# FCJ-099 The Renewable Tradition (Extended Play Remix)

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Quoting from his own short story 'Death of the Novel'

> Obviously there's no progress in art. Progress toward what? The avant-garde is a convenient propaganda device, but when it wins the war everything is avant-garde, which leaves us just about where we were before. The only thing that's sure is that we move, and as we move we leave things behind–the way we felt yesterday, the way we talked about it. Form is your footprints in the sand when you look back. (Sukenick, 1981: 35)

The quote comes from 'Death of the Novel'
a fictional short story by Ronald Sukenick
to introduce his artist essay 'The New Tradition'
which is collected in the groundbreaking
anthology of artist poetics entitled Surfiction
The New Tradition (Sukenick used to tell me)
is the one we're always on the cusp of inventing
by strategically moving beyond literature per se
For those who may not have encountered
this kind of literary thinking before
this is what the rivals of traditional literature do:
they take on traditional literature so as to destroy it
and in the process remixologically inhabit
its historical body while pushing tender buttons
all along the way (remixology is a way of
intervening or hacking into the transmission of
traditional media discourse and empowers artists
to renew all discourse)
so that they can then revitalize its power
as a renewable form of energy in nature
They do this by breaking down its material components
into a potentially rich heap of source material
that they can then re-embody in whatever
formal experiment feels natural to them
at any given time in history
Think of it as compostproduction
where the leftovers of literature past
get reconfigured into innovative forms of art
meant to breathe life into an always on the verge
(of dying)
creative life force struggling for survival
(Sukenick's last collection of short stories
was entitled Doggy Bag [1994])
The Remixologist's mantra?
Source Material Everywhere
Until recently the Narrative Form
Most Likely To Succeed in the Creative Destruction of Literature
was unquestionably The Novel
in fact

it's been this way for centuries
but are things about to radically change and
what are the indications that these changes
are already well underway?
Sometimes we literary-minded remixologists
find ourselves innovating the mediumistic qualities of
the form we are working in without even necessarily
thinking about it (this happened to me when I was writing
my first novel — The Kafka Chronicles — I was completely
unaware of a so-called 'New Tradition' and was just writing
the only way I knew how to which was to sync my unconscious
with the narrative tracing of a trance ritual in transfigured time
What manifested itself out of this trance ritual
was something that resembled a 'novel'
but that was itself a kind of anti-novel
i.e. a work of art contained in book form
that used narrative and poetry and typography
not to mention visible language and sound art
to creatively de[con]struct the novel form it was inhabiting)
Other times we who create innovative works of remix art
are fully self-conscious of the rival lineage we spring forth from
and knowingly take on other remixological styles just to see
what happens when we move inside other writers' bodies (of work)
This is when remixologically inhabiting
the spirit of another writer's stylistic tendencies
or at least the subconsciously imagined writerly gestures
that illuminate their live spontaneous performance
feels more like an embodied praxis
An embodied praxis where the vocal intonations of
the artist are used as source material to discover
new aesthetic facts
And what is a writer anyway?
The lyrical conceptual poetic narrative movements
come in wildly assorted forms
everything from dance to cinema to performance art
to the scribbling of pen or pencil on paper
But for now let's stick with literature
For instance I remember a passage from Sukenick's
Down and In: Life in the Underground
where he self-consciously (and remixologically) inhabits
the style of Norman Mailer circa Armies of the Night (1968)

> It dawned on Sukenick only much later when he read Mailer's book Armies of the Night, about the 1967 Justice Department and Pentagon demonstrations, that Mailer, by his own third-person account of himself, is no mere mimic but is a multiphrenic with a handy miscellany of personalities. Mimicry by itself was an impulse that Sukenick could well understand and sometimes justifiably indulge, as here that of the book in question, since such imitation, properly executed, brings along with it an intuitive comprehension of the ideas, attitudes, and modes of feeling that produced the style of expression at hand. (Sukenick, 1987: 236)

