

# Speculative and Critical Design and Libraries

# Schedule

## **What is speculative and critical design?**

Examples—Italian Radical Design, Daniel Weil, Superflux.

Discussion—what are your initial reactions to this work?

## **Case Study: speculative design and climate reading group**

A partnership with LATITUDE, an arts organization in Chicago.

Discussion—how might we actually do speculative design?

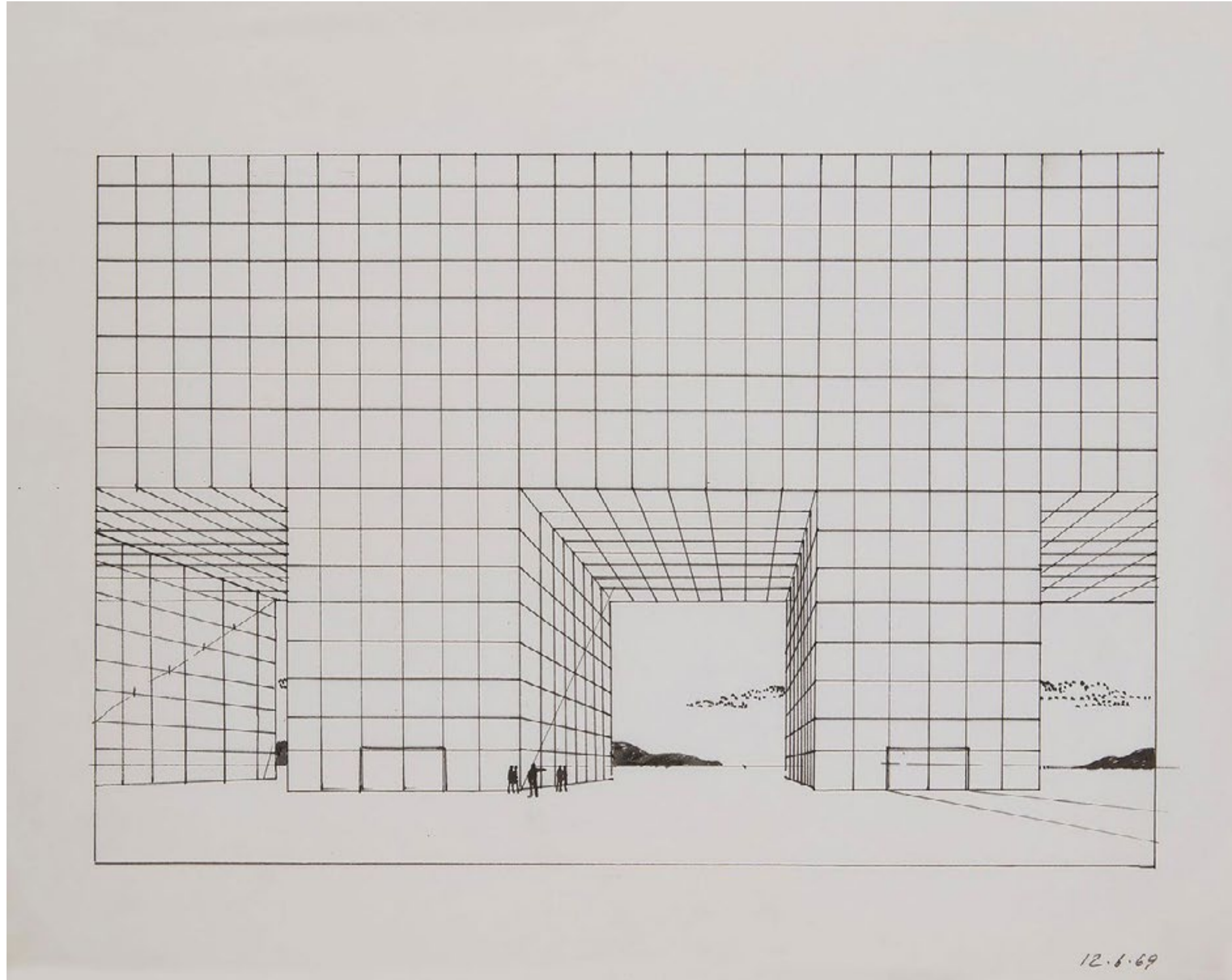
## **How might libraries use speculative and critical design?**

Design that is “critical”, not “affirmative.” Having important conversations.

Imagining alternatives to the status quo. Being provocative.

