This is a highly readable and thought-provoking book. Pepperell’s research is extensive and covers many quite disparate disciplines such as art, technology, culture, history and religious politics. All these are relevant to the posthuman condition.

Just what is meant by posthuman? Briefly, three rather different notions apply to posthumanism. Firstly, it means the end or demise of “humanism.” Secondly, it embraces a new way of understanding that which constitutes being human. Thirdly, it refers to the general convergence of biology and technology to the point where they are becoming indistinguishable (p. iv). The book expands and carefully investigates these definitions. The questions asked are profound, and the answers provided, in some cases speculative, delve into the deepest and most sacred beliefs of the waning humanist epoch.


Chapter 5, especially the section discussing good and bad art, seems somewhat ineffectual compared with the rest of the book. I found Pepperell’s notion of “aesthetically stimulating” and “aesthetically neutral” art unconvincing (pp. 103–106). This section could perhaps have been replaced with an overview of Eastern philosophies that have had much of importance to say about consciousness and the nature of “the self,” which is now being acknowledged within the fields of quantum mechanics and cultural studies (deconstruction). This is a minor criticism, though—maybe something to look forward to in a future edition.

Possibly the greatest contribution this book makes to our future is the extensive attempt to clarify the relationship between us (male and female humans) and the rest of the “stuff” of the universe, from rocks to plants to our technology. Computers and mobile (cell) phones are not devices foisted upon us by some alien visitors; they are created and utilized by us as extensions of ourselves. That is, from the beginning of our existence we have attempted to “extend our physical abilities with tools”; this is the “extensionist” view of human nature (p. 152).

As Pepperell eloquently puts it, “where humanists saw themselves as distinct beings in an antagonistic relationship with their surroundings, posthumans regard their own being as embodied in an extended technological world.”

References

**ABSURD SUMMER**


Reviewed by Stefaan Van Ryssen, Hogeschool Gent, Jan Delvinlaan 115, 9000 Gent, Belgium. E-mail: <stefaan.vanryssen@pandora.be>.

Japanese composer Koji Asano (currently based in Barcelona) has documented his musical journeys in a series of over 30 self-produced recordings. **Absurd Summer** is a suite of 11 carefully arranged parts, each in its own mood and character but sharing filtered and distorted piano figures drifting in and out of a background of almost white noise. Sometimes an abstract melody peeks out from under the cover, hiding again as soon as it takes form and shape. Sometimes there are bells or metal plates. Sometimes the wind seems to be moving loose parts of some long-forgotten metalworks, playing a rhythm of its own. It is summer, after all, and it is, as the title suggests, absurdly hot or threatening or languishing. Then again, in the background, a melody is played, in the right hand, gravely accompanied by a repeated note in the left hand.

At the level of composition, there is no unifying mood or overarching structure apart from the sheer consecutive-ness of the different sounds. Only the second and the very last parts show a resemblance in texture and melody. So, Asano is exploring the different shades of the distorted piano, sent through seriously mangled speakers and augmented with a choice of electronically generated hisses, scratches, screeches and unnameable sounds. The overall

**SIGNIFICANCE OF THE WORK**

**REVIEW**

**ABSURD SUMMER** by Koji Asano (Solstice, Barcelona, Spain, 2003).

Reviewed by Stefaan Van Ryssen, Hogeschool Gent, Jan Delvinlaan 115, 9000 Gent, Belgium. E-mail: <stefaan.vanryssen@pandora.be>.

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effect of these 30 minutes is to raise listener eyebrows, make us shift uneasily and ask the very old question: Why should I listen to this? Why is this ever recorded? Why should I bother to listen to this again? There is no reason, apart from the exploration of the extended sound palette. It is a CD to be scavenged by sampling wizards and professional sound effect hunters.

**Vingt Chansons pour Jean Cocteau (Twenty Songs for Jean Cocteau)**


Reviewed by Chris Cobb. E-mail: <crobbs@hotmail.com>.

Maurice Methot’s 20 quiet songs are full of ephemeral references to Erik Satie, Claude Debussy and other French or “impressionistic”-sounding piano works. Methot’s trick, however, is that this sweet and meditative CD was derived and shaped all on a computer, not on a piano.

