METLIB 2026 · IFLA METROPOLITAN LIBRARIES · WORKSHOP RECAP

Let's all time travel together

Thank you for boarding. Here is what we did together, what your tables imagined, and everything you need to take this journey with your own teams.

Floriane-Marielle Job
Wednesday 28 October 2026 · Utrecht



FLIGHT BRIEFING · THE ONE THING TO TAKE HOME

It is hard to agree on a future in the abstract. It gets easier once you can hold it in your hands.

That is what the artefact does. We build libraries for a hundred years, but our foresight data only reaches ten or fifty. Speculative design does not predict anything. It makes a future concrete enough for a group to look at it, argue about it and decide whether they want it.

An object forces choices

A poster, a form or a membership card has to say who it is for, what it costs, what it allows and what it forbids. A vague agreement turns into real decisions.

Everyone points at the same thing

Different countries, languages and jobs around one table. We were not debating words that mean something different to each of us. We were debating one object.

Trade-offs become visible

Every solution helps someone and costs something. Saying it out loud is where the conversation about values starts, and where a collective future gets chosen.

"If this helps our persona with X, society has to give up Y."

Where speculative design comes from

1994 · 2003

The futures cone

Hancock and Bezold draw it for health planning, Joseph Voros extends it. There is never one future: around the probable sit the plausible and the possible. The preferable can sit anywhere.

1999

Critical design

In Hertzian Tales, Anthony Dunne proposes objects that ask questions instead of selling solutions. With Fiona Raby he designs for worlds that do not exist yet.

2005 · 2010

Design fiction

Bruce Sterling names it, Julian Bleecker describes it, David Kirby adds the diegetic prototype: an object that feels real because we see someone use it.

2013

Speculative Everything

Dunne and Raby's reference book. Their A/B manifesto opposes design that solves problems to design that finds them. Speculation as “social dreaming”.

2010s

Futures for everyone

Stuart Candy's experiential futures, the Extrapolation Factory's open workshops, Superflux's climate apartments, UNESCO's Futures Literacy Labs.

2022

A practical manual

The Near Future Laboratory's Manual of Design Fiction shows how to make ordinary objects from the future. Exactly what our tables built.

“The deliberate use of diegetic prototypes to suspend disbelief about change.” Bruce Sterling's definition of design fiction

IN THE ROOM

Six ideas we used in the workshop

FUTURES CONE

Aim for the plausible, not the probable. The probable is what happens if nobody decides anything.

ARTEFACT

An idea that could exist tomorrow, made concrete today: an object, a poster, a form. Neither a prediction nor a plan. A door.

DIEGETIC PROTOTYPE

An object only becomes believable when someone uses it. Hence the one-minute demo between the persona and the object.

THE EVERYDAY FUTURE

Prefer a membership card or a job advert to a flying car. Ordinary objects say more about daily life, rules and power.

EXPERIENTIAL FUTURES

A costume, a countdown, a guided visualisation. People reason differently about a future they have felt for five minutes.

PROBLEM FINDING

The goal is not to solve the persona's life in thirty minutes. It is to discover the question we had not thought of.

FLIGHT PLAN

Eight steps, about ninety minutes

STEP 1 — 2 MIN

The rules

Open your mind, respect differences, explore without judging.

STEP 2 — 5 MIN

Immersion

Wander among the “windows to the future” on the walls. Pick two. Let them find you.

STEP 3 — 5 MIN

What I take with me

One intangible thing for the trip, shared with another traveller.

STEP 4 — BRIEFING

Speculative design

The futures cone (probable, plausible, possible) and what an artefact is.

STEP 5 — 5 MIN

Take-off

A guided visualisation, eyes closed, all the way to the library of 2126.

STEP 6 — 30 MIN

The mission

One shuttle folder per table: persona, context, rules. One artefact to build.

STEP 7 — 25 MIN

Back to 2026

Each table presents: who, what, how, why. One minute of demo each.

STEP 8 — 5 MIN

What I bring back

What each of us brings home from the trip, alone, then as a group.

