



Heresy in the Library:

Planting a Paradigm

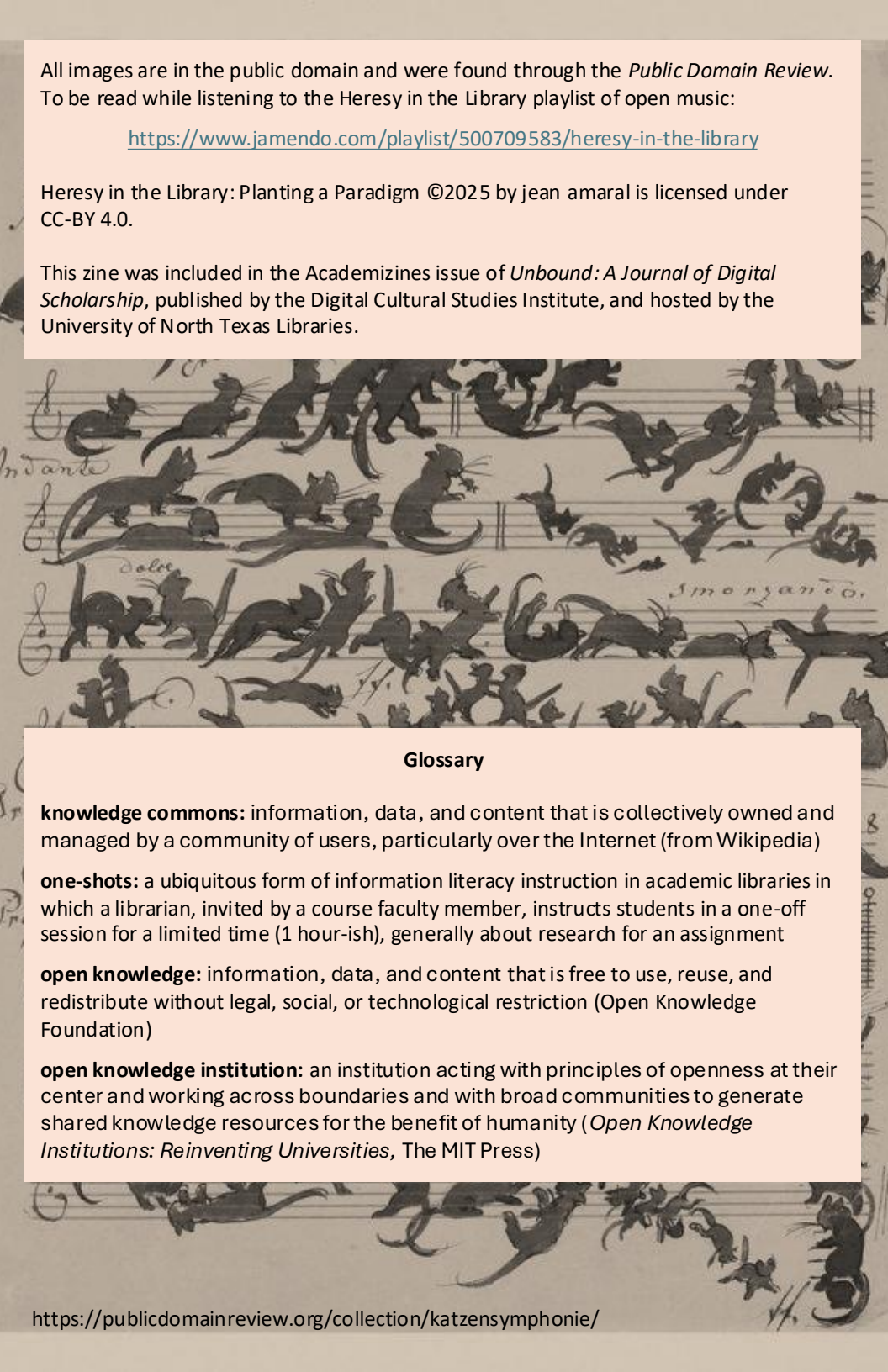


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To be read while listening to the Heresy in the Library playlist of open music:

<https://www.jamendo.com/playlist/500709583/heresy-in-the-library>

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Glossary

knowledge commons: information, data, and content that is collectively owned and managed by a community of users, particularly over the Internet (from Wikipedia)

one-shots: a ubiquitous form of information literacy instruction in academic libraries in which a librarian, invited by a course faculty member, instructs students in a one-off session for a limited time (1 hour-ish), generally about research for an assignment

open knowledge: information, data, and content that is free to use, reuse, and redistribute without legal, social, or technological restriction (Open Knowledge Foundation)

