:

Flash flood in the creases
not a time for 'niching'

black brown
waterscapes

the contagion is -

lack of mania

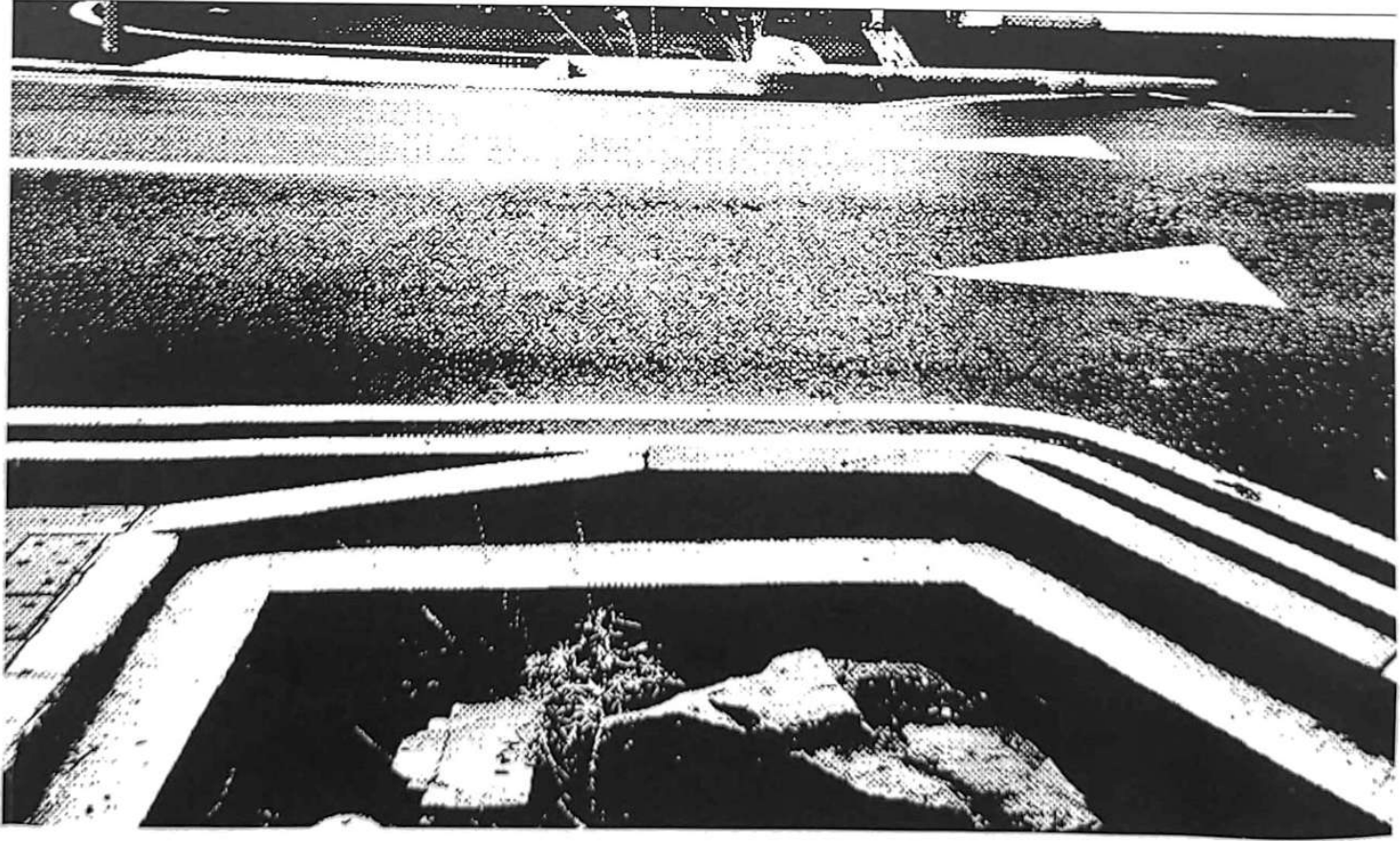
it falls ornamental or furnishment now
'gotic + Saphires' - I get it now, but not here.

