'Average Stray Aliens': An Average Australian Conversation on Eurocentrism

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6 August 2001: Paul

I want to begin with a little report from *The Weekend Australian* ('Alien' 2001, 19):

> Yesterday *The Canberra Times* ran this self-explanatory apology for a phrase in its Tuesday editorial. 'Most One Nation supporters are "average Australians", not "average stray aliens", as the editorial on Tuesday quoted the Prime Minister as saying. The error began with voice-recognition technology, and was missed by the author and sub-editors'.

However inadvertently, this misrecognition of the current conservative Australian Prime Minister's voice has produced perhaps the best definition of the Australian national identity of our time: 'average stray aliens'. The phrase is connotatively rich and supplies one particularly insistent signifying thread here, to do with the Australian state's European origins and the widely held belief that Australia represents to various degrees the end-result of Europe transplanted. And if a place called Europe can be transplanted, then arguably, so too do (straying) European values, some of which may be designated Eurocentric. Another thread, related to the first, concerns the current hostility on the part of Australian authorities, the newly emerged right-wing One Nation party, and many Australian citizens, to those (non-euro) 'stray aliens' who occasionally make it to Australian shores. Some stray aliens are less acceptable here than others.

Prompted by the editorial error noted above, this paper appears as a conversation about Eurocentrism between five participants, all of whom work in European studies as teachers and researchers in Australia, the place of 'stray aliens'. The dialogue proceeded cumulatively in August 2001, with responses circulating between contributors in e-mail form. Our aim was to dislocate the debate about 'Europe', and hence about those discourses gathered under the eurocentric rubric, away from the eurocentre to one of Europe's blind spots, Australia. Emerging in the debate is a strong sense of the ways in which power and privilege inevitably accrue centrifugally. As a bid toward resistant practice, our local Australian, even Sydneyside, perspective is here foregrounded. While we provide some translation of the antipodean locales mentioned along the way, we have refrained self-consciously from explaining every local reference, and since this paper represents the end-point of an informal discussion, we have refrained from formalising its self-reflective, dialogic, and open-ended character.

After Israel, Australia has the highest percentage of first and second-generation migrants of any nation-state. It is routinely described as one of the world's multicultural success stories. This success, however, does not translate to the nation's indigenous peoples, and nor does it offer solace to the (very few) thousands of

refugees who attempt to reach the nation's northern coastline. Indeed, the rhetoric of alien swamping with which the current Liberal government responds to such arrivals, as well as its practice of housing them in detention centres far from major urban centres, suggest that multiculturalism has done little to diminish a long-standing social imaginary that Australia is in danger of being overrun by people from the Asian north. Until 1973, this fear underwrote the official White Australia Policy, by which non-European migration was actively discouraged. It also informed the rhetoric of 'the Yellow Peril', the yellow people in question describing first, the Japanese in the period leading up to and including World War II, second, the South-east Asian communist regimes of the post-war period, and third, the refugees (boat people) from the Cold War conflicts in South-east Asia, conflicts in which Australia supplied troops in support of U.S. efforts. Before the post-1945 mass migrations from Europe and elsewhere transformed the Australian social imagination away from faith in a securely British-dominated world, most Australians regarded Britain as the true cultural home. Since the 1970s, however, home has shifted. Europe is likely to signify Italy, Greece, Malta, or parts of the former Yugoslavia, as well as Britain. Moreover, recent national identity debates reflect Australia's uneasily articulated desire to redefine its geo-political and cultural place at the south-eastern tip of Asia, or at the south-western edge of the U.S-dominated Pacific region, as opposed to the old, but resilient, notion that Australia signifies Europe transported. This sketch, of course, is cursory and partial, but it does provide a frame for the straying concerns of the following conversation.

7 August 2001: Maja
Still fresh from last week's conference 'The Nation is my Thing', which included two papers by cultural theorist Slavoj Zizek,[1] I would like to respond with the following threads, the self-proclaimed brainchildren of the thought-provoking Slovene. First, I would like to take up Zizek's (1998) consciously universalising and politically mobilising reading of Eurocentrism as a potential form of resistance, embedded in the European tradition, to globalisation. As an avenue for political action in the era of global liberal capitalism, Zizek's Eurocentrism potentially allows the 'nonpart' (that part of society with no defined place, or which resists its allocated subordination) to elevate its own destiny and present it as universal. Zizek's rehabilitative reading of Eurocentrism may be interpreted as an attempt to salvage this overused and abused word from its possible destiny as a theoretical cliché, as well as an enactment of his proposed political strategy, of which the tension between the particular and the universal is a *conditio sine qua non*. Now, back to Australia. For Zizek, so called 'tolerant liberal multiculturalism', a manifestation of today's postpolitical world that thwarts the positive potential of articulating universality, necessarily creates its direct opposite in the excessive intolerance and violence of new fundamentalist groups, of which One Nation is a current example. In other words, Howard's 'average stray aliens' are not alien to contemporary Australian society, but are in fact a product of that society.

