

Conversation Pieces  
Volume 24

Three Observations and a  
Dialogue: Round and About SF

by  
Sylvia Kelso





Published by Aqueduct Press  
PO Box 95787  
Seattle, WA 98145-2787  
[www.aqueductpress.com](http://www.aqueductpress.com)

Copyright © 2009 by Sylvia Kelso

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, transmitted, or stored in an information retrieval system in any form or by any means, graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, taping, and recording, without prior written permission from the publisher.

ISBN: 978-1-933500-28-7

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Cover Design by Lynne Jensen Lampe  
Book Design by Kathryn Wilham  
Original Block Print of Mary Shelley by Justin Kempton:  
[www.writersmugs.com](http://www.writersmugs.com)

Cover photo of Pleiades Star Cluster  
NASA Hubble Telescope Images, STScI-2004-20  
<http://hubble.nasa.gov/image-gallery/astronomy-images.html>  
Credit: NASA, ESA, and AURA/Caltech

Cover photo of Earth  
NASA 2002 Blue Marble Series  
NASA Goddard Space Flight Center image by Robert Simmon and Reto Stöckli

Printed in the USA by Applied Digital Imaging, Bellingham, WA

## Prior Publication Acknowledgments

“Tales of Earth: Terraforming in Recent Women’s Science Fiction.” *Foundation: International Journal of Science Fiction*, Reading, UK. Spring (2000): 34-43.

“Third Person Peculiar: Reading Between Academic and SF-Community Positions in (Feminist) SF.” *Femspec: An Interdisciplinary Feminist Journal*. (2001) 2.1: 74-82.

“Loud Achievements: Lois McMaster Bujold’s Science Fiction.” *New York Review of Science Fiction*, No 122, 1+. No 123, 1998. 13-15.

“Letterspace: Letters between Lois McMaster Bujold and Sylvia Kelso.” *Women of Other Worlds: Excursions through Science Fiction and Feminism*. Eds. Helen Merrick and Tess Williams. Perth: University of Western Australia, September 1999. 383-409.

With thanks to my long-suffering PhD supervisor, Professor Robert Dixon, and to Dave Willingham, who published my first fully-fledged academic article. And affectionate and respectful thanks to the many SF writers who over the years have entertained, fascinated, provoked me to thought, and on whose work these speculations were built.”

## Contents

Third Person Peculiar: Reading Between Academic and SF-Community Positions in (Feminist) SF .....	1
Tales of Earth: Terraforming in Recent Women's SF .....	23
Loud Achievements: Lois McMaster Bujold's Science Fiction Through 1997 .....	43
Letterspace: In The Chinks between Published Fiction and Published Criticism— Correspondence with Lois McMaster Bujold .....	85



## Third Person Peculiar: Reading Between Academic and SF-Community Positions in (Feminist) SF1

A chapter heading in eluki bes shahar's novel *Hellflower* exactly captures my position here at WisCon, and I'd like to thank her for it. I am somewhat of a third person peculiar at WisCon, and that position, and the tensions between its varying components—as academic researcher, sf reader and/or member of the sf community—is really what this paper is about.

To begin with the most obvious peculiarity, I am an Australian abroad, as you can tell from the moment I talk. To go on, I've always read sf, but though I fit the classic sf reader's profile—first child, introspective, lay interest in science—I have never shared an up-close, personal acquaintance with the sf community, let alone what I understand as fandom, which is the basis of convention-going. I've only glimpsed such a community electronically since a conference about eighteen months ago put me on the Australian sf grapevine and connected me with Justine [Larbalestier] and Helen [Merrick], then fellow post-graduate, or as they say in the US, graduate students. When Justine

---

1 This essay originated as a paper given at WisCon 20 in Madison, Wisconsin, May 1996.

## Three Observations and a Dialogue

began mentioning interviews with Connie Willis and meeting Katharine Kerr, my first response was pure sensawunda—like, “Really? WOOWW...” And when Helen and Justine inveigled me onto the Fem-SF list-serv, and names like Suzy McKee Charnas and Karen Joy Fowler started turning up on my email, I thought the Inbox had sprouted unicorns.