Invisible mardling, cones engineered
for pale colours.

Out-cornered they insist on staying and
flourishing even, fermenting

Not another deep-brown Not
a carboniferous filter. Filtering +

fricking, the bouncing of waves off fabric





Dreams of cities past, dreams of future cities, future city dwellers' dreams

St Helens primary school was built in the 1870s – an early example of a school board school. I too attended a school board school and these early institutional architectures still shape my dreams and interior landscapes. Are the architects and planners of today aware they are shaping the dreams and subconscious landscapes of generations to come? Do they know they create, or narrow, the realm of what can be imagined, of today's children, tomorrow's architects?

built 1890s

KB rock spiral

Walking up the stream in Singleton park barefooted, midsummer of the pandemic, it became clear just how many alterations the Victorians had made to the water cycle in this area. The culverts and diversions here mean there are no fish. But there are some insects and some promise, said Nathan of the West Wales River Trust. Singleton was the industrialist's parkland, another ideological shaping. The dog graveyard at Clyne for the Vivians' pets is roughly the same size as living space in the Hafod for the Vivian's workers. Many of the greenspaces we inherit were not designed for ordinary people. Kilvey hill was a polluted wasteland, a surplus zone for fumes and toxicity which still ~~lives~~ ^{lives} in the soil. The people of Swansea East joined in its regeneration and planting, now they face a new enclosure of their public wild space.

When did Swansea East get clean water? On the *Swansea in Gloom* walk I found out, among many other things, that the Greenhill area was a cholera hotspot. Water for drinking and washing came from local wells and the heavily polluted Tawe. In 1845 the city built the reservoir in Brynmill park. This provided clean water for the wealthier southern and low lying half of the town but did not reach the higher ground around Greenhill. People drank the contaminated water, children played in it, they got sick and died or survived in terrible conditions. Deadly cholera outbreaks. Matthew's ~~place~~ ^{place} have written in depth about this traumatic history in their new garden and trail – they point out that it was the suffering of people due to poor sanitation in this area that led to agitation for change and healthier sewage and water systems.

enough

thus

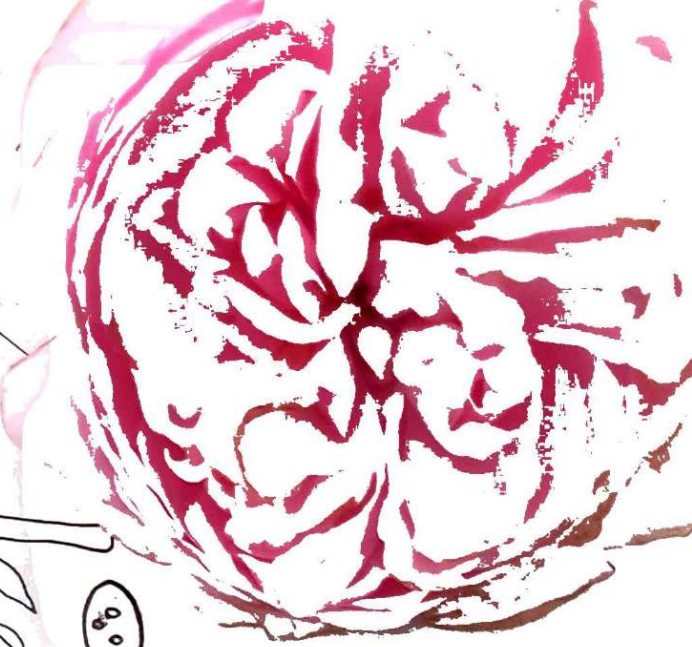
The decisions of the powerful, the architects of the nineteenth century, their dreams and visions, lay heavily on our every day environment and thus our lives. The century's buildings, hierarchies and punitive values, industry and its

