Editorial note: Alan Sondheim occasionally transmits micro-reviews of various titles he is reading, and, from time to time, we will be compiling some of the more new media-related or just interesting titles he's been perusing with his permission.

Spy Planes and Electronic Warfare Aircraft,
Bill Gunston (Arco, 1883)
I found this recently and love it. It's about seeing instead of killing, although sight itself is a grasp / rapture / raptor. Although outdated, it has the Lockheed SR-71 in it, a work of art that I saw in real life in Omaha. I like to think of these planes monitoring forest fires, clear-cutting, and other environmental travesties, instead of fast-forward monitoring of 'insurgents.' Almost none of them have weaponry. I dream of the whole tribe of them watching each other soundlessly in the skies, leaving the rest of us alone.

PDF Hacks, 100 Industrial-Strength Tips & Tools,
Sid Steward (O'Reilly, 2004)
Personally I am irritated by PDF, finding it clunky, almost useless within browsers, long-loading, difficult to manipulate and at times even to download. This book does tell you how to work it more flexibly, from both creator and consumer viewpoints. I highly recommend this to academics and anyone (myself included) who has to work with the format.

The book includes sections on speeding up Acrobat's startup, copying data from PDF pages, managing a group of PDFs, authoring and self-publishing PDFs, and, among other things, "dynamic PDF" which is fairly interesting.

For myself, I'd like to see a spy-plane Acrobat that opens instantly, a browser in which files melt and can be infinitely molded, almost html...

The Culture of Civil War in Kyoto,
Mary Elizabeth Berry
(University of California Press, 1994)
This book was mentioned first by Philip Agre; it's an account of culture, not just of war, but of ludic tea ceremonies, dances, during the 15th and 16th century "Era of Warring States" in Kyoto. What fascinates me is the resonance between civility, civilian unrest, dance-form, control and release -- all those Bataillian qualities (or Foofwa d'Imobilite for example) played out

centuries ago. This work is useful for me in my own aesthetic flounderings; I highly recommend it, even for those not particularly interested in Japanese history.
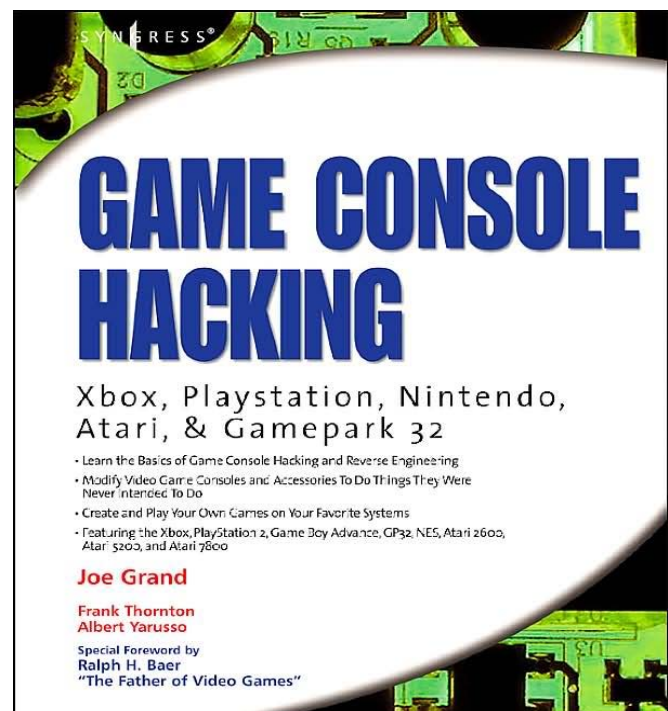
Synthetic Philosophy, First Principles,
Herbert Spencer
(Appleton, 1892 ed. The work is decades earlier).
Well, he is associated with social Darwinism, "survival of the fittest," and so forth. This work, which is the first in the series of Synthetic Philosophy, has been a surprise, since it seems above all to predate chaos and non-equilibrium thermodynamics theories in a fascinating way, which also reads like phenomenology. The titles of some of the chapters will give you the idea -- "The Persistence of Relations Among Forces," "The Instability of the Homogeneous," "The Multiplication of Effects," "Segregation," "Equilibration," "Dissolution" -- you get the idea. I'm currently working my way through sections of this.

Steal This File Sharing Book,
What They Won't Tell You About File Sharing,
Wallace Wang (No Starch, 2004)
I just received this review copy, and hope to give an analysis later, but just want to say that it is amazing. This is a subject I know something about from the old

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IRC days, but not much more. The book gives reviews of just about everything from cracking e-books to "stealing" files, pornography, etc. I think works like this will become more and more necessary in this country -- where I now use an "rmm" command to wipe my panix.com account clean of suspect files after the fact. Ah well…

Game Console Hacking, Xbox, Playstation, Nintendo, Atari & Gamepark 32,
Joe Grand with Frank Thornton, Albert Yarusso (Syngress Publishing, 2004)
The back says "Have Fun While Voiding Your Warranty." I wanted to see this, partly out of curiosity (it was offered to me via O'Reilly), and partly out of a real desire to take a console apart (again, a project put off for a few months). You can find some of this stuff at the Salvation Army, not to mention E-Bay, and the very idea of making an Atari 2600PC is really appealing. You've already get head-starts with some of the components, including case, possibly the power-supply, switches, etc. If you have a kid into gaming and soldering, this is a book for him or her. There's good stuff, by the way, for digital artists on homebrew game development with various platforms.

Future Pasts, The Analytic Tradition in Twentieth-Century Philosophy,
edited by Juliet Floyd and Sanford Shieh (Oxford University Press, 2001).
This book is a prescient series of essays by people like Hintikka (on Ernst Mach), Quine, Putnam (on Reichenbach) etc., with an afterword by John Rawls. It's wonderful, lively. It covers people like Kripke, Turing, Dewey, Carnap, Heidegger (of Being and Time), Husserl, Wittgenstein (Tractatus) etc. I love this stuff -- the hinge of 19th - 20th - 21st century philosophy of math and science, both of which are emphasized. It's a good read -- I'm particularly interested in Carnap's notion of tolerance in relation to mathematical foundations / philosophy.

Spam Kings,
Brian McWilliams (O'Reilly, 2004).
I said that I probably could not review this, since it doesn't cover things like the "Nigerian spams." They sent it anyway. I must say the book is astounding in the weirdness it uncovers, and in the apparent messiness of spam history. At times spam fighters change sides, or work both against -- what? It's like a paean to postmodernity. Individual histories, identities, spam offers, ISPs etc., are changed at

the drop of a hat; there are prosecutions, but they're somewhat ineffective. The book shows, guess what, that Bush's spam law is basically useless. I'd try to find this on Amazon. It's hardbound $22.95, and is one of the books I'll pass on -- a terrific read, but no reason to return to it.

Smart Home Hacks,
Tips & Tools for Automating Your House,
Gordon Meyer (O'Reilly, 2004).
Well, this is fantastic for someone with a smart home; ours is particularly dumb, without a TV remote, and many kludged computer thingies. But I will end up using this book constantly -- since the hacks, which cover things that go on with movement change, light change, temperature change, logic change etc. are cheap, and applicable to art installations of all sorts. If you have a real hardware techie to work with, you probably won't need this -- but I do. Next year, I hope to hook some of these things up with motion capture, and then... Anyway, this book is already proving indispensable -- if you do any sort of digital media work and you want potentially cheap fixes, take a look.