One library, four people of 2126



Inès Marchal, 46

Gig worker since 2119

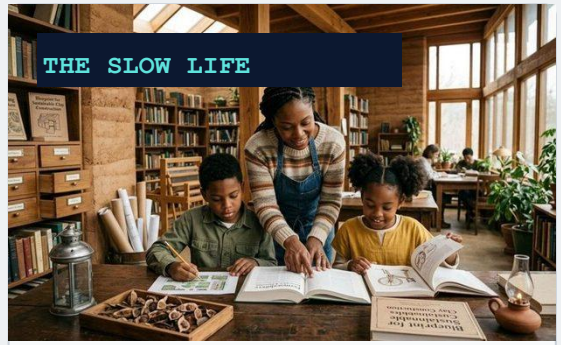
“My rating dropped to 3.1 last spring. Below 3.0, the platform stops offering me anything. I come here because the doors open without a login.”



Aurelio Vance, 58

Trader, three months per city

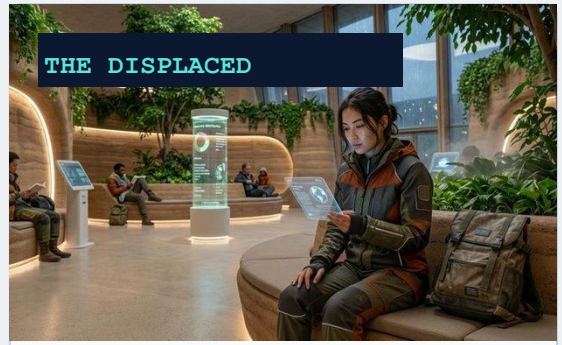
“I pay my local contribution in every city I stay in. In return I expect what I pay for: silence, speed, and something I can't find anywhere else.”



Esther Mbala, 39, and her children

Seed keeper, off the network by choice

“We don't come for the screens. We come because this is where the knowledge from before is kept, and where the children learn to use their hands.”



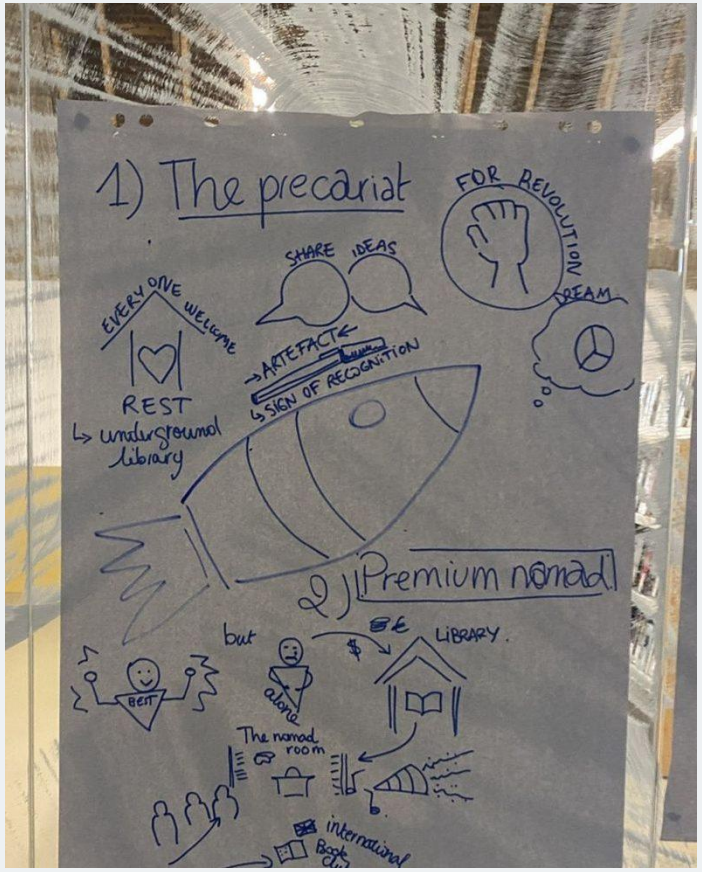
Mei Arnaud, 26

Arrived after the 2119 salt surge

“I don't have the papers they ask for. Here, nobody asked me for them. It was the first thing I noticed.”

All figures and characters in the shuttle folders are fictional. Persona illustrations were generated for the workshop.

A pen that opens an underground library



"Everyone welcome" · "Rest" · "Underground library" · "Sign of recognition"

THE ARTEFACT

An ordinary pen. Because it is not digital, it cannot be tracked, rated or logged. Whoever carries it is recognised by others and can enter an underground library of mutual help: a place to rest, share ideas and dream, without any score attached.