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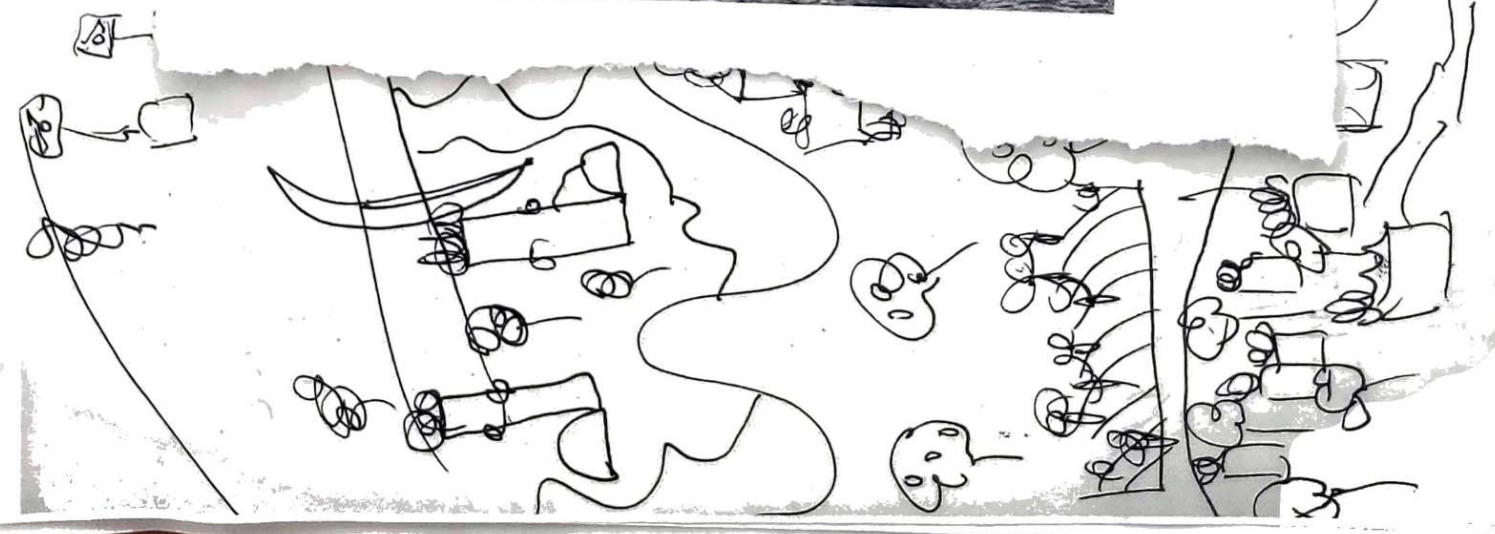
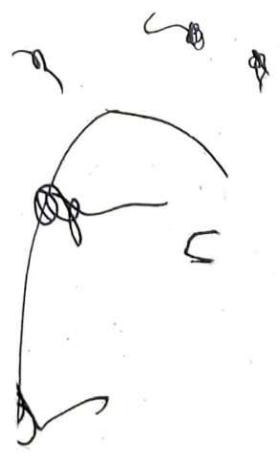


Chms.

