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The Self and Other Dramas

Beyond the window the rain falls vertically out of a sombre, metallic sky. It makes multiple concentric circles in pools of gathered water on the flat tarmac of the roof. The monochrome images in the pools are framed by green: apples hanging heavy from full-leaved trees; willows sweeping long fringes over old stone walls; fields lying at rest in this hovering moment between summer and winter. Any minute now, without warning, the fields will be mauled by tractors pulling the rest of the harvest in; and then the grain silos will roar day and night in mechanical acts of preservation. Other mechanical acts wrap the scene through the window in an arc of twenty-first-century noise; the resurfacing of the road on the horizon has layered traffic sounds out over the countryside, which is now affected by these in much the same way as it offers a home to moles, squirrels, rabbits, spiders, rape beetles, thunderflies and their colleagues. But the latter infestations are seasonal, unlike that of the traffic, which drones on as a perpetual reminder of 'man's' despoilation of nature.

This is what I see and hear as I start to write this book. It's a very particular scene, and my eyes may not see it as other people would. Only I, for example, know about the white patches on the railings where the green paint's wearing thin, and I alone am familiar with the dip in the corner of the roof caused by a failed experiment with a pot of honeysuckle five or six summers ago.

In his book *Speaking from Memory*, Harold Rosen points out that:

A person's knowledge can only exist by virtue of a vast range of past experiences which have been lived through, often with the most intense feelings. These experiences, including textual experiences (books, lectures, lessons, conversations, etc.), we have been taught to disguise so that our utterances are made to

seem as though they emerge from no particular place or time or person but from the fount of knowledge itself.¹

Academics – Rosen used to be a professor of English – specialize in the crime of representing the personal as objective truth. Sometimes they're just deeply confused as to which is which; more often, they put the pursuit of knowledge through a sanitizing process which strips it of its most vital and interesting aspects – where it came from, just how it is mediated by the knower's own experience and rooting in the material social world.

This book is about what its title says: gender on planet earth. It's an attempt to think laterally, rather than compartmentally, about the relationships between many of the world's current social problems, on the one hand, and ideas and practices relating to femininity and masculinity, on the other. It's traditional in policy analysis to isolate social problems from one another: crime is treated in one box, environmental destruction in another; concern about The Family is the province of one set of 'experts', how we transport ourselves about the planet is the terrain of another. Gender – the way in which life on earth is divided into feminine and masculine experiences – is conceived as another separate topic and is considered mainly by academics.

In *Gender on Planet Earth* I argue that the following ideas and practices are closely and dangerously linked: women's continuing marginality as a minority group; feminism's 'failure' to transform society; masculinist power structures; violence towards people and the material and social environment; and various ideological systems, including psychoanalysis, the worship of economic growth and sociobiology, which provide an intellectual rationale for the current state of affairs. None of the book's themes is original on its own. For example, others have made the point about masculinist power structures and violence towards people and the planet,² about the sacrifice of the natural world for the sake of economic profit,³ and about the alliance between economic addiction, commodification and the invisibility of certain forms of work, which turns caregiving, the exemplar of women's labour, into an economic problem;⁴ and there are various elegant critiques of the 'expert' systems which support such mythologies.⁵ But the synthesis of these ideas, their particular coalescence in the format offered here, is new. It's something I feel it's important to attempt for political, personal and scientific reasons.

The *political* reasons have to do with reactions against feminism and linked humanist movements, and with the allegation that we live in a post-feminist world. Like many revolutionary movements, feminism always had an importance much greater than itself. It may only be now, with the much-lauded wisdom of hindsight, that we can see how ideas about women's citizenship are also ideas about human social relations and our collective citizenship of the planet.

The *personal* reasons behind the writing of *Gender on Planet Earth* concern a search for meaning and integration; they also relate to being a survivor of a revolutionary movement. Why did our culture prove so inhospitable to feminism; why did it make it difficult for feminism to survive and achieve the transformation of the social order we saw as in our own and everyone's best interests? Feminism shares with women a victim status: it's feminism's fault that divorce rates are climbing, that boys underachieve at school, that young men turn into thugs and criminals, that women are a bunch of dissatisfied dykes and harpies. Simple, unicausal explanations with no firm evidence base are common in our culture, but this doesn't make them right. They have all the dignity and aesthetic appeal of garden weeds.