We can also see this kind of well executed stylistic mimicry
being expressed in Amerika's second novel Sexual Blood
which was nothing if not a remixological inhabitation of
the style Count Lautréamont (aka Isadore Ducasse)
initiated with his acerbic Songs of Maldoror
where Amerika knowingly and even greedily
pla(y)giarizes Lautréamont's own pla(y)giaristic style as source material
Why did he find it necessary to pla(y)giarize
Lautréamont's style as source material?
You'll have to ask Amerika that question
I (on the other hand) am now recalling
how my late colleague Kathy Acker
once told me that she took on the body-language of
Hawthorne Faulkner Rimbaud and Verlaine
to name just a few
as a way to embody their spiritual unconscious
thus becoming the literary version of
this remixological figure I am proposing
i.e. the artist-as-postproduction-medium
Postproduction mediums working with new media technologies
are developing (multiple/hybridized/integrated)
daily practices as an alternative approach
to the regimentation of consumer bureaucracies
(perhaps we could call it an epic struggle
one the creative or hacker classes
continually commiserate over as a kind of
informal unionization that collectively
accumulates into some kind of bargaining power
i.e. the radical spirit of 'always becoming'
a postproduction medium?
How do artists leverage this instinctive creative process?)
PP mediums play out their performances-to-be
on whatever compositional playing fields
they happen to be (re)cycling through when
caught in the heat of postproduction
(think of it as developing an economy of motion
targeted at turning the body into a renewable energy source)
To paraphrase Vito Acconci
that playing field would be
the ground of the moment
not one they would have to dig themselves
out of continuously but one that they would
act on as part of their constructed persona(s)
moving through the networked space of flows
The list of 'co-' postproductions by artists and writers
creating with the renewable tradition is long

The novelist and screenwriter Terry Southern
took this writing with or ‘co-‘ postproduction process
to its stylistic extreme when as a young man
he began literally writing out by hand
the works of Edgar Allen Poe
The Yes Men remixologically inhabited
the World Trade Organization website
and birthed the gatt.org site which then fed
into many remixological performance art spectacles
at major international economic summits
that were then remixed yet again into
the The Yes Men movie where you can see their collaborative
‘cut and paste as you go’ methodology hybridize
net art performance / fashion design / art / fiction / hactivism
For the work Society of the Spectacle (A Digital Remix)
the art-collective I belong to (DJRABBI.COM)
took Guy Debord’s original scrambling of propaganda noise
from the days of May ‘68 and détourned the détourner
generating random video imagery by cutting and pasting
key phrases from his own ‘postproduced’ essay
as search terms in Google Image Searches
while also mashing up an alternative détourntablism
with some of the audio productions he participated in
even overwriting the English subtitles in his SOS film
as a way of translating his monotonous Marxist voiceover
into a more self-contradictory new media manifesto
that highlights ‘the flickering other we love to hate’
If an embodied digital flux persona performing
their daily practice as an artist-medium
becomes a kind of compositional instrument
acting on whatever ground is available
then we may also view them as a kind of
remixological body electric
affectively mixing their source material
body-image to body-image
via an oscillating string of excitation modes
accelerating on the edge of a ‘forever composition’
that is then experienced by the artist-medium
as the ongoing becomingness of postproduction
This ongoing becomingness of postproduction
catapults the artist-medium further into the Infinite
that unidentifiable space of mind where
the unconscious projections of near future events
always keep us on the cusp of what it is
we are in the process of creating while experiencing
this all-over-sense of ‘being in perpetual postproduction’

even as our ‘novel togetherness’ smudges together
with what we used to think of as simply being
in production…
As an ‘always live’ networked performance artist
who willingly constructs digital flux identities
for my role-playing personas to circulate in
I uncontrollably / unconsciously create a poetics
that highlights what David Antin refers to as
the ‘cargo of memories and attendant dreams’
as prime source material to remix into my narrative trajectory
But as I conduct these on-the-fly remixes
using my various portable / digital apparatuses
to capture the data points of my Source Material Everywhere
while affectively assembling the flickering images
that swarm my every move
it becomes clear that there is no choice in the matter
the choice has already been made by my biological condition
I have become and am always becoming a postproduction medium
Compostproducing the present
into an ongoing sequence of intense aesthetic experiences
that simultaneously historicizes my performance
as a ‘durational achievement’ playing out its creative potential
is what it means to be avant-garde
(to sample the title of one of Antin’s talking books)
in that it never feels as though I am emptying myself
into the blank canvas of the global future
as much as it feels like I am compostproducing
a Totally Other digital art persona
who is both ahead of his time and of his time
but also fully engaged with intuitively selected bits of data
sampled from the past and utilized as source material
in the postproduction processes of the ‘always live’ remixologist
Antin has little use for any detailed account of
a so-called tradition even an avant-garde tradition
or anti-tradition tradition:

> [T]he tradition will resolve itself in the present […] and all you have to do is find it / but if you don’t it will find you. (Antin, 1993: 56)

But then the question emerges
‘Whose avant-garde tradition?’
The renewable tradition is part of
an open source lifestyle practice
and is available to all
As Burroughs writes:

> Cut-ups are for everyone. Anybody can make cut ups. It is experimental in the sense of being something to do. Right here write now. (Burroughs and Gysin, 1978: 31)

Acker would embody the spirit precursors of
Hawthorne Faulkner Rimbaud and Verlaine

as part of her intense investigation into
writing as an extreme force of (h)activism
In an essay she titles ‘Critical Languages’
where she is transcribing her presentation
on ‘[t]he nature of art in a degenerating polis
inimical to all but its own centralized power’
Acker addresses a group of writers whose
work centres on contemporary art criticism
She meets them head on by saying:

> I want to talk about the body and languages of the body. Which art criticism has denied. And about what art criticism could come out of the languages of the body. (Acker, 1997: 89)

At which point she starts riffing on a list of
possible body languages that she would prescribe:

> 1. The languages of flux. Of uncertainty in which the ‘I’ (eye)
> constantly changes. For the self is ‘an indefinite series of identities and transformations.’ (Acker, 1997: 91)

She also lists the languages of wonder
materiality and play – but:

> 8. Above all: the languages of intensity. Since the body’s, our, end
> isn’t transcendence but excrement, the life of the body exists as pure intensity. The sexual and emotive languages.
> 9. The only religions are scatology and intensity.
> 10. Language that forgets itself. For if we knew that chance governs us
> and this world, that would be absolute knowledge. (91-92)

‘Language that forgets itself’
resonates with Nam June Paik’s form of ecstasy
where ‘a mystic forgets himself’
while unconsciously triggering
body languages out of principled uncertainty
Paik’s notes on ‘Experimental Television’
were written around the same time of
his first-ever 1963 video art exhibition in Wuppertal
an exhibition entitled ‘Exhibition of Music – Electronic Television’
and these handwritten notes were encased
in a long glass box as part of a re-installed version of
this legendary exhibition in Bremen, Germany in 2005
These notes feature an excerpt that truly connects
with my recent discoveries in the emerging fields of
hyperimprovisational new media art & performance
where the artist as postproduction medium
taps into the unconscious flow detonated by the trigger-inference
before conscious thought steps in and derails
ones signifying momentum . . .
In ‘Experimental Television’ Paik refers
to the word ‘ecstasy’ (which is held up
at the top of the page by clawing quotes)
by writing immediately below it

to go out of oneself…
and then continues with the following
bullet-pointed words and phrases:
* completely filled time
* the presence of eternal presence
* unconscious, or super-conscious
* some mystic forgets himself (goes out of oneself)
* abnormal
* the world stops for three minutes!
where the trick for stopping the world
(and this is the exact same phrase used
in Carlos Castenada's Journey to Ixtlan
where the trickster-shaman Don Juan advises
his young disciple on how to trip/drift through life)
is to always stay a half a second ahead of the game
creating on-the-fly DO-IT-YOURSELF MANIPULATIONS
of all of the source material you have at your disposal
Experiencing these transformations outside of time
is the only way to achieve absolute knowledge
as an intensely rendered aesthetic fact
In this regard I can use my own inhabitations
as an example of transforming remix practice
into unconscious / experiential knowledge
Much of what I write when composing my fictions
including the 'Distributed Fictions' planted inside META/DATA
inhabits the early developments of Laurence Sterne
(and in particular his work Tristram Shandy)
as well as the aforementioned Lautréamont
(all of what little he wrote)
For those who follow such things
this will make perfect sense
since one of these writers
is the Godfather of digressionary
[hyper-textual] fiction (Sterne)
and the other is the Prince of Pla(y)giarism (Lautréamont)
**a pseudo-autobiographical fiction style / remixologically inhabiting the body language / an ancient form of 'realtime' manipulation**
Sukenick himself would be quick to point out
Henry Miller as the Godfather of
a pseudo-autobiographical fictional style
that leads the disappearing writer into
acts of creative composition that samples from
the data of unconsciously generated experience
accumulated in the practice of everyday life
and that by manipulating these sampled bits of data
into pseudo-autobiographical fiction
one is capable of producing new forms of knowledge

