

**STORMING**

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**THE**

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**REALITY**

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**STUDIO**

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Edited by Larry McCaffery

■ A

Casebook

of

Cyberpunk

and

Postmodern

Science

Fiction

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## Cyberpunk 101:

### A Schematic Guide

#### to *Storming the*

#### *Reality Studio*

A quick list of the cultural artifacts that helped to shape cyberpunk ideology and aesthetics, along with books by the cyberpunks themselves, in roughly chronological order.

*Frankenstein* (Mary Shelley, 1989 [1818], Penguin). The recycling of body parts, the creation of life (or monster making), murder, sex, revenge, the epic chase, the brilliant scientist working outside the law, a brooding, romantic atmosphere—this book is a veritable sourcebook for SF motifs and clichés. It also created the first great myth of the industrial revolution, and reflects the deeply schizophrenic attitude toward science so evident in postmodern culture and in the fiction emerging from this culture.

*Red Harvest* (Dashiell Hammett, 1929, Vintage). Established the basic template for the hard-boiled detective format. The tough guy—loner confronting a vast system of corruption with his own private code of ethics, the vividly drawn underworld populated by sleazy criminal types, the richly idiosyncratic lingo, the violence and surrealism of urban life—these motifs proved readily transferable to cyberpunk's portrayal of survival in a multinational version of street life.

*Last and First Men* (Olaf Stapledon, 1937, Dover). Hardly a novel at all. More like a long, brilliant encyclopedic essay on the next million-or-so years of human evolution.

*The Big Sleep* (Raymond Chandler, 1939, Random House). Chandler's smooth, polychromatic prose style and vision of the detective as knight-errant has influenced more than one cyberpunk.

“*Coming Attraction*” (Fritz Leiber, 1950, in *The Best of Fritz Leiber*, 1974, Ballantine). Virtually without precedent in 1950s SF, this grim short story of the future was told in sharp, surreal images, highlighted by an unflinching *noir* viciousness and terse prose. Its opening sentence is a paradigm for much of cyberpunk: “The coupe with the fishhooks welded to the fender shouldered up over the curb like the nose of a nightmare.”

*Limbo* (Bernard Wolfe, 1988 [1952], Carroll & Graf). Wolfe, ex-Trotsky bodyguard, wrote this great American dystopia (and proto-cyberpunk) novel. Self-mutilation, lobotomy, and prosthetics are seen in a postnuke North America as the cure for war. *Limbo* is a brilliant black comedy, which is probably why it has been so neglected. Average SF readers don’t score high on *irony* tests.

*The Stars My Destination* (Alfred Bester, 1956 [1955], Sidgwick & Jackson). Body modification, corporate intrigue, baroque settings and characters, and a walk down the gray line that separates criminals from the straight world. But it’s the protagonist’s purely anarchic belief in humanity that makes this book remarkable. This remains one of the few truly subversive novels ever to come out of science fiction.

*Naked Lunch* (William S. Burroughs, 1962 [1959], Grove). A blast of maniacal laughter from Hell. A combination of comedy as black as clotted blood. Dr. Benway’s twisted medical speculations, tales of the criminal underground, and sexual fantasies that tear at your inseams like a rabid brontosaurus, all told in a fragmented prose style that still reads like the raw, beautiful poetry it is. The influence of this book is enormous. Without *Naked Lunch* there would probably be no cyberpunk.

*The Gutenberg Galaxy*, *Understanding Media*, and *The Medium Is the Massage* (Marshall McLuhan, 1962, University of Toronto Press; 1964, NAL; 1967, Random House). McLuhan was to the 1960s what Baudrillard, Kroker and Cook, and Deleuze and Guattari are to the postcyberpunk era: grasping the profound implications of how technological change (in the form of the printing press, television, movies, the telephone, and so on) was reshaping human interactions, perceptions, and self-concepts, McLuhan presented his message in a medium that was “postmodern” before its time—that is, via a jagged mosaic of

audacious speculations, samplings of quotes, photographs, footnotes, digressions. Another candidate for the “Godfather of Cyberpunk.”

*A Clockwork Orange* (Anthony Burgess, 1962, Norton). Alex is the subject of a mind control experiment in a bleak near-future world overrun by youth gangs obsessed with violence and trendy fashion. Told in a well thought-out patois collaging bits of Cockney rhyming slang and various Eastern languages.