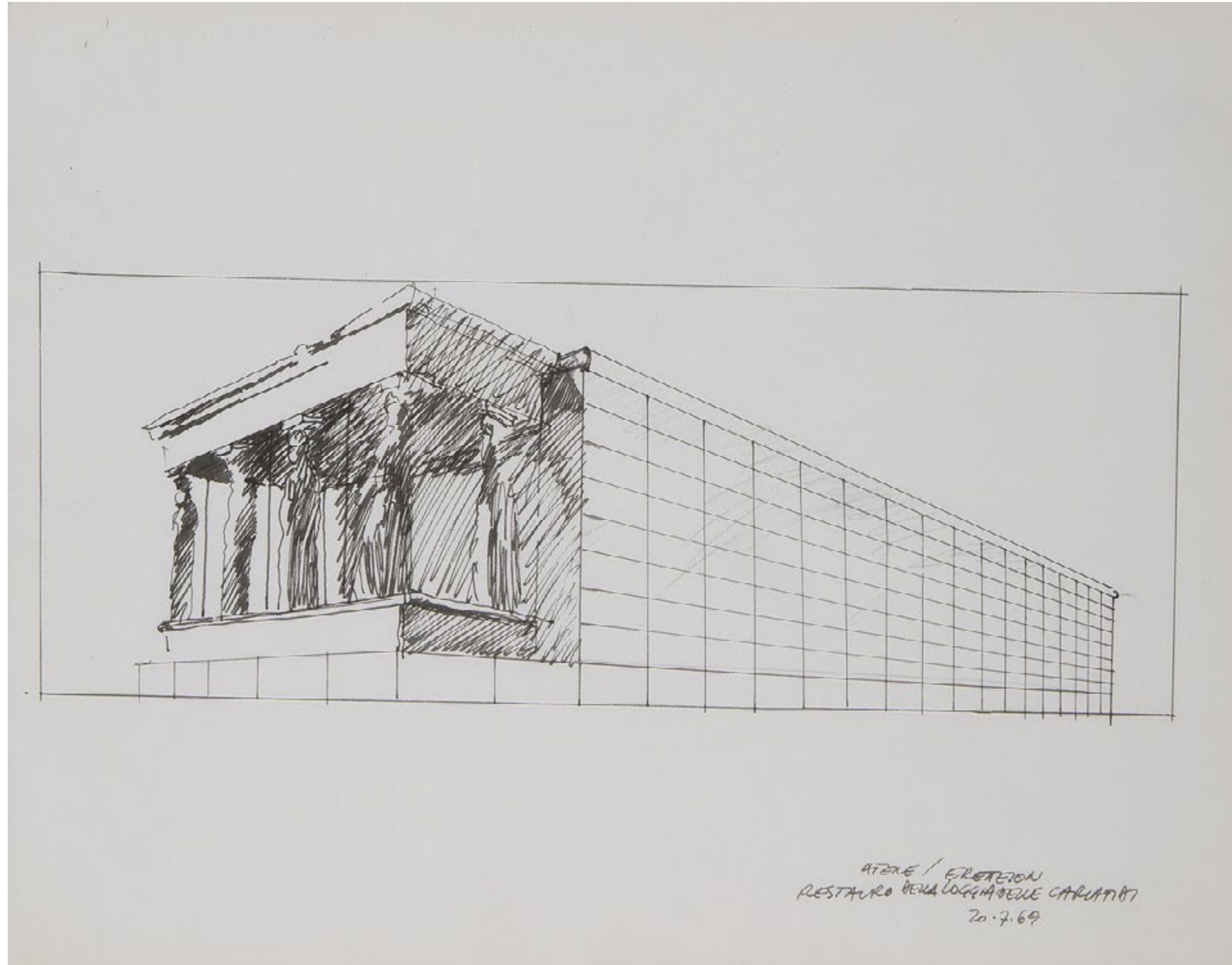
Discussion—what types of library projects lend themselves to this approach?

# Italian Radical Design: Superstudio



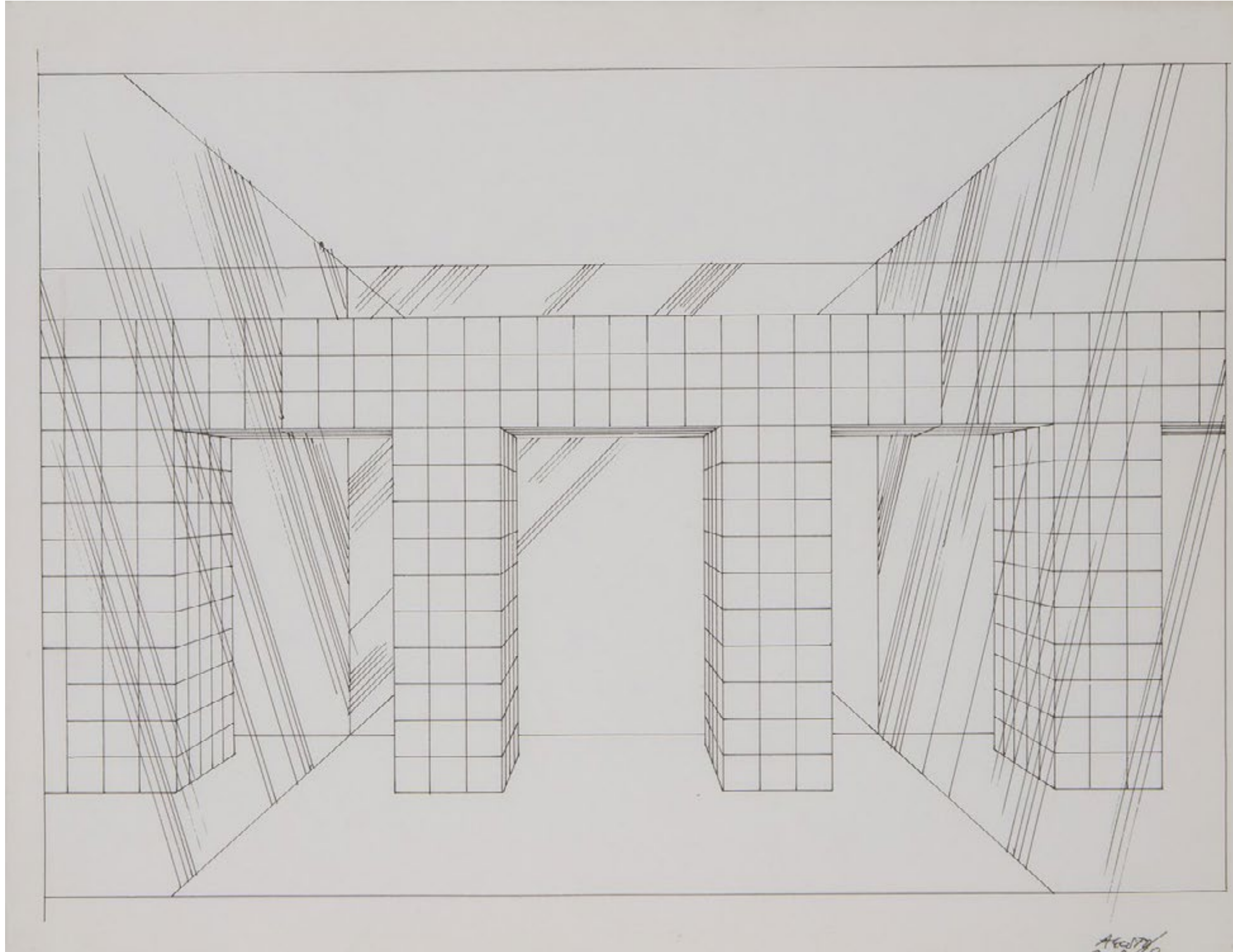
<https://www.drawingmatter.org/sets/portfolios/adolfo-natalini-drawing/>