that (and this is me talking now)
the reader then attempts to mirror
by tracing the movement of the body language
embedded in the textual apparatus
we are perpetually postproducing when reading
For example reading Henry Miller novels
while moving through the streets of New York City
as a foot messenger in the 1980s
was a way for me to learn
how to embody my own pseudo-autobiography
as source material for future fictional remixes
In an email dialogue I had with Sukenick
a few years before he passed away in 2004
he said that 'Miller was the one who woke me up
to the fact that words on the page can be
a vital extension of the life of the writer
and therefore of the life of the reader.'
The pseudo-autobiographical experience of
remixologically inhabiting the body language
as well as the spiritual unconscious of those
who we eagerly interact with via their work
is part of a larger attempt to correspond
with the rich resources of our precursors
in acts of performative postproduction
To develop a mutually beneficial co-responsibility
with those in the rival tradition who came before us
is to simultaneously pay homage to while expand out of
the discoveries they had already made themselves
via remixologically inhabiting their prior sources
If Borges is correct in suggesting that we all
quite literally create our own precursors (Borges, 1964: 199-201)
by embodying their source material without
either their or our knowledge while creating
then these remixes could be considered
part of a larger biological imperative
providing sustenance for the future viability of the species
A primary issue Sukenick and I always traded notes on
was how can the vitality of writing as an art form
survive in electronic/networked environments?
or when things got really dark
Is human culture preformatted
to kill literature as such and
what then will it mean to be
what we now still call a literary artist?
We were not overly concerned about
saving literature for literature's sake

The important thing is to annihilate
the important thing (wrote Sukenick
in his ongoing work The Endless Short Story)
and we knew via our experiences
as writers practicing how to become postproduction mediums
that just saving our own asses by expanding
the concept of writing so that it too could infiltrate
and have influence on the emerging digital culture
was and still is our only way O U T
That is to say as interdisciplinary media artists
who formally experimented with language
we were going to write the only way we knew how
i.e. through a constant oscillation
between improvisation and revision
digression and pla(y)giarism (hyperimprovisational remixology)
and if literature wanted to come along for the ride
then (conjuring the spirit of Mailer circa Armies of the Night)
The Novelists would not stop it from doing so
The bottom line for type A metamediums
addicted to the rush of becoming
just-in-time skywriters operating on autopilot
while navigating the restless skies
was that as long as we were left to our incandescence /
our satori / our hallucinatory language adventures
then literature was always welcome to join us at its own risk
As much as we would be happy to kill it on our own terms
(after all this was not a job for Corporate America and its Cable News /
Hollywood Sensationalism / Fakebook Culture —
No, killing literature was a job for The Novelists!)
we must accept the fact that it (Literature)
has earned our respect just for having survived this long
and like your rich old man with shiny new tooth implants
champing at the bit of careening post-careerism
if it is hungry for more historical relevance
then so be it
We will even acknowledge its tough guy stubbornness
till the day it dies (just ask Mailer, R.I.P.)
Still there are many ways of out-surviving literature per se
while expanding the power of writing to hack
into the abyss and transform the world
and this will always be the mission of
the zealous participants in the rival tradition
Taking on the stylistic writing gestures of
other artists and then remixologically inhabiting them
in some ancient form of ‘realtime’ manipulation
requires practice (and here I cannot help but think of