With regard to the suggestion that some stray aliens (the refugees reaching Australian shores) are less acceptable than others for the Australian public imaginary, consider the case of eighty Kosovar refugees who in June 1999 refused to enter the Singleton

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[1] The conference, which took place in Sydney on 3-4 August, 2001, was hosted by the Division of Society, Culture, Media and Philosophy at Macquarie University and the Research Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Sydney.

army barracks in the Hunter Valley, claiming that the conditions in this 'Safe Haven' were not suitable for a lengthy stay. Their concerns were confirmed by U.N. inspectors, who described the barracks as frightening, inappropriate and insecure. From the outset, the media sought to construct a clear border between 'us' (liberal, rational, tolerant and charitable westerners) and 'them' (the needy and often infantilised objects of our charity). By staging their three-day sit-in on the buses that had transported them to the barracks, the Kosovars blurred this border by asserting themselves as potentially equal subjects. The media border control, whose tone immediately lapsed into hostility and undisguised orientalism, became almost violent, focusing exclusively on the Kosovars' supposed backwardness, unruliness, and lack of hygiene. Zizek would probably say that the 'only good alien is a dead alien', that is, one separated from her or his right to *jouissance* and thus prevented from claiming a position of equality in the debate.[2]

9 August 2001: Murray
Prompted by lecturing on the Contemporary Europe subject, and my encounters with Babylonians in 'Civilization II', I've been wondering how much sense 'Eurocentrism' makes. It would seem that the etymology of Europe is traceable to Akkadian sailors, and their designation of the twilight coast to the West as *erebu*. In what sense, then, can the West be a centre? Were Eurocentric to be regarded as a personal rather than (supra-)national designation, it would have to be regarded as eccentric. Europe actually has an odd myth of origin, one where the sense of a chosen people is tempered by displacement: the delectable virgin Europa carried off to Crete on the back of Zeus (a great white bull). Not a story too familiar to the average European, I would guess, but one with the requisite components of union, privilege, and differentiation, yet also of an originary decentering.

For practical purposes, however, euroland offers a different story about beginnings, the often told tale of a continent torn apart by two world wars but vowing a hollow 'never again', and with a second Zeus coming to its aid in the form of a great white Marshall Plan, from whence came Coal & Steel agreements, monthly sittings in Strasbourg, and the slight inconveniences of minor realignments at the Eastern margins (what price the re-ethnicisation of nations to meet the privileged standards of membership?). Yet this story doesn't stick: its school promotion literature conjures up Erasmus in the shape of a nomad, the originary free-movement scholar; while some entrepreneurial Austrians are bottling the scent of old banknotes as a way of selling authenticity for its new currency.

From Sydney there seem to me to be many Europes: the Mediterranean homelands of new generations of many 'stray aliens' re-inflecting the English inherited from previous migrants; my own eccentric stray Europeanism where coasts are always on the West, suns set behind Ailsa Craig, and there is one kind of football only; the imagined exotic of our students *en route* for Konstanz, Caen, Barcelona and Bologna; and the world of the 'smeg' appliance and European 'cachet'. Insidious Europes of displacement all. Perhaps the official myth of origin (of choice), ambivalent about the colonising processes that have resulted in the lights going out and the saving grace of the *deus ex machina* 'outre-Atlantique', is a useful gloss after all (is useful for what it

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[2] I am referring to one of Zizek's presentations at the above conference, entitled 'The Only Good Neighbour is a Dead Neighbour: or a Deadlock of Multiculturalist Tolerance'.

glosses over). Europe *is* decentered, out of kilter, unification a byproduct of its orbit around its others, including the new Bushian Europe against whose simultaneous pull and othering Europe gets marshalled into definition. The question here, then, is to what extent the U.S.A actually requires a grand-narrative genealogy derived from Europe and a eurocentred vision?

August 13 2001: Adam
It seems to me that the idea of Europe has a lot of symbolic power, but it symbolises very different things to different people. Europe can embody the worst excesses of colonialism, as well as a culturally diverse and refreshing alternative to pax Americana. It is an object of desire as well as one of derision: desired by the likes of us 'stray aliens' and others who inherited the history and culture of the place, but lack the context or landscape to put it in; and derided by neo-nationalists and eurosceptics as a bureaucracy gone mad and a threat to cultural identity. The notion of Europe is slippery, imagined. The Europe gazed at by an Algerian looking north across the Mediterranean is not the same as that in which a French person stands to look south. Geographically, politically, culturally, economically and psychologically, the borders of Europe are changing; indeed, there never were clear borders anyway. Turkey might be European geographically, but it isn't (yet) politically, and certainly hasn't been for a long time historically. One could argue that Australia is European culturally, but not geographically or politically. England doesn't want to be in Europe, but it doesn't want to abandon Europe either. 'Europe' is enigmatic precisely because it doesn't exist. It signifies liberation (the enlightenment) and oppression (colonialism), wealth (Monaco) and poverty (Albania), diversity and monopoly, and opportunity and disadvantage.