display 12
model
papers
text



Stamens
with
stamens





syniad o fyw biofflig a phensaerfaeth sy'n

lle mae'n troi'n

Four rounds of dream, and a procession

Ceffylau

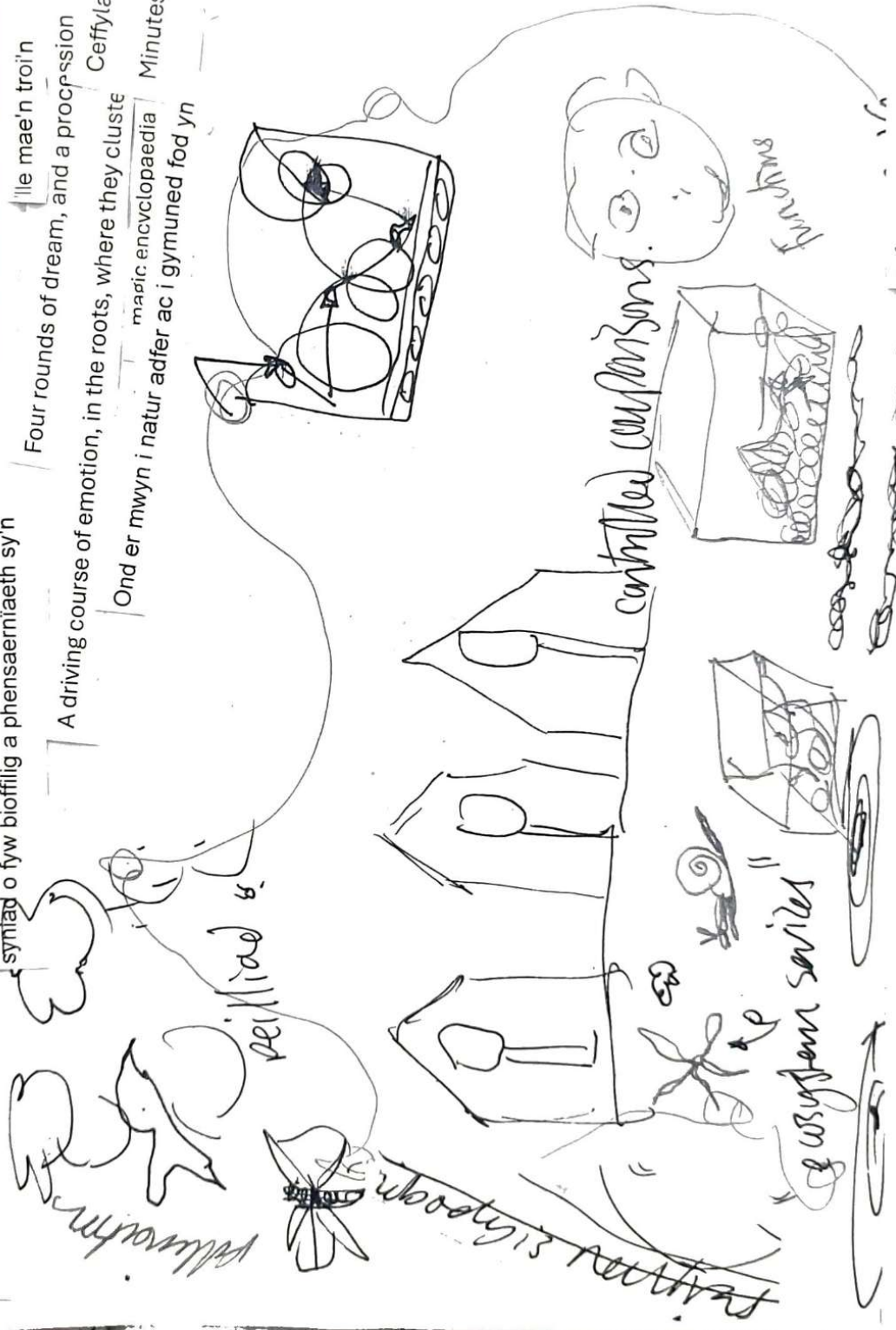
A driving course of emotion, in the roots, where they cluste

