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The Postcolonial Eye

Alison Ravenscroft

This exquisitely written and important book combines the most sophisticated aspects of critical theory with the important question of race and vision. In focusing on the contemporary Australian scene, Ravenscroft demonstrates an acute, tortured and urgent problem of race. And it is precisely because of this specificity that Ravenscroft is able to avoid the generalizing claims that dominate many modes of critical theory. The Postcolonial Eye will be hailed as a major contribution to race theory, postcolonial theory, political theory and ethics.

—Claire Colebrook, Penn State University

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Cover illustration: Alexandra Frith ©. Untitled 2011, pen and ink, 30 cm x 42 cm.

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The Postcolonial Eye

White Australian Desire
and the Visual Field of Race

Alison Ravenscroft



Informed by theories of the visual, knowledge and desire, *The Postcolonial Eye* is about the 'eye' and the 'I' in contemporary Australian scenes of race. Specifically, it is about seeing, where vision is taken to be subjective and shaped by desire, and about knowing one another across the cultural divide between white and Indigenous Australia. Writing against current moves to erase this divide and to obscure difference, Alison Ravenscroft stresses that modern Indigenous cultures can be profoundly, even bewilderingly, strange and at times unknowable within the terms of 'white' cultural forms. She argues for a different ethics of looking, in particular, for aesthetic practices that allow Indigenous cultural products, especially in the literary arts, to retain their strangeness in the eyes of a white subject.

The specificity of her subject matter allows Ravenscroft to deal with the broad issues of postcolonial theory and race and ethnicity without generalising. This specificity is made visible in, for example, Ravenscroft's treatment of the figuring of white desire in Aboriginal fiction, film and life-stories, and in her treatment of contemporary Indigenous cultural practices. While it is located in Australian Studies, Ravenscroft's book, in its rigorous interrogation of the dynamics of race and whiteness and engagement with European and American literature and criticism, has far-reaching implications for understanding the important question of race and vision.