# Italian Radical Design: Superstudio



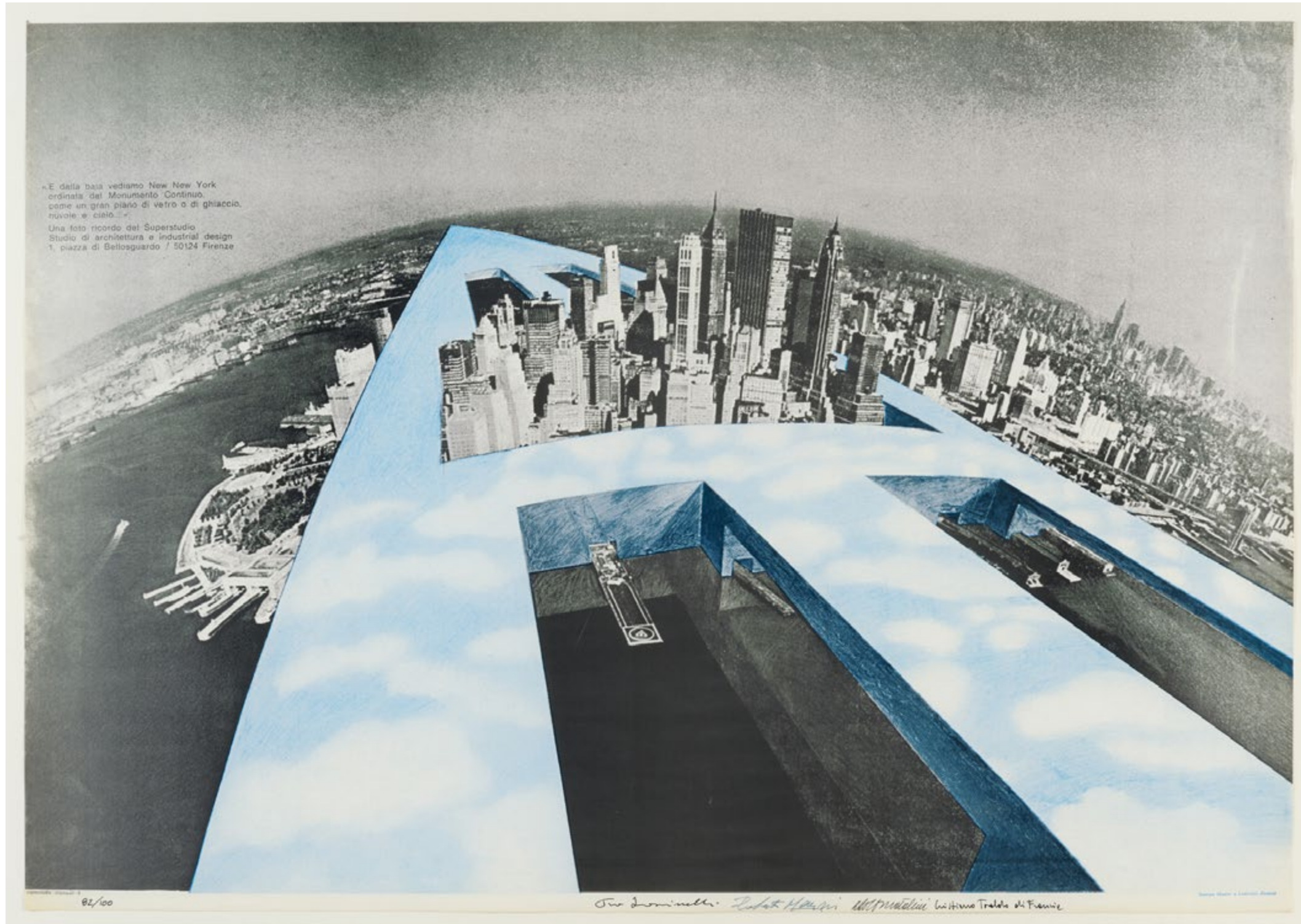
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# Italian Radical Design: Superstudio

