

# NOG



Netherlands Research School of Gender Studies

**Masterclass by Katja Diefenbach**  
**Thursday November 22, 2018**  
**Utrecht University**  
**10:00-12:45**

Co-organised by and J. Mascot (UU) and K. Thiele (UU)

### ***Possessive Individualism and Transatlantic Slavery in Early Modern Philosophy***

One of Spinoza's first biographers noted that the philosopher's ink-and-charcoal drawings included a self-portrait in the pose and costume of Masaniello. The Neapolitan revolutionary was involved in one of the first mass insurrections of the Modern era. Recurrently, the existence of this portrait was used to illustrate Spinoza's position in early modern philosophy as an »Anti-Hobbes« (Negri) who – under the influence of Machiavelli's realism – was early to formulate a « mass standpoint in philosophy » (Balibar) with which he affirmed that legal authority « does not equal real force » (Montag) in that the stability of democracy rests on the potentialities of the masses which can never be subsumed under the name of the People, the Party or the State.

Our Master Class will start by showing that at the foundation of this doctrine of the conflictual constitution of the Republic by and through the passions of the multitude, we find a concept of natural law which Spinoza took from Hobbes in order then, step by step, to turn it against the latter's conception of ego-logical drives, possessive individualism and absolute sovereignty. What was thereby inscribed, deep in the origins of modern philosophy, is a fundamental disagreement about questions of appropriation, guilt and sovereignty, which also reflects the violent conflicts of early modern state foundation and colonial globalization.

The seminar will revisit the pinnacle of Spinoza's intellectual blockages, his silence on colonial slavery, while being a contemporary of Dutch colonialism, of the colonial engagement of the Amsterdam Jews in Northern Brazil and of the slave resistance shaking the region during the entire 17th century. By reading Spinoza's texts with and against its author, we will put his concepts of *conatus*, affect, imitation and *potentia multitudinis* into the context of *marronage* and the fugitive communities of escaped slaves in 17th century Dutch Brazil.

Possible students' presentations (10 to 20 min.) can engage with one of the texts from the reading list or with a selection of arguments from different texts. Further information will be announced after the summer.

PhD and RMA students can receive 2 ECTS for attending the Masterclass and the Symposium 'Caring for the World. Ethos and Partisanship' (on November 23). And an extra 1 ECTS when writing a paper of 4.000-5.000 words. Please note if you wish to receive credit for the Masterclass with your registration at [nog@uu.nl](mailto:nog@uu.nl).

**Katja Diefenbach** is Professor of Aesthetic Theory at the Merz Akademie, Stuttgart. Her research interests are French philosophy and epistemology of the 20th century, with a special focus on the relations between Marxism and Poststructuralism. She recently published *Spekulativer Materialismus. Spinoza in der postmarxistischen Philosophie* (Turia + Kant, 2018). She is co-editor of the volume *Encountering Althusser: Politics and Materialism in Contemporary Radical Thought* (Bloomsbury, 2013), and author of numerous articles on political philosophy, aesthetics and cultural theory. She has taught at various universities, such as the Berlin University of the Arts, Humboldt University, and Jan van Eyck Academy in Maastricht. She is an Editorial Board member of the publishing collective *b\_books*, Berlin.

<https://www.merz-akademie.de/personen/katja-diefenbach/>  
<https://merz-akademie.academia.edu/KatjaDiefenbach>

## Reading List

- Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza* (Chapter XVI: "The Ethical Vision of the World"), trans. Martin Joughin, New York: Zone Books, 1992, pp. 253–272.
- [https://monoskop.org/images/c/c8/Deleuze\\_Gilles\\_Expressionism\\_in\\_Philosophy\\_Spinoza.pdf](https://monoskop.org/images/c/c8/Deleuze_Gilles_Expressionism_in_Philosophy_Spinoza.pdf)
- Katja Diefenbach, »Hallucinating Colonialism. Spinoza and the Silence on Colonial Slavery in Early Modern Philosophy«, paper presented at the Colloque international *Les noms de la violence*, May, 26–27, 2016, American University and Collège international de philosophie, Paris, pp. 1–16.
- Roberto Esposito, *Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of Community*, trans. Timothy Campbell, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010, pp. 20–40.
- [http://criticallatinoamericana.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Roberto\\_Esposito\\_Communitas\\_The\\_Origin\\_and\\_Destiny\\_of\\_Community\\_Cultural\\_Memory\\_in\\_the\\_Present\\_2009-1.pdf](http://criticallatinoamericana.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Roberto_Esposito_Communitas_The_Origin_and_Destiny_of_Community_Cultural_Memory_in_the_Present_2009-1.pdf)
- Lewis S. Feuer, »The Dream of Benedict de Spinoza, in *American Imago. A Psychoanalytic Journal for the Arts and Sciences*, Vol. 14, No. 3, Autumn 1957, pp. 225–242.
- Hebe Mattos, »Black Troops and Hierarchies of Color in the Portuguese Atlantic World: The Case of Henrique Dias and His Black Regiment«, in *Luzo-Brazilian Review*, Vol. 45, No. 1, 2008, pp. 6–29.
- Stuart B. Schwartz, *Slaves, Peasants, and Rebels. Reconsidering Brazilian Slavery* (Chapter IV: »Rethinking Palmares: Slave Resistance in Colonial Brazil«), University of Illinois Press, 1996, pp. 103–136.

## Regarding Spinoza and Hobbes, we will work with the following editions:

- Thomas Hobbes, *Man and Citizen*, ed. Bernard Gert, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1998.
- Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Edwin Curley, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1994.
- Benedictus de Spinoza, *The Collected Works of Spinoza, Vol. I and II*, ed. Edwin Curley, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985, 2016.

**Copies of particular passages will be handed out in the session or are sent prior to the Masterclass. It is not necessary to read Spinoza's *Ethics* and *Political Treatise* nor Hobbes' *De Cive* and *Leviathan* in advance of the Masterclass.**

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## Friday November 23, 2018 Utrecht University

### International symposium: *Caring for the World. Ethos and Partisanship*

Co-organised by J. Mascat and M. Borren, in cooperation with Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis (ASCA)

### *Caring for the World. Ethos and Partisanship*

Why and how do we engage in political movements, groups, and parties? On what basis we recognize and identify as members of a political community? How do we know that a particular cause or claim is "ours" and that we are ready to fight for it? How do we express and elaborate collectively our "care for the world"?

This international conference aims at discussing the ethical and political foundations of militancy by bringing together different strands of critical theory, political philosophy and feminist thought. Its goal is to reflect on the groundings of contemporary forms of political commitment by focusing on the ideological, relational and affective mechanisms (belonging, care, responsibility, indignation among others) that sustain long-lasting attachment to political ideals and enhance active practices of political engagement.

### Confirmed Speakers:

Marieke Borren (Open University, Utrecht)  
Jodi Dean (Hobart and William Smith Colleges, Geneva, NY)  
Katja Diefenbach (Merz Akademie, Stuttgart)  
Femke Kaulingfreks (Hogeschool InHolland, Amsterdam)  
Jamila Mascat (Utrecht University)  
Ella Myers (University of Utah, Salt Lake City)  
Kathrin Thiele (Utrecht University)

Further information will be announced after the summer.