

# Gender Performativity and the Possibility of Fantasy

Judith Butler and Slavoj Žižek



“Where there is an ‘I’ who utters or speaks and thereby produces an effect in discourse, there is first a discourse which precedes and enables that ‘I’ and forms in language the constraining trajectory of its will. Thus, there is no ‘I’ who stands *behind* discourse and executes its volition or will *through* discourse. On the contrary, the ‘I’ only comes into being through being called, named, interpellated, to use the Althusserian term, and this discursive constitution takes place prior to the ‘I’; it is the transitive invocation of the ‘I’. (Butler 611-612)

“[Ideological State Apparatuses] the means by which any given society ensures pliant and obedient citizens, predominantly civil institutions that have legal standing such as churches, schools, unions are political parties—as distinct from Repressive State Apparatuses (e.g. the police, military or prison system)” (footnote, Žižek 697)

“I can only say ‘I’ to the extent that I have first been addressed, and that address has mobilized my place in speech; paradoxically, the discursive condition of social recognition precedes and conditions the formation of the subject: recognition is not conferred on a subject, but forms that subject” (Butler 612)

“If the power of discourse to produce that which it means is linked with the question of performativity, then the performative is one domain in which power acts as discourse” (Butler 611)

“The American toilet acquires its meaning only through its differential relation to French and German toilets” (Žižek 696)

“But from where and when does such a performative draw its force, and what happens to the performative when its purpose is precisely to undo the presumptive force of the heterosexual ceremonial?” (Butler 611)

“Let us remember that reiterations are never simply replicas of the same” (Butler 612)

“The standard notion of the way fantasy works within ideology is that of a fantasy-scenario that obfuscates the true horror of a situation.” (Žižek 697)

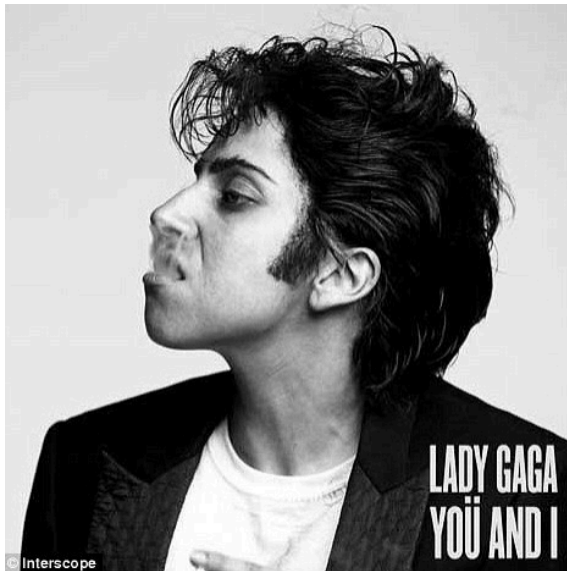
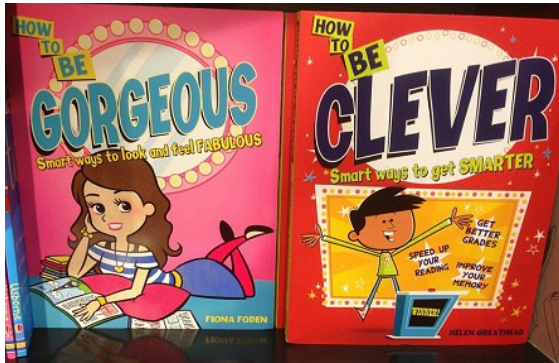
The first, rather obvious thing to add is that the relationship between fantasy and the horror of the real that it conceals is much more ambiguous than it may seem: fantasy conceals this horror, yet at the same time it creates what it purports to conceal, it’s ‘repressed’ point of reference.” (Žižek 698)

“The critical promise of fantasy, when and where it exists, is to challenge the contingent limits of what will and will not be called reality. Fantasy is what allows us to imagine ourselves and others otherwise; it establishes the possible in excess of the real; it points elsewhere, and when it is embodied, it brings the elsewhere home” (Butler “Beside Oneself” 29)

“What they misperceive is that the mysterious X that accounts for the true upper-classness cannot be pin-pointed to a specific positive symbolic feature” (Žižek 704)

“Heterosexuality can augment its hegemony through its denaturalization, as when we see denaturalizing parodies that reidealize heterosexual norms without calling them into question” (Butler 616)

# Thinking about gender and performativity...



1. Butler suggests, “‘I pronounce you...’ puts into effect the relation that it names” (611). Can you identify instances of such naming in *The Buddha of Suburbia*? And how do these instances of naming limit, or constrain, the characters?
2. In relation to the theory of “gender performativity,” Butler claims that “gender is an assignment [...] which is never quite carried out according to expectation, whose addressee never quite inhabits the ideal s/he is compelled to approximate”. How far does this statement apply to the gender performances of any one character in *Buddha*?
3. How might Karim’s performance of Indian (Mowgli and Changez) be an instance of drag?
4. Developing question three, what subject positions do any of Karim’s fantasy’s offer? Be liberal in your notion of fantasy? (Žižek’s four features might be useful).
5. Why is “the immigrant the everyman of the twentieth century”? Can you relate this concept to Butler and Žižek’s theories of gender performativity and fantasy?