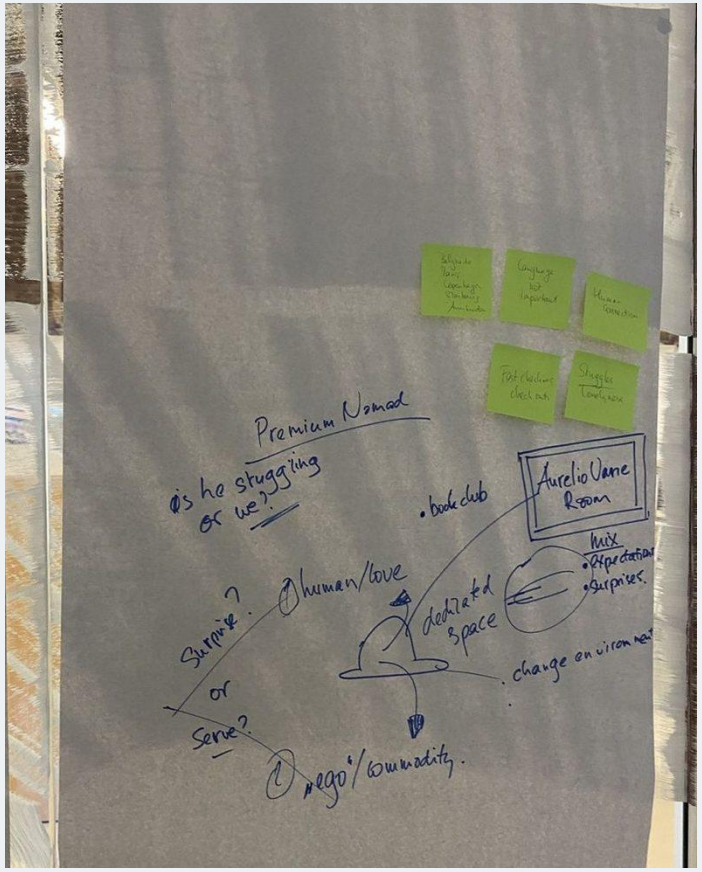
SIGNALS ALREADY HERE

Ratings that decide who gets work. Public services that move online and leave people behind: in France, the national rights ombudsman warned in 2022 that digital-only procedures cut people off from their rights. Libraries already act as the last counter where a human answers.

WHAT IT TEACHES US

In a fully measured city, being unmeasured becomes a service. The most radical idea was low-tech: a door without login. It asks us a hard question today. How much of our users' data do we really need, and can a library defend its budget without counting everyone who comes in?

The nomad room and an international book club



"Is he struggling or we?" · "Surprise? or Serve?" · "The nomad room" · "International book club"

THE ARTEFACT

A dedicated, paid room with fast check-in and check-out, and a book club that follows its members from city to city. The table's question: "Is he struggling, or are we?" Aurelio wants a service. The room slowly gives him surprise and human connection instead. On the post-its: language matters little, loneliness is his real struggle.