*The Soft Machine*, *The Ticket That Exploded*, *Nova Express*, *The Wild Boys* (William S. Burroughs, 1966 [1961], 1967 [1962], 1964, 1971). In this sequence of novels (or prose poems), Burroughs draws more heavily on the SF pulp motifs of his childhood than in *Naked Lunch*. Space odysseys, Uranium Willy and the Heavy Metal Kid, image banks and silence viruses, protopunk “wild boys” engaged in apocalyptic guerilla warfare, body and mind invasion, the Nova Mob matching wits with the Nova police (hampered by the corrupt Biologic Courts) for control of the Reality Studio—these hallucinatory SF elements interact with shards of poetry by Rimbaud, Shakespeare, and Eliot (and much, much more) to fuel Burroughs’s atomic-powered strap-on, which probes the asshole of society with more glee and wicked humor than anyone since Swift.

*The Crying of Lot 49* (Thomas Pynchon, 1966, Perennial). Like Pynchon’s first novel, *V.* (1963), this book serves up bits of history, science, philosophy, and pop psychology in a sauce wonderfully spiced with rock lyrics, sophomoric jokes, and truly *twisted* character names and types; when these elements are heated by paranoia and alienation, severe turbulence occurs. Less dense and less grounded in technology than his massive next novel, *Gravity’s Rainbow*, *Lot 49* nonetheless anticipates cyberpunk in its wondrous use of scientific metaphors, its slam-dance paces, its depiction of an exotic underworld of alienated weirdos, and its rapid modulations between the realms of “high culture” and the pop underground of drugs and the media culture.

*Andy Warhol Presents the Velvet Underground and Nico* (Velvet Underground, 1967, Polygram). Lou Reed and John Cale took pop audiences for harrowing rides into the darkness existing not on the edge of town but right in its center. Combining avant-garde, industrial-strength noise and back-to-basics impulses, *VU*’s brutally honest depiction of

drugs, s&m, and desperation was a breakthrough for a pop culture then entranced by the Summer of Love. The epitome of cool, bored-but-hyper hipness and street smarts, Reed—resplendent in black leather jacket and mirrorshades—created adult songs about characters whose arrogance and paranoia clashed headlong with their human frailties. As musicians and as cultural icons, the VU were seminal influences on the 1970s punk and the 1980s cyberpunk scenes.

*Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (Philip K. Dick, 1968, Ballantine). Renegade androids escape to earth from off-planet, and robot killer Deckard must track them down. Identity is the big question here: who is more human, the androids who want to live or the cop who wants to kill them? Basis for the film *Blade Runner* (1982).

*Nova* (Samuel Delany, 1968, Bantam). Stylistically, the bridge between the baroque 1950s SF of *The Stars My Destination* and the harder edge worldview of *Neuromancer*. A space opera full of feuding families and oddball characters, but with a respect for the science that makes it all run.

*La Société du Spectacle* (Guy Debord, 1967, Buchet-Chastel; trans. *Society of the Spectacle*, Black & Red, 1977). The first comprehensive examination of the far-reaching effects of postindustrial capitalism on individuals. The book opens with the following startling statement: “In societies where modern conditions of production prevail, all of life presents itself as an immense accumulation of *spectacles*. Everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation.” From there, we are only a hop, skip, and a jaunt from Baudrillard’s “simulacra,” Rucker’s software, and Gibson’s cyberspace.

*The Cornelius Chronicles*, volumes 1–3 (Michael Moorcock, 1969, Avon). The semicomplete story of the life/lives of Jerry Cornelius, Nobel Prize-winning scientist and rock and roll musician. The existential plotting, ambiguous sexuality of the main characters, and general low life/high brow feel make these very important works in the canon.

*The Atrocity Exhibition* (J. G. Ballard, 1990 [1969], Re/Search Publications). Ballard studied medicine while in college and it shows here. Through a series of fragmented “compressed novels,” Ballard traces the breakdown of a doctor at a mental hospital.

*Future Shock* (Alvin Toffler, 1970, Random House). Information increased and comprehension decreased. Sound familiar? Get ready. The future is only going to get weirder.

*Dub Music* (1970-present). Reggae, all dreads and drive, collides with modern tech toys like digital delays and rhythm machines. That bastard offspring is called Dub, a hypnotic dance music from Jamaica, a brain graft of primitive glee and cool digital grace. Sly & Robbie, Prince Far I, the Mad Professor, as well as British honky Adrian Sherwood, are all masters of the style. This melding of tech and street music was extended even further by adding sampling machines (digital shoplifting of sound) by Rap musicians.