The *scientific* reasons for writing the book derive from the clash between the elegantly abstract and arrogant theorems of postmodernism, and people's everyday experience of the world and themselves. There's a great gulf between postmodernist dictates about the fluidity of social facts and personal identity even (or especially) as filtered by the mass media, on the one hand, and how people actually negotiate their way through daily existence, on the other. Postmodernist mythologies dangerously obscure our willingness to make connections, to imagine the links between how we see and treat each other, and forms of both personal and public violence towards people and the material world. Most seriously, they deny the possibility that some things are more true than others. Searching for unbiased, democratically accessible knowledge is an important scientific and moral project.

What I contend in this book about women and about men is that they are jointly locked in a culture which distorts the possibilities of humanness as an ethical project. Women are outsiders in a system which often appears to them to come from another planet. And so, indeed, it has been brought to them by men, whose alienation from the experiences of others is often so complete that they can't even see their own will to power. These dual positions of aliens and outsiders are the creation of a gendered division of labour inherited from the past. But that past, where men's domination was far more concretely manifested than it is now, lives in the present through men's understandable reluctance to give up their ownership and commodification of the world.

Gender on Planet Earth doesn't stick to the usual academic format of citing detailed evidence and then reaching what the author hopes is a credible conclusion. It doesn't do this for two reasons. The first is that I seem, at this stage in my life, to have developed an intolerance for anything other than plain speaking. In *Writing a Woman's Life*, the American writer Carolyn Heilbrun talks about women after fifty ceasing to be 'female impersonators', and being able to say what they think in a manner unbridled by conventional feminine constraints.⁶ You have to stop 'holding back for fear of alienating some imaginary reader'.⁷ However, the book does have notes so readers can see the sources for my arguments. Both the text and the notes stride through some

disciplines and territories in which I'm not qualified as an expert; so I'm bound to have got some things wrong, although I believe I've also got some right. Straying into these 'expert' lands is something I'm convinced we all must do, because preserving the future of human beings and planet earth is a venture which is far too important to leave to the experts.

This is the second reason for departing from the usual academic format: the crisis facing human beings on planet earth at the start of the twenty-first century is simply too enormous for us *not* to say what we think. We urgently need to develop an understanding of our predicament that is sufficiently collective, accurate and sensitive to enable us to do something about it.

My own location as a white middle-class woman is necessarily reflected in the book. Although I have no sense of national identity, and 'class' and 'ethnicity' as applied to women are often seen as confusing concepts, these are the 'facts', and it's important for me to acknowledge them at the outset.

Gender on Planet Earth is a mixture of expert and non-expert opinion, personal narrative, statistical recitation and historical diversions. The trips into history (for example, the history of shopping in chapter 5; the story of the women's liberation movement in chapter 4) are there as examples of how the past has given birth to the present. As for the statistics, readers who don't like these should just skip them. Since the book is being published at the same time in the UK and the USA, there are twice as many statistics as there would otherwise have been – someone would have screamed had I left either set out.

The next chapter begins with a woman on a bicycle, ventures into the history of cycling as liberation for women and the working classes, and from there into the transport policy problems of modern urbanized nations. Its central point is that cars dominate public space in much the same way as men dominate public life, and both marginalize other kinds of planetary travellers. Extending either of these forms of domination won't result in a more hospitable or fairer world. The chapter that follows, 'Manslaughter', is all about crime and damage of various kinds: its linking theme is the institutionalization in our culture of a macho masculinity which is expressed in both individual and corporate forms. The next three chapters turn the spotlight on 'women's issues': the periodic demands of (some) women for equal rights with men, and what exactly *has* happened to women's position (chapter 4); gender divisions in housework and childcare (chapter 5); The Family in all its glory as practice and ideological value (chapter 6). In chapter 7 the frame changes to the more global scenario of environmental destruction, and its close relations, the killing of animals for food and the mutilation of female bodies for sex and reproduction. Since all of the above has to be sustained by some pretty powerful thought systems, chapter 8 offers a strong critique of psychoanalysis, neo-classical economics and sociobiology as major ideological supports for gender-divided power structures. A brief opinion about postmodernism saunters in at the end of the chapter. In the final two chapters of *Gender on*

Planet Earth, I look at cross-gender experiences and at different ways of organizing sex and gender for the light these may throw on what it feels like for an alien to become an outsider and vice versa (chapter 9); and then I try to bring it all together with some conclusions about the unfashionable subject of patriarchy (chapter 10).