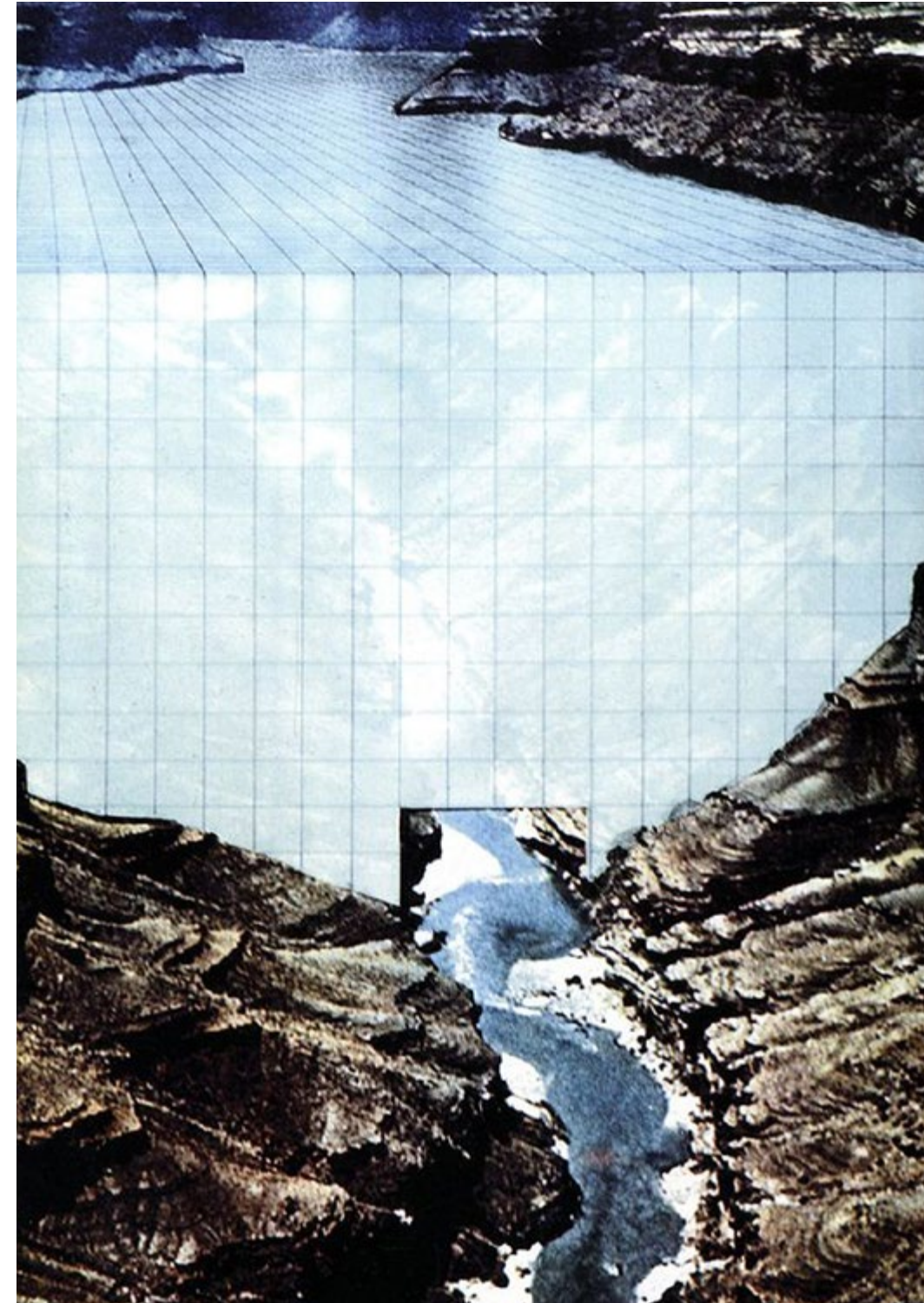


<https://www.drawingmatter.org/sets/portfolios/adolfo-natalini-drawing/>

# Italian Radical Design: Superstudio



# Italian Radical Design: Superstudio



# Radio in a Bag, Daniel Weil



<https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O85208/radio-in-a-bag-radio-weil-daniel/>

# Yellow Chair Stories, Anab Jain



<https://vimeo.com/2935189>

**Let's watch Yellow Chair Stories—  
<https://vimeo.com/2935189>**

# Discussion

What are your **initial reactions**?

Did you find any **physical or digital interactions** especially interesting?

Can you think of any **social design interventions** for the software we find ourselves using right now, like video conferencing or group chats?

# Song of the Machine, Superflux



<https://vimeo.com/22616192>

**Let's watch *Song of the Machine*—  
<https://vimeo.com/22616192>**

# Discussion

What are some **rewards and challenges** of working with experts in other fields?

What did the designers who created this video **bring to this partnership?**

How might designers and librarians **collaborate?**



# Case Study— LATITUDE's Speculative Design and Climate Reading Group

# How might we...

use design methods to help artists produce  
work that responds to climate?

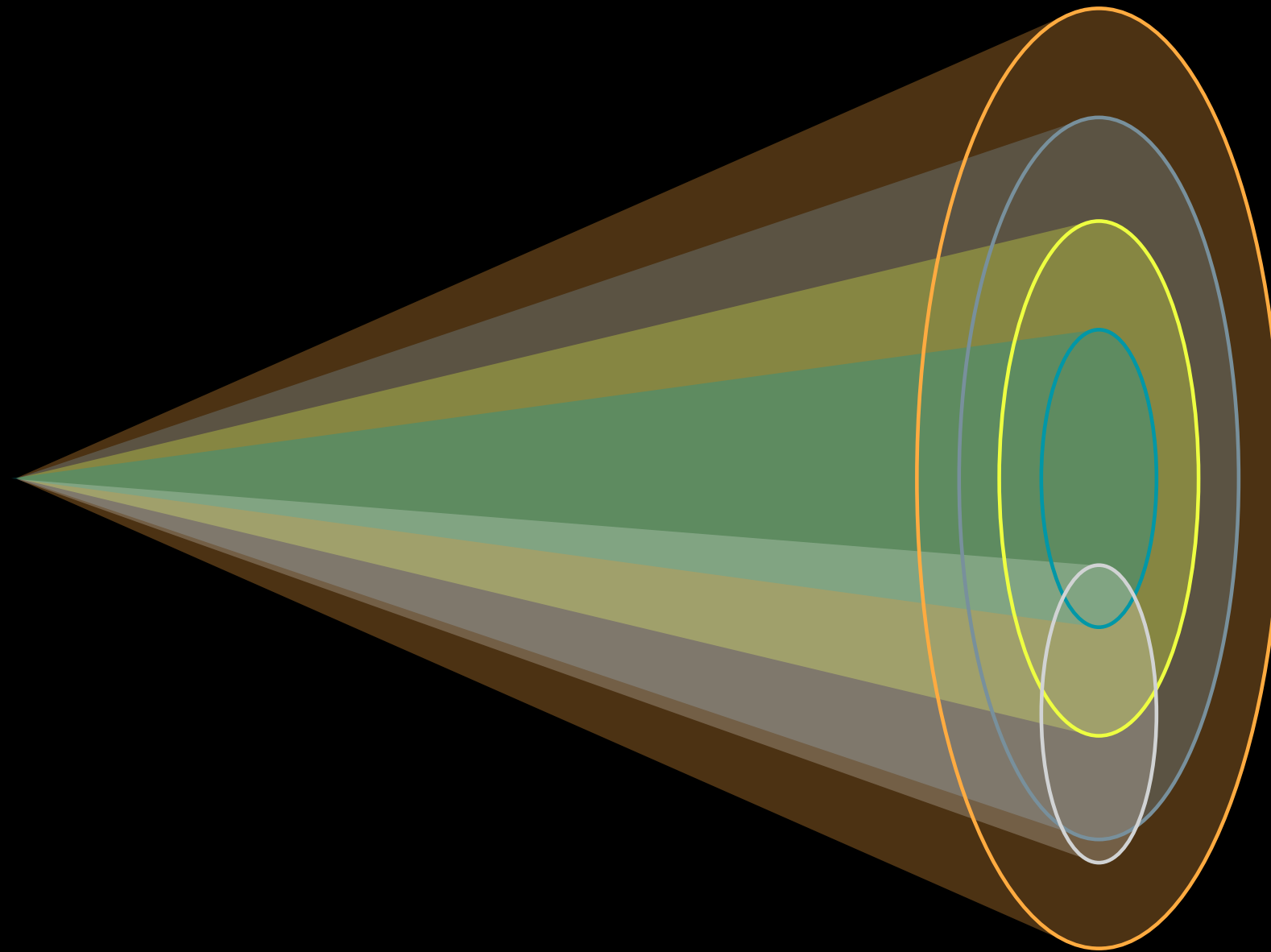
identify methods that are not good at  
helping artists in this way?

identify better methods?

