

Changing Places Within Fan-tasmatic Worlds: Subject Positions in the Case of Scritti Politti's Major Fan

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You may remember Green Gartside's musical platform Scritti Politti from early 1980s independent hits like "I'm In Love With Jacques Derrida" and "The Sweetest Girl" or mid-80s major hits like "Wood Beez (Pray Like Aretha Franklin)" and "The Word Girl." Green Gartside is very ambitious, and personally I like his music a lot. My text will provide several reasons, but to put it briefly, to me his work expresses the postmodern identity crisis that we all are somehow used to, in—I've got to use the same word twice—an ambitious way. But it is not my intention to write about Scritti Politti in detail. To make my perspective clear, I will talk about the representations of another postmodern identity crisis instead, a crisis that is related to Green Gartside. I am speaking about a young woman who does not want her real name to be revealed in the context of my scientific work. Nor does she want to be called by one of the fictional names she has used to signify herself up until now. So for the purposes of my lecture I decided to give her a name: referring to another song of Scritti Politti I will call her Patti... [Green: "I had a dream of us together / In a world where we knew what was true / Oh Patti don't lead the life that I left you with..." (Oh Patti Don't feel sorry for lover boy)]

My perspective is mostly oriented towards a Lacanian psychoanalysis. One of Lacan's main ideas is to distinguish between two modes of identification, the Imaginary and the Symbolic. The imaginary identification is characterised by its binarity: the subject, who experiences itself as meaningless and worthless, identifies itself with an image, an Other, which seems to be fortunate in every respect: beautiful, wonderful, successful, great, etc.. It is this fortunate other that the subject longs to be. It is the standpoint and perspective of this imaginary other where the subject wants to exist and from where it sees and judges itself. It is only the gaze of the other that gives the subject an impression of itself, the notion of being real. Lacan's most famous text, "Le stade de miroir comme formateur de la fonction du Je," deals with this imaginary identification. The medium of imaginary identification is the image, a visual relation between the subject and the perception of itself on the one hand, and the world as an effect resulting from this identification with the other. Lacan's second and preferred mode of identification is the Symbolic, whose medium is language. In contrast to the imaginary identification the field of the symbolic identification is characterised by a third factor. Because of this, non-Lacanian

psychoanalysts speak of triangulation when they are dealing with this type of relation. The third factor stands for the symbolic order, the law, a common system of reference. (Reference is the term, the French philosopher of law, Pierre Legendre, uses to describe the function of the symbolic identification.) In contrast to the imaginary identification the symbolic identification provides much more the feeling of a certain security for the subject. Here, it does not have to relate to an almighty other, it can relate to regularities which provide roles in which the subject can take its place. It is through these roles—this play within the means of the Symbolic—that the subject gains visibility for others.

Another term I am using is subject position. Right now this concept is quite popular in the fields of cultural studies, especially in connection with the author Homi Bhabha. Generally speaking, the concept of subject positions verbalises the relationship between the subject and its modes of identification. Does the subject completely merge with the roles? Or does the subject have a more distant view on his or her roles? Subject positions is the term that addresses the subject's approach to its identifications or fields of identification (if we take into account that there may be a plurality of fields for symbolic identification).

Of course, identifications and their modalities are closely linked with the following terms: the Freudian "Wunsch," Lacans "désir," desire.

A few remarks about Patti: In the beginning Patti is desiring desire. She wants to become part of a world which would provide a structure of desire. Later on she IS desiring: she desires to become Green Gartside, she is taking the perspective of Green Gartside, and: she desires to see all of her different incarnations at once. And in the end we suddenly don't know much about her desire, the person Patti seems to be vanishing, leaving the context of Scritti Politti which had made her visible as a subject for us in the first place.