The liner notes barely mention the music, however. Instead they concentrate on the MIDI interface, the computer and the technical way it was created. But don’t let me give the wrong impression here—the songs, despite being made from samples of a real piano, are soft and a little moody, which I like. But the audience for this seems unclear. Is it for other so-called digital composers who like to experiment with new software? Is it for those who like “all things French”? I think this is a fair question, because people who are drawn to “all things French” are also drawn to ideas such as passion, beauty, nobility of cause and the exaltation of desire that is often associated with Frenchness.

So I am not sure what to make of the quiet music on this CD. At first I think of the difference between the tension contained in the pause of a piano player and the simulated tension made on a computer. Whereas live music could be seen as a conversation partly with the audience and partly between the musician and the instrument, what happens when the music is completely derived from a program? What becomes of the conversation that makes a piano player’s skill affect people emotionally? Jean Cocteau is not mentioned in the liner notes and so I am also not sure what connection he or his work has to Methot’s work. So I wonder if this is informed by the now-classic image of Baudrillard’s “silmacra,” where the map is considered more important than the landscape it describes? The landscape we are dealing with here is music.

Even though the meditative sounds in Vingt Chansons pour Jean Cocteau are nice to listen to, its process and lack of clear audience bring up a lot of artistic issues, especially those of authorship and inspiration. I feel a little let down, because the liner notes give little sense of the composer’s perspective or purpose. It is intriguing to think of a group of compositions dedicated to Cocteau, but I want to know what the connection is. Did he meet Cocteau as a child? Was Methot influenced by certain works of Cocteau, or is he simply trying to evoke the music of an era long gone and just using Cocteau’s name to create context? Rather, this appears to be a kind of experiment or one-off idea. Music, like other art, needs a context, and it is unclear what that is on this CD.

### EXHIBITIONS

**Els Altres Arquitectes (The Other Architects)**


Reviewed by Dennis Dollens, Department of Genetic Architectures, Universitat Internacional de Catalunya, Barcelona, Spain. E-mail: <exodesis@mac.com>.

Less internationally publicized than the Zoomorphic exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, but more intensely focused, the show Els Altres Arquitectes at Barcelona’s Zoological Museum is by far the more satisfying of the two.

**Zoomorphic Architecture: New Animal Architecture**


Reviewed by Dennis Dollens, Department of Genetic Architectures, Universitat Internacional de Catalunya, Barcelona, Spain. E-mail: <exodesis@mac.com>.

The building’s shape, structure and ventilation scheme all find a parallel in the class of sea creatures known as glass sponges. These have delicate, elongated exoskeletons. They filter nutrients from water they suck in at their base and expel from a hole at the top, just as Foster’s tower circulates air.

Well, yes. But “parallel” is imprecise, and many sponges look nothing like elongated exoskeletons. Did Foster actually study *euplectella*? The tower has a beautifully engineered structural braid, while *euplectella* is also beautifully composed of spiraling strands complexly cross-braced from within. So, indeed, visual biomimesis exists, but it is not analytically considered—was the sponge a visual, mnemonic device or an inspirational, biological one? The show provides little guidance to such relationships.

Furthermore, *euplectella*’s siliceous fibers are currently under intense biomimetic observation (Lucent Technologies), since its glassy material is identical to manufactured fiber optics. Yet this animal grows underwater—at low temperatures, and subject to low pressure—a process that, if understood, could provoke a revolution in engineering and architectural materials. Is it possible that Foster was looking to such qualities of growth and being? Did he study the sponge’s algorithms? It is important to know, because new architecture is not going to arrive on the basis of visual “parallels.”

If, for example, you could secrete sheets of material the way the sponge grows, you could create a chance of developing an architecture more attuned to biology and hence more attuned to the environment. Because Zoomorphic, subtitled New Animal Architecture, lacks sufficient biological information and specific connections to the generation of architecture, it fails to make more than tenuous, pictorial use of biology and results in an intellectual tease.

The Barcelona exhibition in the Zoological Museum takes us into a 19th-century naturalist’s environment. A beautiful enigma in relation to modern museums, this institution’s second floor retains a core collection in original cases, traditionally displayed, that now biomimetically supplements the intelligences of the Altres Arquitectes work downstairs.