Gender on Planet Earth isn't a book which offers simple policy solutions. There aren't any simple solutions to any of this, although the last chapter does suggest some ways forward. The most important way forward is a change of consciousness about the problems that confront us: a willingness to see that nothing will alter fundamentally without our understanding that gender isn't just something feminists get angry and write books about, that patriarchy isn't an ancestral disease but a living institution. *Gender on Planet Earth* also isn't a book which sets out to lambast men and blame them for the state that we and the world are in. The 'sex/gender system' is something with which both men and women actively collude: you and I support it in multiple, frequently unrecognized ways every day of our lives. But our positions in this aren't equal: men as a group do have more social and economic power than women. This includes the power both to damage and to heal; both to continue with the old oppressive ways and to dismantle the structures and practices which legitimate these as 'normal' behaviour.

I originally included in the last chapter of the book three fictional reviews of *Gender on Planet Earth* written by imaginary critics who were not entirely satisfied with whatever it is I've managed to accomplish in it.⁸ I wrote these reviews to acknowledge the point that a book of this kind can only satisfy some of the people some of the time. Opinion was divided among those who read the manuscript about whether these reviews 'worked' or not. My publishers didn't like them, but everyone else did. So here they are:

1 Wayne Chauvin, in the *Daily News*

This is a peculiar book. Sharp-shooting Annie Oakley's war-cry is that we men, God help us (she won't), are quite deplorable creatures – violent to women, other animals, and the planet, far too interested in football, useless in the kitchen, emotionally incapable – like aliens from outer space, in other words. While women – you've guessed it – are gentle, caring people whose only problem is men. Men are The Patriarchy. We might not wear labels, but we're all guilty of a Great Plot Against Women.

A friend of mine who runs a big management consultancy sighed deeply the other day over a bottle of cabernet sauvignon and a nice rare New Zealand steak (meat-eating is another of Ms Oakley's *bêtes noires*). 'You know, Wayne,' she said, 'the biggest problem I have these days is all these young women who come to work for me all bright-eyed and buzzing with energy, and then off they go and have babies, and I'm landed with a whopping great bill for their maternity leave. I'm only going to hire blokes in future.'

The truth is it's us guys who are the real outsiders of Ms Oakley's title. Women really do Have It All. They pass the exams, they've got the jobs, they have the babies and then drop them in daycare (which Ms Oakley thinks is a good thing – she would). Feminism has left us men cowering on the sidelines while the Matriarchs blow the whistle.'

2 Maggie Twomey, in the *Sunday Record*

Gender on Planet Earth is a polemical tract against many evils of modern life – capitalism, violence, war, crime, cars, meat-eating, environmental destruction. Its author, a well-known academic feminist, sees all these as connected, and the guiding thread is how we construct what it means to be men and women. Professor Oakley's argument is sometimes very persuasive; I found the chapter called 'Delusional Systems', in which she attacks sociobiology, psychoanalysis and economics all at the same time, particularly plausible (as readers of these pages will know, I've never been very fond of economists or psychoanalysts, and some of the arguments about genes determining behaviour are far too simplistic to be believable, even for a woman who's notoriously bad at map-reading and crossword puzzles).

Sections of *Gender on Planet Earth* consist of personal narratives which engage the reader more directly. For example, the chapter on male violence starts with a tale about Oakley's own encounter with a rural flasher – an episode many women will identify with – and the chapter on family values has a nice account of taking her two grandchildren for a walk. But these personal stories are rather self-indulgent: Ann Oakley is hardly a typical woman.

The book is, in the main, engagingly written, and thoroughly researched – indeed, there are almost too many notes. But has Oakley got it right: do we live in a patriarchy? Several important questions are left unaddressed. One is why our world is patriarchal in the first place.

Oakley was herself part of the women's movement (chapter 4, 'Sick to Death of Women', gives an entertaining angle on this). She wants to know why it didn't achieve everything it set out to. I don't know the answer, but neither, it seems, does she. This is one of several loose ends that dangle in the air at the end of the book. But at least *Gender on Planet Earth* makes us think; questioning received wisdom is at the heart of the Oakley enterprise.

3 Grace Person, in *Feminism and Social Science*

Gender on Planet Earth advances an essentially unoriginal hypothesis: that the sex/gender system gives rise to particular identity formations – femininity and masculinity, or, better, femininities and masculinities – in which interlocking discourses 'explain' phenomena of gendered behaviour: men's predisposition to aggression, women's to maternal thinking; men's values-based, and women's more pragmatic, orientation to the family; the masculine predilection for technology and the feminine scepticism about its social and ethical uses; men's habit of 'penetrating' the secrets of 'Mother Nature' versus women's greater respect for ecological principles.