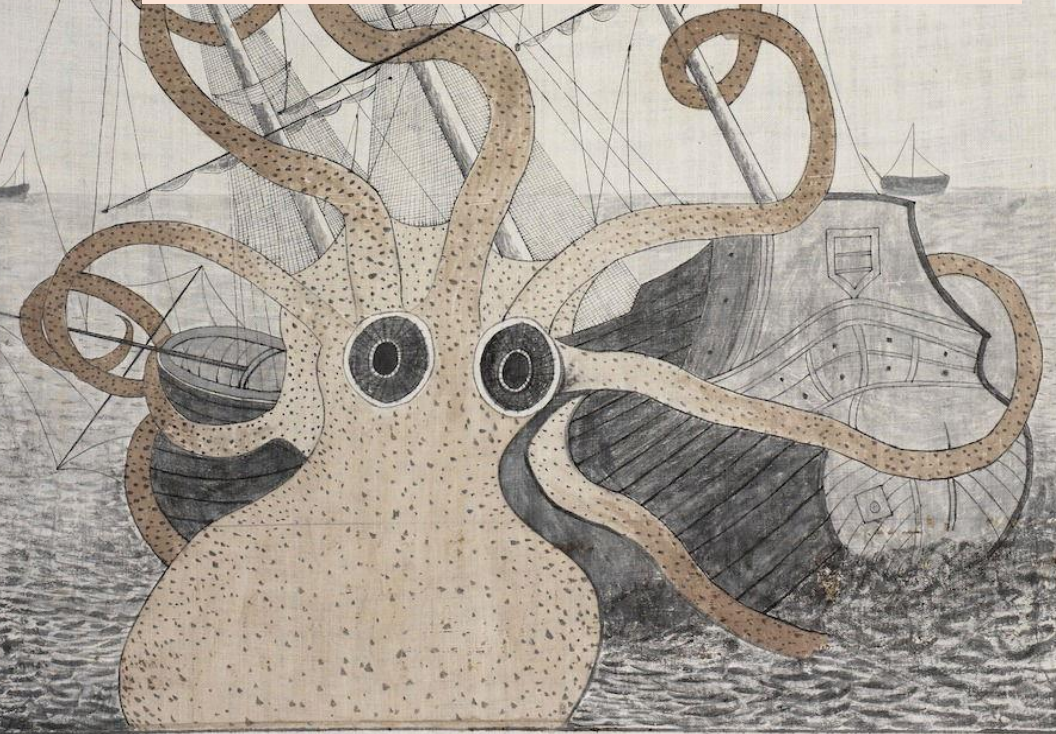
open knowledge institution: an institution acting with principles of openness at their center and working across boundaries and with broad communities to generate shared knowledge resources for the benefit of humanity (*Open Knowledge Institutions: Reinventing Universities*, The MIT Press)

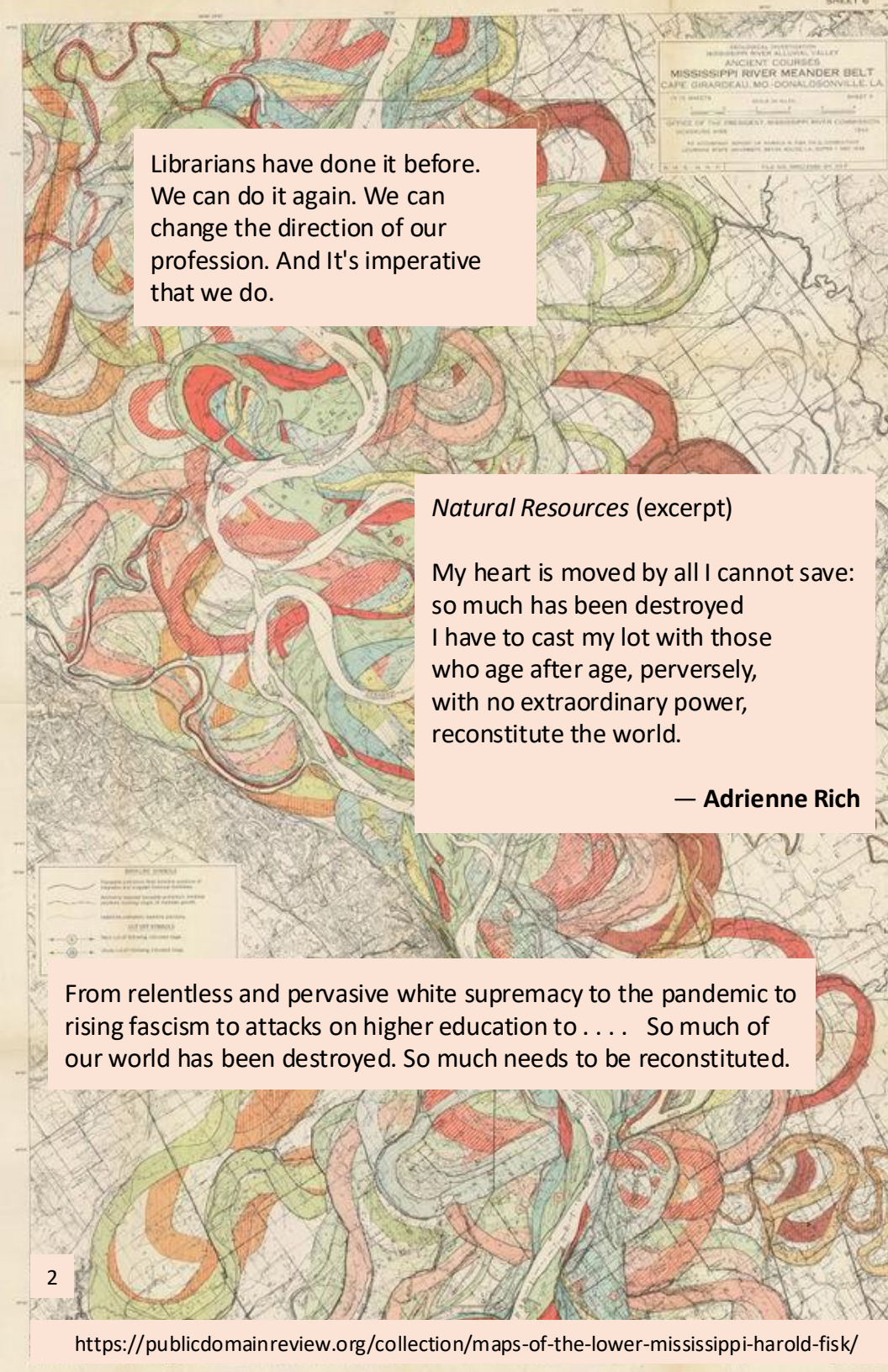
Making Way:

Hey hey, ho ho, sacrosanct practices have to go

Before heresy there is orthodoxy. For context, here's a very incomplete list of (once scandalous) challenges to orthodoxy in academic librarianship:

closed to open stacks, preservation to reference to instruction focus, segregated to desegregated libraries, print to digital collections, neutral to inherently political, multiple service points to combined ref/circ desks (including triage by students workers!), recognizing all student needs are academic needs, rise of progressive and critical librarianship, practices that entrench profession's whiteness to those that challenge it, bibliographic instruction to skills-based information literacy competencies to information literacy frames





Librarians have done it before.
We can do it again. We can
change the direction of our
profession. And It's imperative
that we do.

Natural Resources (excerpt)

My heart is moved by all I cannot save:
so much has been destroyed
I have to cast my lot with those
who age after age, perversely,
with no extraordinary power,
reconstitute the world.

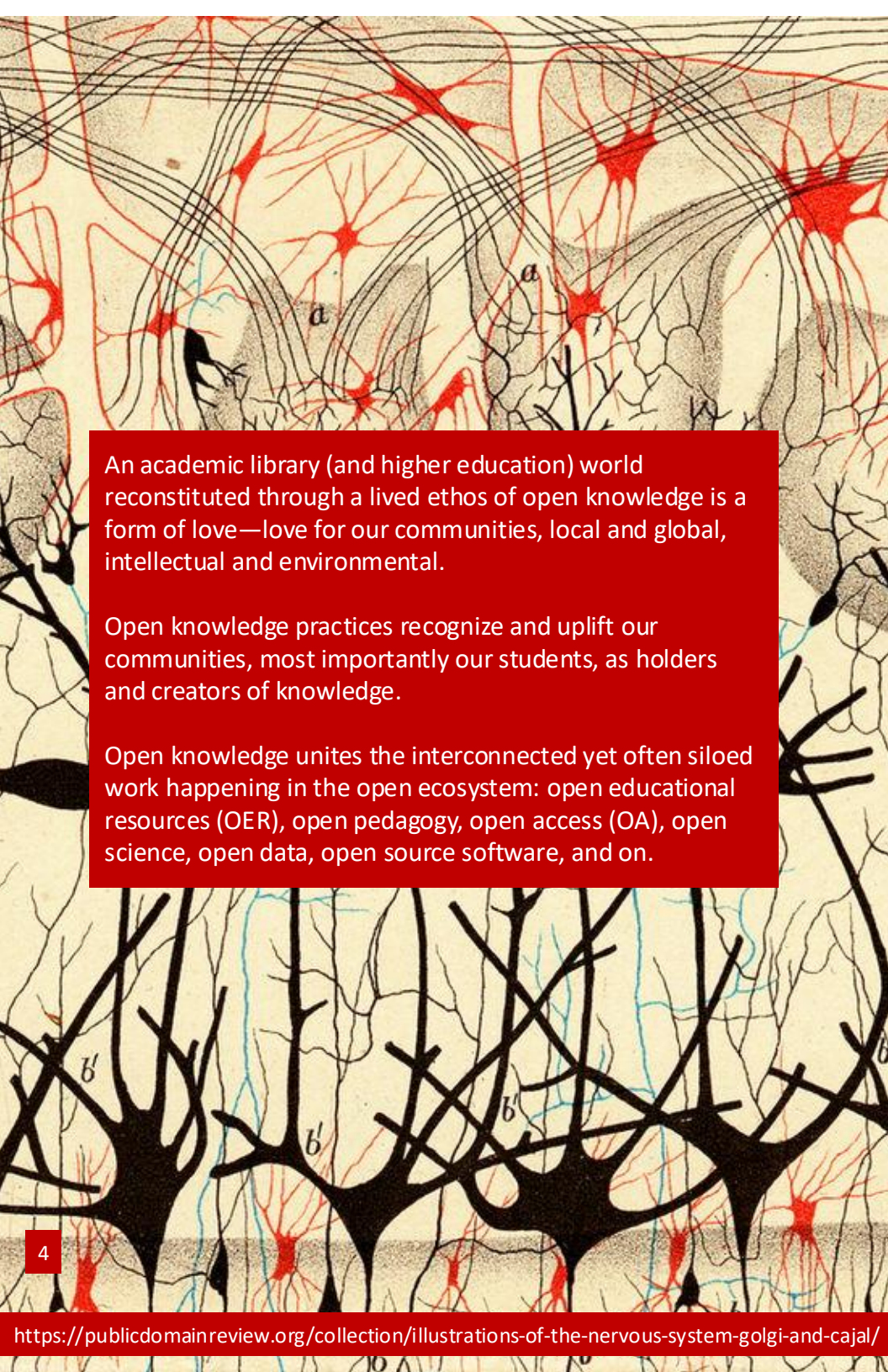
— Adrienne Rich

From relentless and pervasive white supremacy to the pandemic to rising fascism to attacks on higher education to . . . So much of our world has been destroyed. So much needs to be reconstituted.

Heresy as Reconstitutional Practice

Heretical proposition #1: Academic libraries should center and reorganize around open knowledge as the explicit lifeblood of our work.