Europe has the possibility of giving small cultures a greater political voice. It is a chance for the Bretons, Catalans, Sami and others to be represented, not as minorities, but as members of a system where no single culture or nation dominates. But the concept of a Europe is also a spurious unifying force used by governments and corporations to legitimate the exclusion of non-Europeans: a tool for the protection of capital, economic and cultural, from the ghastly hoards of the South. The borders of this Europe are culturally arbitrary and designed to keep the money flowing whilst protecting the privilege of those within. In this Europe, the protection of culture or of cultural tradition is used as an ugly alibi for the continued exploitation of the South and the perpetuation of political and economic inequity.

So what does this mean for Eurocentrism? In some ways it is inevitable for me to be eurocentric: I come from a European background, live in a society based on European principles, speak a European language. But before I can begin to think about this, I must understand what Eurocentrism means. So the question is not are we or am I eurocentric, but what is Eurocentrism, or what does it mean to be eurocentric, or how can we achieve a Eurocentrism that is just? Since the notion of Eurocentrism is far from fixed and the symbolic role of Europe is contested, we must ensure that critiques of Eurocentrism engage debates about social justice, cultural diversity and mutual respect as well as about history, politics and economics.

August 14 2001: Yixu
When I spent my formative years being educated in Germany in the 1980s, there seemed to be an unwritten rule that well-educated Germans called themselves

Mitteleuropäer, not Germans. Curious about this, I was told that the time of nationalism was now over and that Germans, because of their history in the first half of the twentieth century, should be more cautious about, or preferably avoid, using words such as 'fatherland', 'patriotism', and 'Germany'. I was given to understand that I should appreciate this as a sign of progress; Germans could now term themselves Europeans, and not, in the first instance, Germans. For the majority of the educated classes in Germany at that time, nationalism was linked to a dark episode in history that must never be repeated.

When I left Germany in the early 1990s, houses of Turkish migrants and asylum-seekers were in flames, Jewish cemeteries were being desecrated, and people with an Asian appearance were being abused, especially in the former G.D.R. There were violent clashes between neo-fascist demonstrators and their anti-fascist opponents. Talk about a united Europe and Germans as good Europeans seemed to have little impact on a renascent German-centrism which made no secret of its overriding intention to exclude 'stray aliens' from Germany.

To me this contradictory, and very personal, experience of Germany could serve as a model for a more general experience of Europe. The continent, with its many contradictions, is trying to learn from its past, to make the best of its future. We don't know where history will ultimately lead European peoples, and it is hard to judge their ambitious endeavour to unite Europe. The past of many major cultures tells us, the creation of a new political entity inevitably means the exclusion of the Other, from the chosen formula. Nevertheless, for me Europe is a reality, not a mere symbol. Nor is it merely enigmatic. The history of Europe is real: subsequent interpretations of it will clash, and some will be wrong. If Europeans concentrate on themselves and call this attitude Eurocentrism, there is nothing inherently praiseworthy or reprehensible in the process. Such attitudes are found everywhere. The news about Australian sporting events and local politics takes more time than the world news in the thirty-minute bulletins on our national television. If the respectable SBS didn't exist, it would be much harder for Australians, who experience the world predominantly through the media, to imagine that continents such as South America or Africa exist at all, except as film-sets for disaster-movies.

However, if European scholars or media people believe that self-assertion is something uniquely European, thus differentiating them from the rest of the world, then that would be both arrogant and megalomanic. Eurocentrism as a concept or an etiquette, a popularly acceptable mode of discourse, could serve many purposes, some fundamentally different from others. Like the discourses about a united Europe, it could serve as an ideal to counter nationalism and express critical reflection; it could also become the ideology of an elite club that could consciously exclude other societies by claiming precisely their lack of some kind of centrism.

August 15 2001: Murray
'Departure. Arrival. Adaptation. Fusion'.
No matter how much I told myself I wasn't supposed to be working at the Nitin Sawhney gig on Tuesday night ('Don't be afraid of letting go'), the sequence flashing up on the giant screen during one track, entitled 'The Immigrant', from Sawhney's *Beyond Skin*, just kept telling me otherwise. Interspersed with shots of coloured balloons bobbing up and down over the barbed wire of a detention camp, the recipe

for a new, transversal perception of social movement characterised the evening: singers and rhythms from Latino, South Asian, Afro-Caribbean and European heritages; the 'call to prayer' that set the meditation on sound in motion; and Sawhney's own Anglo-Indian slant on the politics and noise of the global, his engagement with Mandela; and Sydney's Enmore Theatre packed to its art deco rafters with all the usual ethnic-and-other eclecticism of Newtown fauna. All things conspired to nag away at a eurocentric idea. Maybe it's time for the 'G-word': globalisation.

