

**LOUIS ALTHUSSER,
1969**

**IDEOLOGY AND
INTERPELLATION**

WHO IS ALTHUSSER?

- Louis Althusser is a French philosopher who developed Marxist theories.
- He discusses **ideology** in his work, looking at the way in which people lose their individuality and become subjects based on ideological views.
- An interesting yet irrelevant fact... he strangled his wife to death!

WHAT DOES HE SAY?

- Ideology, for Althusser 'represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence.'
- This means that Althusser believes that ideologies are circulated by **agencies** (in our case, the media) and help to construct peoples' identities. But because this is so subtle and covert, members of society don't realise this is happening.

WHAT DOES HE SAY?

- Althusser believes we are controlled by the **ruling classes**. Their ideas of what's right or wrong, what we should or shouldn't, what we can or can't is inflicted upon us, inevitably **brainwashing** us until we believe that these ideologies are the way of life.
- This explains why there are **pre-defined ideas** about gender, class, ethnicity and sexuality.

IDEOLOGICAL AGENCIES

- Althusser believes that there are several establishments in society that reinforce stereotypes and discriminations. They are called **ideological agencies**.
- These include religion, education, the family, the mass media and popular culture.

INTERPELLATION

- From this Althusser goes on to say how ideology **interpellates** us or **hails** us as subjects. We are no longer individuals, we are subjects that are categorised.
- He then says we begin to **join groups** to be with others who live by certain sets of rules.
- For example: you are students → you live by a certain set of rules → these are not necessarily correct but you will act and behave in the way you believe is required.

APPLYING TO SOAPS

- Althusser's ideas of how we lose our individuality can be applied easily to soaps if we look at the way in which we can easily **categorise** characters.

APPLYING TO SOAPS

THE BOSS

Characters such as Phil Mitchell, Jack Branning and Tony off Coronation Street are represented as macho, powerful and threatening. This, according to Althusser reinforces dominant ideas about masculinity, the way in which men should behave in society.

THE BATTLE- AXE

Characters such as Peggy Mitchell and Blanche off Corrie are meddling and disapproving. Using Althusser's ideas, these character suggest how older women are bitter, angry and judgemental – all negative characteristics.

THE TART WITH A HEART

Characters such as Michelle in Coronation Street and Roxy in Eastenders reinforce the idea that women are promiscuous and use their sexuality to get what they want. Soaps also portray this character type as lacking intelligence.

STRONG INDEPENDENT WOMAN

Ronnie and Peggy Mitchell are represented as powerful, determined women who have suffered in the past at the hands of men. Although this is positive, their ruthlessness is not a feminine quality.. Althusser would suggest that in order for women to succeed in society, they must adopt more masculine traits.

ACTIVITY

- Using the notes you made last lesson on identifying characters in soap, write a paragraph **applying Althusser's theory** to other character types.
- What does categorisation in soap opera mean for society?
- Does it **reinforce** collective identities in terms of gender?