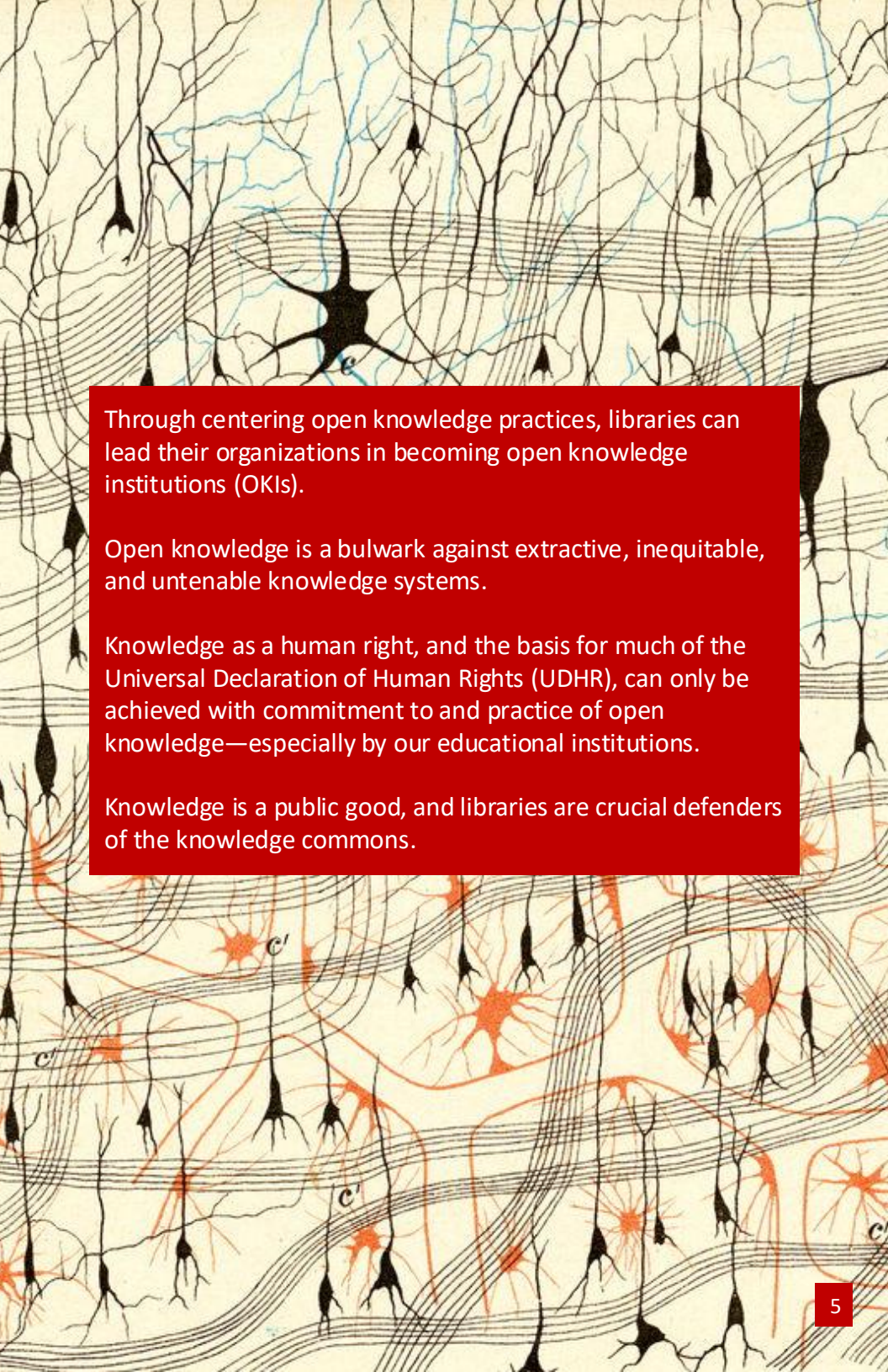




An academic library (and higher education) world reconstituted through a lived ethos of open knowledge is a form of love—love for our communities, local and global, intellectual and environmental.

Open knowledge practices recognize and uplift our communities, most importantly our students, as holders and creators of knowledge.

