



## REVIEWS & REFLECTIONS

wide strip of paper, two artists outlined a landscape on which we shared our ideas for a way forward. It was a braided river of words that asked, “What do you love too much to lose?” and “What will you do to defend what you love?”

The result was a collective statement of our values. In the realm of social media, this crowd-sourcing of meaning is sometimes called a *folksonomy* or *social indexing*. It is a bottom-up version of traditional taxonomy, and we read it aloud, together.

Conference co-chairs Kathleen Dean Moore and Robin Wall Kimmerer offered their own additions to our folksonomy, and their words have already begun to shape my own thinking.

Moore donated the word *avulsion*, which Wikipedia defines as “the rapid abandonment of a river channel and the formation of a new river channel.” We don’t need to dam the river, she said—we must redirect it. A few well-placed rocks can shift the entire flow. Sometimes those rocks are words.

Kimmerer spoke of a “grammar of animacy.” The English language refers to the non-human world as “it,” while pronouns such as “he,” “she,” and “we” are reserved for members of our species. Western culture needs a new singular pronoun to describe the other members of our biotic community. The word Kimmerer proposed is *ki* (pronounced “kee”). The good news, she added, is that we already have the plural pronoun: *kin*. To learn a new language is to change your outlook on the world.

Kimmerer also introduced us to the Thanksgiving Address of the Haudenosaunee people. These are the “words before all else,” the recitation that begins each meeting of the tribes of the Iroquois Confederacy. It is their expression of gratitude to everything in their world: plants, animals, sun, moon, and winds. Each section of the address concludes with the phrase, “now our minds are one.” As my friend Curt Meine points out, wholeness of mind can be both a communal and an individual aspiration.

The Thanksgiving Address identifies the things

that we can agree upon, the values we share in the face of our obvious differences. That would seem to be a great place to begin any collective project.

At one. Atone. A tone.

Finally, I should mention the improvisatory singing of the vocalist Rhiannon, who performed several times at the conference. Her guttural utterances remind us that speech is both sign and signifier. We understand as much from pitch and tenor as from literal meaning. One song sounded vaguely like French, and she encouraged us each to sing in our own unique language. Later, with a collective hum, she led the entire audience in a series of harmonies that ultimately formed a uniform tone. All things do eventually merge into one.

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Steve Dunsky is a documentary filmmaker for the U.S. Forest Service. He co-directed the documentary *Green Fire: Aldo Leopold and a Land Ethic for Our Time*, which was co-produced by the Center for Humans and Nature, the Aldo Leopold Foundation, and the U.S. Forest Service.

The biennial conference, *Geography of Hope*, sponsored and hosted by Point Reyes Books, brings together leading writers and activists in the coastal village of Point Reyes Station, California, for a three-day feast of readings, discussions, and activities to inspire and deepen an understanding of the relationships between people and place. This year the Center for Humans and Nature was a co-sponsor of the conference. For more information about the *Geography of Hope* conference please visit the Point Reyes Books website. A slightly different version of this article appeared in *Orion Magazine* as part of the *Orion Noteworthy* blog series: <https://orionmagazine.org/category/blog/orion-noteworthy/>