In common with other 'net major contributors' to euroland (France and Germany), and with the nascent sleeping-giant, white-dwarf, bubbling-under economies (or whatever metaphors that the *Newsweek*s of the world choose to run with this week) that are (Northern) Italy and (Catalan) Spain, Euro-imaginings of national identity still think in colonies. In opposition to the bloc mentality propagandised by CNN (measuring the world to business*men* in variously rated hotel rooms, ticking over synchro-timezones in the only English that counts), that is, of regions with their notional egality of participant economies (rather than states, far less countries), the logics and organisations of the global have no bounds. Colonial nodes of connection that brought tea to Guildford and couscous to Poitiers are now reconfigured, overlaid with the fusions of the ethnotourist, and, *mea culpa*, world music. What globalisations are there? Where and how can we find value among them, and whose values? It was only a thought, and it was a thought when the only real 'eu' on my mind was 'phoric'. Bloc proliferations, such as the New Europe, offer the inherent centrism of any hegemony. Or perhaps not 'any', but that of the originary united states, the paradigmatic blocism that makes the U.S.A. as globally ubiquitous in power-economics as it is with its chains of dead-cow restaurants.

A new nodalism, in other words, beneath the commonalities, with the land of the rising euro as guilty as any other, centripetally conceptualised in currencies, trade winds, and language bloc(k)s. I'm talking about the U.S.A., not Europe. And for all that any real 'America' exists, it is much less of a monolith than I'm suggesting, despite being so shrink-wrapped within its own problematically defensible borders. Yet let us posit forms of fusion against the suffusion of the melting-pot: migrations as exchanges and dialogues rather than appropriation; perhaps a euromodel of interlearnings through difference, a revalorisation of the global as surprising crossings of the local. While cities such as Sydney champion a multicultural *bouillebaisse*, these global theme-parks do little more than affirm the protean dominance of the West. But there are other ways to conceive of fusion, that is, as the sense that world citizenship is not organised hierarchically, and that since no continent exists in isolation, questioning our shared responsibility for the present happens as a matter of course.

The taxi-driver was Bengali. Australian Bengali. The music was awful. Australian. I noticed something or other technological that may have been a CD player. What negotiation took place? What was it about? It didn't and doesn't matter. I am not (only) white, European, American. 'Sunset', the first track of Sawnhey's *Prophesy* plays. $25, 5 minutes before. Quietly at first, but the driver has one of these wheel control things. ('People are starting to ask for less technology'.) Then louder. Smiles. Laughs. 'Do you understand the language he's singing in?' One of us did.

August 17 2001: Adam

An interesting exercise was undertaken a couple of years back in a European newspaper. The goal was to find the stereotypical European, a European Paul Hogan, someone whose appearance and behaviour would personify the new community. After months of looking came the admission of defeat. They could not find the typical European, ostensibly because no stereotype satisfied the pan-European brief. It was perhaps possible to envisage the typical Scot, or Spaniard or Italian, but there was no unifying character to which everyone in Europe could relate and identify.

It is a truism that stereotypes do not exist. They are caricatures used to identify both similarities and differences between groups of individuals, simplistic renderings of cultural traits that have social and political purposes. But if we see stereotypes as focal points for constructing social identities, measuring sticks for individuals to assess their position (Austalianness, Englishness, or Europeanness) in a cultural system, then what does this mean for Europe? Is there no typical European simply because the notion of Europe is artificial and false, or is the concept of a culturally united Europe is still too new? Do people need more time to identify and represent the similarities they share with each other? Stereotypes assert similarities within and differences between groups. Perhaps Europe is still in the process of focussing on the differences between states and not on the similarities of the Union.

However, in these questions a third possibility emerges, that of seeing personal and social identity as strategic, not fixed. I recently asked a French national with Breton ancestry whether she felt herself more French than Breton or more Breton than French. She replied 'I am Breton first, European second and French third'. This surprised me. To me she seemed very 'French', but her attitude suggested that she saw Europe as an umbrella for a union of smaller cultural groups that were very post-national, or possibly neo-national, in nature. Her comment suggested she was willing and able to slip between Breton, French, or European as she required, and yet be all three at the same time. She did not have to give one up in order to be the other; she chose her identity strategically.

Would this have been possible without Europe, if the only choice was between Breton or French? In the past it has been rare for people to feel comfortable locating themselves in more than one culture (for example, Said's struggle with identity in exile) and rarer still for nations to tolerate identity differences within their borders. In a sense 'Europe' facilitates a plurality of social identities, precisely because it is free (or freer) from 'unifying' social stereotypes and the overarching desire for cultural 'normality'. Being European is about choosing strategic alliances with others based not on social stereotypes or common cultural traits (not even religion or language) but on pragmatic opportunity or necessity. Perhaps this is a consequence of a bloc-ism based on a perceived economic response to the U.S.A.'s economic dominance. The fact remains, however, that on a community level the sense of Europe gives people another means for articulating an identity based on something other than nationalism. The slipperiness of European identity opens up possibilities for enabling new forms of community. Europe also offers an opportunity for creating a space where smaller communities, old and new, can be represented in an environment where ideas of nationalism and a united national identity have less relevance. I am glad that 'Europe' resists definition.