I use the word phantasma in the title of this article, and I have got to admit that this mainly has to do with a play on words. I will not talk about phantasma in particular. In Lacanian psychoanalysis phantasma is a concept of relation which is linked with a dimension of the world that Lacan calls the Real. Phantasmatic identifications are a bit of a substitute—at least from a point of view that could be defined as believing in the opportunities and necessity of symbolic identification, which is my point of view. That's the impression I would like to evoke with the title of my lecture: I am trying to point out a certain relation between fandom and the misery that characterises the urge to become identified—in other words, the misery that characterises postmodern identity crisis.

Patti's website and subject positions (in four steps)

When I got to know Patti, I was occupied with searching the World Wide Web for information about Scritti Politti—in fact, I didn't know much about the group at this time. This was 1998. At that time Patti offered the most interesting website about Scritti—most interesting because, on the one hand, it provided lots of information about the band, but on the other, this data was presented in a strange, very personal, idiosyncratic way. The idiosyncratic way of presenting data about Scritti Politti frames the data. During the following days, weeks and months this frame developed into something I felt touched

by. In my opinion this frame was mysterious. Unfortunately the website does not exist any more (a fact which is due to the changes Patti was undergoing within the process of identification that I am describing). I won't go into very much detail with its description. Probably the main thing about its mysteriousness was that within the medium of this website the user had the possibility to link Scritti Politti with Tarot, for example. So, within the medium of her website Patti not only presented Scritti Politti her fascination with this pop-group, but she used Scritti Politti as a tool. To provide a website about Scritti Politti enabled her to say something about other things as well, as if they were related to Scritti Politti in an almost natural way. In the end, the website enabled Patti to say something about herself, of course. In fact, the website provided a platform, so to speak, which made it possible for Patti to present herself as a subject. Patti did not merely use Scritti Politti to articulate herself, but to do so she depended on the band: first she had to identify herself with the band. This identification led to the development of a series of position changes that in the end resulted in a position which contained a number of opportunities—for example, an opportunity to leave this series of Scritti-Politti-related identifications and become someone else: the subject of other identifications—identifications which are probably easier to express and more likely to lead to happiness.

The realisation of the imaginary identification: the subject without a world is longing for... a world

Besides stories about the biography and the musical development of the band, Patti provided some information about her own history on the website. What I still find most astonishing in this respect is the fact that she has changed her name several times. One could ask: why not? But names are not without meaning to their subjects, because they are related to worlds in which they possess and are imposed with meaning (see Waltz 1993). From my point of view the constant change of names can have the meaning of changing the worlds one feels attracted to. And in addition to that it suggests a longing for the concept of world itself, a longing to become part of a world. In Patti's case the world she is attracted to is a world in which desire is very transparent. This world is very structured. It is a world that provides roles which are clearly defined and shaped. I am speaking of the fictional world of a comic book.

Pia was the name I used in 85–88 while I was still in high school. It came from a Japanese girls' manga (comic book) character. My life was very much affected by these manga back then. The next phase of my life, represented by the next name I used and by the person who I idolized, also were rooted in these manga." Furthermore Patti explains: "Moé (...) was the name I used in 88–92 while I was still in college. It, like my previous name, came from a Japanese girls' manga character. The other major influence in my life during this period was also derived from another manga character: The person looked like the character and the character was probably based on the person. In fact, I chose this name partly because its meaning—to sprout or the color of sprout—relates to the name of this person, Green Gartside a.k.a. Scritti Politti.

The trail of the signifier is leading her from one imaginary identification to another. Patti demonstrates the way this identification-producing-machine works with the illustrations



from the manga. Here we can see how the trail of the signifier leads her from the manga to Green Gartside: a metonymic shift. What links both worlds is Green Gartside's appearance as a character within the world of the mangas. It is his appearance on the scene of her desire that initiates Patti's interest in Scritti, as she describes in the following quote:

What got me hooked initially, I'm ashamed to admit, is Green looking like the characters in my favourite Japanese comic book at the time. Exhibit no.1... Yes, that's Green, named after none other than the Mighty Ambiguous Bright One himself. And that's Pia, after whom I named myself (...) Sickly cutesy isn't it? (...) And if you think it's just some weird coincidence, witness exhibit no.2 ... and exhibit no.3... (see illustrations)

This kind of chain of signifiers leads Patti from one identification to the next. It does not necessarily lead to another subject position, though. The changes I've described so far did not at all effect her subject position.

