

## **Emilie in the wild: Education, Enlightenment and the Exploitation of Nature.**

Beginning with the premise that wild (nonhuman) nature is unknowable, this paper offers a critique of dominant Western cultural ideologies that function to domesticate and order nature through violent images and action. The philosophical conundrum that establishes boundaries between wild (nonhuman) nature and domesticated nature brings up questions about 'being' and 'freedom'. Emilie (Jean-Jacques Rousseau's fictional boy-child), is a philosophical attempt to eliminate the boundary between man as a historical being and man as a natural being. Emilie in the wild (nonhuman) nature is free from man's social history and thus what Rousseau calls the 'chains' of civil society. His only education is that of wild (nonhuman) nature, leaving him at liberty, according to Rousseau, to develop in tune with his natural inclinations.

In this presentation I will revisit Rousseau's call for a naturalised education in terms of what this means historically. While wild (nonhuman) nature can be understood to exist in a material form it is still unknowable, but can be explored in terms of its discursive constitution. The historical origins of modern capitalist discourses of nature are explored using Laclau and Mouffe's discourse analysis. It locates capitalist discourses of nature as central to the Enlightenment Project and its endorsement of modern Western scientific and technological principles (Merchant,2005). Images of an untamed and unproductive wild go hand in hand with ideologies and practices of domination and control in the name of scientific, technological and capitalist economic progress. This presentation seeks to analyse the assumption that the boundary between wild (nonhuman) and domesticated nature is crossable through scientific and technological knowledge. It looks at the concept of alienation from nature (as expressed by Jean Jacques Rousseau in 'Emilie' and Karl Marx) to explore how modern schooling and the capitalist economy stifle human freedom to relate to nature in a dialogical fashion.

### References

- Merchant, C. (2005). *Earthcare. Women and the environment*. New York: Routledge
- Rousseau, J. (1979). *Emilie or On Education*. New York : Basic Books, Inc.