August 21 2001: Yixu

Post-1945 Europeanism, as a positive but 'wholesome' ideology, can be seen as an attempt to revalidate the cosmopolitanism of the Enlightenment in eighteenth century Europe, that is, a 'free' choice of cultural identity is offered, but the ultimate privilege is given to none. The German intelligentsia in the late eighteenth century was eager to embrace cosmopolitanism, since a German cultural national identity had yet to achieve currency and credibility. To endorse universal cultural and intellectual citizenship was a convenient way of repudiating and evading the obvious dominance of Diderot and Voltaire, and their lesser compatriots. Therefore, prior to the upsurge of nationalism during and after the wars against Napoleon, and in the aftermath of the Congress of Vienna, cosmopolitanism became for German intellectuals a mode of demonstrating the best of all possible intentions toward fellow 'civilised' societies. At the same time cosmopolitanism left one's own relationship to the stars of the French Enlightenment conveniently undefined, thus implying a refusal to kowtow to them.

In the twentieth century, when national dreams had turned into nightmares or hangovers that needed repudiating, a wholesome Europeanism became once more like the cosmopolitanism of the Enlightenment; that is, a way out of fixing identity too narrowly in relation to any dominant national culture. Problematically, such Europeanism still carries the ballast of nineteenth-century colonialism and thus of the exploitation of countless indigenous peoples by Europeans with allegiances to French, Italian, Portuguese, Dutch, German and, above all, British culture. The ballast includes the wholesale destruction, consciously or by assimilation, of the cultures of these indigenous peoples. This guilt cannot be glossed over, for as long as it is accepted as guilt.[3] But the liberation movements in former colonies and the devastating eloquence of writers such as Fanon mean that there is no easy way for Europeans to resurrect Enlightenment cosmopolitanism. Whole-food Europeanism can slide into junk-food Eurocentrism: it depends on whether you get it at McDonalds or what the Germans call a *Reformhaus*, actually nothing more threatening than a whole-food shop. The integrity of the ingredients is all.

Eurocentrism will remain a suspect ideology until the collective guilt of destructive nationalist-inspired wars, the legacy of the murder of the Jews, Sinti and Roma, and Jehovah's witnesses in Germany, and the colonial maceration of indigenous cultures outside Europe, are sufficiently forgotten to no longer matter. In the meantime, the slide of well-meaning 'Europeanism' (posed as an antidote to Balkan nationalisms) into a snide Eurocentrism will always be on the cards. Indeed, it will be taken up in polemics and propaganda for as long as there is a way of re-actualising the unpurged guilt of nineteenth century colonialism and destructive twentieth century nationalist and class ideologies.

August 22 2001: Paul

'Euro-ness' is sometimes manifested as a celebration or appeal to hybridity as differences in productive cultural contact, as non-essentialist heterogeneity. Robert Young (1995: 2-4) points out, however, that the discourse of hybridity emerged within the interwoven histories and discourses of European imperialism, colonisation, slavery, economic and civilising progress, commodity manufacture, agricultural

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[3] Chinese cultural centrism was, by the way, superbly immune to guilt, indeed to the least nostalgia for the indigenous cultures it ate up over the centuries.

modernisation, evolutionary eugenics, and racial taxonomies. Nonetheless, while Young suggests that contemporary uses of hybridity as a cultural signifier might not have escaped the term's resilient racist and eugenic past, he also betrays his own euro-blindspot. Describing himself standing at Greenwich, Young claims to inhabit both east and west because 'the Longitude Zero, the centre of the world, has become . . . suffused with the pulse of difference', populated by peoples 'whose ancestors hark back to the Caribbean and Africa, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh' and so on. This is an unarguable rejoinder to tired appeals to euro-purity. However, in Young's hybrid revision of Englishness, there is no recognition that the straying peoples he speaks of might not experience life as he does around the Meridian, itself proof of an ex-imperial centre's persisting epistemological control over the world beyond it. Young's (non-straying) hybrid Englishness, untroubled by race, class, gender-sex, generational, linguistic or regional differentials, defines a late twentieth century, postmodernist and euro-centred hybrid everywhere. Grey, damp, middle-powered London becomes the paradigmatic endpoint of a trajectory that includes the way-stations of imperial expansion, industrialisation, colonization, decolonisation, transnational capitalism, and finally cultural hybridisation, a happy culmination and recuperation indeed.

