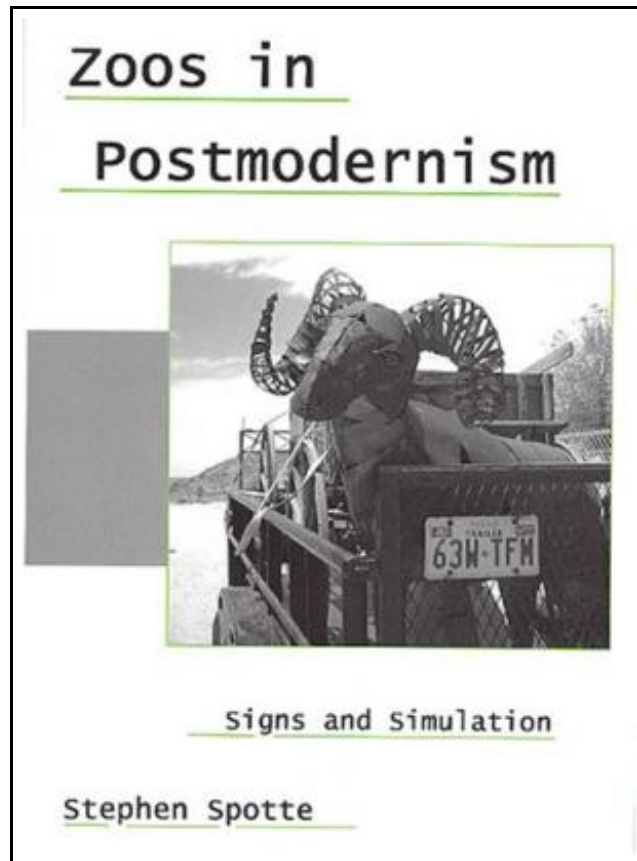


Zoos in Postmodernism: Signs & Stimulation



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ZOOS IN POSTMODERNISM: SIGNS & STIMULATION

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Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, Madison, 2006. Hardback/Cloth. Book Condition: New. 1st Edition. 208pp . [In stock in Australia, for immediate delivery] In his provocative new book, *Zoos in Postmodernism: Signs and Simulation*, marine biologist Stephen Spotte lumps together public aquariums and zoological parks (which he collectively calls zoos) and treats them as cultural derivatives assessable using semiotics (the study of signs and their meanings) and Baudrillard's models of simulation. He concludes that only modernist zoos can exist in postmodern times, making captive animal displays anachronistic. Today's zoos are thus reminiscent of an era generally agreed to have ended with the 1950s. Unable to evolve and compete with contemporary entertainments, they can only be spectacles viewed passively. *Zoos in Postmodernism* offers a startling new perspective in which animals are reduced to secondary status by their own images. Spotte argues that zoos can never be representative of Nature, partly because wildness, or the 'Other', exists separately from humankind. The sign, having been decoupled from Nature (its referent), transforms zoo animals into semiotically real objects, their status as living beings unable to impart to them a greater reality. Strangely, nothing about zoo animals is 'inreal'. Consequently, whatever zoos claim to be, they can teach us nothing about Nature. In Spotte's metaphysics, zoo exhibits represent Baudrillard's 'first-order' simulacrum (i.e., attempts to counterfeit Nature). The animals themselves, if bred in captivity, are 'second-order', the equivalent of factory production items. Baudrillard's 'third-order' simulacrum, exemplified by the dinosaurs in the film version of *Jurassic Park* and Disney's robotic crocodile, occupy the rarefied world of hyperreality. Here Spotte agrees with semiotologist Umberto Eco that captive animal exhibits are like wax museums in their inability to attain hyperreality and gain a place in the postmodern world. Postmodernism is driven by images and other simulations of reality that make the exhibition of living animals passé....



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