From the imaginary to the symbolic identification with Scritti Politti: the subject identified with the world of Green Gartside is enabled to become the subject of the principle of representation itself

Patti states:

I was obsessed with/idolised Scritti Politti at the time, and read up on Mr. Gartside. To what extent was I obsessed? I structured my college courses according to what the articles on Mr. Gartside claimed he was interested in....Where my pondering took me was to college and a major in fine arts/art history. Basically I took the lyrics and interviews on cue and dabbled in whatever Green said he was interested in. (...) Where there's a short supply of role models and the line of inheritance is kaput, this adoption of Green as an unwitting and unwilling God-father just gives one—both directly and inversely—a narrative structure to follow in life, that's all.

This is an imaginary identification: Patti wants to be Green. Totally living under his gaze, she receives the feeling of coherence and self-consciousness from a standpoint or place which seems to be occupied by Green. The process of the identification started to end when Patti realised the impossibility of becoming Green entirely. The realisation of this impossibility resulted from an experience that illustrated to her the indispensability of

difference. It consists of two aspects: first, Scritti Politti's early nineties cover of the Beatles "She's A Woman" (Tautology Business Mix) made her aware of their different sexes. This aspect is not important for my further argumentation. Second, she read Derrida and gained the knowledge that nothing can ever be identical or natural. To put it in other words, she learned about the necessity of representation. In fact, the whole deconstructive movement is based on an identification with representation, or let's say the hegemony and authority of discourse. Without the belief in the effectiveness of representations there would be no impulse for deconstructing them. The signifying power of the signifier is the big Other—to use the Lacanian term for the agent of the symbolic identification— from which the deconstructionist sees himself or herself as to be seen. It is in this sense that deconstructionism believes in the effectiveness of representation. Green Gartside's art is all about representation, language, deconstruction. This aspect of Scritti Politti is interwoven with Green Gartside's major topic, which is love. Here love means identification; in the world of Scritti Politti love is the constitutive element for the existence of world in general. To fall in love results in a preliminary fixing of the subject. (I am writing about this aspect at length in my PhD.) In the case of Scritti Politti deconstruction means using the genre of the love song to articulate this extreme and cleverly understood identifying dimension of love. But Scritti Politti does not correspond with common representations of love. Nevertheless it is the genre of the love song in which Gartside finds ways of expressing himself. Exactly in this way he stresses and underlines the dimension of representation.

So, during the process of disintegration of her imaginary identification Patti became aware of the existence of a whole system of thought *behind* the image of Green Gartside, a kind of law, a regularity: the idea of representation as a mode of communication, visibility, and power, of course, the committing power of discourse and identification. This experience of the concept of representation caused a change in Patti's subject position. Instead of being dependent on an other—the small other of the imaginary identification—from now on Patti could relate to a symbolic order, something that exists besides and independently from herself and her relationship to the other. She engages in a symbolic identification.

The whole idea of representation is of great importance for Patti's thesis at college. This thesis is a combination of an exhibition of artworks, paintings above all, and a textual elaboration. In this context she writes for example:

I paint complexes of meaning which re-presents my experiences.