One would have hoped for more of a recognition of multiculturalism and multivocality from a social scientist of Oakley's calibre. She also gives insufficient attention to the rooting of the politics of difference in master-narratives.¹ One question is to what extent the politics of difference can 'in fact' be disentangled from these. It is an ironic comment on the drift of the academic and policy debate since 1970s feminism that Oakley, who herself pioneered the use of the term 'gender' as a tool to clarify discourses about identity,² should find herself, thirty years on, returning to her original justification for this epistemological move. She performs a timely role in restating the parameters of her primary case and defending its relevance to a world torn by global, national, and domestic conflict. Her observations about the multitextured pathways according to which an emancipatory politics can (should?) be constructed are refreshing after recent waves of literature devoted to the deconstruction of gender and the politically unappealing postulate of fragmentary, rather than unitary, identities. The emancipatory politics of postmodernism have historically always had a deconstructive relationship with rationalism.³ But how do we combine a recognition of this, and its corollary that truth is perpetually being made rather than merely there to be found, with positivism's outdated insistence on a world of demonstrable facts? *Gender on Planet Earth* fails to ask this question, despite the fact that it is one with which many academic readers of the book will identify.

¹b. hooks (1996) Postmodern blackness. In W. T. Anderson (ed.) *The Fontana Postmodern Reader*. London: HarperCollins.

²D. H. J. Morgan (1986) Gender. In R. Burgess (ed.) *Key Variables in Social Research*. London: Routledge.

³A. Yeatman (1994) *Postmodern Revisionings of the Political*. London: Routledge.



The book's starting point is a personal one: the constant fracturing of personal identity by social values, customs and relations experienced by members of social minority groups.

When Virginia Woolf went to the British Museum in 1928 to find out the truth about women and fiction, she sent back all the books she'd ordered, having concluded one thing from them: the subject of women made people – mainly men – very angry. She went out to a restaurant for lunch, picked up a newspaper someone had left on a chair, and studied the headlines. 'Somebody had made a big score in South Africa . . . Sir Austen Chamberlain was at Geneva. A meat axe with human hair on it had been found in a cellar. Mr Justice – commented in the Divorce Courts upon the Shamelessness of Women.' Reading these headlines, Woolf decided that even 'The most transient visitor to the planet . . . could not fail to be aware . . . that England is under the rule of a patriarchy.'⁹ The 'fact' of patriarchy explained the puzzle of women's attributed inferiority. 'Life for both sexes', she wrote, 'is arduous, difficult, a perpetual struggle. It calls for gigantic courage and strength.

More than anything, perhaps, creatures of illusion as we are, it calls for confidence in oneself.¹⁰ Ironically, Woolf's insight about the importance of self-confidence failed to guarantee her own survival. Thirteen years after her epic journey to the British Museum, having suffered from bouts of emotional instability all her life, she put a large stone in her pocket and drowned herself in the River Ouse at the age of fifty-nine.¹¹

Patricia Williams, professor of law at Columbia University, learnt to think of herself as Black at the age of three; but probably none of the little white children who taught her this ever learned to see themselves as white. Little girls, whether Black or white, may not appreciate their femininity by noticing the lack of a phallus, as Freud, that arch phallus-worshipper, said, but gender is, nonetheless, a pervasive early subject lesson. The question is about what the membership of cultural minority groups means in terms of self-identity throughout life. One exists within the ambit of a set of cultural conceptions: Black people, or women, or children, or gays, have certain characteristics and a particular social place. As Williams puts it, negotiating 'This distance between the self and the drama of one's stereotyping . . . is an ethical project of creating a livable space between the poles of other people's imagination and the nice calm centre of oneself where dignity resides.'¹²

The concrete and the personal are always easier to grasp than generalities:

Scene 1

A smart French restaurant in London's Charlotte Street one summer evening in 1999.

Players: A Swedish man and an English woman having dinner together; various black-suited waiters; the restaurant owner; a certain ethos about what restaurants ought to be; the agricultural and food production industries; the economies and governments of various implicated countries.

Food and drink: Leg of lamb with white beans, pommes dauphinois (him); vegetables roasted with garlic, green salad (her); a bottle of Aligoté de Bouzeron, two glasses of carbonated mineral water ('We don't do tap water in this restaurant, sir').