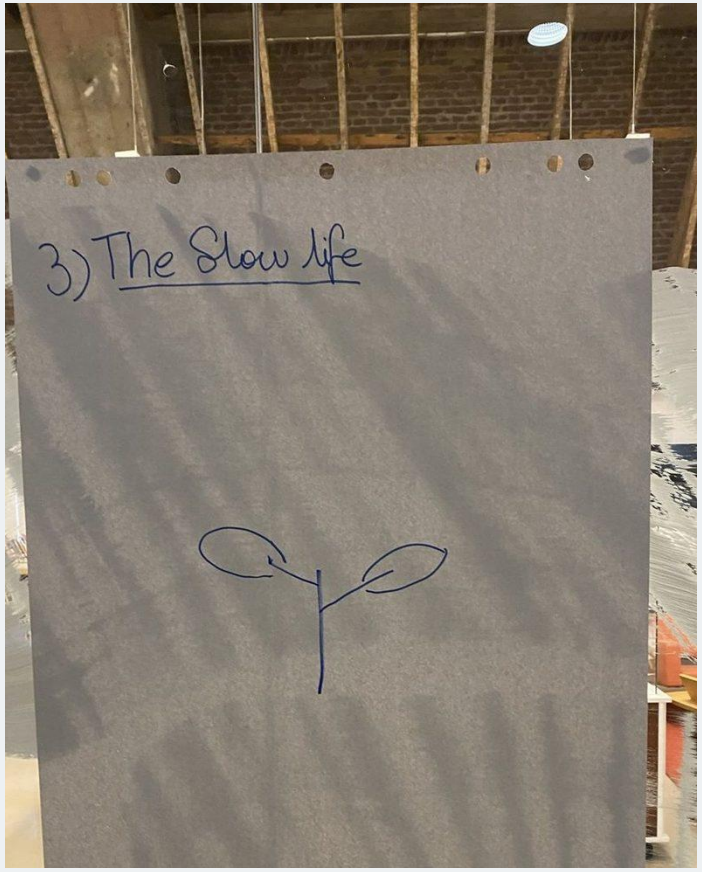
SIGNALS ALREADY HERE

Remote workers who change city with the seasons, and the many countries that now offer digital nomad visas. Libraries already rent rooms and run co-working spaces, and wonder how far they can go.

WHAT IT TEACHES US

The person who seems to need us least may be the loneliest. But a paid room opens the door to a two-speed library. If the library earns from those who can pay, how does it keep the best of itself for those who cannot? Surprise, which no subscription can sell, may be what libraries offer everyone.

Seeds, tools and carrier pigeons



"The slow life" · the title page. The table's ideas went into a shared notebook.

THE ARTEFACT

A library of things you do with your hands: a seed library, a tool library, workshops where generations teach each other. Between libraries that have chosen to disconnect, messages travel by carrier pigeon. The table worked mostly in a shared notebook, which I forgot to photograph. My apologies to the slow life team.

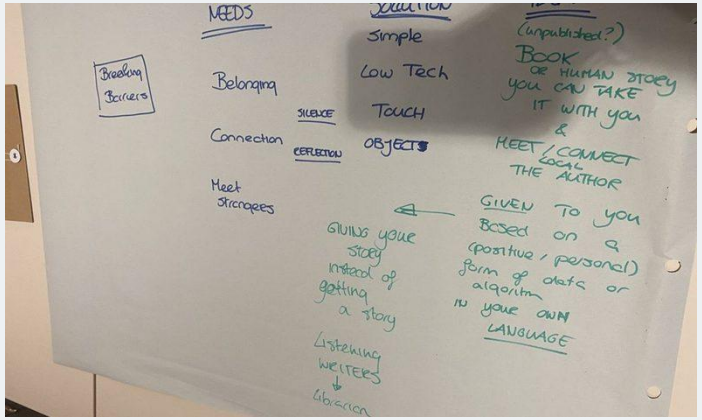
SIGNALS ALREADY HERE

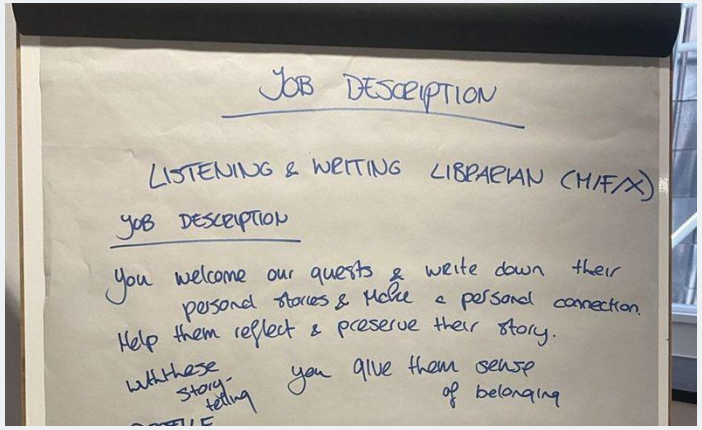
Seed libraries, tool libraries and repair cafés already live in many public libraries. Makerspaces teach crafts that schools have dropped. More people choose to slow down and unplug some of the time.

WHAT IT TEACHES US

A library is also a memory of know-how, not only of texts. If some future users refuse screens, every service that exists only online leaves them out. And the pigeons remind us that a library network can survive a network failure, as long as we keep low-tech ways of staying in touch.

A new profession: the listening and writing librarian





Needs, solutions, ideas · the job advert written by the table

THE ARTEFACT

A job advert. “Listening & writing librarian (M/F/X). You welcome our guests, write down their personal stories and make a personal connection. Help them reflect and preserve their story. With this storytelling you give them a sense of belonging.” Around it: a human story you can take with you, in your own language.

