

Essay

THRESHOLDS IN TIME AND SPACE

Visioning A Multidimensional Permaculture Paradigm

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“As soon as I started up the steps to your house, I felt a change in the atmosphere.”
— Veronica

[pic of steps]

John, upon entering our common patio area: “Oh! Why doesn’t everybody do this?”

[side by side pics of empty patio, of dinner group circled on patio]

First time visitors’ remarks upon entering our tiny Green Acres Village

It was the final day of August. Time for puppy Shadow and I to go see Georgia, my dear friend and neighbor who endures the advancing debilities of Parkinsons disease. On our walk over to the care center where she is confined, we pass through one threshold. Thanks to a \$10,000 grant from the city of Bloomington, which four young neighbors shepherded from design to completion, we now have five beautiful signs that announce Green Acres Neighborhood at all its major entrances.

[picture of sign with people]

But I don't really need the signs. I already know the invisible, palpable difference between inside and outside. Others do need the signs. Indeed, because of our signs, for the first time Indiana University students who rent houses in Green Acres now recognize that they live in a neighborhood, and that it's called "Green Acres"!

And it's true: there really is a distinction between the atmosphere inside and outside the neighborhood. An invisible membrane, one might say, separates the two. Just as with all thresholds both demarcating and linking one "reality" to another.

In shamanic cultures, some thresholds are known as "portals." I think of the time I sat, eyes closed, inside the (natural?) indentation of a gigantic rock face bordering Lake Titicaca, one of the Peruvian portals, and truly did sense that if I let myself go, I could travel literally anywhere — that this portal was a crossing point in time/space, a jump off point, as it were. Alarmed, I opened my eyes, and exited the hot seat!

[pic of portal Peru]

In Egypt, I discovered another threshold-as-portal, this one more literal: I found myself gingerly placing one foot on the threshold of a small room in a tiny temple at Luxor, dedicated to the goddess Sekhmet. The room was dark. My body balked, didn't want to go in there. What happened next is a story for another time. (See: <https://www.exopermaculture.com/2017/03/03/k-reader-meeting-sekhmet/>). Just know that it felt momentous, a massive turning point in my long life.

[side by side pics of temple and statue]

In Siberia, this past summer, I was gifted with a portal experience high in the mountainous steppes south of Lake Baikal. Three portals, actually — each one higher and more remote than the one below. A Siberian guide found himself accompanying me to the top two. But even before reaching the first portal, on the path up I had suddenly and subtly felt my body breach a powerful, invisible membrane. The feeling was eerie, as if, beyond this point I was put on notice: be aware: *different laws apply here.*

[photo of third portal, Siberia]

My fascination with portals, thresholds, the liminal spaces that we enter at our peril, and the energetic membranes that divide atmospheres from one another, each one “catching and storing energy” of a certain kind (Permaculture Principle #2) stretches back to childhood when, on long car rides, all of a sudden a sign would loom into view — “Welcome to Idaho” — and I would close my eyes and try to feel it. Was there a difference? Yes. There really was. The atmosphere had changed even though the landscape had not. Being in “Idaho” felt other than being in Wyoming. Still the same sagebrush all around, but in some imperceptible manner, the ambiance did not feel as “wild.”

Now I could ask, and even then, I did ask, “Am I making it all up?” How do I know that the difference I think I sense is real or whether it’s just traces of my own and others’ memories and attitudes towards Wyoming and Idaho? What’s real? Is reality something outside, in the air? Or is it inside, in my mind, and I project it out, see what’s inside as outside.

Yes, I really did think that way as a kid. And I still do. Still ponder the various and diverse membranes separating/linking the various realms.

Of course, for us old hippies, another obvious portal was LSD. Anyone who has ever taken that, ayahuasca, or other psychedelics is also put on notice: *different laws apply here.*

Back in the mid-'60s, as a young doctoral student in philosophy, I remember coming upon an article in Scientific American that fascinated me. For the first time, I learned that the brain has two sides, the logical left brain (where things get figured out, detailed, argued for or against, described, encoded) and the creative right brain (vast, infinitely spacious, imaginative, visionary). Dividing the two brains is the corpus collosum, a thick membrane which, literally, means "tough body!" Does this mean that the two brains are forever separated? Walled off? Or can the corpus collosum thin to the point of osmosis, permeability. Even back then, I vowed to learn how to move back and forth between left and right brain at will and more: to have left brain logic serve right brain imagination, rather than the other way around.

In permaculture, we might say that these "inner" considerations are aspects of what some are calling Zone 00 to distinguish it from Zone 0 (the household). Zone 00 lives inside the psyche of each human being, as the zero-point source from which, for each of us, the entire cosmos emanates. And frankly, this zone is where I spend most of my time.