Open knowledge unites the interconnected yet often siloed work happening in the open ecosystem: open educational resources (OER), open pedagogy, open access (OA), open science, open data, open source software, and on.

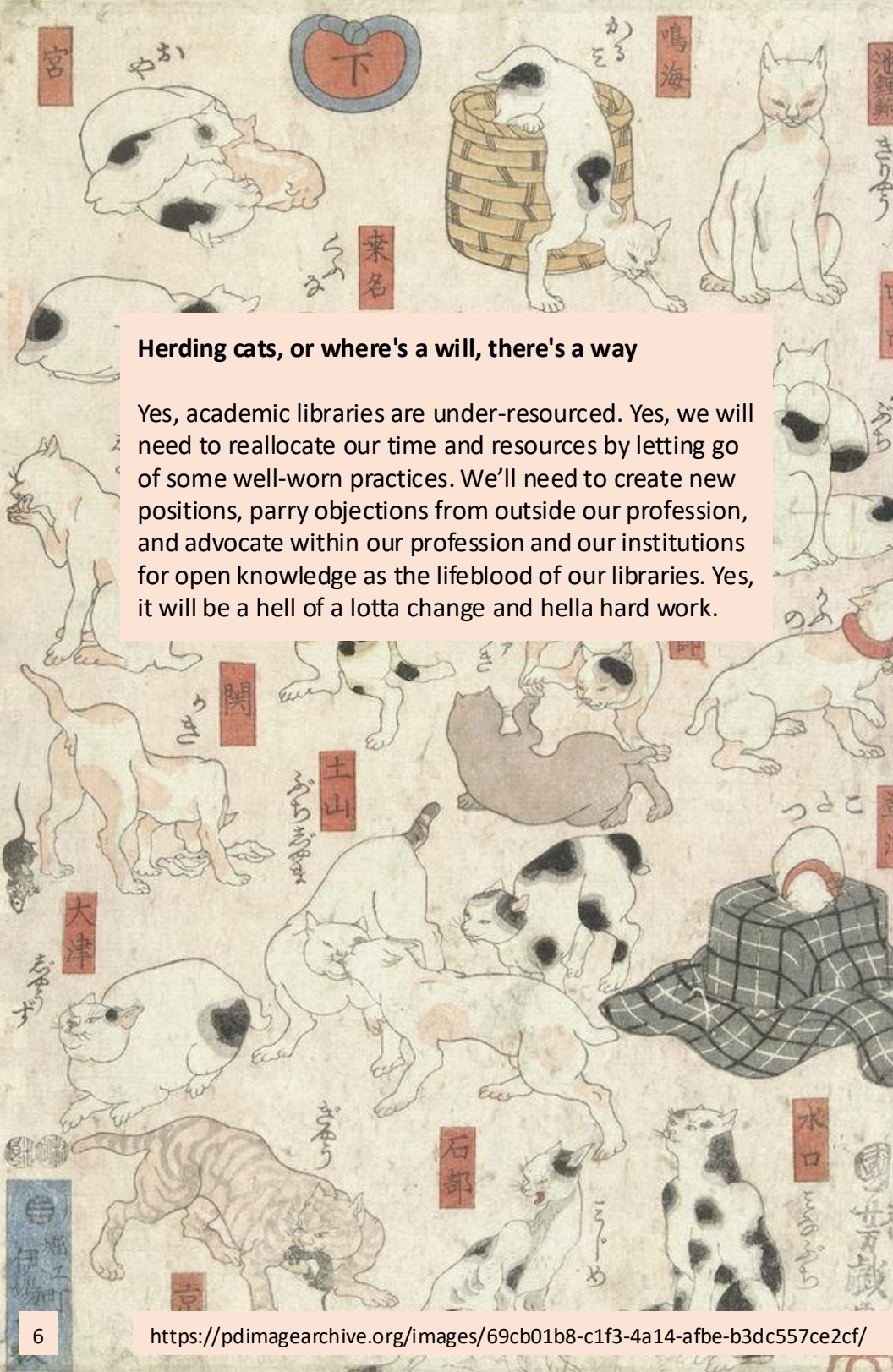


Through centering open knowledge practices, libraries can lead their organizations in becoming open knowledge institutions (OKIs).