SIGNALS ALREADY HERE

The World Bank's Groundswell report estimates that 216 million people could have to move within their own countries by 2050. The Human Library, born in Copenhagen in 2000, already lends people instead of books.

WHAT IT TEACHES US

For someone who has lost everything, the most valuable service may be to be listened to. The table reversed the flow: giving your story instead of receiving one. Our profession may include jobs we have not named yet, making the library a place where a city learns who it has become.

DEBRIEF · WHAT THE FOUR TABLES TELL US TOGETHER

Four futures, one direction

The answers were low-tech

A pen, a room, seeds and pigeons, a person who listens. Asked to design for 2126, no table reached for advanced technology. The scarce resource in their futures was human attention.

The library as a place without proof

No login, no rating, no papers. Inès and Mei come to the library because it asks them for nothing, and their tables protected that. Unconditional access looks like the core of the library's future value.

Every solution costs someone something

Paid rooms against free access. Anonymity against statistics. Slowness against efficiency. The artefacts made these choices visible, and that is where a collective decision can start.

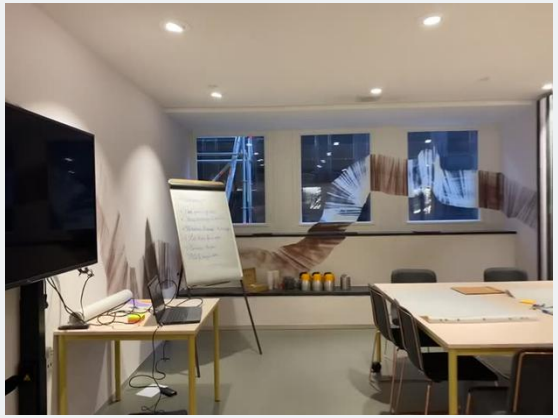
The future is already here, unevenly

Each persona was built on signals we can see today. With the artefact we can discuss them before they become the probable future, while they are still a choice.

The room, before and during



Before take-off · video



The welcome board · video



Mission in progress · video



Mission in progress · video



Four tables, four shuttles



“Supportive community”



Back in 2026: the debrief

How to run this workshop with your own team

BEFORE

Prepare the trip

- **Start from real people.** Use your own user surveys, then push them a hundred years forward. The further away, the freer people feel to speak.
- **Pick personas that pull apart.** The tension between them is the material: one building, people who want opposite things.
- **One shuttle folder per table,** in a kraft envelope: persona, context (timeline to 2126, invented figures, signals visible today), rules.
- **Prepare the room:** images on the walls, paper, markers, post-its and magazine cutouts on each table.

DURING

Fly the mission

- **Set the rules first,** then lower the stakes: a costume, a countdown, a guided visualisation.
- **Offer a menu of artefacts:** an advert, a form, a membership card, a device, an object, a piece of furniture, a job advert.
- **Mind map first, object second.** Write down every idea, then let it lead you to the artefact.
- **Keep the clock visible.** Thirty minutes is short on purpose. People stop planning and start building.

AFTER

Land safely

- **Photograph and transcribe every poster** before anyone leaves. The traces are your data.
- **Ask the return question:** which of these futures would we like to live in, and which would we fight against?
- **Feed the artefacts into real decisions:** a strategic plan for your network, a building project, team training, a consultation with residents or elected officials.

The debrief in four beats

WHO

“This is [persona] in 2126. Their biggest daily struggle is…”

WHAT

“To answer it, we created [artefact].”