LATITUDE  CHICAGO



# The Futures Cone



Preposterous

Possible

Plausible

Projected

Preferable

Time ———|—————→  
Now

Adapted from Joseph Voros  
<https://thevoroscope.com/2015/12/28/on-examining-preposterous-futures/>

# a/b, Dunne and Raby

{ a }

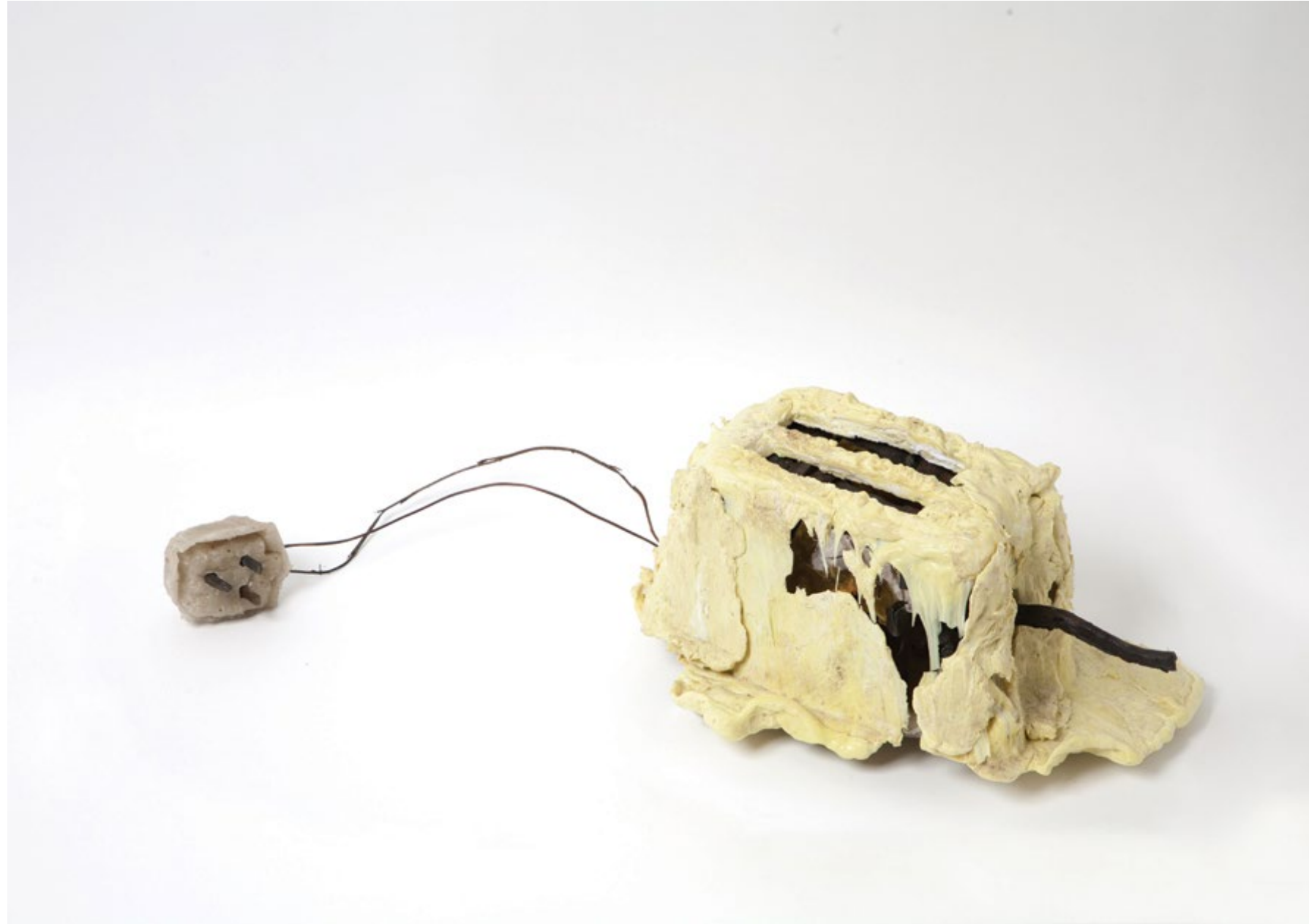
affirmative  
problem solving  
design as process  
provides answers  
in the service of industry  
for how the world is  
science fiction  
futures  
fictional functions  
change the world to suit us  
narratives of production  
anti-art  
research for design  
applications  
design for production  
fun  
concept design  
consumer  
user  
training  
makes us buy  
innovation  
ergonomics

{ b }

critical  
problem finding  
design as medium  
asks questions  
in the service of society  
for how the world could be  
social fiction  
parallel worlds  
functional fictions  
change us to suit the world  
narratives of consumption  
applied art  
research through design  
implications  
design for debate  
satire  
conceptual design  
citizen  
person  
education  
makes us think  
provocation  
rhetoric