In another sense, I am even more dislocated in this milieu because I’ve worked as an academic for the last twelve years, and for at least six of those I have researched, thought, and written about sf. I have read enough rude remarks about how academics mishandle sf to feel dubious about the wisdom of admitting that. And yet I don’t really fit the academic slot either, because I don’t read “high” fiction for pleasure. For pleasure, I read what I study: feminist (sometimes) detective novels, commercial fantasy, and sf. This sounds simple, but its effect has been more like terraforming. To explain, let me steal a title, in good academic fashion, from a fashionable theorist: I have to talk about the pleasures of the sf text.

In equally feminist fashion, let me use some personal experience here. “Long, long ago, in a galaxy far, far away”—as far away as North Queensland, which is the finger at the eastern side of Australia, and longer ago than I intend to admit—there was a kid sitting on the homestead veranda on a hot January afternoon, reading a book. At least, her body was there; the rest was sneaking across a mysterious sub-Alpine plateau at the head of the Amazon. She read a lot, including a good Children’s Encyclopedia, where she had found a beautiful plate of an iguanodon, old style, sitting on its



hind-legs like a kangaroo. So she knew what they were, and how they looked, and how long it had been since they'd existed. And lo and behold, as Conan Doyle's intrepid explorers rounded a clump of bushes...there was a glade full of grazing iguanodons.

Writing this paper, I spent a long time trying to capture that girl's response. You all know the cliché for it; it's the hoariest line in sf. It was my first experience with "sensawunda," of course. But let me do another quick academic detour here to tell you that "sense of wonder" has a long and lofty pedigree, which theorist Stephen Greenblatt kindly assembled for me. According to Greenblatt, Ancient Greek Aristotelian philosophers saw wonder and pleasure as the end—the goal—of poetry. By the Renaissance, an influential Italian critic thought that no one who failed to "excel at arousing wonder" could be called a poet. Thomas Aquinas's teacher hit the nail closest of all. Wonder, he said, was not only intellectual, it was visceral. It caused "a systole of the heart" (79-81).

Despite its hoariness, that, I think, is a hallmark pleasure of the sf text; and although such experiences are rare as a phoenix, it's one I have never lost. When I found the sea vane in Nicola Griffith's *Ammonite* (326), there it was, just as on Conan Doyle's South American plateau: the pause, the stoppage, the visceral clutch. The systole of the heart.

Now grow the explorer up: an English graduate of the late '60s, rather idealistic about politics, rather cynical about art. Dutifully plowing through Barth and Pynchon and Burroughs in the library, buying *Dune* and *Lord of the Rings* and slipping off to rock concerts on the

### Three Observations and a Dialogue

side. Then she walks into her local bookshop—about 900 miles from campus—and finds a Victor Gollancz hardback with the old yellow dust-jacket that signals, sf.

This is a fairly literate reader; besides Spenser and Chaucer she has studied the *Aeneid* and known the *Iliad* almost as long as Conan Doyle, and she has a '60s taste for myth. But with her persistent “low” tastes, that yellow cover is a magnet. So she picks it up, reads the title—*The Einstein Intersection*, by some writer she doesn't know—flips it open, and here's Lobey fighting his mutant Minotaur. This time it's not just a systole of the heart; it's, “Wow, they never told me sf writers did stuff like this!”

Mostly, they don't. One of the drawbacks of an old-fashioned humanist tertiary education is that it leaves this awful awareness of style: you can take the girl out of humanism, but you can't take humanism out of the girl. But when an sf writer is a stylist, reading does things for a humanist-educated reader that no realist text can match. It affords—to use another old phrase—an aesthetic pleasure in the text.

Now picture your explorer as a secretary in an out-back Queensland town: three or four hundred people, streets wide enough to turn a wool wagon. And three blocks from Main Street, these long, long horizons where a hill goes for two and three miles, nothing but grass and glare. Nothing much in town, either; and only the news agency sells books. She wanders in one day in 1975, and here's a cover that says sf and a name she first saw in a second-hand bin in the Athens Plaka. Ursula K. Le Guin: *The Dispossessed*. So she buys it and takes it home, and ninety or so pages in, Shevek sits

down on a park bench with a woman at the other end. She's old and oddly dressed and, "The light was dying fast but she never looked up. She went on reading the proof-sheets of *The Social Organism*" (Le Guin, 90).

The double-take that it's a statue is a given. In those ninety pages, Odo's founding role for Anarres, incidents in Odo's life, and the pronoun "she" crop up often enough: it's not as if you don't know who *she* is. But I still remember getting halfway down the page—stopping, staring at the fan, which was burning its blades off as usual—going back to re-read, and thinking, "Ye Gods—Odo's a *woman* philosopher!"