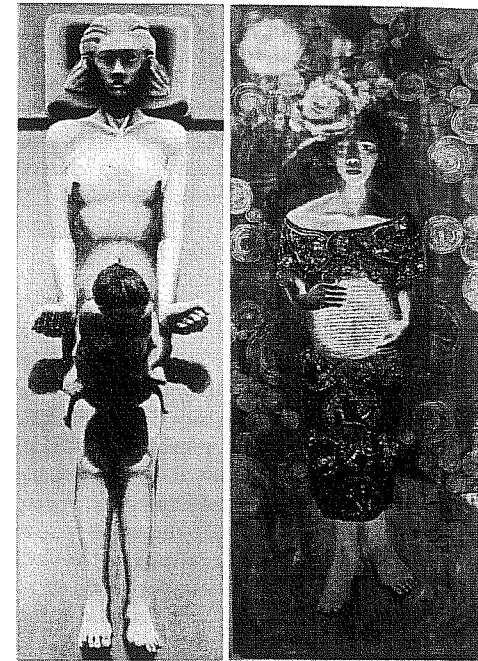
Representation as the fulfilment of desire which seeks to satisfy a need by directing the need to the re-presentation of what is missed.

Found between lived life and re-presentation, the crossing between the two, the state of mind is the sense that my experience of life will always be a *shevelled* physical reality, but from which beautiful narratives always emerges. This state of mind un-re-presented, before being re-presented (...) is sublime—i.e. fascinatingly terrifying. To master it through re-presentation, to tame the sublime and translate it into beauty—for it is beauty when captured within my comprehension—is the goal of at least three of the paintings.

Representation is a ritual to effect magic

I (...) celebrate representation.

The pictures themselves articulate an awareness of the gap between one's real self, the subject (the "I," in the terms of sociologist Georg Herbert Mead) and the representations, the roles, the identifications/names of the subject: the "moi" (Lacan) / "me" (Mead). In one of the pictures a figure presents herself as a ball of light, and this seems to have the meaning of: Hey, this ball of text is me in a way that's able to be communicated! In another picture we find a similar articulation of the distance between I and me. Here it is a kind of statue: an effigy that seems to see itself being represented by a baby. The effigy stands for the I, and the baby is the role in which the I sees itself as seen from others.



About the function of Patti's website: to become the subject of one's representations

I understand Patti's website as an expression of another, more slight, change in her subject position. (Maybe it is more like a change in the line of vision.) As I said before, the website represents different former representations of Patti: her being Pia, and so on. It also presents Patti as being strongly related to Green Gartside, and it shows her relation to a general idea as well—the idea of representation, which functions as a system of values for her at this time. In other words, the website provides a frame for different concepts of Patti. It shows Patti in the coherence of her multiplicity: We know that Patti used a number of names through the years. But now she makes herself the subject of all of them. Now she has found a perspective that allows her to have a clear vision of the diversity and the chronological order of her names. The symbolic identification enables her to see the variations of herself as a whole, as a kind of entity.

The end of a website must not mean the end of the world: Patti's emancipation from Scritti Politti

In 1999, after 10 years of near silence, Green Gartside presented the fourth Scritti Politti album. In 2000 Patti stopped her website. Today she has found new modes of

identification. I don't know very much about her present life because she did not want to give me much information about it, but I do know that she is very busy working in a job she only gained the competence for in the context of working on her website (again: a kind of metonymic shift). Through the new identifications offered by the world of a regular job, the world of Scritti Politti, while it has not become meaningless to her, is no longer necessary as the main "reference" (Legendre). Through the identification with Scritti she emancipated herself from this identification. But even this process of emancipation took place on a more general level: Patti finally gained the experience that the imaginary mode of identification is not only one possible. In contrast to the modes of identification of her past, Patti is now occupying a subject position that allows her to distinguish between herself as an independent subject and the role. While formerly she found herself imprisoned in a role, she now gained more freedom to engage herself in the roles the world(s) in which she lives provide for her.

This may sound as if it is my final intention to idealise the change in Patti's subject position. But, actually I do have definite proof to support this particular interpretation. To make this final point clear, it is necessary to mention my general scientific approach and the methods which I have used. Clearly, I define myself as an ethnographer, a cultural anthropologist. In the field of popular culture, my scientific work consists of participant observation and other forms of qualitative research; especially biographical interviews. Based on methods used in ethnopschoanalysis, the level of irritation emerging from the process of evaluating the selected scientific data is very significant regarding my further proceedings. This strategy is based on Freud's concept of *Übertragung/Gegenübertragung* and uses the subjectivity of the researcher as a valuable source: the subjectivity of the researcher is therefore accepted and recognized as a substantial part of the scientific data. Usually, these notions of irritation in the researching process are discussed with fellow colleagues in a special kind of colloquium, a „Deutungswerkstatt,“ as it is called in German.