The moment of truth:

'I'm paying this one, it's my turn' (her).

'Oh no, I can't allow that . . .' (him) (joint laughter, edged with slight tension).

'You're going to have to, it's my treat, you're a visitor to London' (her, placing a credit card in what she hopes is an authoritative gesture on a plate on top of the leather folder containing the bill, in full sight of the waiter, who's clearing away their dishes).

(What do you bet . . . she thinks to herself)

Five minutes later: The waiter reappears with the plate holding her credit card and slip of paper to sign, placing it neatly down in front of the man.

Scene 2

A March evening in a London street.

Players: Woman-on-a-bicycle and a lot of people in cars, including two policemen.

Action: Woman-on-a-bicycle is cycling in the cycle lane when a taxi ahead of her suddenly brakes, pulls into the cycling lane and then swings out, doing a U-turn in the road. Close behind her is a police van. Woman-on-a-bicycle, somewhat shocked, proceeds nervously to the next lights, making a quick getaway just as the lights are turning to amber.

The two policemen materialize from their van.

One of the policemen: 'Excuse me, Madam, you went over a red light.'

Woman-on-a-bicycle: 'Did you see what that taxi just did?'

Policeman: 'You went over a red light, Madam.'

Woman-on-a-bicycle: 'Yes I did. But I just nearly had a collision with a taxi. Why didn't you stop the taxi-driver? Isn't it illegal to do a U-turn in the middle of a busy street? Isn't it illegal for cars to stop in cycle lanes?'

Policeman (staring hard at woman-on-a-bicycle): 'The taxi was only turning round. You admit that you went over a red light, then?'

Woman-on-a-bicycle: 'Yes I do. Are you going to report the taxi?'

Policeman (getting out notebook): 'Yes, yes' (irritated tone of voice). 'I need to take a few details. Name?' (she gives it) 'Is that Miss or Mrs?'

Woman-on-a-bicycle: 'Why is that relevant?'

Policeman: 'We need it for our paperwork.'

Woman-on-a-bicycle: 'It's professor, actually.'

Policeman raises his eyes to heaven in a gesture of God-save-me-from-nutty-women, looks at his colleague: both laugh: 'Is it Miss, or Mrs?'

Woman-on-a-bicycle: 'I told you, professor.'

Policeman repeats eyes-to-heaven gesture, and then looks down at notebook: 'How do you spell "professor"?''



The critical experience is that of marginality: of feeling, and being seen as, different from the human standard represented by men. In 1944 the Swedish

economist and public policy analyst Gunnar Myrdal published a classic work on 'the Negro problem' in the United States. Myrdal's *An American Dilemma* contains among its 1,542 pages appendix 5, 'A parallel to the Negro problem'. This begins:

In every society, there are at least two groups of people, besides the Negroes, who are characterized by high social visibility expressed in physical appearance, dress, and patterns of behaviour, and who have been 'suppressed'. We refer to women and children. Their present status, as well as their history and their problems in society, reveal striking similarities to those of the Negroes.¹³

In the ante-bellum South, the status of Black people was modelled on that of women and children as non-citizens. Like second-wave feminism, the first wave was started by activist women, such as Angelika Grimké, Lucretia Mott and Susan B. Anthony, who defended Black rights first and then realized that everything they were saying applied to women, too. Like Black people, women have been seen as biologically and therefore socially inferior, and the study of their intelligence and personality had until recently a history very similar to that of Black people. 'In drawing a parallel between the position of, and feeling toward, women and Negroes,' said Myrdal in the concluding paragraph to his appendix 5:

we are uncovering a fundamental basis of our culture . . . The similarities in the women's and the Negroes' problems are not accidental. They were . . . originally determined in a paternalistic order of society. The problems remain, even though paternalism is gradually declining as an ideal and is losing its economic basis. In the final analysis, women are still hindered in their competition by the function of procreation; Negroes are laboring under the yoke of the doctrine of unassimilability which has remained although slavery is abolished. The second barrier is actually much stronger than the first in America today. But the first is more eternally inexorable.¹⁴

