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BA English Honours | Semester VI | ENG6EJ308

Introduction to Disability Studies

Module 2: Disability and Society: The Social Model and Michael Oliver • Comprehensive Notes

Chapter 2: The Social Model of Disability and Structural Barriers

The single most transformative breakthrough in Disability Studies was the formulation of the **Social Model of Disability**, pioneered by British sociologist Michael Oliver and the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) in the 1970s and 1980s.

2.1 The Medical Model versus The Social Model

The distinction between the medical model and social model is foundational:

Analytical Dimension	The Medical / Individual Model	The Social Model of Disability
Location of the Problem	Located entirely within the individual's biological body or mind (defect/illness).	Located in an unaccommodating, exclusionary social environment and architecture.
Definition of Impairment	Impairment and disability are treated as synonymous.	**Impairment** is the physical condition; **Disability** is the social barrier.
Prescribed Solution	Medical cure, rehabilitation, prosthetics, or institutional segregation.	Universal design, wheelchair ramps, accessible transport, and civil rights laws.
Agency & Power	Doctors, psychiatrists, and medical professionals hold supreme authority.	Disabled self-advocates lead the movement: *"Nothing About Us Without Us!"*

2.2 Michael Oliver: The Politics of Disablement (1990)

In *The Politics of Disablement*, Michael Oliver demonstrated that capitalism produced disability. The rise of industrialized factory production required synchronized, interchangeable, able-bodied wage labor, physically excluding anyone whose bodies or minds operated at different speeds, consigning disabled people to institutional asylums and economic dependency.

Advanced Critical Theory, Hermeneutics & Literary Praxis

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1. Hermeneutic Paradigms and Textual Mechanics

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- **Structuralism and Semiotic Deconstruction:** The organization of signs, tropes, and syntactical structures establishes narrative authority while simultaneously revealing internal fissures. Binary oppositions embedded within the discourse—such as center versus margin, tradition versus modernity, and subjective interiority versus objective reality—are systematically problematized through textual slippages and ambiguous signifiers.
- **Postcolonial and Subaltern Interventions:** Interrogating power dynamics, linguistic hegemony, and epistemic violence within the literature demonstrates how marginalized voices negotiate, resist, or appropriate dominant canonical modes. The representation of colonial encounters, diaspora, and regional identity operates not merely as a passive backdrop but as an active agent reshaping literary genres.
- **Feminist, Queer, and Intersectional Critique:** Analyzing the construction of gender roles, patriarchal surveillance, and non-normative subjectivities provides crucial insights into how bodily experience, domesticity, and public agency are mediated across divergent historical moments and cultural landscapes.
- **Ecocritical and Spatial Dynamics:** Physical topographies, built environments, and non-human ecologies function as active participants in the narrative economy. Space is never neutral; rather, it reflects socio-economic stratification, environmental exploitation, and geopolitical borders that delineate belonging and exile.

2. Historiographical Context and Reception Theory

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3. Comparative Aesthetic and Thematic Matrix

The following analytical matrix summarizes key comparative dimensions across traditional interpretive paradigms and modern critical frameworks relevant to Module 2:

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4. Pedagogical Synthesis and Scholarly Praxis

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