To you in the United States, of course, this is almost a time warp. Nineteen seventy-five: feminists were re-writing every academic discipline from linguistics to anthropology, feminist utopias were popping out like peas—*Woman on the Edge of Time*, "Houston, Houston, Do You Read?," *The Female Man*. Women's studies were getting off the ground; women were infiltrating every profession. It happened in Australia too. I just wasn't where it happened. I was a proto-feminist—I self-raised my consciousness about 1972, defining the problem with Betty Friedan and transiting the rage phase with Germaine Greer. But I did it in the bush, and for all I knew, I was the only female in Queensland with such weird ideas.

More to the point, the feminist writing I had seen was still in Greer and Millett's phase: mapping women's oppression, triggering women's rage. I had never seen anyone look past that sorry material reality and try to put something in its place. I had never experienced the pleasure of the feminist or feminist-oriented sf text.

### Three Observations and a Dialogue

So it was more than wonder that I felt at this amazing new world, more than aesthetic pleasure; it was a politicized joy, an exciting, empowering glimpse of what women might be. If somebody had told me Isaac Newton was a cross-dressing female scientist, I would have been less galvanized.

Now find your explorer back on the academic treadmill, in a small English Department, where she has worked happily part-time for four or five years; until post-grad students proliferate, and funds shrink, and there is a subtle message that says, “Don’t you think you should do a PhD?” So, in a fit of perversity, in this very orthodox Australian department, she says, “OK, I’ll do feminism and science fiction,” thinking, “Ha, they’ll have fits.” And to her eternal chagrin, they carol, “Fine, fine.”

Well, it could be worse. Many of my students thought I had the most amazing PhD topic ever. When I said, “I’m doing feminism and popular fiction,” their eyes would bulge. “You’re studying Stephen KING? You’re researching sf?” So, even while stepping on the treadmill, I was doing what the French, according to theorist Michel De Certeau, describe as *perruque*: your own work on the company’s time (25-28). To top it off, I could indulge what you might call an academic pleasure in the text.

That concept needs another quick preliminary detour through the theory of how texts—meaning literature—are produced. First comes the good old humanist story: the text is the writer’s creation, handed down like Moses’ tablets, full of universal truths straight from his original mind. Then come the post-humanist theories

that lose the writer altogether. Of these, I like best Pierre Macherey's Marxist version, according to which writing is production, using cultural and literary raw materials, a sort of assembly line that pops the text out for readers to consume (66-68). But for an academic, there's another step. Seduced by a text that excites, baffles, or actually infuriates, the academic wants to reproduce: to read that text—which is to say, to re-make it in academic discourse. Then this “product” goes into the academic shark-pond and in its turn competes for printing space, to win its writer what another theorist, Pierre Bourdieu, calls symbolic capital: chiefly, reputation and respect (Johnson, 7).

All of that still lies far ahead when, a lot of sweat, tears, blood, and metamorphoses later, your intrepid explorer finds herself writing a chapter that includes a reading of *The Dispossessed*. And to convey the impact of this feminist utopia, this sf, “Snap!,” she describes it in first person, a little more formally than I am doing here. Whereupon her Supervisor comments, “This is an awkward shift in tone.”

This anecdote exemplifies what happens when the academic and feminist-sf reader's priorities collide. How do you convey that politicized, feminist, yet integrally science-fictional sense of wonder in a discourse that has been evolved to steamroller out the personal? Without operating from a basic feminist premise, how do you do a feminist reading at all? How, in a word, do you transmute the pleasures of *perruque* into company work?

First, there is the problem of how any academic discourse can handle sf. I know that at least one writer-critic whose work I respect greatly considers it

### Three Observations and a Dialogue

impossible, because to him sf isn't literature (Delany, "Science Fiction"). But then, how do you define sf? There's no easy answer that I know, except the one proposed by that same person: it's whatever is marked as sf on the bookshop shelf (Delany, "Gestation," 65). But then, what about someone like Marge Piercy, who marketed *He, She, It* as "literature"? And if sf isn't literature, what, given the lack of a consensus on its actual nature, distinguishes it from other popular forms?