Returning to the place of 'average stray aliens', the Tasmanian Aboriginal Ian Anderson (1993-94: 10-11) has something to say about hybridity discourse: 'I am no hybrid. I am a muttonbird Koori'. This claim forcefully brings to the fore the liabilities of a term in the service of 'assimilation-colonialism'. Hybridity signifies a body signed by Europe as 'doomed to disappear' because of racial and cultural admixture, and by implication, inferiority. Anderson's stand influenced the cultural theorist Suvendrini Perera (1994: 19) to make her stand against the 'happy hybrid' syndrome of Australian culture. For Perera an Anglo-Celtic/antipodean hybridity (euro-ness and whiteness displaced; an 'uncontaminated, asexual and non-native hybridity') is socially laudable, while the Aboriginal-European, mixed-race hybrid is denied, punished or simply not countenanced in post-colonial, post-euro Australia.

Eurocentrism is alive and well as an inherited epistemological hold on our own straying histories and relationships. It is as unarguable as the Greenwich Meridian, proof sterling that the world is rated in and from euroland, even the British part of it ambivalent about its euro-ness. Eurocentrism means that an Australian can arrive in London (Paris, Rome, or Greece) and be told time and again that there is no history but that which is on superficial display around the stray alien (the acceptable one, that is). Eurocentrism is to recognise with a jolt as one navigates around the landmarks of euro-history that Europe's main cities are as familiar to us as our own cities. It is to learn how euro-ness exists in many of us as a somatic sign that enables us to slip unnoticed into euro-streets, until our accent betrays us.

And as a response to such manifestations of euro-power counter-narratives emerge from us, uneasily and anxiously. We feel anger about, *not* solace in, the fact that a little island on the other side of the world determines how our speech patterns are valued, what names our writers have to live up to, who our head of state is: European. In our trips of self-discovery back to euroland some of us are taken aback by the pervasive drabness of expectation we see around us. We note that the stultifying hold of tired social niceties, oppressive kinship networks, and toffee-mouthed, inbred aristocracies never translated to the antipodes. We find the local cuisines wanting (our South-east Asian modulated palates unsatisfied), and we begin to suffer from a

claustrophobia brought on by low skies and the impossibility of finding a space large enough in which to lose ourselves. Indeed, we come to understand why so many millions of euro-men and women took advantage of colonial projects and decamped for more hopeful and spacious elsewheres, blithely untroubled by who and what they might displace in the process, forever more unable to decide whether or not history is to be shared between place of origin and destination.

The participants in this discussion teach and research on Europe. As befits a typical 'stray alien' profile, four of us were born outside Australia, three in Europe, one in China, and the fifth is a third-generation citizen. Some of us enjoy access to two passports. We are surprised when our students approach Europe as an exotic destination, a decidedly not-Australia, as little more than a richly filled space in which they expect to encounter such pleasant authenticities as *la corrida*, German pilsner, and Mediterranean 'passion'. But despite our own personal straying from euroland, is it possible that we have sidestepped the ways by which euroland informs our academic location? Do we still require Zizek to tell us that politics is a euro-concept (all hail the classical Greeks, our unstraying fathers) and do we need to hear that (euro)-universalism is really not a dirty word? Do we continue to seek consolation in 'mastering' the words of euro-god-thinkers (Weber and Derrida, Plato and Foucault, Deleuze and Guatari, and the hero-men of the euro-Enlightenment) whose epistemologically heavy reputations (in translation) arrive on our shores? Are we impelled to defer to euro-author functions when articulating our own geocultural (dis)location or conducting the academic work that we think is interesting and/or important? Do we reside and work in a perpetual (euro-)state of citational anxiety? Are we happy to shift our attention from imaginary and historical-material euroland to the equally imaginary and historical-material U.S.A in an age of contested globalisation, only to find that in the process we have rescued and redeemed euroland and euro-ness? Are we average stray (euro-)aliens after all?

August 24 2001: Murray
This is a tale of two Germaines. First Ms Greer (Henderson 2000), and her declaration in the first weeks of the third millenium that 'I am an honorary Aborigine' (*pace* JFK). Her comments were widely perceived as hyperbole, but Greer (Ellinsen 2001) nonetheless contextualised them as a particular and local defusion of the hyperreality of Australian debates over Aboriginal issues. She attacks reconciliation, that which 'reconciles' Aborigines to their fate, and comes out as pro-treaty. She regards modern Australia as an ongoing whitewash of indigenous cultures, the positing of a unitary ethnicity at the expense of diverse tribal traditions. She lambasts the inflations of the art world as a market-induced cover-up that blanks out the black in the pictorial background. Modern Australia, she says, signifies a practical, successful and silent apartheid, one that, it is no paradox, her status in exile allows her to address, yet never *as* an Aborigine.