Ond er mwyn i natur adfer ac i gymuned fod yn

Minutes

magic encyclopaedia

Minutes

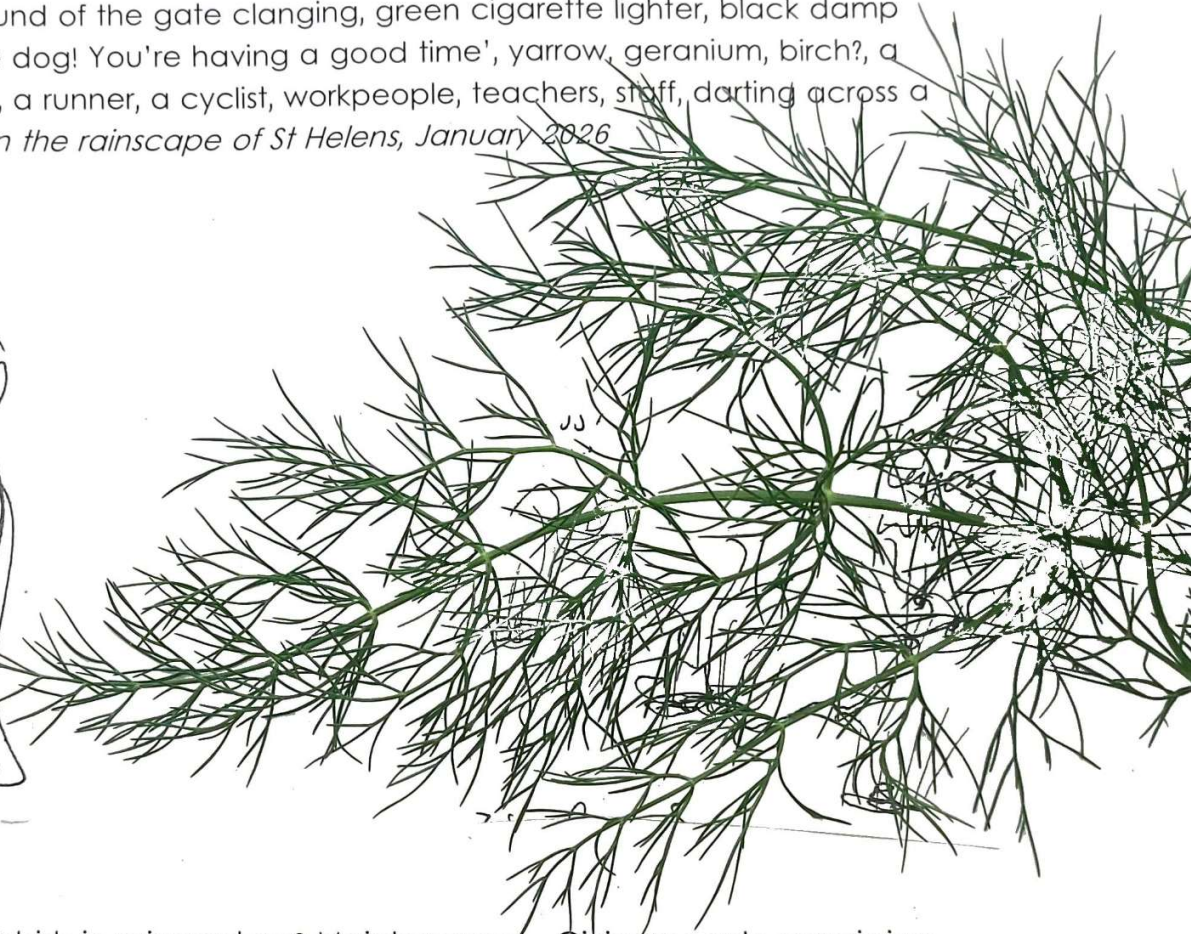


an ymaddas i faes synhwyraidd, i'n gilydd, ac i fodau

cyfranogwy'r i ganfod y ddinas

What catches on?

Upturned foodwaste bucket, a potato, travel sickness tablet prescription, grasses, trickling sounds, place to rest, green, Mexican orange blossom, a smooth entrance for wheels, red, herby looking shrub, water in the peripheral senses, hidden flows, angles, paving, orange sweet wrapper – 'win a spooky adventure', sound of the gate clanging, green cigarette lighter, black damp earth, 'ah cute dog! You're having a good time', yarrow, geranium, birch?, a joiner for pipes, a runner, a cyclist, workpeople, teachers, staff, darting across a space *Found in the rainscape of St Helens, January 2026*



What about rubbish in raingardens? Maintenance.... Giving people permission and agency to be stewards and creatively look after their area. Is the rubbish so bad? Can we, or supermarkets etc, reduce waste and packaging? There is a nostalgia, perhaps, for a time when people took pride, more care, of their streets? but now you see people litter picking too. In Cymru we are have all this rain, what can we do with it?

What catches on, what flows:



When we (who?) ask people in Swansea what they want for their city and they reply – we want more parking – maybe we (who?) are asking the wrong questions. Or they worry about ^{green} spaces becoming magnets for 'anti-social behaviour' ~~will any~~ new green-blue spaces become a place for loitering and teens to gather and even have fun?!!!

