



Southern Californians know all about the four primary elements—fire, water, earth and air. We get too much fire, not enough water, the earth can move violently, and who really wants to breathe smog?

But these elements also can be positive forces in our lives, as exemplified in a provocative exhibit that Pomona College hosted in Spring 2016: “*Umdenken*/Rethinking—Learning from Nature.” On loan from the Goethe Institute of Germany, the exhibit filled four rooms in the underutilized Seeley G. Mudd building, animating that musty space with an array of electrifying posters and bold images that reminded us of our deep dependency on those elemental forces without which no species can live. They reminded us as well of the distressing degree to which we have manipulated these substances in the pursuit of progress. Alert to the stresses we have placed on the planet, the designers of this smartly framed exhibit posed the apt question: are there limits to progress, to our capacity to progress? “Now that the natural equilibrium has been destabilized in many places,” one panel cautions, “and has in some cases been lost forever—an era of rethinking has now begun.”

The opportunity to reflect, to reconsider, to rethink led a group of Claremont faculty, students, and community members to gather together on February 11, 2016 to talk about the exhibit’s import. What follows are a set of essays that pick up on different aspects of its significance, informal reflections that amount to a hopeful reimagining of our place in this place, this Earth, our home ground.

~ Char Miller