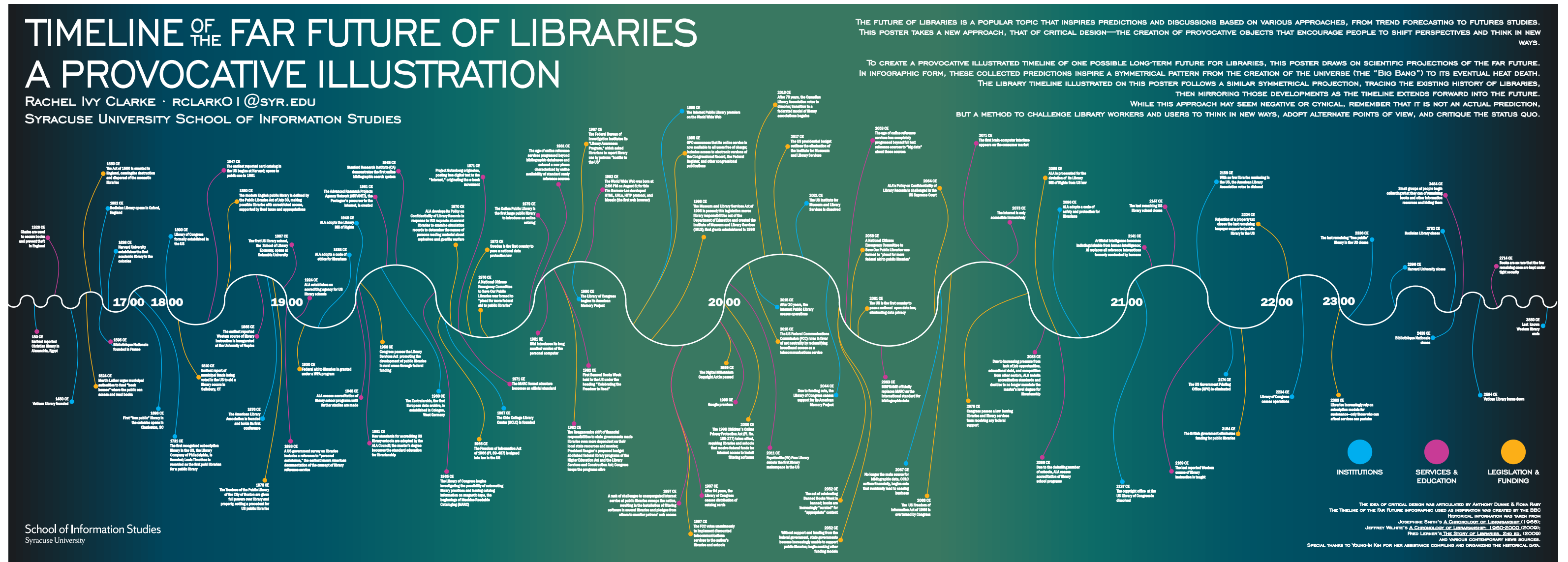
<http://dunneandraby.co.uk/content/projects/476/0>

# The Toaster Project, Thomas Thwaites



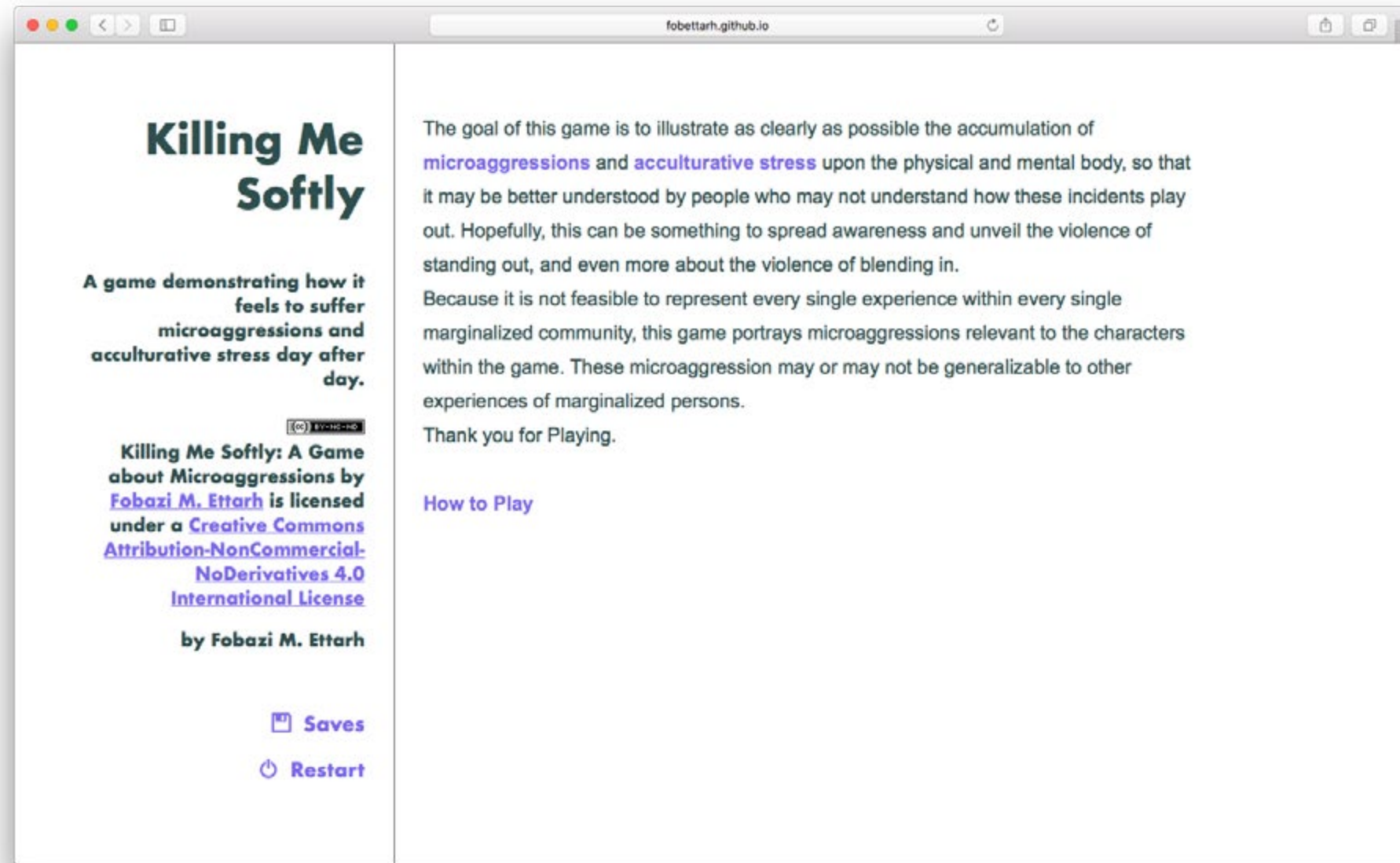
<http://www.thomasthwaites.com/the-toaster-project/>

