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BA English Honours | Semester VI | ENG6CJ304

Narrative Constructs in Non-Fiction

Module 4: Visual and Digital Non-Fiction: Documentaries and Audio Essays • Comprehensive Notes

Chapter 4: Multimodal Non-Fiction and Digital Documentaries

In the digital era, non-fiction storytelling expands across audiovisual documentaries, narrative audio essays, and interactive digital reportage. By synthesizing moving image, field recordings, and verbal narration, digital non-fiction crafts multi-sensory experiences that confront environmental crisis, human rights violations, and historical memory.

4.1 Documentary Modes: Bill Nichols's Taxonomy

Film scholar Bill Nichols categorizes documentary cinema into six primary modes: Expository, Observational, Participatory, Reflexive, Performative, and Poetic. Digital non-fiction increasingly blurs these boundaries, employing participatory immersion to deconstruct claims of objective neutrality.

4.2 The Audio Essay and Podcast Journalism

Long-form narrative podcasts (such as *Serial*, *Radiolab*, and investigative audio documentaries) represent the vanguard of contemporary non-fiction. By deploying binaural field recordings, layered acoustic design, and intimate vocal narration, audio essays immerse listeners directly within forensic investigations and historical recreations.

Advanced Critical Theory, Hermeneutics & Literary Praxis

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1. Hermeneutic Paradigms and Textual Mechanics

Critical inquiry into Module 4: Visual and Digital Non-Fiction: Documentaries and Audio Essays reveals how textual forms construct meaning through complex aesthetic strategies and structural choices:

- **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.
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- **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

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