Open knowledge is a bulwark against extractive, inequitable, and untenable knowledge systems.

Knowledge as a human right, and the basis for much of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), can only be achieved with commitment to and practice of open knowledge—especially by our educational institutions.

Knowledge is a public good, and libraries are crucial defenders of the knowledge commons.



Herding cats, or where's a will, there's a way

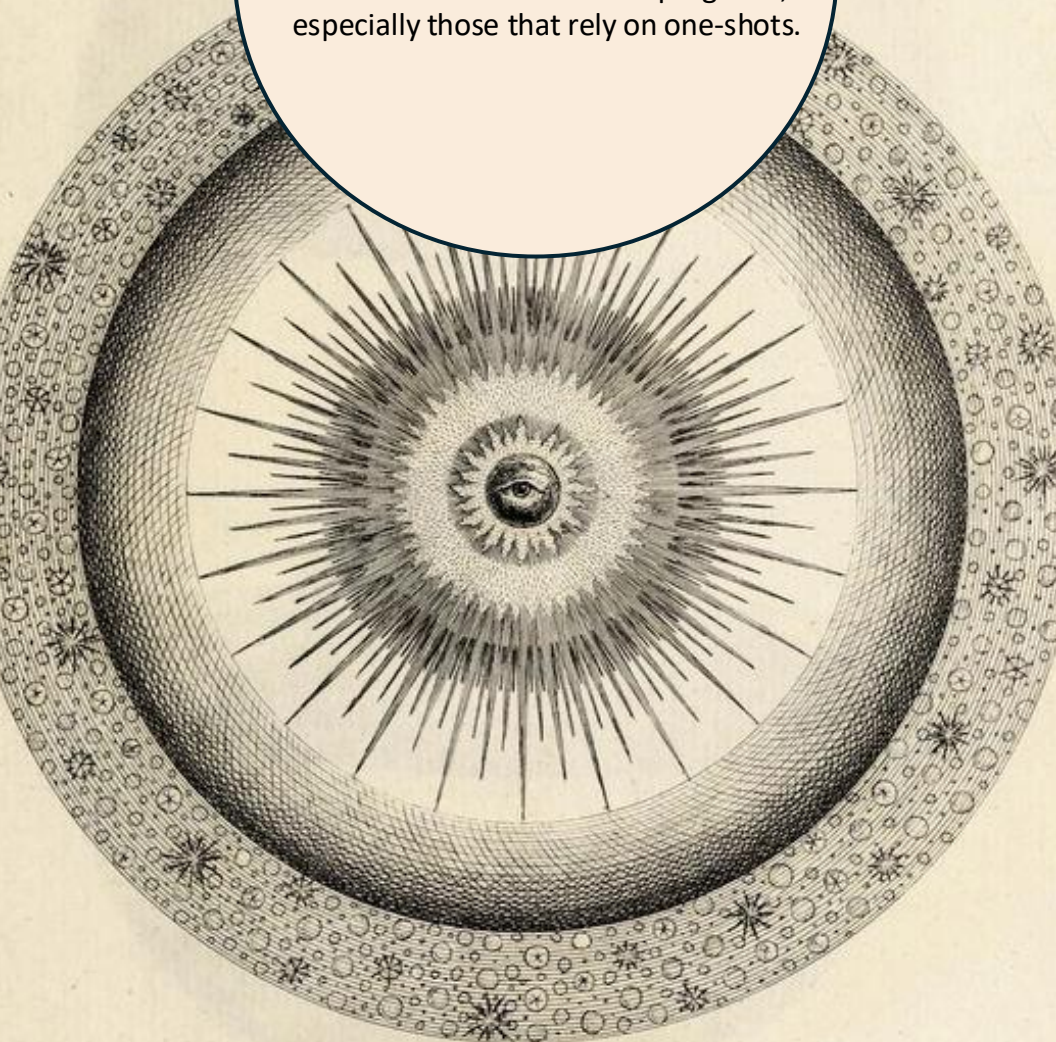
Yes, academic libraries are under-resourced. Yes, we will need to reallocate our time and resources by letting go of some well-worn practices. We'll need to create new positions, parry objections from outside our profession, and advocate within our profession and our institutions for open knowledge as the lifeblood of our libraries. Yes, it will be a hell of a lotta change and hella hard work.