After that tangle comes the question of approach. In the good old humanist days, academic heretics who really wanted their sf *perruque* had to join people like Brian Aldiss and Sam Moskowitz, climbing the ghetto walls, trying to prove that sf was aesthetically O.K., that it actually was "literature." Post-humanist studies have eased this pressure. With Marxist, psychoanalytic, post-colonial, deconstructive, queer, and feminist theorie(s), you may miss the genre's specificity, but the same criteria apply on every bookshop shelf. Every work on there, from Tolstoy's to E.E. (Doc) Smith's, is analyzed and valued in exactly the same way. They are all "texts." And to give only one example, I've found that post-colonial theory, with its foregrounding of colonial discourses, is a very enlightening approach to sf.

As you probably know already, most of these theories have to be retrofitted—to lift another sf word—for feminist use. The feminist theorist has to do what De Certeau argues all consumers of culture do: chop up, twist, retool; or, to use his word, they poach (31). Academics have characterized *Star Trek* fanzines as a classic example of poaching. Like the fanzines, many feminist academics, often under other feminists' re-

proaches, poach from—chop, twist, put a feminist spin on—post-humanist theory. So doing sf criticism, I had to double-poach: retrofit non-feminist theory while poaching from the pool of non-canonical texts.

How do you poach for a feminist PhD? An answer on a utopian scale would be, dismantle the system that demands PhDs. One on a more modest scale would be, remodel the discourse: include, for example, fictocriticism, or stories, or poems, or rhapsodic passages like those of H el ene Cixous or Susan Griffin. For “high” texts that your readers already know, or can easily access, this often works well. But when you throw *Faster Than Light Travel*, alternate universes, or a world of androgynes at non-sf readers (which covers most academics, including feminists), and then toss a so-called experimental style on top...

My solution was to dislocate. Most of my PhD dissertation, or thesis, as we say in Australia and the UK, is written in orthodox, impersonal acaspeak. But every now and then, an intervention, to use that hallowed feminist word, comes along to make the genre—and I use the word deliberately, since academia tends to naturalize its work as transparently beyond genre classifications—visible. My interventions use non-academic, often traditional “women’s” forms: a poem, a dialogue, but also a computer program and a piece of women’s magazine fiction. They drag in the personal. They highlight academic biases. They refuse to let the reader forget that what s/he is reading is no more natural than magazine fiction, and just as partially blind.

Glitches do remain. Samuel Delany once commented that academic sf critics are unclear about both au-

### Three Observations and a Dialogue

dience and purpose (Samuelson, 33). To adapt David Samuelson's response, much of this stems from "our" links with "our" primary audience (33): trying, for example, to write a PhD dissertation/thesis for three examiners, one of whom—if I was lucky—would know sf, but none of whom would be an expert in sf, horror fiction, *and* Female Romance. To dodge this glitch, traditional literary departments have a tendency to push students toward "high" literature, which lies within most of its members' field of expertise, thus perpetuating the loop.

The bind doubles when you work as a feminist. The consensus of those who know both sides is that in Australia feminism is stronger politically and weaker academically than in the US. In my department, however, there is a glass ceiling for women, let alone avowed feminists. My whole University has only a part-time women's Research Centre. We have no Women's Studies department proper. But even if we did, Women's Studies academics, like many feminists in the '70s, tend to consider sf a genre for men.

So a major headache for the heretic sf postgrad/graduate student, compounded for the feminist, is finding a supervisor well-versed enough to get the project off the ground. My best chance was a male specialist in popular fiction who is strongly sympathetic to feminism. As Justine and Helen and I once decided, for a graduate/postgrad student in Australia, having an sf-specialist supervisor would get you trashed for unfair advantage, and first-person stories suggest it is not always better in the US. My Supervisor did wonders. But I will never forget how, two chapters into the sf



section of my thesis, he moved to a southern job, and I gave him a Farside farewell card and wrote on it, *I can do EVA without a hand-line, but do I have to fix the Hubble while I'm out?* He read it and asked, "What's EVA?"

What we have here is actually the loneliness of the long-distance PhD student. Helen and Justine remarked on the problem, doing sf in English or History Departments. But at a Women's Studies conference I spoke to someone writing a thesis on feminist discourse, and in the heartland of Australian feminist academia, I learned that she also felt isolated. For the actual work, though, it is more than lonely; it can be dangerous. Living in North Queensland, outside the sf community, doing a PhD in the literary equivalent of freefall, was sometimes very near a God trip. The texts propose, you dispose; no other critical voices intervene, and the texts can't fight back.

