



Spectacular Nature: Corporate Culture and the Sea World Experience

By Susan G. Davis

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This is the story of Sea World, a theme park where the wonders of nature are performed, marketed, and sold. With its trademark star, Shamu the killer whale—as well as performing dolphins, pettable sting rays, and reproductions of pristine natural worlds—the park represents a careful coordination of shows, dioramas, rides, and concessions built around the theme of ocean life. Susan Davis analyzes the Sea World experience and the forces that produce it: the theme park industry; Southern California tourism; the privatization of urban space; and the increasing integration of advertising, entertainment, and education. The result is an engaging exploration of the role played by images of nature and animals in contemporary commercial culture, and a precise account of how Sea World and its parent corporation, Anheuser-Busch, succeed. Davis argues that Sea World builds its vision of nature around customers' worries and concerns about the environment, family relations, and education.

While Davis shows the many ways that Sea World monitors its audience and manipulates animals and landscapes to manufacture pleasure, she also explains the contradictions facing the enterprise in its campaign for a positive public identity. Shifting popular attitudes, animal rights activists, and environmental laws all pose practical and public relations challenges to the theme park. Davis confronts the park's vast operations with impressive insight and originality, revealing Sea World as both an industrial product and a phenomenon typical of contemporary American culture. *Spectacular Nature* opens an intriguing field of inquiry: the role of commercial entertainment in shaping public understandings of the environment and environmental problems.

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From the Inside Flap

"In this imaginative and fascinating study of Sea World, Susan Davis powerfully combines the interpretation of metaphor and symbol with the analysis of more concrete evidence. *Spectacular Nature* constitutes a very significant contribution to our understanding of the relationship between human beings and other animals in modern America."—Harriet Ritvo, author of *The Animal Estate*

"This beautifully subtle, nuanced analysis of one of the most ambiguous of American commercial institutions—the nature "theme park"—is a landmark of social criticism and a telling dissection of a central contradiction in a world dedicated to profit and also, supposedly, to public knowledge and compassion."—Stephen Jay Gould

From the Back Cover

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About the Author

Susan G. Davis is Associate Professor of Communication at the University of California, San Diego.

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