some musicians and athletes who always seem
to find that necessary physical and psychical balance
while engaged in their well-choreographed
scenes of experiential play
perhaps this ancient form of 'realtime' manipulation
is an unconscious process of intuitively making
the right move at just the right time
as when the famous American quarterback
Joe Montana asked to describe his 'play' on the field
once said 'I am an unconscious while playing'
and is not necessarily something one learns
but anticipates as part of their active methodology
for example when the jazz musician Ornette Coleman
asked to elaborate on how one can learn to play like him
he matter-of-factly states
'I didn't know you had to learn to play;
I thought you had to play to play')
Moving in and out of these ghost tendencies that
mark the outlines of a body language once performed
by another artist of the past also necessitates
a certain amount of lived experience —
experience at remixologically inhabiting
the spiritual unconscious of another body language
whose code has been transmitted to our own
neural network for postproduction processing
Is this not how we become postproduction mediums?
The bottom line is that
to remix Miles Davis
sometimes it takes a long time
to become a postproduction medium
(Davis once said 'Sometimes it takes a long time
to play like yourself.')
I think of it as an enduring embodied praxis
i.e. where the gesture of writing embedded in muscle memory
enables the postproduction artist to intuitively
mirror the neuron activity of the ones who came before
something that feels like a deep interiorization of
someone else's creative rhythm mediumistically
syncing with whatever filters one turns on
at any given time during the remix performance
What I learned from Sukenick and Acker
for example
came both from being with them in person
as well as reading them from a distance
Reading their body language and moving through their books with them
kept me on my game as did engaging with them in person

or via email dialogue so that we fed off each other
kicking up more spurs of intersubjective codework
to illuminate our collaborative sets with
'You're on fire,' Acker told me in the first email
I ever received from her (she was right – and knew it)
We may have been individuals in pursuit of
our own form of writerly nirvana
but collectively we were also always in pursuit of
'that final "race to the wire of time"'
(to quote LeRoi Jones writing about Kerouac's
spontaneous bop prose style)'[1]
For now
I'm still in the race
but these artists were the ones who taught me
how to haunt the texts that came before me
even as these same texts haunted me back
Think of it as literary hauntology
i.e. the conjuring of ghost-note tendencies
but with a twist: by mediumistically transcoding
the resonant styles inherited from
the Rival Tradition in Literature
contemporary remixologists simultaneously
carry on the next phase of a more digitally-inclined
Renewable Tradition
(a 'next phase' that opens itself up to
the hacking priorities of other remixologists
who are positioning themselves to carry on this same tradition)
By replacing the 'new tradition' in writing
with a formidable 'renewable tradition' in
electronic remixology or what Gregory Ulmer calls "electracy"
(the meeting of electricity and literacy) (Ulmer, 2005: xxiii)
we open up future channels of distribution
that are fueled by 'renewable energy sources'
that come directly from the artist-mediums themselves
and can begin imagining how the future forms of
fiction(al) performance might emerge as 'hybrid vehicles'
to transport our digital personas in
(and in this regard let's not forget that 'Prius'
means before or first and so plays right in to
our avant-garde reckoning with innovation
as it applies to all things clever and entrepreneurial
but that also emerge out of necessity
as part of a pragmatic survival strategy
in the degrading environment that is gasping
for whatever oxygen there may be out there)
If there were an Academy Award for

Best Remix Persona in A Divination Role
one would have to consider Burroughs
for The Lifetime Achievement award
His entire scramble-the-code methodology
was grounded in derailing the predetermined self
Burroughs demonstrates to us how he plays
the pre-Internet remixologist circa 1960:

> [...] I took a short passage of my recorded voice and cut it into intervals of one twenty-fourth of a second on movie tape — (movie tape is larger and easier to splice) — and rearranged the order of the 24th second intervals of recorded speech. The original words are quite unintelligible but new words emerge. The voice is still there and you can immediately recognize the speaker. Also the tone of voice remains. If the tone is friendly, hostile, sexual, poetic, sarcastic, lifeless, despairing, this will be apparent in the altered sequence. (Burroughs and Odier: 1974: 178)