# A Timeline of the Far Future of Libraries, Rachel Ivy Clarke

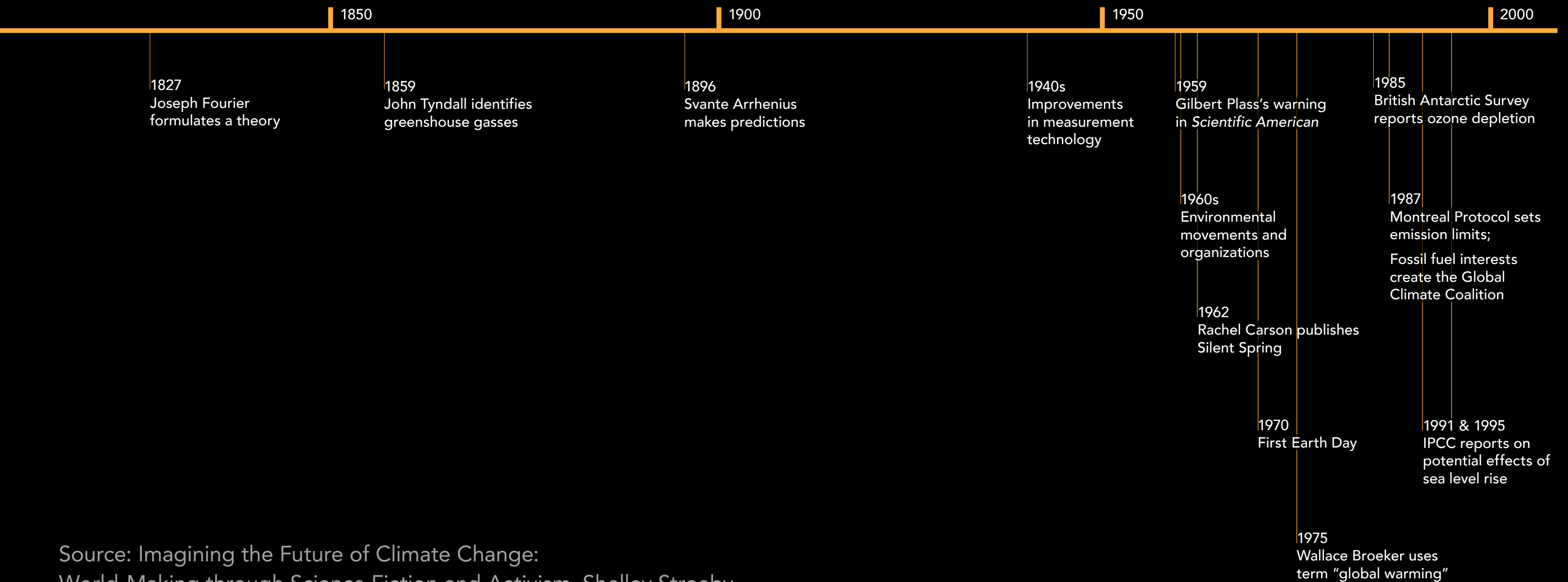


<https://ischool.syr.edu/people/directories/view/rclark01/>

# Killing Me Softly, Fobazi M. Ettarh



# A Brief History of Global Warming



# Reading Groups as a Method



# Syllabus

Design After the End of the World  
Readings & Activities

Week 1: a/b (Dunne & Raby)

Week 2: Speculative Everything, Dunne & Raby (chapters 1 & 2). "Design Fiction: A Short essay on design, science, fact and fiction," Julian Bleeker.

Week 3: Imagining the Future of Climate Change: World-Making through Science Fiction and Activism, Shelley Streeby (chapters 1 & 2).

Week 4: "Do Artifacts Have Politics?" Langdon Winner. "Do Politics Have Artefacts?" Bernward Joerges. "The Economics of Climate Change: Cocktails and Conversations with William Nordhaus," William Nordhaus.

Week 5: The Clock of the Long Now, Stuart Brand (excerpts).

Week 6: The Future Energy Lab, Superflux. The New York Times Special Edition, the Yes Men.

Week 7: The Thing From the Future, Stuart Candy. Brainstorming.

Week 8: The Thing From the Future, Stuart Candy. Brainstorming.

# Sources of Inspiration

Imagining the Future of Climate Change: World-Making through Science Fiction and Activism, Shelley Streeby

“Do Artifacts Have Politics?”  
Langdon Winner

ONE

#NoDAPL

*Native American and Indigenous Science, Fiction,  
and Futurisms*

In the days leading up to the March for Science on Earth Day, April 22, 2017, more than eleven hundred Native American and Indigenous scientists, scholars, and allies endorsed the “Indigenous Science Statement for the March on Science,” authored by four leading Native American scientists and scholars. In this statement, Robin Kimmerer, Rosalyn LaPier, Melissa Nelson, and Kyle Whyte emphasized the concept of Native American and Indigenous science as they encouraged “Indigenous people and allies to participate in the national march in DC or a satellite march.” Naming the declaration “Let Our Indigenous Voices Be Heard,” the authors insisted on the need to “engage the power of both Indigenous and Western science on behalf of the living Earth.”<sup>1</sup> Nelson further elaborated on the concept of Indigenous sciences in an interview: “To successfully address our world’s pressing ecological issues, it is critical that we look to the multiple place-based and time-tested sciences of Indigenous peoples.”<sup>2</sup> The use of the term Indigenous science, like the

LANGDON WINNER

Do Artifacts Have Politics?

IN CONTROVERSIES ABOUT TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIETY, there is no idea more provocative than the notion that technical things have political qualities. At issue is the claim that the machines, structures, and systems of modern material culture can be accurately judged not only for their contributions of efficiency and productivity, not merely for their positive and negative environmental side effects, but also for the ways in which they can embody specific forms of power and authority. Since ideas of this kind have a persistent and troubling presence in discussions about the meaning of technology, they deserve explicit attention.<sup>1</sup>

Writing in *Technology and Culture* almost two decades ago, Lewis Mumford gave classic statement to one version of the theme, arguing that “from late neolithic times in the Near East, right down to our own day, two technologies have recurrently existed side by side: one authoritarian, the other democratic, the first system-centered, immensely powerful, but inherently unstable, the other man-centered, relatively weak, but resourceful and durable.”<sup>2</sup> This thesis stands at the heart of Mumford’s studies of the city, architecture, and the history of technics, and mirrors concerns voiced earlier in the works of Peter Kropotkin, William Morris, and other nineteenth century critics of industrialism. More recently, antinuclear and prosolar energy movements in Europe and America have adopted a similar notion as a centerpiece in their arguments. Thus environmentalist Denis Hayes concludes, “The increased deployment of nuclear power facilities must lead society toward authoritarianism. Indeed, safe reliance upon nuclear power as the principal source of energy may be possible only in a totalitarian state.” Echoing the views of many proponents of appropriate technology and the soft energy path, Hayes contends that “dispersed solar sources are more compatible than centralized technologies with social equity, freedom and cultural pluralism.”<sup>3</sup>