Nonetheless, Greer (Henderson 2000) has also advocated Aboriginality as a more appropriate model for being Australian, and for managing the resource base of the country, than the Anglo-American models of official governance. The processes through which Greer's articulation is made are as interesting as their content. Her controversial 'adoption' by Aboriginal women in Fitzroy, far from cultural appropriation, turns out to be a nomadic and uncomplicated acknowledgement, made in a café, of her entry into dialogue. If 'the whole point is that all Australians could be

Aborigines', then this does something very interesting to our thinking on centricity *per se*. The competing, disappearing and impossible Europes that our discussion has imagined, offer more than a peripheral repetition or recentering around 'Western' values. Call me a geographical determinist, but Australia can never be meaningfully Western. More than this, what does the stray alien status we've been working with for the last few weeks mean if not something similar to what Greer is saying, in particular her implication that there are few Australians who are not, in a sense, here through nomadism and struggle: 'And the thought of these people who themselves had been driven off their crofts into Scotland and off their farms in the west country, and my Swiss ancestor being sold out by his brothers and sisters and sent off to die on the goldfields, and so on and so forth'.

This brings me to Germaine Lemaire, the leading author and national figure in Nathalie Sarraute's *The Planetarium* (1959). Lemaire, like the other poles of consciousness in this experimental novel, functions metaphorically as a planet around which other satellite consciousnesses revolve, herself vectored into a wider solar system, universe, macromodel. The relativism of Sarraute's tropistic approach challenges both the primacy of the centre and its possibility. And yet this is only a novel, a planetarium, a mock-up, reassuringly fixed in its simulation of always teetering relational systems of attraction and repulsion.

I'd like to stress the *eccentricity* of orbit that links, perhaps, the two Germaines. That eccentricity represents the entropies, deviant quarks, what the hell 'différances' that our e-dialogue is generating, always already at work and play in any grand narrativisation of our world (as European), or indeed of its disruption (as the critique of Eurocentrism). We've kicked around the terms 'Europe' and 'Eurocentrism', sometimes meeting, sometimes straying offcourse, alienated in Australia, adopting and adapting as we go, the local as valid as the central.

25 August 2001: Maja
As this string of thoughts develops, we can read it as a mosaic of autobiographical allusions underlying our particular preoccupations, approaches and the ways of communicating them to the rest of the group. As a 'stray alien' originally from the obscure orientalised 'orbits' of the European planetarium, I am tempted to regard topical Eurocentrism debates as funerary discourses, encomia or invectives, surrounding the passage of a European 'core' of fifteen towards a future enlarged Europe of twenty-seven or more. Since the 1980s, Orientalism has been a dirty word inseparable from Eurocentrism (Said 1979). Europeanness has been seen as defining itself in opposition to the Orient: Rome against Constantinople; crusaders against the Infidel; the Holy Roman Empire against Byzantium; post-Westphalian Europe against the Ottoman Empire; the Marshall Plan Empyrean against the Stalinist Malebolge; European unity against Balkan discord. In support of their right to membership of the EU, the traditionally orientalised aspirant countries now often embrace westcentric rhetoric and point their finger at the 'true orientals' waiting with them to cross the European Lethe.

Turkey, the heir of the 'sick man of Europe', holds a record in waiting for the doors to

open.[4] We may recall that, in his proposal for a peaceful and stable European society of states written three centuries ago, the English Quaker William Penn suggested that the Ottoman Empire be included only if it rejected Islam as its official religion (Neumann 1998: 51). The long waiting period Turkey is experiencing today is officially explained in terms of the country's disputed adherence to liberal democratic principles, as reflected in its treatment of the Kurdish minority and in the political role of the armed forces. Under the surface, however, religion still underpins people's imagining of Europeanness. If or when admitted into the Union, Turkey (66 million) would become the second most populous member after Germany, with remarkable voting power. Tacit fears that the current Turkish pro-European secularism might be supplanted by militant nationalism and Islamic fundamentalism go against the grain of the rhetoric of reason that Europe wants to extol. And what about other candidate countries? While their new governments may preach and practice democracy, and expend great amounts of energy in dismantling the former Eastern European geopolitical mythology and relocating themselves from the orbits into the heart of Europe (*Zlata Praha!*), their efforts are often met with invisible walls and curtains.

But, things are changing. Borders are shifting. Eurocentrism is yielding more and more of its self-defined semantic terrain, shedding the self-imposed straightjacket that had been foreclosing its potential discursive horizons. It has recognised itself as an empty sign, which can at best signify its own erasure or perhaps, as Taoists would have it, seek empowerment in 'that which is not'. The iconography of the European Union fittingly embodies both this erasure and potential empowerment: a blue board with a crown of yellow stars, waiting to proliferate with each new member. Unlike the earlier emblems loaded with religious and political symbolism, the current design almost invites us to project our own meanings of Europe onto it. The hopefuls in the waiting room are painting new stars; the integrationists are consolidating defences; the globalisers are constructing galaxies.

