

MOREL TALES: THE CULTURE OF MUSHROOMING, Gary Alan Fine, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998, 336pp., \$40.00 (cloth), \$19.95 (paper).

EPISTEMIC CULTURES: HOW THE SCIENCES MAKE KNOWLEDGE, Karin Knorr Cetina, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999, 320pp., \$50.00 (cloth), \$24.50 (paper).

FISHY BUSINESS: SALMON, BIOLOGY AND THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF NATURE, Rik Scarce, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000, 272 pp., \$61.50 (cloth), \$21.95 (paper).

Although at first sight *Morel Tales* (1998), *Epistemic Cultures* (1999), and *Fishy Business*

itself, on the one hand stressing our elevated difference from so-called natural species; on the other, claiming humanity's sameness with the animal world and our rootedness within the order of nature (Soper 1995, 15-36). Of course, these conceptions of nature are in many ways incompatible, although they are often used as simple alternatives in scientific, political, or everyday discourse. In a similar vein, MacNaghten and Urry stated "there is no pure 'nature' as such, only natures. And such natures are historically, geographically and culturally constituted," and further: "there is no simple and sustainable distinction between nature and society. They are ineluctably intertwined" (MacNaghten and Urry 1995, 207; 1998, 29). The nature-society antithesis can thus be perceived as a false dichotomy. Even more, the socially constructed meanings of nature are much more diversified than the three general delineations sketched by Soper. One could extend this argument so far in stating that conceptions of nature are idiosyncratically informed and impossible to classify under common nominators. What is denoted by one as a sublime example of "being in nature"—for example, a walk along a towpath with rows of pollard willows along a canal's banks—is a scenery decried by another as a cultural scare in a historical and ecological valuable heath landscape.

Notwithstanding the idiosyncracies in the formation of all these conceptions of nature, it is, however, not impossible to map common interpretations of what nature "is," along different organizational or institutionalized lines, for example, specific leisure organizations, professional groups, or scientific maps. This becomes abundantly clear in the readings of *Epistemic Cultures*,

West of Canada. He conducted semischeduled interviews with more than twenty salmon biologists and attended two salmon biology conferences and numerous public hearings on salmon-related topics where biologists were present. Furthermore, he gathered information from speaking with several others in noninterview encounters and observed biologists at work in fish hatcheries and in a laboratory that conducted DNA research on salmon. Guided by a thoroughly qualitative approach of grounded theory, Scarce round up his project after nearly three years of research and analysis in the salmon biology “business.” In *Fishy* 902CW@kEJd:JrN7bp:bAMA[]90

conservationist perspective on salmon argues for the intrinsic worth of all species (instead of treating salmon as a mere “resource”), and its proponents are advocating the protection of “natural salmon,” seeking a paradigm shift in the species’ study and control. In chapter 6 (pp. 147-76), Scarce argues (maybe too optimistically so) that this conservation biology perspective can substantially revise salmon biology’s dominant, use- and control-oriented perspective, not only allowing the salmon more freedom, but also the biologists who have taken this species as their research topic, in their pursuit of self-determination.

A similar “peopled sociology” as to the one used by Scarce in *Fishy Business*—in Fine’s terms “an analysis of what people actually do and say” (Fine 1998, 12)—can also be found in *Morel Tales*. During several years, Fine talked to, observed, and joined members of the Minnesota Mycological Society in their hunt for mushrooms. He attended local and national forays, conducted interviews with more than twenty members, and analyzed several mushroom documents and two surveys. His

example, “LBMs”—being “little brown mushrooms”—are denigrated), or by the attribution of character, gender (pp. 80-3), or personification. As such, the Morel (*Morchella*) is valued as the Cadillac of mushrooms, an “elite mushroom,” and has the greatest cultural resonance, reflected in Morel festivals and the greater emotional weight of morel hunting than other mushrooming.

Fine not only deals with the individual processes of naturework but also with the social features of searching for, identifying, and consuming mushrooms by mushroomers, portrayed as being “a community in the woods.” This is, for example, spelled out in being together at forays,

“pastoral and harmonic link between man [*sic*] and nature, while underlining the authenticity of the natural environment” (p. 10). On the other hand, they are not totally devoid of holding humanist visions of nature, in seeing nature as a well of resources for human consumption, evidenced of course in hunting mushrooms for consumption.

Although Knorr Cetina’s work (1999) indirectly also deals with cultural meanings of nature in a specific social setting (for example, she shows how in molecular biology, living organisms are seen as “machines,” similar to industrial production systems and production sites, with the central dogma that DNA contains the building blocks of life), the prime focus of *Epistemic Cultures* is not so much on *what kind* of knowledge is produced, but on the “construction of the machineries of knowledge,” more specifically in the domains of High Energy Physics (HEP) and Molecular Biology (MB). Knorr Cetina gathered data through the work of several field ethnographers, involving the unmediated observation of scientific procedure, gathering researchers’ notes, written correspondence, audiotapes of interviews, and other interactions. The research arena for the study into experimental HEP was situated at the European Particle Physics Laboratory, and a molecular cell biology research group was the focus of research into the epistemic cul-

through experiential knowledge (experimenting with different variations of “problematic factors”).

As stated, the outcome of *Epistemic Cultures* is not so much a focus on the kind of scientific knowledge being socially constructed, but more a comparison and juxtaposition of how HEP and MB are organized and their means of knowledge acquisition. Knorr Cetina labels

aspect—the interchangeability of species—he documents how salmon are construed by salmon biologists as only one of any number of organisms that they might study. As one Canadian interviewee stated, “It doesn’t really matter whether you’re working on insects or moles or

interesting to compare how similar conflicting discourses (e.g., the anthropocentric attitude of hatcheries biologists versus the ecocentric attitude of conservation biologists; the organic view of nature among amateur mushroomers versus the humanistic paradigm of commercial pickers) dome the domains of salmon biology, mushrooming, and even molecular biology.

Fishy Business—as Scarce mentions himself (pp. 17-18)—has a foot in two intellectual camps: the tradition of environmental sociology (the social construction of Nature) and the sociology of science (the social construction of science and technology). A hard constructivist position in which nature were only to be seen as a cultural construction not only poses serious headaches for environmental philosophy but hence also leads to the pointlessness of environmental advocacy (see Dombrowski 2002). However, both Scarce and Fine show that our choices have real impact. Scarce’s position is not a “hard constructivist” approach, which would imply the untenable position that nature holds no ontological

Fine, Gary Alan. 1998.