Zone 00: what does it include? Well, might it include the possibility of viewing permaculture from not just a Newtonian, but a quantum perspective, acknowledging the infinite field of possibilities, each of which blooms into palpable form when we focus intention in that direction? In Green Acres Village, we feel most alive as we inhabit this mysterious quantum field. More and more, we encourage each other to develop and express those interests about which we feel most passionately. Our common life benefits from the natural expression of each person's unique individual energy.

Indeed, I would say that, for all who live here, inner contemplation serves as the basis, the spiritual underpinning, of what is becoming an increasingly stable, grounded experiment in our Green Acres Neighborhood. We intend to not just "brand" the

neighborhood itself with signage, but to create — to wave into being, as if with a magic wand! — a more potent, intense atmosphere inside the larger neighborhood, one which, two years ago, we began to call “Green Acres Village.”

[view from corner DeKist/Overhill.]

In our Village, we aim to be multidimensional, continually invoking a more and more complex differentiating and integrating atmosphere that becomes more and more resilient through time and space — to the point where no shock is too much. We absorb shocks by acknowledging, adjusting and making room for yet one more surprise. Like lightning, shocks reset our internal systems and serve as stimuli for further growth in awareness. Thus, we aim for continuous exploration and connectivity — not just with the mysterious fertility of the land, but with and through one another and the larger, multidimensional cosmos.

In this quantum approach to permaculture we recognize that the “laws” we obey here in 3D may not “apply” at other levels. Or that they might be superseded. Or that, we think we know what we’re doing, but we do not!

But I get ahead of myself.

One might say that it all began when I took the PDC (Permaculture Design Course), on the advice of Nathan, then a young neighbor who told me that it would “change the way you perceive the world.” Well, as a philosopher, that got my attention! That was in 2006. In 2008, the house next door to me came up for sale. Nathan suggested that I buy it, “because it has a sunny side lawn. You could do permaculture there.”

I didn't have the nerve. Plus, I was still healing from my husband's untimely death. (We had moved here in 2002, so that he could go to law school at IU. He died after one semester in early January 2003, and left me an inheritance.) The house sold — at which point I kicked myself for not having bought it! So when it came up for sale again, the very next year, I immediately purchased it — just as the real estate market was topping out. I didn't care. This was important. I had discovered how I was going to draw down Jeff's legacy.

Yes. We have been working this magic now since about 2009, when I bought that house next door for the express purpose of establishing a neighborhood garden on its spacious sunny side lawn.

Or maybe it began earlier, in 2006, not just because of the PDC, but that was also the year that I decided to set out a bench facing the street in my front yard and surround it with plantings. And followed that by adding a screened in front porch. These two structures signaled an attitude of interconnectivity and friendliness to passers-by.

As the years rolled on, and more and more material changes became evident — the pond, the community garden, flower plantings alongside the outside of the fence, solar panels on one of the roofs that power both houses, gate into garden with sign.

[pic of gate and sign]

I noticed that more and more people were walking Overhill Drive, and even stopping, to check out the Little Free Library that we built and placed next to the bench a few years ago.

[pic of Little Free Library and bench]

I can call the entire boundary of this property and the one next door on the corner of DeKist and Overhill, a threshold, because it signals something other than the usual is happening inside, and that this something is bleeding out to affect the space around it, at least in that more and more people are strolling by, rather than driving fast, in cars.

Plus, one year ago, the young family who bought the house across from us on Overhill did so because of what we are doing here. They were from Davis, California, and familiar with N-Street Co-Housing, which is the nearest model for our project.

Likewise, both 2601 and 2615 (the latest purchase, in December 2016) DeKist properties now feature permaculture gardens in their front yards. Further evidence that something other than usual is happening here. In fact, the only lawn left on all three properties is the part of my Overhill front lawn bounded by two hugelkultur flower gardens (made from downed trees). Otherwise, the grounds of the entire three-home village are either gardened, or operating otherwise as a commons.

[google earth pic of three properties]

And in each case, no matter what material forms are created or repurposed — two ponds, two greenhouses, patio area, chicken yard and coop, workshop area, and now in construction, an inside space for common activities, including pottery kilns — all these areas have edges designed around them and paths among them winding in and out among the three homes and their various gardens. A number of gates hold energy inside their boundaries and indicate thresholds of intentionality.

In short, for first-time visitors, it's obvious that something transformational is happening here. Many tiny atmospheres exist inside the larger one, each an intentional fractal of the whole.