*Dog Soldiers* (Robert Stone, 1973, Houghton Mifflin). Stone’s post-Beat prose style and vision of America as a morally bankrupt party town tearing itself apart is as harrowing as Conrad’s “Heart of Darkness.” The difference is that like most cyberpunk, the action in *Dog Soldiers* could be happening right next door.

“The Girl Who Was Plugged In” (James Tiptree, Jr., 1973, in *Warm Worlds and Otherwise*, 1975, Ballantine). A near-future Pygmalion story in which a hideous street girl is fitted with a sleek new “perfect” body and groomed for media stardom as a sort of living-breathing ad for all things marketable.

*Crash* (J. G. Ballard, 1973, Farrar, Straus & Giroux). The erotic thrill of violence, the secret satisfaction of watching machines fuck up and go haywire, and the numbing power of mass-produced imagery have never been presented more convincingly. If you’ve ever wondered what it would have been like to be approaching orgasm with Jayne Mansfield just before the Fatal Impact, this book is for you.

*Gravity’s Rainbow* (Thomas Pynchon, 1973, Viking). The best cyberpunk ever written by a guy who didn’t even know he was writing it. Pynchon’s most difficult (and rewarding) book puts you into the bad brains of soldiers, scientists, hookers, losers, and more during World War II, when science was about to Change Everything.

*Soon Over Babaluma* (Can, 1974, Restless). Trance music from the band that practically invented what we now call “modern rock.” Bassist Holger Czukay studied with Stockhausen for several years before

jumping into a rock band. Their sound influenced everyone from Soft Machine to Public Image Limited to the Talking Heads.

*Horses* (Patti Smith, 1975, Arista). Patti Smith's androgynous, defiant, radiantly obscene stage personality showed a generation of would-be women rockers (and a number of cyberpunk authors) that females could be every bit as tough, raunchy, and daring as their male counterparts. Drawing equally from the realms of the artistic avant-garde (Rimbaud, Genet, and Burroughs) and of pop culture, Smith dipped down into the sea of possibilities and conjured up a jagged, delirious vision that drew its intensity from the same sense of desperation and exhilaration that characterized cyberpunk.

*Shockwave Rider* (John Brunner, 1975, Harper & Row). When people are little more than bytes in the government data stream, can anyone remain human? Fugitive Nickie Heflinger wants to find out, and change a few things.

*Galaxies* (Barry Malzberg, 1975, Pocket Books). Pure postmodernism in SF drag. A novel about a trip to a "black" galaxy, as well as a novel about writing a novel. Self-referential and reflexive in the extreme. Like reading Wittgenstein in a hall of mirrors.

*Plus* (Joseph McElroy, 1976, Knopf). A dying engineer who has his brain removed awakens to find he has become, literally, a mere communication device, attached to a computer inside a satellite orbiting the earth. As "he" (Imp Plus) gradually recovers his memories and reinvents language, he transforms himself into a fully conscious biological and chemical laboratory. Eventually he discovers a means of rebellion against the people and world that put him where he is. Told in a dense, poetic blend of Beckett and computerese.

*Never Mind the Bollocks* (The Sex Pistols, 1976, Warner). The band that shook the world and said "No" in power chords so loud and elegant that they were heard by a whole generation of artists wishing to escape the emptiness and safety of the corporate consumer mentality. The dadaists performing nightly in Zürich's Cabaret Voltaire in 1916 performed an experiment in which the language used to justify the great war raging outside was destroyed. If they had had access to electric guitars and amplifiers, those dadaists would have sounded like this.

Enter cyberpunk, which appropriated punk's confrontational style, its anarchist energies, its crystal-meth pacings, and its central motif of the alienated victim defiantly using technology to blow everyone's fuses.

*Second Annual Report* (Throbbing Gristle, 1976, Industrial Records). Throbbing Gristle completely abandoned the pretense of playing anything like conventional music. Their albums and performances were psychological assaults of the most extreme, where creative use of pure noise substituted for songs. The Futurists performed similar experiments in the 1920s. Throbbing Gristle's brilliance, however, came when they approached their noise assaults as rock and roll shows, seducing thousands of listeners who would normally run screaming from anything called "art."