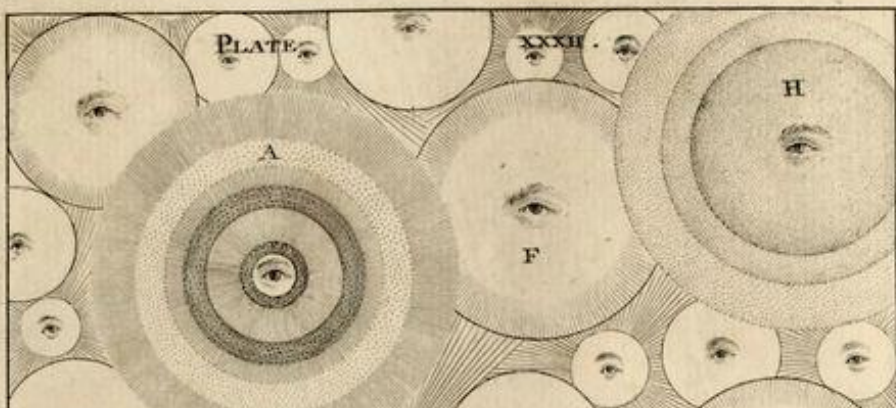


And many are already engaged in this grounding work, uniting efforts across silos in the open ecosystem. For instance, North Carolina State University Library is leading the way with their Open Knowledge Center. Carnegie Mellon University, Georgia State University, Oakland University, and Borough of Manhattan Community College all have open knowledge librarians, while the CUNY Graduate Center offers an Open Knowledge Fellowship.

But we need so many more joining this effort, including you!

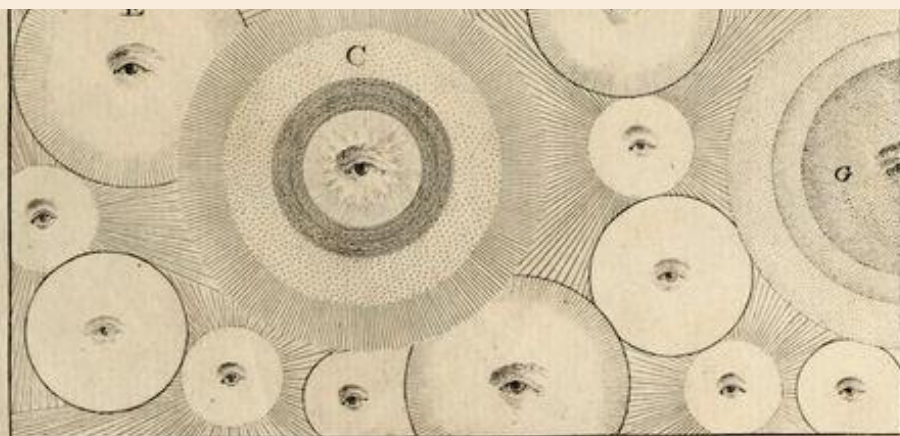
Heretical proposition #2: To center open knowledge, academic libraries should decenter instruction programs, especially those that rely on one-shots.





Academic librarians have begun this discussion. We have the evidence that change is needed.

As well as lacking efficacy, many library instruction programs suffer from lack of resources (hello, austerity), especially human resources (hello, burnout). There are the small fraction of students reached, the opportunity costs, all the other ways we could reach and engage students but don't have time to. And no, instruction as is currently practiced, especially one-shots, is not necessarily better than nothing. There are also more sustainable alternatives (e.g., online, course-embedded, asynchronous materials; librarian-led professional development that teaches faculty to teach information literacy). Yet instruction, usually in the form of one-shots, is often treated as sacrosanct.



O, the places you'll go, or imagining ourselves into open knowledge futures

What might the academic library look like when centered around open knowledge?

Your library has an open knowledge department, encompassing the spectrum of open—open access, open education, open data, etc.

AND All librarian positions include open knowledge, bolstered by a x-departmental working group (just say no to silos).

SLIS programs offer open knowledge tracks, and every other track requires an open knowledge course.

Your library leads in weaving open knowledge throughout the institution's mission, vision, policies, and practices.

There is robust support for open access scholarship at your institution, and OA is highly valued in tenure and promotion.

Students have opportunities to enact their agency as knowledge creators, writing zines, producing podcasts, publishing on the web—all through your library and its partnerships.