American Pragmatism at its best
The DJ scratches The VJ scrubs
the net artist / computer programmer hacks
and the literary provocateur Burroughs scrambles
Burroughs: 'Pick a card, any card.'
Professor VJ: 'I'll take mine scrambled.'
Burroughs then charts out an imaginary large festival of
scramblers working with A/V devices who would first of all
hack into entertainment products since 'in fact entertainment
is the most promising field for cut-up techniques.
Imagine a pop festival like Phun City...' (Burroughs and Odier, 1974: 184)
and before you know it
he's drawing up a blueprint for a live A/V Hackfest
so as to 'lay down a grid of sound over the whole festival.' (Burroughs and Odier, 1974: 182)
The jam session would not be with a list of performers
on stage playing before the crowd
In Burroughs' festival the hacker audience
would produce the event itself and
it would take place ad hoc
in this massive field of play (literally 'car park,
a camping area, a rock auditorium, a village with booths
and cinema, a large wooded area.') (Burroughs and Odier, 1974:184)
Everyone would be equipped with tape players /
video recorders / prepared and unprepared
source material / projection screens etc.
Fast-forward to 2009 and Burroughs' Phun City Project
is already happening in Virtual Reality Land
via cut and paste / mash-up culture
yet under the guise of freeform remixology
where an efflorescence of postproduction artworks that
are now being released over the networks
by the digital personas who create them
blends with the fusion of horizons
a networked art scene depends on

for its ongoing cultural sustenance
('for such a fusion of horizons to occur,'
writes the late intermedia artist Dick Higgins,
'the reader or listener must have some consciousness of
sher [sic] own horizons in order to have something to blend with...')
And that brings us back to scratch one —
that is: How does a contemporary remixologist
create a sense of measure that stylistically
blends with the fusion of horizons?
How would a contemporary remixologist
divining their own just-in-time context
for the compositional playing field of the moment
jump-start a renewable tradition made out of all of
the 'renewable energy sources' (i.e. artist-mediums)
signaling from the past / present / future?
That is to say
(borrowing lingo from the jazz scene) –
how do you account for ones remixological chops?
One way to measure remix chops
might be via generational influence
i.e. intensity of influence across generations
Renewable energy sources back to the future?
It's cosmic
Cosmic inflation snapping back to haunt us
in a way that gets our creative attention
Professor VJ [me-myself-an-Eye]
feels compelled to ask
in a momentary fit of multiphrenic distortion:
'How can artist-researchers developing
new practice-based initiatives in remixology
turn the immediate future into a renewable source of
"energy" that fuels their unconscious readiness potential?'
Success in this area of practice-based research could lead
to the artist becoming a valuable postproduction medium
running (as Henri Michaux suggests)

> ... at full speed, in all directions, into the memory, into the future, into the data of the present, to grasp the unexpected, the luminous, stupefying, connections. (Michaux and Ball, 1997: 212)

In the heat of developing
an applied remixology
these luminous connections are intersubjective
part of a spontaneous jam session
with the Source Material Everywhere
indicating the rise of digital socialism
as collectively generated autofiction
or creatively dispersed bio-formalism
It is out of this collectively generated
and always-in-the-making autofiction

that artist-mediums contribute to the unfolding of
an ongoing co-poietic process of mutual becomingness
one that feeds off of the renewable energy sources
their remixological practices turn to for future sustenance
so that they can then generate novel forms of life
that are at once of their time and ahead of their time
A tradition worth renewing if ever there was one.

## Author's Biography

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## Notes

[1] LeRoi Jones, who changed his name to Amiri Baraka, published his 'Letter to the Evergreen Review about Kerouac's Spontaneous Prose' in
1961. 'The actual experience of this "race" is experienced only by the
writer,' writes Baraka, 'whose entire psyche is involved and from whence the work is extracted. And no matter how much we "identify" or are extended by the work, it remains always a work and not ourselves. [...] only the writer is "relaxed and said" [Kerouac]; the reader is finished, stopped, but his mind still lingers, sometimes frantically, between the essential and the projected, i.e. what we are and what the work has made us, which is the writer's triumph.' The essay was reprinted in Ann Charters, ed., The Portable Beat Reader (New York: Viking, 1992), 352-53. [back]

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