*Low* (David Bowie, 1977, Ryko). Bowie's first collaboration with Brian Eno resulted in *the* album that mended the rift between the razor heat of rock and the cooler geometry of electronic/progressive/avant-garde sounds. A happy mistake early in the recording process resulted in a fresh drum sound still being copied.

*The Ophiuci Hotline* (John Varley, 1977, Dial). Cyberpunk ideas presented in their larval form are the highlight of this otherwise vastly disappointing first novel. Though the prose is graceless, Varley has a fine feel for the infinite malleability of flesh through technology, and his multiple clones of a single female character and their wildly different fates is an excellent depiction of the fragmentation of a single personality.

*Dawn of the Dead* (George Romero, 1978, Media). The mindless zombies who can eagerly (but placidly) rip-and-devour the flesh of gun-toting bikers (when they're not riding the escalators or being drawn to Blue Lite Specials) and prowl the shopping mall scene of this classic, horrifically funny film are, of course, the same folks we've hurried past on our way to the Cineplex 12. The nightmarish, punk extremities of surreal violence, the relentless exposure of capitalism's banalizing effect on individuals, the insistence on visceral, bodily reality that our unbrushed, roboticized exteriors deny—all would find their way, in transmuted form, into cyberpunk's own brand of dark humor, aesthetic extremity, and notions of guerilla-tactics survival.

*Blood and Guts in High School* (Kathy Acker, 1984 [1978], Grove). Her influence is similar to that of Burroughs and Moorcock, but Acker started out as a poet, so her prose is infused with the poet's lust for words. That and her moral outrage make her very important. If Genet had sung for Black Flag, he might have sounded like this.

*Survival Research Laboratories* (Mark Pauline, Matt Heckert, Erick Werner, ca. 1979–present). These San Francisco–based industrial sculptors and performance artists have literalized the machinery-run-amok theme by staging spectacular, alarming, and often nauseating catastrophes. As these surreal, grotesque mechanical simulacra (which are often rigged up to dead animals magically brought back to a pathetic parody of “life”) attack effigies, images, targets, and eventually turn on each other, our culture's deepest emotional responses toward the technological milieu are played out in ways not soon forgotten by anyone who was there (and survived).

*The Postmodern Condition* (Jean-François Lyotard, 1984 [1979], University of Minnesota Press). This difficult but provocative “Report on Knowledge” lays a philosophical blueprint for cyberpunk (if anyone can read the map). How to react to the computerization of society? or the dystopian prospect of a global private monopoly of information created by the profitability of the new technological and information revolutions? or the crisis of representation? Lyotard has a quietly optimistic view that science's capacity for change, innovation, and renewal will ultimately be the undoing of the repressive system that supplies it with grant money. Stay tuned.

*MTV* (1981–present). Mundane music (for the most part) is genetically altered into a pure info monster comprising collage, rapid-fire imagery, and a stream-of-consciousness sense of timelessness and placelessness. All these things make MTV an influential point of reference for the age when information overload is more chic than a pierced nipple.

*Easy Travel to Other Planets* (Ted Mooney, 1981, Farrar, Straus, Giroux). Blending mainstream's emphasis on psychological depth with an eerie ambience of SF (an impending war in the Antarctic, information sickness), this haunting, lyrical novel perfectly exemplifies the blend of the postmodern mainstream and SF that Bruce Sterling has dubbed “slipstream.” If affairs with dolphins, the fear of death, the

throb of reggae, and the lure of what the next twist of your joystick might bring pretty much describes the world you live in—one that's rushing away from you at every moment—give this book a whirl.

*Big Science* (Laurie Anderson, 1982, Warner). Okay, so she does seem occasionally too cute, precious, and “profound” to be mingling with this roughhouse gang. But there's an undercurrent of minimalist dread, alienation, and paranoia that wafts over you so gently, as you sit entering spreadsheet data on your laptop while sipping cocktails in the business class of a 747. Slowly it dawns on you that you're only seconds from impact, that the reassuring voice of the “pilot” was only another recorded message, that the arms of the loved one gripping you in a last embrace are really automatic, electronic arms, that all those amazing chemical reactions going on inside your body right now to protect you aren't going to mean a thing when this lumbering, gas-guzzling pile of metal plows into a Kansas cornfield at 600 MPH with you strapped inside like the meat puppet you are. Stand by.

*Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982, Embassy). This film has often (and deservedly) been compared with Gibson's *Neuromancer*, and for good reason. The claustrophobic feel of Scott's mise-en-scène, with its overabundance of exotic images and information, its mixture of Asian and American, glittery high tech and refuse-strewn lowlife, plus the sheer intensity of its presentation—these are the cinematic equivalents of Gibson's prose. Just as important, the movie shares with *Neuromancer* a focus on the moral and epistemological questions created by technology. No answers in sight.

*Simulations* (Jean Baudrillard, 1983, Semiotext(e)). French Marxist theorist Baudrillard runs amok in the labyrinth of epistemological quandaries, simulated experiences and desires, and all-too-familiar banalities that comprise postmodern American life. His elaborate, playful theorization of the concept of the “simulacra”—a copy of something which has no original—has been a landmark in the theorization of postmodern culture. Beneath all the neologisms, undecipherable rhetoric, and confusing analogies, readers sense that in his probings of Disneyland, Reagan, and celebrity hijackers he has indeed put his finger upon something real in the wispy abstractions of postmodernism. (Or was that finger in a data glove?)

*Videodrome* (David Cronenberg, 1983, MCA). Cronenberg explores one of cyberpunk's favorite themes—the denaturing of the body, the displacement of the real by the “hyperreal” of television. A Dickian vision, troubling in its gruesome but perceptive take on how society has become transfixed as it consumes its own desires and fears in the form of media-produced images.

*Frontera* (Lewis Shiner, 1984, Pocket Books). The first privately funded mission to Mars after the collapse of NASA turns nightmarish when the protagonist, Kane, finds himself programmed to bring something back to Earth, at any cost.

*The Terminator* (James Cameron, 1984, EMI). Arnold Schwarzenegger is a time-traveling killer robot sent to 1980s L.A. to murder the woman destined to give birth to the leader of the future rebellion against the sentient machines who have taken over the planet. Like much cyberpunk, this film is a conscious throwback to earlier pulp forms, full of genre references; a SF potboiler saved by a bent wit and savage speed-freak energy, it was the model for virtually every action movie for the remainder of the decade (and beyond).

*Neuromancer*, *Count Zero*, *Mona Lisa Overdrive* (William Gibson, 1984, Berkley; 1986, Arbor House; 1988, Bantam). The evolution of the Matrix, a computer-generated reality created by data from all the world's computers, and the lives of those that live in and through it.

“Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism” (Fredric Jameson, 1984a, *New Left Review*). This seminal essay remains the most cogent and compelling description of the central features of postmodernism. What is interesting is the way Jameson's central, oft-quoted premises about postmodernism—its impulse toward collage and pastiche, its eschewal of “depth” and its emphasis on “surface,” the deliberate foregrounding of sensory overload and proliferation of signs without reference (with the resulting inability of individuals to locate themselves, physically or psychically), the odd response of “euphoria” when confronted with sensory overload, the lack of affect, the “nostalgia mode”—read almost as a litany of cyberpunk thematic and stylistic tendencies.

*White Noise* (Don DeLillo, 1985, Viking). DeLillo mixes dystopian premises (a toxic cloud raises havoc in an Everytown, U.S.A.) with

utopian ones (the development of a drug that eliminates the anxiety of death) in a novel that portrayed the most essential dilemmas, absurdities, and wonders of postmodern life. Wonderfully comic and yet deeply moving, this was written with more wit and sympathy than any other novel of the 1980s.

*The Soft Machine: Cybernetic Fiction* (David Porush, 1985, Methuen). The first important investigation of the ways in which recent concepts of cybernetics and AI have begun to provide contemporary writers with key sources of images and literary techniques. While Porush focuses mostly on writers whom Bruce Sterling would later dub “slipstream authors” (he examines Burroughs, Barthelme, Vonnegut, McElroy, Beckett, and Pynchon in detail), his analysis of the struggle taking place between those who accept the mechanical model for human intelligence and communication and those who resist it leads him to propose the recent evolution of a literary synthesis that has striking applications for cyberpunk fiction of the 1980s.

*Blood Music* (Greg Bear, 1985, Arbor House). A renegade gene hacker injects himself with his own experimental microorganisms and gets up close and personal with Information. Theory and a too, too malleable reality. Visually, this book is worthy of Salvador Dalí.

*Eclipse*, *Eclipse Penumbra*, *Total Eclipse* (John Shirley, 1985, 1987, 1989, Warner Books). A large-scale story on the reemergence of fascism as a major political force, told in a vivid, hallucinatory prose style.