Again, the feminist dimension deepens supervision glitches. Though my Supervisor did not know the primary texts, he turned my academic chapters into subway graffiti; but he would not comment on the interventions at all. In the course of supervising my six-year part-time thesis, he reached the position taken by many male academics; not wholly, I feel, through sexism or lack of interest: that is, to bow out of what Australian indigenes call "women's business" in fear that if they venture in, they'll get thumped.

This political crux also left me as something of a third person peculiar at least once. As Sandra Harding powerfully argues, if white middle-class feminists claim they have learnt from the standpoint of black, lesbian, Chicana, and Third-World feminists, how are we to

### Three Observations and a Dialogue

deny men can do the same (145)? In my work on male and female sf writers, I found at least one male sf writer, John Varley, who uses feminist discourse to produce women characters that still don't get up my now highly sensitized feminist nose. But when I remarked that by all the feminist-established criteria Varley's *Titan* was a lesbian text, my male Supervisor went ballistic, saying, in effect, that in claiming a man could write a lesbian text, his female student wasn't being "feminist."

This topsy-turvy incident highlights another crux. It's difficult enough having to define sf for the academic project, but how do you define *feminist* sf?

This, it seems, is the sixty-four thousand-answer question. Critics are the first academic resort. Some offer the equivalent of what Katie King calls "taxonomies of feminism" (124). Others classify the same texts as feminist sf or feminist utopias (Roberts, 86-111), writers are included in one list and omitted from another, and you find hierarchies that put "feminist" above "women's" sf (Lefanu, 87-93). As Justine and Helen and I once discussed, academic feminists can ignore—or simply remain ignorant of—anything not published by the Women's Press, or just, to poach Evelyn Fox Keller's title for the biography of Barbara McClintock, not have "a feeling for the organism."

I hear you saying, there is another choice. Get out of free fall: go to the sf community. Check out the zines and look at letters and interviews from writers understood—by you or somebody else—to be feminist. Or contact them directly, through something like the Fem-SF listserv, and ask, "Do you consider your-

self a feminist? Whose work, including yours, do you consider feminist sf?”

But in the sf community, you find more answers than the critics gave. The Internet has a whole site devoted to definitions of feminism. A recent listserv discussion of what feminist sf is came nowhere near achieving consensus. But for a third person peculiar, entering any sf community raises questions as difficult as those in academia.

Mostly, these center round the interaction of criticism and personal acquaintance. I'll begin with a male member of the sf community whose networking helped put me here. He gave me contacts, discussed texts and ideas on email, lent me books, read my work. A good way into the friendship, I sent him a piece on a novel I greatly admire, Connie Willis's *Lincoln's Dreams*. After some eight pages' rhapsody about its innovations, its structure, its brilliant narrative techniques, I suddenly remembered I was a post-humanist feminist. And when I looked at Willis's text through Annette Kolodny's lenses of race and gender, I found an alarming absence of black characters or voices in a novel supposedly about the American Civil War.

So, fairly embarrassed at my lapse, I clapped a critique on the essay's tail and sent it off to my mate. I got back a note saying, in effect, a lot of American readers are going to get upset at some Australian lecturing them on race problems, and a warning that, in fandom, I might have started an international incident.

This was somewhat startling, but it could have been an individual response. I had great hopes of discovering if this was so when I was accepted into the Fem-SF

### Three Observations and a Dialogue

listserv discussion group. An sf community at last! A woman's community, and a feminist one at that! Now I was really at the Galactic heart.

After a while, though, I noticed an implicit hierarchy, which someone else also remarked on: nobody said so, but there seemed to be gatekeepers. If you were new, you could make a posting, but a gatekeeper might well challenge you; if you survived, your posting was mostly ignored. In time I was reminded of the poem about the Boston Cabots, who spoke only to Lowells, and the Lowells, who spoke only to God. In this case, the Cabots were a personally acquainted or long-term group of sf community members, and the Lowells were established feminist sf writers. The hopeful sf readers/academics—and I don't speak only of myself—were certainly not God.