Who feels they can make changes by here? What skills, ideas and ambitions ^d of the people who live here have to coexist ~~with~~? Who owns the land and how does capital interests skew change?

Despite ^{an} opportunity for some corporate responsibly green wash, Tesco's ~~re~~ down the offer of a raingarden on what is currently unused paved space. They said something about a turning circle in the car park. Often people want the parking and roads as they are but when pressed there is something more that they want in this – to ^Tmove around the city freely and socially.

change / no change - what do you want?

Elsewhere people (in the Biophilic Dreams of Swansea workshop) have talked about wanting a totally new skyline raised above the green-blue bay, green paths for walking barefoot, connectivity, places to chat and linger. What other visions and ideas are under the surface? Underneath or below the surface of our streets are ^{+ other} older landscapes and cultures, these are what we are trying to unearth and invite in the REPAIR: Retrofitting the Future Project.







Scores, tell us your rain dreams

How would you design a rainscape or a sponge city?

What rivers do you dream of, or what marshes, what streams and floods linger in your subconscious?

Can we design spaces that may linger in a consciousness and later stimulate biophilic gardening and environmental care? What do the young gardeners of the present encounter, dream and then later design?

*future architects
dreamers*

I've been thinking about dream ~~of~~ spaces, architectures and landscapes and how these ~~work~~ *linger* on our memories and then how we imagine and create future spaces?

Can the raingardens be ~~the~~ beautiful, beguiling, lush, green, buzzing with insects and enchanting at the same time absorbing and drying, keeping us comfortable as waters rise...

Score: walk the routes the water takes from mountain to sea

Score: design a speculative rainscape in your street

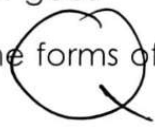
Score: follow the sound of water on foot, if safe, immerse feet in the water and feel how it affects the body and senses. Later draw or write

notice

Could you make a rainscape in and around your home? On your street? How can we make that possible?

Watch and listen for where water flows, collects and floods in your area, draw where the run off goes

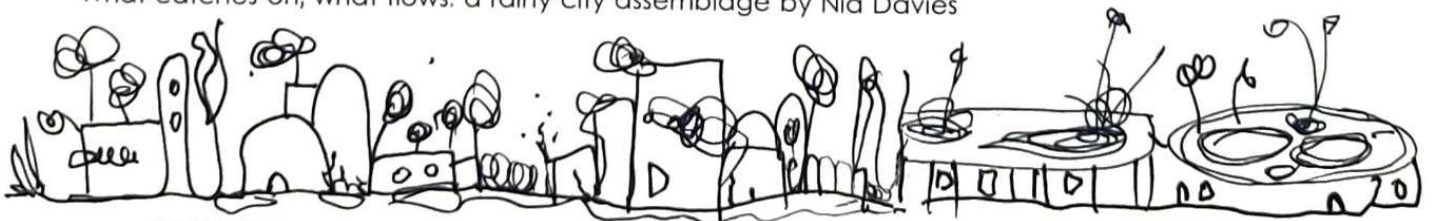
Move or draw the forms of a future city or your dream city, or your dreamt-of city.



Simon Whitehead's Biophilic City score, December 2025

Take a 'drift' through the city. Be led by prompts from the 'more than human' inhabitants. Begin by preparing to drift, attuning to a sensory field, to each other, to other beings. Then in pairs, move through the city, notice and be open to surprise. The drift score encourages attention to sensory encounters ~~with~~ life forms in the city, 'where it greens by default'. What might be biophilic already? When you return talk, draw or write what you have witnessed.

