

## **Call for Papers: Upcoming Special Issue Women Thinking in Public**

**Guest Editors: Debra Rae Cohen and Catherine Keyser  
Deadline for Submissions: 1 December 2023**

Although the inclination to read fiction was historically understood as a sign of women's exclusion from the realm of intellection, in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, fiction has become a place where women perform philosophical and political reflection and debate, revel in cleverness, place essayistic and novelistic voices in conversation, challenge the mind-body divide that would consign them to—and devalue—the flesh, and redefine the shape of intellectual labor.

As the Dobbs decision denies women's constitutional right to bodily autonomy in the United States (on the heels of a pandemic that drove many women out of the workplace and into caregiving roles) and as social media amplifies both a new breed of female public intellectual and the virulent backlash against them, the keywords of this special issue take on renewed urgency. This special issue of *MFS* seeks neither to collapse intersectional experience into a white-washed mass of Women Thinking nor to project a Habermassian public sphere of rational individuals, abstracted from race, sexuality, ability, or any other coordinates of identity. Rather, we see the phrase "women thinking in public" as a provocation, a modern problem, that fiction both catalogs and catalyzes.

We take inspiration from recent work that recovers women's communications and collaborations, modes of thought, and even strategies for survival in the academy: Rachel Sagner Buurma and Laura Heffernan's *The Teaching Archive*; Saidiya Hartman's *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*; Melanie Micir's *The Passion Projects*; Mo Moulton's *The Mutual Admiration Society*; Imani Perry's *Vexy Thing*; and Sara Ahmed's *Living a Feminist Life* and *Complaint!* Like these works, we take seriously pedagogy, performance, friendship, intimacy, gossip, bitchiness, and embodiment as templates for new intellectual modes.

We seek essays that illuminate the way that fiction can itself serve as a mode of public intellectualism, as both depiction and enactment of women thinking, attending to the connections between gendered expression, the forms of thought and the forms of fiction. Questions to be considered might include the following:

What styles, tones, and personae in modern and contemporary fiction signal authorial wit while perhaps disowning the institutional and masculinist inheritances of intellectualism? What role do cleverness, banter, and syntax play in the presentation of

the woman thinking in public? How does such cleverness provoke, unsettle, and engage politically? How does fictional form serve to activate new ways of thinking, to draw new constellations of publics? How have women mobilized traditional associations with gossip, "chatter," and folk tale to turn quotidian talk, intimate improvisation, and collaborative sociality into the tools of thought? How does fiction about women thinking in public challenge the identification of intellectualism with abstraction and disembodiment, which is also a patriarchal and white supremacist inheritance? How do queer fiction, trans fiction, science fiction, and other genres and modes invested in the visceral and the material, generate new models for women thinking? How does the scandal of the thinking woman as a literary character move from *The Female Quixote* to *The Group* to *Conversations with Friends*?

Essays should be 7,000-9,000 words, including all quotations and bibliographic references, and should follow the *MLA Handbook* (8th edition) for internal citations and Works Cited. Please submit your essay via the online submission form at the following web address: <http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/mfs>

We encourage queries ahead of submission: please direct them to Debra Rae Cohen ([drc@sc.edu](mailto:drc@sc.edu)) and Catherine Keyser ([CATKEYSER@sc.edu](mailto:CATKEYSER@sc.edu)).