What startled the third person peculiar a good deal more was how little this feminist sf community seemed aware of what I, from my North Australian crowperch, understood as the issues and history of feminism. Reading the famous *Khatru* symposium, I found Suzy McKee Charnas in 1974-5 expounding what in 1980 the academic feminists would name standpoint theory (Smith, 13). I found Joanna Russ and Luise White working through the still vexed question of women's killing fantasies (72-79). I found James Tiptree posing questions about why we mother that still go unanswered (20-21). Shortly before, I had read a 1990 interview with Karen Joy Fowler, Lisa Goldstein, and Pat Murphy about "The State of Feminism in SF." Though Goldstein et al. were explicitly called feminist sf writers (Council, 21), and they knew sf backwards,

they hardly seemed aware of second-wave history like the sex-wars—probably the most crucial single happening in '80s feminism—let alone separatism or Goddess worship. To me, these are not merely academic matters. Theories of pornography or political lesbianism were not developed behind academic desks but through interactions in the home, the workplace, the street. They were finessed into libraries afterwards; but they feed straight back into personal politics: do I write to the papers about that poster, do I join Reclaim the Night marches, do I give evidence to the Meese commission? Do I join a separatist commune, do I change my doctor because he's a man? These issues are still both academic hot-points and cruces of everyday feminist life. Yet Goldstein et al. left all this unmentioned. It seemed as if these writers, as Karen Joy Fowler remarked in a postscript to *Khatru*—had “lost their [feminist] edge” (Smith, 129).

In the same way, many of the Fem-SF listserv participants in a '96 discussion of feminism seemed unaware they were doing things, such as recounting undifferentiated “women's” experience, that feminist theorists—from white women getting their knuckles rapped by black women to straight women being called by lesbians—learnt to avoid quite a while ago. I was startled by this: because most of these people came from the US, where feminist coffee-shops, feminist book-stores, separatist communes, Wiccan festivals—the whole breadth of gynocentric feminist culture—was supposed to be a twenty-year-old reality. I had only read about it. What was more, I considered my knowledge out-of-date, because according to Katie

### Three Observations and a Dialogue

King's description of the speed of feminist thinking (71), what came out of printed books was already four and five years down the wave.

So it astonished me to come on a reverse time-warp, so to speak, when as a third person peculiar I was ready to disparage the academic ignorance of sf. More worrying, to my academic side, were posts defending Marion Zimmer Bradley as a feminist writer, not on the basis of her texts' content, but because of her health problems, personal problems, and her well-doing to others. Now, I may have been seduced by the post-humanist reduction of writers to author-functions, and perhaps I have internalized masculinist academic criteria for excellence. I have made a ground-tenet, like so many others, of the value of women's experience. As a feminist, I would be delighted to argue that Bradley's texts draw power and passion and even "truth" from personal experience. But as an academic, I grow extremely worried when someone tells me, in effect, "Don't say what you honestly think of this work, because of what you know about the writer's life." This suggests to me that my male friend is NOT an aberration in sf communities. And moreover, that if I want to keep my academic integrity, I must stay outside the (feminist) sf community, or I will be expected to put the personal before the political in ways that I, personally, can't accept.

I feel this opens a major question for the sf/academic interface and, indeed, for feminist practice as a whole, which has long struggled with the question of criticism. I've repeatedly been told that the personal/communal element is specific to sf. But how do you enter an sf community and retain academic honesty

about the texts? How do feminists combine the personal and the critical without being viewed as either Pollyanna or the Wicked Witch?

Obviously, these questions intersect my concerns as an academic approaching an sf community, but I think they are also crucial for feminists in general. I have no overall solution. I have found a gathering consensus in (published) feminist thinking that goes past Yes/No answers to insist on tensions, tight-rope walking, and contradictions acknowledged—to use Teresa de Lauretis’ phrase—but not resolved (144). About 1985, Linda Gordon addressed this in terms of writing women’s history. Speaking from debates on the value of experience, the myth of objectivity, the choice between chronicling what women have suffered and praising what they’ve done, she wrote: “There may be no objective canons of historiography, but there are better and worse pieces of history. The challenge is precisely to maintain this tension between accuracy and mythic power” (22).

To me, writing a feminist PhD that included sf, the question of maintaining tension between the mythic and the accurate, the personal and the critical, was anything but academic. In my own practice, it might mean including the writer’s personal dimension while skirting the biography trap; critiquing without animosity, but also without compromise; putting “myself” in the text, without over-privileging “women’s experience.” In general, I found myself repeating what so many women have been saying since the ’80s began: maybe we have to raise our boiling points, to avoid the horrendous previous personal schisms, and work to keep our feminism as a hard-won personal praxis/

### Three Observations and a Dialogue

principle, while forming coalitions with others who are not—are not and never will be—Us. The conflicts at the UN World Conference on Women, at Beijing in 1995, indicate how hard this still is.