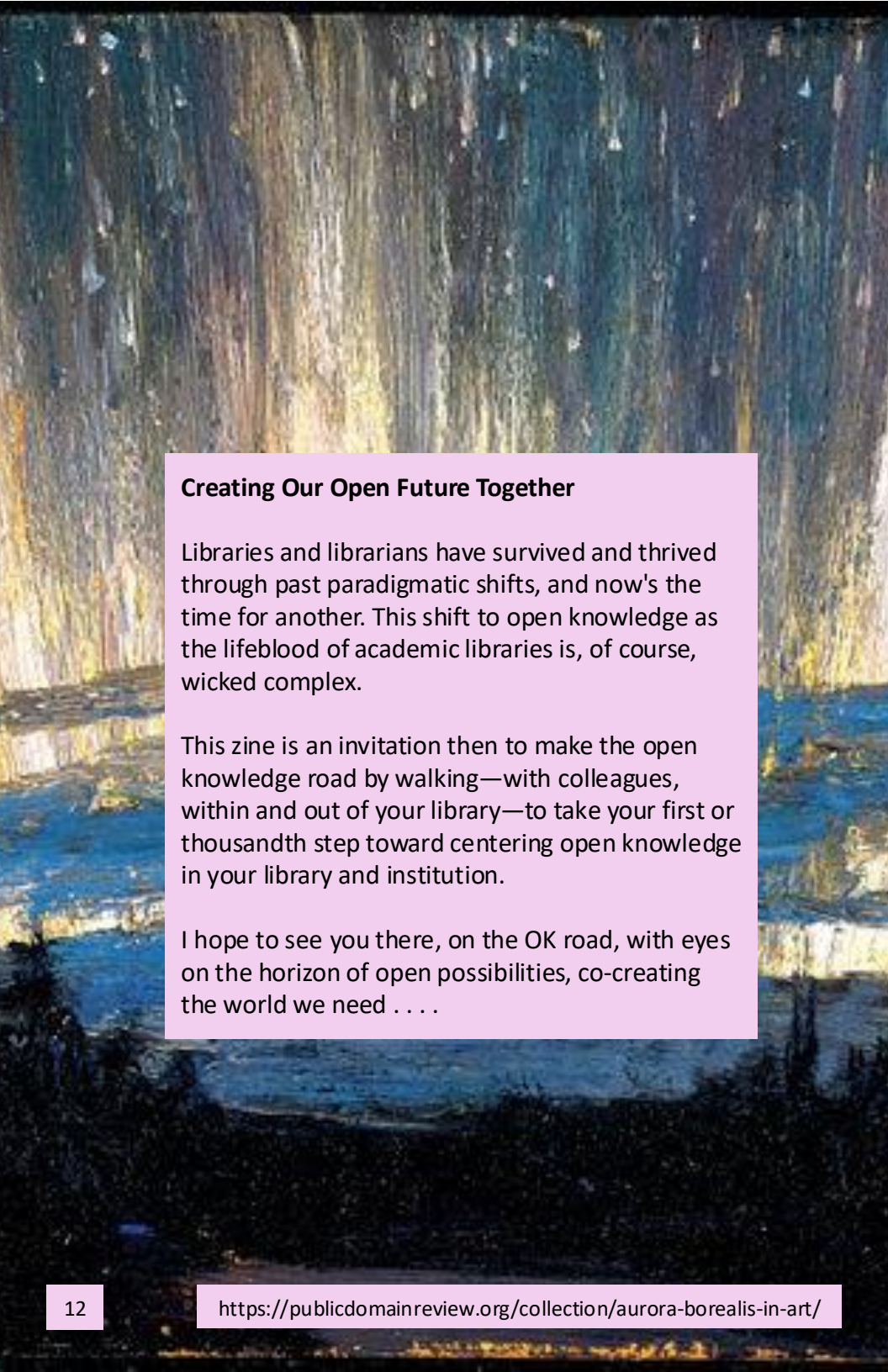
Community members contribute to the knowledge commons through editing Wikipedia, taking photos for Wikimedia Commons, participating in Wikidata projects.

The library's physical space invites knowledge creation (e.g., it has a maker space, podcast booth, zine collection, performance area, etc.).

The library also provides open digital spaces (e.g., Pressbooks, Manifold, CBOX and CBOX-OL)

Information literacy instruction happens primarily through the lense of these ↑ open knowledge projects.

Let these examples give you wings to soar into your wildest dreams of open—be even bolder, more audacious, more revolutionary . . .

The background of the page is a full-page abstract painting. It features a dark, silty landscape at the bottom, possibly a riverbank or a rocky shore. Above this, there's a body of water reflecting the light. The upper two-thirds of the image are dominated by a massive, vertical aurora borealis (northern lights) display. The colors are a mix of deep blues, purples, and greens, with bright, streaky highlights of yellow and white, suggesting intense light and movement. The texture of the painting is visible, with brushstrokes and splatters.

Creating Our Open Future Together

Libraries and librarians have survived and thrived through past paradigmatic shifts, and now's the time for another. This shift to open knowledge as the lifeblood of academic libraries is, of course, wicked complex.

This zine is an invitation then to make the open knowledge road by walking—with colleagues, within and out of your library—to take your first or thousandth step toward centering open knowledge in your library and institution.

I hope to see you there, on the OK road, with eyes on the horizon of open possibilities, co-creating the world we need

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PAGE 1

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“What seems most urgent now is that we should practice a radical feminist ethics of care and practice from feminist standpoints in order to decenter dominant positionalities, bodies, systems, and perspectives in our work. In order to do this, we have to interrogate our positions and standpoints and question what we consider common sense or intuitive in our policies and processes. It would mean that libraries and library workers eschew the notion of neutrality and work toward social justice goals that seek to dismantle patriarchal, white supremacist, Eurocentric, and hegemonic practices and systems that prevail in our profession.”

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(H/T Lindsey Jones-Renaud, in *Ethics of Care in Libraries: A Zine*)

