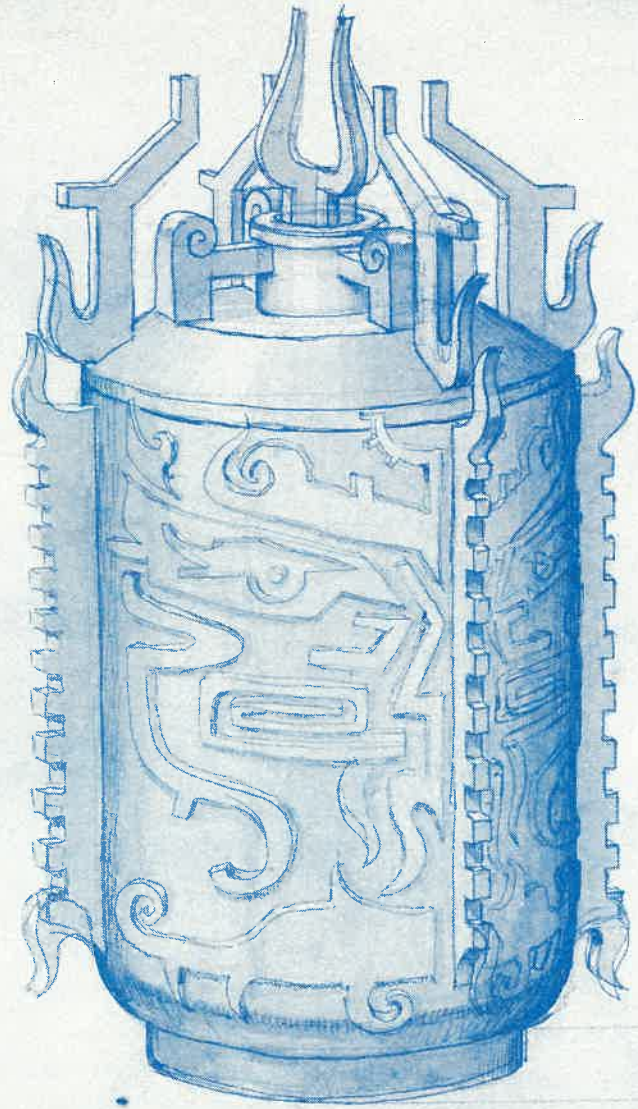


# OTHER SUNS





Prologue to an exhibition that has not yet taken place

Darren Jorgensen

The first exhibition of science fiction was Harald Szeemann's 1967 *Science Fiction*, that wanted to make a 'Museum of Today'. European museums presented a particular problem for Szeeman, with their Greek statues and Roman coins standing for the past of Europe's future. Of course an exhibition about the future is properly speaking impossible, because as soon as something is made it is a part of the present. This is why contemporary art often appears to be futuristic, but could never be about the future. Contemporary art brings into being that which did not exist before, something different from other things, but can only gesture to the future from its own present.

The conundrum for artists lies in the differentiation they must make of their work from the clutter of things that instead promise the future. In the lexicon of science fiction theory such things are called quasi-novums, that appear to transform the world but really do not. Videophone watches and motorised skateboards appear in the world like science fiction but are not, because we are already living in the future that they bring into being. As homes become smart homes and cars begin to drive themselves, science fiction seems less world shaking than the world itself. It is barely possible to imagine the future when the world is constantly becoming different and strange.

The quasi-novums that surround us mean that it is harder than ever for the world to be present to itself, because everything appears as old or incredibly new, a legacy of the past

or a portent of the future. The present is the paradox of science fiction itself, its imaginary futures symptomatic of an inability to grasp the present. These futures are invariably less complicated than the present, the immensity of the universe crossed at the speed of light, and aliens appearing all too much like ourselves. Contemporary art is similarly nostalgic for a future that will never come to pass. So it is that as we look at contemporary art about science fiction we might as well peer into a black hole, the future no longer being visible there, the light that it should shed on our contemporary condition bending into the paradox of being present in the time that it is already in.

This is what the writer Philip K. Dick meant by the titles of his 1959 book *Time Out of Joint*, and *The Martian Time Slip* from 1964. In the latter the settlers of Mars are disoriented by the extra 20 minutes in a Martian day, the sense that they are slightly behind the real time of Earth. Dick was describing the way we are all Martians now, the sense that there is a delay in the way we grasp the present, the gap between the world we know and the one we do not. Contemporary artists want to make this present visible, to speak to a future that has not arrived, to grapple with the impossibility of living in a time in which it is not only impossible to imagine the future, but the present itself.

Darren Jorgensen is a writer and senior lecturer at the University of Western Australia.

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