And perhaps we have to change our thinking even more radically. I saw sf communit(ies) as offering both the sort of in-house knowledge I academically needed, and the sort of personal contact and support we all desire. Maybe I should have remembered Martin and Mohanty's well-known academic essay called, "What's Home Got To Do With It?" They take up the memoirs of another feminist historian, Minnie Bruce Pratt, who found that every home is an illusion, created by exclusion and Othering, never existing for long, never for real. Maybe, then, my expectations of the sf community were also unreal. I should have remembered that, however much feminists, in particular, long to find some place they can be welcomed and comfortable, that is not, to use Carol Emshwiller's evocative title, "The Start of the End of it All." I should have recalled what Linda Kauffman once said: "I never thought feminism was about happiness. I thought it was about justice" (274). I would like to think that sharing the standpoint of a third person peculiar could make this insight more positive. Could help us to live as if we want a home, but as if any community, even in sf, even in feminism, is not primarily for safety and permanence. As if it is rather a place where we're always opening doors and uprooting furniture; making sure, in effect, that the "home" we build doesn't turn into a trap.



## Works Cited

- bes shahar, eluki. *Hellflower*. New York: Daw, 1991.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*. Ed. Randal Johnson. Oxford: Polity, 1993.
- Charnas, Suzy McKee. "No Road." *Women of Vision*. Ed. Denise Du Pont. New York: St. Martin's, 1988. 143-62.
- Counsil, Wendy. "The State of Feminism In Science Fiction: An Interview with Karen Joy Fowler, Lisa Goldstein and Pat Murphy." *Science Fiction Eye* August (1990): 21-31.
- De Certeau, Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Trans. Steven F. Rendall. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.
- De Lauretis, Teresa. "Eccentric Subjects: Feminist Theory and Historical Consciousness." *Feminist Studies* 16.1 (1990): 115-50.
- Delany, Samuel R. *The Einstein Intersection*. 1967. London: Victor Gollancz, 1968.
- . "The Gestation of Genres: Literature, Fiction, Romance, Science Fiction, Fantasy..." *Intersections: Fantasy and Science Fiction*. Eds. George E. Slusser and Eric S. Rabkin. Carbondale: University of Southern Illinois Press, 1987. 63-73.
- . "Science Fiction and 'Literature'—Or, The Conscience of the King." *Starboard Wine: More Notes on the Language of Science Fiction*. New York: Dragon, 1984. 81-100.

### Three Observations and a Dialogue

- Gordon, Linda. "What's New in Women's History." *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies*. Ed. Teresa de Lauretis. Houndmills: Macmillan, 1988. 20-30.
- Greenblatt, Stephen J. *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1991.
- Griffith, Nicola. *Ammonite*. London: HarperCollins, 1993.
- Harding, Sandra. "Reinventing Ourselves as Other: More New Agents of History and Knowledge." *American Feminist Thought at Century's End: A Reader*. Ed. Linda S. Kauffman. Cambridge MA, Oxford UK: Blackwell, 1993. 140-64.
- Johnson, Randal. "Editor's Introduction." Pierre Bourdieu. *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*. Ed. Randal Johnson. Oxford: Polity, 1993. 1-25.
- Kauffman, Linda S. "The Long Goodbye: Against Personal Testimony, or An Infant Grifter Grows Up." *American Feminist Thought at Century's End: A Reader*. Ed. Linda S. Kauffman. Cambridge, MA, Oxford UK: Blackwell, 1993. 258-77.
- King, Katie. *Theory in its Feminist Travels: Conversations in U.S. Women's Movements*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994.
- Le Guin, Ursula K. *The Dispossessed*. 1974. St. Albans: Panther, 1975.
- Lefanu, Sarah. *In the Chinks of the World Machine: Feminism and Science Fiction*. London: Women's Press, 1988.

- Macherey, Pierre. *A Theory of Literary Production*. 1978. Trans. Geoffrey Wall. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986.
- Martin, Biddy and Chandra Mohanty. "What's Home Got to Do with It?" *Feminist Studies, Critical Studies*. Ed. Teresa de Lauretis. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986. 191-212.
- Roberts, Robin. *A New Species: Gender and Science in Science Fiction*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993.
- Samuelson, David N. "Necessary Constraints: Samuel R. Delany on Science Fiction." *Foundation* 60 (1994): 211-41.
- Smith, Jeffrey D. *Khatru: Symposium: Women in Science Fiction*. 1975. Madison: Corflu No. 10, 1993.