Here a footnote refers the reader to a book called *Nation and Family* by Myrdal's wife, the renowned social scientist Alva Myrdal. The reference is to chapter 22, 'One Sex a Social Problem', in which Alva Myrdal discusses the 'petty reforms' so far introduced in Sweden to solve what is seen as the problem of married women working both in the home and out of it. 'In Sweden as elsewhere,' she wrote, 'popular attitudes toward women's problems are still chaotic in most groups. Traditional thinking is enmeshed in an accumulation of vague interests, confused emotions, and pure nonsense.'¹⁵

An American Dilemma established the 'dogma of liberal social science'¹⁶ that Black people are Americans and nothing else. The work was commissioned by the Carnegie Corporation of New York in 1937. It was expected to take two years, but lasted much longer. Like Virginia Woolf, Myrdal began

his work in the library, where he was amazed at how much had been written about the Negro problem – a complete bibliography would run to several hundred thousand titles. All this intellectual energy should, said Myrdal, rather as Woolf said about writings on women, have moved mountains, or at least have led to some collective enlightenment. The main reason it hadn't was because of the way the problem had been conceptualized: as belonging to Black people rather than white society. White Americans defined the economic and social position of Negroes and then wondered why they tended to behave differently. In just the same way, gender equality has been seen as a problem of, and for, women, not of, and for, men, or of the social system as a whole.

Black people and women constitute minority groups. A minority group isn't a statistical concept – it's a group of people who are treated unequally because of their physical or cultural characteristics, and who have some awareness of this differential treatment. Awareness is a tricky notion, because knowing one is discriminated against doesn't always follow the 'facts' of discrimination. The beholder's eye is often only half-open; acceptance of inferiority comes as part of the package, and there may be very little point in recognizing subjugation when there are few chances of escape.

Members of minority groups tend to exhibit certain kinds of behaviour; for example, they may place a low value on their own abilities, prefer to avoid conflict, dislike one another, use 'wiles' to get what they want, and appear helpless or overemotional (where too much emotion is definitely not counted as a good thing).¹⁷ This is because the power relationships between dominants and subordinates identify self-importance, strength and rationality as human standards denied to those who are not quite human.¹⁸



I sit here looking out of my window, as I've done many times before; but each time is also the first, because the angle of vision changes, the sky alters its hue, discharging light differently, the seasons come and go, the paint on the railings and other surfaces of things wears and survives, and the perceiving self, the 'I' of the sentence, is differently comfortable or distressed, awake or fatigued, at peace or at war, sad or exultant. Since I started writing some days ago the apples at the top of the tree have reddened, but they're no nearer my grasp now than they were then. A wind has come from somewhere, battering the latches on the windows and diluting the drone of cars along the horizon. As predicted, a mechanical harvester now ploughs back and forth in my line of vision, converting a green field into a brown one, though in the more-or-less certain knowledge that what is temporarily fallow will soon be rendered fertile again.

In order to write this book I've had to deny relation in almost a masculine way. I've had to retreat to the countryside on my own, away from people and

away from (too many) books. When I'm close to other people, sensitivity to their needs always encroaches on the hard task of finding out who I am and what I want to say. Books intrude differently by offering so many different and similar stories that telling one's own becomes a virtually impossible act.

Solitude is often the price that has to be paid for creativity. Books aren't written in the midst of parties, or paintings created *au famille*. History is littered with tales of female servitude in the interests of male creativity, and much less often by matching stories of masculine dedication to women's creative pursuits. The composer Gustav Mahler wrote much of his music in a hut surrounded by trees in the Austrian countryside. No one was allowed to visit this sacrosanct studio, because the mere sight of another human being was enough to put him off. The cook, taking his breakfast there, had to go by a steep and dangerous path to avoid the risk of being sighted by the great man.¹⁹ Mahler was also hypersensitive to noise – except that of nature. He led a life of rigorous routines, dependent on his wife, Alma, for the orchestration of all practical details. A composer herself, Mahler forbade her to write music after their marriage: 'You must give yourself to me *unconditionally*, shape your future life . . . entirely in accordance with my needs.'²⁰ At the end of his life, Gustav Mahler was overcome with guilt at this suppression of his wife's creativity, seeking a consultation with Freud himself in order to understand and make amends for it.²¹

We don't all see the world in the same way, but we'll never be able to quantify the extent to which our perceptions differ, or are the same. We sense that our humanity is expressed in the existence of some common ground beneath the constantly shifting topsoil on which we mark out our individual postures and directions. This is why we go beyond ourselves when we decide just to be ourselves. Human liberation may be too much to ask for, but giving up the roles of aliens and outsiders in order to preserve the future of planet earth would be a good beginning.