In her own vision of hybridity, Dubravka Ugresic (1999: 250) sees hope for the new Europe in a new generation of Europeans, born from a love affair between the East and the West, the 'nomads, bastards, wossies . . . those who unite in themselves the traumatic Wessie and Ossie genes'. I myself am such a hybrid. In Brussels or Amsterdam, I would (still) be a 'sub-tenant'. Down Under, I am free to feel (if I so desire) and likely to be interpreted as, fully and unmistakenly European, yet more proof that Europeanness asserts itself only through dislocation.

23 August 2001: Adam
What is Eurocentrism and how does it differ from postcolonialism, westernisation, and globalisation? Europe was built on ideas of privilege and power and the need to legitimise the inequity this produces and continues to reproduce. Yet Europe represents, idealistically perhaps, a way of circumventing nationalism, at least until such time as Europe becomes itself a nation. The difficulty with understanding Eurocentrism derives from the term's discursive ambiguity, its shifts between an historical sense of orientalism and colonialism, an economic sense of capitalism, a political sense of nation, and a personal and communal sense of identity. Eurocentrism is not one idea but many applied selectively and strategically in a number of contexts

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[4] The metaphor of the Ottoman Empire as Europe's "sick man" was coined by the Russian Tsar Nicholas I in 1983 (Neumann 1998: 55). Turkey signed an association agreement with the then EEC in 1963; it formally applied for membership in 1987.

to express, legitimate, explain, and represent a shifting tension between inclusion and exclusion.

24 August 2001: Yixu

A discourse about Eurocentrism conducted by European scholars in Europe would be differently centred, with different external points of reference than those in our ambivalent conversation. We try to adopt an external, critical stance to something we have internalised in more than one mode of discourse, if only by a process of overlapping 'as if's'. If we speak as 'Europeans' from an Australian perspective, then we are Eurocentric for want of our own centre. We look at Europe and its cultural/linguistic egocentricity from a position 'outside', but centered nowhere. A criticism of Eurocentrism from that decentered Australian cultural margin of both Europe and Asia, falls between a self-criticism from outside an identifiably centred self and a hesitant half-acceptance of Australia's colonising and colonised past.

I would like to end with Kafka's discussion (1946: 99) of Prometheus: 'fatigue set in concerning a myth that had lost its basis. The gods got tired; the eagles got tired; Prometheus's wound closed in weariness. There remained the inexplicable cliff. The myth tries to explain the inexplicable. Since it arises from a basis in truth it must end once more in the inexplicable'. Could this be a model for Eurocentrism?

28 August 2001: Paul

Colonisation in Australia was and remains a Euro-fact. The current population is atoning for this fact, and rightly so, but it concerns me that the relocation of this process to Australia "only" reprieves Europe from confronting its past. As it sits atop of a changing (to me, explicable) demographic cliff on the other side of the world, is Europe kidding itself that history has absolved it from the legacies of colonialism?

28 August 2001: Murray

An inexplicable (Kafkaesque) cliff? Is this where we end up? Captain Euro to the rescue, perhaps. The currency-friendly superhero now promoting that most tangible form of Eurocentrism, and zapping his way across the www-waves (www.captaineuro.com), will surely save the day. Frame one: the world in clouds, the sun shines on Europe, and (no joke) a hurricane brews over Turkey: 'As the **21st century** dawns the world is changing more rapidly than ever before. The old structures are disappearing as new ones take their place, bringing with them uncertainty for the future'. Frame two: a mysterious light emanates from Brussels: 'In this climate of constant change the **European Union**, a union of prosperity and innovation has emerged as a global superpower. The **twelve stars** organisation has been set up to defend the security of Europe and uphold the values of the union'.

Perhaps more than a metamorphosis, we end up on the same old originary myth of pan-Europe. Episode 1 of the good captain's adventures draws together strands from the frozen Baltic, sunbaked Greek Islands, and giant caves in Majorca, to explain the super-European force that transforms plain Adam Andros into a comic-book hero capable of combating the evil powers of Dr. D. Vider. The message of unity in diversity is conveyed in graphic terms, with a deconstructive twist: the runic text of the stone tablet hits the deck of a Viking vessel and smashes into twelve little stars. The euro-goodies' comments ('Thousands of years of history smashed', 'No it looks like it was meant to break like that'), like the federal future that represent

Eurocentrism's logical endgame, give the lie to any hope of progress on the real issues of global responsibility and realignment that this dialogue has raised.

As we bring our discussion to a close, and prepare to courtier our thoughts back to a now questionable motherland, events conspire to remind us of the damage that Eurocentric visions continue to wreak here in fortress Australia. Another Viking vessel, the Norwegian-registered 'Tampa', carrying more than 400 rescued refugees from Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan, was stormed by the Australian SAS, with the government refusing to grant permission to the ship to dock in Australian territory, a direct contravention of international law. The fate of those on board is uncertain. How different a story this would have made if the passengers had come from the place of nicely smashed gold stars.

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