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Swansea, where you can take the waters, find your pocket
resilience

Sponge city

An aminate city you can create with your friends



Living streets we love to be in and care for

Porous liveable surfaces for plants and animals including



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Artwork

All images by Nia Davies, except Flood map p.2 (Natural Resources Wales)

Contact us

send your work, reflections, dreams, artworks and words to add to this work in progress: nia.davies@swansea.ac.uk or REPAIR@swansea.ac.uk

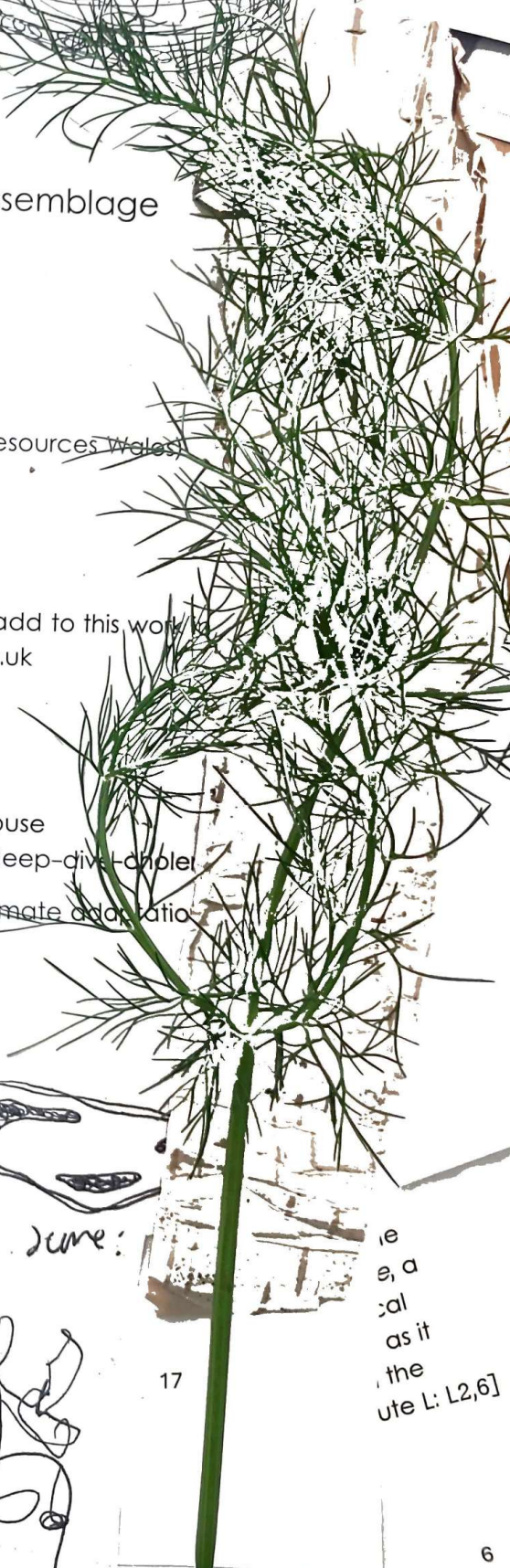
Links

The Cholera Outbreaks – Greenhill Gardens by Matthews House
<https://www.matthewshouse.org.uk/greenhillgardens/trail3/deep-dive-cholera>

REPAIR: Retrofitting the Future: Nature-based solutions for Climate Adaptation
<https://biophilic.wales/>

Biophilic Dreams of Swansea at Oriel Science
<https://www.instagram.com/p/DHaxDxkqM33/>

Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru (Map llifogydd):
<https://naturalresourceswales.gov.uk/flooding>



Retrofitting for the Future:
Nature-Based Solutions for Climate Adaptation

What catches on...



17

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ute L: L2,6]



Speed/slowness/friction
in a back door,
a single, harmonious vision,
enact emotional and

but I have never taken this route
what happens if I'm fantastical or
snalt her name wrong, childhood
science fictional

to do something later
theatre dream, down a shute
hands-off process
and wait where is your stuff
space=composites
to turn these raw
the night before.

put over, shot and went down
a turn-house style
#m going somewhere
entrance to a pub
Greece without hiccup
memory-based
I know this pub
What are you doing here?
Putting all of this in here
could move along,
Putting all of this in here
The world turned upside down



Hot Water Bottle
during the English Civil War
A hot water bottle for
weaving together architecture
successful developments in private education this century