But let us get back to Patti. In her case, I was fascinated by the number of different names she uses for herself on her website; right from the very beginning. This fascination caused in me a feeling of irritation which finally led to the interpretation that I am presenting here in this text. But in addition to that, I would like to speak about a second moment of irritation. After I had been fascinated with Patti's web site for quite a long time, I finally contacted her via e-mail. I asked her if it would be possible for me to meet her personally in order to interview her. But for Patti, this option was out of question. In her opinion, she wouldn't be able to communicate in a face-to-face situation. Nevertheless, she seemed to enjoy my interest in her work, and so we compromised on an e-mail interview. As agreed, I contacted her half a year or so later, but suddenly she seemed to have changed her mind and she reacted rather coldly. I was shocked and irritated. Would I lose the contact to this person, and therefore the perfect example that seemed to illustrate different modes of identification of a fan so clearly? (To me schematic descriptions seem to be the most significant: not because they are simplifying (and I don't think that I am doing this in Patti's case) but because they provide the opportunity to show something like a new truth about things. In another e-mail, I begged Patti not to break off our contact. I told her that I would love to have her as the subject of my scientific work. The use of this specific expression ("love") finally explained her apprehensive behaviour: my vital interest in her person (her enthusiasm for Scritti Politti, her engagement as a fan)

had led to troubles in her relationship with her boyfriend. He had become very jealous and had therefore demanded the end of my contact with her. Finally Patti sent me a lot of helpful material, for example her college thesis from which I quoted above, and even allowed me to ask her questions via e-mail. But I had to agree to a set of strict rules of conduct which culminated in my promising her to break off our contact immediately after the e-mail interview.

I am telling you this for two different reasons. First, it is my intention to give you an impression of the applied strategies in my scientific research. Second, and most importantly, I want to point out Patti's new sovereignty concerning processes of identification in her life today. After an odyssey that took her from one identification to another, she now takes her chosen final set of identifications very seriously. And this does not mean that she is limited—or, as I said above, imprisoned—within these roles. That is the reason why, at one point in our relationship, Patti made it unmistakably clear that she had reached a decision. This process stresses the difference: nowadays, in questions of identification she is able to reach decisions.

In the case of my interest in her work she had decided in favour of her relationship to her partner and against every possible step that might threaten that relationship. In my opinion she reaches this decision for this specific role and field of identification—which is the relationship to her partner and her role within this relationship—again and again. This would not have been possible at the beginning of the series of identifications I tried to describe here. Patti has definitely changed her place.

I did send Patti this text, of course, and she replied: "...very busy at the moment. Started reading it, couldn't find time to finish. No promises on when I'll finish reading. Seems like another life though—not meaning that I think your analysis is wrong, but that things have changed so much. Sorry."

P.S. After I gave this text as a lecture at the IASPM conference in Turku, Finland, in July 2001, the Slovenian ethnomusicologist Rajko Mursic approached me and told me about his understanding of Patti's fandom. In his opinion she is attracted by Scritti Politti because of something absolutely unknown and pleasurable, the Real in Lacanian terms. It is this fascination that leads her into a state of extreme fandom. At the end of my research it is the other way around: now I and my interest in her person are occurring to be 'real'—and now she experiences this as disturbing and terrifying. This really offers an alternative interpretation which takes its point of view from the late Lacan, or, to be more specific, the Lacanian theory from the 1960s onwards. But the Lacanian theory that my scientific approach is influenced by is an earlier one. It is the Lacan of the early seminars, of the 50s, the Lacan whose interest is still concerned with something like the truth of the world (see Waltz 2001), or the possibility of something like authentic subjectivity in the context of the world. It is this perspective which is related to a deeper understanding of the term symbolic identification.