[pic of entrance to side yard 2601 E DeKist]

I view this entire project as an experiment (as I view my entire life as an experiment!) — one made possible initially by that legacy from my husband. And the Village does feel utterly “other” than its surround, and yet operates as an ineluctable part of it, a sort of engine of community within the greater neighborhood; and it functions a seed, a template for what is possible when we reimagine suburbia. The entire three-home property is about .6 acre. Not much. Not large. But already immensely potent.

And the key, all along, has been to continuously visualize, in my mind’s eye, a strong, sheltered and yet permeable atmosphere that “catches and stores energies” of many kinds, generating immense and intense possibilities, where residents (or “podmates”) express our individual gifts and talents fully in shared communion with both each other and the sacred land.

And it’s not just me that’s visualizing. My village partner Rebecca, another old woman, who arrived four years ago, also recognizes this overall seeing in the mind’s eye as what we might call the first principle, or originating idea of Green Acres Village. I think of the Old Testament: “In the beginning was the Word.” No! We might use language to attempt to describe what we are doing here, but in actual fact, in the beginning is imagination, a particular, vividly portrayed inner vision of unbounded possibility. Our common work is to ground that vision into human and ecological vitality. In this sense, we are observing Principle #7 (“work from patterns to details”), but with a difference: we don’t know from one moment to the next, how the vision will actually materialize, what forms will come into play and how they will interact with one another. Instead, we proceed organically, paying close attention, “observing and interacting” (PP #1), working slowly and surely to make small potent decisions (PP #9) that encourage and integrate diversity (PP #8) of individual, cultural and ecological “yields” (PP #3).

The thresholds we work with are not just spatial and temporal, but dimensional. Spatial thresholds in the overall way the structures inside the three home complex work with each other. Temporal, in that the entire project takes time, lots of time, with

definite turning point thresholds. One of them occurred about two years ago, when, after two years of weekly community dinners (to which we invite both neighbors and friends), we began to realize that our community garden had now evolved into a subset of community itself. That the garden, which had underpinned our original effort, was now folded within a larger order. That discovery, of dimensionality, felt like a revelation.

And yet, always, underneath everything that goes on, and empowering the entire complex, is the land itself, the tiny 6/10 of an acre that we inhabit, and the immense, intense possibilities still hidden within its dimensional folds. These possibilities call out to us. We know that we are here to serve the land, and not the other way around. We recognize that she knows what's needed next, and that our job is to listen, and do as she bids.

Our near future plans include a product line of value-added foods, under the label "Green Acres Alchemy," and the transformation of this place (still owned by me) into some kind of a non-profit. This year, six of our podmates are musicians! So we are already beginning to dream into being monthly house concerts.

An even larger and much longer-term vision is to see this entire neighborhood (440 homes) or perhaps one fourth of it, as itself a village, composed of a number of interconnected pods, each with two or more next door homes sharing more than usual. We call ourselves the original "Milkweed Pod" of the Green Acres Village, and hope to inspire others to emulate what we are doing here.

Meanwhile, we imagine GAV partnering with various departments of Indiana University to run various programs through this neighborhood — architecture, planning, sociology, philosophy, art and design, ecology — the sky's the limit! We already host IU interns, and have hosted several undergraduate IU Sustainability classes. Clearly, permaculture embodies the thoroughly grounded education needed in the 21st century, and we envision GAV as in the vanguard of that.

In our visioning, we have moved beyond where my friend Georgia was able to go, though she would have, had Parkinsons not colonized her body. She knows what we're doing in the village within the neighborhood, but she can no longer participate.

How many times, back in the old days when we were both idealistic neighborhood activists, did Georgia and I dream of a neighborhood that welcomed young and old, and where the very old could die at home, in place! That Georgia now lives in a care center is, for me, one measure of how far we have yet to go in acknowledging and working with the entire cycle of life — not just for plants in permaculture, but for human living and dying as well.

When I moved to this Green Acres Neighborhood in the summer of 2002, fresh from 18 years in a 20'- diameter yurt in the (wild) Wyoming Tetons to a suburban ranch house that my husband had bought for us to live in during his years at the Indiana University Law School, I thought, well, I can stand it for three years, but then we're outta here! To where, I didn't know. All I knew was I hated both ranch houses and suburban living. So much sameness, isolation, conformity!

Then Jeff died, of a heart attack. On January 4, 2003. And there I was, stuck in Green Acres.

I look back on that event now and marvel at what's changed. What's changed and what remains the same. For just as when I was a kid, I still work to identify atmospheres, and the often invisible edges between them, and now, as a nearly 75-year-old woman, I've gotten quite adept at not just identifying them, but creating, altering, and intensifying them! Indeed, as a permaculturist, I do recognize that the edges are where the action is, and living here, in this Green Acres Village, with its three homes, gardens, and shared structures, I see in my mind's eye, every point of view inside our snug little village world as the center of the multiverse, surrounded by its own edges, connecting, interlacing, working with other edges, and not just of a material kind, not

just 3D, but multidimensional — the emotional edges, the mental edges, the spiritual edges, each one a threshold, a stepping place from one “reality” to another. And the more complex, the more intricately interwoven are these various sorts of edges and their atmospheres, the more fruitful, surprising, and resilient the symbiosis.