*Max Headroom* (Peter Wagg, producer; Steve Roberts, original screenplay; 1985, MLV-TV [Lorimar]). Traveling just 20 minutes into the future, we arrive in cyberpunk land—a place where video-generated talking heads call the shots for the anonymous guys with *real* power (the multinational bigwigs), where capitalism's goal of transforming every point in space and time into a potential sale opportunity has never been realized, where the present moment seems to disappear into a turbulent sea of disconnected words and images that all seem vaguely exciting *and* banal. And you forgot your life jacket.

*Mirrorshades: The Cyberpunk Anthology* (ed. Bruce Sterling, 1986, Arbor House). Could be subtitled “A Young Person's Guide to Cyber-

punk.” The first and still definitive collection of cyberpunk short fiction.

*The Postmodern Scene: Excremental Culture and Hyper-Aesthetics* (Arthur Kroker and David Cook, 1986, St. Martin’s Press). Kroker and Cook examine “sign crimes,” “panic sex,” “body invaders,” the role of television as a “consumption machine,” and other central bummers of the technological age. In its own way, their vision is as extreme and hysterical as that of anything found in cyberpunk (for example, they claim that Saint Augustine was the first postmodernist!).

*Mindplayers* (Pat Cadigan, 1987, Bantam). Deadpan Allie is a sort of future psychiatrist who works on her patients by entering virtual representations of their psyches.

*When Gravity Fails* (George Alec Effinger, 1987, Bantam). Petty criminals in a postsuperpower Arab world augment themselves with designer drugs and personality chips in a Chandleresque murder mystery.

*You Bright and Risen Angels* (William T. Vollmann, 1987, Vintage). In one of the most ambitious and original debuts since Pynchon’s *V.*, Vollmann develops a dense, sprawling, novelistic “cartoon” in which bugs and electricity become motifs used to explore the revolutionary impulses that have arisen in response to the evils of industrialism. Moving across vast areas of history and geography filled with arcane information and surrealist literalizations of sexual longings and violence, this book’s wild flights of improvisational prose and intensity of vision signal the arrival of a major talent.

*Daydream Nation* (Sonic Youth, 1988, Enigma). The ultimate cyberpunk musical statement to date, this double album evokes the confusion, pain, and exhilaration of sensory overload, via chaos theory-produced blasts of sound and sonic textures whose dissonance and wildness are matched only by their soaring beauty and wicked sense of humor. What becomes a mirrorshade most?

*Islands in the Net* (Bruce Sterling, 1988, Morrow). A thoughtful extrapolation of a future in which nuclear weapons have been banned and information is the most valuable commodity. Don’t overlook Sterling’s other books, *Schismatrix* (1985) and *The Artificial Kid* (1980).

*Empire of the Senseless* (Kathy Acker, 1988, Grove). Thivia (a pirate) and Abhor (part human and part robot) roam through a Sadean future (“dystopia” is much too mild) on a quest to kill-the-father (and hence demolish the world of patriarchy) on as many different levels as possible. Like the cyberpunks (and she appropriates an extended section of *Neuromancer* here), there is something oddly optimistic about Acker’s vision of pirate-renegades stealing what they need from The Man and transgressing every taboo imaginable, while still trying to work out their own myth that lies beyond those devised by the hippies or the punks.

*Metrophage* (Richard Kadrey, 1988, Ace). Art and crime meet literally, in the streets when a strange virus hits Los Angeles. If Tom Waits were a cyberpunk writer, he’d be writing something like *Metrophage* [L.M.]

*Wetware* (Rudy Rucker, 1988, Avon). Sentient robots (“boppers”) on the moon want to interface with human beings and create the first “meatbop.” This book recently netted Rudy his second Philip K. Dick Award.

*My Cousin, My Gastroenterologist* (Mark Leyner, 1990, Harmony). Imagine some sort of metal cylinder of near-infinite diameter that has been twisted into a circle; inside this cylinder, verbal elements of political and lit-crit jargon, cyberpunk, speed-metal rock lyrics, language poetry, movie dialogue, obscure medical and scientific textbooks, television ads, and all manner of pop-cultural discourses have been accelerated to near-warp velocities, until they collide violently and begin to ooze out onto the page. If Rudy Rucker’s claim that the essence of cyberpunk fiction lies in its information density and concern with new thought forms is to be taken seriously, Leyner, like Pynchon before him, wrote an instant cyberpunk masterpiece without even knowing he was doing so.