An eagerness to interpret technical artifacts in political language is by no means the exclusive property of critics of large-scale high-technology systems. A long lineage of boosters have insisted that the “biggest and best” that science and industry made available were the best guarantees of democracy, freedom, and social justice. The factory system, automobile, telephone, radio, television, the space program, and of course nuclear power itself have all at one time or another been described as democratizing, liberating forces. David Lilienthal, in *T.V.A.: Democracy on the March*, for example, found this promise in the phos-

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# Sources of Inspiration

Project site:  
<https://theyesmen.org/nyt>

Photo source:  
<https://visitsteve.com/made/the-ny-times-special-edition/>



**What makes  
LATITUDE special?**



# Group properties

open call	invitation only
open group	closed group
interdisciplinary membership	intradisciplinary membership
ongoing	set duration
virtual meetings	physical meetings
daytime	evenings
weekends	weekdays
no alcohol	alcohol
host network	leader network

# Group properties



# Next experiments

1. Free-form verbal brainstorming with facilitator taking notes
2. One hour of brainstorming  
one hour of making
3. Open discussion with a facilitator taking notes
4. Pause discussion to sketch favorable ideas every 15–30 minutes
5. Short critical write-ups based on sketches from brainstorms
6. Mini-research projects based on sketches
7. Field work as input
8. News and social media as input

# Discussion

What experiments would you like try to combine **making and critique**?

How might reading groups with **different people or topics** be different from this one?

What other **partnerships** with outside organizations could libraries explore?

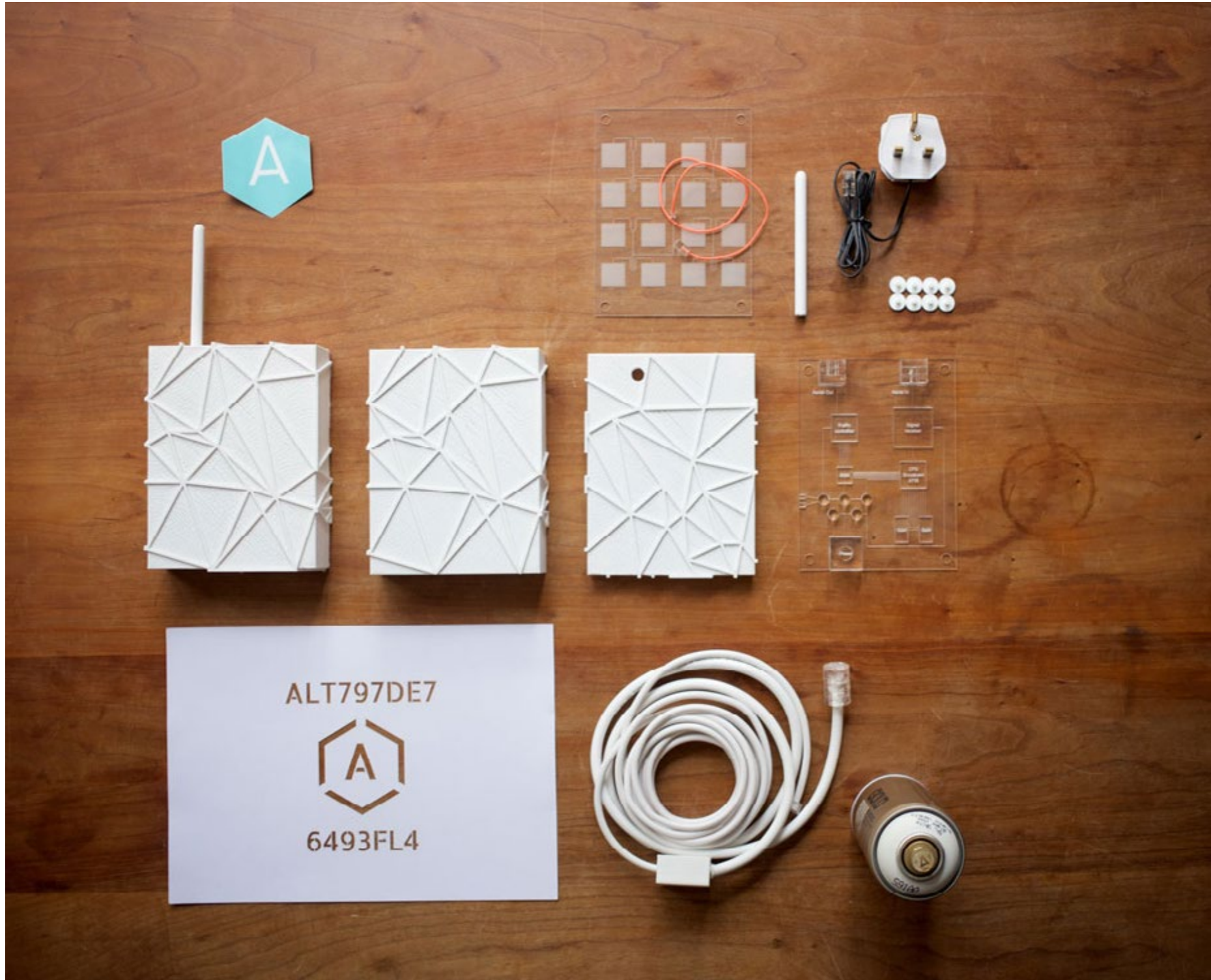
# How might libraries use speculative and critical design?

Being “critical”, not “affirmative”.

Learning to have difficult conversations.

Imagining alternatives to the status quo.

# The Alternet, Sarah Gold



<https://www.sarah.gold/work.html#Alternet>

# The Selfish Ledger, Nick Foster and David Murphy



<https://vimeo.com/270713969>

**Let's watch *The Selfish Ledger*—  
<https://vimeo.com/270713969>**

# Discussion

Have you ever worked with someone who was very good at providing **critical feedback**? How did they do it?

What kinds of situations might call for more **provocative or confrontational** speculative design work?

What types of **problems in libraries** might lend themselves to this kind of approach?

# Invitation—

A **virtual reading group** on speculative and critical design this fall, meeting at convenient times for people in different time zones.

Please stay in touch.

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Twitter: **@johnjungdotus**