As I told Rebecca when she moved here: “I visualize every little corner of this place as holding some kind of surprise and delight, an intense little potent presence of its own, both in terms of food and artistic flourish.” May the entire place function as 1) a multidimensional center of creativity, 2) a refuge from the larger monotone suburban culture that surrounds it, and 3) a potent seed within that larger culture that little by little transforms it.

In short, together we aim to invoke, through shared intention, a living breathing presence of immense regenerative possibility. An authentic permaculture paradise, where the land instructs human beings how to live and work with her in the most nourishing way possible.

Rebecca, it turns out, was the perfect permaculture partner for me, as my intuition realized the instant I met her four years ago. 40 years as an organic market gardener in nearby Brown County, she also has lifelong experience living in community, is a potter and artist, and has worked with young people to create community gardens in inner cities.

I am nearly 75 years old; Rebecca is nearly 64 years old — both idealistic Sagittarians! Combined, our experience and patience with how long things take to manifest is a steadfast resource for the young people who live with us to draw upon. And they realize it. They learn from us. As we learn from them. Plus, we old ones benefit from their vitality! The threshold between young (in their mid-20s to early 30s) and old (60s and 70s) may be wide, but the membrane that divides us is permeable.

Now let’s return to yesterday, and our visit with Georgia.

As Shadow and I approach the care center, the glass doors automatically slide open and we pass through yet another threshold into an atmosphere that feels institutional, but sweet, and somewhat stuck. Not a place I want to spend much time in. Not a place to which she wanted to be confined either, had she had the option.

Georgia hoped to be able to live and die in place. Will she get her wish? Hard to say. She's due to "return home" soon; her care needs as she goes forward are being evaluated now.

Meanwhile, except for her husband and in-town daughter, no one visits Georgia once or twice a week like I do. Everybody is so busy. Or so scared, of seeing a woman once so vital and alive, an activist on so many levels in her community, reduced to having to remember to move her tongue back to swallow her pills. Georgia's edges are now very different from ours, much more numerous, and closer to hand. Each small motion that we take for granted as automatic, more and more becomes something that she has to intentionally decide to manifest.

In a way, you could say Georgia is all edge now, that for her every single moment includes a threshold into the now, the new. Inside each membrane is a tiny space that leaves little room for play. For her, each space is that of survival — how to get off the bed without falling, how to hold the walker while she edges into the bathroom, how to balance herself while she pushes her Depends down and then sits down on the toilet... On and on. Each tiny movement crucial, lest she crash. Life does not proceed automatically, in a flow that none of us need to notice. No. Life is hard for her.

Why did I begin this article with Georgia and why do I end it in the same way? Because the threshold crossing from life to death is the most immense that any of us will ever venture through, and because, even so, we don't want to talk about it. We don't want to talk about this, or about other shadowy aspects of our lives, those dark, painful

spaces that we wall off with nearly impermeable membranes deep inside us. Most of them — all of them — having to do with fear. FEAR: false evidence appearing real.

In Green Acres Village, we are deliberately conversant with shadow work, both our individual shadows and our group shadow; we know that, at least in the 3D world, all light throws a shadow, as all dualities define each other through contrast. Likewise, we recognize that it is the eternal dance between the two poles of all dualities, including the overall dance between individualism and community, that continuous and ever changing dynamic, that vibrating membrane's osmosis, which allows the flow of living and dying of all creatures, human, animal, plant, mineral, soil, the living land, the Sun and Moon, the cosmos itself.

I will end with this story.

One day several summers ago, I was standing next to our pond when suddenly, and almost ponderously, I felt what I can only call the Soul of the Earth rise up from below. Like a great ballooning pregnancy, Her intense fullsome presence, so sudden, unexpected, and overwhelming, did not just envelop me, but nearly crashed me to the ground. It was a moment I will never forget.

Later, *sotto voce*, I told another permaculturist about this numinous experience. Shocked, he blurted out, remembering, and in wonder: "I had the same thing happen to me. Once, in the early morning, standing in one of my gardens."

That threshold, between the human world and the natural world; especially, the threshold between how we think we work with nature, and who nature really is — her primal power, her mystery — is impossible to either assess or understand. She is magic. And insofar as we are of her, insofar as we are living deeply inside the aliveness of our own bodies which are made from her, we are magic, too.

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