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Recombinant Style Topics

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My guiding question in this paper is this: how are notions of musical creativity evolving with the widespread use of "slice-and-dice" digital-manipulation software. How do tools like "Supercollider" and "Soundhack" revise our understanding of the practice of musical composition, and how do such technologies feed back into more traditional modes of music making?

Sampling, Style-shifting, and "Pomo-phobia"

With its parade of Beguine rhythms, Klezmer melodies, acid-house beats, thrash-metal guitars, and the strains of the Hungarian cimbalom, the song "Ars Moriendi" on Mr.

Bungle's 1999 album *California* demonstrates the stylistic plurality that has become the band's signature device. Critical appreciation of *California* has focused on exactly this kind of rapid-fire style shifting as representative of post-modern pastiche. Such polystylism is a virtue or a vice, depending upon your theoretical perspective. Following Fredric Jameson, some have argued that this kind of stylistic multiplicity tends to collapse the field of signifiers into an affectively undifferentiated heap. The trivializing eclecticism characteristic of postmodern modes results in what Jameson calls "blank parody." It is a fundamentally conservative artistic stance, he argues: with the evacuation of any generalizing aesthetic positions, we abandon any possibility for transformation of the status quo.

For musicians, the Jamesonian charge of "blank parody" has been directed, more pointedly, toward the phenomenon of "sampling" in popular musics: that is, the re-use of quotations extracted from previously recorded materials. Certainly sampling democratizes the act of composition, opening up a vast sonic palette to anyone with a computer. In the sampling practices of the late 1980s and early 90s, especially, Tricia Rose and other scholars saw powerful modes of irony and recuperative possibilities. But many critics in the post-Puff-Daddy musical landscape feel that the technique of sampling has become increasingly banal and pedestrian; the bizarre concatenation of, for instance, Carl Orff and Jon Bonham in Enigma's "Gravity of Love" suggests for some listeners ever-more insidious strains of schizophrenic mimesis.

But let's return to the Mr. Bungle example. We might think about "Ars Moriendi" as a musical style that is *in dialogue* with a sampling culture. The song does not, of course, consist of any actual samples at all, but rather presents a series of newly-made stylistic allusions. I do not intend to make any claims for "greater authenticity" in this music; nevertheless, there is a way in which Mr. Bungle seems to trump the sample. For one thing, the band members can all play their instruments extremely well, and so there is a level of traditional musical labour in the sound that many listeners appreciate. In any case, I want to highlight the distinction between the use of sampled quotations and whatever it is Mr. Bungle is doing. To that end, I invoke Leonard Ratner's notion of "stylistic topoi," the term used in his influential book *Classic Music* (Ratner, 1980). Ratner's familiar lexicon of 18th-century topoi includes generic dance types (both courtly and rustic), military music, hunting music, "learned" music, and various orientalist codes—all of which were recognized as discrete styles by 18th-century listeners. In the present context, Ratner's term "topoi" provides a simple way to distinguish between an overt *quotation*—like a sample extracted from a pre-existing recording, and a *topic*—a newly-composed, newly-performed stylistic allusion, like we find in Mr. Bungle.

In the work of a number of popular musicians we can observe a shift away from explicit sampling and toward a greater use of these style topics. This shift can be read as an effort to engage with and react creatively to the technological practices of cut-and-paste that have become so ubiquitous in popular musics.

Certainly one of the virtues of sampling is that it demystifies the cult of musical authorship. It manifests and promotes what Jason Toynbee calls "social authorship"—that is, the idea of the author as editor, mediator, parodist, and hybridizer, in contradistinction to the Romantic conception of the autonomous artistic genius. But for many performing musicians, the deployment of "stylistic topoi," in place of explicit samples, accomplishes the same thing, while still preserving a space for *musical mastery*: virtuosic display,