HOW

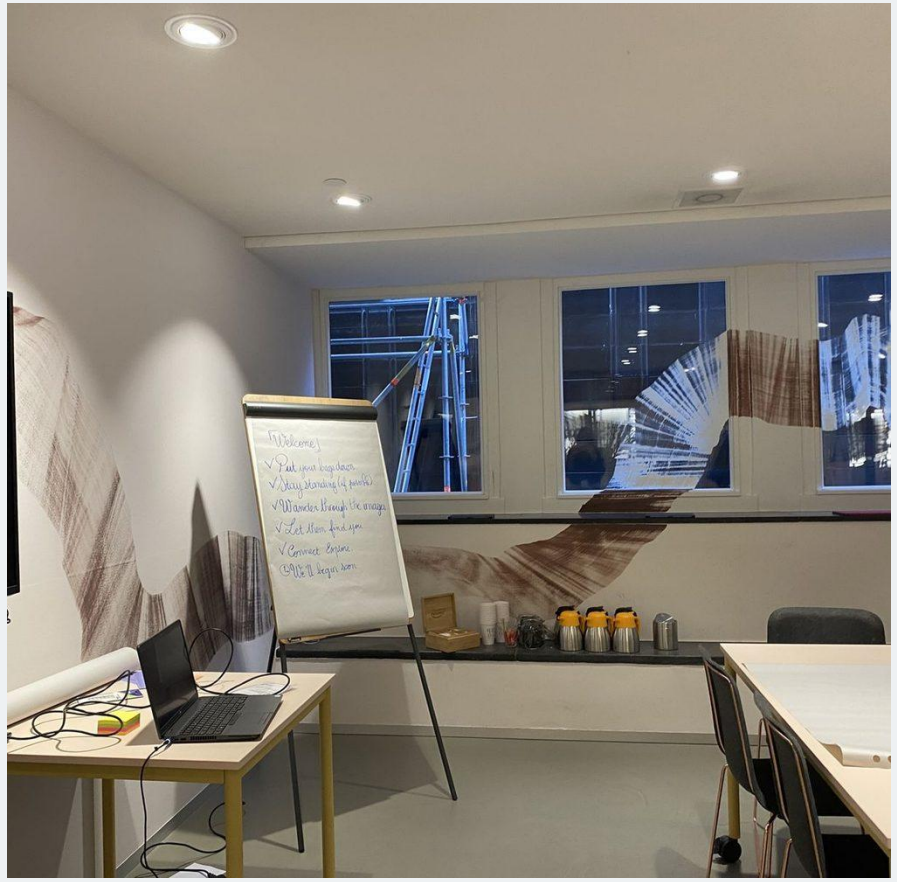
A one-minute demo between the persona and the object.

WHY

The trade-off: “If this helps our persona with X, society has to give up Y.”

If a table gets stuck

1. What does your persona struggle with every day?
2. What does the library do for them that nothing else does?
3. What would the object look like if it were sold, advertised, or broken?



The welcome board: “Wander through the images. Let them find you.”

PAYLOAD

What it can bring to your library

A shared picture

Teams, managers and partners leave with the same images in mind, and with words to name them.

Users made tangible

Personas turn survey figures into people you can argue for. It is harder to forget a group once you have spent half an hour in their shoes.

Hard questions, early and safely

Access, surveillance, who pays, who is left out. In our room it also brought up the risk of keeping LGBTQ+ programmes in some parts of the United States today.

Material for decisions

Artefacts are easy to show to elected officials and residents. They start a conversation that a strategy document rarely does.



Methods and reading to go further

BOOK · 2013

Speculative Everything

Dunne and Raby. The founding text, with the A/B manifesto.

ARTICLE · TOOL

The futures cone

Joseph Voros on where the cone comes from and how to use it.

MANUAL · 2022

The Manual of Design Fiction

Near Future Laboratory. Everyday objects from the future, step by step.

CARD GAME

The Thing from the Future

Stuart Candy and Jeff Watson. Deals you a future, a theme and an object to invent.

STUDIO · METHOD

Extrapolation Factory

Elliott P. Montgomery and Chris Woebken. Prototyping futures with non-designers.

EXPERIENTIAL FUTURES

Mitigation of Shock

Superflux. A full apartment set in a climate-changed future.

BOOK · OPEN ACCESS

Transforming the Future

Riel Miller (ed.), UNESCO. Futures literacy and the Futures Literacy Lab.

TOOLKIT · LIBRARIES

Design Thinking for Libraries

IDEO with Chicago Public Library and Aarhus Public Libraries.

OVERVIEW

Speculative design

A quick map of the field, its history and its critics.



LANDING

Thank you for travelling with me

You gave a pen a revolution, a nomad a book club, a sprout a future and a whole new job to libraries. I came home with your posters and a lot of hope.

If you want the shuttle folders to run this with your own team, just ask. I will be happy to share them, and to hear where your libraries travel next.

Floriane-Marielle Job

Bibliothèques-Médiathèques de Metz, France · florianemariellejob.fr

Futures cone on screen: Elliott P. Montgomery, Narrative Futures Cones (epmid.com). Short film: Extrapolation Factory. Workshop held at MetLib 2026, IFLA Metropolitan Libraries Section, Netherlands, 25–28 October 2026. Photos: Floriane-Marielle Job and the MetLib 2026 conference photographers.